

# MATSOL NEWSLETTER

Massachusetts Association Of Teachers Of English To Speakers Of Other Languages

VOL. 16, NO. 3

SPRING 1989

## MATSOL Spring Conference Saturday, April 1



**Carolyn Graham**

Carolyn Graham teaches English as a Second Language at the American Language Institute at New York University. She is the originator of Jazz Chants and has conducted teacher-training workshops around the world. Ms. Graham is also a professional entertainer, performing in Manhattan.

by Sandra Fotinos

A surprise this year: the Spring Conference will be ONE DAY ONLY — Saturday, April 1 at Bunker Hill Community College. Northeastern University's decision to close down for two weekends to conserve energy has given us a new format. If MATSOL members approve, we may even change on a regular basis to two large, one-day conferences each year, one in the fall and the other in the spring. Many MATSOL members recall not so long ago when the fall get-togethers were cozy workshops, but the attendance at last fall's conference at Roxbury Community College was on a par with spring conference attendance. As usual, MATSOL is growing and changing to meet the increasing needs of our membership. (The conference evaluation form will ask what you think of the one-day format. Be sure to register your opinion.)

The plenary speaker this year is a

MATSOL favorite, Carolyn Graham of New York University. Her address, scheduled for 11:00, is "Singing, Chanting, Telling Lies: Music and Poetry in the Language Classroom." Her topic, drawing on the creativity of the students to make music and poetry move the language classroom, is not limited to ESL applications, but would be useful for anyone teaching language or special education. In addition to creating Jazz Chants, Carolyn Graham has conducted teacher training workshops in Canada, Mexico, France, Turkey, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, and is familiar to many MATSOL members as a Teaching Fellow in the Harvard Summer ESL Program for the past three years. Those of us who recall her spirited Jazz Chants plenary at the Spring Conference four years ago know we are in for an exciting presentation. This will be a good conference to encourage ESL students and your colleagues to attend!

Bunker Hill Community College is hosting the conference for its second year in a row, and once again we will have the pleasure of perusing ESL publishers' latest offerings under the trees in the main lobby. Coffee and pastries will start at 8:15, and the first set of sessions will begin promptly at 9:00. With only one day and a bonus selection of exciting conference proposals this spring, we will have something for everyone, including nine choices of sessions to attend in each time slot. Lunch will be at local restaurants—just across the walkway. During the lunch break, the Video Theater will be open. If you have a video that you would like to make available during this time, call Sandra Fotinos at (508) 373-5053.

Sessions are evenly divided this spring between topics of interest to elementary/secondary teachers and those geared toward college and adult programs, with an emphasis on creativity in the classroom. We will offer practical advice on everything from teaching pronunciation, to discovering students' perceptions of second language learning, to how to write a MATSOL/TESOL proposal.

Some special presentations:

- Unusual EFL experiences, such as "English as a Revolutionary Language" (in Nicaragua), and "The Hungarian Experience" (a multi-media presentation).
- Two hour sessions: "What Happens When They Get to College?" "Interaction Dynamics among Japanese Students," and

"Teaching the Elements of Pronunciation."

- Practical advice on dealing with classroom challenges: inner-city burnout, uncooperative students, and bilingual illiteracy.
- Classroom management and methods: "The Role of the ESL Teacher," "Pullout ESL Program Activities," "Cooperative Learning Groups," "Discussing the Issues," "Using Student Monitors," "Developing Critical Thinking Skills with Math Problems," and "Classroom Management to Reach All Students."
- Workshops on student-produced video and print publications.
- Suggestions for using materials effectively: "Experiencing Breaking Away," "Beyond Anne Frank: Holocaust Literature in ESL," "Peace Pilgrim in the ESL Classroom," "Songs, Radio, and Music Publications in the Language Classroom," and "The New Side by Side."
- An update on theoretical linguistics.
- A demonstration from the Massachusetts Bureau of Educational Technology of video materials available to ESL teachers, and a discussion of suggestions for second sound tracks and further development.
- "An ESL Software Database?" and other news from TESOL '89, San Antonio.
- Oral EST . . . Structured Listening/Speaking Exercises . . . Community College ESL: Developmental Studies? . . . New Life for the Language Lab . . . and more . . .

Another regular conference feature, the Swap Shop, will take place again. Simply write up one of your best teaching ideas on 8 1/2" X 11" paper, and make 50 copies. Bring the copies to the Swap Shop table in the registration area between 8:15 and 9:15, and exchange them for a ticket. The Swap Shop will be open from lunchtime on, and your ticket will gain you access.

