VATESOL Newsletter

December, 2006/ Vol. 9, Issue 2

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2006 - 2007

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President's Message

Judy Marlow
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Great thanks from the VATESOL Board to Barbara Carper and her team of helpers from Roanoke and elsewhere who organized our fall conference – VATESOL's first ever 2-day event. The speakers were inspiring and informative. Numerous workshops gave us opportunities to learn from one another and find out what is happening in different parts of the state. The publishers gave away lots of great books and supplied us with catalogs and information to keep us up to date with the latest materials. And we all enjoyed seeing one another, meeting new colleagues and friends, eating and dancing!

Anyone wanting to help plan next year's conference, please contact our vice president, Kieran Hilu.

A highlight for me at the fall conference was meeting a student from JMU who came with some of her professors and fellow students from JMU's education department. In 1993 Quang came from Vietnam to Roanoke where she was one of my elementary ESL students for 3 years. It was a real thrill to meet her again as a college student preparing to become an elementary teacher with an ESOL endorsement. Thinking back to the days when I taught Quang (and 30 other students in 9 schools, as a half time teacher!), I became aware of how much has changed in the past decade. Roanoke's ESOL program has certainly grown and changed in very positive ways. Students now come from very different parts of the world. Standards have become the focus of instruction and we all know that data is the great dictator of how and where we are headed.

While much has changed, I am grateful that some things remain the same. As excited as I was to see Quang on her way to becoming a teacher -- and more importantly fulfilling one of the dreams she expressed to me as a younger student-- I was equally excited when my newest student, Clovis, from Burundi, learned to read his first 4 words this week. The light that shines in my students' eyes when they are able to meet new challenges and show their strengths, continues to inspire me to keep going even in some very stressful situations.

Recently I managed to find time to look at some of the information I collected at the VATESOL conference. I read information from the VDOE that listed the top 10 languages spoken by ESOL students in Virginia. Most of my students' languages were not there. There are schools just a few miles from mine whose ESOL students come from entirely different parts of the world from mine. Our city's schools and our state have very diverse student populations; our teachers need different types of resources and models of instruction; our needs for staff development and conference workshops may be very different also. And yet there was not a single teacher with whom I spoke at our conference who was not passionate about the work he or she does. The love and dedication that we pour into teaching our students is immeasurable and abundant. It shows on the faces of our students – new and old – and in the support we offer one another when we gather.

As the days grow shorter and the nights seem darker, may the light keep shining through the eyes of all of our students and their dedicated teachers. We may or may not get the privilege of seeing our students again in 10 or 15 years, but we know that what we do now makes a big difference in their lives. Likewise, what we, as teachers, share with one another at conferences and in articles, keeps our own lights aglow and strengthens us to meet the challenges we face.

Membership Report

Jen Kuchno
kuchnoj@vcu.edu

VATESOL has 125 paid members for 2006-2007 as of November 4, 2006. However, there are about 90 members that have not yet renewed their membership and are still on the LISTSERV. We need you to renew. VATESOL's membership rate remains a very affordable $15 for regular members and $7.50 for students. Membership forms can be downloaded from our web site: www.vatesol.org. Non-renewing members will be purged from the directory and LISTSERV beginning November 15, 2006. Of course, you can join VATESOL at anytime, but the deadline to be included in the Membership E-Directory is November 15, 2006.

MEMBERSHIP E-DIRECTORY: The Membership Directory will be made available to members in good standing in December 2006 in electronic form using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. E-directories will be sent via e-mail. If you would like a paper copy, please e-mail me at kuchnoj@vcu.edu.

LISTSERV: There are several members who have indicated that they do not wish to be on the VATESOL LISTSERV. I am urging you to reconsider! The LISTSERV is an e-mail list that is a valuable resource to you as an ESL professional. It is also VATESOL's main tool for distributing information to members. The LISTSERV acts like a bulletin board not a "chat" forum, and there are only a few e-mails sent each month with professional information about ESL in Virginia and beyond! Members in good standing can post items of interest (such as job postings, ESL seminars, speakers, etc.) to the LISTSERV by sending an e-mail to our LISTSERV Manager, Ron Corio, at rcorio@vcu.edu. The LISTSERV connects you to the entire membership. Contact me if you are not on the LISTSERV and we can make that change.

Treasurer's Report

Kathleen Cahoon
kathleen_cahoon@yahoo.com

Balance 10/5/06	9168.07
2006-2007 Membership/Conference Dues	3059.50
Conference Expenditures: Dinner/Breakfast/Lunch	3185.95
Speakers	1448.23
Posters/Flyers	67.00
Cash for change/miscellaneous	738.24
Total conference expenses	6439.42
Balance 11/27/05	5732.60

VESA 2007

Working together for Success: Partnerships and Interventions
At the Koger Conference Center and Holiday Inn
Richmond, Virginia
February 9-10
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Donald Bear
For information, contact:
Coordinator Sharon Lommel: badwing@juno.com
Lolly Young for registration:
lolly_young@ccpsnet.net

Globetrotters

At the 2006 VATESOL conference, a new feature was launched: Globetrotters. We hope to include information about VATESL members' globetrotting experiences in each newsletter.
For now, here are some sites that can help us to find out ways to be globetrotters:

Dave's ESL Cafe International Jobs
http://www.eslcafe.com/jobs/
Numeours resources for teaching English overseas, including a place to post your resume.

