

## Portrait of a "Tree-peater"

*Kristin Lems*

**T**hanks to the Chicago Bulls, we now have a handy word to describe a student who repeats a class for the third time: a "three-peater." The joke goes in Chicago that the "th" is pronounced as "t," so it's only appropriate that a three-time-around ESL student, too, be called a "tree-peater."

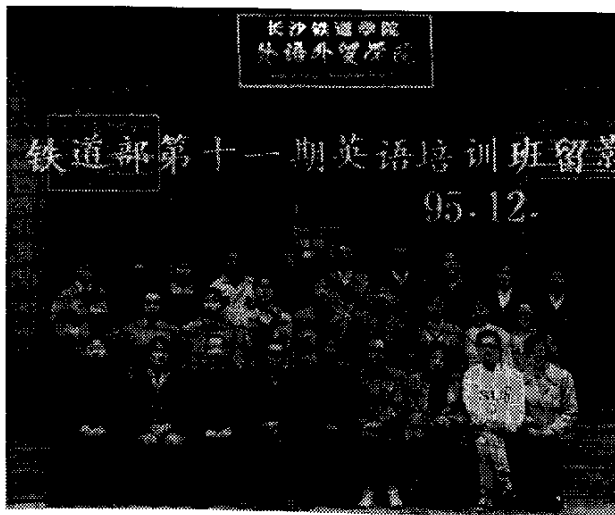
I've got one right now and I write this article to try to sketch this particular adult learner in some detail. There is a small but persistent subgroup of adult learners that seems to fail in exactly the same way he is now failing—though many are not as persistent as he.

At our school, as is the case all across the state, the student will be ineligible for financial aid if he fails the level yet a third time, so it's pretty much "learn or die" for him this quarter. Since there are only so many teachers at each level, I'm teaching him for the second quarter in a row. I also taught him at another, lower level (which he just barely passed), so I'm very familiar with his learning style.

He's an artistic Hispanic man in his mid-thirties who had a rather prestigious job in Mexico as a teacher-trainer. He came here "for love"—his wife is an American citizen who was once his student in Mexico. Why doesn't she help him with his English, you ask? You have obviously never tried to study a foreign language with your spouse! Except in the rarest possible situations, it doesn't work.

I have watched this man change, over the past year, from an open, inquiring soul, who reached out to others in the class and tried energetically to express himself, to a driven, defensive man, looking furtively at the

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**Call for Manuscripts —13**

## Cultural Dialogue in the Chinese Classroom

*Raquel Kellermann*

**H**ypnotizing chants echo through the hallway as I enter the school building and walk toward the room where my class is about to start. Even though I have already taught here for a few months, the only thing reminding me that I am not in a Buddhist temple is the swarm of chatting young men and women dressed in school attire. I am in the Foreign Language Department of my host university in south-central China, where my students are in their last year at college. I step

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## **MATSOL Currents**

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## **From the President**

**T**he Fall Conference on October 19 was a resounding success; approximately 400 people attended over 50 presentations given in the spacious buildings at Clark University where, as Jim Raby, director of the American Language and Culture Institute, reminded us, Sigmund Freud was introduced to American academia in 1909. Bob Bickerton, the plenary speaker, urged us to be advocates as well as teachers, and although he was first praised then criticized in the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*, he was well received by MATSOL members. Special thanks to the conference committee (John Antonellis, Pamela Greene, Joy Karol and Brenda Sloane), to the administration at Clark University, and to all the volunteers for their time and effort.

The Spring Conference committee, Linda Schulman, Bette Steinmuller and Janet Siegel, have chosen a promising site for the Winter/Spring Conference on February 28 and March 1. Lantana in Randolph has reasonably-priced and comfortably-equipped function rooms. One of the plenary speakers is Martín Espada, a Puerto Rican poet currently teaching in the English Department at U/Mass, Boston. We hope you will join us again for another two days of professional development and "rejuvenation."

On the table for discussion at board meetings are a joint Spring Conference in 1998 with Northern New England TESOL and other activities in conjunction with state organizations like MABE, MAFLA and ConnTESOL. We are also in the process of tallying the questionnaire which was on the back of the fall conference evaluation forms in order to decide how to spend the money made at conferences. We have received very worthwhile suggestions, ranging from re-instituting research and travel grants to funding political action campaigns. Now that we are "in the black," we hope to act upon them in the near future. As always, we welcome your input and support in these efforts.

*Carol Piñero*

## **From the Editor**

**T**his issue should come to you around your holiday break. Please take the time to enjoy the variety of articles, columns, and notices and information included for your benefit. I am pleased to include two letters to the editor, and I again invite readers to send me their reactions to anything published in the *Currents*.

You may have noticed that the last issue featured a cover article by *me*, and for this issue I wrote the plenary summary and shared the photography (along with fellow CELOPer Sandy Swing) for the fall conference. I gladly would have ceded both those opportunities if other people had come forward. So please contact me if you have ideas for articles or would like to write a summary or do some of the photography at the spring conference. We supply the film and can provide rides and even equipment if necessary.

Your articles and help are *always* needed. See the "Call for Manuscripts" in this issue for submission guidelines. Even if we do not run such an extended "call" in a given issue (for space reasons), we require submissions on an ongoing basis, and brief guidelines and deadlines are published on the inside front page in the *Currents* sidebar in each and every issue. The more submissions we get, the better the issues you read.

Let me remind you again that affiliations and contact numbers for MATSOL board members are listed in the back of each issue (and those people welcome

*Continued on page 9*

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## Letters to the Editor



### MATSOL Archaeology

*Judy De Filippo was kind enough to send a number of missing issues from the early eighties, along with this letter.*

Dear Ron,

Your article "In the Archives" [Vol. 22, No. 3; Summer 1996] reminded me that I had saved some early issues of the MATSOL *Newsletter* so I went into the file cabinet and lo-and-behold I found not only the ones from the early eighties but also the very first one printed in 1972. And that means MATSOL is about to celebrate its 25th year! I also can give you a few tidbits:

Vivian Zamel was also one of the founders and continues to be active (and prominent) locally at MATSOL conferences and nationally at TESOL. If Bob Saitz is the grand master of MATSOL, then Vivian is the "grande dame."

For a future article, I recommend an interview with Cathy Sadow and Edgar Sather, who have just completed their third listening text. Both are former MATSOL presidents. Edgar is one of my favorite people and Cathy is an extraordinary woman, one of the most creative teachers in the field.

Susan Herrera, president of MATSOL in 1976-77, is

now Susan Stempleski. She's done two MATSOL plenaries and is the author of the FOCUS videos.

Boston hosted the 1979 TESOL conference. Alice Fastov and Edgar Sather were involved in planning it. TESOL has considered Boston as a future site but we've been nixed. Can you imagine hosting 8,000 people?

This is my 19th year at Northeastern University and 21st in ESL. I was in Steve Molinsky's first ESL class at Boston University in the fall of 1975 and I still love teaching.

Sincerely,

*Judy De Filippo*

MATSOL President 1986-87

Dear Ron:

I was interested in your article, "In the Archives" (Vol. 22, No. 3), about the history of MATSOL, and I like your idea of encouraging some interaction in the pages of *Currents*. In that spirit, I would like to add that the column on teacher research began in the Winter 1995 issue. As editor of that column, I welcome both submissions and letters to the editor in response to it. The latter could be either for publication or simply for readers to tell me something they would like to hear about, etc.