Job seekers, bring multiple copies of your resume for distribution at the Resume Exchange, Job Bank table, in the registration area.

And everyone, remember to vote for new members of the Executive Board. Either mail in your ballot or bring it to the conference.

For child care assistance, call Sandra Fotinos at (508) 373-5053.

End the day with a final treat. After the business meeting, we will gather for the MATSOL social hour from 4:00 to 5:00, with the traditional Old MATSOL Punch.

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This is a regular publication for the members of MATSOL. Subscription costs are included in annual dues. Letters, articles, black and white photos and other contributions are welcome. They may be sent to:

Stephanie Cohen  
454 Brookline Avenue  
Newton, MA 02159

Articles should be typed and double-spaced. Please include bio-data.

Next deadline, May, 1989

# From the President

It's thank-you time. At the risk of sounding alarmingly like an Academy Award acceptance speech, I want to acknowledge the wonderful job which all the members of the Executive Board have done during the past year. Many thanks to:

Mary Christie, for her ingenuity in the difficult task of putting together a slate of nominees for next year's Executive Board;

Mary Doolin, for her competence in streamlining the membership renewal process; Elsa Auerbach, Rosalie Porter, Wendy Schoener, and Ralph Radell, for their resourcefulness in putting together the best Fall Conference MATSOL has ever had;

Sandra Fotinos, for her perseverance in the face of adversity in organizing this year's Spring Conference;

Gwen Blackburn, for her achievement in securing Scott Enright to give the Rick Smith Lecture;

DeeDee Magers, for her patience in recording Executive Board minutes and her punctuality in sending them out;

Betty Stone, for her thoroughness in all aspects of the operation of the Job Bank;

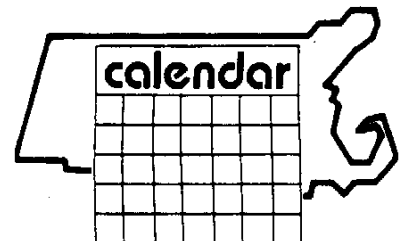
Linda Schulman and Stephanie Cohen, for their creativity in maintaining the superb quality of the MATSOL Newsletter.

MATSOL's continuing success depends on its members getting involved in MATSOL activities. Serving on the Executive Board is an enjoyable and rewarding experience, but there are many other ways in which members can help. Regional coordinators and special interest group coordinators are very important in MATSOL's structure. Conferences would not take place without people willing to give presentations, and the Newsletter does not write itself. A few hours' time helping with a MATSOL function or getting a mailing out is always appreciated.

My own involvement with MATSOL began when Jackie Clayton asked me to do a

workshop for a Spring Conference. I had voiced the perennial complaint about there not being enough workshops for elementary and secondary teachers at conferences, and she politely reminded me that I shouldn't complain unless I was willing to do something about it. I would like to pass that reminder on to all of you. If your involvement can help maintain MATSOL's vitality, why not volunteer for something? It's as easy as calling any member of the Executive Board.

Suzanne Irujo



**MATSOL SPRING CONFERENCE**

April 1, 1989 8:15 - 5:00 p.m.  
Bunker Hill Community College  
Plenary Speaker: Carolyn Graham

**RICK SMITH MEMORIAL LECTURE**

May 18, 1989  
Featured Speaker: Dr. D. Scott Enright

**CONTEST: STUDENT PRODUCED VIDEOS**

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c/o Hopedale  
Junior Senior High School  
Hopedale, MA 01747

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Educators and students  
Information: Bowling Green Station  
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(212) 747-1755

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**HELP WANTED**

Like to read? Write? Express Opinions? The MATSOL newsletter is looking for a book review editor. If interested, contact:

Linda Schulman  
48 Arnold Road  
Wellesley, MA 021818  
(617) 237-1763

or

Stephanie Cohen  
454 Brookline Avenue  
Newton, MA 02159  
(617) 969-1859

**A NOTE ON MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in MATSOL covers one year and is renewable. All memberships expire on the last day of the month. Thus, if you are a July member, your membership will expire on the last day of July but you will be notified by mail in early June. All members will receive only one renewal notice and their names will be removed from the computer list if they have not renewed by their expiration date. Because of the growth in our membership, it is no longer possible to send reminders to those who have forgotten to renew. Please help MATSOL by responding to the renewal notice promptly and guaranteeing that your name stays on the mailing list. Beginning in January, 1989, membership cards will no longer be mailed. If a card is desired, it can be picked up at either of the conferences.

