

matsol

Currents

NETS EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
Vol. 40, No.1 Spring/Summer 2017



INSIDE
MATSOL'S 45TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
GIVING PARENTS A ROLE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S READING DEVELOPMENT
USING TRANSLATION TO HELP STUDENTS DEAL WITH COMPLEX ACADEMIC TEXTS



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President's Message

Greetings MATSOL Members, Colleagues, Supporters, and Friends,



In pondering the message I wanted to convey for this issue, I was reminded how fitting the name of this publication is for our organization and our beloved vocation. We are *current* and *involved* as we advocate for our students and families, who need us more than ever in this time of political uncertainty and disturbing shifts in policy; *current* and *present* as we advise, advocate, promote, and assist at state and local legislative and academic assemblies; *current* and *connected* as we host our annual conference and provide quality professional development for the field; *current* and *up-to-date* in the reports, bulletins, research, and news of interest that we disseminate to our field; *current* and *unflinching* in our support of you who do yeoman's work every day in your classrooms, organizations, and agencies; and *current* and *available* as we address the professional needs of our members and affiliates and strive to deliver the high quality services you need.

My sincere gratitude to all of you, our members and friends, for the support you give to MATSOL.

Our 45th annual Conference at the Sheraton Framingham on June 1-2 was very successful, with over 650 attendees each day, 95 presentations (including nine invited speakers), and 30 exhibitors. as well as three pre-Conference Institutes with some 200 attendees. We thank our Conference sponsors: National Geographic/Cengage Learning & Educational Solutions, Inc., who sponsored our Thursday night MATSOL Social and Award Ceremony, and program sponsors Elizabeth Clair's Easy English News and PTE Academic (Pearson Test of English).

My sincere gratitude to all of you, our members and friends, for the support you give to MATSOL throughout the year and for your wonderful contributions to our annual Conference and to *Currents*, which make it a valuable publication for all who work in the field of English language education in Massachusetts.

Now, find a comfy chair and enjoy all we have compiled for you in this issue

of Currents: In the “MATSOL News” section you will find reports on our Conference, our newly-elected MATSOL Board members, our professional development (PD) offerings, our advocacy efforts (the LOOK Bill and

the Seal of Biliteracy), and the activities of our special interest groups (SIGs). The “Reports” section presents a report from MCAE on the status of Adult Basic Education in Massachusetts, along with reports on grant-sponsored projects in Lexington, Lunenburg, and Boston. Our “Articles” section contains four articles on teaching strategies and techniques, and two on building personal relationships with ELLs and their families. Our “Reviews” section includes a review of *Reading A-Z*, a program of on-line reading materials, along with two recent books that discuss educational policies and approaches that are important in our field.

May summer bring you all some well-deserved relaxation.

May summer bring you all some well-deserved relaxation, memorable and fun activities with family and friends, and an opportunity to restore your energy for the Fall. Until then my very best to all of you! 🍀

Sincerely,

Vula Roumis

MATSOL President

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MATSOL's 45th Annual Conference

MATSOL held its 45th Annual Conference June 1-2, at the Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center in Framingham, MA. Activities began on Wednesday, May 31, with three pre-Conference Institutes:

Sara Hamerla, Ed. D., Newton Public Schools, "Transforming the Classroom a Dynamic with Academic Conversations"

Maryann Cucchiara, Educational Consultant, "Learning, Language and Literacy: The 3 Ls Approach from Remediation to Acceleration"

Claudia Rinaldi, Ph.D., Lasell College, "Using Progress Monitoring Tools to Guide Instructional Planning for English Learning with Disabilities"

On Thursday and Friday, Conference attendees were offered their choice of 95 different presentations, including nine invited speakers.

There were more than 650 people attendees each day on Thursday and Friday. Thirty exhibitors displayed their wares and generously contributed raffle prizes for our daily raffle.

Mini-networking sessions each day after lunch provided opportunities for attendees to meet and share thoughts with others who have similar interests.

There were more than 650 attendees each day on Thursday and Friday

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Jeff Zwiers, "Let's Stop Gluing Apples to the Tree: Authentic Communication as the Cornerstone of Enduring Learning"

Our keynote speaker on Thursday was Professor Jeff Zwiers, a senior researcher at Stanford University's Center to Support Excellence in Teaching, and Co-Director of the Academic Language Development Network. Professor Zwiers talked about the importance of authentic communication in language learning, as opposed to the "pseudo-communication" tasks that we often assign, e.g., *Tell your partner the meaning of the word "irony."*



Thursday keynote speaker Jeff Zwiers

Authentic communication, Professor Zwiers told us, is the “use of words and/or other meaning-carriers to share information for doing meaningful things that one person can’t do alone.” An authentic communication task has a useful and engaging purpose and contains an “information gap”—information one partner has that the other lacks. To make authentic communication happen in their classrooms, teachers must choose appropriate prompts (*Was Lincoln more interested in abolishing slavery or preserving the union? Find evidence to support both sides of the argument and evaluate each piece of evidence*) and must explicitly teach conversation skills: Rather than jumping right in with an opposing view, conversation partners are taught to begin by working together to build up one idea. Students learn to ask probing questions such as “Why do you say that?” to encourage their partners to flesh out their thoughts. Only after clarifying and building up one idea are the partners ready to take up another idea and, eventually, to evaluate and choose between them. Professor Zwiers concluded his talk by walking us through some specific teaching strategies, such as the “Stronger and Clearer Each Time” exercise, in which students respond to the same prompt several times, with a series of different partners, working to make their ideas clearer and stronger each time.

Rather than jumping right in with an opposing view, conversation partners are taught to begin by working together to build up one idea.

Jean-Michel Dissard, “The I Learn America Project: Using Personal Storytelling to Give a Voice to Young Immigrant Learners”

Our Friday keynote speaker was Jean-Michel Dissard, a critically acclaimed filmmaker who directed and produced the documentary film “I Learn America,” which tells the stories of five students at the Lafayette International High School, a New York City public school dedicated to serving newly arrived immigrant teenagers from some fifty different countries. At the International High School, students are taught that it is not a problem to have classmates from other countries; it is a privilege.



Friday keynote speaker Jean-Michel Dissard

Jean-Michel spent a year at International High School, talking and filming students who “knew who they were and were not afraid to speak about the experience of growing up in a new land.” What the film is about, he told us, is “how to make this place yours while remaining yourself.” In the film, five students describe how they strive to master English and adapt to a new country and to families they may not have seen in years, all while confronting the universal trials of adolescence. Jean-Michel is now bringing this project to schools all over the United States and to other countries. Students in New Jersey, Colorado, California, Maryland, and Boston—including two students from East Boston who accompanied Jean-Michel to the MATSOL Conference—are producing books and films that tell their own stories. 561 of these stories can be found on the *I Learn America* website, <http://ilearnamerica.com>.

It takes courage for these students to tell their stories, Jean-Michel told us, but they have no choice. The environment we are living in is not safe for immigrants, but the students feel that the louder they tell their stories, the safer they will be. They know that “if you don’t tell your own story someone else will tell it, and they will get it wrong. They remember the words of the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos: ‘When they buried us, they didn’t know we were seeds.’”

AWARD RECIPIENTS

The following awards were presented at MATSOL’s Social & Awards Ceremony on Thursday, May 5, sponsored by National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning & Educational Solutions, Inc.:

MATSOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Anne Basseggio, of the Newton Public Schools, was named MATSOL’s Teacher of the Year. This award was established to recognize excellence in the education of English Language Learners, to include successful teaching, a long-term commitment to the education of ELLs, leadership at the school, district, and/or state level, and a strong relationship with the community.



Anne Basseggio (second from left), recipient of this year’s Teacher of the Year Award, is pictured here with (from left to right) Jamie Portolese, Maureen Berardi, and Mark Nardelli

Anne was introduced by Mark Nardelli, Principal of Horace Mann School, who praised her thoughtfulness, her expertise, her collaborative spirit, her desire to continually learn new things, and the welcoming voice she offers students, some of whom have experienced great trauma. Anne wears many hats, Principal Nardelli told us, including that of social worker. "Families *trust* Anne," he said. "She is selfless, hard-working, and has a very big heart."

THE ANNE DOW AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVITY

Laurie Hartwick, of the Lawrence Public Schools, was the recipient of this year's

Anne Dow Award for Excellence and Creativity. This annual award was established in memory of Anne Dow, who was the director of ESL Programs at Harvard for over 20 years. Laurie was introduced by Tom Griffith, of the Anne Dowe Committee. She came to Lawrence in 2004, Tom told us. At Lawrence High School, where she now teaches, 83% of the students come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and 31% are English Learners. Her career is three-pronged: She is a classroom teacher, a program administrator with a cadre of 20 ESL teachers, and, more recently, an adjunct professor at Salem State and UMass Lowell and an instructor in DESE's RETELL Program. She focuses seriously on content learning, and has developed a system of classroom observation that gives attention to both content *and* language learning.



Laurie Hartwick (second from left), recipient of this year's Anne Dow Award for Excellence and Creativity, is pictured here with (from left to right) Juanita Brunelle, Tom Griffith, and Vula Roumis

LINDA SCHULMAN INNOVATION GRANTS

The Linda Schulman Innovation Awards program supports projects that promote English language learning and embody the spirit of creativity, sensitivity, and community. Grants of \$500 to \$1000 are given to fund pedagogical projects that benefit English language learners by improving their language skills or increasing their understanding of American culture.

This year's grants were awarded to the following recipients:

Molly Curren, North Attleboro Public Schools. Project title: "Seeing is Believing: A Project to Foster a Growth Mindset in English Learners" (\$1,100)

Rita DeOliveira, Sky View Middle School, Leominster. Project title: "Homework Hotline for English Learners" (\$1,000)

Holly Fleury, STEM Academy, Rogers School, Lowell. Project title: "Welcome to Our School" (\$1,000)

Sheila Hamm-Moylan, Clark School, Worcester. Project title: "My SLIFE Students are Seeds Ready to Sprout" (\$1,000)

Esther Jeong, Ninth Grade Academy, Lawrence High School. Project title: "Growing Confident Readers Through Audiobooks" (\$1,000)

Michele Leduc, Woodland Elementary School, Milford. Project title: "Using Technology to Foster Confidence in our English Learners" (\$950)

Noreen O'Brien, Billerica Middle School and High School. Project title: "Experiencing America's Early Years through Literature & Plimoth Plantation" (\$1,100) 



Recipients of this year's Linda Schulman Innovation Awards



Conference attendees check in at the check-in table



The presenter table, staffed by volunteer Zakia Sarwar and Board member Allison Rainville



MATSOL President Vula Roumis watches the Award presentations



Conference attendees celebrated MATSOL's 45th birthday at our Thursday night Social and Awards ceremony



MATSOL's Board and Staff supervise the cutting of the cake



Jane and Martin Brauer, of National Geographic/Cengage Learning & Educational Solutions, Inc., who sponsored our Thursday night MATSOL Social and Award Ceremony



Conference attendees socialize over lunch



Lunch table with DESE staff and MATSOL Board members. From left to right: David Valade (DESE), Paul Aguiar (DESE), Meta Raha (DESE), Christine Leider (MATSOL Board), Sara Niño (DESE), and Mary Hughes (MATSOL Board)



Shannon Varga, Michael Gary, and Catalina Tang, invited speakers from the Center for Promise, Boston University School of Education



Conference attendees waiting for a session to begin



Session attendees busy at work



Conference attendees peruse the Linda Schulman Award Showcase

Elections to the MATSOL Board of Directors

THE FOLLOWING SLATE OF NOMINEES WERE ELECTED TO 3-YEAR TERMS ON THE MATSOL BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT OUR ANNUAL MEETING AT 6:00PM ON MAY 31:



Sheila Caldwell, MA - ELL Coordinator,
Randolph Public Schools

Victoria Ekk, Ph.D - Principal, Early Learning
Center for North Attleboro Public Schools



Mary Hughes, Ph.D - Lecturer,
School of Education, Boston University

Christine Leider, Ph.D - Clinical Assistant Professor,
Language Education, Boston University



Kevin O' Connor, Ph.D - Director, Fram-
ingham Adult ESL Plus

Yuiko Shimazu, MA - ELL Teacher,
Lexington Public Schools



Kathy Lobo and **Rhoda Webb** have completed their terms on the Board, and were awarded plaques to commemorate their service. **Ann Feldman** resigned from the Board earlier in the year, in order to assume her present position as MATSOL's Director of Professional Development. We give our sincerest thanks to these three former Board members for their dedicated service to MATSOL over the years.



