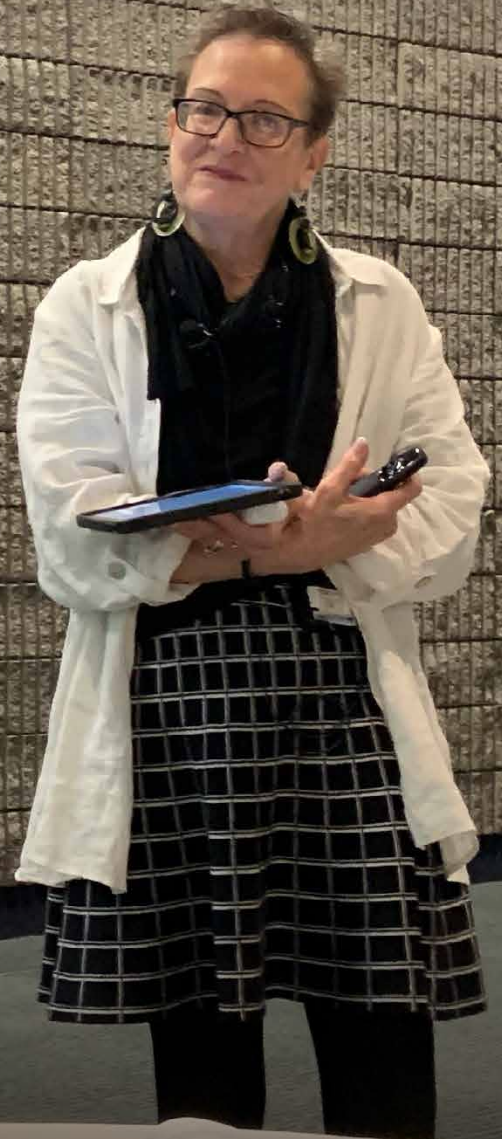
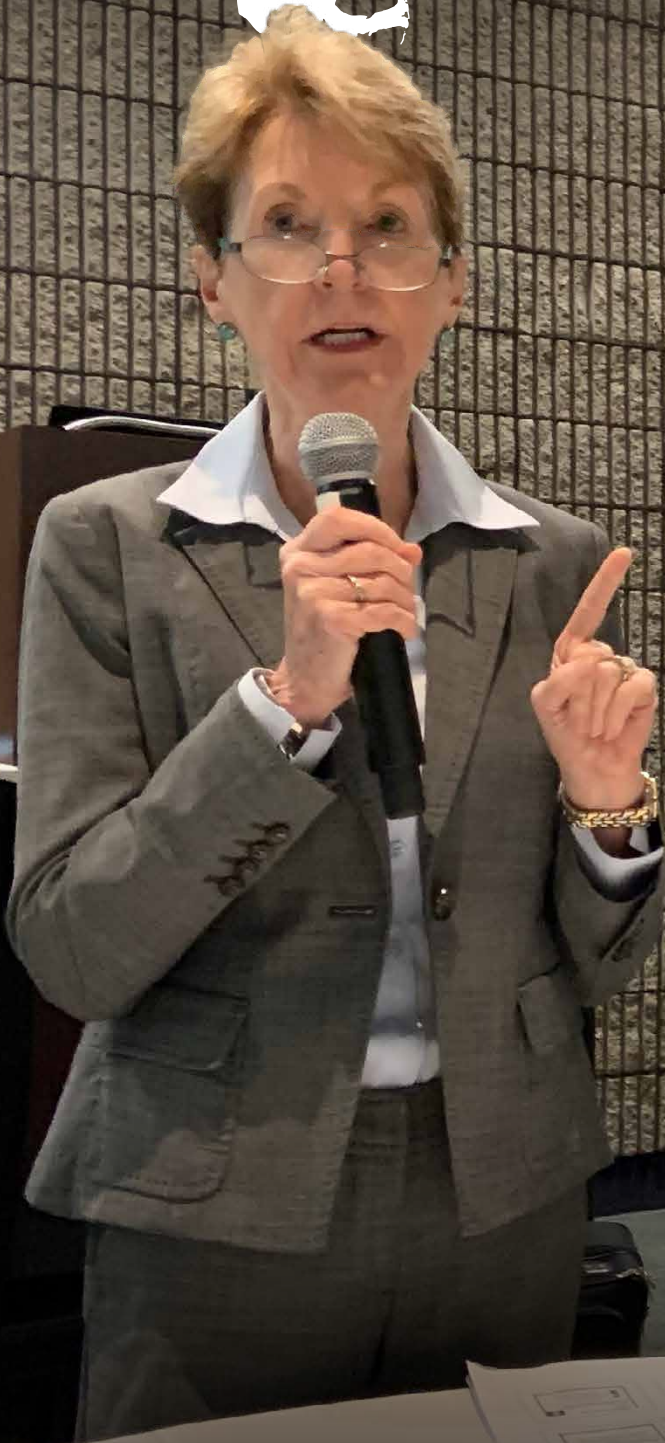


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# Currents

MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS  
Equity And Excellence For English Learners  
Vol. 42, No. 1 Spring/Summer 2019



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MATSOL's 47th Annual Conference  
Integrating Advocacy for ELs into Teacher Education Programs  
Experiences of a First-Year ESL Teacher

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# President's Message

July, 2019

**Dear MATSOL Members, Colleagues, Supporters, and Friends,**

As your incoming president, I want to start off by saying how grateful I am to you, my fellow MATSOL members. I am constantly inspired and motivated by your expertise, your commitment to English learners, and the innovations you are making in your ESL, SEI, and bilingual classrooms to incorporate new technology, promote critical thinking, and cultivate intercultural competence for a changing world. To my fellow teacher educators, I thank you for the ideas and insights you have given me about how to support and empower the newest members of our profession in my work at Bridgewater State University



I hope that you were able to attend this year's four-day Annual Conference, which celebrated the passage of the Look Act and showcased some of the work that is being done around the state to implement this new and empowering law. Immediately following the conference, four of our members traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the TESOL Policy & Advocacy Summit and meet with our congressional representatives to advocate for English learners in Massachusetts. As educators, we must all be advocates for our students, every day, in our classrooms and schools.

MATSOL has had a very productive year. In addition to our Annual Conference this Spring, we held two one-day conferences in the Fall—one for Private Language Schools and IEPs, and one for MA Community Colleges. We sponsored five Special-Interest Groups (SIGs)—the Low-Incidence SIG, the Teacher Educator SIG, the Community College ESOL SIG, the Private Language Schools SIG, and the MATSOL English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)—and are working with four proposed SIGs that hope to start up soon (a School, Family, and Community SIG; an Instructional Coaches SIG; an Educators of Color SIG; and an EL/SPED SIG). We maintain Facebook and LinkedIn pages and put out a biannual newsletter (*Currents*), a monthly electronic bulletin (the *E-Bulletin*), a MATSOL blog ([matsol.blog](http://matsol.blog)), and weekly job postings. We have also encouraged leadership in our members by forming a Conference taskforce, increasing

volunteer participation at the annual meeting, and providing information at a Getting Involved with MATSOL networking session.

On the educational front, MATSOL was selected by DESE to be one of the providers of their SEI Teacher Endorsement Course for Career Vocational Technical Educators, and we developed and piloted a new course for DESE, entitled “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Schools: Leading for English Learner Equity and Achievement.”

We have also developed a set of 15-PDP courses of our own, four of which will be offered in Fall, 2019:

- Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners with Special Needs, PK-2
- Integrating Social and Emotional Learning into Instruction for English Learners
- Promoting Academic Conversations for English Learners

In addition, we offered multiple sections of Massachusetts Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Teacher Endorsement Courses and provided professional development programming for 21 districts.

We are collaborating with the MA Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) and the MA Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) to advance the interests of immigrants and refugees in Massachusetts, and with the Language Opportunity Coalition (LOC) to set up a series of Biliteracy Pathway Awards that recognize intermediate steps in students' progress, at different grade levels, toward the statewide Seal of Biliteracy. We sent representatives to the Commissioner's



from l to r: Victoria Ekk, Priya Tahiliani, & Helen Solórzano represented MATSOL at the Commissioner's KAIROS 2019 statewide conference.

KAIROS 2019 Statewide Conference to Reimagine K-12 Public Education in Massachusetts, and we are represented on the State Board of Education's Advisory Council for English Language/Bilingual Education and the Advisory Council for Parent and Community Education and Involvement. We look forward to working with all of you as we continue our advocacy for multilingual learners in the upcoming year.

**We are collaborating with MIRA and MCAE to advance the interests of immigrants and refugees.**

In this issue of *MATSOL Currents*, you will find reports on MATSOL's Spring Conference and on our presence at the TESOL Convention and at TESOL's Policy and Advocacy Summit. There are introductions to our newest Board members, a review of the activities of MATSOL's special interest groups (SIGs), and a (mostly good news) report from the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education. We have six articles, on a variety of topics: Early Childhood education; using riddles and jokes to reach vulnerable students; designing an ESL program for EL parents; challenging the "deficit perspective"; training pre-service teachers for advocacy; and the preparation of teachers of ELs in Maine. We have a personal-experience essay on the experiences of a first-year teacher, and we end with reviews of the Mursion simulation scenario for

**We'd like to recognize Ann Feldman for her years of service.**

practicing parent-engagement techniques and of an Alyson Richman novel called *The Secret of Clouds*. We hope you will find some items that engage your interest.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I'd also like to recognize Ann Feldman for her years of service to MATSOL as a volunteer, board member and, most recently, staff member. We wish Ann a very happy retirement! 🇺🇸

Sincerely,

**Melissa Latham Keh**  
MATSOL President

# MATSOL's 2019 Annual Conference

**M**ATSOL held its 2019 Annual Conference May 28-31, at the Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center in Framingham, MA. Activities began on Tuesday, May 28, with two pre-Conference Institutes:

**Andrea Honigsfeld, Ed.D., and Maria G. Dove, Ed.D.,**  
“Co-Teaching for English Learners: Collaborative Planning, Instruction, Assessment, and Reflection”



**Meg Gebhard, Ph.D.,** University of Massachusetts, Amherst, with **Heeok Jeong, Ph.D., Nicolas Blaisdell,** and **Beth Marsh,** “Teaching and Learning Content-Based Literacies: Systemic Functional Linguistics in Action”



On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, Conference attendees chose among 41 different presentations each day, offered in five parallel time slots. After-lunch networking sessions provided opportunities to meet and share ideas with others who have similar interests. Twenty-seven exhibitors displayed their wares and generously contributed raffle prizes for our daily raffle. On Wednesday and Thursday, students from local Teacher Education Programs displayed posters of their work in the lower-level hallway.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Maria Estela Brisk,** “Learning from the Past, Moving to the Future: The LOOK Act—An Opportunity for Quality Education”

Our keynote speaker on Wednesday was Dr. Maria Estela Brisk, Professor of Education at Boston College. Professor Brisk began by talking about the personal and cultural rewards of being bilingual. She raised her own daughter in a bilingual environment, using the one-parent, one-language system, and now her two bilingual granddaughters are able to connect with family in Argentina and participate fully in family gatherings.



MATSOL is to be congratulated, she told us, for helping to keep hope alive during the dark “English Only” days of Question 2 and for our role in promoting the LOOK Act. MATSOL members have been amazing advocates for bilingual kids.

However, now that we have the LOOK ACT, we can't be content to just follow the law, Professor Brisk told us. Legislative mandates don't create good education; they simply allow possibilities. The LOOK Act provides three alternatives—transitional bilingual education, sheltered English immersion, and dual language. Among these alternatives, it is dual language that we should be striving for, so that Massachusetts students graduate from high school with full biliteracy in (at least) two languages, in academic language as well as conversation. The new law creates opportunities for improving the whole school as we address the presence of emergent bilinguals. Here's what we should aim for:

- Quality and equitable education with no marginalization of bilingual children
- Bilingual communities where languages are a means of learning, relating, and supporting identity, regardless of the language of instruction
- Advocacy and respect for bilingual students and their families
- Involvement of the whole community in the schools

**“MATSOL members have been amazing advocates for bilingual kids.”**

**Adam Strom**, “Re-imagining Migration: Educating Youth for a World on the Move”

Our Thursday keynote speaker was Adam Strom, Director of Re-Imagining Migration, an organization that aims to combat racism and antisemitism by teaching history. Mr. Strom reminded us that [the story of human migration is at least 60,000 years old](#). All of us alive today can trace our origins to southern Africa. While some Homo sapiens remained in Africa, others ventured out to Asia, Australia, and Europe, and eventually to the Americas. The 21st century has its own patterns of migration—from region to region and from rural villages to cities, but migration is an ongoing theme in the human condition.



