President’s Message

Katya Koubek

President’s Message

I trust your summer break was relaxing and peaceful and you came back with a renewed enthusiasm for working with your English learners and their families! Our students deserve excellent instruction that takes their needs and aspirations into account and values them for who they are and where they come from. Student success depends on educators who appreciate their students’ background, cultures and native languages, who take the time to assess their own teaching and student learning on a regular basis, and who strive to stay current in their teaching profession and embrace opportunities for learning and growing as professionals.

The VATESOL Board has been working diligently to ensure that opportunities for learning and sharing expertise, knowledge, and skills are provided. In just one month, we will have our 2017 VATESOL conference in New Kent, Virginia. A big thank you goes to our first vice-president, Monica Starkweather, who is bringing our conference to her school, New Kent High, and who has been working tirelessly on the conference logistics.

The 2017 VATESOL conference promises to bring over 35 sessions focusing on the conference theme, Bridging the Divide: Communication, Compassion and Community for ELLs. The conference is a place to exchange ideas, connect with others, and learn about best evidence-based practices that will impact English language learners and their achievement. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Ayanna Cooper, will share her vision on evaluating all teachers of English learners and students with disabilities. Dr. Cooper is an independent consultant, educator and advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Her nationwide work revolves around supporting districts to improve outcomes for English Learners. She’s been an active leader in the TESOL International Association and in 2016 the Association recognized her as one of TESOL’s 30 Up & Coming Professionals. While serving as Chair of International TESOL's Professional Development
Standing Committee, she highlighted the importance of diverse representation, equity and access across the profession. Dr. Cooper was honored to be elected as the 2010 President of Georgia TESOL and served as Southeast TESOL Conference Chair, *A Passion for Language and Teaching*, in 2009. Her current projects involve building administrator capacity to develop and manage English language programs, use English language proficiency data more effectively and increase stakeholder participation. She has contributed to a number of publications, such as WIDA’s Essential Actions Handbook and is the co-author of *Evaluating ALL teachers of English learners and students with disabilities: Supporting great teaching*.

As VATESOL president, I would like to welcome you to the 2017 VATESOL conference on October 21, 2017 at New Kent High School. Please register and make your hotel reservation early by accessing the VATESOL website at: [http://vatesol.com](http://vatesol.com). You will also find information posted about a Friday night social event on our website.

Please contact me if you would like to become a Board member. We need everyone’s expertise, wisdom, and passion!

Katya Koubek, Ph.D.

*Katya Koubek is President of VATESOL and Associate Professor of Education and TESOL Coordinator at James Madison University. She can be reached at koubekex@jmu.edu*

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**Bridging the Divide: Communication, Compassion and Community for ELLs**

**VATESOL 2017 Conference**

**October 20-21**

New Kent High School
New Kent, Virginia
I am very thankful to have attended the TESOL Advocacy Summit in June and learn how ESL educators can have a voice with local and state representatives. While Summit attendees came to D.C. from across the country, Virginia had the largest number of participants from a single state. Although many of us were attending for the first time, the workshops and sessions led us step-by-step through the basics of advocacy.

After a day of training and information, I was able to put my new knowledge to work in a meeting with Mr. Brian Alphin, a staff member in Representative Bob Goodlatte’s office. I would like to share a few notes from my conversation with him. I provided Mr. Alphin with information available on the Census Bureau and DOE websites, noting that there are approximately 40,000 immigrants in 6th district—the majority (72%) of which are in the U.S. with proper documentation. I also shared that public K-12 schools in the 6th district received about $450,000 under ESSA’s Title III funds to provide services to more than 4,200 ESL students in AY16/17. Because this funding may be cut, I wanted to make the congressman aware of how that could adversely affect his district.

I highlighted the fact that Rep. Goodlatte’s is the only district in the state with two refugee relocation cities (Harrisonburg and Roanoke), to which Mr. Alphin seemed both surprised and interested. I also shared news articles from Harrisonburg and Lynchburg about ways in which these communities were positively supporting LEP students in their school districts. Mr. Alphin was very interested in both of these stories, and appreciated the printed news articles I left with him.

