

matsol



Currents

MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
Equity And Excellence For English Learners
Vol. 42, No. 2 Fall/Winter 2019-2020



INSIDE

MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference

Learning to Live in Another Culture

Five Common Myths about the Teaching of Grammar

ON THE COVER

Olivia Szabo (l) and Laura Dziuban (r), both from CELOP, enjoyed being together at MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference in the November. Olivia co-presented a paper entitled "Teaching English in the Modern Market" with Antonio (Ari) Iaccarino, who teaches at CELOP and Suffolk. (Photo by David Green)



Contents

MATSOL News

- 4 President's Message
- 6 An Introduction to our New MATSOL Staff:
Victoria Ekk & Jason Fei
- 9 MATSOL's Fall Social
- 11 MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference
- 15 A Report from the Massachusetts English
Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)
VICTORIA EKK
- 17 What's Happening in MATSOL's Special Interest
Groups (SIGs)

Get Involved in MATSOL

- 21 Join a MATSOL Sub-Committee or Task Force
Submit to MATSOL Publications

Reports

- 22 The Northern New England TESOL
Conference (NNETESOL)
THERESA LAQUERRE
- 24 We are America: A Collaborative Exhibition
JOHANNA M. TIGERT

Personal Experience Essays

- 28 What I've Learned from my Experiences as a
Language Learner
JIMAIRA VAZQUEZ
- 31 Learning to Live in Another Culture
KATHY LOBO

Articles

- 33 Five Common Myths about the Teaching of
Grammar
KEITH FOLSE
- 36 Professional Learning Communities: One Form of
Strategic Collaboration
CHRISTINA TERRANOVA
- 42 Bringing Universal Design for Learning to Bear on
the Sheltered Instruction Strategies
SARAH JORDAN & THEA DURLING

Reviews

- 48 Stories without End, by Taylor Sapp
REVIEWED BY ELENA MURPHY
- 51 What Would You Do? 81 Philosophical
Dilemmas for Discussion and Expansion,
by Taylor Sapp
REVIEWED BY KATHY LOBO
- 53 How to Raise a Boy, by Michael C. Reichert
REVIEWED BY EILEEN FELDMAN

President's Message

December, 2019

Dear Colleagues, Supporters, and Friends,

AS I write this letter, the school year is well under way and the winter break is approaching. I hope that this break will have brought you opportunities to rest, reflect, and restore your energy for the important work you do.



I've been reflecting this year on the generosity and kindness of the people I know and work with. One such reminder came to me a few weeks ago in the cafeteria at Bridgewater State University, as I was trying to figure out their new payment system: A student behind me offered to pay for my meal! And this was not the first time I experienced this gesture. It reminded me of the high-school ESL students I worked with five years ago, who were so willing and eager to give back to their teachers and community. Some returned to the middle school to help out after school or translated classroom labels for elementary school teachers. Some greeted parents in their home languages on Back-to-School Night or helped peers with classroom assignments. Whether it was a planned activity or a spontaneous question, students often stepped forward without hesitation to give back to their community. The investments we make in our students and learning communities bring tremendous returns!

**A student
behind me
offered to pay
for my meal!**

MATSOL is pleased to introduce two new staff members: Vicky Ekk, our new Director of Professional Learning, who is replacing Ann Feldman in that position, and Jason Fei, our new Program & Member Engagement Coordinator, who is working to improve communication among our members and give assistance to our Special Interest Groups (SIGs), including three *new* SIGs with enthusiastic new leadership: the Instructional Coaches SIG, the Educators of Color SIG, and the Family-School Partnership SIG. (See the article about Vicky and Jason on [pg. 6](#) of this issue, and reports on the recent activities of MATSOL's SIGs on [pg. 17.](#))

This issue of *Currents* also contains reports on MATSOL's Fall Social, on our fourth annual IEP/Community College Conference, on the annual conference of

Northern New England TESOL (NNETESOL), and on a collaborative exhibition at UMass Lowell of an inspiring collection of narratives written by the diverse youth of Lowell, entitled *We Are America*. There are two personal-experience essays — one by prospective ESL teacher Jimaira Vazquez and one by veteran ESL teacher Kathy Lobo — and three articles:

one on common myths about the teaching of grammar, one on the value of Professional Learning Communities, and one on Universal Design for Learning and how its principles can be used to strengthen the teaching strategies that are advocated in MA DESE's SEI endorsement course. Finally, we have three reviews — two student texts by Taylor Sapp, with enticing sets of readings, and a recent book that addresses the difficult question of *How to Raise a Boy*.

[We have] three new SIGs with enthusiastic new leadership.

Thank you for your participation in MATSOL and for all you do for English Learners in our area! We hope you enjoy this issue of *Currents*.

Sincerely,

Melissa Latham Keh

MATSOL President

An Introduction to our New MATSOL Staff: Victoria Ekk & Jason Fei

MATSOL has two wonderful new staff members who joined our staff this Fall — Victoria Ekk, as Director of Professional Development, and Jason Fei, as Program & Member Engagement Coordinator. Vicky is replacing Ann Feldman, who retired from MATSOL in June, but Jason's position is a new one which we are very excited about. Victoria and Jason have written as follows to tell you a little about themselves and their work with MATSOL:

A NOTE FROM VICTORIA EKK

I am honored to work for MATSOL as Director of Professional Learning, a position previously held by Ann Feldman, who gave birth to both the MA English Language Leadership Council (MELLC) and our Low-Incidence SIG and who helped launch so many great courses! It's wonderful to have such a model to follow and to have the opportunity to work with MATSOL's Executive Director, Helen Solórzano, who is a fantastic advocate for Massachusetts ELs and their teachers!



I've had the pleasure of meeting and working with many of you in table groups, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and workshops across the years, but I like to give you a little of my story to help connect the dots. I was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina and came to the US at the age of 12 with my mother and three younger sisters, to join my father and another relative who were already in this country. We were among the many Argentines who fled to the States following political unrest and persecution. Like many current immigrants, my sisters and I were told that this was our home now and to make the best of it. Despite the nonexistence of bilingual education, I managed to keep my Spanish alive, learn English and some French, and gain admission to Beloit College, where I majored in International Relations. I later earned a Master's in Education, Curriculum, and Instruction from the University of California at Fresno and went on to teach elementary school (grades 1, 4, 5 and 6) in California, as a bilingual teacher. I ultimately became a middle school principal, a post I held first in California and then, for the past 16 years, in Massachusetts.

Because of my experience with ELs, my Massachusetts district asked me to take

on the additional role of EL Coordinator. At that time, there were fewer than 20 ELs in the district but the numbers grew and grew until we became a mid-incidence, Title III school system. MATSOL provided me with the information I needed to handle this role, and a place to meet with other professionals who were facing similar challenges.

My concern for social justice in education led me to earn a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Boston College, with an emphasis on Policy. Along the way, I served on the MATSOL Board and the MA Bilingual/English Learner Advisory Council and was a member of the MA Secondary School Administrators Association. I taught both the “old” Category 1-4 SEI trainings and the current RETELL courses.

My work at MATSOL includes setting up and monitoring our 12-session SEI endorsement courses for core academic and vocational teachers and our shorter 15-PDP courses that provide teachers with Professional Development Points (PDPs). I am also working with expert instructors to develop new courses: We have just completed the first pilot presentation of EL-114: Integrating Social Emotional Learning for ELs, and we are considering a possible course on Equity for ELs, a cutting-edge course on ways to increase cultural responsiveness in our schools.

I also have the honor of working with an Advisory Council to facilitate the meetings of the Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC) — a vibrant group of EL Directors/Coordinators who meet several times a year to gain information, share ideas, and promote equity and excellence in the education of ELs. MELLC was both an anchor and a set of sails for me in my previous work as an EL Program Director, so I am happy to have the opportunity to offer a welcoming place for my colleagues to share their challenges and successes, learn about resources, and have a voice in EL education across the Commonwealth.

Because of the hard work and dedication of MATSOL members like Paula Merchant, Ann Feldman, and our Executive Director, Helen Solórzano, our organization is considered to be one of the most active and productive TESOL affiliates in the US. I pledge to work with you to continue to provide courses that address your needs so that we can all serve ELs to the best of our ability. I invite you to be part of our MATSOL team as we move forward to secure an excellent and equitable education for every EL! You can reach me at vekk@matsol.org.

[MATSOL] is considered to be one of the most active and productive TESOL affiliates in the US.

A NOTE FROM JASON FEI

I am MATSOL's newest staff member with a fresh new position: Program & Member Engagement Coordinator. Some of you have already heard from me in various formats: E-lists, official MATSOL emails, ZOOM online meetings, or traditional face-to-face meetings.



I come from a background in education and non-profits. Before coming to MATSOL, I taught middle school English Language Arts in Dorchester and then music and percussion to elementary students in Chinatown. In both workplaces, I was serving the low-income immigrant demographic for which I feel a special affinity, because I come from it: I'm a first-generation Chinese-American citizen. My parents are immigrants who have always worked long, hard hours, so I can identify with the circumstances of many of our students and their families.

That is why I'm so excited to be part of this organization that connects and supports the teachers and administrators who work with ELs. My first couple of years in elementary school were in ESL classes. From my own first-hand experience, I can attest that you make a big impact in the lives of your students. Please keep doing what you're doing!

My first months in MATSOL have required a lot of learning, mainly because I do not come from an EL teaching background (and wow, the jargon alone!), but I've been very excited to help find ways to use the latest technology to better connect you with MATSOL and with one another. I have been working to update the website and E-lists to make our information more accessible. I have also been working with MATSOL's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to give you the logistical and technical support you need to run online ZOOM meetings, and in-person meetings, too. All MATSOL members can now access our online meetings, so please check them out on the [calendar](#). It's just a click and you're in! I am also working with the Low Incidence SIG to make their meetings more easily accessible by allowing in-person meetings to take place simultaneously in two or more locations.

Everyone I've met has been so friendly and welcoming, and I am humbled and excited to be working with you. The purpose of my position is to support MATSOL members and help you take full advantage of your MATSOL membership. Please feel free to contact me at jfei@matsol.org. 

MATSOL's Fall Social

MATSOL held its annual Fall Social on Saturday, October 26, at the Union Street Restaurant in Newton, with three MATSOL staff members, four MATSOL Board members, and some 35 other MATSOL members in attendance — from universities, community colleges, adult education centers, public school districts, and private language schools throughout the state. After an initial interval of socializing, participants settled in to converse with colleagues and enjoy a complimentary luncheon of chicken wraps, beef and fish “sliders,” four kinds of salads, and a variety of desserts.