The level of immigration to America has stayed roughly the same throughout our history, Mr. Strom told us, though in the case of the American southwest it was



initially our borders that crossed the people rather than people crossing the borders. Immigrants have always faced prejudice and skepticism;

**“We all have migration stories to tell.”**

regardless of their background and country of origin, they are believed to be economically weak, dependent on government assistance, and, above all, “not like us.” Today, 26% of our students are of immigrant origin, and our schools must create the conditions that lead to real integration. For their sake and the sake of their dominant-culture classmates, we need to teach the history of human migration, especially immigration to this country, including, importantly, the [United States v. Wong Kim Ark Supreme Court decision of 1898](#), which established that a child born in the United States is a birthright citizen.

We all have migration stories to tell. By way of illustration, Mr. Strom told the story of his father, who grew up on the south side of Chicago in a family of Ashkenazi Jews who had emigrated from Poland in 1911. But in the late 1990’s, now a Harvard professor living in Boston, he underwent a genetic test that revealed that he also had genes from the Punjab! Mr. Strom recommended storytelling as an activity that gives the teller a stronger sense of their own identity while building empathy and compassion in those who listen. Kids need to learn to put themselves in the larger story; it’s not just *them*; we are *all* are migrants.

### **Jake “2Pi” Scott, “Empowering the Next Generation of ELLs”**

Our keynote speaker on Friday was Jake Scott, founding upper-level Math Success coach at the International High School at Langley Park in Bladensburg, MD. Mr. Scott described how a conversation with a student who felt out of place as a minority in an AP Math class propelled him to challenge himself and eventually become a world-renowned Math rapper, educational leader, and author. He organized his talk around Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, beginning with physiological well-being and moving on to safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.



### **Here are some of the ways Mr. Scott tries to meet these needs in his high school classroom:**

#### **Physiological well-being**

- He allows snacks to be eaten responsibly.
- He allows responsible bathroom/water breaks.

#### **Safety**

- He tries to be as predictable as possible.

- He allows students one “bad” day each quarter when they don’t have to participate in class.

### **Love and belonging**

- He practices restorative justice.
- He doesn’t assign seats, but does make suggestions.
- He offers summer math classes for students to catch up.
- He gives students “points” for helping others.

### **Esteem**

- He learns about his students’ languages, culture, and food.
- He sets high expectations.
- He apologizes when he’s wrong.

### **Self-actualization**

- He gives his students authentic, open-ended questions and tasks.
- He has them serve as tutors for younger students.
- He lets them critique one another, after teaching them *how*.

Our classrooms are defined by how well we meet our students’ needs, Mr. Scott told us; one break on the part of a teacher can change a student’s life trajectory. The ultimate goal is for students to realize that they can be successful *without* the teacher.

**“One break on the part of a teacher can change a student’s life trajectory.”**

View Mr. Scott’s rap video “Quadratic Formula Rap by Mr. 2Pi” at <https://youtu.be/cjZpGM7veW4>.

## **THE CELEBRATION & AWARDS CEREMONY**

MATSOL’s annual Celebration & Awards ceremony was held on Thursday night, sponsored by National Geographic Learning and Educational Solutions. The following awards were presented at the ceremony:

### **MATSOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

**Christine Hingstrom**, of the Medford Public Schools (formerly of the Salem Public Schools and Bunker Hill Community College), was named MATSOL’s Teacher of the Year. This award was established to recognize excellence in the education of English Language Learners, to include successful teaching, a long-term commitment to the education of ELs, leadership



at the school, district, and/or state level, and a strong relationship with the community. Colleagues spoke of Christine's openness, compassion, dedication, and her belief that each child is a special, unique person. Christine thanked her colleagues and expressed her gratitude to be part of this great profession!

### THE ANNE DOW AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVITY

This year's Anne Dow Award was presented jointly to **Vula Roumis & Gloria Cho** of the Brockton Public Schools and to Stephanie Pickup of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The Anne Dow Award is given annually to a professional who has made outstanding efforts that reflect enthusiasm and creative, energetic, independent thinking along with the ability to take risks, solve problems, support colleagues, and model ethical behavior. Criteria vary from year to year; this year's award was given for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching.



**Tom Griffith**, who presented the award on behalf of the Anne Dow Committee, began by talking about Anne Dow, who created the Harvard ESL program and ran it for over 20 years.

**Stephanie Pickup**, one of this year's winners, is presently a professor at U. Mass. Dartmouth, but she began her career in East Fairhaven and New Bedford, where she was a passionate supporter of students and families and part of the leadership team in her school.




**Vula Roumis & Gloria Cho**, of the Brockton Public School System, were the other recipients of this reward, for their leadership in the establishment and development of three dual-language tracks—Spanish/English (2003), Portuguese/English (2016), and French/English (2018). In the Brockton School System, 40.9% of the students are English learners. Vula and Gloria view this diversity not as a problem, but as an asset.

### LINDA SCHULMAN INNOVATION GRANTS

**Margo Friedman and Debbie Turney**, of the Linda Shulman Committee, presented this year's grants to **Sarah Cordero** of the International Academy at Lawrence High School, for her project "Enhancing ELs through SEI in a Digital Age," and to **Rachel Kramer Theodorou and Brita McNemar** of the Waltham Family School, for "Parenting as ELs in Waltham Public Schools." The

Linda Schulman Innovation Fund was created in 2009 to honor the memory of Linda Schulman, who headed the Needham ESL program and who served as president of MATSOL from 1997-1998. Grants of \$500 to \$1000 are awarded each year to fund pedagogical projects that benefit English language learners by improving their language skills or increasing their understanding of American culture.

### UNDER THE SAME MOON

At the end of the Celebration & Awards Ceremony, **Jane and Martin Brauer**, of National Geographic Learning and Educational Solutions, spoke for a few minutes to express their appreciation for MATSOL's support of Under the Same Moon, the American fund-raising arm of Asociación Bendición de Dios, a nondenominational, nonprofit school and community development organization in San Juan Alotenango, Guatemala. The school, Bendición de Dios, educates about 500 children, most of whom otherwise would not be able to afford the \$250 in annual costs for the "public" school. Under the Same Moon raises funds by collecting donations and selling handcrafted items made by Guatemalan indigenous artisans. Purchases of artifacts by attendees at MATSOL's annual Conference help to support the school and provide fair earnings for the artisans who make them. 

**Purchases by attendees at MATSOL's annual Conference help to support the school.**

# Elections to the MATSOL Board of Directors

**THE FOLLOWING NOMINEES WERE ELECTED TO SERVE THREE-YEAR TERMS ON THE MATSOL BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT OUR ANNUAL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 29:**

**Jody Klein** is an ESL teacher in the Newton Public Schools. She has had over 25 years' experience as a bilingual and ESL teacher, program administrator, teacher trainer, and organizer of professional development. She looks forward to working with MATSOL to mentor teacher leaders, organize and deliver professional development, and assist in the development of EL programs and curriculum.



**Theresa Laquerre** is a K-6 EL teacher in the Acton-Boxborough Public Schools. She has been active in TESOL as chair of the Elementary Education Interest Section, Nominating Committee, and Steering Board. She appreciates the support that MATSOL provides regarding program guidance and best teaching practices, and she looks forward to being involved in MATSOL's advocacy on behalf of English Learners in Massachusetts.



**Stephanie Marcotte** is an Adjunct Professor of ESL at Holyoke Community College, current president of the HCC union chapter of the Massachusetts Community College Council, and a past president of NNE TESOL. She is concerned about the high cost of tuition and the de-professionalization of ESL teaching at the college level, and she looks forward to advocating for these issues as a member of the MATSOL Board.



**Molly Ross** is an SEI Instructional Coach in the Randolph Public Schools. She believes that we all benefit from a community to share ideas, improve as professionals, and advocate for our students and our profession. Collectively, we have a stronger and more powerful voice. She looks forward to the opportunity to work with MATSOL to ensure that teachers are being heard in Massachusetts.




# MATSOL Staff Changes

**A** **NN FELDMAN**, who served as MATSOL's Director of Professional Learning for the past two years, retired from the position in June after the Conference.



Ann began her association with MATSOL as a member. She later served on the Board of Directors, where she founded and led two long-running MATSOL special interest groups (SIGs)—the Low Incidence SIG and the MA English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC), a support group for directors and coordinators of EL programs.

In her position on the MATSOL staff, Ann has overseen the development and expansion of our professional learning services and has developed several new courses for educators and administrators working with ELs. MATSOL thanks Ann for her many contributions over the years and wishes her all the best in her next adventure. 

**MATSOL thanks Ann Feldman for her many contributions over the years.**

# What's Happening in MATSOL's Special Interest Groups (SIGs)?

**MATSOL OFFERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)** with online and face-to-face meeting options for teacher educators, educators from low-incidence school districts, community-college ESL faculty, educators from private language schools and intensive ESL programs, and English learner coordinators/directors (MELLC). Except for MELLC, which is restricted to PK-12 ELE Program Directors or Coordinators, and which carries a registration fee of \$340/year, MATSOL's SIGs are open to all our members, free of charge.

## **HERE ARE REPORTS ON RECENT SIG ACTIVITIES:**

### **THE TEACHER EDUCATOR SIG**

The Teacher Educator SIG is for educators who work in pre- or in-service teacher education. Our members include full- and part-time university faculty, as well as district and school leaders across Massachusetts. We work collaboratively to learn from one another and to inform other teacher educators, education leaders, and policy makers about effective practices for preparing in-service and pre-service teachers of multilingual learners.

During our monthly meetings, members informally present their own work in both teaching and research. During AY 2018-19, a group of our members worked together to co-author articles that were published in *MATSOL Currents* and in the *TESOL Journal*. We also co-presented at regional and national conferences, including MATSOL, the Massachusetts Reading Association, the American Education Research Association, and the National Association for Bilingual Education. We have begun work on an advocacy position statement focused on issues of equity in the current pathway to ESL Licensure for teachers who already hold an initial license in another content area. We expect to continue to produce co-authored articles and conference presentations during the coming academic year.

The Teacher Educator SIG is co-chaired by Dr. Chris Leider ([montecil@bu.edu](mailto:montecil@bu.edu)) and Dr. Michaela Colombo ([michaela\\_colombo@uml.edu](mailto:michaela_colombo@uml.edu)). We meet online, via ZOOM, from 10:00-11:30 on the third Monday of each month.

## THE LOW INCIDENCE (LI) SIG

The goal of the LI SIG is to provide support to educators in low-incidence school districts with regard to current research, best practices, state policies and procedures, and upcoming events of interest. We also gather and disseminate information, materials, and resources from MELLC meetings and DESE's Low Incidence meetings.

The LI SIG met four times in 2018-2019. We continued our work on formatting student progress reports and writing the accompanying ELD strands, and we reviewed DESE's newly released guidance documents, with the aim of helping our members to fully understand and implement the LOOK Act—especially the benchmarks—within the required timelines. The half hour at the end of each meeting is used for networking and discussion.

**We . . . disseminate information from MELLC meetings and DESE's Low Incidence meetings.**

For more information about the LI SIG or to reach members of the planning committee, please contact Jennifer Fitzgerald ([jfitzgerald@seemcollaborative.org](mailto:jfitzgerald@seemcollaborative.org)).

## THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL FACULTY NETWORK

The Steering Committee of the Community College ESL Faculty Network met regularly throughout the Fall and Spring. We presented a workshop at MATSOL's Annual Conference, where we shared our updated annual survey of community colleges in Massachusetts and engaged in a lively discussion of the current state of community college ESL programs in Massachusetts. It is a priority of our Steering Committee to advocate for strong ESL programs in community colleges across Massachusetts.

Plans are underway for our fourth annual Community College Conference. We are coordinating with the Private Language Schools SIG, with the expectation that we will hold a joint conference on Saturday, November 9, in Boston.

Following is a list of the Community College Steering Committee members, with their college affiliations and a list of the colleges for which they serve as contact: Darlene Furdock (Middlesex, Northern Essex, North Shore); Eileen Kelley (Holyoke, Greenfield, Springfield Tech); Bruce Riley (Cape Cod, Bristol, Massasoit); Madhu Sharma (Mt. Wachusett, Berkshire); Jennifer Nourse (Mass Bay, Bunker Hill); Anne



Shull (Quinsigamond, Roxbury). Juanita Brunelle serves as liaison to the MATSOL Board.

For information about the Community College ESL Faculty Network, please write Juanita Brunelle ([jbrunelle@matsol.org](mailto:jbrunelle@matsol.org)).


### **THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE SCHOOL/INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM (PLS/IEP) SIG**

We'd like to extend a sincere thank you to all who joined us at our Spring Workshop on May 2, when Rebecca Hawk, of Framingham State University, took time out of her busy schedule to conduct a very enlightening workshop entitled, "Achieve Writing Success for Student (and Teacher) through Practical Applications of Transformative Learning Theory." This discussion focused on how [Transformative Learning Theory](#) can help students and teachers frame second language learning, particularly writing, in such a way as to bring about shifts in understanding that can be applied to the learning process. Rebecca gave us several practical techniques and frames of reference for classroom success.

