

In 2012, MATSOL will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of our founding in 1972. In commemoration of this milestone, we are reprinting this article by Robert Saitz, the first MATSOL president, from the first MATSOL newsletter. Despite the many changes that have taken place over the years, the essence of his message remains true to MATSOL's mission and goals as an organization.

MATSOL Newsletter, Fall 1972

President's Message

Robert Saitz

As an organization conceived by teachers of speakers of other languages, MATSOL is dedicated to the interests, concerns and problems of the people who are struggling to develop new educational models appropriate to life in multicultural communities.

We welcome and hope to bring together a wide range of people who have common concerns: for example, teachers who teach content to elementary and secondary bilingual classes; teachers who teach first or second languages in bilingual or ESOL school programs; teachers in community and institutional adult education programs; teachers in colleges who work with both permanent and temporary populations; and administrator, paraprofessionals and volunteers at all levels. While each of us faces unique problems, all of us are working with students who have something in common – despite the differences in our students' age, education, interests, motivations, etc., all of our students live in two languages, in two worlds. And it must be our goal to ensure that this experience be an enriching one – to both the students and to all who come in contact with them.

Once again, we in Massachusetts have the opportunity to lead; your responses and your suggestions will determine the way in which MATSOL can contribute to education for life in a multicultural world, and idea whose time has finally come.



A Call For Proposals

MATSOL invites you to present at our 40th Anniversary Conference: *Lessons from the Past, Innovations for the Future* on May 3-4, 2012. As we look back on the history of ESOL education in Massachusetts since MATSOL's founding in 1972, we will reflect on the insights we have gained, and highlight the best new ideas and practices to bring us into the future. We hope that you will share your ideas, effective classroom practices and research with our colleagues and fellow MATSOL members in the field of ELL/ESOL education. The deadline for proposals is December 1, 2011.

The conference will take place in a new, larger conference site, the Sheraton Framingham Hotel and Conference Center in Framingham, MA. Both days will include presentations for K-12 and adult, workplace and higher education, as well as general interest sessions.

Proposals must be submitted electronically using MATSOL's online form. You must enter information online and upload the Session Description document, which will be evaluated by the jury of proposal readers. 

Forsaking the Dictionary in Favor of Communication

by Christopher Lyons

Learning a new language can be a difficult, intimidating task. I spent a summer in Japan studying teaching techniques and even taking charge of a few classes myself, all while practicing and strengthening my ability to speak in Japanese. I realized that I often forgot words that I had learned from a dictionary or translation. However, words and ideas that were explained just once in Japanese remain part of my vocabulary. Drawing from my experience, I commonly forbade the use of the students' electronic dictionaries in my ESL classes in Japan.

When I first directed students to put away their dictionaries, I was met with resistance from my students and disbelief from the Japanese instructors. They worried that ideas, explanations, and lessons would be missed, impossible, and/or ruined. I was not alone in my foray into the land of no dictionaries. Some foreign-born professors supported the practice of discouraging dictionary use and had enacted it in their work.

One of the keys to the no-dictionary rule was that students could ask each other or me for help with a word or phrase that they were having trouble with. While I encouraged everyone to speak in English, students provided translations to help their struggling classmates. Contrary to fears of inadequate vocabularies, I never once had a student say "I can't do this," or "I didn't come up with anything." In fact, when I encountered my students outside of the classroom, they often communicated with me using the words and terms that they had learned in my class without the dictionary.

This "unusual" teaching idea overlaps with the theory of Communicative Language Teaching. The idea is for emphasis to be placed on language's functional use in everyday situations. In conversation, it is impractical to stop mid-thought, pull out a dictionary, and find a rough translation of what is needed to express one's self. By practicing and using the knowledge that they already have, my students followed explanations more exactly, retained new words they discovered, and used them in subsequent lessons.

Since that time, I ask my students to consult

with a friend before looking up a word in their dictionaries. I continue to find this to be an invaluable practice. Why? The words that I learned and my students learn through interacting with others 'stick' whereas the words 'learned' from the dictionary are quickly forgotten. 