Fulbright Teacher Exhange Program
http://www.fulbrightexchanges.org/
A federal grant program in which you switch places with a teacher from another country for a semester or a year.

Peace Corps
To be a Peace Corps Volunteer
http://www.peacecorps.gov/
About positions to train volunteers and administer volunteer programs
http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=pchq.jobs.overseasOp

English Language Learners in the 21st Century: Integrating Language and Content

Based on Keynote Talk. VATESOL Conference 2006

Jon Nordmeyer, School for International Training

English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest growing sector of the U.S. school-aged population today. The census bureau predicts that by 2030 40% of students enrolled in U.S. schools will come from non-English speaking backgrounds. In Virginia, the ELL population has more than tripled in the past ten years. In light of this growing linguistic diversity in the student population, it is increasingly important to address the achievement gap between native English speakers and ELLs. Teaching ELLs in the 21st century requires a shift in how schools view students, teachers and ESL programs.

Students who are learning English as a new language face many challenges when they come to new school. They must adapt to a new culture, make friends, and navigate a new building – all in a language which they may not know well. Their biggest challenge, however, is learning *academic content in English*. It is a moving target, since increasingly complex language skills are required for access to academic content, which becomes more difficult at each grade level. Since all students need to develop academic English proficiency and achieve in subject areas, effective instruction must integrate language and content learning.
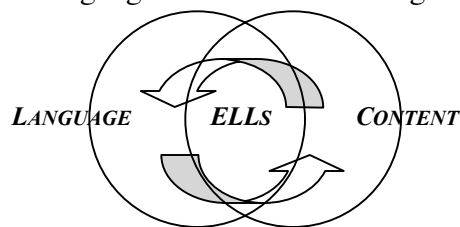

On one hand, students should be provided with scaffolding to understand mainstream, grade-level content. On the other hand, students should be given opportunities to develop academic English skills in the context of their subject-matter classes.

These interrelated processes allow ELLs to attain content standards while developing English language proficiency. ELLs need help with the twin challenges of achieving in content areas and developing academic English proficiency, but ESL teachers cannot do this job alone. The entire school community must take responsibility for all its students. In the face of this need, two myths persist in many schools.

Myth #1: ELLs are only a small portion of our school population.

The reality: The "general" student population includes many students who are still developing English proficiency. Students in this "hidden population" may have exited ESL or bilingual programs or were never identified as needing language support.
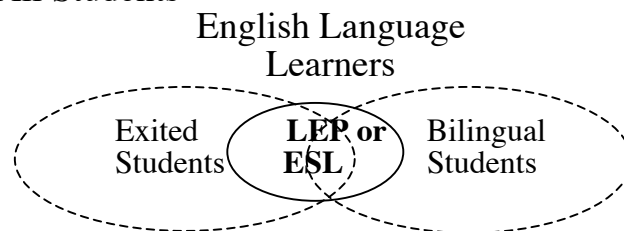
Even if they are not formally identified as ELLs, students' needs are no less acute due to the lack of a label. English proficiency is a tool for academic achievement; and if students cannot use that tool fully, they need a learning environment designed to promote their success. Administrators, content specialists and classroom teachers need to recognize and address the needs of English language learners.

Myth #2: ESL teachers are the ones who should be responsible for ESL students.

The reality: General education or mainstream content teachers spend more time with English language learners than ESL teachers do. Some students receive special services, ranging from a pull-out ESL lesson to in-class support. However, for many ELLs, the majority of the school day is spent with teachers who are not certified to teach ESL, or do not have formal training in working with ELLs. Whether it is physical education or math class, many ELLs find themselves in general education classes with a mainstream curriculum.

ESL teachers play a critical role in supporting ELLs: through newcomer centers, pull-

out classes and other program models. With an increasing population of ELLs, ESL teachers are in high demand. But the key to ELL success is for <u>all teachers</u> to know how to make content more comprehensible and for <u>all classes</u> taught in English to support academic language development. Therefore, collaboration between ESL teachers and general education teachers is essential. Mainstream teachers need to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes which support language and content integration. And, as local resources, ESL teachers need to develop tools for collaborating, coaching and managing change within the school community.

Finally, it is important to recognize that much of what we know about teaching English language learners is best practice for teaching <u>all</u> students. When teachers reflect on the role of instructional language in their classes, all students benefit. That said, it is an oversimplification to say that what works for English language learners is "just good teaching." It certainly <u>is</u> good teaching, but it adds an intentional focus on the integration of academic language development with content area teaching through collaboration of ESL teachers and their colleagues

ESL class　　　　　　　**The rest of the day**
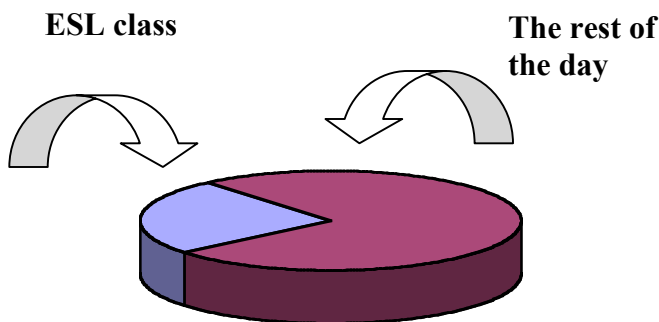
Jon Nordmeyer is the director of the SIT ACCESS Graduate Certificate at the School for International Training. He may be contacted at
jon.nordmeyer@sit.edu

