



34th Annual TESL Ontario Conference

Attendance Rebounds after Funding Boost

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ESL teachers share discoveries at TESL Ontario Conference, Nov. 16 - 18 (Photo: Jesse Fulton)

Our conference is growing,” exclaimed TESL Ontario President Sharon Rajabi, as the first of more than 1200 ESL professionals began to register for TESL Ontario’s 34th Annual Conference. Meeting at the Holiday Inn on King Street in downtown Toronto, the 3-day Conference from November 16 – 18th marked the highlight of ESL Week in communities across Ontario.

Thanks to a restoration of funding for professional development from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 600 LINC participants swelled the registration numbers to record levels this year.

The conference had many highlights, including a couple of firsts. For the first time, TESL Ontario brought together six of the prominent ESL stakeholders in an

ESL Panel, heralding a new era of cooperation as we confront the challenges and share solutions for ESL service delivery.

In another first, registrants at the conference received 10 hours of free webcasting of Conference sessions and plenary addresses. That in itself is an inducement to register early for the conference in 2007.

The conference offered delegates more than 100 sessions to choose from, all contributing to the professional development of classroom teachers, administrators, researchers and scholars, community service providers, assessors and students.

(Continued on page 2)

Conference sets record attendance after boost (continued)



Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Mike Colle spoke at Friday dinner. (Photo: Gov't. of Ontario)

(Continued from page 1)

In addition, Dr. Bob Courchêne and Dr. Hedy McGarrell once again convened 3 research symposia: on evaluation of oral language skills, language and settlement, and teachers' responses to writing.

Attendees renewed old friendships, networked, updated their knowledge, acquired advanced computer skills, reviewed new learning materials, dined, danced and swapped stories. But most of all, they learned.

This year's plenary speakers included British ESL expert Jeremy Harmer, noted author Judy Gilbert, and motivational coach Stuart Knight.

At Friday night's celebratory dinner, Ontario's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Mike Colle outlined his ministry's exciting new initiatives in settlement programs and adult ESL education, now a part of his portfolio in the Ontario government. And post-dinner festivities included salsa music and dancing to the irresistible Latin rhythms of *Maderaz*.

One young teacher summed it up this way: "This is my first TESL Ontario conference and it's a blast. I'm learning so much and so fast. I can hardly wait till next year's conference."

Thanks go out to the conference committee, chaired by Cheryl Richman, and her team of Joanne Hincks, Rodica Vasiliu, Barb Krukowski and Joyce Ivison, and to the many volunteers and TESL Ontario staff who made this conference the best ever. ◇

Contact us

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

Contributors should include their full name, title and affiliation. Text should be e-mailed to: teslontario@telus.net

or mailed on CD to:

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From the Editor

The Fall 2006 TESL Ontario Conference is the focus of this issue of *Contact*. We highlight three of the most stimulating sessions, and in our book review section we feature Azar Nafisi's best-selling teacher's memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. In addition – a first for us – we present the work of two ESL student writers from Marc Garneau Collegiate in East York.

Our short **photo essay**, "A Conference is People", catches the flavour of the conference for you in an album that reveals teachers at their happiest – when they themselves are also learners.

In the first of three Plenary Session reports, **Ken Lackman** encourages us to heed the warnings of British ESL author **Jeremy Harmer** as he cautions us against becoming slaves to innovation in ESL, especially of the technological kind. "Candles," he affirms, "have never been obsolete". Harmer scaffolds his argument with analogies drawn from music – not surprising, since he himself is also a musician.

Judy Gilbert, the ever-popular author of the *Clear Speech* Series of textbooks and CDs, underlines seven essential concepts in teaching pronunciation and listening, with the aid of low-tech and cheap instructional aids – kazoo and rubber bands.

Stuart Knight's luncheon address on how to succeed in life – and in teaching – was a motivational *tour de force*, complete with a concluding rap on taking control of our lives by making our own decisions. "You decide what you want to do and be," he challenges.

TESL Ontario's **First Annual ESL Panel Discussion** brought together six of the most important stakeholders in ESL to share ideas, describe their unique mandates, and identify some of their recent challenges and solutions in the delivery of ESL across the province. The panel heralds a new era of cooperation and collaboration.

Georgia Irwin of Nipissing University in North Bay, reviews *Reading*

Lolita in Tehran, the touching memoir of Azar Nafisi, a bold and inspired teacher of literature. Nafisi was forced to go underground to continue her teaching as she welcomed seven remarkable young Iranian women into her home and introduced them to the works of four of the greatest writers in the English language.

In the first of our conference session reports, **Carolyn Samuel** describes five classroom activities that will help students acquire thousands of English words, with the help of Brown's (1971) "14 words that make all the difference".

Rebecca Allen-Nakonechnaya explores the issue of teaching and learning about non-verbal communication in ESL classrooms. If we don't make NVC a part of our programs, are we giving students only half a communication system?

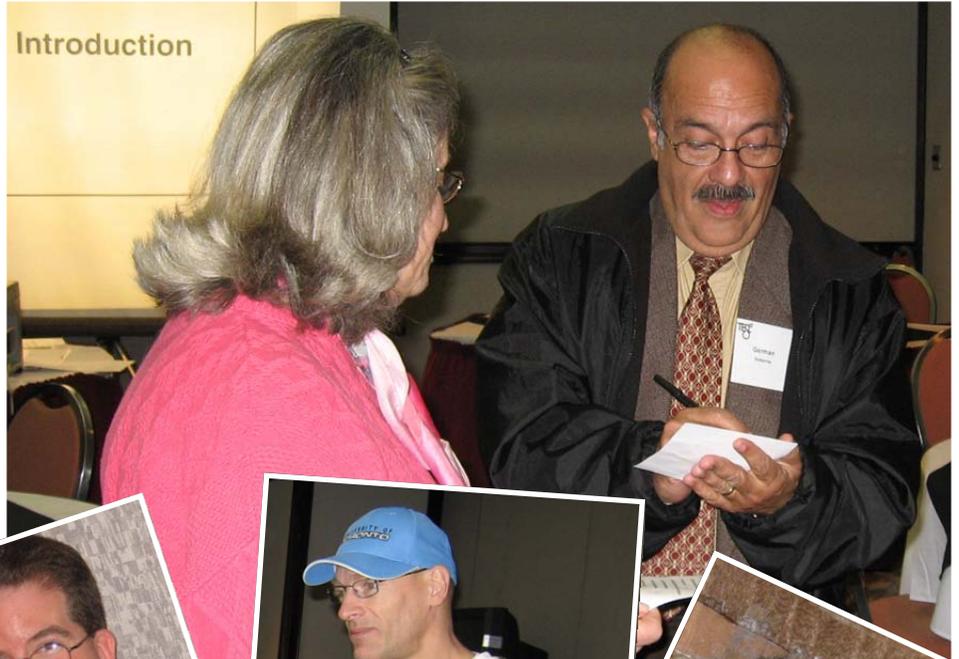
Finally, two Toronto ESL high school students reveal their remarkable writing talents. **Talha Saeed** reviews the recent novel of Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, and **Yousuf Farooqi** distills his intense feelings of alienation and homesickness poetically in "Come Home". Both are accompanied by the strikingly beautiful photography of photographer Luke Powell. A special thanks to **Cathy Haghghat** for discovering the two young writers.

As always, on a personal note, I extend sincere thanks to **Laura Stoutenburg** and **Bob Courchêne**, whose guidance and contributions continue to make *Contact* interesting, informative and, we hope, a must-read for ESL teachers in Ontario.

Clayton Graves

Editor

A Conference is People



"Best ever!"



PLENARY SPEAKER

Jeremy Harmer: Dealing with innovation in the world of ESL— When Were Candles Obsolete?

Report

by Ken Lackman

During the seven years I spent teaching in Europe, I periodically encountered Jeremy Harmer at conferences of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). He was a frequent presenter along with many others whose names are found on the spines of books on my shelves: Scott Thornbury, Michael Lewis, Michael Swan, Penny Ur, Adrian Underhill, Jim Scrivener, Henry Widdowson, Dave and Jane Willis and many more.

After returning to Canada in 2003, I noticed that none of those people seemed to be present at any of the ESL conferences I attended. I wondered why this was. Are we afflicted with a peculiar insularity that we often attribute to our southern neighbours? Do we consider British English another language? Or are we just being proudly Canadian, trying to promote our own but, in this case, at the expense of losing touch with the work of people who have been responsible for many of the major developments in our field?

So, I was pleasantly surprised to see Jeremy Harmer's name prominent in this year's TESL Ontario Fall conference program. And the topic of this year's opening plenary session, 'How to deal with innovation', couldn't have been more appropriate. Harmer's opening statements, however, confirmed my suspicions about the infrequency of British presenters at our

conferences when he told us that as a young hippie in the UK he had dreamed of visiting the Canada that was romanticized in Joni Mitchell's 1971 album "Blue" but that he had never actually



Jeremy Harmer (Photo: International House, Barcelona)

been here. That is, until he was invited to a conference in Montreal just last year.

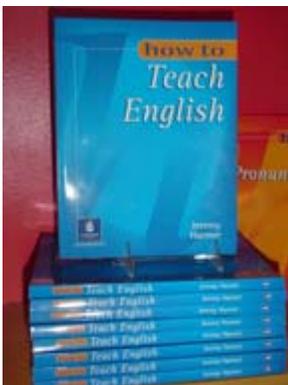
Following that he was invited to speak at the Association of B.C Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL) in Vancouver and was sponsored at TESL Ontario this year by Nicole Graham of The English Centre bookstore on St. Clair Avenue East. And it was a good thing that Conference organizers had booked the King II Ballroom at the Holiday Inn for his plenary session because it was SRO (standing room only - "Sold right out!").

Harmer began by asking how we, as teachers, should react to new developments in technology and methodology.

As a methodologist he spoke with passion and irony about what he called a "post-method world", where some would say that teachers should not be looking for an alternative method but an alternative to method. He then discussed some of the recent technological developments that have impacted language teaching, from

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"Perhaps teachers should not be looking for an alternative method, but an alternative to method."



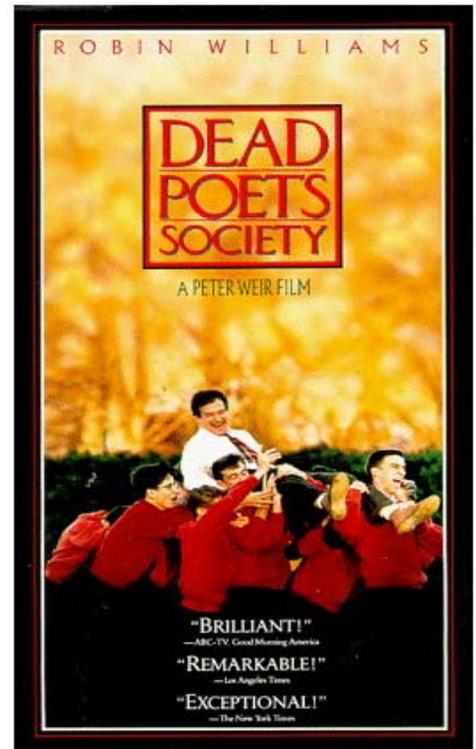
*PLENARY SPEAKER***Jeremy Harmer (continued)***(Continued from page 5)*

online computer blogging and cellphones (!) to interactive whiteboards.

Ironically, Harmer pursued his persuasive argument against blindly adopting technological innovation with the aid of audio and video clips in a spectacular PowerPoint presentation. In explaining the sub-title of his Plenary address, “When were candles obsolete?,” Harmer played an audio clip of the British photographer Ian Hargreaves responding to a suggestion that his old-fashioned, darkroom-created, composite photos might just be obsolete in the high-tech era of Photoshop.