Christopher Lyons is a graduate student studying Education at Elms College in Chicopee, MA. He spent the summer of 2011 studying and teaching at the University of Kochi in Kochi, Japan.

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MATSOL Advocacy Alerts

by Michaela Colombo, MATSOL Advocacy Co-Chair

As educators, we currently have the opportunity to improve educational opportunities for English language learners throughout schools in Massachusetts. To do so we must act on three urgent advocacy issues: 1) Commissioner Chester's plan to address issues cited in the report from the U.S. Department of Justice, 2) the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (MADESE's) flexibility waiver application from specific requirements of NCLB, and 3) House Bill 1065/Senate Bill 197, *An Act Relative to Enhancing English Opportunities for All Students in the Commonwealth*, the same bill filed by Representative Jeffrey Sánchez in 2009 and supported by MATSOL both then and now. Below is a description and discussion of each advocacy issue and suggestions regarding what you can do to support advocacy for ELLs on each issue.

Massachusetts DESE Plan to Address the Report from the Department of Justice

Recently the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) found shortcomings in the Massachusetts ELL program, and specifically in the preparation of teachers who teach academic content to ELLs in SEI programs. In a letter from the DOJ to the MADESE, Deputy Chief Emily McCarthy, wrote, "ELLs in Massachusetts ... have already gone far too long without the SEI services to which they are legally entitled" (p. 3). The DOJ based its findings on the three criteria established in the *Castañeda v. Pickard* case (1981): 1) programs have to be based on sound theory, 2) programs must have sufficient resources, and 3) program results must show that language barriers are being overcome. The DOJ found that the MADESE had violated the third prong of *Castañeda* by not mandating SEI professional development (category training) even though the DESE had established that the current voluntary approach to professional development has been ineffective in producing adequate numbers of SEI teachers, and that MADESE "has not satisfied the second prong of *Castaneda* because its category training does not adequately train teachers to deliver SEI content instruction to ELL students appropriately" (p. 10). (Note: I use *training* and *train* to be consistent with the DOJ report, rather than *professional development* and *prepared*, terms I believe more accurately reflect the preparation of teachers of ELLs.)

At the September 27, 2011 Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BOE) meeting, Commissioner Chester received near unanimous approval to develop a timeline to review the needs of Massachusetts English language learners and the options for responding to the shortcomings indicated in the report and to present proposed regulations to the BOE by February 2012.

It is critical that educators throughout Massachusetts who have expertise in the teaching of ELLs and preparation of teachers of ELLs provide the Board of Education with guidance about what constitutes effective preparation for teachers of ELLs. At a minimum, content-area teachers who provide instruction to ELLs at varying proficiency levels must complete rigorous pre- and in-service preparation that prepares them to effectively teach ELLs, including foundations in second language acquisition, cultural influences on learning, making content accessible, appropriate assessment (content and language), developing academic language, teaching reading and writing. Pre- and in-service professional development must also include an understanding of the needs of students with interrupted formal schooling (SIFEs) and strategies for effectively teaching SIFEs. Preparation must be of the highest quality, and implemented by colleges and universities throughout the state as well as well-established professional organizations, such as MATSOL, and must be connected to initial licensure and relicensure.

The Flexibility Waiver

On October 25, 2011 Commissioner Chester will seek endorsement from the Board of Education for the MADESE to submit an application for a federal waiver from specific requirements of NCLB. If this endorsement is approved, the MADESE will file a flexibility waiver by November 14, 2011. It is unknown how the waiver will affect the education of ELLs in Massachusetts schools. It is critical that educators and advocates of ELLs provide feedback to the Commissioner and the BOE. Given the limited period of time for comment, MATSOL encouraged its membership to respond to a survey from DESE and has submitted preliminary recommendations, including:

- using appropriate, valid, and reliable assessments for ELLs
- implementing a growth model that mea-