Outgoing MATSOL Board member and former MATSOL President, Kathy Lobo
with Millie Eng of the Watertown Public Schools

The following MATSOL Board members are continuing to serve: **Vula Roumis** (President), **Juanita Brunelle** (Vice President), **Melissa Latham Keh** (Treasurer), **Mary Clark** (Clerk), **Jennifer Noorjanian**, **Allison Rainville**, **Laura Shall-Leckrone**, and **Robyn Dowling-Grant**. [C](#)

An Update from MATSOL's Director of Professional Learning

Ann Feldman

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MATSOL offers a variety of professional development (“PD”) courses for teachers and administrators, including *Extending the Learning* courses, SEI Endorsement courses, and other courses that enhance instruction for English language learners. Our courses are available to school districts and individuals interested in furthering their professional learning and/or meeting State requirements for licensure. MATSOL's courses are developed by expert educators with experience in Massachusetts schools, and informed by feedback from educators and school districts across the Commonwealth.

In collaboration with the Office of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement (OELAA) at DESE, MATSOL is currently offering four facilitator-training sessions in the *Next Generation ESL Model Curriculum*. This five-day institute prepares participants to effectively and collaboratively design Next Generation ESL curriculum units within the context of the *Massachusetts definition of the focus of ESL Instruction*. There are still slots available for courses starting in July; for more information see <http://www.matsol.org/fact-course>.

In addition, at the end of June, we are also offering *Six Standards Coaching* courses for teacher/coaching teams, including *Integrating SEI Into Literacy*

MATSOL's courses are developed by expert educators with experience in Massachusetts schools, and informed by feedback from educators and school districts across the Commonwealth.

and Math Coaching. These courses focus on the long-term integration of sheltered instruction into core instruction and the role of the coach in supporting, expanding, and sustaining effective standards-aligned SEI practices in diverse classrooms that include English language learners.

Please check our website for offerings, pricing, and locations.

Continuing our new Open Enrollment courses during the Fall of 2017, MATSOL will be scheduling several courses in various regions across the Commonwealth. These courses are open to individual educators who want to continue their professional learning and receive PDPs and/or graduate credit. Please check our website for offerings, pricing, and locations at www.matsol.org/courses. Among the offerings you will find the following for ESL and SEI educators and district/school administrators:

- EL-101: Introduction to English Language Development Standards in Massachusetts
- EL-103: Supporting English Learners in Specialty Subjects and Support Services
- EL-104: Early English Language development for PK – K Teachers
- EL-105: Academic Conversations in Classrooms with English Language Learners
- EL-106: Academic English for English Learners in Math and Science
- EL-107: Massachusetts Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Smart Card for School/District Administrators
- EL-108: Next Generation ESL Model Curriculum Units (MCUs): A Practical Orientation for ESL Teachers
- RE-600: Massachusetts Sheltered English Immersion Teacher Endorsement Course
- RE-601: Massachusetts Sheltered English Immersion Administrator Endorsement Course 

Advocacy Update

Helen Solórzano

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LOOK BILL

On May 22, the **LOOK Bill** — **H.3705/S.2070** An Act for Language Opportunity for our Kids, filed by Senator Sal DiDomenico and Representative Jeffrey Sanchez. The bill passed the House by a vote of 151-2, and passed unanimously in the Senate. At press time, the bill had been assigned to conference committee to reconcile the two versions.

The LOOK Bill removes the restrictive mandate requiring Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) as the “one size fits all” default English Language Learner (ELL) program model and gives school districts the flexibility to establish programs based on the educational needs of their students. We are grateful to the Speaker and House leadership for prioritizing these important changes so early in the legislative session, and to House legislative champions Representative Jeffery Sanchez and Representative Tony Cabral for taking such a strong stance on this critical issue.

This legislation is supported by the Language Opportunity Coalition, with representatives from MATSOL, the Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education (MABE), the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (MaFLA), the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA), and others. The coalition was founded in the summer of 2014 with the goal of increasing opportunities for learning English, developing native/heritage language, and learning foreign languages, in order to ensure that all learners have equal access to a high-quality education and professional opportunities.



Phyllis Hardy (left) and Helen Solórzano (right), who represent MABE and MATSOL on the Language Opportunity Coalition

SEAL OF BILITERACY PILOT PROJECT

The Language Opportunity Coalition is celebrating the presentation of over 700 Seal of Biliteracy Awards presented to students across the Commonwealth this spring. Although data are still being collected, the number of participating districts as well as the number of Seals awarded have more than doubled since last year.

Districts participating in the 2016-17 pilot include Andover, Boston, Chelsea, Falmouth, Framingham, Melrose, Newton, Norwood, Pioneer Valley Regional School, Pittsfield, Salem State University, Wayland, Westwood, Wilmington, and Winchester. Awards were made at the following levels:

- 106 Platinum Seal awards (Advanced Low)
- 250 Gold Seal awards (Intermediate High)
- 222 Silver Seal awards (Intermediate-Mid)
- 129 Biliteracy Attainment awards (Intermediate-Low)

The Seal of Biliteracy Pilot Project is designed to be inclusive of many language acquisition programs and languages. Students receiving awards were from World Language, Two-Way Immersion, Transitional Bilingual Education, and Spanish for Spanish Speakers programs. Languages represented in the pilot included Spanish, French, Italian, Mandarin, German, Bengali, Vietnamese, Hebrew, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, Greek, Patois, Thai, and Polish.

Districts or schools that are interested in joining the pilot project should visit the [Language Opportunity](#) website and join the Seal Workgroup (a Google group). The group meets monthly online to share and develop implementation resources.

The Language Opportunity Coalition was named a finalist for the [Mass Nonprofit Networks Excellence in Collaboration Award](#) for their collaborative work on the Seal of Biliteracy pilot project .

Languages represented in the [Seal of Biliteracy] pilot included Spanish, French, Italian, Mandarin, German, Bengali, Vietnamese, Hebrew, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, Greek, Patois, Thai, and Polish.

A Report from the MATSOL English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)

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 nearly 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.

During the 2015–16 school year, MELLC members engaged in important strategic planning for our leadership group. With the help of an organizational consultant, we agreed on the following set of goals for our group:

- To stay informed, sharing policy and regulation updates, new ideas, and research from professionals
- To give and receive support, through leadership training, promoting best practices, and sharing challenges and successes in our districts
- To advocate for our English learners and their teachers/administrators and families

The following is a sampling of topics we discussed during 2016–17:

NEXT GENERATION ESL CURRICULUM PROJECT (NGESL)

This year's MELLC meetings included work on the new NGESL curriculum project

with its resource guide and model curriculum units (MA DESE, 2016).

Our December meeting focused on how leaders in the state are implementing the NGESL in their districts. Sections of the Resource Guide were discussed in depth, and groups came up with slogans and elevator speeches. We agreed that the aspects of the NGESL that should be emphasized in our schools and districts are

- ESL and content teachers working together in the education of our English learners
- Student agency, voice, and identity
- An assets-based approach to this population, affirming the valuable resources that they bring with them
- A focus on equity
- Making content standards accessible for our students

We heard a panel discussion by district directors/coordinators and teachers, including representatives from Brockton, Burlington, Holyoke, Northborough/Southborough, Fitchburg, and Martha's Vineyard, who have rolled out the initiative in their local venues. They spoke of the success their teachers have had in implementing the components of Understanding by Design and having a language focus goal. All agreed on the importance of encouraging content and language teacher to work side-by-side to "figure it out."

Boni-esther Enquist, a member of MATSOL's Professional Development Team, presented genre-based ESL units which take into account ESL skills and knowledge and focus on topics such as landmarks, human feats, world records and inventions, and tools, which motivate students at different grade and proficiency levels. Language functions associated with these topics were emphasized at the word, sentence, and discourse levels, along with a focus on academic conversation. All Boni-esther's work with districts is based on the NGESL's curriculum tools and resources.

This year's MELLC meeting included work on the NGESL curriculum with its resource guide and model curriculum units.

ADVOCACY AND STUDENT SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

Updates on the LOOK bill and Seal of Biliteracy (MATSOL, n.d.) were shared at

each of our meetings. (See the report on pg. 16 of this issue.)

Given the recent concerns of students and families in immigrant communities across the state, we welcomed the description by our Framingham ELL director of Framingham's "Know Your Rights" campaign, which aimed to assuage fear and confusion in that city. School-based outreach groups are collaborating with local immigration agencies and other community organizations to provide information to families.

School-based outreach groups are collaborating with local immigration agencies and other community organizations to provide information to families.

Deb Zacarian, a nationally renowned expert in educational policy, programs, and professional development, presented information for educators and administrators entitled, "Teaching Students Living with Trauma, Violence and Chronic Stress Using an Assets-Based Approach." She recommends that teachers (1) get to know their English learners and teach to their strengths, (2) empower students through acknowledging their voices, (3) explicitly teach the social and emotional communicative skills needed for collaborative work and interaction, and (4) foster family/guardian engagement.

UPDATES ON ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Our members have appreciated updates on guidance shared with us by staff from DESE's Office of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement (OELAAA). Sara Niño, who is working on the English learners with disabilities guidance, shared the following very helpful resources:

Specific Learning Disability Eligibility Checklist (MA DESE, 2017)

Inclusive Practice Tool (MA DESE, Sept. 2016)

MTSS Quick Reference Guide: Student Support Teams (MA DESE, 2006)

Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities (US Dept. of Education, 2015)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We'd like to acknowledge the contributions of the following professionals who have given their time and expertise to making these MELLC meetings so engaging and relevant for our ELE instructional leaders during the 2016 to 2017 school year:

District English Learner Education Leaders (Presenters): **Bonnie Baer-Simahk, Vula Roumis, Kerri Lamprey, Rhoda Webb, Leah Palmer, Mindy Paulo, Gen Grieci**

District Teachers and Coaches: **Rachel Sellers, Diana Yousfi, Barbara Page, Manes Pierre, Sejin Choi, Jennifer LaBollita, Rebecca Daigle, Joseph Santiago, Nicoleta Filimon, Christi Cartwright**

Massachusetts DESE and OELAAA Staff: **Sibel Hughes, David Valade, Sara Niño**

Other Professionals in the Field of English Learner Education: **Debbie Zacarian**

MELLC Steering Committee: **Kathy Lange-Madden, Carla Bruzzese, Yvonne Endara, Kerri Lamprey, Mindy Paulo**

MATSOL Staff and Professional Development Team: **Anne Dolan, Boni-esther Enquist, Teresa Kodis, Helen Solórzano** 

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

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

The 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
- The Community College ESL Faculty Network
- English Language Educators of the Cape & Islands

SIG membership is open to all 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 MATSOL's SIGs:

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL FACULTY NETWORK

The Steering Committee of the Community College ESL Faculty Network met regularly throughout Academic Year 2016-17. We have added two new members: Jennifer Nourse, from Mass Bay Community College, and Anne Shull, from Quinsigamond Community College. Professor Nourse hosted our October 2016 Mini-Conference at Mass Bay Community College, and Anne Shull was very helpful in the organizing of this event.