Steve Meshon (back left), Peter Wilner (back right), Beth Meyer (front left), & Allison Leavitt (front right) enjoy lunch and conversation before the meeting begins

Then MATSOL's Executive Director, Helen Solórzano, walked us through a Power Point outlining MATSOL's history and structure, with a particular emphasis on



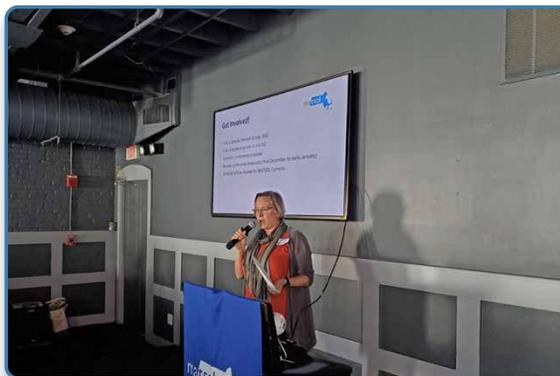
Mary Clark (left) and Helen Solórzano (right) share a moment while attendees enjoy their lunch

our special interest groups (SIGs), including several new ones that are just starting up (See the report on [pg. 17](#) of this issue). Next, Victoria Ekk, our Director of Professional Development, highlighted the professional development opportunities that MATSOL offers, and Helen finished the presentation by announcing upcoming MATSOL events and listing some ways that MATSOL members can be actively involved in our organization.

With the formal part of the gathering behind us, Jason Fei, MATSOL's new Program & Member Engagement Coordinator, led the entire group through an exciting drumming exercise, using tabletops and other surfaces along with the real and improvised drums that he had brought with him. He began by teaching us three different rhythms and then broke us into groups, each taking one rhythm and, after several attempts, melding the three rhythms together into one complex composition. The formal activities closed with a distribution of raffle prizes, but many participants stayed on for further conversation with colleagues.

MATSOL's Fall Social and other events of this type are a good opportunity for members to meet one another, learn more about our organization, confer with MATSOL staff and Board members, and find ways to become more actively involved. 

Photos by Jason Fei & Mary Clark



MATSOL's Executive Director, Helen Solórzano, says, "Get Involved!"



Jason Fei, MATSOL's new Director of Programming and Member Engagement, leads the group in a drumming exercise



Lindsay Beatty (left) and Kristen Chapron (right) choose their raffle prizes

MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference

THANK you to all who participated, presented, and networked at MATSOL's fourth annual Intensive English Program and Community College Conference on Saturday, November 9, at the EC Boston English Language School. A great time was had by all as we gathered to share knowledge relating to ESL in private language schools and community colleges in Massachusetts and beyond. We enjoyed talking about current and future trends in the industry and brainstorming about how we can better the education of our students and our industry.

We had 105 registered attendees who participated in 36 sessions in six time slots. Sessions were 50 minutes in length and covered a variety of topics ranging from professional development for teachers, English for specific purposes, and publisher information sessions, just to name a few. We are grateful to EC Boston and the staff who worked so hard hosting us for this event. Thanks, also,



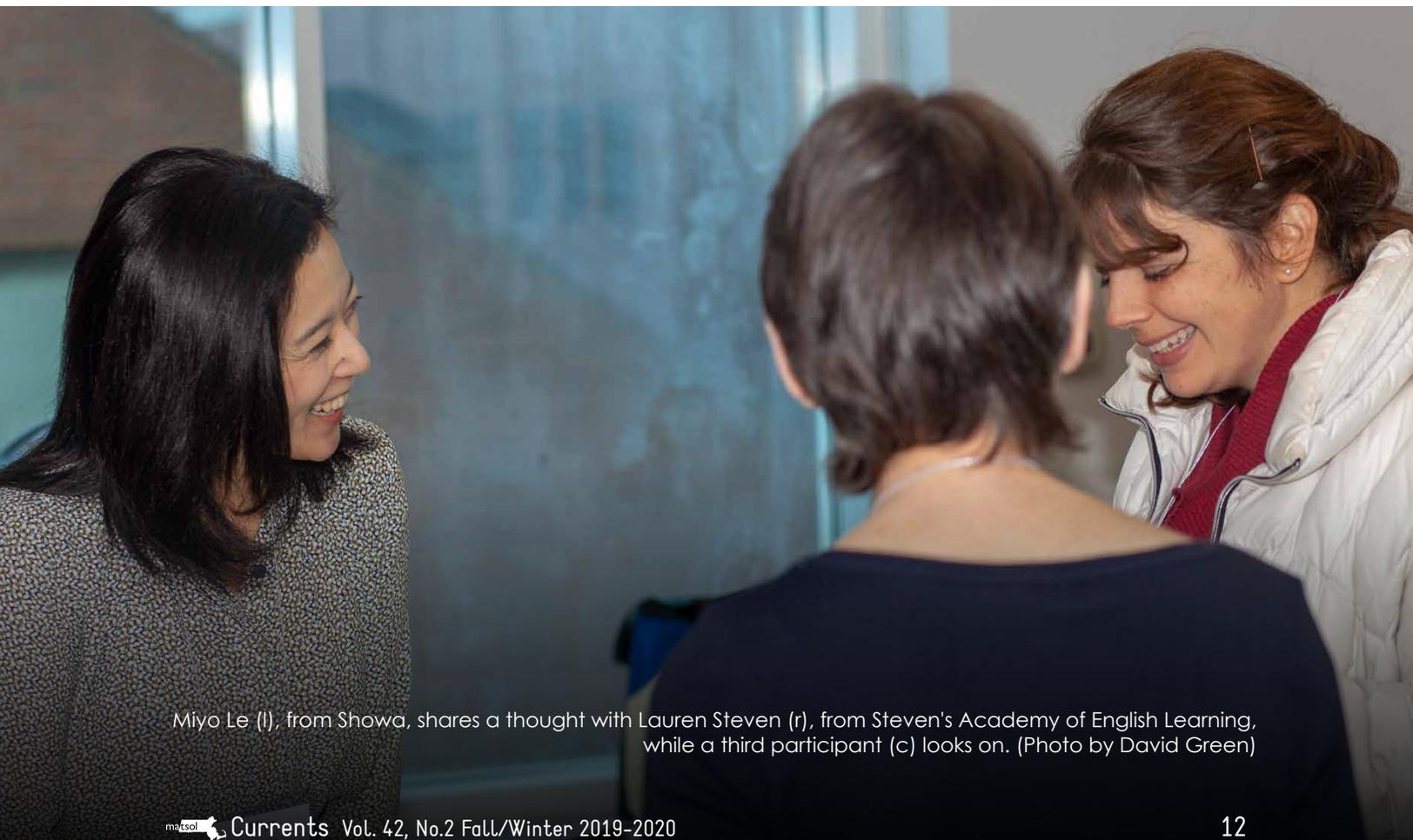
Jenna Collins (l), Boston Public Library, and Sarah Harkleroad (r), YMCA International Learning Center, consult about their presentation "Pronunciation: Tips and Tricks." (Photo by David Green)

to National Geographic Learning for providing lunch!

The conference was organized by the Private Language Schools steering committee (Joy MacFarland, Rachel Kadish, Sarah DePina, and Joshua Stone) and the Community College steering committee (Juanita Brunelle, Darlene Furdock, Eileen F. Kelley, Jennifer Nourse, Bruce Riley, Madhu Sharma, and Anne Shull). A big thank you to Helen Solórzano and Jason Fei for their assistance in organizing and carrying out this special event. Finally, thanks to all the participants and presenters for their involvement. None of this would be possible without their willingness to come together and share their knowledge and expertise. We hope to do this again next year! 



Olivia Szabo (l) and Laura Dziuban (r), both from CEL-OP, enjoyed being together at MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference. (Photo by David Green)



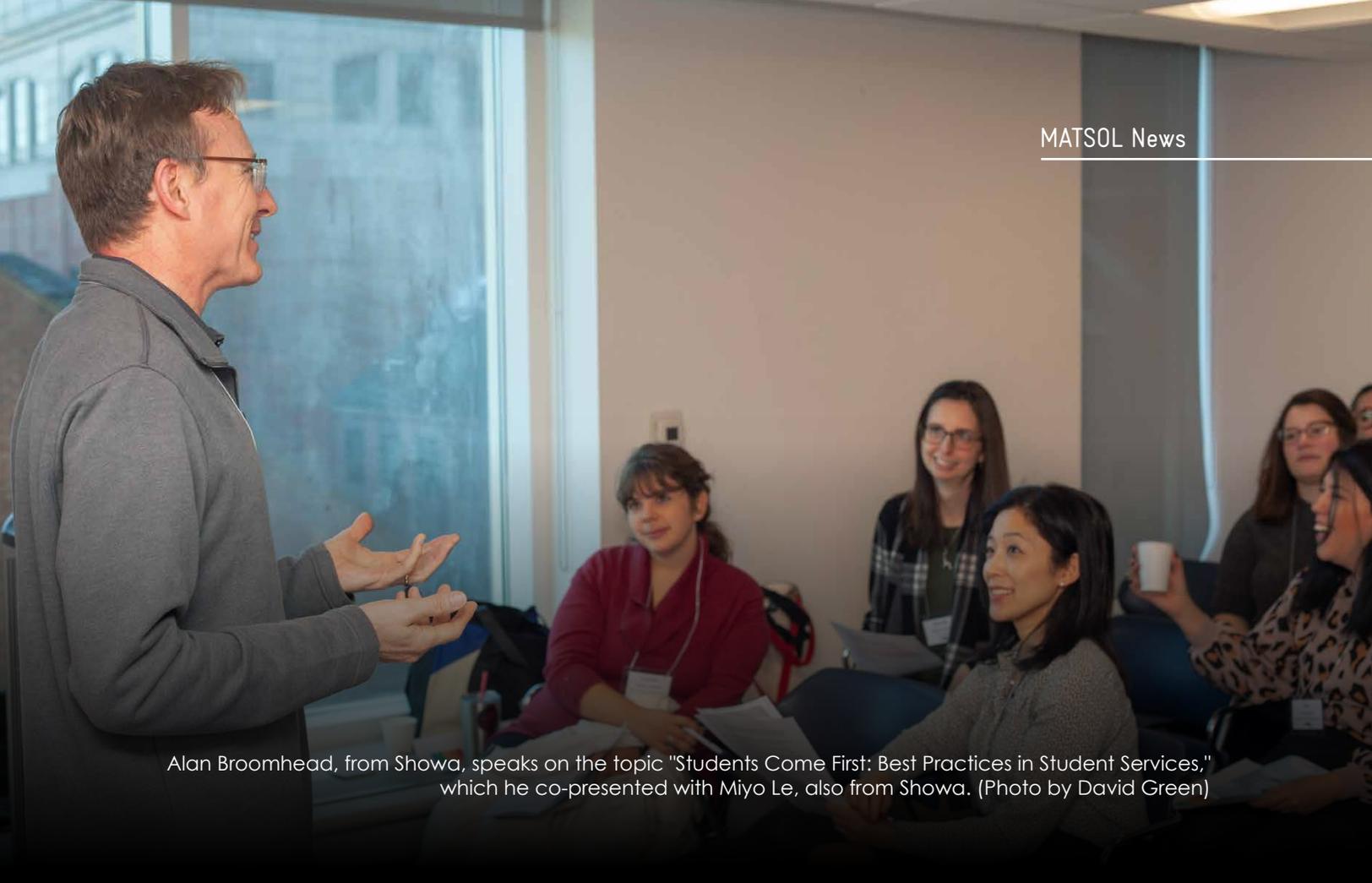
Miyo Le (l), from Showa, shares a thought with Lauren Steven (r), from Steven's Academy of English Learning, while a third participant (c) looks on. (Photo by David Green)