MATSOL Advocacy Alerts

continued from **page 3**

- ensures the progress of students classified as LEP and FLEP over time
- ensuring that all ELLs are taught by teachers who are prepared
- strengthening communication to ELL parents
- providing flexibility with regard to program models for ELLs
- ensuring appropriate funding for ELL programs (for low and high incidence districts)

An Act Relative to Enhancing English Opportunities for All Students in the Commonwealth (H. 1065/S.197)

Current educational programs providing SEI as the only means of instruction for ELLs at all proficiency levels, have often prohibited ELLs from accessing grade level content, thus resulting in limited educational opportunities for ELLs. House Bill 1065 was filed by Representative Jeffrey Sánchez and supported by MATSOL in 2009. MATSOL continues to support this bill, which has the potential to improve educational opportunities for ELLs in the following ways:

- requiring districts with more than 20 limited English proficient students in any one language group to offer more than ESOL
- requiring districts with 50 or more ELLs at elementary, middle, or secondary levels to offer at least two full-time programs at each level in which the ELL population exceeds 50
- providing programmatic flexibility with regard to the type of ELL program that is offered and requiring a description of how the district will evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services with regard to English proficiency and academic standards
- requiring annual assessments of students by qualified personnel, which includes the creation of individualized success plans in English language development as necessary
- requiring adequate and ongoing preparation of teachers providing structures for ensuring the meaningful involvement of parents

MATSOL testified at the Joint Committee on Education hearing on October 4, 2011, and has included language on its website that you can use/adapt to contact your state representative and senator. It is urgent that your state legislators hear from you on this critical issue.

Advocacy Action You Can Take

- Read the advocacy alerts on the MATSOL website.
- Explain one issue to at least one colleague, asking for her or his support.
- Send your stories and concerns regarding each of the issues to advocacycommittee@matsol.org (we will collect, compile, and present these.)
- In response to the DOJ report and plan, write to Commissioner Chester and the Board of Education to support the mandatory high-quality preparation of all teachers who teach ELLs (pre- and in-service).
- Attend a Board of Education Meeting to show your support. You do not have to speak. Contact advocacycommittee@matsol.org to coordinate.
- For House Bill 1065/Senate Bill 197, write to your state representative and senator. MATSOL provides a sample letter on the Advocacy section of its website. 

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Accelerating the Language Development of English Language Learners

by Sergio Páez

In Worcester Public Schools, a district of more than 23,000 students, 7,300 are English language learners [ELLs] and span all levels of language proficiency in both L1 and L2. During the past few years, we restructured all of our language acquisition programs to improve students' academic performance, and the results have been positive.

Hundreds of our students have transitioned from levels I and II to levels III and IV on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). They have done this in a short period of time. MEPA analysis shows significant movement of students reaching the transitioning level and making significant progress from one level to the next. Our test analysis of our ELLs performance on the MCAS shows that our students are performing better than the state average!

As we restructured our language acquisition programs, we worked diligently to add interventions, supports and safety nets to assist students as they learned the academic content and language skills they needed to achieve success in our schools. These interventions and supplemental support services include *before and after school programs, multi-sensory interventions in the classrooms, new technologies, and ongoing professional development* for all teachers.

One intervention that is having a positive impact on the acquisition of the English language for ELL students is an educational software program called *Fast ForWord* (Scientific Learning). Through the program's individualized, adaptive exercises, students build memory, attention, processing, and sequencing in the areas of English language and reading. These exercises improve the processing efficiency of the brain, so that individual phonemes within words can be more easily differentiated. This greatly speeds up the process of learning and comprehending spoken and written English, and builds fluency, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and other language skills.

By strengthening both processing efficiency and English language skills, we have been able to accelerate the performance of ELLs and help students make significant academic gains. In three

schools, for example, we have seen students achieve more than a 1 ½ years of growth in 28 days. In addition, students who have had a difficult time sitting in a classroom environment are immediately engaged in the computer lab because they know the program is individualized to their needs.

