

English Language Learning Magazine

CONTACT

November 2015

Churches and English language learners

Pop culture in
the classroom

Technology
for teachers

And lots more...

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 4, NOVEMBER, 2015

ISSN # 0227-2938

Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario

www.teslontario.net/publication/contact-magazine

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Calendar

December 2–4	The Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA). http://www.cesba.com/events/#Conference
January 7–10	Modern Language Association (MLA). Austin, Texas. http://www.mla.org/convention
January 23	Technology for Teachers (T4T) Conference. http://teslontario.org/technology-for-teachers-conference-t4t
March 2–5	Languages Canada's Annual Conference, Victoria, BC. http://languagescanada.ca/en/language-education-sector/annual-conference/
April 5–8	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Baltimore, Maryland. http://www.tesol.org/convention2016

Please, contact us (editor@teslontario.org) to let us know about upcoming events.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This time around, Hossein Nassaji starts us out with a discussion of interactional feedback, what it is, what it can do, and how to apply it in the classroom. Katy Borodkin presents research showing how phonological processing ability may have an impact on how successful our learners are. James Corcoran argues that we're potentially impoverishing our classrooms if we don't maximize our plurilinguistic resources when teaching ESL. And Huamei Han explains how attending Sunday services felt more helpful than taking English classes for some Chinese immigrants.

We then have three articles on bringing pop culture into the classroom: Jeff Brown with a critical approach to TED talks, Kathe Geist with some advice about choosing and using films, and Stephen Roney & John Allan about what pop culture fits in the classroom (not the Biebs).

There are two articles on teaching with tech. Pamela Manson discusses the benefits of LINC courseware, and Patricia Glogowski and Lara McInnis walk TESL teachers through setting up an online course for TESL students.

The issue is rounded out by Layla Guse Salah's personal essay on teaching with cerebral palsy and another Viva la lingua franca essay by Eufemia Fantetti.

I'd like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the contributors.

Finally, I hope our long-delayed *Contact* website will be ready before the next issue arrives in February. Keep your eyes open for an announcement.

Brett Reynolds

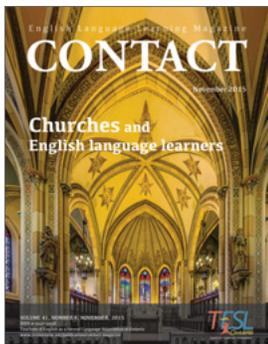
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CONTACT

Contact is published four times a year (Feb, June, August, and November) by TESL Ontario. February is our conference issue and May is our research issue. It is published for the members of TESL Ontario and is available free online to anyone.

Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, and calls for papers.



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ISSN # 0227-2938

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HOW TO DRAW LEARNERS' ATTENTION TO FORM IN COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXTS

The use of interactional feedback

By Hossein Nassaji, University of Victoria

Abstract

Recent second language acquisition (SLA) research has demonstrated a need for instructional strategies that draw learners' attention to form in L2 communicative classrooms. In this paper, I will discuss an instructional strategy that can help teachers achieve this goal. This strategy is "interactional feedback," a kind of corrective feedback that occurs in the course of communicative interaction. Drawing on recent theory and research, I will first present the various types and subtypes of this strategy. I will also discuss how such feedback works and how it contributes to L2 learning. I will conclude with several suggestions about how to use such feedback effectively in language classrooms.

How can learners' attention be drawn to language forms in communicative contexts? In particular, how can learners' errors be corrected while maintaining focus on communicating meaning? These are important pedagogical questions that have recently attracted the attention of many SLA researchers who believe in the importance of communicative interaction, but at the same time realize that learners need to pay attention to language forms in order to learn them successfully. They are also of interest to teachers who often encourage learners to get engaged in oral interaction but would also believe that they need to deal with their inaccurate production.

In this paper, I will discuss interactional feedback as an instructional strategy that can draw learners' attention to form in the course of communicative interaction. Interactional feedback is a feedback strategy that takes place in the course of conversational interaction through the use of various negotiation and modification strategies to deal with communication problems, such as repetition, reformulation clarification requests, etc. This approach is based on the assumption that such strategies highlight linguistic problems, causing learners to pay attention to linguistic forms (e.g., Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Mackey, 1999; Nassaji, 2007a). Since interactional feedback occurs in the course of interaction, it is believed to provide an effective means of connecting form and

meaning. Also, because such feedback involves brief side sequences rather than lengthy discussion of grammatical forms, it is assumed to draw learners' attention to form without interrupting meaning-focused communication.

Interactional feedback types

Research that has examined student-teacher interaction in communicative contexts has identified a number of feedback types that can and have been used by the teacher when interacting with their learners (e.g., Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Nassaji, 2007a; Panova & Lyster, 2002). In the following section, I will present the major types of such feedback.

Recasts

One of the interactional feedback types is the recast. Recasts are utterances that “involve the teacher’s reformulation of all or part of a student’s utterance minus the error” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 46). A particular characteristic of such feedback is that it provides the learner with the correct form. Thus, it provides the learners with the correct model of the language, or what has been called *positive evidence*. Another feature is that it may indicate to the learner, though implicitly, that he or she has made an error. Thus, it provides the learner with what has been called *negative evidence*. The following provides an example of a recast.

Example 1

- Teacher:** *Where did you do last night?*
- Student:** *I watch TV.*
- Teacher:** *You watched TV?* [Recast]
- Student:** *watched*

Clarification requests

Another type of interactional feedback is the clarification request. This is a type of feedback that occurs when the teacher or an interlocutor does not fully understand a learner’s utterance and asks for clarification by using phrases such as ‘*Pardon me?*’, ‘*Sorry?*’, and ‘*Excuse me*’. This kind of feedback does not correct the learner’s error. However, since the feedback requests for clarification, it may imply to the learner that he has made an error. Also, because the feedback does not correct the learner’s errors, it provides the learner with an opportunity to self-correct.

Example 2

Student: *I don't know what bother.*

Teacher: *I'm sorry?* [Clarification request]

Repetition

Repetition refers to feedback that repeats all or part of the learner's erroneous utterances with a rising intonation (see Example 3). Similar to clarification requests, this kind of feedback does not provide the correct form and thus it provides an opportunity for self-correction.

Example 3

Student: *Oh my God, it is too expensive, I pay only 10 dollars.*

Teacher: *I pay?* [Repetition]

(Sheen, 2004, p. 279)

Elicitation

Elicitation refers to feedback that attempts to more overtly elicit the correct form from the student. It does so, for example, by repeating the learner utterance up to the error and waiting for the learner to complete the utterance or by asking the learner more directly to reproduce the utterance such as '*Can you say it again?*'.

Example 4

Student: *I go school everyday.*

Teacher: *I go...?*

Metalinguistic cue

Metalinguistic cues are feedback types that provide the learner with meta-linguistic information. The information can be about the location of the error or the nature of the error such as '*You need a past tense*'. The following provides an example of a metalinguistic cue.

Example 4

Student: *The writes very quick.*

Teacher: *You need an adverb.* [Metalinguistic cue]

Student: *quickly*

Direct correction

Another type of interactional feedback is direct correction. This feedback type refers to utterances that not only correct the learner's error but also clearly indicate to the learner that his or her utterance is erroneous. This is usually done by the use of very explicit words or phrases (i.e. 'No', 'This is not correct', 'You should not say this', etc.). Because direct correction provides the learner with the correct form, it does not provide opportunities for self-repair. The following provides an example of direct correction.

Example 6

Student: *He never tell a lie.*

Teacher: *Not tell, **tells**. [Direct correction]*

Interactional feedback and L2 acquisition

In the field of L2 acquisition, a number of arguments have been made about the importance of interactional feedback and its contribution to language learning. One such argument comes from the importance attributed to the role of negotiation of meaning in communicative interaction (e.g., Gass, 2003; Long, 1996). Negotiation of meaning occurs as a result of the various conversational adjustments and modifications when learners perceive difficulties in understanding messages during interaction. It is believed that when learners interact and negotiate meaning, they may notice the linguistic forms in the input. They may also become aware of their non-target like utterance. Interactional feedback has also been suggested to provide opportunities for negative evidence (i.e., information that tells the learner what is not possible in a given language). For example, when the teacher asks a learner a question in the form of a clarification request during interaction, the feedback may not only require the learner to clarify his or her message, but it may also make the learner aware of an error in his or her utterance. Similarly, when the teacher correctly reformulates a learner's erroneous through recasts, the recast may signal to the learner that his or her utterance contains an error. In other words, recasts also provide opportunities for negative evidence.

Research evidence

A considerable body of research has examined the efficacy of interactional feedback for L2 acquisition. The findings of this research has been reported in many individual research reports and also summarized in number of recent reviews and meta-analyses. The scope of this research is vast and a detailed discussion of this research is beyond the scope of this article. However, it suffices to say that in general, and as confirmed in several recent meta-analyses (e.g., Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2012; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006), interactional feedback facilitates L2 acquisition. Research has also found that the effectiveness of feedback is mediated by a number of factories including the type of feedback, the context of feedback, the nature of the target form,

and various individual learner differences such as language proficiency, motivation, and learners' learning styles and strategies. For example, different types of feedback (recasts, clarification requests, etc.) may have differential effects on learning the targeted form. In general, elicitation has been found to be more effective in pushing learners to provide self-correction than recasts. Also more explicit forms of the same feedback type have been found to be more effective than more implicit forms (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Nassaji, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). The effectiveness of feedback has also been shown to vary depending on learners' developmental level or language proficiency. For example, recasts might be more effective when learners are developmentally ready to learn the language form than when they are not ready (Mackey & Philp, 1998). Learners have also been found to be better able to perceive the corrective force of recasts—realize they're being corrected—when the feedback targets lexical errors than when it targets morphosyntactic errors (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000). Students also perceive it more easily when the feedback occurs in a form-focused context where learners' attention is already on form (Sheen, 2004, 2006; see Nassaji, 2015, for a detailed review of the factors affecting feedback).

Conclusion and implications

Meaning-focused interaction is an important component of communicative L2 classrooms. In this article, I have discussed interactional feedback as a technique that can be used to draw learners' attention to form during communicative interaction. I've also briefly discussed how interactional feedback facilitates L2 acquisition and what research has shown in this area. In the following paragraphs, I present some of the pedagogical implications of this discussion.

As briefly reviewed, research has suggested that interactional feedback facilitates L2 acquisition. An important implication of this is that when teachers interact with L2 learners, they can make use of these strategies to draw learners' attention to language forms. However, not all feedback types are equally effective. For example, SLA research has shown that interactional feedback is effective when learners notice the corrective force of the feedback. This suggests that when providing feedback, teachers should provide it in ways that the feedback is noticeable to learners. For example, when they provide recasts, learners may not perceive the corrective nature of the recast because recasts are often implicit in nature. Thus, it is important to provide the recasts in ways that learners can notice them as feedback, not just conversational interaction. One way of doing so is by providing the recasts in the form of shorter recasts or recasts with fewer changes rather than longer recasts or recasts that with multiple changes (Loewen & Philp, 2006; Philp, 2003). Research has also shown that the effectiveness of interactional feedback depends on a number of factors including learners' developmental level or linguistics ability, context of feedback, types of errors, and various individual learner differences. This suggests that teachers should consider these factors when providing feedback. Finally, it should be noted that interactional feedback is only one of techniques that teacher can use to draw

learners' attention to form. There are a number of other strategies that teachers can use to do so, including various forms of input, output, and discourse enhancement strategies (see Nassaji & Fotos, 2004, 2010 for a detailed discussion of such techniques). Thus, to be effective, teachers should make use of a variety of instructional strategies in order to promote effective attention to form in L2 classrooms.

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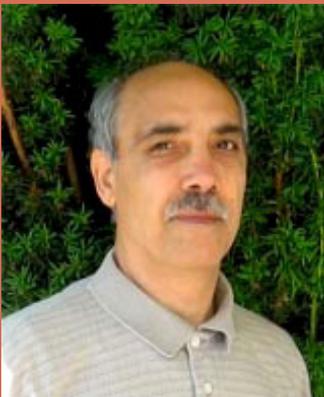
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Hossein Nassaji is Professor and Department Chair in the Linguistics Department at the University of Victoria. His teaching and research interests include form-focused instruction, interactional feedback, and second language reading and vocabulary learning. His recent books are *Interactional Feedback Dimension in Instructed Second Language Learning*, 2015, Bloomsbury Publishing; *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context*, 2010, Routledge (with Sandra Fotos); and *Form-Focused Instruction and Teacher Education: Studies in Honour of Rod Ellis*, 2007, Oxford University Press (with Sandra Fotos). He is Co-Editor of *Language Teaching Research* and Editor of the Grammar Teaching volume of *The TESOL Encyclopaedia of English Language Teaching* being published by Wiley. He is the winner of the Twenty-First Annual Kenneth W. Mildener Prize of Modern Language Association of America and the recipient of 2012 Faculty of Humanities Award for Research Excellence, University of Victoria.