**[We are planning] another Fall Workshop as well as our annual Conference in November.**

Looking ahead, plans will be starting soon for another Fall Workshop as well as our annual Conference in November. For more information on the MATSOL PLS/IEP Special Interest Group please contact Joy MacFarland ([joymacfarland@gmail.com](mailto:joymacfarland@gmail.com)) or Joshua Stone ([jstone@highpointenglish.com](mailto:jstone@highpointenglish.com)).

### **MELLC**

The MATSOL English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC) is open only to directors and coordinators of PK-12 English Learner education programs in Massachusetts. The group meets four times during the school year, and communicates by a private MATSOL E-List. The agenda includes topics such as advocacy, compliance, and civil rights; curriculum and instruction; screening and placement; special education/Response to Intervention (RTI); parent involvement; technology and EL education; and issues specific to low-incidence/high-incidence districts. Meetings include presentations by guest speakers and experts in the field, as well as time for discussion and networking with other MELLC members. There is a registration Fee of \$340.00 per year, which includes annual MATSOL membership, the four-meeting series with breakfast and lunch, and subscription to the MELLC E-List. For more information about MELLC, please contact the MATSOL office ([matsol@matsol.org](mailto:matsol@matsol.org)). 

# MATSOL at TESOL 2019

**M**ATSOL was well represented at TESOL's International Convention, March 12-15, 2019, in Atlanta. Among 31 pre-conference workshops, two were presented by MATSOL members:

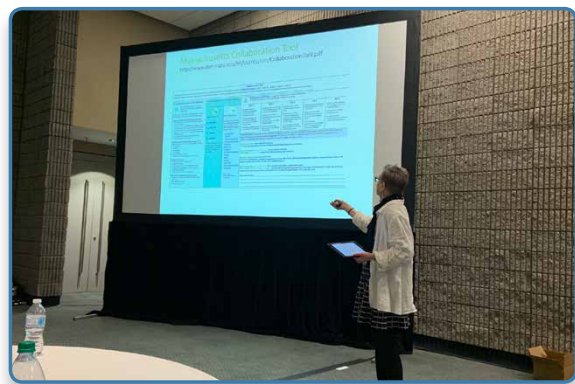
- **Ann Feldman**, MATSOL's Director of Professional Development, with her colleague Linda New Levine, presented a 4-hour workshop entitled "The 6 Principles: Training of Teachers."
- **Debbie Zacarian and Lourdes Alvarez-Ortiz**, along with their colleague **Judie Haynes**, presented a 4-hour workshop entitled "Teaching to Strength: Supporting Students Living with Trauma and Stress."



from r to l: MATSOL members Debbie Zacarian & Lourdes Alvarez-Ortiz, with their colleague Judie Haynes

## A NUMBER OF MATSOL MEMBERS MADE INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

- **Donna Brown** (University of New Hampshire): "Visualizing Spoken English with Schwa'd Sentences and Mysterious Phrases"
- **Denise Desrosiers** (University of New Hampshire): "Making Contact! 3 Approaches to ESL/Mainstream Combined Classes"
- **Stella Dubish & Nereida Cheney** (Boston Prep): "Engage Your Long-Term ELs for Language Success"
- **Ann Feldman** (MATSOL's Director of Professional Development) & Yvonne Endara (ELL and Title III Director, Malden Schools), "Organizing a Successful and Sustainable State-Wide EL Leadership



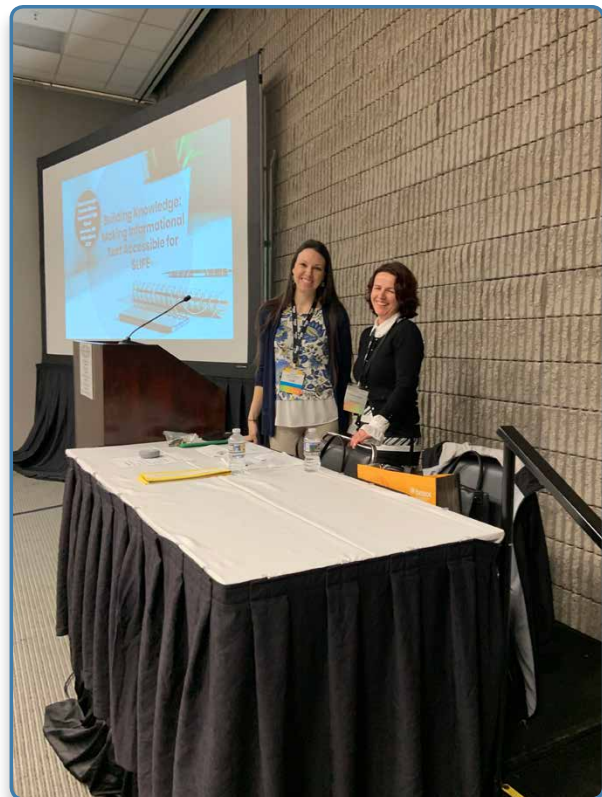
Ann Feldman makes a point at TESOL.

Group”

- **Nicoleta Filimon & Christi Cartwright** (Lawrence Public Schools): “Building Knowledge: Scaffolding Informational Text for SLIFE”
- **Stephanie Garrone-Shufran** (Merrimack College): “Investigating Novice ESL Teachers’ Advocacy Beliefs and Practices”
- **Sumeyra Gok** (University of New Hampshire): “Translanguaging and Teacher Preparation”
- **Ilka Kostka & Lucy Bunning** (Northeastern University): “Fostering Communication during Service-Learning: Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes”
- **Veronica Maliborska & Natalya Watson** (Northeastern University): “Reimagining Academic Identities Through Graduate Research in a Pathway Program”
- **Leah Richardson, Tracey Spence & Sara Hamerla** (Newton Public Schools): “Alliances with ELs: Goal Setting as a Tool for Empowerment”
- **Zhongfeng Tian & Katya Davidoff** (Boston College), “Leveraging Translanguaging in Role-Plays”



Ann Feldman looks on while Linda New Levine (LNL Consulting) makes a point.



Christi Cartwright (l) & Nicoleta Filimon (r) at TESOL.

## SEVERAL MATSOL MEMBERS PARTICIPATED IN PANEL PRESENTATIONS

- **Maria Brisk** (Boston College) was part of an 11-member panel presentation on “Academic Writing Instruction for Bilingual/Multilingual Students.”

- **Mary Clark** (Editor of MATSOL Currents) participated in a six-member panel of affiliate-journal editors on “Demystifying the Academic Publishing and Review Process.”
- **Laura Schall-Leckrone** (Lesley University) & **Ana Solano-Compos** (U Mass Boston) were part of a five-member panel on “Being a Reflective Practitioner and Scholar in TESOL.”
- **Laura Schall-Leckrone** (Lesley University) & **Yasuko Kanno** (Boston University) participated in an eight-member panel on “Policy Impacts on TESOL Endorsements and Certifications.”
- **Zhongfeng Tian** (Boston College) was part of a nine-member colloquium on “Envisioning TESOL Through a Translanguage Lens.”  
As one of the winners of a TESOL 2018 mini-grant award, Zhongfeng also participated in an eight-member panel on “TESOL’s Research Agenda and Future Research Priorities.”



Mary Clark displays recent covers of MATSOL Currents.

**Helen Solorzano**, our Executive Director, **Ann Feldman**, our Director of Professional Development, and **Juanita Brunelle**, our president, participated in a series of meetings and workshops that focused on collaboration with other organizations whose goals are congruent with ours. **Kathy Lobo**, past president of MATSOL, was also at the convention in her role as a member of the TESOL Board. She is in the middle of the back row in the photo on the right.

Helen took the opportunity to attend several sessions on federal policy updates, TESOL affiliates, and the Seal



The TESOL Board of Directors, including MATSOL past president Kathy Lobo (back row, middle)

of Biliteracy. On the first day of the conference, she participated in the TESOL Leadership Forum for leaders of TESOL's Professional Councils and Interest Sections. She also chaired the meeting of the Public Policy Professional Council, which supports and advises on TESOL's strategic initiatives related to public policy. On Monday before the conference, she visited the Atlanta headquarters of Memberclicks, the Association Management System (ASM) provider for MATSOL's website, membership database, and online registration system. MATSOL has been using the Memberclicks system for over 10 years, and Helen has worked with them through two system upgrades and the adoption of new services. During her visit, she was able to meet some of the staff and observe the technical support department and programmers in action.




MATSOL's Executive Director, Helen Solórzano, poses alongside the TESOL sign.

Ann made two presentations at the conference and attended two sessions concerning the activities of TESOL affiliates—"Creating Notes for Collaboration: What We Learned from This Experience," which focused on the efforts of US affiliates to partner with affiliates in other countries, and "K.E.Y.S to Cultural Proficiency: Unlocking the Power of Your Affiliate."



Helen Solórzano at Memberclicks, with Jay Fitzmaurice, Customer Success Manager

On Thursday night, MATSOL hosted a social gathering at Haveli Indian Cuisine, where more than twenty MATSOL members enjoyed lively conversation and delicious Indian cuisine. 



MATSOL members gather at Haveli Indian Cuisine

# The 2019 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit

## Juanita Brunelle

jbrunelle@matsol.org

## Maura Dean

deanm@dy-regional.k12.ma.us

## Stephanie Marcotte

smarcotte@matsol.org

## Meaghan McDonnell

mcdonnem@dy-regional.k12.ma.us

**F**OUR MATSOL members—**Stephanie Marcotte, Juanita Brunelle, Maura Dean, and Meaghan McDonnell**—represented the state of Massachusetts at this year’s annual TESOL Advocacy Summit from June 17-19 in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the Summit is to give TESOL members the information and skills they need to advocate for English learners at the federal level and to give them a hands-on advocacy experience in which they meet with Senators and Representatives from their own state. Prior to the event, participants were sent information about the training they would undergo and instructed how to arrange appointments with their representatives in Washington. Once at the Summit, our MA group joined approximately 100 other TESOL members from around the United States for trainings, workshops, and



from l to r: Stephanie Marotte, Juanita Brunelle, Maura Dean, Meaghan McDonnell in front of Elizabeth Warren’s office



With U.S. Representative Bill Keating (MA 9th District)

information sessions, organized by TESOL staff members David Cutler and John Segota, about the federal policies that affect English Learners, with tips for conducting congressional meetings. On the third day of the Summit we were sent out to congressional offices and met, as a team, with staff members in the offices of Senator Warren, Senator Markey, and Representative McGovern (MA 2<sup>nd</sup> District), as well as with Representative Keating (MA 9<sup>th</sup> District) and a member of his staff.

This was an unparalleled opportunity for four Massachusetts educators to learn about educational issues at the federal level and to advocate directly for policies that support English learners and the field of English language education. We enjoyed the opportunity to network with EL educators from around the country and to compare information and ideas about the issues our students face. With one K-12 teacher, one EL coordinator, and two community college teachers in our group, we were able to offer a comprehensive picture of the TESOL situation in Massachusetts. We were well received in all four congressional offices that we visited, and our requests were given careful attention.

The TESOL Policy and Advocacy Summit stands out as an exceptionally well-organized and useful experience. We urge other MATSOL members to attend this summit to become better informed and more effective advocates for our students. 📍

**This was an unparalleled opportunity for four Massachusetts educators to learn about educational issues at the federal level.**



With TESOL President Deborah Healey (center)

**We urge other MATSOL members to attend the Advocacy Summit.**

# Get Involved

## JOIN A MATSOL SUB-COMMITTEE OR TASK FORCE

For members who would like to be more actively involved in MATSOL, we encourage you to become a MATSOL Ambassador or an e-list leader, to join our Conference Committee or our Publications Committee, or to consider creating an issue brief or webinar on a topic that is of interest to our membership. Assistance is available for all these tasks.

For the latest listing of volunteer opportunities, please go to our “Get Involved” webpage at <http://www.matsol.org/get-involved-with-matsol>.

## SUBMIT TO MATSOL PUBLICATIONS

### MATSOL E-BULLETIN

The MATSOL E-Bulletin is published monthly. It includes short (one-paragraph) notices relevant to EL/ESOL education in Massachusetts. Submission deadline: the 25th of each month for publication in the first week of the next month. For more details, see <http://www.matsol.org/matsol-e-bulletins>.

### MATSOL CURRENTS

There’s a lot going on in the world of TESOL and EL education, and we’d like all of it to be reflected in *Currents*. We want reviews of books and materials, reports on meetings and events, personal experience accounts, and articles on everything of interest to MATSOL members: adult education, PreK-12 education, bilingual and dual-language programs, community outreach, ESL in higher education, educator-preparation programs, professional-development initiatives, Intensive English Institutes, private language schools, teaching ideas, profiles of and interviews with significant figures, and discussion of issues that our members should be aware of. We’d also love to publish stories from students—about their adjustment to life in New England and their experiences learning English in our English-language programs and elsewhere.

