matsol Currents
MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
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# Contents

# A Message from the President

**Every fall, as we enjoy the fruits of farmers' labor,** I think about the fruits of our own labor as educators. Our interactions with students and colleagues are like sowing seeds that ultimately come to harvest. This year I have had the joy of hearing, unexpectedly, from many of my former students. First, I heard from a young Swiss woman, now 23, whom I first knew fourteen years ago when we were both living in Australia. Her first language was Swiss German, and she did not speak English. Now she is fluent and has a job working for a sporting-events-marketing company in Boston. Then a young Japanese man that I taught for a year while his father was a visiting scholar at Harvard came to Massachusetts for a visit and invited me to meet him for coffee in Harvard Square. He is a now a university student in Washington state, still working hard to improve his English, while taking courses in history, culture and sociology. Next a young man from Korea sent me an e-mail to say that he has landed his dream job, having earned a degree in accounting. He suggested that he and his sister try to meet me at Thanksgiving, when they will be in the Boston area, so "we can remember the great times when we were together." Now this week two high school seniors have contacted me to share their college application plans. One wants to work towards a medical career, after spending a considerable amount of time volunteering at a hospital. The other has discovered the world of architecture through a summer school program. The architect-to-be met me at school in the classroom I still use. On the ceiling next to the fluorescent light is a little pink post-it note labeled "light" that he and I put there close to five years ago, on St. Patrick's Day, his first day of school. That day he asked me in Chinese, "*Why is everyone wearing green? School uniform?*" His English was so limited that we spent a good part of the day labeling everything in our classroom; hence the post-it note on the ceiling. He is now classified as a second year FLEP, and he is thriving.

In May, when I stood before 600-plus people in the ballroom at the MATSOL Conference, I told you that much of the work we do is invisible. While I still think that is true, the visits from my former students have helped me to visualize what I do and why it matters. The "harvest" is very sweet.

In addition to the work we do in our classrooms, another part of MATSOL's mission is to advocate for our students, and I am working to hone my skills as an advocator — not only for my students and their families, but also for you, the Mas-

sachusetts Educators of English Language Learners. In June I attended TESOL's 2014 Advocacy and Policy Summit in Washington D.C. (see my report on that meeting immediately following this letter). MATSOL is planning several new advocacy efforts that will become clearer once the new administration takes office; we'll communicate more about these soon.

We're already busy preparing for the 2015 MATSOL conference that will take place May 7-9 in Framingham. We hope to publish the program for the conference some time in March. Please mark these dates on your calendar and plan to attend the conference. It's a unique opportunity to establish and renew contacts with colleagues, catch up on recent events in the TESOL world, and hear inspiring presentations on many different aspects of our field.

Finally, if you are able to attend the 2015 TESOL Conference in Toronto in March, please join us at the MATSOL Members Social on the evening of Thursday, March 26th. We'll provide details about the venue as the time draws closer.

This issue of *Currents* contains reports on MATSOL's professional learning initiatives, on MELLC (The Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council), on adult basic education, and on the Language Opportunity Coalition (a new coalition that is advocating for expanded opportunities for language education in Massachusetts). There are five articles: one on an adult literacy program in Berkshire County, one on working with administrators and colleagues to plan programming for preK-12 ELLs, one on an oral-skills curriculum in Taunton, one on a Parent Action Group in the Manchester Essex Regional School District, and one on a federally-funded collaboration between school districts and educator development programs at four Massachusetts universities. Finally, we have three reviews: one of Elizabeth Green's book *Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works,* one of an article by Shawna Shapiro about the effects of deficit discourse on English language learners, and one on four books with multi-cultural content that may be suitable for K-12 classrooms.

We're trying hard to cover all areas of English language education in Massachusetts; please let us know if you see important topics we've missed.

Respectfully yours,
**Kathy Lobo**
**President, MATSOL**

# MATSOL President Participates in TESOL's 2014 Advocacy and Policy Summit

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**On June 22-24, 2014,** I joined sixty other members of the TESOL International Association, representing approximately 25 U.S. affiliates, for the 2014 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit in Washington, D.C. This program, in its ninth year, consisted of one day of issue briefings and other activities, followed by one day of visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of over 100 Representatives and Senators. Unlike past TESOL Advocacy Days, which have typically focused on a single piece of legislation, this year's summit had a broad two-part agenda: (1) to learn more about federal policy issues impacting ESL and ELLs, and (2) to provide a hands-on experience with advocacy.

Participants in the summit were required, in advance, to set up meetings with our Congressional representatives. Since this was a first for many of us, the TESOL office provided directions, guidance, and a list of Representatives and Senators to contact. To encourage collective advocacy, attendees from the same state were connected with one another.

I was on my own representing Massachusetts, so I scheduled individual meetings with the educational advisors to Senators Warren and Markey and Congressman Tierney and Congresswoman Clark. Arranging meetings was easier than I had expected; for all but one of them I was able to make my appointment by email. For the fourth appointment, I called the office of the Congressman. One thing to keep in mind is the time it takes to reach the offices of the Senators and Congressmen/women (including time to get through security and find their offices once one gets into the building). Some summit attendees took advantage of a little underground train that runs between the office buildings.

For citizens who want to meet their Congressional representatives, it is useful to know that elected officials sometimes host open meetings or coffees. I was invited to an event hosted by Senator Warren, but, unfortunately, it was scheduled for the day I was to return to Massachusetts and I was not able to adjust my itinerary.

Summit participants received advance background information on key policy issues so that they could begin to familiarize themselves beforehand. To make their Congressional meetings more effective, participants were encouraged to find examples from their own programs to illustrate the talking points they would use. When making my appointments, I asked if the people I was to meet had any questions they wanted me to address. Some of them did. The main message I wanted to convey is that the members of MATSOL work directly with English Language Learners in Massachusetts, so we can be a good source of information and support.

The policy-focused portion of our program started the morning of June 23, after a welcome reception and brief overview of policy issues the previous evening. The morning kicked off with speakers Carlos Martinez and Emily Davis from the US Department of Education. Martinez provided a general overview and update from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), while Davis, an ESL teacher and Teacher Fellow Ambassador, discussed teacher preparation and teacher quality initiatives at the department.

Other presentations included a discussion from the US Department of Justice on the civil rights of English learners; an update on the Student & Exchange Visitor program from the US Department of Homeland Security; an overview of Common Core State Standards as they impact ELLs; and an update on Adult English Language Learning programs under the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Massachusetts' RETELL (Rethinking Equity for Teaching English Language Learners) initiative was mentioned, and, as a DESE-approved RETELL trainer, I was able to give an insider's view of what has been happening in Massachusetts. However, one thing I learned from the summit is that our circumstances in Massachusetts are not exactly the same as in other states; there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Following these briefings, the summit shifted its focus to advocacy, with a series of activities to help participants prepare for their meetings with members of Congress. Through a cooperative learning-chart/poster-making activity, we were led through a series of advocacy training activities and began to plan for our own meetings with legislators. I hope to use this activity at one of our MATSOL board meetings to prepare our board and staff to advocate better here in Massachusetts.

To maximize the impact of the summit, key members of Congress serving on the

education and appropriations committees in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. I was especially pleased to be able to meet with staff from the offices of Senators Warren and Congressman Tierney, because Senator Warren is a member of the Senate's Education Committee, and Congressman Tierney is a member of the House Education Committee. Senator Warren's advisor for education met with me for a record-breaking 75 minutes! My shortest meeting, also quite fruitful, lasted 35 minutes. One issue being considered on Capitol Hill this summer was the possible combining of Title 1 and Title 3 budgets — in other words the pooling of budgets for economically challenged children with that for English Language Learners. This is a very bad idea: As ESOL professionals, we know that poverty and lack of proficiency in English are not at all the same thing.

June 24 was the day for our meetings with Congressional members and staff. To show what our ELLs look like, I brought a copy of my school's yearbook, with the faces of the LEP and FLEP students circled. I also prepared a glossary of terms legislators might encounter within our field. For K-12 education, I gave them a "cheat sheet" about WIDA and RETELL, along with a handout about the DART DESE website, an excellent tool that shows what is happening district by district. For adult and higher education, I brought copies of relevant reports from MATSOL board members. Finally, I brought plenty of business cards.

At the end of the summit, participants met over dinner to share their experiences; it was interesting to hear what other people had done. Meeting times had mostly ranged in length from 10 to 30 minutes. Some groups had prepared folders to deliver to the offices of their Senators and Representatives, but had spent little or no time in meetings. However, all the participants agreed that this event was a very positive experience for them and for the TESOL International Association. Additional information about the 2014 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit will be available soon at www.tesol.org.

We usually send one member of MATSOL's Board to attend this summit each year. We expect to continue our advocacy work not only in Washington D.C. but also in Massachusetts. We'll keep you posted!

# Submit to MATSOL Publications

## MATSOL E-BULLETIN

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

## MATSOL CURRENTS

There's a lot going on in the world of TESOL and ELL education, and we'd like all of it to be reflected in Currents! We want reviews of books and materials, reports on meetings and events, and articles on everything of interest to MATSOL members: adult education, K-12 education, community outreach, ESL in higher education, educator-preparation programs, professional-development initiatives, Intensive English Institutes, teaching ideas, profiles of and interviews with significant figures, and discussion of issues that our members should be aware of. We'd also love to have stories from students — about their adjustment to life in New England and their experiences learning English in our English-language programs or elsewhere. We welcome articles with scholarly content as well as those that share interesting experiences or give practical advice. If you have something to share, don't hesitate to send it to us at currents@matsol.org. If necessary, we can help you get it into good shape for publication.  For more details, see www.matsol.org/matsol-currents.