Hargreaves used the analogy of the candle – apparently obsolete, but still widely used whenever we want to create an atmosphere of warm intimacy, love, comfort, and of beauty. Technology for producing light may have advanced far beyond the lowly candle, he says, but it still has its function and an important one at that.

The inclusion of Hargreaves’ assertion typifies Jeremy Harmer’s approach to his presentations on language learning and teaching. He draws heavily on a wide range of seemingly unrelated cultural, historical and personal sources and then shows how they connect to teaching. Being a classical musician, he chose to illustrate



four different approaches to new ideas and new technology with musical examples.

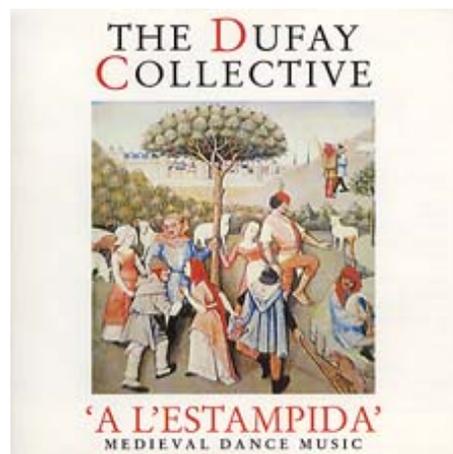
Cue the traditional sounds of the Dufay Collective, a British quintet that performs music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. “Dufay” is a word that Jeremy Harmer used to refer to those teachers who stay with the old and completely reject the new, since the old is more comfortable and safer.

He then showed an image and played audio samples from a typical 1960’s language lab, sparking hysterical laughter from the audience of ESL teachers, revealing the obvious irrelevance today of that technology and its long outdated ideas for teaching.

Yet, I think Harmer also implied that resistance to change could sometimes be justified when he pointed out that those language labs were once the cutting edge

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“Being a classical musician, he chose to illustrate four different approaches to new ideas and new technology with musical examples.”



PLENARY SPEAKER

Jeremy Harmer (continued)

For whom the word scrolls: too much work for incorrect information, says Harmer.



(Continued from page 6)

in ESL. Thankfully, both they and the courses that were designed for them are now completely obsolete.

Steve Bingham, a classically trained violinist whose experimental musical piece featured a violin playing a series of notes in shifting time with an overdubbed recording of the same sequence, represented Harmer's second archetype. According to Harmer, the "Binghams" of the teaching world always reject the old in favour of the new.

Harmer used the Robin Williams character in the 1989 movie, *Dead Poets Society* to represent a "Bingham" - struggling to bring in the new. However, I think his point was better made when discussing those electronic dictionaries that some of our students are wedded to.

Harmer reminded us that when they originally came out, the snazzy new contraptions had display windows so tiny that students had to keep scrolling down for the information they wanted...only to discover that it was frequently wrong.

In fact, the electronic multilingual dictionary was no match on any level for the plain, old-fashioned book form. When

it comes to dictionaries, the book is still often the best level of technology.

Harmer's next musical excerpt captivated the audience. It was a collaboration between another medieval vocal group, the Hilliard Ensemble, and a Norwegian jazz saxophonist, Jan Garbarek.

The dulcet tones of the tenor sax floating over the backdrop of the vocal harmonies of the Hilliard Ensemble perfectly illustrated the third teacher type - the "Hilliards" - those who layer the new on top of the old.

Harmer seemed the most critical of this tendency as he gave numerous examples of its inappropriateness. Drawing his wrath (and deservedly so, in my opinion) are all those PowerPoint demonstrations which simply display the speaker's lecture outline, line by line and page by page.

This plenary session, by contrast, demonstrated how PowerPoint should be used - to display visuals which augment and enhance the talk, not duplicate it in point form on a projection screen.

Harmer went on to complain about those who use the electronic gizmo called an interactive electronic whiteboard solely to produce standard PPP lessons ("Presentation, Practice, and Production", for you Binghams!) and how ridiculous it was to project artists' clumsily-drawn images of oranges and bananas on a screen when it would be far more instructionally effective to display the real things in the classroom - and then enjoy eating them in a fruit salad.

(Continued on page 8)



Hilliard ensemble and Jan Garbarek, foreground. (Photo: Friedrun Reinhold)

"Harmer went on to complain about those who use the electronic gizmo called an interactive electronic whiteboard..."

*PLENARY SPEAKER***Jeremy Harmer (continued)***(Continued from page 7)*

He also disapproved of students practicing reading on computer screens, asserting that the printed book is still the most efficient, effective, portable and best vehicle for reading texts. He did concede, however, that Podcasts via the internet provide a great way for students to access listening material anytime and anywhere.

Harmer's last musical analogy was Groove Armada's techno rendition of a 1969 recording made by British folk-rocker Sandy Denny.

This intriguing recording suggested that one could effectively blend the new with the old rather than put something new on top of something old.

For example, we shouldn't be using computer screens for reading texts but if the text is incorporated into a Webquest project (<http://webquest.sdsu.edu/>) where the teacher can provide research links accompanying the text, then the Internet becomes a much more efficient and effective student research tool, compared to the traditional way of sending the students out to search through books in a library.

To sum up, Harmer presented six questions which we should ask whenever we encounter new ideas or technology:

1. **What's the pedigree?** Who is suggesting this idea and are they a reputable source?
2. **Who gains?** If the students gain, it should be considered. If the teacher gains, it may also be worth looking at. However, we should beware if it is primarily the product's creator who benefits.
3. **What is the best way to use it?** Are interactive whiteboards the best way to teach "banana"? Harmer illustrated this point by reviewing the "old" ways of teaching word stress (underlining, dots above syllables,

etc.) and then asking the audience to match up a handful of words with their oscilloscopic wave patterns. Most of us found it difficult, if not impossible to do. Sometimes the old ways are best.

4. **Does it pass the "TEA" test?** Is there proper "Training" available? Is the "Equipment" readily available? Do teachers and/or students have easy "Access" to it? He mentioned a British school which supplied teachers with one shared interactive whiteboard. Only a short time after its installation, school administrators were surprised to find that it was rarely being used. Why? It wasn't easily portable; its size and weight thus confined it to one room, which posed unsolvable scheduling problems. So there it sits.
5. **What future possibilities does it open up?** Will it lead to other beneficial innovations in methodology or technology?
6. **How can I make it work?** How can I adapt this to work with my students, classroom or school?

This plenary session featured Jeremy Harmer at his best, his colourful narrative swirling around a structure consisting of four typical reactions to innovation and six recommended ways of dealing with it. Yet, I think an important step in dealing with innovation was not mentioned – finding out about it!

Numerous teachers I talked to afterwards had not heard of interactive whiteboards and I was among those who had never heard of Webquest.

Attending conferences is crucial for keeping abreast of new developments and let's hope that TESL Ontario continues to look beyond our borders and bring us more presenters like Jeremy Harmer. ◇

"I think an important step in dealing with innovation was not mentioned – finding out about it!"



PLENARY SPEAKER

Judy Gilbert: Teaching Spoken English: Seven Essential Concepts

Report
by Antonella Valeo

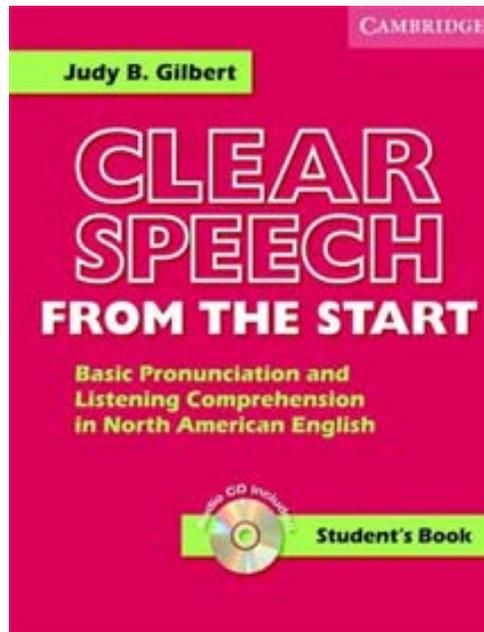
What can you do with a kazoo and a rubber band in your classroom? Judy Gilbert joined us as plenary speaker at the TESL Ontario 2006 Conference to share the answer to this important question, among others.

Judy unpacked the teaching and learning of pronunciation by describing seven essential concepts to guide us and began with the most elemental – a reminder that we cannot teach everything. Far from an admission of failure, it is a call to efficiency - *focus on the highest priority issues.*

Where then should we start? Judy began by calling for a focus on *intonation* as fundamental, and on this premise the rest of her plenary address fell into place. Her essential concepts included some that many of us may have forgotten, such as a focus on *quality repetition.*

Consider the difference between 20 people chanting a single sound that carries no meaning on its own or repeating a complete question they may need to ask someone tomorrow. Which is more useful to the ESL learner? This lesson many of us have had to learn the hard way - by making the mistake. Such is the development of an ESL teacher.

(Continued on page 10)



Clear Speech from the Start by Judy B. Gilbert.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000

“Her essential concepts included some that many of us may have forgotten, such as a focus on quality repetition.”

PLENARY SPEAKER**Judy Gilbert (continued)***(Continued from page 9)*

Judy also reminded us of something else we might easily forget in the day-to-day life of the classroom – that meaning is not created by single sounds but most often by the way those sounds play and work together.

Consider her fourth essential concept: *the thought group* is the organizing unit of spoken English. What happens if the boss overhears *John said the boss is an idiot* or *“John”, said the boss, “is an idiot”*? John had better hope that the speaker emphasized the correct *focus word* in the sentence and changed *the pitch* correctly.

This is not to say, however, that single sounds are not important. Judy reminded us that the forest is made up of trees – and to continue setting priorities. What sounds, then, are most important?

Consider: which way will the bus go if I say *ease* instead of *east*? Perhaps the bus driver will figure it out – or perhaps not. And what if you ask the driver where

the *giftu shoppu* is? In Japan, you may end up at the right place. Not likely in Toronto.

The audience, however, did not just listen. This is where the kazoos and the elastic bands came in. We stretched our bands and blew our kazoos to ‘feel’ the length of vowels and the stress in a sentence.

My special thanks to Judy for revitalizing the teaching of spoken English! ◇

Antonella Valeo has been an ESL teacher, consultant and teacher trainer who, in her early years of teaching, sometimes subjected her fair share of adult learners to less than quality repetition. She is also President of the TESL Toronto affiliate, a proud co-sponsor of Judy Gilbert’s plenary address at the TESL Ontario conference.

**“...John”, said the boss,
“is an idiot?”**

Kazoos.

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kazoo (*kə-ZOO*) *n., pl. -zoos* *A toy musical instrument with a membrane that produces a buzzing sound when a player hums or sings into the mouthpiece. [Perhaps imitative of its sound.] (Image source: Typologie des instruments à vent, <http://jeanluc.matte.free.fr/articles/typologie/kazoo.htm>)*



LUNCHEON SPEAKER

Stuart Knight: You Decide: choose your path to success

**Report
by Clayton Graves**

From time to time everyone needs a jolt, a shot in the arm. And perhaps this was the purpose in inviting Stuart Knight, producer, actor and motivational speaker to give the plenary luncheon address at the 2006 Fall Conference.

Knight is a slender, carrot-topped, 33-year-old Prince Harry look-alike, with a long list of accomplishments to his credit. In the past seven years he has traveled across North America, sharing his positive message with a diverse audience of almost half a million people.