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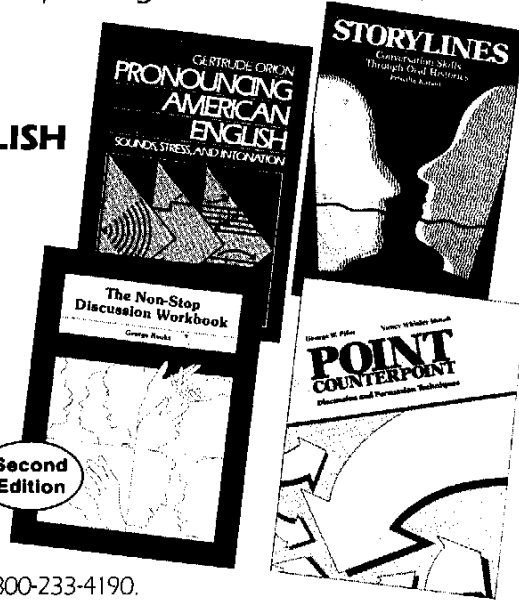
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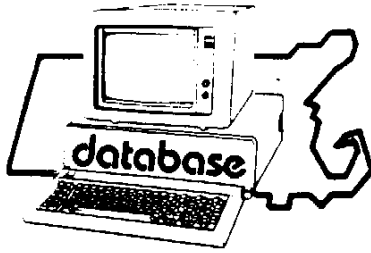
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# Using Computer Activities in Task-Based Learning

by Norman Johnson, CALL Digest

## An Overview of Task-based Learning

Task-based learning is a teaching approach that has been receiving increasing interest in ESOL circles. In part, this can be understood by the close relationship of task-based learning to several other approaches which currently enjoy widespread popularity. Task-based learning is inherently communicative, it is often based on other content subjects, and it frequently entails the cooperation of several students working together to solve the task. Task-based learning is part of the rejection of the traditional model of language learning which features discrete language taught in a cycle of presentation, practice and production. Proponents of task-based learning argue that such an approach is too focused on the teacher and a set language syllabus. They claim that language learning is not an additive process but a natural, organic one. It takes place best when it is student-led and within contexts that are supportive and interesting to the student. As such, they often reject functional syllabi as well as grammatical or structural ones for being merely new content based on an outdated learning model.

Work in task-based learning has been going on for several years, especially in ESP settings, but also in some innovative public school language programs in south Asia. N.S. Prubhu, one of the pioneers of task-based learning, has experienced considerable success in the Bangalore Project with both primary and secondary students of English. This project, which follows what has been termed a "procedural syllabus", has no overt language syllabus, no explicit language-focused activity, and attempts no explicit language generalizations. Students are given a variety of problems to solve in English, including using maps, schedules and completing math

word problems. The content of the problems is related to what they are studying in their native language classes. The emphasis in this approach is solely on getting the right answer to the problem. No attention is paid to how they get the answer, nor to the language used in the process. The program has been so successful that it is now being tried on a wide scale in the Malaysian school system. Success stories such as this one have contributed to the growing interest in task-based learning as an important new approach in ESOL education.

## Task-based CALL Activities

Computers can be used very effectively and in a number of different ways within a task-based language learning environment. Many software programs can be completed by groups of students working together, thus facilitating interaction not only with the computer but among the learners. There is a wide array of problem-solving software that has been produced for use in both primary and secondary education in the U.S. that has potential application as an appropriate communicative task for second language learners. Programs such as "Rocky's Boots," "The Factory," and "Royal Rules" present intrinsically interesting problems of logic and organization, with language that is not too difficult for intermediate and advanced level students to work with.

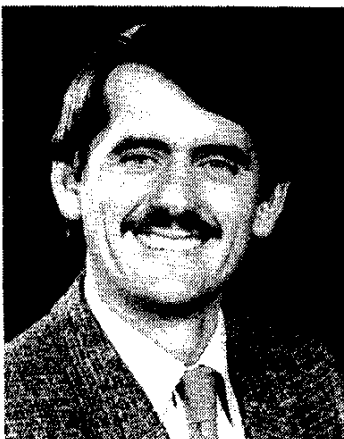
Simulations of scientific experiments and historical or contemporary social events also encourage students to use language for meaningful communication. This is especially true when the simulations are about subjects of interest to the students. A simulation like "Math Shop," in which students make purchasing decisions about a variety of products, is directly relevant to any adult non-native student of English living in an English-

speaking country. A geography simulation like "Where in the U.S. is Carmen San Diego" not only presents interesting tasks for students to communicate about, but also helps them to become more familiar with places in the U.S. Historical simulations like "Revolutionary Wars: choosing Sides" can help students not only to use English in the completion of the simulation, but also to get a better understanding of U.S. history. Contemporary issues simulations such as "Television: A Study of Media Ethics" and "Immigration: Maintaining the Open Door" interest students because these topics often have directly affected their lives.