*Jean Chandler*

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## MATSOL and the Slovak Association of Teachers of English (SATE): An Exchange

*The two letters reprinted below were exchanged this past fall. The first was e-mailed by Carol Pineiro, MATSOL president, to Gabriela Dornakova, SATE's president, for her to share with SATE's members at their end-of-October national conference. The second is Gabriela's e-mailed reply. Words and names in Slovak lack certain pronunciation marks.*

*We again invite MATSOL members to become involved in this sibling relationship. Contact any board member if you are interested or have ideas which we might pursue.*

October 24, 1996

Dear Colleagues,

As you pause and take time out of your busy schedules to meet with fellow teachers of English as a Foreign Language to share ideas, techniques, and methodologies, I would like to send greetings from MATSOL, your sister (or "sibling" to the politically correct) organization in Boston, Massachusetts. For the past year or so, we have been talking about establishing this relationship for the mutual benefit of both groups.

The idea sprang from visits by MATSOL members to Slovakia to teach or train teachers, most notably by Ron Clark, the *Currents* editor and board member, who taught at the *Vysoka Skola Pedagogicka* sponsored by Fulbright in 1993-94. This relationship would facilitate the exchange of ideas, materials, and possibly teachers between SAUA/SATE and MATSOL. Our first exchange was to take place at this conference, at which Ron Clark was to have been the plenary speaker. However, it was difficult to find funding, and when it became available, it was too late to make the travel arrangements. In the future, we have resolved to make plans for speakers at least six months in advance to insure that the conference goes smoothly.

Other possible exchanges include the collection and mailing of EFL textbooks to Slovakia, exchange of publications, joint projects involving teachers and students (perhaps by e-mail), and, if funding from an official agency can be found, exchanges of teachers for short periods of time. Please submit ideas regarding these and any other category to your board members.

We regret not being represented at your conference, but

*Continued on page 18*

**Summary of Plenary Address****“Our Role in a Changing Sociopolitical Landscape”**by **Bob Bickerton**

Massachusetts State Director of Adult Education, Adult and Community Learning Services

**Ron Clark**

*“...those of you who were born in another country ... please stand up. Now those of you whose parents, grandparents or great grandparents were born in another country stand and join our more recent immigrants. Thank you and thank you to your ancestors for bringing all you have to offer to our community.”*

**T**wo thirds or more of those in the auditorium—composed of educators serving *thousands*—were standing in response to this, Mr. Bickerton’s opening request, powerfully illustrating the overwhelmingly-positive impact which immigrants to the United States have traditionally made and demonstrably continue to make. According to the speaker, in a changing sociopolitical landscape in which popular but untrue myths about immigration and immigrants dominate and to which reactionary legislators respond, educators must also reconsider their roles, for,

*“we have it within us to become one of the powerful forces shaping the quality of life of our students, friends, and neighbors who happen to be recent immigrants to this country. In fact, we have it within us to become one of the powerful forces shaping the quality of life, period.”*

Mr. Bickerton went on to suggest that we educators must mobilize ourselves to utilize this latent power on our students’ behalf because, unlike other, powerful constituencies who “can pursue their education in stable and secure conditions,” those we serve are “so disenfranchised that every aspect of their educational, social and economic life is a constant struggle. Whether or not they even have the opportunity to get the basic education they need is, and always has been, at risk.”

The speaker first exposed, as examples, three myths which shape the present sociopolitical environment:

*Myth 1:* “Immigration is out of control, demonstrated by the fact that there are more immigrants in our country today than even after the great immigrations at the turn of the century.”

*Reality:* “Be honest with the statistics and adjust for population “inflation”: Immigrants were 15% of our population then but are only 8% now.”

*Myth 2:* “Unlike immigrants today, *my* grandparents came here with nothing, learned English, and supported their families without any help from the government.”

*Reality:* At that time the Massachusetts Department of Education had an active “Division of Americanism,” which had more than 100 employees, had the power to subpoena employers who allegedly mistreated immigrant employees, and ran ESOL and citizenship classes (as did many local school districts). On the books was a law *requiring* school committees to establish English and citizenship classes “upon the petition of any twenty residents.”

*Myth 3:* “Unlike *my* forebears, today’s immigrants are a net drain on our resources.”

*Reality:* 3.9% of immigrants are on public assistance, compared to 4.2% for native-born citizens.

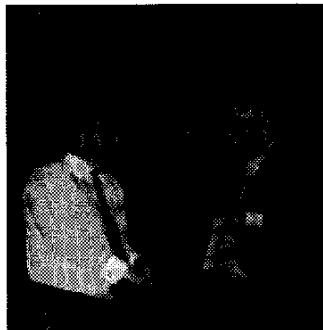
**A**s educators, according to Mr. Bickerton, we have an obligation to analyze, understand, and discuss the implications of these myths. Since perception is often more powerful than reality, and since such perceptions are changing the laws and policies of our governments, unless we and our students become powerful counteractive forces, “our jobs will become less meaningful” and our students will lose their chance at pursuing their time-honored dreams.

Becoming a powerful force in support of the poor or disenfranchised never has been and never will be easy, but, based on his own experience with a successful campaign strategy in support of threatened Adult Basic Education (ABE) services (and by “ABE,” Mr. Bickerton meant the full range of adult literacy, adult secondary education, and ESOL services provided), Bickerton suggested three strategies toward becoming a force to be reckoned with: *Clear and Consistent Marketing, Aggressive Organization, and Grassroots Advocacy.*

About three years ago, according to Mr. Bickerton, those in ABE had “abdicated their responsibility” and let a myth take hold that allowed Congress to threaten to subsume adult literacy, high school equivalency, and ESOL services under

*Continued on page 6*

# 1996 Conference



*Bob Bickerton, Plenary Speaker, confers with David Rosen, Adult Literacy Resource Institute.*



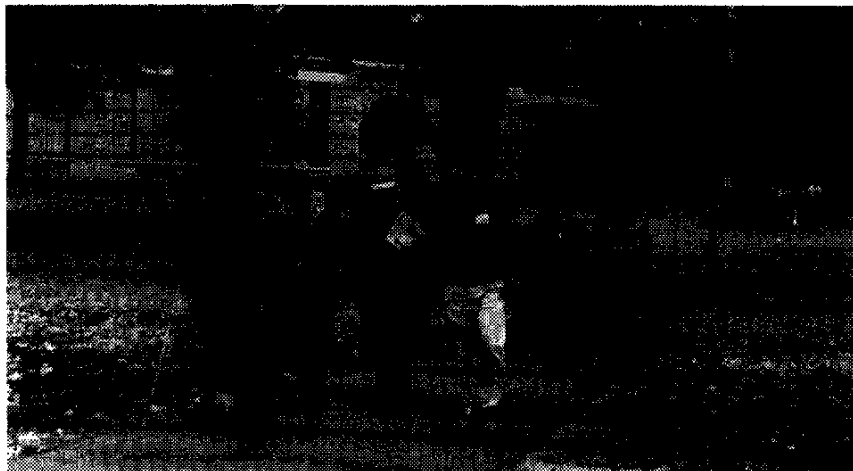
*Will Van Dorp and listener.*



*Carol Piñeiro, MATSOL President, and Fall Conference Co-Chairs, Joy Karol, Pam Greene, Brenda Sloane, and John Antonellis (l. to r.).*



*Kelly Jones, Membership Secretary (l.) and Janet Siegel, Treasurer, after the rush.*



*Back and Forth.*



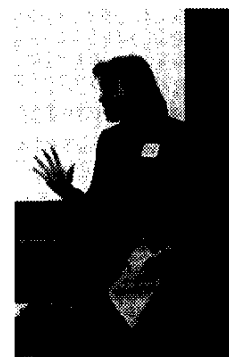
*Mary Sutton, Publishers Rep.*



*Exhibition*



*ESL Community College Student Roundtable Participants; Bette Steinmuller, MATSOL Higher Ed Rep (standing).*



*Jennifer Boudrie, Director, English Language Training, Marlborough.*

Photography by Sandy Swing and Ron Clark.