# MATSOL's Professional Learning Initiatives

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**MATSOL is committed** to expanding and deepening the professional knowledge and practice of educators working with English language learners, in all program models. To further this goal, we have been involved with several state-level initiatives, managed by Paula Merchant, Director of Professional Learning, with participation and stakeholder feedback from MATSOL members.

## ESL MODEL CURRICULUM PROJECT

MATSOL has been a leading partner working with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) to develop an ESL Model Curriculum. This project includes defining the components of ESL/English Language Development (ELD) instruction in Massachusetts and creating a model unit template, a language progression tool to support curriculum development, and a rubric for developing and evaluating curriculum.

The model unit template grew out of a template developed by MATSOL's Paula Merchant and Brockton Public Schools' Kellie Jones, Department Head (K-8) of Bilingual/ESL Services. It follows the Understanding by Design process of Wiggins & McTighe (2012). A draft version of the template was piloted in Brockton and then presented to the Commissioner's office in 2012 to demonstrate the integration of WIDA English Language Development Standards with Common Core State Standards for ELLs. The ESL Model Curriculum Committee used this template as a starting point, further refining it to meet the state's needs.

Since licensure competencies for ESL/ELD teachers were revised in Massachusetts as part of the Rethinking Equity in Teaching English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, districts have consistently reported a need for support with ESL curriculum. The ESL Model Curriculum initiative identifies the components of ESL

within our Massachusetts context and defines the content that ESL teachers are responsible for teaching as they integrate WIDA ELD Standards with state content standards.

Once the ESL Model Curriculum has been developed and piloted, MA DESE will create a plan for related professional development. MA DESE, MATSOL, West Ed, WIDA and other partners are poised to support school districts and ESL teachers in applying 21st-century standards to ESL/ELD instruction.

## SEI COACHING

A new graduate course entitled *Integrating SEI into Literacy Curriculum* has been developed in a partnership between MATSOL, Dr. Annela Teemant, Dr. Serena Tyra, and Fitchburg State University. This will be the first course in a multi-year project funded by MA DESE to provide coursework for literacy, math and other content coaches who are working with new SEI-endorsed teachers in classrooms with English language learners. MATSOL will also provide coaching courses for ESL teachers, based on input from our membership. This course follows the Six Standards Instructional Coaching framework (Teemant 2014), which provides a model for coaching that can be integrated into existing coaching roles.

The coaching courses will be offered statewide over the next three years under MA DESE sponsorship and funding. MATSOL is the only vendor selected for provision of SEI coaching. In tandem with this coursework, MA DESE will offer a pathway for coaches to earn the SEI Endorsement, and MATSOL will support a statewide coaching network. We will be publishing more details as this initiative rolls out.

## SLIFE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SLIFE POLICY AND GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT, AND SLIFE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

In response to input from our members, we have been advocating for several years about the needs of our many Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). These are English language learners who have experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors, who have never had the opportunity to participate in any type of schooling before entering school in the United States, or who have experienced limited education in their home countries due to lack of resources or other circumstances. (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010) They typically enter our schools with a distinct set of needs and learning styles.

To address the needs of these students, MATSOL has developed formal and

informal professional development opportunities for SLIFE educators. Last year, we offered two sold-out institutes on *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Massachusetts: Adolescent and Adult English Language Learners with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)*, led by Dr. Helaine Marshall and Dr. Andrea DeCapua. MATSOL will offer a third session of the Institute in April 2015. We are planning further dissemination of the MALP (Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm) Framework that Drs. Marshall and DeCapua presented in these institutes. MATSOL has been joined across state lines by districts in other states that are finding similar needs, and we hope to continue to build capacity for MALP implementation, and to share both "best" and "next" SLIFE practices.

MATSOL has also started a SLIFE Special Interest Group and E-List to connect educators around the state for networking, sharing of resources, and support. MATSOL's 2014 Teacher of the Year Rebecca Daigle (Framingham Public Schools), MATSOL Board member Stephanie Scerra (Boston Public Schools), and MATSOL member and consultant Jennifer Lancaster (Milford Public Schools) will keep us informed of upcoming SLIFE SIG activities and meetings.

As a result of our work around SLIFE, MATSOL has been asked by MA DESE to assist in the development of SLIFE Policy and Guidance for Massachusetts districts, including future professional development. This effort is being led by David Valade and Joni Magee of MA DESE, along with MATSOL's SLIFE partnership, including Dr. Marshall, Dr. DeCapua and local experts from our Massachusetts districts. Both the state and our SLIFE partnership have recommended the inclusion of a SLIFE data element in the state's Student Information Management System (SIMS), to improve understanding of SLIFE students in Massachusetts. We will share more as new policy and guidance is finalized.

## RETELL EXTENDING THE LEARNING

Two RETELL extension courses developed by MATSOL have been approved by MA DESE as part of the RETELL Extending the Learning initiative.

In the course *Teaching Academic Conversations in Classrooms with English Language Learners*, developed and piloted by Dr. Sara Hamerla (Framingham Public Schools), teachers will learn how to build on students' strengths through paired academic conversations based on five core communication skills from Zwiers' and Crawford's work on academic conversations: paraphrase, elaboration, supporting ideas with examples, building on or challenging ideas, and synthesizing conversation points. The course includes practical activities for work-

ing on each conversation skill and ideas for using conversations to teach and assess content.

Our course *Academic English for ELLs in the Talk, Texts and Tasks of Middle and High School Mathematics and Science Classrooms* will show Math and Science teachers at the Middle/High School level some ways to identify, analyze and develop academic language for ELLs and apply effective language-development strategies within their teaching context, taking into account the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and their students' English proficiency levels.

MATSOL is currently developing additional extension coursework for specific educator needs, as well as for ELL leaders and administrators, who must also re-certify their SEI endorsement licenses.

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# A Report on the Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)

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**The Massachusetts English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)** was formed by MATSOL in 2007, in response to a need expressed by our state's ELL coordinators and directors for a formal support system to help them develop programming for our culturally and linguistically diverse population of students. MELLC's membership has now grown from a relatively small group from mid- to high-incidence districts to our current group of 91 administrators, representing a range of low-incidence to high-incidence districts from across the state.

MELLC meetings focus on a variety of topics of interest to our members, and related to MATSOL's strategic goals for developing and supporting the leaders in our field — from technological resources to systems of support for ELLs, from English learners with disabilities to students with interrupted education, from techniques for engaging families to the preparation of data for our School Committees. In addition to opportunities for professional development and a forum for advocacy on behalf of our students and programs, our members find comfort and inspiration from meeting together, as we share our frustrations and our ideas for dealing with challenges, including the obstacles that are placed in our path by people without the background knowledge to be empathetic.

To give you a sampling of what MELLC offers, I will describe one presentation from each MELLC meeting of the last two years:

- MATSOL Board Member Genevra Valvo (Waltham Public Schools) and Sonya Merian (Holliston Public Schools) described their team's Newcomer English language development curriculum. (October 2012)

- Ely Sena, at that time a professional development specialist and WIDA training coordinator at the Office of English Language Acquisition, Massachusetts DESE, shared the Framework for English Language Proficiency Standards that correspond to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. (December 2012)
- Yael-Zakon Bourke and Minerva Gonzalez, from the Massachusetts Association of Bilingual Education (MABE), gave a presentation on dual language education. (February 2013)
- Guest speaker Karen Beeman, from the Illinois Resource Center, gave a presentation entitled "Leadership Considerations for ELL Literacy Development: Bridging Language and Culture." (May 2013)
- Dr. Andrea DeCapua and Dr. Helaine Marshall presented a three-hour workshop focusing on students with limited and/or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) from a leadership point of view. (October 2013)
- Craig Waterman, from the Educator Policy, Preparation and Leadership Group at MA DESE spoke with us about District Determined Measures (DDMs) and ELLs. (December 2013)
- MATSOL Board Member Ann Feldman, Waltham Public Schools, presented a slide show entitled "District Data and Program Strengths/Challenges of Our Districts' Governing Committees." (February 2014)
- Dr. Claudia Rinaldi and Dr. Diana Baker conducted an all-day workshop entitled "ELLs and the Multi-Tiered System of Support: ELL Leadership Considerations and Practices." (February 2014)

Links to resources on these topics can be found at www.matsol.org/mellc-resource-page (member login required).

MELLC is a leadership group open to MATSOL members who have been appointed as, or serve in the role of, PK-12 English Learner Education Program Directors or Coordinators. The group offers access to a wealth of information and resources, and an opportunity to meet in a venue where networking and mentoring is readily available. If you are a district ELL director or coordinator and would like to join our group, please see the MELLC page on MATSOL's website at http://www.matsol.org/ma-english-learner-leadership-council.

# An Update on Adult Education in Massachusetts

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## RECENT EVENTS IN MASSACHUSETTS

- In September, Jolanta Conway was named the Director of Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which oversees public-funded adult basic education in Massachusetts. Jolanta had previously served as the Interim Director of ACLS.