We held our first annual Community College Mini-Conference in Fall 2016, and we plan to hold our second annual Mini-Conference in Fall 2017. We have been

in touch with representatives of the Private Language Schools SIG in hopes of coordinating some of our activities.

We hosted a Workshop on Friday, June 2, at the 2017 MATSOL Conference, where we presented the results of our annual survey of community college programs and services in Massachusetts. We thank all of you who contributed to this survey by responding to our questionnaire. Additional information will be provided in the Fall/Winter issue of *Currents*.



Community College Network members Madhu Sharma and Eileen Kelley get together at MATSOL's Annual Conference

The following is a list of our Community College Steering Committee members, with their college affiliations and a listing of the community colleges for which they serve as contact:

- **Darlene Furlock (Middlesex Community College)** Middlesex, Northern Essex, North Shore
- **Eileen Kelley (Holyoke Community College)** Holyoke, Greenfield, Springfield Tech
- **Bruce Riles (Cape Cod Community College)** Cape Cod, Bristol, Massasoit
- **Madhu Sharma (Mt. Wachusett Community College)** Mt. Wachusett, Berkshire
- **Jennifer Nourse (Mass Bay Community College)** Mass Bay, Bunker Hill
- **Anne Shull (Quinsigamond Community College)** Quinsigamond, Roxbury
- **Juanita Brunelle**, liaison to the MATSOL Board

For information about the Community College ESL Faculty Network, please write Juanita Brunelle, at JBrunelle@matsol.org.

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

ELE-C&I is a regional organization of PreK-12 ELL educators on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, including the following school districts: Barnstable, Bourne, Dennis-Yarmouth, Falmouth, Martha's Vineyard, Mashpee, Monomoy, Nantucket, Nauset Regional, Provincetown, and Sandwich. We meet four times a year on Cape Cod. Our goal is to provide ongoing support to EL educators in our area as they implement state and federal mandates for English learner education.

ELE-C&I is a regional organization of PreK-12 ELL educators on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

At our March meeting, Boni-esther Enquist, MATSOL Consultant and Trainer, presented her work with the New Bedford Public Schools on developing genre-based ESL curriculum units that work both horizontally and vertically. This meeting was held at Cape Cod Collaborative in Osterville, MA. At our May meeting, we continued the work we had begun in March, held Constructive Conversations on topics including ESL Curriculum planning and SLIFE students, and made plans for the future of the Network.

For further information please contact either member of our Steering committee: Tricia Leon Finan (leonfinp@dy-regional.k12.ma.us) or Christine Nicholson (cnicholson@falmouth.k12.ma.us).

LOW-INCIDENCE PROGRAMS (LI)

Our format changed this year, when we shortened our meeting time to 90 minutes and teamed up with the SLIFE SIG to allow our members to attend both meetings without missing too much time out of district.

Our main focus this year has been on curriculum. Ann Feldman, MATSOL's Director of Professional Learning, kicked off the year with an update on RETELL, the LOOK Bill, MA DESE's ESL Model Curriculum Units (MCUs), the 2016 Guidance Document, and revised guidelines for Coordinated Program Reviews (CPRs). In December, our group took a look at the Curriculum Guidance Guide and began examining the ESL MCUs through a Low Incidence lens. During the Spring, we dove more deeply into curriculum: In March, we explored each MCU in a

Gallery walk and members selected a unit to pilot in their classrooms. In April, we shared how our piloted units had gone, and in May, we discussed the possibility of amplifying existing units to include WIDA Levels 4 & 5 and/or working together to create new units.

The LI Planning Committee met at the MATSOL Conference to look over our end-of-year surveys and determine the focus of the group's work in 2017-2018.

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PRIVATE LANGUAGE SCHOOLS (PLS)

TESOL in Seattle was an exciting time, with many of our PLS members presenting and attending sessions. We always enjoy seeing each other, even if it's on the other side of the country! We were tremendously proud of MATSOL's own Kathy Lobo, who served as Associate Chair for the Conference and was a member of the Conferences Professional Council that put the conference together. For many PLS members, the next stop was the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) in Los Angeles at the end of May. Many of our members who were not at NAFSA attended the MATSOL conference in Framingham.

On March 6, we held an evening event at Education First (EF) headquarters, where we heard a wonderful presentation by Beata Schmid, EF's Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, on creating and supplementing more dynamic lessons. It was a great night! We are planning another evening speaker for September; keep your eyes open for date and location, coming soon. We are also pleased to announce that we will be holding our second annual fall Mini-Conference on November 11. Call for Proposals opened at the end of June.

For information about the Private Language Schools SIG, please write to Joy MacFarland at joymacfarland@gmail.com.

STUDENTS WITH LIMITED/INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION (SLIFE)

MATSOL's SLIFE SIG met on Monday, April 10, in Shrewsbury's Town Hall, and Monday, May 8, from 10:30 AM–12 PM at Milford High School. At our April meeting, facilitated by Kathy Lange-Madden, attendees worked in small groups to unpack the SLIFE Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) in the 2015 SLIFE Guidance Document. Afterward, David Valade, DESE Urban ELL Coordinator, and Sara Niño, DESE's EL-SWD Coordinator, gave a presentation on the SLIFE Numeracy Protocol within the Expansion Project Charter (MA DESE, forthcoming).

Our May meeting was facilitated by Ann Feldman, who invited Anne Bartoszuk, from Benchmark Education, to talk about resources the company offers to support SLIFE teachers and students, including *RIGOR (Reading Instructional Goals for Older Readers)* and *Advance All*, a series of leveled texts that align with Common Core State Standards.

For information about MATSOL's SLIFE SIG, please contact Jenn Noorjanian at jnoorjanian@matsol.org. Meeting dates for school year 2017-18 will be announced on our website: https://matsol.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=389:slife-sig&catid=57:member-groups&Itemid=316.

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TEACHER EDUCATORS

The Teacher Educator SIG met on January 23 and February 27 to discuss issues that impact teacher educators, teachers, and, ultimately, English learners. We also conducted a panel at the MATSOL Conference to collect feedback and ideas from our members. Our April 3 meeting of the Teacher Educator SIG was canceled due to a looming deadline for an NPD grant proposal to improve instruction for English Learners.

During this academic year, we have focused on two broad teacher-preparation issues: ESL licensure and SEI endorsement. Upcoming action items are (1) to draft an opinion piece related to ESL teacher licensure, (2) to find a way to share what teacher educators are doing to ensure that the stand-alone SEI endorsement course prepares pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach English learners effectively, and (3) to develop a survey to identify what teacher educators are doing to make the SEI endorsement course meaningful to pre-service teachers. **C**

During this academic year, we have focused on two broad teacher-preparation issues: ESL licensure and SEI endorsement.

For further information about the Teacher Educator SIG, please write to teacheredsig@matsol.org.



Members of the Teacher Educators SIG get together at MATSOL's Annual Conference.

Join a MATSOL Sub-committee or Task Force

For the latest listing of opportunities, please go to our “Get Involved” webpage at <http://www.matsol.org/get-involved-with-matsol>.

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, PreK-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 publish stories from students—about their adjustment to life in New England and their experiences learning English in our English-language programs and 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 our submission guidelines, see <http://www.matsol.org/matsol-currents> or write to the editor, Mary Clark, at mclark@matsol.org.

An Update on Adult Basic Education (ABE)

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The Adult Basic Education (ABE) system of Massachusetts, under the direction of the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)/Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), provides classes in ESOL, basic literacy, high school equivalency preparation, math, citizenship, college and career readiness, and other areas for adult learners throughout the state.

Despite the need for increased adult basic education services, State funding for ABE continues to decline, both in appropriated dollars and even further in inflation-adjusted dollars. Here's where matters stand for the coming fiscal year (FY18): The Governor began the budget process by proposing a figure of \$28.4 million, which is lower than our final FY17 appropriation of \$28.824 million. The Legislature was more generous: The House proposed \$28.9 million, the Senate raised that figure to \$30.6 million, and the joint Conference Committee then settled on a compromise figure of \$29.63 million, which was passed by both houses of the Legislature.

Unfortunately, on July 17, Governor Baker announced vetoes of some budget items, and the ABE line item (#7035-0002) was among them. His veto, if allowed to stand, would set the appropriation for FY18 at \$28,782,377. That's not only lower than the Legislature's figure, but also lower than our FY17 final appropriation of \$28.824 million. The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) is asking supporters to urge their legislators to override the Governor's veto and restore the figure of \$29.63 million. For the latest information on this process, along with information about when and how to contact your legislators, please go to the MCAE website, <http://www.mcae.net> and sign up to receive MCAE News and Alerts.

On the Federal level, there is concern that the budget that emerges from the new administration and from Congress may include sizeable cuts in federal funding for adult basic education. MCAE is collaborating with national advocacy groups working to ensure that federal funding for ABE is maintained at least at current levels. 

The Newcomer Project: Mentoring and Peer Leadership at Fiske Elementary School

Catherine Glennon Murphy

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Newcomers enter our schools with rich cultural and linguistic experiences from their home countries, but they also bring anxiety and culture shock. As

ELL teachers, we are responsible for these vulnerable students, but we also need the help of classroom teachers and other staff. At Lexington's Fiske Elementary School, we are employing staff as mentors and students as peer leaders to help our newcomers transition into our school culture.

Our newcomer program got its start four years ago, when two fourth-grade students arrived at our school from Israel with an English proficiency of WIDA Level 1. They were completely lost and unable to cope with the robust curricular demands of 4th grade. I had given them my treasured *Heinle Picture Dictionary*, and access to *Google Translate*, but these supports were not sufficient. The girls were feeling isolated, and I could see that they were very frustrated.

I therefore appealed to the math coach at our school, who readily accepted my request to set up a once-a-week lunch meeting with my students. During these lunches they played card games, shared words from their native language, and learned some academic language. The language demands were very low, and they were allowed to speak with one another in their native language, Hebrew. They looked forward to these weekly lunches and, with this extra support, they gradually became more comfortable at our school. The math coach described these lunch meetings as the most treasured part of her week, as she could see that she was truly making a difference. I could see that I had found an untapped resource and decided to set up similar relationships for every newcomer that came to our school.

I reached out to other teachers, who readily accepted the challenge to work

once a week with an assigned newcomer on a volunteer basis. In this initial year we had five mentors working regularly with our newcomers. Kari Owen, a 3rd grade teacher who was one of our first mentors, described her mentoring sessions as “a chance for the students to practice their English without being judged, without people giggling.” During this first year, the program was very informal, in that there were no logs and no training for the mentors; they simply met with their mentees once a week whenever they could find time during the school day. However, I could see that this was the beginning of something special, and I set to work to plan a more extensive mentoring program for the following year.

Last spring, I received a grant from the Lexington Education Foundation (LEF) to set up a formal Newcomer Mentoring Project at our school. In the program’s first year, every newcomer who arrived

at our doorstep was offered a staff mentor and an iPad fully loaded with apps to assist with language acquisition. Mentors received a small stipend, for which they were required to meet with their newcomers weekly and attend three community meetings. We created a mentoring committee to plan the community meetings and other events. Newcomer families, mentors, and administrators were invited to the community meetings to celebrate the work of the mentors. This was also a great opportunity to offer helpful information to our families about town resources.