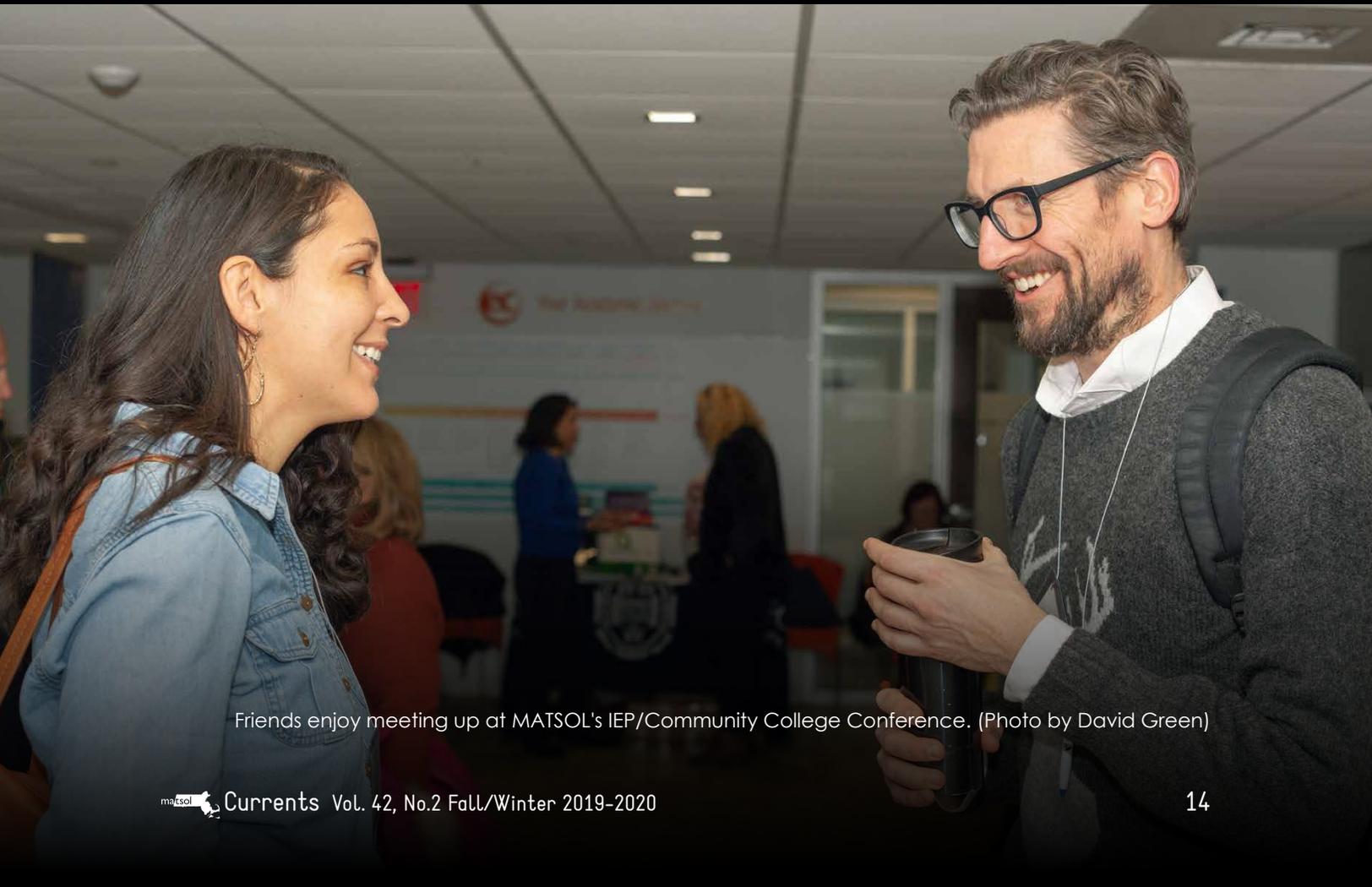
Felixa Eskey, from Dartmouth College's Rassias Center for World Languages and Cultures, peruses the conference program while two other participants hold a serious discussion in the foreground. (Photo by David Green)



Faculty from FLS International - Boston Commons pose for a group photo: back row, l to r: Kevin Thai, Oliver Ward; middle row, l to r: Megan Thai, Julianna Donaher, Bill Caruso; front row, l to r: Rachel Kadish, Liz Soteris McNamara, Katherine Heithmar. (Photo by David Green)



Alan Broomhead, from Showa, speaks on the topic "Students Come First: Best Practices in Student Services," which he co-presented with Miyo Le, also from Showa. (Photo by David Green)



Friends enjoy meeting up at MATSOL's IEP/Community College Conference. (Photo by David Green)

A Report from the Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)

Victoria Ekk

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MELLC is MATSOL's venue for EL Directors and Coordinators to receive updated information on laws, regulations, resources, and research pertaining to the education of ELs in the Commonwealth. The council is under new leadership this year, as our great friend and founder, Ann Feldman, has retired to sunny Mexico. As MATSOL's new Professional Learning Director, I, Vicky Ekk, am taking up the torch, with the able assistance of the MELLC Advisory Council: Kathleen Lange-Madden, Yvonne Endara, Deborah Wall, Mindy Paulo, and Laurie Hartwick. We will continue to provide EL leaders with information, resources, and a safe environment for airing concerns and working together to find answers.

The first MELLC meeting of this year took place on Friday, October 25, in Leominster, with three presentations focusing on the theme of immigrant ELs and their families: First, Saran Sekhavat, from the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA), explained the new "public charge" federal regulations and what they mean for immigrant families who receive public assistance. Then Drs. Debbie Zacarian and Lourdes Alvarez-Ortiz addressed the issues of ELs and their families who have experienced or are experiencing trauma or discrimination; they urged us to focus on *strengths* as we work with this population. Finally, Sibel Hughes, of MA DESE's Office of Language Acquisition (OLA), provided key information on the new English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and the requirement for schools to set up a documented process to monitor ELs who are not meeting benchmarks. A [Padlet](#) tool was used throughout the meeting to keep track of questions and comments from the audience; these will serve as a source of

We will continue to provide EL leaders with information, resources, and a safe environment for airing concerns.

topics for future MELLC meetings and other MATSOL services.

Our second MELLC meeting, December 6, focused on newcomers. The day opened with a panel of representatives sharing what is being done for newcomers in their schools and districts. Then ESL teacher Karen Hall gave us an overview of a new course on improving equity for ELs in more culturally responsive classrooms. Finally, DESE Student Assessment Office representative Melanie Manares walked us through ACCESS data and showed us how to use it more effectively to support struggling ELs. We used a [Padlet](#) activity to compile a list of needs, resources, and strategies to assist newcomer ELs.

As you can see, MELLC will continue to reflect its membership's passions and concerns. Stay tuned for more as we move on to 2020! 

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

MATSOL offers Special Interest Groups (SIGs), with online and face-to-face meeting options, for community college ESL faculty, educators of color, educators with an interest in family-school partnerships, instructional coaches, educators from low-incidence school districts, educators from private language schools, teacher educators, and English learner coordinators/directors (MELLC). Except for MELLC, which is restricted to PK-12 ELL Program Directors or Coordinators, and which carries a registration fee of \$340/year, MATSOL's SIGs are open to all our members, free of charge.

HERE ARE REPORTS ON SOME RECENT SIG ACTIVITIES:

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL FACULTY SIG

The Community College ESL Faculty SIG has had a busy Fall. On October 23, members of our Steering Committee attended a meeting of the ELL Working Group hosted by Dean Christian Bednar of North Shore Community College. We will be serving on subcommittees that Dean Bednar has set up to review and make recommendations for the future of community college ESL programs in Massachusetts.

On Saturday, November 9, we joined forces with the Private Language Schools SIG for a joint IEP/Community College Conference (see the report on [pg. 11](#) of this issue). Our Steering Committee gave a report at the conference on our most recent Community College Survey and the October 23 meeting of the ELL Working Group.

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

For additional information about the Community College ESL Faculty Network, go to www.matsol.org/community-college-esl or write Juanita Brunelle at jbrunelle@matsol.org.

EDUCATORS OF COLOR SIG

As you may have already heard, we have a new Special Interest Group for Educators of Color! This group was formed and organized by two MATSOL members, Yuiko Shimazu and Lonamae Shand, who saw a need in this area and wanted to reach out. This SIG will provide a space for educators of color with common backgrounds, interests, and experiences to get together in order to build relationships, share ideas, and support one another.

The Educators of Color SIG will meet via ZOOM on the first Friday of even months. For more information, go to www.matsol.org/educators-of-color-sig.

**[W]e have a new
Special Interest Group
for Educators of Color.**

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP SIG

The Family-School Partnership SIG is a new SIG for educators who work with linguistically and culturally diverse families across Massachusetts. Group members include professionals in the PreK-graduation and higher education spheres who interact with families in various capacities. This platform will provide a forum to share resources, learn about innovative methods, collaborate on projects, explore approaches to cultural engagement, learn from one another, and see how policies inform our practices.

