



Effective English Language Education: A New Teacher's Guide

by Paul S. Haughey, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

Effective English language education: A new teacher's guide is based upon the research of Paul Haughey, Marty Hopkins, James Trgone, Jack Warner and Bryan Clyde. This article utilizes current research and case stories to describe/detail the unusual obstacles special education teachers face in their first year in the field. Special consideration to these obstacles and more than nineteen years of experience laid the foundation for a set of core values offered to the reader in surviving their first year of teaching in the field of English language education. Finally, through its core values this article offers some suggestions for making sure your first year of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) successful - so that all students learn effectively.

Keywords:

English Language Education
New Teachers
Quality teachers
Effective teachers

As I look back on the very beginning of my teaching career, I vividly recall thinking I may not make it to the end of my first academic year. I was constantly on overload. In my first year of teaching English as Second Language students, I was a surrogate parent, counselor, disciplinarian, coach, study hall proctor, and oh yeah, a teacher. There was no way my college field studies/practicums prepared me for all of the hats I wore as an English teacher. As a result of my first year of teaching I came to realize that this profession required a great deal of time, energy and commitment. This article takes into consideration these facts and more than nineteen years of experience. As well, this article offers some suggestions for making sure your first year of teaching is successful - so that all students learn effectively.

Recently, New England National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) were asked to identify those characteristics that they associate with "effective teachers." Below is a compilation of the most common responses received from these experienced educators. "As one NBCT so aptly pointed out, there are many levels of quality from quite low to quite high" (Hopkins,

2004). All respondents agreed that the educational reform efforts on the national, state, and local levels are most concerned with accomplished teachers who are deemed to be of the highest quality and effective in what they do.

Although not representative of all parts of the Five Core Propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Core Propositions provide a suitable context for most responses.

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning. As a first year English language education teacher, you need to make sure your philosophy is in sync with all of the federal and state mandates. This means your philosophy needs to be anchored in all of the current events within

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the profession of teaching, especially when it comes to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Massachusetts General Law. In simplest terms, your philosophy needs to promote inclusive practices/inclusion...making sure all English language learners are provided with the same opportunities to learn as their peers. Ideally, the setting in special education for such experiences for students with disabilities is commonly known as the least restrictive environment (LRE) - in many cases - the regular education classroom. The same philosophy applies in English Language Education.

I am a strong proponent of least restrictive environment and inclusive practices. As I look back over my career, I realize that I became a proponent of inclusive practices/inclusion in my first few years of teaching when one of my mentors told me, "Remember, families send you their best... They aren't hiding the other kid in the closet from you. They are sending you what they have. So, knowing they're sending you their best, give them your best."

In your first year of teaching students with disabilities, keep in mind that effective teachers:

- Have a passion for teaching
- Genuinely enjoy all of the students
- Believe in children and their potential
- Believe all children can learn
- Know and respect students as individuals
- Meet individual needs of all learners based on multiple assessments (both informal and formal)
- Establish realistically high expectations for each student
- Respect/celebrate cultural diversity of students while caring, listening, understanding and knowing their students (Haughey, 2002 & Stronge, 2002).
- Adapt lessons to meet individual student needs quickly and appropriately
- Create and implement developmentally appropriate lessons that are well grounded in prevailing theories of cognition and intelligence

2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

In English language education, teachers are required to know the content areas well - in

an effort to differentiate instruction and modifying the lessons to meet student needs. In my first year of teaching, I learned the hard way that lecturing to a student who was hard of hearing was not the right way to teach this young person. For much of the first few weeks, the student struggled to keep up. Yet, through

constant dialogue with the family; and most importantly, with the student, I learned how to best meet this young person's needs by providing a number of cooperative learning activities, problem-based learning exercises, writing my notes on the board, providing handouts, and offering extra help/review sessions before, during and after class/school. Slowly but surely, this student made progress and went on to become one of the better students in the room with outstanding tests, quizzes, and presentations that made the students who were not hard of hearing envious. Still, these accomplishments came as a result of a lot of hard work on the part of English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and the student.

In your first year of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs), keep in mind that effective teachers:

- Are proficient in their content area beyond the actual grade they teach
- Are masters of the art of teaching as well as the content
- Integrate content across disciplines
- Help students appreciate the relevance of the content by connecting it to real world contexts
- Display enthusiasm for their content
- Teach for mastery rather than coverage
- Re-evaluate and revise plans from

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hour to hour, day to day, and year to year based on individual student strengths and weaknesses

- Can explain/justify all instructional decisions based on knowledge of students, knowledge of content, and on short and long term goals
- Have a large repertoire of strategies and choose from them as appropriate for the students they teach
- Create lessons that are student-centered, steeply based in content, exciting, challenging, stimulating, innovative, based on current research and best practice, developmentally appropriate, enhanced with appropriate technology, Inquiry-based, and fun

3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

In English language education, the task of managing and monitoring student learning is a constant and continuous process. Yet, for this process to be effective, teachers need to be clear in their expectations, and communication. As a result, on the first day of school, first class, students need to know that in order to be an active participant in class they have to adhere to four rules at all times. I call these my classroom “Rules for Life.” They are:

- A. Respect: My students know from day one that they need to be respectful of themselves, each other and of the teacher.
- B. Responsibility: My students know they have to be responsible; do what they are asked to do when they are asked to do it.
- C. Cooperation: My students know they have to be cooperative at all times. They do not have to like each other, but they do have to get along. And yes, there is a difference. As an educator, I recognize that they might not always get along or like each other, that they may have fall outs or disagreements from time to time, but that does not excuse them from doing their work, meeting their deadlines or not cooperating with one another. And here is why...today more than ever, companies, especially Fortune 500 companies, depend upon the ability of their work force to work well together from the research and planning stages through to the final phases of a project. As a result, a great deal of my classes are cooperatively based

with the course itself built upon cooperatively learning exercises, problem based learning activities or group presentations.