We discussed the unique challenges many ESL teachers face in school districts. When I described one scenario of an ESL teacher having to travel to multiple schools across a large region, for example, Mr. Alphin expressed concern for how that might adversely affect the amount of time an LEP student receives in English instruction. One way to address these concerns is by educating administrators and content-area teachers about the unique needs of LEP students. Therefore, I encouraged Mr. Alphin to ask Rep. Goodlatte to vote to fully fund Title II-A of ESSA, which provides professional development for teachers and administrators. These funds can be used to provide teachers and administrators with additional training about working with LEPs, and ultimately help them make strides in areas such as scheduling, access to resources, and optimized instruction for LEP students.

Overall, Mr. Alphin seemed very interested in learning more about the immigrant populations in the 6th district, and assured me that he would share all this information with Representative Goodlatte as well. Mr. Alphin echoed our concern that WIOA and Title III funding might be cut. While he did not say that Rep. Goodlatte would vote to keep these two
programs fully funded, he suggested that if federal funding were cut, there might be a way to find additional funds at the state-level to sustain LEP programs and services that are currently funded through Title III and WIOA funds. He also said that he was interested in receiving future updates on these issues and concerns.

These are only a few of the things I discussed with Mr. Alphin, a staff member of Rep. Bob Goodlatte’s office. Mr. Alphin said that he would like to stay informed about issues that affect the immigrant population in the 6th district. I would like to encourage you to contact your local representatives as well, and let them know about the needs your program may have—especially when issues, such as federal funding and state budgets, are involved. If you were not able to make it to the Advocacy Summit this past June, I hope you can join us next year. In addition, please consider attending one of the advocacy workshops offered this fall.

Thank you for your work with English language learners in Virginia, and the ways in which you advocate for them on a daily basis.

Christina Wade is chair of the Adult Education SIG of VATESOL and ELA Instructor with Adult and Career Education (ACE) of Central Virginia.

Higher Education SIG Chair Report

From Summary to Synthesis in English for Academic Purposes

Miriam Moore
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In the summer of 2017, Lord Fairfax Community College added a new course to our ESL program: ESL 48, Writing Workshop. In designing the course, we looked at the specific areas of difficulties our students face in moving from ESL courses to the first-year composition sequence (FYC) and other credit-bearing courses. We identified two critical skills—summarizing and synthesizing sources—and we encouraged students who had completed the ESL sequence and those entering the highest ESL level in the fall to take the summer class.

In the first part of the course, students worked on writing analytical summaries: short paragraphs that identify key ideas in the assigned text as well as rhetorical strategies such as comparing, presenting evidence, defining, narrating, etc. This first step proved to be a challenge for students, in part because in their previous reading experiences, they had encountered texts exclusively at a sentence level, taking one sentence at a time to examine vocabulary and meaning. These students had not been taught to read rhetorically, to identify signs that point towards an overall structure for an academic text. To address their struggles, I encouraged several strategies:

1. Careful annotations (see Kama Offenberger’s excellent suggestions on this process in the December 2015 newsletter).
2. Reading above the sentence level. To help students understand different types of reading, we talked about “ground-level” reading strategies, which move from one sentence to the next, sequentially, and “drone-level” reading strategies, which hover above an entire text. One way to
illustrate this is to show aerial pictures of the college campus. Then identify landmarks or provide an overlay that helps viewers contextualize the image and provide a sense of location. That same process works when we hover above an academic text: we discover the genre, the purpose, and the audience of the piece; then we can identify how the ground-level components are working together rhetorically to create the big picture. As students begin to understand these levels of reading, they are better able to recognize both what a writer is saying in the text and also what the writer is doing.

3. Practicing signal phrases that include a reference to the author and a verb that specifies a rhetorical strategy (what I call a “saying and doing” verb). As summer students moved from a generic signal such as “The writer says” to more specific verbs, however, they struggled with the grammar of complementation. For example, students wrote, “Author X defines that the purpose of laptops in the classroom is __________.” A more natural structure, however, would be this: “Author X defines the purpose of classroom laptops as _______.” Similarly, students wrote, “Author Y encourages to give clear laptop policies,” instead of “encourages teachers to give” or “encourages giving.” Working with these signal phrases and the accompanying verbal complements allowed me to discuss grammar in a natural and meaningful context.