The Family-School Partnership SIG will meet every other month. For more information, go to www.matsol.org/family-school-partnership-sig.

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES SIG

The Instructional Coaches SIG is a new SIG which will provide a forum for PreK-12 instructional coaches, teachers, and coordinators whose role includes coaching teachers on how to best meet the needs of multilingual learners. Thank you to everyone who joined our first meeting in November! Our monthly meetings will include time for small group discussion and networking around specific topics related to coaching, such as coaching cycles, defining the role of the coach, finding time to meet with teachers, and challenging the quick-fix mindset. Additionally, each month one member will present and share a resource or practice that they have used.

The Instructional Coaches SIG meets online, via ZOOM, from 12:00-1:00 on

the first Friday of each month. For more information, go to www.matsol.org/instructional-coaches-sig.

LOW-INCIDENCE SIG

The Low-Incidence SIG provides ongoing support to educators in low-incidence school districts on best practices, state policies and procedures, current research, and upcoming events. We gather and disseminate information, materials, and resources from MELLC meetings and DESE low-incidence meetings. We continue to work on formatting the progress reports and accompanying ELD strands while helping low-incidence districts to fully understand and implement the various components of the LOOK Act.

This year . . . we will begin streaming our meetings to satellite locations across Massachusetts.

We meet four times per year — twice in the fall and twice in the spring. This year, for the first time, we will begin streaming our meetings to satellite locations across Massachusetts in order to give greater access to educators in low-incidence districts throughout the state. For more information about the Low-Incidence SIG or to reach members of the planning committee, please visit <https://www.matsol.org/low-incidence-sig>.

PRIVATE LANGUAGE SCHOOLS SIG

The Private Language Schools SIG is proud to have just completed our fourth annual conference on November 9, 2019. (See the report on [pg. 11](#) of this issue). This year, we partnered with the Community College Special Interest Group to include even more educators from all across Massachusetts and beyond. We expect to follow up with small meetups throughout the year to continue the great conversation and to stay informed about what is happening in our industry. And we are already looking forward to our fifth annual conference next year!

For more information and notifications of meetings, please visit <https://www.matsol.org/private-language-schools-sig>.

TEACHER EDUCATOR SIG

The Teacher Educator SIG meets online once a month and provides an opportunity to share best practices and to collaborate on research and advocacy projects relating to the preparation of teachers of multilingual

learners. We are currently finalizing a position statement about the preparation of Massachusetts ESL teachers, which we will send to the MATSOL Board for review. We also collaborate to submit sessions to the annual MATSOL Conference.

The Teacher Educator SIG typically meets throughout the academic year, from 10:00 to 11:30 on the third Monday of each month. Reminders and agenda are sent out via the Teacher Education e-list. All MATSOL members are welcome, but attendees must be registered members to access the meeting link. For more information, go to <https://www.matsol.org/teacher-educators>. 

We are currently finalizing a position statement about the preparation of Massachusetts ESL teachers.

Get Involved in MATSOL!

JOIN A MATSOL SUB-COMMITTEE OR TASK FORCE

For members who would like to be more actively involved in MATSOL, we encourage you to become a conference proposal reader, to join a sub-committee or task force, or to consider creating a webinar on a topic of interest to our membership. Assistance is available for all these tasks. We are also always looking for volunteers to help plan and lead our SIGs. For the latest listing of volunteer opportunities, please go to our “Get Involved” webpage, <https://www.matsol.org/get-involved-with-matsol>, which has recently been updated.

SUBMIT TO MATSOL PUBLICATIONS

MATSOL E-BULLETIN

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

MATSOL CURRENTS

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

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

The Northern New England TESOL Conference (NNETESOL)

Theresa Laquerre

tlaquerre@abschools.org

OUR NNETESOL colleagues in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont held their annual Fall conference at the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston-Auburn campus on Saturday, November 2, with 25 fifty-minute concurrent presentations on a wide range of topics, plus seven 25-minute concurrent workshops. The one-hour buffet lunch allowed time for networking and visiting the publishers' exhibits.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Keith Folse, a Professor of TESOL at the University of Central Florida, who has written more than 60 books on ESL topics, including *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook* and *The Grammar Answer Key: Short Explanations to 100 ESL Questions*. In his address, entitled "Why Vocabulary Matters So Much in Learning a New Language," Dr. Folse shared lessons from his experience as a student of French, Spanish, and Japanese and from his four decades teaching English in the US, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Kuwait, and Japan. Experienced teachers nodded in agreement as he spoke, while those new to the profession were able to gain some practical teaching tips and a deeper appreciation of the difficult path our students have to navigate as they learn English. His central point was that vocabulary matters; without vocabulary, grammar is of little use. Many stayed on for the break-out session that directly followed the keynote when Dr. Folse took the keynote to the next level by providing practical ideas and tips for teaching vocabulary. (See Dr. Folse's article "Five Common Myths about the Teaching of Grammar" on [pg. 33](#) of this issue).



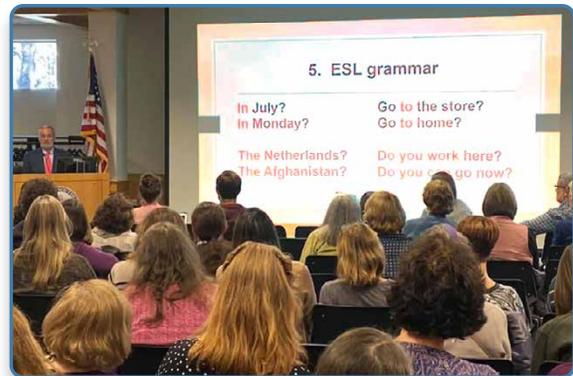
MATSOL past president Kathy Lobo with keynote speaker Keith Folse

I traveled to Lewiston with my friend and fellow ESL teacher, Kathy Santo. We find that we learn much more when we are able to attend sessions together and talk them over afterward. We especially enjoyed a presentation called *Preschool/Kindergarten ELLs: Sound Substitutions Impacting Speech Intelligibility Across Languages*, by Catherine Lavigne, a speech language pathologist who works with preschool and kindergarten students in the Winooski School District in Vermont.

“[V]ocabulary matters; without vocabulary grammar is of little use.”

Other MATSOL members were also in attendance at the conference — Stephanie Marcotte, a MATSOL Board member who is serving, temporarily, as Acting Interim President of NNETESOL, and Kathy Lobo, former MATSOL President, who gave a presentation entitled “Engaging Students: More Than Just a Riddle, & No Joke!,” based on an article she published in *MATSOL Currents* (vol. 42.1, Spring/Summer 2019).

The day ended with a distribution of books and resources generously donated by the vendors, followed by a beautiful fall-foliage-filled drive home. Be sure to mark your calendar for November 7, 2020, when the NNETESOL Fall Conference will be hosted by the University of Vermont in Burlington! 



Dr. Folse shows why English grammar is so tricky.

Kathy Santo, Kathy Lobo, and Stephanie Marcotte contributed to this article. Photos are by Nicole Decoteau and Kathy Lobo.

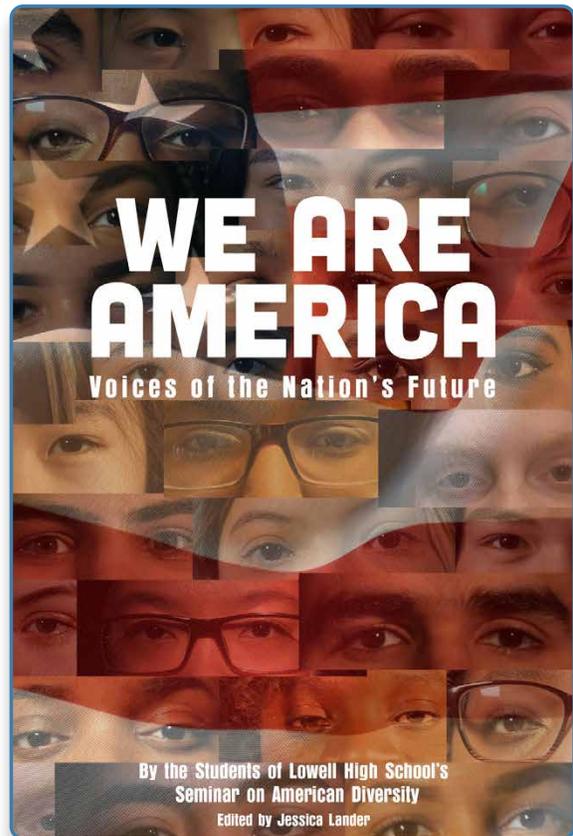
We are America: A Collaborative Exhibition

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*My skin color is the color of a clear oak wood plank; it is the color of sandy beaches. It is the warm sand at the beach in mid July; it is Mac nude lipstick, freckle toned. It is the yellow of old good-looking woods. My skin is the color of my father's dark chocolate with a mixture of my mother's light caramel self. My skin is the color of vanilla strawberry ice cream, caramel, milk chocolate, creamer with a splash of coffee, white rabbit candy. (Excerpt from the preface of *We are America*).*

So begins a collection of narratives written by the diverse youth of Lowell, entitled *We are America*. Last May, I had the privilege of working on a community event with the editor of the book, social studies and ESL teacher Jessica Lander from Lowell High School. Ms. Lander teaches a course called *Seminar on American Diversity*, which explores the histories of the diverse people of America and their fight for equity and social justice. Throughout the course, her students study the history of the social justice movement in America, analyze landmark court cases and laws that work to establish equity for all, and travel to Montgomery, Alabama, to learn about activism in the very spaces where the civil rights movement started. For the last three years, the course has culminated in a student-authored, self-published book. The first was titled *Defining Diversity*, featuring student-authored



The Book: *We Are America*

passages on key Supreme Court cases and constitutional amendments as well as explanations of concepts central to diversity and equity, such as privilege, structural racism, or stereotype threat. For the second book, *Achieving Equality*, Ms. Lander's students researched and wrote about the lives and work of social justice activists. The biographies include such names as LGBTQ+ advocate Aaron Fricke and labor leader Dolores Huerta. Both books can be used as reference guides or texts for social studies and history courses and are reader-friendly down to upper elementary levels.



The authors of *We Are America*

The latest book to come out of the seminar is titled *We are America*. In this volume, Ms. Lander's students turn to the diverse identities that they themselves represent. Based on research into their family trees and an exploration of what it means to grow up in today's America, Ms. Lander's students write compelling, bittersweet stories that time and again make the reader wonder at the insight of these youth. Many of the authors are immigrants who describe the difficulties of leaving behind the old life and trying to make a new one in America.

