

# CURRENTS

Massachusetts Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

VOL. 21, NO. 2

WINTER / SPRING 1995

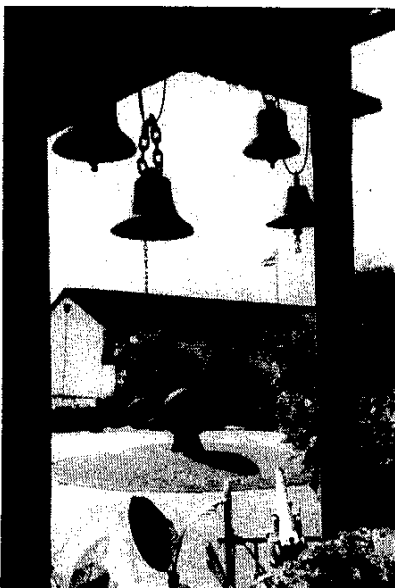
## Let the Text Do the Teaching

*Susan Seefelt Lesieutre*

When students encounter literature for the first time in the ESL classroom, it can be a daunting experience. To aid students in "finding their way" into a work of literature, it is necessary to provide them with meaningful activities for interacting with the text. Although many aids exist which help the student progress through a work of literature, most of these are activities built around excerpts of literature. While these exercises can be insightful, the best source for activities to be used with a particular text is the text itself. As a text is examined, various pertinent activities emerge: for example, a discussion of dialect and other language features specific to the work, different types of writing tasks, role play, debate—all of which aid the students' comprehension and enable them to develop a relationship with the work, making the experience and the literature itself more meaningful to them.

Many resource books provide activities for using literature in the ESL classroom. These books fall roughly into three categories: those that use literature to teach language, those that use literature to teach language and literature, and those that use literature to teach literature. The first

*Continued on page 14*



*National Museum  
San José,  
Costa Rica*

Photo by Mary Jane Curry

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## A Costa Rican Adventure

*Mary Jane Curry*

While Bostonians suffered through the worst winter of the century last year, I headed to Costa Rica in January, two days after I submitted my master's thesis. I planned to teach English, improve my Spanish, write, travel, and recover from a bout of walking pneumonia. Tropical skies and fresh mountain air were tonics for my health, as were ripe papaya and mangoes for breakfast, strong coffee, and a homestay with a Costa Rican family who didn't allow me to lift a finger.

*Continued on page 16*

MASSACHUSETTS  
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OTHER LANGUAGES

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MATSOL Currents is published three times a year and is available through membership in MATSOL. Send materials to Ron Clark, 13 Dudley St., Cambridge, MA 02140. (617) 551-8121

Next Deadline: June 1, 1995

Typesetting: Bartleby Sisterspress  
Printing: Sir Speedy, Brookline

## From the President

When I became vice president of MATSOL last year, someone asked me what my goals for this organization were—seeking, I suppose, an articulation of my “vision thing.” At the time I had none, at least none more specific than to serve the membership well. In the intervening year, I have learned a great deal and developed some quite well-defined goals for the coming year.

First, I'd like to enable members to become familiar with the workings of MATSOL. For starters, you will soon be receiving a copy of our constitution. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with it so that when we begin the process of amending it, you will be fully informed. The amendment process will serve another of my goals: to have the constitution and reality accurately reflect each other.

I would also like to see members participate more actively in this organization. Aside from serving on the Executive Board, members can also work on various committees. For example, we are now looking for volunteers to help with ESL Awareness Day 1996, the fall conference in Springfield, and the previously mentioned constitutional amendment process. Please contact me or any other board member if you are interested in becoming involved in any of these projects.

In addition, I hope to promote closer ties between representatives and their constituencies. You should know the name of your rep and how to get in touch with her or him (If you don't, call me). Reps will be encouraged to cultivate closer contacts with their constituents by doing mailings and organizing events.

Finally, in matters external, I think it imperative that MATSOL continue to increase its active presence in the social and political debates that affect our learners and their well-being. We also need to organize to improve the conditions that we suffer in order to do the work we love.

If you have comments or questions about any of the above (or the spring conference for that matter), you may reach me in the following ways: telephone (617) 521-2170, FAX (617) 521-3199, e-mail: eiwanaga@vmsvax.simmons.edu. You could also write me at Simmons College, 300 The Fenway, Boston 02115.

*Esther Iwanaga*

## From the Editor

In the last issue I announced the creation of our editorial board. But wait . . . there's more good news: Ron Clark has agreed to take on the editorship of *MATSOL Currents*. Ron has served on the editorial board for two issues and has also been a contributing writer (see one of his pieces on Slovakia in this issue). Please join me in welcoming him; I'm sure you will agree that I leave you in capable hands.

As outgoing editor, I would like to thank my colleagues on the MATSOL Board and in the general membership who have enriched my life, both personally and professionally, over the last three years. I have also appreciated the professionalism, talent, and generous spirit of the *Currents* contributors. I've enjoyed the process of watching raw manuscripts develop into polished pieces and ultimately into a finished product of which we can all be proud. In fact, our publication is recognized as one of the finest newsletters in the country. Keep up the good work.

*Suzanne M. Koons*  
smkoons@mit.edu

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# MATSOL '95 Spring Conference

WHAT A SUCCESS! THANKS TO . . .

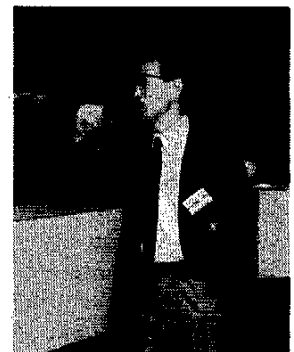
## Individual



*Paul Abraham*



*Mary Sutton*



*Anping Shen*



*Roberta Adams &  
Kathleen Almasi*

## Pair



*Samuela Eckstut &  
Bruce Rindler*



*Ginny Toner &  
Heidi Wolf*

## And



*Session participants  
sharing novel ideas*



*Esther Iwanaga, Claire White, &  
Mary Jane Curry*



*ESL Awareness Day winners*

## Group

# Effort!

Photos by S. Koons & K. Riley

Summary: Sonia Nieto's Plenary Address

## Creating Connections between Multicultural Education and ESL

Marilyn Barrett

MATSOL Fall Conference attendees were captivated by the words of plenary speaker Dr. Sonia Nieto. She helped participants see what multicultural education is and is not and how ESL fits into this total educational approach. "Diversity," in Nieto's vision, "is all of us. We may think it is about those who are 'other' than the mainstream." The goal is to "include those who have been excluded but not to push others out." Teachers, including those who teach ESL, hinder multicultural education when they believe students should "shed their language and culture at the schoolhouse door."

Nieto illustrated seven components that comprise multicultural education. She also reminded the audience what it is not—a superficial approach consisting of celebrations, holidays, and heroes. Such approaches may be a beginning, but used alone they may do harm by magnifying stereotypes. "It is not," Nieto continued, "sensitivity training, human relations, learning to get along, a feel-good curriculum, ethnic cheerleading, or politically correct themes."

Multicultural education is . . .

- antiracist. It involves teachers and students directly confronting institutional discrimination in tracking, discipline, the school environment, placement, and hiring practices by giving students the skills to identify and combat racism in schools, textbooks, and communities.
- basic education, part of the core curriculum. Without it, schools "provide monocultural miseducation."
- important for all students, not only for inner-city, underprivileged or linguistically different students. Beverly Tatum, an antiracist educator from Mt. Holyoke, said that multicultural education may be even more important for members of the dominant culture. Many assimilated, dominant culture students need to understand what their culture is because they don't realize they have one.
- pervasive. It is not the responsibility of one classroom or one teacher. It is a philosophy and perspective of a school that examines and reflects on everything from bulletin boards and lunch menus to sports, extracurriculars, and staffing from a multicultural perspective.

- education for social justice. Students need opportunities to "dialog about injustices in their lives" and to work actively to use education to better their lives, change oppressive laws and practices, and obtain a quality education.

- a process and thus involves students and teachers who learn to question together the context and content of their learning.

- critical pedagogy. "Knowledge," says Nieto, "is neither apolitical nor neutral." She challenged participants to "affirm rather than suppress student voice" and work toward the common creation of knowledge, respecting differences and seeking a balance for students between a group identity and their unique individuality.

Implications for ESL teachers include the need to support bilingual education. Our goal is to help non-English speakers be fluent and literate in their own language as well as in English. Nieto asked that we examine our materials critically to determine what message our students are receiving about our diverse society and to develop new multicultural materials. She noted that no one can know all cultures; instead, we should be committed to learning something new every day, a lifelong task. [Dr. Nieto is the author of *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (Longman, 1992).]

Marilyn Barrett teaches in the Greenfield Public Schools and at Greenfield Community College.

### SEEKING EMPLOYMENT?

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Job Bank for the latest openings.

(617) 575-1032

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## MATSOL '94 Fall Conference

### INTEREST SECTION REPORTS

#### Elementary / Secondary

*Bethel Charkoudian*

The primary focus of the elementary/secondary session was the issue of recertification. A representative of the Massachusetts Department of Education commented that at present the DOE wishes to work with individual teachers in approving their overall five-year plan for Professional Development Points (PDPs) towards recertification. Local school systems want to be the deciding factor in approving the overall plan as well. There is some question of conflict of interest here. Many teachers at the session were concerned that the vision of local systems may be narrower (or have different agendas) than the teachers' vision of the DOE. If you have an opinion on this matter, please write to the commissioner

of the Massachusetts Department of Education.

An underlying concern expressed by elementary school teachers at all MATSOL conferences is how few presentations are geared to the elementary level. Please understand that the presenters at MATSOL conferences are the membership, that is, you. If we are to have more presentations with an elementary focus, you, the elementary school teachers, need to respond to the call for presenters, and present! If you have any comments, please call Joy Karol, the new Elementary School Representative, at (617) 552-7585.

*Bethel Charkoudian was the Elementary/Secondary School Representative to the MATSOL Executive Board.*

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#### Higher Education

*Jeffrey Di Iuglio*

The MATSOL rap session on issues in higher education was attended by fourteen participants and was productive for all. The facilitator presented a set of questions about the professionalism, status, and future of ESL in higher education, hoping that these questions would promote a better understanding of the expectations and diverse realities of ESL specialists in higher education.

Some of the more important questions were: 1. Do you expect to be an ESL educator/specialist five years from now? 2. Do you feel that your salary is commensurate with your duties, responsibilities, and training? 3. Would you advise a younger person to enter a graduate program offered in TESOL/TEFL by some of the area's leading universities and colleges? 4. What would you advise such a graduate student to investigate before he/she entered this field? 5. What has surprised you about ESL? What didn't you expect to encounter in the field of ESL when first entering the job market, specifically in Massachusetts? 6. Are you respected by your administrator and/or dean for the work that you do?