WHAT EXPLAINS LOW PROFICIENCY IN A SECOND LANGUAGE?

By Katy Borodkin, Lehman College, CUNY

Individuals differ in how successful they are in second language learning. Some achieve high language proficiency, while others might invest great efforts and yet find interacting in a second language very challenging. A plethora of variables has been suggested to explain this individual variability. For example, younger age of language acquisition and higher motivation were shown to positively correlate with second language performance (Gardner, 1985; Johnson & Newport, 1989). In more recent research, an association between native language skills and second language proficiency has been reported (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). We have extended this research, particularly focusing on phonological skills and further clarifying their role in second language learning outcomes.

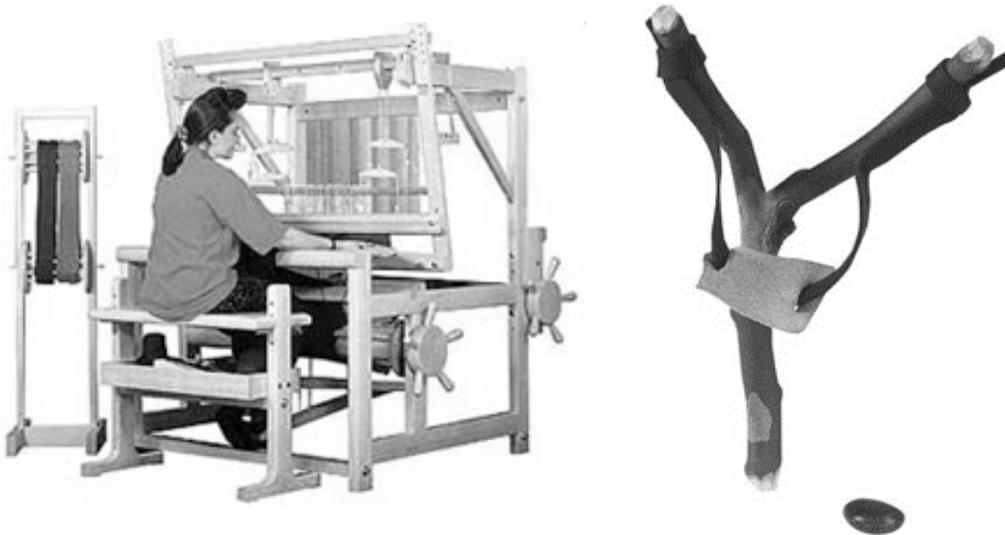
Phonological skills involve the processing of language sounds in written and oral communication (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). They include phonological awareness, phonological short-term memory, and lexical access.

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize the phonemic constituents of spoken words. It is heavily engaged in tasks requiring phoneme manipulation, such as deleting a sound from a word (say *spot* without the /s/), segmenting words into sounds (what are the sounds in *spot*), putting isolated sounds together to form a word (what do you get when you combine /s/, /p/, /ɒ/ and /t/), and reversing the order of sounds in a word (say *spot* backwards).

Phonological short-term memory is the ability to temporarily store linguistic sounds. It can be measured by a non-word repetition task, in which participants are asked to repeat meaningless words varying in the number of syllables (e.g., *mel*, *kipser*, *bleximus*). Importantly, these words usually include only possible sound sequences from the test language. For example, *tvertm* would not be used for testing English L1 processing skills.

Lexical access is the ability to access and retrieve words from memory and is involved in naming tasks. One way to measure lexical access is using the tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) experimental paradigm. TOT states are naming failures characterized by a feeling that the word exists in memory but is temporarily unavailable, rather than simply unfamiliar. They are particularly frequent for proper names (try to remember the name of your elementary school teacher or

the names of the cast members of the *Harry Potter* movies). To evoke these naming failures experimentally, researchers use verbal definitions or pictures of low-frequency items (like the pictures of a *loom* and a *slingshot* here).



One place where we often find impaired phonological skills is in people with dyslexia (a reading disability). These individuals not only perform below their peers in first-language reading, but also on a range of second language tasks. For example, they succeed less on second language literacy tasks, including single-word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension (Crombie, 1997). But they also perform below controls on second language tasks involving writing, oral production, and listening comprehension (Crombie, 1997). There are other individuals, though, who reach only a low level of second language proficiency despite having no classified dyslexia in their native language. In a previously published study that will be briefly described here, we hypothesized that these low-proficiency second language learners, like individuals with dyslexia, also have a weakness in native language phonological skills, which might be evident in a more limited set of phonological skills (Borodkin & Faust, 2014b).

The study method and the findings

To test this hypothesis, we enrolled 15 low-proficiency learners and 23 high-proficiency learners, who were classified as such based on scores on an English proficiency test. They were native speakers of Hebrew who learned English as a second language at school, starting from the age of 7. All participants were undergraduate students at an Israeli university, aged 19–31, who had no known history of dyslexia. A third group included 16 students who had been formally diagnosed with dyslexia in Hebrew. The groups were similar in previous and current exposure to English and nonverbal intellectual abilities. Individuals with dyslexia were, as expected, slower and less accurate when reading words in Hebrew compared to both low- and high-proficiency learners. Importantly, low-proficiency learners were

as good in reading as high-proficiency learners, confirming they did not have a reading difficulty in their native language.

The groups were different in their phonological skills, including phonological awareness, phonological short-term memory, and lexical access. Individuals with dyslexia performed below high-proficiency learners on each of the three Hebrew (L1) phonological tasks. Interestingly, low proficiency learners were more comparable to individuals with dyslexia than to high-proficiency learners in the number of meaningless words they were able to repeat in the non-word repetition task. They were also less able than high-proficiency learners to correctly name objects in the TOT task and experienced more TOT naming failures. The naming difficulty was also evident when low-proficiency learners were tested in their second language, English (Borodkin & Faust, 2014a). This difficulty could not be entirely related to low English proficiency, given that individuals with dyslexia, who on average had similar English proficiency scores, performed better than low proficiency learners on the English naming task.

These results suggest that the specific combination of weaknesses in phonological skills gives rise to different kinds of language/reading difficulties. A weakness in the three phonological skills—phonological awareness, phonological short-term memory, and lexical access—will give rise to dyslexia in a native language, which is often associated with low second language learning outcomes. Individuals who have a weakness in only some of these skills, specifically, phonological short-term memory and lexical access, as measured by the TOT naming paradigm, may develop intact native language reading skills but still have difficulties with second-language learning. Performance in a second language may be particularly vulnerable to a subtle weakness in native language phonological processing (as in low-proficiency learners) due to the less-than-optimal circumstances characteristic of second language learning, such as later age of acquisition and limited language exposure, often along with the need to learn a new phonological or orthographic system, or both.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The research described here is an important step toward a better characterization of individuals who experience difficulties with second language learning, as evident in low second language proficiency. It suggests that on the continuum between clinically recognized individuals whose difficulties are identifiable in their native language (as in specific language impairment and dyslexia) and typically developing individuals there is also an intermediate group, whose functional disadvantage is only evident in a second language. This descriptive research maps the kind of weaknesses that low-proficiency second language learners have in native language phonological skills.

It also raises a number of interesting follow-up questions. For example, what are the mechanisms linking native language phonological skills and second language proficiency? What underlies the phonological weaknesses in low-proficiency learners? One possibility

we considered in relation to the latter question was that the sounds of native language words (i.e., phonological representations) in the memory of low-proficiency learners are not as well specified as they are in the memory of high-proficiency learners (Borodkin & Faust, submitted; Borodkin & Faust, in preparation). Thus, the phonemic information for some words may be only partially specified, as in as in *man?lin* for *mandolin*, where the presence of a middle syllable is indicated (as signified by the question mark) but its content is unspecified. This under-specification may explain low performance on both phonological short-term memory and naming tasks.

We believe that by looking into the sources of phonological weaknesses and by addressing other important questions we will improve our understanding of individual differences in second language proficiency and of the processes involved in second language acquisition and learning. This line of research may also contribute to the development of testing instruments for early identification of individuals with difficulties in second language learning and of teaching methods specifically designed to address their weaknesses.

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A RESEARCH-BASED ARGUMENT FOR MAXIMIZING LINGUISTIC RESOURCES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

By James Corcoran, University of Toronto

Building on an piece I wrote for Contact in 2009 and linking to a presentation I will give at the TESL Ontario conference in November, this article outlines a research or evidence-based argument for (re) conceptualizing language teaching and learning and, in doing so, maximizing our plurilinguistic resources when teaching ESL. I hope that this article challenges readers to reflect upon how such a plurilinguistic conceptualization of language teaching and learning relates to their context-specific English language teaching (ELT) policies and practices.

I started my teaching career at private language institutes in Brazil and Quebec. For the past decade, I have been teaching in post-secondary contexts as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and TESL instructor. These experiences have included classrooms with both homogenous Spanish and Chinese L1 students as well as heterogeneous classes of students/student teachers of differing linguistic backgrounds.

Most recently, I have been teaching an EAP writing course to Chinese Engineers transitioning into a professional Master of Engineering program at the University of Toronto. While teaching this course, I had one of those rare “Aha!” moments when reflecting on a particular teaching session that started out unsuccessfully but was transformed through the integration of students’ L1. I had asked my students to carry out small group discussions (6 groups of 3) on cross-cultural differences between English and Chinese academic writing and was disappointed to see only minimal engagement. I then decided to allow an interlocutor for each group to facilitate the discussion using English or Mandarin/Cantonese. When these other languages were employed by those tasked with facilitating the discussion, group members became more engaged (using multiple languages), and the resulting report back to the entire class with facilitators sharing details from their small group discussions was lively and full of debate (in English). Now, you may be thinking, “How can you allow these other languages space in a language classroom where the goal is to promote *English* language learning?” The remainder of this article describes my evidence-based rationale for this type of plurilingual classroom practice by countering some commonly laid arguments for explicit or implicit English-only classrooms, suggests some plurilingual practices that may be effective in the teaching of language in varying contexts around Ontario, and concludes with a call for a more reflective, responsive, and evidence-based teaching of languages in an era of English as a global or international language.

The following research-based comments are ones I have re-created from the many thoughtful questions and concerns I hear from ESL teachers in Ontario in response to my suggestions for plurilingual classrooms that maximize linguistic resources:

1) Our departmental/institutional policy is to use English only. I have to follow the policy.

Institutional policy has been found to be instrumental in affecting teachers' decisions to include other languages in their ESL/EFL classrooms, both in how they adhere to or resist such policies (Arnett & Turnbull, 2007; Barcelos, 2003; Borg, 2003; Corcoran, 2011a; Richards et al., 2001). One of the more persistent fallacies in ELT, one that promotes monolingual policies and practices, is that language is best taught and learned strictly in the target language. This belief persists even though theorists and practitioners alike have shown the cognitive (Cook, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) and affective (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins et al., 2005) benefits to some inclusion of students' L1s in classroom teaching, particularly when done in a judicious manner (Butzkamm, 2003; Macaro, 2009). Perhaps more importantly, evidence showing the potentially detrimental effects of an *English only* policy on learners' motivation and engagement with the target language suggests that these policies, while widespread (especially in private language institutes) are poorly conceived and lead to problematic teaching practices and low teacher and student self-esteem (DiCamilla & Anton, 2012; Cummins, 2001). Ultimately, we as teachers must make our own decisions on how to negotiate our practices in response to departmental/institutional policies; however these decisions should be evidence-based and reflection-driven as opposed to applied simply in accordance with institutional policy.

2) I am failing my students if I do not provide them with chances to negotiate meaning in English while in class.

As we have all been told time and time again when considering a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (or a method under this ever-expanding methodological umbrella), negotiation of meaning in the target language is an essential element of developing communicative competence (Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, it should be noted that developing such confidence in an increasingly multilingual global landscape often denotes balancing linguistic resources by employing multiple linguistic resources and translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011a; García, 2013; Pennycook, 2010) or codeswitching/codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011b; Kramsch, 2015; Macaro, 2005) during communicative events. Further, allowing other-language use does not necessarily denote *less* English language use, but rather, I would argue, stimulates *more* overall language use, including more in the target language. Negotiating in the target language is important, yes, but allowing other languages a space in such interactions should not be prevented as it is a natural, authentic way for language learners who share similar linguistic resources to interact and negotiate meaning.