Now in our second LEF-funded year, the “Newcomer Project” has grown and added an important new piece: the peer leader. Peer leaders, who are nominated by classroom teachers, are often ELLs who were once newcomers themselves. These peer leaders understand the vital need for companionship in the first few months after arrival in a new country. They provide our newcomers with friendship at a much-needed time in their lives.

As ELL teachers, we see the effects of culture shock in students who have just arrived in a new country. Our mentoring program offers each newcomer a personal ambassador in the school. This mentor, or ambassador, offers one dedicated session each week when the newcomer can play, ask questions, and

Now in our second LEF-funded year, the "Newcomer Project" has grown and added an important new piece: the peer leader.

know that they are supported. Surveys of our mentors, classroom teachers, and newcomers all demonstrate that this program has been well received. At a recent community meeting, Shikma Kinsbruner, the mother of two newcomers who have now become peer leaders, spoke to a group of families and teachers who had gathered in the school gym on a snowy March morning before school. She described her experience bringing two young children from their home in Israel when they spoke very little English. She told the newcomer families how the mentoring program had helped to ease her children's transition into American culture. "[Without the mentoring program] I'm sure they would know less English," said Kinsbruner in an interview with the local newspaper. "They're having fun learning. It's not learning, it's a different experience. It's fun." Knowing that her son is now a peer leader made her proud that he is giving back and learning important leadership skills himself. It is an inspiration to see our returning newcomers become peer leaders. These students know the value of a personal ambassador on the very first day of school in a new country.

Knowing that her son is now a peer leader made her proud that he is giving back and learning important leadership skills.

Our district is now in the process of analyzing the elementary mentoring programs at each of our schools and collaborating across schools to maximize the benefits for all our students. **C**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Glennon Murphy is an ELL specialist at Fiske Elementary School in Lexington, MA. She earned her B.A. at Providence College and her M.A.T. in English from Boston College and did extensive course work in Second Language Acquisition at Simmons College and B.U. She taught ESL at Framingham High School for ten years. After leaving FHS to raise her family, she taught part-time at Bunker Hill Community College and SCALE in Somerville, MA. In Lexington she taught the SEI course through the RETELL initiative for three years and continues her work in teacher training by teaching a course called "Teaching with Academic Conversations," developed by Sara Hamerla. She is participating in a district-wide study group in Lexington to promote collaboration and mentoring in the Lexington Public Schools. If you have a mentoring program in your elementary school, she would like to hear about it!

Linda Schulman Grant Helps to Promote Reading and Family Engagement in the Lunenburg Public Schools

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A fifth-grade English Learner arrives in our school during the middle of the academic year, after missing a year of school back home. A first-grader born to an immigrant family in the U.S. loves learning about animals, but struggles with reading. The family doesn't speak English and has had limited schooling in their home language. A third-grader fascinated with science is nearly ready to exit the ESL program, but Mom's commute to her work as a health care professional makes it challenging to spend as much time reading together as she'd like. Four siblings sharing one old laptop at home try to help each other with homework. A seventh-grader enjoys reading fiction but feels self-conscious about classmates seeing her with books at her independent reading level. A second-grader "hates reading" but enjoys listening to stories. Dad says he'd like to help, but feels his English is "not good enough." How can the ESL teacher provide enough books, and the "right" books, to satisfy all these readers and their English Learner classmates?

Welcome to the unique challenges and opportunities of the low-incidence ESL program! One challenge is providing appropriate supplemental reading materials for learners across a span of grades and representing the full range of English development levels, all while staying within the budget. Another challenge is responding to English Learner parents who express a desire to become more involved with and informed about their child's learning. In our low-incidence district, we were looking for ways to increase reading opportunities for our English Learners while engaging parents in their child's

language acquisition process. At the same time, we wanted to find more effective ways to extend reading and learning beyond the classroom and beyond the school calendar.

For support in meeting these challenges and creating more opportunities for our students and their families, we applied for a Linda Schulman Innovation Grant. Our goal was to empower our English Learners by providing them with access to more materials and to support parental engagement. After an extensive review of available materials and resources, we requested funding for an A-Z subscription for our ELs, along with a set of iPads to make online reading more accessible outside of the school day. We chose A-Z for its excellent reputation, its research-based programs, and its alignment with WIDA, TESOL, and CCSS standards. (See our review of A-Z on pg. 65 of this issue.)

We chose A-Z for its excellent reputation, its research-based programs, and its alignment with WIDA, TESOL, and CCSS standards.

At the 2016 MATSOL conference, our ESL program was awarded a Linda Schulman Grant for our project, entitled *Empowering English Language Learners for Academic Success*. The grant committee recognized our project as “innovative,” because it encourages parents to interact with their children around online reading activities, in both English and the home language. Parents are given their own login credentials to view their children’s activity and performance. This format also encourages siblings to interact with one another around shared interests while building academic language. The Linda Schulman Grant facilitated the purchase of an ESL classroom subscription for our low-incidence district as well as several iPads for our ELs to use both at school and at home.

We began by inviting our EL parents to an informational meeting to introduce the program and provide a hands-on demo. Our parent population is as varied as our ELs. Most of them are literate in their home language, and most will attempt at least a greeting in English while visiting our schools. Some are highly accomplished professionals who are literate in multiple languages, but some have achieved no more than a basic education in their home country and make limited use of English in their workplaces.

Despite the great variation in our parent population, the meeting was well-attended and the program was well-received. Parents were enthusiastic about the variety of topics, the range of reading levels, the audio component, and the quizzes. They also looked forward to having parent login credentials to monitor their children's reading. After the meeting, we emailed the parents their login credentials, thanked those who had attended, and provided instructions for those who had not been able to attend. We suggested that the students should read about fifteen minutes a day, and we encouraged the parents to converse with their children in their home language about their reading. Because the site is user-friendly, it was not necessary to provide extensive training. A few parents had difficulty logging in, but we were able to resolve the issues fairly easily via email. Whenever we met with parents we shared their children's individual reports.

Prior to launching the program, we also met with classroom teachers in order to get information about reading levels and topics related to current content instruction. We provided the teachers with their students' login credentials so that they could monitor online reading during "free time." Each week we share the results of the activity reports, to keep the classroom teachers informed about our mutual ELs and their reading activities.

When we checked with the parents to see how things were going, some parents reported reading with their children, while others said they just check in. A few students are not yet actively participating. One parent does not endorse online reading for the child because of the family's choice to limit screen time. Another family has a busy and unpredictable after-school schedule, so they prioritize required homework over optional reading.

Student response has been very positive. Although most of their reading is in English, the children were also excited about being able to read and listen to books in their home language. They found that the audio component made the reading easier to understand. We appreciated how quickly even our youngest ELs became comfortable with the user-friendly app! As ESL teachers, we value the weekly summaries of student activity, which include detailed individual reports, with historical data about what books the student has read, along with test scores and an analysis of performance on each skill. This data allows us to have quick informal conversations with students about their reading.

The program has already had a positive impact. Students demonstrate more enthusiasm about "extra" reading, and their classroom teachers have noticed progress for their ELs. Sharing the weekly reports provides a useful piece of data

to guide instruction. In one classroom with two ELs who were both reluctant readers, we brainstormed with the classroom teachers and set up a reading challenge which dramatically increased the amount of outside reading for these two students.

Our English Learner parents are also noticing and appreciating the benefits. They like having their own login credentials to monitor their children's activity and progress. Following are some of their comments, collected in a parent survey:

I like the different levels of readings and the topics of the books. It is a great choice for free time around the house. Thank you! We like that we could have it in N---'s Amazon tablet too. He reads it at night. -Parent of a 5th grader

He has access to books from home and I can check his progress. -Parent of a 6th grader

Eu gosto do programa A-Z por que nele meu filho pode ter contato com a lingua inglesa falada y escrita e isso e esta ajudando na proeficiencia e habilidades para aprender o novo idioma. [I like the A-Z program because my son can have contact with the spoken and written English language, and this is helping with proficiency and skills to learn the new language.] -Parent of a 4th grader

For me as a parent, I just want to say that the program was great and it helps my children very much. -Parent of 5th, 6th, 9th & 10th graders

I like the program because it has books with varied themes and helps my daughter to have a routine and a habit of reading and increasing her vocabulary. -Parent of a 2nd grader

A---'s use of A-Z reading has been only a short period at home because I forgot about the program. Although it has only been a short period of use, I see great potential in the program. A--- likes the setup and contents of the A-Z reading. I would definitely approve of the use of the program this summer. -Parent of a 1st grader 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Linda Schulman Grant Helps Adult Students Learn Using Tablets

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Students at the Asian American Civic Association (AACA), a multi-service center located in Boston's

Chinatown, live very busy lives. AACA serves immigrant adults with a variety of services, including ESL. While more than half of the students are from China, there are also students from many poor and troubled parts of the world. In addition to their English classes, many of them work long hours in low-paying jobs and have family responsibilities, as well. They could benefit from more English instruction, but their time is precious and limited. With help from a 2016 Linda Schulman Innovation Grant, I have tried to make more productive use of the time they have available. I used the grant funding to purchase eighteen nine-inch Android tablets with attached keyboards, for about \$60 each. The tablets allowed me to make more efficient use of class time and to supplement class activities with multimedia apps that the students could use to study on their own, outside of class.

While most of my students have smart phones, there were a variety of issues with depending on them for class-time use. Some students don't have smart phones, some don't get good coverage in our location, and then there is the concern of costly data usage. There were several advantages to having all the students use tablets. First, the tablets could all be connected to our AACA wi-fi network, so there was no expense for in-class use, and the students could also use them on their home networks, if available. Furthermore, since everyone was using the same operating system, we didn't lose valuable time dealing with the little quirks of disparate operating systems.

The tablets were loaned to the students for the entire twelve-week term. They each signed an acceptable-use policy and pledged to bring their tablet to class charged. Although these were not high-end machines, they were good

enough for the tasks at hand. The size of the tablet was small enough that transporting them was not a big issue and, in the classroom, they were just big enough for students to pair together for some activities.

Word processing was an important component; it makes sense for students to be able to write and edit their assignments electronically versus using pen and paper. And because the students all used Google Docs for their writing assignments, they were able to share their writing with others and edit their writing online. Although I was concerned that a lack of digital literacy might be a hang-up for some students, that concern proved to be unfounded. After a few lessons in class, the students were all comfortable with the tablets and with the procedure for working collaboratively on assignments—valuable 21st century skills! Students who had previously used email and smartphones appreciated the larger screen size of the tablets and the ease of collaboration on Google Docs.

Because all the students now had tablets, we were also able to make use of a student-response system (SRS). The particular system we used was Socrative, a free web-based SRS. Along with other interactive activities, Socrative allows the creation of tests that can be administered in class with immediate feedback and grading. With this resource, I was able to do formative assessments in grammar or vocabulary to guide planning for future lessons. And my students really appreciated the immediate feedback.

Students come with a variety of skill levels. Some are very weak in spelling but have good verbal skills. Others may write well, but have poor pronunciation that makes their speech difficult to understand. There is a wealth of free apps for ESL students, and I was able to differentiate instruction by introducing apps that addressed particular issues. All the students benefited from my short in-class demonstrations, but those for whom these apps were particularly germane were encouraged to use them outside of class, as well. I found many wonderful web-based ESL grammar lessons that students could use for review outside of class; many have short review quizzes to give the students immediate feedback.