## Changing Sociopolitical Landscape *Continued from page 4*

a huge employment and training block grant. Though employment and training *were* important, so too, to at least an equal degree, were those other services. But they would not survive if the panacea of the "all we need is employment and training" myth was allowed to shape policy. Therefore, supporters of full-service ABE mobilized and formulated a campaign strategy designed to preserve what was most important to their field and their students.

**T**hey first identified key "bottom-line" issues around which they knew they had to rally and then developed an equally-important *consistent marketing* plan. Allied organizations agreed always to send out a common message, created with common language, always emphasizing these already-identified key issues or elements.

Second, they created an *aggressive, coordinated organization*, consisting of a contact in each state, phone/fax/internet trees, and a core of "campaign managers," all led by the already-established National Coalition for Adult Literacy, which had been identified as the one organization which could serve as an umbrella for the others and champion for the cause.

Finally, all of these associated parties kept hammering

away at the grassroots level by contacting every Representative and every Senator in order to keep awareness and pressure high. This *grassroots advocacy* campaign was meant to hit fast and hard and relied upon already-prepared scripts.

Bickerton believes that the challenges that immigrants are now confronting are even more daunting than those faced by ABE constituents and proponents. Though the bills that recently passed in Congress contain no prohibition that would keep immigrants from receiving ESOL or other educational services (as once threatened) and though the president and some members of Congress seem supportive of our concerns, others have shown that they want to take restrictions found in recent legislation even further. Even without further restrictions, "problematic provisions" of the new Welfare Reform Act and Immigration Enforcement Act confront us.

Under the new Welfare Reform Act, some *current and future legal* immigrants may be banned from Social Security and Food Stamps programs. States also have the option to cut AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) payments and other social services. Some *future* legal immigrants may also lose access to most federal programs that provide a cash benefit and to many that are means-tested. They may be

*Continued on the next page*



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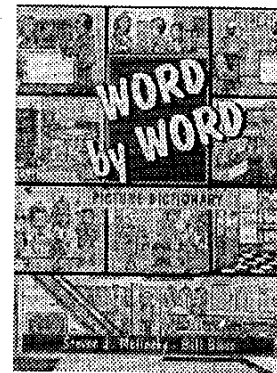
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ineligible when the sum of their income and that of their sponsors exceeds eligibility criteria ("deeming").

Under the new Immigration Enforcement Act, standards for asylum have been made more stringent, as have standards for proving discrimination in hiring. The INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) is now more insulated from court challenges when its actions are questioned. Also, "deeming" provisions mirror those of the Welfare Reform Act.

Bickerton emphasized that, though "daunting," these developments have to be seen as challenges. The gauntlet has been thrown down before us. Shall we respond? "Can we get together? Can we get our messages out?" Bickerton suggested that we can "shape the outcome of this struggle" if we make a commitment to clear and consistent marketing, aggressive organization, and grassroots advocacy as we attempt to "sweep away the myths" and replace them in the public consciousness with marketed messages like the following:

- "In the emerging global economy, a second language is an asset, not a problem."
- "If we're intent on only importing products from other countries, then 'English Only' is fine, but if we want to export as

well, we'd better be able to speak their language."

Again, these serve only as examples. The list of "essentials" that ESOLers should champion and the marketing campaign which should be waged in support of them need to be established. The speaker suggested that we evaluate all of the state and national organizations which support immigrant rights and services to determine if their work is as coordinated as it needs to be if we hope to be a real player in the debate. He asks, for example, "Have we [for example, MATSOL and other organizations] tightly organized into a single effective coalition at the state and national levels?" "Have we agreed on one or more campaign managers?" These and other questions remain to be answered.

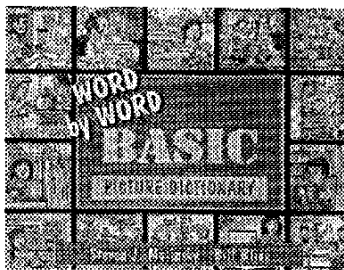
"Is this part of my job?" "Can't I just ignore all this and just teach?" According to Bob Bickerton, in addition to being *very good* at what we do in the classroom ("accountability" also being increasingly important, and respect being a prerequisite for being heard), we clearly must answer these questions "Yes!" and "No!"

*The editor wishes to thank Bob Bickerton for his assistance in preparing this summary.*



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## Three-peater *Continued from page 1*

blackboard, cursing himself during in-class exercises or tests, and nearly buried alive in sheaves of loose notebook paper covered with his small, detailed pencil markings.

And that's one of his big problems: he's always so busy with his note-taking that he's ten minutes behind the topic of the moment. In ESL, ten minutes is a fatal delay. Worse, when I glance over his voluminous notes, I often see that he didn't get it down right to begin with. Something has been switched around, or added, or omitted, and the point has been missed. Yet it has proven impossible to wean him from his note-taking. He feels he cannot retain the material at all if he doesn't write it down in excruciating detail.

**A**nother problem is that same artistic nature which makes him so charming in his native language. Instead of giving a straight answer to any question, written or oral, he feels compelled to innovate, to show that he can do more than merely answer. Unfortunately, mastery must precede innovation, as anyone who has studied modern art knows. (I remember, at a retrospective featuring artist Piet Mondrian, my amazement at seeing how his still lifes, portraits, and landscapes had reached a high level of skill before he evolved—devolved?—into painting only large, colorful rectangles and squares!) My student is so busy forming a speculation, philosophical observation, etc., far beyond his syntactic ability that he ends up completely incoherent. Woe to the student who disdains simple sentences, for he or she is doomed never to master them.

Finally, this student is so literate in Spanish, and loves his native culture so much, that he has closed his mind to the possibility that a grapheme might have a different pronunciation than the one it is assigned in Spanish. For example, after six quarters at the school, he still says "oos" for the word "us." This is the most extreme case of native language interference I have ever seen. It seems as if the part of him that had misgivings about immigrating to the U.S. has control of the English learning portion of his brain and is putting forth colossal resistance.

I tried several ways to help him. For a start, I moved him to the front row, because he seemed to disappear into the fog when he was in the back half of the class. It helped his blackboard copying skills, but overall results have not been

impressive. He still manages to "cocoon" right under my nose. I have spent a lot of time talking with him after class and sympathizing with his difficulties working as a janitor now, when he was a nationally-known teacher before. Also, he complained after class that he needed English speakers to talk to, so I helped him write a classified ad for the *Chicago Reader* asking for an English language conversation partner. He has not shared the results of that effort with me. I hope he didn't have so much trouble talking on the phone that he couldn't manage to meet with anyone. Finally, I helped him locate some groups in his neighborhood with interests common to his, since I thought his skill in his field might help take up the slack when his English fails.

All of these are good efforts, but I still get the sinking feeling he's going to fail again, and melt back into the naked city, with its thousand stories, a defeated man. While praising him for his persistence, I cannot implant into his brain the English he has been trying so long to learn. Something has to happen, and it has to happen soon. How to make that happen is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. © 1996 by Kristin Lems

*Ms. Lems teaches at National-Louis University in Chicago.*

### The MATSOL Job Bank

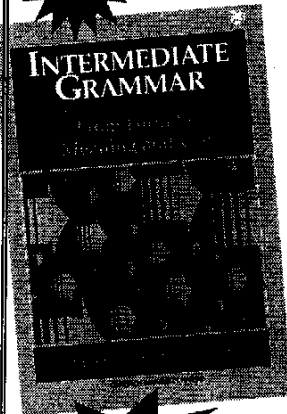
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## From the Editor *Continued from page 2*

your ideas and questions), and information on the MATSOL Job Bank and other services are frequently published, as well. Members often ask me for such information, and I politely point them back to the most recent issue sitting on top of a table or desk at their offices or homes.