The participants divided into groups and a lively discussion ensued. As the facilitator, I had the opportunity

to join the various groups and glean what was going on. Following are some facts that I gathered from the groups. Many ESL professionals work exclusively in ESL though some work simultaneously in another field. For example, one participant taught both Spanish and ESL at a local business-oriented college. Her position was full time and permanent. Another ESL educator who received her Ed.D. has created a flourishing ESL program at a state college. Others, through grit and determination, have achieved full-time or part-time status with benefits by working in two distinct but related areas such as ESL and English composition. Another participant has obtained a fulltime, tenure-track position at a community college. We concurred that overall our situation has improved in the past five or six years.

The situation is not all rosy, however. There remains a great need for improvement and upgrading of the profession. Most of us agreed that our salaries are still below those of specialists with similar training in foreign languages or English composition. Also many of the classrooms in which we teach are run-down and the laboratories we use are antiquated. Part-time help is too often

*Continued on the next page*

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## Higher Education *Continued from page 5*

used in programs, with too much last-minute hiring. The group hoped that administrators would pay greater attention to these conditions and do everything in their power to rectify these situations. With demographics in our favor (the declining number of American students entering college) and the increasing internationalization of the global market, we hope that ESL will hold a more prominent

position, gaining greater professionalism in higher education in the future. The dedicated, highly trained, and skilled practitioners of this field certainly deserve it.

*Jeffrey Di Iuglio is the Higher Education Representative to the MATSOL Executive Board (617) 332-4604.*

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## Adult Education

*Maria E. Gonzalez*

**T**he purpose of the rap session for adult educators was to get a profile of teachers of adults and their needs so that MATSOL can serve them better. Eleven teachers attended the workshop. Rebecca Pomerantz from Adult Educators Intent on Forming a Union (AEIOU) joined us at the end of the session to talk about the AEIOU mission.

The teachers interviewed each other in pairs and wrote the following on newsprint: the program in which they worked; their number of years teaching; whether ESL is the only subject taught; if they were MATSOL members, and if so, for how long; their needs and expectations of MATSOL; and whether they were being affected by recertification. The "pair profiles" were posted and everyone looked them over.

The information revealed that most of the teachers had taught for one or two years. Predictably, given the reality of our field, the majority taught part time and strung two or more jobs together to make a living. In spite of these conditions, they all expressed a love of teaching adults and commitment to their students. The length of their membership in MATSOL generally corresponded to the years they had been in the field of ESL. For most, the fall conference was the second MATSOL event they had attended. No one was

affected by the recertification of public school teachers.

During the discussion of our findings, it became clear that the teachers present attended the rap session because they were new teachers who wanted information about ESL and the field of adult education. They wanted to know not only about MATSOL but also about other resources such as the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) and the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education. I collected a list of those interested and after the conference sent them a packet of materials through the Adult Literacy Resource Institute and SABES.

Based on the findings of the rap session, I am recommending to the MATSOL Board that we produce a brochure with general information for new teachers of ESL to adults. This brochure would be sent to new MATSOL members after they declare adult education as a major area of interest. What do you think of this idea? What kind of information should we include? Your feedback would be most useful and appreciated. Please call John Antonellis, the new Adult Education Representative, at (617) 536-8280.

*Maria E. Gonzalez was the Adult Education Representative to the MATSOL Executive Board.*

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## Western Massachusetts

*Roberta E. Adams*

**A**t the fall conference, a small group of MATSOLers interested in western Massachusetts concerns met to share ideas and information. The announcement that the Fall 1995 conference will be held at Springfield Technical Community College received a warm response, as did the news for plans to hold every

other fall conference in central or western Massachusetts and the suggestion for a holiday or spring social to follow up the successful summer event in Amherst.

The overwhelming concern of those present was the need for access to professional development workshops

*Continued on the next page*

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## **Western Mass.** *Continued from page 6*

and teacher (re)certification courses in western Massachusetts. Courses are available at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, Elms College, and Clark University, and Fitchburg State College is beginning a program. A question was raised whether more workshops and satellite courses might be provided and if a list of western Massachusetts teacher-training resources could be compiled. Anyone interested in working on or contributing

to such a list should contact Pam Greene, the new Western Massachusetts Representative, at (413) 586-3929.

Western Massachusetts MATSOLers met at the spring conference; details of their session will appear at a later time.

*Roberta Adams was the Western Massachusetts Representative to the MATSOL Executive Board.*

*e-mail: radams@fscvax.fsc.mass.edu*

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## **Sociopolitical Concerns**

*Ginny Toner*

**A** wide range of topics was discussed at the first meeting of the MATSOL Committee on Sociopolitical Concerns on November 20, 1994. The group formed after a rap session at the Fall '94 MATSOL Conference.

Topics discussed included: health benefits for part-time teachers in higher education, concerns about the new ESL certification process, establishing communication with other professional organizations with interests similar to those of MATSOL, keeping more aware of legislative initiatives that affect ESL instruction, and investigating MATSOL's hiring a lobbyist. Although these important topics need our attention, the committee will limit itself to one or two issues on which to focus its efforts.

The committee hopes to provide MATSOL members with information about ESL certification for public school teachers via the new phoneline and in *MATSOL Currents*. Elinor Klasky of Melrose Middle School will maintain a file and collect information on ESL certification.

Monitoring what is happening on Beacon Hill in relation to the 1993 Education Reform Act and other legislative activities of relevance to MATSOL is the interest of Heidi Wolf of Berlitz. The committee will explore fi-

nancing an experienced lobbyist for MATSOL. We are also looking into letter-writing campaigns to state and local representatives on specific ESL issues.

A recent meeting at SCALE to discuss prorated health benefits for part-time teachers at public and private colleges and universities was also reviewed at the meeting. It is currently illegal for institutions of higher education to provide health-care benefits to part-time teachers, even if the institution wishes to do so. The committee is investigating supporting a proposed bill to rescind the current law. The committee members felt that MATSOL should keep abreast of these bread-and-butter issues for the membership.

The MATSOL community is diverse, but if we can work together and support each other in achieving political ends, we will all be stronger.

We welcome the ideas, energy, interest, or political savvy of MATSOL members who wish to join us. For more information, call Karen Samuelson, the new Sociopolitical Concerns Representative, at (617) 547-2602.

*Ginny Toner is a member of the Sociopolitical Concerns Committee.*

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## **Fulbright Scholar Awards**

**for U.S. Faculty and Professionals: 1996-97 Competition**

The deadline for lecturing or research grants for 1996-97 is **August 1, 1995**. Deadlines are in place for special programs: distinguished Fulbright chairs in Western Europe (May 1) and Fulbright seminars and academic administrator awards (November 1).

Funding for the Fulbright Program is provided by the United States Information Agency, on behalf of the U.S. government and cooperating governments and host

institutions abroad.

For further information and application materials, contact the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, 3007 Tilden Street, N.W., Suite 5M, Box GNEWS, Washington, DC 20008-3009. Telephone: (202) 686-7877. Internet (application requests only): CIES1@CIESNET.CIES.ORG



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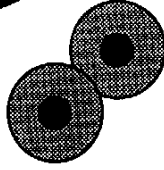
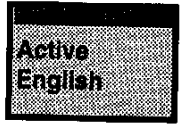
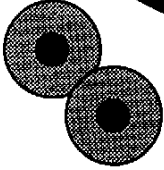
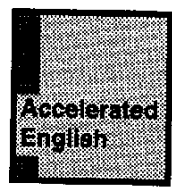
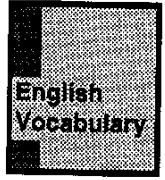
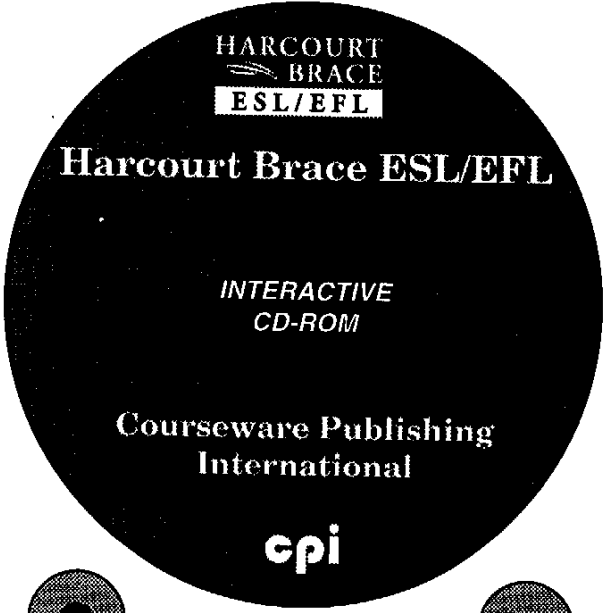
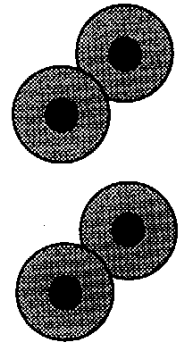
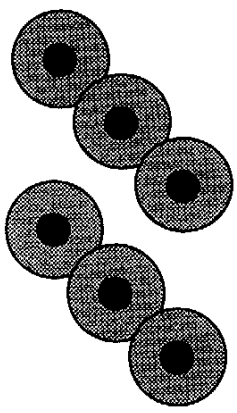
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 School \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Students \_\_\_\_\_  
 School Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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## ESL Awareness Day 1995

The second annual ESL Awareness Day was held on March 1, 1995. Several events took place throughout Massachusetts to celebrate the occasion. Like last year, in conjunction with ESL Awareness Day, poster and essay contests were held. We received a total of 322 entries addressing the topic "My Turning Point" in the different levels and categories. The video contest, a new category this year, proved to be especially interesting. The winning video, created by a high school class at Dennis-Yarmouth High School, was a rap song about learning English, written and performed by the students. Congratulations to Edie Graf and to her students for this most original effort.

The goals of ESL Awareness Day are to create student uplift and to create public awareness of the contributions and efforts made by students and teachers of ESL. By dis-

playing our winning posters, essays, and information about ESL at the Boston Public Library during the month of March, contacting Governor William Weld and Mayor Thomas Menino (who both signed the ESL Awareness Day Proclamation), and writing private companies throughout Massachusetts, we hope to have come close to achieving the second goal, which we felt was extremely important.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who helped to make ESL Awareness Day a success this year, especially the teachers who submitted their students' entries to the contest, the contest judges, the people in Governor Weld's and Mayor Menino's offices, the companies who donated prize money, and everyone who served on the ESL Awareness Day Committee.