I introduced some assignments that demonstrated the power of technology, along with others that helped to develop higher-order thinking skills. In one example, the students viewed a children's story presented in three ways: YouTube, e-book, and traditional book format. They worked collaboratively to write their opinions on the different formats and to answer the question, "What

is the best format for children of the 21st Century to 'read' stories?" This activity addresses a College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard for writing: *crafting arguments, writing to inform and explain, and fashioning narratives about real or imagined experiences.*

As with all new things, there were some hurdles to surmount. It took many hours to set up the tablets the first time, and a lot of time to set up technology lessons in manageable chunks. (Things were much easier the second time through.) The students sometimes forgot to charge their tablets, but this was not a big issue since most class activities were collaborative. And there were some complaints from students that the tablets are heavy (not really true), that the keyboard is small (better than a smartphone), and that the tablet is slow (maybe true). Some students had concerns about damaging the tablets, and, in fact, a few did get broken over the twenty-four weeks of the two terms. In general, however, the students appreciated the chance to use tablets: "I think it is better than a computer and a cell phone," one said, "Using the tablet in class diversifies studying ways," "Tablets help students learn faster," said others. (Though one student, on a more cautionary note, said "But I think we should not ignore traditional ways of learning.")

As for me, I think the benefits were well worth the trouble. After the first few weeks, the tablets became a very valuable tool for my students in their journey toward proficiency in English. The future looks bright for the use of tablets. In fact, with the introductions of e-texts, tablets may soon become a necessity in the adult ESL setting. It would be hard for me to go back to teaching without tablets! **C**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Freeley was a technology teacher in the Boston Public Schools for more than thirty years. After retirement he earned a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of Massachusetts at Boston. He has taught at AACA for the past seven years.

A Case for Content-based ESL Instruction

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Content-based ESL is a curriculum and instructional model designed to address the development of language proficiency in the context of a theme or content area. This approach is commonly used in adult and professional programs, but is just emerging in K-12 schools. Content-based ESL is not intended to take the place of subject-matter instruction; rather it aims to develop the academic *language* that is needed for subject-matter instruction (Brown, 2004). It can be used at any level of English language development. Content-based ESL is considered to be a more natural way to facilitate language development because instruction corresponds to the way that many of us originally learned our first language.

Integrating language instruction with academic content was particularly appropriate for my students Rosa and Jean. Both born overseas, they came to the United States as young children and attended Boston Public Schools starting in 5th grade for Rosa and 1st grade for Jean. In September 2016, both had an English proficiency level of ELD 3 based on their ACCESS scores and as observed by their ESL and general education teachers. As their ESL teacher, I was concerned about the very modest progress they had made in all these years; they were starting their freshman year below grade level in reading and writing, though they communicated fluently with peers in informal settings. Determined to accelerate their language learning, I decided to couch their English classes in a social studies framework so as to help them acquire some of the language they would need in their content classes (Pohan & Kelly, 2004). Knowing that both of them would have to take the citizenship test at some point, I felt that a content-based ESL curriculum focusing on social studies would address that need, as well, while also responding to their personal desire to learn about their adopted country and its past.

In the fall, the two students completed "Afrika Lives," a combined English

Language Arts and Social Studies unit that covers the arts and culture of ancient Africa, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and the Age of Colonization. Learning about the African Diaspora, the colonial past, and the history of US immigration served as a foundation for building their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

In my content-based ESL classes, I do not purport to know and teach US History; the teaching of content still resides with the social studies teacher. My focus is on teaching the *language* necessary to access social studies content. Social studies texts can be incomprehensible to ELLs because of the technical vocabulary, the frequent use of pronouns, and the very complex sentences, many of them written in passive voice. Because the text we used had a high cognitive demand, I did not expect Rosa and Jean to understand every word or phrase. They underlined unfamiliar vocabulary, rephrased sentences, and wrote reflections to communicate their understanding of the text. They learned to locate explicit information, re-read to verify comprehension, and ask questions. Exposure to authentic content area text was tremendously helpful to their language learning and acquisition of academic skills. As Jean put it, "It is a better way to practice my reading and learning words that I did not know before. I am learning different ways of saying things. If a word comes up, you go on the board and explain so I know what it is. I am learning ways to sound professional in English."

Social studies texts can be incomprehensible to ELLs because of the technical vocabulary, the frequent use of pronouns, and the very complex sentences, many of them written in passive voice.

In addition to helping with academic language, content-based ESL also offers a forum to process personal perspectives. Rosa and Jean sometimes took a unique point of view on critical concepts that we encountered in the text. For example, when I asked them to complete the sentence *All men are created _____*, Jean replied, "by God" and quickly added, "I don't want to be inappropriate. Is it okay to say 'by their mom and dad'?" Rosa promptly added, "by DNA...gene cells!" Rosa and Jean's responses reflect their cultural background, which is different from that of fully socialized members of American society. When I volunteered "equal" to complete the sentence, Rosa and Jean's emphatic response was "That is a lie!" Rosa went on to explain,

“Everyone thought democracy was good, but a lot of people are left out of the system.” This opportunity to discuss serious academic material has allowed them to practice risk-taking, express their own opinions, and engage more fully and deeply with academic content.

Through content-based ESL, Rosa and Jean are gaining greater understanding, widening their perspectives, and expanding their language. Rosa described our content-based ESL class as “a good way to understand history and how it was a built a long time ago. Certain events that happened a long time ago are related to what is going on right now.” Each time I present them with authentic text, I am reminded of the importance of language development to their academic success. Each content area has its own special vocabulary, syntax, and discourse features. Content-based ESL is a good way to gradually introduce ELLs to the language that they will need to navigate in grade-level academic courses. 

Exposure to authentic content-area text was tremendously helpful to [my students'] language learning and acquisition of academic skills.

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Arlene Hijara learned English as her fourth language and immigrated to the US in 1994. She was introduced to content-based ESL when she lived and worked in Southeast Asian refugee camps teaching ESL to Laotian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and AmerAsian young adults and children. She later served in the UNHCR Project as an ESL Teacher Trainer. She now has a dual role as Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf in Boston Public Schools and ESL Teacher at Boston Arts Academy.

Teaching Mathematical Literacy to English Language Learners

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Mathematical literacy is “the vocabulary, symbols, syntax, and semantic structure of mathematical language which can often be challenging for all mathematics students, and even more so for English Language Learners. The current curricular movements in education put a great deal of emphasis on having children explore, explain, reflect, reason, and communicate.” (Kersaint, Thompson, & Petkova, 2013, p. 91). When teaching mathematical literacy to English language learners, we are often in the position of having to teach mathematical concepts to students with low English proficiency and an unknown background in mathematics. How can we create comprehensible math lessons for these students?



The first step is to find out what mathematical concepts students may have acquired from their prior schooling. Typically, we find two sorts of cases: Some students have had experience with mathematics in their home country. Because they are already familiar with basic mathematical concepts and can explain these concepts in their home language, these students quickly catch up with their native-speaking peers; all they need is the vocabulary and oral language development to explain their mathematical thinking in English. But there are other students who have had little or no previous exposure to mathematics. These students need small-group or even one-on-one instruction in order to learn both language and content at the same time, beginning with basic concepts such as number sense, operations, and place value. They have to begin by experiencing mathematical concepts

Young English language learners . . . can develop a strong number sense if they are given the opportunity to practice problem solving with manipulatives, accompanied by a lot of conversation.

in context, using visuals, manipulatives, and other hands-on experiences.

The initial assessment can be tricky, since even students with proficient computational skills may be missing some basic concepts. When you ask them to explain how they know that $36 \times 7 = 252$, you may get a blank stare. One possibility is that the student knows how to answer this question in his or her home language, but lacks the necessary vocabulary to explain the procedure in English. The other possibility is that the student has learned computational skills through rote memorization, and doesn't really understand such basic concepts as expanded form, the distributive property of multiplication, or partial products. Students like this can do the computation, but don't understand the place value concepts behind the operation. To determine the starting point for instruction, it's important to understand the student's mathematical background. (Of course, for many students the issue is not one or the other of these obstacles, but a mixture of both.)



In the school where I teach, 10% of our student population consists of ELLs with diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds and an enormous range of skills, from very limited understanding of basic mathematical principles to astounding computational, problem solving, and logical reasoning abilities. One student that I've worked with for the past two years moved to the United States from Korea and entered our school system in first grade. Her ability to speak and understand English was limited, starting out at WIDA Level 1. Her mathematical skill set at this time consisted of some memorized computational procedures and the ability to count objects. In order to find a starting point for instruction, I gave her an assessment using the "Hiding Assessment" technique, in which the assessor shows the student a set of objects, then covers up some of them and asks the student to say how many objects are covered.

My student demonstrated proficiency with number combinations up to six, but when I showed her a set of seven cubes and covered up six, she answered "five." So I began teaching her number combinations of seven, such as $6 + 1$, $5 + 2$, $4 + 3$, and $7 + 0$, using manipulatives, visuals, and number combinations in context. Sometimes I had to translate some words into Korean before she understood. But after some initial work, she fit in perfectly with a small instructional Response to Intervention (RTI) group of four ELLs, two of whom were also at WIDA Level 1. I worked with this group on addition and subtraction of numbers up to ten, using strategies such as "counting on¹," "doubles +/- one²," and creating sums of ten with manipulatives. When I gave my student the same Hiding Assessment as before, I found that she was now able to identify missing parts of sets up to nine in number. We then began working with sets up to twenty in size. During this time, her speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills increased significantly. At a parent conference, her mother asked me to explain the "counting on" strategy, because she had watched her daughter use this strategy at home to add and subtract numbers.

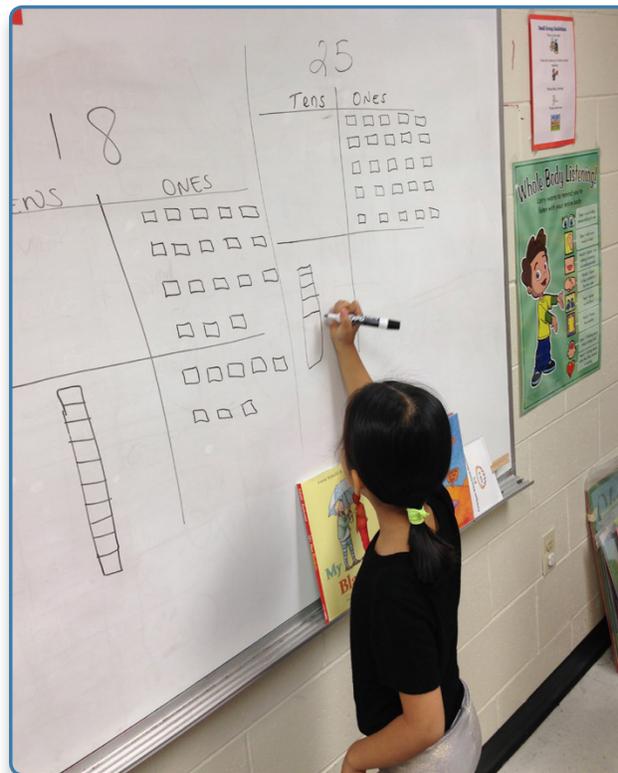
My student demonstrated proficiency with number combinations up to six, but when I showed her a set of seven cubes and covered up six, she answered "five."

The next mathematical concept I introduced to my Korean student was place value. On her first-grade post assessment, she demonstrated some understanding of base ten models, but struggled with identifying the value of the ones and tens digit within a two-digit number. She was not yet able to calculate quantities that were ten more or ten less than a given number. When I asked her, "How are the numbers 50 and 70 alike?" She responded, "They both have zeroes." She recognized that zero was a common digit in the two numbers, but couldn't explain that its purpose is to indicate the place value of the five and the seven.

¹ In the "counting-on" strategy, the student adds two numbers by starting with the larger number and "counting on" the smaller number. For example, for $4 + 7 = ?$, start with the larger number (7) and then count 4 more: 8, 9, 10, 11. Students can use counters, their fingers, or a number-line/track.

