



## ON THE COVER

Valentine's word games with the Lowell Coalition for a Better Acre teen program

matsol



# Currents

MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Equity And Excellence For English Learners

Vol. 45, No.1 Spring/Summer 2022

## Contents

---

### MATSOL News

- 4 President's Message
- 7 MATSOL's Annual Spring Conference 2022

### Reports

- 13 Reports from MATSOL's Special Interest Groups

### Articles

- 20 Racialized Religion: Implications for Schools  
**NASIBA NOROVA**
- 25 Critical Rethinking and Continual Retelling of True Justice in SEI  
**FLORIS WILMA ORTIZ-MARRERO AND ANDREW W. HABANA HAFNER**
- 32 Weekly Dictation in the ESL 1 Classroom as an Essential and Culturally Sustaining Spelling Practice  
**JENNIFER DINES**
- 40 The Power of a Teacher Learning Community to Improve Formative Assessment in Teaching Adult ESL  
**MARSHA PARINUSSA FLYNN**
- 48 Reflecting on Collaboration: Instructional Coaching and the WIDA ELD Standards Framework  
**MOLLY ROSS AND ANGELA POMAROLE**
- 56 Poetry Writing with Teens at the Lowell Coalition for a Better Acre  
**JOHANNA TIGERT**

### Reviews

- 58 A New English Grammar – American Edition  
by Andrew Rossiter  
**REVIEWED BY GOLNAR FOTOUHI**

# President's Message

**BEGIN THIS MESSAGE** by acknowledging the leadership and work of Priya Tahiliani who served as our MATSOL President for the last two years. Priya wishes to thank the MATSOL community for all your support, effort, and ideas during her presidency. As the incoming President and a Board Member under Priya's presidency, I am so grateful for Priya and her leadership. Priya, thank you so much for all you have done for the MATSOL community.

Speaking of community, this year marks the 50th anniversary year of the organization and as I write this, I ask us all to reflect a bit. This July marked nearly two and a half centuries after the United States officially became its own country. In June, the LGBTQIA+ community celebrated Pride month for the 23rd time - President Clinton first officially declared June as Pride Month in 1999. In May, the Asian American and Pacific Islander community celebrated AAPI heritage month - Congress officially designated May as AAPI month in 1992. In March, we celebrated women's month, whose origins began in 1991; and in February we honored Black History, which was first celebrated as a week in 1926 and then expanded to a month celebration in 1976. All this while living in our third year of a global pandemic.



Priya Tahiliani & Chris Montecillo Leider

The complicated history (and present) of our country has so often been glossed over in school - reduced to heroic narratives of our founding fathers and proud stories of industrial advancements with much of the rich BIPOC and (im)migrant history acknowledged shallowly within each respective month. Today, many people are actively fighting to keep it that way through movements opposing critical race theory. The stories of forced migration under slavery and the Asian immigrant population that paved this country's way as a technologically and financially privileged country have long been absent in education. As an adult, I think of what Maya Angelou said: *"Do the best you can until you know better,*

*and when you know better, do better".*

This past year MATSOL partnered with the Empowering Success Corps of New England (ESC) to develop a new strategic plan. Part of this included working with Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) experts to ensure that equity and justice was infused throughout all aspects of our work. Our last strategic plan was written in 2014 and updated in 2017. Since then, long-standing issues of racial injustice have come even more to the forefront. We, as individual educators and advocates and as a collective community need to really ask ourselves, *What does this mean*

*for us as educators and advocates of multilingual learners, especially when many of our students come from immigrant families and communities of color? It means we need to bring the work of social justice into our classrooms in new and different ways. It means recognizing the legacy of colonialism, colorism, racism, and linguisticism in English as a Second Language (ESL) education specifically and within education broadly. It means acknowledging that working in the field of TESOL, ESL, and bilingual education does not inherently make us advocates for social justice. In fact, the history of English language instruction is rooted in the goal of erasing Indigenous and (im)migrant languages and cultures.*

*How are we acknowledging this ugly past (and present) in the way we approach new program and curriculum development? As a field, especially in recent history, language education has been pushing itself and others to create more culturally and linguistically sustainable classrooms, yet Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) remains the primary program for classified English Learners (ELs) in Massachusetts and assessment practices across the nation are nearly exclusively done in the English language. How do we ensure our students' feel their culture and language are valuable and not things they must discard as they learn the English language in American schools? While federal, state, and local governments have stated again and again that classified ELs should have equitable access to school, we know that classified and reclassified ELs are still*

**This past year MATSOL partnered with the Empowering Success Corps of New England to develop a new strategic plan. Part of this included working with Diversity Equity and Inclusion experts to ensure that equity and justice was infused throughout all aspects of our work.**

so often tracked out of advanced academic courses and/or not supported to be college or career ready due to their too often historic labeling as “remedial students”. *What do we need to do to ensure equitable access to learning and future employment opportunities?* Being an educator and advocate for multilingual learners is not just about inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual curriculum and instruction in our classrooms – keep that up though! But it’s also about working toward larger systematic change for racial and linguistic justice. **Now that you know better, what will you do better?**

**Being an educator and advocate for multilingual learners is not just about inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual curriculum and instruction in our classrooms – keep that up though! But it’s also about working toward larger systematic change for racial and linguistic justice.**

This issue reflects many of these threads, as well. Be sure to read the [report of the MATSOL Conference](#), which had many sessions focusing on culturally sustaining, anti-racist teaching and advocacy. You can also learn about the implications for schools of Ramadan and other Muslim traditions in an article titled [Racialized Religion](#) and consider what [True Justice](#) is for multilingual students. Be sure to check out the articles on important practices, including [dictated spelling](#) as culturally responsive practice, [Teacher Learning Communities](#) for adult ESL teachers, and [collaboration between instructional coaches](#) using the WIDA 2020 Standards. You can also read [student poetry](#) and get a tip for [a great grammar book](#) in this issue.

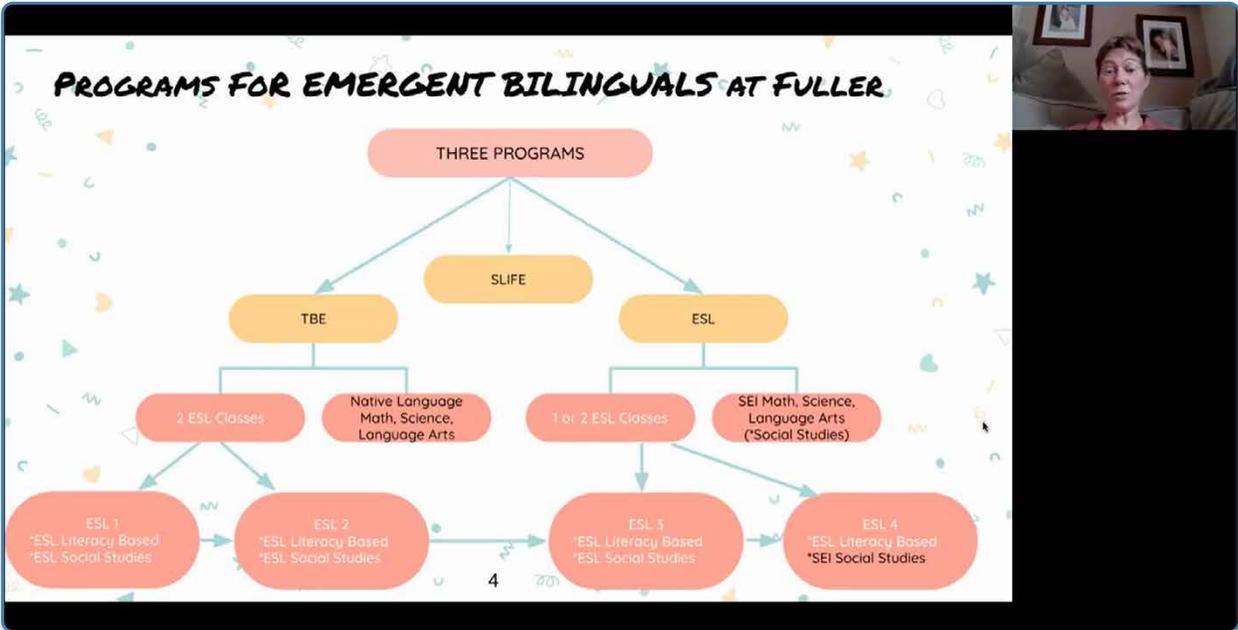
Yours in education,  
**Chris Montecillo Leider**  
[cmleider@matsol.org](mailto:cmleider@matsol.org)

# MATSOL's Annual Spring Conference 2022

Report by Johanna Tigert

**THE MATSOL CONFERENCE** met virtually from May 24-27, 2022, with great interest from our community. A total of 759 attendees watched almost 4,000 hours of programming. If you missed it, the archive of conference sessions and materials will be up until November 27, 2022. You can purchase access to the archive by visiting the [MATSOL conference website](#). Previously registered attendees have automatic access to the archive until September 30. Below are some highlights as well as three screen captures from various sessions.

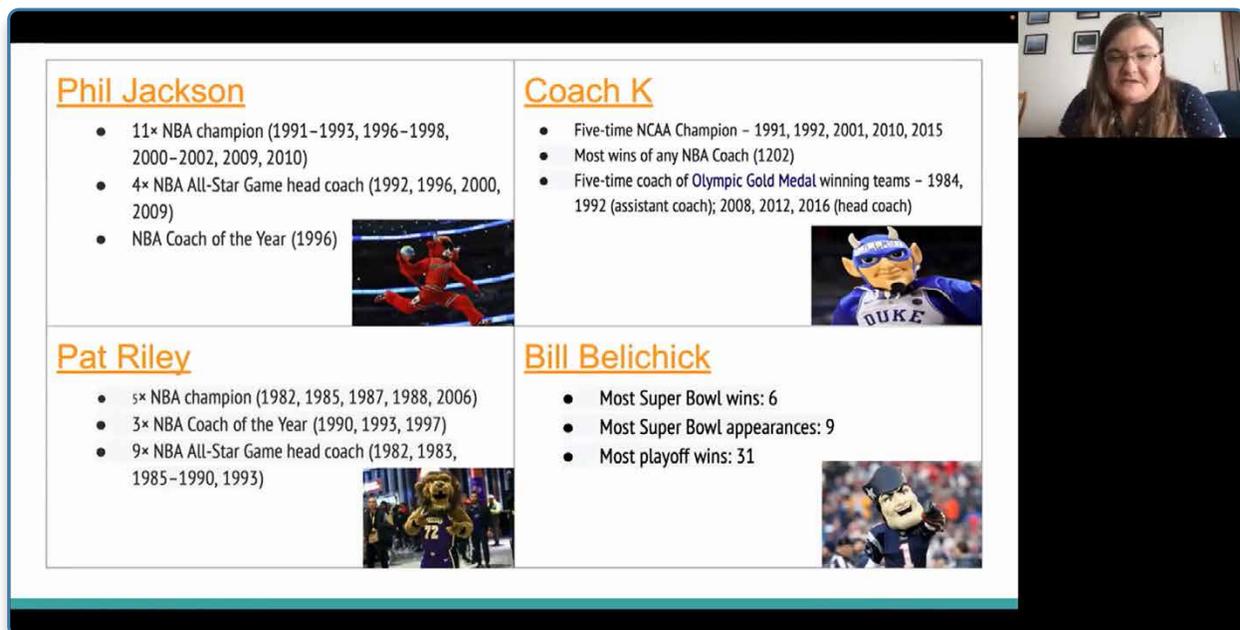
The lineup of keynote and featured speakers was impressive: Trish Morita-Mullaney from Purdue University delivered Tuesday's opening keynote, Allison Balter from DESE's Office of Language Acquisition spoke on Wednesday, and Dr. Claudia Rinaldi from Lasell University delivered her remarks on Thursday.



Less Stressful Language Objectives - Megan Quinlan

Dr. Morita-Mullaney's talk was titled *Advocating for multilingual learners: Educators at the nexus of creativity and resistance*. Dr. Morita-Mullaney

noted that teachers of bilingual students, principals, and district leaders often experience a clash of coherence and congruence when different stakeholders' goals and visions for the education of bilingual students do not meet. Communication can be misinterpreted because of each person's lens: for example, a teacher might be thinking about the need to translanguage while a building administrator is concerned about curriculum standards. Dr. Morita-Mullaney recommended stakeholders examine their own and others' discourses, roles, and identities. She urged educators to think about how clashes can be turned into levers for productive change, and how diverse roles and identities can be brought together to make better teacher-leaders. Importantly, she emphasized that ascending to a leadership role does not require shedding one's teacher identity; on the contrary, teacher and other identities can and should inform educators' work in an intersectional manner. Dr. Morita-Mullaney also urged educators to reflect on how different identities are ascribed and negotiated, and how their intersections can be used to strive for a (de)leadership of creativity, resistance, and advocacy.