- The Patrick Administration is preparing its budget proposal for FY'16; the Massachusetts House and Senate will follow with their own proposals early in 2015. Last year, Governor Patrick proposed approximately level funding for ABE, at the FY'14 level of $30 million-plus, and that was what emerged in the final state budget. The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE), the advocacy organization for adult education in Massachusetts, will be requesting a $5 million increase for FY '16. It will be important for ABE/ESOL programs, students, and other stakeholders to contact legislators in January, after the winter holidays, to support this request.

- A new Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in March for Social Impact Financing (SIF), otherwise known as "Pay for Success," to provide some $15 million over three years to fund ABE programs that are successful in transitioning students to college and/or careers. "Pay for Success," or Social Impact Financing, is a new model in which the private sector invests in bonds that underwrite investment in social services of various kinds. In September, this funding was awarded to Jewish Vocational Services, along with smaller amounts of funding for an intermediary called "Social Impact Financing" and for the agencies who will evaluate the initiative. The funding is for three years of direct services programming plus three years of follow-up and evaluation. JVS is currently ramping up to start the new program.

This is the first time that this type of financing has been available for adult education programming in Massachusetts or, to our knowledge, in the U.S. It is separate from public funding for ABE, and programs do not need to follow the DESE regulations that apply to state-funded ABE programs. Of course, there are concerns in the field about "privatizing" adult basic education in this way.

The success of the program will be measured by the placement of graduates in college and/or careers at specified levels. It is too soon to know whether these Social Innovation efforts will be effective. They have been piloted in England, but they are relatively new there.

- DESE decided earlier this year to dismantle its thirty-year-old statewide professional development system, known as SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support). As of July 1, 2014, the five SABES regional support centers and one central resource center no longer exist, and approximately 20 of 27 SABES staff were laid off. In their place, the Department has established a network of statewide professional development centers, based in several locations across the state, each of which focuses on one of seven "priority areas": ESOL, educational leadership, mathematics, English Language Arts, distance learning, SMARTT support, and assessment. The centers for ESOL, English Language Arts, distance learning, and educational leadership are located at Quinsigamond Community College; the center for mathematics is at TERC; the center for SMARTT support is at Holyoke Community College; and the center for assessment is at Bristol Community College. The role of providing information about professional development has been moved from World Education to the Education Development Center (EDC), but World Education will continue to provide overall coordination, along with information about educational planning and college and career readiness.

  It is too soon to know how this reorganization will work out. The change is motivated, ostensibly, by the desire to provide a higher level of expertise in the various support areas for ABE, but there is a danger of losing the close connection that previously existed between ABE programs and their local SABES offices.

## AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

- OVAE, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, which is part of the U. S. Department of Education, has renamed itself "OCTAE," the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. This rebranding reflects a new Federal movement of adult education towards more direct preparation for careers and post-secondary education.

- Johan Uvin has been named the Acting Assistant Director of Education for OCTAE, replacing Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, who resigned from her position in April. Johan was previously OCTAE's Deputy Director, and before that was head of research at Commonwealth Corporation in Massachusetts. (Editor's note: Johan served on the MATSOL Board of Directors and was President of MATSOL in 2001-2002.)

- Through a compromise bipartisan agreement, the U.S. House of Representatives recently reauthorized a new version of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which had been unchanged since its first passage by Congress in 1998. WIA Title I governed workforce development, and Title II governed Adult Basic Education. The new law is called "WIOA," the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act. It merges Title I and Title II, so that the same outcome measures now apply to both ABE and workforce development.

  National ABE/ESOL advocates are mostly positive about the new law, but are still advocating for specific provisions more favorable to ABE/ESOL and our students. The primary concern is that the new bill, as written, seems to specify outcome measures solely in terms of placement in college or career, without counting learning gains. Attainment of high school equivalency is counted as a successful outcome, but only if it is followed by placement in college or a career within a short period of time. Thus progress by low-literacy students or students with very limited English proficiency may not be counted for WIOA purposes if the students' transition into college and/or career takes many years, as is common for our lowest-level or beginning ESOL students.

# The Language Opportunity Coalition


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**Over the summer, MATSOL played a leading role** in the formation of a new advocacy group called the Language Opportunity Coalition. This coalition grew out of an effort during the last legislative session to pass two language-related bills: the English Language Learner bill and the Seal of Biliteracy bill, both of which attempted to expand the options for English language learners in Massachusetts public schools.

Unfortunately, the Joint Committee on Education did not refer the legislation out favorably, thus blocking it from proceeding further in the legislative process. While we were disappointed by this result, we were heartened by the support and enthusiasm that was generated by the proposals. In order to capitalize on this momentum, MATSOL has been working with our allies, including the Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education (MABE) and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Coalition (the MIRA Coalition), to organize a new coalition — the Language Opportunity Coalition — to advocate for expanded educational choices for English learners, and to promote policies and practices that encourage the development of language skills for all students in our 21st-century global word. This new coalition will serve as an umbrella group for those interested in supporting education in English as a second language, heritage/native languages, and/or foreign language, for both children and adults. The Coalition will be looking at ways to further our mission through public education and policy initiatives.

## THE GROUP'S MISSION STATEMENT IS SET OUT BELOW:

### LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

We are a coalition of students, parents, teachers, activists, and community members and groups. Restrictive language education policies have resulted

in a lack of equitable educational opportunities for language learners in Massachusetts. We believe that language and cultural competence are resources to be invested in and valued, and are essential for a strong economy and a just society. We aspire to increase bilingualism, biliteracy, and multicultural understanding as assets that enhance social and economic growth within a global economy.

### OUR GOALS ARE TO...

- Increase language learning opportunities for learning English, developing and/or maintaining a native/heritage language, or learning a foreign language
- Ensure that all learners have equal access to a high quality education and professional opportunities.

MATSOL has been represented at the Language Opportunity Coalition organizational meetings by Board member Kathy Santo and Executive Director Helen Solórzano. In addition to organizational work, MATSOL has provided material support to the Coalition by setting up an E-list, an internal website, and online forms. If you are interested in volunteering to work on one of the Coalition committees, please contact Helen Solórzano at solorzano@matsol.org, and watch for updates from MATSOL on the Coalition's activities.

# The Literacy Network of South Berkshire: Making Good Use of Volunteers

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**Founded in 1991 by reading specialists Zoe Dalheim and Peg Smith,** the Literacy Network of South Berkshire (LitNet), began as a tutoring program for rural non-readers, but it soon expanded to meet the educational needs of a rapidly growing immigrant community. Today it provides free, one-on-one tutoring to over 125 adults living and working in southern Berkshire County.

LitNet students come from 24 different countries and speak 16 languages collectively. They range in age from 18 to 78 and have very diverse educational and professional backgrounds. Approximately one-third of our adult learners left school prior to completing the 6th grade, while others completed high school and some hold professional degrees from their native countries. However, they all share the desire to improve their skills and create a better life for themselves and their families.

Until 1995 the Literacy Network was funded through state and federal grants. When government funding was discontinued, agency leaders rushed to obtain 501(c)(3) non-profit designation. Since that time all financial support for the organization has been provided by individuals and private foundations. Our staff and budget are small, but our positive impact is large.

How is it possible to make a large impact with a small budget? Through the generosity of a team of 150 volunteer tutors who contribute more than 10,000 hours of time each year. Volunteers deliver individualized instruction in basic reading, math, and writing, along with support in learning English as a second language, obtaining a high-school equivalency diploma, and/or preparing for U.S. citizenship. Tutor-student pairs meet for one to two hours each week at public libraries, churches and community centers throughout the southern Berkshires.

Tutoring is not a replacement for classroom instruction, but it is a very valuable supplement. As a former classroom teacher, I am continually struck by the effectiveness with which volunteer tutors meet student needs; students' skills often improve dramatically. Unlike teachers, tutors are often able to be flexible about meeting days, times and locations. If a student's work schedule changes, her daughter falls ill or her car breaks down, the tutor may be able to make accommodations. And the relationships between tutors and students often extend beyond tutoring and help the students feel less isolated and more connected to the community. Many LitNet tutors and students become fast friends and work together for years.

One of our students, "Luisa," had recently arrived from Mexico when she first came to LitNet for help with conversational English. Within a few days she was matched with "Joan," a recent retiree. Luisa and Joan quickly discovered that they had a lot in common. Both were the mothers of two sons, both enjoyed fashion and shopping, and they both shared a passion for cooking. Luisa had grown up cooking meals for eleven brothers and sisters and her extended family, while Joan had spent twenty years running a successful catering business. They decided to team up and teach a cooking class to a group of at-risk teenage girls. The result? Luisa gained confidence in spoken English, Joan discovered another rewarding volunteer opportunity, and the girls learned how to make delicious chicken burritos.

Volunteers report receiving great benefit from the work they do. Most are retired professionals anxious for opportunities to be useful and to give back to the community. In addition to the direct support they provide for students, they have been instrumental in raising community awareness around literacy needs, supporting organizational fundraising efforts, facilitating employment opportunities for adult learners, and recruiting and mentoring other tutors. I highly recommend that educational programs of all sizes and types consider how to engage community volunteers to support their efforts.