² "Doubles +/- one" is a strategy for quickly adding numbers that differ in size by only one. It requires the students to first memorize the addition facts for doubles ($1 + 1$, $2 + 2$, etc.). Then, to add $5 + 6$, they can begin by remembering that $5 + 5 = 10$. Since 6 is one more than 5, $5 + 6$ must be one more than 10, namely 11.

I began working on place value with the RTI group by playing plus/minus-one games, re-arranging numbers from groups of ones to groups of tens plus ones, and, finally, creating a strip of base-ten patterns. During rearrange-it activities, my Korean student was hesitant at first and unsure about how to approach the problem. When I asked her, "How can you show fourteen ones in two different ways?" She began to re-arrange her 14 cubes into different patterns on the "ones" side of her place-value mat, rather than creating a group of ten and leaving four ones remaining. When I prompted her by saying, "Can you make a group of ten from your fourteen ones?" she answered, "No, I can't." But after several RTI sessions, she was able to perform this task and had acquired enough mathematical understanding and mathematical language to ask questions and engage successfully in group discussion. This student has made tremendous progress from first grade through second grade. She is now adding and subtracting two- and three-digit numbers and can explain her mathematical reasoning to the class.



In addition to the understanding of basic mathematical concepts and procedures and the ability to describe those concepts in English, mathematical literacy also includes the ability to apply mathematics to real-life situations. Young English language learners, despite their diverse mathematical and linguistic background, can develop a strong number sense if they are given the opportunity to practice problem solving with manipulatives, accompanied by a lot of conversation about how they combine, decompose, and compare quantities of real objects such as cubes or beans. They need visual examples and the opportunity to act out story problems. Asking a young child to tell you what $2 + 3$ equals will not strengthen her number sense. Asking her to combine 2 apples with 3 apples by counting on to 5 is both more comprehensible and more effective.

To teach our ELLs mathematical literacy, we often need to catch them up in both content and language. Some of the successful components at our school have been teacher and math coach collaboration within Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), our math RTI model of instruction, and consistent progress-monitoring of our ELL students in grades K through 5. The goal of teaching bilingual children both concepts and language becomes more attainable when the above factors are in place. 

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Behr has been teaching English Language Learners for twelve years. She has a Master's Degree in Elementary Education and currently teaches in the Wayland Public School System. She has also received training in Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners (Interventions and Implications before Identifying an ELL with Special Learning Needs) and has completed courses in WIDA Language Differentiated Instruction and Making Student Thinking Visible.

A Translation-based Warm-up for Helping Adolescent ELLs Access Grade-Level Content Texts

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Accessing grade-level content texts is a big challenge for my high school ELL Biology students. I use an inquiry approach, and I want students to be able to work with the textbook (Miller & Levine, 2004) as well as other grade-level texts such as the high school level of *Encyclopedia Britannica* and media articles. To help my WIDA level 2-3 students access text, I previously used linguistic modification (the practice of simplifying the language in order to help students focus on the conceptual content). However, I worried that this procedure robbed my students of the chance to engage with the authentic language of science. The Common Core clearly states that engaging students with grade-level text is a priority:

By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend science/technical texts in the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
(Common Core RST 9-10.10.)

Furthermore, high-stakes tests like the Biology MCAS are couched in grade-level language, not the simplified language I was using with my students. So I started to ask myself: What would it take for my ELL Biology students to read and work with grade-level text?

In my experience, the main obstacle to accessing grade-level texts is vocabulary. Biology texts are loaded with technical vocabulary, which SEI teachers are well-equipped to teach. However, I found that I needed to focus on a different category of words, which I will call Low-Frequency, Non-Technical vocabulary (LFNT). These are words that are not particular to science, but are infrequent in everyday English and are not taught in introductory ELL courses. LFNT words are common in grade-level texts, and there is simply not enough

time in the SEI class to teach them all.

As an example, consider the vocabulary the student will encounter when consulting the information for “neuron” in a typical high-school text. The text will contain a good number of technical words like “dendrites,” “nucleus,” “axon,” and so on, that are the proper target of science instruction. However, an ELL student who understands these key words may still not be able to understand and work with this text because it is loaded with many other words in the LFNT category: *transmit, fibres, carried, gap, arrive, released, tiny, and along*. These words are not high in an SEI teacher’s list of priorities—except that the students need to understand them in order to read this specific text. For me, the question of how to help ELL students access grade-level science text boils down to finding a way to help the students understand this LFNT vocabulary.

In looking for a solution to this problem, I was inspired by Ofelia García’s concept of *translanguaging*—the idea that, when learning, bilingual students deploy their full linguistic repertoire, rather than just their knowledge of L2. García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer note that translanguaging can be a useful tool to teach complex content (2017, p. 8). Because that was my goal—to help students access complex texts—I was intrigued by this idea and began to implement it through a translation protocol.

When planning an activity that involves reading, I start by analyzing the target text to identify the LFNT words—words that are not specific to science, but which I suspect to be outside the knowledge of my students. I list these LFNT words (together with key technical words and some high-frequency words) on a handout. As a warmup, I ask the students to translate these words into their L1, using a word-for-word dictionary or translation program. The students write a translation next to each word and keep the handout throughout the lesson. Because I speak other languages, I can check the accuracy of some students’ translations; for languages I do not know, I use the internet myself ahead of time to get an idea. Depending on the topic and the situation, I may put some

Student Name: _____

ATP vocabulary

Translate the following into Spanish:

	Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives/Adverbs/Transition words
Things	Cosas	Carrying (carry)	Llevar
Adenosine	Adenosina	Found (find)	Encontrar
Triphosphate	trifosfato	Require	requerir
Breakdown	descomposición	Drive	conducir
Glycogen	glucógeno	Needed (need)	Necesario
Task	tarea	Deliver	Entregar
Storage	almacenamiento	Consists (Consist)	consiste
Shuttle	lanzadera	Taps (Tap)	Cajetas
Adenine	Adenina	Released	liberado
Ribose	Ribosa	Yield	ceder
Phosphate	fosfato	Having (have)	tener
Tail	cola		
Source	fuentes		
Bonds	enlaces		
Hydrolysis	Hidrólisis		
Living			Viviendo
Across			atraves de
Such as			como
Within			dentro
Main			Principal
Nitrogenous			Nitrogenoso
Available			disponible
Through			mediante
Outer			exterior

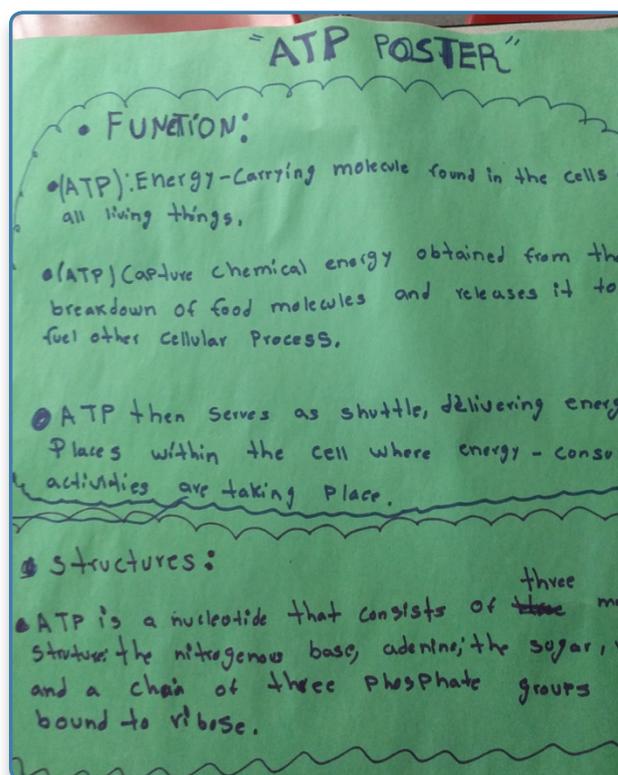
translations on an overhead that students can use to check their answers. A warmup of this kind typically takes between 5 and 20 minutes.

I then distribute the grade-level text and let students use their translations to aid in interpreting it. This is not an automatic process, and I often have to redirect the students to their translations. I do not allow the students to use their translation programs during this phase, as they tend to use them to translate whole sentences at once. Reading texts is about constructing meaning from the words; the use of an app to translate whole sentences bypasses this crucial step.

From the perspective of the Common Core, reading always takes place for a larger purpose. Thus the big question is what kind of tasks students are capable of doing after reading a text in this fashion. Here are two types of tasks that I have tried successfully:

Classify information. This activity is appropriate for a text that contains information about several different issues. The students are asked to separate the information relative to each issue. In one example, I asked the students to read a text about adenosine triphosphate (ATP). My warmup listed 35 words for the students to translate, which took them 15 minutes. Then, after reading the text, I asked the students to classify the information in the text as describing either the structure or the function of ATP, and to make a poster presenting that information. A gallery walk at the end helped students who had some misconceptions. During the gallery walk, I observed students arguing (in L1) about which posters were correct and referring to the text and their translations as evidence.

Prepare a visual representation. This activity involves using a text to prepare a model, diagram, or flow chart that summarizes a body of information. In one example, I gave the students a paragraph-



long description of neurons which they then used to label a diagram of a neuron with its parts. A more challenging example was when I asked the students to use a text to prepare an equation describing cellular respiration; I found I had to supplement this exercise by highlighting which words meant *reactant* and which words meant *product*.

This translation technique works, I think, because many (though not all) adolescent ELL students are grade-level speakers in their L1, and so already know these LFNT words in L1. I don't think the technique would work if the text were loaded with technical vocabulary that the students do not already know in their own language, and I do not think it would work well with SLIFE students, whose L1 vocabulary may be limited.

I am definitely not advocating that all new words be taught through translation. Key words specific to the content area should be taught in the ways that content ELL teachers already excel at: Frayer models¹, vocabulary notebooks, writing sentences using the words, building background, sketching and diagramming, analogies, etc. I endorse this translation technique specifically for LFNT words that are not essential to the discipline but crucial to the understanding of a specific text. I also think it could be helpful to students in acquiring function words that are difficult to define, but easy to explain to students who have parallel words in their own language.

Most (though not all) adolescent ELL students already have some knowledge of the grammar and text structure that are needed to access grade level text.

Most (though not all) adolescent ELL students already have some knowledge of the grammar and text structure that are needed to access grade level text. Vocabulary is the big obstacle and, ironically enough, it is often non-technical, low-frequency vocabulary that gets in the way. I have found that translation is a tool that can help with this problem. As a bonus, students who go through this procedure end up feeling that their knowledge of L1 is a strength, that it is connected to their school work, and that it can be used to advance their learning. 

¹ The Frayer Model is a strategy that uses a graphic organizer for vocabulary building. This technique requires students to (1) define the target vocabulary words or concepts, and (2) apply this information by generating examples and non-examples. The information is placed on a chart to provide a visual representation (AdLit.org, 2017).

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Miguel Angel Hernando Cupido is an ELL science teacher at the Bridge Academy at Chelsea High, where he has worked for 16 years. He is grateful to his students for all he learns from them every day, including resilience, perseverance, and what works and does not work when you combine science and language instruction.

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The Power of Peer Interaction in Language Development

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INTRODUCTION

How do language learners receive linguistic input in the classroom? The teacher is a key source, of course, but fellow students make important contributions as well. With our recent pedagogical emphasis on Interactive Language Teaching and the cooperative learning tasks that support it, students have many opportunities each day to provide linguistic scaffolding for one another. How effective are they in leveraging these opportunities to help their peers (and themselves) strengthen and develop their language skills?