### My Turning Point

*Antiya Roma*

Winner: Adult Education Essay Contest  
Framingham Adult Education. Teacher: Lois Moyer

There is a moment in our life that we call the turning point. At this particular time we might make a very important decision, or do something unusual, and then our life turns in a totally different direction. After that,

everything is "new"; new "I", new challenge, and a new life. This experience could be filled with happiness, or pain, or both. No matter what it would be, this is for sure a time

*Continued on the next page*

### Calendar of Events



#### CALICO

Dates: June 20-24  
Place: Middlebury, VT  
Contact: CALICO  
(919) 660-3180

#### TESOL Institute

Dates: July 2-July 28  
Place: St. Michael's College  
Colchester, VT  
Contact: (802) 654-2700

#### NCTE

Dates: July 7-9  
Place: New York Univ.  
Contact: Linda Oldham  
(800) 369-NCTE

#### NNETESOL Conference

ESL in Public Education  
Dates: July 14-16  
Place: St. Michael's College  
Contact: Polly Howlett  
(802) 654-2274

#### TESOL Institute

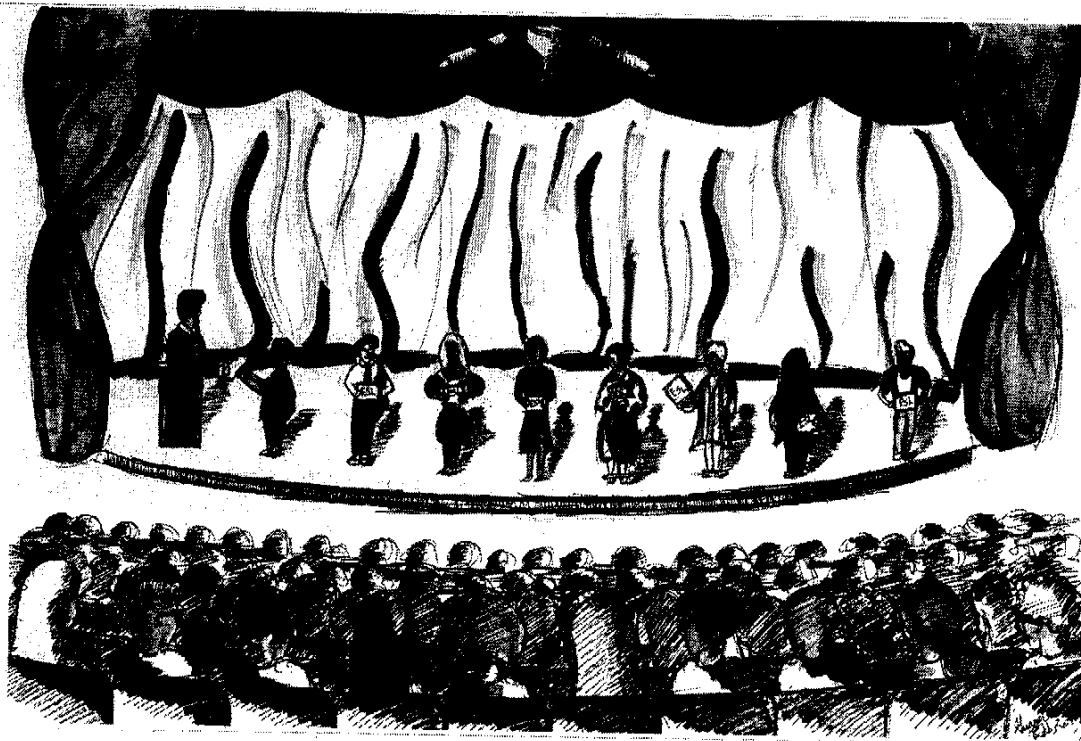
Dates: July 17-Aug. 25  
Place: Valencia, Venezuela  
Contact: Emma Miliani  
(58) (41) 42 83 82-21 23 22

#### MATSOL '95 Fall Conference

Date: Oct. 21  
Place: Springfield Technical  
Community College  
Contact: MATSOL  
(617) 576-9865

#### The Expanded New England Kindergarten Conference

Dates: Nov. 16-18  
Place: Lesley College,  
Cambridge, MA  
Contact: Marta Gredler  
(617) 349-8922



*Guang Wai Choi, Poster Winner, Taft Middle School*

## ***My Turning Point*** Continued from page 9

that you can feel the impact of life. You can also discover and surprise yourself at how flexible and strong you can be. My turning point happened one and a half years ago. After I had struggled for many years over the decision. Finally, I made up my mind to leave my husband. At that moment I had neither friend nor family around me in this foreign country, and I could only speak a little English. It was the wish for my children's happiness that gave me the courage to face a new life alone in America.

The law in my country does not protect the mother and the child as much as American law does. The father always gets custody. If I went back to my country, it would be more difficult to get a divorce, and I would probably lose my children. I know that I am the only one who can take good care of them. I did not want to lose them, so I chose the most difficult way to keep them. I chose America to be our shelter. I trusted and believed that the law here would treat my children and me fairly. I was right. With the help of a lawyer in Legal Services, I got my divorce and received the custody of my children.

After I moved out, I needed to learn how to live in America. My biggest lesson was to learn to adapt myself to this new life and to get used to the difference between two lan-

guages, two social systems, two countries, and two cultures.

My first step was to improve my English. I needed it to express myself and to communicate with others; I learned it from the beginning like a child. I went to ESL-class, where I learned to speak, read and write better than before. Now I am able to handle my ordinary life; at least I know how to ask when I need help. At the same time I increased my ability to help people when they need me.

Now I am very happy to say that I have a home here, in America. I received help, unexpected love and friendships from many American people. They helped me at my turning point; without all these good people, life would be harder than it is. The most important things I learned are not to give up easily, try to make good friendships with nice people, and not to let any chance go by when you are able to help others. An open heart creates all kinds of possibilities. I believe that a turning point in our life always comes as a gift. Most of the time we grow and improve ourselves after such an experience. I appreciate this big challenge in my life. It helped me to realize that we can always conquer the limitations of our courage and ability. All we need is the opportunity, and we call it "THE TURNING POINT."

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# My Turning Point

*An Nguyen*

Winner: Middle School Essay Contest  
Grade 8, West Springfield High School. Teacher: Roberta Leopold

**W**hen I came to America, I felt a lot of things were different from my country. The way Americans live and the language that they speak was different. Those differences at first gave a very excited feeling, but they also gave me a lot of difficulties that I had to overcome.

The first week I came to America, it was so great. I felt happy because I was reunited with aunts and cousins. And the new life seemed to be so good. Everybody told me that America was a perfect wonderful place. I imagined it was like a "Golden Heaven" for everyone. So I felt really excited about it.

The exciting feeling went away as soon as I realized the differences gave me many problems when I went to school. I missed my old school so much and I was so sad. The new school was so different from my old one. It was so big and I got lost so many times. Moreover, I didn't understand the

language. Some kids were really nice. They said hello and were very friendly. But some weren't nice at all. They made fun of me and my language when I passed by. Being left out and looked down on, I was really hurt. I just couldn't study well. The first month in school was the most terrible time of my life.

But nothing lasts forever. I got used to everything. I had spent a lot of time studying English and being open to everyone so that I could communicate and make friends. Now everything has turned out to be good. I have many friends, both native speakers and Asians. I have fun with all of them. I am doing well in my studies. And also I really feel good about myself.

I have done a lot of things to overcome my difficulties, but it's also a good lesson for me in my future. I know that I have the ability to do whatever I want in my life, if I try my best.

---

## Poster, Essay, and Video Contest Winners

MATSOL would like to congratulate the winners of the 1995 ESL Awareness Day poster, essay, and video contests and their teachers.

### POSTER

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

##### Winner

Linda Geng  
Lincoln School, Grade 5  
Teacher: Anne Roberti

#### MIDDLE SCHOOL

##### Winner

Guang Wai Choi  
Taft Middle School, Grade 8  
Teacher: Jian Xu

#### HIGH SCHOOL

##### Winner

Nagila Matos  
Burncoat High School, Grade 11  
Teacher: Mary Angelopoulos

##### Honorable Mention

Tri Lam  
Brighton High School, Grade 9  
Teacher: Ruth Ann Weinstein

### ESSAY

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

##### Winner

Hussein Osman  
Powerhouse School, Grade 5  
Teacher: Andrea Utz

#### MIDDLE SCHOOL

##### Winner

An Nguyen  
West Springfield Junior High School, Grade 8  
Teacher: Roberta Leopold

##### Honorable Mention

Virna Araripe  
Weston Middle School, Grade 8  
Teacher: Debbie Wheelwright

#### HIGH SCHOOL

##### Winner

Xian Han Ou  
Brookline High School, Grade 11  
Teacher: Jody Curren

##### Honorable Mention

Quang Tran  
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, Grade 11  
Teacher: Barbara Hull

#### ADULT EDUCATION

##### Winner

Antiya Roma  
Framingham Adult ESL  
Teacher: Lois Moyer

##### Honorable Mention

Lelya Pinkhasik  
The Power Program  
Teacher: Donna M. Bosco

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

##### Winner

Ya Yee Chen  
Suffolk University  
Teacher: Hillary Nanda

##### Honorable Mention

An Hoai Trinh  
Bunker Hill Community College  
Teacher: Eileen Feldman

### VIDEO

#### Winners

Ricardo Chaves,  
Alessandra Dominatto,  
Karina Machado,  
Osvaldo Pires,  
Samuel Viana,  
Henry Chang,  
Gabriel Castro,  
Luciana Dominatto,  
Pablo Herrera,  
Emi Chihara,  
Anna Kondrashova,  
Cintia Viana,  
Meyre Medeiros  
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School, Grades 9 - 12  
Teacher: Edie Graf

Thanks to Josephine  
Vonarburg & Eileen  
Feldman, ESL  
Awareness Day  
Co-Chairs.

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# Testimony on the Adult Education Authorization Act Hearing

Betty Stone

(Testimony presented by the MATSOL President to the U.S.  
Department of Education, Boston, Massachusetts, November 17, 1994)

Good morning. I am very pleased to be here to present testimony on the reauthorization of the Adult Education Act. I come with 22 years of experience in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages, 17 of them as program administrator at the Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences, one of the largest full-time ABE centers in Massachusetts. I am currently the President of MATSOL, the Massachusetts affiliate of the international organization TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. MATSOL has a membership of approximately 800, with adult educators being the second largest interest section.

The need for adult education, and, in particular, English language instruction for adult immigrants and refugees, is no secret to any of us. The 12-14 million adults in the United States whose native language is other than English and who have serious difficulties understanding, speaking, reading and writing English are sitting on wait lists throughout the country. In eastern Massachusetts the wait varies; at my center, learners wait from six months to two years, depending on their level; in Jamaica Plain and in Chinatown, the standard wait is three years. Some centers, so frustrated with the prospect of keeping a wait list of 600-1,000 people and then contacting them when class spaces become available, open the gates just once a month for the lucky first twenty callers who can get through to make an intake appointment. The chances of winning a \$100 gift certificate for a popular mall store by being the tenth caller to the local soft rock radio station and correctly naming the recording artist are probably just as good or perhaps better than making it into an English class. A Massachusetts DOE survey last year indicated that approximately 8,000 people were waiting for classes; at best we are serving 2% of the documented need. We clearly need new resources to meet the ever-increasing ESL needs, but not at the expense of current or future ABE funding. We need additional funds to address the enormous demand for English instruction.

