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CONTACT

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The Conference Issue

SMARTPHONES AND ESL

FEEDBACK: FOR STUDENTS AND OURSELVES

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Calendar

March 4–6	British Council Going Global
March 8–9	International Conference and Workshop on TEFL & Applied Linguistics
March 20–23	TESOL Conference
March 21–23	Ontario Modern Language Teachers' association Spring Conference
March 23	TESL Durham Spring Workshop
March 27	TESL Toronto Workshop
April 5–6	TESL Niagara Annual Conference
April 6	TESL London Annual Conference
April 15–17	Ontario Association for Students at Risk Annual Conference
April 16–19	AAAL Annual Conference
April 19–22	International Reading Association Convention
April 20	TESL Hamilton Annual Conference
April 25–28	Asian Conference on Language Learning
May 4	TESL Ottawa Plenary and AGM
May 4	TESL North York/York Region's Spring Conference
May 6–10	Education week
May 16	TESL PHE Spring PD Workshops
May 20–23	IJAS Multi-disciplinary Conference
May 24–25	TESL Toronto Conference

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



EDITOR'S NOTE

The 40th Annual TESL Ontario Conference, “TESL Ontario at 40: Thriving, Excelling, Sharing, Learning” was held at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel from November 8th to 10th, 2012. Over 1500 delegates attended, 710 of whom were LINC and ELT personnel who received conference assistance from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. An additional 250 ESL delegates were supported by Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Thanks to the efforts of all the presenters, organizers, and volunteers, the conference was a great success as usual. All the articles in this issue of the magazine spring from presentations given at the conference, and you can watch more on our [webcasting](#) service.

When you attend a TESL Ontario Conference, you can't help but notice that women make up the vast majority of attendees. In fact, there are so many that the facility converts many men's washrooms into temporary women's washrooms. In last year's TESL Ontario member survey, 83% of the respondents were women (see Valeo, this issue). This imbalance is not limited to TESL Ontario members. According to a recent Toronto District School Board (TDSB) [memo leaked](#) to the media, the TDSB will be making extra effort to ensure that qualified male applicants get an interview for new teaching positions because of the preponderance of women teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

It's interesting to speculate on why this might be. There is good [reason to believe](#) that we are unfairly suspicious of the motivation of males who want to be around young children, but that obviously doesn't apply in the case of TESL Ontario members, who overwhelmingly teach adults. Perhaps a better comparator would be university teaching positions across all the disciplines, where [the data](#) shows the imbalance tilts the other way. There, men still outnumber women two to one, though women are gaining. We might want to speculate, then, that it is the poor career prospects of much ESL teaching that drives men away. A [new report](#) issued by McMaster University and the United Way of Toronto shows that a large and growing number of workers in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area are working in precarious employment circumstances with little job security and few benefits, a situation familiar to many ESL teachers. Yet the same report states that men and women are equally likely to be in precarious jobs.

It's also hard to understand what the implications are for the students and for the field. It seems likely that teachers' [beliefs and practices are shaped](#) by their own experiences. If male and female economists, for instance, have [different policy views](#), it seems likely that male and female teachers have different viewpoints about language teaching and that those would affect their students.

We could try to establish policies to attract more men to the profession, but it's not even clear that the imbalance is a problem. And there may be imbalances that we need to pay more attention to. What share of the membership is composed of LGTB teachers? Are non-native speaking teachers ghettoized? What is the racial make up of our membership, and are atheists, say, or younger teachers fully represented?

This year, the 41st Annual Conference will be held October 24–26, at the [Allstream Centre](#) at Exhibition Place in Toronto. The theme is “Merging and Emerging Pathways through Language.” I hope to see a wide range of teachers represented.

Brett Reynolds

editor@teslontario.org



CONTACT

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

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TESL ONTARIO

TESL Ontario is a supportive community empowering educational professionals to help English language learners to thrive.

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TESL ONTARIO NEWS

Career Development Resource Centre

TESL Ontario is pleased to introduce a new Career Development Resource Centre on the website at: <http://www.teslontario.net/career-development-resource-centre>

Conference Communiqué

We will be introducing the new TESL Ontario *Conference Communiqué* in the coming weeks. This is a short e-news bulletin designed to provide members with regular updates on the development of TESL Ontario's Annual Conference. This has been designed to better prepare the membership for the many changes to the conference format in our new venue this year.

Accreditation

The TESL Ontario PTCT (Post TESL Certificate Training) Adjudication Committee has approved three new PTCT courses:

- Advanced Grammar by Advance Consulting for Education Inc.
- Language Teaching and Technology -Part Two by Advance Consulting for Education Inc.
- Teaching Pronunciation by Canadian College of Educators

For more details about these courses, please visit the TESL Ontario website at <http://www.teslontario.net/accreditation/PTCT-courses>

Tutela.ca Webinars Now Recognized as PD by TESL Ontario

Tutela.ca is Canada's largest collection of ESL/FSL resources and online peer community. If you are not a Tutela member yet, we encourage you to go to <http://tutela.ca/PublicHomePage> and click on "Sign up" to join. Tutela membership is FREE.

TESL Ontario now recognizes every hour of **LIVE** webinar participation through Tutela.ca as one PD hour for accreditation renewal. Participants can email diane@tutela.ca after the webinar to request a Certificate of Participation.



POLITICS

Proposed Changes to Canada's International Student Program

New measures to prevent fraud in the International Student Program (ISP) were proposed by Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney.

Read more at [CIC](#)

Over 100,000 International Students Entered Country in 2012

“Canada admitted over 100,000 international students in 2012 according to an announcement by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) on Tuesday. The number marks a 60 percent increase over the number of foreign students hosted by Canada 2004, and demonstrates the growing significance of international education to the country.”

Read more at [CICS News](#)

Access to special Employment Insurance benefits denied

“Changes Ottawa made to the Employment Insurance program in December were immediately condemned by advocates for migrant workers.

The changes resulted in migrant workers losing access to special EI benefits that they have enjoyed in recent years.”

Read more at [The Simcoe Reformer](#)

Second list of Designated Countries of Origin announced

Jason Kenney, announced that the list of Designated Countries of Origin is expanding to include an additional eight countries: Mexico, Israel (which excludes Gaza and the West Bank), Japan, Norway, Iceland, New Zealand, Australia, & Switzerland.

Read more at [CIC](#)

Overseas Orientation Program Celebrates 20,000 Graduates

“Our Government is committed to helping newcomers succeed,” said Minister Kenney. “By giving immigrants a better understanding of what to expect before they arrive in Canada, we can help ensure they can more quickly contribute fully to Canada’s economic growth and long-term prosperity.”

Read more at [CIC](#)

Toronto officially opens services to undocumented residents

“Toronto city council has accepted a recommendation that calls for a review of the access to city services for undocumented workers – a recommendation opponents called redundant, though advocates said it makes Toronto a ‘sanctuary city.’”

Read more at the [Globe and Mail](#)

Study finds Canadian immigrants at a growing disadvantage

“A major international study ranks Canada among the world’s leaders in immigrant integration, but there are signs that advantage is on the wane.

Canada sits near the top of most categories in the study, which measures integration of immigrants in the 34 wealthy countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The report...compares outcomes for immigrants and their children looking at factors such as income, health, education and civic engagement.”

Read more at [The Globe and Mail](#)

English schooling rights stay under new Bill 101

Read more at [The Montreal Gazette](#)



OTHER NEWS

First-time English language teachers need to learn on the job

“Teachers can start out from degree-level courses or just a week’s introduction to ELT, but all training providers should be working to develop practitioners who can reflect, share and adapt once they are in class.”

Read more at [The Guardian Weekly](#)

Growing up bilingual: Dual-language upbringing reflected in young children’s vocabulary

“Language mixing – using elements from two languages in the same sentence – is frequent among bilingual parents and could pose a challenge for vocabulary acquisition by one- and two-year-old children, according to a new study by Concordia University psychology professor Krista Byers-Heinlein. Those results are likely temporary, however, and are often counterbalanced by cognitive advantages afforded to children raised in a bilingual environment.”

Read more at [Concordia University](#)

Bilingual babies know their grammar by 7 months

“Babies as young as seven months can distinguish between, and begin to learn, two languages with vastly different grammatical structures, according to new research from the University of British Columbia and Université Paris Descartes.”

Read more at [University of British Columbia](#)



Bilingual Children Have a Better ‘Working Memory’ Than Monolingual Children

“A study conducted at the University of Granada and the University of York in Toronto, Canada, has revealed that bilingual children develop a better working memory -which holds, processes and updates information over short periods of time- than monolingual children. The working memory plays a major role in the execution of a wide range of activities, such as mental calculation (since we have to remember numbers and operate with them) or reading comprehension (given that it requires associating the successive concepts in a text).”

Read more at [Science Daily](#)

Could boredom be curable?

“After an exhaustive survey of every study they could locate that mentioned boredom—over 100 are referenced in the final paper—a group of psychologists from York University in Canada has proposed an answer [to the question “what causes boredom], essentially a new unified theory of boredom. In a new review paper published this fall in Perspectives on Psychological Science, cognitive psychologist John Eastwood and his team suggest all boredom may result from essentially the same thing: a conflict of attention, or attention misfocused in a way that disrupts our engagement.”

Read more at [The Boston Globe](#)

Eliminating useless information important to learning, making new memories

“As we age, it just may be the ability to filter and eliminate old information – rather than take in the new stuff – that makes it harder to learn, scientists report.”

Read more at [Georgia Health Sciences University](#)

Driven to distraction: How to help wired students learn to focus

“A recent Pew Internet & American Life Project report surveyed 2,462 middle and high school Advanced Placement and national writing project teachers and concluded that: ‘Overwhelming majorities agree with the assertions that today’s digital technologies are creating an easily distracted generation with short attention spans, and today’s students are too “plugged in” and need more time away from their digital technologies.’”

Read more at [eClassroom News](#)

Common Core and ELLs: Reading and Writing Persuasion

In the US, school districts have begun the transition to the new [common standards](#), which includes English-language learners. As a result, putting complicated, original texts in front of middle school English-language learners may become much more common. “So says a group of English-learner experts who are working on a collection of instructional resources meant to help educators elevate the quality and rigor of their instruction and support for English-language learners as the common core standards roll out into classrooms.

The Understanding Language team, based at Stanford University, has released its first such instructional resource in English/language arts... called ‘Persuasion Across Time and Space,’ the [five-week unit for middle school students](#) with at least an intermediate level of proficiency in English, is designed around persuasive speeches and texts.”

Read more at the [Learning the Language](#) blog.

In China, English teaching is a whites-only club

“Speak a little English and are willing to relocate? Well, you’re probably qualified to be an English-language instructor in China. As long as you are white, that is.”

Read more at *NBC News*’ [Behind the Wall](#) blog

Critical Thinking – Teaching Tips from Around the World

“Following his webinar on [Teaching Critical Thinking in EAP](#), [Louis Rogers](#) looks back at the participants’ tips and ideas on the subject.”

Read more at OUP’s [English Language Teaching Global Blog](#)

Cerego Memory Training Website Launches

Cerego brings together [advanced learning and memory science](#) in a cloud-based platform to make learning more flexible and mobile.

You can sign up at <http://cerego.com/>

SOLD ON CELL PHONE ACTIVITIES¹

By Lesline Smikle

Curriculum and Training Coordinator, Centre for Education & Training

“All right everyone, let’s begin our lesson. Take **out** your cell phones!” This introduction to a class or activity has never failed to produce raised eyebrows, quizzical looks and gasps of surprise the first time I say it to a new group of adult learners. It is one of my favourite attention grabbers and I use it with almost every group I teach!

Using cell phones in the classroom is a growing practise. Teachers and learners are finding cell phones to be valuable tools for learning. Since cell phones have exponentially increased in popularity and capability over the last few years, they have become indispensable in our daily lives. This was originally the problem for me as a teacher; I felt as if I were vying for the learners’ attention, and losing out to a small plastic contraption the size of someone’s hand was not flattering at all. So, instead of continuing my chant of “Put your cell phones away. Put your cell phones away,” I joined forces with the “mobile enemy” and began incorporating it into classroom activities. This is how the TESL Ontario Conference 2012 workshop entitled “Cell Phone Activities” originated. After reading this workshop summary, readers will know how I became sold on cell phone activities and hopefully more practitioners will be encouraged to use mobile phones in the classroom in various ways.

The Academics

There are a handful of academics who have influenced my stance on cell phones and their place in the 21st century classroom. The most important one is Mark Prensky (2001), who wrote about Digital Natives and Digital immigrants. In his paper, he outlines the differences between those born before and after 1980. The premise is that those born after 1980 have always lived with computer technology and therefore think, learn and live differently from those born before that time. As a self-proclaimed futurist, he encourages digital immigrant teachers to broaden the way they conceptualize education in order to effectively address the needs of the learners in the class. This paper alone made a strong argument towards using more technology in the classroom, but Prensky wrote more papers, including an article on what can be learned from a cell phone (Prensky, 2005) where he gives practical ideas on how to use voice, camera, and GPS functions among others.

¹ This paper is based on a presentation entitled “Cell Phone Activities” delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

During my workshop at the 2012 TESL Ontario Conference, I cited a few more scholars like Marc Warshauer and Susan Smythe, who acknowledged in their writings the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating technology in the classroom. There are many factors which inhibit or facilitate the usage of cell phones including administrative and institutional policies, the physical learning environment and the limitations of the tools themselves. The benefit of further promoting learner-centered environments with authentic, learner-endorsed tools is outlined by Smythe (2012), who quotes one of her interviewees saying “...linking instruction to the technologies adults have access to outside of a classroom... is central to learner-centred practice.” Warschauer was similarly quoted ten years earlier in an interview saying, “Whatever the technology is, let’s involve learners in active use, constructive use, and mastery of the technology for producing content rather than just passively receiving it.” (Ancker, 2002).

Activities

There are many activities that can be done when learners have access to the Internet via their phones, but neither I nor the majority of my learners were in that situation when I first introduced cell phone activities. My goal was to use the basic features of the phone in order to encourage the development of language skills. Here are some sample activities. More activities can be freely downloaded from the “Teaching Resources” page at www.lincpeelhalton.com : <http://www.lincpeelhalton.com/LINC-Teaching-Resources/Documents/CellPhoneActivities.pdf>

Presenting...my cell phone

Higher levels can interview each other with the question “What features does your cell phone have?” After interviewing each other, learners may be able to extend their thinking and explain what a cell phone can reveal about a particular individual and their personality.

Lower levels can ask more formatted questions “Does your cell phone have _____?” In the case where all learners do not have cell phones, it is a good idea to pair them up so that the one who does not have a cell phone interviews and reports on someone who does.

For those who frequently download apps, it is always interesting to find out from them which app is their favourite or most unusual and then talk about useful apps intended for language learning.

When they have finished their respective interviews, learners can prepare presentations about their own or each other’s phones. Presentation techniques can be taught at this point to facilitate the task.