<p><b>Phil Jackson</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11× NBA champion (1991–1993, 1996–1998, 2000–2002, 2009, 2010)</li> <li>• 4× NBA All-Star Game head coach (1992, 1996, 2000, 2009)</li> <li>• NBA Coach of the Year (1996)</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Coach K</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-time NCAA Champion – 1991, 1992, 2001, 2010, 2015</li> <li>• Most wins of any NBA Coach (1202)</li> <li>• Five-time coach of Olympic Gold Medal winning teams – 1984, 1992 (assistant coach); 2008, 2012, 2016 (head coach)</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Pat Riley</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5× NBA champion (1982, 1985, 1987, 1988, 2006)</li> <li>• 3× NBA Coach of the Year (1990, 1993, 1997)</li> <li>• 9× NBA All-Star Game head coach (1982, 1983, 1985–1990, 1993)</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Bill Belichick</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Super Bowl wins: 6</li> <li>• Most Super Bowl appearances: 9</li> <li>• Most playoff wins: 31</li> </ul> 

Collaborative Learning Approaches to Teaching and Evaluating Speaking – Natalia Radziejewska

Allison Balter's *State of the state: Updates from the Office of Language Acquisition* garnered great interest. Balter shared that while overall student enrollment was down this past year, the number of ELs has continued to grow, now comprising 11% of the student population. These include over 3,000 recent newcomers mainly from Brazil. Sixty percent of ELs are served by just 15 districts,

top districts being Boston, Worcester, Lynn, Lawrence, and Brockton. However, ELs are increasingly present everywhere: the number of districts with 100+ ELs has doubled from 60 to 112. Ninety percent of ELs are served in Sheltered English Instruction programs. Challenges ELs face include behavioral health, absenteeism, opportunity gaps and lack of community resources, which were exacerbated due to COVID-19. These are reflected in fewer students making progress on the ACCESS test, reaching proficiency on MCAS, completing advanced coursework, and graduating. In addition, out of 1,296 Seals of Biliteracy awarded last year, only 31 went to current ELs.

DESE's strategic planning includes foci on culturally responsive instruction, multi-tiered supports, and modeling a shared responsibility for ELs across DESE and the state. The office is also launching a multiyear SLIFE research project and SLIFE numeracy and literacy screeners, and is focusing on heritage languages as a lever for Seal of Biliteracy implementation.

Dr. Rinaldi's keynote was titled *Critical updates in teaching and advocating for dually identified students*. She cited two recent documents that should drive practice for ELs with disabilities. The first is the SCOTUS case *Endrew v. Douglas Country School District*, which introduced a new standard for IEPs called Educational Benefit. This means an IEP must be reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in light of their circumstances. These circumstances include language, as detailed in a policy letter to WIDA's Timothy Boals from the U.S. DOE Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The letter stated, "in the case of a child with limited English proficiency [we must] consider the language needs of the child as those needs relate to the child's IEP (34 C.F.R. § 300.324 as cited in OSEP, 2021)," and "English learners with disabilities, including English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities, must receive English language development instruction" (OSEP, 2021). Dr. Rinaldi shared some resources to help educators consider the above in their decision making, including [New OSEP Fast Facts: Students With Disabilities Who Are](#)

**The SCOTUS case *Endrew v. Douglas Country School District* introduced a new standard for IEPs called Educational Benefit. This means an IEP must be reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in light of their circumstances. These circumstances include language.**

**The presenters shared four equity strategies: 1) Amplify the talent, spirit, and personal power of MLs, 2) Recalibrate the curriculum to accelerate learning for MLs, 3) Teach and assess to build student autonomy, agency, and resilience, and 4) Harness the power of connections and relationships.**

English Learners and Rinaldi's own article [Helping English Language Learners Succeed with a Multi-tiered System of Support](#). She also made the recommendation that districts and institutions of higher education form joint study groups to examine current research and documents, such as briefs from the [OSEP Model Demonstration Program](#).

The conference sessions featured a variety of speakers, from nationally recognized names to local experts. I was able to catch a presentation by Maria Dove, Andrea Honigsfeld, Audrey Cohan, and Carrie McDermott Goldman from Molloy University, who shared *Essential equity*

*strategies for teaching multilingual learners*. The presenters warned against the dangers of deficit thinking, which may lead to multilingual learners' tracking into long-term remediation and may negatively impact MLs' self-concept and social-emotional well-being. Then, they shared four equity strategies: 1) Amplify the talent, spirit, and personal power of MLs, 2) Recalibrate the curriculum to accelerate learning for MLs, 3) Teach and assess to build student autonomy, agency, and resilience, and 4) Harness the power of connections and relationships. They also urged educators to focus on the prefix "multi" to teach in ways that are multilingual, multisensory, multimodal, and multicultural; and that offer multiple grouping strategies and entry points. Using tools such as MentiMeter and AnswerGarden, the presenters made this session interactive and reflective for the attendees.

The Teacher Education SIG presented a panel discussion titled *Voices from the field: How can we best support a new generation of teachers?* The panel's invited speakers included early career teachers Evan Hughes (Somerville High School), Mai Mazan (James W. Hennigan School), and Joey Kramer (Somerville High School); as well as future Education majors Jessica Lemus Montiel and Kaylin Seward from Everett High School (EHS). Jessica and Kaylin described the EHS Education Pathway, where they have had yearly Education coursework

and a senior-year paid internship in a middle-school classroom. Jessica shared a rewarding experience where she was able to explain a math concept to students in Spanish, and how it made her consider becoming an ESL teacher. Mai, who is licensed in both elementary education and ESL, emphasized how choosing to work a school where a third of the staff was focused on SEI or ESL had supported her professional growth. Evan spoke of the lack of prestige in EL education and especially in his field, SEI math. He shared that while decisions are not always made with the EL population in mind, it is important to try to not get frustrated by it. Joey, who completed most of his practicum virtually, spoke of the myriad of things that are part of a teacher's job that he was not able to experience during his preparation; luckily, his school has many senior teachers who have helped him catch up. The three teachers shared advice, including setting limits on how much time you spend on planning lessons and making sure you focus on students first. To better support aspiring and new teachers, Kaylin hoped that teacher preparation would focus on creating strong teacher-student relationships, Mai spoke of the importance of school-based mentoring, and Evan emphasized that schools should offer teachers common planning time.

## Who are New Bedford High School SLIFE students?

<p><b>The Majority.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come from Quiche, Guatemala.</li> <li>• Speak K'iche as home language.</li> <li>• Speak Spanish as second language.</li> <li>• Have completed sixth grade.</li> <li>• Are unaccompanied minors.</li> <li>• Are undocumented (and have lawyers).</li> <li>• Are between ages 16-20.</li> <li>• Have a gap of two or more years in their education.</li> <li>• Tend to be young men.</li> <li>• Experienced trauma.</li> <li>• Work at night and are frequently absent.</li> <li>• Do not have transcripts.</li> <li>• Prefer rote learning.</li> <li>• Live with extended family members</li> </ul>	<p><b>Some or few.....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have never attended school.</li> <li>• Are non-literate.</li> <li>• Are from Cape Verde, Honduras, and El Salvador.</li> <li>• Only speak a dialect (K'iche, CV Creole).</li> <li>• Are retained in the program for year 2 SLIFE depending on academic performance and attendance.</li> </ul>
---	---



ALL BEGIN AS FRESHMEN

Differentiating Content Between the SLIFE and Newcomer Student - Alexandra Castro

During a session titled *Using linguagrams as a teacher education tool*, Dr. Jennifer Altavilla from Boston University shared how linguagrams can be used to help teachers interrogate their linguistic identities. Linguagrams are visualizations

of perceived language proficiency across the four domains of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), and look like two 4-by-10 grids. Each grid is titled with a language the teacher knows, such as English and Arabic. Each of the four rows has ten boxes, representing ten-percent increments of perceived proficiency in a given domain. By coloring in one to ten boxes per domain in each language they know, teachers can visualize and reflect on their linguistic identities. For monolingual teachers, opening the activity up to varieties of English, such as “in-person English” versus “digital English,” is a way to help engage with the tool. Participants tried out the tool and shared their impressions. The session concluded with a discussion of language beliefs and assumptions.

**Linguagrams are visualizations of perceived language proficiency across the four domains of language, and look like two 4-by-10 grids. By coloring in one to ten boxes per domain in each language they know, teachers can visualize and reflect on their linguistic identities.**

Networking is another strong feature of the MATSOL Conference. I stopped by the Educators of Color SIG and Allies networking lunch on Thursday. SIG leaders Lonamae Shand and Yuiko Shimazu shared that this fairly new SIG already has 176 members. Using a Padlet and breakout rooms on Whova, participants shared challenges, ideas, and goals for BIPOC educators and for the SIG. I also visited the newly reinstated, small but active Cape & Islands Member Group, led by Alyssa McClorey and Courtney Schneeweiss. They shared that the SIG had organized three sessions this past year, focusing on co-teaching, reading strategies, and the writing strategy [Writing with Colors](#).

Next year’s MATSOL Conference will hopefully be held in person. Be on the lookout for a call for presenters later this year.

# Reports from MATSOL's Special Interest Groups

MATSOL offers a variety of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) which, except for the Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council, are open to all members free of charge. For more information on the SIGs and to sign up, please visit the [SIGs website](#).

- Advocacy
- Cape Cod and Islands Regional Group
- Community College ESL Faculty
- Early Career Educators
- Educators of Color
- ESL Unit Developers
- Family-School Partnerships
- Instructional Coaches
- Low Incidence Programs
- Private Language Schools
- Teacher Educators

Here are reports on recent and upcoming SIG activities.

## **MELLC**

The MA English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC) is a group for Directors and Coordinators of English Language Education Programs in Massachusetts. The goal of the group is to create a professional community to support and guide EL educators in the administration of ELE programs at the district level through collaboration and advocacy. Our meetings feature presentations by guest speakers, DESE staff, and MELLC members, and always include time for networking, collaboration, and discussion between MELLC members.

This spring, the March meeting focused on dually-identified students (EL/SWD).

The meeting started with a presentation by Claudia Rinaldi, Ph.D., Professor & Chair of the Education Program at Lasell University. Dr. Rinaldi reviewed the status of Bilingual English Learners in Massachusetts and recent updates in federal Special Education Case law. She then provided an overview of two important policy updates from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) -- *Endrew v. Douglas Country School District* and the Policy Letter to Timothy Boals at WIDA -- and implications for instruction of and advocacy for dually-identified students. In the second part of the meeting, we received an update from OLA's new staff member Samantha Kodak, Language Acquisition Specialist, who gave an update of current state data and initiatives related to EL students with disabilities.

At the May meeting, we discussed EL Student Success Plans. The meeting began with a presentation by Sibel Hughes, Assistant Director of the DESE Office of Language Acquisition, who reviewed the benchmark requirement of the LOOK Act of 2017 and how the requirement can be used to focus on individual English learner (EL) success. Next, a panel of MELLC members from a low-, mid-, and high- incidence district shared the progress their districts have made implementing EL Success Plans. It was acknowledged that implementation is a work in progress in most districts, and the panel shared their progress so far. They discussed the type of resources that are needed to support EL Success Plans, approaches for promoting collaboration between staff in different areas, and ways that EL Success Plans can be integrated into other existing systems within the district. The group then had an opportunity to share their perspectives in breakout rooms by incidence level.

The final meeting of the year in June took place immediately after the 2022 MATSOL Annual Conference. Members had an opportunity to debrief the conference and discuss what they want to start, stop, continue and change next year.

All meetings were held online this year, but we are planning to hold two hybrid meetings next year (with the option for in-person or online attendance) and three meetings

**At the May meeting, we discussed EL Student Success Plans. The meeting began with a presentation by Sibel Hughes, who reviewed the benchmark requirement of the LOOK Act of 2017 and how the requirement can be used to focus on individual English learner success.**

online.

Steering Committee: **Laurie Hartwick, Kerri Lamprey, Wendy Anderson**

## **ADVOCACY**

**Advocate** **Defend** **Vocalize** **Opportunities** **Causes** **Action** **Championing** **YELL!**

Are you tired of complaining about inequities inside your head? This SIG provides the opportunity and a safe space to yell on a platform where you can be heard with a team of like-minded defenders ready to fight for the causes that others shy away from. Join us for a year full of action as we vocalize our concerns and strive to find solutions to help our MLs and their families. Our first call to action is to propose a position statement on concerns about ACCESS testing that MATSOL will champion. Help us to create a more equitable education for our MLs and to advocate for policies and practices on the local, state, and federal levels. Join us as we gain momentum and gather support from within MATSOL and also develop collaborative relationships with other organizations to achieve shared goals. We look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

If you are interested in helping with the drafting of a Position Statement on ACCESS testing, please email us at: [peterсонk@springfieldpublicschools.com](mailto:peterсонk@springfieldpublicschools.com) and [mowersk@nausetschools.org](mailto:mowersk@nausetschools.org)

Steering committee: **Kelly Mowers, Katie Peterson**

## **CAPE AND ISLANDS SIG**

The MATSOL Cape and Islands SIG completed its first year after being re-established as a collaborative group aimed to connect EL educators and administrators throughout the Cape and Islands, and share resources that address our specific needs and student population. We held two online meetings in 2022, a highlight being several guests who shared resources and experiences about co-planning and curriculum development at our February 17th meeting. One of the presenters, Courtney Schneeweiss, EL teacher in Mashpee, also joined our steering committee! We hosted a lunch Zoom session at the MATSOL conference, and finally held an in-person get together in Hyannis in July. We are hoping to build the group's capacity next school year and focus more on sharing curriculum, and talking about different EL program models in 2022-2023.