Computer-based games that are text-oriented are the third category of computer activity that lend themselves to task-based language learning. Text manipulation games are being widely employed and are commercially available specifically for language classrooms. Many of these programs utilize a variation of the cloze technique where different amounts of a text are masked from the students and the students must recreate the original text, getting points for quickly doing so. "Missing Links", "Storyboard" and Quartext" are three that have been used widely in ESOL settings. Computer-based adventure games have also generated a considerable amount of interest among language teachers, but often contain vocabulary that is a barrier to language students. Where the topics of these adventures are not too far removed from normal daily life, such as in the text adventure "Mystery House," or "In Search of the Most Amazing Thing," these programs have also been used effectively with ESOL students.(NJ)

Please send Database articles to Adrienne Saltz, CELOP, Boston University, 730 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215.

## Rick Smith Lecture Features: Dr. D. Scott Enright



On May 18, 1989, Dr. D. Scott Enright will be the featured speaker at the Rick Smith Memorial Lecture. Dr. Enright is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, Educational Foundations, and Applied Linguistics/ESL at Georgia State University. He is a former bilingual/ESL classroom teacher, earning his Ph.D. in bilingual education from Stanford University. Currently, he serves as an editor to the TESOL Quarterly and is an incoming member of TESOL's Executive Board. His latest publication is Integrating English: Developing English Language and Literacy in the Multilingual Classroom (co-authored by Mary Lou McCloskey). In addition, he has made numerous presentations in both this country

and Canada.

The evening promises to be both informative and stimulating. All MATSOL members will receive information with details prior to the event. *Save the date!*



# A Foreign Teacher in China: 1986-1988

by Margaret L. John

I spent the three days before leaving for China in August, 1986, in Los Angeles with my father. The scene at our airport hotel was reassuring, as many travelers were either going to or coming from Beijing. Their air of confidence, even nonchalance, made the trip seem as routine as taking the Red Line to Braintree and back.

Rationally, I knew I had nothing to fear. I'd studied three years of Chinese language, and had been thoroughly briefed in living conditions, health precautions, and bureaucracy by recent returnees. Thanks to Professor Donald Gjertson and the "PRC Junior Teacher's Program" at U Mass, Amherst, an ESL job waited me at a top technical university in Tianjin. I had previously taught in Japan on my own; thus I knew I could handle the occasional feelings of isolation and disorientation.

But "China," the concept, evoked such a formidable array of possibilities that I felt overwhelmed. To some, the word echoes with a scene of lazy sampans at sunrise; to others, it conjures up throngs of glazed-eyed workers, shouting paeans to Chairman Mao perched high above in the huge Soviet-inspired Tiananmen Square; and to still others, it evokes the Great Wall, snaking endlessly, assuring cultural purity by keeping foreigners out.

This third image remained frozen in my mind as I passed through the "Restricted Area" at the airport, beyond which the seers-off must not go. I waved goodbye to my father, feeling sure I would never see him again and resigned to living in a society that would find me guilty of insurrection as a result of some "too political" class discussion, leaving me to languish, forgotten forever, in a lonely prison.

Well, I was reunited with my father, and I never even saw a prison. I did develop a sixth sense about the political suitability of classroom topics and discovered a whole world of challenges and delights while teaching for two years at Tianjin University.

My teaching duties at "Tianda" (11,000 undergrads; 6,000 grads) were many and varied. They changed each semester, usually with less than an hour's notice at the semester's beginning. Over four semesters, the classes I taught included conversation to an eager but reticent group of 60 freshman engineers, technical writing/public speaking to Ph.D. engineering candidates, English Literature Survey to sixteen jaded English department seniors, and a course ambiguously entitled "Background Knowledge" to a savvy group of thirty-five junior English majors. All students were thoroughly trained in grammar, and many read at an advanced level. Most had never spoken an English word in their lives, nor met a foreigner.