3) I only speak English. I am afraid that if I allow students to use other languages in the ESL classroom, they will go “off-topic”. Further, I am concerned about “opening the floodgates” to rampant other language use. How do I know when I am allowing too much L1 use?

This is a reasonable concern. I have often experienced that sinking feeling when I see two students chatting in a language other than the ones I am fluent in. It has taken me several years of teaching and reflecting upon the positive and negative experiences of allowing other-language use (or disallowing it) to come to my current practice. Classroom research from school-age populations (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Stille & Cummins, 2013) to higher education classrooms (Dailey-O’Cain & Leibscher, 2014; Duff & Polio, 1990; Macaro, 2009; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003) has shown the potential benefits of allowing students the opportunity to use shared L1s as a scaffolding tool in order to build engagement with the L2 as well as via quick translations of lexical items or activity instructions. Further, as mentioned previously, research has also shown the detrimental effects of prohibiting such practices. I have found that allowing other language use between students to be effective with both a heterogeneous (different L1s) and homogeneous (shared L1s) population of students in both ESL and EFL contexts. With overwhelming evidence pointing to the cognitive and affective benefits of allowing L1 inclusion in the L2 classroom, I would nevertheless caution that this use should be judicious. As suggested by Turnbull (2001), among others, there is sufficient evidence to show that a certain amount of target-language exposure is necessary for optimal language learning outcomes, particularly in contexts where students do not receive sufficient out-of-class exposure. Ultimately, it is important for us as teachers to base our decisions about how much L1 to allow or proscribe on research (such as that highlighted in this article) as well as our own reflections on what was effective and ineffective in relation to our teaching objectives.

4) I am supposed to be the model of English language use. If I am speaking other languages, isn’t this poor modeling?

Another myth in the world of global English language teaching is that the ideal speaker of a language is the native speaker (Llurda, 2009a; Paikeday, 1985; Phillipson, 1992). The argument goes that a native speaker is the ideal model for language use ostensibly in order to stimulate good or proper language use among their students, use that emulates the pronunciation and speech patterns of the teacher. Following this logic, an ideal language teacher would speak only in English in order to provide as much of this proper model of language use as possible. However, numbers stemming from studies into the global use of English (e.g. Crystal, 2012) show that the language is mostly used by non-native speakers (including those labeled non-native English-speaking teachers), with studies of spoken and written English corpuses (Mauranen et al., 2010; Flowerdew, 2015) showing this language use includes significant variation from the native speaker norms prevalent as the model for good or proper language use in ELT. Remember that, as teachers, we are *a* model, not *the* model of language use. This is a world (including in this country,

particularly in cosmopolitan centres) of increasing plurilingual communication where those who speak multiple languages far outnumber those who are monolingual, and the use of other languages by teachers provides a model of that kind of multilingual competence to students. This is indeed a model to strive for and, unlike a native speaker model, it is one that multilingual, multicompetent L2 users can realistically strive to achieve.

5) I speak (French; Spanish; Mandarin; Farsi; Tagalog; etc.) and sometimes use it with students in my classroom who share the same language; however I feel guilty about this because I think I may be excluding or insulting other students.

Research points to the potential benefits of using other languages in the ESL/EFL classroom for various reasons, including increasing engagement (Cummins et al. 2005), achieving teaching/learning objectives via scaffolding (Bhooth, Asman & Ismail, 2014, Macaro, 2009; Merino, 2011) building teacher-student relationships (Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Corcoran, 2011a), and challenging unequal relations of power (Cummins, 2009). Teachers should begin their interactions with particular student groups (i.e. on the first course day) with an explicit plurilingual policy that celebrates other languages within the framework of English language teaching/learning. This includes a sharing among teachers and students of linguistic resources as well as discussion of how and when using particular linguistic resources is potentially effective and appropriate. In doing this, multilingual and multicompetent teachers and students can interact in a way that does not exclude others but rather celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom in an open and transparent way.

Conclusion

A reconceptualization of the language classroom as a welcoming and plurilingual space that celebrates language users (including the teacher) as multicompetent users of other languages is of paramount importance moving forward. This approach in the language classroom, one more in line with authentic English language use outside the classroom (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011; Mauranen, 2012), provides for a truly student-centred pedagogy that embraces students as multicompetent language users instead of deficient English users (Cook, 2005). I believe it is high time that we embrace the empirical evidence supporting such an inclusive approach as we move forward in this post-method (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), post-native speaker (Baker, 2015; Llurda, 2009b), post-normative (Dewey, 2012) era of ELT. I encourage readers to engage in reflective, evidence-based practice (Corcoran, 2009; Farrell, 2014) moving forward as they decide on classroom policies and practices that (hopefully) reflect this plurilingual conceptualization for our ESL classrooms. It is my sincere hope that this article inspires a robust debate among Ontario ESL educators on context-specific plurilingual teaching practices in line with what has been described as the *multi/plurilingual turn* in second language education (Kramersch, 2012; Kubota, 2014; Levine, 2013).

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FINDING AN ENGLISH ENVIRONMENT AND NETWORKING AT AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM MULTICULTURAL CHURCH IN TORONTO

By Huamei Han¹, Simon Fraser University

In the spring of 2003, I started working with a young immigrant couple in Toronto for a larger project on language learning for settlement. I will call them Grace and Timothy, and I have changed all personal and institutional names to protect their identities. Grace and Timothy told me that the government-funded LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) English classes were not useful, but Green Meadow, a church they had been attending, helped them the most in improving their spoken English. I assumed this must be because they had many opportunities to interact in English at Green Meadow. However, when I first attended a Sunday service at Green Meadow, it seemed that they had limited opportunities to interact with others and even fewer opportunities to interact in English. I was puzzled: how could this be more helpful than taking English classes?

In my subsequent fieldwork with Grace and Timothy, and other immigrants, for four years, at Green Meadow and at other spaces, I gradually learned that a lot more was going on at and related to church than Sunday services, and a large number of formerly atheist immigrants from mainland China converted to Evangelical Christianity in settlement in Canada. With limited space, here I will focus on Grace and Timothy's search for access to English and networking at Green Meadow only.

Searching for an English Environment and Finding Christianity

Born and raised in mainland China, Grace and Timothy did not plan to join any organized religion before immigration to Canada, but their search for an “English environment” eventually led them to Green Meadow and to evangelical Christianity. After going through the atheist education system in China and obtaining bachelor's degrees, Grace and Timothy worked in accounting and computers respectively. Both studied English for various exams in their educational careers, and Timothy used English for work occasionally and passed English exams for his immigration application. In their mid- and late-twenties respectively when arriving in Canada in late 2001, Grace and Timothy found the “English Environment” in Canada that they had imagined was limited to short exchanges on the bus and with

1. This is a re-write of Han, H. (2014) Access English and networks at an English-Medium multicultural church in East Canada: An Ethnography. *Canadian Modern Language Review*. 70(2): 220–245.

the cashiers at the super market, while their LINC classes largely repeated the grammar points they had learned in China. Then through a LINC classmate, Grace heard about a free English conversation group, so Grace and Timothy went together. The Senior Tutors program was organized by an American missionary, and matched retirees in an old age home who were Christians with international students and immigrants to meet weekly for an hour and half of conversation. Green Meadow went to the Senior Tutors program to “load up” immigrants to go to their church “to learn more on English”, and Grace and Timothy “held out for half a year” before finally going there to take a look. At that time, neither job search nor re-training was working, but Green Meadow helped with English and beyond. After about a year in Toronto, Grace and Timothy converted to evangelical Christianity and received baptism at Green Meadow.

Green Meadow was a young English-medium multicultural church led by a group of young people: all were of Chinese descent and born in various Southeast Asian countries, they immigrated as children, were mainly or exclusively educated in Canada, and spoke native-like English. Seeing Green Meadow as a *community of practice*, these so-called “1.5-Generation” members comprised the *old-timers* while Grace and Timothy joined as the *newcomers*. Green Meadow mainly served immigrants from mainland China, Southeast Asia, and Sri Lanka, who comprised the *other members*. During my fieldwork there, *a wide variety of ongoing activities* were happening at or related to this community of practice: formal, religion-focused, whole-church activities, including weekly Sunday services and religious events such as Christmas and Easter celebrations at church; semi-formal, religion-focused, group activities, such as a weekly Bible Study class at church, and weekly Cell Group gatherings, where about a dozen individuals gathered at their group leaders’ home to study the Bible followed by a social; and informal social activities of various size, such as a weekly juice-and-snack fellowship after each worship service at church, summer whole-church barbeques in parks, and small-group activities such as Cell Group seasonal outings, e.g., skiing or strawberry-picking trips. But the most frequent ones were small-scale informal gatherings and home parties initiated by individuals with a few friends; sometimes, it could be just one woman inviting another woman to have a home-cooked meal together.

Grace and Timothy participated *fully* in informal social activities of all sizes, but participated in the *periphery* in the formal events and the semi-formal group activities. They seemed content there mostly, maybe partly because they recognized that their full participation in informal activities was the most helpful for improving their English, as Timothy explained to me in an interview in May 2003:

Ah, the thing is, the church itself, if you go there for the *service* only, then *fellowship* a little and leave, I think- the help [for English learning] isn’t huge... but at church, once you have *networking* – then it would help greatly – it would make a difference...

Grace and Timothy networked with the old-timers and two sub-groups of other members – how did it work?

Networking with the Old-Timers

Grace and Timothy seemed to value their interactions with the old-timers the most. In an interview in May 2003, Timothy explained how networking with them worked:

Ah *networking* is – for example, many members at our church grew up here since they were little. They were very willing to help, then I made friends with them... Sometimes they invited us to their home – this is very important! Imagine, they invite you to their home! Then the topics [...] could include anything everything!

They invited us to have fun, and we got to do something too – Chinese people value returning courtesies, right – so we invited them to have a meal – we made dumplings – they didn't know how to make dumplings – we taught them! You know, just through making dumplings, I heard a LOT of English! Talking back and forth making dumplings – the everyday English – ah in no time I knew– [...] how they said things – and how they did things – a lot of people say: “I can't integrate into the Western society and I feel so distressed.” I think it is mainly because they haven't made Western friends...

There are many interesting points in Timothy's remarks above, but here I will focus on three. First, the informal interactions were the most useful for improving their everyday English because they covered a wide range of topics and demanded interlocutors to engage in comprehending and producing utterances *in contexts*. In the process of accomplishing real-life tasks at hand, such as hosting a dinner party, they integrated words and deeds in specific contexts, which made learning more comprehensible and durable. This contrasted with their English classes in China and in LINC classes in Toronto where they were learning from distance or *in abstraction*. However, it is not the home that makes learning contextualized, or the classroom that makes learning decontextualized, or abstract; instead, it is participating in personally relevant and meaningful activities and in *productive* roles that makes the meaning and the learning contextualized. In this sense, learning English contextualized is an issue of *access* to using the language in meaningful contexts. Second, home visits constituted important processes for Grace and Timothy to construct positive identities and accumulate social capital. Being invited for home visits indicated to them that they were trusted and valued as friends; then by hosting a dinner party at home and teaching dumpling-making, Grace and Timothy created an opportunity to construct themselves as competent and contributing members, which compensated for their 'deficient' linguistic identity in English. Third, these informal socializations bonded individuals on a personal level and built the foundation for the circulation of material and symbolic resources far beyond home-cooked meals and English linguistic capital.

During my fieldwork, a young 1.5-Generation couple, Joanna and Barry, were the leaders of the Cell group that Grace and Timothy attended, and the two couples socialized frequently and were very close. They visited each other and talked on the phone frequently outside of group activities. Timothy and Barry often talked about cars, real estate, and business collaborations. When Timothy started selling internet services, Barry co-registered an incorporated company with him so that Timothy could become eligible to sell to not only residential customers but also businesses. When Grace started looking for bookkeeping jobs, Barry helped editing her resume, and Joanna coached her on answering mock interview questions. Joanna later passed on an internal posting to Grace, acted as her reference, and first encouraged and then comforted her when Grace failed the telephone job interview. The same summer, amidst financial difficulties, Timothy persuaded Grace to agree to buy a car with a budget of \$1,000. Barry and Joanna connected them with a private seller, helped to seal the deal, and guided them through buying automobile insurance. Timothy drove this car for door-to-door sales until it failed an emission test three years later, by which time they had left Green Meadow and saved enough for the down payment of a modest house.