- D. 4.) Effort: And finally, my students know that effort is everything! As a matter of fact, in all of my years as a teacher, not one of my students failed a course – when they gave their best effort! It is my belief that one does not fail if eventually they succeed.

In your first year of teaching English Language Learners, keep in mind that effective teachers:

- Encourage critical thinking, lifelong learning, creativity and risk-taking through the establishment of a positive, supportive, nurturing and challenging environment
- View all instruction as assessment
- Employ a variety of assessment methods (student work samples, anecdotal records, portfolios, tests, etc.)
- Base all instruction on the results of assessments (formal and informal)
- Provide students with clear assignments and assessment rubrics
- Provide appropriate, timely, and constructive feedback to students
- Teach the whole child (academic, social, emotional, physical)
- Engage students in, and encourage students to take responsibility for, their own learning
- Implement effective classroom management strategies
- Manage time and resources effectively

In English language education, the task of managing and monitoring student learning is a constant and continuous process. Yet, for this process to be effective, teachers need to be clear in their expectations, and communication.

4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

Many of today’s educational reform efforts came from industry and the health care reform initiatives of the 1990s. NCLB and the Re-Authorization of IDEA reflect a growing trend for standards, accountability and a need to think systematically about praxis. What is important to keep in mind is the fact that health care reform efforts focused its energies on nursing. The rationale was simple. At the heart of health care reform

is the nurse, who provides direct care to the patient and is probably the single most important individual in making sure someone who is sick gets better. Well the same holds true in education reform, the teacher is the single most important person in making sure improving teaching and learning becomes a reality (Haughey, 2006).

So, what makes teaching and learning effective? The teacher who stands side-by-side with the student as a guide through the learning process; the educator, who needs to let the students know on day one who they are as a professional and what they are all about... The educator, who clearly explains what they stand for and what they do not stand for!

As an educator with nineteen years of experience, I am in awe as to how much I work at conducting myself as a surrogate parent, counselor, disciplinarian, coach, study hall proctor, and oh yeah, a teacher - to so many young people within our school system. To be brutally honest about any hope we have to be effective in identifying and then meeting students needs and opportunities to learn; teaching and learning effectiveness requires a team approach, a collaborative approach on the part of everyone – working together.

In your first year of teaching English language Learners, keep in mind that effective teachers:

- Constantly reflect on their practice and make adjustments as appropriate
- Welcome/invite constructive criticism and are energized by their perceived “failures.”
- Strive to strengthen their practice by engaging in life-long learning
- Continuously work collaboratively with everyone involved in your school for it to become a true place of learning.

5. Teachers are members of learning communities. In your first year of teaching English Language Learners, your classroom is a home away from home, a safe place designed to promote learning, for you and your students. Thus, it is essential that you become familiar with the community as a whole to reflect its values. According to Jack Warner and Clyde Bryan (1995), your feel for the community will become invaluable as you establish rapport with your students,

their parents/family members, and the staff of your new school. The goal is to have your classroom become a reflection of the school, and the school a reflection of the community-at-large.

Yet, for a school to become a true learning community requires everyone thinking systematically and reflectively - about teaching and learning praxis as a means of promoting student learning. In English language education, teachers are the single most important people in making sure students are successful in learning and in their communities. As a result, in your first year of teaching English Language Learners, keep in mind that effective teachers:

- Advocate for students in the school and community as collaborators, mentors, learners, leaders, trainers, and partners
- Advocate for the profession
- Serve as proactive leaders in educational change
- Seek to learn from students, parents, peers, colleagues and the community
- Seek learning opportunities that extend beyond their content area or areas of personal interest in order to better serve their students
- Develop strong partnerships with families through consistent and constant two-way communication
- Participate in professional organizations
- Participate in continuing education
- Work collaboratively for the benefit of all students in the school

In conclusion, effective teachers in English language education are committed; know their subject matter and how to teach it; are responsive; think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and are contributors to the learning community to which they are a part of... Effective teachers recognize the complexity of their chosen profession. They work diligently to communicate clearly. And finally, the most important of all criteria, effective teachers serve the public - peers, families, the community-at-large and the students - conscientiously (Stronge, 2002). ■

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Do We Ask Our English Language Learners to Think?

by Lan Ngo

Teachers may be tempted to ask English language learners (ELLs) simple questions due to the students' status as language learners, a phenomenon that can be commonly observed at both the elementary and secondary level. However, because language ability should not be equated to overall intellectual ability, teachers should aim to develop the cognitive skills of their ELLs. One method is to ask questions that elicit higher-order thinking skills. How often do teachers ask such questions of their English language learners?

Purportedly, of the approximately 80,000 questions that the average teacher asks annually, 80% of them would be categorized as Literal or Knowledge questions (Gail, 1984; Watson & Young, 1986, as cited in Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). How were these numbers derived? Are they a true reflection, today, of a typical classroom- particularly a sheltered instruction classroom? This article provides a summary of classroom research that investigated the types of questions that teachers asked.

Research Questions

The questions to be answered were:

What types of questions does the teacher ask?
Does the teacher ask a variety of questions that may promote higher-order thinking skills in the classroom?

Context

The research is based on observations of a grade 9, sheltered instruction, English Language Arts class in an inner-city high school where the author was a student teacher. There were 15 students from various countries, including the Dominican Republic, Yemen, Russia, China, and Puerto Rico. All students at the school had been in the US for no more than four years and they were all considered ELLs. Students were heterogeneously grouped with respect to their first languages, current English as a second language ability levels, and their abilities in the content areas.

Methodology

The class was observed and "thick description during" field notes, as described by Andrew (2003), were taken. The focus was on questions asked by the teacher and written questions included in worksheets and other written assessments. Data was recorded over the course of five weeks.