Good teaching materials were hard to find. One reading class used a book that had been

published in the 50's. I quickly developed a way of covering just enough of the required book to keep leaders happy, and supplementing it with enough current articles to keep me and the students happy. A loyal mother and friends back home kept me well-supplied with clippings. Our campus had a photocopying center, and I spent at least 150 of my 400 monthly yuan on copying (400 yuan=approx. U.S. \$100).

All of my students loved to sing, so I frequently brought a cassette player to class and taught songs. The Beatles were a favorite, and the students seemed unaware that their music had been banned during China's Cultural Revolution (1962-1976), when Mao ruled China and sought to destroy all "bourgeois" elements. In fact, most of my students seemed unintimidated by government, and quite willing to discuss problems in China's government—even in the Communist Party—to a point. To understand when and how this "point" would be reached, one must understand how a Chinese university class is structured.

Each class consists of about thirty students who are selected for a major as a result of their college entrance exam scores. These thirty students stay together as an entity for four years, taking all classes together, often in the same classroom. Within the class, the students elect several "monitors," including an academic monitor, who collects homework and serves as liaison with the teacher; and a political monitor, who is responsible for maintaining political standards, and, presumably, for keeping tabs on wayward-thinking students.

The dynamics of such a structure were not apparent to me at first. The atmosphere seemed free of tension, and I even found myself livening up classes by using names of well-known Chinese leaders in sample sentences: "When I saw Deng Xiao Ping at the post office, I was \_\_\_\_\_!"

In late December, however, word started to leak out through the Voice of America on radio that Chinese students were demonstrating at some campuses, calling for democracy. Christmas Eve, students demonstrated on our campus, and overnight the relaxed atmosphere changed. In the classroom, it seemed that the temperature had dropped. Formerly voluble students grew quiet, fewer students visited the Foreign Guest House where I lived with eight other foreigners, and, without being told, I knew I should avoid any political references whatsoever.

Denunciation of all student demonstrations by top leaders, followed by a campaign to eliminate "bourgeois liberalization," kept temperatures down all winter. Although I knew that the campaign was aimed at corruption within China and not against foreigners, I still felt uneasy each

morning as I jogged around the campus lakes, listening to vehement anti-bourgeois rhetoric booming out of the ubiquitous loudspeakers.

It wasn't until late spring that the atmosphere relaxed, thus completing one cycle of what I came to know as "the accordion" of Chinese politics: a period of tension followed by a period of relaxation, which in turn causes leaders to tighten the societal reins, thus bringing back the tension. In my second year of teaching I was more attuned to these political cycles, and to the point at which the temperature could drop in a class.

I managed to introduce some "radical" ideas in my literature class when we discussed the *Bible* and its place in western culture. I think "shock" would be the best way to describe my students' response when they realized that I, a well-educated Western woman, was serious about believing in God, and they were stirred by the challenge of trying to find a true basis for democracy in a God-less world. Students followed up such discussions in their private English journals, and I was amazed at their frankness, especially as they had unanimously affirmed that keeping a journal in Chinese would be "too dangerous."

In addition to a sixteen-hour per week classroom load, I made tapes for the department and gave a series of Tuesday night lectures on U.S. culture. I worked hard preparing topics like "Baseball in America" and "The American College Freshman," and expended tremendous amounts of energy presenting them to groups of 400 plus. Question-and-Answer "Free Talk" sessions always followed, during which I would stroll through the audience and take questions directly. I soon learned that slips were safer, as I could screen out questions I considered possibly compromising. For example, I chose to ignore the fellow who wanted my opinion on the student demonstrations, and the young woman who asked about my love life. I never stopped being amused at myself in this celebrity role, and am certain I'll be more remembered at Tianda for my renditions of Chinese pop songs, which became my trademark at a lecture's close, than for any English I taught there!

My life outside the University was rich with activities as well. I was "adopted" by a kind family, and over a year of weekly dinners with them, learned much about the past fifty years of Chinese history, particularly the suffering of intellectuals. I volunteered at the YMCA's English classes and spent hours on my bicycle exploring Tianjin. Here architecturally fascinating, European-style buildings abound, remnants of the foreign concessions of the mid-nineteenth century. Travel in China took me from Harbin, near the

(continued on page 6)

# Video Views

## Two Video Thrillers from Britain

by Susan Stempleski

THE LOST SECRET (BBC) and MYSTERY TOUR (Oxford University Press) are two British-produced adult video courses which use the format of a television detective story. Both are polished productions using atmospheric locations to provide a scenic background to the mystery and suspense, and both present situations containing language which learners can transfer to real life situations.