## HERE ARE FIVE TIPS ON WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS:

**Network, Network, Network –** Talk to people at your local fitness center, garden club, library or supermarket about the work you do. You may be surprised how many people are willing to help. Several months ago I recruited a wonderful new tutor outside of yoga class. I'd noticed how helpful she was in welcoming newcomers to the class and how she informally helped people with poses. When I asked if she'd like to volunteer as a literacy tutor, she jumped at the chance.

**Hold Informational Sessions –** People are often interested in volunteering, but worry about the time commitment. To make a commitment and stay involved, they may need to hear directly from staff and other volunteers about how valuable they can be.

**Volunteers Want to Help –** People want to be useful when they volunteer. Be sure to use volunteers' time wisely. Set clear expectations and provide mentoring opportunities.

**Recognize a Volunteer's Strengths –** Identify the projects best suited to a volunteer's skill set and personality. Does s/he have professional experience in teaching, web design, graphic design, software development, fundraising, special event planning, etc.? These may be the exact areas where your program or your students need support. When a friend recently mentioned how much he enjoys coaching his son's soccer team, I realized that he was the perfect match for "Carlos." Carlos is a longtime LitNet student whose spoken English is excellent, but who struggles with feelings of isolation and loneliness. He is an avid soccer fan who speaks longingly of Sunday pick-up games played with friends at home in Guatemala. I matched the two of them together, and Carlos is now the assistant coach of my friend's soccer team!

**Appreciate Your Volunteers –** Hold an annual appreciation event. Send birthday cards and thank-you notes. Encourage volunteers by providing positive feedback on a regular basis.

I began my career in adult education twenty years ago, as an ESL volunteer tutor at a local women's shelter. I am extremely grateful to the people who got me involved in this field and to those who volunteer every day in programs like the Literacy Network of South Berkshire.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Laura Qualliotine** holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology from Smith College and a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. She is the Executive Director of the Literacy Network of South Berkshire. Laura has been a Lecturer in the University of New Hampshire's ESL Institute and has served as a program director at Northern Essex Community College and at the Gray House in Springfield, MA. She has been involved in adult education as a volunteer, as an instructor, as a program director and as a board member. She is a longtime practitioner of meditation and currently resides in Chester, Massachusetts with her partner, David.

# Advocating for ESL Programming

**SONYA MERIAN**
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**In Fall 2014,** Kathy Lange-Madden and I began discussing how to set up class schedules for our PreK-12 ELLs, with adequate ESL time each day. Kathy is the K-12 ELE Director in Shrewsbury, and I am the ESL Facilitator in the Holliston Public Schools. We started with the Guidance Document from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education entitled "Transitional Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners" (DESE, August 2013). This document is very long (43 pages) and, in addition to the topic of ESL programming, contains details about the WIDA standards, procedures for the identification and assessment of ELLs, and information about the legal rights of parents. We wanted to create a condensed and simplified document, with just those portions that are concerned with programming itself. Our simplified document, entitled "Sheltered English Immersion Program," is attached as an appendix to this article. To help make Sheltered English Immersion more comprehensible to non-specialists in our schools, we also distributed Andrea Weingartner's concise and very useful "Modification Tips and Techniques for ESL Students" as an attachment to our document.

I began by meeting with my Assistant Superintendent. After we had reviewed the document together, I suggested that we meet with the PreK-2 administrative team to discuss a group of ten students who fell within WIDA proficiency levels 1 and 2. According to the guidance document from DESE, these students would need at least 2.5 hours of ESL per day.

We then held three meetings at the PreK-2 school, with the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the Student Services Administrator, the Math and Literacy Specialists, the Assistant Superintendent and me. We went through the Sheltered English Immersion document and addressed questions regarding materials, what the students' day would look like, and how the ESL teacher would organize her class, which would start in mid-December. From that time forward, these children would receive 2-2.5 hours of direct ESL in a self-contained classroom.

Having worked out the scheduling details, we then arranged a meeting of all classroom teachers and specialists who would be affected by this change in programming, sharing the rationale for the changes and fielding their questions and concerns. This process required patience and flexibility, as well as an ability to articulate the needs of our English language learners and the accommodations they would require, but in the end our staff felt confident that they understood what is needed to provide effective and appropriate support for our ELLs.

By extracting from the Transitional Guidance document the specific parts that were relevant to the issue at hand, and advocating this to my district leaders, I was able to set up programming that meets the needs of my ELLs. This was not an easy process, and the bridges to collaboration will need to be continually rebuilt and fortified. I offer my experience, along with the document that Kathy Lange-Madden and I put together, in the hope that Currents readers may find it useful in their own dialogues with their school leaders, as we all work together to provide the most appropriate educational environment for our English language learners. C

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sonya Merian** is the ESL Facilitator in the Holliston Public Schools and a member of the MATSOL Low-Incidence District Group Advisory Committee.

## APPENDIX

(This is the document that Kathy Lange-Madden and I presented to our administrative team, excerpted from MA DESE, 2013, pp. 12-14.)

## SHELTERED ENGLISH IMMERSION PROGRAM

### INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ELL STUDENTS

Chapter 71A of the Massachusetts General Laws (G.L. c. 71A) requires that students classified as ELLs be educated in a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program, unless a program waiver is sought for another program model, such as

Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE). This requirement applies to all districts that enroll ELL students, regardless of the number. SEI programs in grades K-12 shall consist of two components:

- **Sheltered Content Instruction.** Sheltered content instruction (also called Sheltered English Immersion or SEI) includes approaches, strategies and methodology to make the content of lessons more comprehensible and to promote the development of academic language needed to successfully master content standards. Sheltered content instruction must be taught by qualified content area teachers. It must be based on district-level content area curriculum that is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and that integrates components of the WIDA ELD standards frameworks. Entering and Emerging students (Levels 1 and 2) will find this instruction more challenging than students at higher levels of English proficiency levels (i.e., Developing, Expanding, and Reaching - Levels 3, 4, and 5, respectively). Therefore, districts can group Entering and Emerging students together and provide additional support during sheltered content instruction (i.e., sheltered content instruction delivered by an ESL teacher with appropriate content area license, or co-teaching between an ESL teacher and a sheltered content area teacher).
- **English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.** ESL instruction provides explicit, direct, and systematic instruction to learn the English language that is intended to promote second language acquisition and English language proficiency. It includes learning outcomes in the four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. ESL instruction must be tailored to the students' English language proficiency levels. In order to prioritize language needs, districts may group students of different ages and native language groups within the same ESL classroom (G.L. c. 71A § 4). For example, districts may choose to group students within the following levels for targeted ESL instruction: Levels 1-2, Levels 2-3, Levels 3-4, Levels 4-5 and/or Levels 3-5. ESL instruction should be based on district-level ESL curriculum that is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and integrates components of the WIDA ELD standards frameworks.

## PROGRAM COMPONENTS

### FIRST COMPONENT

ESL or ELD Instruction provided by ESL teacher

**DESE recommended hours of ESL instruction:**

Level 1 & Level 2: 2.5 hrs to full day ESL (150 minutes to a full day ESL)

Level 3: 1 to 2 hrs per day to full day ESL (60 to 120 minutes ESL per day)

Level 4 & Level 5: 2.5 hrs per week of ESL (30 minutes ESL per day)

**Recent Research:**

"The available evidence suggests the following major commitments: schools should make ELD part of the program of instruction for English learners; they should do so for ELs at all levels of proficiency; and they should make the presence, consistency, and quality of ELD instruction a strong and sustained priority." (Saunders et al, 15)

## SECOND COMPONENT

Sheltered Content Instruction provided by a content teacher with SEI Endorsement or content teacher with ESL license or co-taught by content teacher and ESL teacher

**DESE recommended hours of Sheltered Content Instruction:**

- Level 1 & Level 2: sheltered content instruction during other available hours after ESL instruction
- Level 3 & Level 4: sheltered ELA or sheltered reading instruction after ESL instruction; other instructional hours available for sheltered math, science, and SS
- Level 5: full day sheltered content area instruction after 30 minute period of ESL

**Recent Research:**

"Students with teachers who were trained in the SIOP Model of sheltered instruction and implemented it with fidelity performed significantly better on assessments of academic language and literacy than students with teachers who were not trained in the model." (Short et al 363)

"Sheltered instruction is a set of teaching strategies, designed for teachers of academic content, that lower the linguistic demand of the lesson without compromising the integrity or rigor of the subject matter. It was originally designed for content and classroom teachers who teach in English (Best Practices for ELLs)."

## BEST PRACTICE WITH ELLS

- Weekly planning session with SEI and ESL teachers
- *Reading Street* (RS) and all of its components for ELLs are to be used by

the SEI teacher

- ESL teacher will support vocabulary development of RS and use ESL texts for English language development
- Modifications to assignments, assessments, and homework based upon English language proficiency level www.wida.us/get.aspx?id=542 and www.wida.us/get.aspx?id=543

At the end of the document, we attached a copy of Andrea Weingartner's "Modification Tips and Techniques for ESL Students."