After data was collected, recorded questions were labeled according to *Bloom's Taxonomy Model Questions and Keywords* (UT Learning Center, n.d.), such that each question was placed under one of the following categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Questions categorized as "knowledge" and "comprehension" are typically considered lower-order thinking skills [LOTS] questions, while questions in the other categories are often considered to be higher-order thinking skills [HOTS] questions. Knowledge and comprehension questions are often recall questions that ask students to regurgitate details and respond to *when, where and why questions*.

Results

During the five-week observation period, the teacher asked a total of 327 questions. Of those questions, 206 were in the knowledge category, 62 were in the comprehension category, 12 were in the application category, 37 were in the analysis category, 4 were in the synthesis category,

and 6 were in the evaluation category. The results are presented in figures 1 and 2.

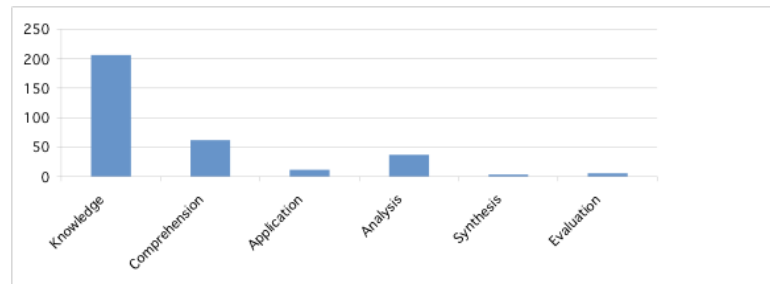


Figure 1: Bar graph - Number of questions asked for each classification

Findings and Implications

The data seem to confirm what researchers and educators often suggest: classroom teachers overwhelmingly tend to ask lower-order thinking questions. Although there was some difficulty in distinguishing between “knowledge” and “comprehension” questions in analyzing the types of questions, those two types are nonetheless encapsulated in the lower-order thinking category.

Noticeably, students were rarely asked evaluation questions. It seems that there are usually few opportunities for students to offer opinions, make evaluations, and provide corresponding evidence. This observation aligns with the notion that classrooms often lack space for students’ voices. This tendency may be a disservice particularly to ELLs who are already marginalized by society.

According to the findings, it may be hypothesized that teachers would benefit from explicit training on how to promote critical thinking and inquiry in the classroom. Based on conversations with the observed teacher, it does not seem that she (or most teachers) are aware of the types of questions that they ask their students. In particular, teachers seem unaware that they ask a disproportionate amount of knowledge/recall questions.

In the process of reading the field notes and classifying the questions, it was apparent that

there were few follow-up questions aimed at sustaining conversations and extending student responses to delve deep into a specific topic. Rather, following the teacher’s agenda, often one disparate question after another was asked. This pattern seemed to have made the teacher more susceptible to asking knowledge questions in reviewing reading assignments with the students, and thus, breadth took precedent over depth.

These findings also suggest that there may be a lack of training to prepare teachers to ask worthwhile questions that are accessible to students of various proficiency levels and encourage deep, intricate thoughts. As described by de Jong and Derrick-Mescua (2003), for such training to be effective, it should include the following major components: raising awareness of the issue, building teachers’ questioning skills, and having teachers practice formulating and formatting different questions. Perhaps there

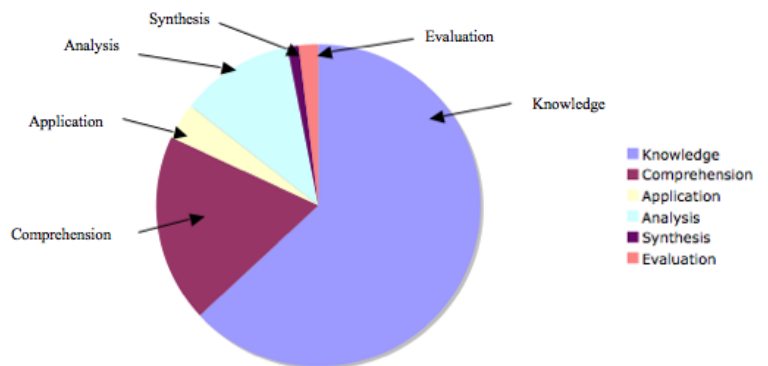


Figure 2: Pie chart - Proportion of questions asked according to question type

should be professional development for in-service teachers and classes for pre-service teachers that focus on this topic. It may also be beneficial for teachers to learn about different questioning structures that go beyond the traditional Initial question-Response-Feedback format, which seems to be the easiest to implement, yet the least stimulating for most students.

It should be pointed out that lower-order thinking questions should not necessarily be entirely eliminated. Such questions are important for building background and checking students’

comprehension. However, these questions should eventually lead to many more higher-order thinking questions. Otherwise, ELLs may only be asked to engage in low level of cognitive activities.

If we wish to guide our ELLs to think deeply, we must first think deeply about what types of questions we ask our students. By deliberately including opportunities for ELLs to develop higher-order thinking skills in our lesson plans, we can cultivate an environment in which we ask our students to not merely recall information, but to truly think. ■

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Lan Ngo received her MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from Teachers College, Columbia University. She currently teaches ESL, grades 9-12.

New Features on the MATSOL Website

by Helen Solorzano

Over the next few months, look for new, dynamic features on the MATSOL website that will help you get the most out of your MATSOL membership. Right now, you can sign up now for our new Elists: the MATSOL Advocacy Committee, the Low Incidence Special Interest Group (SIG) and the Secondary SIG, and look for more Elists to come online this summer. Elists are a great way to stay in touch with MATOL and your colleagues around the state.

To sign up for Elists, log onto the MATSOL website at www.matsol.org and follow the "Manage Elist Subscriptions" link in the Member Center. In your member profile, click on the "My Elists" tab and click "Subscribe" to subscribe to an Elist.

