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A Message from Our President

I look forward to going to school every day. While I love traveling, I don't really need to travel, because as an ESL teacher, the world comes to me through the experiences and lives of my students. Through my students and their families, I am connected to people, places, and events all around the world.

On 9/11, I was working as a teacher of Art and ESL at a private school in Queensland, Australia. Many people in the school community sought me out that day. I was the American closest to them, the only one employed at a K-12 school of close to 1000 students. I particularly remember a conversation with students in my 8th-year art class about "degrees of separation"—the theory that anyone on the planet can be connected to any other person on the planet through a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five intermediaries.



Ian Thrope, an Australian Olympic swimmer, had ascended one of the Twin Towers that day only to find that he had forgotten his camera. He went back to his hotel with the intent of returning to take photos, but while he was gone the towers were hit and his life was spared. One of the students in my class knew him personally. I shared my belief that we are closely connected to everyone in the world—the most virtuous and best, as well as to the most sinister and evil. That's why the way we treat each other is so important; it is impossible to know how far the effects of our behavior may travel.

President Kathy Lobo, in the conductor's hat that she wore to start the June 13 Board meeting that launched the All Aboard! Project (See the article that immediately follows this letter.)

Within the class we determined that we were three degrees of separation from John Howard (the Prime Minister of Australia), from lots of famous Australian athletes and celebrities, and from President Clinton (my stepmother's first cousin). The list went on. Later, I learned that several of the terrorists involved in 9/11 had stayed at a hotel in Watertown, Massachusetts, just blocks from the house I grew up in, and another group of them had been trained at a flight school in Venice, Florida, a short drive from the home of one of my cousins. I had been to an air show at the Venice Airport where the flight school was located.

As teachers of English language learners, we can never guess how our students will connect us to world events, both good and bad. The Turkish and French students that I work with now had family and friends near the recent terrorist targets in Ankara and Paris. When National Public Radio reported that Massachusetts

is home to 52 recently settled Syrian refugees, I realized that I have worked with several refugees not only from Syria, but also from Russia. While helping a former Pakistani student with her college essay, I learned that she had not been able to attend school as a child because in the region where she lived, girls were being kidnapped. Even her best friend had been kidnapped.

Truly, we are all connected. That is why I look forward to going to school every day and that is why I work to promote language learning. As language teachers, we teach our students how to explain, debate, and share their very divergent points of view—but always in a respectful way. That is how we contribute to spreading, person-by-person, conversation-by-conversation, the skills we need to build a more peaceful world.

This issue of *Currents* contains reports on the activities of various MATSOL-related groups, both local and national, along with three articles: one on the teaching of pragmatic skills to English language learners, and two (one from the teacher and one from the students) on a student presentation at last year's MATSOL conference. There are also three reviews—one of Shell Education's leveled black-line-master book series, one of the heart-warming art-house film *Buen Día, Ramón/Guten Tag, Ramón*, and one of Anne Sibley O'Brien's wonderful new picture book, "I'm New Here." Anne will be one of the keynote speakers for our 2016 MATSOL conference.

Do take a look at the report entitled "All Aboard! A New Organizational Structure for MATSOL," immediately following this letter. A year and a half ago, in 2014, the MATSOL Board published its new five-year strategic plan (See *Currents* 37/1, <http://www.matsol.org/assets/documents/currentsv37no1springsummer2014.pdf>). One major part of the plan is a change in the committee structure for MATSOL, which is explained in the article.

We hope you will plan to attend our annual conference from May 4-6, 2016, at our usual location at the Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center in Framingham. See our website, <http://www.matsol.org/2016-conference>, for the latest conference details. Vula Roumis, our next MATSOL President, will take office at the Business Meeting.

And if you are planning to be in Baltimore for the TESOL Convention from April 5-8, 2016 stay tuned for information regarding the reunion and social that we hold every year at TESOL. 

Respectfully yours,

KATHY LOBO

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All Aboard! A New Organizational Structure for MATSOL

KATHY LOBO, PRESIDENT

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MATSOL has undergone dramatic growth and development over the past ten years. Our membership and revenue have increased, and we have formed new member groups and expanded our educational and social programming. In addition, we have moved from an all-volunteer organization to an organization with a part-time professional staff.

In 2013, in response to these changes, MATSOL's Board of Directors began work on a new Strategic Plan, a process that had last taken place in 2001. After several months of discussion and planning, our new MATSOL Strategic Plan was approved in April 2014. For a copy of the plan, see Currents 37/1, Spring/Summer 2014, <http://www.matsol.org/assets/documents/currentsv37no1springsummer2014.pdf>.

Among the goals and objectives in our Strategic Plan, the Board agreed that what needed most attention was Goal 1: *Develop clearly defined board and staff roles in order to work together effectively and cohesively*. We decided to focus immediately on two of the sub-goals that were listed under this goal:

- c. Review and revise board responsibilities and roles.
- e. Review and revise committee structure.

We began addressing this goal at our annual all-day Board Retreat in June 2015. With assistance from Claudia Lach, a leadership and organizational consultant who had helped the Board with the development of our Strategic Plan, the Board evaluated board effectiveness, reviewed the goals and objectives set out in our Strategic Plan, examined current board and staff roles, and brainstormed a new board structure. At the end of the retreat, the board charged President Kathy Lobo and Executive Director Helen Solórzano to continue working with

Claudia over the summer, to clarify the new Board structure and draft Board committee charters.

On September 16, 2015, the Board of Directors approved the new Board structure and committee charters, assigned committee memberships, and began working to activate and develop work plans for the new committees, as follows:

- Executive Committee – made up of officers of the Board.
- Governance & Nominations Committee – oversees board operations and the board nomination and election process.
- Finance & Audit Committee – oversees financial planning and management, and non-profit reporting requirements.
- Program & Member Engagement Committee – oversees our conference, professional learning programs, events, member activities, and membership.
- External Relations Committee – oversees communications, collaboration with other organizations, and advocacy.

NEW FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBER

The MATSOL Finance Committee is pleased to welcome a new member, Anna Popova, CPA. Anna has a Master's degree in accounting from the University of Massachusetts and a MA CPA license. She has spent most of her career at a small CPA firm, where she helped non-profit organizations with accounting, taxes, budgeting and cash flow managing. We look forward to working with Anna and benefiting from her financial expertise.



Anna Popova, CPA, new member of the MATSOL Finance Committee

To assist them in their work, Board committees may form sub-committees (to focus on specific areas of work) and task forces (to focus on one-time tasks) made up of MATSOL members and/or other volunteers with specific areas of expertise.