Cell Phone Survey

Learners can text their family or friends (you determine the number) with one common question ideally related to your theme/unit and compare, discuss, categorize, analyze and/or graphically organize the results. For example, lower levels when studying food can text, “What is your favourite fruit?” Higher levels can ask more interpretive questions such as, “What makes a good citizen?”

When the results have been collected, higher levels can write summaries or reports while lower levels can create graphs and short statements about the results.

For individualized or small group projects, each learner can pick their own survey question to text 10 people and (orally) report the results to the class.

Read Aloud

Students can record a native speaker (or their teacher) read a text. Students can then use that recording to improve their pronunciation and fluency or prepare to read the same text aloud for their teacher or peers.

Video Recording

Students can record their presentations and demonstrations and complete self/peers feedback forms or checklists. For teachers who are interested in developing their craft, they can tape themselves teaching and self-evaluate it. When guest speakers visit or when you go on field trips, you can ask permission to record small amounts of the presentation or tour to review later with your learners.

Dial-A-Story

Many public libraries have a telephone program called “Dial-a-story” where children and parents can call a special phone number and listen to stories. Have students dial that story and reconstruct the text with their classmates. If the phone has a loudspeaker, then a whole group can listen and collaborate to recreate the text.

Personal Picture Dictionary/Flashcards

For those learning vocabulary words, pictorial dictionaries are very useful. Let students take pictures of items that they want to remember (e.g. classroom objects) or make visual connections with concepts they need to remember (e.g. emotions or cultural gestures). Since it is on their personal handheld tools, they can maintain this picture dictionary by reviewing and revising content as their language develops.

Conclusion

In Smythe's 2012 report, she reminds us that our role as teachers changes when technology is introduced. As teachers, we have to be a bit more open with experimentation and in saying, "I don't know. Let's try and find out." After reading her report, I am led to concur that we **must** incorporate technology like the cell phone as a means to an end (e.g. for language learning) as well as teaching technology as an end in itself (e.g. learning how to use cell phones appropriately and effectively) seeing that increased digital literacy may lead to better opportunities in Canada. I recommend using cell phones in the classroom, not just because it has enhanced the learner-centred, task-based learning environment in my experience, but also because these handheld tools empower learners to complete and review class work on their own time; resulting in engaged, autonomous learners.

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Author Bio



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SMARTPHONE APPS FOR ESL:

Finding the Wheat Amidst the Chaff¹

By Julie Zilber

There are between 1.5 and two billion people in the world learning English as a second or foreign language today (Walker, 2009; Graddol, 2006). In many countries, the ability to speak English is the key to economic opportunity and social status. Yet the demand for qualified English language teachers outstrips the supply to such a degree that even government-run English teacher-training programs in many countries commonly produce graduates who cannot speak English themselves. As one of the many Canadian immigrants I've interviewed told me:

We focused on grammar and vocabulary – ‘this is subject, this is verb.’ Teachers didn't speak English.

- JS, Korea

Consider this: with an estimated 1.5 to 2 billion people learning English, if every native English speaker (man, woman and child) were to become an ESL teacher, each English speaker would have five to ten students. How is it possible to meet such a demand?

A substantial percentage of ESL students already have smartphones (mobile phones with onboard computing capabilities), and within a few years smartphone ownership will be the norm (Farago, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Mobithinking, 2012). Already, in many countries and among certain demographics in Canada and the United States (immigrants and youth), the smartphone is often an individual's sole communication and computing platform. And smartphones have attributes that make them well suited to the delivery of certain kinds of English language learning and practice. Smartphones are:

- familiar and easy to use
- personal, private and carried everywhere
- a natural environment for speaking and listening
- equipped with microphone, speakers, and special speech processing hardware and software
- network connected

¹ This paper is based on a presentation entitled “Smartphones As A Platform For English Language Learning” delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

- fully-capable computing devices, and
- becoming ubiquitous.

Smartphones won't replace good teachers. But the growing prevalence of smartphones among ESL learners creates opportunities to provide supplementary English language practice anytime, anywhere.

How to find a *good* smartphone app for ESL

A large number of smartphone apps for English learners have emerged over the past two years. Although smartphones can provide inexpensive and portable access to learning and practice opportunities for ESL students, the challenge is to find tools that are compelling, engaging, effective, complementary to classroom learning.

After hundreds of hours perusing both Apple's App Store and Google Play in search of ESL apps, downloading apps and trying them out, I can testify to how difficult it is to find those apps that are really useful. Teachers are busy people. They don't have time to look at all the apps out there. And unfortunately, the ranking of an app in the online store often has more to do with how clever the marketing people are than with how good the app is. With this in mind, and based on my own experiences, here are some suggestions of what to look for in a smartphone app.

Designed in small segments

A good ESL app should be designed in small segments that can provide a complete experience in five minutes or less. This respects and takes advantage of the way in which people use their smartphones in between other activities. The best ESL apps allow the user to complete something in a short time, while linking that activity to a longer journey or story arc to encourage repeated use and progress.

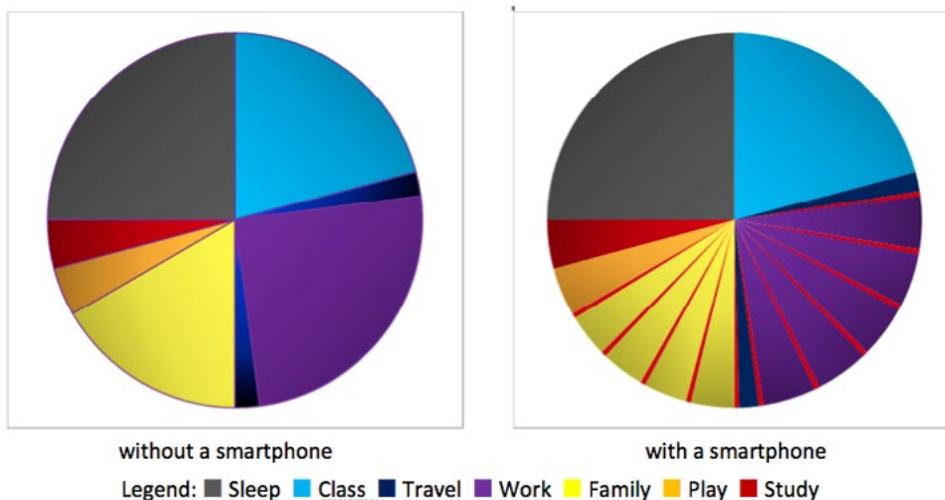


Figure 1. Brief interactions on smartphone increase learning opportunities

Figure 1 shows how study time (shown in red) fits into the day of an ESL learner without a smartphone (left) and with a smartphone (right). In the chart on the left, study outside the classroom is restricted to a single block of time. In the chart on the right, numerous small learning and practice opportunities have appeared throughout the day, cumulatively doubling the study time.

Highly engaging, entertaining and addictive

However valuable the content or concept of an app may be, if it's boring it won't get used. Passive content, except in tiny bites, just doesn't work on a smartphone. Many ESL apps fail because they don't do anything *for* the user and there's little or nothing for the user to do *with* the app except read or watch. For an app to be valuable, it must be used – and to be used a lot, it has to fulfill one of two criteria:

Provide small bites of timely information. An example of this would be reference works such as dictionaries, thesauruses and search engines, which are generally used briefly, to provide just-in-time information. Good reference works for smartphones are easily navigated, take advantage of functionality such as “sounds-like”, “image recognition”, or fuzzy logic in look-up, and exploit the audio and visual capabilities of the platform.

Engage and entertain. Games and game-like activities are the most obvious examples of engaging apps. On a smartphone, games are not just for kids. Grammar and vocabulary games and quizzes can be highly addictive for adults, as they try to improve their best scores and earn rewards. An app might look like a kids' game, but remember: on the smartphone, adults like playing games, too. For this reason, even apps that are not really games are starting to incorporate game-like features. Just as games use feedback loops, rewards, and the ability to earn content, the challenge of trying to complete levels or improve scores, will keep students playing—and learning—where paper-based practice would quickly become boring.

Funny is good, too. One of the more entertaining ESL grammar apps I've come across is called *English Now! con John Peter Sloan*. Created for Italians by a Brit living in Italy, what could be a fairly standard set of grammar definitions and comprehension quizzes becomes a lot of fun with a colourful informal interface, short (under 3 minutes) entertaining audio introductions, and short quizzes with humorous audio feedback. A big part of the appeal of this app is John Peter Sloan's colourful persona, his self-deprecating willingness to poke fun at himself, the humorous examples he chooses, and the funny responses he provides in the quiz section. (You do have to understand Italian, though, to appreciate this app!)

Game-like features that make apps more engaging

Feedback loop: a term taken from the field of software engineering, in games a feedback loop is any visual, audio or textual feedback to the player that makes the player aware of the effects of his or her actions. Common examples are progress bars and meters of various types, accumulation of points, positive or negative sound effects, written or spoken words such as “You rock!” or “Excellent!” and changes in the size, colour, health or other representation of on screen characters.

Rewards: badges, points, titles, rankings, stars, coins, screensavers, new powers or abilities, trophies are all examples of rewards that players can earn in games.

Earned content: Many games allow player to earn or unlock new game levels by achieving a certain number of points or by playing the game a certain number of times or some combination thereof. Player may also earn access to new game assets (maps, weapons, cars) or other types of content such as videos.

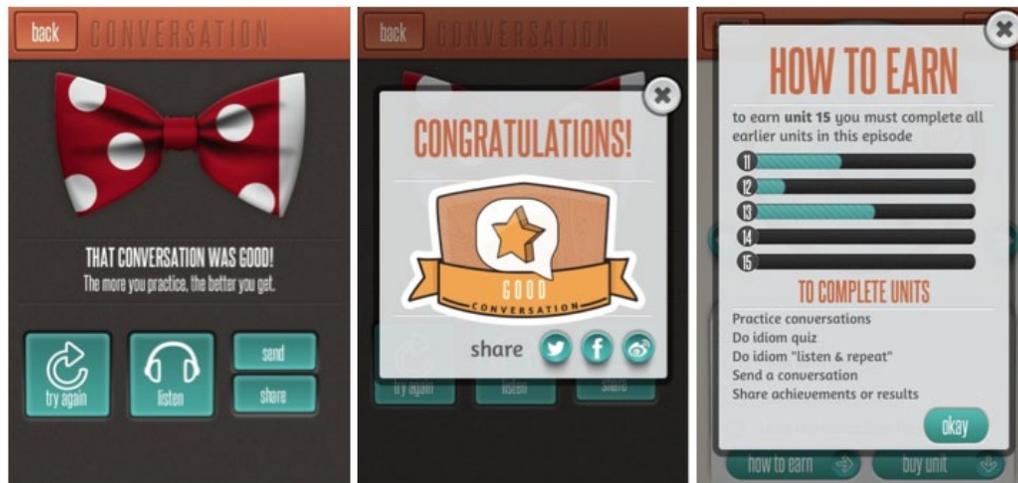


Figure 2. Interactive conversations, feedback, achievement badges and the ability to earn more content keep learners engaged in the Supiki English Conversation Practice app. (Screenshot © Linguacomm Enterprises Inc., Vancouver. Used with permission.)



Figure 3. English Now! con John Peter Sloan uses humour to create an entertaining English grammar app for Italian speakers. (Screenshot © KiwiLabs Digital Guerilla, Milan. Used with permission.)

Content created by competent English speakers

In her fascinating book *Factory Girls* (Chang, 2009), Chang devotes an entire chapter to the insatiable desire to learn English among the young internal migrants who flood into Chinese factory towns from rural China. Chang accompanies a young woman to the school of one Mr. Wu:

The guiding principle of Mr. Wu's school was that treating people like machines was the key to mastering English. After learning the alphabet and the phonetic sounds of the language, a student sat at a machine while columns of English words rotated past. The student read aloud each word and wrote it down without knowing what it meant, week after week, until he attained the highest speed. He then proceeded to another machine that showed Chinese definitions of words; next he advanced to short sentences. At each stage, he wrote the word or sentence in English and said it aloud without comprehending its meaning. When

a student achieved the top speed – able to write six hundred English sentences in one hour – he graduated to basic grammar. Only then did he learn the meaning of the words, phrases, and sentences he had been repeating for months. (p. 250)

Sadly, there are many ESL smartphone apps created by people whose ability to communicate in English and understanding of ESL teaching methods is poor. Would you recommend an ESL app from a producer who says of its app, “You can learn more natural conversations that like Japanese conversations you usually have! [sic];” “You can learn english very easy and funny [sic];” or “Improve your TOIEC score for a short time! [sic]” (Examples taken from actual Google Play and App Store descriptions of ESL apps, January 2013)?

Good ESL apps are created by teams that combine expertise in app development, user experience, and ESL. You can often identify the apps that are missing the last element simply by reading the descriptions posted on the App Store or on Google Play. Identifying who is actually responsible for creating the app can be as easy as reading the descriptions carefully and visiting the app web sites.

Highly focused apps that complement and reinforce classroom learning

The best apps don’t try to do everything. They do one thing well. App developers who come from the desktop computing or Internet world often try to cram too much into an app. Unlike desktop application users, smartphone users don’t want one app that does everything: they want lots of little apps, each of which does one thing well.

Be specific about what you’re looking for. Do you want your students to learn the English alphabet? There are apps for that. Do you want your students to practice reading authentic materials and testing their comprehension? There are apps for that. Do you want your students to practice pronunciation, increase their vocabulary, improve their listening comprehension, prepare for a TOEIC test, or get extra conversation practice between classes? There are apps for each of those things as well.

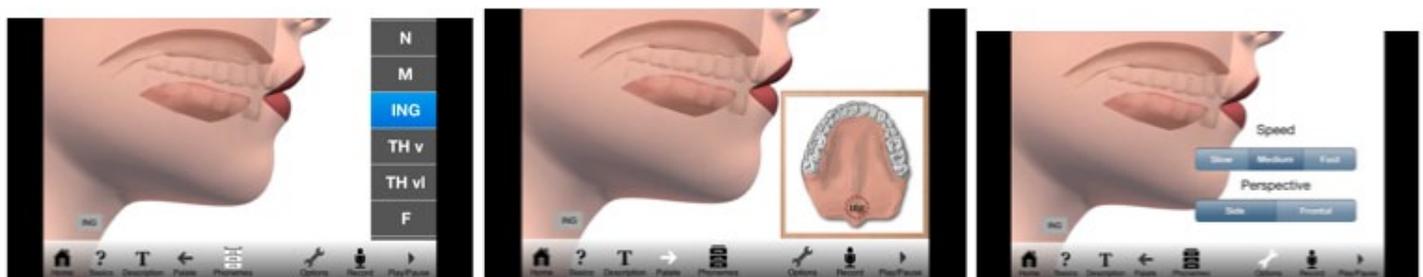


Figure 4. The SLP Speech Tutor provides cross-section animations showing how the tongue lips and jaw move when different phonemes are produced. (Screenshots © Pocket SLP, New Mexico. Used with permission.)