For more information, visit our [web page](#) at or send us an email,

[amccloreytimoh@sturgischarterschool.org](mailto:amccloreytimoh@sturgischarterschool.org) or [cschneeweiss@mpspk12.org](mailto:cschneeweiss@mpspk12.org).

Steering Committee: **Alyssa McClorey Timoh, Courtney Schneeweiss**

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL FACULTY

The Community College ESL SIG has sponsored four meetings this academic year for our colleagues in the 15 community colleges in Massachusetts. We very much appreciate the support from Elena Quiros-Livanis from the Department of Higher Education in our advocacy for graduation credit and transfer credit for our credit-bearing ESL courses. Elizabeth Paz, Special Program Coordinator of ESL at North Shore Community College, spoke to us about how her fulltime position has significantly increased enrollment at her college. The Steering Committee meets regularly to plan these state-wide meetings. We are also focused on the impact of remote instruction on our multilingual students. Understanding the scope of the issue will support our efforts to deliver better services to these students. It is encouraging that a number of community colleges have adopted the Seal of Biliteracy, which grants college credit for proficiency in English as well as for one or more additional languages. Our Steering Committee traditionally holds a workshop at the MATSOL Annual Conference. We are active in TESOL, and members have done presentations at the TESOL Annual Conference. This Spring we have been recruiting new members to our committee. We are pleased to be welcoming new colleagues who will join us for the following academic year. For more information about the Community College SIG, please visit our MATSOL Website or write to Juanita Brunelle at [jbrunelle@matsol.org](mailto:jbrunelle@matsol.org).

Steering Committee: **Teresa Cheung, Eileen Kelley, Anne Shull, Juanita Brunelle**

### EDUCATORS OF COLOR SIG

The Educators of Color SIG continues to grow in numbers with a shift from 145 members last year to an impressive 173 in mid-May. Throughout the year, the steering committee continued to invite other members to co-facilitate, and one of our sessions was co-facilitated by another SIG member. The goal is to continue to provide opportunities for SIG members to share in leadership roles at our meetings. The SIG had their fourth session at MATSOL conference this past May. After a year of bimonthly meetings, the group culminated in a lunch and networking session joined by allies. There was an impressive turnout, and the discussions were very rich. At this session, facilitators shared the history, mission, and goals of the SIG with participants. We engaged in some meaningful

discussions regarding successes and challenges around DEI work in the various places of work. We also discussed ways in which allies can support BIPOC and DEI efforts in the workplace. The EOC SIG continues to seek additional members to join.

Steering committee: **Yuiko Shimazu, Lonamae Shand**

### **ESL UNIT DEVELOPERS**

In the words of Yogi Berra, “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” The ESL Unit Developers’ SIG believes in planning and writing cohesive units that reach designated audiences and end points, and which include the WIDA ELD standards and MA DESE expectations. This spring we met monthly with unit developers (of all experience levels) from around the state. If you have yet to attend one of our virtual Unit Developers SIG meetings, we hope you will join our collaborative network; you’ll be impressed by how much happens in the span of a single, well-organized hour! In January, we worked collaboratively on a WIDA ACCESS Prep unit; in February, we welcomed guest speaker Kelly-Ann Cooney; in March and April, we offered a series of “Choose Your Own” Unit Writing Pathways, led by committee members, on topics such as creating Reach units, Unit review and feedback, ACCESS prep, and a how-to on getting started. In May, we hosted a Virtual Open House at the annual MATSOL Conference. SIG committee members also created an On-Demand video presentation, which can be accessed through September on the MATSOL Conference Whova site. Check out our resources on the MATSOL website as well, in the ESL Unit Developers SIG Resource Forum. Questions? Contact Jess Pulzetti Nguy at [jnguy@arlington.k12.ma.us](mailto:jnguy@arlington.k12.ma.us), or Liana Parsons at [lparsons@nsboro.k12.ma.us](mailto:lparsons@nsboro.k12.ma.us).

Steering committee: **Jessica Nguy, Boni-esther Enquist, Casey Doherty, Kerry DeJesus, Sarah Trotsky, Kelly-Ann Cooney, Liana Parsons**

### **THE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP (FSP) SIG**

The Family-School Partnership SIG welcomes educators who want to explore ways to strengthen partnerships with families. In a typical year, we come

**We engaged in some meaningful discussions regarding successes and challenges around DEI work in the various places of work. We also discussed ways in which allies can support BIPOC and DEI efforts in the workplace. The SIG continues to seek additional members to join.**

together 3-4 times in a virtual setting. This year, our initial meetings centered around student success. We came together in October trying to gain a better understanding of how educators were determining success. We asked educators how families are brought into the conversation. What are the benchmarks that they co-construct with families and how do they report the improvements to the families so that they understand? In December, we invited staff members from the Waltham and Milford Public Schools to share how they are partnering with families post-Covid. We held our third meeting in February. We continued our post-Covid understanding of school and family partnerships by understanding how the Somerville Public Schools work with families. Finally, we concluded our year by inviting professors from Lasell College, Boston University and Brandeis to share how they are preparing undergraduate students for their critical work in partnering with families for the education of their children. For information about meeting times and how to join the Family-School Partnership SIG, please go to our MATSOL [webpage](#).

Steering committee: **Mary Jo Rendon, Theresa Laquerre, Craig Consigli**

### INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

The Instructional Coaches SIG is a forum for PreK-12 instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and coordinators. The goal of the Instructional Coaches SIG is to facilitate collaboration of instructional coaches across Massachusetts in order to improve coaching systems and strategies that support General Education and ESL teachers in meeting the needs of Multilingual Learners. Each month the SIG's discussion focused on a coaching issue using The Problem of Practice Protocol. This protocol helped coaches think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma while giving possible suggestions. After receiving such positive feedback from the group, the steering committee decided to share this extremely helpful protocol at the MATSOL Conference. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and networking in the Fall. For more information and notifications of meetings, please visit our MATSOL website.

Steering committee: **Molly Ross, Moira Greenon, Mary Lu Kennedy, Ivone Spencer**

### LOW INCIDENCE PROGRAMS

The Low Incidence SIG was on hiatus this past year, but they are aiming to come back with regular meetings in SY22-23! Be on the lookout for announcements from this SIG with its new Steering Committee in the fall!

## TEACHER EDUCATION SIG

The Teacher Education SIG gives our members an opportunity to share critical teacher practices and collaborate on research and advocacy projects relating to the preparation of teachers of multilingual learners. This year we launched a new initiative centered on reimagining RETELL to be more contemporary, critical, and timely to the needs of multilingual learners. We put together a [list of resources](#) to help RETELL instructors revise their course. We also organized two panels at the MATSOL Conference: *Voices from the Field: How can we best support a new generation of teachers?* and *Reimagining RETELL: What should equitable teacher education for English learners look like?* The SIG aims to provide a space for educators to share their perspectives and experiences. Our plans for 2022-2023 include the continuation of intentional collaboration and sharing of instructional strategies and content for our ESL, SEI, and Bilingual Education teacher education courses. We also plan to continue to work on group writing projects and advocacy efforts centered around teacher preparation. For the past few years, the steering committee has been led by Johanna Tigert and Chris Montecillo Leider. Beginning in 2022-2023 we are excited to have Melanie González and Rachel Kramer Theodorou take on SIG leadership! The SIG meets online throughout the academic year, on the third Thursday of each month. Reminders and agenda are sent out via the SIG e-list. All MATSOL members are welcome, but attendees must be registered members to access the meeting link.

**This year we launched a new initiative centered on reimagining RETELL to be more contemporary, critical, and timely to the needs of multilingual learners. We put together a list of resources to help RETELL instructors revise their course. We also organized two panels at the MATSOL Conference.**

Steering committee: **Christine Montecillo Leider, Johanna Tigert, Rachel Kramer Theodorou, Melanie González**

# Racialized Religion: Implications for Schools

**Nasiba Norova**

[nasiba.norova001@umb.edu](mailto:nasiba.norova001@umb.edu)



**ISLAM, WITH 3.45 MILLION FOLLOWERS**, is the second largest religion in the world, and the third largest in the United States (Beysheer, 2021). American Muslims, both native-born and foreign-born, are ethnically, culturally and racially diverse, with 41% identifying as White, 28% as Asian, 20% as Black, and 8% as Hispanic (CAIR, 2020). Muslims of color trace their origin to North Africa, the Middle East, and Central and Southern Asia.

The racialization of Islam is an ideological process that attaches racial meaning to Muslim practices and communities (Omi & Winant, 2015), so that religion becomes a proxy for race (Joshi, 2006). Although Muslims are not a race, they are identified and labeled by skin color and cultural-religious symbols, such as beard, *abaya*, *hijab*, and *paranja* (Considine, 2017). These religious “markers” essentialize Muslim people and homogenize them as a monolithic group.

The current double standard towards Ukrainian and Middle Eastern refugees at the border of European countries is an acute example. The open-armed welcome for Ukrainian refugees stands in sharp contrast to the treatment of Muslim Iraqi, Syrian, and Afghani refugees of color who experience hostility and violence at the same borders (Wamsley, 2022). In the U.S., Muslims of color are regarded as a threat — as terrorists, spies and forever foreigners (Gotanda, 2011; Taras, 2013). They are viewed as an out-group and subjected to verbal and physical violence, invisibility, distortion, isolation, and oppression (Joshi, 2006).

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is home to over 7,000 Muslim families (Pew Research, n.d.), and, in the wake of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, our state is now home to nearly 1500 Afghan resettled refugees (The Associated Press, 2022). These newcomers, along with other refugees who fled their countries of origin due to wars, conflicts, and/or natural disasters have experienced traumatic and violent events.

Muslim students have been facing obstacles since 9/11 and this situation was exacerbated by Trump's anti-Muslim policies, including the Muslim travel ban. A pre-pandemic K-12 school-climate survey of Massachusetts Muslim youth (CAIR Massachusetts, 2021) reported disheartening incidents of prejudice against Islam and Muslim youth in the form of bullying and discrimination. The report found that 61% of the surveyed Muslim students had been verbally insulted or abused just for being Muslim. Over half the students reported having experienced racism in their schools. Approximately 1 in 6 female respondents reported having had their hijab tugged or offensively touched. A third of the students were afraid to share their Muslim identity.

Muslim students, like all other ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, should be educated in schools where they feel a sense of belonging, comfort and where they will be able to stay true to their identities. In order to eliminate bias and discrimination against Muslim students, K-12 schools must work to increase awareness and knowledge about Islam, its contributions to world civilization, and its commonalities with other monotheistic religions. An awareness of the five core pillars of Islam — profession of Faith (Shahada), prayer (Salat), alms (Zakat), fasting (Sawm) and pilgrimage (Hajj) — would be a good place to start. Here, I focus mainly on providing information about Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, during which healthy adults and adolescents who have passed the age of puberty observe an obligatory act of fasting. This month commemorates the first revelation day of the Qur'an, called *Laylat al-Qadr* (the night of decree). During this month, we refrain from all food, water, and other human desires from dawn to dusk for 30 days. Through this temporary deprivation, we are encouraged to control our needs, desires, and distractions and give ourselves space to reflect upon our gratitude, devotion and submission to Almighty Allah.

**A pre-pandemic K-12 school-climate survey of Massachusetts Muslim youth reported disheartening incidents of prejudice against Islam and Muslim youth in the form of bullying and discrimination. The report found that 61% of the surveyed Muslim students had been verbally insulted or abused just for being Muslim.**

Ramadan is a month of empowerment, because it helps us realize that desires do not drive a person, but it is the person who controls their desires. Fasting is also a opportunity to share the hunger and thirst of the needy, as a reminder of the religious duty to help the less fortunate. Educators should take this opportunity to address common misconceptions about Islam and fasting. It is also important to raise the awareness of school administrators, nurses, coaches, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and all other school staff who have contact with students.

Consider adopting these practices:

- Offer a safe place for fasting students to go during lunchtime so they can rest during breaks.
- Avoid consuming food and beverages in front of fasting students.
- Reschedule high-stake exams to be done during the morning sessions closer to when Muslim students will have eaten.
- Offer alternative, less intensive activities during PE classes.
- Offer short breaks during lessons.
- Avoid asking students whether they are fasting or not.
- Do not plan tests or exams on Eid-al Fitr, which is a recognized religious holiday.

Students may show exhaustion and sleepiness during Ramadan, not only because of hunger or thirst, but because of changes in their sleeping and eating routine. Fasting families wake up early in the morning to perform morning prayer and have a meal before dawn, known as *suhour*. *Iftar*, the breaking of fast at sunset, comes 15 hours after *suhour*. Students may experience tiredness because of this schedule change. Showing compassion and empathy to sleepy students during this time is a good starting point for developing cultural and religious sensitivity. Consider encouraging students and teachers to fast for at least one day in solidarity with Muslim students.