The creation of the new organizational structure has many benefits for MATSOL. It provides clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each Board member and ensures that all strategic areas are receiving oversight. In addition, the new structure provides opportunities for MATSOL members to become more involved in the association through participation in sub-committees and task forces.

We invite MATSOL members to look over the restructuring plan and new committee charters on the MATSOL website at www.matsol.org/mission. 

News from MATSOL's English Learner Leadership Council

ANN FELDMAN

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The MATSOL English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC) is a leadership group open to MATSOL members who serve as PK-12 English Learner Education Program Directors or Coordinators in Massachusetts public schools. MELLC was formed in 2007, in response to a request from our ELL coordinators and directors for assistance and support with programming for their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Membership has now grown to over 100 professionals in the field. MELLC promotes best practices in the classroom and supports ELLs and their families by validating our students' cultures and languages and advocating for an equitable and meaningful education for all students.

MELLC meets four times a year, in Leominster, for full-day professional development and networking sessions. We started off this year by stepping back from our typically jam-packed first meeting agenda and working, instead, on articulating our group's goals, purposes, and meeting structure. We were assisted in this endeavor by Claudia Lach, a professional consultant who had worked previously with the MATSOL Board on the development and implementation of MATSOL's new Strategic Plan.

At our October 16 meeting, we developed a purpose statement for MELLC:

To create a professional community that will support and guide ELL educators in the administration of English Learner Education programs at the district level through collaboration and advocacy.

This will be achieved by

- **staying informed** about policy and regulation updates, new ideas/learning, research from professionals and broad views on policies and politics,
- **supporting one another as leaders** through network-

ing/collaboration, sharing/problem solving, exploring best practices and leadership training, and

- **advocating** for our students, their families and their teachers and administrators at the district, state and federal levels.

We then brainstormed topics and goals to focus on during the 2015-2016 school year. After the meeting, we conducted a survey of our members to determine which goals should have top priority. Here are the results, ranked in order:

1. Provide information on policy, guidance, trends, research, best practices, and resources.
2. Explore and share ESL curriculum (models, frameworks, units, templates, teacher professional development, and texts).
3. Address SPED/ELL issues, suggesting protocols for identification, services, and reclassification. Give feedback to DESE's Office of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement (OELAAA).
4. Build strategic collaborations with other groups to create a shared vision for ELL education across the state.
5. Build leadership skills through professional development for ELL administrators.
6. Provide opportunities for networking and sharing.
7. Learn more about student subgroups such as Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE).

We started off this year by stepping back from our typically jam-packed first meeting agenda and working, instead, on articulating our group's goals, purposes, and meeting structure.

During our December 11th meeting, we will begin by looking at state compliance issues that were identified in the August 2015 DOE guidance document (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/Guidance.pdf>). We will listen to a panel of district ELL leaders who have recently been through Coordinated Program Reviews and will share a slideshow that covers Chapter 71A compliance criteria and Title III funding. Districts will work together to formulate action plans for their districts based on information from the slideshow and the panel discussion.

For further information about MELLC, please write the group's chair, Ann Feldman, at AFeldman@matsol.org. 

MATSOL Participates in TESOL's Annual Advocacy & Policy Summit

JENNIFER LANCASTER

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On June 21-23, 2015, I joined approximately 90 other TESOL educators and members of the TESOL International Association in Washington, DC, for the 2015 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit. Approximately 30 US affiliates were represented. The program featured a full day of issue briefings and activities around education legislation and advocacy, followed by a day of visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. Participants came to the Summit with two goals: (1) to learn more about federal policy issues impacting ESL educators and English learners and (2) to gain hands-on advocacy experience. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of over 100 Representatives and Senators.

To prepare for the Summit, I set up individual meetings with staff from the offices of MA senators and representatives Elizabeth Warren, Ed Markey, and Joe Kennedy III. The TESOL International Association provided directions, guidance, and a list of specific Representatives and Senators to contact.

The Summit featured a keynote address by Dr. Libia Gil, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U.S. Department of Education, along with speakers from the Office for Civil Rights; the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) at the U.S. Department of Education; the Student & Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the American Federation of Teachers; and the National Education Association. We also heard from Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner, of DSF Consulting, who spoke about her book, *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators*.

Following these briefings, the Summit shifted its focus to advocacy. To prepare for their meetings with members of Congress, affiliates worked in teams to develop their talking points and set up mock meetings to practice their presentations to representatives.

Throughout the Summit, participants received background information on key policy issues to address with their representatives. To make our meetings more effective, we were encouraged to find examples from our own programs to

illustrate the talking points we would use in our meetings. On June 23, when I went to Capitol Hill to meet with our members of Congress and their staff, I was prepared to speak about the following topics:

THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

- As statistics and census figures have consistently shown, English learners (ELs) continue to be the fastest growing segment of the school-age population in the United States. Massachusetts has the fastest growing EL population in the nation.
- TESOL supports the continued disaggregation of student performance measures across various student demographic groups, including ELs, as mandated by both H.R. 5, the *Student Success Act*, and S.1177, the *Every Child Achieves Act*.
- TESOL supports maintaining a strong and distinct Title III program to provide critical resources for professional development and to expand state and local districts' capacity to serve ELs. **We do not support merging** Title III into a sub-component of Title I, as specified in H.R. 5, the *Student Success Act*. This would represent a major step backward in serving the needs of the growing population of ELs in U.S. schools. Although many ELs are served by Title I programs, merging the two programs into a single funding stream will not provide greater support for these students.
- TESOL supports the language in S.1177, the *Every Child Achieves Act*, which includes funds for professional development for general education and mainstream educators who have not previously worked with ELs, and funds to help recruit, retain, mentor and induct educators of ELs and ELs with disabilities. As the population of school-age English language learners continues to grow, we need more highly trained and ESL qualified professionals, and more training for mainstream teachers who work with English language learners. Additional resources under Title III, such as re-establishing federal grants for graduate study in ESL and bilingual education, will help towards this goal.

ADULT EDUCATION

- Adult education programs serve individuals 16 years of age and older who need to improve basic skills, including literacy, mathematics, and English language proficiency.

- Adult English language learners comprise a substantial proportion of the adult education population in the United States. In program year 2006–2007, 46% of participants enrolled in state-administered adult education programs were in English as a second language (ESL) classes. This percentage does not include ELs enrolled in other types of programs, such as adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE).