According to Brown & Lee (2015), students in true cooperative-learning classrooms work as a team to achieve goals, share information, and come to each other's aid (p. 55). Researchers such as Gagne & Parks (2013) have examined these behaviors in a language classroom and found students scaffolding in meaningful ways to promote language development. This suggests that peer-to-peer scaffolding can play a role in language development in an ESL classroom.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PEER SCAFFOLDING?

The term "scaffolding" is associated with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): the gap between what learners can do on their own and what they can do with support and guidance ("scaffolding") from a more competent mentor (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017, p. 116). With effective scaffolding, the student moves gradually toward greater understanding and, ultimately, greater independence as a learner. Some researchers view scaffolding as a process facilitated only by the teacher, but others have adopted a broader definition of scaffolding to include "any process in which any class participant helps to solve a problem" (Gagne & Parks, 2013, p. 194). In a language classroom, this can include any interaction in which students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, correct one another, or assist each other in expressing themselves.

Guk & Kellogg (2007) found that students and teachers tend to use different scaffolding strategies. Scaffolding by teachers consists mostly of negotiation of meaning – comprehension, confirmation, and clarification checks, but these are the strategies that students use *least*, if at all, whether they are adults or children (Guk & Kellogg; Gagne & Parks; Foster & Ohta, 2005).

In a study of the role of scaffolding in cooperative learning tasks in a 6th-grade intensive ESL class in Quebec, Gagne, & Parks looked for instances of nine types of scaffolding strategies: request for assistance, comprehension check, co-construction, confirmation check, continuation, instruction, marking of critical features, other correction, and use of resources. Students were observed over two weeks in collaborative tasks such as JigSaw with classroom teachers available to offer assistance. During this time, the researchers observed 217 scaffolding events; 94% in learner-to-learner interactions and 6% in learner-to-teacher interactions. Interestingly, the teachers used *only* strategies associated with negotiation of meaning (i.e., comprehension checks and marking of critical features), but the students used neither of these strategies. 9% of student scaffolding attempts were confirmation checks, but the students relied primarily on request-for-assistance and other-correction (54% and 24%, respectively). 73% of their scaffolding attempts resulted in successful correction of an error. The researchers argue that, because students have no authority, they position themselves on a level playing field with their peers and use the same communication strategies that they would to work through any problem with a peer: asking for help, co-constructing dialogue, using resources, and correcting each other's mistakes without the use of negotiation strategies. Since negotiation of meaning is a fundamental strategy within the interactionist theory of language learning, it may be disturbing that this was not part of the students' scaffolding repertoire. However, the researchers considered any scaffolding attempt "positive" if it resulted in correction of an error.

Some researchers view scaffolding as a process facilitated only by the teacher, but others have adopted a broader definition.

IS PEER SCAFFOLDING EFFECTIVE?

Sometimes ELLs working in small groups don't appear to be having productive

discussion, let alone helping each other solve linguistic problems. They act silly, lapse into their L1, or rush through a task haphazardly in order to move onto something else. But can we find positive scaffolding attempts in these interactions?

Yes, according to Guk & Kellogg. They compared teacher-led and learner-led interactions in an EFL class of 5th- and 6th-year Korean students. In a series of exercises, the teacher presented an activity to one learner, who then showed another group of students how to carry out the task. The researchers transcribed the dialogue between the teacher and the student and compared it to the interaction that occurred in the peer groups. Following is a sample of teacher-student dialogue about casting parts for an imaginary school musical:

1. T: You can say, I want to play drums.	2. S1: I want to play drum.
3. T: Drums.	4. S1: Drums.

This sample is representative of this teacher's style of breaking down sentences to focus on particular lexical items, in this case "drum" versus "drums." The student responses are abbreviated, limited to one or two words.

The student (S1) who was responsible for explaining the task to others also attempted to keep the focus on the word "drum," as the teacher had done, but things quickly went awry. Here is a sample of the group's conversation. Note the length of student responses compared to the teacher sample:

1. S1: Say, I want to play the drum.	2. S2: I want to play the drum.
3. S1: Drum.	4. S3: Hey, try it again! (In Korean)
5. S4: I want to play the dance!	6. S1: Again! You go first! (In Korean)
7. S2: I want to sing!	8. S3: You want to sing a song? (In Korean)
9. S2: I want to play the sing!	10. S1: Say it again! (In Korean)

The students seemed to want to *talk*, whether it was correct or not. They focused on co-constructing the discourse, using longer and more complex utterances. They used their L1 liberally, as a strategy to keep the task moving along. This sample reflects the broader findings of the study: Compared to their peer interactions, the students used English more accurately when interacting with the teacher (96% of the time compared to 89%) and more frequently (53% compared to 47%).

It's easy to look at these results and conclude that this study is *not* a great example of learners helping one another with language development, given the number of errors produced and their reliance on their L1. However, the researchers propose that these two scenarios represent two ends of a continuum: The teacher-student interactions emphasize form and grammar, while the learner-to-learner interactions focus on co-constructing discourse. Taken together, they cover the two competing language learning objectives of *using language now* (as the students were doing with each other) versus *learning it for later* (the teacher-student approach). In other words, we should not be quick to dismiss the value of peer interactions that seem off-point; it's important to consider the motivation behind the various strategies.

THE MOTIVATION FACTOR

Peer scaffolding is a shared responsibility. In order to achieve the desired result, both the giver and the receiver of support must be actively engaged and committed to the experience. Yu and Hu (2017) introduce the concept of *motivation* in a study of how high proficiency (HP) L2 learners perceived feedback from low proficiency (LP) peer partners in an EFL writing class at a university in Mainland China. The study followed three HP students for a semester, each assigned to a group of 12 peers of lower proficiency levels. Peers were told to provide feedback on the form, content, and organization of various writing assignments. The researchers looked at whether the HPs incorporated the feedback and, if so, if it improved their writing.

The data showed that the feedback improved the textual quality of the writing of all three HP subjects, though only two believed they had benefitted; the third student considered the exercise a “waste of time” and a “required task.” He didn't believe the comments he received from his LP peers could be helpful because he “knew more than them,” so he wasn't motivated to engage seriously in the project. This suggests that the way students are oriented to a group task can influence their level of engagement.

CONCLUSION

As with many research studies, those summarized here represent a limited sampling, with conclusions that are not definitive. Still, each provides a perspective that sheds light on the scaffolding techniques of teachers and students. Students have their own way of supporting one another that is reflective of where they are in life *and* in language learning. When their motivation to learn is strong, when they are in a collaborative environment with the freedom to practice and problem-solve, they can become partners in the teaching and learning process.

In my own observations of pair and group work in both elementary and adult ESL classrooms, some interactions appear more constructive than others. For example, one group may focus simply on getting an assigned task done, relying exclusively on their L1s to finish as quickly as possible, while others seem sincerely interested in helping each other resolve linguistic issues. What can the teacher do to change the focus of the first group and thereby enhance the experience for all students?

Explaining the purpose of a task and clearly defining roles and expectations seems to help set the stage for positive peer interaction. I've been using this approach with a pair of very competitive five-year-olds in my ESL program, each with different language strengths and needs. After a few days of suggesting how they might each use their "superpowers" (our Kindergarten code for language strengths) to help each other, their interactions started to become more positive and productive. For example, unprompted, one patiently and slowly explained to the other what a *pirate* was, helping to build background for a story we were about to read. Later, the other student offered letter-sound clues to his partner during an alphabet scavenger hunt.

This may not seem remarkable, except that they have also begun to recognize each others' strengths and give each other positive feedback (e.g., "You know *all* the letters!" followed by a high five). Of course, they are only five, so not all of their interactions are positive! However, with a bit of guidance and coaching, these two young ELLs – with significantly different proficiency levels, backgrounds

[T]hese two young ELLs — with significantly different proficiency levels, backgrounds and life experiences — have found ways to help each other strengthen and develop their language skills.

and life experiences – have found ways to help each other strengthen and develop their language skills.

I believe that teachers cannot – and should not – be the single source of truth in the classroom. We can encourage our students to share that responsibility by recognizing the sometimes unpredictable ways they add value, orienting them appropriately to a task, and showing them how they are contributing to and benefiting from the collaborative learning process. In this way, students can take a more prominent role in operationalizing a whole classroom's ZPD (Guk and Kellogg) and support a continuous, multi-dimensional language learning cycle. 

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Creating Effective Parent and Community Involvement Programs that Support the Academic Achievement of ELL Students

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Parental and family involvement is an important element of academic success. Wanat (2010) found that “parents’ collaborative relationships with schools have a positive impact on academic achievement” (p. 60) by ensuring that student learning is continued at home. Unfortunately, many of our students come from families who are newcomers to this country, some of whom do not read, write, speak, or understand English. In some of the countries from which our families originate, even the basic goal of school attendance may not be as high a priority as it is here. Arrangements for school supplies, lunches, nurse visits, transportation, and the everyday functions of being a student can all be daunting. As newcomers to this country, these families also face a whole range of challenges outside of school, including poverty, racism, discrimination, and exposure to violence (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). These “stressors complicate immigrant students’ adjustment to new schools and community settings and tax the coping capacities of even the most robust immigrant adolescents, leaving them vulnerable to academic failure” (Suárez-Orozco, et al., p. 713).

The formation of personal relationships in school is another critical component of academic achievement. Giambo, Gonzales, Szecsi, & Thirumurthy (2007) found that students who have formed strong, positive relationships with the adults in their educational life have a much better chance of academic success. For immigrant and non-native speaking students, “relationships in school play a

particularly important role in promoting socially competent behavior in the classroom and fostering academic engagement and achievement” (Suárez-Orozco, et. al., 2009, p. 717). And Arias & Morillo-Campbell (2008) found that involvement with the wider community leads to higher student achievement and lower drop-out rates, regardless of a student’s cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic background.

Schools can address all these issues by creating parent-community involvement programs that bring parents and community members together. When they work well, these programs can help immigrant families form stronger school-home connections and greater involvement in the community at large. There are many community members, organizations, and businesses who would be willing and able to help. Open houses that invite members of the community to share with parents and students can introduce families to activities of which they may not have been aware. We have a variety of wonderful opportunities within our communities that might be beneficial to our students, such as art and historical museums, family assistance programs, legal aid, academic support and tutoring programs, and cultural events. “Relationships with nonparent adults can provide immigrant youth with compensatory attachments, safe contexts for learning new cultural norms and practices, and information that is vital to success in schools” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 718). In addition, effective involvement of immigrant families can also help to foster “the parental participation that is a key aspect of educational opportunity and academic achievement” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 16).

Unless special care is taken, families and community partners that reflect the cultural diversity of our schools may be inadvertently left out.

To achieve these goals, parent and family involvement programs must develop “creative and welcoming approaches to engage all families” (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2010, p. 2). Unless special care is taken, families and community partners that reflect the cultural diversity of our schools may be inadvertently left out. When that happens, school-community partnerships can create an even greater achievement gap. Sheldon (2003) found that unless everyone is included, “schools’ efforts to involve families can create greater inequities in

children's schooling, creating disadvantages for students in low-income, urban areas" (p. 163). It is essential to be aware of and to address cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and racial differences.

Teachers can play an important role in this process by serving as a bridge between students, their families, and the community at large. They are the leading authorities on the needs of their students and the school. By being the bridge between our students and their families and the community, we build a stronger school system in which everyone has a vested interest in everyone's success. Community engagement programs that invite and encourage cultural diversity will benefit all of our students, as well as our surrounding community. By taking care to include the families of ELL students, we can help to narrow the achievement gap and ensure that all our students are achieving – academically, socially, culturally, and globally – to the best of their ability. Creating a community of learners and their supporters will go a long way in ensuring that all of our students are on the path to academic success. 