Finally, as we approach a new organizational year, which begins at the end of the coming spring conference, I ask you to consider becoming active in MATSOL. We need people to staff nominating committee positions, and some Interest Group representatives are finishing their terms (see the "Get Involved" piece inside this issue and contact Esther Iwanaga). Like other volunteer organizations, MATSOL will crumble and disappear without a constant flow of individuals who realize that it is time to put something into the organization from which they have received so much.

*Ron Clark*

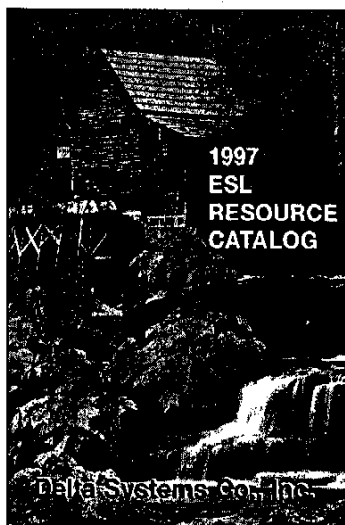
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## Cultural Dialogue in the Chinese Classroom *Continued from page 1*

into the classroom, and a familiar scene greets me: students sitting, standing, sometimes pacing as they each recite loudly with their heads bent over their books. The cacophony of the 20 voices are silenced by the bell, which announces the beginning of my class. Suddenly the students look up to see their teacher and wait to be lectured. Another day in my life as a teacher in China is about to start, posing startling questions for both myself and my students.

I discover that some students have not done their homework, generally consisting of reading a short story or of briefly responding in writing to the text. Yet to my amazement, students are busy poring over their books before and after class, during breaks and sometimes even—though secretly—during class. But they are not necessarily studying “Young Goodman Brown” or “William Wilson” or doing assignments for other classes. In fact, many are involved in learning activities that are not connected to their classes. Students prepare to take the Graduate Record Examination or the Chinese equivalent (a gruelingly-competitive exam testing various subjects including politics), the TOEFL, business certificates, correspondence classes, or anything that may be useful to them in the future. They are involved in self-improvement, be it for bettering their chances for a job or for purely personal gains. I observed one student who practiced writing Chinese characters over and over on the margins of his notebook because his father had told him that beautiful handwriting will be a marketable skill on his job hunt. After I told my students about my observation of their extra-curricular activities, they explained to me that this striving for self-betterment was a traditional way of learning in China. It was called “self-cultivation.”

I became intrigued by this concept, with which all my students were familiar yet which they could not easily explain. Each used different words to describe the same concept, so I decided to get to the bottom of it. I asked each student to write his or her definition of the term for the following week’s writing assignment. I received 20 different definitions and extracted the basic meaning. This is what I wrote:

Self-cultivation is the process of improving one’s character to achieve the virtues of modesty, bravery and honesty; it is a way to both realize one’s individuality and adapt to society’s standards; it is a way to behave in a dignified manner and to treat others politely and respectfully. Some people seek their own means to self-cultivate, such as introspection, while others reach out to renowned scholars who have achieved a high degree of self-cultivation.

I presented my students with this general definition, thinking they would find their own formulation in it, but I was surprised to detect frowns on many of their foreheads. To them, the definition had lost the luster of their individual expressions and had been turned into a bland generalization.

For me, however, this communal classroom struggle toward a definition had served its function, for it revealed something that had puzzled me ever since I started teaching in China. In Chinese culture, self-cultivation is an integral concept which reveals the people’s attitude toward learning, including their view of it as a life-long process. In a country where formal education has historically been a privilege of a small number of people and in which classroom teaching is not necessarily geared toward students’ needs and interests, learning often occurs outside of the classroom through independent reading and imitation of esteemed scholars or sages. It is a high honor if one is asked to be somebody’s teacher, and both individualized learning and informally-created master-student pairings are common in contemporary Chinese society.

This distinction between learning and education posed interesting challenges for me. After initially being annoyed that students hadn’t done their homework or would occupy themselves with other things during class, I realized that the issue was much more complex than I had thought. The cultural background of my students, their expectations of me and what we did in class, and their general notion of education all intersected at this point.

I talked to my colleagues and friends about this, but mainly I wanted to work together with my students on this issue. Through frequent student-initiated meetings outside the classroom, I found out the concerns and worries of their daily lives. I received frank feedback on our classroom in off-the-record conversations and in dialogue journals where students seized the opportunity to engage me in conversations on paper. My students seemed to have accepted long ago that what goes on in the classroom may not necessarily relate to their lives. In fact, its disjunction from daily life in part defined education for them. Yet they had a firm concept of what they needed to learn. However, the expectations of my Chinese students ran counter to what I wanted to effect in the classroom and the way I structured my lessons. To them, the teacher is there to tell the students what they need to learn in order to pass the exams at the end of the semester. A common way to assess students is to have them recite passages, to memorize them word by word, the students’ comprehension of the passage being of secondary importance. (Hence, my aforementioned encounter with what seemed to me to be the trance-like, brain-numbing repetition of sentences echoing through the school building.) Yet I was not interested in, and did not consider it my

*Continued on the next page*

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## *Cultural Dialogue in the Chinese Classroom* Continued from prior page

responsibility, to stand in front of the class and lecture on subjects that were only remotely comprehensible and entirely uninteresting to my students. I considered it my duty to demonstrate to my students that what goes on in the classroom can be part of their self-cultivation if they actively participate in the learning process in class.

A person's words mean little if they are not backed up with actions; a teacher's philosophy needs to be expressed in classroom activities. So in order to show my students that I was truly interested in their opinions and thoughts, I asked them to write journals, which, on a regular basis, went back and forth between the students and myself. In order to hone their debating skills, we had discussion circles on specific literary texts. Each student presented his or her interpretation and heated discussions arose when students disagreed with each other. Eventually my students felt comfortable voicing their opinions even if they were counter to my own. The process of learning how to explore their views and analyze literary works with relation to their own knowledge and personal experience was gradual, developing over the year I was their teacher. The exchange between us, which took place on different levels and in different contexts, enabled us

to appreciate each other's cultural background but also remain loyal to our own beliefs.

Our daily dialog led us to a deepened understanding of each other's culture. I introduced my students to Western theories of reading and writing; they, on the other hand, taught me about their values and concept of education. Instead of considering our encounter a clash of ideas and values, I learned to look at things from a different angle. My year in China offered fertile ground for testing my ideas on teaching and learning, an experience from which I emerged both knowing more and, at the same time, reassessing what I "already knew."

*Raquel Kellermann recently returned from one year of teaching American Literature and Composition at Changsha Railway University in Hunan Province, People's Republic of China. She holds an M.A. in TESOL from UMass Boston and is currently working at Massachusetts Bay Community College in Wellesley.*

*This is the first of a pair of related articles. Expect the second in the Spring/Summer 1997 issue.*

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## Teachers as Emerging Researchers: Through Coursework

Paul Abraham

*Until recently, with a few notable exceptions, teachers have taught and researchers have conducted research. Now, there are signs that the situation is changing. Conducting classroom research has become an important means of teacher development. However, since many teachers have little experience with research, various approaches are needed to help them become competent in, and comfortable with, this mode of practical inquiry. Two such approaches are courses in teacher research at institutions of higher education and peer support groups. Over the next two issues of MATSOL Currents this column will examine one of each. This time, a course in teacher research at Simmons College is described by its teacher, Paul Abraham. [Jean Chandler, column editor.]*

The Massachusetts teacher certification guidelines enacted in the fall of 1994 require the completion of a research project for all candidates for standard teacher certification in the state. This research project has been integrated into the Master of Arts in Teaching programs at Simmons College. I teach a course on educational research that incorporates such a research project and serves as a capstone course within the programs.

By the time students enroll in this course, they have completed a minimum of one semester of teaching in their field of certification. The course requires that the students identify a classroom-based research question from their own teaching experience and complete a related literature review. Students are then required to design an appropriate plan to investigate their question, gather data for analysis, and report their findings in both a poster presentation to their classmates and in a final paper.