FY 2016 BUDGET APPROPRIATIONS

- In the FY2016 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education funding bills, TESOL supports an increase in funding for Title III of ESEA (English Learning Education/Language Acquisition State Grants) to \$800 million.
- In the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education bill, TESOL supports an increase in funding to \$577 million. *This is still below the FY2012 funding level.*
- TESOL supports increased funding for professional development of K-12 ESL teachers and Adult Education professionals.

At the end of the day, after meeting with Senate and House of Representative staff, participants shared their experiences and talked about what they learned. It was evident that some affiliates were supported by their state legislators, while others were not. However, we all experienced a sense of accomplishment at having the opportunity to meet with our representatives and advocate for the needs of ELs and educators of ELs.

My meetings with staff members at the offices of Elizabeth Warren, Ed Markey, and Joe Kennedy III went extremely well. The staff I met with were eager to hear MATSOL's ideas and concerns regarding upcoming policy issues. They were genuinely engaged and listened attentively, asking pertinent questions and gathering information to pass on to their legislators. After each meeting, I followed up with an email summarizing the key points of our conversation, and thanking them for their time and support. I received an email response from each staff member asking MATSOL to stay in touch for continued advocacy efforts. I left the summit confident that our key points were heard and that our Massachusetts legislators will support forthcoming federal initiatives addressing the needs of English language learners and their teachers.

Additional information about the 2015 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit can be found online at <http://www.tesol.org/AdvocacySummit>. 

Join a MATSOL Sub-committee or Task Force

Opportunities are available in the Publications Committee and the 2015 Conference Planning Task Force, among others. For the latest listing of opportunities, please go to our new “Get Involved” webpage at <http://www.matsol.org/get-involved>.

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 <http://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, bilingual and dual-language programs, community outreach, ESL in higher education, educator-preparation programs, professional-development initiatives, Intensive English Institutes, private language schools, 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. We will work with you to get your article or report into good shape for publication. For more details and a copy of the submission guidelines, see <http://www.matsol.org/matsol-currents> or write to the editor, at mclark@matsol.org.

What's Happening in MATSOL's Special Interest Groups (SIGs)?

MATSOL's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are member-led groups formed around common areas of interest:

- Community College ESL Faculty Network
- English Language Educators of the Cape & Islands
- Low Incidence Programs
- Private Language Schools
- Students with Limited/Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)
- Teacher Educators

SIG membership is open to all current MATSOL members, at no charge. In addition to face-to-face and online meetings, most SIGs have e-lists to facilitate communication between members. For instructions about how to join a SIG or a SIG e-list, please go to our website <http://www.matsol.org/member-groups>.

Here's what's happening in our SIGs:

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL FACULTY NETWORK

The past eight months have been an active time for the Community College ESL Faculty Network. Our Steering Committee is in regular contact with faculty at our fifteen community colleges.

We hosted a workshop at MATSOL's Annual Conference in May, at which we distributed the results of our survey on community college ESL programs and services and discussed current issues at our colleges. Approximately 14 people attended. A number of programs are undergoing changes in curriculum and staffing, often with little or no input from ESL faculty. We also conducted two Higher Education mini-sessions at the Conference, where we discussed curricula, staffing, and support for our diverse and growing ESL population, along with connections between public and private ESL programs.

Some members of our committee are planning to attend the TESOL Community College Day on April 4, 2016, in Baltimore. Dr. Eileen Kelley of Holyoke Community College, a member of our Steering Committee, will be a presenter. We are currently discussing the possibility of sponsoring a Higher Education Conference in Fall 2016.

We encourage community college ESL faculty to attend TESOL's annual convention in Baltimore in April, and MATSOL's 2016 Annual Conference in May.

For further information regarding the Community College SIG, please write Juanita Brunelle at jbrunelle@matsol.org.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATORS OF THE CAPE AND ISLANDS (ELE-C&I)

The English Language Educators of the Cape & Islands (ELE-C&I) is a regional group for Pre K-12 ELL educators on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. We became a MATSOL SIG in October 2013. Our goal is to provide ongoing support to ELL educators in our area as they implement state and federal mandates for English learner education.

Membership includes the following school districts: Barnstable, Bourne, Dennis-Yarmouth, Falmouth, Martha's Vineyard, Monomoy, Nantucket, Nauset Regional, Provincetown, and Sandwich. We meet four times a year on Cape Cod. Here is a summary of the topics we have discussed during SY 2014-2015 and SY 2015-2016:

SY 2014 – 2015

- **October 2014:** Dr. Maria de Lourdes Serpa, Professor Emerita of Education, Lesley Graduate School of Education, presented a workshop on why typical evaluation tools may not be culturally appropriate for English Learners (ELs) and provided information on tools and proven strategies for evaluating the learning of these students.
- **December 2014:** ELE PARCC Fellows Nancy Farrell and Rebecca Fredericks presented an overview of PARCC and how to prepare our ELs for the rigor of PARCC. In the afternoon we reviewed our guiding question for the year "*Now that we have supportive initiatives for our ELs, how do we refine and strengthen the role of the English Language Educator?*"
- **April 2015:** Members viewed and discussed the video "Hard Truth, Levity, and Hope" and discussed the TESOL article "*Changes in the Expertise of ESL Professionals: Knowledge and Action in an Era of New Standards-March 2014.*"

- **June 2015:** In the morning we had a lively discussion on district successes and challenges with family engagement. The afternoon session included member presentations on co-teaching models, and a presentation highlighting Dr. Serpa's article entitled "*Imperative for Change.*"

SY 2015 – 2016

- **October 2015:** Our essential question was "*How will you make the ELD Curriculum meaningful for you and your students?*" We watched a video clip entitled "*Why are So Many of our Teachers in School So Successful?*", featuring researcher John Hattie, and then discussed the question of what practices have the biggest impact on student achievement. Next, Mary Ellen Caesar, Regional Literacy Specialist from MA DESE, presented some Understanding by Design (UbD) materials that support the preparation of curriculum units. Members shared EL Progress Reports as well as books and articles that they had found useful.

The group will meet again on April 1 and June 3, 2016. Future topics include ELL writing, ELE programming, and the new DESE guidance document.

For further information please contact any member of our Steering Committee: Tricia Leon Finan, ELE Coach and Team Leader, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, leonfinp@dy-regional.k12.ma.us; Christine Nicholson, ELL Teacher, Falmouth Public Schools, cnicholson@falmouth.k12.ma.us; or Mary Ellen Caesar, Regional Literacy Specialist, MA DESE, mcaesar@doe.mass.edu.