Have you ever accidentally deleted an important email message from MATSOL? You can find a copy by going to your member profile and clicking on the "My Message History." You can also click on the "My Receipts" tab to see the membership dues and event registration form receipts you've completed.

If you want to update your contact information, change your password, or subscribe to MATSOLworks job listings, simply follow links in the Member Center.

Remember that if you've forgotten your password, you can retrieve it anytime by clicking on the "Forgot your password?" link on the login page. ■

ELPBO: The Baby in the Bath Water?

By Jill McCarthy

I was asked recently to comment on a case (outside of the district in which I work) of an English Language Learner (ELL) student being considered for placement in Special Education. Perusing a 4-inch binder of “evidence” from numerous experts, I came upon a listing of “ELPBOs” and dated work samples maintained by the ELL staff. I was pleasantly surprised to see how clearly the “trail” of second language literacy development was demonstrated, as documented by “benchmarks and outcomes” (English Language and Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes, DOE, 2003).

This snapshot experience reminded me of the constant need of ELL professionals to demonstrate to non-ELL colleagues, advocates, parents and others that English language acquisition is occurring in a predictable time frame and manner. The usual “It takes 5-7 years...” does not appease those who expect tangible “evidence” of progress. As I was reminded in this recent experience, such evidence can be documented through the ELPBO document’s benchmarks and outcomes.

The original ELBPO emerged from the assessment division at the MA Department of Education in 2003. A major objective for creating ELPBO was to provide a consistent document for assessing language and literacy development of ELLs across grades, languages, and educational backgrounds. The writers of ELPBO had curriculum and instruction aspirations as well as the state-motivated assessment purpose. The committee that participated in the development of this document hoped that “best practices” in the field could be integrated into the document. Thus, the document ultimately contained numerous distinctions unique to the field of English (as a Second) Language Development, for example:

- the focus on essential content vocabulary from the earliest proficiency levels;
- integration of content language with literacy development, designed to support both ESL teachers and content classrooms teachers’ work with English learners;
- integration of thinking skills (see selected verbs as language functions) at all proficiency levels so that even beginning English

learners would be intellectually engaged in the learning process;

- comparative approaches to content topics that could encourage teachers and students to draw on students’ prior knowledge and experiences;
- explicit teaching and application of learning strategies for students from differing cultures, languages, and schooling experiences. Strategies included use of one’s prior knowledge and first language, for example, access first language cognates to increase English vocabulary knowledge.

Having heard rumors that ELPBO may be revised in the near future, I feel a growing concern that we may find ourselves with a simplified standards document that will not address the complexity of our work (and that of content and classroom teachers) and our students. Will it matter to our daily work, planning, and assessment if ELPBO is revised by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE] in the near future? Will a revised document be more accessible for purposes of team-teaching, teacher assistance teams, curriculum design, progress reports, parents supporting their child’s learning, and other school uses?

Conceptually, there are few differences between the MA ELL document and the current national TESOL standards, in my opinion. However, in 2003, ELPBO differed in that the ELL development committee was asked to mirror the MA English Language Arts framework standards for smooth transitioning (and assessment) from ELL to ELA content. To more comprehensively represent the nature of second language learning, the development committee found additional conceptual and specific elements within the MA Foreign Language Framework, already approved by the Board of Education at the time. By adopting elements from this document, we were able to include additional shared outcomes for ELLs, for example:

- the inclusion of background knowledge and experiences of the learners;
 - cultural aspects that influence individual learning;
 - knowledge of first language features that enhance or complicate the learning of the “new” language, from sounds to false cognates and culturally aligned narrative styles.
- Perhaps the largest challenge for the commit-

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tee was the development of academic language benchmarks and grade/proficiency-level outcomes representing the range of content areas (eg., science, history/social studies, mathematics). To accomplish the desired range of differentiation, we needed to dig deeply into the MA frameworks of these content areas. For example, what are the demands of scientific writing for grade 10? How should ELL students of all proficiency levels write about cause and effect within social studies themes? How does content writing differ between grade 4 and grade 8, for example?

In order to build toward L2 reading and writing in content areas, we needed to assure an oral proficiency base (see indicators such as S.1.17, S.1.29, S.3.30, S.3.51). By providing the aural/oral language base early in the English-learning school experience, reading and writing for academic content purposes would be grounded in meaning and purpose. For example, reference to R.1.17.e in ELPBO provides samples of linguistic structures for the content areas at various grade levels. ELPBO R.3.4, R.3.10 and R.3.14 (comprehension) provide guidance for both ELL and content teachers to assist their students with practice in “using evidence from an informational text.”

Incidentally, the rationale for linking oral language development to academic literacy for ELLs was recently framed as a key research finding by the National Literacy Panel (2006), “Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth,” edited by Diane August and Timothy Shanahan (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, and Center for Applied Linguistics). The document details a range of second language areas for attention by ELL and content teachers in the current high stakes context of content assessments.

With such national, current research findings in mind, we ELL professionals in MA might want to carefully consider how to avoid “throwing the baby out with the bath water” in regard to procedural frustrations with ELPBO. Specifically, what caused the awkwardness of the current ELPBO document and might it be “fixed” in a new version? Perhaps the most visible difference to the reader is that ELPBO is divided into two formats, one for Listening/Speaking and one for Reading/Writing. Reasoning for this

relates to the original purposes of the document to serve statewide assessment purposes for all English proficiency levels at all grades. The DESE assumed any ELL standards document would embed the listening and speaking continua of MELA-O, the oral assessment instrument used K-12 in MA for several years prior to the general standards movement and resulting curriculum frameworks.