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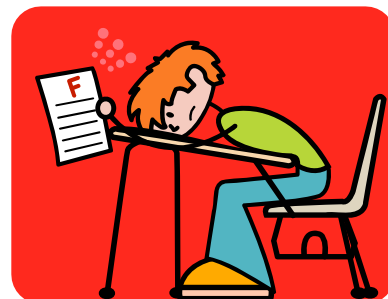
MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF CONTENT INSTRUCTION

Based on Keynote Talk. VATESOL Conference 2006
Judith B. O'Loughlin, Education Consultant, Language Matters Education Consultants, San Ramon, CA email: Joeslteach@aol.com

In the January 30, 2006 *New York Times*, Bob Herbert reported in an article entitled "The Lost Children," that big city high schools with large numbers of Latinos are "hemorrhaging students." Describing Latino and other minority students as children who "fall through the cracks," Herbert stated several startling statistics. Only one-twelfth of all Latino students in the U.S. acquire college degrees. Even more startling is the fact that _ of all Latino students entering ninth grade ever graduate from high school. Minority students, who drop out of high school, Herbert states, are much less likely to be regularly employed, own a decent home, ever marry, or escape poverty. They are much more likely to end up in prison.

With school age population projections that certain U.S. states in all regions will have enrollments consisting of up to 50%, minority students by the year 2050, and that Virginia will have 30-40% of its students from minority backgrounds, there is certainly much to think about. How do we keep minority children, and specifically, language minority children from "falling through the cracks?"

Picture the world of language minority children as symbolically represented by "two cups of tea." In the first cup of tea, ELLs converse socially about tea, drinking it, types of tea, the taste of tea, and other such topics. This social conversation might occur, as do most social conversations, in a face-to-face setting, in which students can visually determine if they were understood, can make repair, and can enhance conversation with intonation, hand gestures, and realia.

In our second "cup of tea" students are in middle or high school U.S. history class, in a lesson, which might occur any time during the fall of any school year. Students are asked to read a passage about The Boston Tea Party in their textbooks. They are confronted with a text dense with unfamiliar vocabulary [e.g. consumption, taxation, representation, protest, etc.]. They must also face complex sentence structure, often with a variety of tenses in the same sentence, frequent use of the passive voice, few visuals that support comprehension, and a text filled with references to unfamiliar past events.

Although learning about and remembering the events leading up to the Boston Tea Party ends when students leave the academic environment of school, the skills needed to read, comprehend, and interpret information are needed for life after school. Think back on Herbert's startling information about "the lost children." Without learning academic language, represented in such lessons, how will minority students, who leave school before graduation, develop the ability use the academic functions of English. In school students learn how to not only acquire information, but also to combine information in various ways—sequencing, classifying, combining it to identify patterns, determine solutions, predict outcomes and implications, justify decisions---all skills needed for employment and survival in the "real world" outside of school.

The frustration for many English Language Learners and their teachers is that, although social language develops within one to three years, academic language takes up to seven years and beyond. To facilitate the development of academic competence in English or any second language requires, what Jim Cummins refers to as "embedded" language learning instruction. Embedded academic learning means that the learning materials, textbooks, instructional sequence, and the instructional classroom are "embedded" by the teacher with visuals, manipulatives, word walls, supplementary support materials [e.g. alternative texts, bilingual dictionaries, technology websites, etc.] and strategies instruction.

The importance of embedded instruction becomes quite clear when you only look at the challenges for a content area, such as mathematics usually thought of as easy for second language learners—after all, isn't mathematics a universal language? Then, why is mathematics so difficult for English Language Learners?

English language learners:

1. Have limited experience in applying reading comprehension strategies, such as inferring and determining essential information. There is a direct correlation with identifying key information and mathematics proficiency.

2. Have limited mathematic vocabulary. Everyday language takes on a more specific meaning in content learning

3. Have varied background knowledge and experiences that may be a mismatch to American culture.

4. Have difficulty understanding the complex syntax of mathematics within word problems, inability to understand and interpret logical connectors [e.g. then or so]

What can teachers do to meet and overcome the challenges of content instruction? To begin, instruction should both address content and language needed to access content. Teaching the language of the content, not isolated discrete-point language skills provides students with a real purpose for learning. The National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] recently published a position paper on the "Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs." In the paper the NCTE made the following recommendations on selecting materials for instruction of ELLs, as well as the implications for the focus on instruction, in the language arts/English classroom:

Choose:
1. a variety of texts around a theme
2. texts at different levels of difficulty
3. reading and writing materials that represent the cultures of the students in the classroom
4. materials that represent both literature and informational texts
5. texts with natural language
6. texts with nonlinguistic cues that support comprehension

In addition, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach [C.A.L.L.A.] and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol [S.I.O.P.] research indicate the importance of developing a systematic lesson plan that introduces language and content objectives to students to set the purposes of and for

learning. Both lesson plan sequences indicate that students need an introductory part of the lesson that builds background knowledge, concepts and vocabulary that links current learning to past learning and world knowledge. Although English Language Learners cannot speak English, they do have a wealth of background experiences and world knowledge in their first language. Specific strategies instruction should be modeled and taught, as well as practiced in cooperative grouping configurations. Finally, review and assessment should be an ongoing process to assess comprehension, language development, and allow for re-teaching and adapting strategies instruction to lesson revisions.