In 1993, the Technology Assessment Board of the 103rd Congress produced a report, "Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime," which examined the complex demands of adult education at present and the "massive problem" faced by the United States in "equipping citizens with the skills needed to participate fully in the workplace and to contribute as members of family and community."

Through the process of examining the problem, several

issues surfaced. In an effort to provide education opportunities for all, and especially target groups that Congress has felt have been neglected or underserved, the federal government has, over recent years, passed more laws to increase the amount of federal funding with restricted eligibility.

The intent here *seems* to make sense, to serve those who have not been adequately served, creating pots of money for target populations. In fact, from my standpoint, from the perspective of the service providers, targeted funding is not the efficient and effective model envisioned by those who created the legislation. For providers there is duplication, inefficiency, and outright waste of resources as programs scramble to do outreach and assessment on 100 potential participants to find the five who meet all the eligibility criteria. A case in point is the Department of Welfare regulation that disqualifies JOBS clients for ESL programs if they have a high school credential from their native countries. If the purpose of the ESL program is to teach English and basic skills, and the ultimate goal is training and/or a job, why should it be a disadvantage for someone who does not speak English to have this credential. We all know that a secondary credential, diploma, GED or ADP, is a first stepping-stone for everything.

The number of slots in adult ESL programs for working, limited-English-proficient adults—the majority of those on waiting lists—decreases as the proportion of a program's budget and programming goes towards targeted population programming. People sit on wait lists for years as the targeted groups "jump" them on the list.

Yes, the Adult Education Act should absolutely be reauthorized.

The AEA should not be consolidated with Vocational Training or employment legislation. While coordination with these other systems is critical, there needs to be a strong foundation to provide basic skills services to those who need and desire them. We need to have resources to teach and improve basic skills so that adults are trainable and ready to respond to the necessarily fluid demands of the business community.

Finally, we do need new resources. Our newcomers want to learn English. They want to participate fully in their communities and in the workplace.

Our challenges will continue, and adult educators and learners will persevere. Please consider MATSOL and TESOL a resource for the future. Thank you.

## From Russia

July 30, 1994

**H**aving the privilege to be a member of the international TESOL organization and having received quite a number of TESOL (MATSOL) publications, I feel a kind of obligation, but most of all a strong wish and desire, to express my gratitude to the Executive Board for giving me a two-year membership in the organization and to share my experience in working with the material. All this prompts my letter. But a bit of my life story first.

I'm Victor Fefelov, an English teacher, working in a lyceum-school (mainly high school). I live in a small city, Dubna, which is on the Volga River—120 km to the north of Moscow. A good connection with the capital is available. The city is well known for its Joint Institute for Nuclear Research. The former republics of the late USSR and all socialist countries of Europe and Asia were (and still are) represented in it. A lot of foreigners come to live and work in our city. You can imagine to what extent English is popular among the citizens. Thus there is a constant need for good, qualified teachers. In 1992 (from Sept. 1 til Nov. 30) I was in Boston on an exchange program. I worked at the Devotion School in Brookline and had a chance to visit many other public and private schools in the area. We (we were two EFL teachers from Dubna) made presentations at the MATSOL Conference '92 at Bentley College and at the Soviet East European Center at Harvard. It was a great experience for us. I'm happy that this experience is supported and enriched through the *MATSOL Newsletter*, *TESOL Journal*, *TESOL Matters*, and *TESOL Quarterly*, which I've been receiving all this time. They are a real treat to me. Now I'm exposed to the newest ideas of how ESL/EFL is being taught not only in the U.S. but around the world as well. My goal at present is to involve the teachers of Dubna in this work (it's not an easy task, though). Anyway, I use every opportunity to show them the publications and share my knowledge

and experience with them. This year we're planning to organize workshops and seminars on some important problems. I hope we'll all benefit. As for me, I really enjoy working with the printed material I receive.

I've mentioned already that Dubna is a special city. For almost three years Dubna and La Crosse, WI have been sister cities. The friendly relationship grew into an all-around cooperation. For two years we've been enjoying the close collaboration of the medical centers of the

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**Now I'm exposed to the newest ideas of how ESL/EFL is being taught not only in the U.S. but around the world as well.**

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two cities. The project was supported by a U.S. federal grant. Nine medical groups from La Crosse visited Dubna, and the same number of Dubna medical workers paid the visits back. To support the contacts, money was given to set up EFL courses for adults (doctors, nurses, and social workers primarily). I teach two of the evening classes; in each group there are more than ten change-resistant adult learners. (This term is from "Four Strategies to Improve the Speech of Adult Learners" by Janet Graham, *TESOL Journal*, 1994, Vol 3., No. 3, pp. 26-28. It's my practical application.) So I close my letter. Hope I achieved my goal.

Victor Fefelov  
Entuziastov Street 3B # 162  
Dubna, Moscow Region 141980  
Russia

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### ***Let the Text Do the Teaching*** Continued from page 1

type often contains bits and pieces of larger literary works chosen solely for their language features with activities developed around these language features. The second type also presents excerpts from larger works and sometimes a complete work, thus enabling students to grapple with a whole text. These books also provide a variety of comprehension activities and useful discussion and writing topics. The third category usually has complete selections arranged by topic with accompanying comprehension, discussion, and writing questions. Each book type has its merits but is limiting in one way or another. My goal in teaching literature is to teach language, literature, and culture. Some of these resource books do not provide that breadth, while others provide too much, meaning teachers need to use their selections in order to use the activities they have developed. Using these types of books together with the selected work presents an artificial context for studying the literature.

#### **Text-driven activities**

Allowing the text itself to generate activities provides a much richer experience for the student by more precisely focusing on the particular features of that text, whether

they be language, literary, or otherwise. The study of the book becomes more efficient for everyone, and students begin to develop a relationship with the text, thereby enhancing their personal experience with that work of literature and their overall comprehension. Two examples from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (TKM) will illustrate how students can become involved with a novel.

I developed various exercises for comprehension and language study, but the most interesting activities to come out of this particular text were the writing assignments. In one chapter, after Scout has experienced some trouble at her first day of school, she and Atticus talk about people, and Atticus suggests that a person can't be understood "until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." As a writing activity, the students chose a character and climbed into his/her skin "and walked around in it." Most of my students, writing in the first person, produced insightful pieces about what *they* thought about life, without quoting from the book. Their success with this assignment made it evident that they had a firm grasp of the characters and could identify with them.

Another successful writing assignment came about as

*Continued on the next page*

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# In Room 101

*Stephanie Goldstein*

Their faces long  
for the old country  
where they were  
children and lovers  
of winter.  
One woman says,  
"At zis age  
English is difficult."  
Can I find a way  
to make it easy?  
"It's difficult  
to speak," I say  
watching the expression  
on a face creased  
like a well-worn map.  
"You have come far,"  
I remind her  
"From Moscow to Boston."  
Ice cracks  
around her eyes.  
Her smile is bright  
with gold.

I imagine her tongue  
tied up tight  
with thin ropes of rules.  
I imagine it stuck  
with needles, struck numb,  
senseless, unsound.  
I imagine I'm trying  
Russian, my tongue  
frozen in fear.  
I tell her to put her tongue  
between her teeth, like this—  
I demonstrate—saying, "This,"  
and sticking it out beyond  
my teeth.

Our laughter joins us  
in the power of agreement  
and the fingers of fear  
loosen their icy choke  
on this beginner.

*Stephanie Goldstein is working on a series of poems about ESL classes.*

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## **Let the Text Do the Teaching** *Continued from page 14*

a result of a combination of resources. The students read a description of a house in *TKM*, an excerpt from *The Diary of Anne Frank* in which she describes her hiding place, and a short piece by Sandra Cisneros in which she describes both the house she lives in and the house she would like to live in. With these three texts as input, my students wrote about a house that they had either lived in or knew about. One student wrote a charming account of a house she had lived in as a child and described all the rooms in the house by describing a game she and her father used to play. In this game, he would march ahead of her and blow on a whistle and she would follow, mimicking him. She described the rooms in the house that they passed by as they marched down the hall.

Other activities such as viewing the movie, role play of the courtroom scene, related readings, and the possibility

of relating the story to current events in the real world, make *TKM* a vivid text from which to work. Last spring, when the Medgar Evers case was reopened, we discussed the case with regard to *TKM*. The book became more salient for my students when they could see its relationship to real world events. Overall, my students have been pleased with their progress through the book.

Selecting a text with intriguing potential and allowing it to generate its own activities ensures that students will have a more genuine experience with literature. Creating this experience for students entails a bit more work for the teacher, but the results are gratifying for all.

*Susan Seefelt Lesieutre teaches at the Harvard Institute for English Language Programs.  
e-mail: leisel@power.mit.edu*

## A Costa Rican Adventure *Continued from page 1*

Costa Rica is a gem of a lush agricultural country filled with active volcanoes, raging rivers, virgin rainforests, remote cloud forests, humid jungles, arid Pacific beaches, and funky Caribbean beach towns. Considered "the Switzerland of Central America" for its topography, Costa Rica is the most developed country in Central America. Its high proportion of government spending on social programs such as education and public health is enabled by its lack of a military as well as large donations from the U.S. The country is the size of West Virginia, with two mountain ranges running down its middle and a population of almost 3 million, about half of whom live in the area of San Jose, the capital.

Costa Ricans are incredibly friendly; although tourism has increased in leaps and bounds in the past five years, they haven't gotten tired of North Americans yet and practice their hospitality even on strangers. If you speak even a little Spanish, Costa Ricans (known as "Ticos") are delighted to talk with you.

Although it is more expensive to live in Costa Rica than other Central American countries, it's still much cheaper than living in Boston. I brought a few thousand dollars, figuring if I didn't find enough work, I'd come home when money ran out. Costa Rican-American friends who own a language school had promised me part-time work, but my trip was officially unsponsored. Since work permits are difficult to obtain, and the authorities lenient with North Americans, I entered the country with a 90-day tourist visa. When I left six months later, I merely had to pay a fine of about \$60. (The other option is to leave the country for 72 hours and come back on a renewed tourist visa.)

My friends placed me in two worksites, teaching beginners in a cooperative bank and an advanced class in a telecommunications company. Classes met two nights a week at each site. When I arrived, my Spanish was low-intermediate level at best, so teaching beginners meant that I too learned a lot and relied on the false beginners to translate key grammatical points and vocabulary. I had brought some English books with me but missed using everyday materials such as newspapers, especially with the advanced class. After a couple of months I also found private students who came to my house and paid much better than the \$4 per hour I was earning.

