CURRENTS

Massachusetts Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

VOL. 22, NO. 3 SUMMER 1996

Collective Dialogue Journals: A Way to Written Interaction

Clara Perez Fajardo
Finlay-Albarran Medical School
Havana, Cuba

Since Jana Staton and Leslee Reed began to popularize dialogue journals in 1979, many teachers around the world have used them to establish written communication with their students. Authors have expressed agreement on some essential characteristics of dialogue journals: They are interactive, frequent, sustained, open-ended, not corrected, private, and somehow durable and accessible. Topics are often not assigned, leaving participants free to write whatever they wish. Though dialogue journals are normally seen as written interaction between an individual student and the teacher (i.e., private communication), a lack of both time and paper led me to create a *collective* dialogue journal, one single notebook in which all the students and the teacher write freely to one another on any topic.

After a brief ten-day experience in July, 1995, I started a new collective dialogue journal last September in which my thirty-six fifth-year medical students could write. At first, their writing was shy and rather simple. They did not have much to say:

September 5, 1995

Dear Teacher,

I'm very happy with the new course, but I'm still tired. I liked it when

Continued on page 7

INSIDE

In The Archives

Ron Clark

Lying among old photos and conference flyers, in a dusty cardboard box sitting in a corner of my apartment, is a bundle of thin, bound volumes labeled "the archives"—which is the recorded history of MATSOL, albeit incomplete, as reflected in the pages of the MATSOL *Newsletter* and its successor, MATSOL *Currents*. Possessing this package is a privilege reserved for the editor, but its true owners are all of us, so let's have a look at what's there.

1984

The oldest document currently in the archives is the Spring/Summer 1984 issue of the newsletter (Vol. 12, No. 4). It's a dozen pages long and was edited by

Continued on page 8

MATSOL
Currents

Editor
Ron Clark
Boston University

Associate Editor
Tom Griffith
Showa Boston

Assistant to the Editor
Doug Kohn
Harvard Extension

Reviews Editor & Advertising Liaison
Sterling Giles
Roxbury Community College

Teacher Research Editor
Jean Chandler
New England Conservatory of Music and *Clark University*

MATSOL Currents is published two times a year and is available through membership in MATSOL. Send submissions to the editor, Ron Clark, 13 Dudley St., Cambridge, MA 02140. For submission guidelines or questions, call the editor at (617) 353-7937. Submit materials on a Macintosh disc, *Microsoft Word*, if possible.

Submission Deadlines
Vol. 23, No. 1: October 15, 1996
Vol. 23, No. 2: March 1, 1997

Advertising
Contact Sterling Giles
(617) 451-6332

Typesetting
Bartleby Scriveners

Printing
Sir Speedy, Brookline

From the President

Once again autumn is in the air; it's time to dust off our desks and unpack our briefcases to greet another academic year, another eager class, sure to be different from yet as challenging as the last.

I am happy to report that the conference committee is diligently planning the program for the fall conference to be held on Saturday, October 19, at Clark University in Worcester. We hope you can attend, not only to hear the erudite words of the plenary speaker, Robert Bickerton, and other presenters, but also to visit a university that has been a state leader in the field of ESL and teacher training.

The spring conference committee, as of this writing, is still seeking a site in or around Boston. Suggestions have been made to hold our annual conference at a hotel, as MABE, MAFLA, and ConnTESOL do. One advantage of this practice is that members and publishers always know where and approximately when the conference is to be held. Also, the conference committee has an easier job because they can simply duplicate the planning and site work done the previous year and not "reinvent the wheel" at a completely different location. The major disadvantage is increased cost: We have to pay for hotel space (which is sometimes donated by educational institutions) and in most cases are required to use the hotel's food service, which is much more expensive than accessing cafeterias or nearby fast food restaurants, for example. These extra costs would have to be absorbed by members, and conference fees would need to be raised. If there was a low turnout because of prohibitive fees, we would have to use our treasury funds to offset the costs. Having spent a year in the red, we are loath to allow our reserves to diminish. Perhaps in the future, when we have a heftier bank balance, we can think of following the example of these other organizations, but for now, unless we find an inexpensive hotel, it is safer to hold our conferences at a school or university.

Other topics under discussion by the board include a revised MATSOL brochure for new members, future Professional Development Opportunity venues, and socio-political updates. The board welcomes your input on these and other topics; simply call your representative (contact numbers are listed in the back of each *Currents*) and give him or her your feedback, which, in turn, will be brought to the next monthly board meeting. As always, we thank you for your contributions and continued support.

Carol Pineiro

From the Editor

With a new school year imminent, it is perhaps no surprise that, once again, I bring you *Currents* personnel news. Anne Roberti, on the *Currents* editorial board for the past two years, is moving to Philadelphia to begin a Ph.D. in educational linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. Anne has been teaching ESL, K-8, in Brookline and in the evenings at Bunker Hill Community College since 1989. With such strong connections to the Boston area (she has a house to sell), this move will be a big one, but Anne is looking forward to it, and MATSOL and I wish her well and thank her for generous work on the last two volumes of this publication.

Another important development is that the MATSOL board, at its May meeting, voted to reduce the number of *Currents* from three issues to two per year, starting with Volume 23, which begins with the fall 1996 issue. As the *Currents* has grown in length and expanded its scope over the years, producing three issues per year has become, quite simply, a hectic race to stay on schedule. When one

Continued on page 6

Letter to the Editor

Continue ESL Awareness Day

I sincerely hope that MATSOL will continue to celebrate an annual *ESL Awareness Day*. On behalf of our students and our colleagues, I think that *ESL Awareness Day* is a way for us to continue to make the citizens of Massachusetts aware of the following information:

• *The numbers of people (adults and children) studying ESL in Massachusetts.* Thousands of *international students* study at our universities, colleges, prep schools, community colleges, and proprietary language schools. They are a significant source of revenue for the educational institutions they attend, as well as for Boston in general (by paying rent, buying food and clothing, etc.). Many of the international students go back to their countries and become business or political leaders. Thousands of *immigrants and refugees* study in our public schools, community colleges, and private colleges and then go on to become part of the American mainstream, working and *paying taxes.*