And don’t restrict your search to the ESL category. Not every app that might be useful for your students was designed for ESL students. I found an app designed for speech pathologists that uses animations to show how the tongue and lips move in producing

the English phonemes. This app could be a great resource for teachers to use with certain students.

Designed for Smartphones

The best apps are designed specifically for the smartphone platform. They are easy to use and interactive. Some well-known and reputable publishers of ESL books and videos have “repurposed” their legacy content by digitizing it and selling it, sometimes with minimal adaptation, as a mobile app. This reflects a serious lack of understanding of the ways in which people use content on a smartphone. Very few people are going to read a textbook or watch a one-hour instructional video on a smartphone.

When searching for apps, read the descriptions carefully and look at the screenshots. Do you see screenshots with lots of text or pictures of “talking heads”? Are there a lot of indices, or a list of videos and/or transcripts? Odds are, this is not content that has been specifically designed for the smartphone platform.

Do you see screens that indicate high levels of interactivity? Does the description suggest that the app takes advantage of features such as fingertip interactions, record and playback functionality, speech recognition, connectivity, graphics, animations, and other rich media content? The likelihood is that this app was specifically designed for the smartphone platform, making a richer environment for students and encouraging them to practice more.

Summary

Smartphones offer a great opportunity to get your students practicing and learning between classes. There are thousands of smartphone apps for ESL out there, and the number is increasing rapidly. The best smartphone apps for ESL are:

- designed in small segments
- engaging, entertaining and addictive
- created by native English speakers
- highly focused and complementary to other learning
- specifically designed for smartphones.

Separating the wheat from the chaff is a challenge, but with the growing ubiquity of smartphones this will become an important tool in the ESL teacher’s arsenal. Do your own research and also talk to your students. They can be a great source of information on apps that they find useful. Investing a few hours each month to keep abreast of this rapidly evolving field will definitely pay off in increased student engagement and achievement.

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Author Bio



A new media expert with over 20 years of experience developing interactive applications for education and culture, Julie Zilber is also a certified ESL teacher. She is currently Imagineer-in-Chief at Linguacomm, leading the development of Supiki® - the world's first mobile app that allows people to practice English by engaging them in realistic conversations. Prior to co-founding Linguacomm, Julie was Co-Director of 7th Floor Media at SFU. She has been a Research Leader on the Mobile Muse Research Network and a Principal Investigator for the TeleLearning National Centre of

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MAXIMIZING FEEDBACK IN L2 CLASSROOMS¹

By Maryam Wagner and Eunice Eunhee Jang

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Assessment is an integral component of instruction. The use of assessment in language classrooms may have multiple purposes including: tracking the development of students' language proficiency and identifying their language learning needs to make decisions about how to help students move forward in their learning; evaluating the effectiveness of instruction; and making decisions about placement into a language program. All of these uses of assessment provide teachers with invaluable information that informs curricular decisions and classroom instruction on how to best support students' English language learning needs. However, as teachers, we often struggle with how to share the information that we learn from assessments with students to help advance their language development. It's common to ask: *What should be the focus of my feedback? How much feedback should I give? How do I give feedback? Should I correct students' errors?* The focus of this article to propose some answers to these questions and discuss *diagnostic* feedback and its potential for maximizing learning in English language classrooms.

Let's begin the discussion by picturing a Grade-10 English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classroom. There are 20 students in this class all of whom are at a high-intermediate level of English-language proficiency. They are in this ESL class to prepare for mainstream English instruction. Each student has individual strengths and areas of English-language proficiency which need developing. For example, Mario is a motivated student who is always engaged and participates to the best of his abilities. His oral language proficiency is highly developed, but he struggles with his second-language (L2) writing. Although he has mastered the ability to use punctuation, and he applies correct grammar in his writing, he has difficulty translating his ideas into a coherent text. He needs help articulating his ideas and organizing them coherently. Jia is another student who has some challenges with her L2 writing. Jia is a much quieter student, and is motivated when she is rewarded with high marks. She tends to be less interested in her teacher's comments on her writing. Jia's writing also shows that she has good ideas which are organized coherently. However,

¹ This paper is based on a presentation of the same name delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012 (Jang & Wagner, 2012).

Jia struggles with the use of vocabulary in her essays. She often uses words incorrectly or words that are not appropriate to the genre. Furthermore, she tends to use short, choppy sentences without any connectors; most of her sentences are simple. What type of feedback do you think will target each student's individual L2 writing needs and best help these students improve? Let's begin with a discussion of feedback and how it's defined in the research literature.

What is feedback?

Feedback is a means of communicating to students about their strengths and areas for improvement based on their performance on assessment tasks (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This information can come from various sources including teachers, parents, computers, books, peers, and students themselves. A pivotal facet of feedback is that for it to be effective it must help students understand the gap between where they are now in their learning, and where the next level is (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Another potential gap may arise from a discrepancy between the content of feedback and students' perceived ability. These various sources of gaps prompt students to respond to feedback differently. Of course, there is also the possibility that students will reject the feedback. Teachers need to consider the aforementioned learner characteristics in order to integrate a feedback loop into teaching and learning. Figure 1 illustrates key dimensions of a feedback loop and their connection with assessment and instruction.

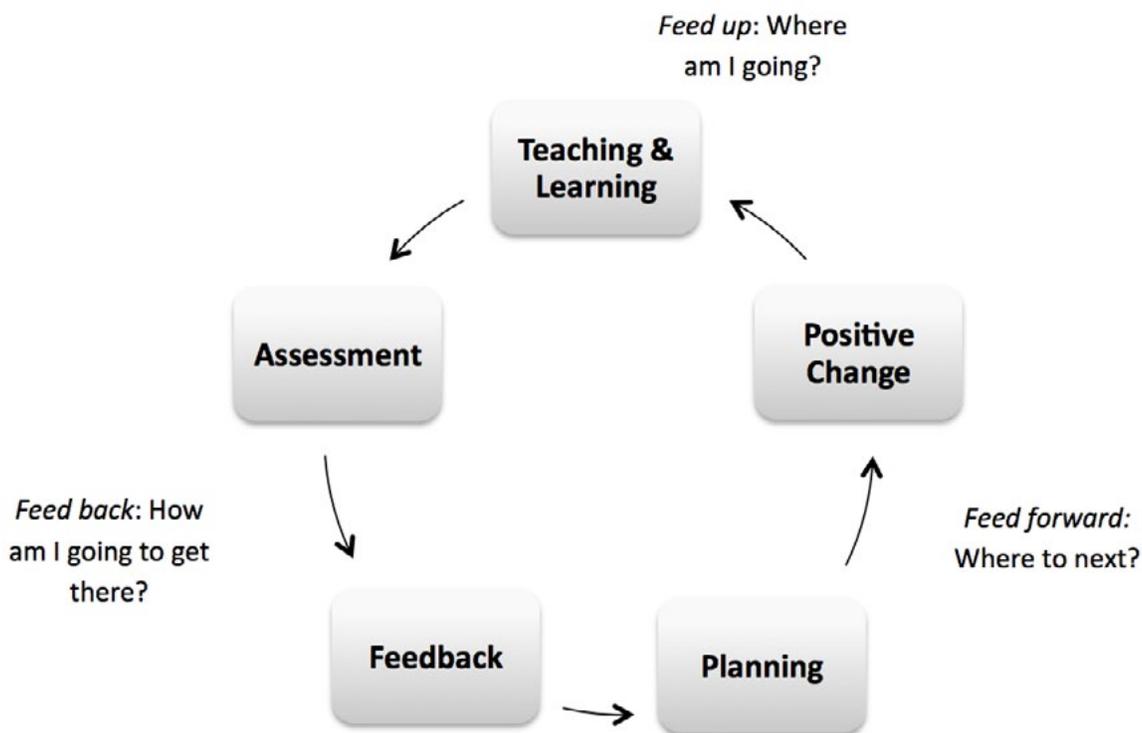


Figure 1. Feedback Loop

If we revisit our Grade-10 classroom, it becomes apparent that in order for Mario and Jia to improve upon their L2 writing they will need to receive feedback that specifically addresses: 1) the target of the writing instruction and the English language learning outcomes (Feed up); 2) the specific strengths and areas of improvement in their L2 writing which they need to target to achieve these outcomes (Feed back); and 3) specific instruction and learning strategies that will guide their next steps (Feed forward).

What should be the focus of feedback? How much feedback should I give?

Ideally, feedback should focus on addressing students' cognitive processes and strategies, rather than focussing on language products as a learning outcome. When feedback focuses on the quality of language products as a learning outcome, there may be little information for learners to understand how to improve their language proficiency (Butler & Winne, 1995). We encourage teachers to focus their feedback on processes and strategies which can be useful for identifying formatively cognitive strengths and areas of improvement. This feedback can serve to help students *replace* misconceptions or *restructure* past knowledge based on new information. This feedback addresses conceptual gaps and strategies; it does not focus on syntactic errors or summative evaluations. Furthermore, this cognitive feedback provides a level of specificity that is not excessively detailed, nor is it so coarse that learners are unable to gain any meaningful learning from it. Most importantly, this type of feedback promotes self-regulatory learning, and is generated externally and internally (Jang & Wagner, in press). We use the term *diagnostic* feedback to refer to this type of feedback that targets the cognitive gap between students' current level of performance and a future, goal driven level of performance (Jang & Wagner, in press). Its role is much greater than simply directing attention to learners' errors, and its use has the potential to motivate students to advance their learning.

How do I give feedback? Should I correct students' errors?

Have you ever struggled with giving feedback? Marking and preparing feedback (particularly on writing) is a time-consuming process. As teachers, we want to ensure that this time is well spent and the information that we provide our students is helping them improve upon their work and is facilitating their language learning. Imagine if you were asked to give feedback to Mario and Jia to help them improve upon their L2 writing. You had the opportunity to mark a draft of a multi-paragraph essay. What would your feedback look like? Would it be diagnostic feedback? Would you highlight *all* of the errors? Would you correct the mistakes? Would you encourage the students and provide positive reinforcement with comments such as: 'great work' or 'well done'?

Typically, feedback tends to be one-directional from the teacher to the students in which teachers provide learners with oral or written feedback based on their work. They often highlight errors and provide the corrected form, which is referred to as *corrective feedback* (or direct feedback. Teachers can provide *facilitative feedback* (or indirect feedback) in which they identify errors but do not provide the correct form (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). As the term implies, some research (particularly in the area of second language (L2) writing) points to the fact that facilitative feedback leads to greater gains in learning (e.g., Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982); however, there is no conclusive evidence across all L2 research.

Therefore, if we think back to Mario and Jia's essay, it is probably a good idea to highlight the errors in their writing, but not necessarily give them the right answers. It is also likely that the students' essays will show that they are making the same type of mistakes repeatedly. It may be a helpful to point out these types of errors and provide them an opportunity to find the additional occurrences in their paper. A student-teacher conference may be a good way of giving this type of feedback.

The research evidence does indicate that the use of evaluative or tangible feedback may be detrimental to student learning. Evaluative feedback refers to the non-descriptive, overall comments such as 'well-done', 'great job', or 'nice effort' that we all use from time to time. Tangible feedback refers to the use of objects as rewards. For example, a tangible object may be gold star, or stickers, or happy faces. According to the research literature, these two types of feedback are not helpful because they tend to rely on students' extrinsic motivation (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Tunstall & Gips, 1996). Furthermore, these types of feedback tend to focus on the positive aspects of learner's performance. By not drawing students' attention to areas in which they need to improve, learners are not given the opportunity to consider and possibly change their approach to solving a problem. Recall from the classroom scene that we described that Jia is a type of student who is motivated by high grades. She may be the type of student who would only notice the evaluative feedback, and not focus on the other descriptive feedback that is provided elsewhere in her essay. Such feedback would probably not help her improve her English language proficiency.

Maximizing Diagnostic Feedback

Let's revisit Mario and Jia's classroom. What would diagnostic feedback of Mario and Jia's writing look like? What type of feedback would help each student advance their L2 writing proficiency? In order to answer these questions we can draw from the findings Wagner's (forthcoming) research in which she provided students in a secondary ESL classroom with diagnostic feedback on their L2 writing. The students were assigned a major essay which involved writing multiple drafts and revision following feedback. In the assignment, students were asked to write about themselves in the future. The assignment included specific criteria to which students had to adhere. The feedback consisted of: self-assessments, teacher

feedback, peer-assessments, and a diagnostic writing profile which provided them with diagnostic feedback about their writing. In order to generate diagnostic profiles that would address the cognitive gaps, conceptual errors, and cognitive strategies in their L2 writing, it was first necessary to identify some of the integral components that comprise the skill. For example, students were provided feedback on their ideas, organization, vocabulary use, sentence structures, and grammar and mechanics. These components aligned with both curricular areas of focus for writing and the conceptions of the multidimensionality of L2 writing identified in the research literature. Figure 2 illustrates a portion of one student's diagnostic profile.

IDEAS

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↳ You have written several key main ideas ↳ I learned new information about you in the future ↳ You make connections to your own knowledge/experiences ↳ Quotations are included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ You did not include enough details that would help improve your essay and answer more questions for the reader (for example: How did she start a company and win the Nobel prize?) ☞ Include more information such as specific dates (In what year was she 28 years old?), and names (for example, the names of her parents)

ORGANIZATION

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↳ Essay includes an introduction with key pieces of information that is interesting and makes the reader want to keep reading the essay ↳ The ideas in the paragraphs are in a logical order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Introduction does not include all key pieces of information such as date. ☞ Sometimes, your essay is not focused because there are different key ideas in a single paragraph ☞ Most paragraphs do not have a topic and a concluding sentence ☞ Your essay has a title, but it does not give enough information about your essay (for example: it's YOUR future) ☞ You have a conclusion but it does not summarize the main points in your essay ☞ There are no transitions between your paragraphs The ideas are not presented so that the reader can easily move from start to finish; there is a mix of ideas

Figure 2. One section of a student's diagnostic writing profile

In addition to detailed feedback addressing students' strengths and areas for improvement, students were given the opportunity to re-write the feedback in their own words, and set specific writing goals for the subsequent draft on the areas on which they chose to focus. Would these strategies work in your classroom?

Concluding Remarks

We have aimed to highlight some of the key elements of feedback that have the potential to maximize learning in second language classrooms. Specifically, we have discussed the role of diagnostic feedback in helping learners to address the gap between their current level of performance and a future, target. In order to maximize the role of feedback in your classroom, you may want to consider the following suggestions:

Design rich tasks or learning opportunities that provide students the opportunity to build specific language skills.

1. Provide feedback that highlights learners' strengths and areas for improvement.
2. Avoid feedback that is excessively detailed.
3. Avoid feedback that provides summative descriptions of students' work (e.g., Well done!)
4. Provide feedback that addresses conceptual errors and cognitive strategies.
5. Don't limit yourself to written feedback; engage students in oral feedback as well.
6. Create opportunities in the classroom for feedback to be generated from multiple agents, e.g., teachers, peers and self.
7. Encourage students to set goals and help them achieve those goals.
8. Providing effective, meaningful feedback is a time-consuming task; however, it provides learners with invaluable opportunities to improve their second language learning skills and become successful, self-regulated learners.