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# Going All-Out for Oracy

**SANDY LORD**
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**ELLs have to accomplish two goals:** learn grade-level academic content, regardless of language proficiency, and, at the same time, develop peer-level academic language proficiency. To improve understanding of academic content, classroom teachers are learning Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) techniques, which have proven to be very effective. However, SEI is only half the solution; attention is also needed for the ESL/ELL programs that address our students' language development. According to the US Department of Education (2005), "Effective goals for ELL students address both English language development and subject matter instruction." Unfortunately, because of the pressure of high-stakes standardized testing, our students' language development is often placed second to their learning of academic content. In this article, I will argue for the importance of language development, especially oral language development, and describe a program I am putting together in my elementary classroom in Taunton.

Current scholarship offers three broad recommendations for the development of English language proficiency:

1. ELLs need advanced, academic *oral* English proficiency — oracy — in order to gain peer-level proficiency across the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. (August & Shanahan, 2006; Williams & Roberts, 2011)

2. Student output, with interaction and feedback, is necessary for the automatization of oral language. (Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1987, 1994; Swain, 1985) "Through oral production of *comprehensible output* and by engaging in oral *negotiations*, language learners often come to notice and consolidate structural properties of their target language" (Boyd & Rubin, 2002).

3. Students learn academic English more quickly and thoroughly if they continue to develop academic language proficiency in their home language(s). (Collier, 1989, 1992; Foertsch, 1998; Ford, 2005; Genessee, 1994; Genessee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2008; Guccione, 2012; Proctor, Carlo, August, & Snow, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997)

In my elementary classroom in Taunton, I have gone all-out on the first two of these recommendations. Ernst (1994) points out that during most of the school day students speak for 1/3 of the time, while teachers speak 2/3 of the time. The situation is reversed in my classroom, with student speech constituting the majority of our time. Using a curriculum that I have created called CIRCLE-ELL, students spend their time discussing, listening, and debating, with each other and with me. I teach them to speak politely, respectfully, and honestly, and to value the contributions of others, regardless of proficiency level. They use the language of all five WIDA categories (Social and Instructional Language, English and language arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science) in a low-stress, socially motivated setting that encourages expressive and receptive skills.

In my classroom, work begins with 'Good morning' and continues with academically oriented talk and debate based on over 700 images that I have carefully selected and arranged by theme. Each theme, ranging broadly from art to world culture,[1] contains forty images, which I project one at a time on a 6' x 12' screen. In a light black box covering the bottom sixth of the screen is a vocabulary word, a sequence of syllabifying hands that indicates which syllables are stressed, and an orange and yellow starburst strip that flashes for 4.5 seconds. Students read the word, spell the word, clap the syllables of the word, listen to a model sentence during the 4.5 second visual cue, and repeat that sentence. Then the fun begins!

Aligned with these images, and also to the WIDA standards, are a series of teacher scripts that provide jumping-off points for student conversation. The scripts are designed to elicit the language of the five WIDA standards, without expecting any particular content. The goal is to prepare students with the *language* they need in order to understand the *content* they will be required to learn in their academic classes. Here is an example of the sorts of scripts I provide for various age and proficiency levels:

1 Other topics include, in alphabetical order, *electricity, fall, farm, geography, houses, jobs, music, numbers, past and present, plants, police and fire, school, space, sports, spring, tools, transportation, water, and winter.*

## WATER THEME (QUESTIONS 1-8 OF 40)

Tier AB Sample Script (For all Ks, 1s, and 2s, and Tier AB 3-12s)

| Word | Slide | Phrase | WIDA Category | Question |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| amphibian | 1 | This amphibian is a frog. | LA | 'Amphibian' is a four syllable word. Let's clap it. These two states are also four syllable words: 'Massachusetts'; 'Connecticut'. Which state - 'Massachusetts' or 'Connecticut' - has the same rhythmic pattern as 'amphibian'? |
| | 2 | Some amphibians are black and yellow. | SIL | I think if I saw this black and yellow amphibian in the wild I would get the heebie jeebies! Would you? What gives you the heebie jeebies? |
| aquarium | 3 | At the aquarium you see fish. | SIL | This group of kids is at the touch tank in the aquarium. What do you think that's like? What are the animals in the touch tank like? Sharks and piranhas? |
| | 4 | He cleans the aquarium. | SC | What is this aquarium worker doing? Why is it really important in a place like this? |
| bottle | 5 | This bottle has water. | SC | Vincent van Gogh painted this bottle, pot, and shoes long ago. At that time, bottles were usually made of glass. What is usually made of glass these days? |
| | 6 | These bottles are glass. | MA | Glass bottles like this can be returned for five cents apiece in some states. Let's count out the amount of money we'd get for returning 20 bottles. |
| fire fighting | 7 | Fire fighting is hard. | SS | Fire fighting is extremely important. Since this picture was taken almost 100 years ago, some things have changed and some have stayed the same when it comes to fighting fires. Let's discuss. |
| | 8 | Fire fighting is hot work. | LA | What do you think: Have the fire fighters almost put out the fire or do they still have their work cut out for them? Are they done or is there more to do? |

With the same exact images, here is the sample script for Tier BC 3-12s:

| Word | Slide | Phrase | WIDA Category | Question |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| amphibian | 1 | Amphibians like frogs need land and water to live. | SC | Frogs, toads, and other amphibians do not drink water - they actually absorb it through their skin just by being around it! What are some things they do with their mouths? |
| | 2 | Stay away from this yellow and black amphibian. | SC | Yellow and black creatures like this amphibian often have those colors to warn other creatures to stay away. What other animals have this sort of pattern? |
| aquarium | 3 | At the aquarium you may be able to touch a fish. | SS | Most children and parents don't have too many chances to interact with stingrays and other marine life. Why is it important to get to interact with these creatures? |
| | 4 | The aquarium needs to be scrubbed everyday. | SIL | What will happen to the aquarium walls if they aren't scrubbed regularly? What happens to your house if you don't scrub it regularly? |
| bottle | 5 | The glass bottle is one-quarter full. | MA | Vincent van Gogh painted this still life with some wooden shoes, a clay pot, and a bottle that is one quarter full. If he had painted six bottles that are one quarter full, how many full bottles' worth of water would he have? |
| | 6 | These bottles can be returned for some cash. | MA | Each of these bottles is ready for recycling. In this state, you can return glass bottles for 2 cents each. There are 500 bottles here - far too many to bring to the recycling center in one day. If you brought half of the bottles today, how many cents would you get? How many dollars is that? |
| fire fighting | 7 | Fire fighting is both difficult and dangerous. | SIL | What is the job of a fire fighter? What do they do when they are not fighting a fire? When they are? What is the role of water? |
| | 8 | The fire fighting is almost finished here. | LA | 'Fire' and 'fighting' start with the consonant /f/ and the long vowel /i (aj)/. What are some other letters or combinations of letters that have the same sounds as <f> and <i>? |

These questions are just a jumping-off point. To lower the students' affective filters, I tell them that they can talk about anything they want. My youngest students often create fantastic stories of how the amphibians meet up with ninjas to save some gorillas. Instead of directing away from this sort of discussion, I run with this passion and follow up with "Wow! I never realized that. So the ninjas and the amphibians work together? How can they work together to save those gorillas?" And the students gleefully construct a narrative about amphibians and ninjas, with procedures, cause and effect, and other academic content. Without knowing it, they are working hard at acquiring academic English. To view all forty images on one theme takes up to 3.5 hours a week. It's amazing how the time flies, and how little I need to say to keep the students going.

In a follow-up class session, after the initial viewing, I remove the material at the bottom of each image and replace it with the sentence that goes with that image. We read the sentences and write them down on carefully prepared handouts. In this way, the students become accustomed to writing academic English in a no-stress way. They often try to write the sentences from memory without re-reading them. The next day, after reviewing the original images, students are asked to vote for the images they like best and write an original sentence or two about each one. They are given only one direction: that they must use the focused word. Students at all levels produce amazing work because they enjoy doing it.

In another follow-up activity, students solidify their knowledge of the *sounds* of the words by listening to each word from a new teacher script, writing the number of syllables, and marking the stress pattern, metalinguistic knowledge that is one predictor of literacy skills. They also answer a phonological-awareness question that asks them to identify particular features of the word, such as the rhyme, the sequence of sounds, or what the word would sound like with substituted sounds or if particular sounds were deleted.

For the older students (grade 2+), these activities are followed by a free-write. We review the vocabulary, write some sentences using that vocabulary, and then brainstorm using one of the sentences. After that comes a 45-minute free-write session, when students can write on whatever topic they like.

The final in-class activity is a review of the images, with a student at the helm. Having removed the information bar at the bottom of the image, I invite the student teacher to lead a class discussion on whichever images he or she wants to talk about. The students take it very seriously, and hold a discussion similar to the one we had earlier in the week.

What about the third recommendation from the language-acquisition scholars, that ELLs need to continue to develop academic language skills in their home languages? My curriculum addresses this challenge by providing translated curricular tools, to be used by a parent or caregiver at home. The content is the same as in my classroom; only the language is different. Parents and students look at the images and have discussions about them. Instead of English words appearing on the screen, there are words in Spanish, Kreyol, or Urdu, among others. Parents also have access to translated versions of the teacher scripts. With our classroom discussions fresh in their minds, students have academically oriented conversations with their caregivers — qualified, native speakers of the language.