In short, Grace and Timothy's full participation in informal networking as both the participants and the organizers or hosts, entailed opportunities to use English in contexts. More importantly, when settlement life was harsh, and material resources and symbolic capital, particularly social connections and English linguistic resources, were scarce for them as newcomers, the frequent, regular, and caring interactions with the 1.5-Generation enabled the circulation of material and symbolic capital that supported their settlement on a daily basis. Indeed, the mutual friendship growing out of these interactions was integral for their economic and socio-emotional survival and wellbeing in settlement.

Networking with Other Members

In addition to the 1.5-Generation, Grace and Timothy networked with two sub-groups of other members, which served similarly multiple functions, including helping with English learning. The first sub-group comprised other recent immigrants from mainland China who were also new adult converts. Although Mandarin was the primary language they shared, they all came into contact with Christianity in Canada and mainly through English. Therefore, they used mainly English when discussing issues pertaining to Christianity. The second sub-group included several middle-aged couples from Southeast Asia who had had Christian socialization before immigration to Canada due to intensive missionary work in that region after the Communist Party banned all missionaries in mainland China in 1949. These "senior Christians" encouraged new Christians to call them at home, which made the interest in communication mutual. The only language the senior Christians and the new Christians shared was English. Grace and Timothy's interactions with these two sub-groups therefore also constituted the process of learning English in contexts.

More importantly, judging by the range, the frequency and the outcomes, networking with immigrants from mainland China seemed to be at least as helpful, if not more so, for their

settlement as with the 1.5-Generation old-timers. Grace and Timothy interacted with three other mainland Chinese couples frequently and closely. They had regular home parties, and some also went grocery shopping together; when two couples had their first babies—alone in Canada without the support of extended families or relatives—the others visited with gifts in addition to visiting with other Green Meadow members. When the new mothers or babies fell ill, the others helped at home and visited in hospitals. They also passed on job information, first mostly introducing each other to manual jobs to pay their bills, as well as workshops, English classes, training programs, and so on. Later when Timothy started doing door-to-door sales, he brought along unemployed new and old friends at Green Meadow and former co-workers from the factories he worked at. Knocking on doors was a tough and challenging job without a base salary, let alone doing it in English; but unlike the dead-end manual jobs, it offered the possibility of making more money to start their own businesses one day. When Grace looked for entry level accounting jobs, friends shared resumes and cover letters that yielded interviews, and in fact, it was an advertisement an immigrant friend clipped from the *Toronto Star* that landed Grace her first full-time job in April 2004. In these ways, informal socializations at and around Green Meadow helped Grace and Timothy, and their mainland immigrant friends, to form settlement support networks, and to accumulate material and symbolic capital in the new country.

Discussion and Further Questions

Despite their peripheral participation in formal religion-focused, whole-church, and semi-formal group activities at Green Meadow, Grace and Timothy were content with their full participation in informal social activities outside of church, which contextualized English language learning to make it more comprehensible and durable. The informal networking also provided opportunities for them to construct positive identities as competent and contributing members despite their relatively limited English linguistic capital, and created a sense of belonging. Even more importantly, these informal socializations enabled the circulation of material and symbolic resources, and were instrumental for their settlement at this stage. Their experience at Green Meadow illustrates that with caring interpersonal interactions, immigrants can survive and thrive even when they are positioned unfavourably ideologically and structurally.

Grace and Timothy's trajectory to and experience at Green Meadow have implications for immigrant language training policy, program design, and pedagogy. Below I pose a series of questions to stimulate dialogues and actions.

1) Canada is a leader in providing immigrant language training; but with a focus on learning discrete linguistic skills and a concentration of recently arrived immigrants in the program without pathways structured afterwards, the current LINC program *unintentionally segregates* immigrants from, instead of integrating them into, the Canadian society. How can immigrant language training policies and programs help build a community that enables immigrants to have regular and frequent access to a sufficient number of old-timers,

other members, and information, and to participating in a wide-range of ongoing activities linking them to other communities?

2) Within the constraints of the current policy, would it still be possible for LINC administrators and teachers to *intentionally* design and organize activities to broaden and link immigrants to other communities in meaningful ways? For example, in addition to or in place of occasional fieldtrips, how can LINC help different groups of immigrants make use of their expertises in languages, computers, cooking, arts, sports, and so on, by *contributing regularly* to community centers, old-age homes, libraries, tutoring centers, public events, NGOs, and so on?

3) Within the current LINC structure, how can a teacher *intentionally* design and implement curriculum and instructions that are relevant and engaging to immigrants to create opportunities for *contextualized* English language learning in their classes? Instead of positioning immigrants as the *perpetual learners*, is it possible for a LINC teacher to structure opportunities for immigrants to teach their peers, even their teacher, another LINC class or even the neighbourhood where LINC is situated, something that immigrants are good at?

4) What might be some productive ways for applied linguists to engage the public in dialogues and discussions of the sociopolitical nature of language issues?

Language issues are always symptoms of inequalities when groups meet; immigrant language training has always been thorny and emotional issues rooted in historical inequalities, which are intensified today in the processes of globalization. Canada has benefited from immigration and immigrants in its relatively short history. As a developed country, Canada has a choice to use its advantaged position to continue accelerating global inequality by focusing on *selecting* immigrants to benefit Canadians economically, or to take its responsibility to seriously *integrate* immigrants for the wellbeing of Canadians *and immigrants*. Fundamentally, it takes changing socioeconomic relations and making ideological shift to address language issues; and I contend that, as a way of contributing to public discourse and to a more equitable world, it is an applied linguist's job to keep making and exemplifying this point. Some scholars have set good examples by raising critical language awareness, initiating debates about language issues through ethnography-based plays, teaching English speakers to listen to accented English, or writing introductory texts on linguistic diversity. We still have a long way to go.

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TED TALKS AND CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE EAP CLASSROOM

By Jeff Brown, George Brown College

Reflecting their educational utilization generally (Romanelli et al, 2014; Rubenstein, 2012), TED talks are being used ever more widely in the ELT (and, in particular, the EAP) classroom. Though commonly seen as a listening resource, TED talks can also provide a basis for reading and writing activities. TED talks—videos of conference presentations (usually from 15-20 minutes long) on a variety of topics available for free on the TED (Technology Education and Design) website—are an example of what Chun (2015) describes as “videos as class texts” (Chun, 2015, p. 14). These ‘texts’ can be drawn upon in a variety of ways in the L2 classroom. The transcripts¹ of the talks can be used as more traditional texts, and learners can engage in any number of activities aimed at improving reading/writing skills. TED talks, for example, provide an excellent opportunity to work on vocabulary expansion: both academic vocabulary and idiomatic usage can be targeted. Drawing upon the transcripts as written texts also presents an effective focus on *cohesion* (syntactic connectedness, the use of linking words, grammatical and lexical relationships between elements of the text, etc.) and *coherence* (semantic connectedness, relationships of meaning, ensuring a text makes sense, etc.) that serves learners well in developing their academic reading and writing skills.²

TED talks can be used for more than just the enhancement of language skills, however. As Fogal et al (2014) point out, they can also help L2 learners “develop autonomy and critical thinking skills” (p. 353). This involves helping learners develop “higher order skills” (Bloom, 1984) that require analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Teaching these skills requires pedagogical strategies that move beyond merely teaching concepts, vocabulary, and grammar. For example, students can be asked to write pieces evaluating a TED speaker’s argument, to express either support or disagreement with it, in other words, to critically engage with it in a way that requires a deeper processing of the content and ideas.

Critical Thinking / Critical Literacy

Critical thinking is an essential skill for academic literacy in a post-secondary setting; as such, the development of critical thinking is invariably a learning outcome for EAP courses.

¹ Transcripts are made available some time after the video is posted on line. They are crowd-sourced and, while typically very accurate, occasionally include errors. Translations are also made available through the same process.

² This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the ways in which TED talks can be drawn upon in the EAP classroom. For more ideas, see Fogal et al (2014), Servinis (2013), and a growing amount of online content.

But *critical thinking* ought not to be equated with *critical literacy*, and critical literacy is something on which the responsible practitioner needs to focus. Chun (2015), for example, highlights the problematic conflation of critical thinking with critical literacy. Critical thinking tends to take the form of a sort of *critical reading* that seeks to identify the structure of an argument in a text, whether the conclusion/thesis is justified, and perhaps highlights authorial biases and political agendas. Going further than this, key aims of critical literacy are the identification and naming of power instantiations in texts, and the highlighting of “the societal attempts [...] to produce uniform and conformist understandings of socially constructed representations of reality” (Chun, 2015, pp. 99–100).

Lee (2011) points out that critical literacy goes beyond critical thinking in that the former involves a critical encounter with both the “word and the world” (Lee, 2011, p. 99). Lee identifies the identification of critical literacy and critical thinking as one of the central misunderstandings of critical literacy that needs to be “unlearned” by educational practitioners. “Critical literacy practices differ from critical thinking skills in that the former are set in a sociopolitical context oriented toward identifying unequal power relationships and serving social justice” (Lee, 2011, p. 97). Pennycook (2001) points out that “critical thinking” denotes “a way of bringing more rigorous analysis to problem solving or textual understanding” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 4), whereas a focus on social and political concerns informs critical literacy. Crookes (2013) argues that critical literacy encourages the language learner to “develop tools for seeing the ways in which language has position, interests, [and] power” (Crookes, 2013, p. 28). In other words, critical literacy brings the *word* (the text that is the subject of critical thinking) into an encounter with the *world* (the larger socio-political context that falls under the purview of critical literacy).

The importance of this distinction becomes even more urgent when we consider who EAP learners are. An EAP class is often composed of students from a wide variety of backgrounds: as a community, the EAP classroom is multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic. Many learners are international students experiencing an academic North American classroom for the first time. Clearly, English language learners (ELLs) “face a daunting array a power-laden discourses they need to learn and engage with in their various academic, institutional and societal forms” (Chun, 2015, p. 3). If we return to the notion that critical literacy involves an awareness of the encounter of the *word* with the *world*, we see that a critical perspective on the use of TED as a resource in the language classroom involves inquiring into the socio-political context surrounding it. After all, TED’s motto is “ideas worth spreading” (<http://www.ted.com/>). We—the classroom practitioners exposing learners to this resource—should ask: *whose* ideas? *where* do these ideas come from? *why* should we spread them or accept them? Indeed, the teacher introducing this resource into the classroom has a responsibility to foster such a critical awareness on the part of learners.

Issues with TED

Fogal et al (2014) identify two considerations to bear in mind regarding the use of TED talks in the L2 classroom. These are “the range of difficulty with some of the TED Talks and an overreliance on aural and verbal modes of communication” (p. 361). The second of these is ameliorated by the use of the transcripts as a reading resource to complement the talk itself. More problematic is the first “consideration”, which, upon analysis, is actually a nest of considerations. TED talks present significant difficulties for the L2 learner in part because of their lexical density, subject-specificity, and conceptual sophistication. Beyond this, they also employ a great number of culturally-specific references and make assumptions about the knowledge-base and background of the audience—assumptions that presuppose and favour certain literacies and literacy practices over others. For these and other reasons, TED talks (and TED itself) have recently been subjected to a number of criticisms, with commentators claiming that TED is, among other things, elitist, biased, scientifically dubious and (problematically) evangelical (see, for example, Hustad, 2014; Jurgensen, 2012; Robbins, 2012). For example, Hustad (2014) observes that “a great TED talk is reminiscent of a tent revival sermon” (Hustad, 2014). O’Brien (2013) argues that “TED dumbs down complex subjects to pre-packaged knowledge nuggets for the masses.” There is also concern that “what began as something spontaneous and unique has today become a parody of itself [and that] the whole TED vibe has come to resemble a sales pitch” (Jurgensen, 2012).

Given some of these critiques³, it is not enough to conclude that, despite some difficulties in terms of language, the study of TED talks serves ELLs “as they become members of an increasingly global community” (Fogal et al, p. 353). For, again, crucial questions arise. What does it mean to be a “member” of such a “community”? To what extent should the ELT practitioner be involved (complicit?) in leading learners into such membership? At the very least, a respect for the autonomy and rights of ELLs would suggest that such issues should be addressed. This falls under the auspices of critical literacy rather than critical thinking, and it reveals a responsibility incumbent upon the EAP practitioner.