As students gained proficiency in reading rhetorically and writing summaries, we turned to a focus on synthesis. Synthesis challenges students, who often resort to side-by-side summaries when working with multiple sources, instead of true synthesis (see Numrich and Kennedy, 2017). To facilitate the movement from summary to synthesis, I encouraged students to draft what I call PQ (paraphrase/quote) paragraphs. A PQ paragraph addresses a single question (such as whether or not taking notes on a laptop benefits ESL students). The answer to that question is the topic sentence for the paragraph (which may come at the beginning or at the end of the paragraph). To develop their paragraphs, students must call on three “voices”: two authors they have read and their own experiences.

Students begin by raising the question or identifying the purpose of the paragraph. Next, they introduce their first source with a single-sentence summary (adapted from the first sentences of the longer summaries they have already written). They then choose a quote or paraphrase from the source which directly relates to the question. After quoting or paraphrasing (or both) this key point, they invite a second voice, again using a single-sentence summary to introduce the source and a pertinent quote or paraphrase. Critically, however, students must establish a relationship between the two sources: does the second voice confirm, contradict, complicate, expand, illustrate, or challenge the first voice? They must identify that relationship and explain the connection for their readers. Finally, the students include their own voices, but they must once again explicitly show a connection between their contribution to the conversation and the two sources. This interplay—or synthesis—of voices leads to an answer for the original question and/or a new conundrum or possibility to explore. As PQ paragraphs become essays, these new questions are addressed and additional voices introduced.

The PQ paragraph is similar to the sorts of paragraphs we write in literature reviews and traditional research papers (see Doolan & Fitzsimmons-Doolan, 2016; Spearie, 2017; Carroll & Dunkelblau, 2011), and it encompasses a number of discrete skills: summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, citing, focusing a paragraph, organizing a paragraph, and juggling sources accurately. While all of these skills are addressed in our top-level ESL writing course and in FYC, there is generally not enough time to focus on them separately and provide targeted instruction towards a successful synthesis. The ESL 48 class
allowed students to spend 10 weeks on instruction and practice in composing both summary and synthesis.

One of my summer students is now in my FYC course. She pulled me aside in the hallway after the first class and said, “Oh Professor, I am so glad I took ESL 48 this summer. I am ready for this class now!”

And she is ready.

What strategies are you using to prepare your students for the demands of writing with sources? Please share them with me at mmoore2@lfcc.edu.

References


Miriam Moore is Professor of English/ESL at Lord Fairfax Community College and co-author of a series of developmental writing and integrated reading/writing textbooks for Bedford-St. Martin’s.

Treasurer’s Report

Laura Ray

BB&T Bank Statement Balance as of 8/8/17: $40,411.65
PayPal Balance as of 8/30/17: $20,866.29
Elementary Education SIG Chair Report

Stephanie Sebolt
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I hope everyone had a relaxing summer break and feels rejuvenated to begin a new school year! I know that I am excited to meet my students and begin teaching. My goal for this year is to infuse mindfulness practices into my courses to help my students be present and engaged in course activities. What are your goals for this year?

Please make plans to attend the VATESOL Conference on October 21st at New Kent High School in New Kent, VA. Information can be found at http://www.vatesol.cloverpad.org/2017Conference

Our theme this year is Bridging the Divide: Communication, Compassion and Community for ELs. After the events in Charlottesville, I feel this theme is particularly relevant to our students and their families. It is so important that we build a sense of community for our ELs and their families through compassion and communication. We need to build a sense of belonging and caring in our schools and this begins with YOU!

I hope your school year is off to a wonderful start! See you October 21st in New Kent!

Peace, Stephanie

Stephanie Sebolt is an Assistant Professor at Mary Baldwin College. She taught K-5 ELs for nineteen years in Roanoke County Schools.