English Language Learners need to learn through an integrated approach that teaches both content and language together. They need to learn through an approach that taps into their strengths as learners, respects their culture and language, provides them with opportunities to interact in the classroom, and uses multiple learning modalities and a variety of materials. In this way we empower and enable English language learners to use strategies on their own, to learn in the classroom, and not "fall through the cracks."

Article Resources:

www.ncte.org

www.phschool.com/professional_development/learning_strategies/short_takes.html

www.siopinstitute.net

www.cal.org

http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/research/crede/index.html

http://calla.ws/

Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll

By Lynn Thorpe, English Language Institute of Virginia Tech

This highly interactive session at the recent VATESOL conference in Roanoke, Virginia, focused on a very frank PowerPoint presentation used at the English Language Institute as a means of getting the attention of international higher education students regarding issues of consequence -- Federal State, and local law -- and the problem of risky behavior in a new culture.

Having just come from the keynote session about students falling through the cracks, the presenter was motivated to get the audience involved from the start. She led the audience in singing, "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Half the audience held a tenor rhythm with their hands, and the other half, the bass. everyone joined in and seemed happy to participate.

The participants introduced themselves and told where they worked and what their current issues of concern were. Most of the audience worked in a public or private school setting and their issues were somewhat different than those included in the planned presentation. For example, some members of the audience had problems with teenage pregnancy among their students and talked about the need to help parents understand the law. In general, the discussion was guided by overheads with amusing and attention-getting graphics designed by Judy Snoke. Issues of underage drinking, rape, fighting, and the seductive nature of the media in American culture were highlighted. Issues concerning the Internet were also mentioned. The PowerPoint presentation was meant as an example that could easily be modified to fit specific needs in different settings.
Copies of the PowerPoint presentation are available on request from eslsnoke@vt.edu.

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Computer-based Tests for ESOL Reading placement: Effects of Test Mode and Format

By Laurie Weinberg
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This discussion-based session at the VATESOL conference addressed issues to consider when using a computer-based test for placement purposes. I became interested in this topic after frequently facing large discrepancies between reading scores based on the COMPASS ESL Reading Test and writing scores based on writing samples among incoming students at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. This led to a literature review on the topic in a graduate course in curriculum and assessment that I took at the University of Mary Washington this past summer. While my research findings supported the test's use, other factors might affect its reliability.

In this session, I shared my findings, touching on factors such as passive omitting, screen capacity and graphics, and the test taker's computer familiarity. These issues were then related to participants' own teaching situations. We concluded that testing reading is, indeed, a complex process and that a computer-based test, while efficient, may not be the best way to properly assess a student's reading ability for placement purposes.

Reflection on the OELA conference 2006

By Dotty Mills Rilee
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ESL teacher
Longan Elementary
Henrico County

I attended the OELA Fifth Annual Celebrate Our Rising Stars Summit in Washington, D.C. from October 30 through November 1, 2006. My colleagues from Henrico County who also attended include Doreen Peay, Irene Alexander, Rhunell

Pierce, Leslie Remington, Ana Krieg, and our ESL specialist, Ana Watson.

We had a fantastic time! The food was great and the location in Dupont Circle near Adams Morgan provided opportunities to explore DC. More importantly, we enjoyed spending time with each other and meeting new people who have ESL student needs on their agenda. Some sessions I attended offered examples of programs that work and I'd like to mention a few details from a presentation that provided helpful resources.

Kate Kinsella, a keynote speaker as well as a session presenter, provided useful strategies in "Structured Academic Talk for English Learners". ***** Her lively discourse about how we teachers can organize whole group and small group discussions *easily* lent ideas to K-12 and even college classrooms. I was furiously jotting down ideas for academic talk:

...When I ask 1st graders what objects vibrate to make sound, they will answer in complete sentences, referring to the prompt in bold below which I wrote on the board and modeled for them: *Guitar strings/vocal chords/airwaves/ bells /flags in the wind* **vibrate to make sound.**

...When 2nd graders are discussing in small groups what the setting of The Enormous Turnip is, they answer in complete sentences:
The setting is a farm.

Kinsella provided us with a list of language prompts for "Active Classroom Participation." Her lists would make a classic classroom poster as a valuable reminder to students and teachers to reword our statements to include academic language. For example, I know that if a 5th grade student says,
"Ve is wrong. It is the Mayflower."

I would usually accept that as good English and I would be happy that Kim knows the correct answer. Kate Kinsella's list will remind me to ask Kim to say that in the more dignified "academic talk*":

"I disagree with Ve. The Pilgrims' ship is the Mayflower, not the Santa Maria."

Since Ve and Kim are in 5th grade, I am concerned that the academic vocabulary they will encounter in middle school is heavily embedded in the texts they will read. I intend to structure "academic talk" practice by writing a review question on the board, then having the students practice orally the possible responses using academic vocabulary. The example below has bold letters to indicate the prompt I might write on the

board to assist the students as they say their responses:

"What events led to U.S. expansion after they gained independence?"