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Education and Empathy: Reflections and Action Steps for Working with Immigrant Students

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My newcomer students, especially after our recent national election, have been questioning their right to be in this country and wondering if their arduous journey in search of safety and opportunity was all in vain. Students have asked me, “What’s happening?” “Is coming to school worth it?” and “Why should I care anymore?” These talented and curious students, primarily asylum-seekers from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, have taken great risks to be in the United States. Without a real understanding of their life experiences and the challenges they face, I have often felt ill-equipped to answer their questions and give them the support they need. In order to gain a better understanding of their situation, I began researching best practices for working with students in the current sociopolitical context. Here are some of my key takeaways so far:

We have to be culturally responsive. According to Nieto (2013), culturally responsive pedagogy is more than a series of discrete methods and techniques; it is a mindset that guides how educators think about the strengths and values of their students. While continuing to hold all students to high expectations in academics and behavior, culturally responsive teachers make adjustments in their practice, classrooms, and curricula when necessary to meet students’ needs. Teachers who serve newcomer students have an especially crucial responsibility to provide “critical care” for the whole child, taking into account their histories and current realities. *We have to educate ourselves about our students and their communities.*

School climate matters. Unless we are on our guard and very well-prepared, we may find members of the school community falling into negative attitudes that mimic those of the larger community (Nieto & Bode, 1992). I have witnessed such incidents in my own teaching experience. Once, in my advisory section for newcomer and mainstream students, some of the mainstream students sharply resisted working with students from the newcomer program. Teachers in our building have sometimes fed into this division by referring to our Central American students as “Spanish kids,” and suggesting that our high school newcomer classrooms are closer those of an elementary or middle school. These attitudes tend to create a hostile school environment and undermine our ability to work effectively with our students. *In order to create a climate that empowers all students, we have to find ways to sensitize the members of our school community to the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.*

Students’ experiences matter. For immigrant populations, the experience of migration and asylum seeking has long-term effects on socio-emotional health and stability. The process of applying for legal asylum status is confusing and unpredictable, leaving many students and families in legal limbo and facing the fear of deportation (Bonilla-Mathe, 2013). Restrictive immigration policies create “legal violence” that affects the emotional and familial well-being of immigrant children (Jefferies, 2014). In addition to trauma from experiences in their home country and from their difficult journey to the United States, our students now live in fear of deportation and may be internalizing the idea that they are inherently “illegal” (Jefferies, 2014). When a student is chronically absent, drops out, or is not working in class, the school community must take notice and respond. *We have to share information about student progress and behavior with one another and with support staff and families in order to ensure that children get the support they need both in and out of school.*

Family outreach matters. Efforts to engage families are critical. However, we have to be cognizant of cultural differences that may affect family involvement and even interactions among family members (Faltis & Valdés, 2010; Orellana, 2001). As Orellana explains, the United States differs from other countries in the value we place on individualism. Central American families often focus on the collective interest of the whole family, rather than that of a single child. An understanding of this difference can provide context for educators when communicating and connecting with families. *We have to learn about, and respect, the cultural values of our students’ families.*

This research has taught me about the complicated sociopolitical context in which my students live. By developing a deeper understanding of my students and a greater appreciation for their lived experiences, I hope to be better prepared to respond to their questions and concerns and to create an environment in which they can feel welcome. 

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was conducted as part of an independent study at Boston University's School of Education, under the guidance of Professor Christine Leider.

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Reading A-Z

<https://www.readinga-z.com>

REVIEWED BY CINDY ROSANCRANS

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Reading A-Z is an online reading program that provides 2,500+ leveled downloadable books in various genres and on various topics in English, Spanish, and French. Originally intended for grades K-6, the program has now been expanded to include materials for special education, remedial reading, and ESL programs. The website offers leveled readers, poetry books, alphabet materials, high-frequency word books, shared reading, and literature circles. There are lessons and worksheets to go with each book, as well as a complete phonics program, high-frequency word books, poetry resources, fluency passages, reader's theater scripts, alphabet resources, assessments, and more. Students are given login credentials so that they can go to the Kids A-Z site (<https://www.kidsa-z.com/main/Login>) during their free time at school or at home, and listen to, read, and record themselves reading books written at 27 levels of difficulty. After reading a book, students can take an interactive quiz to check their comprehension. Teachers can gather data on their students' language development and track progress by printing out a weekly *Kids A-Z activity report*. Using the Kids A-Z Dashboard, teachers can track the amount of time a student logged in and see any alerts the program may have triggered — for instance, if a student has failed an entire quiz or specific questions relating to vocabulary or author's purpose or main ideas and details. Instructors can also create custom assignments or assign specific assessments so that the student focuses and practices one particular skill. The teacher can also see what book (including genre) the student was reading. Additional material can be printed out to practice the target skill based on results given on the Dashboard.

A subscription to *Reading A-Z* gives teachers access to *English Language Learner Resources*, which includes materials for ELLs in all four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), organized according to proficiency level and topic. These resources align with WIDA, TESOL, and CCSS standards to save valuable time for educators. Lessons and assignments can be chosen

to match each student's individual needs (comprehension, vocabulary, fact vs opinion, etc.). ELL Content Picture Packs or Vocabulary Books provide practice in specific writing, speaking or reading skills. Language skills (grammar, language function) can also be addressed. Word sorts, close reading packs, language skill packs, and ELL Leveled Reader packs are also provided.

January 2017 marks the 15th year of *Reading A-Z's* launch on the internet. The site is continually adding new books, lesson plans, and other resources/materials. The program has won several educational awards for its "innovation in reading instruction."

We used the funding we received from a 2016 Linda Schulman Award to order an ESL classroom subscription to *Reading A-Z* for use in a home-reading program for students in our low-incidence ELL program throughout the district in Lunenburg, Massachusetts. (See our report on pg. 33 of this issue.) *Reading A-Z* offers a variety of programs, including *Reading A-Z*, *Raz-Kids*, *Science A-Z*, *Headsprout*, *Writing A-Z*, *Vocabulary A-Z*, and *ReadyTest A-Z*. We ordered a package that included *Reading A-Z*, *Raz-kids*, *ELL Collection*, and *Vocabulary A-Z*, at a price of \$779.85 for one classroom set of 36 licenses. We were very pleased with the results! The students in grades 3-5 at Turkey Hill Elementary School were the most eager and receptive. A newcomer in 3rd grade was excited to be able to participate in free reading time using an iPad and the *Reading A-Z* app to listen to the stories in English and in Spanish. And a friendly competition emerged between two 4th graders who like to compete against each other in academic situations. We recommend this program for classroom and ELL teachers who are looking for a way to differentiate instruction and encourage students to do independent reading during their free time at school and at home. 

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Common Core Bilingual and English Language Learners: A Resource for Educators, edited by Guadalupe Valdes, Kate Menken, & Mariana Castro. Indianapolis, IN: Carlson Publishing, 2015. 320 pages. ISBN: 978-1-934000-17-5.

Reviewed by Kathy Lobo

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This book is a 320-page gold mine of wisdom regarding the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The editors pose 95 questions, with answers from 130 experts from the fields of bilingual and English learner education. The questions are organized into seven chapters:

- **Terrain and Landscape:** (1) Shifting Landscape, (2) Challenges and Opportunities
- **Fundamental Language Issues:** (1) Becoming Bilingual and Multilingual: Language Acquisition and Development, (2) The Language Valued at School, (3) Language Teaching and Learning
- **Family and Community Participation:** (1) Engaging Diverse Families and Communities in Education, (2) Shifting views of the Relationship between Families and Schools
- **Policy, Leadership, and Advocacy:** (1) Policy Negotiations from “Top-down” to “Bottom-up,” (2) Programming and Instruction, (3) Advocacy in Common Core State Standards Implementation
- **Teaching and Learning:** (1) Content-Area Language Demands, (2) Content-Area Literacy, (3) Multiliteracy Development, (4) Language

This book is a 320-page gold mine of wisdom regarding the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

and Literature for Disciplinary Purposes

- **Professional Learning:** (1) Shifting Roles of English as a Second Language Educators, (2) Planning for Professional Learning, (3) Preparing and Supporting Educators
- **Assessment and Accountability:** (1) Goals and Challenges, (2) Assessing Student Attainment of the Common Core State Standards and Making Meaning of the Results, (3) Improving Assessment and Accountability

Each contributor has a page or two to share their views on the given topic.

Each of the seven chapters contains discussion questions, a “Topics for Reflection and Action” survey, and a short-answer section to facilitate recording the reflections and action steps. Each contributor has a page or two to share their views on the given topic. This book is like a *Who’s Who* of experts in our field. It is a very valuable quick reference for teachers and administrators in the field, as well as for pre-service teachers in training. 

Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland? by Pasi Sahlberg. New York: Teachers College Press, 2013. 167 pages. ISBN 978-0-8077-5257-9.

Reviewed by Eileen Feldman

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The times, they are a-changing, and so are students' educational needs and preferences. To reappraise our own practices, we should study successes both in the United States and in other countries. Finland is a good place to begin. Just thirty years ago Finland ranked in the middle of the pack, but now it is a consistent leader in international assessments such as PISA, TMSS, and OECD.

In his book *Finnish Lessons*, Pasi Sahlberg, Professor at the Universities of Helsinki and Oulu, Director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in the US, and Director General of the Center for International Mobility and Cooperation at the Finnish Ministry of Education, points out several reforms which he credits with improving Finland's standing: (1) sample-based testing, (2) thematic assessments, (3) rigorous, free, research-based teacher training, (4) an emphasis on making teaching innovations from the bottom up, and (5) the coordination of educational policy with social, health, and economic policies. This book is a must-read for teachers, teacher educators, educational policy makers, school administrators, and planners of special needs and ESL programs.

Just thirty years ago Finland ranked in the middle of the pack, but now it is a consistent leader in international assessments.

Chapter 1, "The Finnish Dream: A Good School for All," sets out the importance of education and social welfare for all. Success in school should not be

predetermined by class or family circumstance; expectations must be the same for all. Career guidance should begin in the lower grades and continue through high school. This chapter describes postwar Finland, the birth of the new school, the expansion of upper secondary education, and the Finnish model as of 2015.

Chapter Two, "Less Is More," explains the use of part-time special educators in classrooms, differentiated learning opportunities rather than grade repetition, a shorter school day with fewer teaching hours, fewer dictates from supervisors, a great deal of trust in teacher decisions, and minimal testing and homework. Immigrants to Finland score higher on international assessments than do immigrants to other similar countries.

Chapter Three, "Advantage: Teachers," describes Finland's licensure process, which requires a research-based Masters degree in Education in addition to other academic requirements. The teaching degree is rigorous and prestigious; selection of candidates is from the same pool as for doctors and lawyers.

Chapter Four, "The Finnish Way: Competitive Welfare State" describes an ideal "knowledge" society, in which educational policies are based on a "systems view of policy making and sustainable leadership." In Finland, the Departments of Health, Welfare, Economics, and Education all work together to build an optimal labor force.

Chapter Five, "Complacency is not Acceptable" warns that Finland must continue adapting to budget shortfalls and must pay attention to alternative voices from within the country and outside. The knowledge base of older students must be revitalized, because social communication is increasingly digitalized. New materials and approaches must be employed.

The author points out that other high-performing communities with different cultural values, including Japan, South Korea, and Alberta, Canada, have successfully adopted many Finnish educational practices. However, although he is extremely complimentary in his assessment of the Finnish educational system, he also describes its weaknesses, such as the growing challenge of limited budgets.

There are extensive Notes and References, which provide the reader with resources to investigate further. Altogether a very worthwhile read! 

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