He has toured Canada three times in his National "Discover What's Inside You" tour with Coca Cola, and was recently awarded the National Young Entrepreneurs Award for Community Leadership from the Canadian Youth Business Foundation.

He has written, produced and starred in the "A Whole New Perspective" and recently launched his show, "Decide", in a massive studio space in downtown Toronto.

The excitement was palpable as Knight bounded onto stage and we settled in for the ride. He speaks quickly, without notes. (How many of us could do that before a gathering of 500?) And he seemed fearless.

With an initial bow to self-help guru Anthony Robbins, Knight launched into what turned out to be a 30-minute 'motivational performance piece', complete with an extended poetic 'rap' as his conclusion. His theme was how to be successful in life, and the things that hold us back. In a nutshell, Knight says, our success comes down to how we make our decisions along the way. "We are the Picasso's of our own lives. We paint the picture we want."

Fear is our number one enemy, according to Knight, who reminded us that human beings are born with only two instinctual fears: of loud noises and of falling over. Every other fear is acquired. "As ESL teachers, what do you fear?" he asked. Government cutbacks? Not finding a job?

(Continued on page 12)

***"Sticking too long to
tradition is another trap
on the way to success..."***

*LUNCHEON SPEAKER***Stuart Knight (continued)***(Continued from page 11)*

Losing your students? Losing control in the classroom? Or that gnawing Sunday night tension in the pit of the stomach?"

Apparently the number one fear in North America is public speaking. (Surely no teacher suffers from that one.) But there are a host of other fears that confront us; fear of the unknown, for example. Confronting the unknown means accepting the possibility of failure.

However, as Knight points out, the game of life is not played by standing on the sidelines or sitting in comfortable bleachers; we can only be successful if we move beyond our borders, challenge ourselves as we confront the unknown.

Blinkered vision is another hurdle that blocks the path to success. Knight reminded us that there are two sides to every coin. "If there is a bad situation, there is also a correspondingly good possibility".

If we fear we won't have a large enough ESL class next semester, we can also imagine we could have an overflow crowd. In other words, we can choose to devote our thoughts to the worst-case scenarios or the best. It's up to us. We decide.

Blaming others when things go wrong is another impediment to success, but this one is different: it's self-generated. At a personal level, if someone is late for a meeting and blames the traffic, wasn't that the same traffic that the others present, who arrived on time, had to deal with? So, taking responsibility for our mistakes also factors into our success. And since we all make mistakes, the question is how will we respond to them?

As teachers we know we're going to have bad days – with uncertain funding, low enrolments, intransigent administrators. We all face challenges in our jobs. What are we going to do to change the situation?



Sticking too long to tradition is another trap on the way to success, says Knight. If one of our parents was a medical doctor or an engineer, where is it written that we too must follow that path? Once again, we decide. In our teaching, do we always have to do it the way it has always been done? What would happen if we stepped outside the boundaries of tradition and began to teach in non-traditional ways?

Finally, says Knight, we have to believe in ourselves. We need to have daily self-talk, to affirm that we can succeed. Wayne Gretzky was told he was too small and skinny to play in the NHL. Roberta Bondar was likewise challenged by skeptics. Martin Luther King received forty threatening phone calls a day as he took on the struggle for racial equality in the USA. Thomas Edison failed 2,000 times in his quest to invent the light bulb. Only Edison explained it this way: "I didn't fail. I just took a 2,000-step journey to success."

In a final challenge, Knight encouraged us to believe that we can and do make a difference in the lives of our students; in other words, to embrace the challenge of success. And the way to do that is by making plans, confronting the unknown, taking responsibility, accepting the possibility of failure, and never giving up on ourselves.

What we are, says Knight, is what we choose to be. We decide. ◇

"What would happen if we stepped outside the boundaries of tradition?"

2006 CONFERENCE

1st Annual ESL Panel Discussion



Sharon Rajabi opens the 1st ESL panel discussion, Nov. 17 2006. Inset: Cheryl Ende, Lidija Biro, Sheila Nicholas, Elizabeth Gryte.

The Regency Ballroom was packed on the morning of Friday, November 17, as TESL Ontario hosted the first annual Panel Discussion - "Talking Together: Challenges and Solutions in English as a Second Language Delivery".

The purpose of the session was to provide a forum for providers and experts in ESL to share ideas and information and identify critical issues and best practices for realizing their common goals.

Moderator Renate Tilson welcomed representatives of the six stakeholder organizations, allotting each a 15-minute presentation time slot, followed by audience questions.

As the session began, one audience member offered up this humorous observation: "This panel is like an acronym breakfast - TESLO, ERGO, MCI, CIC, CESBA, LINC, COIA. I need a Blackberry just to keep track."

TESL Ontario President **Sharon Rajabi** set an upbeat tone for the morning, drawing attention to the fact that ESL is gaining more prominence and greater public visibility with fully professional certified

teachers in virtually every community in Ontario.

She detailed some of the upcoming challenges in ESL delivery, from refitting school sites with up-to-date electrical wiring to accommodate technological change to implementing new curriculum guidelines and courses.

Sharon also reviewed earlier successful initiatives of TESL Ontario in working to standardize ESL teacher certification, advocating for adequate funding for teachers' professional development, advising government funding bodies and curriculum developers, and meeting with officials at the ministerial level to advise on policy development and implementation.

Elizabeth Gryte, Director of Settlement Programs (Ontario region) for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, traced the history and development of LINC, singling out also the recent (November 2005) Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) as a very positive development in stabilizing the delivery and success of language and settlement programs, including LINC.

(Continued on page 14)

"The agreement is the first of its kind between the federal government and Ontario..."

*2006 CONFERENCE***1st Annual ESL Panel Discussion
(continued)**

Judy Stanleigh, Manager of the Language Training Unit, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

sponsored by the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre to build a national policy on adult education and a national community of adult educators.

Judy Stanleigh, representing the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, has been the manager of its Language Training Unit for a year.

To lend perspective to the need for an effective and co-ordinated approach to the provision of ESL services, she noted that in 2005 about 140,000 immigrants came to Ontario, the great majority settling in the Greater Toronto Area.

That adds up to approximately 2,500 every week. Projecting that growth rate over four years yields a total of over one-half million new arrivals by 2010.

Since her appointment, Judy has helped to articulate a more holistic approach to the provision of language training for newcomers as part of their successful integration into Canadian society.

The overall goal is to ease their pathway into successful, productive and happy citizenship, including employment. Among other initiatives, MCI is working to create better linkages with employers, and eliminate barriers to accreditation and certification for internationally-trained professionals.

In addition, MCI has recently devised a more robust immigration website, created Bridging Training Programs, and established a Loans program to help professionals pay for tests, training and certification costs.

In visioning the future of ESL delivery, she pictures a comprehensive Ontario-wide adult ESL/FSL language system for assessment, referrals and training, effectively linked to all government-funded immigrant programs and services – a sort of ‘one-stop’ settlement service for newcomers.

Cheryl Ende, representing ERGO (the ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario) drew attention to the important advocacy role of her organization, helping to ensure that English language learners have equita-

(Continued on page 15)

“The overall goal is to ease their pathway into successful, productive and happy citizenship...”

(Continued from page 13)

The agreement is the first of its kind between the federal government and Ontario, and through it the federal government has committed to quadruple its investment in language training by providing \$920 million in funding over five years to help newcomers integrate more quickly into Ontario communities and achieve their full potential.

An important part of the agreement is to better coordinate and expand the range of services, reduce duplication, and help newcomers locate and access community resources for orientation, information, referrals, assessment and job search assistance.

Sheila Nicholas, co-chair of the ESL committee of the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA), outlined her organization’s important advocacy, research and oversight functions in advancing the interests of adult learners and their teachers.

CESBA is working at all levels of government to remove barriers of access to continuing education. In addition CESBA is participating in the current national forum

2006 CONFERENCE

**1st Annual ESL Panel Discussion
(continued)**

(Continued from page 14)

ble access to quality education programs at all levels.

ERGO also advises education authorities on program implementation as well as the inclusion of the needs of ESL and ELD in all provincial curriculum guidelines, policy documents and supporting resource materials for the classroom teacher.

ERGO continues to provide leadership in professional development through publishers' displays and resource sharing, especially at its annual "Celebrating Linguistic Diversity" conference, and advocates for accommodations and fair practices for young English language learners to such bodies as the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

ERGO has produced language assessment materials in CD-format, and maintains through its website a provincial network for communication and liaison with ESL providers across the province.

Finally, **Lidija Biro**, Educational Officer with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education, detailed the progress towards completing and implementing the revision of its curriculum documents for ESL and ELD.

She drew attention to the successful production of practical resources for classroom ESL teachers, such as "Many Roots/Many Voices", "TIPS for English Language Learners of Mathematics", and "STEPS – Steps to English Proficiency", a set of assessment tools to help teachers identify and understand the learning needs of English language learners.

English Language Learners have become a priority for the Ministry of Education for a number of reasons, not the least of which are the dramatic demographic changes in Ontario's population, and the assessment data on the language learning of students yielded by EQAO.

In addition, the 2005 Report of the Provincial Auditor-General made a number of important recommendations on improvements to Ontario's delivery of ESL programs.



Renate Tilson, Executive Director of TESL Ontario and Saskia Stille

Some of these included increased funding to support teacher training, the provision of adequate and appropriate instructional aids, more effective monitoring of student progress, new processes for assessing program performance, and connecting funding and accountability through measures that will require school boards to provide appropriate allocations of funding for ESL/ELD programs.

The Ministry of Education is also responding to the important contributions of public advocacy groups such as People for Education, the Atkinson Foundation, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, and the Ontario Public School Board Association.

All in all, this inaugural ESL Panel discussion was a significant step forward in bringing together the principal providers of ESL in Ontario.

It provided a stimulus to the six participating bodies, all with specific mandates and constituencies, to begin to visualize their common challenges, goals and solutions through the same lens.

And it underscored the fact that the desired outcome of this collaboration is the improvement of the lives of newcomers to Canada. ♦

“English Language Learners have become a priority for the Ministry of Education for a number of reasons, not the least of which are the dramatic demographic changes in Ontario’s population...”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference”**

By Carolyn Samuel,
Faculty of Arts, English and French Language Center, McGill
University, Montreal

A common issue for the university students with whom I work is that they have many ideas but not enough vocabulary to express them. As well, in many cases, students are frustrated that after years of English study, they cannot build their vocabulary quickly and efficiently enough to meet the demands of university study.

In an effort to help students build their vocabulary in an effective manner, I have introduced many to Brown’s (1971) “14 words that make all the difference”:

Brown “tabulated the most important prefixes and root elements and compiled a list of 20 prefixes and 14 root elements which pertain to over 14,000 words in *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* and a projected 100,000 master words” (Thompson, 1958, p. 62). By learning the master words and the meanings of their parts, learners will know the most useful prefixes and roots. (As cited in *Nation*, 1990, p. 169)

The objective of the workshop was for participants to learn about the 14 master words, namely the significant roots and prefixes, to try out several activities for use with their students and finally, for them to have a basic understanding of the relationship between prefixes and pronunciation.

To achieve optimal benefit, students should be encouraged to learn the meanings and the variant spellings of the prefixes and the roots.

However, students will likely find it overwhelming if presented with the list in its entirety.

Instructors should consider presenting the words incrementally and having students practice them in context over time. One suggestion is to introduce a word a day and to encourage students to

practice the words cumulatively over 14 days, each day recycling the previous day’s word and then adding a new word.

Afterward, there could be regular, planned recycling of the language or there could be extension activities.