THE LOST SECRET, told in eleven 13-minute episodes, is a home-study course aimed at adult near-beginners or people who have previously studied English and need refresher material. The story, written by Robert O'Neill and Martin Shovel, is about a man "without a name." In the opening episode, the central character is seen standing on a bridge, arms outstretched, declaring, "I'm a bird! I can fly!" As the story unfolds, a psychiatrist and a policeman join forces to find out who the man is and what has happened to his memory. Subsequent investigations uncover the man's past and a sinister plot to discover a dangerous, lost secret of the past.

The dialogue starts out slowly but, as the story progresses, it speeds up as the vocabulary and structures presented become more complex. However, deliberate recycling of language provides learners with numerous opportunities to hear and learn key items. As an aid to acquisition and general understanding, words and structures, once introduced, are later repeated in a variety of contexts which clarify their meaning.

Support material for THE LOST SECRET, to consist of bi-lingual study books using a comic strip format, is still in preparation. Together with the video, it could provide a sound basis for home-study learners to increase or review their comprehension of basic English.

Unlike THE LOST SECRET, MYSTERY TOUR is intended for classroom use. Aimed at intermediate level students, the video consists of ten 5-6 minute episodes and can be used as supplementary material or as the basis of a short course. The story, written by detective story writer Bob Barker and adapted by Peter and Karen Viney, is set in and around Oxford, England, and centers on the disappearance of a tourist during a sightseeing tour. The tour guide and her boyfriend, an insurance salesman, take up the search for the missing passenger. The courageous duo soon find themselves involved with the local police, the U.S. Air Force, and a million-pound robbery plot.

A wide variety of characters expose students to a range of accents, both British and American, all relatively easy to understand. The language syllabus, ranging from a review of present tenses to more complex structures such as *would have done*, concentrates on

reinforcement of difficult items and reviews structures likely to be presented in lower level courses.

Support materials include a student activity book and a video guide for teachers. The richly illustrated activity book presents a variety of classroom tasks, based on the video itself and related readings. Pre- and post-viewing activities for each episode are combined with storytelling based on color stills to encourage language practice. A language reference page and transcript are included for each episode.

Technical excellence, good language coverage, an entertaining story, and pedagogically sound support materials make MYSTERY TOUR an excellent choice for use in intermediate level classes.

### CALL FOR REVIEWS

Are you currently using commercially produced ESOL videotapes? Have you previewed any recently? The MATSOL NEWSLETTER welcomes either sort of review. Please send submissions, typed and double-spaced, to the review editor:

Carol Pinelro  
CELOP/Boston University  
730 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, MA 02215 USA

The United States Peace Corps is launching a program designed to encourage experienced teachers to join the Peace Corps as one-year Associate Volunteers in countries where their expertise is in great demand. Because of the difficulty most mid-career teachers have in accepting the usual two-year Volunteer assignment and the value of their skills to developing nations, the Associate Volunteer Program requires only a one-year commitment. This includes three months of orientation and training during the summer followed by nine months of service in the host country.

More information about this program and other opportunities for teachers is available from the Peace Corps Office at The University of Michigan's International Center, 603 E. Madison, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1370. (313) 764-9310.



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### A Foreign Teacher in China:

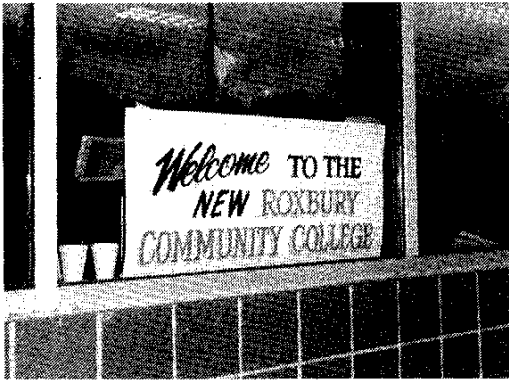
*(continued from page 5)*

Soviet border, to Hainan Island, east of Vietnam on the Tonkin Gulf. Of course, the highlights of my trips were visits to friends' and students' homes.

I returned to the U.S. in July, 1988, and have felt much more disorientation readjusting to my own culture than I ever felt in China. Two years after that first flight, I can hardly believe I had experienced such apprehension at the onset of my adventure. Now, when I reach into my memory to find my "before China" emotions, I recall instead the moment seventeen hours into that flight when the pilot announced that the lights of Shanghai were visible below. In that instant "China" as a country, with its milleniums of history and culture and its billion people, began to truly exist for me. The lights below seemed to symbolize the lives I would be privileged to enter and share. Those magical words, "The Lights of Shanghai," suddenly appeared in bold print in my mind, on the cover of the book that I was just beginning to write, and chapter titles danced in my head for the final two hours of the trip. I can honestly say that I never lost that feeling of privilege and awe throughout my two years of living and teaching within the Great Wall.