Anecdotal information indicated that these novice teachers initially felt ill-prepared to undertake a classroom-based research project. However, course evaluations at the end of the semester indicated a great feeling of accomplishment and learning: "The process really taught me a lot." "I am surprised at how much I learned throughout this process."

Students appreciated the systematic approach to the research process. They completed their work "one step at a time," with "deadlines so that they stayed on track." Several students also felt that the poster presentations were particularly effective. They enjoyed presenting their own findings and learning about those of their classmates since they had discussed their projects with each other throughout the semester.

The end of the semester evaluations indicated that the research process was successful. As one respondent said, "I

will refer to this course often in my future." But what about the long-term effects? Does this type of guided training in classroom-based research create teachers who incorporate research into their own classrooms? To investigate the long-term effects of this classroom-based inquiry, in January, almost eight months after the completion of the research course, a follow-up survey was sent to all seventeen students who completed the research project.

Six of the seventeen students who were sent surveys responded. The survey asked these first-year teachers a number of questions, including a general assessment of the research course and their own research project of last spring. Generally, these novice teachers felt proud of their projects and pleased with the step-by-step process supported by the course. Some comments indicated a concern over conflicting interests of learning to teach and learning to conduct research at the same time. These teachers felt that the research course should focus on the skills to become better consumers of research and not on the skills to conduct their own teacher research.

When asked about teacher research in general, most of the respondents replied that it is an extremely helpful way to learn about the teaching and learning process. They also suggested that teachers should integrate their research into the on-going curriculum and share their findings with colleagues. One respondent suggested that teachers need to engage in the research process because, unlike traditional researchers, they are intricately involved in the learning process. There was also some concern voiced about the lack of scientific and intellectual rigor and objectivity in teacher research, a concern clearly echoed by the larger research community.

Three of the six teachers are currently involved in some type of classroom-based research; the other three indicate that their current teaching situations, with split teaching assignments or extremely structured curricula, prevent them from undertaking classroom-based research right now. All but one of these teachers plan to continue researching their original topic at some point in their career. When asked if other teachers in their schools or departments were conducting classroom-based research, they generally reported no. One respondent wrote, "Teachers in my school are basically on their own and do not interact with one another." Another reported that her current research on school improvement was developed by a group of teachers working on a task force.

I understand how difficult it is for student teachers to complete a research project. On the other hand, these novice

*Continued on page 18*

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## MATSOL *Currents*

# Call for Manuscripts

**M**ATSOL *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 present new ideas or information related to the topics listed above. Please contact the editor beforehand if you expect your submission to exceed approximately 1,250 words in length, which is a general guideline.

### Columns

#### *Foreign Correspondence*

This column features accounts of EFL teaching experiences. Geographical, sociopolitical, or cultural information often provides helpful background, but the article should include a focus on aspects of teaching and learning English. Submissions should be about 750-1,000 words in length.

#### *Program Spotlight*

Submissions should describe innovative programs that are successful in meeting defined needs. 750-1,000 words in length.

#### *Reviews*

Reviews should be between 500 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 (of about 1,000 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. (500-750 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 (about 250-350 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, it is preferred that documents 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

## Test Anxiety

Tom Griffith



In these columns I normally like to write about things I do well. In this one, however, I want to discuss something I do badly, a facet of teaching that haunts me like a youthful sin. As with all such flaws, I try to persuade myself it isn't so important. But then a different voice, pitilessly honest, tells me I have got to confront this issue and do better.

The issue is testing. To frame a discussion, let me invoke my musical theory of teaching styles. Some teachers are naturally classical and some are jazz. The classicists think ahead about what they want to do in a semester. They treat their course like a symphony, all divided into predictable movements that flow together and build to a smashing finale. Most important, the course is precisely scripted, first in a syllabus that they actually follow, second in lesson plans that lay out and achieve an exact daily goal.

Then there are the jazz types, and I'm one. We are constitutionally incapable of thinking ahead. If we try and plot out a nice three-month plan, we have great trouble stick-ing to it. Rather than playing the score just as it reads, we take the melody and bend it a thousand ways to Sunday. We may be oblivious to next December, but we're highly attuned to the moment, flexible, good on our feet; and at this particular hour with these particular students, we can make beautiful music.

It's very self-serving, but I think the jazz style is better suited to language teaching. This is because language, as opposed to physics or history, is primarily social. Language isn't something you know; it's something you do, and do with other people. Of course there are private applications—reading books, writing journals, listening to a Walkman—but these all involve surrogates for another human being.

Moreover, language mostly happens in the moment, spontaneously and unpredictably. Our students will have to read and write texts, but their main need is to function in the river of English talk. First crawl, then walk; first talk, then write. And perhaps that oral proficiency is best developed by teachers adept at shifting course, following new lines of talk, drawing out verbal creativity, getting people to relate.

Having said that, consider the peril of too much spontaneity—chaos. Jazz teachers may grow overconfident and lazy, trusting too much in their knack for sparking discussion. Students want to talk, but they need the component parts of language to do so. Social and spontaneous it may be, but there remain certain language facts and skills that students must master.

How do they do it? Well, that's when we have to get artificial, isolating parts of language use, focusing on them, developing them, testing them. It just speeds things up.

Testing in general is in bad odor these days. It clashes with two American values, our zeal for equality and dislike of hierarchy. Testing by its very nature puts people into ranks, separate and unequal. Besides, testing can be reductive, focusing too much on discrete facts, emphasizing passive knowledge. We've probably all made bad tests and then taught to them. Students may even demand it, for it's familiar and tangible; but a little voice tells us it's a fraud.

Perhaps the solution lies not in abandoning tests but in expanding our definition of them. One of the best French tests I ever took involved no paper. After five years of academic French, I was plunked down in West Africa in the Peace Corps. Though I'd always aced the exams, I could barely open my mouth. Our Senegalese teacher saw this, and sent me off to buy some stamps. Talk about test anxiety—I was in a sweaty panic. The actual exchange at the post office was humiliating. But I got the stamps; I passed the test.

In my own classes I do some old-fashioned multiple choice, and identification, and essay questions. If nothing else, it helps me organize my teaching and gives students a chance to review. Much of the value of formal tests comes before they're ever corrected. Beyond that, I keep an eye out for any chance to push students into language usage, for example, getting directions on a field trip, or interviewing a staff member. These are far harder to evaluate, but probably more valuable. Do they cause the students stress? Of course, yet they're glad in the end. Tests, formal or not, may spur anxiety and suffering. But where did we ever get the idea that suffering is something to avoid?

Tom Griffith teaches at Showa Boston.

### Directory of Massachusetts ESL Programs

MATSOL's *Massachusetts Directory of ESL Programs* (1995-96 edition) lists approximately 230 ESL programs and includes addresses and phone numbers, contact people, program size, working conditions, and more.

The directories are *free* to MATSOL members. Send a self-addressed, stamped (\$1.93), 6" by 9" (or larger) envelope and a request for the directory to the MATSOL Job Bank, 20 Daniels Street, #316, Malden, MA 02148.

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# The Nature of Callousness

Joe Pettigrew

**A**t a well-known university in eastern Massachusetts, the ESL program held a meeting (paid, let's be fair) for its potential faculty two weeks before classes were to begin. I say potential faculty because, as the director explained, *none* of the roughly thirty teachers there could be guaranteed a job, including a number who had been working there for several semesters.

When one of the teachers pointed out that it was a bit difficult to learn what course and book she'd have (assuming she'd have a course) right before classes began, the director replied, "That's the nature of ESL."