How do my students, who have been mostly discussing and writing loosely directed sentences and paragraphs, perform on standardized tests? After one year with my curriculum and classroom strategies, my students' scores on the ACCESS assessment showed 64% y/y gains overall and 72% y/y gains in literacy skills. Even though reading and writing are only a small part of the curriculum, students' improved oral skills allowed them to make big gains in literacy as well.

Please contact me at andrew.lord@tauntonschools.org. It would be my pleasure to share my materials with you.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sandy Lord** is an elementary ELL teacher in the Taunton, MA public schools. He received his masters in Applied Linguistics from Boston University. After his first child was born, he decided to apply his linguistic skills to a newfound passion: working with children. Sandy has been developing CIRCLE-ELL with his students and colleagues in Taunton for the past three years. For his work on CIRCLE-ELL, he received MATSOL's Anne Dow Award for Excellence and Creativity in 2014, "for innovative use of technology tools to enrich and improve English language development."

# Forming a Parent Action Group

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**Communication between home and school** is an important and often overlooked route to improved student performance: research shows that student achievement rises when a strong home/school bond is created. According to Williams and Chavkin (as cited in Assam, 2009, 92-93), "the more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way, at every level — in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers — the better for student achievement."

Teachers and parents traditionally stay connected during the school year through newsletters, websites, emails, conferences, and phone calls, but these channels are not always sufficient for ELL parents. Faced with language difficulties, cultural differences, and differences in educational experience, ELL parents, especially those in low-incidence school districts, may feel isolated and alienated. They often do not feel comfortable volunteering in the schools or attending PTO meetings.

An ELL Parent Action Group (ELL PAG) can be an effective way to reach out to ELL parents and give them the opportunity to meet with school personnel in a friendly, non-threatening environment. At these meetings, parents can learn how the school is structured, whom to ask for help, how to interpret testing results, how to advocate for their children, and much more. School administrators can be invited to attend, so that parents can ask them about school policy and decision-making in a smaller, more accessible setting. Initially, the agenda may be set by the teacher or facilitator, but ultimately the parents will assume control of the meetings and formulate their own agendas.

Forming a PAG takes planning. It is good to make the first contact about the

group in person, and at the beginning of the school year. Meeting parents at Back to School Nights is ideal. Explain the group concept, find out the parents' level of interest, and take note of their availability.

## HERE IS A TIMELINE THAT MAY BE HELPFUL IN PLANNING PAG MEETINGS:

### TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

- E-mail parents about day, place, and time, with translations. Make it clear that children are welcome.
- Ask if there are specific topics parents would like to discuss.

### ONE WEEK BEFORE

- E-mail a meeting reminder and agenda, with RSVP.
- Tell students about the meeting and the group. Tell them that they can ask questions on behalf of their parents.

### TWO DAYS BEFORE

- Send home a paper invitation with a copy of the agenda.

### DAY OF THE MEETING

- Make sure all main office personnel, colleagues, and administrators know where the meeting is being held.
- Put up signs so parents can find the meeting.
- Prepare a craft and a snack (if your school allows) for children who attend.
- Make copies of the agenda and any materials you will need.

### DURING THE MEETING

- Give parents time to meet each other and connect.
- Make sure the children are busy.
- Take notes.
- Ask how you can be helpful.
- Set the date/time of the next meeting.

### AFTER THE MEETING

- Follow up with a thank-you e-mail.
- E-mail any resources parents requested.
- Give an update to your administrators and colleagues.

**Possible Topics:** school structure and personnel; the school website and grading portal; testing procedures; how parents can support their children at home; the benefits of bilingualism and how parents can promote their children's bilingualism; adult ESL classes, both on-line and in-class; community resources; cultural adjustment; and cross cultural awareness.

In my current district, the ELL PAG is new. We had four meetings last year (Oc-

tober, January, March, June) — two in the afternoon and two in the evening. We alternated locations, as well, with two at the elementary school and two at the middle school. We planned the last meeting of the year for a Friday evening in June, but when the date came many of the families were busy with other end-of-year activities. This year, I plan to have the last meeting in May so we can be sure to celebrate together.

I always set aside a good amount of time at the beginning of the meeting for the parents to meet and get to know each other. My parent attendees catch up for about 30 minutes before we get down to the business part of the agenda. This can make the meetings last about 90 minutes, but it is important for the parents to connect; I wouldn't skip this part. Over the course of the year, their conversations have become closer and more familiar. In the beginning, they talked about the best supermarkets and prices, the weather, and learning English; now they share news about their children, their hopes for the future, and the joys and challenges of forging a new life in a new land.

A well-organized ELL PAG can create a welcoming and supportive relationship with our students' families and forge a vital link between home and school. This can have a lasting impact on educational achievement in a student population that is historically underperforming. *Enhancing Partnerships between Teachers and Parents of English Language Learners: Promoting Pre-K to Post-Secondary* (Uy, Carbino, Martinez, & Vazquez, 2014) is an excellent publication that describes various ways to foster a positive, effective relationship with parents.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jennifer Fitzgerald** holds an M.Ed. from Boston College and is a licensed ELL teacher in grades PreK-12. She is an ELL Teacher/Coordinator in the Manchester Essex Regional School District. She marvels every day at the courage, resilience and spirit of the children she is privileged to teach.

# Massachusetts Universities and School Districts Collaborate to Prepare Educators of English Learners

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of English learners (ELs) in the United States has been increasing steadily for the past twenty years. During the 2013-2014 academic year, Massachusetts schools enrolled 73,217 ELs, a 63.6% increase from the 2000-2001 school year (Figure 1) (MA DESE, 2014). ELs now make up about 7.5% of the Massachusetts PK-12 school population.

## RETELL

In order to improve instruction and provide better support for the academic achievement of these English learners, the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has launched the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, which requires that by July 1, 2016 all core academic teachers of ELs, along with the administrators who supervise or evaluate them, must earn a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Endorsement. In-service teachers are to earn the endorsement by completing a prescribed RETELL course which is offered by the districts. Pre-service teachers must complete a state-approved SEI endorsement course as part of their initial licensure programs.

## OUR NPD PROJECTS

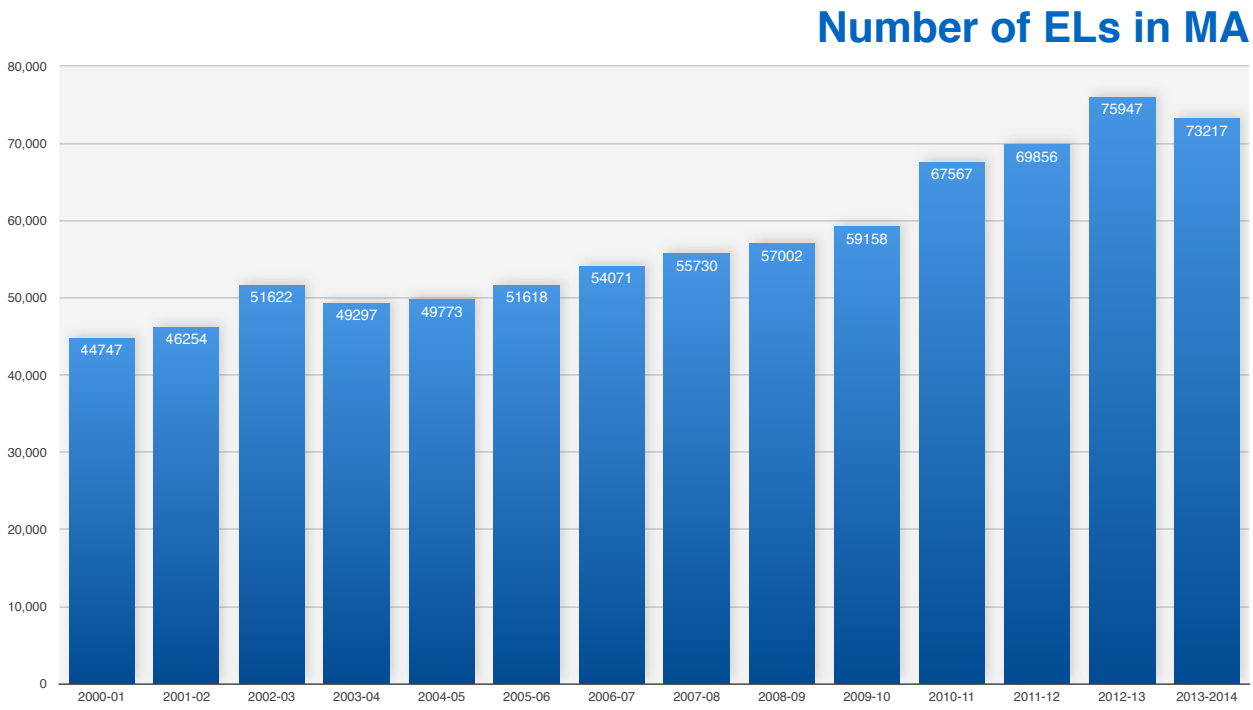


Figure 1. Number of ELs in MA, by MA DESE, 2014

While the RETELL initiative is a promising beginning, a single course, by itself, is not enough to fully prepare educators to work with ELs; ways must be found to sustain the effort (Whitlow & Gonzalez, 2013). We, the authors of this paper, are fortunate to be working on National Professional Development (NPD) grants that allow teachers in our partner districts to benefit from additional resources and access to training.