My grandpa in Brazil got sick with cancer a year ago, and my family in Brazil wanted us to help to take care of him. But we were far away. We were immigrants here, and we could not go back, writes one student.

When I arrived here, I was surprised by everything: the language, the people, the culture. Everything was different. Schools in the United States are very different than in Iraq...Some things were the same...Like Iraq, in my school there were police officers with guns that were there to protect us, writes another.

“My mom’s story of making a new home here in the United States inspires me to want to do better for myself and be successful...”

But what also comes through is an unabashed determination to succeed. One student writes, *This year I want to just keep playing, work on getting into college,*

and try to play ball in college. Everything is totally different compared to when I was in the Dominican Republic. I've learned to be strong and brave. I am proud of the challenges I have surpassed.

Another one concludes her passage, My mom's story of making a new home here in the United States inspires me to want to do better for myself and be successful... I owe our success to her. She is my biggest influence and reminds me every day that home is where they love you the most.

Each narrative is accompanied by a professional portrait of the author — some looking steadfastly into the camera, others gazing thoughtfully into the distance or holding an object central to their story.

Ms. Lander and I organized a community event on May 2nd to celebrate this year's book, *We are America*, and its authors. The event was funded by a Mary Bacigalupo Educational Endowment Award, founded to honor Mary Bacigalupo, a deceased UMass Lowell administrator and community activist who worked tirelessly for the city and school system of Lowell. I did not know Mary, but based on what I have read about her she would have loved the event: an authors' reception and showcase of student work in UMass Lowell's O'Leary Library. Before the event, Ms. Lander's students hung up striking enlargements of their portraits from the book, printouts of their narratives, examples of family trees they had constructed, and other artifacts from the seminar. The reception, attended by students' families, UMass Lowell faculty, and community members, began with a student panel which I led together with Tsongas Industrial History Center Director Sheila Kirschbaum. During the panel the students recounted some of the narratives they had written for the book and discussed what teachers and professors should know about the diversity in their students. The students spoke maturely and authoritatively



Audience members study student portraits, with printouts of their narratives and family trees.

about the joys and tribulations of growing up multilingual and/or multicultural in today's America. All declared Ms. Lander to be the most caring teacher they had ever had and described her efforts to create a safe space for students to grapple with the important but sensitive topics of the seminar. Afterwards, the students milled around like celebrity authors, chatting with audience members and sampling refreshments, while audience members read student narratives and took in the portraits around the room. The showcase remained in the library until late May.

It was a great honor to host Ms. Lander and her students at UMass Lowell. I encourage readers of *Currents* to seek opportunities to engage in similar collaborative community efforts. It is important to celebrate the work of our multilingual and multicultural students whenever possible. Universities are often well positioned to assist public schools in finding the venue and funds to do so at a larger scale. 

To order any of the books mentioned above, go to www.jessicalander.com. All proceeds go towards funding Ms. Lander's next project with her students.

What I've Learned from my Experiences as a Language Learner

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As a former ESL student and now a candidate in the TESOL Certificate Program at Bridgewater State, I hope to use my own background and experience as a language learner to better understand my students and give them the support they need.

My parents came to the United States from Puerto Rico, as children, and I was born during their senior year of high school. They themselves spoke fluent English, but while they finished their education and then went to work, I spent my days with my two grandmothers, who spoke very little English. So I was surrounded by Spanish and, because we were living in a predominantly Latinx neighborhood of Dorchester, I heard mostly Spanish in the neighborhood, as well.

My elementary and middle school days were a difficult time. I went to kindergarten and first grade in Dorchester where I felt comfortable, but then we moved to Braintree, which was a huge culture shock. No one looked like me, and everyone spoke English. At school, for reasons I did not understand, I was placed in the ESL program, which I hated, because it made it difficult for me to assimilate. I was constantly pulled from class to work one-on-one with the ESL teacher, and there was always an aide with me in the classroom. I already had the odds stacked against me socially by being the new kid, visibly different looking, with broken English. Group activities could have been a good time to connect with the other students, but I was pulled aside to work with my aide, in the corner, away from everyone else. My school was so focused on having me learn English as quickly as possible that they made no effort to recognize my background and culture or to help me integrate smoothly into the classroom.

I desperately wanted to learn English so I wouldn't be so different from my peers.

I desperately wanted to learn English so I wouldn't be so different from my peers; in fact, I was so determined to learn English that, for a time, I lost my Spanish. Other students sometimes bullied me for the way I talked, how curly my hair was, and how "tan" I was. It made me hate myself. I watched sitcoms in order to improve my fluency and pick up American mannerisms. I talked more slowly and quietly, straightened my hair every week, and stayed out of the sun to avoid getting darker. But as I assimilated to American culture, I lost who I was. It was not until I went to a more diverse vocational-technical school outside my town that I began to feel more comfortable in my own skin.

Now I am tackling still another language. At the beginning of every new year, when I make a list of goals to accomplish, "Learn a new language" is always on the list. Up to now, I have always failed, but this year was different because I booked a trip to Paris and London and used that as motivation to be serious about learning French. Though I had no prior background, I was hoping to be fluent by the end of the year. But here I am, six months later, still nowhere *near* fluent, despite all the hours I've spent with Duolingo, Babbel, podcasts, grammar books, and YouTube videos. Because I learned English so quickly, I thought I could learn French quickly, too. Instead, I found that it is hard to stay motivated, because I am learning on my own and not practicing with French speakers or immersing myself in a French-speaking environment. At this point, I am able to introduce myself, order food and drinks, and talk about my family and other small-talk topics. But while I am making good progress in reading and writing and know how to order a bottle of wine or tell someone my occupation, I am terrified to speak. Somehow, the words in my head don't translate into speech.

Students should not feel, as I did, that it is shameful to be an EL!

My experience as an ESL student and now a student of French can help me become a better teacher. What I learned as an ESL student is the importance of integrating students' cultures into their school experience. Students should not feel, as I did, that it is shameful to be an EL! When I am a teacher, I want my classroom to evoke a feeling of inclusion so that students feel welcome and that they are heard and understood. I want them to know that it is OK to be who they are. One idea I like from classrooms I have observed is identity wheels posted on the wall, where the students list parts of themselves that they want to share, such as their countries, hobbies, careers they want to pursue, sports teams they follow, and so forth. Something like this can be created during the first class

meeting and can help students find classmates who share their interests and backgrounds.

My experience as a student of French is also valuable, since it has taught me the importance of a learning community. If I had a companion who was fluent in French or who was learning French with me, it would keep me motivated and give me valuable practice in speaking. Of course, students learn a lot from their teacher, but working with other students their own age or at the same proficiency level can be especially motivating. Small-group activities can encourage discussion and give students an opportunity to speak without pressure. I want to create an atmosphere where students feel safe to express themselves without worrying about whether what they are saying is “correct.” My students will be working towards a common goal of learning — not seeing who is the smartest or who is grasping the material fastest. Everyone learns differently, and I want to make the learning process as painless as possible.

I want my students to understand that while language learning can be frustrating, it is well worth the effort. I want to know what works for them and what doesn't work. I want to create a learning community where students take responsibility for their own learning and that of their classmates. My experiences as an ESL student and a student of French have lit a fire in me to avoid the problems I encountered myself. Because I know what I needed in my own studies, I think I will be better equipped to give my students what they need to succeed as language learners. 

Learning to Live in Another Culture

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On a flight from Shanghai to San Francisco in summer, 2018, I sat between two Chinese nationals with different perspectives on life in China and abroad.

On one side was a woman from Shanghai, an electrical engineer trained in the United States, who had lived in San José, California, for the past 20 years. She had two children, an older daughter soon to be a freshman in art school in Chicago, and a son soon to be a seventh grader. She had travelled to China so that her son could sit an entrance exam for an international/English school in Shanghai. She planned to quit her job, rent out her San José home, and leave America, because, in her view, American schools and society are dangerous and full of drugs.

On my other side was a 32-year-old man, also from Shanghai, whose wife is half Mexican and half French. He met her when she was an international student in Shanghai. Now they are married with two children, a girl almost seven and a boy four. He and his wife had left China and moved to Mexico to seek a better life a year and a half ago, before their daughter started first grade. Working as a trader in Shanghai, he could not earn enough money to provide the life he wanted for his family. He wanted a cleaner, more natural environment for his family, and since there are fewer and fewer unpolluted places in China and since it is difficult to move from one place to another, they decided to move to Mexico. They settled in an area in western Mexico, where he works as a trader, using his ability to speak Mandarin, Shanghainese, and now Spanish. The area where he lives is an international community and is home to many retired Americans as well as a Mexican “locals.” He feels that it is a safe, clean, wonderful place for a growing family.

This encounter made me think about the experience of living abroad, and how differently it affects people. My daughter has been studying in China for the past two-plus years. Following a six-month Fulbright scholarship to study Chinese, she now has a three-year Chinese government scholarship to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Ethnography at a university in Xian. She has a 29-year-old Mexican friend who spent four years in China, earning a graduate degree in

graphic design! In our conversations, he shared his vision of a future in China and Mexico. He sees many positive things about life in both countries and about the opportunities that will be available to him because of his international experience. As I write this article, he has now finished his studies and moved to join his sister, who has settled in Australia!

I myself was once an exchange student in China. I first traveled to China in 1982, at a time when almost no one in China spoke English; I had to learn Chinese in order to return to study traditional Chinese painting in Tianjin in 1986-1987. I later taught at an international school in Tokyo for three years, and then worked in Australia for five years. Now I am a public-school ESL teacher in the United States, where over the past 17 years I have taught in several districts at grade levels ranging from 5 to 12. Since many of my students have come from mainland China, my knowledge of Chinese languages and cultures has served me well.

When our Chinese seatmate had fallen asleep, I told the young man next to me not to be frightened by the things she had said about San José; in my long years as a public-school teacher, I have not experienced the drugs and danger she described. I told him that we in the United States hear that Mexico is dangerous and full of drugs, but he, like me, has had a very different experience. At the end of the journey we wished one another well.

Traveling or living abroad offers both opportunities and challenges; a lot depends on the choices we make and the attitudes we bring to the experience.

Traveling or living abroad offers both opportunities and challenges; a lot depends on the choices we make and the attitudes we bring to the experience. As ESL teachers, we are an integral part of this exchange. One part of our job is to help our students enter their new lives with an open heart, to see the best in the new culture they are joining and to take advantage of every opportunity it offers. But we must also be open to the new worlds that our students bring *with* them. As they share their experiences, questions, and challenges, we get glimpses of their home cultures and their former lives, and we must encourage and support them as they share these riches with their new community. The connections we help to nurture and develop can endure not only across time, but across geography, languages and cultures. 