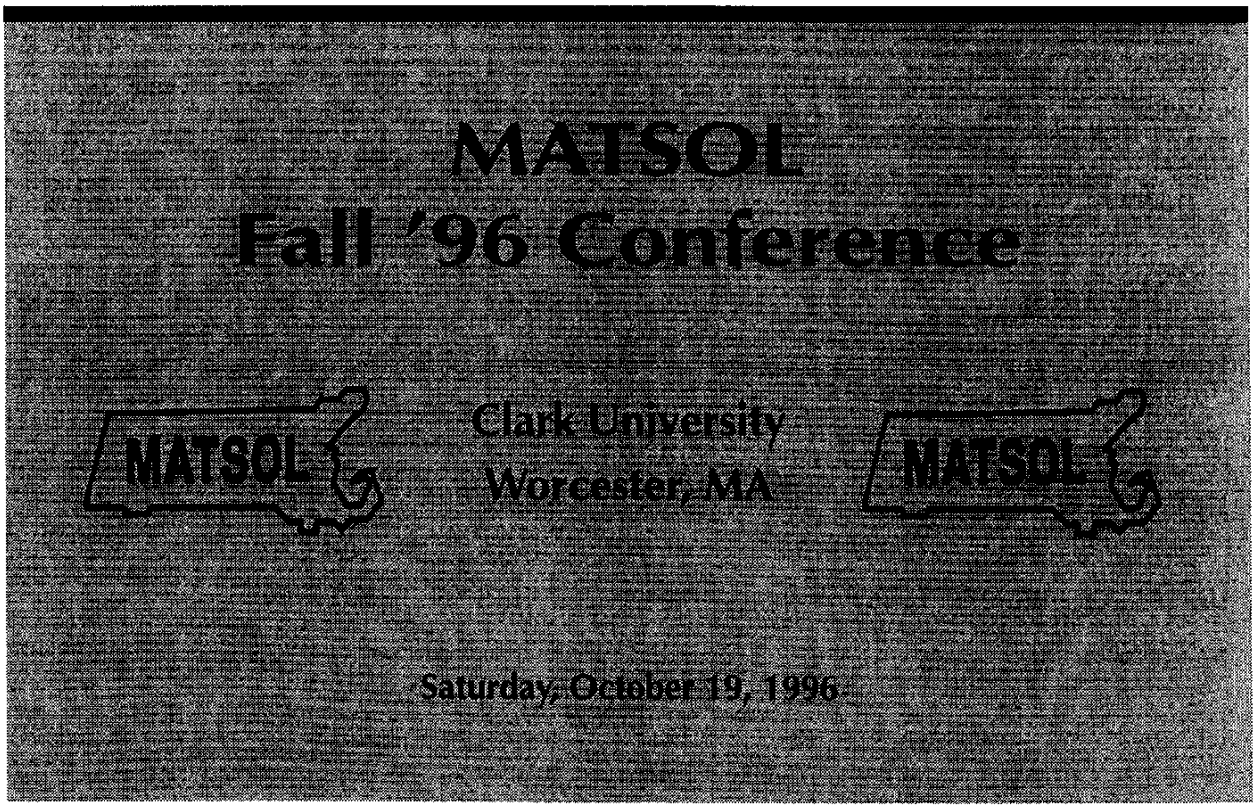
• *ESL professionals do a superb teaching job and make a contribution.* I think that much of the public is ignorant about ESL—thinking that anyone who speaks English can teach it. And of course, t'ain't so. Skilled, innovative, exciting teaching is happening. ESL is not taught in a lecture setting. It involves skills acquisition, which is far different.

• *Teachers, in general, need more positive PR.* Teachers have a bad rep nowadays, which I think is tragic. But teachers work hard, plan and prepare, and think about how to be effective and how to teach their pupils to function effectively in English.

• *Massachusetts has some outstanding superstars in the ESL field*—authors, teacher-trainers, etc. There is a huge array of books, materials, etc. developed here.

Sincerely,

Marlyn Katz Levenson
Former MATSOL President and
ESL Awareness Day Co-Chair



"The Hard-to-Reach ESL Student"

Saturday, April 27, 1996

John Antonellis

Experts in literacy, second language acquisition, and learning disabilities offered their insights into the ESL student one has to work harder to reach at MATSOL's first Professional Development Opportunity (PDO). Over fifty people attended the PDO, which was hosted by the International Institute of Boston. The event featured the following panelists:

Grace Rooney, Coordinator of PAL/ESL, a support program for ESL learners with learning disabilities at Curry College;
Martha Jean, Coordinator of NE YALD Partnership (Young Adults with Learning Disabilities) and an ABE teacher at the Community Action Council in Haverhill;
Michelle Ede, an ESL teacher and member of the NE YALD Partnership;
Leona Breslow, Coordinator of ABE/Literacy for Immigrants at the International Institute of Boston;
Eileen Farah, a bilingual speech therapist with the Boston Public Schools;
Charles Skidmore, Assistant Headmaster, Brighton High School; and
Janice R. Lewis, a speech and language pathologist with the Newton Public Schools, K-5.

Following a panel presentation which provided participants with a portrait of the learner from a variety of perspectives, each panelist led a break-out session designed to give participants an opportunity to discuss relevant learning issues in greater depth. [See Betty Gulesian's report on Grace Rooney's session, below.]

Those who attended the PDO enjoyed its manageable size, smaller time frame (3 hours), and interactive nature. Several expressed hope that MATSOL would sponsor more PDO's in the upcoming year.

A special thanks to all who volunteered their time to make this event a success and to *Signature Breads*, *Espresso Royale Caffe*, and *New York Deli* for their generous contributions to the event's breakfast table.

John Antonellis is MATSOL's Adult Education Representative and was one of the organizers of this event.

"The Hard-to-Reach ESL Student"—Break-out Session Report

Betty Gulesian

In paraphrased Q & A format, the following is Betty's report on Grace Rooney's break-out session, representative of the informal roundtables which followed the panel presentation. Each of these session focused on issues relevant to the participants' own work situations; Grace's focused on adult/college level concerns. [The editor]

How is oral fluency transferred to academic fluency?

Using visual representations of the processes involved in writing or reading (such as description, comparison, cause and effect, analysis) is suggested. The book *Framework for Teaching* [see bibliography] gives suggestions and illustrations for using this method. Give students choice of topic. With hard-to-reach students tasks often must be broken down. LD (learning disability) students generally don't read well and can't get themselves organized. Breaking reading and writing tasks into visual frameworks taps into more than one modality. Heinle & Heinle has a learning strategies packet which explains visual organizers, such as Venn Diagrams. The instructor should sit with individual students to discuss writing drafts, revising and editing.

How does a teacher deal with different learning styles? For example, many Russian students are used to more formal teaching and learning arrangements than I typically provide.

This is a real issue. Instructors need to build trust and confidence in their teaching. They need to make clear to the students the purpose of the learning activities. Another real issue is that classes are often multi-level; but students can help one another and concurrently develop the ability to work in a team or group.

How does a teacher test for learning disabilities?

Formal testing can be done at centers such as Mass

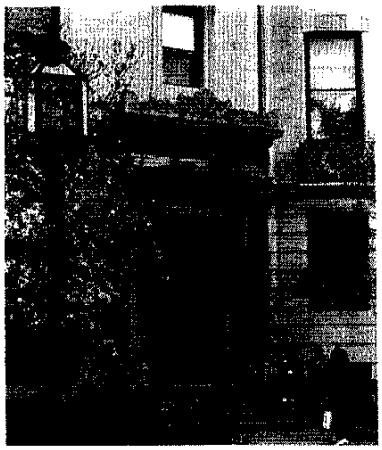
Continued on page 6

Development Opportunity

(l. to r.) Esther Iwanaga, John Antonellis, Cynthia Cook, and Carol Piñeiro.

An attentive audience.

(l. to r.) Janice R. Lewis, Charles Skidmore, Eileen Farah, Martha Jean, Michelle Ede, Leona Breslow, and Grace Rooney.



Spring at the doorstep of the International Institute.

Break time.

Break-out Session Report *Continued from page 4*

General, Children's Hospital, or Curry College. IQ testing should be done in the student's native language. The Disability Center at Northeastern may have names of people who can test in languages other than English. There is a type of dynamic testing which may be helpful, called the Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD), which uses a test-teach-retest method to look at learning efficiency. Informally, a teacher could look at some of the screening tests in the Hull Specific Language Disability Screening Process [see bibliography].

However, it is often difficult to ascertain whether a problem is related to ESL or learning disability. ESL issues should be transitional, but LD issues will remain.

An LD student often needs to learn how to advocate for and promote him or herself. It is also hard for many LD students to learn social cues. In addition, as a student loses his accent, he also loses some protection, a measure of which he or she may have come to depend on.

Have students look at their own learning. One suggestion is to have students write the syllabus for the following semester at the end of the preceding one.

In summary:

- Don't make assumptions about learners.
- *All* classes are multi-level.
- Students should be helped to recognize their strengths.
- Students should be given choices.
- The "affective" dimension is important.
- Visuals are important.
- Using portfolios helps to develop organizational skills.
- Students should know the purpose of tasks.
- Objectives for each lesson should be listed at the beginning of class.
- Students should be given individual attention and time.

Resources

A Closer Look: Perspectives and Reflections on College Students with Learning Disabilities. Adelizzi and Goss, editors. Published by Curry College, Milton, MA.