The NPD Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), provides five-year grants to institutions of higher education (IHEs) that work in partnership with local school districts or state educational agencies to prepare teachers and other professionals to educate ELs (Ryan & Garcia, 2010). Of the five Massachusetts IHEs that received NPD grants in 2012, four of us[1] (Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Salem State University, and The University of Massachusetts at Lowell) are working together to share our findings and learn from one another. Each of our projects provides ongoing professional development to educators who work directly or indirectly with ELs, including our own university faculty, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators in our partner districts. We hope these efforts, consistent with the state initia-

1 The other IHE that received a NPD grant is the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

tive, can go beyond RETELL and build the support structures that are needed to continue improving the education of ELs across Massachusetts.

In the remainder of this article, we will describe our individual programs and then say a little about the collaboration among our institutions and about some more general opportunities that we are planning to offer to educators in Massachusetts.

## FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY

Framingham State University is partnering with Wachusett Regional School District, the Marlboro Public Schools, and the Cambridge Public Schools. Our $1.68 million NPD grant (T365Z120171), called MASSexcELLS, is fully funding a Framingham State University M.Ed. in TESL for 50 in-service district teachers and supporting three instructional coaches who provide job-embedded professional development in classrooms throughout the district, including strategies for vocabulary development and content comprehension in STEM area classrooms. We are providing WIDA workshops for 300 district teachers, and assisting administrators in establishing optimal placement and support structures for ELs. For additional information about MASSexcELLS, please visit our website at www.mmahler.com.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT LOWELL

Our $1.63 million grant (T365Z120232), called Preparing Excellent Teachers of All Language Learners (PETALLs), is funding 17 pre-service teachers who are working towards a dual licensure in ESL plus a content area, with focus on STEM fields. For our own faculty, we are offering workshops on SEI pedagogy and how to incorporate this content into their methodology courses. In partnership with the Lawrence Public Schools, PETALLs is funding 29 teachers who are participating in a 12-credit ESL certificate program. We are also providing ongoing professional development workshops for 22 district administrators on the planning and implementation of SEI and ESL programs for ELs. Finally, we are providing professional development workshops for 139 paraprofessionals who will support instruction for ELs in our partner district. For more information about project PETALLS, please visit our website at www.uml.edu/petalls.

## SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY

Our $1.92 million NPD grant (T365Z120109), called Successful Advancement of English Learners (SAEL) has partnered with the Salem, Lynn, and Revere school districts to support their faculty and staff in serving English Learners. We are currently funding 48 graduate participants in either a Graduate Licensure program or a full Master of Arts degree in TESOL, along with eleven undergraduate participants who are completing coursework for an initial license in Geography, Chemistry, Biology or Math with SEI Endorsement. All participants are teachers or future teachers in our partner districts. In addition to their coursework, they are given

the opportunity to gain hands-on experience by working in summer programs with ELs, and participating in professional development workshops around Spanish-English language contrasts, Teaching Science Literacy to PreK-Grade 6 ELs, Strategies for working with EL Writers, and Family and Community Engagement. For our own Salem State faculty, Project SAEL is offering workshops on SEI teaching strategies and how to infuse them into all our education courses. For more information on Project SAEL please visit our website at www.projectsael.org.

## FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Our $1.97 million NPD grant (T365Z120282), called Transforming Education and Schools for English Learners (TESEL) is funding a partnership between Fitchburg State University, the Collaborative for Education Services (CES), and the public school districts of Fitchburg, Leominster and Lowell. In order to improve language instruction for ELs, we are providing 230 teachers and paraprofessionals in our partner districts the opportunity to earn their ESL license through hybrid online graduate courses. We are also offering ESL professional development for our 350 STEM content teachers, along with workshops for superintendents, principals, school leaders and mentor teachers in best practices for high quality classrooms with diverse learners. At our own institution, the TESEL project has worked with education faculty to help them embed SEI practices throughout all our coursework. For more information about the TESEL project, please visit our website at www.fitchburgstate.edu/tesel.

## CONCLUSION

As the NPD grantees in Massachusetts we find it important to work collaboratively. We meet quarterly, communicate regularly and use Dropbox to share and disseminate our findings. We firmly believe that all students can achieve at high levels, and we are working together to ensure that educators in Massachusetts are well prepared to meet the needs of the ELs in their classrooms.

Although we cannot accept participants from outside our partner districts, we do hope to share the results and findings of our work so all educators may benefit. We are currently working together to plan a joint conference on classroom practice for ELs, to be held on Wednesday, October 7, 2015, from 4:30 – 7:30, in O'Leary Library 222, 61 Wilder Street, Lowell, MA. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Susan P. O'Hara, co-author (with Jeff Zwiers and Robert Pritchard) of *Common Core Standards in Diverse Classrooms: Essential Practices for Developing Academic Language and Disciplinary Literacy*. The conference is open to all teachers throughout New England. Please visit our website at www.uml.edu/petalls for further information as it develops. C

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach It to Everyone)

by Elizabeth Green. W.W. Norton, 2014. ISBN: 978-0393081596

**REVIEWED BY MARY CLARK**

**"From the moment our children step into a classroom,** the single most important factor determining their achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from; it's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is." (Barack Obama, during his 2007 presidential campaign) Obama's inspiring statement about the importance of classroom teachers was based, according to author Elizabeth Green, on research beginning with Hanushek (1972) and continuing to Kane, Staiger, and Gordon (2006). This research argues persuasively that the most important determinant in children's academic progress is their classroom teacher.

There are two competing schools of thought as to how to respond to these findings: One says, "Evaluate teachers and remove those that perform poorly"; the other says. "Treat teachers as professionals; give them autonomy in their classrooms and set them free to do their job well."

Green argues that neither of these strategies, on its own, will produce better teachers. Even if we knew how to identify weak teachers accurately, which we do not, there are enormous logistical obstacles to simply removing them from the classroom; to replace the bottom 10% of teachers in California, she points out, we would need 30,000 new teachers. Even if we could immediately find this many new hires, what guarantee would we have that their replacements would be better? And what should we do about the many teachers who are "good enough" but could be much better?

The other proposed remedy — setting teachers free to figure things out for themselves — is the path that was traditionally followed in this country, with very limited success. I had personal experience of this approach when, many years ago, as a 20-year-old beginning high school English teacher, I began teaching five classes (four preparations) with no guidance and no curriculum except for

aged sets of textbooks, including one set of grammar books with pictures of Shirley Temple inside the front cover.

Green points out that both these strategies — fire weak teachers, set teachers "free" — are based on the assumption that teaching is an in-born talent: it can't be taught. This is a fallacy, she argues; good teaching *can* be taught. But in order to prepare teachers effectively, we first have to identify the knowledge and skills that good teachers have, and then find ways to teach these skills to others. And effective teacher education must begin with a coherent, academically rigorous set of learning standards for *students,* along with widely accepted curricula for achieving these standards, textbooks that support the curriculum, and assessment tools that are based on the curriculum rather than overriding it.

Common Core is a good first step at identifying what students need to learn, Green believes; she likes its emphasis on understanding, rather than rote reduplication of facts, definitions, and procedures. But we still lack the assessment tools, textbooks, and other supporting materials that teachers need if they are to teach the Common Core effectively. Without these supports, she predicts, Common Core will become just "one more piecemeal mandate handed to teachers without any guidance on what to do."

Some of the gaps are beginning to be filled in, Green says. As promising trends, she describes the work of Deborah Ball, Francesco Forzani, and others at the U. of MI School of Education, whose organization, "Teaching Works," is developing models for teacher education based on "high-leverage practices" that pre-service teachers need to master, such as "leading a whole-class discussion," and "making content explicit through explanation, modeling, representations, and examples." Green is also encouraged by recent efforts to use teacher evaluation measures as diagnostic, rather than "sorting," tools. In one study, Pam Grossman, at Stanford, used an observation rubric called the Protocol for Language Teaching as a professional development tool: weak spots in teachers' evaluative ratings became the focus of subsequent coaching sessions. Unfortunately, Green says, most states are using "generic" evaluation tools, when what is needed is a separate evaluation for each school subject; the skills an English teacher needs are not exactly the same as those that are needed by a Math teacher.

Green also covers some more specific topics: One chapter is devoted to a description of the highly collaborative Japanese school system, with its common curriculum and exam system, where teachers are given regular opportunities to observe and critique one another's lessons, and where outstanding teachers are brought into textbook publishing companies to contribute their expertise. Two chapters are devoted to the description of an inquiry-based method for the teaching of mathematics, in which students begin each lesson by working

independently on a problem or question that has been carefully chosen to develop their understanding of a particular mathematical concept. Green credits the success of Japanese mathematics education to their nationwide adoption of this methodology in the 1990s. (But see Tom Loveless's critique of Green's analysis in the Brookings Institute's *Brown Center Chalkboard* (Aug. 7, 2014)).

Two chapters are devoted to the topic of charter schools, with particular attention to their approach to discipline in inner-city schools, beginning, in the 90s, with a rigid "no-excuses" strategy and evolving, gradually, to a more relaxed approach that focuses on character development, personal relationships, and explicit instruction about how to behave as a scholar.