Islamic practices may vary from culture to culture and from family to family. While some cultures allow children to fast at the age of seven for several hours a day, others do not. While some families perform additional *Tarawih* prayers in the evening (special prayers for the month of Ramadan) and spend several

**After a month of devotion and self-control, Muslims around the world celebrate the accomplishment of sacred duties during Ramadan with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of Breaking the Fast. Depending on the culture, the celebration may last three days or be limited to one day. It starts with Eid prayer and continues with family gatherings, gift-giving, and celebratory meals with family and friends.**

can enjoy festivities with their loved ones.

By explaining some of the core pillars of Islam, I have tried to present a corrective perspective through which Islam and Muslim students can be viewed in a K-12 context. By discouraging racism in any form, schools can transform the lives of Muslim students and provide a hospitable environment where students of all religions, races, cultures, ethnicities can have a sense of belonging.

This year, Ramadan started on Saturday, April 2, 2022, and ended on Sunday, May 1. I and my two middle-school children always look forward to Ramadan. We delight in this time given to us for devotion, submission and reflection. By sharing this article, I hope to encourage cultural and religious sensitivity in school communities who have been teaching and welcoming immigrant, refugee and local Muslim students.

hours at night reciting the Qur'an, others do not. Communication with students and their families about their Ramadan traditions is the best way to learn about their way of observing Ramadan.

After a month of devotion and self-control, Muslims around the world celebrate the accomplishment of sacred duties during Ramadan with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of Breaking the Fast. Depending on the culture, the celebration may last three days or be limited to one day. It starts with Eid prayer and continues with family gatherings, gift-giving, and celebratory meals with family and friends. Importantly, Eid accomplishes another core pillar of Islam, the annual obligatory payment for charity, called *Zakat*. *Zakat* is given to less fortunate families so that they also

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nasiba Norova** is pursuing her Ph.D. degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research interests include resident L2 students' writing performance, Global/World Englishes, racial literacy, and critical pedagogy. Her dissertation project aims to explore the development of racial literacy among international students in the First-Year composition course.

## REFERENCES

- Beysheer, M. (2021).** Muslims are a growing presence in U.S., but still face negative views from the public. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public>
- CAIR Massachusetts. (2021).** Massachusetts Muslim youth: Standing up & speaking out. [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-ma-issues-first-ever-report-on-muslim-youth-bullying-in-massachusetts](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-ma-issues-first-ever-report-on-muslim-youth-bullying-in-massachusetts)
- CAIR (2020).** An Educator's guide to Islamic religious practices. <https://www.cair.com>
- Considine, C. (2017).** The racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, hate crimes, and “flying while brown.” *Religions*, 8(9), 1-19.
- Gotanda, N. (2011).** The racialization of Islam in American law. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 637(1), 184-195.
- Joshi, K. (2006).** The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(3), 211-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600790327>
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2015).** *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd ed.). Routledge. Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Religious landscape study. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>
- Taras, T. (2013).** Islamophobia never stands still: Race, religion, and culture. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(3), 417-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734388>
- The Associated Press. (2022, January 24).** Massachusetts to host 2,000 Afghans, double expected amount. <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-boston-migration-massachusetts-taliban-3152acc2a7b5bfad710c38932b96ab58>
- Wamsley, L. (2022, March 3).** Race, culture and politics underpin how — or if— refugees are welcomed in Europe. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/03/1084201542/ukraine-refugees-racism>

# Critical Rethinking and Continual Retelling of True Justice in SEI

**Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero**

fortiz@westfield.ma.edu

**Andrew W. Habana Hafner**

ahafner@westfield.ma.edu



*"To be an anti-racist educator, it means that you acknowledge the racist and white-supremacist ideas that the school is built upon, and that you actively work to try and break those beliefs and structures." (Student response, SEI Assignment for Anti-Racism Education Town Hall, Fall 2020)*

## CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGIES AND ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION IN SEI

**WE BELIEVE** an essential priority in English Language Learner (ELL) education for the MATSOL community is promoting teacher preparation and teacher development courses that actively combat the resurgence of exclusionary policies of xenophobia, anti-immigration, and anti-multilingualism. Research on English-only language policies in the national context (e.g. Johnson et al., 2018)

and in Massachusetts (e.g., Gort et al., 2008; Viesca, 2013) has highlighted persistent language-based inequities for ELLs. In this article, we share our interventions for a critical language agenda and anti-racist lens in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) courses within the sociopolitical contexts of anti-immigrant sentiment and policies

(Chang-Bacon, 2022; Sleeter, 2017). During our SEI course journey, we have incorporated anti-racist pedagogies with SEI strategies to critically analyze

**We share our interventions for a critical language agenda and anti-racist lens in SEI courses within the sociopolitical contexts of anti-immigrant sentiment and policies.**

Muslim bans, border walls, 'speaking American', and fear-mongering of invading youth caravans (Orelus et al., 2020).

We are two multilingual educators with Puerto Rican & Filipino heritage and combined experience of 60 years in second language teaching and research. As our SEL praxis evolves from our *RETELLing It!* research agenda (Hafner & Ortiz, 2021), we share how critical language pedagogies have synergized with our leadership roles as Co-Chairs of the Anti-Racism Education (ARE) Project at Westfield State University's Education Department, a predominantly white institution (PWI) and department. The ARE Project is a faculty-driven initiative in its fifth year that aims to affect change at multiple levels: pre-service teacher (PST) development, Education faculty development and course revisions, and shifts in Education program frameworks to center anti-racist teacher dispositions, theories, and practices (see Figure 1).

The project first took shape amidst the 2016 presidential election, acts of racist hate speech and anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ harassment on our campus, and similarly disheartening trends in schools at all levels. The ARE agenda animated Education faculty's solidarity to organize against and denounce these hate acts, and called for a stronger administrative response, to counter a chronic failing through years of institutional upheaval and leadership transition. The ARE Project has been sustained through collective leadership, the building of an ARE professional learning community, and a commitment to slowly transform Education programs and practices. We believe that having anti-racist dialogue with predominantly White PSTs helps them situate their 'selves' and the ELL 'others' within current historical tensions.

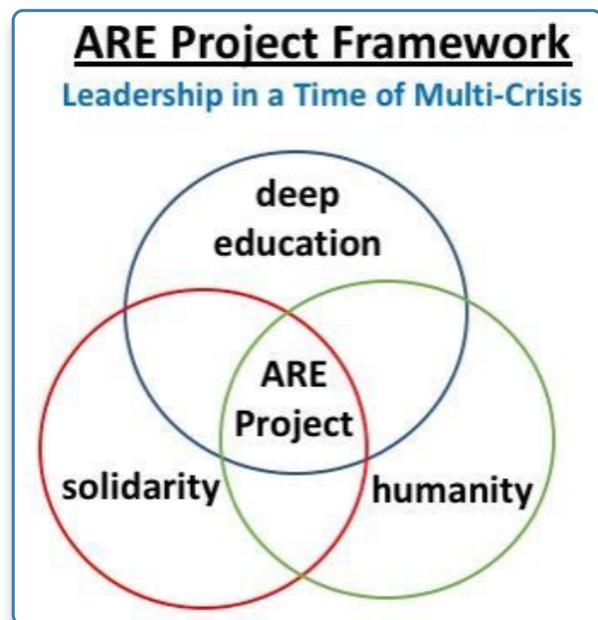


Figure 1

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The ARE Town Hall Film and Dialogue is a week-long commitment that provides

a department-wide experience on social justice issues in U.S. society, with implications for PK-12 curriculum and classroom practice. Preparation for the fall semester Town Hall begins in the preceding spring semester and continues over the summer. The ARE Committee selects a theme and film and sends resources to the Education faculty to integrate critical concepts and a Town Hall assignment in their courses. In week 4 of the semester, we facilitate nine 60-minute Town Hall sessions structured around a theme, big ideas, and essential questions; and focus on three pre-selected film segments followed by dialogue questions. Participants engage in small group and whole group dialogue, with an exit ticket asking participants to consider course connections and ideas for action.

As we studied the ARE Project, we followed a practitioner-research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) and qualitative design, drawing from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and critical discourse analysis (CDA; Bloome et al., 2005; Fairclough, 2003). CDA studies micro-macro analysis of language (at lexical, phrase, sentence, and discourse levels) to reveal how ideologies, identities, and power are conveyed and constructed in texts. We used CDA as a theory-method to explore how PSTs' oral and written texts in the SEI course reflected discourses of in/equity for ELLs. The principal data collection included SEI course materials, ARE Town Hall assignments, readings/resources, student work; Town Hall plans, and student exit tickets. Data analysis was conducted in weekly research meetings that generated preliminary & secondary codes. Through iterative phases, analytical constructs and analysis charts were refined, which strengthened interrater reliability in the research process.

### **TEACHING TRUTH FOR JUSTICE: ARE TOWN HALL AND SEI**

The ARE Project framework for the Fall 2020, *Humanity, Solidarity & Deep Education*, stemmed from an ARE-organized event in Spring 2020 with activist and philosopher Dr. Cornel West, who spoke on *Solidarity & Servant Leadership: The Power of Deep Education*. The documentary *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* (Kurnhardt, 2019) was chosen to connect to the ARE framework and bring attention to police brutality and the criminal justice system involving Black citizens, amidst the nation-wide protests against our long history of state violence and racial injustice. Mr. Stevenson recounts his advocacy for falsely accused death row inmates, and revisits 400 years (1619-2019) of anti-blackness in America, highlighting the [Legacy Museum's](#) educational programs on lynching during eras of white supremacist ideology and public terror. The Town Hall intentionally pushed PSTs to make historical connections between the human stories of those lynched and lost and the 'digital witnessing' of the public

'lynching' murder of George Floyd, replayed and reposted online to excess.

For SEI, we co-designed an assignment in conjunction with critical texts and concepts related to ELLs; and used the Town Hall essential question (Q1) *What does it mean to be an ARE educator in a time of multi-crisis?* We assigned the [Learning for Justice](#) article *All Students Need Anti-racism* (Torres, 2020) to move our students' thinking beyond implementing SEI strategies and seeing themselves as change agents

for social justice education for ELLs. Our assignments asked them to make text-text connections with the following question: (Q4) *Connect the article on Anti-Racism & the film True Justice from ARE Town Hall; what would True Justice for ELLs look like?* Below are excerpts from student answers:

- "... making sure to acknowledge everyone racist beliefs and structures in different aspects of our lives. Having an active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing the systems." (Q1, Student1)
- "True Justice for ELLs looks like by treating all the students equally... If they need their native language, having it available in the classroom can help aid in a student's success." (Q4, Student1)
- "...would consist of the teacher using different ways of presenting information like through visuals, writing words on the board, and spoken. Also, teachers would speak slowly and clearly, and not use tricks in the English language that could confuse an ELL." (Q4, Student 1A)

The student quote opening the article and the first excerpt above from Q1 reveal an understanding that racism exists at the institutional, ideological, and structural levels; as reflected in the student's specific language around "racist beliefs," "structure," and "white-supremacist ideas." We attribute this to an infusion of ARE in SEI in relation to a critical linguistics framing of our sociocultural

**We co-designed an assignment in conjunction with critical texts and concepts related to ELLs. We assigned the Learning for Justice article All Students Need Anti-racism to move our students' thinking beyond implementing SEI strategies and seeing themselves as change agents for social justice education for ELLs.**

framework with understandings of white supremacist language ideology.

However, a critical analysis of students' responses to Q4 show conflicting narratives of color-blind ideologies in mentioning general strategies for all students and "treating all students equally", while recognizing the importance of students' "native language...in students' success." These excerpts reflect why a continual rethinking of critical texts and Anti-Racism Education in the SEI course is our uncompromising agenda. The SEI course alone, without these interventions, tends to reproduce a narrow focus on content, and language learning and development driven by strategies, even when a sociocultural context and equity framework ground the course within the WIDA 2020 framework. We continue to observe colorblind beliefs alongside recognizing the need to dismantle racist hegemonies. As such, we assert ARE work is imperative in teacher education institutions, primarily in teacher preparation programs, since these are spaces of knowledge construction and reproductive ideologies.

### RETELLING TRUTH FOR JUSTICE WITH ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION FOR ELLS

ARE in SEI moves our critical language pedagogy beyond mere awareness, toward problematizing and contesting perceptions, policies, and educational practices toward *true justice for ELLs* (see Figure 2). We learn from SEI-ARE intersections of the need for constant rethinking of SEI with a critical, anti-racist lens. An SEI sociocultural framework must better scaffold, challenge and equip PSTs with a critical **perception** of how equity is defined, and undermined, in relation to multilingual youth and communities. Our PSTs lack significant depth in U.S. history and culture; as a result, they are consistently challenged to situate equity for ELLs across history, context, and cultural politics. Identifying equity for ELLs requires naming language as and for true justice and not merely as the conduit for academic development.

As policies are designed and institutionalized at varied-levels, PSTs need to understand the systems and hierarchies in which they operate.