LOW-INCIDENCE PROGRAMS

The Low-Incidence SIG is a support group for MATSOL members who are working with ELLs working in low-incidence school districts. Activities include

- sharing resources such as forms, parent manuals, translation resources, and curriculum resources,
- exploring topics such as second language acquisition vs. language disability, language assessment testing, getting support from administrators, and CPR compliance issues, and
- getting updates on DESE initiatives and policy changes.

Meetings are held on Mondays from 9:00 - 11:00am in Shrewsbury. Our next meeting will take place on March 7, 2016.

For information on the Low-Incidence SIG, please write the chair, Rhoda Webb, at RWebb@matsol.org.

PRIVATE LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

We finally have a SIG for Private Language Schools! We plan to have regular meetings and events and hope to encourage opportunities in MATSOL that are applicable to our types of schools—professional development programs as well as speakers and presentations at MATSOL’s annual conference. If you work at a private language school, please help us get the word out. We want as many PLS educators as possible to join MATSOL and be part of our group!

Our steering committee is currently making plans for our first meeting and get-together. The members of the committee are listed below:

Joy MacFarland: Center Director, FLS Boston Commons

Joshua Stone: Center Director, Approach International Student Center

Sarah de Pina: Assistant Academic Director, ELS Boston Downtown

Rachel Kadish: Academic Coordinator, GEOS Boston

If you have ideas about activities and events that you would like to have, or topics and issues that you would like to discuss at our meetings, please write Joy MacFarland at joymacfarland@gmail.com. We are eager to hear about your ideas and resources, and to work with you for the benefit of our programs.

SLIFE

Exciting news! The SLIFE Guidance Document was published on December 10, 2015. You can locate the document on DESE's website: http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html.

Our SLIFE SIG had its first meeting on Monday, September 28th, at Milford High School in Milford, MA. The discussion focused on the creation of a needs-assessment survey to be sent out to MATSOL SLIFE SIG and E-list participants. We then sent out the survey and received 38 responses, which were reviewed by our steering committee at a GoToMeeting on November 9. Based on the results of the survey, we have identified the following immediate areas of need or interest:

- SLIFE curriculum development
- Literacy instruction for adolescents

- Lesson planning for SLIFE courses
- Programming for SLIFE

Our next face-to-face meeting will take place on Monday, January 11th, at Milford High School in Milford, MA. For information about the SLIFE SIG, please contact Jennifer Lancaster at jlancaster@matsol.org.

TEACHER EDUCATORS

The Teacher Educator SIG has established a presence at the Massachusetts Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (MACTE), with MATSOL member Michaela Colombo representing MATSOL as an ex-officio member of the MACTE board.

One issue of concern for the Teacher Educator SIG is the pending implementation of the Higher Education Act, with its increased emphasis on test scores. Under the new regulations, assessment of teacher education programs will be based partly on the selectivity of their admission standards, including the grades and GRE scores of their teacher candidates. Furthermore, first-year teachers (and the teacher education programs from which they came) will be assessed partly on the basis of the test scores of their students. We are concerned that these regulations may reduce the numbers of teachers who will seek employment in high-needs districts with large numbers of English learners.

We are making plans for an electronic meeting early in December, once the fall semester ends. For further information on the Teacher Educator SIG, please contact Professor Michaela Colombo at Michaela_WymanColombo@uml.edu. 

An Update on Adult Basic Education in Massachusetts

STEPHEN REUYS

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The Adult Basic Education system of Massachusetts, under the direction of the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), provides courses in ESOL, basic literacy, high school equivalency preparation, and other classes for adult learners throughout the state. Recent news items include the following:

- The state's funding for its adult basic education system (line item 7035-0002) increased by \$850,000 for FY2016, to \$31,249,000, a 2.8% increase over the previous year's funding—the first significant increase in ABE funding in several years. This success is due to the on-going and effective advocacy efforts of students, staff, and others in the ABE field and to the recognition by state legislators that ABE services are an important part of the education and workforce development systems in the Commonwealth. For FY17, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) is advocating for even greater funding, to a level of \$35 million.
- The process of writing the federal regulations that will govern state ABE programs around the country continues in Washington, DC, following last year's passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). ABE programs and practitioners throughout Massachusetts submitted comments on the proposed regulations. Like its predecessor, the Workforce Investment Act (known as WIA), the WIOA deals with the country's overall workforce development system and includes adult basic education within its purview. How the new act will affect ABE programs, classes, and students will become much clearer when the new regulations are released.
- The state's ABE staff and program development provider, the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) was significantly redesigned last year. A new and very different constellation of SABES grantees was set up to provide support to adult

basic education programs. As part of this reorganization, there is now a SABES Professional Development Center for ESOL, located at Quinsigamond Community College (for the eastern part of the state) and Holyoke Community College (for the west).

- Adult basic educators in Massachusetts continue to work on forming a non-traditional union of ABE teachers, advisors, directors, and others in order to improve working conditions for ABE practitioners and bolster the quality of services for the students. This year legislation was filed (House bill 3390) that would allow the recognition of a non-traditional statewide union of ABE practitioners and authorize that union to negotiate with the state with regard to various aspects of work in this field. 

A Visit to the Annual Conference of Northern New England TESOL (NNETESOL)

Two members of MATSOL's Board—President Kathy Lobo and Board Member Mary Clark—attended the annual conference of Northern New England TESOL (NNETESOL) at the University of New Hampshire, on Saturday, November 7.

The keynote speaker was Professor Danling Fu, from the University of Florida Department of Education, who spoke on the topic “From a Monolingual to a Translanguage Pedagogy Model.” (MATSOL members learned about the notion of translanguaging at our May 2015 conference, from keynote speaker Ophelia Garcia.) Dr. Fu, in her address, focused on the task of teaching composition. If students are already literate in their L1, she reminded us, they don't come to us with empty minds; they may already have developed complex composition skills that can be transferred to English. Thus, in place of the part-to-whole development pattern of the TESOL model (Level 1: single words or simple phrases, Level 2: memorized phrases and formulae, Level 3: simple sentences, Level 4: some complex structures, Level 5: clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured texts), she argued for a developmental pattern that gradually transfers skills from L1 to L2, as follows:

STAGE 1: Students write in their L1.

STAGE 2: Students use L1 words and phrases to fill in where they don't know the English equivalent.

STAGE 3: Students use “inter-language,” with English words and L1 syntax.

STAGE 4: Students write entirely in English, with a proficiency that approaches Standard English.