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BECOMING A METACOGNITIVE TEACHER:

Thinking Aloud as you Teach¹

By Maggie Heeney

Whether you are a seasoned teacher, a teacher new to the ESL world or even a TESL teacher-trainer, you have likely encountered the following scenarios. You give a series of instructions for an activity to a class and use the magic words “Do you understand?” There are a few solemn nods, and then you hear the whisper, “What are we doing?” Alternatively, the activity progresses in what seems to be a smooth manner, but when the students hand in their work or present to the class, you find the task has been done wrong. Even worse, you might think, “What did I do in my teaching or instructions because I don’t think they ‘got’ it?”

How do you know your class ‘got’ it? Certainly reflecting back on the lesson is essential in teaching practice; however, proactively working towards being what I call a Metacognitive Teacher is a good step. What is metacognition? We may know it as thinking about thinking (Flavell, 1987). In learning, metacognition means understanding the self as a learner and knowing about the cognitive skills’ functions. Flavell describes metacognition as a process that regulates cognitive processing while the learner is doing a task.

Metacognition can be divided into two aspects: awareness and experience (Flavell 1987). Awareness refers to having metacognitive knowledge and knowing that there are strategies available to achieve task goals. Metacognitive experience pertains to the learner consciously planning to use those strategies and subsequently monitoring, testing, regulating, revising and evaluating their effectiveness. In other words, strategies are deliberate, controlled actions chosen by learners to facilitate learning. What is important to this concept is that planning or thinking about a task, and monitoring and evaluating success of the task requires the metacognitive knowledge to be activated so that it becomes metacognitive experience (Heeney, 2010).

How does that activation happen? Wenden (1998) says that metacognitive strategies need to be directly taught and scaffolded. Instructors that explicitly teach and demonstrate tasks can facilitate the learners’ thought activation processes. This with scaffolded practice helps consolidate knowledge. When this knowledge is triggered, learners can self-regulate

¹ This paper is based on a presentation entitled “Training Teachers To Model Effectively And Give Rationale” delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

learning and have opportunity to be active in their own learning. Wenden (1991) describes this as the actual process of learning rather than just having an awareness of learning.

What does this mean for the teacher? How do we activate this process in the learner? If we understand how the process of metacognition works for a learner, then it is important to use and, essentially, exploit metacognition in our teaching. It means that for learner success, we need to become Metacognitive Teachers and teach strategically. Zhang (2008) describes scaffolding strategies as essential to implement in the classroom. He emphasizes the need to explain the rationale behind strategy use such as defining the strategy, and explaining why, how, or even when and where it should be used. Most importantly, he stresses the value of demonstrating by thinking aloud and interacting with the students through questions.

So what does all this mean? Think aloud? Let the students ‘get inside’ your head? Be interactive and use a lot of questioning that involves the class? Students need to be engaged with what you are doing and need to understand how you do it. Becoming a metacognitive teacher follows a process: what, why, when, where, how, and evaluating the success of the task.

What, Why, When, Where?

These steps are the easiest. They are the rationale behind what you are doing in the classroom. Tell the learners what they are going to learn and what it means to them. Tell them they are going to learn a specific strategy or a specific skill and why that strategy or skill is important to their learning. Tell them when and where to use it.

Metacognitive teachers are very aware of their teacher talk and how they model to their students. In order to explain this concept, I need to actually model what I mean. The following examples are of the kind of teacher talk I would use about paraphrasing to an advanced level. Metacognitive teacher talk is important no matter what level you teach, and you just adjust your language to the learners’ level. In this “what, why, when, and where” example, note the questioning interspersed with the rationales:

(T) Now we need to think about paraphrasing. What is a paraphrase? Yes it is to restate. Re – is a good way to think about this. Re-write. Re-tell. Re-phrase. Why bother? Why rephrase? Why can’t we use what is there if the original person wrote it so well?

(S): Plagiarize

(T) That’s right. It is to avoid plagiarism. What if you get caught plagiarizing? Yes, you get in trouble. Many students think they can use what is there in the original text especially when they are writing essays. When you write, you have to paraphrase or if you quote, you have to give the source. Paraphrasing is important for developing knowledge, for developing English skills and for avoiding academic crime in any kind of academic institution.

As can be seen from the above interaction, students know why the lesson will be important to them and what they essentially have to gain from the learning including when and where to use the skill.

How?

According to Zhang (2008), the ‘how’ is the key step in that the “[t]eacher [needs to break] down the strategy, explaining each component of the strategy as clearly and articulately as possible and show logical relationships among the various components” (p.101). This means to model the task and to think aloud through the process. Learners then hear as well as see how the task is done. There is a difference between ‘telling students how’ and ‘showing students how.’ Consider this example of teacher talk of ‘telling how’:

“So when we paraphrase, we need to change the sentence type, change the active to passive, change the parts of speech. Also the most important is that we look at the sentence structure. We need to change it. Read the sentence, go away from it and write it as you remember it.”

Students hearing this would certainly gain awareness that there are strategies around paraphrasing and understand that there is process to follow. However, if the instructor showed an original sentence and subsequently a paraphrase of the text, students may not understand ‘how’ it happened.

Now consider the next teacher interaction of thinking through ‘how’ to paraphrase. This would be done on a board or an over head projector with the use of different colours so that the students could hear not only what the teacher is thinking through the teacher talk but also see the process in action:

Okay class, this is the original quote I need to paraphrase. It is from our text book. (written on board).

Vaccines are safe for almost everyone although very rarely there are people who experience adverse reactions (Williams, 2005 p.135).

I have to think about the process of how to do this. Step 1 – synonyms and Step 2 – switch the word order. So let me try this. First, I am going to read this sentence, and I should read it two or three times to myself. Okay, so where do I start? Vocabulary! So I need a synonym for vaccine. A good word is inoculation. But, I don’t want to start the sentence with that word. Why? Yup, I have to change the word order.

So I think I should go to the end of the sentence and look at ‘adverse reactions.’ Hmm. Okay, so what is a synonym here? I think ‘negative side effects’ is good. So if I start with ‘Negative side effects are not often felt...’ that is a good beginning. I have changed the word order, I have changed the vocabulary. The word ‘felt’ is similar to experience, so I did not change meaning. That’s good.

Also, 'are felt' is passive. Do I need 'by people?' No, I don't. That is understood because of the passive. So now what? Shall I go back to the beginning of the original sentence? Okay. So, inoculation is the word I want now.

Negative side effects are not often felt after receiving inoculations. But I am missing an idea. What is it? Yes ... some people get the reaction? How do I get that in there? Exceptions!

How about "Negative side effects are not often felt after receiving inoculations; however, exceptions occur (Williams, 2005)." Now I have changed the type of sentence structure too. Notice how I kept the reference to avoid plagiarism, but I do not need the page number when I paraphrase.

As can be seen from this example, the teacher has thought out loud the 'how' of paraphrasing. The next step would be to scaffold and to have the students paraphrase sentences and put them on the board. The teacher would then continue the think-aloud about how the learners achieved the task. You could think of this as a type of 'reverse metacognition' in that the teacher looks at the finished result and thinks out loud what the student did. Another idea is to get the students to think out loud through the process too.

Evaluating the success of the task

Metacognition entails the evaluation for the success of the task. The learners need to see the teacher assess the learning. This also becomes a checklist for both the teacher and the students; it is further metacognitive knowledge consolidation.

"Look at my paraphrase. Is it okay? Is it the same idea as the original? Yes! Did I use the same words? No! Did I change word order? Yes! It is good!"

This provides not only opportunity for celebration of success but also chance for correction and explanation of why the task was not successful.

What does all this mean? A few hints!

Metacognitive teaching stresses the importance of teacher modeling in student learning. Whenever I am involved in teacher training, I actively get the student teachers to practice this think aloud strategy. The mantra in the class is "Model, model, model." Student teachers are encouraged not only to model the learning but also to get into the habit of 'doing the first one together.' The metacognitive process does not end with the teaching or presentation of the point but continues through the giving of instructions for tasks as learning is often scaffolded teacher to student and then peer to peer.

For seasoned teachers, it means really thinking about how you teach and how you talk as you teach. Are you allowing students 'into your head' so that they can see the process? It means that saying "Does everyone understand" or assuming the students 'got it,' can set teachers up for failure. Making instructions complicated and overlong can have the same

effect. Even after effective modeling, it is still strategic to start a task with a comprehension check. Ultimately, this means we need to develop our own set of metacognitive actions and check that we too are self-regulating and evaluating the task of teaching. A Metacognitive Teacher has immense awareness of the self as a teacher and of the metacognitive learning process of the learner.

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EFFECTIVE ONLINE TEACHING PRACTICES IN ESL TEACHER EDUCATION¹

By Johanne Myles and Vesna Nikolic

In 2003, Cheng and Myles discussed the challenges involved in changing on-site teacher education courses to an on-line format. How would we impart information? Would we use a textbook, course pack or internet resources as a guide? How would candidates be assessed? And what about a practicum component? Those were big questions ten years ago and still are today; however, what has changed is that online teaching and learning is definitely alive and well. In fact, our passion for electronic modes of communication has made online courses increasingly popular and commonplace. They have undoubtedly become the norm.

By offering online Additional Qualification (AQ) courses for elementary and secondary teachers (K-12) for ESL Part I, II and the Specialist, Ontario universities annually serve thousands of teachers (referred to as candidates) who want to grow professionally, increase their employability and expand their knowledge of ESL instruction. Candidates can be working in Ontario, other parts of Canada or in various countries around the world. This article explains some of the reasons why online courses have become so commonplace, and the challenges and benefits of online learning and teaching. It also offers practical tips for effective online instruction.

ESL AQ Courses

A variety of post-secondary institutions, including Queen's University, offer ESL Part I, II, and the Specialist in an online format using such platforms as Desire to Learn. These courses are designed to provide K-12 teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to meet Ministry of Education requirements for English language learners, whether these students are placed in specific ESL classes, ESL content classes or mainstream classes. *Part I* is an introductory course in TESL that focuses on both the theory and practice of second language teaching, as well as cultural issues that can affect student performance and adaptation to the Canadian context. *Part II* is an expansion of Part I, in that the course content extends and reinforces the knowledge and skills acquired in the previous course. Teachers have more opportunity to explore theoretical perspectives of second language

¹ This paper is based on a presentation of the same title delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

acquisition and apply their knowledge and skills, as most of them will have already had ESL teaching experience in Canada or abroad when they take Part II. In the Specialist, more attention is given to analysing the implications of ESL curriculum guidelines, policies, procedures and regulations. This course is intended for those teachers who wish to gain more knowledge about program administration and planning in schools and at the Board of Education level.

The ESL AQ courses each consist of 125 instruction hours. Each course contains a set of modules that include a culminating activity or task which candidates are required to complete. Modules comprise a variety of topics related to ESL theory and practice with related readings and resources (emphasis is placed on Ministry of Education documents), content-based tasks, online discussions, self-reflections, and opportunities for instructor feedback with comments and rubrics. Candidates are expected to read the material, complete tasks, engage in quality interactions with other candidates, extend their knowledge, and reflect on their learning in ways that will change their teaching practice.

Advantages and Drawbacks of the Online Format

There are numerous advantages to using instructional technology in K-12 additional qualification courses. One of the benefits of online courses is that they can offer relevant and current information designed to enhance candidates' understanding of ESL theory, practice and policy in a format which is easily accessible, flexible, and cost effective. These courses can also reach a large number of participants and utilize interactive and engaging discussion tools to support learning, reflective practice, and research. For example, through YouTube and other internet sites, candidates can now access and observe a wide selection of teaching films that illustrate authentic effective teaching methods and techniques. Even "worst practices" can serve as a point of discussion and comparison (O'Connor, 2009). Online instructional technology can supplement or complement existing on-site approaches and, in turn, foster the creation of new and innovative methods in teaching and learning, which is essential for teacher education (Spiro, 2011).

Nevertheless, there are drawbacks, such as the lack of face-to-face interaction, which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretation of instructions, which are all text-based. In addition, there isn't as much of an opportunity for relationship building and incidental learning, the kind of learning that takes place when candidates share ideas as they are walking to class or having a coffee break. Time frames can be short and the workload challenging for candidates and instructors alike. Because courses are created in advance, there is little opportunity for instructors to do any modifications while the course is in progress and there is the possibility that links to websites and materials that the candidates need to access are broken. Ethical considerations are also huge, especially with regard to the practicum or tutoring experience. Instructors and candidates need to be mindful of releasing pictures, or names of people, schools and any other information

that might identify individuals. And finally, what can instructors do about “disappearing” candidates? How do they reach people who are not “showing up for class,” when the only way to communicate with them is through the technology which they are *not* accessing?

So what does online teaching involve?

According to Salmon (2003), online education is purposeful. With this in mind, it is the responsibility of instructors to think through the design of structured learning experiences for their students, and tap into the potential of the online format, which is different from any other instructional context.

Effective online teaching incorporates the following components:

- A solid level of trust between the instructor and candidates, and among the candidates themselves
- Pedagogy that effectively fits the online format
- Virtual spaces that foster an engaging learning environment and support the sharing of ideas and expertise
- A variety of materials and resources that everyone can easily access and incorporate into their repertoire
- Course outlines, clear task instructions, and explicit schedules for due dates
- Asynchronous and synchronous communication, via a discussion board, chat, email and pager, depending on software capabilities
- Small “class” sizes and much more ...

Effective online instructors

Certainly, there are plenty of technological “bells and whistles” that can be utilized in online courses but the most essential ingredient for effective instruction is having a committed and knowledgeable instructor. Student views of online instruction reveal that effective instructors adapt to student needs, use meaningful examples, motivate students to do their best, facilitate the course effectively, deliver a valuable course, communicate effectively, and show concern for student learning. Effective instructors are also visibly and actively involved in the learning, work hard to establish trusting relationships, and provide a structured, yet flexible classroom environment. Communication is consistent and timely and the expectations clear, fair and challenging (Durrington, Berryhill & Swafford, 2006; Young, 2006). Indeed, there are several strategies that instructors can employ at the beginning, during and at the end of the course to encourage student participation and interactivity. What follows is a selection of helpful tips.