Teaching occupied only about 12 hours per week, and I had Fridays off, so I did a lot of traveling around the country. Buses are very inexpensive in Costa Rica and will take you anywhere in the country. I visited the famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, Arenal Volcano, one of the most active in the world, and other national parks, which make up about 20 percent of the country. I traveled alone and with other gringos, but the best luck came when a Canadian lawyer I met on a bus introduced

me to the Mountain Club of the University of Costa Rica. The club organizes day hikes within a bus ride of San Jose and longer trips to locations further afield, usually going out every other weekend. Not only was I able to visit out-of-the-way places that most tourists miss, but I spoke only Spanish with club members, although most of them speak English well. Hiking also helped my physical recovery, although climbing in altitudes over 9,000 feet was taxing.

I wrote travel articles about the places I visited and hiked with the club and submitted them to the *Tico Times*, Costa Rica's English-language weekly newspaper. I usually checked in with the travel editor before going on an outing and was given other assignments as well. For one, an article about a new children's museum that had been created in a renovated prison, I interviewed the then-First Lady, who was the driving force behind the museum. Luckily, her English was flawless.

Although I took only a few Spanish classes, living with a Costa Rican family proved to be wonderful for my language learning. I spent a lot of time with the señora of the house, who was in her early 40s and accustomed to hosting students. She and her husband and three children were charming and patient. The two teenage boys taught me slang, which the parents tried to correct. I also read the newspaper every day, looking up new words and grammar. My neighborhood was not populated by many North Americans, so I used my Spanish almost all the time. In contrast to the anxieties I'd felt as a 20-year-old student in Paris, now in my 30s I plunged into Spanish without worrying about making mistakes—which I did, nonetheless.

By my fifth month I was asked to translate a book on Costa Rican biodiversity (from Spanish to English, naturally) and to substitute for the bilingual secretary at the telecommunications office where I taught while she went to the Grand Canyon on vacation! Although I began these challenging assignments with trepidation, both were excellent for my Spanish.

Six months in Costa Rica were the best reward I could have given myself for finishing my master's degree (and surviving pneumonia). After ten years in Boston, the change of scenery, language, and culture was exhilarating and enriching. And the language skills I've gained have helped my Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking students as well as deepened my empathy for second language learners.

*Mary Jane Curry teaches ESL at SCALE and Communications at UMass/Boston's College of Management. She is also a freelance editor and writer. © 1995 by Mary Jane Curry. e-mail: curry@umb.edu*



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## Using Students' First Language in a Multi-level Class

Fran Perkins

Teaching students of differing proficiency levels in the same class is a problem that many language teachers face daily. When you add to that the permutation of various types of learning disabilities and literacy skills that vary widely in any two languages, the range of needs to be met seems almost endless.

I teach Spanish-speaking bilingual high school students who exhibit some kind of "special needs," which can be any one or more of the following: a learning disability (e.g., dyslexia); language delay in the first language; slow learning; or the need for the emotional support of the small classroom. In my classes, I often have students whose English abilities range from almost none to completely fluent. Some non-English speakers also demonstrate low literacy skills in Spanish. All of my students can speak and understand Spanish, although those who are most literate in English often have less experience with Spanish literacy.

When I first thought about how to teach such a group, I discovered three basic ways to approach the problem of their differing literacy backgrounds. I could divide the class into small groups and provide individualized lessons, with a minimum of large-group interaction; I could somehow find a way to involve the entire group in the same task, giving one assignment to everyone; or I could combine these two approaches, teaching the entire class at times, and dividing it at others. I have moved more toward the whole group method because I have found that some classes prefer learning that way, and I have come up with strategies that allow the students to work together most of the time.

We often spend class time discussing issues that are important in the students' daily lives, such as the immigration experience, racism, crime, violence, gangs, schools, work, and relationships between men and women. I have found that showing films to my students exposes them to new, complex, and interesting ideas, and that a wide variety of classroom activities can be based upon themes from the films. Furthermore, using their own language to talk and write about issues increases their involvement and improves their writing.

### Films and related activities

The themes we discussed over the year can be illustrated by relevant films. Students often became engrossed, and there were many possibilities for related literacy activities. Finding time to show a feature-length film is difficult in the typical secondary school schedule. I have to spend several class periods, sometimes arranging double

periods by asking other teachers to allow students to stay with me during the time they are scheduled elsewhere. However, it's worthwhile because of the great interest and intensity of discussion generated.

When the film must be shown in parts over a period of several days, there is an opportunity to summarize what was missed for those who have been absent. I also give short, oral plot summaries or ask questions in Spanish before and after viewing to be sure that all students, not just those most proficient in English, are following the action. After seeing a film, I give the students writing assignments. Sometimes I ask them to write reactions in their journals in either English or Spanish, summarize the plot, write their own questions related to it, or write essays on the characters and the choices they make. Generally, I show a film after we have already begun discussion and reading about the themes related to it, as a way of tying things together.

We read selections on related topics, which I find in a variety of places—student produced anthologies, such as South Boston High's *Mosaic*, the *United Youth* newspaper, *Neighbors Talk*, the *Boston Globe*, and selections from novels or short stories. If the reading is too difficult for the Spanish-dominant students to understand, either another student or I summarize it in Spanish.

I often make up worksheets asking the students factual and interpretive questions about the reading and reviewing some of the vocabulary. I have also begun to have students pick out cognates from the readings and make their own sentences with the words, again in either English or Spanish. I may take the writings of the students themselves and copy them for the others to read, using them as text for the class. We might also translate the students' writings from Spanish, as a way of focusing on how to express what they want to say in English, and remark on correct spelling and punctuation as we go along. I may also translate an individual's writings into English in their journal and ask them to read and copy it.

Occasionally, I can find a lesson from a lower level ESL text that is related to our topic, and students at that level work on it. For real beginners, I like to have them make their own dictionaries in a little notebook, with a couple of pages for each letter. As they learn new words, they write each one in their books in English, with the Spanish translation beside it. Sometimes the students look up a few vocabulary words in the Spanish/English dictionary to reinforce familiarity with alphabetical order. For

*Continued on page 21*

# ESL Outrages

Joe Pettigrew

## Inexcusable Inefficiency

Enrollment is always an unknown in ESL programs at the beginning of a semester, and it can be very tricky scheduling teachers and classes. In this field it's quite common to be offered a job—or to find out that you don't have a job you were offered—at the last minute. However, there is a community college in the Boston area which has given new meaning to the term "last minute."

This January several teachers there found out that they had no job on the night they showed up for their first class! At least one or two taught their first class and were then replaced by another teacher. Reportedly, one person was 20 minutes into teaching her class when she was interrupted by the director and another teacher. It seemed there had been a mistake, and she didn't have a job after all.

The new teacher then took over the class. (What an impression this must have made on the students!)

If this had happened to one person, it would be bad enough. The fact that several were treated this way suggests a workplace out of control.

The confusion didn't start this term, either. The previous semester, three different classes were assigned to one room at the same time. One of the teachers described feeling like a "Pied Piper," leading the students from room to room trying to find a place to teach.

I would think most of what I'm going to say next is ridiculously obvious, but I'm going to say it anyway. To the people (supposedly) in charge of this program:

There is no excuse for treating people like this. These are people's lives you're dealing with. If you couldn't plan any farther ahead, the absolute minimum you should have done was call these people up before they walked into your school prepared to teach. It's too late for this semester, but you should take a hard look at the way things are being done—or not done—in your office to make sure it never happens again. Every teacher involved in the whole sordid mess deserves a written apology. And finally, you are morally obligated to make every effort to give jobs to these people in the future if they still want to work there.

Do I expect any of this to happen? Of course not. Bureaucracies—especially the one at this college from what I've heard—are notorious for refusing to admit their mistakes. It would be nice, though, if the union that claims to represent these teachers would make a little noise on their behalf. Many people there are afraid to say anything critical for fear they won't be rehired in the future. And this is not an unfounded fear.

Joseph Pettigrew teaches at Boston University's CELOP.

e-mail: [jpettigr@acs.bu.edu](mailto:jpettigr@acs.bu.edu)



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## Living in Slovakia

Ron Clark

This is the second of two articles about Ron's experiences in Slovakia.

Just after dusk on the first of September, 1993, my wife and I were deposited in front of a crude elevator in the bare lobby of a prefabricated, ten-story, concrete apartment building in Nitra, Slovakia. Four flights up, we entered our apartment: big enough for two, yes, but sparsely furnished with a rust-colored, polyester sectional, a TV, a bed and bedding such as we had never seen, a half-pint refrigerator, a sixties-style kitchenette, a fifties phone, and, in the bathroom, a thigh-high rectangular box—open the lid—a washing machine! Directions in Slovak.

In the morning light, the view from our concrete balcony showed us a dozen nearly identical buildings. And on our way down to the College of Education, looking over our shoulders, we saw *hundreds* of such buildings, in which one third of Nitra's ninety thousand people lived, all perched on this ridge ten minutes by bus from downtown. To us it appeared as something Bronx-like—a low-income, crumbling maze of apartment blocks, potentially dangerous. This was our new neighborhood.

As we came to discover, however, our neighborhood, though definitely deteriorating and, depending on the weather, muddy or dusty, wasn't at all dangerous: most lights were out by ten o'clock, the majority of thirty thousand early-rising Slovaks quietly sleeping. Nor was it low-income, relatively speaking: almost all strata of Slovak society were represented, doctors, army colonels, and university professors included. And the apartment was, after the initial shock, quite satisfactory: a few added amenities and decorative touches soon made it feel like home.

As with all Slovak apartments, our balcony was largely reserved for hanging laundry. The washing machine and phone were much-appreciated luxuries, for one could not take it for granted that all households had both; many had one or the other, and some had neither. One interesting and unexpected habit connected with Slovak homes is that inhabitants and guests alike remove shoes at the door and wear slippers or socks once inside. This keeps the mud and dirt off the carpets and, perhaps, psychologically preserves the home as a clean refuge from the more "soiled" aspects of society beyond the walls.

### Sustenance . . .

"A lot of pork" is the answer to the much-asked question of what we ate. Pork and chicken are staples, as are potatoes, rice, cabbage, carrots, onions, garlic, and cheese.

Nobody starves in Slovakia or waits in long lines for food—as the mythology might have one believe—but almost all families supplement what food they buy with produce and home-canned fruits and vegetables from a garden in the yard, one in an enclosed section for dozens of families over the hill, or from one at a relative's house in the family village not too far from town. In the winter time, outside the capital, Bratislava, the produce available is generally limited to the long-storing root vegetables listed above. There is only one growing season in Slovakia and the Slovak economy cannot yet afford to import produce from warmer climates, as the neighboring Austrians can, for example.