Legislative Liaison Report

Why Are So Many English Learners Failing To Reach Their Full Educational Potential: An Advocacy Perspective

Velma Denise Harrington
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When I read this question posted in a journal, I had no trouble pointing out some of the reasons why English Learners (ELs) “fail” to reach their true educational potential.

However, we must admit that we have come a long way in educating English learners. 200 years go, as the United States was in the infancy phases of its journey into the Industrial Revolution, were immigrants welcomed with open arms? Where were their children attending school? How were the children perceived and treated in schools? What kind of training did the teachers have to support these children in their studies? Nobody cared to ask, let alone to address these questions then.

I’m glad that today we have trained English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers, and that the dialogue has “matured” around ELs, or has it matured? After I spoke with an American who arrived here in a
refugee program, I felt good about our country and ESOL teachers. His family escaped persecution in Vietnam, and he was so grateful to his ESOL teachers even to this day. He is now the head of a state agency and has obtained his Masters degree. However, why are so many of the ESOL students still not reaching their fullest educational potential? Freeman et al. (2008) categorized the divergent ESOL students as the following: students with adequate formal schooling (i.e. having highly educated parents, and L1 Literacy); students with limited and interrupted schooling (i.e. unaccompanied minors, refugees from rural villages); and long-term English Learners (i.e. students who are attending the public schools and yet, still cannot read or write in English) (p. 33-38).

Of all the categories designated, the last category (i.e. long-term ELs) is the most disturbing for me. Many of these students often become recruits for gangs or eventually become employed in menial jobs. As we examine the inequity of school funding; general education teachers’ lack of knowledge and professional development about ELs; local, regional, and national policies, procedures, and legislation; and finally, political discourse surrounding these “newcomers”; I wonder if we really have matured. There is a growing number of methods and resources available to teaching ELs. Some of the examples include organizing the curriculum by themes, portfolio assessments, project and problem-based learning, content based language teaching, utilizing students’ background knowledge and providing instructional support to general education teachers (Freeman et al. 2008, p. 41-49). However, none of these resources focus on providing an equitable education for them from an advocacy perspective.

When I first joined VATESOL as a graduate student at Old Dominion University, I attended my first meeting of a teacher’s organization. Our salaries had been frozen (K-12), the higher education professors were expected to teach for a lower pay, and the feeling toward English Learners was that somehow, ESOL teachers, leaders of English language centers on college campuses, and other professors of adult education were supposed to accomplish this with less funding. My favorite catch phrase for this was “You Can Do More with Less”. I thought was this a joke?

As many of you are aware, English Learners are the fastest growing population in our public schools and universities, and English language centers as well as our adult education programs (now serve more than 60% English Learners) are a necessity. However, if you simply complain, and never stand up for your students and their parents, and finally yourselves, how will policy makers at the local, regional, and state levels ever hear from you as a practitioner in the field?

In America, we have an indirect democracy, which means that we elect people to represent us. They must hear from us. For the past 13 years, TESOL has had an advocacy policy conference in Washington, D.C. This year, a team of 25 advocates from Virginia came out to “speak truth to power”. Currently, Title II Funding is at $0.00 level. This has shocked ALL of Washington. Specifically, Title II affects teacher professional development training (i.e. free classes from VDOE, Teach Grant, etc.). Our advocacy team consisted of teachers of adult education, K-12, higher education, and intensive English programs. One attendee had just become a naturalized citizen; she was originally from Russia and wanted to participate in the democratic process. Two other foreign nationals, one from Russia and another from Spain, also attended. Three VATESOL board members attended as well. When all 25 of us walked into our two state senators’ offices, their representatives were impressed by the number (there is power in numbers) and the perspectives of everyone (teachers of K-12, higher education, and adult education) involved.
On October 27 and November 4, TESOL will host an advocacy training conference that will enhance a person’s advocacy skills. I am encouraging anyone to attend. My definition of advocacy is as follows: listen to your demands, make sure they are heard, and organize them into action. Having received training from the National Association of Parliamentarians, TESOL, NEA, and VEA, I am finally able to step down and let others take the reign, and that new person deserves your support. Utilize every avenue to network and form collaborative bargaining, and if needed, network with similar organizations that hold similar values.