At the Beginning

Getting the course off to a good start

- Be available as much as possible at the beginning of the course
- Identify the candidates for whom this is the first online course and offer extra support during the first couple of days of the course
- Make sure that everyone is aware of and has accessed the course content or other important tabs in the course
- Take notes related to the professional and personal information the candidates share and occasionally use them during the course to add a personal touch (“By the way, how is your son doing?” or, “How are things with your supply teaching?”)
- Establish an effective system of tracking candidates (Excel spreadsheet, Word, or hard copy notes)

Knowing your candidates and accommodating them

- Create a dynamic and vibrant online community right from the beginning
- Emphasize things that you have in common
- Accommodate candidates in special circumstances
- Observe busy times for teachers (e.g., Report Cards, EQAO testing) and be flexible
- Encourage candidates to get to know each other and network

During the course

Implementing fair formative assessment practices

- Send email reminders to candidates who lag behind as soon as you notice the pattern; keep these emails, and if you anticipate problems, copy and paste them into a Word file
- Send feedback and formative assessment grades on time
- Make your feedback detailed and specific to show that you have read candidates’ postings
- Provide occasional, quick, positive anecdotal notes to show that the candidates’ effort is appreciated
- Set clear expectations and offer guidelines for responses to postings at the beginning of the course

Engaging in meaningful communication

- Foster a non-threatening, comfortable environment that encourages the candidates to be active in the course
- Praise the quality and depth of overall discussion wherever appropriate
- Post links to articles with different viewpoints to encourage discussion
- Maintain a constant and timely communication pattern, so that students feel the instructor’s presence at all times
- Get actively involved in facilitating the course by raising questions and using prompts to encourage critical thinking

- Be careful with wording and tone in your responses and postings; use questions rather than statements; use first names; show that you know the candidates' circumstances and/or teaching context
- Ask for feedback on your instruction during the course, invite candidates to make suggestions

Encouraging student interactivity

- Encourage the candidates to collaborate and interact with their classmates
- Praise in-depth interaction: ask questions about candidates' postings and encourage everyone to respond by adding to the discussion or raising additional questions
- Discourage candidates from posting short, thank-you notes, such as "awesome activity, thanks for posting" without providing more details about why it was "awesome," and how they would use it
- Challenge students to do further research and share their findings

Sharing your expertise

- Expand on the candidates' knowledge in your postings and responses
- Post additional resources, links and materials

At the end of the course

- Create a new topic on Discussion Board during the last week of the course ("*Say Good Bye to Your Colleagues Here*")
- Acknowledge the candidates' contributions
- Send their final grades and feedback in a timely fashion.
- Encourage candidates to evaluate their experience and offer sincere and construction suggestions for how to improve the course and your teaching

Concluding Remarks

Online ESL teacher education is here to stay and the number of candidates (and providers!) of online courses is growing fast. No doubt, the software is improving but despite its capabilities, it cannot replace the conscientiousness, dedication, knowledge and passion of the instructors. The degree to which instructors require effective, mostly text-based communication and facilitation skills, continuous presence, and flexibility is critical to the online format. Equally critical are teaching strategies that encourage candidates to not only acquire knowledge and skills through continuous and meaningful presence, but also to reflect on their own teaching. Guided by an effective online instructor, candidates have the opportunity to focus on the metacognitive aspect of the course, engage in meaningful professional development, network with other ESL teachers online, share ideas and resources, and think critically about issues relevant to the field of second language acquisition and instruction.

Author Bio



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Extensions

TED Talks:

Salman Khan: Let's use video to reinvent education

Daphne Koller: What we're learning from online education

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USING RATER FEEDBACK FOR L2 WRITING RUBRIC REVISION¹

By Carla Hall and Amelia Hope

Just as a car needs periodic tune-ups, so tests need to be routinely reviewed to ensure that they are still measuring what they were intended to measure. For productive skills tests, a tune-up would include examining the rater-training process, the test manual, the nature of the prompts, and of course, the scoring rubric.

There are several ways to approach revision of a scoring rubric. The literature on rubric development and revision often makes a distinction between two types of approaches: *a priori* and empirical (Fulcher, 1996; Milanvoic, Saville, Pollitt, & Cook, 1996).

An *a priori* approach uses intuitive judgment or expert views of the construct to be measured as the starting point for rubric development. This approach to rubric development may involve reviewing the theories of the components of writing; consulting with experienced teachers about what distinguishes good, average, and weak writing; or examining the rating scales of other tests. Test developers then use information from these sources to establish scoring descriptors that suit the purposes of their tests.

An empirical approach to rubric development, on the other hand, is evidence-based. This approach may involve examining samples of writing to explore systematically what characterizes the different levels of proficiency. The goal of such an analysis is to identify the specific ways that a well-written paper differs from an adequate paper or a poorly-written paper. Alternatively, an empirical approach may entail analyzing how raters interpret and apply criteria when evaluating papers (Knoch, 2009). The latter is the approach that we took to better understand how CanTEST raters score papers and to identify inconsistencies and problematic areas in interpreting and applying the criteria in the scoring rubric. This article will first describe how we went about collecting rater information to revise our own scoring rubric; then we will outline steps that could be used with other tests.

Background: The CanTEST

The CanTEST is a four-skills, high-stakes English proficiency test used for university admission and professional licensure. The writing portion of the test is paper-based and requires candidates to produce an essay of approximately 300 words in 45 minutes.

¹ This paper is based on a presentation entitled "Using Rater Comments For Writing Grid Revision" delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

The test is intended to be a direct measure of written English expression that provides information about a candidate’s ability to present and develop ideas in standard academic/professional language. Each writing sample is evaluated independently by two trained raters according to criteria specified in the writing rubric. The writing rubric describes ten levels of proficiency based on the following four criteria: *Overall effectiveness in conveying message; Accuracy of vocabulary and structures; Range of vocabulary and structures, and Organization and development of topic*. Although there are descriptions for each criterion at each level, raters score each paper holistically.

During the scoring process, each rater completes a *Rater Comment Sheet* for each paper. In addition to recording basic information about the paper (e.g. candidate number, date, test site), raters note the salient features of the paper that influenced the score they awarded. Although raters can write down what they want, the *Comment Sheet* has seven headings to guide them. All of these headings are derived from the rubric, with the exception of “On topic?,” which is discussed in rater training and in the writing test manual.

- Effort to understand?
- Reads like English?
- Organization, development, & links
- Accuracy: Grammar: # errors, types of errors, effect of errors
- Accuracy: Vocab: wrong forms, spelling, effective use
- Range: Structures and Vocab
- On topic?

The *Comment Sheet* serves two needs. First, it functions as a reminder—almost a “note to self”—of how a rater arrived at a given score. The rater can refer to these notes in the discussion with the co-rater when establishing a consensus score. Because it is archived with the actual writing papers and score reports, it is also a record for an external reader—the test administrators—of the rater’s justification for the given score.

It should be noted that raters undergo training for the CanTEST by attending a training session, marking sample papers, studying an annotated exemplar book, and reading the writing test manual. The role of these support materials will also be considered briefly in the discussion section of this paper.

Method

Comment sheets are produced during the CanTEST rating process and filed with the test session papers. As such, they provided a convenient, accessible, and authentic source of data about what raters deem important enough to record. For our analysis of rater comments,

we looked closely at the comments of three raters who read and scored the same 16 papers. The goal was to gather information to shed light on the following questions:

- What kind of comments do raters make?
- What textual features do raters mention? Which features do they neglect to mention?
- What attitudes and values about the construct of Writing underlie the comments?
- Which textual features are commented on most often when there is agreement among raters and when there is disagreement about scores?
- Can rater comments helpfully inform scoring rubric revision?

Comments were identified at the semantic level; that is, any word, group of words, or symbol (e.g., !; ü) that represented an evaluation of the text being rated was considered a comment. Three different analyses were conducted. First, all comments for all papers were coded as either generally positive or negative. The comments were then organized under the seven headings printed on the *Comment Sheet*. Comments which fell outside of these seven categories were reread to identify any emerging categories or common themes. In the second analysis, the focus turned to individual papers on which the raters agreed and those on which they disagreed; the comments on these papers were examined in-depth in an effort to understand what accounted for the agreement or disagreement. Finally, comments that were unique to certain papers or that were judged as idiosyncratic were analyzed separately. Once trends were identified, we looked for confirmation of these trends by consulting a larger database consisting of the comments made by other raters on different papers.

Results

Overall trends

In the first analysis, the most salient pattern that emerged is that negative comments outnumbered positive comments. This is hardly surprising, since the raters are all professional teachers, who are, in fact, trained to notice errors. The preponderance of negative comments may also be a result of the wording in the *Comment Sheet*, which guides raters to look for errors:

Accuracy: Grammar: #errors, types of errors, effect of errors

Accuracy: Vocab: wrong forms, spelling, effective use

Another trend that emerged in the overall analysis of the comments was that by far the highest number of comments were made on accuracy in grammar and vocabulary, with negative comments outnumbering positive comments. Again, the wording on the *Comment Sheet* may have affected the number of comments in each area. For example, the categories of *Effort to Understand?* *Reads like English?* and *On-Topic?* require only a yes or no comment, whereas the wording of the other categories prompt the rater to comment in more detail and on more areas. It may also be the case that aspects of a text having

to do with these areas are more easily identified and therefore more easily commented on. Features of syntax and vocabulary are identifiable at the sentence level, so the rater can easily note these as she or he reads. The areas of the *Comment Sheet* less frequently commented on require the rater to take into account larger chunks of text, and thus require more reflection and possibly a second or third read-through.

As would be expected, negative commenting was related to low scores for all raters and papers. This suggests some consistency among raters in their general impressions about the quality of the texts they are scoring; they clearly mentioned more negative textual features in the papers they evaluated as weaker papers than in those they evaluated as stronger papers. For all of the weaker papers, the most frequent type of negative comment concerned accuracy of grammar and vocabulary.

An interesting finding from this analysis was that raters commented both positively and negatively on aspects of writing that are not explicitly mentioned on the *Comment Sheet* or in the scoring rubric. These comments most often concerned text length, uneven proficiency, risk-taking on the part of the writer, or memorized chunks of text. Some of these concerns are directly addressed in training sessions and in the writing test manual, so it is natural that raters commented on them. This type of commenting could also be explained by the fact that some raters have been trained to evaluate writing for other tests and may be bringing those test criteria to this rating event.

The overall analysis of the comments was valuable in that it provided us with insight into how the *Comment Sheet* may direct raters' attention to specific textual features while scoring. It also indicated that there is a certain degree of agreement on the textual features that contribute to low scores. Finally, it showed us that raters bring their own rating criteria to the scoring task.

In Depth Analysis of Individual Papers

The in-depth analyses of individual papers revealed two general trends. First, by examining the comments on papers where there was disagreement in the final score, we determined that raters were sometimes weighing criteria in the rubric differently. For example, on one paper, all three raters commented harshly on the inaccuracy of grammar and vocabulary, but the final mark each rater awarded was different. This suggests that the relative contribution of grammar to the final score varied among the raters. This could be the result of rater bias or again the influence of training with other tests.

The second trend we noticed was that raters were interpreting criteria on the rubric differently in two ways. First, raters sometimes interpreted the *level* of proficiency differently for a specific criterion on the *Comment Sheet* or scoring rubric. For example, commenting on the same paper under the category of *effort to understand*, one rater wrote down 'some', meaning that reading required some effort, while another rater wrote 'not much'. In other words, the raters might have shared an understanding of what the criterion entails, but differed in their view of the degree to which the paper demonstrated proficiency

in that area.

The other way that raters interpreted rating criteria differently was in the definition of a criterion. This was most noticeable for the criterion of *Range*. Some comments under the heading of *Range* were entirely appropriate; these concerned the complexity of structures, lack of precise vocabulary, or use of idiomatic expressions. However, many comments written under *Range* clearly related to other features of the text, for example, effect of errors, accuracy of grammar, links, fluency, and ease with English.

These inconsistencies could be explained by a number of factors. Raters could be considering different parts of the paper when scoring. Raters may also vary in their standards and general severity in rating. As the case of range illustrates, raters may also be unclear about the rating criteria.

Now what? Using the Information from the Analysis

The analysis of rater comments brought many issues to the fore: 1) the frequency of comments about criteria not considered on the rubric, such as text length or risk-taking; 2) the lack of agreement about the score when raters seemed to agree about some features of the paper; 3) the lack of agreement about some features of the paper; and 4) the difficulty evidenced by raters in understanding some criteria, for example, *Range*. The challenge remained of how to use this information to improve the test, specifically, how to revise the scoring rubric, training procedures, and training support materials, which include the writing test manual and a book of annotated exemplars.

The decision was made that all the issues raised will be handled more explicitly in the training sessions, the writing test manual, and the annotated exemplar book. For example, spelling and risk-taking will be addressed more extensively in training and support materials as they relate to the overall effectiveness. Guidance on how to rate uneven texts and memorized chunks of texts will be included in the section of “Problematic Papers” in the writing test manual, and more examples will be added to the annotated exemplar booklet. The exemplar book will now include papers that are unusually short and unusually long, with clearer explanations of how, if at all, the text length influenced the final score.

The scoring rubric is the most critical component of the rating process in that it specifies the criteria deemed important to good writing. However, a rubric has to balance completeness with conciseness—it should fit on a page. Therefore, not all the issues can be addressed in the rubric. Clearly, however, the analysis of rater comments suggested that the rubric needs to be revised. In particular, the descriptors of some criteria need to be fine-tuned to make the different proficiency levels more clearly distinguishable. The criterion of *Range* needs to be reconsidered, and perhaps incorporated into other criteria. Once the changes to the rubric are completed, the new rubric will be field-tested and rater feedback will be collected.

Tips for Collecting, Analyzing, and Using Rater Comments

We chose to use *Comment Sheets* to collect raters' comments because they were readily available to us, but there are a number of other ways to gather similar information. There are also many ways to analyze and apply the information obtained. Some of these will be described below.

Collecting Raters' Comments

Think-aloud protocols. In this method, raters articulate their thought processes as they rate papers. These thoughts are audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed. This is a commonly used method in research on the rating process (Cumming, Kantor, & Powers, 2002, Lumley, 2005; Vaughn, 1991), but it is also time-consuming and expensive. Further, it requires that raters be trained in the technique of the protocol.

Raters underline parts of the rubric. As raters score papers, they identify exactly which criteria they used in judging a paper by circling or underlining the relevant parts of the rubric. If the rubric does not include the criteria they apply when marking, they could add this information. The underlining procedure makes it easy to see which criteria raters rely on, and which do not contribute to the scoring decision.

Post-Rating Interviews. After marking papers, raters talk about how they arrived at judgments. This format allows test developers to probe more deeply into the problematic areas of the rating process.

Questionnaires. Raters fill out a questionnaire about which features of texts they consider, which descriptors on the rubric are most useful to them, which descriptors need greater precision, etc.

Rater comment sheets. Raters fill out a form to record the features of the paper that influenced their scoring decisions. If you choose to collect rater comments with a comment sheet, think about what format the comment sheet will take because this will affect the type of information elicited from the raters. Possibilities include a blank sheet, a form that mirrors the criteria on the rubric, or a form that solicits comments related to rubric criteria as well as other features that may be important. It is also important to provide some guidance to raters so that they understand what type of comments are expected. Raters can note generalizations about the text they are scoring (e.g., 'weak article use'), or they can record actual excerpts from the paper that typify the writer's ability.

Analyzing the Comments

Once you have collected and sorted the comments, you can analyze the data in a number of ways:

- Look at what criteria are being commented on and what criteria are not being commented on.
- Determine if the pattern of comments changes for low papers or high papers.
- Look separately at papers where there is disagreement among different raters about the final mark: Is there a particular criterion that might be responsible for the different final marks?
- Look separately at papers where there is agreement among different raters about the final mark: Are the raters commenting on the same things or arriving at the same mark by different routes?
- Examine comments to determine if raters are interpreting rating criteria differently from one another.