*Margaret John is an ESL aide in the  
Newton Schools.*

Foreign Correspondence Editor: Jennifer Bixby  
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Dr. Vivian Zamel, Plenary Speaker

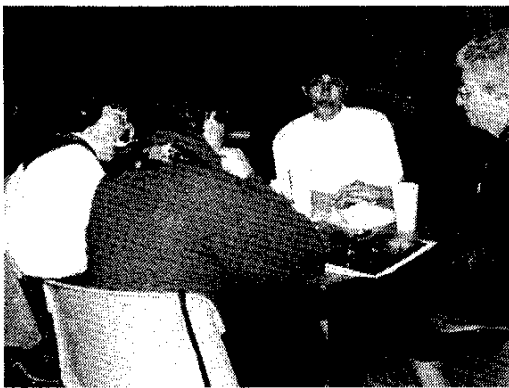


Teachers as learners

"ESL from the Learner's Perspective"

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November 5, 1988



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# Letter to the Editor

## "In Support of the English-only Movement"

I'd like to offer a dissent to the article by Thomas Ricento in the Fall newsletter deploring the "English-only" movement. While his case is reasoned and commendably unrhethorical, his conclusions just don't square with my own, based on years of teaching ESL to immigrants and of thinking about the process of assimilation.

On a pedagogical level, the key question is which method leads most quickly to English proficiency - bilingual instruction or immersion? The evidence I've read is far less conclusive than Mr. Ricento makes out. The positive examples he cites are rather obscure. It seems fairer to say that despite the huge expenditures in recent years, bilingual instruction has yet to yield a clear, measurable advantage over the traditional approach.

When formal studies are inconclusive, one might resort to personal observation. I was trained, and experience has confirmed, that immersion is best. Is there a single ESL teacher reading this who does not strive for an "English-only" classroom? Of course restricting students to English imposes a mental strain, since functioning in a different language is wearying. Of course they want to lapse back into their first language, and do so the instant they leave the classroom. Yet don't they themselves usually favor the policy? Most will admit what some educational theorists seem to forget, that we're all basically lazy.

For many immigrant families, time spent in the classroom may be the only meaningful exposure to English they get throughout the day. For adults, whose language learning capacity diminishes with age, that's unfortunate, although the desire to conduct family life in the native language is understandable. For children, whose absorptive capacity is much greater, it's less of a problem UNLESS they then lose their only structured exposure to English. They could be getting six hours a day; instead, they may receive only three, or one, or none. What a waste!

This isn't just a teacher's opinion. I've had Hispanic adults who were pressured by quota-conscious educators into putting their children in bilingual classrooms. It seemed wrong-headed to them (one said, "I didn't bring my children here from the Dominican Republic to learn Spanish"), but like many immigrants they were hesitant to challenge authority. I always quiz my classes of adult learners and find that a majority oppose it. They know English is the key to success in this country, but they're not at all convinced that bilingual instruction will help their children achieve fluency. I've observed that support for bilingual education is stronger among second or third generation immigrants, who are

assimilated enough to become anxious about losing their ethnic heritage.

This leads to the second rationale for bilingual education discussed by Mr. Ricento. Since the hard statistical evidence of its value is so elusive, defenders point to the supposed psychological benefits. Maybe it won't guarantee English proficiency, they say, but it will increase students' self-esteem and compensate for any sense of cultural inferiority.

This argument touches on some of the deepest issues of the American experience. Who is an American? How do you become one? How do you balance your original ethnic identity with your new, national one? No one involved with immigrants can be blind to the trauma involved in their uprooting from one culture to another. Coming to America is painful; it always has been. Historian Daniel Boorstin said, "American life is a powerful solvent," and one thing it dissolves is tradition, the cultural integrity of its tributary ethnic streams.

Yet historically, that dissolution has been accepted, since the benefits of political freedom and economic opportunity seemed to outweigh the loss. Except for the Indians and African slaves, every group has come here voluntarily. There has been an implicit understanding that while distinct folkways could be maintained on a private level, citizens would also have to become "Americanized" by adopting a common culture whose language was English. It was the price of admission. The main locus of "Americanization" has been the public school classroom, and its success in melding so many disparate cultures into a reasonably harmonious polity is a major achievement.