It is important to note that the success of this approach is due, in part, to the quality of our implementation. From the beginning, we have been committed to ensure all the resources are present to maximize the use of this product. Working with the support of the company and experts in the area, we have been able to implement 14 labs across the district — in our elementary and secondary schools and two alternative schools. We have processes in place to identify the right students for the program and for students to consistently use the program for 30 minutes a day. Our computer labs are staffed by a teacher and a lab coach to make certain that students receive the help they need when they need it. In addition, we work to ensure that this program and all our interventions are connected to students' classroom instruction.

By combining effective programs and interventions with high-quality instruction, we are making learning engaging and meaningful for our ELL students, and helping accelerate their transition into mainstream classrooms. 

Dr. Sergio Páez is Manager of English Language Learners and Supplemental Support Services for Worcester Public Schools.

TESOL Advocacy Day 2011

by Helen Solórzano

On June 6-7, 2011, I traveled to Washington DC to represent MATSOL at TESOL Advocacy Day 2011; joining over 40 other TESOL members from more than 25 U.S. based TESOL affiliates. This year was the sixth consecutive year for TESOL Advocacy Day, and featured a new format, along with an opportunity for any TESOL member to participate. The event was expanded to feature a full day of issue briefings and activities around education legislation and advocacy, followed by a full day of visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. The goals of Advocacy Day were not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for affiliate representatives on elements of advocacy. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of more than 100 Representatives and Senators.

Responding to recent action in Congress and from the White House, TESOL Advocacy Day 2011 was focused on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently revised as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. This year, I met with staff from the offices of Senators John Kerry and Scott Brown, and Congressmen John Tierney (Education), John Olver (Appropriations), and Michael Capuano (my representative) to discuss TESOL's recommendations for ESEA reauthorization and the impact of the current law upon English language learners in Massachusetts. I was joined for some of the meetings by a representative of Northern New England TESOL who lives in Massachusetts but works in New Hampshire.

To fully prepare for Advocacy Day, each affiliate representative was required to do several things in advance, beginning with setting up our individual meetings with our Congressional representatives. To assist with this, TESOL provided directions and guidance, as well as the list of specific representatives and senators to contact. We were also sent talking points and background information on ESEA reauthorization so that we could begin to familiarize ourselves

with the issues in advance. To help make our Congressional meetings more effective, we were also encouraged to find examples from our own states to illustrate the talking points.

TESOL Advocacy Day commenced with a welcome from TESOL Past President Brock Brady, and a welcome from TESOL Executive Director Rosa Aronson. The event was led by John Segota, Director of Advocacy, Standards, and Professional Relations, and Ellen Fern of Washington Partners, LLC, TESOL's legislative consultants. The first day featured a briefing from Congressional staff to present the "view from the Capitol Hill" on ESEA reauthorization and the key issues under debate, as well as a similar briefing with representatives from the National Education Association, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. In addition, Dr. Rosalinda Barrera, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) at the US Department of Education, provided an update from OELA and discussed the Obama Administration's proposal for reauthorizing ESEA. The briefing from the congressional staff was especially valuable in understanding how legislation moves (or doesn't move) through Capitol Hill, and the negotiation process that takes place in committee.

Following these briefings, a series of activities were held to review aspects of the legislative process as well as how to prepare for meetings with members of Congress. We had the opportunity to role play as members of Congress in a mock hearing to discuss a piece of legislation, as well to have a mock debate on the floor of Congress to try and pass legislation. We also received key information to prepare our talking points and given the opportunity to plan for our meetings. The purpose of these briefings and activities was to help the participants practice and prepare for their meeting on Capitol Hill that afternoon. During the discussion, affiliate representatives had an opportunity to share their experiences from around the country. One interesting perspective was the near unanimous opinion that despite the drawbacks of the testing mandates, they at least shine a spotlight on ELL achievement and force school districts to respond. Many affiliate representatives expressed reservations about proposals for "flexibility" in funding, fearing that if funding was no longer targeted to ELL programs, and they would end up being defunded. In addition, many people also told

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2011 TESOL Advocacy Representatives

chilling stories about the anti-immigrant sentiment and practices in their states that negatively affect many children and families, whatever their immigration status.