Using the Information and Validating Your Rubric

After analyzing the data you have collected from raters and identifying problematic areas of rating, you need to decide how these problems are best addressed. As our experience indicates, some areas of concern can be dealt with in training and training support materials. We plan to clarify most issues that arose in our analysis by including explanations in the writing test manual, the training presentation, and the annotated exemplar booklet.

If you choose to modify your rubric, you will need to take measures to validate the new scoring scheme. We have listed below some questions that can be used to obtain information towards this end, as well as suggestions for how to gather this information:

- Do the new criteria measure the same thing as the old criteria?
 - Collect rater feedback on criteria (interviews, verbal protocols, rater comments)
- Do candidates receive the same score with the new rubric?
 - Ask raters to evaluate papers using old and new rubrics
- Do the new criteria reflect the construct of writing?
 - Compare the rubric to expert views of the construct.
 - Ask experienced writing teachers: “Does this rubric reflect writing proficiency? Are any important aspects of academic/professional writing missing?”
- Which criteria on the new rubric contribute most to the final score?
 - Use a questionnaire to ask which descriptors the raters most rely on.
 - Ask raters to underline descriptors on the rubric as they rate.
 - Do a statistical analysis.

With thoughtful work and some measure of luck, the new rubric, support materials, or training procedures that are modified through this revision process will likely work better than the old ones. Inter-rater reliability should improve or at least stay the same. The construct validity of the test may be strengthened because the criteria will better mirror

the construct of writing. In any case, one thing is clear: this work is never done—there will be tune-ups in the future.

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF SAUDI STUDENTS IN ONTARIO EAP CLASSES¹

By Trevor Laughlin

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) has had a huge impact on North American universities, bringing approximately 14,000 students to Canada. Between 2008 and 2010, the number increased from 2,200 to 13,899 Saudis (Abaalkhail, 2011). Sadly, the performance of the KASP program has been characterized by broad failures by several institutions (Redden, 2007); this comment is no less valid now than it was in 2007. Several authors (Muhammed, 2012; Alsamadani, 2010; Bersamina, 2009; Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007; Yushau & Bokhari, 2005) have dealt with L1 interference when Arabic speakers working in an ESL/EFL context and have considered the pedagogical interference that these students bring from the Saudi educational system itself. This article attempts to help North American teachers understand what learning challenges these students face and how teachers can help them overcome these issues. But to understand the nature of these issues, one must understand the demography of Saudi Arabia, the nature of their educational system and the subsequent interplay that these two factors have through the KASP program. While many are familiar with the stereotypes brought about by the oil wealth in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), not as many are familiar with the unique demographics of the nation. In 1950, Saudi Arabia had a population of about 3 million; since then, this population has skyrocketed to a staggering 25.7 million (Saudi Arabia, 2012). Two unique features of this demography are seen in the breakdown of component parts: its foreign populace and its young populace. Over 30% of the KSA's population is composed of foreign nationals, most of whom are living in the KSA for job opportunities. At the same time, the mean age of a Saudi citizen is 25 and around 75% of the population is under the age of 30 (Saudi Arabia, 2012). See figure 1.

By themselves, these factors may seem inconsequential; however, when you combine them, certain conflicts arise. As mentioned previously, many non-nationals live and work in the KSA, occupying jobs ranging from simple labour positions to highly technical specialists. Youth unemployment among native Saudis is estimated to be between 10.8% (Maqbool & Al-Husoon, 2012) and 28% (Saudi Arabia, 2012). Ideally, it would be native Saudis who would gradually replace these foreign nationals in these career fields. However, despite government laws mandating that certain percentages of the workforce be Saudi (Maqbool & Al-Husoon, 2012), companies are unwilling or unable to meet these regulations.

¹ This paper is based on a presentation by Trevor Laughlin and Marian Holley entitled "Saudi Students In EAP: Using Classroom Hours Effectively" delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

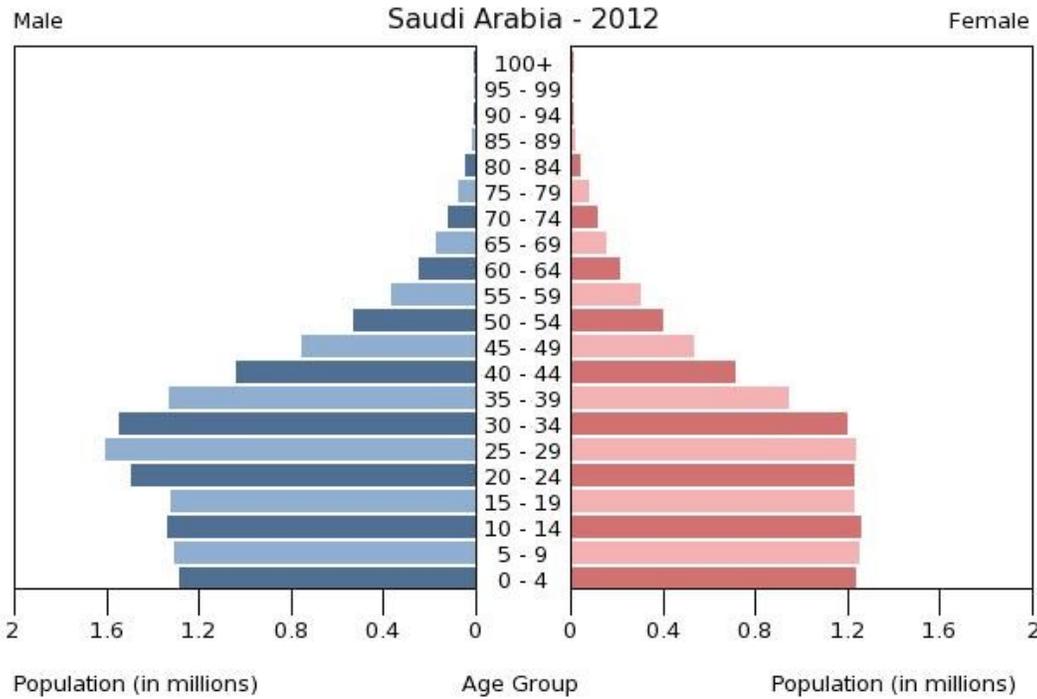


Figure 1. Saudi population pyramid for 2012 from the CIA World Factbook.

Simply put, “there aren’t enough well-trained Saudis in the kind of jobs that are needed,” says John Sfakianakis, Group General Manager and Chief Economist of Saudi Franzi Bank and Chief Economist, Middle East North Africa for Credit Agricole C.I.B. (Lindsey, 2010). These local university graduates, “generally lack... the education and technical skills the private sector needs” in order to reduce the dependency on foreign technical workers (Maqbool & Al-Husoon, 2012; Saudi Arabia, 2012; Lindsey, 2010). Already, the discerning eye can see the beginnings of the impetus behind the KASP program. But before that is examined, we must examine why local private companies consider Saudi education insufficient to the task of training their employees (Maqbool & Al-Husoon, 2012; Muhammed 2012).

In terms of education, the KSA is a very young country. The Ministry of Higher Education has only existed since 1975 with the goal of developing a highly skilled workforce, a task it has only realistically had 30-some years to do. But the statistics paint a grim picture. In the 2007, Saudi schoolchildren being measured on a number of academic levels ranked near the bottom of the 48 countries surveyed according to U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (in Lindsey, 2010). Even the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education recognized that Saudi education has focused too much on memorization and rote learning, creating a lack of understanding and critical thought in regards to topic material (Lindsey, 2010). According to Bersamina (2009), there is little emphasis in writing on the formulation, planning and revision of work; this is a product-oriented approach (Salem & Lawless, 2011), not a process-oriented one.

Pedagogically, extensive reading, research, and writing does not play as large a part in the KSA as it does in Ontario's educational system. Many problems that manifest include the following:

- The Saudi classroom is teacher centered; the teacher is the source of all wisdom and the students are receptacles for that wisdom (Salem & Lawless, 2011). Lessons are more of a lecture format than a dialogue.
- As Arabic does not have strict punctuation rules, there is a tendency for poor punctuation to appear in L1 and L2 essay writing (Salem & Lawless, 2011). Alsamadani (2010) has found clear evidence that poor writing skills in English are mirrored in poor writing skills in students' L1 (Arabic).
- The argumentative essay is particularly hard for Arabic speaking students (Bacha, 2010). In Arabic rhetorical style, the argument is usually near the end of text and may not be given at all. Further, there is often no refutation of counter arguments, which makes texts sound highly descriptive and anecdotal. As mostly descriptive or expository essays are assigned in KSA classrooms as opposed to research and critical essays, one can see this leading to a weak argumentative structure in English.
- Repetition of ideas and paraphrase (without explicit connection to topic sentences) are considered rhetorically effective modes of discussion, leaving readers to wonder what the connection to the original topic is if the example is not clear. This can also lead to cases of plagiarism (Salem & Lawless, 2011).
- Saudi students are given model essays to memorize and to "adapt/imitate". These essays are designed to display students' linguistic ability in Modern Standard Arabic (Salem & Lawless, 2011), a language students learn in school that can differ quite substantially from their vernacular speech, and are evaluated on students' "choice of words" rather than on the strength of their evidence.
- As there is little or no opportunity to revise works, the concept of drafting and outlining essays (Bersamina, 2009; Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007) are exchanged for simply attempting to meet the word count and writing in a disorganized fashion.

These issues exist in students' L1. Now consider that these are acceptable work in a KSA context, even at the university level. Muhammed (2012) notes the effect of such pedagogy on the rankings of Saudi Universities few of which have ever scored highly in international rankings. This explains the reluctance of KSA employers who complained, "...that if the ministry forced them to hire unqualified Saudi youth on high salaries and train them, it would put a huge financial strain on their businesses" (Maqbool & Al-Husoon, 2012).

When you consider the issue of skilled foreign labor with the difference in educational standards of Saudi schools, the purpose of the KASP program becomes quite clear. The goals of the KASP program are ostensibly to expose students to a "western experience" and to help those students obtain a degree from a western university. Yet, what lies at the heart of the KASP movement is the creation of that skilled Saudi workforce to lessen

the dependence on foreign labour, reduce unemployment and ultimately develop the knowledge base within the kingdom. However, students are entering higher education in North America with the misconception that it will be similar to higher education in the KSA. This leads to what Alsayed (in Redden, 2007) describes as “disconnect between students’ interests in competitive programs and actual skills and credentials,” a misconception that Bersamina (2009) states Saudis have even when entering KSA universities. Redden (2007) suggests that the first influx from the KSA was not sufficiently screened for their credentials and came in with such underdeveloped English skills that it wasn’t realistic to see them develop sufficiently strong EAP skills prior to KASP ESL funding running out.

The skills we are speaking of here specifically are in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), a concept initially put forth by Cummins (1979). In brief, Cummins suggests that children develop native speaker *conversational language* within two years of immersion into a new culture but only manage *cognitive academic language proficiency* after five to seven years of immersion. To that end, is it realistic to expect students to rise to a reasonable CALP level in 18 months? Yet, students are not starting at a zero point: most Saudi students are coming to North American universities with some English knowledge. But the burden of committing to study is on the shoulders of the student. The majority of that should be in extensive reading or writing, given that that is the largest part of university work.

Teaching Strategies

Despite these challenges, there are a number of strategies we as ESL educators can adopt.

Begin with a familiar classroom structure

As students are familiar with a teacher-centered classroom (Bersamina, 2009), maintaining this format initially will establish a level of familiarity from which to move into more independent work.

Emphasize the fundamentals of grammar and punctuation from the beginning

Failing to do so will lead to L1 interference and poorly punctuated English sentences, a tendency that will present an ongoing problem and continually reduce the perceived quality of their work (Salem & Lawless, 2011; Bersamina, 2009).

Teach English-English paper-dictionary skills

Al-Fuhaid (2004, in Alhaysony) indicates that his Saudi students have clear preferences towards bilingual dictionaries as they save time and provide a clearer concept of unfamiliar words than monolingual dictionaries. However, Alhaysony (2011) also found that, “high proficiency students consulted monolingual dictionaries significantly more frequently than low-proficiency students.”

There are multiple benefits to this. “Generally, the meaning of a word as a translation equivalent is sought more often than the meaning of a word as an L2 definition. On the other hand, looking-up grammatical information, collocations, appropriateness, usage, pronunciation and etymology is not a frequent occurrence.” (Alhaysony, 2011) which ultimately leads to errors. Directing students to read through the various English explanations forces them to actively negotiate the words in the dictionary with the possible meaning on the page. Going through this “deep processing” aids recall (Kent in Alhaysony, 2011). Also, forcing students through the “page and paper process” helps develop skimming/scanning skills (Kent in Alhaysony, 2011), familiarizes them with alternate meanings and families of words, and develops reading speed.

There must be explicit instruction of English rhetorical styles

Yeh (in Bacha 2010) points out the success of explicit instructional methods. Practice for argumentative essays must constantly refer back to the basics of the argumentative paragraph: topic sentence, controlling idea, support and explanation/conclusion (Salem & Lawless, 2011). Reading practice to specifically identify these elements in other written work helps reinforce its place in students’ essays. Salem and Lawless (2011) strongly recommend instructors caution students against the use of repetition as rhetorically effective as it is seen as redundancy. However, Yeh (in Bacha 2010) also cautions that the use of explicit organized patterns may lead students to inflexibility in argumentative thinking where obeying the pattern takes precedence over the argument or clarity.

Extensive reading is essential

Students rarely read extensively either in Arabic or English. Most tend to read as little as possible as reading is often their weakest skill. “Teachers [in KSA ESL settings] usually count on the personal interests of their students to learn. In some cases, this practice might work as this could inculcate in the minds of the students the value of independence or self-reliance, but in most cases it would hamper the academic development of the students” (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). To counter this, assigned readings are a must. Further, the use of classic children’s tales, like *The Tortoise and the Hare*, offer chances for students to read for deeper, sub-textual meanings rather than simple literal translation and allows students to move beyond their current spheres of interest. This is also recommended by Salem and Lawless (2011) as a springboard for critical thinking activities.

Planning, revision and grading draft work is key to developing a good writing ethic

Bersamina (2009) claims that “[as] a result of poor teaching methods applied in most Arab universities, most ESL learners have difficulty coping with the following crucial tactical aspects: formulating, planning, and revision,” and encourages teachers to “actively involve the students in the planning process by engaging them in active class participation, discussion and brainstorming.” To that end, drafts must retain a significant portion of the

mark and contain detailed feedback from which to build a better final draft. If the planning stages do not factor into the final grade, students will see no incentive in it and disregard the step altogether. Teachers should continually encourage students in their work and emphasize the academic value of the planning/revision process.