The ELPBO committee was satisfied early in the design process with the organization of the listening and speaking domains as “grade-free”, that is, a “beginner is a beginner.” MELA-O allows the recording teacher to assume the grade-level aural/oral context for the student being assessed. In contrast, ELL students arrive in ESL and SEI classrooms with a range of literacy skills and schooling experiences, thus needing a “sliding” structure to locate literacy “entry points.” Older ELLs need the longest “slide-back” potential in order to locate entry points of literacy development in academic contexts, leading to grade-level participation, successful MCAS experiences, and ultimately, graduation.

The organization of ELPBO does not readily indicate how to proceed with “sliding back” to locate entry points for literacy. Second language literacy diagnostic assessments similar to MELA-O might have been useful to the range of ELPBO, for example, leveled and grade cluster samples of second language writing for specific purposes. The next version of ELPBO may be able to overcome some of the structural issues encountered in 2002-2003 without diminishing the complexity and range of the students (and teachers) for whom the document is intended. Hopefully, any new standards document for ELLs will include additive features of first language literacy and culture embedded in a shared vision of equity and excellence for all learners in MA K-12 schools. ■

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Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners

RITELL Becomes TESOL's 102nd Affiliate

by Nancy Cloud, RITELL Coordinating Council Member

Just in time for the annual TESOL Convention; this year held in Boston; RITELL became an official independent affiliate of TESOL! In 2000, RITELL was just a dream envisioned by Rhode Island ELL educators and supported by the efforts of past MATSOL Presidents Johan Uvin and Rob Vitello. The work begun in 2000-2001 was focused on one goal: to help Rhode Island educators serving ELLs to reconstitute their own professional association. That dream has now become reality thanks to the unbelievable support of MATSOL leaders, particularly by Paula Merchant and Helen Solorzano with whom we have worked most closely to learn the ropes of being an independent professional association. We thank all of the MATSOL Boards from 2000 to now who have supported the development of our professional association. We particularly thank the current board of directors, especially Linda Foley-Vinay and past president Robyn Dowling-Grant. Our existence is a tribute to MATSOL's unwavering support. During the past decade, RITELL has progressed from being a special interest group of MATSOL (RISIG) to an allied professional association (RITELL) of MATSOL's, to its current independent status as an affiliate of TESOL. Like MATSOL, RITELL is an-all volunteer professional association whose mission is:

- To develop, maintain, and promote professional expertise, research and scholarship in English language teaching and learning for speakers of other languages in Rhode Island.
- To work cooperatively toward the improvement of instruction in all programs which seek to provide English Language Learners an opportunity to acquire English language proficiency;
- To disseminate information, and provide direction and support to its membership in promoting excellence in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages;
- To encourage informed participation, ad-

vocacy and leadership at the local and state levels regarding the education of English Language Learners in Rhode Island;

- To promote intercultural understanding and effective cross-cultural communication and the valuing of the native languages and cultures of the learners and their families;
- To cooperate in appropriate ways with other groups having similar concerns.

RITELL plans to offer Rhode Island Teachers of ELLs:

- Two conferences per year, one fall and one spring
- A newsletter
- E-bulletins
- A website with resources for teachers, and
- Opportunities for professional networking

If you are a teacher of ELLs (PK-adult) living and/or working in RI, we look forward to your continued support and involvement in RITELL. Your energy and commitment to our professional association are essential for RITELL to remain a healthy, vibrant professional association.

Towards that end, we invite all RITELL members to our spring event on June 2nd from 6:30-8:30 PM in Alger 110 where we will celebrate becoming TESOL's 102nd affiliate, conduct our first annual meeting and elect our first official Board of Directors/Coordinating Council. More about the nominations and election process will be sent to members in advance of the June meeting. At the conclusion of the annual business meeting, we plan to show the documentary film "My American Girls: A Dominican Love Story." The film captures the joys and struggles over a year in the lives of the Ortiz family, first generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic. It captures the rewards — and costs — of pursuing the American dream, from hard-working parents, who imagine retiring to their rural homeland, to fast-tracking American-born daughters, caught between their parent's values and their own. It's a wonderful film so don't miss it!

The future of RITELL is bright thanks to MATSOL's decade-long support! We look forward to many opportunities to collaborate with MATSOL in the future and plan to officially recognize MATSOL at our fall conference for its pivotal role in helping RITELL become a reality. Until then, we want to send our heartfelt thanks to MATSOL, its leaders and its members, for helping make a Rhode Island dream come true. ■

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Secondary SIG Update

by Suzanne Coffin

In January, at the all SIG gathering, a group of thirteen secondary educators met and discussed the possibility of starting small gatherings among ELL teachers from diverse districts in order to share information and discuss issues which interest us.

We decided it would be most productive to focus on instructional issues as that is an area over which we have some control.

After initial brainstorming of the issues, we decided our focus for the morning would be two questions:

How are ESL teachers supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms? And how are ELL teachers managing to teach across the curriculum to beginner ELLs?

The following is part of an email I received from veteran Bilingual/ELD educator, reinforcing my belief that no matter how informal the gathering, it is important for all of us to get together and support each other.

No matter how many years of teaching, sharing these powerful moments help us restore our faith and hope that MATSOL is always there! All we have to do is reach out.

Notes on these meetings have been disseminated to the SIG.

We are interested in keeping the dialogue going on these and other issues of interest or concern. With this in mind, we are hoping that members in various central locations will contact us with a venue and a meeting time.

Suggestions for venues include coffee shops as well as public and school libraries. ■

Suzanne Coffin
Secondary SIG Representative

February MELLC Meeting a Huge Success

by Boni-esther Enquist, MELLC Volunteer

This February's engaging MELLC meeting featured the sharing of helpful information and resources from all over the state. Our meeting began by participants updating each other on what's going on in the field. Some new happenings included the posting of ESL Report card/Progress reports online (a work done by the MATSOL low incidence group), an announcement for an upcoming RTI Forum and Networking Event (sponsored by MABE) and a Higher Education Workshop to be announced on MATSOL's website for March. Participants were also encouraged to register for TESOL Boston – March 24-27, 2010.