A Framework for Teaching and Learning, published by the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

The Hull Specific Language Disability Screening Process. Oddleifson. Published by SABES in 1994 and available through the Adult Literacy Institute at Roxbury C.C./Boston Business School Campus on Commonwealth Ave in Boston.

The Learner-Centered Curriculum. Nunan. Cambridge UP, 1988.

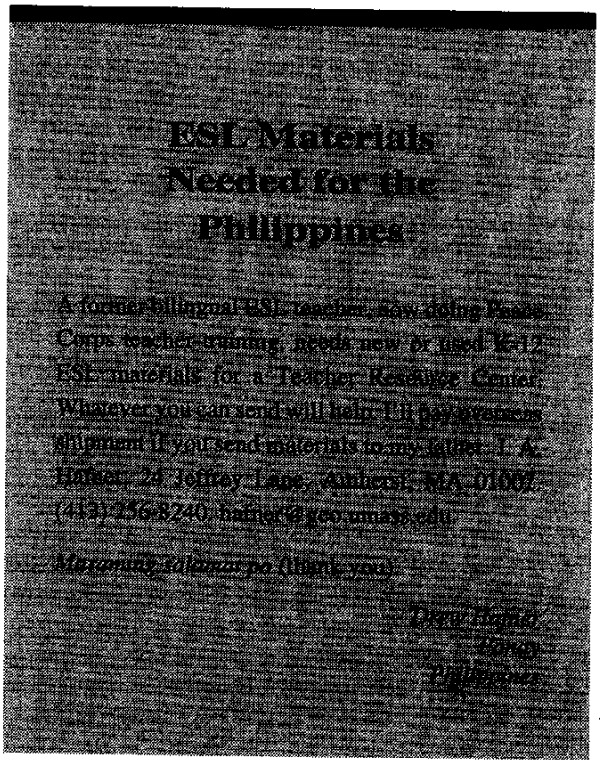
From the Editor *Continued from page 2*

issue is in the mail, the next one immediately beckons, leaving little or no time for the editorial staff to reassess, develop new ideas, or even to seek out and nurture the articles we'd like to publish. Reducing the number of issues does not mean, however, that members will get less for their money. In fact, the total number of pages may not be reduced at all. We'll shoot for two issues at 32 or 36 or 40 pages each as opposed to three at 24 or 28 pages, for example. There will be a fall/winter issue, mailed after the fall conference, and a spring/summer issue, mailed after the spring conference. This change will give us the time and energy to ensure a dynamic, quality publication, of which we can continue to be proud.

Given this change, along with others over the years, MATSOL *Currents* will become even more like a journal and even less like a newsletter. Therefore, newsy, date-sensitive information will be published in a "bulletin," to be mailed as necessary to members.

These recent personnel and publication developments are the latest called for in the twenty-four-year evolution of the MATSOL *Newsletter* and MATSOL *Currents*. With support from the membership, especially in the form of submissions and editorial help, we can have confidence that such developments remain positive ones.

Ron Clark



Collective Dialogue Journals *Continued from page 1*

I saw you with this notebook in your hands. Goodbye and good luck for everyone here.

Irlys.

September 6, 1995

Hello!

I'm very happy to be here. I want to learn English.

Gusev

September 7, 1995

Dear Irlys,

Hello! How are you? I'm very well, I'm in Frank Pais hospital. This week we have a test. We hope to obtain good results. Tania, Yahily and I will be happy if the teacher transfer you to our group. We miss you very much. Please call me when you have some time.

Love, Yainet

Time and practice made students more confident, and their writing improved:

September 19, 1995

Dear everybody,

I've read about the things that some of you say to other friends of the class, you are very friendly. I think that this dialogue journals is a good idea for us to express ourself because we can talk with the others friends in a writing form and it sometimes is easier for us to express our feelings, our friendly feelings!

Bye, bye, Jorge

Note: A big kiss for you too.

September 26, 1995

Hi!

I'm here again. How are you? I want to say that is very important to give love to your friends. If you give love you will have love too. I'm learning this now. Why do we have to bother the people who is around us? Please think about it! I think George is right, but he must do what he told us.

Bye, bye. Alice

September 28, 1995

Yasmira,

I've already remembered the name of the illness that we were talking about, the immunological illness that Emilio had in his ward, that I couldn't remember, it was Waldestrom illness.

Love, George

Students have reacted to the journal with enthusiasm. Sometimes they rush into the room looking for it, to let their thoughts run through their pencils before the class starts. It is interesting to see how their faces change, how their bodies relax, as they read or write, once their urgent need for communication has been fulfilled.

They have used the journal for announcements, for general comments not addressed to any specific person, for real communication with students from other groups, for invitations to parties, and many other things. As long as communication flows, I prefer not to write too much in the journal, unless they address me directly.

To respond to students' need for correction, evidenced throughout the journal, I systematically do the following:

- Model correct language usage in response to their journal entries.
- Select erroneous expressions, disguise them so students do not identify them as taken from the journal, and insert them in a "Spots to Consider" session.
- Ask students to give the English or Spanish equivalent to troublesome words and expressions.
- Devise oral/written drills, including corrected forms of their most common mistakes.

In the "Spots to Consider" session, individuals, pairs or small groups spot the problem sentences and discuss how to improve them. I never tell students I search for their mistakes in their journal entries, since in free-writing activities the emphasis should be on meaning, on real communication, and not on form.

Collective dialogue journals are different from traditional ones. They are not private, there is no one-to-one teacher-student interaction, and not all students participate equally. (Though "slow" students seldom write, they do benefit from what others have written and sometimes, in their own private journals, comment on what they have read.) But a collective dialogue journal promotes uninterrupted written communication among the students, something well worth trying for. Since the topics are not previously assigned, students are not worried about grammatical perfection but write and read for genuine communicative purposes. It is a form of freewriting but a form which still allows the teacher to follow the students' progress in writing English. I invite you to open a collective dialogue journal with your class of whatever level, and please let me know how it works.

Clara Perez Fajardo teaches at ISCM-H Finlay-Albarran in Havana, where she presented this paper at the Grupo de

Continued on page 8

In The Archives *Continued from page 1*

a Mary Christie, whom I do not know. I read that membership was then about 500 (about 900 now). Annual membership cost $5 for a full-time student and $10 for a professional. The MATSOL President for 1984-85 was Jacklyn B. Clayton, of Needham Public Schools. The 1984 fall conference, "Writing in ESL," was to be held at Bradford College in Haverhill. Mark Stepner, now a colleague of mine at CELOP, was a book reviews editor and wrote a cover profile of one Rob Gogan, who had been editor of the newsletter from 1980 to 1983. Elsa Auerbach wrote the other cover story, "Beyond Survival: ESL as a Tool for Change," which discussed, in part, Brazilian educator Paolo Freire's "problem-posing model" and how it had been adapted to ESL instruction. A few years later, in 1987, Dr. Auerbach published, along with Nina Wallerstein, whom she mentioned in that 1984 article, *ESL for Action: Problem Posing at Work*, a copy of which sits on my shelf. Also, recently published and reviewed in that issue was George Rooks' *Can't Stop Talking*, which still hasn't stopped being used.

1987-1988

That academic year Ms. Christie, who had moved on to Pine Manor College, became MATSOL President and Mark Stepner became Editor (Vol. 15, No. 5). Linda Schulman, then Associate Editor—and now back for more as MATSOL's 1996-1997 Vice President—was soon to take over from Mark, it appears, since subsequent submissions were to be sent to her address. Other now-familiar MATSOL leaders were also active at that time: Carol Pineiro, now MATSOL President, did the photography for the issue. Betty Stone, recently Past-President, was MATSOL Job Bank Coordinator.