The five activities discussed in the workshop were considered suitable for high school, university and adult students. Participants were encouraged to modify the activities to suit their students’ needs. Since the activities did not address language in context, it was left to participants to consider how to best use the material in their respective teaching environments.

It was suggested that a variety of activities be used so that students develop full knowledge of the words: how to understand them when reading them; how to produce them in writing; how to understand them orally; and how to produce them orally (pronunciation).

Five Learning activities

1. Stemgo

The game **Stemgo** (Bernbrock, 1980) is an amusing way of practising prefixes and stems. The learners have a sheet like the one [below]. There is a prefix or stem written at the head of each square.

Learners work in pairs to write three words for each prefix or stem. For each square the teacher announces and explains two words of his or her own that contain the prefix or stem.

If a pair of learners has these two words on their sheet, they check off that square. When a pair has four checks in a line down, across, or diagonally, they win. (As cited in *Nation*, 1990, pp. 171-172)

(Continued on page 18)

“The objective of the workshop was for participants to learn about the 14 master words...”

2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference” (continued)

PREFIX	ITS OTHER SPELLINGS	ITS MEANING	MASTER-WORDS	ROOT	ITS OTHER SPELLINGS	ITS MEANING
1. de-	--	Down or away	detain	tain	ten, tin	To have or hold
2. inter-	--	Between	intermittent	mitt	miss, mit, mis	To send
3. pre-	--	Before	precept	cept	cap, capt., ceiv, ceit, cip	To take or seize
4. ob-	oc-of-op-	To, toward, against	offer	fer	lat, lay	To bear or carry
5. in-	il-im-ir-	Into – not (counts as 2 prefixes)	insist	sist	stat, sta, stan	To stand, endure or persist
6. mono-	--	One or alone	monograph	graph	gram	To write
7. epi-	ep-	Over, upon, beside	epilogue	log	ology	Speech or science
8. ad-	a-ab-ac-af-ag-al-am-an-ap-ar-as-at-	At, to or towards	aspect	spect	spec, spi, spy	To look
un-	--	not	uncomplicated	plic	play, plex, ploy, ply	To fold, bend, twist, interweave
9. com-	co-col-con-cor-	With or together				
non-	--	not				
10. ex-	e-ef-	Out or formerly	nonextended	tend	tens, tent	To stretch
re-	--	again, back	reproduction	duct	duc, duit, duk	To lead, make, shape fashion
11. pro-	--	Forward or in favor of				
12. dis-	di-dif-	Apart from	indisposed	pos	pon, post, pound	To put or place
over-	--	above	oversufficient	fic	fac, fact, fash, feat	To make or do
13. sub-	suc-suf-sug-sup-sur-sus-	Under, supporting				
mis-	--	wrong or wrongly	mistranscribe	scribe	scrip, scriv	To write
14. trans-	tra-tran-	Across, beyond or over				

“14 Words that make all the difference.”

Table 1: Source: The 14 Words That Make All the Difference, Coronet, August 1956, Stevens, L.A. (adapted by M. Hemler)

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference” (continued)**

extra, extro 1. extrovert 2. 3.	auto 1. 2. 3.	epi 1. 2. 3.	graph 1. 2. 3.
inter 1. 2. 3.	geo 1. 2. 3.	mono 1. monotone 2. 3.	mater, matri 1. 2. 3.
pater, patri 1. 2. 3.	pathy 1. 2. 3.	scrib, script 1. 2. 3.	circum 1. 2. 3.
tain 1. 2. 3.	sur 1. 2. 3.	man, manu 1. 2. 3.	dict 1. 2. 3.

Table 2: Stemgo card adapted for use with the 14 words

“Have students make up nonsense words, and their definitions...”

(Continued from page 16)

Alternatively, learners can do the worksheet for homework. In class, learners can compare what they wrote and see if anyone has a word or words that no one else thought of.

2. Build on the root

Give students a root and have them individually or in pairs come up with (or find in dictionaries, such as the One Look Reverse Dictionary) as many words as they can with the same root.

Example:

The root is *cide*, from Latin *cidium*, which means “a killing.”

Words:

homicide, pesticide, genocide, regicide (continue the list)

3. Mix and match – Newly-minted Words

Have students make up nonsense words, and their definitions, with the prefixes and roots from among the list of “14 words” or from other prefixes and roots they know.

Students show their words (without the definitions) to peers who have to guess the meaning of each word.

Example:

monospy: verb; meaning: to look at something by oneself

Words:

polyscription: noun; meaning: a large volume of text; a text that is co-written

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Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference” (continued)

(Continued from page 18)

4. “Word Parts” - the roots of vocabulary

See the variety of exercises at Jones’ (1998) [Website](#). Modify the exercises to suit your students’ learning needs. In the workshop, we looked at the following example for students who might need oral practice:

PEL and **PULS** mean **PUSH**: Try to guess the meaning of the word; then, answer the question. When you’ve answered all the questions, discuss your answers with a partner.

(Continued on page 20)

propel	What are three different ways to propel a two-wheeled vehicle?
pulse	What are two things besides a heart which have a pulse?
expel	What are two examples of something besides a person being expelled?
repel	What are three things that repel you?
compel	What are two things someone might say if they were being compelled to do something?
impel	What are two things someone might say if they were impelled to do something?
repulsive	What are three repulsive things you could serve for lunch?
compulsion	What are two reasons compulsions can be inconvenient or annoying?
impulsive	What are three things an impulsive person might do?
dispel	Why is it hard to dispel rumours?
compulsory	What are two things that are compulsory in your life, and two things that are not?

“Modify the exercises to suit your students’ learning needs.”

2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT**Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference” (continued)****ascribe** 

16c. restored spelling of M.E. *ascribe* (c.1340), from O.Fr. *ascriere* "to attribute, inscribe," from L. *ascribere* "to write in, to add to in a writing," from *ad-* "to" + *scribere* "to write" (see **script**).

A scribe would have written this word differently long ago. (Source: [Online Etymology Dictionary](#))

Main Entry: as-cribe 

Pronunciation: ə-ˈskrɪb

Function: *transitive verb*

Inflected Form(s): **as-cribed; as-cribing**

Etymology: Middle English, from Latin *ascribere*, from *ad-* + *scribere* to write -- more at **SCRIBE**

- to refer to a proposed cause, source, or author

Red speaker icon showing audio file link on [Merriam-Webster Website](#)

“...highlight to students the different kinds of information an etymology dictionary offers...”

(Continued from page 19)

5. Dictionary Scavenger Hunt

Example: Use the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#). Look up the word *ascribe*. Answer the following questions:

- What is the prefix?
- What is the meaning of the prefix?
- What is the root?
- What is the meaning of the root?

Take advantage of this activity to highlight to students the different kinds of information an etymology dictionary offers versus that which a standard English dictionary for native speakers might offer.

For example, the etymology dictionary gives the meaning of the prefix and the root while the Merriam-Webster dictionary gives only the meaning of the root.

Merriam-Webster has audio files, which are useful for students who wish to hear the pronunciation of new or unfamiliar vocabulary.

Pronunciation

The workshop concluded with a brief discussion of the impact of prefixes on pronunciation. To begin, we went over the concept of primary stress. In every English word of two or more syllables, there is one syllable that has primary stress.

A syllable with primary stress is one that is pronounced louder, longer and at a higher pitch than the other syllable(s). Next, we looked at two guidelines for pronunciation of words with prefixes.

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2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT**Making The Most Of “The 14 Words That Make All The Difference” (continued)***(Continued from page 20)*

First, in words with a short prefix, it is usually the root of the word that is stressed. In the following examples, capital letters denote primary stress: pro**PEL**, ex**PEL**, re**PEL**, com**PEL**, im**PEL**, re**PUL**sive, com**PUL**sion, im**PUL**sive, dis**PEL**, com**PUL**sory.

Second, “More than 60 per cent of all English verbs [of two syllables] are stressed on the second syllable” (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. 67). For example, de**SCRIBE**, pre**SCRIBE**, a**SCRIBE**, in**SCRIBE**, trans**POSE**, trans**FORM**, trans**PORT**, trans**MIT**. ◇

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Online Etymology Dictionary: <http://www.etymonline.com/>

Resources**Roots and affixes lists and activities**

The 14 words:

<http://www.lexfiles.com/14-words.html>

Medical Terminology, including affixation and pronunciation: <http://ec.hku.hk/mt/>

Roots: <http://www.resourceroom.net/comprehension/wordparts/index.asp>

Roots and prefixes: <http://www.quia.com/jg/66094.html>

Roots, prefixes and suffixes: <http://ueno.cool.ne.jp/let/prefix.html>

Vocabulary workshop: <http://www.southampton.liunet.edu/academic/pau/course/webesl.htm>

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Resources

A Conference is Participation



2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

Addressing Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom: “It’s important... but should we?”

by Rebecca Allen-Nakonechnaya



Stop? High five? Let’s make a movie? What is she saying?

Because of their extensive experience in dealing with human communication, most ESL teachers would agree with David Abercrombie when he underscores the crucial role of nonverbal communication in human interaction:

“Human conversation consists of much more than a simple exchange of words and sentences, and although our vocal organs are enough for a mere production of speech sounds, it is hardly an exaggeration to say we need our entire bodies to converse” (1968, p. 70).

Even though nonverbal communication clearly is important in human communication, Von Raffler-Engle (1980)

points out that it is often neglected in the ESL classroom.

Because I think that this neglect is a disservice to students, I wanted to systematically discover the reason why such an important part of the communication system is apparently being overlooked in ESL classrooms.

Upon commencing my research, I theorized that teachers avoid addressing nonverbal communication because they worry about offending students; I thought that students, however, would not be put off by teachers’ addressing nonverbal communication.

To test my hypotheses, I surveyed and interviewed both teachers and students.

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“...nonverbal communication clearly is important in human communication [but] it is often neglected in the ESL classroom...”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)***(Continued from page 23)*

Before discussing the findings of this research, this paper will:

- 1) give a definition of nonverbal communication,
- 2) provide some examples of its importance and diversity in human communication,
- 3) review some studies showing that nonverbal communication is learnable, and
- 4) look into some theoretical and practical concerns about addressing nonverbal communication.

Definition

For this study, nonverbal communication (NVC) is defined as continuous, learned or innate movements, postures, or positions being made either in conjunction with speech, or by themselves, that could have a perceived message, either for the sender or the receiver (Samovar and Porter, 1991, p. 179, 183). Subcomponents of nonverbal communication include:

1. gestures (Ducan & Niederehe, 1974)
2. posture (Burgoon, 1991)
3. clothing (Harris, 1983; Joseph, 1986, Lurie, 1983)
4. smell (Classen, 1993)
5. facial expression (Wierzbicka, 1999)
6. eye contact (Fatt, 1991)
7. touch (Burgoon, 1991)
8. proximity (Hall, 1959)

Prosodic elements (i.e. speech pausing, pitch/intonation) have also been lumped with NVC under the terms kinesics and paralanguage/paralinguistic behaviour (Birdwhistell 1961, Abercrombie, 1968, Smith, 1984, Hurley 1992).



Gestures can carry localized meaning easily misunderstood or misinterpreted out of their natural context.

However, this paper focuses exclusively on unspoken communication, because that is what is so neglected in the ESL classroom.

The importance and diversity of NVC

One of the reasons that NVC deserves our attention is that NVC varies widely across cultures, and as a result, people do grapple with nonverbal communication difficulties when communicating cross culturally.

In what follows I will take a brief look at each aspect of nonverbal communi-

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“...unspoken communication...is what is so neglected in the ESL classroom.”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)***(Continued from page 24)*

cation and provide a salient example of a cross-cultural communication difficulty in that area.