The Louisiana Purchase **was an event that led to U. S. expansion after they gained independence.**

I was very motivated by Kate Kinsella's ideas. In Henrico County we ESL teachers are using the SIOP model to blend ESL and content objectives. We are teaching content through language, and we need good advice like Kate Kinsella's: to expect our ESL students and all students to express themselves using academic language. Even though every teacher expects their students to use correct English, we do tend to focus more on abbreviated answers because students have so many objectives to learn. It's a great reminder to continuously coax our ESL students to use that academic language. Kate Kinsella convinced me that we're doing them a disservice if we don't expect them to use "academic talk."

*"academic talk": verbal interaction about lesson content using relevant lesson vocabulary, framed in complete sentences with appropriate syntax and grammar. (Kate Kinsella, Ed.D, San Francisco State University)
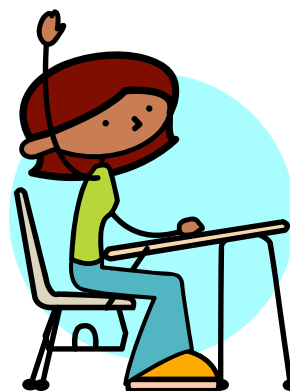
Narrative Study: Language Acquisition Strategies of an Arabic Speaker

Jennifer Kuchno
kuchnoj@vcu.edu

It was during Ramadan, the holy Muslim month, when I met with Mohammad. He was fasting and eager to keep busy by sharing his experience learning the English language with me. A dark featured fellow, his English was laden with a distinctly thick Arabic accent. At the time of the study, Mohammad was a student of mine at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. He is now in his second year of the English Language Program (ELP). He is a native Arabic speaker from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) who came to the United States on a Saudi government scholarship, which pays for English language courses and eventually, a full academic degree. Having earned 90 ELP credits, he is highly motivated to complete the English Language Program so he will be eligible for academic courses at the university and major in bioinformatics.

Mohammad is currently an advanced level ELP student, but he has worked hard for many years to get to this level both through informal and formal education. As a child, Mohammad grew up in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, where he spoke only Arabic in his family, although his father could speak English. As a child, he was exposed to English through the media. He described how, in the KSA there were two television channels: One in Arabic and one in English. As he got older, his interest in English grew when his family gained access to cable television where there were even more programs from the U.S. in English. Additionally, he reported that English is widely spoken in Riyadh by a large group of foreign workers. All these factors contributed to his exposure and interest in learning English.

Mohammad's first formal experience learning English came when he began middle school at the age of twelve. There, he began taking one hour a day classes in English grammar, reading, and writing. The teachers were fluent, non-native speakers of English but did not focus on oral language or communication, and used Arabic in instruction. The instructional delivery was entirely in lecture form and memorization was a common learning strategy. Mohammad continued to study the language in this manner throughout his secondary years. Upon completing high school, Mohammad had studied the language for six years and felt he was a strong English student. Then, he came to the United States.

When Mohammad arrived in Richmond in the summer of 2005, he was surprised by his low English proficiency. The realization of his weak oral skills was evident to him from day one. He couldn't do anything; he couldn't interact with people at the grocery store, order food at a restaurant, or even read the newspaper without difficulty. He was very worried when he was tested by the ELP at the university, and was placed at the Pre-Intermediate I level for listening and speaking, and at the Intermediate I level for reading and writing. He knew he had to work hard to progress in his language skills, but was motivated by the investment. He sees English as a vehicle for advancing his future career.

Mohammad's goal to earn a bachelor's degree in bioinformatics grew from his strong interest in technology. When he got his first computer at the age of 15, his father urged him not to set the computer's language to Arabic, but to keep it set to English. Mohammad explained how valuable this suggestion turned out to be: Not only did it force him to apply what he was learning in his English classes in an authentic context, but it enabled him to learn content specific vocabulary about the technology field.

By using English as the medium of independent learning, he developed advanced technology skills and a solid foundation in the cognitive academic language of his field. So advanced were his skills in these areas, that he admitted later that he could only discuss his area of expertise in the English language, not in Arabic! When his friends seek him out for solutions to their computer problems, he readily helps out, but first asks them to switch the computer's language to English!

Another way Mohammad developed English skills through technology was by using the internet. He stressed how valuable the English language is for accessing information resources on the internet, relaying that there is very little on the web in Arabic. Making a conscious choice to use English to explore his interests in technology and breaking away from his native Arabic in a field dominated by

the English language he was able to increase his English acquisition.

When Mohammad first arrived in the U.S., he lived and spent most of his time with other Saudi students, but he soon realized that this would not improve his English. He lacked practice and needed to put himself in situations where he could interact with native speakers. Thus, he decided to move into a new apartment. Although his new roommates were all Saudi students, the perk came from his neighbors who were all American students studying information systems. Mohammad felt like he had hit the jackpot! He smiled as he described his neighbors and how he frequented their apartment, chatting away in English about his favorite topic: technology. It was a great learning experience for him in terms of the language practice and the opportunities to discuss topics and direct his most nagging questions at his native English speaking friends, who readily clarified information. Mohammad felt that this was the single most effective thing he did to improve his English. For Mohammad, opportunities to interact in English, coupled with the motivation to speak about topics he had an invested interested in proved to be a successful combination in his second language acquisition.

Other successful strategies Mohammad employed also helped him develop his English skills. He watched television and movies in English, read computer magazines, and took advantage of internet resources, such as National Public Radio (NPR) stories and online news. His strategies proved successful and he improved in listening, speaking reading, and vocabulary. His determination paid off when his English was strong enough for him to enroll in his first academic class this past semester.

