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# Contact

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## Making Connections



Hands-on workshops helped show ESL instructors how to bring nature into their classrooms, expand learners' verbal skills and add 'naturalist intelligence' to Gardner's seven multiple intelligences.

**M**aking connections is what more than a thousand ESL professionals of all stripes were doing over three days at the 35th annual conference of TESL Ontario, held in Toronto at the downtown Holiday Inn, November 22-24, 2007. The conference was the highlight event of ESL Week in Ontario.

The conference included over 100 different workshop sessions, plenary addresses, technology labs, symposia, luncheon speaker Dave Sperling of *Dave's ESL Cafe*, Friday night's formal dinner, Drummatix – the talented percussionists of Ballet Creole, a book and

learning materials display, a craft fair, the Annual General Meeting, and the second annual Panel Discussion.

With this cornucopia of events and professional development activities to choose from, there was something for everyone.

This year's assembly drew registrants from across the province and beyond. Workshops covered – or uncovered – topics aimed at the professional development of ESL practitioners from a broad range of teaching sectors - elementary, secondary, adult

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## From the Editor

**I**n this issue of *Contact*, we highlight some of the sessions offered at our 35<sup>th</sup> annual TESL Ontario conference in November 2007.

In her plenary session, "A Lexical Feast", **Jayne Adelson-Goldstein**, co-author of the *Oxford Picture Dictionary* Program, shares vocabulary learning strategies that help learners move from comprehension to production to ownership of their new language.

**Nina Spada** traces some of the developments and conflicting notions in the theory, research and practice of communicative language teaching over the last 30 years. Early notions – what some call 'myths' – of what CLT actually is have been re-examined and new understandings have emerged, especially related to the attention given to form and meaning and the role of corrective feedback for learners.

TESL Ontario once again hosted its annual **Panel Discussion**, bringing together six distinguished representatives from the major stakeholders in ESL, raising the profile of our work and setting

out some of the issues that emerge to challenge our profession.

In a conference workshop, **Cheryl McCarron**, owner of the ESL Shop, guided teachers through the ins and outs of choosing suitable texts and related materials for classroom use, emerging with a comprehensive checklist of criteria for appropriate text selection.

How do both ESL and non-ESL university students fare when it comes to note-taking in academic course lectures? **Jeannie Haller** reports her observations and conclusions from a research study conducted at York University. She goes on to make some recommendations.

The *Global Language Monitor* recently reported that the number of English words is now closing in on a million. What are ESL instructors – let alone their besieged students – to do in the face of this lexical explosion? **Marg Heidebrecht** describes an effective technique borrowed from elementary teachers to help adult ESL learners acquire new vocabulary and store it in long-term memory.

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## 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](mailto:teslontario@telus.net) or mailed on CD to:

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**Matthew Jackson** uses high-quality children's picture books as a stimulating resource in his adult ESL classroom. They not only help learners to activate schema but also provide visual scaffolds to help language acquisition and lead to deeper understanding of cultures from around the world. He also provides teachers with helpful hints on how to get started.

As an advocate for inclusion of immigrant parents in our educational systems, People for Education's Executive Director, **Annie Kidder**, brings to our attention some of the concerns of ESL students and their parents (who may also be students) in our school systems and points the way to some solutions.

Using a novel hands-on approach to learning English, in a program that he refers to as VSL – Video as a Second Language – York University's **Bruce Burron** engages international ESL students in a collaborative eight-week study module to produce a 10-12 minute video. The interest is high, the pressures are intense, and the learning outcomes are real and gratifying.

Three books are reviewed in this issue of *Contact*. In the first, **Bob Courchêne** introduces *Letters to a Young Teacher*, a new book by American educator and critic, Jonathan Kozol. Through a series of letters written to a first-year teacher, Kozol gently guides her towards "the joys and challenges and passionate rewards of a beautiful profession". This epistolary work is filled with Kozol's perceptive and energetic defence of children and teachers against the impositions of educational mandarins of all sorts.