We welcome articles with scholarly content as well as those that share interesting experiences or give practical advice. If you have something to share, don’t hesitate to send it to us at [currents@matsol.org](mailto:currents@matsol.org). We will work with you to get your article or report into good shape for publication. For more details and a copy of our submission guidelines, see <http://www.matsol.org/matsol-currents> or write to the editor, Mary Clark, at [currents@matsol.org](mailto:currents@matsol.org).



# Amidst the Gloom of Spring, Brighter Days for Adult Education: A Report from the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE)

**Jeff McLynch**

[jeffmclynch@mcae.net](mailto:jeffmclynch@mcae.net)

**T**HIS past spring may have been one of the coolest and wettest in recent memory, but the outlook for adult education in Massachusetts has been comparatively sunny, as the Commonwealth continues to renew its critical investments in Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ABE/ESOL).


As of this writing, the Massachusetts Legislature has just approved its FY2020 budget, which allocates \$41,045,000 for ABE line item #7035-0002, a \$7.7 million increase over FY2019 and the single largest one-year increase since FY1999. This constitutes a huge step toward reversing the long-term decline in the real value of state resources for ABE. The Governor has ten days from July 21 to review and sign the budget. If the Governor takes no action on the budget within 10 days, it automatically becomes law. An appropriation at this level will constitute the third straight year of funding increases for ABE/ESOL—a streak unmatched by any other period in the last two decades.

Still, a few dark clouds have hung over adult education during the development of the FY20 budget. Policymakers in both branches of the legislature have maintained the practice in inserting “earmarks” into the appropriation for adult education—legislative provisions that divert resources to specific organizations or entities and that undermine the competitive grant process that is meant

**An appropriation at this level will constitute the third straight year of funding increases of ABE/ESOL.**

to govern the distribution of state funds for ABE/ESOL. In addition, efforts to grant adult education programs greater flexibility to use state funds to improve compensation and other working conditions fell short in this round of debates, even as programs continue to face difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled and experienced administrators, counselors, and instructors. MCAE will continue to fight *against* earmarks and *for* adult educators in the months to come.

Critically, the struggle to ensure that Massachusetts' adult education system has the resources it needs to ensure that every adult has access to literacy, numeracy, and English language instruction may grow easier in the not-too-distant future. Last month, Massachusetts legislators took the first step toward approving the Fair Share Amendment (FSA) to the Commonwealth's Constitution, a change that would impose a 4 percent tax on incomes over \$1 million and devote the resulting

revenue to meeting pressing education and transportation needs in the Bay State. While the Fair Share Amendment has many obstacles to overcome before it becomes law, if enshrined in the Constitution, it would ultimately yield more than \$2 billion annually, funds that could be used to shore up the foundation of the Commonwealth's economy. Education—whether for schoolchildren, university students, or adults seeking to acquire basic skills—comprises the very cornerstone of that foundation. MCAE encourages every member of Massachusetts' educational community to help their elected officials understand what is stake when they consider the FSA. 

**While the Fair Share Amendment has many obstacles to overcome before it becomes law, if enshrined in the Constitution, it would ultimately yield more than \$2 billion annually...**

# The Importance of Play in the Language Development of Early Childhood ELs

**Corrinna Horton**

[professorhorton@gmail.com](mailto:professorhorton@gmail.com)



**D**URING my tenure as principal of the East Zone Early Learning Center in Dorchester, it was my common daily practice to observe, actively listen, and note interactions among the children in the school. As I made my rounds one day, I observed two first graders whom I will call “Manny” and “John” building in the blocks center. In earlier observations I had noticed the two boys playing together outside and working together on a floor puzzle. I watched them speaking to one another in what I assumed must be Spanish. When John had difficulty sharing something with their teacher, Manny would listen to John and then convey his message to the teacher, in English. To my surprise, when I spoke to Manny’s mother one afternoon and told her how he had translated for his friend, Manny’s mother said, “He doesn’t know Spanish!” I then realized that the boys had somehow created their own way of communicating, based on one another’s home languages of Cape Verdean Creole and Spanish, with bits of English mixed in.

## THE ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN’S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Researchers have established that children learn in real-life situations that include social interaction. Miller & Almon (2009, cited by Long 2018), argue that play is the engine of learning in early childhood and is a paramount force in children’s physical, social, and emotional development. When they are given the opportunity to collaborate through free and constructive play, children build a natural learning environment and establish their own creative solutions, as John and Manny did in the incident described above. In the give-and-take of play, young students move from observer to participant as they vacillate between the roles of leader and partaker. The roles change often as they negotiate or agree to different aspects of games and/or projects. They

talk, listen, observe, and plan. The authors point out the difference between superficial play and the complex make-believe play that can engage early childhood learners for an hour or more, fueled by their own thoughts and ideas, and including the rich use of language. It is not unusual to see children imitating various role models and community figures and correcting one another as they go. They create and develop games, with rules and roles for each participant, making adjustments as they go along. For young children, play provides an opportunity to freely use and explore language, making it an ideal environment for language development. In a (2009) position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple, eds.), free play is touted as “an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence” (p. 14). Both Long (2018) and Miller & Almon (2009) point to Finland’s recognition of the importance of play for their young students. In Finland, with its very successful educational practice, young students spend large amounts of the school day engaged in play.

**[P]lay is the engine of learning in early childhood.**

What does this mean for ELs like Manny and John? Can they develop their oral English and begin to develop literacy in English by engaging in play with their classmates? According to Stefanakis (1998), “Language is best learned in social interactions” (p. 31). She refers to six teachers’ descriptions of the patterns they noted in the learning progression of bilingual children: The children first experience a “silent period” of observing others, then a “mimicking stage” of copying others, then a transition to “attempt[ing] their own single-word phrases,” and, finally, “comprehensible conversation.” Language develops as the children speak to one another, beginning what I call a “communication cycle.” The more they speak, the better acquainted and the more relaxed they become, leading them to speak more. In this way, play encourages conversation.

Young children like John and Manny communicate with one another across language barriers by using their understanding of the setting. A study done by Markova-Lama (2013) found that preschool bilingual children engaged and interacted dramatically more during free play than during teacher-structured activities. “The free play activities during which children were the most engaged and used their second language, English, the most were pretend play, free play, and monkey bars” (p. iii). The children were moving from being monolingual learners to bilingual learners. Grosjean (1982), cited by Beeman and Urow

(2013), notes that bilinguals “can function in each language according to given needs” (p. 67). As they become completely engrossed in playing with others, the language they use may include their home language but will, in time, emerge as English—as happened, eventually, with Manny and John.

Ultimately, as Beeman and Urow point out, the development of oral language serves as a basis for the development of literacy skills. Oral language development “leads to expanding vocabulary, language skills, background knowledge, and phonological awareness” (p. 66). With a variety of opportunities to communicate through play, children build strong linguistic skills that will later provide a firm foundation for reading and writing.

### WHAT IS THE TEACHER’S ROLE?

The teacher’s role is to set up the classroom intentionally, including areas for play. Constructive and pretend play settings like block corners, restaurants, veterinary, and kitchen areas are perfect setups for children to play, negotiate, and plan together. These settings provide an opportunity for children to practice the language that has been introduced in lessons and in their home environments. Careful consideration should be given to what materials will be available. For example, the teacher can place multicultural restaurant menus in the classroom restaurant, along with small pads or pieces of paper to encourage taking “orders.”

Another important teacher responsibility is to schedule *time* for play. Unfortunately, time for play is not always scheduled in classrooms for English language learners, because it is assumed that the

children need academic studies more than play. But what we forget is that play is academic and is an important way for children to build readiness skills. As they integrate subject-matter terminology into pretend play, children count, check for equity, and attempt to form letters and write words. I have seen children using a small pad to write the customer’s choices in a classroom “restaurant.”

**“Language is best learned in social interactions”  
(Stefanakis, 1998).**

Teachers also have a responsibility to recognize and track the children’s growth. Stefanakis (1998), citing Ambert (1991) and Rhodes (1993), among others, points to the value of observing “the child’s language use in activities that involve play” (p. 12), using strategies that include anecdotal records and notes. By jotting down quick notes, or using a checklist system aligned with WIDA level descriptors, teachers can notice and record learners’ progression from one level

of language development to another. In addition, these anecdotal records allow the teacher to notice patterns and figure out what play areas foster the most language use for individual children.

By allowing multiple opportunities for young children to play, we provide multiple opportunities for young children's language skills to grow. Opportunities for free play are an essential part of the education of young learners, especially ELs. **C**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Corrinna Horton** is retired from the Boston Public Schools, where she served as a third grade teacher and then as assistant principal and principal. She earned a Master's degree in Teaching Young Children (K-3) from Wheelock College and a CAGS in education administration (elementary) from UMass Boston. She has qualified as a MEPA/MELA-O trainer and completed RETELL and WIDA trainings. She is currently an associate lecturer at UMass, Boston.

# Engaging Students: More Than Just a Riddle & No Joke!

**Kathy Lobo**

katherinelobo@hotmail.com



**I**'VE recently become interested in jokes and riddles as a way to engage students in language. In his book *Grammar with Laughter* George Woolard shows how jokes and humorous stories can aid in the acquisition of grammatical patterns, because they “lead to spontaneous practice and consolidation of grammar through the learner’s natural desire to share jokes with others” (p. 3). His book is organized by grammar point, with jokes that employ particular tenses, modal verbs, conditionals, passives, verb patterns, articles, pronouns, clauses, questions, reported speech, and prepositions. Each of the eleven sections contains a grammatical explanation followed by worksheets consisting of eight to ten jokes in the form of a sentence frame or sentence starter with a blank space to be filled in by a selection from an accompanying word bank. I have used the modal-verb section frequently with my Korean students, because modal verbs are particularly difficult for them. Here is one of Woolard’s jokes to teach the model *should/shouldn’t*:

Person A: You . . . pay your taxes with a smile.

Person B: I tried that but they wanted cash (p. 25).

Jane Gragg Lewis, in *Dictation Riddles*, uses *riddles* to teach listening, speaking, and writing, while accessing students’ higher-level thinking skills. Each riddle consists of a series of clues to be dictated by the teacher or by a student. As each clue is revealed and written down, the students can guess at the answer. Lewis provides dictations that span three topic areas—people, places, and “other”—at three proficiency levels, suitable for various grade levels and curriculum areas. Here is an example of a Level-Two Dictation Riddle:

1. This popular food originated long ago in Greece.
2. When this food came to Italy, it was a peasant food.

3. It was sold in the streets and in markets with no toppings.
4. One day, Queen Margherita saw peasants eating the large flat bread.
5. She tried it and loved it and asked her chef to bake this bread.
6. The chef decided to add tomatoes, cheese, and fresh basil.
7. The toppings represented the Italian flag: red white, and green.
8. It's a . . . (pizza!) (p. 101).

In her book *Jokes and the Linguistic Mind*, Debra Aarons shows how jokes and riddles draw on all facets of language—pragmatics, semantics, morphology, phonology, and syntax. She also provides some jokes that make use of more than one language, a form of translangualism. Here are some examples from Aarons' book:

Linguistic concept	Example
Pragmatics (p. 46)	Clouseau: Does your dog bite? Hotel Clerk: No. Clouseau: (bowing down to pet the dog) Nice doggie. (The dog bites Clouseau's hand.) Clouseau: I thought you said your dog did not bite! Hotel Clerk: That is not my dog. (from <i>The Pink Panther Strikes Again</i> )
Semantics (p. 87)	When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become president. I'm beginning to believe it. (reportedly told by Clarence Darrow)
Phonology (p. 111)	Recently a guy in Paris stole several paintings from the Louvre. However, after getting in and out past security, he was captured only two blocks away when his Econoline ran out of gas. When asked how he could cleverly mastermind such a crime and then make such an obvious error, he replied, "I had no Monet to buy Degas to make the Van Gogh" (= I had no money to buy the gas to make the van go.)
Translangualism (p. 179)	Q. Why do French People only have one egg for breakfast? A. Because one egg's <b>un oeuf</b> ( <i>un oeuf</i> = 'enough')

I was recently able to use my newfound interest in jokes and riddles to address a serious teaching challenge. When I changed schools and had an



alteration in my teaching assignment, I met a challenge I hadn't encountered before—a seventh-grade boy whom I will call "Shamim," who has selective (or "elective") mutism. According to the [Selective Mutism, Anxiety, & Related Disorders Treatment Center](#) (Smart), "Selective mutism is a complex childhood anxiety disorder characterized by a child's inability to speak and communicate effectively in select social settings, such as school. These children are able to speak and communicate in settings where they are comfortable, secure, and relaxed." Shamim, my student, will whisper in English to a select number of adults at school. He speaks the most when he is one-on-one with the school psychologist, an outside psychologist, or me, his teacher. He manages to communicate with his peers, but does not to speak with any of them. At home he used to speak to his family in Bengali, but now he does not speak to them at all, in either English or Bengali.