Bill Biddle's "Recreational Grammar" column—which was later taken over by Bob Saitz and a few years later was renamed "Language Lore," listed then-recent additions to "The Ever-Growing Lexicon" of English. "Input" was new, as was "*glasnost*" and "crack, the new, lethal form of cocaine." The acronym "CD" (compact disc) was said to be a relatively new addition, and so too, sadly, was "AIDS." In this copy of that "Winter 1987-Spring 1988" issue, pages 5 and 6 are missing. Who knows what bits of MATSOL history they contained?

In a 1991 issue, Fred Turner encouraged ESL teachers to be more "businesslike," more ruthless, if you will, when it comes to demanding better salaries and working conditions.

Spring 1989

In that season, Vol. 16, No. 3 of the newsletter arrived in members' homes with a picture of Carolyn Graham on the cover (since she would soon deliver the spring conference plenary) and a butterfly-bedecked ad, of course, for the new, second edition of Betty Schrampfer Azar's *Understanding and Using English Grammar. Expressways*, "from the authors of *Side by Side* ... Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss," had a half-page ad, too. Carol Pineiro edited the "Video Views" column and Adrianne Saltz, another CELOP colleague, was editing "Database," which now occasionally appears as "Technology Showcase." Suzanne Irujo, who just recently retired from Boston University's School of Education, was MATSOL President. That year I was finishing my Ed.M. from B.U. and yet hadn't taught a stitch of ESL (though I soon would at JVS's ESL program, then located at Hebrew College).

1991

For the Winter 1991 MATSOL *Newsletter*, Fred Turner, who recently reiterated similar, still-pertinent themes in a letter to the editor in the most recent MATSOL *Currents* (Spring 1996), wrote a cover article, "Don't Nurture: Negotiate!" He encouraged ESL teachers to be more "businesslike," more ruthless, if you will, when it comes to demanding better salaries and working conditions. (Fred also wrote a cover article for the Fall 1991 issue and another article for Spring/Summer 1991 issue. These pieces were precursors, in tone, to our "ESL Outrages" column, begun by Karl Smith.) This issue, by the way, has a blue-accented cover; the newsletter went to colored cover pages in 1990.

In the spring of 1991, Catherine Sadow was MATSOL President; Kathryn Riley, V.P.; Ruth Spack and Sharon

Continued on the next page

Collective Dialogue Journals

Continued from page 7

Especialistas de Lengua Inglesa (GELI) conference in December, 1995. She is working on a Master's degree in Havana and was one of Bette Steinmuller's students when Bette was doing research and training teachers at the Cuban Ministry of Public Health. Bette, MATSOL's Higher Ed Representative, kindly passed the article along to MATSOL Currents. *The students consented to the publication of their writing, Their entries were reproduced* verbatim.

In The Archives *Continued from prior page*

Tsutsui, co-editors; Susan Vik, Secretary; and Dianne Ruggiero, Treasurer. Clark University, site of our 1996 fall conference, advertised its "new graduate program... [leading to a] Graduate Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language." (We can see what and how they're doing when we visit this fall.) Amy Worth had just become the new Job Bank Coordinator. Back then, too, MATSOL was sponsoring travel and research grants to the tune of $350 each: Vivian Zamel won one. Bob Saitz was by then doing the "Recreational Grammar" column.

Advertisements in the Winter 1991 issue included one for TESOL '91 in New York and one for the second edition of *Skill Sharpeners,* Vols. 1–4, by Judy DeFilippo and Charles Skidmore. Ms. DeFilippo is still a MATSOL member, according to a recent list, and Mr. Skidmore served on the panel at MATSOL's first Professional Development Opportunity (PDO), held this past spring [see related articles in this issue of MATSOL *Currents*].

Will Van Dorp, in "Foreign Correspondence," in the Fall 1991 issue of the newsletter, reported on his experience as a hostage of the Iraqi army. He had been abducted from Kuwait and spent the "fall semester" as one of their human shields! He ended up exchanging English lessons for Arabic with some of his guards.

Spring/Summer 1993

This was Volume 19, Number 3, still called MATSOL *Newsletter.* (It was renamed MATSOL *Currents* in 1994.) Suzanne Koons, my predecessor, was Editor. Karen Price, formerly of Harvard University, was then editing the Database" column, which, in that issue, discussed the then-emerging concept of customized textbooks assembled from on-line databases. [Her former colleague, Ramon Valenzuela, now at CELOP, gives us a look at the state of that art today; see his *Primis* review in this issue of MATSOL *Currents.*] Tom Griffith, now Associate Editor of MATSOL *Currents,* wrote a cover story on "English as a Subversive Language"—how the language may help spread the positive aspects of "wealth," egalitarianism," and "individualism" and assist in subverting authoritarianism and economic injustice around the globe. Joe Pettigrew was writing the "ESL Outrages" column, and what an outrage he then described: a historic, influential, dynamic and creative ESL program at a "prominent university in the Boston area" was then being significantly "restructured," a change which should have turned those responsible crimson with shame. Joe asked whether it might not have been the "outrage of the decade."

Marlyn Katz Levenson was then President [see her letter to the editor in this issue of MATSOL *Currents*], and Betty Stone, recently Past-President, was Vice-President. Anne Dow, who delivered a wonderfully-received plenary at the spring 1996 conference, had been presented with a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from MATSOL at the spring 1993 conference. At that time annual dues were $8 for a student and $15 for non.

The "Missing" Years and the Early Years

But what about the first eleven volumes of the newsletter? There are no copies of any of those issues in the archives—twelve years of MATSOL history unrepresented. What was going on then? I called Bob Saitz, one of MATSOL's founders, who still regales us with language lore. He told me this: In Boston, in the late 1960's, educational and religious leaders—especially one "Sister Georgia"—were very concerned about the plight of non-native speakers of English who were then not being served by schools. Many of those young people simply chose not to attend school. Bilingual education grew in response, and the field of ESL grew alongside it. (Boston and Massachusetts were influential locales with regard to these issues.) MATSOL was founded in 1972, and Bob Saitz was our first president (1972-1973). Other significant players back then included Ann Hilferty, John Corcoran, Robert Bousquet, Alice Fastov and Maria Geddes.

"But the documentation of our proud history remains incomplete. . . . If any reader has copies that he or she could spare or would like to donate to our archives, please contact the editor."

MATSOL became a TESOL affiliate on January 1, 1973. It was one of the first dozen or so of the now 85 affiliates to join. It is now one of the largest, and greatly respected.

But the documentation of our proud history remains incomplete. I would be glad to relate more tales from our past—if only those missing issues of our newsletter could be found. If any reader has copies that he or she could spare or would like to donate to our archives, please contact the editor.

Ron Clark is the editor of MATSOL Currents *and a lecturer at CELOP at Boston University. He can be contacted at the addresses or numbers listed on the inside covers.*

Using Technology in Data Collection: Considerations for the Researcher

Jane D. Tchaïcha

In the past twenty-five years, educational researchers have broadened their focus by examining not only performance but also process in learning. Teacher-researchers and research-scholars no longer concentrate solely on how much knowledge the learner has acquired but also explore the processes that contribute to the acquisition of such knowledge. In the area of second language research, of which ESL is a part, understanding what factors contribute to language learning has been the focus of numerous studies. Moving beyond the written questionnaire which investigates ESL learners' personal backgrounds, learning strategies, and ESL education within pre-defined parameters (e.g., Likert scales and structured-response choices), some researchers have tried other approaches—think-aloud protocols, personal interviews, and participant observation—to gather similar information. These latter approaches have come to rely on the power of technology (in particular, the audio cassette and the video camera) to assist in the collection process. But are these technologies as helpful as one would expect? Are there trade-offs and/or limitations in the kinds and quality of data collected using audio and video technology in contrast to data collected using the survey instrument?