Gestures

If they are discussed in ESL classrooms at all, gestures are often oversimplified. For example, ESL teachers may not be aware that the 'thumbs-up' gesture commonly used in Canada to indicate that something is positive or good, has different meanings world-wide (Darn, 2005). And the gesticulation signal (a closed fist or hand movements made in sync with speech) always indicates that the person wants to hold the floor – even if the person pauses or uses a fall in intonation (Ducan & Niederehe, 1974).

This kind of pragmatic information is invaluable to ESL students, particularly in North American school contexts, where participatory discussion is expected, but where taking turns in an organized fashion is also practiced.

Posture

Posture is another important aspect of nonverbal communication. Posture is much more than just standing up straight.

Posture encompasses conventional understandings about leaning and limb position. Lean refers to the angle at which a person's body is inclined: one can either lean forward ("forward lean") or lean back ("backwards lean").

Most North Americans tend to lean slightly forward when listening in order to show their interest. Some other cultures do the opposite: they stand very straight to show engagement with and



Listening intently or dozing off? Culture informs body language and posture.

respect for the listener.

Limb position, and its meaning, also varies from culture to culture.

For many North Americans it is acceptable to sit with one's legs or arms crossed, but for some cultures this posture is considered obscene and rude. In short, posture is a significant element of NVC.

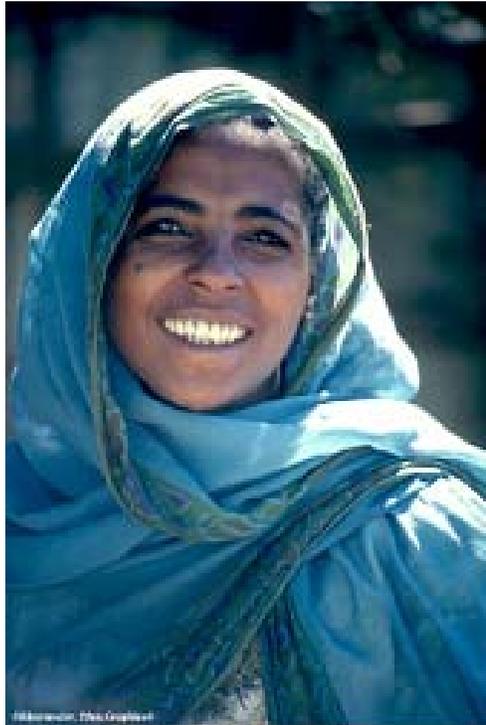
In fact, in one study posture was noted as a contributor to serious misunderstandings among North American university library workers and international students (Wang & Frank, 2000).

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“Limb position, and its meaning, also varies from culture to culture.”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)**

“In much of the western world...as a display of respect, people typically wear black or dark colours to funerals.”



In some societies, clothing colour carries unspoken communication.

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Clothing

My research suggests that most teachers do not discuss clothing as a part of NVC because they think of it as an expression of personal taste.

This perception is not universal, however: in many cultures and contexts “how you’ll appear to others” outweighs personal style when it comes to clothing choice (Harris et al, 1983).

Clothing does send a strong communicative signal, but as with any communication, the messages sent by clothing are subject to cross-cultural misunderstandings.

For example, a great deal of cultural information is transmitted by the choice of colours in items of clothing. In much of the western world, for example, as a display of respect people typically wear black or dark colours to funerals and lighter colours to weddings (Lurie, 1981, p. 181-202).

In the course of my research, I was surprised to discover that not all students are aware of this. For example, one student reported that in his country people were very careful about which colours they wore to which place, but that here [in North America] “you can wear any colour you want”.

It may thus be very helpful in ESL classes to discuss and clarify which communicative messages students are sending through their clothing.

This potentially sensitive issue, like other aspects of NVC, should be addressed in a non-prescriptive way that will allow students to make informed choices about how they communicate.

Smell

In addition to clothing, one area that teachers are apt to skirt entirely is smell and body odour.

Different cultures have different perceptions of what smells “bad” (Classen, 1993); some cultures do not find certain natural body odours offensive, as is common in North America. Consequently, different cultures have different expectations when it comes to bathing routines (US Department of State documents).

Lack of knowledge about culturally-specific hygiene rituals can sometimes contribute to students’ making an undesired impression on those around them.

People do not soon forget a person who “smells”.

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Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)

(Continued from page 26)

George Orwell, noted British author, once commented on the importance of smell by saying:

Race hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot" (as cited by Classen, 1993)."

Teachers with whom I talk agree that smell is indeed a hard issue to address in the classroom.

However, if the issue is left completely unaddressed, students may learn about it later, possibly through negative experiences.

Facial Expression

It is part of commonly accepted folklore to state that "everyone smiles in the same language". Yet, is this really true? Are human facial expressions, particularly the smile, universally understood?

Yes and no. It has been well documented that facial expressions are a natural reflex and thus universal (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 168-182). Most cultures do associate a smiling face with happiness and a scowling expression indicates anger.

However, what has been under-emphasized is that not all cultures display their emotions openly. Some cultures tend to employ facial expressions to cover emotions rather than display them.

For example, Ramsey points out that cultural conditioning prevents Japanese from outwardly displaying strong emotions. So for Japanese, a smile could mean happiness, but it could also be used to mask underlying annoyance (1984, p. 141-142). Thus, in the ESL classroom, dis-



Eye contact, you contact...

cussing the obvious – that specific facial expressions mean certain things – would not be as useful as discussing when one is allowed or expected to show which emotions in various cultures.

Eye Contact

My research suggests that eye contact is one of the NVC aspects that teachers are mostly likely to address. For example, teachers are apt to remind students of the importance of making eye contact when giving a presentation (Fatt, 1999).

However, students also need to know that eye contact is not just important in speaking; it is also important for listen-

(Continued on page 28)

"...some ESL listeners interpret the North American tendency toward extensive use of eye contact to be socially or sexually aggressive."

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ing. I have never heard a teacher discuss that learners may be struggling to interpret eye contact when they are listening to others.

Yet, some researchers have found that some ESL listeners interpret the North American tendency toward extensive use of eye contact to be socially or sexually aggressive (Nixon & Dawson, 2002).

Misunderstanding of eye contact could also affect students' ability to focus on the message when listening; they become needlessly anxious and offended if they do not understand North American norms of eye contact.

Touch

Touch can be defined as bodily contact. North Americans typically touch relatively little in comparison to many other cultures. However, it is not enough to state how much a culture touches, it is also important to note when and why a culture touches.

Some cultures, notably the Japanese, touch even less than many in the North American culture do. However, certain touches such as unintentional touch in crowded public spaces and touch between close (non-romantic) friends occur more frequently in the Japanese culture (Ramsey, 1984) than in western contexts.

Hence, we need to help students make sense of the context and the meaning of touching in North American and other cultures. One useful point when discussing touch is that adult-to-adult touching in North America typically carries connotations either of romance or of dominance (Burgoon, Buller, Hale & de-Truck, 1984).

ESL students should be helped to understand that, in some cases, patting

their acquaintances and superiors on the back or holding a friend's hand in public could be misunderstood by North Americans.

Proximity

It is useful to note the findings of the well-known anthropologist, Edward Hall (1959) related to specific distances for specific types of information and behaviour when speaking and listening.

These distances are not the same for all cultures. North Americans, as Hall

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“...a neutral distance for most conversations in North America is about an arm's length or more...”

Very close (3 in. to 6 in.)	Soft whisper; top secret
Close (8 in. to 12 in.)	Audible whisper; very confidential
Near	Indoors, soft voice; outdoors, full voice; confidential
Neutral (20 in. to 36 in.)	Soft voice, low volume; personal subject matter
Neutral (4½ ft. to 5 ft.)	Full voice, information of non-personal subject matter
Public Distance (5½ ft. to 8 ft.)	Full voice with slight over-loudness; public information for others to hear.
Across the room (8 ft. to 20 ft.)	Loud voice; talking to a group
Stretching the limits of distance	20 ft. to 24 ft. indoors; up to 100 ft. outdoors; hailing distance, departures

Table 1: Information speaking distances (Hall)

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)***(Continued from page 28)*

observed, are very possessive of their personal space. They often choose to carry on personal conversations from distances that other cultures would consider too far and distant. As a result, people from cultures that usually employ closer conversational distances will try to step towards North Americans, and North Americans will then try to back up.

In the end, the closer-distance culture feels slighted at the “stand-offish local” and the North American feels manipulated by the “pushy foreigner” (p. 209).

Hall writes of an actual incident where he watched a conversation between a foreign student and a North American professor in which the professor actually backed up the entire length of a corridor (p. 205).

A good rule of thumb in my practice has been to recommend to students that if they wish to employ it a neutral distance for most conversations in North America is about an arm’s length or more away.

Why address NVC?

As I have shown, addressing NVC in the ESL classroom is not always simple or easy. NVC is often very subtle. NVC is also personal and culturally-bound. Nevertheless, NVC is part of the communication system our ESL learners struggle to acquire, and if we as teachers do not equip learners with information and advice about NVC, they are bound to be misunderstood and to misunderstand others.

NVC merits attention; tactful and considerate ways of empowering learners with critically important NVC skills need to be thought out.

**We can address NVC**

NVC is learnable.

Aside from concerns about students’ comfort and identities, many teachers whom I interviewed alluded to the fact that they do not address nonverbal communication because they are not sure what aspects to address or if there are any fixed rules about nonverbal communication. In short, many teachers question whether nonverbal communication is learnable.

Some research has shown that nonverbal communication can be successfully learned in an ESL context. For example, Davies, Tyler, and Koran (1989) report that in one case study an international teaching assistant (ITA) received feedback from trained peers and was subsequently able to modify his verbal and nonverbal behaviours when teaching.

Douglas and Myers (1989) also report on an international teaching assistant training program.

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“...teachers should not try to change students’ cultural habits or identities or favour one style of North American communication. ”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)***(Continued from page 29)*

In their program ITAs chose to modify their nonverbal teaching styles after watching and discussing videos of other successful ITAs and Teaching Assistants (TAs) at work. Using role plays and drama is also recommended: Darn (2005), Taboada (2005) and Cullham (2003) all report success using these methods to address NVC in ESL settings.

But Should We?**Theoretical and practical concerns**

Just because NVC is learnable, however, does not mean that teachers will feel comfortable addressing it. Many teachers wonder which English's NVC to address – Canadian, American, British? Other teachers worry that addressing NVC might be interpreted as a criticism of learners' identities.

Finally, some instructors conclude that NVC is a non-issue, because, in any case, Canadians are multicultural enough to overlook atypical NVC. The question of which variety/varieties of spoken and written English to teach is an ongoing issue in ESL literature.

There is no easy answer to this question. In pronunciation teaching, for example, Jenkins (2002) suggests that we try to focus on those aspects of English that are universally accepted as important for intelligibility. Teachers might deal with NVC in a similar manner.

While acknowledging that there are diverse styles of North American NVC, teachers should perhaps focus on areas of NVC that are most likely to be problematic and lead to misunderstandings; teachers should not try to change students' cultural habits or identities or



Should teachers try to stop or change non-verbal communication?

favour one style of North American communication.

The fact that there is little research to date about nonverbal communication in North American contexts suggests that more research needs to be done on this topic.

In thinking about issues related to student identity, addressing NVC in the classroom could be seen as empowering to students. Cummins' CUP (Common Underlying Proficiency) construct has been commonly cited as a model for second language acquisition. Cummins (1981) suggests that increasing proficiency in any language, be it the L1 or the

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“...the problem is that nonverbal communication, though very subtle, is powerful.”