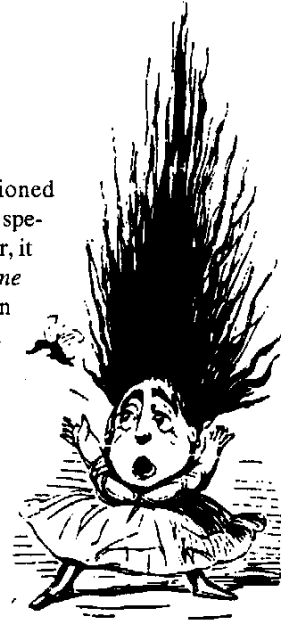
Excuse me, but no, that's the nature of an administration that doesn't know—or doesn't care—how to treat its employees.

The usual explanation for this type of behavior is that since students register at the last minute, no promises of job availability can be made. Frankly, this is disingenuous. This program didn't start up last week. There's an enrollment history that can be used to make some predictions. And in any program, especially one at a large institution, classrooms must be reserved and textbooks ordered well in advance of the time classes start. Administrators can, and in fact have to, make educated guesses as to how many students will show up.

Administrators can be wrong, of course, but enrollment figures are rarely off by 50%. Couldn't *half* of the teachers at that meeting—say, the ones who had been there the longest—have been promised jobs? How about a third of them? A fourth?

Perhaps the program mentioned above couldn't guarantee that a specific class would run. However, it was certain there would be *some* classes. A guaranteed job, even if exactly what that job would be is not guaranteed, would make a huge difference in morale. Trying to piece together part-time jobs to make ends meet (the real nature of ESL) is stressful enough without the extra, unnecessary uncertainty created by policies like the one described here.

So why do administrators at this institution—and elsewhere!—needlessly subject their faculty to this? I wish I knew. I'm reminded of a Dilbert cartoon, as I often am when thinking about this field. In it, someone is trying to convince the boss to adopt a new program. As a selling point he mentions that it would be good for employee morale. The boss looks back at him blankly and says, "Tell me again why I'd want morale to be good."



*Joe Pettigrew teaches at CELOP at Boston University. He welcomes your comments on his column. e-mail: jpettigr@acs.bu.edu*

## Get Involved!

MATSOL is looking for candidates for positions on the Executive Board. Our immediate needs are for a Publisher, Treasurer, an appointed position, now open.

We will also need a Vice President, Recording Secretary, and new representatives for the Elementary Education, Adult Education, Sociopolitical Concerns, and General Interest groups. Candidates selected for these positions will appear on a slate to be voted on in the Spring.

If you would like to nominate someone, including yourself, we'd like to hear from you. Also, if you have many contacts and know people who may be

willing to serve, you're eligible to serve on the Nominating Committee headed by Brian Twenge, MATSOL's Past President.

All that MATSOL accommodations and is able to offer to its members is possible only through the voluntary efforts of those who step forward. To learn more about these positions on the Executive Board or Nominating Committee in other terms of time and responsibilities, contact either manager by phone or e-mail. Work: (617) 351-3170 Home: (603) 745-9652.

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## To Be Or To Not Be

Bob Saitz



For a century or so, “split infinitives” have been a rallying point for those of the defenders-of-the-language faith. After all, if something has been split, it once must have been whole and that which was whole and is now split must be breaking apart—all coherence gone.

If we look briefly at the history of the infinitive in English, we note that its form in Old English was a single word: *to snore* was *hrutan* so that “I want to snore” was “Ic wille hrutan.” Yet even then the infinitive was starting to be accompanied by the preposition *to*, especially when the verb form was functioning as a noun: in “I want mead” and “I want to drink mead,” *mead* and *to drink mead* both function as objects of *want*. The *to* thus can mark the verb as working as something other than a verb, in this case a noun. We might also note that other prepositions, such as *till* and *at*, were used for this same function, but *to* won out in the nineteenth century.

Although the *to* caught on for this nominal function of the verb, other uses of the infinitive, such as verbs following modals, retained the simple form: we still say “I can snore quietly,” not “I can to snore.” This use of the infinitive was ignored in the nineteenth century when grammarians interested in paralleling the grammatical analysis of English with that of Latin or Greek concluded that the single-form infinitive of Latin (e.g., *facere*, to make) needed its counterpart in English and the *to* form of the infinitive was chosen to carry the burden.

As the *to* form of the infinitive was considered *the* infinitive and as the form of the infinitive in Latin was a single word, the idea arose that the *to* plus the verb should be treated as a single item, never to be sundered. The crime of infinitive-splitting was invented. Speakers of English could no longer say “I want to carefully analyze his plan.” They were expected to put *carefully* at the very end of the sentence, the normal spot for adverbs of manner.

As the use of the infinitive as a noun became increasingly popular, perhaps at the expense of our alternate verbal noun, the gerund (“Snoring was fashionable during the....”), infinitive-splitting also became more frequent. And of course this only hardened the hearts of the “never split” proponents, and they succeeded in making it into a “rule” with all the social plusses and minuses attendant upon such rules.

We must remember, however, that this particular commandment has almost no history; it didn’t exist before the nineteenth century. J. J. Lamberts, in *A Short Introduction to English Usage*, also noted the inconsistency of the rule. Is the

rule, he asked, that verb parts should not be separated from each other? If so, then we can’t say “I can always snore if I want to” or “I have never snored in the kitchen.”

The real question is whether splitting infinitives somehow detracts from the clarity of our message. To answer that question we might look at the practice of the infinitive-splitters and ask why they do it. Words that are inserted between *to* and the verb are usually modifiers of the verb (and whatever completes the verb). Some examples:

- (1) We decided to always lock the front door before we went upstairs.
- (2) To really appreciate opera, we have to listen to good singers.
- (3) We had to actually swallow the haggis so that our hosts wouldn’t be offended.
- (4) They all gathered in the square to silently bear witness to the outrages of the regime.

These examples illustrate different functions of splitting. In (1) the writer could have put *always* after the predication (“to lock the front door always”) but that puts *always* between the two predications “lock-door” and “went-upstairs,” leaving the reader unsure of what to attach it to. By splitting, the writer thus avoids a problem and gains the advantage of having *always* right next to the verb it modifies.

In (2) and (3) we have adverbs used as intensifiers and in English intensifiers almost always go next to and in front of the words they intensify, as in “It’s *very* hot” and “We *truly* believe in his candidacy.” Thus, in the examples above, *really* precedes *appreciate* and *actually* precedes *swallow*. If we moved them to the left, they would be understood as disjuncts, not intensifiers (“Really, to appreciate opera, we....”). If we moved them off to the right, they would probably be understood as adverbs of manner (e.g., to appreciate opera in a real rather than imaginary manner?). We don’t have much of a choice with intensifiers.

In (4) we do have reasonable options: “They all gathered in the square to bear witness silently....,” “...to bear witness to the outrages of the regime silently” or, as above, “...to silently bear witness....” Each option has a different effect and the splitter might defend his choice by noting that it (a)

*Continued on page 18*

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## MATSOL and SATE *Continued from page 3*

we hope that you profit from it, and that the establishment of our official relationship bears fruit. Gabriela Dornakova and I will keep in touch as long as we hold the office of president and make certain that our successors do likewise. I send heartfelt greetings in the name of the MATSOL board and all our members. Have a wonderful conference!

With sincere best wishes,

Carol Piñeiro  
President of MATSOL

Dear Carol,

Thank you for the letter you sent us to greet participants of our conference. I had to leave for Poprad (the city where the conference took place) already on Thursday and your letter had to arrive after my departure. During a business meeting I gave information about the friendship between MATSOL and SAUA/SATE and I declared that our partnership has been validated. At the moment I have been working on a new issue of our newsletter and I will publish your letter there. I hope you will agree.

The conference is over and the whole last week I spent with Carolyn Graham who was a keynote speaker at our conference. I worked out her itinerary and planned all meetings with people who might help her to realize her project "Jazz Chants" based on Slovak folk-tales. We really worked hard and if the project works, within a year a book and an audio-cassette will be ready.