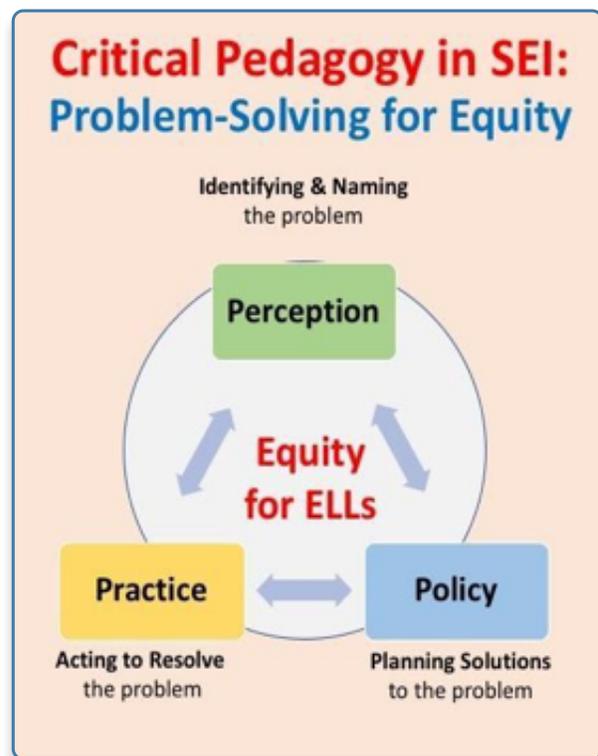


Figure 2

PSTs must recognize how belief systems intersect race, identity and language; and operate in and through language **policies** that perpetuate language hegemony. We must support PSTs in recognizing their own positionality in implementing language policies in their teaching/learning spaces. Our work contributes to theoretical and pedagogical turns toward foregrounding diverse linguistic resources not honored or optimized in English-only policy (Motha, 2014).

**We must support PSTs in recognizing their own positionality in implementing language policies in their teaching/learning spaces. Our work contributes to theoretical and pedagogical turns toward foregrounding diverse linguistic resources not honored or optimized in English-only policy.**

Implications of our SEI-ARE praxis work centers on the important **practice** of infusing critical texts across subject areas to focus on language development strategies within a critical treatment of the sociocultural contexts of disciplines, societal issues, and ELL realities. Equitable language practices address the tensions inherent in ever-changing relationships of language, power, and ideological contexts; especially within our persistent multi-crisis of pandemic struggles, partisan politics, distorted truth, xenophobic demagoguery, and multiple forces of aggression that will bring newcomers to our country and classrooms. In centering an unapologetic activism for ELLs, we assert the imperative for SEI-ARE intersections in teacher education programs to envision equitable changes for ELLs education and our democratic futures.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Ortiz-Marrero** is Associate Professor of Education at Westfield State University. She joined WSU in 2012 after twenty-two years of teaching ESL. She is the 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of The Year and Co-Chair of the Education Department's Anti-Racism Education (ARE) Project, which received a 2020 AAQEP national accreditation commendation. She is educational consultant, trainer, and researcher.

**Dr. Hafner** is Associate Professor of Education at Westfield State University. He has 30 years of U.S. and international experience in bilingual, ESL/ELL and literacy education as a teacher, trainer, curriculum developer, evaluator, and researcher. He is Co-Chair of the ARE Project.

## REFERENCES

- Bloome, D., Carter, S. P., Christian, B. M., Otto, S., & Shuart-Faris, M. (2005).** *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events: A microethnographic perspective*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Chang-Bacon, C. K. (2022).** "We Sort of Dance Around the Race Thing": Race-Evasiveness in Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 73(1), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871211023042>
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993).** *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. Teachers College Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2003).** *Analyzing discourse: Text analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Gort, M., De Jong, E., & Cobb, C. (2008).** SEeing through a bilingual lens: Structural and ideological contexts of Structured English Immersion in three Massachusetts districts. *Journal of Educational Research & Policy Studies*, 8(2), 41-67.
- Hafner, A.H. & Ortiz, F.W. (2021).** Toward Transformative Teaching for English Language Learners: Critical Texts in Sheltered English Immersion Courses. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* 23(2), 145-160.
- Johnson, D.C., Stephens, C., Nelson, J.J. & Johnson, E.J. (2018).** Violating Lau: Sheltered English Instruction programs and equal educational opportunity, *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(4), 488-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1380847>
- Kurnhardt, G. (Director). (2019).** *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* (Film). HBO.
- Motha, S. (2014).** *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice*. Routledge.
- Orelus, P., Malott, C., & Hafner, A. H. (2020).** Youth of Color Living and Learning in the Age of Racial Paranoia: What Social Justice Educators Need to Know. Retrieved from *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 19(1). <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol19/iss1/7>
- Sleeter, C. (2017).** Critical race theory and the whiteness of teacher education, *Urban Education* 52(2), 1-15.
- Torres, C. (2020).** All Students Need AntiRacism Education. Learning for Justice. Retrieved from: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/all-students-need-antiracism-education>
- Viesca, K. M. (2013).** Linguicism and racism in Massachusetts education policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21(52). <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/977>

# Weekly Dictation in the ESL 1 Classroom as an Essential and Culturally Sustaining Spelling Practice

**Jennifer Dines**

[jdines@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:jdines@bostonpublicschools.org)

**E**XPRESSIVE LANGUAGE, and especially writing, poses a formidable challenge when learning a second language, with spelling functioning as gatekeeper for proficient academic communication. Those who can spell fluently craft texts that reflect their creative and intellectual capacities, while those who can't have their cognitive energies absorbed in choosing the right letter rather than the most effective structure, vocabulary, and syntax.



I became a full-time teacher of English Learners (ELs) in 2007, as a 4th and 5th grade SEI teacher for newcomers. In 2009, I transitioned into the role of middle school special education teacher for ELs, where I worked primarily with students functioning at levels 3, 4, and 5. In this role, I made my first inquiry into spelling instruction for ELs during the 2015- 2016 school year as part of the Boston Teachers Union's year-long [Inquiry Project Course](#). At the conclusion of this program, I composed a paper titled [Spelling as Social Justice: Empowering Students Learning English as a New Language Through Explicit Spelling Instruction](#) that focused on improving the written expression of long-term English learners.

The literature review that I conducted through this course provided many keen insights into the importance of spelling instruction for English learners. I learned that "A mere one percent of 12th grade English language learners (ELLs) scored proficient or above in writing on the [2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress]" (Olson et al., 2016). I also learned that "the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2005) reported that 80 percent of the time an employment application is doomed if it is poorly written or poorly spelled." While the former fact about standardized assessment certainly called my attention to the need for vastly improved writing instruction

for ELs, the latter impressed upon me just how dire the real world consequences are for those with poor or limited capacities for writing.

In 2017, I transitioned into a role of supporting middle school ESL 1 exclusively, and I discontinued using the spelling practices I had crafted, which were intended for ELs at higher levels. Instead, I developed a practice of spending 10-15 minutes per class on phonics and word recognition following [the MGH Speech, Language, and Literacy Center scope and sequence](#). I use a booklet of [Decoding Fluency Drills](#) from Maria Serrano's classroom website as a foundational resource as they provide word and sentence lists that clearly follow the skills of the MGH scope and sequence.

As a part of this spelling practice, I develop students' metalinguistic awareness skills through explicit discussions about how language works. For example, if we are working with digraphs, I teach the word 'digraph' and its definition (two letters that together make one sound) and explicitly teach students the digraphs that exist in English. I task students with identifying examples and non-examples of words that include digraphs and require them to defend their answers.

This spring, while working towards the completion of my [Bilingual Education certificate](#) through Boston College, I enrolled in a course titled "Bilingual Literacy and Literature." Throughout one of the readings, a chapter titled "Word Study and Fluency: The Dictado and Other Authentic Methods" from the book *Teaching for Biliteracy: Strengthening Bridges Between Languages* (Beeman & Urow, 2013) I realized a flaw in my classroom practice. While I had phonics and word recognition as a component of my classroom practice, I had not yet developed a routine that supported assessment of students' understanding, so I had no way of measuring the effectiveness of the activities I employed, such as choral reading, decodable texts, and [phonological awareness tasks](#).

The chapter emphasized a weekly *dictado* as a widely used practice in Spanish-speaking countries for assessing fluency, spelling, and mechanics. I hypothesized that, since my students, who were predominantly Latinx, might already be familiar with dictation tasks, adding them as a weekly assessment practice could provide a bridge between education in their home countries and the United States. Additionally, I felt that the *dictado* would provide a useful end-of-week assessment of phonics skills that would illuminate which might require reteaching or reinforcement.

As a result of my metalinguistic awareness assignment for the Bilingual Literacy and Literature course, I reworked my lessons to establish a weekly routine in

which I would teach skills leading up to the *dictado* on Monday through Thursday and then implement a dictation exam at the end of the week.

The objective for this initial dictation was for students to encode one-syllable closed and silent-e words with the short *a*, long *a*, *am*, and *an*.

Each Monday, I shared the objective for the week with students. I then presented them with a packet for activities that we would work through together on Monday through Wednesday, and I told them we would have a practice test on Thursday so they would know the format of the test prior to the real exam on Friday.

The activity for Monday used a list of short *a* words from the Serrano booklet (see Figure 1). I wrote directions at the top of the page that instructed students to translate the words, mark the short vowels with a breve diacritical mark (˘), and underline *am* and *an* combinations contained in words. In class, I read the words aloud to the students and completed several rows of words with the student, emphasizing the audible distinctions between the short *a*, *am*, and *an* sounds.

On Tuesday, we practiced reading the word list from Monday. Then, I presented students with a list of sentences from the Serrano booklet (see Figure 2) that contained words made up of closed syllables with short *a*, *am*, and *an*. I instructed students to circle the words with short *a*, *am*, or *an*; to mark the vowels with a breve; and underline *am* and *an*. I also pointed out that each sentence began with a capital letter and ended with either a period or a question mark. We completed the first few sentences together, and then students had time to work with a

<b>Short A Words</b>			
cab	lab	tab	bad
dad	fad	lad	had
mad	pad	sad	bag
gag	lag	rag	sag
tag	wag	am	dam
ham	jam	ram	yam
an	can	fan	man
pan	ran	tan	van

Figure 1

<b>Short A Sentences</b>
The man is sad.
Here is a bag.
I had a nap.
Here is the jam.
The pan is here.
I had a hat.
She had the bat.
Is he mad?

Figure 2

partner or individually to complete the rest.

On Wednesday, I presented students with a list of *long a* words with *a-consonant-silent e* syllable pattern (see Figure 3). On the board, I showed students how adding an *e* to the end of a CVC word changes the vowel sound from short to long. Students were given the following instructions: translate the words; draw a slash through the *e* since it doesn't make a sound; mark the *long a* with a macron diacritical mark (ˉ).

<u>Long A Words (Silent e)</u>			
face	lace	pace	race
brace	grace	place	space
trace	fade	jade	made
wade	blade	grade	shade
spade	trade	age	cage
page	rage	sage	wage
stage	bake	cake	fake
lake	make	quake	rake

Figure 3

On Thursday, I facilitated a practice test where students used mini-whiteboards and dry erase markers. I dictated five *short a* words and five *long a* words to the students. They held up their boards, and we checked their work together. Additionally, when students completed each word, I directed them to chorally spell the words aloud.

On Friday, I provided students with composition notebooks and had them create columns for the dictation exam (see Figure 4) with one column for closed syllables and another for silent-*e* syllables. The first column had words 1-5 and the second 6-11, 11 being an optional bonus word. I reminded students that each word would contain an *a* and that the words in the second column would also have an *e* at the end. I prompted students by saying a word, a sentence containing the word, and then the word again. All the words I used were from the packet we had worked through together.

Following the exam, I had students complete a survey I had developed that inquired about students' experiences with dictation in their home countries. The survey asked students about how dictation might support their development in other areas of language as well as whether they enjoyed the dictation task.

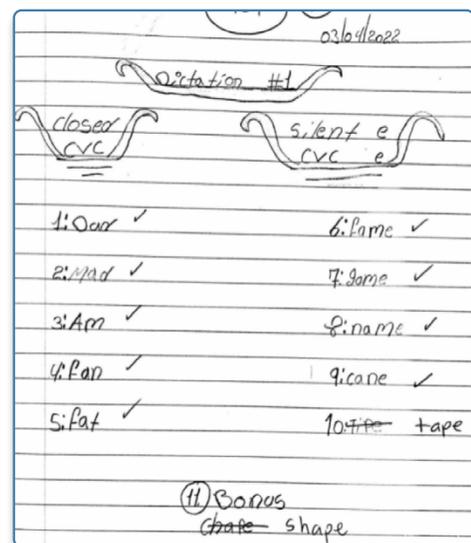


Figure 4

The survey included the following questions as well as a space for additional comments.

- Did you complete dictation (dictado) activities in your home country?
- If you responded yes, how often did you have a dictation in your home country?
- How might doing a dictation help you in other areas of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?
- Did you enjoy the dictation test today?