I first met Shamim when I visited the school prior to beginning my new assignment. In our first encounter he smiled, nodded his head, shrugged his shoulders in a polite greeting, but said nothing. I thought about him all summer and worried about how to engage him and get him talking. I did some reading about selective mutism and chatted informally with friends and colleagues. Colleagues who had had experience with this issue suggested using wordless books to get him talking, or to ask him to write when he would not speak. The school psychologist suggested asking him questions that provide limited options for the answer and to avoid open-ended questioning. I learned that he would shake his head slightly for a "no" answer and shrug his shoulders for a "yes" answer. Despite not speaking to classmates, he seems to be well liked; his peers accepted him and included him in groups in class and in the lunchroom. Maybe this is because he is a good listener!

I decided to approach this challenge by beginning each class with a joke or riddle. If I got him hooked on this routine, I might be able to use it to motivate him to participate in class. I hoped that he might eventually want to share some jokes with his friends and content teachers.

The first day of school I asked him a riddle: "Where do snowmen keep their money?" (Answer: "In snow banks.") He had arrived in class a little early, so when the next student came in, I told him the answer and tried to get him to ask *her* the riddle. He smiled but refused to talk. But then, on the third day, when I asked him, "Why is six afraid of seven?," he whispered the answer: "Because seven 'ate' nine." He liked the play on words of "eight" and "ate." When the next student arrived, I asked her the riddle, and Shamim again provided the answer! As we continued this routine, he would remain silent on some days, but on other days he would speak and share, though always in a whisper.

Sometimes, instead of telling a joke or asking a riddle, I would tell a little story or share something that was happening in my life or in the community. At Halloween I told him about my friend's cat. My friend had asked me to take care of his cat while he was out of town, and he asked me to keep the cat inside, because the cat is black and some people are afraid of black cats, especially on Halloween. Suddenly the floodgates opened! Shamim was full of questions about the cat, and then he told me about his own black cat, "Shadow." When he asked why my friend's cat is named "8 Ball," I told him that 8 balls are black and my friend had previously had a white cat named "Cue Ball," because cue balls are white. This led to further conversation, with me speaking in my normal voice and him whispering.

I conducted the class as I normally would, using lots of modeling and interactive strategies. We frequently "partner" to read fiction or non-fiction stories and articles, with a focus on reading strategies, especially reading fix-up strategies such as re-reading, reading out loud, using context, looking up words you don't

**I will continue to use stories, jokes, and riddles as a way to get my students to talk more in class.**

know, and asking questions. Shamim would participate in the class by reading aloud and partner-reading with me, but only in a whisper, not a speaking voice. He would answer questions orally if there was plenty of wait time. In writing, he would answer text-dependent questions, write summaries, and make predictions. Sometimes he would read his answers quietly out loud. Once in a while he would initiate conversation. I was still one of the few people he would talk to.

A further break-through happened a few months after school began, when he whispered, "I have a joke for you, Ms. Lobo: What happens *once* in a minute, *twice* in a moment, and *never* in a thousand years?" I used the "think-aloud" strategy to show my thinking to him and three other students who were present. I looked at the words and at the letters. "Is it the letter 'm'?" I asked. Shamim shrugged and smiled. When I asked him where he had learned the joke, he told me from his fifth-grade teacher.

When Shamim came to see me on our middle-school graduation day, I gave him the letter he had written to himself at the start of the year. I had asked the students to choose a goal or write a wish, and I also asked them to predict the

last day of school. I had sealed the letters in envelopes and saved them until the last day. While *my* goal for Shamim—to get him talking—had been met to some extent, I was interested to learn that *his* goal had been to improve his handwriting, which is tentative, crooked, and hard to read, even for him. If I had known his wish I would have helped him more with this. I did not correct him or criticize him for his handwriting because I did not want him to shut down further, but I did model how letters were formed and gave him tips for how to write in straight lines and pay attention to margins.

A bigger goal for Shamim would be to improve and increase communication with others, in both speech and writing. He made some progress on that goal this year by starting to talk with me and share jokes. But in his letter, he said that he planned to meet his goals on his own, not seek or accept help and support from others. I worry about that part of his plan. I invited him to visit again next year, when he is a high school student, to tell me any good jokes he has heard. I promised to make a note of any really good ones *I* hear and to share them with *him*. He smiled and nodded as we finished our conversation.

Based on my experience with Shamim, I will continue to use stories, jokes, and riddles as a way to get my students to talk more in class, and to promote and support them as they acquire (not just study) English. Jokes and stories are a good way to encourage the use of language, because children have a natural desire to share them with others—with their families, friends, and peers, both in school and out. **C**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kathy Lobo** is an ESL Teacher in the Newton Public Schools and an adjunct professor at Brandeis and Lesley Universities. She has served on the MABE and MATSOL Boards of Directors and was MATSOL's president for two years. She is presently a member of TESOL's Board of Directors.

# A Family Engagement Project: Teaching and Learning From EL Parents

**Emily Spitzman**

espitzman@bridgew.edu

**Alexandra Dema**

adema@bridgew.edu



**F**AMILY involvement has been shown to have many benefits for all students, leading to improved academic performance (Wilder, 2014) and in-school behavior (Domina, 2005), and it has been identified as a particularly critical contributor to the success of ELs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Johnson, 2012). But for many of our EL parents, there are linguistic and cultural barriers that interfere with their ability to be actively involved in their children's education. For the past two years, at the request of the school, Bridgewater State University's MAT in TESOL program has offered an ESL class for parents and caretakers of elementary students at the Gilmore School in Brockton, MA. Classes meet once a week, with 4-5 participants at the Entering and Emerging level on the English Language Development (ELD) scale.

In Spring 2018, during its first year, the class was taught by a teaching assistant from our MAT program, with supervision from Bridgewater State faculty, who advised the instructor on curriculum, modeled lessons, observed her classes, and provided feedback. But when the project resumed in Spring 2019, we had no graduate assistant, and so we, the authors of this report, took over the teaching of the course. In response to feedback from the first year's participants, we had revamped the curriculum in several ways, and we looked forward to piloting the revised curriculum and establishing a highly effective program that could be used as a future teaching site for MAT candidates in TESOL.

The class participants had asked us to address two main goals: First, they wanted to focus on English skills, especially vocabulary and conversation. Secondly, they


wanted to focus more closely on school-related topics in order to learn more about their children's school experiences and improve communication with the school. To address these needs, we decided to introduce ten key words each week and practice using them in a variety of school-related contexts such as helping children with homework, asking questions in parent-teacher conferences, and communicating with school personnel. We addressed the six main topics that the parents wanted to cover—introductions, classroom vocabulary, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, school personnel, and school lunch—and, in addition, we discussed some of the frustrations they were experiencing in their interactions with the school. For example, when one parent expressed disappointment about a teacher not asking her name during a parent-teacher conference, this led to a discussion about communication styles in the American school system and how to deal with difficulties that arise. We explained that the parent could have discussed this situation with the school principal, who is very receptive to parental feedback. We then engaged in role plays where one person acted as the school principal and the other as the parent who had come in to discuss the issue with her. These activities increased the parents' confidence and made them more aware of available strategies to handle frustrating situations.

**[E]ffective family engagement practices should be an integral part of any teacher education program for future ESL teachers.**

Following each class we made detailed notes, with written reflections on the participants' language development, their interest in the topics we discussed, and their progress in improving their communication with the school. As the weeks passed, we could see that they were becoming more willing to take risks and formulate questions, using their new vocabulary. They were actively engaged in class, with comments such as "It was a very helpful lesson today." During the focus group at the end of the course, several of the parents reported that they were now able to use English more easily in their daily lives and in helping their children with homework, and they had a better understanding of information given in English. One participant reported that she had noticed when a translator was not translating a doctor's instructions correctly.

At the end of the year, based on our own observations and on feedback from the participants, we identified the following changes as we move forward: First, we will extend our class meeting times or meet more frequently, as the participants expressed the need for more face-to-face language learning time. We will also give more attention to pronunciation, which is one of the weaker

areas in the participants' language development. In addition, we are planning to include more activities that model how parents can engage their children at home in academic and literacy activities linked to the school curriculum. Finally, we will facilitate literacy nights at the school.

Now that our ESL class is well established, we hope to again involve the candidates from our MAT program in TESOL. Given their importance to ELs and their families, effective family engagement practices should be an integral part of any teacher education program for future ESL teachers. We hope to improve the preparation of our own TESOL candidates by giving them opportunities to spend time in our Gilmore School ESL class, where they can practice teaching English while gaining greater awareness of the perspectives of the parents of their future students. 

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Emily Spitzman** is an Assistant Professor of TESOL at Bridgewater State University who researches family engagement and academic language development among multilingual learners. Prior to her work in teacher education she taught English to immigrants/refugees and international students.

**Dr. Alexandra Dema** is an Assistant Professor of TESOL at Bridgewater State University who teaches TESOL research, methodology, and SEI courses. Her research agenda includes academic language development for ELs, second language learner identity development, and teacher education pedagogy.

# Challenging Deficit Perspectives of Multilingual Learners in Everyday Talk

**Kathryn Accurso**

kaccurso@mtholyoke.edu

**Stephani Lopez Rodriguez**

lopez32s@mtholyoke.edu

**Alicia Lopez**

alopez@mtholyoke.edu



*How does my school see [multilingual learners]? Well, honestly, some people think we're stupid. They be like, "Aw, they can't do this, they don't know English." But people who know English can get stuff wrong, too, you know? Or other people who doesn't even know much English can get it better than the ones that do. But students and some racist teachers be like, "They don't know English. They can't do that!" Yes we could. Just give us a try.*

*"Alberta," 11th grade student*

**D**EFICIT perspectives of multilingual learners (MLs), reductively labeled "English learners," are all too common in U.S. schools. As Alberta's opening quote suggests, multilingual learners are often regarded as academically incapable in a system that defines success from a white, middle-class, monolingual cultural standpoint. As a person of color born in the Dominican Republic, Alberta had attended Massachusetts public schools since she was 10 years old. But despite earning mostly B grades, having an attendance rate over 90%, and being known among her friends as *la doctora*, because she was applying to college in hopes of pursuing a career in medicine, Alberta was still considered by the state to be "at risk" for failure or dropout. The association of MLs—particularly MLs of color—with failure and dropout stems from a widespread belief that "difference is deficit" (Mitchell, 2013, p. 348).

Deficit perspectives have been shown to be seriously damaging for the academic, social, and emotional trajectories of students like Alberta (Adair, 2015; Harman, 2018; Martínez, 2013; Rosa, 2016). Classroom observations and

interviews show that they negatively influence MLs' developing sense of self and social identity and teachers' perceptions of these students' competence and belonging. But because deficit perspectives have been built into school policies and practices for so long, they can show up in the everyday talk of even well-intentioned teachers (Colombo, Tigert, Leider, 2018; Henderson, 2017; Martínez, 2018). Such talk is not limited to students' academic performance: Because state and local educational policies have historically pitted English against students' "home languages," deficit perspectives often translate into negative assumptions about students' home lives, as well. While some of this talk about language and language learners may seem innocuous, it gradually and subtly leads to harmful effects for MLs and undermines the creation of a supportive learning environment.

As a community of language teachers, readers of *MATSOL Currents* know that language matters. To change negative perspectives of MLs, we must change the language that creates and upholds these perspectives. Below, we share some examples of problematic talk about language and language learners and offer ideas for language that promotes a more asset-oriented perspective of MLs and their resources:

Instead of...	Try...
ML students won't be able to understand this lesson or participate in this activity.	What scaffolds can we put in place to make this lesson/activity more accessible?
Those kids...	Our students...
That name is tough. I'm going to call you ____ instead.	Can you say that again? I'd really like to get your name right. It's part of who you are and I'm happy you're here.
This student doesn't seem to know any English.	This student is in the beginning stages of learning English, but it's not like they don't have any language. They speak _____. How can we build on that resource to promote their English literacy development?
This student can't complete this entrance test in English. How am I supposed to know what her academic level is?	Let's give this student a chance to express herself in writing in her own language. Then we'll get someone to translate it for us so we can get an idea of her academic level in her own language.