In general, eating in a Slovak home will get you a tastier and less fatty meal than eating out. Most restaurants are very similar to each other and all serve a somewhat limited selection of rather similar dishes. A few more expensive ones will leave you satisfied, but at no time did we leave a Slovak restaurant raving about the meal. However, this is a moot point for Slovak families since dining out is a luxury for most.

### . . . and where to find it

One of the greatest challenges of living—especially shopping—in this formerly socialist society is dealing with the still-kicking heritage of the socialist *modus operandi*. Customer service is not a forte of this kind of economy or administrative system, and, while certainly looking to the future, Slovak clerks and bureaucrats still have at least one foot firmly rooted in the past. In general, most clerks were neither gruff nor solicitous; they performed their duties with a minimum of personal interaction and effort. However, curt and even nasty clerks were too frequently met. Without the free-market forces of customer choice and the fear of being fired, public "servants" for years treated their "clients" with as much attention or condescension as their mood dictated—and such habits die hard. The Slovaks themselves are more immune to this behavior, but only because they have long resigned themselves to it.

There are department stores (with a familiar selection of merchandise—but with clothing, in particular, inferior in quality), although in most towns only one, a monopoly, so some of the highest prices prevail there; supermarket-type food stores; "convenience" stores, including compact little kiosks that sell staples when other stores

*Continued on the next page*

## Living in Slovakia *Continued from page 20*

are closed (which occurs more frequently than we western consumers prefer); and "boutiques," most of which are privately owned. Therefore, customer service, quality, and prices are generally the highest in these shops.

The daily town market, where one finds the freshest fruits, vegetables, and meats, as well as jeans, boots, cassettes, electronics, etc., is the most interesting and picturesque place to shop. Also, since people who sell at the *trznica* (market) are in business for themselves, there is more incentive to actually *attract* customers. One is forced to practice Slovak there, especially numbers, and patronizing this open-air mall is a good way of feeling most like a native.

### Socializing

Yes, the Slovaks are drinkers by and large. Adult "recreation" often involves alcohol consumption. And alcoholism, particularly among men, is a problem for many families, and for the economy, too, as at least *some* of the drinking which sometimes takes place on the job or at lunch would certainly seem to affect productivity.

*Slivovica* is a high-proof, plum-based beverage (though this seems too kind a word), sometimes homemade. On occasion, all those present will be urged to down a shot as a welcoming toast. The Slovaks also make beer that is almost as good as their Czech neighbors', but even their mediocre beers are very tasty indeed.

But it is not of their beer or *slivovica* that Slovaks are most proud: it's the wine. There is an extensive wine industry centered in Nitra, but many families make their own yearly supply from grapes grown in their yards or from the other garden sources previously mentioned. The homemade wine is often better than store-bought, though even the latter is quite drinkable at the price of 30 to 40 "crowns" (a bit more than a dollar) per liter. When visiting a Slovak home that has enough basement or other storage space, it is quite likely that a father or grandfather will proudly ask you to come and see his wine cellar, and he will tell you how much he makes and how good it is as you watch him siphon out the first of the many liters you will all soon happily consume.

Calling on friends, drinking, and sampling snacks (nuts and fruits and meats and cheeses and pickles and veggies—whatever's on hand) is a common form of socializing. Going to church—most Slovaks are Catholics—buying flowers, and visiting relatives is a frequent Sunday schedule. So, too, is buying *zmrzlina* (ice cream), an affordable treat, and strolling downtown. Even in our relatively large town (by Slovak standards), only a few chromy discos and after-hours bars are the normal late-night options. Many Slovak families spend weekends out in the country, where they may own a *chata* (cottage) which are of varying sizes, styles, and sophistication.



It is not common practice for Slovak students to socialize with their teachers; however, this might be more of a function of the teachers wanting or feeling obliged to set themselves apart rather than a lack of interest from the students (since many students responded eagerly and appreciatively to the relative approachability of, for example, the American or Canadian lecturers). Also, since most students were commuters, they had very tight schedules jammed with many "lessons" and some with hours of daily traveling time.

Nonetheless, we were able to share some time-off in the *bufet*, and a group of us would occasionally leave a spring-fever-infected class a bit early and go for an ice cream cone. One or two students were closer and would come along with a few faculty members for a Friday beer or a coffee and smoky chat in the tiny department library (where the faculty smokers congregated). And those asked were generally pleased or even flattered to help with Slovak lessons or translating for necessities like haircuts. So the teaching and learning and the giving and receiving were always reciprocal—as was meant to be.

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## Using Students' First Language

*Continued from page 18*

my students, some of whom may be in their 20s, using English spontaneously does not always come easily.

I have found use of native-language oral discussion and writing to be helpful in improving my students' comprehension and participation in a multi-level ESL class. The technique is limited to groups where the teacher and students share a common language besides the target one. Showing films on subjects of interest to the students is a particularly good way of tying together topics of study. Using the first language to reinforce the ideas in the films helps all students feel that they understand and can take part in the class interactions.

Fran Perkins teaches in the Boston Public Schools.

## Listen Up!

*Stephen A. Sadow*



**T**here are many imaginative and quick tasks for practicing listening skills. These activities can be used as warmups or homework.

### Eavesdropping

Imaginative listening tasks build on what is known. Eavesdropping—listening in on L2 conversations from a discreet distance—requires even advanced students to piece together overheard words and phrases in an attempt to establish what is being said. This exercise can include a study of gesture, touching, facial expression, social distance, and a raft of other sociolinguistic features. Eavesdropping on groups is also possible, though it may be necessary to watch from a greater distance. Turn taking, silences, and male-female interactions can be observed. Each listening-in period takes five to ten minutes (it is hard to be inconspicuous for longer). Immediately after listening, students jot down everything they have heard and seen.

### One-liners

From a teacher-made audiocassette, the student listens to exclamations and parts of conversations that might have been overheard at a noisy party. The segments are random and unrelated. For instance, a student might hear: "I can't believe she said that to him!"; "Two months in Europe? Incredible"; or "Charlie got married? When?" After listening once to each selection, the student jots down ideas about what the entire conversation was about or writes out the dialogue that preceded and followed the segment.

### Soundbites

In a more elaborate use of teacher-developed audiotape, students listen to recorded segments—not more than three minutes in length—of simulated advertising, radio drama, weather reports, events calendars, or other common audio formats. While very advanced students can handle material modeled closely on that which is heard on radio or television, teacher-made materials allow for tighter control of vocabulary, rate of speech, and even types of humor. The instructor, aided by one to three histrionic native-speakers, can mimic (or exaggerate) and record well-known spoken formats. Armed with the necessary vocabulary, the student listens to the tape segment and reacts to it as directed, choosing which clothes to buy after listening to competing advertisements or planning an outing after listening to an account of a day's happenings.

In one possible bit, a platitudinous politician begins a speech, but a fit of coughing forces him to stop. The student, as a loyal party member, is asked to fill in and complete the oration. In another, a head waiter recites a sumptuous and varied menu; the student must then order dinner. In a 90-second soap opera scene, Norma must choose between the steady and conscientious Richard and the charming and devil-may-care Eddie. Unexpectedly, the writer of the soap opera quits; the student must create the next scene. Student reactions to what is heard are jotted down as notes, a short summary composition, or as dialogue.

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## Revision Revisited

*John Dumicich, Christine Root, and James Russell*

**M**ost teachers have long been advocates of the necessity for revision as a step in the writing process, yet most students have long been resistant to the necessity for such revision. Some things never change. But other things do change. Current writing pedagogy, with its emphasis on the *process* of writing, has been a welcomed change in that it attempts to help students see the importance of each step in the pro-

cess, from brainstorming to final draft. Process writing has, in turn, brought into focus the fact that revision is the breakdown point, for most students, in the writing process. The need is great, therefore, for instructional activities designed specifically to help students hone their revision skills.

One such activity, which we call "Story Tails," en-

*Continued on the next page*

## Revision Revisited *Continued from page 22*

courages students to consider and reconsider their drafts. Story Tails call on students to “associate” their ideas to a picture (i.e., write about themselves using ideas merely suggested by very simple drawings) and “connect” what they wrote about one picture to what they write about another picture (i.e., use the continuation of the drawings to rethink, expand, revise, and rewrite their pieces many times over). Story Tails instill in students a sense of how to view and review each successive draft with an eye to content, development, organization, and language use, as well as mechanics. It is our intention with Story Tails to help students come to understand the difference between revising (reworking the structure of a piece until the ideas are fully thought out and well-organized) and editing (checking the cosmetics of the piece—errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation).

The activity capitalizes on the considerable value that research shows can be derived from playing on interconnections between images and words. Some of the merits include (Olson 1992):

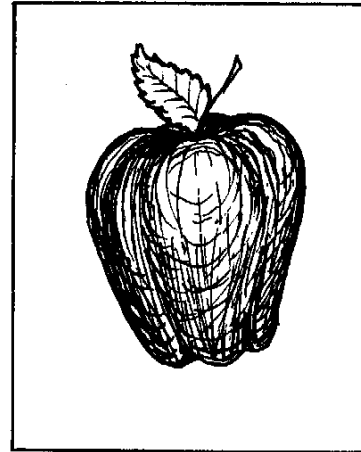
- when pictures and words are woven together, a rich tapestry is created that helps people make real connections between words and pictures
- when a picture is already in your mind, it is easier to create a picture using words—which is what writing is supposed to do
- when visual and verbal activities are integrated, it is more likely that all the students, with their varying learning styles, will be “reached”
- visuals stimulate reflection and provide the basis for the cultivation and expansion of verbal skills. They are helpful in writing and in the revising process because they provide a spark for additional reflection and further development.

Having just launched *Drawing on Experience* (forthcoming, McGraw-Hill) in which students are called upon to write from their own drawings, we hit upon the idea of Story Tails as a way to engage ESL students in revising their work. By providing students with accessible prompts from which they can write and rewrite their own stories, students are given the opportunity to practice verb tense dexterity as well as work on their revision skills.

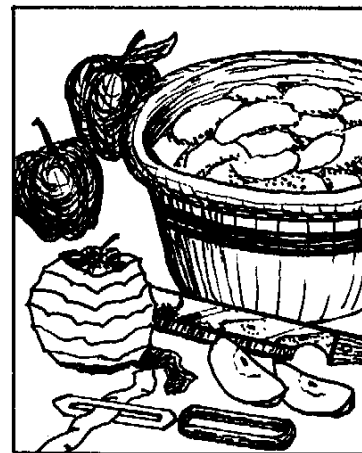
We have found the following Story Tail to work very well. Instruct students as follows:

- A. You are going to write a story about yourself using the drawings provided to give you ideas.

- B. Look at the first drawing. Use the space below it to write about where you are and what you are doing. Base your writing on the thoughts that the drawing triggers in your mind.