During lunch, we held breakout groups for SEI Category trainers, LD vs. L2 issues, ELL Placement and Identification, CPR issues, High School issues and Document translation issues. There was much mention, throughout the day, of hoping that the DESE could help create approved standard documents (and their accompanying translations), such as those used in Title I services, to have available online. Directors are currently either inventing their own documents or borrowing ones from other districts, only to have various program evaluators approve of some and not others, with each change costing time and money in the creation and subsequent and numerous translations of documents. Francine Johnson (Greater Lawrence Technical School) offered to spearhead the creation of a letter to the Commissioner requesting the publication of some key required documents (such as home language surveys).

Neil Lynch (Concord-Carlisle) presented a slideshow summarizing some of the main points of the recent Educational Reform Bill which included emphasis on strategies to raise student achievement, especially in underperforming schools. It was noted that new models of accountability include a growth model rather than achievement model and the creation of regional centers (DSAC) to support underperforming schools. Ramifications of poor findings in a school could lead to staff having to renew their contracts yearly and teacher dismissal. Increased time and resources to promote more professional development for teachers of ELLs and planning time, as well as the establishment

of Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils would be some steps that might help in some districts. The MELLC group was encouraged to continue to support House Bill 486 to help safeguard measures to support ELLs in our schools. Neil's slideshow is available on the MELLC bulletin board.

Dan Wiener from DESE's Office of Assessment, gave an update on MEPA for the MELLC directors. The MEPA results are scheduled to be sent to the schools in June and computer-based MEPA testing, which was piloted in some large districts this year, will expand to include more districts next year (the Massachusetts trees are saying, "Yippy!") Other details of Mr. Wiener's presentation may be read from the minutes of this meeting.

The meeting also featured suggestions by several MELLC members for vocabulary development for ELLs. Bonnie Baer-Simahk (Fitchburg Public Schools) modeled an activity to share with staff to highlight the challenges that ELLs face with comprehending academic language. Laurie Zucker-Conde (Bedford Public Schools) shared some of her strategies she encourages her staff to include in their vocabulary instruction and Helaine Block (Needham Public Schools) shared some graphic organizers she uses at the high school level to help build ELLs' academic vocabulary. Marilyn Barrett (Nantucket Public Schools) shared some of her favorite resources from a life science series and described how she uses them to develop academic vocabulary for ELLs in the content classrooms.

As a final presentation for the MELLC Directors, Jim McDonough from Heinle Publishers shared a slideshow based on Robert Manzano's work on vocabulary development and introduced the group to the resources that Heinle has to offer. We are grateful to the publisher for their generous support of our meeting and encourage everyone to visit their website.

Thank you to those MANY people who helped to create a great day of resource sharing and problem-solving. We are especially grateful to Michelle Griffin, Colleen Billings and Jessica Gonzalez of DESE's Office of Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement for taking time to visit our group and be available to answer questions. We look forward to the May meeting when we will focus on Technology. ■

"Do you understand the words that are comin' outta my mouth?"

Comprehensibility In The Classroom Through Pronunciation

By Katherine E. Morelli

Teaching pronunciation is crucial for English language learning. It supports students' comprehension more effectively. The more recent emphasis on suprasegmentals—intonation, rhythm, and stress—has been an important development in the instruction of pronunciation (http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/sec_document.asp?CID=196&DID=580). Teaching pronunciation can be made more effective when it is taught in context. Teaching in how words are pronounced in context can greatly help students to learn a new language more optimally. While it is important for students to understand segments (phones/phonemes) in isolation—it is also necessary for students to be aware of how these sounds and their accompanying stresses may shift and change in rapid streams of speech. Suprasegmental instruction, which addresses the noticeable changes in natural speech, can provide students with the tools to better comprehend English in the "real world".

If you are teaching stress, one suggestion I have learned is playing "stress dominos"—wherein students try to match similar stress patterns between words. This activity can be even more helpful if you use target vocabulary or grammar as your "dominos." You can also make students more aware of connected speech by playing the "Can I Help You?" game. To elicit vowel-vowel linking, you (or a student) walk around with photographs of food, for example, and ask, "Can I help you?" Students then have to respond by saying, "Can I have..." followed by the item(s) in the photograph: "Can I help you?" "Can I have three eggs," or "Can I have two eggs."

I also like to incorporate music in the classroom. Studying stress and rhythm in language is much like studying music. In the past, I have had students bring in musical instruments or simply tap their desks or feet to the syllabic beat of the word, phrase, sentence, or poem. I have been known to distribute quite a few Shel Silverstein poems including, "Sarah Silvia Cynthia Stout."

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The most challenging aspect of suprasegmentals is intonation. One of the worst things that can happen when communicating is being misunderstood, even worse, unintended negative perceptions. The anxieties that are caused by these misunderstandings can be discouraging. Intonation instruction can help students express themselves with more confidence.

The complex components of intonation make it extremely difficult to define, let alone teach. You may ask, why bother teaching my students intonation and what is the function of intonation? I think one of the reasons for this confusion, is the fact that you can't really see it, and it's largely unconscious for native speakers. More importantly, it needs to be taught in context. However, to really understand the function of intonation, or at least its form, consider for a moment the English language without stress, pause, and alternations in pitch, speed and volume. While we could still communicate in the absence of these things, why would we want to?