If you hear...	You might respond...
<p>They came with absolutely no language.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>They don't speak either language really.</p>	<p>That's not true. All students have language and use it to make meaning. They do it all the time, every day, just like you and me. We need to think of some ways to identify their skills so we can build on them.</p>
<p>They can't be in content classes; they need to focus on learning English first.</p>	<p>Actually, people learn language by learning to do things with language. What kinds of words, sentence structures, and text types can we use to make this content more accessible?</p>
<p>Oh wow, they did so good! (about completing a task below their ability levels)</p>	<p>They did do well, but I'd like to think about how to challenge these students further. I think they're capable of completing even more complex tasks.</p>
<p>We've got a language problem in this school. More than half of the kids here can't speak English.</p>	<p>Wow, more than half the kids at your school are multilingual?! That's awesome. Have you ever considered learning a new language? That could be a great opportunity to build community with these students and their families!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>That doesn't sound like a problem at all! Learning a new language isn't easy, but I see our students developing their English language skills every day.</p>
<p>Their parents don't care. They're no help because they don't speak English at home.</p>	<p>Research shows it's best for families to speak the language they're most comfortable speaking.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Did you know that home language skills can actually be helpful for learning English at school? We should never try to cut off that channel!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>It's good that the parents are providing rich language input at home, and there's no reason it needs to be in English. In fact, let's talk with the parents about the possibility of supporting this student toward the State Seal of Biliteracy.</p>
<p>(from a student) I'm dumb, I don't know the language and I never will.</p>	<p>That's not true. You <i>are</i> a capable person, even if some teachers or classes send the message that you aren't. Learning a new language isn't easy but you've grown a lot this year! You'll learn more language as you do new things each day.</p>
<p>Your students are failing my class.</p>	<p>Well, actually, they're <i>our</i> students. Let me help you find some good SEI strategies to help them be more successful.</p>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Kathryn Accurso** is a teacher educator in the MAT program at Mount Holyoke College. She supports pre- and in-service teachers in developing more effective, equitable, and inclusive literacy teaching practices for linguistically marginalized students.

**Stephani Lopez Rodriguez** is a newly licensed language teacher and recent graduate of the MAT program at Mount Holyoke College. Prior to this program, she tutored and mentored MLs in Little Rock, Arkansas, as a City-Year AmeriCorps Member.

**Alicia Lopez** is a long time middle-school language teacher and a teacher educator in the MAT program at Mount Holyoke College. She is co-author with Sonia Nieto of the 2019 book, *Teaching: A Life's Work, a mother-daughter dialogue*.

# Integrating Advocacy for ELs into Teacher Education Programs

**Stephanie Garrone-Shufran**

[garroneshufs@merrimack.edu](mailto:garroneshufs@merrimack.edu)



**T**EACHER educators in ESL programs are well aware of the enormous amount of content that must be covered to ensure both passing MTEL scores and a successful experience in the practicum and beyond. As we struggle to cover the technical and specific content of language, language acquisition, and teaching strategies, it can be easy to lose sight of one of the less-discussed aspects of ESL teacher preparation—preparation for advocacy. Aspiring teachers of ELs must be made aware that “[T]eaching ELs is not just ‘business as usual’ but a process of monitoring for inequities, of seeing oneself as capable of agency, and of making change” (Athanases, Sanchez, & Bronte Gray, 2018, p. 4765). An advocate for ELs must develop a deep understanding of language policy in order to implement instruction that meets the needs of all learners, work toward the fair distribution of resources to ELs, and evaluate curriculum and assessment for ELs (deOliveira & Athanases, 2007).

In state standards for the design of ESL teacher education programs, content knowledge for the design of instruction far outpaces knowledge about advocacy. In fact, the word “advocacy” does not always even appear. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (2018) *Subject Matter Knowledge Guidelines (SMK)* for ESL licensure does not mention advocacy by name, though the concept is suggested in items that specify knowledge about “[t]he role of the community, families, and schools in English language learner education,” “[s]trategies for school collaboration, family outreach, and community involvement for English language learners,” and “[f]ederal and state laws pertaining to the education of English language learners” (p. 24). There are some standards that suggest background knowledge an advocate should have, such as “[t]he nature and role of culture and its intersection with teaching and learning,” but what, exactly, ESL teachers should be able to do with this knowledge is never made clear.

In contrast, TESOL’s *Standards for Initial TESOL Pre-K-12 Teacher Preparation Programs* (2019) includes many standards that describe how ESL teachers might enact advocacy in their practice. For example, all five of the criteria

listed in Standard 2: “ELLs in the Sociocultural Context” require that teachers understand the impact of sociopolitical factors, educational history, and family literacy practices on the academic achievement of ELs. Standards 5a and 5b specifically use the term “advocate” in relation to teacher candidates’ knowledge of “effective collaboration strategies in order to plan ways to serve as a resource for ELL instruction, support educators and school staff, and advocate for ELLs” and their ability to apply knowledge of “school, district, and governmental policies and legislation that impact ELLs’ educational rights in order to advocate for ELLs” (p. 11).

**[[I]t can be easy to lose sight of one of the less-discussed aspects of ESL teacher preparation—preparation for advocacy.**

Activities and discussions that introduce the concept of advocacy for ELs and highlight how teachers can be advocates in their classrooms, schools, and communities should, ideally, be integrated into a variety of courses so that students revisit this concept through the lenses of different faculty and in the context of varied topics. For example, in courses in which the topic of assessment is discussed, teacher candidates should learn about assessment bias, both linguistic and cultural, and how it might affect ELs’ success on standardized tests.

As the only full-time faculty member in a graduate ESL (PreK-6) licensure program, I have had relative autonomy to rethink course design and implementation, as long as the courses continue to meet the assigned Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Professional Standards for Teachers and SMKs. In the past two years, I have taught six of the eight courses that our ESL teacher candidates are required to take. In each course, I have tried to make our teacher candidates aware of their roles and responsibilities as advocates for ELs.

I address the topic of family engagement in Foundations for ESL Education, which is the first course that our candidates take. One assignment is for the students to explore a strategy described in *Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders* (Breiseth, Robertson, & Lafond, 2015) and present the strategy to their classmates, describing what it entails and how it is connected to school success for ELs. In my course on assessment of ELs, I ask the students to analyze MCAS test items to see if they detect any bias and to

consider how the biases might impact the answers that ELs provide. I also guide them through a careful evaluation of the [WIDA MODEL](#) testing materials to consider exactly how the language proficiency of ELs is measured in our schools.

For the final course in our program, Current Issues and Trends, the existing course description listed current trends in teacher preparation, evaluation, co-teaching models, assessment, updated state and federal laws and regulations, and social justice issues. I re-designed the course to include material to make the students more aware of the challenges that impact ELs' school success, including discrimination, immigration, and trauma, as well as English proficiency.


**The students in our teacher education program are mostly white, native-born, English speakers whose schooling experiences are nothing like those of the diverse students they will teach.**

The students in our teacher education program are mostly white, native-born, English speakers whose schooling experiences are nothing like those of the diverse students they will teach. For that reason, I have designed activities and discussions to promote empathy, using activities such as simulations and role plays to provide perspective on the experiences of diverse students and their families in American schools.

In the most recent iteration of the course, the students read a narrative describing a young immigrant's experiences, and discussion groups were assigned one of three texts: *Enrique's Journey*, *How Dare the Sun Rise*, or *The Distance Between Us*. Each week, a facilitator from the group created a list of discussion questions and led their colleagues in talking about the text. The second half of the semester focused on advocacy for ELs, using Staehr Fenner's (2014) *Advocating for English Learners* as a primary text. We discussed how to advocate for ELs through collaboration with colleagues, family engagement, effective instruction, and assessment. The major course assignments related to the candidates' own teaching or field-experience settings. The students wrote two reflections, each focused on an issue that they felt was impeding their ELs' access to educational opportunities in that school setting. The final course assignment asked them to choose one of the issues they had identified and create an action plan for amelioration, with accompanying materials such as a professional development session, a brochure, or a curriculum/unit plan.

Data collected in the first iteration of this course (Spring, 2018) revealed the development in our students' ideas about advocacy over the course of the semester. Their end-of-course definitions of "advocacy" were more specific

and demonstrated a deeper understanding of the role of advocate than the definitions they had provided on pre-course surveys. The students reported feeling prepared to advocate for their students, even as new teachers, and all were able to describe multiple advocacy actions in which they had engaged during the semester.

ELs' struggles to succeed in American schools demand that aspiring ESL teachers be ready to advocate for their students from day one. While it can be difficult to imagine fitting one more element into our already full teacher-education programs, I believe that explicit instruction in advocacy can and should be integrated into ESL teacher-education programs to ensure that ESL teachers are prepared for this crucial role. 

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Stephanie Garrone-Shufran, PhD**, is an Assistant Professor of Education at Merrimack College. She teaches courses on English learner education, as well as linguistics and language development. Her research focuses on ESL teacher preparation and the experiences of new teachers.

# Teacher Preparedness and Perspectives on Teaching English Language Learners in a State with a Rapidly Growing EL Population

**Andrea Stairs-Davenport**

andrea.stairs@maine.edu

**Meaghan Bradbury**

meaghan.bradbury@maine.edu



**A**CCORDING to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), there were about 4.8 million English Language Learners (ELs) in U.S. public schools in 2015—about 9.5% of the total school population—an increase from 3.8 million students, or 8.1%, in 2000. The preparation of the classroom teachers who work with this growing population of ELs is a nationwide concern. A survey of 5,300 California educators (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005) found that almost half the teachers who taught in classrooms with 50% or more ELs had either no professional development or only one session focused on teaching ELs over a five-year period. A recent survey of Los Angeles teachers—the school district with the most ELs in the country—found that teachers had received seventeen hours of professional development devoted to teaching ELs and that the teachers found this amount of continuing education to be insufficient (Santibanez & Gandara, 2016).

We are now facing this issue in the state of Maine. Our EL population has increased 100% over the last fifteen years and is now up to 3.3% of total enrollment. With current trends in immigration and refugee resettlement, some school districts have seen increases well above the statewide average, to anywhere

**[Maine's] EL population has increased 100% over the last fifteen years.**

from 5% to 35% of their total student population. The University of Southern Maine's Department of Literacy, Language, and Culture has been working with districts in our area to offer professional development and conduct research on teachers' preparedness and perspectives on teaching ELs.

## OUR RESEARCH

In 2014-2015, Southern Maine faculty administered a selected-response and open-ended survey to a select group of Maine teachers, based on research conducted by Karabenick and Clemens Noda (2004). The survey was administered to 283 practicing general classroom teachers, specialist teachers, and ESL teachers in three very different school districts with growing EL populations. Study participants were employed in districts that enroll 5%-35% EL students, with 15-50 home languages, the most common being Somali, Arabic, French, Spanish, and Chinese. Many of these ELs are recent immigrants or refugees with limited formal schooling.

**[Most of the teachers] were underprepared, with either no preparation to teach ELs or the equivalent of one day or less of professional development.**

Survey data were collected at the participants' school sites during staff meetings that had been set up to consider future professional development opportunities that might be provided by the university in collaboration with the districts. Participants were asked to volunteer their contact information for a follow-up interview and to suggest the names of other teachers in their school who might also be interested in being interviewed. The researchers then conducted in-depth interviews with seventeen teachers—thirteen general classroom teachers, three ESL teachers, and one 50% mainstream/50% ESL teacher—to further explore how they had learned to teach ELs. Descriptive statistics were calculated on selected-response items, using SPSS software, and inductive coding of interview transcripts was employed to identify patterns and themes.

## THE SURVEY

Analysis of the selected-response portion of the survey revealed that most of the teachers in these three districts (80%) were currently teaching ELs, and most (77.5%) were underprepared, with either *no* preparation to teach ELs or the equivalent of one day or less of professional development. Respondents'



preparation was related to the size of their EL population; the school with the most ELs (100% of teachers currently teaching ELs) had the better prepared teachers (64.8% with the equivalent of a 3-credit graduate course or more), and the school with the fewest ELs (69.5% of teachers currently teaching ELs) had the most underprepared teachers (only 12.5% with the equivalent of a 3-credit graduate course or more).

Our data confirm a trend in the research literature that mainstream teachers are generally underprepared to teach ELs (Pettit, 2011), and they align with a finding by the Education Commission of the States (2014) that over thirty states (our state included) do not require EL training for general classroom teachers.

**TABLE 1 TEACHERS' SURVEY RESPONSES ACROSS RESEARCH SITES**

District	Number of teachers surveyed	% EL students in district	% Teachers teaching EL students	Teachers prepared with 3-credit graduate course or more	Teachers with some professional development, but less than a 3-credit course	Teachers with no preparation at all
District 1	121	5%	69.5%	12.5%	19.2%	68.3%
District 2	124	13%	88.1%	19.3%	26.7%	54%
District 3	38	25%	100%	64.8%	32.4%	2.8%

### THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

The alarming percentage of teachers with little to no preparation who currently teach ELs increased our interest in the interview portion of the study, where we asked teachers to identify what they enjoy about teaching ELs and what challenges they are encountering.