Five Common Myths about the Teaching of Grammar

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I hear a lot of misinformation about the role of grammar in the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language. For many years, when the Natural Approach was in vogue, grammar was taken out of the ESL classroom. Things got so bad that one program where I taught in the late 1980s required me to rename our grammar class “Accuracy Development.” Now the pendulum has swung back to allow the teaching of grammar.

After all of this, where are we now? Well, all over the place. We have teachers who love grammar and give it a major part of their class, teachers who unfortunately do nothing *but* grammar, teachers who don’t know English grammar or ESL grammar and fear teaching it, and teachers who still reject the idea of teaching grammar at all. What we don’t have is a lot of research on this topic, because it’s still not considered to be important by researchers, which is ironic, because it is a very important topic for students. The bottom line is that there are lots of myths out there about the topic of grammar. Here are five that I often hear from ESL teachers, with my responses:

MYTH 1

There is an authorized grammar syllabus out there given to us by the grammar gods or, possibly, by well-known grammar-book authors.

REALITY

No, we grammar-book authors just use a syllabus that we think teachers will like. We include what teachers expect. If we try to do something different, the book won’t sell, and publishers won’t publish it. I have managed a few adjustments in some of my books, such as teaching modals earlier (because they are very common) and giving very little attention to verb tenses such as the past perfect progressive or future perfect (because they are not very common). Grammar texts should

teach the grammar that students actually need.

MYTH 2

Teaching grammar is more important than teaching vocabulary.

REALITY

Well, students do need structures but, especially from the intermediate level and beyond, they need lots and lots of vocabulary. You can never go wrong teaching vocabulary.

You can never go wrong teaching vocabulary.

MYTH 3

- a. There is great value in making grammar the backbone of your syllabus.
- b. There is little to no value in making grammar the backbone of your syllabus.
- c. Grammar is boring.

REALITY

a/b. Grammar is important, but you can't lose sight of your *goal*. Your goal isn't simply to teach students how to *form* the present perfect (which is in fact a very useful verb form); they have to know how to *use* the present perfect — when to use it and why. Students are not trying to become future linguists; they don't need an old-fashioned “rules” class. What they need is information about important structures and their usage.

c. Grammar is not boring, but boring teaching is always boring, no matter what the topic.

MYTH 4

The grammar of spoken English is the same as the grammar of written English.

REALITY

No, they are not the same. For example, *whom* is used pretty much only in written language, and *though* at the end of a sentence (“I'm not hungry, though”) occurs only in spoken English. However, the grammar of spoken English and the grammar of written English are not so different as to warrant two separate classes.

MYTH 5

- a. English is crazy and has no rules. There are so many exceptions the rules just don't apply.
- b. Teachers don't need to know anything about grammar since they speak English already.

REALITY

a. No, English is not crazy. All languages have seemingly crazy aspects, but there are actually very few exceptions. (That's why they're called *exceptions*.)

b. Teachers can't know *all* the "rules," but that's okay, since we shouldn't be trying to *teach* all the rules. We should teach the structures that our students need in order to meet their goals, such as passing their academic classes. However, teachers most definitely *do* need to know about grammar, even the grammar that you end up not teaching because your students don't need it. You can't make that kind of decision if you don't *know* about grammar. You can't provide comprehensible input unless you are aware of which structures your students know and don't know yet.

[T]hough at the end of a sentence ("I'd like a favor, though") occurs only in spoken English.

I love teaching grammar, but I don't teach a lesson on "the passive voice" in a traditional grammar book way. Instead, my students learn the forms of the passive voice and their use in business material from college business books, because they are planning to be business majors. Grammar itself is not the goal. Rather, grammar is a *tool* that allows students to speak and write better English for whatever their own goals are. That is the reason teachers should know ESL grammar. **C**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Keith Folse is a Professor of TESOL at the University of Central Florida. He has written more than 60 books on ESL topics, including *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook* and *The Grammar Answer Key: Short Explanations to 100 ESL Questions*.

Professional Learning Communities: One Form of Strategic Collaboration

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HOW can American schools shed traditional methods of teaching and create schools with a “...strategy... for adopting and implementing potentially powerful programs and practices for students?” asked educational researcher Shirley Hord (1997, p. 5). The answer, she argued, is to directly involve the body charged with *teaching* the students — its teachers — in the process of their own professional development. Why not let teachers themselves research curriculum and instructional resources for their students, consult with each other on types of instruction that work best, plan cooperatively, visit each other’s classrooms to see what works and what does not, and share honestly with one another?

Groups of teachers who perform these functions are called *professional learning communities*, or PLCs. The PLC is a powerful and virtually cost-free strategy that encourages teachers to form collaborative groups where “the result [is] a body of wisdom about teaching that [can] be widely shared” (Hord, p. 3). The PLC provides a forum for teachers to talk with each other about their work and “mobilizes [teachers] to commit themselves to making major changes in how they participate in the school” (p. 21). As a result of Hord’s work, along with that of Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many (2006) and others, this approach has now been widely adopted in public schools across America.

TYPES OF PLCS

While there are many different forms of PLCs, the idea is always the same: teachers working toward a common goal in an area of their choosing, using an action-research method to pose, refine, and reevaluate ways to improve some facet of their practice. Here are two common types:

Instructional Rounds: Succinctly stated, “Rounds” is “a special kind of

walkthrough, a special kind of network, and a special kind of improvement strategy integrated into one practice” (City, Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel, & Lachman 2009, p. 90). This approach begins by coming to a common agreement about the definition of “high-quality instruction” (p. 87), with establishing a common terminology for ease of discussion. In the traditional approach, the evaluation of teachers can be rote and nonfluid. An administrator announces the observation and watches a lesson in what could possibly be a one-time event put on for that evaluator on that day. In the PLC approach, walkthroughs are commonplace. Peers come to classrooms to watch peers teach and then come together to critique the lesson, using agreed-on protocols and terminology to examine what they saw. PLCs encourage a healthy mindset of evaluation-free feedback, with teachers and administrators working together in a shared commitment to student success. Given the “we’ve got each other’s backs” nature of the relationship among teachers who work together, peer review is a valuable source of constructive feedback. This approach has the further benefit of allowing teachers to see how others are handling curricular issues, as well as potentially thorny discipline matters that can prove difficult for even the most seasoned educators.

Action Research, Teacher Research, or Teacher Inquiry: This approach uses a study of teachers’ own practice as the basis for a collaborative search for solutions to common daily problems of teaching. For example, a team of elementary math teachers at different grade levels might want to consider ways of differentiating instruction for diverse learners in their classrooms. The team could meet with a school-based math coach or read and discuss professional articles or books on the topic of math differentiation, using protocols of the type described below. One formalized method that includes analysis of data is the Data Wise Improvement Process (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2014), an eight-step model that guides teams of educators from schools or systems in working collaboratively to improve teaching and learning through evidence-based analysis.

Each of us provided insights from our different specialties and students.

I have experienced Action Research in the form of a book club in which teachers from different grades and subject areas met on a monthly basis to discuss a book about best teaching practices called *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov. Each of us provided insights from our different specialties and students: How does ‘asking open ended questions’ look when working with kindergartners, for example, as opposed to seventh graders? More specifically, we discussed how our practices could be expanded and improved, such as by standardizing the format of our classroom materials to improve efficiency

of lesson delivery and our ability to assess student mastery. We also discussed how we could improve our students' understanding of the material by anticipating incorrect answers and planning, in advance, how to address those misunderstandings before they arise. Finally, we talked about how we can improve our lesson objectives by making them manageable and measurable and (very importantly) making them *prior* to writing the lesson.

In all types of PLCs, the goal is improvement of some kind, whether in teaching methods or in student performance. The work is collaborative and ongoing and builds accountability and commitment among the members of the group (O'Neill, 2006). A good PLC is flexible, dedicated to accountability (O'Neill, 2006), teacher-driven, and focused on student outcomes (Stepanek, 2007).

THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

A PLC needs the regular, sustained support of administration (Dana, 2008). If there is no leadership for PLCs to form, then none will be created. Administrators need to learn about PLCs themselves in order to direct their teachers to form the kind of teams that will be most impactful for their students. Joining a PLC or at least visiting them from time to time is a good administrative practice to celebrate the work teachers do that parallels their daily activities inside the classroom.

It is essential to start by building trust, so that teachers will feel comfortable sharing both successes and failures. I had a principal who attempted a version of Instructional Rounds without first cultivating an atmosphere of trust with her teachers and being clear about her reasons for setting up this process. It was a top-down initiative that did not have the buy-in of the staff as a whole. If we had taken the time to agree on a common definition of what good teaching looked like in our context, then we could have built upon that definition and used that common understanding to support each other. Instead, it became a pointless exercise, as not many felt comfortable entering one another's rooms to observe and then write about what they had seen. It was hard for the teachers to believe that the process was truly meant to be non-evaluative, as the principal claimed.

NORMS AND PROTOCOLS

An important feature of any PLC is the protocols and norms that are used to ensure that everyone participates and that the discussion moves forward in a productive way with a sharp focus on the data or problem of practice. McDonald (2007) advises the use of norms such as "What is said in this room

stays here,” “No judgement zone,” “No hogging airtime,” and “No use of cell phones during the meeting.” These norms help participants avoid bad habits such as speaking too much or too little, and they slow down the conversation to allow for more listening and thinking. Norms can be used to prevent problems that might arise, such as ringing cell phones, loud talking, or the sharing of sensitive information.

These norms . . . slow down the conversation to allow for more listening and thinking.

Protocols, similar to norms, are structures to improve the group's efficiency by building skills for effective collaborative work. The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) houses a free online list of more than 200 protocols to be used for various purposes. For example, there are “icebreaker” protocols, in which group members are given specific directions to follow in introducing themselves. An example is the “Reflection on a Word” protocol, in which the facilitator chooses a word such as *literacy* for each person to interact with (McDonald, Moore, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007, p. 24). This allows the group to begin to focus on the day's topic in a controlled way that can get the conversation moving.

There are also protocols designed to help the group become comfortable with each other and build trust among themselves, such as “Postcards from the Edge,” where members choose postcards from a group of “wild” postcards that relate to their experience as a teacher. Another fun idea is “Autobiography,” where a facilitator asks members to write down a title for themselves and then explain to the group why they chose it. Investing small amounts of time in activities like these will pay back tenfold as teachers come to know each other in deeper, more meaningful ways that allow trust to build.