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L2, increases overall language ability. That is, the acquisition of an L2 does not displace the L1; both languages should be seen as complimentary. Perhaps a similar idea could be applied to the acquisition of NVC skills by ESL students.

Addressing NVC could be seen as empowering students by equipping them with more skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about how they will communicate nonverbally. The learners' L1 NVC habits should not be displaced or criticized; instead, two (or more) systems of NVC could exist together.

Unarguably, some aspects of NVC are touchy matters; nonetheless, ESL teachers need to develop solid theoretical understandings about the topic and begin to develop non-prescriptive methodologies for addressing it in the classroom because Canadians may not overlook atypical NVC and, further, may make highly negative judgments about it.

The problem is not that Canadians are by nature close-minded; the problem is that nonverbal communication, though very subtle, is powerful.

Jenkins and Parra's (2003) research suggests that even linguistically aware ESL professionals do not overlook atypical NVC. In one study, Jenkins and Parra analyzed videotapes of ESL teachers conducting proficiency tests of people applying to become ITAs, based on the SPEAK test from Educational Testing Services (ETS).

While the SPEAK test itself does not include nonverbal communication, the NVC of the aspiring ITAs influenced how the ESL teachers evaluated their verbal proficiencies. In borderline cases where students barely passed or barely failed, the ITA applicants with more typical North American nonverbal behaviours passed, but those with more atypical nonverbal behaviours failed.

When preparing students for communication in the workplace and the community, we must keep such findings in mind. If NVC can subconsciously influence even ESL practitioners – who tend to be more culturally and linguistically aware than others in the population – it is unlikely that the general public will ignore unusual nonverbal behaviours.

Therefore, while students should never be coerced to change how they act, they should be respectfully and tactfully helped to understand the messages they are sending non-verbally; in other words, students should be equipped to make informed communication choices.

There are theoretical justifications and practical reasons for addressing NVC in the ESL classroom, but perhaps the final say on whether to address nonverbal communication should be with those whom we are trying to help: our students themselves.

Research findings Part I:***What do students think about learning about NVC?***

I began by theorizing that ESL students would not be offended by teachers' addressing nonverbal communication in the classroom. To find out how they themselves actually felt about nonverbal communication, I surveyed a group of thirteen ESL students from six different countries and all attending the same major Canadian university.

The students were recruited through word of mouth and e-mail and were not evaluated or graded by me in their course work.

The survey consisted of a brief explanation of the concept of nonverbal

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“...the final say on whether to address nonverbal communication should be with those whom we are trying to help: our students.”

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communication (from piloting, I knew that students understood the concept of nonverbal communication, but not everyone understood the English term for it) and about thirty questions in either yes/no or Likert scale format.

I did random follow-up interviews with four of those students to try to elicit more elaboration and explanation.

The most telling finding yielded by the survey was that all thirteen students answered “yes” - they would prefer their teachers to address nonverbal communication in the ESL classroom.

Eight out of 13 surveyed students felt that their teacher does not/did not spend enough time on nonverbal communication. Twelve out of 13 surveyed students felt that nonverbal communication could be taught in a way that is not insulting to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Follow-up interviews gave more insight into these findings. When asked why she would like to learn about nonverbal communication, one student, “Tracy”, explained that:

ESL classes exist [because] there are lots of students from different countries. They are here for learning English, which mean, each student have a different background. So it's very important for them to learn nonverbal, I mean nonverbal language.

When asked if she would find addressing nonverbal communication offensive she commented:

No, not really. That's my personal opinion. No, not really. Because, no, like me, I am living in North America, right? So I should know about nonverbal communications. That's very important to living in this society.

Other students expressed attitudes similar to Tracy's. One student, “Ben”, explained:

I needed to learn. I needed to know other body language. I like to learn. I cannot communicate with them because they are different in body language. I didn't understand. Maybe I make a mistake. I need to learn this body language.

In short, students had pragmatic reasons for wanting to learn about nonverbal communication; they wanted to be able to function comfortably in society.

Another part of my research included trying to determine which aspects of NVC students were most interested in and which methods they thought would be best for learning about NVC. Students were surveyed about the eight aspects that I included in my definition. They were asked to disagree or agree on whether they would like to learn about facial expression, touch, personal space (proximity), clothes, smell, gestures, posture and eye contact.

All 13 agreed that they most wanted to learn about facial expression, touch, gestures, and eye contact. One student had reservations about learning about personal space (proximity); three had reservations about learning about clothes, and two had reservations about exploring the topic of smell.

Overall, a small fraction of students had qualms about limiting their learning to only certain aspect of nonverbal communication, excluding some.

When questioned about methods for learning about NVC, twelve out of thirteen students agreed that they would like to actively practice – not just learn about

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“Students had pragmatic reasons for wanting to learn about nonverbal communication; they wanted to be able to function comfortably in society.”

*2006 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT***Nonverbal Communication in the ESL Classroom (continued)***(Continued from page 32)*

– nonverbal communication in class. This desire for active practice is further attested to by the fact that all the surveyed students agreed that role plays would be an effective method. In fact, in the interviews several students spontaneously suggested this method of learning, referring to role plays as “dramas” or an “act”.

All 13 students also liked the idea of viewing movies and discussing the films’ depictions of NVC.

Students were not against reading about nonverbal communication, but more than half of the surveyed students felt that their ESL textbooks did not contain enough information about nonverbal communication.

Research findings Part II:***What do teachers think about teaching nonverbal communication?***

Having observed students’ attitudes about NVC, I thought it would be valuable to compare them with teachers’ attitudes and classroom practices. To do this, I surveyed eight teachers and did randomly selected follow-up interviews of three teachers.

The ESL teachers were from the same university as the students, and all of them were either presently teaching or had recently taught ESL classes at the university’s semi-autonomous ESL institute or for credit-level university classes. Teachers were recruited through the use of campus mail.

The survey results showed that while some teachers do address nonverbal communication, others do not. In response to the following survey question: “Do you address nonverbal communication in your ESL classroom?”, six teachers

answered “yes”, one teacher answered “no”, and one teacher answered both “yes” and “no”. Most teachers (six out of eight) felt that they *do* spend enough time on NVC, but most students felt that their teachers did *not* spend enough time on NVC.

Of the teachers who did include nonverbal communication in their classes, all addressed facial expression, proximity, gestures, and eye contact. One teacher did not discuss touch. More than half of the teachers did not discuss clothing or smell.

The interviews showed that teachers were concerned that students would not feel comfortable if these aspects were explored in class. However, as we have seen from the surveys with students, those fears appear to be unfounded.

Although students preferred direct practice when learning about nonverbal communication, teachers preferred to use awareness-raising types of techniques.

Most teachers (five out of eight) never used role plays – even though role plays were one of the students’ favourite methods. Six out of eight teachers used teacher modeling, readings, and movies to raise awareness of nonverbal communication. Perhaps one of the reasons that some teachers did not feel NVC merits direct instruction is that seven out of eight teachers thought that students would ‘pick up’ NVC without any instruction. This finding was somewhat surprising because, in the research that does exist and in this study, non-native English speakers often confront difficulties related to their NVC when interacting cross-culturally.

Students may eventually pick up NVC – in the same way that they may eventually pick up some aspects that are

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“...seven out of eight teachers thought that students would ‘pick up’ NVC without any instruction. ...”

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those sensitive topics actually are. Otherwise, they risk not equipping students with valuable information that they may actually want and need.

Teachers might also be convinced of the usefulness of doing needs analysis with their students. A needs analysis can consist of more than just a survey at the beginning of a course (Weddel & Santopietro-Van Duzer, 1997).

Teachers can also arrange class discussions, have suggestion boxes, invite students to send e-mails, use class management software with message boards, or talk to students informally in teacher-student interviews.

However teachers go about soliciting student input, a supportive and respectful environment conducive to students' open expression of their needs, wants, and discomforts is imperative.

My research suggests that students are comfortable with all methods of addressing NVC, but needs analysis, coupled with a teacher's own beliefs, will help teachers select an appropriate method of addressing nonverbal communication in their own classrooms.

One possible course of action a teacher could take is to start with low-key methods such as readings, movies, and interviews, then move to more practice-oriented techniques such as role plays, as students become more familiar with and comfortable with NVC (Hurley, 1992).

Below, I look first at some knowledge-based activities and then at some practice-based activities.

- **Assigning readings is a particularly useful technique** since it is non-confrontational. Students can choose to read and then decide on their own whether or not to use or disregard the information. Studies in experimental psychology have shown that readings could be potentially

effective: Collet's 1971 study revealed that people who wish to change their nonverbal behaviour can do so – and influence others' perception of them – based on readings alone.

However, I have not found any data about the positive outcomes of simply reading about NVC in an ESL/EFL context. One problem with assigning readings is that it may be hard to find appropriate materials.

Few ESL textbooks contain information about NVC (Von Raffler-Engle, 1980); therefore, teachers may have to adapt material, and this takes considerable time, especially when adapting readings for students at lower reading levels.

- **Another possible knowledge-based method is films.** Films have many uses in the ESL classroom (Kang, 2000). One possible activity for addressing NVC is watching movie clips (with the sound off or on) and talking about how NVC is used.

Teachers must use care and discretion in selecting films for this purpose, however, as some films many contain other objectionable elements (King, 2002). The choice of an inappropriate film may negate any positive outcomes provided by the learning experience.

- **Another activity is cross-cultural interviews.** These can be done very easily in a multi-language classroom (Arias, 1996). Students could discover information about their classmates' cultures and typical NVC styles; the teacher could participate in the interviews to add yet another perspective. This has often proved to be a useful awareness-raising activity for NVC in that it actively engages all students and is not focused on only one culture.

- **Role playing activity has the most supportive research evidence** as a means to help students modify their NVC (if the students so choose) (Davies, Tyler &

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“...start with low-key methods such as readings, movies, and interviews, then move to more practice-oriented techniques such as role plays.”

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Koran, 1989; Douglas & Meyer, 1989). Role plays can help students practice and develop confidence, because they have “been there, done that” in a sheltered environment (Taboada, 2005).

Videotaping role plays can also be useful for self-evaluation. Many teachers whom I interviewed and surveyed, however, were uncomfortable with using scripted role plays because they found them to be potentially too prescriptive and thus limiting.

On the other hand, theatrical exercises – those that actors use to practice improvisation – are an alternative to scripted role plays (Cullham, 2003).

These activities raise awareness of NVC and help students explore what their usual patterns of nonverbal behaviour are (how much eye contact is normal for them, how close they usually stand, and so on).

Conclusion

Students are interested in learning about NVC, even though some teachers are reluctant to explore it. It is my belief that teachers always benefit from knowing how their students actually feel – not just about NVC – but about other potentially touchy topics as well.

A variety of activities such as readings, movies and role playing are already available to the teacher for other instructional purposes, so why not use these means to address the topic of NVC as well? If first attempts are daunting, with repeated practice they can reach a stage where NVC becomes a normal part of the curriculum content.

And it should, since NVC is such a crucial, but presently misunderstood, part of cross-cultural communication. More classroom hours and research

should also be devoted to ESL and NVC, because, if teachers and researchers do not address NVC, students will continue to struggle to communicate appropriately.

Teachers can help students to make informed choices about how they are going to communicate both verbally and nonverbally; as part of this effort, we need to make sure our students understand NVC and its important role in communication. ◇

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“Students are interested in learning about NVC, even though some teachers are reluctant to explore it.”

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References

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Websites that you can explore with your classes or by yourself

For Authentic Listening



Radio programs based on real-life stuff. Some of it is audio-blogging and podcasting.