Several trends emerged from the interviews. All the teachers talked explicitly or implicitly about two-way learning: They learned as much from their EL students as the EL students learned from them. The elementary teachers valued diversity, noting that teaching in a diverse city creates “a golden perspective that is like no other. Being in a school where you interact with families from all over the world. It’s beautiful ... One of the reasons I became a teacher is to be a lifelong learner” (WB, elementary teacher, 3.6.18). These teachers enjoyed getting to know their ELs and their parents. They talked about the assets the ELs and their families bring to schools and communities. Middle school teachers enjoyed the

process of getting to know the ELs and their families—“learning about their back stories and their history, their perspectives” (LA, middle school teacher, 9.26.16)—while valuing the diversity they bring to the classroom and community. The high school teachers valued what they personally could learn from the students—for instance, a new language or fascinating variations in cultures. One high school teacher stated, “Culture is very interesting to me ... a lot of time teachers are just, within [ELs’] cultures, are so highly revered ... so it’s just really different and really awesome and really nice compared to the education that I received when I was coming through school” (HH, secondary teacher, 9.12.17). Another noted, “When the light bulb moments happen, it’s more marked and it’s more profound” (RT, secondary teacher, 11.9.17).

**ELs are primarily clustered in particular urban districts, while districts in rural areas have few or no ELs.**

As for the challenges they encountered in teaching ELs, both elementary and secondary teachers pointed to communication as a top challenge: “It has nothing to do with level of cognitive ability; it has to do with language” (WB, elementary teacher, 3.6.18). They needed additional resources to communicate more effectively in the classroom and with families: “Just being able to talk to them, to get to know them. If they spoke English they would be flying off the charts, but their language is limiting them ... So that’s very frustrating to me because I see that it frustrates them” (NN, elementary teacher, 11.21.16). Elementary teachers identified external circumstances, as well, such as trauma, living in a shelter, food insecurity, and other physical and affective challenges.

Secondary teachers found differentiation of curriculum to be a concern: It is “hard with newcomers ... Differentiation of curriculum and still keeping them engaged” (HL, secondary teacher, 6.15.17). They talked about feeling underprepared to teach literacy. These teachers wonder if they are “doing right” by the kids: “I think it’s just my biggest fear, making sure that I’m going to help them read and write and start excelling. And that I’m doing the right thing, and I just don’t know” (SA, secondary teacher, 10.24.16).

All the teachers in our survey expressed a clear interest in teaching ELs and wanted to support their content and language learning. Overall, the elementary teachers maintained more of an asset perspective in talking about ELs, while secondary teachers focused more on the challenges of teaching content effectively.

## HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

Our findings point to large numbers of underprepared teachers working with ELs in Maine. This is hardly surprising, since Maine is a state with no certification requirements mandating that general education teachers be prepared to work with ELs, even if they have ELs in their classes. Thus, preparing pre-service teachers to work with ELs and providing professional development for currently practicing teachers who work with this population are important first steps.


Unfortunately, there is currently little momentum for addressing this issue in Maine. One argument is that ELs are primarily clustered in particular urban districts, while districts in rural areas have few or no ELs. Though this argument has some validity, we cannot predict where a given teacher will be practicing after earning certification; thus we have an obligation to prepare *all* teachers for the diversity that is evident in many districts. Just as special education preparation is required of all teachers to earn state teacher certification, so too should EL preparation be required. Reactively introducing professional development into a school district's calendar after the EL population has already reached a critical mass is too late for the learners in those classrooms. We plan to advocate for Maine educators and students until policymakers acknowledge the issue and work to address it proactively, through pre-service teacher education and required in-service professional development that is customized for the school district.

In designing pre-service and in-service preparation, we suggest drawing upon Lucas and Villegas's (2013) Framework for Linguistically Responsive Teachers. This model encompasses the attitudinal orientations that are expected of linguistically responsive teachers, such as sociolinguistic consciousness, value for linguistic diversity, and an inclination to advocate for ELs, along with essential pedagogical knowledge and skills, such as strategies for learning about ELs' backgrounds, key principles of second language acquisition, ways to identify the language demands of classroom tasks, and a repertoire of strategies for scaffolding instruction.

The teachers in our study reported an interest in many of these topics. When asked which topics were of most interest for future professional

**We plan to advocate for Maine educators and students until policymakers acknowledge the issue and work to address it proactively.**

development sessions, their top choices included (1) learning more about the backgrounds and cultures of the students in their classrooms (71.8%), (2) learning appropriate instructional models and strategies for teaching content areas to ELs (70.6%), and (3) learning how to exploit the cultural and linguistic resources of ELs to benefit all students (66.1%). Clearly, the practicing teachers in our study were eager to learn ways to improve their instruction and their students' learning.

Developing the attitudinal orientations and pedagogical skills of educators who work with ELs will take consistent effort over time. A recent study in Massachusetts (Colombo, Tigert, & Leider, 2018) surveyed EL education directors' perceptions of the preparedness of their teachers to meet the needs of emergent bilingual learners. The participants in their study reported that the state's required 45-hour course on sheltered English instruction strategies for in-service teachers, known as the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, was widely viewed as "a box to be checked in their district" (p. 55) and that it had not made "a significant difference in instructional practices in their district" (p. 55). Of the Massachusetts' requirement, Colombo, Tigert, and Leider conclude that "[T]he RETELL course represents a minimal level of preparation but is not sufficient, by itself, to create equitable educational opportunities for emergent bilingual learners" (p. 57). We understand the point our Massachusetts colleagues are making, but in a state like Maine, which currently does not require any EL training at all for general classroom teachers, the introduction of basic certification and re-certification requirements is an important first policy step toward a statewide commitment to preparing and developing linguistically responsive teachers. 

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Andrea Stairs-Davenport, PhD**, is professor and chair of the Literacy, Language, and Culture Department at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, where she teaches graduate courses in TESOL, literacy, and research methods.

**Meaghan Bradbury** is a master's candidate in TESOL and current graduate research assistant at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. She is interested in the use of fairy tales as a tool for teaching reading to English language learners.

# Experiences of a First-Year ESL Teacher

**Sumeyra Gok**

sumeyra22101@gmail.com



**M**Y first experience of teaching ESL at a public school was at a high school in an urban district in central Massachusetts. I had done an internship in the same school district during my Master's program in Education, but that was in a special program for newcomer ELs who had not yet been placed in mainstream schools. I had also taught at a language institute in Turkey and at a summer language program in Boston, but private language programs where students or their families have *paid* to take those classes are very different from public schools. Therefore, my first teaching job was unlike anything I had experienced before, and I felt excited, but also rather intimidated.

I was hired just two weeks before school started and a week before my actual starting date. I had the chance to meet the other four ESL teachers in the school, one of whom, like me, was new to this school. However, unlike me, she had had two years of experience at another public school. Also, she was given her own classroom, while I became what they called a “traveling teacher,” with a different classroom for each class period.

On the Friday before school started, I was given my teaching schedule—five classes each day, with one “free” period to use for preparation. I had been assigned to teach Level C, with students who had received scores of 3 or 4 (= “Developing” or “Expanding”) in their ACCESS testing. Average class size was between 15-20 students. We did not yet have a curriculum, a unit plan, or even books, but I was told that the first few weeks would be experimental anyway.

## FIRST-YEAR DIFFICULTIES

### 1. ATTITUDES ABOUT ESL

Before going into the school, I knew that the student population was very diverse and that most students had free or reduced lunch. But what I did not know was that not all students would be happy about being placed in an

ESL classroom. And they had reason! As I got to know the students better, I learned that some of them had been stuck in ESL classrooms for years and were deeply discouraged that they couldn't seem to advance. There were also some who had not been placed in ESL programs in elementary or middle school (mostly because their schools did not have an ESL program), but who were categorized as ELs when they started high school. They were not familiar with ESL programs and were offended at what they felt was a setback. I also had students who had been born in the U.S., and who were native speakers of English, but who were classified as ELs because at least one other language was spoken at home. Some of these students demanded to be taken out of ESL. "I am not dumb," they said, "I know how to speak English," or "I am a citizen; I don't need to be in this class." These were remarks that they had apparently heard from others who mistakenly associate being an English learner with being "dumb." For these students, speaking another language had caused them to be 'othered,' and they didn't like being categorized in this way.

## **2. CONSTANTLY CHANGING CLASS COMPOSITION**

I had expected to get new students in the first three, maybe four, weeks of school, but the reality was that there was constant turnover, with new students arriving and current students leaving nearly every month. I had designed my spring lesson plans around two textbooks, but there were a limited number of books, and students were not allowed to take them home. I had no extra copies for new students to take home so they could catch up, and I had to look for other ways to help them.

## **3. IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE**

I had a lot of good ideas for lesson plans, but since classes were only 45 minutes long many of my lessons required the students to work on a particular activity for several days in a row, and this was a problem because of irregular attendance. I wanted to encourage teamwork and treat assignments as a process, but it was difficult for students to work as a team when their peers didn't attend regularly. Some of them had night jobs and couldn't wake up in the morning, and some were discouraged and told me they wanted to drop out because they didn't believe they could go to college and they wanted to start making money. Attendance was affected by other circumstances, as well. Some of my students had to babysit their younger siblings, even during the school day, as their parents had to work long hours. In other cases, there was no stable parental figure encouraging them to stay in school.

#### 4. CLASS MANAGEMENT

I found it difficult at first to establish good relationships with the students. I wanted to connect with them and thought that if they *liked* me they would be willing to respect my authority. But with high schoolers, respect is a big issue. If they don't respect you, they will be rude or disengaged in your class. As the students became more comfortable in my classroom things sometimes got out of control. Holidays and vacations, standardized exam weeks, and important events were occasions for additional classroom management issues.

#### 5. EMOTIONS AND TRAUMA

Another unpredictable factor was student mood. My students could be involved and enthusiastic one day but come to class the next day feeling depressed and unable to work. Sometimes their minds were preoccupied with something that had happened at home or in one of their other classes. Some of them were dealing with very serious family problems, such as the suicide of a family member, the incarceration of a parental figure, or family separation due to immigration policies. A student in one of my classes had anger-management issues, and when she had one of her episodes it would be difficult to regain the attention of the rest of the class.

### ADVICE FOR NEW TEACHERS

All in all, my first year was full of surprises and life lessons. There were days when I did not want to get up and go to work, but there were also days that brought joy and helped me grow personally and professionally. From the difficulties I faced, I have several pieces of advice for new ESL teachers:

First, learn as much as possible about your student population and their attitudes towards ESL before going into your first class. Be sure you understand the school's procedure for assigning students to your class and find out how to handle cases of students who may be misplaced or *feel* they are misplaced.

Secondly, have a contingency plan for newcomers. I found it helpful to pair them with a fellow student who speaks their language or, if that is not possible, with somebody at the same grade level who is taking the same classes. Make sure you don't overwhelm the newcomer with coursework. I had a couple of students arrive just as we were finishing up a novel. I did find books to give them, along with some resources that would help them to understand the characters and some of the major plot points. I asked them to read as much as they could in their free time. Most importantly, I made sure that they knew they could ask



me questions. They eventually felt comfortable enough to participate in book-related activities.

Third, make your lesson plans as flexible as possible and leave room for students' other needs. Even though I had similar populations in all my classes in terms of grade level, proficiency level, and ethnicities, they did not all respond to the same tasks or the same strategies. When one of my classes seemed particularly uninterested in their coursework, I asked them what would help to motivate them. One student suggested that we start the class with an inspirational or motivational video. Others suggested that they would like to have time to move around and work with their friends. I also created a goals board for each class. I gave everyone post-its and asked them to write their goals for the year, both personal and academic. Then, halfway through the year we looked over their goals and asked how they were doing and what we could do help them do better. Our school had restorative justice circles every month, which gave students an opportunity to talk about issues that were bothering them. I scheduled a few extra circles in my classroom when tension was high or motivation was low.

Fourth, don't try too hard to be "friends" with your students; they need to *respect* you, not just *like* you. But, respect goes both ways, and students will respect you more when they feel respected themselves.

**[R]espect goes both ways, and students will respect you more when they feel respected themselves.**

Despite the difficulty I had with classroom management, I did find ways to connect with my students. From the very first day, I showed an interest in their languages and cultures. I made sure I pronounced their names correctly, even if they said it didn't matter. I told them about my own background and language learning experiences. Together we found commonalities among our cultures and languages. I had a senior from Ghana who kept his head down for the first two or three weeks of school. I thought I would never be able to reach him, but suddenly one day he sat in the front row and participated actively in classwork. In the following weeks, he started making jokes in class, talking to his peers, and asking questions. He inquired about college and about my experiences in college. He was not an "A" student, and sometimes he would do no work for several days but, in the end, he was always respectful, and he would stand up for anyone who was being disrespected.