Some protocols focus on particular tasks. For example, the School Reform Initiative (SRI, 2017) database offers several protocols for examining student work. Each has the general goal of guiding a group through a process to “develop a sense of the kind and quality of work that is going on in the school” and to “develop a shared understanding of standards in different domains and the steps students go through to meet them.” There is also a protocol called the “Four A's Text Protocol,” a favorite of mine, which provides a framework for dissecting an article or book chapter in a systematic way that allows all voices to be heard.

I've had success using The Four A's and some other protocols from the NSRF list when discussing articles and writing prompts with colleagues. A word of

caution, however: Using structured conversations takes practice. I remember some initial floundering conversations and long pauses while people waited for the prescribed amount of time to pass. But if everyone sticks to the guidelines and agrees to follow the rules, these tools do ultimately pay off. It feels awkward at first to stay within the restrictive roles, but with time I learned that you have to lean in to the awkward: First acknowledge it and then allow the group to practice. Nothing is perfect the first time out!

THE TIME COMMITMENT

One issue with PLCs is the time commitment. Teachers obviously need time to dedicate themselves to the work of a PLC, perhaps during the half-day release day we get once per month. Of course, it is important for the team to define a realistic goal that is within reach, given the amount of time available. This is another place where protocols can be useful; protocols that are set up with a given amount of time in mind can help keep everyone on schedule.

CONCLUSION

PLCs offer a good way to address school- or program-wide issues, and they can often produce better results than programs taught by outside consultants telling teachers what they need to do to “fix things.” Change is more sustainable when it comes from within, and professional development is most impactful when it is relevant to teachers’ day-to-day work. The PLC approach allows teachers to decide on their own action research topics and use a year or more to collaborate and come up with a workable solution. Once their work is complete, they can share their newfound knowledge by informing their peers of their research and its outcome. (Hord, 1997).

Change is more sustainable when it comes from within.

The teaching profession is demanding on many levels and often very isolating. PLCs offer an opportunity for teachers to come together in order to find solutions for the issues they all face. “If you can’t make a school a great professional place for its staff, it’s never going to be a great place for kids” (Hord, 1997, p. 19). It’s time for teachers to take stock of the resources they have and use themselves as their best resource to discover what they need to know about themselves, their teaching, their students, and how to achieve more from within. PLCs are a cost-effective way to build community in a school while effecting long-term change. 

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Bringing Universal Design for Learning to Bear on the Sheltered Instruction Strategies

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UNIVERSAL Design for Learning (UDL) is “a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn” (CAST, 2019).

According to Chen (2008), the UDL framework calls for creating curriculum that provides

- *Multiple means of representation* to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,
- *Multiple means of expression* to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know, and
- *Multiple means of engagement* to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed by Congress in 2015, specifically endorsed these principles, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) followed suit by developing Focus Academies on inclusive practices with UDL at their core (MA DESE, n.d). However, UDL principles have not been sufficiently integrated into the techniques that are being taught in the state's Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) course for content teachers of English learners (ELs). These techniques, as presently taught, are still setting up the teacher as the sole repository of native-language support. Furthermore, the course gives too little attention to the opportunities that technology offers for more efficient and effective ways

to implement the strategies. We live in a time of massive amounts of easy and reliable access to technology; students can use the internet to open up a world of native-speaker resources and language supports, thereby providing unlimited opportunities for language learning.

“One of the most basic aspects of UDL is representing key information in more than one modality.”

We can improve our approach by placing the SEI strategies into the UDL framework and using technology to make them more accessible. As David Rose writes, “One of the most basic aspects of UDL is representing key information in more than one modality: Images are described, spoken language is captioned, texts are spoken aloud. Providing those multiple representations is key to ensuring that information is equally accessible for all learners” (Novak, 2016, p. v). In this article, we will take a fresh look at the SEI course from the viewpoint of UDL, in order to identify some potential strategies for creating “expert learners who are purposeful & motivated, resourceful & knowledgeable, strategic & goal-directed” (CAST, 2018) and who also happen to be ELs.

IMPROVING THE STRATEGIES TAUGHT IN THE SEI COURSE

The SEI course has, at its core, a set of research-based, time- and teacher-tested strategies that can be used to promote language acquisition (*Massachusetts Sheltered English Instruction Teacher Endorsement Course Participant’s Manual*, n.d.). The course promotes eight strategies from which teachers select six to practice. Let’s look at four of them, and see how they can be improved by applying the principles of the UDL framework:

- The 7-Step to teach the key vocabulary in a lesson
- Sentence Frames to practice key vocabulary
- Partner Reading for reading fluency
- Language Experience Approach for generating a written text

Here are some problems with these strategies as currently presented in the SEI course:

- The teacher is doing all the work.
- There isn’t enough time in the lesson to implement strategies targeted for the handful of students who need the supports.
- The teacher is the sole source of native-language exposure, and there is never enough teacher to go around.

We begin with the 7-Step, which is used to introduce the core vocabulary of a lesson or unit. The teacher says the word, students repeat it, the teacher defines and explores the word, and students are given an opportunity to use it before actually encountering it in the lesson.

We can improve this strategy by retaining that powerful content piece, the practice of seeing a word X number of times, but changing the modality so that it's not an entirely auditory and teacher-based/full-class instructional mode. Those structures often create barriers for student engagement.

Instead, change the format to give the students options. Some will choose to do the seven steps in a group with the teacher, others will choose to listen to a pre-recorded audio, and some will practice the vocabulary through a repetitive written exercise. Let the students experiment until they find the approach that works best for them. Taking advantage of technology, teachers can make available vocabulary sites such as vocabulary.com or spellingcity.com so that students can choose the kind of practice they prefer.

Let the students experiment until they find the approach that works best for them.

Another strategy from the SEI course is sentence frames. In the current format, the teacher creates a series of sentences around a central idea, at different levels of linguistic complexity. The aim is to model a linguistic structure and provide core vocabulary so that ELLs can answer questions about the passage. The teacher does the up-front work by first providing a model of the expected outcome (which could be a student model from previous years):

*Bear lost his hat and wanted it back. He politely asked his friends if they had seen his hat, and they all said no. But then the bear realized that Rabbit had lied to him, and he politely asked for the return of his hat.
(From I Want My Hat Back by Jon Klassen.)*

Sentence frames at the elementary level might be

Bear lost his hat.

Bear wanted his hat.

Bear asked his friends.

Bear was polite.

Some possibilities for the intermediate level might be

Bear lost his hat and wanted it back.

Bear asked his friends about his hat, and was polite.

Once the sentence frames are set up, key words are removed and placed in a word bank for the students to use in rebuilding the sentences.

Notice that, once again, the teacher has done all the work to prepare and implement this strategy. With a UDL-informed approach, we can leverage technology to transfer some of the language-generating power to the students. For example, instead of having the teacher create and control access to the sentence stems, we could let the students build a library of sentence stems that they can access across their school day and even at home. One possible scenario might be for the EL to tell a story or summarize a lesson in his or her native language and then use a voice translator such as [Google Translate](#) or [iTranslate](#) to translate those sentences into written English. The teacher can then use that translation as the basis for the sentence frames. Of course, the teacher is not completely removed from the process, but at least is now responding to and building on work that the EL has generated.

Partner reading is another strategy that is recommended in the SEI Endorsement course. In this strategy students read in pairs or in trios, following one of a set of possible scenarios:

- Newcomer trio: Two stronger readers read out loud while the third (a less proficient EL) shadow-reads with the others.
- Vocabulary practice: One partner reads a sentence or paragraph which the second partner rephrases, using pre-taught vocabulary as much as possible.
- Comprehension: One partner reads and the other summarizes the reading or asks clarifying questions of the first reader, before the roles are switched.

There are many technical tools that can be used to supplement these strategies and adapt a reading text more closely to the students' individual needs. For example, the original text can be submitted to a text-simplifying app such as [Rewordify](#), and the students can then read it as is, or with a translator such as [Google Read+Write](#) in English, or [iTranslate](#). As another option, the student can shadow-read the passage along with a reading program with adjustable speeds such as [TTSReader](#), or simply follow along silently. The important thing is

that it is the student who decides the purpose of the exercise and chooses an appropriate application to support that intent. The teacher is a monitor — a data collector, really — observing performance and noting what the student can do now, and what are possible next steps.

A fourth SEI strategy, the Language Experience Approach, is an approach to basic literacy that entails the teacher writing as the student dictates. The point is to generate a text that can serve as a tool for language instruction as well as a model for future texts. It's also a way for teachers to support shy and/or struggling writers as they try to generate text in English. But why must text generation always be in English? UDL principles suggest that students should enter a lesson or activity from where they are, which might mean generating a text initially in their native language and then slowly building an English version. The student could start by dictating in [Google Read + Write](#) or [iTranslate](#) and then work with the teacher or with a peer to edit the text, which can then serve the same purposes as in the traditional approach.

CONCLUSION

In bringing a UDL lens to the strategies that are taught in the state's SEI endorsement course, we examine good practices that already exist in order to make them better. Our central argument is that the teacher cannot be the sole source of language input to students; we must abandon teaching practices in which students simply copy the language that we have generated for them. Instead, our purpose as teachers should be to create situations in which students are invited — even compelled — to generate language themselves. The challenge is to give students access to native-English resources with an expectation that they will self-identify and self-advocate in order to self-direct their own learning. In doing so, the teacher's role shifts from that of the provider/controller of resources to that of data-collector, watching how students use resources and helping them decide on possible next steps. The ELD teacher, the language learning specialist, should be a key resource in helping the SEI teacher to identify resources and technical supports for use in the content classroom. 

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Stories without End

by Taylor Sapp. Branford, CT: Alphabet Publishing, 2018. 134 pages. ISBN 1948492-11-9.

Reviewed by Elena Murphy

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EVER think about how you would change the ending to a movie or book? Imagine a future where people teleport to lunch? Or muse how pursuing a particular goal in life, whether beauty, wealth or fame, could change everything?