- C. Using the space on the opposing page, use your imagination to predict what you will do or what will happen in the next drawing.
- D. Look at the next drawing. Revise your story, if you need to, based on this additional visual. You can keep or change any parts of your story that you want.



- E. Continue the same procedure throughout the Story Tail. Use the pages on the right for your predictions, and the pictures and spaces on the left to revise your story.

*Continued on the next page*

## Revision Revisited Continued from page 23



- F. Review your previous stories. Then revise and make the final changes.
- G. Write your complete story on the last page. Don't forget to include a conclusion.
- H. Think of a good title for your story. Write it at the top of your story.

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*This is a revised version of the article, "Story Tails," which appeared in the 1994 edition of the Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning.*

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*James Russell is a freelance artist and writer.*

A dark, textured rectangular area containing text and two tree icons. The text is centered and reads: "October 21, 1995", "Plan for a Weekend in the Berkshires", "MATSOL '95 Fall Conference", and "Springfield Community Technical College".

October 21, 1995

Plan for a Weekend in the Berkshires

MATSOL '95 Fall Conference

Springfield Community Technical College



## Using Interviews or Questionnaires in Teacher Research

*Jean Chandler*

**D**o your students like to read each other's papers? Do they expect the teacher to correct all their errors? What do they understand to be the problem if you say their paper is "wordy"? Do they feel discouraged or do they have a strategy for what to do about that problem? Often we ESL teachers want to know how our students feel about something or what their practices are. In some cases, interviewing them or asking them to fill out a questionnaire is the best way to find out. For example, at the last MATSOL conference, I reported on survey research in a study of my students' language learning backgrounds, strategies, and preferences. This month this column discusses the advantages and problems of using these survey research methods in teacher research.

### **Interview versus questionnaire**

One gets a better response rate in a face-to-face interview than on a written questionnaire, but of course, interviews are much more time consuming (and therefore expensive) to administer to lots of people, and (unless your interview is the administering of the questionnaire) written questionnaires have the advantage of greater standardization. The issue of which tends to elicit more accurate information probably depends on who is asking the questions, what the questions are about, and how well the respondents know English. For example, if you are asking your own students questions about your teaching, they would probably not want to say anything very negative to your face, whereas if they could answer anonymously on a questionnaire, they might be more willing to tell the truth. On the other hand, in an interview you might be able to tell from their body language or by clarification of responses if they didn't understand the question. With a questionnaire, by contrast, you might not be able to tell whether or not they understood the question as you meant it.

### **Closed versus open questions**

In both an interview or a questionnaire, you can have either open or closed questions. A closed question is one in which the respondent is offered a choice of replies. Open questions are better if you have no idea what the answers are likely to be or when there are too many possibilities to list. Closed questions, on the other hand, are quicker both to

answer and to tabulate if the response categories are obvious. Closed questions tend to get fewer incomplete responses, but they are also easier to answer randomly, and it is hard to tell when respondents have misinterpreted the question or made a clerical error. Sometimes, on the other hand, it also is hard to interpret the answers to open-ended questions. For example, on my language learning background questionnaire, I asked in what kind of institution the student had studied English besides high school. When they gave the name of an institution, I didn't always know whether it was for elementary, junior high, or university students or all of the above. Even on closed questions, students can interpret responses differently from the teacher. For example, on my language learning strategies questionnaire, more than half of the students said they "often" try to get meaning without translating when reading and "often" try to get the general idea before looking words up. At the same time, a majority also reported what seems to be the opposite: that they "often" translate from their language and that they "often" look up all unfamiliar words before reading. Did they just not read the questions carefully or did they not interpret "often" as meaning "usually," as I meant it?

Many questionnaires or interviews have both open and closed questions. Sometimes open-ended questions are used in a pilot study and closed ones in a larger follow-up.

### **Opinion polls: An illustration**

To illustrate my points about survey research in general, it is helpful to look at political opinion polls because voting provides an objective test of the accuracy of the poll results. To show how response categories make a difference, we can compare two different surveys during the 1992 elections. The Gallup Poll asked people if they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion about a candidate, or didn't know. This poll elicited 63% favorable, 25% unfavorable, and 12% undecided about Clinton. The CBS poll at the same time gave a choice between favorable, unfavorable, undecided, haven't heard enough, and no answer. On this survey, Clinton received 36% favorable, 24% unfavorable, 31% undecided, 9% haven't heard enough, and 1% no answer. The first approach maximizes opinion-giving but risks encouraging respondents to make up their minds before they really have,

*Continued on the next page*

## Using Interviews *Continued from page 25*

whereas the second gives respondents three ways out of making up their mind and risks underestimating the number who have.

### **Crafting the questions**

Of course, the wording of the question can be very important, too. I'm sure that ESL teachers would understand the necessity of avoiding jargon, slang, and words the students don't understand, but being clear and unambiguous is not always easy, even with native speakers.

Avoid leading questions and words with positive or negative connotations to your audience. For example, during the last presidential campaign, most people said yes when asked, "Are you in favor of school choice?" But if the question was worded differently, as it was in the Carnegie Foundation poll, the answer was different. The wording was: "Some people think that parents should be given a voucher which they could use toward enrolling their child in a private school at public expense. Do you support or oppose that idea?" In response, 62% were opposed. School choice sounds good, but private school at public expense sounds bad. Another classic example that is timely now is illustrated in a pair of questions that were asked for years by the National Opinion Research Center. People were asked if the U.S. was spending too much, too little, or about the right amount of money on "assistance to the poor." Two thirds said too little. But when the word "welfare" was substituted for "assistance to the poor," sentiment swung the other way. Nearly half said too much was being spent on welfare.

Be careful not to ask two questions in one. For example, instead of "Do you want the teacher to correct all your mistakes in speaking or writing?", separate it into two questions. The order of the questions is sometimes important, too. Three separate polling organizations noticed something odd in the last presidential campaign. They asked half the people to choose first among Bush and Clinton and then a few questions later to choose a favorite in a three-way race between Bush, Clinton, and Perot. The other half were first asked to pick a favorite in the three-way race, then in the two-way race. Perot always did better when the three-way question was asked last. Pollsters said that that ran counter to what they would intuitively expect but cannot explain the phenomenon. Apparently there was something about the psychology of casting a second vote that made voters feel freer to choose Perot.

### **Validity**

Of course, no questionnaire or interview is worth anything unless people tell the truth. Nobody—not even the surveys of voters leaving the polling places—predicted that Gephardt would finish second with 20% as he did in the 1988 Democratic primary. And of course some kinds of questions are more likely than others to elicit the truth. People tend to

## **People tend to give socially acceptable answers . . . they deny that they read publications of dubious repute**

give socially acceptable answers, to be reluctant to admit that they don't know something. For example, they claim that they read more than they do, bathe more than is strictly true, and buy new tires instead of retreads; they deny that they read publications of dubious repute, deny sexual practices that aren't universally approved of, etc. Another problem is the "halo" effect: when someone generally likes or doesn't like, for example, their car or their teacher, they rate all aspects high or low. There are strategies to use to explore sensitive topics or to check reliability, but it is still difficult to know how valid the results are.

### **Cultural factors**

Of course, there might be cultural differences in students' responses to some questions. Karen Price, former associate director of Harvard ESL programs, told me that with nearly 10,000 course evaluations from foreign students at Harvard, Asians as a group rated courses and teachers lower than Europeans or Hispanics rated the same courses and teachers. In my experience, Asian students tend to be modest when asked if they feel that their English skills have improved—even on an anonymous questionnaire and even when their skills, as measured objectively, have in fact improved, maybe even more than those of other cultural groups. One tactic I have tried to get around this cultural tendency toward modesty is to ask about the improvement of other students in the class rather than about the respondent's own improvement.

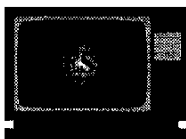
### **Representative sample**

A major advantage of classroom research is that it is usually not hard to get responses from all the students in a class. This eliminates one of the trickiest problems of survey research, which is selecting a sample that is representative of the population. On the other hand, remember that the responses of one class of students may not generalize to other classes. Classes might differ from each other in the cultural background of the students, their major subject of study, or their level of English, to name just a few of the variables that could be important in ESL classes. It is important to survey all the students in a class and not just those whose responses are easiest to get because the latter may differ in some systematic way from the others. For example, they may be the better students.

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## TECHNOLOGY SHOWCASE



**S**peakEasy is a ten-part television series that teaches basic ESL and health information on Boston's municipal channel. The program is the result of a pledge made to Boston's immigrants by Mayor Tom Menino that ESL classes would be available through television. Since most free or low-cost programs have very long waiting lists, these programs will reach those immigrants not currently being served by either academic or community ESL programs. However, the series is only one part of the language learning project; the other part is a network of community-based study groups that will provide more intensive instruction in ESL.

The project director is Laurie Covens, the program director is Jeff Lipset, and the program host and teacher is Kelly Keough. The series consists of lessons on vocabulary and conversational English introduced through short skits highlighting everyday situations that immigrants typically confront. Since the funding for the televised program comes from Healthy Boston, the lesson content covers basic health information: food shopping, making a doctor's appointment, family relationships, exercise and stress, and other similar topics. The actors are all immigrants and former ESL students, most of whom are acting for the first time. Non-

## ESL on TV in Boston

*Margo Downey*

native speakers were purposely used to encourage the participation of learners who might be intimidated by native-English-speaking actors.

During the month of January, the program previewed each night on cable station A22, the Boston municipal channel. The regular programming began at the end of January, and each 20-minute lesson is broadcast for one week at 9:00 pm, Monday through Thursday, and at 7:00pm Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The series lasts for ten weeks this spring and then will run again during the summer. Study groups meet once or twice a week with volunteer tutors (many from UMass/Boston) to practice the language lesson broadcast that week and review previous lessons using materials developed for the program. At present, there are approximately 25 study groups in neighborhoods and work sites around the city.

If you are interested in organizing a study group for the summer programs or know anyone interested in community tutoring (training is provided), call Healthy Boston at (617) 635-3140.

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## Using Interviews *Continued from page 26*

To take another timely example, if you sent a questionnaire to 100 citizens asking if their income tax return has been audited and 35 said yes, 35 said no, and 30 didn't answer, you cannot conclude that half the population had their income tax returns audited because the 30 who didn't respond would probably be less likely to have been audited.

All kinds of error can easily creep in, even with competent people and the best of intentions, and a pilot is certainly to be recommended. But survey research, especially on a classroom scale, is cheap and relatively easy to do, and it can be empowering for the students to be asked, and for the teacher to find out, what they think. Usually, in my experience, interviews or questionnaires produce food for thought, sometimes confirming what I already suspected (that my students don't like to have peers read their work, for example) and sometimes producing something quite unexpected, which leads to further questions. (For example, in my last study, I was surprised to learn that my Asian students preferred to study alone rather than with others.) This reflection on one's

own teaching is, after all, the main benefit of any teacher research.