Out of 33 students surveyed, 29 students indicated that they had completed dictations in their home countries. This group was composed of students from the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, and Brazil, as well as a boy from Afghanistan. The four students who responded “no” come from Cape Verde, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and a girl from Afghanistan. (Note: I make this distinction about the gender of the students from Afghanistan because I have learned that my students from this country have had vastly different schooling experiences based on gender with boys receiving far more educational opportunities than girls.) Of the students who completed dictations in their home countries, 46.7% reported this as a weekly activity and 23.3% reported it as a daily activity. 3.3% said monthly, and the remaining students indicated that they could not recall the frequency of dictation tasks.

All but one student indicated enjoyment of the dictation task. Below is a list of selected responses that students provided when asked how dictation activities support growth in other areas of language learning:

- *It helps me remember the letters.*
- *Reading will help you see how to write. Listening will help you know what to write. Speaking will help you to have that work in your mind.*
- *Enseñarlo a que escucha mi pronunciación y leer y escribir [It taught me how to listen to my pronunciation and read and write]*
- *A mejorar las palabras en inglés [To improve the English words]*
- *It teaches writing.*
- *Helps me communicate with people more correctly when speaking and being able to hear what others say to me.*

Other comments included the following:

- *Estuvo bueno el dictado.* [The dictation went well.]
- *Este dictado ayuda mucho a comprender y escuchar algunas frases en inglés.* [This dictation helped me a lot to understand and to listen to some phrases in English.]

## ANALYSIS OF INSTRUCTION

The dictation showed overall positive results for many students as 15 (over half of) students scored 90% or higher and 3 students scored 70-80%. A majority of the students who achieved these higher results had been in the country for at least eight months, including five students who have been enrolled in Boston Public Schools for at least two years. Students who had been in the country for one to six months scored 50% or below, and one student who has remained in ESL 1 for three years and has a diagnosis of dyslexia scored below 50% as well.

Because of the students' responses on the survey, where they indicated dictation as a culturally familiar activity and their enjoyment of and sense of purpose around the dictation, I have continued with weekly word study and dictation quizzes. However, I have made a few adaptations to the instruction leading up to the dictation. One change I have made is to provide explicit direct instruction in identification of word families, which has supported my students in further developing sound-symbol relationships through locating rhyming words (see Figure 5).

I have also woven vocabulary questions into my instruction to emphasize the connection between phonics and semantics. For example, as we practiced reading the page in Figure 5, I paused after specific words to ask questions such as:

- Does Mrs. Dines drink a **mug** of coffee each morning? (While holding up my coffee cup)
- Are you allowed to chew **gum** in this class?
- Do you ride the **bus** to school?
- Do you have a **cuff** on your shirt?

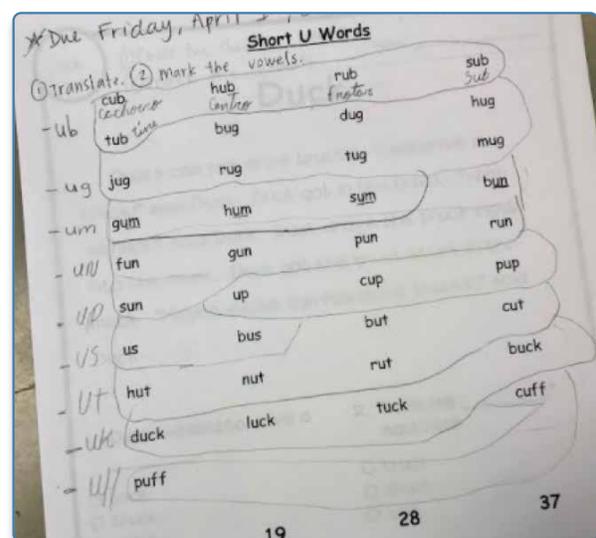


Figure 5

Finally, I have added sentence-level dictation to the weekly test to emphasize the conventions of capitalization and punctuation.

The structure and routine have benefitted many of the students who initially scored lower on the exam. For example, Figures 6, 7, and 8 show one student's progression from failing grades to a more moderate 80%. With students who initially received the lowest scores, I made sure to point out that all the words and sentences used come from their homework, and I contacted parents to encourage them to study with the children at home. I have done more daily 1:1 check-ins with these students of their work completed on Monday through Thursday in order to provide both encouragement and corrective feedback.

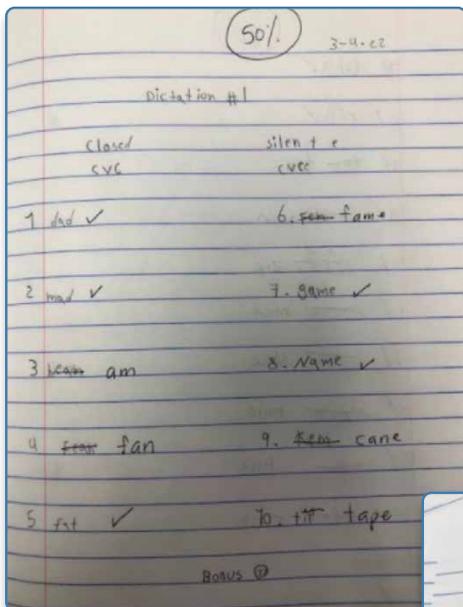


Figure 6

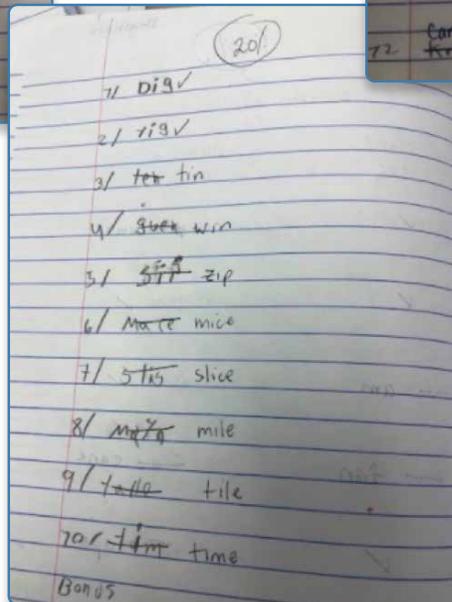


Figure 7

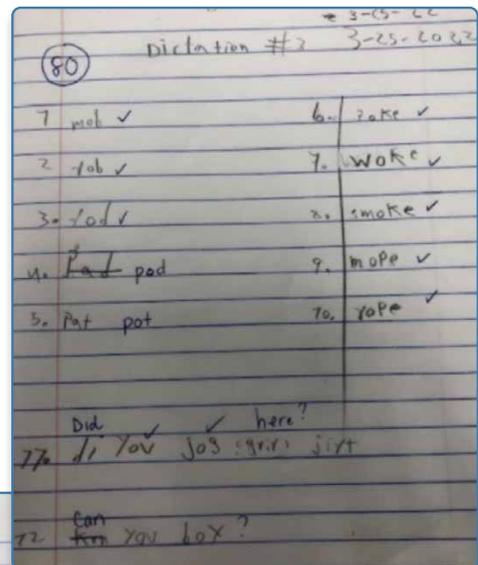


Figure 8

For the 2022-23 school year, I am transitioning to a role where I will work with students with a wider range of ELD levels. I plan to continue to employ the weekly dictation practice with my students next year. However, rather than starting at the beginning of the MGH Speech, Language, and Literacy Center scope and sequence, I plan to administer the [Words Their Way](#) spelling inventories at the start of the year to determine which skills need instruction and reinforcement.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jennifer Dines** is a National Board Certified Teacher in the Boston Public Schools. She serves as a supervising practitioner for the MGH Institute of Health Professions Reading Specialist licensure program, and she recently earned a Bilingual Certificate from Boston College. Her published work can be found [here](#).  
twitter:@DinesJennifer

### REFERENCES

- Beeman, K., & Urow, C. (2013).** *Teaching for biliteracy: Strengthening bridges between languages*. Caslon.
- Olson, C. B., Scarcella, R., & Matuchniak, T. (2016, January 31).** *The write stuff*. *Educational Leadership*.
- Moats, L. C. (2005).** *How spelling supports reading*. *American Educator*.

# The Power of a Teacher Learning Community to Improve Formative Assessment in Teaching Adult ESL

**Marsha Parinussa Flynn**

[mparinussaflynn@necc.mass.edu](mailto:mparinussaflynn@necc.mass.edu)



## INTRODUCTION

The number of immigrants moving to the United States has continued to grow for the past four decades and this increase has caused many challenges for schools in their attempts to provide support and services that meet the needs of the newcomers. Once settled in their new environment, many adult newcomers go back to school to learn English. This is necessary for integrating into a new society, pursuing their education, or finding a job to sustain their families. To provide teachers support and to improve their instruction teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), my research focused on teachers who participated in a Teacher Learning Community (TLC) with the purpose to share and improve their formative assessment. Formative assessment “provides evidence to modify or adapt teaching to meet the learning needs of students” (Menon, 2018, p. 43). Findings showed that teachers participating in a TLC felt encouraged to share, discuss, and reconstruct their formative assessments, and as a result connecting with colleagues in TLCs strengthened their instruction. Furthermore, findings showed that teachers were knowledgeable about conducting formative assessment that applied to a broad range of measurements.

## ADULT EDUCATION

One of the top priorities for immigrants in a new society is to learn the language. This will not only help them integrate into and learn about their new community, it will also support them in becoming productive citizens. With state funding, the Center for Adult Education (CAE) at Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence offers ESL courses to adult learners, free of charge, aimed at helping them achieve the above goals. The center administers a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to assess learner’s English knowledge and skills necessary to

enroll in class.

The center's programs focus on:

- developing student language and employment skills necessary to work in a particular industry,
- preparing students to pass a High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) or a General Educational Development (GED) test,
- preparing students to transition into a community college, or
- sustaining student daily life skills.

When teachers focus their instruction on creating a learning environment that is positive and centered around student needs and goals, it is conducive to student learning. William (2009) underscores Monk's (1994) claim that "the most important difference between the most and the least effective classrooms is the teacher, but the most important variable appears to be what they do" (p. 186). Such actions by the teacher range from what happens behind the scenes of the classroom environment through actual teaching moves. Teachers are most effective when they conduct formative assessment regularly to check for student understanding and adjust their instruction because students did not comprehend a concept. Their instruction addresses student needs and their strategies encourage students to improve their own learning in an attempt to help students develop and strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Consequently, the purpose of my study was to create a teacher learning community for teachers where they can collaborate, share, and discuss, their use formative assessment. Participating in a TLC will provide evidence what teachers do is good for their learning and teaching and that TLCs have an impact on and are powerful for teacher practice. With that concept in mind, this article discusses findings drawn from one research question of my study: *How do teachers describe and understand the impact of being part of a collaborative inquiry on their use of formative assessment?* In the following section I describe how participating in a TLC can positively support and effectively improve teachers' instruction.

## **THE ROLE OF A TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITY**

The design of my study was based on a collaborative inquiry model widely known as a Teacher Learning Community (TLC). This model has proved:

- to promote a community of learners
- to motivate teachers sharing best practices with each other

- to be effective for teachers reflecting on their instruction, and
- to foster discussion among teachers on their use of formative assessment.

The purpose of the TLC meetings in my study was to provide teachers professional development where they can convene, share with, and learn best practices from each other. Research has shown that teachers participating in a TLC carries positive motivators for transforming teaching practice (Hord 1997, Vescio et al. 2008). Figure 1 shows the learning process of teachers when they participate in a TLC.

1. Teachers start the process exploring the knowledge and skills about their daily practice conducting formative assessment.
2. Teachers continue the process and analyze their formative assessment and deliberate with colleagues about the matter.
3. Afterwards teachers evaluate their techniques. As they assess their instruction for effective student learning, teachers reconsider their strategies and tools, and in some cases they may contemplate their philosophy teaching adult learners.
4. In the final step of the learning process teachers re-assess their experiences and decide whether they adjust their instruction before they resume the learning process.

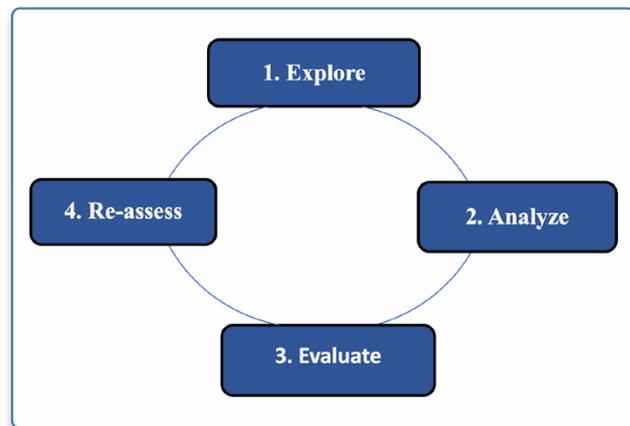


Figure 1: Process of Teacher Learning

Sixteen teachers who, at the time of my study worked at the CAE, received an invitation to participate. Six teachers agreed to voluntarily partake in the study. Of the six teachers, four attended an orientation meeting in which I disclosed the purpose and design of my study. Ultimately, three teachers committed themselves to participate for the entire period of the study.