Conclusion

When placed together in a supportive classroom with adequate teacher feedback, these strategies can work together in a very empowering way. Knowing these obstacles and having these strategies available to us allow us to better provide for student success in university academic English programs. To use the age-old adage, we can bring the horse to water, but we cannot make it drink. We have the waters. The KASP program provides for this too in terms of financial and cultural support. But in the end, it is the student's responsibility to take up the burden of his/her education.

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Author Bio



Trevor holds a master's degree in TESL and a decade of experience teaching ESL/EAP/ESAP. He has taught Business English and EAP at Al Yamamah University, Riyadh and Trent University.

THE TESL ONTARIO MEMBER SURVEY: A BRIEF REPORT¹

By Antonella Valeo

TESL Ontario marked a milestone in 2012, celebrating 40 years of bringing together teachers of ESL in Ontario. This landmark year inspired the association to reflect on the growing diversity of its membership and the changing needs of its members; to this end, the association launched a membership survey in spring of 2012. TESL Ontario wanted to use the survey to collect data in order to better understand who its members are, what characterizes their current work, and how it can best support them as members of their professional community. A snapshot of the findings was shared in a poster session with members at the 2012 TESL Ontario Fall Conference. This report builds on that presentation by providing a brief overview of the survey, its design, development, and a summary of some of the key findings.

Method and Design

The survey was a collaborative effort that was created with input from the TESL Ontario Member Services Manager, the Executive Board, the Research Committee, and a group of TESL Ontario members. The Member Services Manager drew on her knowledge of the membership as a whole and her experience working with individual members in order to help design the survey questions. The Executive Board provided input that reflected concerns and visions for the future of TESL Ontario, especially given its increasingly diverse membership. The Research Committee members contributed their expertise in research design, survey methodology, and data analysis. Finally, a group of TESL Ontario members piloted the survey and suggested revisions to the first draft. After revisions were completed an online version of the survey was constructed using FluidSurveys and a link was distributed to all TESL Ontario members through the membership email list. As an incentive for participation, members were offered the opportunity to enter a draw for a free TESL Ontario membership. They were also asked to provide consent for their responses to be used anonymously, so that the survey results could be shared with the larger membership.

The survey included both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions organized into four sections. Section 1 contained questions about the instructors' professional

¹ This paper is based on a poster by Alison Keown entitled "TESL Ontario Member Survey Results" delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

backgrounds, including age, gender, education, work, and their history as members. Section 2 was concerned with questions about how members connected with the association. These questions were designed to assess how often members used different avenues and tools to communicate with TESL Ontario. In particular, these questions aimed to assess the potential for social media tools (such as Facebook or Twitter) to allow TESL Ontario to connect with members and support a professional community. Section 3 focussed on the conferences and workshops offered by TESL Ontario. The annual TESL Ontario conference and the multiple conferences and workshops offered by TESL Ontario affiliates comprise a large part of the service provided to the membership and represent the most important avenue for professional networking. These questions attempted to assess patterns of participation, as well as motivation and key obstacles to participation. Section 4 addressed membership benefits and was designed to help TESL Ontario understand which benefits were being used most often by members, which were considered valuable, and what gaps there might be in the range of services. A range of benefits was included, such as publications (*Contact* and the *TESL Canada Journal*), members' savings programs such as group insurance and discounts, and membership in the affiliates and TESL Canada. This section also included open-ended questions asking members what other benefits they would like to see in the future.

Key Findings

Who are the members?

The survey was sent out to all TESL Ontario members and 1,327 members participated, almost 30% of the entire association membership. The responses to questions about membership type and affiliate showed that the survey responses represented the general membership well. Each of the 12 affiliates was represented and, while the majority of participants held individual memberships, volunteers, TESL students, and retired individuals also participated. Participants were also distributed across membership history; 13% had been members for less than a year and 31% had been members for over 10 years.

A general profile of association members emerged from the first section. In terms of gender and age, 83% of the respondents were women, and the majority (62%) were between 41 and 60 years old with 36% of this group between 51 and 60 years old. The majority (82%) had completed a TESL/TESOL Certificate program in Ontario while the others had completed a range of international programs. In addition, almost 40% reported completing a graduate degree.

What work do they do?

Most of the members responding to the survey (75%) held teaching positions. Others held positions as tutors, program administrators and TESL trainers. In terms of professional involvement, almost 34% reported working or being involved in the field between 3 and 10 years while another 32% reported a career length of more than 15 years. However, at

the time of the study only 37% were employed full-time. Slightly fewer, 31%, reported part-time employment and 21% were not employed at the time of the study. School boards were the largest employers with almost 31% identifying this employer group. Members, however, identified a range of other organizations as well, including colleges, universities, and private schools. A majority of the members, 76%, reported working in LINC and Continuing Education ESL programs.

How are they served and supported by TESL Ontario?

Most of the members (77%) responded that they joined TESL Ontario primarily for accreditation. However, a number of other reasons were also cited as motivators. The two most commonly cited reasons were professional credibility (identified by 58% as a motivating factor), and professional development (identified by 52%). In terms of their engagement with TESL Ontario, the website appeared to be the most common way in which members connected with the association. Almost 75% reported occasionally checking the website, while over 85% had never accessed social media connections with the association (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). However, when asked if they would be interested in exploring other professional community tools such as live chats and blogs, 70% responded that they were open to participating.

Although the TESL Ontario annual conference is one of the association's primary activities, 26% of the members responding to the survey had never attended a conference. Just over half of those who had attended did so with financial support. The remaining members attended the conference at their own cost. Most of those who received financial support (63%) identified the support as a LINC or ELT subsidy and just under half of these recipients felt that they would not attend the conference without financial support of some kind.

Of the various TESL Ontario services and benefits, the most popular were the job board maintained by TESL Ontario and the publications, specifically *Contact*, the affiliate newsletters, and the TESL Ontario Conference Reports. When asked what additional services members felt they wanted to see TESL Ontario offer, one of the most common responses was a call for more support with finding work in the field, through job counselling, links with employers and advocacy in the field.

Conclusion

What have we learned?

What have we learned from this survey? Some of the results reflect what is already widely known, for example, that the majority of TESL professionals are women. Other data, however, is more surprising. TESL professionals are characterized by maturity with a significant percentage of individuals, 36%, approaching retirement in the next 10 years. In addition, a sizeable group, 40%, have completed education beyond the minimum required for professional accreditation of an undergraduate degree. Despite these qualifications,

only 37% reported holding full-time employment at the time of the survey. Many of the members value their professional credibility and want to pursue regular professional development. However, fewer than half are able to access financial support to attend the annual conference and many in that group report that they would not attend without support. As a community of professionals, overall members do not typically use a range of social media to connect professionally but are open to participating in new ways to connect with their colleagues and the field.

It is also important to recognize the limitations of this survey, inherent in survey methodology and reflective of the diversity of the field. The nature of any survey, where a menu of options is provided, limits the kind of input and feedback that participants can provide. In addition, a multiple-choice question is only 'as good' as the options given in the question. While the questions were created with the input of a range of individuals that represented a spectrum across the membership, they can never encompass all the possibilities. Not surprisingly, for many of the questions, the 'Other' category drew responses that were in themselves widely divergent. While the analysis of the survey explored these divergent responses, and all open-ended question responses were considered, recognizing this diversity amongst the members may be a significant contribution of the survey.

Where do we go from here?

Overall, the survey has provided TESL Ontario with an effective snapshot of its membership, along with insights into future potential benefits and means of connecting members with TESL Ontario itself, and with each other. However, with the limitations of any survey in mind, TESL Ontario recognizes the value of ongoing contact with all its members, and invites them to get in touch to share their thoughts on issues, concerns, and potential future directions on an ongoing basis.

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TESL Ontario Member Services Manager: Allison Keown

TESL Ontario Research Committee Members 2012: Antonella Valeo (Chair), Johanne Mednick Myles, Bob Courchene, Hedy McGarrell, Theresa Hyland, Farahnaz Faez, Liying Cheng, Subhadra Ramahandran

Author Bio



Antonella Valeo is Chair of the TESL Ontario Research Committee and Associate Professor of ESL and Applied Linguistics at York University.

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Presents...

THE MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

Main Questions

- Who are the TESL Ontario members?
- What do they do in their institutions?
- What do their students look like?

Context & Rationale

Context

The survey was:

- Compiled by the TESL Ontario Research Committee
- Conducted in the winter of 2012
- Sent to all members of TESL Ontario
- Completed by **1,190** members

Rationale

TESL Ontario created a member survey to:

- Identify areas of improvement
- Determine which member services are useful & valuable
- Help the organization to meet the needs of its members now and in the future.

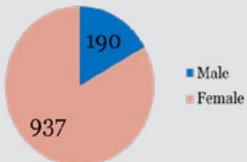
Overview of Results

Overview of Membership*

*Based on completed questionnaires

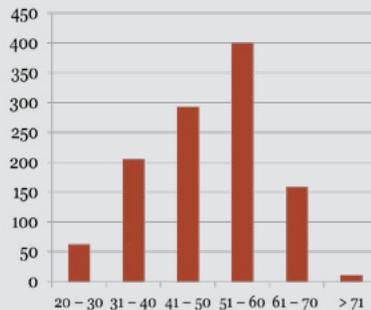
GENDER SPLIT

Total Responses: 1125



AGE RANGE

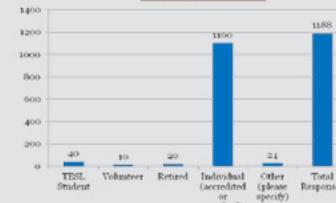
Total Responses: 1124



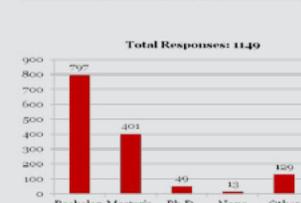
Length of Membership



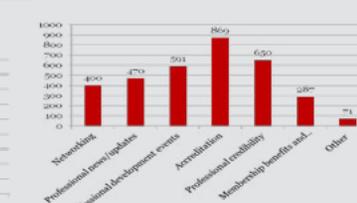
Membership Type



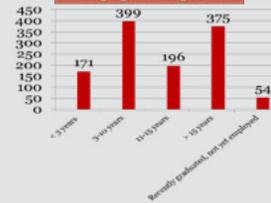
Type of Educational Attainment



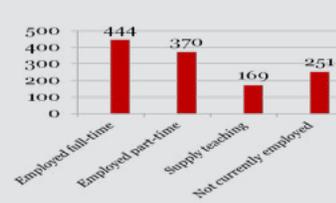
Reason for joining TESL-O



Length of Time in the Language Training Field

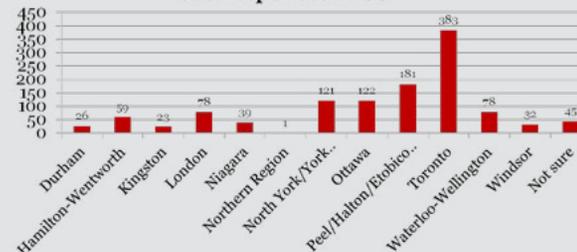


Employment Status



TESL AFFILIATION

Total responses: 1188

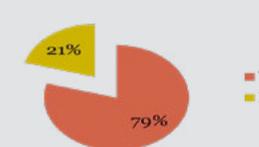


Overview of Membership Activities*

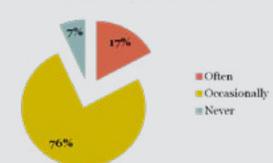
*Based on completed questionnaires

Access to TESL-O's Website

Accessed at least once

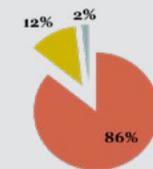


Frequency of Access

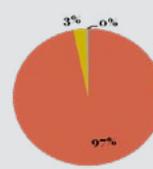


Access to TESL-O's Social Media Channels

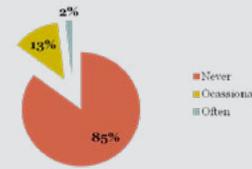
FACEBOOK



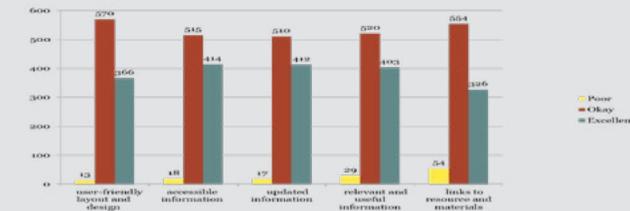
TWITTER



LINKEDIN



TESL-O Website Ratings

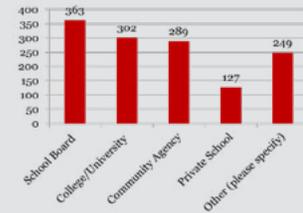


Interest in Online Professional Interaction



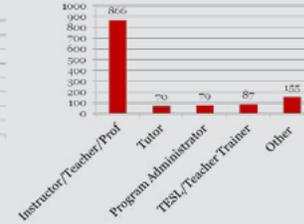
Type of Language Training Workplace

Total Responses: 1183

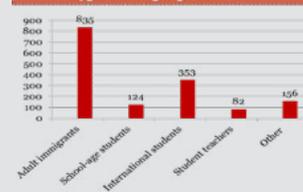


Primary Position

Total Responses: 1131



Type of Language Learners



Type of Teacher Education Completed



ESL WEEK CONTEST WINNERS

Every year, TESL Ontario celebrates ESL week with our ESL week contest. Congratulations to Madlin Eisho, a learner at Caledon Community Services for her Photo Collage entitled “[With Gratitude to you, My School](#)” and Anne Marie Guy and Baye Hunter, instructors at the Victoria LINC Learning Centre (Toronto) for their Video entry entitled “[Let’s ALL Go to the AGO!](#)”. You can find out more about the contest and the winners on [our website](#) and the accompanying *Toronto Star* [article](#). We’ve included two of the first prize entries below.

When Passing Matters: Instructor Short Story

By Maria Bermudez

When Peggy assigned me a one-to-one student for preparation for the TOEFL, I groaned inwardly. One-to-ones were not my favorite classes; they took up too much time and energy, but I could not say that to Peggy so I simply nodded in acceptance.

On Monday morning when the young woman walked into the room, she definitely was not what I expected. Actually, I do not know whom I was expecting considering that all I knew was that she was from Kazakhstan—a place I had to look up on the map. Therefore, I stared at the tall, thin young woman with high cheek bones and almond shaped eyes that revealed the presence of Mongolian ancestry (she later confirmed this to be true) because she had a most commanding presence, and because her voice was husky yet pleasant in the way she deliberately looped her L’s.

“Hello and welcome,” I ushered her in. “I’m Maria,” and stuck out my hand to shake hers.

“Hello. Nice to meet you. I’m Anastasia.”

In the subsequent chat to establish her level of understanding, I found that her language skills were higher than I expected. Her intention, she told me, was to take the TOEFL exam in order to attend UCLA. To me, she sounded as if she had everything figured out.

So, we began our daily two-hour routine of plugging away at readings, analyzing grammar, and carrying out the prescribed exercises. Her rate of learning was impressive, and I found her to be a very intelligent young woman, quiet in her own way, perhaps even a little on the shy side.