Dr. Fu urged us to remember that, whatever pedagogical model we follow, our students will not be identical to monolingual native English speakers; their L1 is a valuable resource which will and should continue to flavor their writing. Dr. Fu recommended that teachers allow students to take notes, discuss, and write drafts in whatever language they choose; our goal should be to maximize all their competencies and produce proficient multilingual/multiliterate individuals. Allowing students to use their L1 in ESL and content classes does not retard their

development in English, she argued, it makes their progress easier and faster.

In addition to the keynote address, there were 21 individual presentations. Kathy Lobo attended three presentations—one on Phrasal Vocabulary: Training the Brain to Think like a Native Thinker, by Rebecca Graham, a K-12 educator who has had experience teaching ESL in South Korea; one on research exploring the pronunciation and spelling errors of Arabic-speaking students, by Dr. Peter Parker, a professor at Plymouth State University; and one on Scaffolding ELLs in their Writing Development, by the keynote speaker, Dr. Fu.

Mary Clark attended three other presentations—one by three instructors from UNH's Intensive English Program (IEP) on the use of creative writing to develop students' empathy, confidence, and writing voice in English; one by Sarah Jusseume, also from UNH's IEP, on the use of an extensive reading such as *Divergent* or *The Hunger Games* as the organizational focus for an ESL course; and one on professional development for content-area teachers in Maine schools that now have sizeable ELL populations.

Altogether, it was a fine conference and well worth the time we spent there. We hope other MATSOL members will consider visiting and presenting at the conferences of our neighboring TESOL affiliates. The Northern New England states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont take turns hosting the NNETESOL conference (<http://www.nnetesol.org>). Next year's conference will take place on Saturday, November 5th, at a still-to-be-determined location in Maine. ConnTESOL (<http://www.conntesol.org>), Connecticut's TESOL affiliate, holds its annual conference in October, and RITELL (<http://www.ritell.org>), Rhode Island's TESOL affiliate, holds a fall conference in November and a spring conference in May—the Saturday after our MATSOL conference. 

CATS Academy ELLs Present at MATSOL: The Teacher's Story

CHRISTOPHER MEOLI

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Although American students now practice academic speaking and writing skills for an increasingly large part of their school careers, they are not always prepared to perform at an advanced level when they finish high school: studies show that college students continue to struggle with speaking and writing. Hart Research Associates (2005) found that 46% of college students do not feel that high school sufficiently prepared them for academic oral communication. And in a recent national writing assessment, only 27% of 12th graders were deemed proficient or better as essay writers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011); the average writing score for all 12th graders was a mere 150 out of 300. As we might expect, the results were even worse for ELLs: their average score was only 96. In response to this data, I have been seeking more effective strategies to engage my high school ELLs in academic speaking and writing.

As a high school ESL teacher in the Revere Public School District, I sometimes found it challenging to motivate my students. I noticed, however, that many students spent a substantial amount of time listening to music — before school, after school, at lunch, and between classes. This observation, coupled with some reading about the correlation of music with L2 acquisition, academic achievement, and higher order thinking skills (Arts Education Partnership, 2011; Steve & Miyake, 2006) inspired me to develop a “song project” that promotes academic skill development through the analysis of musical lyrics.

I asked my students to each select a song that spoke to them, to analyze the lyrics of the song, and to develop an analytical essay based on their findings. For three weeks, the students worked exclusively on this project in their ESL class. After selecting a song, they interpreted the lyrics and constructed the thesis statement that would form the basis of their essay. Sixteen-year-old Chris Alvarez, from violence-ridden Honduras, argued that

The song "Where is the Love," by Black Eyed Peas, is important because it talks about people doing bad things in the world. It can help the people change and take the message what are they doing.

As the students analyzed their songs, developed outlines, and framed their arguments, I guided them with explicit instruction on academic writing and oral presentations. Each student gave a 15-20 minute class presentation, including an introduction to essential vocabulary from the song, a thesis statement, and a description of the lyrics that supported their thesis statement. Sergio Nuñez brought a guitar into class and sang "Give Me Love," by Ed Sheeren. Another student found an example of personification, a term he had learned in his literature class, in Ed Sheeren's song "Kiss Me": "I'm falling for your eyes but they don't know me yet." Following up on their presentations, the students produced well-written academic essays.

This project was such a success in this challenging environment that I repeated it the following year with over 30 students at CATS Academy, a private preparatory school in Newton, MA. Since many of my CATS students had no previous experience in creating thesis statements, I had them work in pairs to develop their thesis statements and presentations, but then write their essays individually.

Despite the differences between the urban public school and the private boarding school environments, the song project was equally successful in both cases. My CATS Academy students were highly motivated to develop academic skills by talking and writing about a song of their choice. Eighteen-year-old Maria Wei chose a topic relevant to many teenagers by claiming that

The song "If I Were a Boy" by the prominent American singer Beyoncé Knowles is helpful for boys to know about girls' perspective by criticizing boys who do not pay attention to their girlfriends.

Rodrigo Valentoni and Carlos Ferreira, from Brazil, argued that the rhythm and flow of Bobby McFerrin's song "Don't Worry Be Happy" was just as important as the lyrics in conveying the song's meaning. They had the entire class snapping, whistling and singing during their presentation.

When my proposal was accepted to present the song project at the 2015 MAT-SOL conference, this seemed a natural arena for my students to obtain real-world practice in making academic presentations. With the cooperation of

MATSOL and CATS Academy, I invited seven students to co-present with me and provide their perspectives on the project. I shared my digital presentation with them and gave them freedom to alter or add to it. They met after school on several occasions to collaborate, add slides, and integrate their perspectives. When they arrived at the conference, nervous and excited, they had note cards already prepared but continued to work diligently on last-minute changes.

The presentations went beautifully. Even though some of the students had initially had difficulty speaking in front of their own classmates, they managed to speak effectively to an audience of ELT professionals—describing their projects, fielding questions, and providing a student perspective. One student said she had been “taught” in other classes how to write essays, but this project both motivated her and helped her “truly learn” academic skills. Her professional demeanor and articulate speech were clear evidence of the skill set she had acquired. These students were able to present their ideas not only to their classmates, but also to a real professional audience. Their contributions to the presentation show the value of engaging high school students in authentic applications of academic skills in a real-life context. **C**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Meoli is an ELT professional with extensive international teaching and teacher training experience. He has worked with children and adults in Germany, Vietnam, Nepal, China, Tajikistan and, in the U.S., at both public and private institutions. He specializes in college preparation for ELLs, project-based and experiential learning, and teacher education. Chris has conducted research in teacher training and is an alumnus of the English Language Fellow program. He is currently a teacher trainer at Teaching House Boston.