On June 7, we went to Capitol Hill to have meetings with members of Congress and staff. I was not able to meet with any legislators in person, but met instead with the legislative staff person who focused on education. Senator Kerry and Representatives Capuano, Tierney and Olver are very supportive of ELL education issues, although they were pessimistic about congress acting on a bill any time soon (and this was before the debt debate started). Nevertheless, we stressed the need for targeted funding for ELL education, as well as continued accountability, but with assessment measures that are valid and reliable for ELLs. I also took the opportunity to thank Kerry, Capuano, Tierney and Olver for their support of the DREAM Act.

At the end of the day, the participants shared their experiences and what they learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear about what other people experienced on their visit. Overall,

I learned a lot from TESOL Advocacy day, and was honored to represent MATSOL and remind the legislators about the importance of ELL education, although it was frustrating to hear how pessimistic people were about any positive changed being made. TESOL Advocacy Day is now open to any TESOL member, and I highly recommend the experience. Just be sure to wear comfortable shoes! ☺

Additional information about TESOL Advocacy Day will be available on the TESOL web site at <http://www.tesol.org>. If you are interested in learning more about your Congressional representatives, and the legislative issues TESOL is tracking, go the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/tesol>.

The Benefits Of Technology With English Learners

by Erin Lenski and Gabriela Sheehan

Many educators can remember the piercing sound and quick tones of a dial-up modem, the 10 minutes that it took to load a homepage, and the anticipation of typing a word into a search engine and seeing relevant websites. Oh the excitement! Since then, technology is a part of the learning experience and we are finding it to be very helpful. Many of the English language learners [ELLs] that we teach know how to surf the web with ease and speed and how to create impressive and compelling presentations with custom animations, music, and well-researched information. There is no limit to what our students can do! Through ESL technology funding, we have supported the use of technology. Our ELLs at Reid Middle School in Pittsfield have access to Macbooks, iPods, Active Expression devices, an ActivBoard, and related technologies.

During class, our students listen attentively as their classmates provide technology supported presentations. They smile, nod or furrow their brows with intense concentration. Their presentations include language such as “isolate the variable and convert fractions to decimals.” They walk their peers through the process of answering a grade-level word problem while explaining the how and why in specific academic terms. While this is occurring, the room is completely silent. Students listen to their peers teach them how to solve a math problem using headphones and iPod Touches. The presentations include text, images and spoken explanations. We believe that our students’ cognitive, behavioral and relational engagement has been astounding as a result of the technology supports that we have been able to provide on a regular basis as a routine part of their learning.

As an example, during a lesson in Erin Lenski’s ESL class about water, the ActivBoard magnifies text, graphics, and pictures about the lesson focus - what water is used to do. Erin asks students to read aloud with her. After reading aloud, each student uses an Active Expression device to write a response to assigned questions about the topic. The writing samples are immediately sent to Mrs. Lenski’s computer. She sees each student’s response and projects these in graphic format on the ActivBoard. Some of the responses include

one word, ‘water’. Mrs. Lenski encourages students to respond more descriptively and ask them to write a description about “what we use water to do.” Once this is done, she separates the class into three groups and furnishes each with a laptop.

One group is assigned to do research on the Internet about conserving water and to create a Keynote presentation on this topic. A second group is instructed to gather information from their classmates about the number of times that they use water on a typical day, create a graph of their findings in Numbers, and to create a presentation on this topic using Keynote. The third group is instructed to create a Keynote presentation that includes narration about why water is important.

The students engage in the assignment with enthusiasm. Their Keynotes have hyperlinks embedded in their text, eye-catching and sparkling slide transitions, a variety of color, and, more importantly, perfect sentence structure and grammar! The last group even has a recorded narration complete with funny student comments including: “Water is used for washing food. Yum! Our bodies use water when we sweat. Gross!”