Somehow the very concept of "Americanization" has acquired a bad odor these days. In his resistance to it, Mr. Ricento makes some statements that are very implausible. "America has never been unified by a common language." What?! What else does he think has unified it? "Language diversity was not only tolerated, but was also seen as economically and politically advantageous in colonial America." Come on! Language diversity is never economically and politically advantageous. It makes life interesting, but it obviously impedes communication in business and politics. From the Tower of Babel on, language diversity has caused no end of social problems.

In its understandable reaction against past sins of discrimination, the bilingual movement fails to appreciate the blessing of linguistic unity. To defend that unity isn't xenophobia, it's legitimate national self-preservation. Nor is it cultural imperialism by some narrow and bigoted "Anglo" establishment. Where I teach,

a working-class area north of Boston, the fiercest critics of bilingual education are local people of Polish, Italian, Greek or other ethnic descent; they see it as favoritism shown by government to more recent immigrant groups, which is not only unfair but ineffective. They ask, why can't they do what our parents and grandparents did? And it's a fair question.

The standard answer, that a changing economy has made it harder for newer linguistic minorities to be absorbed, is partially correct. Yet the classic assumption of immigrants to this country still holds: we, the first generation, will take any job and accept lower social status, as long as our children get an equal chance to be educated and equipped to advance in American society. If a service economy demands greater communication skills, all the more reason to provide them with the proven immersion method. Provide ESL as needed, of course, but NOT instruction in the first language. That's the job of private, cultural organizations such as the Hebrew schools, Chinese schools, Greek schools, and others that have historically helped keep ethnic traditions alive.

The bilingual movement has much in common with affirmative action. Both have little popular support, and have been imposed more through judicial than legislative action. Both are well-meaning efforts to make up for past injustice, yet rest on premises that are patronizing, if not even implicitly racist. They say to minorities, well, previous immigrant groups have been able to make it in American schools and workplaces, but you can't without artificial advantages. And worst of all, both have the opposite effect of their good intentions. Instead of advancing tolerance and mutual acceptance, they exacerbate ethnic tensions by bestowing privileges based purely on national origin. How can this fail to antagonize those who feel left out? Is it any wonder that "English-only" initiatives succeed at the polls, or that the political vehicle of both agendas, the Democratic Party, has lost five of the last six national elections?

The "English-only" movement may be misnamed. The impulse behind it has less to do with a language than a process - the manifestly successful blending of dozens of ethnic strains into one American culture. People of all backgrounds will rally to defend it, and they shouldn't be hastily dismissed as bigoted or xenophobic. I would urge ESL teachers to think again about this issue, and to balance what they read in ideologized media accounts with what they see with their own eyes.

Tom Griffith  
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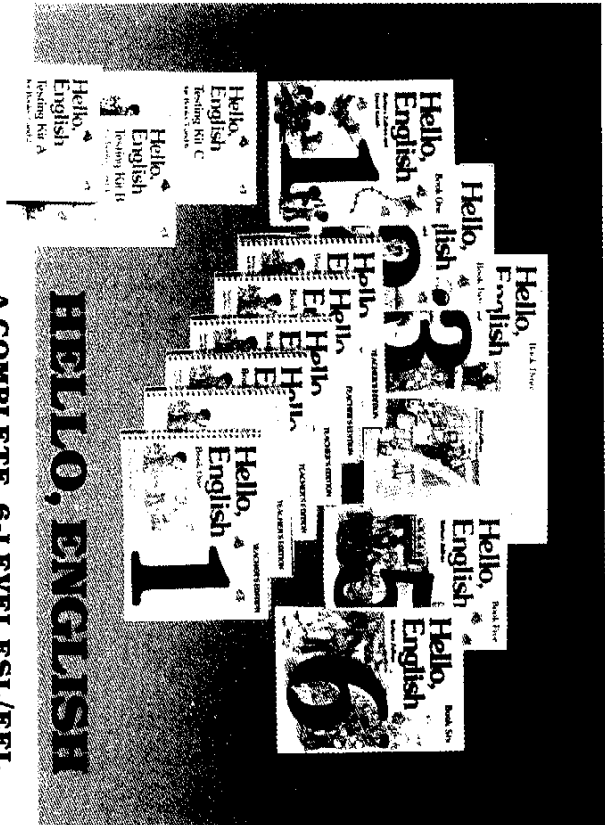
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