Intonation is really the melody or pitch pattern in the voice, whose functions include attitudinal, accentual, grammatical and discourse. For example, intonation helps to signify new information: "I like MUsic. CLASSical music." It also highlights contrasting information. Discussing menus or choosing classes is a great way to practice these contrasts: "Do you want the GREEK salad or the MediterRanean?" It also helps to show emphasis. While this is somewhat challenging to teach with any consistency due to the many variations, fixed idioms or lexical chunks are good subjects: "I can't BELIEVE it." In addition, you can teach some of the ways in which we use tones by working simply with the words, "yes" and "no." For example, "yes" with a rising tone seems to welcome the conversation while a falling tone suggests that it may be unwanted. Each student is given an index card with one of the four tones (rise, fall, level and rise-fall) for "yes" or "no." The student must then respond with that tone when asked a specific question.

I think one of the best ways to really solidify intonation instruction is by exposing students repeatedly to native speech so that they begin to discriminate between sounds, and recognize the obscurities and patterns. Surprisingly, it even helps students recognize grammar structures by using information in the intonation, such as the placement of boundaries between spaces.

The ultimate goal is intelligibility and comprehensibility. Maintaining simplicity in the classroom helps to achieve this goal. While more advanced students may benefit from knowing that the phoneme /b/ is a voiced, bilabial stop, and that in "I want those," "those" is the tone-unit—more often than not, this kind of information only confuses students. The lesson here is to stick to what is teachable. Constant exposure to the moderations, patterns, tones, stresses and rhythms in English can help students communicate with more clarity, and comprehend the language outside of the classroom, where it matters most. ■

Learning about Language Assessment: Dilemmas, Decisions and Directions

Kathleen M. Bailey. Heinle & Heinle, 1998. 258 Pages. ISBN# 0-8384-6688-5
reviewed by Kathy Walter

This book is a part of the TeacherSource series. Its purpose is to guide teachers to additional teaching ideas and concepts without necessarily dictating what *should* be used. The goal is to help teachers to be comfortable with the uncomfortable question of "...evaluating the work of learners we've been trying to help."

The book has many concepts that teachers can use in the classroom and sections of each chapter called "Teacher Voices," where the author shows how others have applied the practices. Practitioners might also find it useful for professional development. There is a large portion of the book that goes into a deep statistical analysis, more than I found useful; more scholarly colleagues might feel otherwise. If there is any doubt whether the book makes sense for your needs, there is a section called "Twenty Questions" to review its relevance.

Though not explicit, it appears the book is divided into three parts – an analysis of assessment and testing, a deep dive into statistical analysis, and then a few chapters on alternative assessment methods.

There are two types of assessment. It can be a mechanism to collect information about a student's background and baseline capabilities before classes begin, or certain methods can be used to monitor student development throughout the class. There are a variety of methods for collecting information and different tests that can be utilized, depending on the classroom situation. The book equally explores initial and ongoing evaluation methods to help analyze student work throughout the teaching period.

For instance, one scenario where assessment can be problematic is when a student does not have enough vocabulary to respond. This could make the assessment process frustrating for the student. Even when students have more vocabulary, they might be concerned with opening up too much in the first few classes. So, how much information is too much? This is the type of thought provoking dialogue that the book undertakes.

Standardized tests, as another example, can be a source of frustration for teachers. While a teacher may struggle to infuse other material and enhance student learning beyond the test, rarely are there sufficient opportunities to do so. The testing chapters give several examples where other learning could be infused, even evaluated, without interrupting the flow required in teaching for the standardized test. The middle portion of the book reviews basic statistical tools and examines the details of some tests discussed in the first part of the book. The analysis delves into statistical detail about how to construct programs that utilize these tests and ensure the construction is well tested as students interact with it.

The final part covers alternative forms of assessment, namely Performance Test, Portfolios and Self-Assessment. All are relatively newer communities of practice and all utilize student-led grading criteria, which infuse a sense of student empowerment. These types of assessments have been implemented mainly in regular and ELL classrooms with younger, school-age children where students do not have as many preconceived ideas about learning. But they are also seeing some foothold in adult classrooms where students might have more settled notions of learning. While it does take additional work and diligence to keep these types of activities going, they allow students to see the progress in their work and to take ownership of their own learning.

This book has a solid depth of research and practical examples to allow individual teachers or departments or systems to develop programs that incorporate classroom assessments. It is useful to have those separate dynamics spelled out more in depth because there are subtle differences in developing assessment regimens with different organizers and purposes. The author does not back away from the complexities of assessment. She inserts her educated preferences into the work and shows where alternate options can be successfully integrated.

While the book has many strengths, I find myself still searching for a book that provides more examples to fully and practically implement a continuous assessment model- a highly complex goal as it covers many stages in the learning process. I would have liked to see more specific, short exercises to use for ongoing assessment in addition to the material provided around initial assessment, which got equal treatment in the book. ■

Kathy Walter is a Senior Product Manager at a large S&P 500 company. She obtained her MBA in Marketing and Operations at NYU Stern and her Graduate Certificate in TESOL at Northeastern in June of 2009. Kathy has taught ELLs in the Global Pathways program at Northeastern as well as the Cambridge Learning Center. Her research interest centers on knowledge workers as a unique subset of adult language learners. This is her first book review for MATSOL. kathy_walter@hotmail.com

Key Decisions in US History: A Participatory Approach

Patrick Henry Smith and John Croes. Walch Publishing, 1997. Two volume set, 160 pages each volume. Volume I 1450-1860, Volume II 1861-1994. ISBN 0-8251-3323-8.

reviewed by Laurie Hartwick

Learning about U.S. History in high school is often a complex process for English language learners [ELLs]. They not have the background knowledge of U.S. history that their native speaking peers have gained from the traditional K-12 social studies curriculum. U.S. history textbooks are often textually dense with complex sentences and higher tiered vocabulary, and contain references to events and people unfamiliar to ELLs. Teachers need to build a great deal of prior knowledge in a short amount of time while keeping students on task with material that may be beyond their interest and lan-

guage proficiency. *Key Decisions in U.S. History: A Participatory Approach* is a supplementary text with engaging activities that allow for collaborative decision making and language development.