Mohammad's first academic class at VCU was "Business 101." He reported that he liked the course, but expressed frustrations about taking a course all in English. He said he got a 35 on his first quiz, but had prepared for it by reading the textbook the evening before. He spoke with the professor who encouraged him to read each chapter prior to coming to each class to build background knowledge, to listen carefully to the lecture, and take notes on how the examples given in class illustrated and connected to the concepts from the text. This type of approach was new to him and he was not used to having to make connections himself. Nevertheless, he tried these study techniques and they worked. He earned an 80 on the subsequent quiz. Mohammad was very proud and

expressed his deep satisfaction in taking an academic class where English was the medium of instruction, not Arabic.

I asked Mohammad about the interaction between his native language, Arabic, and his second language, English, outside the classroom. He had noticed in conversations he and his friends were now more likely to code switch - going back and forth between Arabic and English. This was especially common when they were talking about technology, but it came up every now and then when they were uncertain about a word – either in Arabic or English.

I asked Mohammad if his Arabic accent had had an impact on him socially. He didn't feel his accent has been a barrier for him socially, but has an outgoing personality and doesn't let things like that bother him. For example, he doesn't take it personally when Americans don't understand him. He just tries again. He says he thinks of himself as a Saudi who is learning a second language, and that the Americans he has had contact with accept this fact.

Mohammad has been successful acclimating to life in the U.S., which has a very different culture than his native KSA, but credits the transition to his sense of self and to resources in Richmond and at VCU. Mohammad is a strict Muslim, and he told himself before he came to the U.S. that he would not change - that he would be true to himself, his religion, and his country. After a year in Richmond, he is proud that he has kept that promise to himself, but admits it has not been as big an issue as he originally thought it would be because Richmond has a growing Muslim community. During Ramadan last year, he would visit a community mosque daily, where he was able to network with other Muslims and feel secure in knowing he was not alone. Mohammad was very complimentary toward VCU. He expressed gratitude toward VCU for its campus-based mosque, and feels the VCU staff and students are open to Muslim students. He likes that VCU has many student activities such as the Arabic Film Festival and Saudi National Day celebrations that make Saudi students feel more at "home" and give them a voice to share their culture with the American students. As a VCU student, he feels recognized and valued as a Muslim and as a Saudi. This undoubtedly supports the exchange of cultures, but also puts him at ease so that he can focus on improving his English.

This picture was taken on September 22nd during Saudi National Day celebrations at VCU. The Saudi student is Mesary Al-Suwaigh (not the same student discussed in this article).

A Teacher learns a Second Language

By Robin Miller
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As an ESL/EFL teacher, I have spent much of my past life putting the theories of second language learning into action on a daily basis. Now that I have moved to a new country, I find myself on the other side of that coin, struggling as a second language learner. On September 11, 2006, my husband and I began a five-month Hebrew language program in Beersheba, Israel called "Ulpan". Ulpan is an intensive 5-day-per-week class which has been an
institution in Israel for newcomers to gain a foothold in the language. According to the November 29th edition of the Jerusalem Post, 2,116 classes for adults were taught by 850 teachers to about 37,000 students in 2005. As in American ESL classes, an eclectic mix of cultures, native tongues, and motivations accompany the students.

My class is taught by a native speaker, who was born in Israel and has never lived outside the country. Her parents were Canadian and native speakers of English. My husband and I are the only Americans in our class. There is another English speaker whose native language is Tagalog, and another from New Zealand who is originally from Great Britain. Both of these women recently married Israelis. Then there are 5 young French students, whose parents were originally from Israel. Also, there is a student from Tunisia. The rest of the group is comprised of Russian speakers from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. There is a large Russian speaking population in most places in Israel. Beersheba also has a sizeable Ethiopian community. Other nationalities at our school include Argentinians, Peruvians, Brazilians, Chinese, Thai, Canadian, and Australian students.

Our classes are largely teacher-directed. After sitting in this class, I can appreciate the criticism that most language teachers, particularly at the beginning level, talk far too much. I find myself tuning out the
teacher as my listening comprehension is so weak. My personal strengths are reading comprehension and grammar. Give me a worksheet, (of which there are many), and I can shine. Upon hearing that I was also a language teacher, I was welcomed to make suggestions by the teacher. I immediately suggested that the room seating be changed from a traditional row arrangement to a "U" shaped one. Ours is the only class to adopt this pattern. When classroom management became problematic, I used this opportunity to suggest we do more student-to-student practice, mixing the nationalities. My teacher is trying, acknowledging that she is not adept at managing communicative activities. We occasionally pair up for a creative assignment, but thus far, we've done no group work. Also, there have been few short warm-up activities. When used, they are to fill up the final few minutes of the class. Most of the classes revolve around doing a grammar exercise and then
reviewing it by having the students take turns reading and answering the questions student-by-student. Those without some sort of Hebrew exposure in the past are finding the class very difficult. Two couples who began this course with us dropped out after a week or so due to the intense pace. In the remaining two-and-a-half months of classes, we are clinging to the promise that we WILL be able to speak and understand Hebrew at the end.