If your answer is “yes,” then *Stories Without End*, by Taylor Sapp, offers an opportunity for you and your EL students to consider and debate some of these very questions. In this workbook-style publication, Sapp, an ESL educator who has worked in the U.S. and Japan, offers 24 “open-ended stories” to generate discussion and responses from students in every domain of language. Intended for students at an intermediate level of English language proficiency, the texts are divided into “Short Takes” (500 words or less) and “Medium Takes” (500-2000 words) — all left hanging so that students can supply their own endings. The “Short Takes” are more concise, with less dialogue. They often seem allegorical, as, for example, “Lunch of the Twelve,” where personified astrological signs discuss what to order for lunch. The “Medium Takes” have more extensive, detailed plots usually based on an ethical dilemma.

“[T]he stories in this collection venture a bit outside the box . . . challeng(ing) the students’ assumptions about gender roles, relationships, the meaning of success, and even reality itself.”

In his introduction, Sapp says “One of the big challenges as an ESL teacher is to get students to engage with literature. That is why the stories in this collection venture a bit outside the box . . . challeng(ing) the students’ assumptions about gender roles, relationships, the meaning of success, and even reality itself.” For

example, “House Husbands” follows the father of an overtired nine-month-old baby as the father scrambles to get his grocery shopping done and dinner on the table before his wife gets home from work. In another story, “Silvo,” the author explores a student’s strange feeling when everyone in the class treats another student’s imaginary friend as real.

Exercises are provided for pre-reading and assessment of comprehension. The pre-reading exercises include vocabulary words with definitions and questions that draw on prior knowledge — for example, checking what students know about fairy tales before they read a variation of “Jack and the Beanstalk.” Comprehension questions may ask the students to explain the meaning of the title, predict what will happen next, or say how the reader would handle the ethical dilemmas faced by the characters. After reading “The Long Sleep,” about a wife with an incurable disease who, along with her husband, is given the option to be cryogenically frozen for 50-100 years until a cure can be found, the students are asked whether they would take that chance themselves or for a family member. And following “The Last Human Teacher,” the students are asked if they would want to be taught by a robot instead of a human teacher.

The final section of the book, called “Supplements,” offers additional projects, differentiated by proficiency level (unlike the stories, which are all at an intermediate level). For instance, there is a “Simple Story Summary and Reaction” and an “Expanded” one. Other options in this section include “Illustrations,” “Writing,” “Media,” “Interviews,” and “Language Expansion.” There are templates for interviews, acting out a scene, and designing a new cover for one of the stories.

Many of the selections reflect Sapp’s background in creative writing and his work in TV and film, often sounding like the beginning of a movie scene.

For example, “The Spooky House” begins with a group of friends speculating what will happen if one of them walks into an old, abandoned home with a haunted reputation. In “The Long Line” a woman engrossed in her smartphone ends up in a line that doesn’t seem to have a beginning or end, and the student

One story that might appeal to all ages describes an exchange student’s predicament when her Japanese host family serves horse for dinner because she said she liked horses.

are asked to decide where it leads. Much of the subject matter is geared toward secondary and post-secondary students, though 5th-8th graders might relate to some of the stories. One story that might appeal to all ages describes an exchange student's predicament when her Japanese host family serves horse for dinner because she said she liked horses. Other stories, including one called "Assassin," would be suitable only for older students.

This book is well-organized and thought-provoking. Each reading is accompanied by just one illustration, so students must do most of the visualizing themselves. Some of the writing assignments will be challenging for newcomers or emerging ELs, but there is plenty to talk and think about in this open-ended book. 

Editor's note: See [pg. 51](#) of this issue for a review of What Would You Do?, another interesting text by this same author.

What Would You Do?

81 Philosophical Dilemmas for Discussion and Expansion

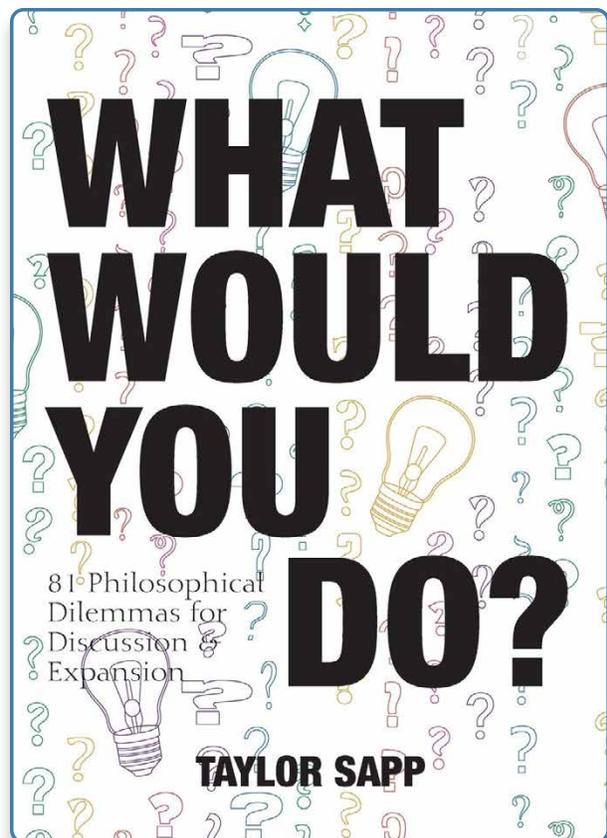
by Taylor Sapp, Branford, CT: Alphabet Publishing, 2019.

Reviewed by Kathy Lobo

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WHAT *Would You Do?* is a very engaging ESL text that centers on 81 situations or dilemmas, some for younger learners, some for teenagers and young adults, and some for adults. Each unit is two pages long, featuring a picture or visual, a brief description of a hypothetical situation, and a list of choices for what the reader would do in that situation — and why. Topics include everyday problems such as a friend who is always late, intriguing hypotheticals (*If you could download a skill to your brain, what would it be?*), ethical issues (*Is it okay to steal if you need food for your family?*), fantasy (*What if a wizard chose you as an apprentice?*), and topical social issues (*Should computers and robots replace humans in the workplace?*). There are follow-up questions about how the students' choices might change if some elements of the situation were different.

I discovered this book at the NNETESOL conference in Lewiston, Maine, in early November. Upon my return from Maine, I tried out the text with an 8th-grade Chinese student that I tutor, and I plan to use it with my 6th-8th graders as a source of discussion prompts that can lead into journal writing. Initially, I will



What Would You Do?

focus on the language of justification, to explain and defend one's reasoning. It will be easy to pair some of the dilemmas with graphic organizers like T-Charts (for lists of *pros* and *cons*) and Venn Diagrams (for the "How would it change the situation if. . ." part of each dilemma).

Many of the dilemmas are commonplace, or have happened to students in my class. For example, the first dilemma I used with my tutee was a situation from the "Younger Learners" section entitled "Lost

"Schools should teach how to fix broken relationships and survive failure."

Wallet" which asks, "What would you do if you found a wallet while walking down the street?" Inside the wallet is an ID card and a large sum of money. Would you take the wallet to the police station, try to contact the owner, keep the wallet, or do something else? What would you do if the wallet had less than \$10 in it? What if there were no ID? What if there were a lot of family photos in the wallet? What if there were no ID but only a phone number and money? The follow-up questions for this scenario include "Share a time this happened to you or to someone you know," "What if you were in a country other than the United States?," "What if you were in a rich (or poor) neighborhood when you found the wallet?" There are research options, as well, directing the reader to studies about lost-wallet situations from around the world. Students could make predictions and then do some research to learn the facts. My tutee and I had a rich discussion about this topic, which was engaging for both of us.

Alphabet Press, located in Branford, CT, will come to our MATSOL conference in May. I want to have a better look at other materials they publish, like a series of readers' theater plays and another book by Taylor Sapp, *Stories Without End*, which is reviewed on [pg. 48](#) of this issue. 

How to Raise a Boy

by Michael C. Reichert. New York, NY: TarcherPerigee/Random House, 2019. 326 pages. ISBN 978-0-14-313320-9.

Reviewed by Eileen Feldman

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SCHOOL shootings, domestic violence, self-harm. What are the reasons? What can be done?

In this book, clinical practitioner and University of Pennsylvania professor Michael Reichert tries to answer these questions by examining the needs of boys today. Young men seem to be suffering from a malaise that arises from our stereotypes about gender identity and manhood along with the perceived feminization of society. This is a global phenomenon.

The reading is dense, with references to large numbers of research studies (35 pages of notes), conflicting theories of masculinity, and Reichert's personal experience in private boys' schools and juvenile detention facilities, and with his own son and grandson. Chapter titles are "Confined by Boyhood," "Freeing Boys," "Boys and Their Hearts," "Boys' Learning and Schooling," "Brotherhood and Boys' Clubs," "Love, Sex, and Affection," "Boys and Their Bodies — Sport and Health," "Violence, Bullying, and Vulnerability," "Boys' Toys in a Digital Age," and "The Twenty-first Century and Beyond." Chapters can be read independently or in sequence. The final chapter names international organizations that are addressing this issue successfully: WHO, Promundo, World Bank, UNICEF, UK's Healthy Mind experiment, and Australia's "Our Toughest Challenge" and "A Fathers Campaign." Local researchers who are cited in the text include William Pollack, Steven Pinker, Susan Linn, Howard Gardner, and Katie Davis, from Harvard; Sherry Turkle and David Autor, from MIT; Amy Banks, from Wellesley; Amy Schalet, from UMass Amherst; Andy Hargreaves, from Boston College; Ann

Dr. Reichert explains how stereotypes about boys needing to be stoic and "manly" can cause them to shut down, leading to anger, isolation, and disrespectful or even destructive behaviors.

Arnelt Ferguson, from Smith College; Diane Levin, from Wheelock College; and Thomas Newkirk, from the University of New Hampshire Durham and the Crimes against Children Center.

Dr. Reichert explains how stereotypes about boys needing to be stoic and “manly” can cause them to shut down, leading to anger, isolation, and disrespectful or even destructive behaviors. Educators and coaches, as well as parents, must take up the mantle for positive growth throughout the school years.

To help boys develop socially and emotionally, he recommends

- Listening and observing, without judgment, so that boys know they’re being heard,
- Helping boys develop strong connections with teachers, coaches, and other role models,
- Encouraging them to talk about their feelings about the opposite sex and stressing the importance of respecting women,
- Letting them know that they don’t have to “be a man” or “suck it up,” when they are experiencing physical or emotional pain.

In schools, Reichert runs lunchtime peer counseling sessions to develop emotional literacy by encouraging boys to listen and talk about their vulnerabilities, and to say what they appreciate in other students. Schools should teach how to fix broken relationships and survive failure, he says. This advice has been given before, but it is updated and expanded in this book. The takeaway is a sensitivity we must consciously and purposefully maintain. 

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