The conference was successful. We had 458 participants and after that experience we think that an optimal number is 300 people. This time we were lucky to have four perfect speakers from abroad—from the USA, England, Austria, Hungary—and 54 presenters. The next National Conference will be in two years in the central part of Slovakia.

Our members can decide themselves which Interest Group they would like to work in. At this time we have these IGs: Young Learners, Teacher Development, Research, and ESP.

The Teacher Development IG is planning to have a conference in August (end) or September (beginning) in Bratislava. What about bringing somebody from MATSOL to this conference? The system we are having now is to have every second year a National Conference and smaller conferences (regional) within these two years organized by IGs. The one in Bratislava will have about 200 participants and some speakers from abroad. Thanks to financial support from the British Council and USIS we can plan and prepare many activities for our teachers.

I should finish my letter because you will be tired of reading. As soon as our newsletter is published, you will get some copies.

With Love,

Gaby  
Gymnazium Vazovova 6  
Bratislava, Slovak Republic

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## To Be Or To Not Be *Continued from page 17*

sites *silently* next to the verb *bear* and (b) provides an effective pattern of stress for the phrase:

"to bear witness silently"

"to silently bear witness"

The split version gives a strong stress at the beginning and one at the end to "enclose" the phrase.

It might be objected that if splitting has been socially proscribed, there could be negative consequences of using it. If we look at some of the latest handbooks and dictionaries, we find that it may be a vanishing proscription. In the *Riverside Guide to Writing*, it is not mentioned. In the *Bedford Handbook*, its use is sanctioned (especially with intensifiers) though not encouraged. The *American Heritage Dictionary* is firm: "The split infinitive ... is not a grammatical error and it has ample precedent in literature. But it is still avoided, where possible, by many writers and editors." Ironically, since infinitives are split in an effort to make a message more effective, it is characteristic of the more

conscientious writers!

*Bob Saitz is often found teaching "Linguistic Problems in TESOL" out of the English Department at Boston University.*

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## Teacher Research *Continued from page 12*

teachers begin their teaching careers with the tools to become leaders in their schools. As teachers continue to engage in research to determine what works in their classrooms, it is essential that school systems support and encourage these efforts.

*Peter Abraham, Director of the Master of Arts in Teaching ESL program at Simmons College completed his doctoral work at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His research interests are in teacher preparation, reading theory, and assessment.*

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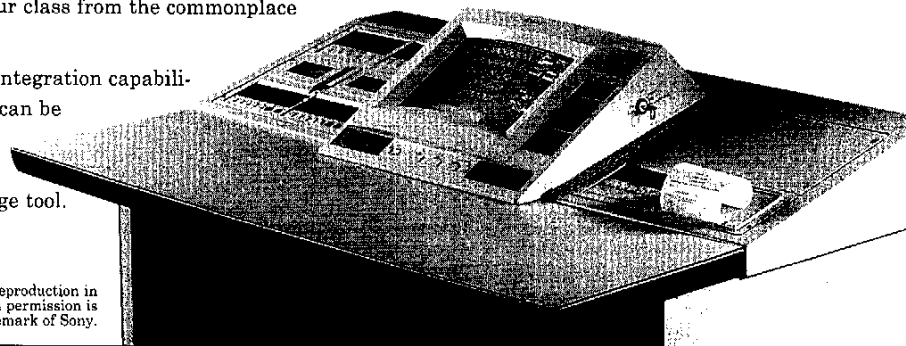
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# Computer Skills and Language Development

John McCarthy



With computer skills becoming a necessity in many areas of life, computer courses are rapidly entering ESL curricula. Of course, teaching these relatively new classes poses certain challenges. It can be difficult to design computer-based lessons which are interactive and reinforce core ESL material. I found this to be true while developing material for a *WordPerfect* course, but I did come up with certain activities that seemed to work well and which may be useful to others teaching computer skills to ESL learners.

In the first lesson of my class, students become familiar with starting and exiting the application, saving and opening files, and some basic typing features. They also work on question formation and learn about their classmates.

They begin by working at the same speed. Following step by step oral instructions, they start up *WordPerfect*, type their name, save the file to a floppy disk, and exit. They then start *WordPerfect* again and open the file. Next, I explain how to move the cursor, start a new line with "Enter," and use the "wordwrap" feature. The students are then asked to make up several questions and type each one on a separate line below their names. The questions can be anything the students would ask someone they met at a party: for example, "How long have you been living in Boston?" or "What are you going to do this weekend?"

As the students are typing, I circulate, checking question formation and making sure that the students use "Enter" and "wordwrap" correctly. When the slowest typist has finished at least a few questions, the students are instructed to save the file and exit. They then exchange floppy disks with a partner.

Without explaining the individual steps again, I ask the students to start *WordPerfect*, open their partner's file, and type an answer after each question. Once again I circulate, helping with grammatical errors and any computer problems. The students seem to enjoy answering each others' questions, and the various steps in this part of the activity provide good reinforcement of the basic *WordPerfect* material. After typing the answers, students save the file and give the disk back to its owner. Students can then open the file to learn something new about their partners.

Another class activity about font size and style uses advice columns to incorporate work on modals. Before the class, I save a "Dear Abby" style letter on a public drive or on the students' floppy disks. At the beginning of the lesson, students open the file and follow instructions on blocking

text with the mouse. They then change certain parts of the text by using the bold, italic, underline and size options.

In the next part of the lesson, students work in pairs, discussing the letter and coming up with advice for the letter writer. This provides them with a good chance to practice using "should" and "should have." After their discussions, students type responses, trying the various font options—selecting a larger font for the salutation and closing, italics for expressions with "should," and underlining for expressions with "should have," for example. As the students type, I help them with the modals and the font options. As an extension to the activity, students can type their own letters and give them to a partner, who responds.

## Another class activity about font size and style uses advice columns to incorporate work on modals.

When learning about spreadsheets, students can work on restaurant vocabulary and practice reading menus. At first, I give step by step instructions on how to create a spreadsheet and enter data, including formulas, into its rows and columns. After the class has followed these instructions and seems to grasp the material, the students are divided into groups of three. Each group is given the menu of a local restaurant, and each student is asked to pick an appetizer, entree and dessert. As the students discuss the menu, I move from group to group, answering any vocabulary questions.

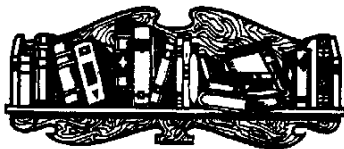
Next, the groups are instructed to design a spreadsheet that has a column for each group member and a row for each of the following expenses: appetizer, entree, dessert, tax, tip and total. After the design has been discussed, each student creates a spreadsheet on his or her computer, entering the correct data according to prices on the menu.

Although the lessons described above were developed specifically for *WordPerfect*, the basic concepts can be adapted to fit a variety of applications. Pair and group activities which reinforce vocabulary and structure have long been staples of ESL lesson plans, but teachers are often on new ground when trying to incorporate this methodology into computer classes which aim to build students' language and computer skills in one course.

John McCarthy teaches at Showa Boston.

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## REVIEW



***Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning, and Use.*** Diane Larsen-Freeman, Series Director; Marianne Celce-Murcia, Series Consultant. Heinle & Heinle, 1993-1994. Student texts: Book One, ISBN 0-8384-3968-3; Book Two, ISBN 0-8384-3969-1; Book Three, ISBN 0-8384-3970-5; Book Four, ISBN 0-8384-3971-3. Also four workbooks, answer keys, split editions of student texts and workbooks, teacher's manuals, and Access Guide.

### ***Reviewed by Rick Lizotte***

**G**rammar Dimensions is a four-level series of ESL grammar texts and workbooks for beginning to advanced ESL/EFL students. The goal of this ambitious series is to provide explanations of grammatical structures while also training students to use structures properly to communicate in everyday and academic contexts.