Due to COVID, participants chose to meet online via Zoom, a web-based video conferencing virtual platform. The meetings were recorded on Zoom and transcribed by a professional transcriber. During the fall semester of 2021 participants attended three TLC meetings and participated in an interview with the author. Table 1 shows participant demographics: teachers have between

20-30 years of teaching experience and taught different subject at various levels. At least two participants have a Master's degree and one teacher earned a Bachelor's degree and a certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. None of the teachers have participated in a TLC.

*Table 1: Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Years of Teaching	Subject Level	Education Background
1	30+	English Language Arts	MA in Education
2	20+	Reading/Writing	BA and TEFL Certificate
3	20+	ESL, Low Intermediate	MA in Teaching ESL

Participant 1 is in her fourth year at the CAE teaching ELA in a High School Equivalency program and has more than 30 years of experience teaching K-12 where she worked as a reading specialist. Participant 2 is in her third year teaching a Reading and Writing course in a program that prepares students to transition into post-secondary education. Besides teaching at the CAE she teaches ESL in a community-based agency. She graduated with a BA in Environmental Education and earned a certificate in teaching English as a Foreign Language. Finally, participant 3 is in her third year at the CAE and has 10 or more years of experience teaching adult ESL. She currently teaches a contextualized ESL class with civics education in a program that focuses on directing students in accounting and bookkeeping. Wynona earned a master's degree in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. She is fluent in Spanish and teaches a noncredit Spanish course. The three participants were representatives of the teaching force at the CAE. The participants were a self-selection of teachers but have similar levels of teaching qualifications and years of experiences.

## **FINDINGS**

Findings from the study showed that participating in a teacher learning community positively impacted teacher learning and improved their daily instruction using formative assessment.

Findings further showed several elements that contributed to participants' learning. The most essential results were related to the advantage of collaborating with their colleagues. Participants mentioned that there have been few opportunities within their programs to collaborate with colleagues, meeting and getting to know new colleagues proved to be invaluable. The

TLC meetings provided participants opportunities to develop new working relationships and that could support them in establishing perspectives to construct new teaching and learning.

Below are a few comments from participants related to the effectiveness of the TLC meetings.

*“There’s never enough time for teachers just to sit and collaborate and talk about what we do in the classroom and it’s such a valuable thing to do.”*

*“Working collaboratively, like we are now, is really helpful for improving our teaching.”*

*“I just want to say how valuable these meetings have been, how much I’ve really enjoyed the collaboration and how I’m so impressed with what [my colleagues] are doing.”*

Additionally, the meetings provided participants to review their formative assessments and welcomed feedback from their colleagues how effective their instruction was.

One of the participants said: “I think working collaboratively like we are now is really helpful for improving our teaching. Because you get so many ideas, like [we] talked about book reports, like oh, that’s a great idea to do a book report on Flipgrid.”

During the TLC meetings, one participant became aware that she should change the way she checked for student understanding.

*“Probably with my adult learners to look at ways to assess their understanding formatively, I mean rather than just saying at the end, okay, so at the end of the class, so does anyone have any questions which can elicit no response sometimes. Nope, I’m all set. I’m now trying to think of ways to engage them a little bit differently”.*

One of the participants attempted to use a new digital application in class and reached out to a colleague whom she claimed “gave me some answers to my questions, specific questions I had and I am planning to use that this evening and then I will incorporate that in the lesson I’m going to use”. She changed her strategy in assessing students’ knowledge of vocabulary and implemented a formative assessment using a digital application called Jamboard.

Furthermore, results from the study confirmed that participating in a TLC elevated teachers in their ability to inquire into each other's and their own practice, learn from and with each other, and obtain knowledge from their colleagues to potentially change their own learning and teaching. One of the participants described it as follows:

*"It changed the way that I thought about how often we assess students. I think as the more experienced teachers tend to assess their students without even thinking about it, and so to have to actually verbalize how I'm assessing my students has helped me to clarify, I guess, how I'm doing it, if that makes sense."*

Participants further mentioned pressing needs due to shifts in pandemic teaching and sharing best practices and teaching resources with their colleagues. Since the pandemic had prompted participants to teach online, they have developed skills and knowledge creating online platforms and applications that benefitted their instruction and formative assessments. Importantly, participants exchanged information about accessing digital learning resources and responded to questions about the effectiveness of their instructional competencies.

Participating in a TLC fostered in teachers a desire to share their resources with colleagues or use colleagues' ideas and resources to their own benefit. For one participant it was beneficial as she asserted "Now you're teaching remotely it's very different than teaching in the classroom. So, anything that I can do to make my teaching more effective remotely is what I'm looking for, is what I need." The exchange of information positively impacted teachers to adjust their teaching in order to improve and strengthen their instructional practice.

Finally, participating in a TLC promoted teachers to think critically about their philosophy on teaching in general and teaching adult learners in particular. I employed the concept of a TLC to assemble participants so that they can enter in discussion about their practice conducting formative assessment. The setting provided participants space to analyze strategies of formative assessment at the same time discuss the purpose for choosing a particular strategy. One of the participants shared her approach about pacing student learning and noted that

*"I guess what's difficult about that is being sure that you're giving enough attention to that student to bring them up to that starting point to do the assignment while still making it engaging for those students that have that*

*foundation and have taken off."*

It appeared that to a certain degree the conversations challenged participants to review their frame of mind as they weighed in on the logic to transform their teaching and learning (Mezirow, 1997). In other words, teachers felt compelled to question then possibly adjust their teaching strategies to improve their instruction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings have showed that creating a TLC for teachers to effectively develop their professional development is critical and should be taken in consideration.

### RECOMMENDATION 1: COMPENSATE TEACHERS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers at the CAE work on an hourly basis. When they are provided compensation monetarily for professional development, it will increase their participation. School leaders can draw on Title III<sup>1</sup> funding through the Department of Education to provide in this matter.

### RECOMMENDATION 2: PROVIDE ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE TEACHERS' USE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT.

When teachers use formative assessment regularly they will discover that their teaching is meaningful and align with student needs. Results of formative assessments provide teachers information about their instructional methods and that their strategies and tools contribute to student progress and outcome.

### RECOMMENDATION 3: PROFESSIONALIZE TEACHING BY REQUIRING PARTICIPATION IN TLCS.

The study showed that teachers felt empowered to participate in TLCs. Teachers appreciated the time and space to learn from and share best practices with each other. Being part of a community of learners created space to build working relationships that they have never experienced before. Participating in TLCs created opportunities for teachers to strengthen their knowledge, skills and boost their confidence and teaching.

In conclusion, my study has showed that collaborating in a Teacher Learning Community provides teachers insight in the quality of their instruction and what

<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3a/index.html>

they can do to improve and strengthen their instructional practice.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Marsha Parinussa Flynn** is a Special Programs Coordinator and works at the Center for Adult Education at Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, MA. Aside from overseeing an ESOL and a High School Equivalency program, Marsha teaches ESOL Writing. Marsha recently earned a Doctor of Education degree, Leadership in Schooling from the School of Education at UMass Lowell, MA. Her dissertation examined the impact participating in a Teacher Learning Community on teacher instruction, relating to the use of formative assessment. This article is based on findings from the author's [dissertation](#).

### REFERENCES:

- Hord, S. (1997).** Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory*.
- Mezirow, J. (1997).** Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
- Stewart, C. (2014).** Transforming professional development to professional learning. *Journal of Adult Education*, 43(1), 28–33.
- Taylor, E. (2000).** Fostering Mezirow's transformative learning theory in the adult education classroom: A critical review. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 14(2), 1-28. Retrieved March 6, 2022, from <https://cjsae.library.dal.ca/index.php/cjsae/article/view/1929/1689>
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008).** A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80-91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004>
- William, D. (2009).** Content then process: Teacher learning communities in the service of formative assessment. In D. Reeves (Ed.), *Ahead of the Curve: The power of assessment to transform teaching and learning* (pp. 183-204). Solution Tree.

# Reflecting on Collaboration: Instructional Coaching and the WIDA ELD Standards Framework

**Molly Ross**

rossm@randolph.k12.ma.us

**Angela Pomarole**

pomarolea@randolph.k12.ma.us



**S**HARED RESPONSIBILITY for the education of multilingual learners is crucial to providing equitable language and content learning environments. According to the Massachusetts vision for English learners, “English learners in Massachusetts attend schools in which **all** educators share responsibility for their success, engage effectively with their families, and value and nurture their linguistic and cultural assets.” (MA DESE, 2021)

One of the greatest assets to a school system is the variety and diversity of experts that exist within the walls of our schools. For the 2021-2022 school year, our school created a team of skilled instructional coaches, each with expertise in a specific area: literacy, social studies, math, science and sheltered English immersion (SEI). As the year has progressed, we have seen how collaboration between content and language specialists can build teacher capacity to ensure that multilingual learners have access to an equitable education.

**Our school created a team of skilled instructional coaches. As the year has progressed, we have seen how collaboration between content and language specialists can build teacher capacity to ensure that multilingual learners have access to an equitable education.**

At Randolph High School, Molly Ross, the SEI instructional coach, and Angela Pomarole, the history

instructional coach, collaborated to support the team of six high school social studies teachers to integrate language considerations into their argument writing assessments using the tools from the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition (WIDA, 2020). Below are our reflections about this process and how the WIDA tools along with strong collaboration led to shifts in thinking from both the content and language perspective.

**Angela:** A specific outcome for our history common planning time meetings for this school year was to use student data from classroom formative assessments to inform planning and instruction with the goal of increasing student achievement.

The challenge for me as the History Instructional coach in meeting this goal was the variety in assessment and grading practices among teachers in the history department. I felt that an important first step in being able to measure student progress was to create a consistent foundation for assessing argument writing across the department. To create alignment among the team, we began by looking at the disciplinary literacy standards outlined in the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework. The first step we took as a department was to have teachers focus explicitly on writing standard 1, “write arguments focused on discipline specific content.” These standards are written according to grade span (9-12) making it unclear what skills should be taught for each specific grade level. I felt it was important to articulate to teachers the specific argument writing skills from these standards that would be targeted at each grade level. This was accomplished by creating a vertical alignment chart that could be shared with teachers. Table 1 shows an excerpt from the history argument writing vertical alignment chart that outlines grade level expectations based on the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework literacy standard with bolded skills signaling that the skill is new for that grade level.

**I felt it was important to articulate to teachers the specific argument writing skills from these standards that would be targeted at each grade level. This was accomplished by creating a vertical alignment chart that could be shared with teachers.**

Table 1. History argument writing vertical alignment chart

History and Social Science and the Standards for Literacy Writing Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas [WCA] WCA 1. Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content. Language of Argue in Social Studies - WIDA			
8th Grade Outs	9th Grade Outs	10th Grade Outs	11th Grade Outs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue,</li> <li>• acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims/critiques, and</li> <li>• organize the reasons and evidence logically in paragraphs and sections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce <b>specific</b> claim(s) about a topic or issue,</li> <li>• distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims/critiques, and</li> <li>• <b>Begin to identify relationship between claims and counterclaims/critique</b></li> <li>• organize the reasons and evidence logically in paragraphs and sections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce <b>precise</b> claim(s)</li> <li>• distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims/critiques</li> <li>• <b>create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims/critiques, reasons, and evidence.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce precise, <b>knowledgeable</b> claim(s), <b>establish the significance of the claim(s),</b></li> <li>• distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and</li> <li>• create an organization that <b>logically sequences</b> the claim(s), counterclaims / critiques, reasons, and evidence.</li> </ul>

As a first step, we presented the vertical alignment document to the history teachers and asked them to complete an independent reflection where they provided feedback on their goals for students around crafting arguments and the challenges they were currently experiencing when teaching argument writing. A common theme that came up in the reflection process was an explicit need to support multilingual learners (MLLs) in putting together claims, evidence and reasoning. Teachers also asked for support around differentiation and understanding how to modify assessments based on student WIDA levels. As the History Instructional Coach, I realized that my expertise in supporting teachers in their specific areas of need when it comes to MLLs was limited so I reached out to Molly, our SEI Instructional Coach to see if there was an opportunity to collaborate.

**Molly:** When Angela approached me to support her work with argumentative writing in social studies, I was of course excited about the opportunity to collaborate with the social studies team especially since that is one of the Big Ideas from Section 1 of the WIDA 2020 Standards (p.19-20). I wanted to first make sure I understood the context and standards since I've never taught high school social studies. Luckily, she had already done the work on breaking down the literacy standards by grade for the team in the vertical alignment document (Table 1). In our first meeting Angela shared this with me while also talking me through the department's argument writing goals. My initial thought looking at the social studies literacy standards was that they are very closely aligned with the WIDA Language Expectations ELD-SS.9-12.Argue.Expressive (p. 200-201). I wanted to make sure that Angela and the social studies team understood the language expectations to argue in social studies before we talked about scaffolding and differentiation for MLLs. To support this, I shared the Language Expectations ELD-SS.9-12.Argue.Expressive as well as the language functions and sample features with Angela (p. 200-201).