<http://www.transom.org/shows/archives.html>

"Street Fantasy" and "Baby Mama Drama" Not only are the premises touchy — like considering a job as a prostitute — but the approach is not distanced or polite. It's connected and sharp-edged. It makes you think about how we talk and what we choose to talk about.



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From *eslgold.net*

"Handouts...yippee!"

BOOK REVIEW**Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi**

Review by Georgia Irwin, Nipissing University,
North Bay, Ontario

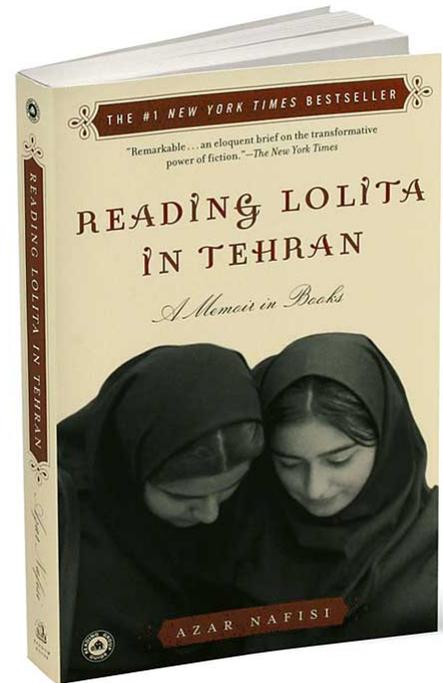
Three years ago I gained a partner in my job in Student Affairs at our little northern Ontario university. His name is Reza Noori and he came from Iran.

Our work is complementary: I support our students with their writing tasks, while Reza helps them in their struggles to master math and science. Reza has his M.Sc and worked as a geologist for the National Oil Company of Iran before he came to Canada. Although English is his second language, his speech is flawless and his reading and writing of English excellent.

As I read Azar Nafisi's astonishing and moving memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, I was constantly reminded of Reza. I knew nothing of Iran before I met him, and my understanding is still very limited. But over the past three years Reza has shared with me some knowledge of the rich history and culture of his country. I hope I have gained not only a small taste of that land but also a larger appreciation of a people so very far away from the experiences of a freckle-faced girl of Scottish heritage who grew up in a little prairie town in Saskatchewan.

My friendship with Reza has also helped me to reconfirm how much alike we all are, in spite of the differences in our location and culture. I have come to realize how we are all looking for the same things in our lives: love, friendship, the opportunity to nurture our children, the freedom to share our thoughts openly and sincerely with others, and the chance to work and express ourselves with passion and without censorship.

Azar Nafisi's determination to do just that in the Iran she loved, a country that through the 1970s and 80s was writhing through a chaotic and painful period of history, is the subject of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Against the political backdrop of the Islamic revolution, the ascendancy of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the tightening restrictions — especially on women —



Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. New York: Random House, 2003, 356 pages.

imposed by the fundamentalist regime, Nafisi reveals her struggle to teach English literature at the University of Tehran and the University of Allameh Tabatabai. She reflects with both insight and passion on the challenge of walking a tightrope: maintaining her authenticity and sense of justice, while still keeping her head in a land of growing repression and ever-present danger.

Nafisi's memoir is divided into four chapters: *Lolita*, *Gatsby*, *James* and *Austen*. It is interesting that she chose to identify her first two chapters after novel titles and the second two after the novelists themselves, for she does not restrict

“Nafisi paints a larger picture, taking us outside her apartment into the universities where she had been teaching.”

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BOOK REVIEW**Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi***(Continued from page 40)*

herself to exploring only one novel of each writer, but several.

Initially, we assume that the book will simply provide a view of the secret, intimate enclave of seven female students whom Nafisi taught once a week in her Tehran home. And certainly we do follow the week-by-week revelation of their remarkably different characters as they study the works of the four famed novelists. To the reader's benefit, however, Nafisi paints a larger picture, taking us outside her apartment into the universities where she had been teaching before her 'retirement', into the coffee shops and apartments where she met her friends, into the bookstores where she scoured for copies of banned "decadent, immoral" English writings. Along the way, she reveals her own inner struggles after the fundamentalist government's imposition of the veil, her frustrations in dealing with pedantic and spying students, and finally her reluctant departure from the homeland she cherishes.

Nafisi's students in the secret classes were hand-picked and brilliant. ESL teachers will be struck, as I was, by their erudition and intelligence as they grapple with the ideas of Vladimir Nabokov, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James and Jane Austen. There is nothing as mundane as grammar and comprehension exercises here. Again and again I had to remind myself that these were undergraduate university students, reading complex works of foreign literature, in a second language, about foreign cultures. Perhaps more striking than that was the fact that they were able to engage in, and indeed thrived on, analysis, argument and reflection - at the most profound levels - of the ideas and universal themes explored by some of the greatest writers in the English language.

But it is not only the astonishing fluency of her students and their thoughtful reading of English literature which make



Best-selling author Azar Nafisi, a professor of international studies at Johns Hopkins University, won a fellowship from Oxford and taught English literature at several universities in Iran. She was expelled from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear the veil and left Iran for America in 1997. Dr. Nafisi has also written for The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and The New Republic and has appeared frequently on radio and television programs. She lives in Washington, D.C. (Source: [U.S. Library of Congress](#))

Nafisi's memoir interesting from an ESL perspective. On page after page she also reveals the complex and rich dynamic of the teacher-student relationship. In so doing, this book prompts all teachers to reflect on their own personal commitment to their life's work.

We teachers owe her a debt of gratitude.

ESL teachers may be the first to note how the private class that met weekly in Nafisi's living room - drinking Turkish

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"Nafisi's students in the secret classes were hand-picked and brilliant."

BOOK REVIEW**Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi****Ethnoreligious distribution in Iran. (Map: University of Texas at Austin)**

“The classmates who came secretly to her Tehran apartment were both hiding and escaping...”

(Continued from page 41)

coffee and eating sweets as they explored great English literature, sharing their own personal struggles in the rigid, restrictive and dangerous world outside the apartment - mirrors the life of many of our own immigrant students here in Canada.

The classmates who came secretly to her Tehran apartment were both hiding and escaping from the extremist and reactionary laws of the religious zeal-

ots who had overpowered their country. Is it a stretch to suggest that the newcomers who arrive in our ESL classes, and at the same time are trying to find their way in an alien North American culture, face a similarly intolerant, even hostile world? Our ESL learners may not face the extreme punishments common in Iran (stoning and death for minor infractions of regime laws, for example) but the world outside the safe enclave of our ESL classrooms is often

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BOOK REVIEW**Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi****Flavour of the text:**

I think in some ways our readings and discussions of the novels in that class became our moments of pause, our link to that other world of “tenderness, brightness and beauty.” Only eventually, we were compelled to return.

During the break one morning, while we were enjoying our coffee and pastries, Mitra began to tell us how she felt as she climbed up the stairs every Thursday morning. She said that step by step she could feel herself gradually leaving reality behind her, leaving the dark, dank cell she lived in to surface for a few hours into open air and sunshine. Then, when it was over, she returned to her cell. At the time, I felt this was a point against the class, as if it should somehow guarantee open air and sunshine beyond its confines. Mitra’s confession led to a debate about how we needed this pause from real life, in order to return to it refreshed and ready to confront it. Yet Mitra’s point stayed with me: what about after the pause? Whether we wished it or not, our lives outside that living room made their claims....

Our discussions of *Madame Bovary* continued way past the hour. It had happened before, but this time no one wanted to leave. The description of the dining table, the wind in Emma’s hair, the face she sees before she dies – these details kept us going for hours. Initially our class hours were from nine to twelve, but gradually they were prolonged into the afternoon. I suggested that day that we continue with our discussions and that everyone stay for lunch. I think this is how we established lunches....

During the years they came to my house, they knew my family, my kitchen, my bedroom, the way I dressed and walked and talked at home. I had never set foot in their houses, I never met the traumatized mother, the delinquent brother, the shy sister. I could never place or locate their private narratives within a context, a locality. Yet I had met all of them in the magical space of my living room. They came to my house in a disembodied state of suspension, bringing to my living room their secrets, their pains and their gifts.

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fraught with danger and frustration for many all the same.

Nafisi’s exploration of literature with her students, her realization that in such study there are broader and more universal goals, also helps to remind us of the attitudes we need to cultivate as we welcome more and more immigrants to Canada.

At one point, in reflecting on the underlying purposes of her teaching life, Nafisi quotes the German thinker Theodor Adorno: “The highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one’s own home” (page 94). She advises her students that, “the best fiction always force[s] us to question what we [take] for granted. It question[s] traditions and expectations when they seem... too immutable” (page 24).

Is this not a good model for flexible and accepting attitudes we might also adopt towards our new immigrants? Along with teaching the history of our own developing culture, should we not also be receptive to *their* knowledge and traditions and ways of looking at the world? In other words, are we ready to learn from our students as readily as we want them to learn from us?

Finally, Nafisi reminds us that it is important for us to be cognizant of the many dimensions of each human personality. Naturally, she believes in literature as the key for opening this understanding of the ‘other.’ She says, “It is only through literature that one can put oneself in someone else’s shoes and understand the other’s different and contradictory sides and refrain from becoming too ruthless”, for “if you understand their different dimensions you cannot easily murder them...” (page 118). All of us engaged in teaching ESL know, above all else, that we must see our students as individuals, complex and unique, and as we know them, so shall we love them. ◇

Flavour of the text

*OUR STUDENTS WRITE: BOOK REVIEW***The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini**

Reviewed by Talha Saeed

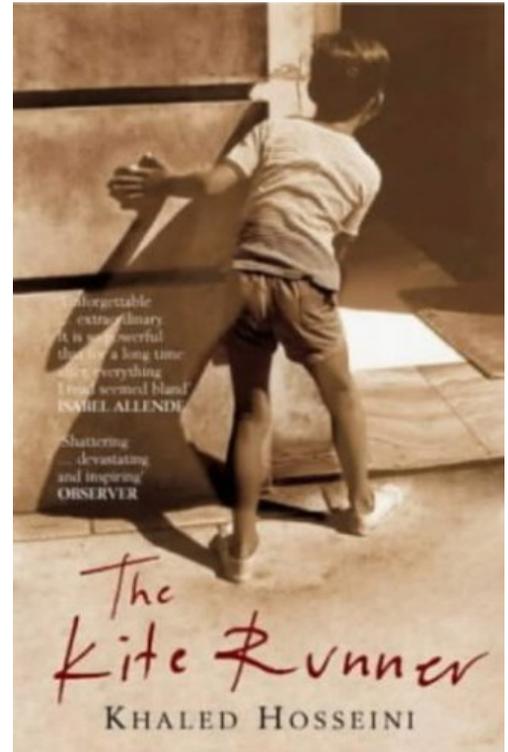
ESL Week proved to be a stimulus for many affiliates around the province to showcase the writing talents of ESL students. An active writing and publishing program is part of the English courses and ESL courses at Marc Garneau Collegiate in East York, Toronto, where 80 per cent of the students come from ESL homes. From their many submissions, we selected two pieces of exemplary student writing. Here we present for your reading enjoyment a book review by Talha Saeed and a poem by Yousuf Faroqi.

“It is...the story of a tribal society’s failed transition to modernity, a failure that resulted in full-scale social, political and personal havoc.”

In his recent (2003) novel *The Kite Runner*, Afghan-American writer, Khaled Hosseini has created a brilliant and dramatic piece of historical fiction. It tells the gripping tale of a conscience-stricken soul who, believing since childhood that he is both powerless and cowardly, finds redemption in an act of great courage that takes him back to his native country to right a serious wrong that he himself had inflicted on a beloved childhood friend.