It's All in the Song: The Students' View of Their Presentation at MATSOL

KRISTINA ZHUKOVA, ANASTASIYA GOMMA, HA NGUYEN, & JOHN CHAENG

On May 8, 2015 seven students from CATS Academy Boston, a private preparatory school in Newton, were invited to attend MATSOL's annual conference, where we helped our ESL teacher to present his work. It was an honor for our group to participate in such an elite conference. We did not expect that students could be allowed not only to visit but also to present something, so our group was extremely excited when we found out that we could go.

Mr. Meoli's presentation, called "It's All in the Song," was about his assignment that helps us to practice our public speaking skills. The assignment was to dig deep into a song that we like and describe why it is significant. Our presentation started with Mr. Meoli's introduction of the assignment and explanation of the advantages of this project. He also demonstrated some research and statistics in which he compared ESL students' oral skills with the native English speaking students. After that, he pointed out how music affects positively the process of learning and memorizing information, which supported his idea of the project. After his introduction, Mr. Meoli gave a short demonstration of the projects we did in our class, giving the audience a chance to watch and listen to them in the same way as



CATS Academy students preparing for their presentation

All the members of our team were extremely excited and nervous because for all of us it was our first time of presenting something outside the classroom, especially in front of such a highly educated audience.

we presented in our class. Then our turn came: we gave a brief review of our presentations and individually told the audience about our experience and our opinion about the assignment. This, probably, was the most highlighting moment of the presentation since it was crucial for the audience to know how students really feel about this kind of public speaking assignment. The presentation ended nicely with an abundance of questions from the audience, which were answered directly by the students.

All the members of our team were extremely excited and nervous because for all of us it was our first time of presenting something outside the classroom, especially in front of such a highly educated audience. However, despite all our fears, as soon as we entered, we were welcomed very nicely by MATSOL's president and its executive director. They personally talked to us and cheered our group up, which was very helpful and lovely. It was scary for our group to be the only students at this conference, but at the same time it made us feel even more proud, as if we were an exclusive group of selected students. We are very thankful to the director of this conference for providing us such a great opportunity to try our skills of presenting and speaking in front of such a serious audience. Despite the attendance of mature teachers from all over New England, we felt comfortable telling and presenting this song project with our ESL teacher.



Students make last-minute preparations for their presentation

People asked us questions and we had an amazing discussion with the audience, although at the beginning we were a little bit shy. "I was blushing and had

People asked us questions and we had an amazing discussion with the audience, although at the beginning we were a little bit shy. "I was blushing and had

difficulty to speak fluently,” said Ha. The audience was not big, only about twenty people, but that did not influence the level of interest that people demonstrated in our presentation. The people who came there really wanted to learn new things in order to contribute to their teaching skills. We think the conversation we had at MATSOL was especially meaningful because it is important to hear opinions from both teachers and students about how to enhance the educational process and make it interesting and entertaining. We are really thankful to the president of MATSOL, Kathy Lobo, and the executive director, Helen Solórzano, who gave us permission to come and have a chance to get such a fabulous experience. 

People asked us questions and we had an amazing discussion with the audience, although at the beginning we were a little bit shy. “I was blushing and had difficulty to speak fluently,” said Ha.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Wai Lon Cheang (John) is a junior at CATS Academy Boston. He comes from Macau and is a strong student. Unlike most boys, he likes playing sports and reading. He wants to study management and law in college.

Anastasiia Gomma is a junior at CATS Academy Boston. She is from Russia and is happy that she had such a great experience at the MATSOL Conference. It helped her to overcome her shyness.

Ha Nguyen is currently studying in CATS Academy Boston as a junior. She comes from Vietnam. Her future plan is continue to study in the US and study about literature in college.

Kristina Zhukova is a senior at CATS Academy. She comes from Russia. She hopes to continue studying in America after graduating from high school. She would like to study finance and accounting.

Learning How to Disagree in English

OKSANA SEMENOVA

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Even advanced speakers of English as a second language sometimes experience communication breakdowns that result in embarrassment, frustration, amusement, or confusion. As an ESL speaker who has spent many years in the U.S., I still have difficulty expressing my communicative intentions and interpreting those of others in certain social situations. Very often the reason for miscommunication is pragmatics. The pragmatic competence of non-native speakers (NNS) is influenced by their first language (L1)—sometimes for good and sometimes for ill. As Hymes (1964) notes, “The ability to speak competently entails not only knowing the grammatical rules of a language, but knowing what to say to whom in what circumstances.” In other words, a competent speaker needs to know how to use the language in social situations.

For my MA thesis in Linguistics at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), I conducted a small-scale study of disagreement strategies in the speech of advanced Russian ESL speakers as compared with native speakers of American English. In order to compare the behavior of the two groups, I asked the participants to engage in the following open-ended role-play, adapted from Beebe & Takahashi (1989):

ROLE-PLAYER 1

You are an executive in a corporation. You have a plan to reorganize the department of human resources. You have worked on this plan for a long time. Now you present this plan to a head of the department. You are convinced that this plan is going to work well.

ROLE-PLAYER 2

You are the head of the department of Human Resources in a large corporation. You are meeting with an executive of this corporation. He presents you with a plan. You are convinced it is not going to work.

The participants in the role-plays were all seniors or graduate students at the University of New Hampshire. All of them were male, pursuing degrees in electrical, mechanical and environmental engineering. The NNS subjects all came from Ukraine and spoke Russian as their first language. On average, they had spent 4.4 years in the USA. All the native speakers (NS) had lived at least their first 18 years in New Hampshire.

Ten dyads were asked to perform a role-play according to the scenario mentioned above. One native-speaking participant took part in multiple role-plays, acting as an executive of the corporation proposing a plan to reorganize the department of Human Resources. All ten role-plays were audio-taped, and a minimal unit of analysis (the first turn taken in the conversation) was analyzed according to the following variables: utterance length, use of modifiers, and order of “semantic formulae” (gratitude, empathy, criticism, cautioning, promising, etc.). (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983)

**Very often
the reason for
miscommunication
is pragmatics.**

The study found three major differences in disagreement strategies between American English and Russian speakers:

ORDER OF SEMANTIC FORMULAE

Although the order of semantic formulae was not absolutely fixed, three out of the five NS participants had a recognizable pattern of alternating positive and negative semantic formulae, creating a “sandwich” effect:

EXAMPLE (NS1)

*OK. What you present sounds interesting. And I think a hierarchical approach may be worth looking into (**positive**) But at the same time I don't think our budget really allows us [the Department of Human Resources] for that type of growth yet. (**negative**) I understand the company is growing. (**positive**) But I just don't see the finances available for the type of plan that you are referring to. It would involve a lot more staffing. I just don't think we can afford that now (**negative**)*

The order of semantic formulae in the example above exhibits a stereotypical American disagreement pattern, in which criticism is preceded by a “token agreement” (LoCastro, 1986 in Beebe & Takahashi, 1989b).