A Mini-Grant Report

By Gretchen Curreri, a VATESOL mini-grant recipient 2006
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Randolph Elementary School in Goochland County has recently experienced an influx of Spanish-speaking students. There were 2 ESL students in 1999; there are now 21. Most of the families are employed on the local dairy farms and horse ranches; most families are low-income.

The families have been found to be very supportive of their children's education. At the same time, they are insecure about their ability to assist their children academically. They lack many of the resources in their homes that would help them with educating their children.

Because there are no faculty members who are fluent in Spanish, the students are taught exclusively in English. It is very important, therefore, that the first language of the children is encouraged at home to facilitate the continued and highly necessary cognitive development of the children.

Thomas and Collier, in their 1997 publication *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students*, emphasized this critical need for continued cognitive development in a child's first language.

"Parents, even those with little education, can help you with their child's cognitive development at home. With help from you, they can assist in their children's academic development at home as well. Both of these can prevent the cognitive and academic slowdown that can occur when students are taught exclusively in English at school…Parents can also provide a learning microcosm that is favorable toward their first language, thus giving their children the documented advantages of an additive bilingual environment, even if the school represents a subtractive environment." (p.77)

The Randolph media center had very few titles written in Spanish. It was decided that funds would be sought to acquire a basic selection of high quality books written in Spanish so that the families could share literature at home in their own language. Through the money awarded from the PODET grant, along with one other grant, the school was able to purchase 75 picture books for the library.

These books were introduced to the families in the early fall. A family dinner in the library was followed by an information session during which the importance of reading to the children in their first language was explained to the families. An interpreter was present throughout the evening. A follow-up letter was sent home with each of the students.

The books were immediately well received by the ESL students. Most of the titles are the Spanish versions of familiar picture books and the students were very pleased to have these titles to take home. Within one month of the inception of this program, 88 books had been checked out by the 18 ESL students in the primary grades.

The parents also have also commented about enjoying these books. A few parents expressed concern that they should be focusing on English with their children, and this provided another opportunity to express the need to continue the home language. One parent commented that she also enjoyed reading these books to the younger children in the home. Certainly there is great value in contributing to the literacy of the future students at Randolph Elementary.

This PODET grant has provided a direct opportunity for the staff at Randolph Elementary School to express how highly valued the ESL students are within our school community. At the same time, it has put books in the homes of these families and encouraged them to experience the true joy of sharing family literacy.

Reference:

Thomas, W.P. & Collier, V.P. (1997a). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) Resource Collection Series, No. 9, December, 1997.

This mini-grant was featured in the article "Grant will provide 75 Spanish picture books." In *The Goochland Courier*, October 18, 2006.

Mini-Grant Proposals Due!!

Mini-grant information is posted at the VATESOL Website. Read the Power Point, which contains descriptions and directions. The next mini-grant proposals are due *February 20, 2007*.

On Being a Professional in a De-professionalized Profession

by Jo Tyler
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With the rising number of immigrant students and the ever increasing need for ESOL teachers in our schools, many people are surprised to discover that one area in which teachers are NOT required to be "highly qualified" under No Child Left Behind is teaching English as a second language (Judd, 2005, p. 58). But why?

One hypothesis is that policy makers believe anyone who speaks the language can teach it, and no special skills are needed. In a study of others' perceptions of ESOL teachers, Creese found that ESOL teaching "was seen as less important than subject teaching. Such observations were made by management, STs [content area teachers], and children. ... In many cases it was described as work without skill or a particular knowledge base." (2006, p. 450).

Current policies indirectly support this view. The provision in NCLB, which is contrary to established research, that no more than three years of specialized services are necessary for English language learners to reach the level of language proficiency of their native speaking peers, is a good example. By stating that ELLs do not need much instruction to gain full proficiency, the law implies that they also do not need skilled instructors. The "inclusion" movement also endorses this view by suggesting that ELLs can gain the language proficiency they need simply by being in classes with native speakers. Giving ESOL teachers

impossibly large numbers of students, not providing adequate working space, and separating them from their colleagues are additional ways of de-professionalizing the field.

Another reason why ESOL teachers are not viewed as highly skilled stems from a similar, long-held view of language teachers in general. In a 1929 government sponsored document known as the Coleman Report, it was officially proposed that "given the skills and limitations of most language teachers, all that one could reasonably expect was that students would come away from the study of a foreign language able to read the target language" (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 5). More recently, Krashen has echoed that belief, saying "language is too complex to be explicitly taught and learned" (1992, p. 409).

Krashen's popular Input Hypothesis reinforces the view that instruction about language is unnecessary and perhaps counter-productive in second language acquisition. Krashen claimed that explicit grammar instruction can only improve second language acquisition if learners know and have time to attend to the rule (1987, p. 37). He has further stated that although this can lead to greater grammatical accuracy on a few limited tasks, "the performer pays a price in decreased information conveyed, and a slower, more hesitant speech style" (1992, p. 409). Krashen concluded that, "the effects of direct instruction are typically short-lasting and do not become part of acquired competence" (1993, p. 725).

If language teachers are led to believe that their teaching is ineffectual, how can we expect others to take them seriously as professionals? Maintaining a view that explanations of language are unnecessary and counterproductive in second language instruction leads to the de-professionalization of language teaching and the marginalization of language teachers in the schools (see Oprandy, 1999, p. 103; Creese, 2002, p. 611). To me this is a tragedy in language teacher education.