Come to think of it, there was something I could not pin-point—I could even call it ‘odd’—about her. Perhaps it was the way she carried herself, after all, she was tall, five feet seven or eight by my estimate; or perhaps it was the almost sinewy way in which she walked. I caught

myself watching her every move: she was talkative, yet reserved; fluid in her movements, but, at the same time, wasted no extra energy.

A cat.

That was what she reminded me of. A Persian cat . . . a beautiful statue that quietly sat on the mantelpiece only to startle everyone when she finally moved. Languidly. Deliberately.

That was Anastasia.

She certainly had a presence about her and she dressed impeccably. My fertile imagination made her out to be a young countess whose family had regained their regal status once again . . . but it was all an illusion created by the beautifully tailored waist-length fur coat. Well, what I hoped was *fake* fur, but then again, her culture was different.

She was definitely . . . different. Not that I had met that many Russians, but she certainly made an impression. Invariably, every day after leaving the classroom, I was left pondering over an elusive thought that was too wispy, too slight, for me even to grasp. There was something—a tip-of-the-tongue something, too ethereal, that insisted on eluding me.

The following Monday, much to my surprise, she did not show up, and when she was still absent by Wednesday, I became concerned and asked Peggy to look into the matter.

“Oh, she’ll show up with a doctor’s letter or something.” Peggy said to soothe me, but promised to personally inquire into it.

On Thursday morning, I was quietly marking papers and patiently waiting for Anastasia’s arrival when I was summoned to the office for a phone call. It was Anastasia’s mother informing me that Stasia had had an accident and that she was in the hospital.

I was dumbstruck. I set the phone down and ran out to the hospital, arriving breathless and with my scarf barely clinging to my neck. A tall woman approached me, one whom I took to be Stasia’s mother because she, too, had that same regal presence about her.

We shook hands and she led me to Stasia’s room down the corridor.

“Please, don’t worry. It is very bad,” she stated in a similar accent to Stasia’s. “Very bad accident. But doctors say—” Her phone rang out a tune cutting her off mid-sentence. She looked at the phone in her hand then at me. “Please, go in. I have to answer. Please.” She ushered me in while she stayed in the corridor.

At first, I thought there had been some kind of a mistake. I looked down at the young man with bandages covering most of his body; tubes came out of his mouth and an IV dripped slowly into a swollen vein. He was either asleep or in a coma. One eye was bandaged; the other showed an angry red cut with a row of black stitches marking a straight line towards the temple.

Out of nowhere, the elusive wisp of something took on a solidity of its own and, suddenly, I understood. Thoughts, fragments of conversations, gestures, looks, comments . . . like pieces in a kaleidoscope . . . suddenly shifting this way and that, and finally falling into place; at the same time creating a new picture, a picture I had not imagined could have been made out of the same pieces when arranged differently. But it did.

Anastasia’s walk, the way she had shaken my hand when we first met, the heavy make-up, the delineating lipstick—though never extravagant in color, but which, nevertheless, heightened her lips to give them a fuller, fleshier, more *womanly* look.

This young man was Anastasia. *She* was a *he*.

But before I could even analyze my own turmoil of emotions at this sudden realization, her/his mother was back in the room. Was it my imagination? But when she looked at me, I felt that she peered deeply into my eyes, searching for something—discomfort? Shock? Or perhaps revulsion and rejection?—but my face registered nothing. Anastasia was a young intelligent . . . *student* . . . and as such I respected her.

“She talked about you a lot. She said she was ‘safe’ with you. Did she tell you?”

I shook my head. There was an awkward silence while we both stared at the young person on the bed. Finally, I broke the silence. “What happened? Car accident?”

“Car? No, no. She was beaten by some boys. The police report, they say, she walked out of the club then some drunk men beat her and her friend.” I was too shocked to even make a comment. Why would anybody do that? “Many people don’t like the trans people. I think they can’t understand and so they want to hurt them.”

That was an understatement if ever I had ever heard one.

I stared at the beaten pulp of human flesh hurting for her, hurting for all those other young men and women who were not compliant with mainstream society. As if there was such a thing as ‘normal’ or ‘mainstream’ for that matter.

I left half an hour later with a heavy heart and a thousand questions on my mind, questions that I would need to resolve and come to terms with to make heads or tails of the topsyturvy world we lived in. If different shades of color existed, then, why not different shades of ‘gender’ and ‘sexual preference’? Anastasia did not seem to have a ‘problem’ with her sexuality or gender or whatever it was when she asserted herself as a woman; it was us, the rest of society, who seemed to have the ‘problem’. What was wrong with her being who she wanted to be and expressing herself as such? Why did the rest of us have to place judgment on her? Worse, what was the purpose of all that violence? Was there a justifiable explanation for such violence? Beating her into being who we wanted her to be? Labelling her into being someone she did not want to be? Another question came to my mind: what if she had ‘passed’? Would everything have been okay for her for the rest of her life? If mainstream society did not notice, would things be fine then?

How inane was that. As if 'passing' mattered. But it did. Delusion mattered. A lie mattered.

I felt proud to have provided a 'safe' space for her, if only momentarily, and wondered what her future had in stall for her.

I went home and wept for Anastasia and a million other young men and women who feel strange within their bodies, yet dare not express themselves for fear of their lives. I silently promised each and every one of them that in my classroom, at least, they would find safety.

My promise stands. Still I wait. Or perhaps they've passed.

My new country Canada: Learner Essay

By Lirije Beqolli

Have you ever been an immigrant or refugee? Have you ever moved in a new country where you have faced many barriers? I am an immigrant who has traveled approximately 4840.7 miles for the only reason to enjoy my freedom of living free and in peace. Being a newcomer or immigrant and having to face so many challenges and barriers is not an easy mission especially if you have to face the barrier called language; however, among the challenges that many newcomers or immigrants face are learning a new language, understanding new cultures, having the education recognized and getting a job in Canada.

First of all, language is often the most difficult challenge that newcomers face. Almost all newcomers in Canada goes through the same challenges; many newcomers cannot communicate in another language except their own language or even if they have some knowledge about English language or French their accent or pronunciation is still not so clear enough to be understood by other people. Learning a new language is just one of the challenges and one of the most difficult barriers to be passed. English language or French are the key of settling and integrating to Canada; Settling successfully in Canada is a result of language which really helps newcomers to integrate themselves successfully. Due to the fact that the English language is just like an ocean, we have to be patient, we have to do our best in order to succeed because language is really hard to be learned quickly. Everybody's future in Canada is going to be easier if the challenge called language is solved. Therefore, language is one of the first important challenge that almost all newcomers or immigrants face.

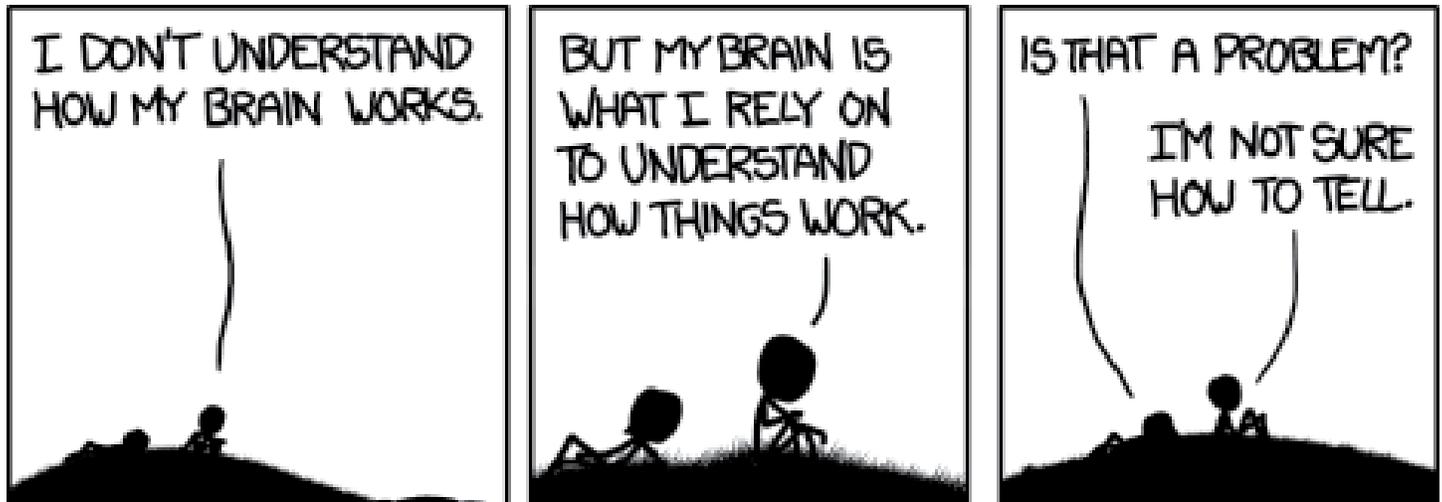
Moreover, Canada is a multicultural country and facing all these different customs is another challenge for newcomers; due to the fact that Canada is a place or nation of multiculturalism, many newcomers find it very devastating and overwhelming. Actually, it represents another challenge for newcomers. Learning and understanding different

customs, thoughts, ideas and beliefs is quite difficult because different people from different countries and nationalities have different customs. Being an immigrant in a new country and experiencing new way of life which actually is not familiar and sometimes you do not know how to behave on different situations is very challenging. In other words, many people find it difficult and call it "culture shock". Imagine if you have moved in a new country and you do not speak and understand the same language that most of the people speak, probably you would face many misunderstandings and in these situations sometimes you might probably call yourself "stupid me!, why did I say that?, why did I ask that?" and the best way to solve this problem is by learning the language and in this way all of us, newcomers or immigrants, will understand and communicate without any misunderstandings. Otherwise, we will always have this problem called effective communication and for sure misunderstandings are not going to miss on our life. In fact, changing the country and trying to understand others customs is very challenging. Therefore, the lack of cultural information leads us to many misunderstandings and many difficulties.

Furthermore, having the degrees recognized by Canada and finding a job is not easy at all; one of the reasons for these difficulties is the lack of job opportunities which actually means that Canada is going through economical crisis and most of the companies are moving into other countries because of the cheap labours. Because of the high rate of unemployed people who are actually looking for job, finding a job becomes more and more difficult especially for immigrants. In order to find a job in Canada, first, we should have Canadian Experience and of course immigrants or newcomers does not have it, but they are always willing to do their best by participating and working as a volunteer in order to have the most often required "Canadian experience". Another reason why finding a job is so difficult in Canada is because of the education; even though many immigrants are having significant qualifications, their qualifications are not recognized by Canada's government and this is quite devastating and upsetting. However, finding a job and having the degrees evaluated and recognized "can be beaten"!

In conclusion, being an immigrant is not easy at all; facing the most difficult challenges like: learning a new language, facing or understanding different cultures and customs, finding a job and having a degree which is recognized by Canada's government are the most important challenges. Almost all newcomers or immigrants are stumbled or stopped in front of these barriers, but those who are willing to work hard and achieving their goals are never going to see these barriers like barriers, but as a small bumpers.

XKCD, by Randall Munroe



It can take a site a while to figure out that there's a problem with thier 'report a bug' form.

Source: <http://xkcd.com/1163>

Dinosaur Comics



(C) 2012 Ryan North

Source: <http://www.qwantz.com/index.php?comic=2266>

www.qwantz.com

Puzzle

Traevölörs Freisbuk

The language below looks like some strange relative of Dutch or Swedish... and it is!

1. täärkois	7. keik	13. ssikss	19. yêlôô	25. hönдрöd
2. bönaenö	8. uön	14. d3êlôô	20. Dök	26. täärki
3. zöörti	9. pôôkör	15. ghrei	21. chêkörs	27. painaepöl
4. puul	10. uatörmêlön	16. aisskriim	22. kukis	28. ghalf
5. kueil	11. ghuuss	17. fighs	23. ténöss	29. zrii
6. braun	12. pôörpöl	18. chikön	24. föd3	30. ghreipss

It's American English, as written in a phrasebook for foreign tourists. Why? Well, it's difficult to know how an English word is pronounced from how it is written, and it's doubly hard if you're completely unfamiliar with the language. The relationship between how English words are pronounced and how they're spelled can be pretty arbitrary!

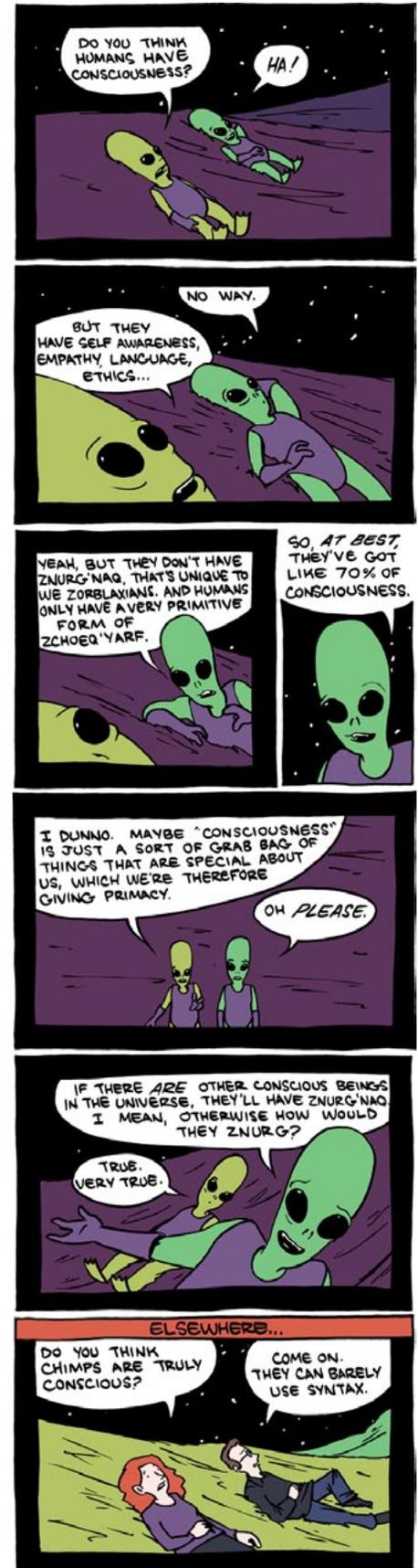
So to help readers with the unfamiliar language, this book used pronunciation guides that represent the actual sounds of English words more systematically, and made use of spelling conventions from their own language.

The thirty words above are taken from various word-lists in the phrasebook, and can be sorted into six categories of five words each. Your task is to sort them into six categories and then name the categories—using the same writing system! We've started you off with one of the category names: "nömbörs"; can you figure out the rest? Please remember to write your answers in "Freisbuk language" and not in real English. (Hint: #7 and 15 are different categories.)

Source:

<http://www.naclo.cs.cmu.edu/problems2012/NACLO2012ROUND1.pdf>

Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal,
by Zach Weiner



Source: <http://www.smbc-comics.com/index.php?db=comics&id=2867>