Fifth, find out what supports are available in your school for dealing with disciplinary problems. For students who were in special education programs,

I was able to participate in meetings where I could talk to the parents, counselors, and special education teachers. There was also a program for students with behavioral problems. My student who had an anger management issue had a counselor that she could visit when she was not feeling well. Sometimes she would take her work and do it in her counselor's office; that was her "safe space." For students who were not in any special programs, I would ask them to visit their guidance counselor or even just take a walk when they were acting out. We were also fortunate to have assistant principals who would take the time to talk to students and provide them with a quiet space where they could complete their work.

I think the best advice I received about creating meaningful relationships with students came from a veteran teacher in my school, who told me, "You can't love every student. Sometimes they will drive you crazy. But I always try to look for something that I like about them, even one little quality that can help you connect with them." I had one student who would refuse to do any work and who found ways to disrupt the class by talking or acting out. It was very hard for me to find anything to like about him until one day he got up and defended me when another student was being disrespectful. After that, I realized that I needed to be more open with him. The next time he acted out, I told him that I felt disrespected by him, that his actions were hurting me and his classmates. He did not stop being disruptive altogether, but he gradually became more aware of his actions and how they were affecting others.


### **OTHER TEACHERS CAN BE A RESOURCE FOR YOU**

One of my biggest misconceptions going into teaching was my belief that I had to handle everything by myself. Part of this misconception came from the fact that I was told that I would be evaluated by the department head and one of the assistant principals and that, at the end of the year, they would write a report about me. This made me feel that I needed everything to be in place and ready for visitors at any time. But I learned that principals and other teachers all know that our plans do not always go according to plan. My colleagues were not looking for perfection, especially in a first-year teacher. They wanted me to succeed and would look for ways to help me when they could.

Finally, in the second half of the academic year, I made the effort to observe a class taught by a veteran ESL teacher who worked with students at the same level as mine. When I visited her class, I saw that there were also students in *her* class who acted out or avoided work. That made me feel much better! Seeing

that even veteran teachers could have problems took some of the pressure off me. This was not a competition: *All* teachers have problems and can learn from one another. I learned some useful strategies from her: For example, every week she chose a “student of the week” from each of her classes and wrote their names on a special little board where everyone could see. This made the students want to be more cooperative and engaged. In talking with her after class, I learned that she, also, visits other teachers’ classrooms and often finds something that she can try out in her own classes.

Overall, it was difficult not having my own classroom space that first year, facing disappointed students who were offended at being placed in ESL classes, having to spend so much time on classroom management, and not having things go according to plan. But amidst all the problems, my students and I came a long way. I had students who moved from barely putting together a paragraph to writing full-length essays. Some who seemed shy and uninterested in class told me about their ambitions and hopes in their journals. We created a classroom community in which we had conversations on topics such as stereotyping, social justice, and bullying. I did not go back to work there the following year, because I was accepted into a PhD program in New Hampshire. But as I was leaving the school I realized how far I had come—from being intimidated and lost at first, to being valued and accepted. Some students gave me goodbye cards, and others invited me to their graduation ceremonies the following year.

The biggest advice I can give to beginning teachers is to find a mentor teacher, if you are not assigned one, and make sure to ask for help. Asking for advice doesn’t make you look incompetent; rather, it shows that you are trying to give your students a better experience. It may be overwhelming to think about everything you need to do: progress reports, grading, meetings, professional development, observations, classroom management etc., but all those tasks become easier with time and, as my fellow newly-hired colleague often told me, “Take one day at a time.” 

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Sumeyra Gok** is a doctoral student in Education at the University of New Hampshire. As a former ESL student herself, she considers English to be her second language. She has taught EFL in Turkey and ESL in Central Massachusetts. Her research interests are preparing teachers for multilingual learners, culturally sensitive teaching pedagogies, and translanguaging in the classroom.

# The Mursion Simulation Scenario For Practicing Parent Engagement Techniques

Mursion, Inc. <https://www.mursion.com/services/education>

**Reviewed by  
Alexandra Dema**

[adema@bridgew.edu](mailto:adema@bridgew.edu)

**Emily Spitzman**

[espitzman@bridgew.edu](mailto:espitzman@bridgew.edu)

**Jeanne Ingle**

[jjingle@bridgew.edu](mailto:jjingle@bridgew.edu)

**Andrea Cayson**

[acayson@bridgew.edu](mailto:acayson@bridgew.edu)

**Gia Renaud**

[grenaud@bridgew.edu](mailto:grenaud@bridgew.edu)

**W**ITH support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has been partnering with Mursion, Inc. to design virtual simulations that can be embedded into educator preparation programs throughout the state. We at Bridgewater State University were particularly interested in Mursion's simulation platform for practicing parent engagement techniques. The ability to communicate effectively with students and their families is a cornerstone of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRD) (Gay, 2010). In the courses we teach for pre-service Structured English Immersion (SEI) teachers, we emphasize the importance of families in the education of English Learners (ELs) and engage our students in discussion about how classroom teachers can communicate effectively with parents. However, this skill is difficult to learn and almost impossible to practice in a classroom setting; family engagement is one of the areas in which new teachers feel inadequately prepared (Jacobsen, 2017).

## HOW THE SESSIONS ARE SET UP

During the 2018-2019 academic year, we made use of Mursion parental-

engagement simulations in nine undergraduate and graduate SEI classes in Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Special Education, and Physical Education. In choosing among Mursion's parent-teacher conference simulations, we selected a scenario that

included information about the student's academic progress as well as some of the socio-emotional issues that might be affecting her learning. Prior to the session, our students reviewed two learning modules from the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation: "Family Engagement" and "Parent-Teacher Conferences," and we talked about how there is often a cultural divide between students' home and school environments (Dilg, 2004). The candidates then constructed a plan for the parent-teacher conference that they would conduct. During the session, which lasted approximately 7-10 minutes, the candidate met with the "parent" (an avatar on the screen), and tried to implement the key elements of an effective conference, ending with a collaborative plan of action to meet the student's needs.

Candidates participated in Mursion sessions individually or with a partner. Sessions started with the avatar appearing on the screen, followed by candidates and the avatar greeting each other and having a personal exchange to build rapport. Going forward, they discussed the student's levels of performance, relying on available evidence and data. They also discussed the student's experiences of social exclusion, and the parent avatar described a variety of examples of her daughter being excluded. Candidates proceeded to develop a plan of action collaboratively with the parent and set goals to support the student. Finally, they scheduled a follow-up meeting.

Despite the fact that the conference structure was pre-determined, the scenarios developed differently for each of the candidates, thus showcasing a

**During the session, which lasted approximately 7-10 minutes, the candidate met with the "parent" (an avatar on the screen).**

**Despite the fact that the conference structure was pre-determined, the scenarios developed differently for each of the candidates.**

variety of possible developments of a parent-teacher conference. The avatar was programmed to react differently and exhibit various kinds of behavior in response to the interview content. For example, the parent could become very concerned about school-related challenges, such as the student being bullied, and might demonstrate denial of the situation or blame the teacher for her daughter's difficulties. If such situations occurred, the candidates' goal was to de-escalate them by using various strategies acquired as part of their preparation for the exercise. Candidates practiced responding and dealing with unexpected concerns brought up by parents. After the session, students had the opportunity to debrief with their classmates—to highlight each other's strengths and offer suggestions for the future. In this way, candidates learned not only from their own interaction with the avatar but from observing their classmates and participating in the follow-up discussion.

### HOW THE PROGRAM WORKED IN OUR CLASSES

This experiential approach to parent-teacher conferences gave our teacher candidates the opportunity to develop and reflect on their own communication style as they encountered a parent who interacted differently than they do. Candidates had to learn to listen carefully to the parents' description of their children's experiences and behavior inside and outside the classroom. The student featured in the Mursion scenario is not an English learner, but she struggles with some of the same issues that ELs face—acclimating to a new school and finding ways to make friends and participate in classroom activities. In our follow-up discussions with students, we focused on implications for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

In the evaluative summaries that we conducted with our students, one theme that emerged was the candidates' increased awareness of their own communication styles when they were interacting with the avatar parent. Our students became more cognizant of their verbal input and the importance

**Our students became more cognizant of their verbal input and the importance of making it comprehensible.**

of making it comprehensible—by speaking slowly, making pauses, articulating clearly, restating key information, and avoiding jargon, acronyms and abstract language, including idiomatic expressions (Echevarría & Graves, 2015). These techniques are especially necessary when interacting with CLD parents who


may be limited in their English language proficiency and in their understanding of the specifics of the U.S. education system. In a written reflection, one teacher candidate wrote, "When the simulator told me she was confused about my idea to help her child, it made me think that I need to be more explicit and relaxed in my explanations to parents." He had learned that he needed to slow down and pause, and not expect the parent to understand immediately.

A second theme emerged from the candidates' reflection on the parents' communication styles and perspectives. As our students analyzed the mother's communication style, they speculated about why she was communicating so aggressively. We considered her perspective and the possible factors that might be contributing to her attitude and choice of words. One teacher candidate reflected, "From watching my classmates [interact with the avatar mother], I learned to really listen to the parent and try to think about the conference from their perspective." Many of our teacher candidates referred back to the earlier conversations we had had about intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). We discussed how teachers have to be careful about making quick assumptions; they have to pause and think about the many possible factors contributing to a parent's behavior and be aware that they may not fully understand the parent's perspective. This led to a discussion about the fund of knowledge that CLD families bring with them to school-family communication. The candidates reflected on how parent-teacher conferences might help them gather valuable information that they can integrate into their classroom practices.

A third theme that emerged in our candidates' reflections was an awareness of the socio-emotional challenges that CLD students often struggle with. One candidate wrote, "The most memorable experience was when the parent brought up a bullying situation and I was not aware or prepared for that at all." This led to conversations about how we, as teachers, do not always know all the dynamics that are unfolding in our classes, and there will be times during a parent-teacher conference when a parent talks about a situation that has been hidden from our view. When the student is still learning English and the teacher does not speak their home language(s), it can be difficult to understand exactly what has transpired. We talked about how translators are sometimes needed to negotiate classroom social dynamics.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this Mursion experience was useful for our teacher candidates, as it deepened their understanding of their own communication styles, parents' perspectives, and the possibility of student experiences that teachers may

not be aware of. Although there is limited research on the use of mixed-reality simulation tools in education, there are findings reporting positive outcomes in the areas of managing classroom behavior and practicing instructional techniques in both general education and special education settings (Bautista & Boone, 2015; Ke, Lee & Xu, 2016; Pas, et al., 2016). Our experience adds to those findings and demonstrates that Mursion's mixed-reality simulations can be used to enhance SEI teacher candidates' preparation for effective communication with CLD parents, a skill that is not sufficiently practiced in teacher education programs. 

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# The Secret of Clouds

by Alyson Richman. New York, NY: Berkley Publication, 2019, 384 pages. ISBN 9781984802620.

**Reviewed by  
Eileen R. Feldman**

[erfeldma@bhcc.mass.edu](mailto:erfeldma@bhcc.mass.edu)


**N** this novel, dedicated to the author's inspirational high school English teacher, a sixth-grade English teacher named Maggie is asked to tutor Yuri, a homebound student with a weak heart (Epstein's anomaly) but expansive mind. Knowing that Yuri is a Yankees fan, Maggie reaches him by assigning W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* and other baseball-themed reading and writing exercises, and gradually expanding his repertoire to include themes involving friendships, middle-school sports, and the role of food in her own home and his. She uses techniques that will be familiar to other teachers of language arts, including literature circles and student letters to their future 18-year-old selves. As she works with Yuri, Maggie becomes fascinated by his whole family, who fled Kiev after the Chernobyl disaster. Richman interjects glimpses of Yuri's mother undergoing ballet training in Soviet Russia and of Yuri's Jewish scientist father before the *glasnost* era.

**As she works with Yuri, Maggie becomes fascinated by his whole family, who fled Kiev after the Chernobyl disaster.**

Maggie has to deal with questions that many teachers face: How to keep work from interfering with personal life, how parents' past histories influence the way they care for their children, how much teachers can/should interfere in a family's life, and how environmental conditions can impact the physical and emotional health of students. This novel about teaching and learning is fictional; however, Richman tells us that the inspiration for the character Maggie Topper comes from her own experience of classroom educators who showed a similar capacity and zeal to reach their most fragile and isolated students.

Here are some questions that arose in my mind as I read the novel: Are Maggie's assignments just feel-good, or do they prepare Yuri for the rigors of secondary school? Do students need to look beyond themselves and study classical as

well as popular literature? How can teachers acquire the background they need to effectively reach each student in a class?

The book was named by PopSugar as one of the best 2019 winter books and by Instyle as one of nine books to read (or gift!) this past February. It is an uplifting book that should appeal to new and prospective teachers, teacher trainers, administrators, and inclusion staff, as well as the librarians and classroom teachers who recommended it to me. The book can be read quickly but will give lasting joy. 

**[This] is an uplifting book that should appeal to new and prospective teachers, teacher trainers, administrators, and inclusion staff.**

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