Key Decisions in U.S. History: A Participatory Approach is a two volume set. Each volume contains 56 reproducible decision making activities. The activities focus on important events and are usually limited to two pages. The first activity page posits a question on which students will eventually make a decision, for example: “1968 Vietnam War Protesters – How can we stop the war in Vietnam?” The first paragraph of the text tells students who they are in the decision making process, thus putting the onus on the student to take on the role of a participant in the event. Two to three paragraphs follow with background information including the stakeholders and the potential impact of different decisions on the parties involved. A photograph or map enhances the text. The second page of the activity includes Comprehension and Decision sections. The Comprehension section consists of a series of *who/what/when/where/why* questions that prompt students to find evidence in the text. The Decision section restates the question and lists several possible choices of decisions. There is also an “Other” choice inviting students to think of further possibilities. Finally, students are asked to explain their decision to the class and what rationale they used. Each volume ends with Historical Notes and vocabulary banks. The text is a useful supplement to any sheltered or mainstreamed history text. The activities are succinct, the reading is at a 5th-8th grade level, and the vocabulary is manageable although some pre-instruction may be needed. The activities promote collaborative work but can also be completed individually. Each activity is formatted similarly so that, once trained in the process, students fall immediately to task. The teacher will want to choose decisions that will enhance her lessons and think carefully about how often to use them.

I used several activities from Volume 2 in my sheltered U.S. History II course for low proficiency newcomers. The decision-making topics align well with MA Curriculum Frameworks. I introduced the decision-making activity with explicit vocabulary instruction due to the proficiency level of the class. While students volunteered to read the text aloud, I asked questions to ascertain comprehension and reviewed the

vocabulary in context; these are the items that we had worked with during the explicit vocabulary instruction. After reading the text as a full group, the class completed a graphic organizer such as a T-chart to organize and clarify information before they broke up into groups for the decision making. At first, students tended to misunderstand that they were taking the role of the decision maker. However, after the first two exposures to the process, they got into their roles easily. Endeavoring to get one up on their peers, students often went back to their textbook or other material to add more details to their decision explanation, thus using a range of sources to validate their decision. Once each group had agreed on a decision, they presented their choice orally while I recorded key points on the board. Students then had the opportunity to change their decision based on what they learned from other groups. I was pleased that when I used the activities students asked more questions about what happened and showed greater interest in the topic. Even more satisfying was that they tended to make connections between the text, other supplementary material, and the decision making activity.

Key Decisions in U.S. History: A Participatory Approach is an effective tool for providing students with a collaborative process to understand important historical events by taking part in the decision making. The skills necessary for reading about and discussing issues and making a decisions about them, involve critical thinking and active language use. ■

Laurie Hartwick has taught ESOL in Lawrence Public Schools for the last 12 years and is an adjunct in Developmental Studies for Northern Essex Community College.
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Teaching Vocabulary ELT Advantage Online Professional Development Courses

Heinle Cengage Learning.

www.ed2go.com/classes/online_course/etv

reviewed by Bayda Asbridge

I became aware of Heinle's online professional development offerings through my work place and have been taking ELT Advantage On-Line Professional Development courses for over a year now. They are a tangible and practical asset in my daily teaching and course preparation. I am an experienced ESL teacher, yet these courses have helped me stay abreast of current teaching techniques and suggested alternative resources which keep my teaching varied, upbeat and interesting.

The courses are taught by some of the most respected names in the field such as Tom Scovel, Diane Larsen-Freeman, and Neil Anderson to mention just a few. Each course is designed to be affordable and flexible and can be taken over a short period of six weeks. I was able to take the lessons at my convenience. There is a two-week grace period, which was good to know, even though I did not need it. Upon successful completion of each course, I was able to print out a TESOL Certificate of Completion. The courses are also offered for credit at Worcester State College.

This review focuses on *Teaching Vocabulary* by Paul Nation. Of the many courses I have taken with ed2go.com, this is one of my favorites. The course starts with an assessment quiz (how much do you already know about teaching vocabulary) and ends with a final exam.

Paul Nation is a professor of Applied Linguistics in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His focus is on teaching vocabulary. Nation emphasizes the importance of designing a course specifically for teaching vocabulary, and this can be an adaptation of an existing course. To start the course, you need to assess your learners' existing vocabulary using the vocabulary level tests provided on his web site: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation/nation.aspx>.

The course discusses the many types of vocabulary (high frequency, low frequency, academic,

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and technical) and which ones to teach in the classroom; strategies in teaching vocabulary; and the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning focused-output, language focused learning, and fluency development. Fluency is emphasized by providing strategies for looking at speed, flow, repetition, and making associations.

Graded readers are used as a benchmark to monitor learners' progress while moving between extensive reading (leisurely reading) and intensive reading (focusing on vocabulary learning). The last two lessons are dedicated to testing and evaluating vocabulary learning by looking at reliability, validity and practicality of the tests and course design.

Each lesson has a list of supplementary materials, list of references (both books and websites), frequently asked questions, assignments, quizzes, a discussion page to ask the tutor any questions you may have, and a list of suggested resources. This on-line course is a great learning opportunity. I recommend *Teaching Vocabulary* by Paul Nation for any language teacher wishing to improve their vocabulary teaching skills. ■

Bayda Asbridge is originally from the Middle East. She has taught ESOL to adults and children at various levels of proficiency in a number of countries including Syria, Kuwait, and the United Kingdom. She currently teaches workplace ESL & computer literacy at Quinsigamond Community College. She also teaches Arabic to adults and children, and works as a legal and medical interpreter.

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If you are interested in writing a review of any of these texts or materials, contact Sterling Giles at (617) 421-9134, sterlg@aol.com. We can also send you a complete list of titles available for review, but if there is any recently published material which you have in mind to review - please be in touch; it's certainly possible. You can earn PDP's for writing published reviews.

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