And this is not just a trend in perceptions of language teachers but of teachers in general, and teacher education programs in particular. At a 2002 government sponsored forum on education policy, an advisor to President Bush declared, "if there was any piece of legislation that I could pass, it would be to blow up the colleges of education" (Lyon, 2002, quoted in McCracken, 2004, p. 104). In a policy environment where statements like this are

being made, it is no surprise that teachers and teacher educators get no respect.

So what can you, as a TESOL professional, do to improve this work environment and these public perceptions? Here are some simple steps you can take and some general advice for more involved ways of enhancing your professional status.

- **Recognition:** One of the simplest things you can do to demonstrate your professional stature is to display your diploma, teaching license, certificates and awards in your work area. I think having these on view is not only a message to others but a reminder to yourself of the hard work you've done to become part of the TESOL profession. It is also important, as a member of a profession, to recognize the professional accomplishments of others. Talk to your colleagues about their educational and professional activities and provide mutual support for their professional development efforts.

- **Solidarity:** Another fairly simple thing that will enhance your professional standing is joining with other teachers in their efforts for educational improvement and professionalism. Besides being a member of TESOL, consider joining another teacher organization, like National Council of Teachers of English, or the International Reading Association. Because it is common for there to be only one ESOL teacher per school, you have to take extra steps to build a community of your peers. Stay in contact with other ESOL teachers by email (or a blog or discussion board). Be sure to work with and support the other specialists in your school who also are isolated from their professional peers, such as counselors, special education teachers, reading specialists, etc. Often they can be your strongest supporters if you cultivate meaningful professional ties with them.

- **Advocacy:** Elliot Judd, the former president of TESOL, Inc., has called for members to participate in the process of the 2007 Reauthorization of NCLB, not only to urge that ESOL teachers be included among the "highly qualified" but also to advocate for other revisions in the law that will improve education for English language learners. As Judd stated, "Silence can be harmful to your professional well-being" (Judd, 2005, p. 58). You can also advocate for your profession and your students at the state and local level. Keep yourself informed about public hearings and other policy forums.

- **Public Relations:** Any time that you speak out on behalf of your students, you create a public presence as a committed, knowledgeable professional. When corporations face negative public perceptions, they launch sophisticated public relations campaigns to restore their credibility. We can do the same thing in our schools and communities to enhance their perceptions of TESOL. Your campaign on behalf of your students and your profession can include public relations posters, a website, or a newsletter. It might also include special events and participation in teacher projects.

- **Communication:** In addition to communicating at a public level, one-on-one communication is essential for establishing your professional status in your school. Many ESOL teachers report difficulties in getting their message across to others. If you feel a need to develop your skills in this area, there are hundreds of how-to books available. Most emphasize the importance of listening and putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Another common point is the importance of maintaining positive communication, and not falling into a pattern of dealing one-on-one with other professionals only when problems arise.

- **Collaboration:** One of the best ways to improve public relations and communication is through collaboration. But more importantly, by working collaboratively with other professionals, you bring yourself into their professional arena. Collaborative teaching is a difficult proposition for many ESOL teachers, not only logistically but also because, according to Creese, it typically places the ESOL teacher in a subordinate role in the classroom (2004, p. 191). It might be more effective, therefore, to establish your professional credentials with your colleagues before sharing the classroom and the teaching responsibilities. Some ways to do this are by collaborating with them on special projects, inservice training, or conference presentations. Try to keep up with and tap into the professional activities other teachers are engaged in.

- **Professional Development:** It is also important to expand your own professional development. The more training you have in your profession and discipline, the more confidence and influence you will have. There is nothing like attending a VATESOL conference, for example, as a way to boost your enthusiasm while also increasing your knowledge of the field. One of the important findings in Creese's research is that

people perceive ESOL teachers as serving a generic support role but having no specific subject matter to teach, and so they are characterized as having no expertise (2004, p. 200). The truth is that well-trained ESOL teachers have expertise not only in language teaching, but in the structures and uses of language itself. As you pursue your professional development, don't overlook the importance of expanding your expertise in your subject area—linguistics and language study.

The other side of professional development is providing professional development opportunities for other teachers. Take advantage of teacher work days to present inservice workshops in your school or school division. Keep a library of informative books and articles in your workspace that you can share with other teachers when they ask for advice. They will recognize your professionalism if the personal advice you provide is backed up with authoritative scholarship. Also, you can start or join a book club at your school. There are many eye-opening books, including accessible trade paperbacks, about multiculturalism and bilingualism that any teacher would enjoy and learn from. One of my favorites is *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman. You will not be able to put it down!

- **Research:** Part of professional development and being recognized as an expert is doing research, both formal and informal. Conducting research in your own classroom or collaborating with colleagues to identify practices that enhance learning is an essential part of reflective practice. Through research as a reflective practitioner, you not only discover what works in the classroom, but you also connect what works to the linguistic and educational theories you have studied. As educational researchers MacLean and Mohr explain, "Working as a teacher-researcher puts you in a position that acknowledges you as a professional responsible for identifying your own instructional concerns, working with colleagues to pursue those concerns, and publishing your findings at least to them if not to a broader group of readers" (1999, p. 162). While conducting research develops your own expertise, it is publishing that gives you recognition for your expertise from others. Be sure to share what you learn through your classroom research with others at the VATESOL, VESA and national conventions or submit an article to the *VATESOL Newsletter*!

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