Making the decision to use technology in data collection

Traditionally, audio and video technology has been extremely helpful in qualitative studies in which researchers adopt a holistic paradigm, seeking to document the full scope of a learning environment by capturing it on audio and/or video tape. However, the same technology is also invaluable for researchers who seek to document the frequency of certain language patterns or paralingual features of ESL learners. Given that technology can benefit both quantitative and qualitative analysis, how then should one go about deciding whether or not to use technology as a tool in data collection? Consider the following questions:

• *Is the physical set-up of the research site receptive to technology?* A sufficient number of electrical outlets and good lighting and acoustics are "musts."

• *Does the research plan include a reasonable time-frame and additional assistance, if needed?* Reams of tape require a great deal of time to transcribe and code, possibly demanding additional person-power and more money.

• *Can the technology be introduced into the research setting so as not to compromise the data?* Participant apprehension, inconvenience, and/or frustration are potential negative influences.

If the researcher feels confident in answering "yes" to these questions and also believes that the investigation will be enhanced by the richness of the data collected via technology, then he or she can go ahead with its use. However, the "go-ahead" should not suggest to the researcher that there are no further considerations. Anticipating participants' concerns and technological glitches are essential factors in conducting smooth research sessions.

Participant concerns

In conducting any kind of educational research, respecting the rights of the participants is essential; it is perhaps even more essential when the research design includes technology as a tool for collecting the data. Answering an anonymous survey is much less threatening than having one's voice and image captured on tape. Participants often become uncomfortable at the sight of the cassette recorder or microphone even though they may not have voiced such concerns previously. Such a situation can be avoided or ameliorated in several ways: by informing participants of the intention to use technology well in advance of the time set for data collection; by introducing the technology to participants prior to the actual research session(s); and by assuring them that any information will be used *only* for research purposes and will not be used to evaluate them on a personal level (for a course grade, for example). It is most important that the researcher outline the goals of the study to, and obtain written consent from, the participants (or the legal guardian if the participant is under 18 years). This step not only demonstrates ethical research procedure; it more importantly gives agency to the participant—he or she can say "No."

Technology trouble-shooting

One of the most challenging aspects of using technology in research is its unpredictability, but a few tips can help prevent a disaster during a research session:

• *Visit the research site beforehand.* Check the location of all electrical switches and outlets. Check the acoustics to determine the number and kind of microphones needed. For videotaping, check lighting and space to determine the appropriate lights and number of cameras needed. (For one-on-one sessions, one camera will suffice; for larger groups, three

Continued on page 15

MATSOL *Currents*

Call for Manuscripts

MATSOL *Currents* welcomes submissions of interest to its membership of approximately 900 ESL professionals, who are in the field as classroom teachers (K through adult/university), program administrators, or professionals in related services, such as publishing. We accept articles on matters relating to ESL methodology and techniques; curriculum design and development; materials; teacher education; program administration; classroom observation and research; professionally-related topics, such as employment or sociopolitical issues, etc. We also welcome contributions to our regular columns.

Please follow the guidelines below in preparing your submission:

Full-length articles

Articles should be 750-1,000 words in length and present new ideas or information related to the topics listed above.

Columns

Foreign Correspondence

This column features accounts of EFL teaching experiences. Geographical, sociopolitical, or cultural information often provides helpful background, but the primary focus of the article should be on aspects of teaching and learning English. Submissions should not exceed approximately 750 words in length.

Program Spotlight

Submissions should describe innovative programs that are successful in meeting defined needs and should be between 500 and 750 words in length.

Reviews

Reviews should be between 375 and 750 words and should evaluate recently-published ESL classroom materials or professional resources. Submissions should be sent to Sterling Giles, Reviews Editor, 62 Chandler Street, Boston, MA 02116.

Teacher Research

Contributions (500-750 words) should describe any aspect of teacher research or provide summaries of completed projects or studies in progress. Send submissions to Jean Chandler, Teacher Research Editor, 15 Leonard Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139.

Teaching Ideas

For this column submit a step-by-step but brief account of successful classroom techniques; include your rationale, variations, etc. (250-500 words).

Technology Showcase

Intended as a forum for introducing and discussing uses of technology both in the classroom and as a professional resource, this column accepts submissions of between 500-750 words in length.

Letters to the Editor

Readers are encouraged to respond to any article that has appeared in MATSOL *Currents*. Letters should be brief (not more than 250 words).

Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with 1" margins on top, bottom, and sides of each page.
- Two copies of the manuscript should be submitted. In addition, if possible, documents should be submitted on a 3.5" computer disk—preferably formatted for Macintosh in Microsoft Word word-processing software. Disks will be returned upon request.
- Photographs, illustrations or other graphics related to the content of the article are welcome. (Black and white photos, line drawings and simple graphics reproduce best.)
- Source citations should conform to MLA or APA guidelines.
- Your full name, affiliation, home address, day and evening phone and fax numbers and, if possible, e-mail address should be included. Please include your own one- or two-sentence biographical note.
- MATSOL *Currents* retains the right to edit all manuscripts that are accepted for publication. A writer's request for final approval is honored whenever possible.

Send submissions, except for Teacher Research or Reviews, to the editor:

Ron Clark
MATSOL *Currents* Editor
13 Dudley Street
Cambridge, MA 02140

Phone: (617) 353-7937
e-mail: rclarkjr@bu.edu

Call Me a Taxi

Bob Saitz

Linguistic ambiguity is a staple of humor across cultures. The ambiguity of *lose*, for example, makes possible: "When he was a kid his parents lost him but he came home anyway." And since dinner, for example, may involve both a diner and a dinee, the absence of explicit indication can create the following:

Scene: A fisherman brings a lobster into a bar and presents it as a gift to a patron.
Patron: Can I take this lobster home for dinner?
Fisherman: No, he's already had dinner. Take him to a movie.

As the fisherman may suspect, a particularly rich source of humor in English can be found in our prepositions, which have developed a plethora of meanings in their relatively short history. Although their core meanings may be considered to be spatial ("The tuna is in the can."), the metaphoric extensions of such meanings ("The tuna is in a jam.") are rife and underlie much of our humor. *Of*, for example, whose earliest meaning seems to have been "away" or "away from," over the years has developed the meanings of origin ("the producer of the play") and association ("a woman of wit"). The resulting potential ambiguity creates the kind of joke illustrated by Leo Rosten:

A: What do you think of a father of seventy-eight getting married again?

B: Disgusting. How many children does he expect to have in a lifetime?

The preposition *for* provides an especially rich basis for humor because of the varied meanings it may carry. *The American Heritage College Dictionary* lists, among others: aim or purpose of an action ("for sale"); recipient or beneficiary ("it's for us"); on behalf of ("spoke for us"); in place of ("a substitute for eggs"); equivalence or equality ("ten dollars for a ticket"); amount or duration ("for ten miles"); a result ("jumped for joy"). Thus the possibility of the meaning of either equivalence or purpose underlies the humor of this exchange:

A: Will you give me a dollar for a sandwich?
B: Depends.
A: Depends on what?
B: First, lemme see the sandwich.

The beneficiary/equivalence potential can produce this:

A: Today is my boyfriend's birthday
B: What are you getting for him?
A: Make me an offer.

"It's obvious that one of the reasons we have trouble understanding humor in a second language is that we don't control enough of that language."

Duration/purpose ambiguity allows the proverbial observation,

> "Most women marry a man for life—and then find out he doesn't have any."

Result/purpose helped Don Rickles with this remark:

> "George Burns came to California for arthritis forty years ago—and he's finally got it."