A pattern could be recognized among the NNS as well. Though the NNS resembled the NS in that they started their responses with a positive formula, three of

the NNS used several negative remarks in a row *without* alternating them with a positive formula.

EXAMPLE (NNS1)

*Well, the idea behind it is certainly very good. I do like it. (positive)
But as of today and I basically based on my working experience
[...] I wouldn't say that this is going to work right away. (negative)
And I am not certain if this is going to work at the moment because
[...] we are growing really fast and having one more responsibility
for the employees means getting real busy. So this [...] is going to
add more pressure [...] on each of the employees. [...] So we either
going to need to hire more people to take care of those things or
we have to relieve some employees from their responsibilities. (neg-
ative) At this moment I don't think this idea is going to work. (nega-
tive) We'll certainly do an effort and encourage people to do that.
And [...] start off by calling kick off meetings or something. (positive)
But we have to be realistic about this right now. (negative)*

The NNS did not alternate their criticisms with positive semantic formulae as the NS did. Instead, they placed positive remarks at the beginning and towards the end of the sequence, producing a slightly different “sandwich” than the one created by the NS.

LENGTH OF UTTERANCE

Utterance length was another noticeable difference between the NS and the NNS. Both the positive and the negative remarks of the NNS were consistently shorter than those of the NS, while their neutral formulae (e.g., explanation, re-stating) were longer. For example, one of the NNS participants began with a positive remark “I see your point,” but continued, immediately, with a criticism. He did express empathy (probably intending to soften the criticism), but the utterance is too short to achieve the intended effect.

Among the characteristics that were attributed to the NNS were “too direct” and “aggressive.”

MODIFIERS

The third difference between the NS and the NNS was in the use strengtheners and weakeners. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), strengtheners (“specifically”, “exactly”, “real”, etc.) mainly act as emphatics, while weakeners “soften or tentativize what they modify.” The NS in this study produced significantly more softeners—55, while the NNS used only 27. All the NS used softeners, some-

times more than one in an utterance, e.g. “....*the way HR is run **often** is not **instantly** able to be evaluated by those in the higher management..*” Furthermore, the NS used a wider range of softeners than the NNS. Three types of softeners frequently used by NS—expressions such as “I think,” “I feel,” and “I would think,” diminutive adverbs such as “kind of,” and expressions such as “you know”—were not used at all by the NNS participants. Finally, although both groups of participants used strengtheners, the NNS speakers used a significantly higher number: 26 for the NNS vs. 7 for the NS. For example, the NNS speaker above says, “*Right now [changing the structure of HR] means getting **real** busy.*”

CONCLUSION

To find out how native speakers of American English perceive NNS acts of disagreement, I asked two native speakers of American English who were not involved in the role-play to describe the NNS participants based on the recordings of the role-plays. Among the characteristics that were attributed to the NNS were “too direct” and “aggressive.” Since the NNS indicated that, on the contrary, their intention was to seem “absolutely indirect and nonaggressive,” this showed a serious miscommunication between the Russian and American speakers. I believe that the deviation from NS norms in the order of semantic formulae, length of positive and negative utterances, underuse of softeners, and overuse of strengtheners may have contributed to the NSs’ negative perception of the NNSs. On the one hand, the NNS succeeded in conveying disagreement (the participant who role-played the head of the corporation indicated that disagreement was clearly conveyed), but on the other hand, they were not successful in conveying their communicative intentions adequately, unintentionally creating a misconception of being confrontational and aggressive. Since the students who participated in the study had lived in the U.S. for some years, this experiment suggests that mere residence in the country (4.4 years on average) does not necessarily lead to L2 pragmatic competency.

The miscommunication of the feelings that the Russian-speaking participants wanted to convey was significant, and in a real-life situation could cause serious miscommunication with American native speakers. The findings of this study show the need for formal instruction in L2 pragmatics; clearly, instruction in American English pragmatics should be included among the teaching objectives of English language programs.

HOW TO TEACH PRAGMATICS

Classroom instruction has been shown to have a positive effect on students’ learning of pragmatic conventions. (See Olshtain, E., & Cohen, A.D. (1990), and Bouton, L.F. (1994), among many others) But how should pragmatics be taught?

The first step I take in my classes is to raise my (college-age) students' awareness of the role that pragmatics plays in communication, and to call their attention to differences in the politeness strategies that speakers employ in different languages. I have used activities such as brainstorming the "rules" for particular speech acts in the students' L1 and in English; discussing communicative failures the students have experienced in the past; analyzing scenes from movies, plays and real life conversations; interviewing native-speaking informants; and studying models.

Next, I help my students practice their new knowledge by engaging them in role plays, dialogs, and problem-solving activities that require them to choose the most appropriate way of speaking for a given situation. One activity, called a "discourse completion task," requires the students to respond to a prompt, taking into consideration the status of the interlocutor as well as other sociopragmatic variables. Another exercise focuses on the use of softening devices.

The miscommunication of the feelings that the Russian-speaking participants wanted to convey was significant, and in a real-life situation could cause serious miscommunication with American native speakers.

Finally, I encourage my students to observe interactions between Americans in the environment around them, and to analyze the language they see in those situations, using the techniques they've learned in class. I encourage them to bring their observations and questions to class, thus extending the learning context to real-life situations outside the classroom. In my experience, students enjoy and profit from these activities; they appreciate the fact that our ESL classroom has provided them with some of the tools they need to communicate successfully in the world outside. 

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Oksana Semenova grew up in eastern Ukraine and speaks Russian as her first language. In 1997, she completed her Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Philology at the Kramatorsk Institute of Economics and Humanities, Kramatorsk, Ukraine. Subsequently, she earned her MA in Linguistics and M.Ed. in Secondary Education from the University of New Hampshire at Durham. For the past ten years, Oksana has been teaching English as a Second Language in the ESL Institute at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, NH. She resides with her family in Portsmouth, NH.

A Leveled Text Series from Shell Education, Huntington Beach, CA

Reviewed by Kathy Lobo

I recently discovered Shell Education's **black-line-master book series**, with parallel texts at four different reading levels in science, social studies, and mathematics, as well as non-fiction and fiction topics for English language arts. This is an invaluable aid for teachers who are looking for ways to differentiate instruction.