TED, the Word and the World: Sample Classroom Materials

To begin with, many learners are not even aware of TED as an organizational entity, let alone that there might be legitimate criticisms of it.⁴ A straightforward worksheet (see Appendix A) asking students to visit TED’s website to learn a few basic facts about the organization serves to raise this awareness. If the syllabus and time restrictions are quite strict—as, of course, they often are in an EAP course—this worksheet can be done as a homework

³ This is not to suggest that TED is a cabalistic organization with some sort of sinister agenda. Indeed, those who criticize TED no doubt have their own agendas. The intent here is merely to raise awareness of something that is often not even acknowledged as an issue (indeed, not only in the language classroom, but in the public consciousness generally).

⁴ In an EAP class, one student, when asked where TED talks ‘come from’, responded, “from the Youtube.”

assignment. Follow-up writing tasks can then be assigned. The instructor wishing to go further—or, the instructor with learners who wish to go further—can follow-up this initial information gathering worksheet with one that asks learners to actually engage with some of the criticisms that have been raised regarding TED, and to consider some of the ways TED has responded to these criticisms (see Appendix B⁵). Learners will then be aware of an entire dialogue that remains hidden if TED talks are regarded merely as “found material”, as texts that stem from no particular place, from no particular socio-cultural or ideological perspective.

The point is not to demonize the TED organization; learners may decide that the criticisms have no merit, or that the benefits offered by studying TED talks far outweigh any drawbacks. Their reactions to and reflections on this dialogue can form the basis of further reading/writing assignments and in-class speaking/listening activities. Use of the worksheets should be contextualized; what works with one group of learners may not work with another group. Any number of variables (including language proficiency levels, specific schedule and curricular constraints, affective issues and classroom dynamics) come into play here. For example, in one classroom implementation of the TED worksheet, the articles on which the second part of the worksheet is based were deemed to be too challenging, both in terms of language and in terms of the concepts covered⁶. Hence, classroom use of the worksheet was limited in this case to a follow-up discussion of the first part of the worksheet (again, see Appendices A and B). Whatever the students’ responses, their engagement in this sort of inquiry opens up the way to a wider, more expansive critical literacy perspective. Such a perspective is clearly to be differentiated from the more narrow conception of literacy underpinned by a focus on “critical thinking”.

Concluding Remarks

This example of how TED talks can be approached in the EAP classroom should demonstrate that ELT can be critical even within a restrictive curriculum. The utilization of TED talks considered here indicates the manner—again, far from radical—in which the limiting curricular focus on critical thinking can be subverted by a critical literacy perspective. Moreover, this subversion remains a legitimate language learning activity. Far from posing a problem from the point of view of learning materials, a focus on critical literacy can lead to a rich variety of classroom materials. These materials, while informed by a critical perspective, are *ipso facto* language-learning materials as well. In this sense, such “subversions” represent the proverbial win-win situation for both teachers and students.

⁵ I’ve used the worksheets in Appendices A and B on several occasions when I taught advanced EAP classes at a Canadian post-secondary institution. The only materials for this course—as indicated in the instructions for the worksheets—were TED talks. Transcripts of the talks were used as traditional ‘texts’ to complement the talks themselves and to facilitate further reading and writing activities.

⁶ Generally, the second worksheet (or ‘Part II’) is appropriate only for advanced EAP classes; however, it may also be accessible for strong upper-intermediate groups. ‘Part I’ can be used for a variety of levels, from intermediate upwards. Again, no two groups of learners are the same, and any use of classroom materials should be based on a careful needs-analysis and insights gained from the rapport formed with the group in question.

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Appendix A

All about TED

Part I – General Background

All three units in this course draw upon TED talks. While it's important to engage critically with the ideas presented by each of the speakers, it's also important (1) to know something about the TED organization itself and (2) to critically reflect on TED.

Let's begin with (1). To answer the questions below, go to main TED website and follow the relevant links.

<http://www.ted.com/pages/about>

1. 'TED' is an [acronym](#). What does it stand for?
2. When did TED begin?
3. What is TED's mission (in 2 words)?
4. What did the first TED conference include?
5. True or False: The first TED conference made a lot of money.
6. Who owns TED?
7. How does TED make money?
8. When were TED talks first posted online?
9. How long is a TED talk?
10. Where are TED's headquarters?
11. Click on 'TED Brain Trust'. What are some of the occupations of members of the 'TED Community'?
12. Where is the 2015 TED conference being held? What is the price of attendance?

Appendix B

All about TED

Part II – Critical Reflection

All three units in this course draw upon TED talks. While it's important to engage critically with the ideas presented by each of the speakers, it's also important (1) to know something about the TED organization itself and (2) to critically reflect on TED.

Now it's time for (2).

Read the following article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/15/opinion/sunday/the-church-of-ted.html>

1. In two or three sentences, summarize Hustad's main points about TED talks:

Now read this article:

<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/against-ted/>

2. What are Jurgenson's main criticisms of TED? Which points are the same as in the Hustad article? Which are different?

Finally, go to <http://www.ted.com/pages/about> once again. Click on 'Debunking TED myths' on the left.

3. What myths are [debunked](#) here?
4. Are any of these issues raised in the articles above?
5. How adequately do you think the response to these issues is? Do you find them persuasive? Why or why not?
6. What is the significance of the use of the word '[myth](#)' in the title of this section?

CHOOSING AND TEACHING FILMS IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

A successful methodology¹

By Kathe Geist, Showa Boston Institute

Most teachers use films in class at some point, and some have written about their methodologies, but in surveying the literature, I found that those who wrote about it use film with relatively high-level L2 students or use incredibly painstaking methods that would be prohibitive for the average teacher. For example, two teachers in Hong Kong describe transcribing the entire script of [Casablanca](#) so that students could study the dialogue and eventually follow the film without subtitles (Hu & Jiang, 2008). In this article, based on a course I developed for Japanese college women with relatively low-level English skills (TOEFL 370–450), I will suggest filters for choosing films that students can understand without transcription as well as methodologies for teaching those films.

Choosing Films

My course was titled “American Culture through Movies.” Since movies are an important part of American culture, I included some film history in the course and taught only classic or highly respected films, but to find enough of these that my students could understand I had to ask myself the following questions:

1. Does the plot depend too much on dialogue?

This eliminates a huge number of pre-World War II films, including *Casablanca*, because so many depend on dialogue to advance the plot.

2. Do action and visuals carry much of the plot?

This is the ideal. I began my course with classic [Mickey Mouse cartoons](#), [Chaplin shorts](#) and [The Wizard of Oz](#), films with broad action, physical comedy, music and minimal dialogue, films understandable to children as well as adults. [Some Like It Hot](#), which I showed later in the course, illustrates the difference between plot that is conveyed by words and plot that is conveyed by action. In the beginning the film is very verbal, and my students never totally understand why the two men lose all their money or go to the garage where they witness the massacre, or how they hook up with the women’s band, but as soon as they join the band, come out in drag, and meet Marilyn Monroe, the plot becomes very physical, and the students understand and thoroughly enjoy it.

¹ This article is adapted from a presentation given at TESOL 2015 in Toronto.

3. Does the film teach what I want to teach?

Once a film passes the “sufficient action” test, it also needs to include those things a teacher is mandated to teach in his or her course. Mine was supposed to teach American culture, and the films I chose allowed me to teach about the American character, American music, the American obsession with home, the West, gender roles, technology, and social and ecological breakdown in addition to a simplified history of American movies.

4. Is the film worth spending time on? Is it multi-dimensional, does it have resonance?

A film needs to be understandable and enjoyable to students, but many good films qualify. Showing a bad or a mediocre film is simply a waste of everyone’s time. Classic films are gifts that keep on giving. One can watch them many times and discover new aspects, including connections to other films. I chose my original line-up using the first four filters and was surprised to find connections between films that I hadn’t planned on teaching. In previewing [Apollo 13](#), for example, I noticed Tom Hanks rousing his crew, who are mesmerized by seeing the moon so close, and saying: “Gentlemen, I want to go home.” I suddenly realized that this highly technical space odyssey was, among other things, an updating of *The Wizard of Oz*. This kind of realization can be the hook that turns a language course into an abiding interest.

Nor were these the only films in my curriculum that came back to the idea of home. [Meet Me in St. Louis](#) and [WALL-E](#) are also about going or staying home, which raised the question: why are Americans so obsessed with home? Eventually my class studied the West in preparation for our American western, and we discovered an explanation: Americans are immigrants and pioneers; we have no ancestral home, so we’re always trying to get, make, or keep a home.

In another example, I usually showed the Christmas segment from *Meet Me in St. Louis* right before Christmas (of course). It contains the familiar song, “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.” The original verses are somewhat darker than what is sung today because the film was released in 1944, and the song is really about families separated by war. Thus a Christmas movie engendered a discussion of what it was like for families to be separated by war, why people in the middle of World War II would have wanted to see a film about a turn-of-the-century family, and the importance, again, of home, this time as a motivation for American soldiers.

Making these discoveries as I taught and re-taught the course kept the material fresh and interesting for all of us, and they were entirely due to the dimensionality of the films themselves.

5. How easily will students relate to the subject matter and how much pre-teaching will the film require?

Teachers need to be aware of how their particular student population will relate to a given film and choose their battles carefully. The western and the American West are important aspects of American culture and film history. However, finding a western that my students could relate to was very difficult because they had absolutely no background or connection to this subject matter. (Despite being Japanese, they had never even watched samurai films.) Eventually I chose John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* because, as a conscious tribute to the myth of the West, it is the most obvious and schematic of any western. However, I had to do more pre-teaching for this film than for any other. This included asking my students to study a short history of western settlement in the U.S. and the icons and myths it engendered as well reading and knowing the film's story, and I tested them on both. We looked at pictures in magazines and on the internet. Altogether, I spent at least two 90-minute class periods pre-teaching before we got to the film. The class would not have been fun if every film required this much preparation, but I believed the subject matter was important enough to prepare extensively for this particular film.

6. What types of films should I consider?

Short films and animation are possible alternatives to full-length or live-action films. Among the latter, musicals and physical comedy are often the easiest to understand. Segments from films that would otherwise be too hard, irrelevant or not worth teaching as a whole are also a possibility, although, ideally, teachers will choose these segments for their content and by not some arbitrary calculation based on the idea that L2 students can only understand (or pay attention) for a certain length of time.

In addition to the films mentioned above, I have shown segments from *King Kong* (1933 version), *Fantasia*, *Stormy Weather*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, and *Stagecoach* in the "American Culture through Movies" class. I have also used *Dumbo*, *Freedom Writers*, and *Babe* in other classes.

Methods for teaching the films

Finding excellent, understandable, and appropriate films is only half the battle. Teaching these to students with limited English is the other half. Lecturing will not only be boring but incomprehensible, and, for my population, generating a discussion without a great deal of preparation on the students' part is impossible. My solution has been to involve my students in internet research and small group discussion before I speak or lead a discussion about the films.

1. Using worksheets for internet research and discussion

I pick out some of the famous or important aspects of a film—a well-known director, stars, important historical background, etc.—and ask the students to research these on

the internet. A worksheet for each film contains three or four questions and room for the student to answer these in detail. I don't require the research to be in English, but if it's not, students still have to write it up in English. This is also a good exercise in picking out and summarizing the most important points, which elude many at first, but as we go over their answers in class and begin to identify the important points on the board, their summaries improve.

After we've seen all or parts of a film, students fill out a response sheet. I sometimes elicit their opinion on which sequence or part of a film they liked most and also ask questions that probe the content or link the film to some aspect of American culture. At the end of the course we staple their sheets together in order, and they have what amounts to a book for their course, which they themselves have written.

2. Small group discussion based on the worksheets

After students have completed each handout, they discuss their answers in small groups and then report to the class as a whole. Because the students get out in front of me through their internet research and initial small group discussion, they already own the film before we see it, which increases not only their comprehension, but their anticipation and enjoyment.

These methods for both choosing and teaching films allow me to teach sophisticated material to learners with both limited English and a limited knowledge of this subject matter. Meanwhile, the students have the satisfaction of learning worthwhile subject matter while they improve their English.

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WHY JUSTIN BIEBER DOES NOT BELONG IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

By Stephen Roney, Jubail Industrial College &
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Last November, we presented the reasons for using pop culture materials in the classroom. Briefly, pop materials have the highest possible motivational value, and understanding references from pop culture (like “Go ahead—make my day”) are an essential part of reading, and probably listening, fluency.