On behalf of/purpose provides for the following:

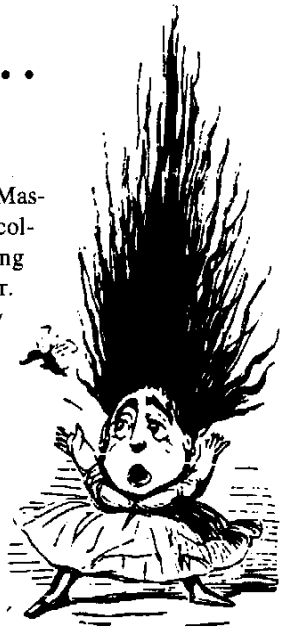
> The beauty queen had had a serious accident and the next Sunday in church the minister said, "We should pray for her." An attentive male parishioner muttered, "I've been praying for her for years but I never got her."

It's obvious that one of the reasons we have trouble understanding humor in a second language is that we don't control enough of that language; the fact that English prepositions have developed so many meanings indicates the extent of the proficiency needed to appreciate that little corner of humor in English. On the other hand, it must be fun for learners of English who have learned the basic meanings of the prepositions and then run into the idiomatic (less frequent?) ones. What wonderful images must course through their minds when they first hear "I'm on the phone" or "She gets up with the birds."

Bob Saitz teaches in the English Department at Boston University.

What I Wish Someone Had Told Me . . .

Joe Pettigrew



Many years ago, I sent letters to several graduate schools requesting information on their linguistics programs. Among the many forms and colorful brochures I got back was a letter from a department chair. In essence, it said, "This is an interesting field, but there are *very* few jobs, even for Ph.D.'s. Think carefully before you devote several years of your life to getting a degree with so few employment prospects." (I went for a Master's in linguistics anyway, but it was nice to do it with my head clear about what the future held.)

I still remember that letter. It was one of the few times I heard any straight talk about jobs in academia. In that spirit, here is what I wish someone had told me about fifteen years ago when I was considering getting a Master's in ESL.

ESL is a profession that offers many rewards. Money, however, is not often one of them. No one goes into education planning to get rich, but most people think they'll be able to make a middle-class living. And to be sure, there are many ESL teachers who have decent salaries. ESL's dirty little secret, however, is that *most jobs at the college and Adult Ed level are part-time with no benefits.*

A couple of years ago, the MATSOL Employment Issues Committee, to which I belonged, conducted a survey of 13 higher education programs in eastern Massachusetts. They included most of the big institutions with ESL departments, both private (B.U., Northeastern, Harvard) and public (UMass/Boston, several community colleges). Among them, there were approximately 500 ESL teaching jobs. Just under 100 were full-time with benefits.

That doesn't mean, of course, that there were 400 different people working part time at these schools. While some people may only want a few hours a week as a supplementary income, many, if not most, ESL teachers patch together two, three, or more part-time jobs in order to make enough to live on. None of these jobs offers health insurance or a retirement plan. Many will not be there next semester when enrollment goes down.

If you stick around long enough, you may eventually be one of the lucky 100. I am, but like many people it was as much a question of being in the right place at the right time as having enough talent or perseverance. I've seen literally hundreds of good teachers go from job to job year after year, never landing that elusive full-time position. You may be willing to live like this at twenty-five. Will you still be at forty?

According to other teachers I've spoken with at MATSOL, the situation in Adult Ed is at least as bad as in Higher Ed, while in Elementary and Secondary Education it appears to be a bit better.

Things are made worse in Massachusetts by the number of colleges and universities churning out M.A.'s in TESL every year. Those colleges in the survey mentioned earlier rarely have trouble finding enough "bodies" (as one administrator I've heard about called them) to teach their courses. I know of no surveys for the rest of the country (and I've looked), but at the TESOL convention every year I manage to talk to a few people from other parts of the U.S. I have yet to hear of a city or state with an abundance of full-time jobs.

No doubt, I'll be called "negative" by many who read this. I've been called worse. I challenge anyone, however, to point out anything I've said here that isn't true.

In the interest of fairness, though, I'll list a few of the good things about ESL. On a purely selfish level, what field besides education gives you so much vacation time? More seriously, working with people from other countries is an enriching experience. There's a variety to this job that you don't get sitting in an office all day. And the feeling that—at least once in a while—you've helped someone, really made a difference in someone's life, is one that can compensate for a lot of gaps elsewhere. Whether that's enough for you, only you can decide, because—to be negative again—those may be the only real rewards you get.

So what should you do? Go for that MBA after all? I offer the following suggestions:

(1) Ask yourself why you want to go into ESL. Is it because there's nothing else to do with a B.A. in French, English Literature, or Psychology? Maybe there's more than you think. Talk to a career counselor. Don't rule out other possibilities. If ESL is still what you want to do...

(2) Talk to other teachers in your specific area of interest. What's the job picture really like in Elementary Ed or at community colleges? You can't get this information from the admissions officers in your Master's program. Talk to them, too, of course, but find some "combat veterans" to get the whole story. Then if you're still interested in pursuing a degree...

Continued on page 15

Dirty Words

Tom Griffith

No one can teach English long before facing the issue of dirty words. I hit it about three weeks into my career, which began in the Peace Corps in Niger. An eighth-grade boy, whom I knew to be salacious-minded, came up after class and asked the English word for "*la chose entre les hommes et les femmes*"—the thing between men and women. I refused to tell him, saying he would only use it to shock people. No, no, he said, he would never even speak the word. He just wanted to know. After some more wrangling I relented and said, "All right. The word is 'Thackeray'." The next day I ran into Mary Ellen Imlau, a volunteer at the health clinic. She asked what had gotten into one of my students. He had approached her on the street, yelled "Thackeray! Thackeray!," and then run off giggling.

That occurred outside the curriculum, yet it well illustrates the great allure of forbidden language. Profanity is like the crazy aunt in the cellar. We all know it's there, but in a classroom setting we may pretend it doesn't exist. Our students know better and occasionally press us for details.

Should we give it to them? Should we make formal lessons on obscene language? I never thought much about it until 1991, when I was asked at Boston University to teach a course in slang, which was pioneered by Michael Feldman, in response to student demand. My own response to the idea was distaste—why fill up a whole course with dirty words? But that, I learned, was prejudice. Slang involves much more than obscenity and is both a field of creativity and a major source of language renewal. Now I think we're remiss *not* to include slang in vocabulary lessons, especially such items that students bring in themselves.

But that doesn't solve the problem of words you wouldn't say around your mother. Before stating my own policy, such as it is, let me offer a couple of insights about dirty words.

First, typological. I was fascinated to realize that for all their variety, there are basically only two sources of profanity: bodily functions and religion. Think about the last swearing you heard. Chances are it had to do with sexual acts or excretion or else the Lord's name taken in vain. The words weren't used in those contexts, of course, but that's where they came from. Why? Why choose pictures from the opposite poles of human nature, our animality and our divinity, the ape and the angel?

That relates to the second aspect, the sociolinguistic. What function does profanity serve in human relations? Most obvious is as an expression of anger or other negative feeling. Robert L. Chapman offers some insights in the preface to his delightful *American Slang*: "Profanity . . . is a surrogate for destructive physical action. Freud once remarked that the founder of civilization was the first man who hurled a curse rather than a rock or spear at his enemy."

A curse—that's the connecting link. In olden times language was seen as a channel for supernatural power. To curse someone was not just a ventilation of feeling; it was serious aggression. The most common profanity is, shall we put it, the D word, the one you used when the mosquito bit you last night. You probably weren't thinking this way, but its basic meaning is to invoke divine condemnation. In shorthand, you asked God to smite that bug.

. . . I invite teachers and all other foes of verbal violence to join me in forming an action group, the Anti-Butt League. Whoever says *butt* in our presence shall be butted.