Hosseini’s novel might seem at first glance to be simply an emotional memoir of an Afghan refugee burdened by harsh childhood memories. But it is more than that. It is also the story of a tribal society’s failed transition to modernity, a failure that resulted in full-scale social, political — and personal — havoc.

From a geo-political perspective, the shift in ideology didn’t only sabotage Afghanistan’s poor economy and those of its neighbours, it also gave rise to a trigger-happy generation of warring factions whom we know as the Taliban, Hazb-I-Islami, and the Northern Alliance.



The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini. Anchor Canada paperback 2004, paperback 400 pages.

This novel’s early chapters are set in pre-war Afghanistan in the 1970s, while the rest of the novel takes place in post-war Afghanistan, Pakistan, and California. As the story opens, the protagonist, Amir, is living the life of an Afghan refugee in Fremont, California and carrying deep within his heart some very bitter memories.

Throughout his childhood in Kabul, Amir had struggled to gain the love and attention of his father, Agha Sahib, called Baba throughout the novel. But from the beginning, their father-son relationship was troubled. The main source of contention was that Baba wanted his son to be a stereotypical Pashtun male, physically

(Continued on page 45)

OUR STUDENTS WRITE: BOOK REVIEW**The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
(continued)***(Continued from page 44)*

strong and interested in taking part in the popular and bloody sport *buzkashi*.

But Amir – much to his father’s sorrow and shame– was by nature a pensive and polite boy and loved spending time indoors, reading stories to his lower-status Hazara servant, Hassan, one of the central figures in this story and the son of Baba’s most trusted servant Ali. Hassan, the servant, also came to be Amir’s best and most reliable friend.

Amir’s childhood changes dramatically when, in order to gain his father’s affection, he decides to take part in an intercity kite tournament. In fact, Amir wins the tournament, but as Hassan, the best kite runner in the town, chases the fallen kite to retrieve it for his friend, the neighbourhood bully Assef chases him down and brutally rapes him.

Even though Amir secretly observes this shameful act of brutality, he lacks the courage to stick up for his friend and doesn’t tell anybody what he witnessed. Overtaken by his own guilt and remorse, he then falsely accuses Hassan of stealing. Shamed and betrayed by Amir, Hassan must depart with his father Ali.

A short while after these events, the invading Russians participate in a bloody political coup carried out by the Afghan army and its KGB advisers. In order to escape both the ensuing anarchy and the imposition of a hardcore socialist regime in Afghanistan, both Amir and his father flee first to the city of Peshawar in Pakistan and then to California.

In the USA, Amir and his father, who had spent most of their lives in an expensive mansion in Kabul’s posh district, begin their new lives as part of the American melting pot. They rent a humble apartment, Amir takes classes at the local college to improve his writing skills, and the father works at a gas station. Every week-



Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965, the oldest of five children. His mother was a teacher of Farsi and history at a large girls high school in the capital. In 1976, Khaled’s family relocated to Paris, where his father was assigned a diplomatic post in the Afghan embassy.

When the father was recalled to their homeland in 1980, Afghanistan was in the midst of a bloody communist coup and the Soviets invaded shortly after. Khaled’s father asked for and was granted political asylum in the United States. The family moved to San Jose, California, where he attended university, graduating from the school of medicine. He has practised there as an internist since 1996. He is married, with two children. The Kite Runner is his first novel.

**“A bloody melee
ensues...”**

(Continued on page 46)

*OUR STUDENTS WRITE: BOOK REVIEW****The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
(continued)***

“...a very satisfying read for anyone who is just looking for a moving story of an agonized soul.”



Photo: Luke Powell

(Continued from page 45)

end they make extra cash by setting up a stall at a flea market.

At the flea market Amir meets Soraya Taheri, the daughter of one of his father's old Afghan friends, and in due course he marries her.

Just a few short months after their marriage, however, Baba becomes deathly ill and dies from lung cancer. Meanwhile, Amir and Soraya find out that they can't have kids. Their disappointment is lessened somewhat when, a year later, Amir becomes a success as he gets his first novel published.

Amir and Soraya buy a house and are leading a placid suburban American life when Amir receives an emergency phone call from Rahim Khan in Pakistan, a sympathetic uncle, who had always been closer and more encouraging to Amir than his own father, Baba.

Rahim implores Amir to return. Arriving in Peshawar, Amir learns that his boyhood friend Hassan and his wife have both been executed by the trigger-happy Taliban, now in power in Afghanistan. Rahim Khan also tells Amir that Hassan's son, Sohrab, is being held captive in the war-torn Afghan capital. But what is more startling is the revelation that Sohrab is actually Amir's nephew, since his father Hassan was, in fact, Baba's illegitimate son and thus Amir's own half brother. In the novel's most touching moment, Rahim urges Amir to go to Kabul and rescue his nephew, with these words: "There is a way to be good again."

Spurred by the enormity of his childhood guilt, Amir decides that he must make the risky journey, seek out and save Hassan's orphaned child, and by so doing make amends and get rid of his guilt. Upon reaching Kabul, Amir discovers that Sohrab has been captured by his old nemesis Assef, now a Taliban commander, who has been sexually abusing the boy.

Once again, after fifteen years, Amir stands face to face with his childhood rival, but now there is no Hassan to protect him, and he will have to fight his own battle. A bloody melee ensues in the Taliban leader's drawing room, but in the struggle the captive boy Sohrab saves his uncle Amir, fatally injuring the brute with his slingshot.

After recovering from his wounds, Amir brings his nephew to the United States, to live as his son.

(Continued on page 47)

OUR STUDENTS WRITE: BOOK REVIEW**The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
(continued)****Flavour of the text**

Winter was every kid's favorite season in Kabul, at least those whose fathers could afford to buy a good iron stove. The reason was simple: They shut down school for the icy season. Winter to me was the end of long division and naming the capital of Bulgaria, and the start of three months of playing cards by the stove with Hassan, free Russian movies on Tuesday mornings at Cinema Park, sweet turnip *qurma* over rice for lunch after a morning of building snowmen.

And kites, of course. Flying kites. And running them.

For a few unfortunate kids, winter did not spell the end of the school year. There were the so-called voluntary winter courses. No kid I knew ever volunteered to go to these classes; parents, of course, did the volunteering for them. Fortunately for me, Baba [my father] was not one of them. I remember one kid, Ahmad, who lived across the street from us. His father was some kind of doctor, I think. Ahmad had epilepsy and always wore a wool vest and thick black-rimmed glasses – he was one of Assef's regular victims. Every morning, I watched from my bedroom window as their Hazara servant shoveled snow from the driveway, cleared the way for the black Opel. I made a point of watching Ahmad and his father get into the car, Ahmad in his wool vest and winter coat, his schoolbag filled with books and pencils. I waited until they pulled away, turned the corner, then I slipped back into bed in my flannel pajamas. I pulled the blanket to my chin and watched the snowcapped hills in the north through the window. Watched them until I drifted back to sleep.

I loved wintertime in Kabul. I loved it for the soft pattering of snow against my window at night, for the way fresh snow crunched under my black rubber boots, for the warmth of the cast-iron stove as the wind screeched through the yards, the streets. But mostly because, as the trees froze and ice sheathed the roads, the chill between Baba and me thawed a little. And the reason for that was the kites. Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the one paper-thin slice of intersection between those spheres.



(Continued from page 46)

This narrative grabbed my attention because I'm really keen on politics and sociology, which are two prominent themes in *The Kite Runner*.

Another reason I was attracted to the novel is the way the author weaves in the impact of the Cold War on the everyday lives of the third world, revealing how the interventions of policy makers in both the White House and the Kremlin shaped the recent history of a small country.

The Kite Runner is an excellent book for anybody who wants to get a better understanding of the male-dominated Afghan social structure. It is also a very satisfying read for anyone who is just looking for a moving story of an agonized soul who thought he was too weak to right his past wrongs, but finally realizes there is always a door open to redemption, and that the price for redemption rises as time passes. ◇

Talha Saeed is a 15-year-old grade 9 student at Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute, Toronto. He was born in Karachi, Pakistan. Talha is passionate about international politics, Asian and Middle Eastern history, and inner city issues, especially those of immigrants. He reads political biographies and enjoys debating. He hopes to follow a career in politics and social action.

Flavour of the text

OUR STUDENTS WRITE: POEM**Come Home!****Poem by Yousuf Faroqi****Come Home!***For the remembrance of my home, and my dreams**December 1, 2006*

I feel so guilty for what I have left behind.

I feel so unfaithful for what I have left behind.

At night I can't go to sleep

because I hear the voice, "Come home, come home".

I wake up frightened, thinking it was just a dream.

But when I settle, again I hear, "Come home, come home".

I start shivering, start crying, close my ears,

and try to go to sleep again.

But the words "Come home, come home",
repeat in my mind over and over again.

Once I fall asleep I go into a deep dream, where I am
playing, having fun, laughing, my clothes dirty and ripped
and then someone very familiar tells me to "Come back".

Then I tell them I will come back,

I will come home,

I will come to find my peace again,

But only with a

new dream,

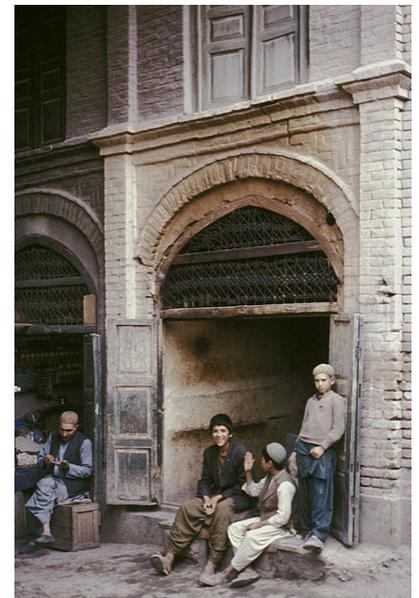
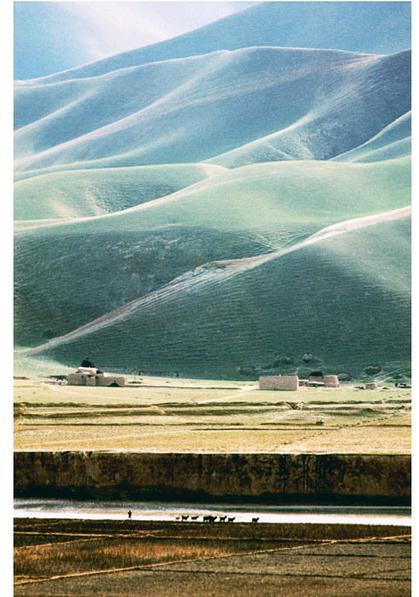
new hope,

new passion,

and a new world

Poem**Yousuf Faroqi**

I am 16 years old, in Grade 11 at Marc Garneau Collegiate in East York, Toronto. I am from Afghanistan, but I lived in Pakistan for a great deal of my life, due to the extreme conditions in my homeland. I arrived in Canada on October 29, 2002. It was a great change for me and also a great cultural shock. I started writing poetry for an assignment in Grade 8 when I was encouraged by my teachers, and then I just continued to write poetry. I now write poetry for my people and when I am really homesick.

**Photos: Luke Powell**



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“Making Connections”

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Attend one day	\$50	\$50	\$50
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- Teachers without Experience
 Teachers with Experience

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Panel		
Workshop		
Publisher's Workshop		
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Technology Fair Presentation		

Check one Special Focus Group.

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- Technology** presentations will all have **Classroom** Setup

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Last name, First Name	Preferred Affiliation / Employer

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