*Jean Chandler teaches at the New England Conservatory of Music.*

**The MATSOL Board will miss  
these dedicated members who  
gave so much to so many:**

Marlyn Katz Levenson  
Betty Gulesian  
Maria E. Gonzalez  
Bethel Charkoudian  
Roberta Adams

## Keynote Plus: Conversation in the Real World

Reviewed by Will Van Dorp

**K**eynote Plus: *Conversation in the Real World*, by Anne McGannon, Carolyn R. Chow, and Michael Rost. Longman Group UK Ltd., 1994. 96 pages. Cassettes and teacher's manual. ISBN 0-582-102367.

The second book in the Keynote series, *Keynote Plus* is a function-based, intermediate-level textbook designed to help students "develop their ability to understand and use spoken English." The taped selections for listening practice are authentic and varied. As an example:

Interviewer: You don't seem to have trouble talking to people. How do you decide what's a safe topic to talk about?

Alex: A safe topic? I'm not sure what you mean.

Interviewer: I mean, what's a good subject to begin a conversation with someone you've just met?

Alex: Hmm. Let's see. If I can't think of anything to say, I can always talk about the weather.

Interviewer: Really? What would you say?

Alex: Oh, something like, "The weather's really great today, isn't it?"

Other listening selections include radio advertisements ("Tickets are \$35 and \$25, but hurry—with a tennis showdown like this, they won't last long.") and radio news ("Our top story today: Plans are being made for another Earth Summit, a meeting of . . .") as well as various radio transmissions and talk shows. Advanced students I've worked with find talk shows particularly intriguing and revealing. Teachers and students with tape recorders can use this text as an introduction to a rich source of materials, formal and less formal, for listening class. *Keynote Plus* also offers a variety of reading tasks such as penpal letters, movie reviews, celebrity bios, and tabloid articles.

The 18 units making up *Keynote Plus* are grouped in

## REVIEWS



pairs, the second unit of each pair extending the theme of the first. For example, Unit 1 is entitled "Don't I know you?" and Unit 2 is "Let's talk about meeting people." Unit 13 is called "Is it OK to . . .?" and Unit 14 is "Let's talk about social rules." The first unit in each pair (about two hours of classroom work) is mostly listening, and the "Let's talk . . ." unit (another hour) is for speaking and reading.

One of the book's strengths is the use and modeling of authentic conversation gambits: "Guess what!" and "You look familiar. Don't I know you?" and "So I hear you're looking for a new job." Each unit contains both structured and open-ended activities for pairs and small groups. The instruction on conversational strategies in each pair of units I find quite useful. For example, in Unit 5, a food unit, these strategies include asking for repetition, "Sorry, what was that?" and "And then I add what?" as well as asking for more information, "I don't think I know that. What's in it?" and "I don't know what that is. Can you describe it?"

Newcomers to this profession and instructors unfamiliar with a function-based approach will appreciate the teacher's manual. There are detailed suggestions on such matters as teaching pronunciation and using the book with low-proficiency students.

*Keynote Plus* will work well in an intensive pre-academic English program. It would also be great in a summer course with students who may be tourists or business people wanting immersion in English and an opportunity to meet people. The book and tapes will work well in the classroom; then students can take them home with them for language maintenance. *Keynote Plus* makes a very positive addition to any collection of listening/speaking materials.

*Will Van Dorp teaches at Bradford College and Northern Essex Community College.*

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## REVIEWS



# Face to Face: Communication, Culture, and Collaboration

Reviewed by David Kramer

**F**ace to Face: *Communication, Culture, and Collaboration*, Second Edition, by Virginia Vogel Zanger. Heinle & Heinle, 1993. 221 pages. ISBN 0-8384-39543.

The text *Face to Face* makes a valuable contribution to the increasingly important area of multicultural awareness. It is incredible to think that there are thousands of international students studying English in the U.S. who never really come into contact with Americans. The use of this textbook could break the ice for many of these students while giving them considerable insight into the complexities of American culture. The author, Virginia Vogel Zanger, is meticulous in her explanations and examples, as is made quite evident in the preface and introduction. It is assumed that *Face to Face* cannot be covered in its entirety over the course of a typical semester, nor should it be considered a core text, unless you are conducting an elective course with a focus on speaking and cultural differences. I have used the book as supplemental material in integrated skills classes in several university programs.

*Face to Face* includes ten chapters, each dealing with a different cultural topic such as the family, work, money, time, and schooling. The author suggests beginning with Chapter 1, which focuses on body language and sets the tone for subsequent chapters. Then, depending on the class's preferences, three to four more chapters can be chosen. Each chapter begins with a warm-up activity to familiarize the student with the topic and continues with a case study of a typical cultural misunderstanding, followed by a background reading which explains the probable causes for the case study situation. These readings help to define the topic in question and are usually accompanied by a glossary or vocabulary review activity. Every chapter also includes two questionnaires, one for in-class completion, which helps students discover the cultural differences among fellow classmates, and another one for use with an American informant, which is later reviewed and analyzed in class.

Fortunately, the book also gives some truly helpful hints on how a student should go about making the initial

contact with an American. Let's face it, if you were living in a foreign country with limited control of the language, how eager would you be to walk up to complete strangers and ask somewhat detailed questions about their culture? The book assures us that, in the U.S. at least, it is not that impossible to manage. Each chapter also includes a section called "Interview Tips," which provides suggestions for a successful interview. It is important to cover this material in class because most students find it difficult to initiate conversations with native speakers, and some of my students had to approach several people before they found a willing informant. Many of these tips should be mentioned at the very start of the semester so as to make the interview more hassle-free.

**E**ven though the chapters introduced new material with a somewhat varied format, I discovered that students considered the actual interview process a bit tedious, especially after the third or fourth out-of-class survey. I also found that the time needed to adequately complete each chapter was much more than I was able to devote to the task. The second time I used the text, I found a solution by completing Chapter 1, "Body Language," and then Chapter 7, "Males & Females," the latter being extremely popular. By the time we had finished these two chapters, the students had a fairly good idea of how the book functioned, so I divided my group of 15 into five groups of three. Each group chose one of the remaining chapters and independently completed the activities and interviews, then reported their findings to the class in the form of small group presentations.

In summation, *Face to Face* can serve as an excellent supplemental text, generating a great deal of student-centered learning, social and cultural interchanges, and, most important, fun in your class. I definitely recommend it for the instructor who is looking for an interesting way to work with multicultural awareness and understanding in the ESL classroom.

*David Kramer teaches at the Harvard Institute for English Language Programs.*



## How They See Us

Robert Saitz



We're still the world's whipping boys (girls are spared this particular ignominy) and they're still taking it out on the poor old English language. If it's not the French with their mortal fear of a Big American Word Attack, it's the Russians with their assessment of English as *culturnyet*. Now, with NAFTA, it's the Mexicans' turn. The traditional fear of the Central and South American countries of being swallowed by the big bear to the north surfaces in the current Mexican concern that a major increase in imports from the United States will North Americanize their culture. As usual, this kind of concern manifests itself in a sensitivity to one of a culture's more accessible symbols, its language—in this case, the English language.

In the light of the many borrowings from English in Mexican Spanish, Mexicans' concern for preserving their Spanish is understandable, although most of the borrowings, like many borrowings from language to language, are for things and ideas that originated in the borrowee culture for which there were no words immediately available in the language of the borrower culture. It is not surprising that "software" appears as a normal form in Mexican computer ads or that a very large bed is called a "king."

However, concern that the borrowings could be overwhelming leads defenders of the language to extremes. A recent article in a Mexican newspaper refers to English as a simple, monosyllabic, infantile, onomatopoeic lan-

guage with few resources for culture or poetry. What kind of a language is it, the writer asks, that uses the same word for potato chip and microchip? How can such a language compare to Spanish, with its lexical richness?

Clearly the writer's characterization of English is not a kind one (here I use the Old English literary device of litotes in revenge), but it's not hard to understand a possible origin of such an attitude when we look at the language of computers and realize how many common terms do seem to reflect a world of youth, if not of children. Computers get named Apple and Macintosh. A computer system that is not functioning is simply "down." We may accomplish miracles by just moving a "mouse." Information comes in "bits" and "bytes." The two major kinds of equipment are "hard" and "soft." There are "daisy wheels" and "windows" and "menus" (upper-middle-class kids?). What kind of population made all this up? Silver-haired scholars imbued with Latin and Greek? The Mexican writer has a point.

The writer's characterization of English goes beyond the far-fetched and probably prevents him from considering an alternate view: The language of the computer world demonstrates an ability to think and talk about a complex technology in simple, everyday language that helps make the complicated machinery more accessible or "user friendly."

*Robert Saitz teaches at Boston University.*

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## A Matter of Style

Misplaced modifiers haunt the writing of many writers and can be confusing or awkward. Student writers need to be taught to place modifiers next to the words they modify, so they don't seem to modify two things or the wrong thing.

The following examples of misplaced modifiers dangle, squint, or just amuse.

### Classified ads (from M. Horovitz, *TESL-L*)

- Cane lost by an elderly gentleman with a curiously carved head.
- For sale: Large crystal vase by lady slightly cracked.

### Mangled modifiers (from R. Lederer, *Anguished English*, © 1987)

- Yoko Ono will talk about her husband, John Lennon, who was killed in an interview with Barbara Walters.
- As a baboon who grew up wild in the jungle, I realized that Wiki had special nutritional needs.
- Locked in a vault for 50 years, the owner of the jewels has decided to sell them.
- Do not sit in chair without being fully assembled.
- She died in the home in which she was born at the age of 88.
- Breaking into the window of the girls' dormitory, the dean

## WORD PLAY





*Suzanne M. Koons*

of men surprised 10 members of the football team.

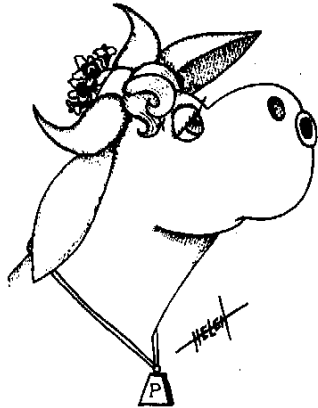
- No one was injured in the blast, which was attributed to a buildup of gas by one town official.
- The police said Barth's 1981 Toyota traveled down the shoulder for almost 1000 feet and then hit a utility pole going about 45 miles an hour.
- Here are some suggestions for handling obscene phone calls from New England Telephone Company.

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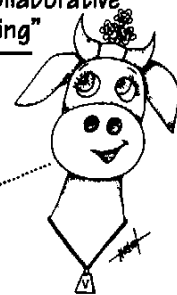
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