Whether we're religious or not, our English-language minds are suffused with religious imagery. When we intend great seriousness with language, we swear, in both senses. In a courtroom, we swear to tell the truth with our hand on a Bible. In an argument, we often swear with reference to the founder of Christianity. (Or were you praying the last time you shouted his name?) Even a mild oath like "bloody" derives from "by the blood of Christ." It's the back-handed compliment to religion of an irreligious age. Yet given the decline of religion, it's not strange that the curse of choice nowadays is from the other, earthier group: the F word. Instead of wishing divine violence on someone, we evoke the sex act as a form of aggression. Not very flattering to ourselves, but effective. Less charged, perhaps, is the S word used to denote something worthless: "What a pile of_____!" Or we say it alone to show disgust, drawing out the satisfying sibilance.

In my experience, D, F and S are the Big Three, known

Continued on page 15

Dirty Words *Continued from prior page*

to most ESL students even before they get here. Rather than teach them directly—obviously, I'm a bit squeamish—I've made a game out of giving their milder versions. Appropriateness, register, when *not* to say a word—these are surely legitimate topics. Besides, it's a fascinating study in euphemism, achieved mostly by alliteration. I write up on the board: "STRONG" and "WEAK" forms of swearing. D gives us a rich family of *darn, dern, dang, doggone, dagnab, dadburn.* Its kindred G gives us *gosh, golly, gad.* From the Son of G: *gee, jeez, jeepers creepers, criminy, crikes.* F begets *phooey, fudge, frigging.* S is less fertile, offering only *shoot* or, for the truly delicate, *sugar.*

These fascinate students. They quickly catch the patterns and can always provide the strong forms themselves. Beyond that, I simply urge caution in using such words, given their potential to offend.

Which brings up the moral dimension. I mentioned mothers, and my own must have shaped my view. She was an old-school English teacher who thought that to nurture correct and graceful language was to do the work of civilization (and she didn't lose sleep wondering what "correct" meant). Of profanity she would declare, "It shows a paucity of vocabulary," and I can't remember ever hearing her swear.

I agree, and my basic view on dirty words is that students should understand but not use them. There are enough acids eating the social fabric. Freud may have thought cursing displaced violence, but it seems to me that the habits go together: the most violent people are the most foul-mouthed. Is it coincidence that our national life grows more crime-ridden at the same time that old restraints on language disappear?

As a final example, consider a word once *declassé* which is now ubiquitous—*butt.* It occupies that nebulous middle ground, not quite profane but certainly not polite. I blame Bart Simpson and George Bush, the former for saying it weekly, the latter for publicly offering to kick some. I say we draw the line here and push this term back outside respectable usage. To that end, I invite teachers and all other foes of verbal violence to join me in forming an action group, the Anti-Butt League. Whoever says *butt* in our presence shall be butted. And for heaven's sake, don't let your students hear the word.

Tom Griffith is a regular columnist and Associate Editor of MATSOL Currents. *He teaches at Showa Boston.*

Using Technology in Data *Continued from page 10*

cameras may be needed.)

- *Check equipment.* Check all machinery and connections prior to research session(s). Become acquainted with unfamiliar equipment. If there is a "techie" at the site, request his or her presence during the session(s).

- *Bring along extra supplies and equipment,* including tapes, power cords, jacks and adapters, and extension cords.

- *Devise a back-up plan.* Consider alternative plans should the technology fail. Can you re-schedule? Are the same participants available for another session at a different date and/or time?

Technology can be a wonderful tool for data collection. However, the technology itself is only a data collection device. It is not a research "instrument." It does not ask questions and simultaneously collect data as does a survey or test instrument. The data collected via technology is only as good as the protocols and preparedness of the researcher.

Jane Tchaïcha is Assistant Professor of Modern Languages and Director of the Modern Language Learning Center at Bentley College.

What I Wish Someone Had Told Me *Continued from page 13*

(3) Try not to ring up a huge debt getting your Master's. Some programs are more expensive than others; some may offer paid teaching positions while you're working on the degree to offset some of the cost. You're not going into a high-paying field. If you're facing years of loan repayments, make sure the monthly rates are something you can afford.

After all this, I'm not saying—believe it or not—that you shouldn't go into ESL. But go in with your eyes open.

Joe Pettigrew teaches at CELOP at Boston University. e-mail: jpettgr@acs.bu.edu

REVIEW

New Ways in Teaching Speaking. Kathleen M. Bailey and Lance Savage, Editors. TESOL, 1994. 307 pages. ISBN 0-939791-54-4.

Reviewed by David J. Kramer

New Ways in Teaching Speaking is much more than a conversation topic resource book. It's a compilation of activities submitted by ESL professionals from all over the world. Most of its entries incorporate a variety of language skills with detailed instructions for their use. The book is divided into four major parts:"Fluency," "Accuracy," "Pronunciation," and "Speaking in Specific Contexts." Each part consists of several sub-sections: For example, Part II, "Accuracy," is divided into "Functions," "Grammar," and "Vocabulary." In their introduction the editors state that the primary reason for the book's organization is ease of access for the user. The book does not adhere to any particular ESL teaching approach.

Ease of access is definitely one of the book's stronger points. The titles of many articles automatically give the gist of the exercise: In the Accuracy/Grammar section, for example, self-explanatory titles such as "Get It Done," "Why Questions," and "The Command Game" are found. On the other hand, "Travel Talk Round Table" leaves one somewhat in the dark; but a simple turn to the indicated page quickly clarifies the nature and purpose of the activity.

Each activity is covered on two or three pages. In the left margin of the entry's first page the proficiency level(s) appropriate to, and the goals and mechanics of, the activity are outlined. For example, for "Grammar/Travel Talk Round Table": "Levels: Intermediate+; Aims: Review present perfect and time expressions *ever/never*. Contrast present perfect with simple past and *ago*. Practice distinction between / b/ and /v/; Class Time: 30-70 minutes; Preparation Time: None; Resources: Chalkboard, chalk, paper, and pencils" (p. 163).

The presentation of activities is orderly and comprehensive. Each exercise begins with a short, introductory paragraph followed by step-by-step instructions, listed under "Procedure." Extra ideas and comments appear under the heading "Caveats and Options." Many entries are more extensively outlined, often including diagrams, charts, and sample lists of sentences and vocabulary, a definite plus. Several entries include references to related academic readings. All conclude with a blurb about the contributor.

I was eager to browse through the chapters and discover new ideas. As an experienced teacher, I was already familiar with a number of the activities (or some variation thereof), but also I was reminded often of activities which I had used in the past and had let slide into disuse. All too often we rely on our own never-fail bag of tricks. Even if one is already familiar with an exercise, something new can be learned from the many variations and follow-up suggestions.

The book's final section, "Speaking for Specific Contexts," is of special interest to teachers of upper-intermediate and advanced students who still lack the fluency and the know-how for giving effective class presentations. We all have struggled through students' oral presentations—some good, others less so and requiring patience from the entire class. The activities in this section require a lot of thought and preparation by the student; they stress that much more than speaking goes into an oral presentation. For such presentations, outlines and visuals are strongly encouraged, as well as feedback forms filled out by the entire class. I have successfully implemented Linda Abe's contribution, "Speakers and Listeners as Partners," in which students talked about some aspect of another classmate's culture or country. This is a project which involves preliminary research and verification through conversation. Interest was high, and in many instances it was not the teacher who took responsibility for re-stating and clarifying, but rather the student-observer who wanted to ensure the accuracy of information about his or her country. This activity is characteristic of the many student-centered ideas in the book.

"All too often we rely on our own never-fail bag of tricks."

Both ESL novices and experienced professionals will benefit from reading *New Ways in Teaching Speaking*. Although the "ways" might not always be so new, they will most certainly help us reflect upon and add to our ever-evolving teaching repertoires.

David J. Kramer is currently teaching at Harvard's Institute for English Language Programs and the Center for English Language and Orientation Programs (CELOP) at Boston University
e-mail: djkramer@fas.harvard.edu.