Students enjoy the learning experience and Ms. Lenski can assess their comprehension and capacity to extract main ideas and concepts from the story through their group’s interactions and creations. Each presentation is recorded so that students can listen to themselves. Ms. Lenski uploads each one to an iPod for this purpose. “I said sweet. It should be sweat,” says a student. “Good self-correction! Would you like to record the narration again?” Ms. Lenski responds. She notes that her students appear to be much more able to self-monitor.

Gabriela Sheehan, co-teaches with Erin Lenski. Gabriela sees the added advantage of technologically created lessons for her students and herself as being able to listen, read and view them more than once and revise and save them for future use. Students can and do improve their communication through self, peer and teacher feedback that is immediate.

Gabriela and Erin find that using technology-based lessons is quite easy and that their students

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benefit greatly. “The test scores have skyrocketed,” reports Erin. During the 2009-2010 school year, students had a 19.9 CPI point increase in the ELA and a 31.4 CPI increase in Math statewide assessment. Erin and Gabriela believe that these outcomes are a direct result of the technology that they use. They also believe that it can work well for all learners.

They also note an additional and important benefit. Their students have the highest attendance rate that they have had during the past five years! Attendance officer April Nutting notes, “We have never made AYP in the 5 years that I have been in this position for the month of December in our LEP subgroup until this year. We made AYP in every subgroup for the month of December, which can be a very challenging month for attendance.” Student attendance saw a 6% increase during this time period, growing 5% alone from 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 school years.

While getting ELLs to school is important, keeping them actively engaged in the learning process remains the number one goal for Lenski and Sheehan. They believe that their students should want to learn such critical things as English, how to solve math word problems, explain physics theories, discuss ancient history, and much more. They believe that technology is the key means to help students to learn social and academic language. 

Erin Lenski teaches ESL to grades 6-8 at Reid Middle School located in Pittsfield, MA. She has degrees in education and modern languages from MCLA in North Adams, MA. Erin is a frequent presenter at Mass CUE and has previously published in Currents. She is a professional development leader in her district and has worked to build a network of support for immigrant students and their families. She can be reached at eleith@pittsfield.net

Gabriela Sheehan teaches ESL to grades 6-8 at Reid Middle School, and to grades 2 and 4 at Conte Community School in Pittsfield, MA. She has taught from K-12 to higher education. She has a graduate degree in education Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ. She can be reached at gsheehan@pittsfield.net

English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course

Third Edition, Peter Roach.
Cambridge University Press, 2000. 283 pages.
ISBN 0 521 78613 4

reviewed by Katherine E. Morelli

For many in the field of language instruction, pronunciation is a seemingly fruitless series of calls and responses and distorted echoes. At times, however, pronunciation work can be quite successful—but why and how? While *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course* does not explicitly answer these multi-faceted questions, it does provide an in-depth look at the field of English phonetics and phonology, which develop your ability to explain to your students what they need to attempt physically, rather than replicate audibly.

Starting with the basic anatomy of speech production, Roach takes us step by step through the articulation process—beginning with the air we breathe and that same air that is processed back through the vocal track, escaping our lips. Of course, the real intricacies occur between the vocal cord and the final release. Explanations of details such as the subdivisions of the tongue, its interaction or lack thereof with the teeth, movements of the lips, and how they all work together to create sound – these help us not only to visualize the process, but also to imagine the challenges learners might face in production. The book is helpful in solidifying one's working knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), something that has plagued some educators, but is often a crucial component for ESL learners. Students familiar with the IPA—particularly those coming from a tonal background such as Chinese—often require this dialogue in the classroom. At times it is the only communicative tool that transcends the muckiness of foreign acoustics.

In other chapters Roach explains strong and weak syllables and stress in simple and complex words. While stress is often unfixed in English as

so much relies on the alterations in rapid speech, variations in word combinations, and an overall dependency upon the context of interactions, Roach does attempt to explain some commonalities and noticeable identifying features of word stress.

This, of course, leads to one of the murkier areas of phonetics and phonology: intonation. Roach goes into great detail when explaining and discussing English tones, the structure of tone units, pitch variation, and the overall function of intonation which, according to Roach, includes accent, grammar, and discourse. The ultimate goal of these chapters is to provide a comprehensible guide for speakers and educators to understand the practical use of intonation in discourse, which is often a challenging concept to teach—particularly for those in a multicultural classroom where linguistic disparity is great.