However, some of you are probably reading that last paragraph with gritted teeth. Pop culture is cheap, commercial, low, lousy culture, isn’t it? As intellectuals, we’re above that, right? Worse, teaching culture is imposing our culture on others, isn’t it? Are we cultural imperialists? Shouldn’t we stick to language alone?

Unfortunately, taking the second objection first, we may have no choice. If the theories of E. D. Hirsch Jr. are correct (Hirsch, 1987), you simply cannot separate language from culture. You want to learn English, you need to learn pop culture. Wishing won’t change that.

But there is perhaps a second point to be made here as well: is pop culture “English” culture in the first place, in any sense other than using that language? Is it not true that “pop culture” is now just as much an international culture as English is an international language? Even when you think of specifically *American* popular culture, of what do you think? Hamburgers? Cowboys? Ketchup? Rock and roll? Are these “American”? Not really. They’re from Germany, Mexico, China, and Africa, respectively.

If pop culture is world culture, we are not imposing a foreign culture. To how many of our students is it really foreign right now?

Next problem: what about pop culture being low quality? That seems a fair point: we have our own doubts about Justin Bieber. But the classic response is that of Theodore Sturgeon. In 1958, of his own pop profession, science fiction, he wrote: “Using the same standards that categorize 90% of science fiction as trash, crud, or crap, it can be argued that 90% of film, literature, consumer goods, etc. is crap” (1958). “Sturgeon’s Law” is often summarized as “90% of everything is crap.” Bad art happens on all levels. A lot. Nobody watches the plays of Dion Boucicault any more. In his day, he was high culture. On the other hand, everyone watches Shakespeare’s plays. In his day, he was competing with bear baiting as the most popular London Saturday night spree.

Yet there are also real problems with pop culture in the classroom. Many attempts in current texts to use pop culture just do not work. We have heard the groans about one more lesson based on *The Titanic*. One grammar text we use currently features a fill-in-the-blanks exercise in which someone recognizes Renee Zellweger in the street.

Wow—Renee Zellweger! That ought to get their attention!

It does not. First, just dropping the name is cheap and lame. It is not making an effort. Second, and more importantly, by show of hands, nobody in our classes has any idea who Renee Zellweger is. So dropping the name did nothing. Renee Zellweger's popularity, it turns out, peaked in 2006—right when the book was published. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, eh? Another lesson drops the name “Halle Berry”—remember her? Pop icons usually get overexposed, everyone is suddenly sick of them, and then they are no longer motivating. They are cringivating.

It is very hard to hit the time just right—impossible, if you are publishing a textbook, because the publication cycle just will not allow such currency, and extremely hard if you are old fogeys like us, not always up to the nanosecond with what is trending on *YouTube*. But even if you do hit the cycle just right, you face another problem: if it is currently popular, most of the students will already have seen and heard it; they are learning nothing. Indeed, they will probably know more about it than you do. What's lamer than that?

This is a game you cannot win. For this reason, we recommend the use, specifically, of *vintage* popular culture materials. By vintage, we mean, as a rule, at least fifty years old. We mean things that are before *your* time.

These will still have the essential qualities that made them popular. But we can comfortably assume that they have not already been seen or heard by our students—let alone having become too familiar.

If they have been around for at least fifty years, granted, they may strike us as awful. Tastes change. Then we do not use them. By the same token, anything that is at least fifty years old, and still holds up, is thus proven to be a work of quality, and worth seeing or reading. It has also then had sufficient time to permeate the culture; its allusions will be more common and more relevant to our students: “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Fifty years ago, pop culture was also much less salacious than it is today: no nudity, no cussing, no drugs. There were tiresome entities like the Ontario Film Review Board, the Comics Code Authority, the Television Code, and the Hays Code to ensure that this was so. This pre-screening reduces problems for us in a multicultural class (tag: cultural sensitivity).

These materials are also, often, out of copyright. By Canadian copyright law, and internationally by the Berne Convention, the period of copyright is fifty years after initial publication, or fifty years after the death of the creator, depending on the type of work.

Being out of copyright is not very significant in itself, because the Canadian legal doctrine of “fair dealing” allows broad exemption for educational use. However, it does mean that the work is likely to be widely and freely available on the Internet—easy to get and easy to use.

Ready to try? Next issue, we will show you how and where to find these copyright-free, vintage pop materials.

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Author Bio



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THE LINC COURSEWARE IN BLENDED LEARNING

Learner & teacher benefits

By Pamela Manson, Algonquin College

Are you a LINC teacher looking to provide your students with more opportunities for online learning? Are you a LINC Co-ordinator hoping to encourage your staff to make better use of your computer lab? Do you want to promote autonomy in your students through blended learning? Would you like to see the teachers at your centre collaborating with each other and with teachers in the wider LINC community? Have you started training with LearnIT2teach but stopped along the way? Let me tell you about what we're doing at Algonquin College, using LINC courseware and training provided through the LearnIT2teach Project, all funded through Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

I've been working in the Algonquin College LINC program since 2007. Right from the start, I was using a form of blended learning with my students, because we had access to the computer lab for four hours a week, where the students could use software on the lab computers. Also, I had a Yahoo Group, allowing me to share files with my students, and send group emails. This meant the students had access to some of our class work even at home. The functionality was limited, though.

Imagine my interest when I learned about the LINC courseware. In the fall of 2010, a colleague at Algonquin took the Stage 1 LearnIT2teach training at the TESL Ontario Conference. She came back eager and excited to begin using the LINC courseware, and I got on board shortly after. The first class I used it with began in February 2011, and I haven't looked back.

Because I had experience using a website with my students, and because I could see all the opportunities with the LINC courseware, I spent a lot of time setting up the online part

What is the LINC courseware?

Concurrent with the development in 2008 –09 of the LINC Classroom Activities books by Algonquin College and the Toronto Catholic District School Board, more than 300 'learning objects' (units of online learning to match individual units in these books) were produced. Since the inception of the LearnIT2teach Project, the number of learning objects has been expanded, and they have been incorporated in a learning management system (Moodle). Courses are available for LINC levels 2 – 7 and the courseware now addresses the four skills: reading/writing/listening/speaking.

The system lends itself to customization by the teacher to learner needs and her own personal preferences. When a teacher completes an introduction to the courseware, she is assigned a course at the appropriate level with an individual account for each student. The end result for the teacher and the learners is a virtual classroom environment where learners can engage in individual online learning activities, and participate in discussion boards, opinion polls and creating wikis or blogs. The system makes online communication in the class easy and allows the teacher to monitor student activity and learning.

of my course. Many other teachers choose to rely on the pre-loaded activities, which bring so much value to the students. Some may gradually start to add the customization that makes each online course unique. I can see that virtually everyone who is using the LINC Classroom Activities Books with their students would benefit from the LINC courseware.

LINC Courseware at Algonquin College

The use of the LINC courseware has been enthusiastically adopted by administration and teachers in the LINC program at Algonquin. Most teachers within the program are using the courseware on a regular basis. Our students expect to have access to this form of blended learning, and they are disappointed if a teacher is not using it in a course.

Teachers can turn to each other for support, creating a community of practice. Because we are all using the same system, the teachers of upper level classes benefit from the work of the lower-level teachers: most students already know how to use the system, so we are free to spend time with the few new students who need to become acquainted with it. In the past, although many teachers were using various forms of blended learning, we needed to instruct the whole class in how to use our particular website.

Students also benefit from this consistency, of course. They are ready to begin working in the lab or at home right from the start of a new term, instead of having to learn the new teacher's website. And new students are able to get assistance from experienced students, rather than relying totally on the teacher. The administration's expectation that we all use the courseware has been a significant factor in its success at Algonquin College.

How do I use the Courseware in my LINC 5 class?

The courseware allows me to offer a blended-learning course to my students, taking advantage of the strengths of classroom time and online time. At Algonquin, the LINC teachers have a computer in the classroom, but the students don't. Our students have four hours of computer lab time during the week. They can go to the lab outside of class time as well, and most students also have access to the Internet at home. Blended learning for my students is therefore a combination of using technology in the classroom with my computer and the projector, using lab time to augment what we do in class or to prepare for a class activity, and using the LINC courseware or other websites for extra work at home. On the other hand, for courses with a small portion of in-class time and a large proportion of online learning, the courseware has functionality that allows easy access to videos and files for independent study, and easy submission of homework.

I use the courseware for communication with my class. My students often have computer lab time without me. I can include instructions for their lab time right in the courseware, so they know what to do on their own. I use the News Forum to send emails to my whole

class, to update them on homework, field trips and tests and I use the calendar to keep them abreast of upcoming class events.

I use the SCORMs (the self-correcting individual activities provided with the courseware) in several ways. Sometimes they are provided to students for review, and sometimes they are supplemental material. I'm also starting to explore the idea of 'flipping' the classroom. For example, there are several activities using graphs in the LINC 5 Classroom Activities binders. I have successfully had students do the Introduction to Graphs, Tables and Charts SCORM as self-study work during lab time, so that in the classroom we're ready to focus on a specific graph activity, and everyone has the basic concepts and vocabulary already.

I take advantage of the Internet; it's easy to send students to do research during lab time, and I can link to websites about current activities in Ottawa to help students get out and join the community.

I create simple webpages, linked from the courseware. For example, each week there is a webpage outlining what we'll be doing in class that week. Also, I link to a webpage describing that week's writing assignment, so that students who missed doing the writing in class can try it on their own time. I can also attach Word documents or pdfs, allowing students to re-read material from class, or to check their answers to exercises.

It's so important for students to be exposed to the same vocabulary in multiple sources, so I often link to articles and videos on the Internet related to the topic we're discussing. This gives them multiple chances to see how the vocabulary is used.

As well as using some of the provided discussion forums, it's very simple to create my own. I use them to allow students to share opinions, to practice writing, and to practice grammar points. Sometimes I edit the forum postings, and the students can learn from each other's mistakes.

Now I'm busy working on my Stage 4 training, which means I'm creating my own interactive activities. For some of these, I'm using the program Hot Potatoes. This is the same program that the included activities are created with, so the format is familiar to students, and no extra instruction is required. I can include readings with questions, quizzes, listening activities and so on.

Setting up your LINC courseware

Teachers who are teaching in LINC 2, 3 or 4 will find the LINC courseware is divided by LINC themes, such as "At Home in our Community and the World," "Banking, Customer Service and Telephone" and so on. Getting started is quick and easy. Teachers simply need to rearrange the order of themes to match their class plans and make activities visible as the students are ready for them. Of course, teachers may eventually want to customize and add their own activities and links, but even before doing this, there is a great deal of material available to the students.

In LINC 5-7, the courseware is arranged by the topics in the LINC 5-7 Classroom Activities binders. These are topics such as “Academic Skills – Writing Paragraphs,” “Managing Information – Reading” and so on. These do not correspond to LINC themes, and in most cases are not themes that would be appropriate for a week’s work. Some teachers may choose to keep the activities divided by these topics, and simply tell the students which section they need to go to for a particular day. At Algonquin, the teachers have chosen to create new sections, one for each week in our course, and move the pre-loaded activities to the appropriate week. This allows us to add our own materials into that week quite easily. Although this reorganization is somewhat time consuming, once it’s done, it’s done, and the courseware can be reused for each following session. No doubt other teachers in other centres have found creative ways to organize their courseware.

Once the initial set-up is complete, students can be added to the course and can benefit from all that it offers. The courseware can be easily updated throughout the session, so as students’ needs and interests are determined, we can easily make changes and add new material.

How do I benefit from using the LINC courseware as a teacher?

The biggest benefit is seeing how the students benefit. I know I am able to provide them with a much richer experience using this method than I could in any other way.

Once my online course was set up, the courseware also made my life easier. The convenience of access to all the online versions of the LINC Classroom Activities makes planning Lab time easy. In addition, as more teachers develop their own online material, I’ll be able to benefit from sharing through Tutela.ca. For monitoring students, I can use the Reporting feature, to see what they have been working on and where they are having trouble, and I can use the automatic Grade-book to keep track of their results.

I enjoy the creativity of customizing my courseware, and I also enjoy the convenience of being able to reuse the work for each subsequent session of my class.

How do students benefit from using the courseware?

The biggest benefit is the increase in autonomy. Students each have their own strengths and weaknesses, so there are always times that a student would like more review on a topic than is available in class. Many of our activities can be linked to the courseware, allowing students to try vocabulary or reading exercises more than once.