Each book in the series is divided into units dealing with related grammatical structures. Individual focus sections within the units concentrate on a structure's form (syntax/morphology), meaning (semantics), use (pragmatics), or some combination of these. Complex aspects of the English language such as the verb-tense system are distributed and revisited throughout the series, although all units are structured to be used independently.

Each unit begins with a communicative task that is meant as an introduction to, and pre-test for, a particular grammatical structure. This task focuses on communication rather than grammatical form, emphasizing that structures must be used meaningfully in conversation and writing. After the initial task, the several focus sections describe and illustrate the form, meaning, and/or use of the particular structure.

One or more exercises accompany each focus section. These exercises require students to recognize forms or usage, or to utilize structures correctly within a given linguistic context. At the end of each unit there is a range of communicative activities—games, problem-solving tasks, surveys of fellow students and native speakers, and in the later books, academic writing tasks.

At each of the four levels, the textbook is accompanied by a workbook and teacher's manual. The workbooks contain further exercises, some of which are constructed in the manner of the structure sections of the TOEFL test. The teacher's manuals are primarily answer keys to the textbook units, with some tips on how to utilize the tasks, exercises, and activities. At the beginning of each manual is an extensive, helpful discussion of one sample unit. Finally, an access guide provides a cross-referenced index to topics in the series

and a listing of all unit titles.

The *Grammar Dimensions* series texts are intended both as resources in English grammar and as pedagogical texts with a focus on oral and written communication. In both areas the series has strengths and weaknesses.

As a resource in English grammar, the series modernizes and improves upon descriptions of English grammar found in other ESL/EFL texts by using the results of modern linguistic research. (E.g., the perfect and progressive forms are presented as aspects rather than as further tense forms, explaining their appearance in non-tensed forms such as infinitives and gerunds.) While generally covering the structures contained in other grammar series, *Grammar Dimensions* also presents a wealth of new data on the meaning and use of English structures, especially those in the long-neglected area of discourse function. (Structures of discourse function are generally used to control the way information is presented in a text or conversation. For example, there is a unit on cleft structures, whose function is to focus the discourse on particular pieces of information.) This thorough and linguistically-informed approach should make the series a touchstone for future grammar texts.

However, the distinctions of form, meaning, and use that characterize the focus sections are not clearly delineated and so are not as useful as they could be in distinguishing core meanings of English structures from common uses of the structures in context. Furthermore, the presentation of grammatical and lexical items treats each piece of information as equally important. It would be more helpful to teachers and students alike if core structures of the grammar were differentiated from more esoteric or infrequent structures. Finally, because interrelated parts of the grammar are distributed throughout the different texts with only *some* integration in summative charts, the impression is of a bewildering array of fragmented data that is difficult to access, compare and review.

As a pedagogical text, the series is a clear improvement over many other series because it truly places grammar in context. Its exercises and activities are multicultural, and it provides a wealth of interesting and engaging communicative activities and authentic texts. However, despite these pedagogical advantages, it can be difficult to teach from this series. Although it is necessary to teach grammar primarily in context, students could also benefit from more preliminary exercises that focus on sheer recognition and drill of grammar structures. Furthermore, teachers without extensive linguistic training may need more explanation of the terminology (e.g., cleft structure and discourse organizers).

*Continued on the next page*

## REVIEW



*New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary*. Paul Nation, Editor. TESOL Publications, 1994. 218 pages. ISBN 0-939791-51-X

### *Reviewed by Ionela Istrate*

**T**his resource book for ESL/EFL teachers is a collection of over 100 vocabulary activities reflecting the experience of almost as many contributors from around the world. Many of the activities are intended for intermediate learners, some can be used at any level, and several are designed for beginners, while only a very few target advanced learners.

The book is organized into five sections: "Meeting New Vocabulary for the First Time," which contains lessons that address receptive skills and encountering words in texts; "Establishing Vocabulary," which presents activities that involve revising words and working with definitions; "Enriching Activities," which describes the use of associations and collocations and activities that promote productive use of words; "Developing Vocabulary Strategies," which concentrates on guessing words in context, word building, using dictionaries, and giving learners control over the learning process; and "Developing Fluency with Known Vocabulary," which contains some activities that foster fluency.

In the introduction the editor sets forth principles which should guide teachers when dealing with vocabulary. Among them: Make sure that learners have good control of the high frequency words before studying less frequent vocabulary. Vocabulary learning can be enhanced by careful planning of content, which should have a low cognitive load, and of activities, which should offer opportunities for meaningful use. After meeting new words, learners should periodically and systematically review them. Learners should be provided with efficient strategies for coping with unknown vocabulary, gaps in productive vocabulary, and less-than-perfect fluency.

Some of the activities in the book reflect these principles and provide valuable ideas for use in class. For example, in "One More Sentence" the words are first met in the context of several sentences, with typical collocations. A second set of new sentences calls for the students to produce the correct word, prompted by the new context.

In "Read and Tell," cooperative work involves two teams which practice reading half a story each, telling it to the other team, listening to the opposite team retell their half of the story, taking notes, reconstructing the story, and reading it again as a whole. This activity offers content-based learn-

ing and leads to intensive manipulation of the words in context, which will ensure good retention.

"In Other Words" is a good example of an activity which presents a useful way of finding an alternate way to express something when learners can not think of the right word.

Although the editor's introductory note warns against teaching words in sets, there are many activities (such as "A to Z Vocabulary" or "Matching Exercises") that focus mainly on the use of sets. These activities teach lists of words or definitions instead of providing contextualized vocabulary.

Some activities require considerable preparation time. "Words in Code" asks for 50 minutes of preparation time for a 20-minute activity. And 40 minutes preparation for "Calendar Fun" may not be worth the outcome. The activity "Stars and Signs" will generate a set of synonyms, but only after lengthy mimed improvisations that do not involve any active, contextualized English-language communication.

Other activities (such as "Say that Again") suggest the use of L1 to provide definitions or equivalents to review decontextualized individual words. "Sorting Words as a Review" suggests a discussion in L1 to compare categories of words.

This useful book strings together activities and techniques successfully employed by many experienced ESL/EFL teachers around the globe. Nevertheless, teachers will need to identify those activities whose preparation time, content, duration, type of class involvement, and outcome are most appropriate to their situations, and some ideas will require adaptation.

*Ionela Istrate has taught in Bucharest, Romania, and is now Director of Greater Boston YMCA International Services. She also teaches ESL at Roxbury Community College.*

### *Grammar Dimensions* Continued from page 21

On the whole the *Grammar Dimensions* series is a flexible and superior resource for teaching English grammar. Teachers using this series will have to emphasize core over subsidiary structures in the grammar, find or create summative charts for some of the material, and make up exercises which drill the material more extensively. The series ought to guide both teachers and students more carefully through its material, but the range of structures covered and the wealth of authentic materials and activities make it an impressive contribution.

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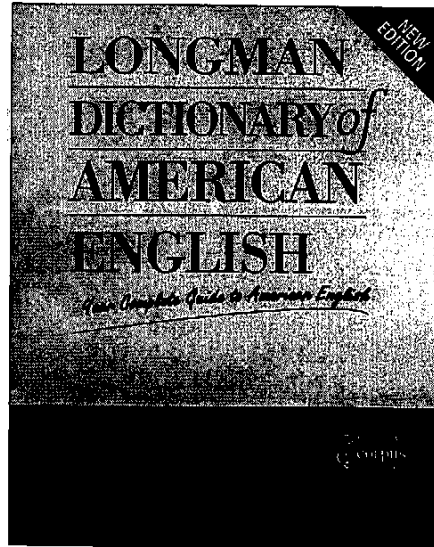
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