I came to this book after reading Green's article "Why Do Americans Stink at Math?" in the July 27 edition of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. I found the book to be just as stimulating as the article — full of interesting ideas about important issues. Ms. Green is a reporter, not a teacher, but she takes teaching seriously — she doesn't blame teachers for the failings of the American educational system, and she never, at any point, underestimates the difficulty of the job they perform; her aim is to find ways to make their job easier and more satisfying. Having abandoned K-12 teaching after that early traumatic experience with the Shirley Temple textbooks, I was fascinated by what she had to say, but do not feel qualified to evaluate the solutions she proposes. I'm eager to hear what practicing teachers have to say about her ideas.

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## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Mary Clark** is a Faculty Emeritus in Linguistics at the University of New Hampshire. She is the editor of MATSOL Currents.

# Words that you said got bigger: English language learners' lived experiences of deficit discourse

## Research in the Teaching of English

### Shapiro, Shawna, 2014, 48 (1), 386–406.

**REVIEWED BY EILEEN FELDMAN**

**In this article,** Shawna Shapiro, Middlebury College assistant professor of Writing and Linguistics, addresses the academic achievement gap for English Language Learners. Her novel approach — to study media coverage of ELL test scores and collect ELL's responses to that unflattering coverage — gives voice to students and parents, whose voices are seldom included in the research on this topic. Our current educational model, where language proficiency determined by standardized tests dictates class placement even in courses such as math and science where language is not the focus, creates discouragement, resistance to educational institutions, and increased drop-out rates. Although *Research in the Teaching of English* is a journal for English teachers, Shapiro's analyses and suggestions are relevant to all teachers, administrators, parents, scholar-researchers, and teacher educators.

The article follows the standard research format: literature review, author's approach, research setting, theoretical perspectives, methods, researcher experience, demographics of participants, findings, discussion, and conclusions. The study was triggered by student protests after a school principal posted newspaper articles about lower ELL test scores on a school bulletin board. After interviewing the ELLs about their school experiences, the author identifies four themes: 1) essentialization — multiple cultural groups are lumped together as "Africans," 2) assumed educational deficit — teachers and administrators assume that incoming ELLs lack previous education and, focusing on their language test scores, fail to acknowledge their talent in other academic subjects, 3) assumption of intellectual inferiority — African ELLs are assumed to be innately less intelligent, and 4) strategies for resistance — we need more balanced, individualized, and empathetic media coverage, more academic challenge,

more school investment in ELLs' educational goals, including classroom discussion of college plans, and more diversity in the curriculum, which would allow ELLs to contribute their experiences to other students' understanding of global citizenship.

The author describes ELLs' frustration at being devalued, bullied, and marginalized both inside and outside of school. As a past teacher of both ESL and high school English, Shapiro feels schools must communicate better with ELL students and their parents, who want more challenging academic experiences. Students respond well to the prestige of being placed in a mainstream English class, and ESL and English faculties must work together to enroll some ELLs into Honors and AP classes.

The limitation of this study is its narrow focus, which could be remedied by future research, including a longitudinal study of these ELL participants, similar analyses of other comparable communities, or an examination of the attitudes of other stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators and parents. Shapiro argues that deficit discourse should be rigorously examined and challenged in research and in educator development programs. The students in her study needed encouragement to speak up at local meetings and write letters about their concerns. They wanted to help design units to raise other students' cultural competence. In these ways they can advance and contribute to the educational experience of all our youth.

In the endnotes to the article, the reader learns of recent research focused on improving instruction for English language learners. Teachers, particularly Social Studies teachers, are starting to infuse diversity and social justice into their curricula. Also noted is the principal's apology for posting the insulting article on the school bulletin board. References include scholarship in English, psychology, and education, including international journals. C

## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Eileen Feldman** is a Lecturer in ESL at Bunker Hill Community College.

# Five Books for a Multicultural World

## REVIEWED BY KAREN GOYETTE

**I was sitting at a table with a couple of my high school English Language Learners** when I noticed that one of them had a copy of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the other had a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. This gave me the inspiration to check out our school's book room, where all the class copies of books are stored. Packed into that little room were copies of what are generally considered "the classics": *The Canterbury Tales, Pride and Prejudice, A Tale of Two Cities, Lord of the Flies, The Things They Carried, The Old Man and the Sea, The Great Gatsby, and A Farewell to Arms.* These are all great books, to be sure, but aside from Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, there was a complete absence of multi-cultural or non-Anglo literature. In this review, I will recommend five multicultural books that are suitable for older students (grade 5 to adult):

### The New Kids: Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens,

by Brooke Hauser. Atria Books reprint edition, 2012. 336 pages

ISBN# 978-1439163306.

In this non-fiction book, written in a narrative-journalistic style, the author records a year in the lives of students at one of New York's International Schools. This particular school is intended for students who were unable to pass the district's English proficiency test.

This is a great non-fiction read which highlights many issues that our students are facing, such as families split between two countries, arranged marriages, family responsibilities that take precedence over academics, and homelessness. One caution: If you like a story with a chronologically-sequenced plot, this is not the book for you. The author jumps around from topic to topic (all related, though) and this may be frustrating to readers who want to follow one student throughout their entire journey. This is a book is fairly challenging, both linguistically and culturally. WIDA Reading Level recommendation: 4+.

## American Born Chinese

by Gene Luen Yang. Square Fish reprint edition, 2008. 240 pages
ISBN# 978-0312384487

This is a vibrantly-colored graphic novel that tells the stories of three characters — Jin Wang, Chin-Kee, and the Monkey King — and intertwines them in a surprising and thought-provoking way. Jin Wang is the son of immigrants and one of two Asian students in his school; he has to learn both English and American culture, which is not always easy. Chin-Kee is the embodiment of all our negative Chinese stereotypes, from the moment he arrives with luggage in the shape of giant Chinese restaurant to-go containers. The Monkey King is a traditional tale about the exploits of a monkey who grows dissatisfied with what he has and ends up searching for more, ultimately realizing that the end of his journey is not so far from the beginning.

The book is based on the author's own experiences combined with elements from Chinese traditional folk tales; it explores issues such as feelings of isolation, stereotyping, and acculturation, in a fun and engaging manner. However, just because this book has pictures does not mean it is at a low reading level. If you are using this book with students, you may have to spend some time teaching them how to read graphic novels. WIDA Reading Level recommendation: 3.0 + with teacher support; 4.0 + for independent reading.

## Serving Crazy with Curry

by Amulya Malladi. Ballantine Books, 2004. 251 pages
ISBN# 978-0345466129.

This is a fiction novel that centers around three generations of Indian women, with the main focus on one of the daughters in the family, named Devi. Devi's family immigrates to the U.S. from India, and for half of the year Devi's grandmother lives with them in the U.S. (hence the three generations). The author states on her webpage that she did not want to tell the tale of the Indian diaspora or of immigrants attempting to adjust to life in another country, but, to the everyday reader, that is exactly what will stand out at the first reading.

The issues presented in the story are adult issues, but understandable to high school students: arranged marriages, cultural differences between parents and children, the keeping of family secrets, and the need for a family to come together in times of trial. This is a beautifully written novel whose characters come alive; it is a touching story that is sure to connect with audiences. If I had to choose between *The Namesake* and *Serving Crazy with Curry, Serving Crazy with Curry* would win out every time. WIDA Reading Level recommendation: 3.0 + with teacher support; 4.0 + for independent reading.

## The Code: Five Secrets to Teen Success

by Mawi Asgedom. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2003. 144 pages
ISBN# 978-0316736893.

This is a nonfiction self-help book based on the author's life and what he has learned along the way: it shares the author's experiences and insights and offers practical "secrets" for succeeding in life. The author lived in Ethiopia, fled civil war when he was three years old, moved to Chicago and lived on welfare with his family, and eventually graduated from Harvard (on a scholarship). The book discusses inner and outer goals, morals, thoughts, and actions. It is about recognizing what you want and how to get it and overcoming any obstacles along the way. The book is at a lower reading level, and it has built-in reading journal entries, which makes it very teacher-friendly. WIDA Reading Level recommendation: 2.8 + with teacher support; 3.5 + for independent reading.

## The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

by Sherman Alexie. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, reprint edition, 2009. 229 pages. ISBN# 978-0316013697.

If you have never read anything by Sherman Alexie (*War Dances, Smoke Signals*, etc…), this is a great place to start. This young-adult novel, inspired by the author's life, demonstrates that diversity and multiculturalism does not always mean coming from another country. The novel follows the story of Arnold Spirit, Jr. ("Junior"), a somewhat misfit Native American teenager who lives on the Spokane Indian Reservation and makes the life-changing decision to attend an all-white school miles outside the reservation. The book openly discusses issues such as racism, poverty, and tradition in a clever and heartwarming manner. Students will be able to identify with many of the struggles Junior faces and the ways in which he deals with his

difficulties. This book is at a lower reading proficiency level, and is suitable for students of many ages. WIDA Reading Level recommendation: 3.0 + with teacher support; 4.0 + for independent reading. C

## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Karen Goyette** is the ESOL Program Coordinator for the Hudson, NH, school district and a teacher lecturer at Plymouth State University. Karen has over ten years' experience in the field of ESOL and has worked in both public K-12 education and adult education. In her off hours, she enjoys practicing the Irish fiddle, fishing, experimenting in the kitchen, and reading.

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