“It gives you the opportunity to review, to listen, to take time to understand as often as you need and want, all that has been done in class from week 1 to week X.” -LINC 5 student

Many of the online activities (the 'learning objects') provided with the courseware give immediate feedback to the student; I have had many students tell me they appreciate this feature.

Students enjoy being able to share ideas with their classmates through the forums, and being able to see and benefit from their classmates' work. They like having upcoming events marked on the calendar, and enjoy being connected with the wider Ottawa community by the links we provide to community activities.

They like the communication with their classmates.

"It is a place to share with your classmates. Sometimes when you receive an email about your classmates' activities you could feel motivation to do the activity too."

-Student

One of the most important ways the LINC courseware promotes learner autonomy is by allowing them to take responsibility for catching up on class work they've missed. Of course, many classroom activities don't translate to the online world, but we make as many available as possible. This way, if a student is away, they are able to avoid being far behind when they return to the class.

"I think it's very good and useful site. I like it because I can study and practice language at home and anytime, when I need it or want it. Also, I can find information which I missed." -Student

Another benefit for students is the increased confidence they gain with using computers. At the college, most of our students are already comfortable with computer technology, but for those who aren't, the courseware gives them concrete reasons and opportunities to increase their skills. They also find it motivating.

"I think the courseware is useful for me. I like it because I can practice my listening, reading and grammar with it. It's easy to do exercise. Another reason I like is that it can push me study a little hard and give me some point to study English. If I want to review what teacher taught in class before, it's easy to find it." -Student

Students also recognize that computer skills and online resources are no replacement for teachers. As one student put it: "I agree. Online abilities at current time are necessary. Of course, they don't substitute teachers..."

Challenges and Drawbacks

Clearly, I have found the LINC Courseware valuable for my students and myself. Of course, there have been difficulties along the way, as with any new teaching method or technology. Some teachers take a little while to feel comfortable with the courseware and may be hesitant

to learn the steps needed for customization. It's important to remember, though, that even a course with no customization can be useful for the students, because there is so much pre-loaded material. Occasionally we have technical difficulties: perhaps the computer lab isn't available when we expect it to be, perhaps a change in a software version, such as Java, causes us trouble, or perhaps we have made an error in constructing the activity. As language teachers, though, we try to be prepared to be flexible and adjust as needed. Sometimes we have students who are less comfortable with technology than most of their peers. This can be a challenge as we try to help them without taking time from the rest of the class, but improved computer literacy is an important part of the college program. I can imagine that some programs may have a lot of students who don't have internet access at home. If this is the case, teachers may choose to only use the coursework for lab activities, rather than for supplemental homework. Another challenge may be the time involved. Although the non-customized course provides great value to the student with little teacher time required, many teachers choose to spend significant time customizing the courseware because the possibilities are endless.

In Summary

Using the LINC Courseware at Algonquin has added immeasurably to our teaching. Our students benefit from both the preloaded activities, corresponding to the LINC Classroom Activities, and from the customization that many teachers choose to do. Our students appreciate the variety, as well as the opportunity to improve their technological skills, and we believe they are learning faster. I, for one, would not want to teach without the LINC Courseware, now that I've seen its value. If you haven't tried it, I encourage you to jump right in!

Author Bio



Pamela Manson completed her TESL training in 2007. Her previous BMath in Computer Science contributes to her confidence in using blended learning. She has been teaching in the LINC program at Algonquin College in Ottawa since 2007, and has recently started to work with the LearnIT2teach project, providing support to teachers using the LINC Courseware.

10 IDEAS FOR TESL ONLINE COURSE DESIGN

Two practitioners' perspectives

By Patricia Glogowski & Lara McInnis, Humber College

A recent influx of online ESL course offerings in private and public sectors in Ontario has led to an increased demand for ESL instructors who not only know how to teach English online but are invigorated by the prospect of it. The current ESL job market in Ontario reflects the need for newly hired ESL teachers to be familiar with up-to-date technological tools and use these tools effectively in the planning and delivery of dynamic and engaging language lessons. Quite simply, technology has transformed the ways in which English can be taught, learnt, practiced, and assessed, and it has opened up unique job opportunities for teachers. It is not just an asset for newly trained ESL teachers to be proficient in technology enhanced language learning. It is a requirement.

So, who provides this training? TESL Canada, TESL Ontario and their local affiliates have been working tirelessly to offer professional development opportunities to certified ESL instructors through conferences, webinars and workshops. And websites such as *learnIT2teach* and *tutela.ca* are doing their part to consolidate online resources and build a strong, supportive community of ESL teachers who teach online.

In spite of these offerings, few *pre-service* ESL teacher-training programs in Ontario provide TESL students with sufficient exposure to technology. We argue that this type of training *can* be done and *should* be done. We know this because we've done it ourselves.

Without degrees in technology or even much experience in online instructional design, we planned and implemented an online TESL course that transformed pre-service teachers from "students who learned online" to "student-teachers who could teach online." In other words, we *used* technology to teach *about* technology, and our graduates entered the ESL job market with a unique set of skills that could meet the demand for ESL teachers who can teach online.

If you are considering developing an online course for your TESL program or have recently been assigned to deliver an online TESL course, we hope these ideas will help you to plan your course with confidence and deliver to your TESL students precisely what they need to succeed in the ESL teaching job market in Ontario and beyond.

Idea 1: Before you begin, conduct an online-specific needs analysis

Consider what learning management systems are available to you, what their capabilities are, and how much they cost. What platforms and types of programs are being used in the ESL field? For example, if you discover that school boards near you are offering online ESL courses through learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Camtasia, or if they use authoring software such as Articulate and Softchalk, consider ways to introduce them to your students via free online trials.

Assess your learners' needs and backgrounds with technology. Use SurveyMonkey or Google Forms to gauge learner attitudes and their previous exposure to online learning. You might be shocked to learn how little or how much experience some TESL students have with technology, so do not make assumptions about what your students already know.

Idea 2: Create a detailed course map

During the course-design stage, a breakdown of modules, objectives, content-delivery methods, and assessments is essential for effective implementation. Before the content creation stage begins, consider how access to technology can be exploited and what elements of the course can be explored online by students.

Use an online interactive Bloom's Taxonomy tool to help you construct meaningful, achievable outcomes that emphasize the application of theory and a critical approach to online learning.

Script out all instructions that will be delivered through audio-visual means so that they can be made available to students with visual or hearing impairments. Prepare drafts of instructions for online tasks and assignments so that they can be piloted later by an unbiased third party. As you go along, create an interactive assessment checklist for students so they can double check deadlines and ensure that they are meeting all course requirements.

It is a lot of work, but it will prevent confusion and disorganization later on.

For example, consider this sample template for course design:

Module Focus	Learning Objective(s)	Content Delivery Method	Tasks and Assessments
Developing an online vocabulary activity	TESL students will be able to assess a peer's online vocabulary activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5-min video introduction, narrated screen recorded and audio recorded demonstration of how to access online vocabulary activity generators video instructions on how to design and develop activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and generate a vocabulary activity Post activity link on Discussion Board for a classmate to try Classmate completes online task and reports back with feedback Reflective writing on Discussion Board

Idea 3: Make friends in IT and take advantage of faculty support services

In any educational institution, relationship building is the foundation of innovation, progress, and faculty support. With this in mind, be prepared to establish an ongoing collaborative relationship with the tech experts at your school. Familiarize yourself with tech jargon and acronyms to ease communication with IT staff. At the same time, remember that you are the content expert, not the techie, so advocate for yourself when necessary so that tech problems get resolved. Trust us, tech problems will happen, and they can be resolved through effective communication with the right people.

Idea 4: Help students deal with “technology culture shock”

Be prepared to offer a thorough and detailed mandatory training session during orientation week. Make sure that students are aware of the technical requirements (e.g., having a mic and updated Java) and that their computer literacy skills enable them to navigate the learning management platform (e.g., Blackboard).

An introductory presentation, a Q & A session, and an introductory video are necessary for students *before* they start the course. Also, be prepared to offer ongoing support during the course such as directing your learners to tech support departments at your institution. This early but important step in the course will help your students deal with “technology culture shock”.

Idea 5: Give clear and thorough instructions to your students

While planning course tasks and assignments, remember that providing clear and detailed instructions is crucial. To accommodate all learning styles and abilities, offer video- and text-based instructions for *all* tasks and assignments, no matter how major or minor. Consider working with tech experts on creating engaging videos that explain how tasks can and should be done. Include exemplars for every assignment and task, and provide detailed rubrics in advance of the due date for each assignment. Even better, turn the rubrics into interactive checklists for students to complete before they submit.

Don't be surprised if students misinterpret instructions; in fact, you should expect it. To address this, consider allowing students to submit preliminary drafts or conduct peer-assessment tasks to ensure that instructions are being followed correctly. Articulate a clear policy on the resubmission of assignments, but at the same time consider lowering the stakes early in the semester so that students can focus on getting the content right rather than panicking about a one-shot submission.

For further clarification opportunities, offer live sessions online. This could include weekly office hours for Q & A or more formal presentations about major assignments. For instance, Blackboard Collaborate is a virtual classroom where you can present and record your sessions for absent students.

Idea 6: With a third party, pilot all course content delivery and assessments

During the course planning stage, test for instruction readability to ensure that tasks can be completed as expected. Check for technological glitches that may have unknowingly occurred during the set-up process. This could include dead links, incorrect sequencing, vaguely worded instructions, or poor audio quality during an online presentation. Piloting is a weighty and time-consuming task. Ask your institution to pay somebody to test out the entire course. If that isn't possible, seek out a third-party volunteer who is generally unfamiliar with the course expectations and course content. It's often hard to find a volunteer, so be prepared to offer a professional favour in return, or present a gift card to the local coffee shop or restaurant.

Idea 7: In collaboration with students, establish expectations for online behaviour, problem solving, and effective time management

From Day 1, articulate clear policies and guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of an online student. Students need to be aware that a positive social presence can happen online. Let students know, “You’re not going to see me, and that’s ok. It doesn’t mean that I can’t support your learning.” Refer students to rules of “netiquette” and student code of conduct, and emphasize that students should conduct themselves online in a respectful and responsible way.

Other guidelines can include, but are not limited, to:

- asking students to send you a detailed study plan and explain how they plan to fit this plan into their broader schedule;
- asking students to read about best practices for online learning and asking them to create a list of their OWN best practices for online learning; and,
- stating clearly your availability as an instructor and your policy on response time to student inquiries by e-mail, via online communication tools, or by phone. (e.g., I will answer your emails within 24 hours on weekdays and longer on weekends).

Idea 8: Create online opportunities for TESL students to create, moderate, deliver, and assess their own activities

Do not think that the onus of online learning is completely on the instructor. Students can also be involved in generating online activities and reflecting on the process. Doing so can build their capacity to be effective online instructors and allow them to reflect on what it means to be an online teacher. This can also be an opportunity for your students to research innovative online delivery methods and to show off their creativity. For example, a TESL student with an IT background can help with problem solving for technological issues. Or a TESL student with a degree in graphic design can be involved in leading a session on creating visually attractive graphic design using free online tools. There is a lot to be learned from our TESL students!

Also, think about the potential of online platforms. Instead of structuring assignments be submitted only to the instructor (e.g., “submit an essay”), design assignments that exploit the possibilities offered by online platforms and challenge TESL students to teach. For example, use the WIKI feature of the online platform for students to collaborate on lesson plans. Once the lesson plan is complete, ask the TESL students to try out the lesson and give feedback to the lesson designers.

Finally, assign tasks that are rigorous and promote critical thinking. For instance, designing an online debate using a discussion board feature can lead to incredible outcomes, as long as clear parameters are given. Avoid True/False or multiple-choice quizzes unless the questions reflect an applied, case study approach to teaching and learning ESL.

Idea 9: Don't forget to gather ongoing feedback from your students

We all know that seeking formative and summative feedback from students is a “best practice” in the traditional classroom. It is equally, if not more important, in online courses because there are not many opportunities for the online instructor to engage in informal chat sessions (e.g., after class) with the student. An online instructor also cannot gauge the level of students' engagement with the material simply because of the absence of the face-to-face interaction. We suggest that you make sure there are opportunities for students to give you feedback on the course. We believe that end-of-the course institutional surveys are ‘post mortem’ in a sense because at the end of the course nothing can be done to improve the learning experience of the students you are teaching right now.

Two good tools to use to get feedback from your students during the course are Google Forms and Survey Monkey, which allow anonymity and can be filled out by students throughout the entire course. Treat online surveys as a “start-stop-continue” task, in which students can identify what they think should be introduced, eliminated and continued in the course.