REVIEW

Day by Day: English for Employment Communication. Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss. Prentice Hall Regents, 1994. 122 pages. Student book: ISBN 0-13-328238-4. Two cassettes: ISBN 0-13-339045-4.

Reviewed by Hava Levitan

Day by Day lives up to its subtitle, "English for Employment Communication," making it possible for a beginning-level ESL student to develop general English ability while gaining specific communication skills and vocabulary necessary for entering the world of work. The book offers a clear, concise, step-by-step approach and includes grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension exercises. It also provides many opportunities in which, and strategies with which, students can use their new skills. Realistic but easily-overlooked situations are discussed, for example, "Locating Places on the Job." The simple black and white graphics and layout add clarity to the text. This textbook also includes a correlation key to other Molinsky/Bliss texts, the *Word by Word* picture dictionary as well as *Side by Side* Books I and II.

The book is organized so that any instructor can use it effectively, even if unfamiliar with the specific requirements of a variety of entry-level positions. The book begins logically with "Getting a Job," then moves on to "New on the Job," "Small Talk," "Communication with Co-Workers and Supervisors," and "Job Performance." By stressing a subtle yet important aspect of workplace language use, the final unit, "More Small Talk," brings together several threads and enables the student to communicate even more effectively.

Numerous discussion exercises and activities are provided. There are pair discussion activities, "Your Turn," as well as role-playing and simulation activities, "Team Work." The "Bulletin Board" pages at the end of each unit provide particularly important cultural information about U.S. workplaces. The book also includes a list of irregular verbs which are particularly suitable to the workplace. Although cassettes are available, the related material in the book can be used without them: The "Scripts for Listening Exercises" in the back of the book allow the teacher to provide task-based listening whenever the need arises. The book does not demand a linear use; the material can easily be redesigned into more complex or job-specific lessons.

However, any teacher planning to use this book should be sure to become familiar with it before entering the classroom. In several cases a sequential, page-by-page approach is not the most effective: For example, on page 16 an applicant responds to "tell me a little about yourself" by volunteering his marital status, etc., but it is on page 18 where "The Bulletin Board" discusses how one should handle this situation. At certain points the book presents unrealistic situations (e.g., "Being Corrected," p. 34, where a new employee is told "not to worry" about an inadequate performance), but elsewhere (e.g., "Asking for Feedback," pp. 74-75) the student gets a more balanced view of the harsh realities of the world of work.

A practical, methodical book, addressing workplace communication issues at the beginning level, *Day by Day* definitely fills a need. It should generate a loyal following of students and instructors.

Hava Levitan has worked at Roxbury Community College and Fisher Junior College and most recently has taught workplace ESL in Haifa, Israel. She currently teaches at Roxbury Community College and EF.

REVIEW

Primis Customized Textbooks. Various Advanced Titles. McGraw-Hill.

Reviewed by Ramon Valenzuela

It's a teacher's dream: Instead of ordering three or four textbooks for a course (none of which you finish) and illegally photocopying all other necessary materials, you design your own ESL anthology. You choose just the chapters you need from a grammar book, a few units from a writing book, some lessons from a listening/speaking book, a few stories from one reader, some essays from other readers, and articles from

Continued on page 18

Review: *Primis* Customized Textbooks *Continued from page 17*

different magazines. Then you add 20, 40, or 80 pages of your own handouts, and you put them all together into one handsomely-printed and bound textbook. On the cover is your name, your course, and your school. The price for the students is roughly the cost of a typical college textbook.

This fantasy has become a reality for advanced-level teachers (not yet for intermediate or beginning levels) through Primis, McGraw-Hill's electronic database publishing system. Primis customized textbooks were developed first for college courses but branched out into ESL in 1992.

So far, eight ESL books are in the *Primis* database: the four books in the *Mosaic I* series (high-intermediate level) and the four books in the *Mosaic II* series (advanced level). Each series has a content-based grammar book, a reading skills book, a writing skills book, and a listening/speaking skills book. In the grammar books, each chapter has been divided into four to six sections, so you can order smaller sections of the grammar instead of whole chapters. The *Mosaic* grammar books are still the most inventive, intellectually-substantial, and linguistically-accurate materials for their levels. These superior grammar materials can serve as a core around which you build a course text. To this core, for example, you could add thematically-coordinated chapters from the *Mosaic* reading, writing, and listening/speaking books.

For readings you can also choose from *The Accommodating Reader*, a collection of over 420 essays, short stories, poems, short plays, and book excerpts from 300 writers, including Maya Angelou, Raymond Carver, Langston Hughes, George Orwell, Tom Wolfe, Russell Baker, Ellen Goodman, Stephen Hawking, and Susan Sontag. In addition, 114 selections from Barbara Clouse's *Cornerstones*, a reader for writers, are available, not to speak of entire novels from world literature. There is an enormous wealth of readings to choose from, and you can organize them thematically, rhetorically, or any other way you want. These authentic materials do require an advanced level in English, so I would recommend them for general advanced courses, ESL writing classes, and freshman composition courses.

For writing skills, *Primis* has parts of seven rhetoric handbooks to cull from. They include *The McGraw-Hill College Handbook*, *Working it Out: A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers* by Barbara Clouse, and selections from the Langan series.

Primis customized textbooks are also ideal if you teach Business English. *Primis* has substantial databases in economics, finance, management, and marketing. The catalogs in these fields include *Harvard Business Cases* and the *Pinnacle Management Strategy Case Base*. You can flesh out your business-oriented textbooks with articles from the *Harvard Business Review* and *Business Week*. (Even in general ESL classes, I have used *Business Week* articles with great success.)

If your course is geared more toward social or political issues, you have not only *The Accommodating Reader* but also the sociology, psychology, and political science catalogs to draw from. The sociology list, for instance, has interesting selections on crime, sex and gender, health and medicine, music and society, etc.

Electronic custom publishing is a win situation for everyone. The authors are paid their royalties, the publisher is paid for the lawful use of its materials, the college bookstore gets its share, the school saves on photocopying, the teacher can tailor the materials to the specific needs and interests of a group of students, and the students pay for only what is needed and used. My students have been uniformly enthusiastic about my *Primis* books. They praise the variety of the content, the interest level of the materials, the convenience of having most materials in one book (I still order other textbooks), the economy of having only needed materials, and the savings in money. Most of all, they feel somehow special that I designed this book specifically for them.

The *Primis* database for ESL may be relatively small at this point, but it is a first step toward a larger vision. Imagine the day when all publishers have all their books available electronically. Then we can forget about textbooks as we know them and truly customize and personalize our teaching materials. [Interested teachers can contact *Primis* at 1-800-962-9342.]

Ramon Valenzuela teaches at Boston University's Center for English Language and Orientation Programs.

MATSOL Executive Board

MATSOL
P. O. Box 391887
Cambridge, MA 02139
576-9865

All numbers are 617 area code unless otherwise noted.

MATSOL

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Mailing Address _____ Street _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Affiliation (Employer/Institution) _____

Dues are for membership through April 1 of the following year (Circle one amount below):

Paid in Apr., May or June: $24 professional / $16 student
Paid in July, Aug. or Sept.: $18 professional / $12 student
Paid in Oct., Nov. or Dec.: professional $12 / student $8
Paid in Jan., Feb. or Mar.: professional $30 / student $20

Special Interest Group (Circle 1 or 2):

Elementary Secondary Higher Ed Adult Workplace CALL Authors Sociopolitical Concerns

Make check payable to MATSOL. Your canceled check is your receipt. Send this form and your check to:

Kellie Jones, Education and Human Services Department, Simmons College
300 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115

Massachusetts Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

P. O. Box 391887
Cambridge, MA 02139

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 57641

MATSOL