This is the last article that I will post for the VATESOL Newsletter regarding advocacy as your Legislative Liaison. Due to the political climate in Washington, D. C., I have been monitoring the proposed DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) reversal legislation (i.e. waiting to find out how many children this would affect). The Migration Policy Institute will have the latest statistics, if this executive order is reversed. I may post a “what to do” document, if your students are “rounded up”. In conclusion, each and every one of you is an advocate. Please get out there and do something. I am the very first generation of African Americans to attend fully integrated (K-12) public schools. Someone stood up for me before I was born. Who will stand up for the immigrants, English learners, and our profession?

Sincerely,

Velma Denise Harrington, your Legislative Liaison for VATESOL.

References


Velma Denise Harrington is the Legislative Liaison for Virginia Association of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (VATESOL).
One + One is Greater than Four: Advantages of Pair Work

Jo Tyler

It is widely recognized in the ESOL field that language learners benefit greatly from working in groups. A staple of communicative language teaching, small group activities provide students with more opportunities to practice the language than whole group settings or individual work. Among the specific benefits small group activities offer ELLs are:

- Lowering of the affective filter
- Freedom to use social language skills, which develop faster than the academic language needed for reading and other forms of independent work
- Access to age-appropriate native models both for language and socio-cultural norms
- Interactive peer support for learning academic content
- Cultural familiarity for students with a collectivist rather than an individualist cultural orientation

In addition, group work in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms benefits all students by promoting cultural competence and developing collaborative skills, two key elements of 21st century learning that impact success beyond high school (Lai, DiCerbo & Foltz, 2017). Moreover, research has shown that collaborative learning results in higher levels of cognitive engagement, motivation, and achievement (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler & Stone, 2012).

Working in pairs, however, provides all of these benefits and more, especially for learning tasks focused on reading, writing, and language development. A key advantage of working in pairs is that free-rider or social loafing problems are much less likely than in larger groups (Lai, et al., 2017). This is greatly advantageous for ELLs, because each member of the pair is using either productive or receptive language at any given time.

This linguistic feature of pair work addresses one concern that teachers may have about ELLs participating in small groups—the belief that ELLs bring the everyday language of their native-speaking peers, with its slang and nonstandardized grammar, into the academic context. This is less likely to occur when students work in pairs to complete a language development task. As demonstrated by research over the last 30 years, when students’ focus is on language, they will collaborate to arrive at the best expression of the assignment (Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). During this collaborative effort, it was found that the essential ingredient in students’ second language acquisition was not the comprehensible input, but their linguistic output that the pair work required of both students. It is well known among linguists that without language production, success is impossible in both first and second language acquisition (Anthony, 2008; Pinker, 1994; Swain et al., 2002).
Language production/output not only improves language acquisition, it improves communicative skills generally, pointing to another key advantage of pair work for ELLs. Linguists use the term *negotiation of meaning* to describe the back-and-forth of interpersonal communication, where two participants in a conversation arrive at common understanding. This process occurs naturally between native speakers in authentic exchanges of information. However, when it occurs between native and nonnative speakers, the feedback that learners receive improves not only grammar and vocabulary but also sociolinguistic skills such as politeness routines and strategies for seeking clarification (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In one-on-one communication, native speaking peers are more tolerant of learner errors. This is a key advantage of pair work because errors are a natural and necessary part of language acquisition. Second language learners cannot progress if they feel that their grammar and pronunciation must be perfect (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). This does not mean, however, that pair work leads to fossilization. In fact, research clearly demonstrates that when language learners engage in pair work focused on reading, writing, and other language development tasks, they pay close attention to language structures, discuss options, and become aware of how linguistic form affects function (Swain, et al., 2002). These collaborative dialogues raise students’ linguistic awareness much like peer editing activities in teaching writing to native speakers. It is through the process of noticing, discussing, and evaluating options that students internalize linguistic knowledge, making grammar more automatic (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

A final but significant support for ELLs in pair work is the opportunity to utilize their native language if paired with a same-language classmate. When students use the language they know best to accomplish challenging tasks, they are much more likely to exercise higher level thinking and to retain the content better (Collier, 1995). This is a principle that applies not only in language development tasks like vocabulary, writing and reading comprehension, but in learning activities throughout the curriculum.