**Angela:** Molly and I met to discuss the best way to support teachers in developing the argument writing skills of MLLs in mainstream content classes. It was helpful for me to see the language expectations for arguing in social studies as I had not previously thought about the technical features of language acquisition such as how we need to explicitly teach the expressive and interpretive language expectations. I realized that this was probably something that teachers were also not aware of. To meet the specific needs articulated by teachers, Molly and I decided to plan a series of meetings that began by creating a foundation of knowledge around the specific language that is needed to argue and then to present some models of assessments for students at different language proficiency levels.

**Molly:** We decided that in the first session we would create a bridge between the content and the language standards, so we started by eliciting the teacher's ideas on what skills go into constructing an argument based on the previous work they had done with Angela. Then we had the history teachers compare the WIDA ELD-SS.9-12.Argue language expectations with the literacy standards vertical alignment document they had created with Angela (table 1) in order to identify the connections between the two. Essentially, we were asking them to understand the ways that explicitly teaching and supporting the language expectations will help teachers meet the disciplinary literacy standards.

**Angela:** After setting the foundation in terms of argument writing skills for each grade level, we decided a logical next step would be to model for teachers what differentiated assessments would look like for each WIDA level. Molly and I met and decided to take an existing argument writing assessment that was being used by the two US History II teachers where students are asked to write an argumentative essay answering the question “How were the 1920s a battle between traditionalism and modernity? We connected the MA History and Social Science Framework content standard, literacy standard and the WIDA 2020 Argue in 9-12 social studies language expectations (Table 2).

*Table 2. Connections between content, literacy, and WIDA standards.*

MA History and Social Science Framework Content Standard	MA History and Social Science Framework Disciplinary Literacy Skill/ Standard	WIDA 2020: ELD-SS.9-12.Argue
<p>12. Analyze primary sources, to develop an argument about how the conflict between traditionalism and modernity manifested itself in the major societal trends and events in the first two decades of the 20th century. Trends and events students might research include:</p> <p>e. racial and ethnic tensions, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacy as a movement, and the first Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North</p>	<p>Support claims with logical reasoning by making connections to relevant, accurate data and evidence</p>	<p>100-300 Per Semester</p>

We created three modified versions of the assessment for different WIDA language levels. The modified assessments included built in scaffolds through a graphic organizer that was formatted to aid students in using consistent organization for framing arguments. Also, we incorporated translanguaging for students at WIDA proficiency levels one and two by asking students to view several images from the 1920's and describe what they see in any language. Student responses from these images were then used as the evidence. The graphic organizer provided the structure for organizing their argument and the sentence starters provided the language scaffold for writing claim and

connecting evidence and reasoning. Figure 1 shows an excerpt from the modified assessment where students were asked to analyze an image in order to write evidence and reasoning.

Figure 1. Excerpt from the Writing Assessment.

1. Reflect on <u>the pictures</u> in <u>any language</u> ( <i>H. Creole, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Spanish, etc.</i> )	
<input type="checkbox"/> What do you see?	
<input type="checkbox"/> What do you think it means?	
Type answer here.	
<b>#1</b>	
French, H. A. (1926, September 13). <i>Ku Klux Klan white supremacist parade, 9/13/26</i> [Photograph]. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/2016842483/">https://www.loc.gov/item/2016842483/</a> .	
<b>Evidence 1</b> ( <a href="#">Picture #1 linked here</a> )	
In the picture I see...	
<b>Reason 1</b> (explain how the evidence connects to the claim)	
This shows that the Ku Klux Klan...	

**Molly:** Co-creating these assessments was one of my favorite parts of our collaboration. I learned so much from Angela about the way social studies teachers think and use their standards. Plus, it was a way to discuss the language needs in a very real and tangible way. As the SEI coach I am always

trying to support content teachers to think about the language needs. This collaboration helped me to push my thinking even deeper into how to apply the WIDA language expectations to the performance expectations articulated by the content standards. In this example, we had to determine how students at different proficiency levels cite and explain evidence.

### **MEASURING IMPACT**

Our success was measured using teacher feedback. At the end of each meeting, we asked teachers to fill out a google form, reflecting on their takeaway and learning from the session. Teachers reported that they appreciated, “learning about what the difference between the MLL levels looks like on actual assignments.” In addition, teachers identified specific strategies that they could use immediately in their classrooms. One teacher reflected on the use of models, “I appreciate the work that was put into the models of WIDA levels 1-3 to show us. Visuals and examples help a lot, plus we can transfer these skills and strategies immediately into our teaching.” Another strategy that teachers found useful was providing students with mini lessons to address gaps in knowledge. One teacher stated that mini lessons helped them to “... understand a little bit more about how lessons can be scaffolded.” Another indicator of success was increased demand for coaching to support the English learners. Two teams reached out to the SEI instructional coach to collaborate on upcoming argument writing assignments and another requested support in writing language objectives.

Using teacher feedback our next step would be to replicate this process while focusing on reading. We also continued to discuss EL needs by introducing the concept of translanguaging and the use of home language in the content classroom.

### **FINAL REFLECTION**

For us as coaches, engaging in collaborative planning and facilitation of common planning meetings provided growth in an area outside of our specific realm of expertise. Instructional coaching can often feel very isolating, particularly when you are assigned to coach within a specific department or content area. We were also able to model collaboration between departments and provide visibility for what ESL support would look like in the content classroom using the WIDA content specific language tools. We hope that this work will provide a framework that can support RHS as we begin to develop co-teaching models in content classes with ESL. The collaborative work that we did

could serve as a model for how teachers can create partnerships and use the WIDA tools to support students and provide targeted language scaffolds.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Molly Ross** is an SEI instructional coach for the Randolph Public Schools and part time faculty at Boston University. She has taught English as a second language for twelve years in the elementary through high school settings. Molly currently serves on the board of directors for MATSOL.

**Angela Pomarole** is the Secondary History and Social Studies Instructional Coach for the Randolph Public Schools. Angela has over ten years of experience teaching ELA, history, and coaching teachers in a variety of content areas and educational settings.

### REFERENCES

- WIDA. (2020).** *WIDA English language development standards framework, 2020 edition: Kindergarten–grade 12*. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021).** *The Massachusetts Blueprint for English Learner Success*.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2018).** *History and Social Studies Curriculum Framework*.

# Poetry Writing with Teens at the Lowell Coalition for a Better Acre

**Johanna Tigert**

johanna\_tigert@uml.edu



**THE SEI CLASS** I teach at University of Massachusetts Lowell includes field work with local K-12 students. This past spring, my class offered after-school activities to the teen program of the [Coalition for a Better Acre](#), a community organization. One of the activities was writing “Where I’m from” and other poems. Below, I share a few of the authors’ poems and photos, with their permission.

*I am from Lowell Mass  
I am from the sound of chaos  
I am from the smell of strawberry shortcake candles  
I am from the sight of cars passing by  
I am from the feeling of love and comfort  
I am from the craziness*

**-Anonymous**

*Make sure you have the right friends around you  
at all times  
Always do what makes you happy  
Don't give  
It's possible to become anything and do anything  
Don't get caught UP with the hype  
Don't follow what people do  
Just be you and you'll be fine  
Enjoy life each day  
Think about this and it will help you in life  
And you'll be successful*

**-Luis, a.k.a. King Louie**

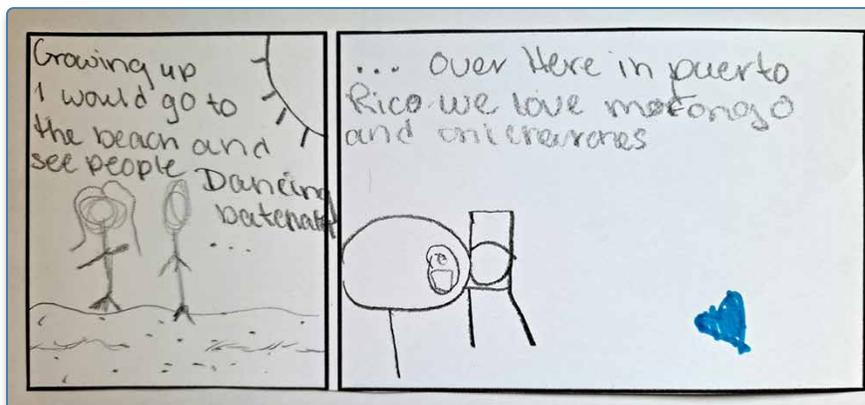


Contributing Poet, Luis

I am from San Juan Puerto Rico  
 I am from the smell of mofongo  
 I am from beautiful beaches  
 I came from the smell of quenepas  
 I am from where you sit down and  
     eat bizcocho at party tables  
 I am from Sunday beaches  
 I am from late stay up party  
 I am from where I play with my friends  
 I am from the taste of mofongos and quenepas  
 I came from dancing bachata at beaches  
 I came from having a style from very little  
 I came from the water and electricity going on  
     and off  
 I came from the storm the María huracán  
 My heart goes to bachata and quenepas  
 I come from a small town, that every day there is  
     music in the store  
 I come from going to the store since I was  
     very little and buying chips and Capri Sun  
 I am from very heavy rain  
 I am from where every day I sweat  
**-Lionelee (Nelly)**



Contributing Poet, Lilly



Nelly's visual draft

# A New English Grammar – American Edition

by Andrew Rossiter. Linguapress, 2021. 207 pages. ISBN-13: 979 – 1069977631.

Reviewed by **Golnar Foutouhi**

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF A LANGUAGE?** Which is more important for surviving in a second or foreign language: vocabulary or grammar? “It is grammar that turns strings of words into messages with meaning,” posits author Andrew Rossiter in the introduction of his book *A New English Grammar – American Edition*. I tend to agree. Most people believe vocabulary knowledge helps a person the most in a second language; however, vocabulary alone is only effective for conveying simple ideas and sentences. When the sentence gets more complicated and has more details, it will become impossible to convey its meaning without grammatical knowledge.

This book consists of four chapters. It starts from simple and moves to complex grammatical concepts in each chapter. The first chapter is “Verbs,” in which the author starts from the simplest verbs such as *start* and *live* and finishes with modals. The second chapter, “Noun Phrase,” covers nouns, pronouns, articles, numbers, possessives, and adjectives. The third chapter, “Other Parts of Speech,” explains adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. Chapter four, “Sentences and Clauses,” includes word order, reported speech, tag questions, relative clauses, punctuation, and formal and informal styles of language. Information about formal and informal styles of writing is not common in grammar books, and I see it as necessary knowledge for a person who wants to use the right voice related to each situation in a second language.

Chapters are also ordered from the most essential, simplest, and the smallest components of language such as verbs to more general, bigger components like sentences and clauses. The important words in the sentences (e.g., main verbs when teaching gerunds) are in different colors and help students to pay attention to the topic of instruction.

The book is a newer, American English version of one previously published about the grammar of British English. American English and British English have differences in spelling, vocabulary, and grammar (Bock et al., 2006). Differences in the grammar between these two versions of English include the singularity or plurality of collective nouns ("the committee is investigating the case," vs. "the committee are investigating the case"), use of modals, past participle of verbs, and more. Therefore, having a grammar book compatible with the rules of American English is essential for learners who want to take American English tests like the TOEFL or who want to live or study in the U.S.

It is important to use simple vocabulary and everyday example sentences when teaching grammar so that students can focus their attention on the grammar lesson. Because this book does that, it is appropriate for students with elementary to upper-intermediate levels of English proficiency. The use of different font colors to emphasize key words in the text is another advantage of this book. I found this book a valuable resource for both learners and teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language. This book can be either self-studied or taught by teachers. It has simple language for students to use independently and covers all the grammatical topics needed for teachers in an English class.

## REFERENCES

**Bock, K., Cutler, A., Eberhard, K. M., Butterfield, S., Cutting, J. C., & Humphreys, K. R. (2006).** Number agreement in British and American English: Disagreeing to agree collectively. *Language*, 64-113.

## **MATSOL BOARD AND STAFF**

### **2022-2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

#### **OFFICERS**

Chris Montecillo Leider, President  
Molly Ross, Vice President & Clerk  
Mary Hughes, Treasurer

#### **AT-LARGE DIRECTORS**

Silvia Fomin  
Kelly Mowers  
Marianne Duffy  
Moira Greenson  
Anne Roberti  
Yuiko Shimazu  
Ivone Spencer  
Priya Tahiliani, Past President  
Lin Zhou

#### **STAFF**

Helen Solorzano, Executive Director  
Jason Fei, Program & Member Engagement Coordinator  
Teresa Kochis, Program Assistant  
Emily Graham, Registration Coordinator

#### **MATSOL CURRENTS**

Johanna Tigert, Editor  
Mary Clark  
Ron Clark  
Clarissa Codrington  
Sharifa Djurabaeva  
Golnar Fotouhi  
Nasiba Norova  
Rachel Theodorou

### **Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages**

2 Canton Street, Suite B-223 Stoughton, MA 02072 617-820-5099 [www.matsol.org](http://www.matsol.org)  
Copyright © 2022 by Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.