Establishing weekly online feedback sessions through Skype or live online platforms encourages students to voice their urgent problems and concerns. Also, do not forget that e-mail is a great tool for personal feedback from students.

Idea 10: Encourage students to create their own community of practice where they can support each other's learning

The key strategy to help students establish their own community of learners is to make sure they know each other. This may sound like a simple thing, but it may be quite challenging in an online environment, where each participant is ‘a name’ (or perhaps ‘an image’) and where most of the interaction happens in a text form.

Here are some strategies to help students create their own community of learners:

- Do a lot of social activities in the first two weeks of the course; these may include asking students to post introductions on the Discussion Forum, to create their own professional profiles portraits using social media, and to create a Facebook support group that is student-led and moderated.

- Assign small group or pair assignments and ask students to complete tasks together.
- Hold weekly live sessions via Blackboard Collaborate where students can pop in and informally chat with each other.
- Ask tech-savvy students to help the struggling students by posting announcements seeking volunteers. Often you don't even have to do it yourself! Many of them are often ready to help on their own.
- Mention specific students in your announcements to let others know who has requested support or volunteered to help their classmates for the week. For instance, an announcement could read "Please ask Bogdan for help if you don't know how to access your Blackboard site on your mobile device", or "Brenda needs assistance with Task 2: can anyone volunteer to be her peer supporter?"

So, those are our **10 Ideas for TESL Online Course Design**. We hope we gave you some thought for food for thought about building a successful online course. We also hope you can give us some of your ideas on how your own experience of building an online course went and what new creative and successful ideas you have.

We would like this conversation to continue with your feedback and suggestions about our ideas either here in Contact magazine or via Twitter: @patglogowski & @mcinnis_lara

Author Bios



Patricia Glogowski teaches in the TESL Ontario program at Humber College. She is interested in the possibilities and limitations of using online learning environments to teach and learn. Her other research interests include teaching pragmatic competence, intercultural communication, and discourse analysis.



Lara McInnis has been teaching a variety of TESL, ESL and EAP courses at Humber College for over 10 years. Her research interests include L2 writing and corrective feedback, paraphrasing strategies in ESL classrooms, and, most recently, adult learners' attitudes towards learning management platforms and content delivery in online courses.

WHERE I BELONG

By Layla Guse Salah

I wonder what would happen if teachers were issued a dare: teach your class while sitting in one spot, with one of your arms taped down. It's probably every teacher's worst nightmare. "But how will I maintain control? ... How will I ever assign group work if I can't be free to move around the class? Total physical response is my favourite pedagogical tool! ... Teach a class without being able to pace back and forth? That's crazy talk ... How am I supposed to write on the chalkboard, provide visual aids or even hand out materials?" The list could go on and on. How would such a challenge be received? Would you try it?

Welcome to my life. I've known I wanted to be a teacher since I was about eight years old. Throughout my life, I've had no shortage of inspiration, from teachers who truly shaped my path and showed me how to embrace my potential, to teachers who inflicted such negativity on me that I was able to recognize even as a child that if I were ever in their position, I would never do to someone else what they were allowing to happen to me. My professional endgame never changed, but as I matured I realized that I'd made a tricky choice. I was not going to be the average teacher; my cerebral palsy ensures that I may, in a lot of ways, be the most unique teacher most people encounter.

I won't bore you with medical terms and the specific details of why my body is the way it is. Here's what you need to know: I use a wheelchair, I only have full proper use of my left arm and all four of my limbs are spastic and shaky enough that it would be easy to assume that I have a *huge* caffeine problem. I also have a visual-perceptual learning disability, which means I have difficulty processing information that is graphically oriented or spatially condensed; my hands are shaky, so my scribing speed is very slow. If you think creating rubrics is hard for you, or you hate the time consuming nature of marking, I will gladly trade you your experience for mine.

I'm not trying to make myself into a martyr; believe me, I'm anything but. I am simply trying to explain my unique circumstances in terms that someone who doesn't live with them will be able to understand. When students walk into a classroom, I might be the last person they expect to see at the front of that room.

One of my biggest challenges is finding ways to adapt (no pun intended). I have very pronounced physical and learning disabilities and yet I teach people who do not; I have to be able to teach in ways that I could never learn, I have to use tools and strategies as a

teacher that would isolate me as a student. I have to find ways around the challenges I have in order to be successful. I can't write on a chalkboard or a whiteboard, nor can I handle a clunky overhead projector that's been chained to the same cart since 1963, but I still have to find a way to incorporate visual aids. I can't reach a photocopier, but I still have to have handouts. Writing is a physically demanding activity that takes twice as long, but I still have to grade materials and provide students with feedback on their assignments. Group work and class movement are integral pedagogical tools, which must be utilized despite the barriers they cause me. Having a visual-perceptual learning disability does not exempt me from needing to create and use assignment rubrics.

As a student, I fought a lot of battles; to be more precise, first my parents fought the battles, and as I grew up, they taught me how to fight for myself. Being properly accommodated for was a huge struggle, both in terms of the physical environment and strategies to compensate for my learning disability. Special Education departments tended to have the perspective that disabilities equal lower standards, a lot lower. That was even if they were willing to accommodate for me at all. As such, I never had the desire to become the painful stereotype of a disabled Special Education teacher. I have always fiercely believed that I do not deserve to be shoved in a box and be cornered by my disability. I'm not ashamed of my disability, but I never ever want it to be the only thing that defines me.

I have very high standards for myself, because my entire life is to a certain extent defined and fueled by defying barriers. I want to be seen as more than the petite woman in the wheelchair. Even though I know I will never be a master at grammar trees, or memorizing the mechanics of every single grammatical convention without a point of reference, I still get mad at myself if I don't do well on a test, even if I know I'm being tested in something that is a well-documented weakness and my mark on a test is not representative of my understanding. I get mad because in those moments, I feel like I become the "disabled" woman people might assume that I am. I hate it when there is any type of spotlight, or forced focus on my shortcomings because I live in a body that displays all of my worst imperfections and I live in a world that was not designed for the use of a wheelchair.

When I was in my senior year and preparing to go to university, one of my favourite teachers told me something I've never forgotten, to comfort me after the Special Education department questioned my choice to apply to universities that were all in different cities. He said, "If I had to face what you face every day Layla, I'd be in the corner crying. I cannot imagine having to face the things you do, simply by getting out of bed. I don't think I could. Everything about your life is a struggle. I don't mean to belittle you. I mean that everything about your life is probably a real, physical struggle. But here you are, all too happy to work harder than everyone else. You earn every single grade you get; you don't want pity-success, you want the real thing. Yes, you can go to university. I'll tell you something else: I've seen a lot of people graduate. Of every single student I have seen head off to university, you are the only one that I am not worried about in the slightest."

Six years after this conversation, I found myself in his classroom again for one of my teacher's college practicums. My teacher's college was failing to accommodate for me appropriately and calling my character into question. He looked at me one day after I'd cried my eyes out and told him I wanted to quit and he said, "Please don't let them win. If they win and you quit, then the entire profession of teaching loses, because we won't get you. And this is where you belong. You were my reason to come to work when you sat at those desks; you're my reason for coming to work now. If you quit, then I'm quitting too."

People like him are the reason I want to teach and why I've never let the inherent challenges of the profession change my mind. He taught me everything about what a teacher should be, who they have the power to be for their students. Other teachers taught me exactly what not to do, precisely how not to treat people.

Teacher's college was a deplorable experience, to put it mildly. In spite of the ignorance of the institution and knowing that dealing with me did almost nothing to inform my instructors' future practice, I do know that my cohort colleagues saw what I went through. I know that their perceptions are forever changed because they witnessed my struggles and the lack of support I was given to deal with them. They will never treat students with disabilities the way I was treated.

Teachers are underestimated; their power to influence and shape the futures of their students is a largely idealized notion. Not to me. My teachers have forever changed my life. Those who changed my life for the better know exactly what they did for me, because I made sure to tell them. If I can do for others a fraction of what they have done for me, I will have succeeded. I don't want to do that by teaching others with disabilities; the best way for me to really affect change is to refuse to conform to the confines that the very notion of "disability" would like to impose. Let me lead by example and change minds anywhere and everywhere I might find myself, opening the minds of anyone who might cross my path.

Author Bio

Layla Guse Salah is a writer, public speaker, and advocate for people with disabilities. She graduated from Carleton University in Ottawa with an Honours Undergraduate Degree in English and Philosophy. She obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Education in intermediate/senior English and Philosophy from The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and has been a member of the Ontario College of Teachers since 2012.

PASSING THE CULTURAL HOT POTATO 3

Holiday edition

By Eufemia Fantetti

Last Yuletide, I sat and listened to the litany of complaints my aunt had about life in general and her specific worries about her children and grandchildren. Much as I would like to, I can never fully relax at her house. There is always some comment that I find offensive, one that my father tells me to ignore, and that I will not.

I offer a sweeping generalization here: I'm not the argumentative type. Mostly. To be honest, I avoid confrontations at all costs (the expense is insomnia, tossing and turning over what I shoulda-coulda-woulda said). Of course, I'm comparing myself to artists in the world of squabbling and I definitely come up short. My mother is descended from a clan of belligerence experts, black belts in the field of quarreling; I prefer quiet discussion and polite disagreement, until somebody says something that makes it hard to stay silent.

My aunt did not disappoint. During a lull in the conversation, she noted, "Mexicans are bad."

I nearly spit up my drink. "Why on earth do you think it's okay to say that?"

"Because they are. Canadians go there and get killed."

My dad is diplomatic in his approach to every situation. His advice is, "Like the English say, no waste you breathing." He says there is simply no talking to some people, they don't understand. Apparently, the village elders back in Italy referred to such activities as 'Washing the Head of a Donkey' – you waste time, soap, and water.

My aunt, like my father, is a devotee of CP24, the television station I like to refer to Constant Panic 24 Hours a Day. They're both inundated with news about the world going to hell in a carefully woven hand basket for the Greater Toronto Area. Occasionally, there's a feel-good story about someone's dog having puppies or a cat saving its owner's life, or something from the script of Kids Say the Darndest Things. Not enough to stem the tide of "There are others in the world, they're not like you, and you definitely can't trust them."

"Don't you think that when you first came here people thought that all Italians were Mafioso?"

"Sure. Everybody thought that way. What can you do?" My aunt shrugged.

I sputtered to stay calm. "You can start by not saying racist things."

That was my father's cue. He stretched his legs and stood up with a sigh. "Okay. We go now."

Outside, the driveway was slippery from the ice storm; the trees looked magnificent – they sparkled in the sun like they were encased in Austrian crystal. I stomped a path to the passenger door and stared at my breath escaping in the cold air.

"Don't gets upset," my father said. "You just waste your breathing."

"It's never a waste to speak out against prejudice," I replied. I told him about an incident the previous winter, when I'd interrupted a TESL classmate to inform her that telling new immigrants "in Canada, we say Merry Christmas" was my idea of prejudiced malarkey.

"Like she'd never heard of *Season's Greetings*, or *Happy Holidays* before? Because it takes that much effort to ask people what they celebrate, or even how they celebrate? Because she couldn't envision a Canadian home where people spend December 25th doing anything but carving up a turkey and passing the Brussels sprouts?"

"Boy oh boy, it's beautiful day today."

"Are you even listening to me?"

"I'm listen. Somebody was say something you thinking stupid and you was fights with them."

"Exactly. I put her in the category of Charming Racist who Needs to Read a History Book."

"So what's you say when people say Merry Christmas to you? *Get outta my face?*"

"I say *Thank you*. And *Happy Holidays*. I might say *Merry Christmas*. It depends on whether I feel like pointing out the obvious to the oblivious. I only argue when people say '*In Canada, we say this*' or '*we do that*' because they're talking about themselves and it doesn't apply to everyone."

My dad nodded. I couldn't tell if he was thinking, "My kid probably squanders a lot of time scrubbing donkey noggins" or "my kid has less sense than a donkey," but I'm going with the first one.

As spoken-word poet Shane Koyczan said in *We Are More*, the piece about Canada that he performed during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, "we are an idea in the process of being realized...we are cultures strung together then woven into a tapestry...we are an experiment going right for a change." Maybe he has a poem that includes all the greetings one could use to offer goodwill and cheer through the long Canuck winter. Until I find a one-size-fits-all expression, I'll just keep wishing everyone, even the people I disagree with, comfort and joy and peace and light for the coming year.