The literature provides numerous language development activities for pair work that can increase the rate and ultimate success of second language acquisition (Anthony, 2008; Spezzini, 2009). The key is to...
assign tasks that provide authentic communication and require students to (1) focus on structure, meaning and/or usage, (2) discuss their linguistic decisions, and (3) reach consensus about their choices. The following is a partial list of pair activities that offer students these opportunities:

- Word study
- Vocabulary cognates
- Think-pair-share
- Turn-and-talk
- Role play and mini dialogues
- Writing poems or songs
- Choral reading
- Tango
- Reader’s theater
- Think-alouds
- Peer editing
- Oral or written book reviews
- Blogs and wikis
- Debate
- Close reading

Last but not least, an innovative classroom practice for pair work is collaborative testing. It is a practice that has been found successful, particularly in math and science classes, where problem-solving skills are being assessed. The focus on problem-solving makes it an excellent option in ESOL classrooms as well. In a study on collaborative testing, Blooma (2009) found that it not only resulted in higher test scores, but also in improved retention of conceptual knowledge. Advocates point out that collaborative testing is more relevant to students’ real world career experiences and turns testing into an authentic learning experience (Leal, 2015). Other benefits include improved student attitudes toward the subject matter, better individual preparation for exams, and reduced test anxiety (Weimer, 2013).

Jo Tyler is chair of the Teacher Education/Program Administration SIG of VATESOL and professor of linguistics and education at the University of Mary Washington.

References


**Image Credits**


“Tango” [http://constantparenting.com/12a-daddys-home/](http://constantparenting.com/12a-daddys-home/)

Dear colleagues,

VATESOL currently has five open board positions for the 2017-2018 Academic Year:

  Recording Secretary  
  Membership Chair  
  Secondary Ed Special Interest Group Leader  
  Treasurer  
  Webmaster

Here are descriptions of the duties for each position:

**Recording Secretary shall:** distribute board meeting minutes; distribute draft minutes to attending Board members for review and revision at least one week before the next meeting; after the Board approves the minutes, send the approved minutes to all Board members; organize and maintain electronic records of minutes and approved motions for retrieval of information; record approved motions in the register of motions by date of approval for easy referral

**Membership Committee Chair shall:** coordinate production and mailing of Membership/Programs/Resources Directory with welcome letters; keep membership informed through letters and brochures, i.e. new members, (late) membership renewal, program director forms and letters; contribute to and implement Board’s Membership Plan to increase/retain members; follow the recommended timeline to complete such duties

**Regional Contacts (NOVA, Eastern, Western, Central) and The Special Interest Groups Leaders (SIGs) shall:** recruit and secure presenters for state VATESOL conference in their interest group, submit an article about the news from the SIG to the VATESOL Newsletter for each newsletter (current educational and legislative trends affecting your group are good topics for the articles); recruit members to write articles for the newsletters, keep list of members in the SIG; coordinate the SIG roundtable sessions at the Fall Conference and outreach to new members

**The Treasurer shall:** collect dues, deposit money received, make disbursements, maintain financial records, arrange for audits as specified by the Executive Board, submit a written report for the newsletter as requested, maintain a register of all paid members in collaboration with the Membership Committee Chair, make a budget for each fiscal year, prepare 990 TAX Forms for the IRS, and upon leaving the position, ensure that the signatory rights to the new Treasurer are transferred (take a trip to the bank), and follow the recommended timeline to perform these duties

**The Webmaster shall:** maintain and update the website, solicit and act on suggestions from the membership on how to improve the website, and (if possible) attend a professional development workshop for website managers (i.e. the national TESOL conference has a website)

If you would like to nominate yourself or someone else for one of these positions, please contact me at lray@odu.edu with the following information:

  - brief statement of interest
  - academic CV and/or resume with relevant experiences
  - (for Webmaster position only) link(s) to previous websites that you have worked on

These positions will remain open until filled. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,

Laura Ray, VATESOL Past President and Nominating Chair