After each chapter, Roach briefly addresses teachers with notes containing practical suggestions as well as written exercises for the reader to apply and test their knowledge of the material. These exercises are useful, but academic in nature. The book is not for someone interested in a light or leisurely stroll through the recondite world of phonetics and phonology. It lacks substantial practical teaching applications for the classroom, but serves as an introduction and invitation. 

Katherine Morelli is a certified ESL instructor and Applied Linguistics graduate student at UMass Boston. She has been teaching ESL for five years, most recently at Kaplan International Colleges at Northeastern University and UMass Boston's Writing Center. kemorelli@gmail.com

Editor's note: It seems this is a good book to learn the science behind pronunciation. Does anyone among us have a suggestion for a book that will take us to the next step: to help teachers use that scientific knowledge to intervene and build effective pronunciation growth in the classroom? If so, please be in touch. A review of that book would be the next logical step here to help our colleagues with this bugaboo of pronunciation.

Tips for Teaching Culture: Practical Approaches to Intercultural Communication

Ann C. Wintergerst and Joe McVeigh.
Pearson Education, 2011. 244 pages.
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-245822-1,
paperback 10: 0-13-245822-5.
reviewed by Lucy Bunning

Tips for Teaching Culture: Practical Approaches to Intercultural Communication is a reference and activity book for teachers in multicultural environments. It provides research-based explanations of cultural influences in language and the classroom and activities for students to develop awareness and understanding of intercultural interactions.

Culture influences our thought, language, values, and actions. Everyone who teaches and learns in multicultural environments can benefit from a greater understanding of dimensions of culture and their own cultural norms to communicate and act more effectively. The stated purpose of this book is to give teachers of adult and young adult speakers of other languages a “practical overview of culture and intercultural communication” (p.vii). However, I argue that this is useful for anyone working or learning in multicultural education. The majority of the book focuses on elements of culture that are not readily visible or acknowledged, yet influence the way people relate to one another.

The book presents a broad range of aspects of culture and includes explanation of research, real-life examples, and activities teachers can use with students. Most examples involve English speakers or people learning English, but the concepts of culture described in the book can be applied across languages and cultures.

The first four chapters explore topics applicable to anyone teaching, learning, working, or living in intercultural settings. The first chapter, *Exploring Culture*, develops readers’ awareness of culture and cultural adjustment. Chapter two, *Culture and Language*, explores the relationship between culture, language, and thought, and emphasizes the importance of social context in expressing and interpreting meaning. The third chapter, *Culture and Nonverbal Communication*, identifies aspects of non-verbal communication, including spatial behavior, concepts of time, and gestures, and their communication functions.

Chapter four, *Culture and Identity*, guides readers in exploring personal, gender, social, cultural, and ethnic identities and roles.

The fifth and sixth chapters are more specific to people experiencing a new culture or specifically teaching culture. *Culture Shock and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, addresses the stages, symptoms, and effects of culture shock and ways to make easier transitions between cultures. *Traditional Ways of Teaching Culture*, looks at more common approaches to teaching culture including the use of literature, arts, research projects, role plays, and outings.

The final two chapters apply to all multicultural educational settings. Chapter seven, *Culture and Education*, addresses teacher and learner expectations, linguistic and sociolinguistic behaviors, and communication styles. The eighth chapter, *Culture and Social Responsibility*, turns to critical pedagogy and establishing a climate of respect for all.

Each chapter presents five to eight “Tips for Exploring Culture” which include a section on “What the research says,” and a section on “What the teacher can do.” The research sections provide an accessibly written introduction to key research drawn from a variety of disciplines including anthropology, multicultural education, psychology, sociolinguistics, and language education. The “What the teacher can do” section provides an activity, requiring minimal preparation time, that can be used with beginning to advanced-level English language learners or proficient English speakers. Some of the activities require no special materials. Others require a photocopiable handout, found at the back of the book. The activities guide learners in exploring personal values and experience in classroom, community, and online settings. In addition to exploring specific cultural content, these activities help learners practice the four skills and appeal to a variety of learning preferences and comfort-levels with self-disclosure. Teaching notes at the end of the activities include references for further investigation.