I was introduced to the series at last year's MATSOL conference, by vendor Alaran Books, who is based in Harrisville, New Hampshire. Since I couldn't decide which of the close to 20 titles to choose from, I bought some from every subject area, without regret. (The cost is \$39.99/book.) Each book contains a series of approximately fifteen two-page readings, with adaptations at four different reading levels (making a total of about 60 readings in all). The level of each passage is coded by an icon—a star for levels 1.5-2.2, a circle for levels 3-3.5, a square for levels 5-5.5, and a triangle for levels 6.2-7.2. The pages are visually identical, with matching illustrations and length of text, but varying from level to level in the complexity of the language. Many of the images come from primary sources, and provide relevant and useful visual support. By way of example, here is a set of passages on the topic "WWII in the Pacific," from *Leveled Texts for Social Studies: The 20th Century*:

"STAR" LEVEL: *Japan invaded China in 1937. The United States did not like this. U.S. President Roosevelt spoke up. He said that he would not sell Japan oil or steel. Japan needed these things to fight the war. Japan wanted to take over other nations in East Asia to get the oil. So, President Roosevelt put bomber planes in the Philippines to protect these nations.*

"CIRCLE" LEVEL: *Japan attacked China in 1937. The United States did not like this. U.S. President Roosevelt told Japanese leaders that he would not sell them oil or steel. Japan needed these things to fight the war. Japan wanted to take over other nations in East Asia*

to get the oil. So, Roosevelt put bomber planes in the Philippine Islands.

“SQUARE” LEVEL: Japan invaded China in 1937. The United States did not like this. So, U.S. President Roosevelt told Japanese leaders that America would not sell them oil or steel. They needed these things to fight the war. Japan decided to take over other nations in East Asia to get oil. To prevent this, Roosevelt stationed bomber planes in the Philippines.

Since I couldn't decide which of the close to 20 titles to choose from, I bought some from every subject area, without regret.

“TRIANGLE” LEVEL: In 1937, Japan invaded China. The United States felt this was wrong, and U.S. President Roosevelt told Japanese leaders that America would not sell them oil or steel. Since the Japanese needed oil to fight the war, they decided to conquer other nations in Asia to obtain it. To prevent this, Roosevelt stationed bomber planes in the Philippines, which are between Japan and the nations with the oil.

Each book title is accompanied by a CD with teacher resources, including a full-color version of the text and modifiable versions of all the passages. I have gotten most use from the readings for social studies and English language arts, but there is something here for everyone, including both ESL teachers and teachers of core subjects.

Sample texts are available for viewing on the publisher's website, <http://www.shelleducation.com/professional-development/differentiation>. 

Buen Día, Ramón/Guten Tag, Ramón (Good Day, Ramón)

20th Century Fox, directed by Jorge Ramirez Suárez, 2015. 2 hours, 1 minute.

REVIEWED BY ANN FELDMAN

If you are looking for a feel-good movie to watch from the comfort of your home, please consider the art-house film *Buen Día, Ramón/Guten Tag, Ramón*, directed by Jorge Ramirez-Suarez, streaming on Netflix with a 100% critical rating from Rotten Tomatoes. This film, partly in Spanish and partly in German, tells the story of an impoverished young Mexican man, played by Kristyan Ferrer, who has tried many times to cross the border into the United States, with no success. Finally, with no other options, he leaves his close-knit family in a small Mexican town to travel to Wiesbaden, Germany. When he fails to locate his family's relative in Germany, he finds himself homeless in a country where the language is completely foreign to him.

When he fails to locate his family's relative in Germany, he finds himself homeless in a country where the language is completely foreign to him.

The film contains some comic relief and lots of sweet surprises. You will be uplifted by the small joys Ramón experiences as he forms relationships and solidifies human connections. This uplifting "sleeper" of a film is a must-see for those of us who work with culturally and linguistically diverse youth and know something about the traumatic journeys and emotional devastation they have had to deal with. It was a blockbuster hit in Mexico, and I would venture to say that it is one of the best films you will see this year! 🇨🇪

I'm New Here

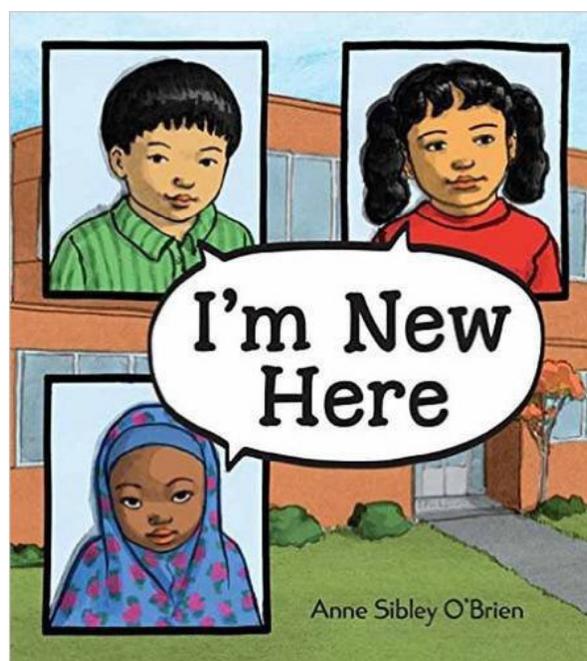
by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Charlesbridge Publishing, 2015. 32 pages. ISBN 978-1-58089-612-2. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Kathy Lobo

Anne Sibley O'Brien was an invited speaker at last year's MAT-SOL conference and will be one of two Keynote Speakers at our 2016 conference in May. Her most recent book, *I'm New Here*, tells the story of three children—Maria, from Guatemala, Jin, from Korea, and Fatimah, from Somalia—as they start school in a new land, the United States.

At their new school, the children have to learn to say new words, write new letters, and behave in new and different ways. They miss the things they knew at home, where the language was familiar and they felt a part of the class. But by the end of the book the children have all found a place within their new class in America.

Some newcomer centers and school registration centers have purchased copies of this book, and Anne has been visiting schools to facilitate conversations about how to make new students and their families feel welcome. Anne knows from personal experience what it feels like to be in a new place far from home. When she was seven years old, her family moved from New Hampshire to South Korea, where her parents served as medical missionaries in Seoul, Daegu, and on the island of Geogedo. MATSOL members who attend our annual conference will have a chance to hear more about Anne's experiences and get an autographed copy of her book! 



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