When talking about culture it can be easy to generalize or stereotype groups of people. The authors, however, provide examples of how to avoid this. They discuss dimensions of culture along a continuum, rather than as dualisms.

While they do say that one group may tend to behave in a certain way, they also acknowledge individual differences within a culture. When analyzing certain behaviors, they do it within a specific context. The authors provide a wealth of real-life examples of intercultural interactions in social, professional, and education settings. Some of the activities revolve around “critical incidents,” which are short scenarios involving problematic inter-cultural interactions that promote discussion and analysis.

This comprehensive exploration of culture in language and the classroom is valuable for teachers and learners who want to improve intercultural relations. It is practical and accessible for use as a reference and an activity book. 

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Top Notch

Second Edition, Joan Saslow & Allen Ascher.
Longman, 2011. Pages vary.
pearsonlongman.com/topnotch2e
reviewed by Elsa Richter

Top Notch’s website describes its first edition as a “communicative course for adults and young adults,” and has been used as such since 2006. The second edition of *Top Notch* came out earlier this year, with new components and updated content.

Longman’s description of *Top Notch* as a course, rather than a text, is apt, as each of its four levels (fundamentals, 1, 2, and 3) includes a teacher’s edition, student’s workbook, DVD and audio programs, assessment package, and “copy & go” activity book for teachers. The DVD also includes a digital version of the student book that can be used on interactive white boards. Teachers who are on their own when coming up with an entire curriculum would have plenty of resources if they used *Top Notch*, and would have the opportunity to choose among *Top Notch*’s many activities and forms of media when lesson planning. The Teacher’s Edition begins with about 20 pages of teaching tips and methodology, and instructions throughout the book are also sprinkled with common-sense suggestions like, “Model this conversation with a more confident student in the class,” which make it a fairly foolproof choice for the less experienced teacher or one who requires guidance with lesson planning.

The units in the book are organized by language function; in *Top Notch 1* (“for false beginners”), units include “Getting Acquainted,” “The Extended Family,” and “Taking Transportation.” The activities in each unit are ideal for a communicative classroom, with goals clearly stated at the beginning of each lesson, followed by a warm-up or model conversation, followed by a productive skill exercise, wrapped up by a “Now You Can...” reminder to reinforce what students have learned in the lesson. Goals in the higher level books get a little more interesting; in *Top Notch 3* (intermediate), goals include “Recommend a book,” “Bring up a controversial subject,” and “Take responsibility for a mistake.” Grammar is snuck into lessons in context with a useful purpose, making it easily digestible for students. Overall, units are organized intuitively and lessons build upon each other in a natural

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way.

The “*Top Notch* TV” series includes a sitcom and pop song, both of which retain the first edition styling and do not seem to fit with the rest of the second edition materials. Additionally, the sitcom is a bit inauthentic, although, to be fair, it would be difficult to gear a natural-sounding sitcom dialogue to beginners. The acting is goofy and awkward; in my classes, students enjoyed it nonetheless, but it would probably best be used sparingly.

The only drawback that I found to having all the materials that *Top Notch* provides was that the cost of collecting this quantity of resources may be prohibitive for the teachers who purchase materials out-of-pocket. In this case, I would recommend that the teacher invest in the student book and audio CD, which is integral to student participation with the text. The student books appear thin, but each page is chock full of activities and the “Copy & Go” activity book offers plenty of extras. The ActiveTeach software, while a useful supplement, could be omitted while leaving the structure of the course intact and, in fact, allowing the teacher to focus the course more on the communicative activities.

For those who are considering using *Top Notch*, or for first edition users upgrading to the second edition, plenty of online support is available on the aforementioned website, including a recent podcast released on September 20 titled “Introducing *Top Notch 2e*.” 

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