**Martha Staigys** has a particular passion for grammar books. When a new one appears, she can't resist. In this case, it is Tony Penston's *A Concise Grammar for English Teachers* that catches her eye. Its features include a clear focus on problematic areas of grammar with ESL learners and helpful sections on error analysis

and correction. It's a user-friendly resource for all ESL teachers.

Robert Weissberg's recent book, *Connecting Speaking & Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction*, was written for the broad audience of teachers, writing tutors, teacher educators and researchers. Weissberg argues that second language learners benefit most from writing instruction when it is rooted in dialogue. Reviewer **Carolyn Samuel** aligns herself with many of the author's assertions.

While the TESL Ontario Conference was going on, not 100 metres away in Toronto's Metro Hall, 36 adult ESL learners were locked in mortal spelling combat in the city's first Adult ESL Spelling Competition, organized by **Channah Cohen** and colleagues. The spelling bee garnered strong media attention and promises to become an annual highlight that just happens to coincide with ESL Week.

With this issue of *Contact*, we extend best wishes to retiring TESL Ontario office administrator Jean Hamilton, and welcome her successor, Antonella Forgiarini-Aiello.

Readers will notice a new, cleaner design for *Contact* as we continue to strive for a readable and attractive professional development newsletter that reflects the diversity of interests and undertakings of our membership. As always, we welcome your feedback.

Finally, we are grateful for the continuing creativity and wise counsel of Bob Courchêne, whose contributions, both authorial and editorial, make *Contact* a pleasure to edit. We also thank Martha Staigys for her perceptive feedback and editorial suggestions.

Happy reading!

*Clayton Graves*

Editor

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*"Highlights from the  
35th Annual Conference  
of TESL Ontario."*

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## Making Connections (cont'd.)



ESL teachers examine live specimens of Lady Bird beetles, record their findings, and identify the eight different species found in Canada.

*“...the corridors of the  
Holiday Inn were  
buzzing from sun up to  
sundown.”*

*(Continued from page 1)*

ESL and LINC, and colleges and universities.

Once again, Dr. Bob Courchène of the University of Ottawa and Dr. Hedy McGarrell of Brock University brought together national and international scholars, researchers and practitioners for the Research Symposia.

The four themes were Vocabulary Development and Retention, Content-based Language Teaching, Native and Non-native English-speaking Teachers, and Literacy in ESL Populations

The Second TESL Ontario Panel Discussion welcomed six speakers who shared their expertise and experience, laying out their exciting plans for future endeavours and documenting the wide

range of issues that challenge all in the ESL field.

The panel was comprised of ESL representatives from the classroom, administration, universities, and both the public and private sectors.

Little wonder that the corridors of the Holiday Inn were buzzing from sun-up to sundown. Heartiest congratulations go to Conference Chair Cheryl Richman and her committee of Joanne Hincks, Barb Krukowski, Rodica Vasiliu and Salome Atandi. Special thanks also go to Sharon Rajabi for organizing the technology fair and to Jean Hamilton, who served once again as conference coordinator.

Watch for exciting details about the 36<sup>th</sup> conference for 2008. ■

## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### PLENARY SPEAKER:

# Jayne Adelson-Goldstein

Report by: Bruce Russell



Jayne Adelson-Goldstein is co-author of one of the most widely used vocabulary teaching resources, the *Oxford Picture Dictionary* series. She is also series director of Oxford's *Step Forward* (the Canadian version is authored by Sharon Rajabi of TESL Ontario).

**I**n this lively and engaging plenary session, Adelson-Goldstein engaged her packed audience with both amusing anecdotes and stimulating ideas about vocabulary development.

The address was organized into two sections: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) and the Five Stages of Vocabulary Acquisition.

Jayne began by demonstrating a teaching tip about non-verbal responses. Each participant received three different coloured answer cards signifying “yes,” “no” and “maybe.”

She then asked a series of questions and participants indicated

their answers by holding up the appropriate card.

The result of this exercise was two-fold: first, she got quick non-verbal feedback from the class (a speedy needs assessment) and second, the students got an idea of where they stood in relation to the rest of the class. The questions that related to vocabulary learning included “Do you like to read the dictionary?” She then presented a language awareness activity that can be used to motivate students to learn English.

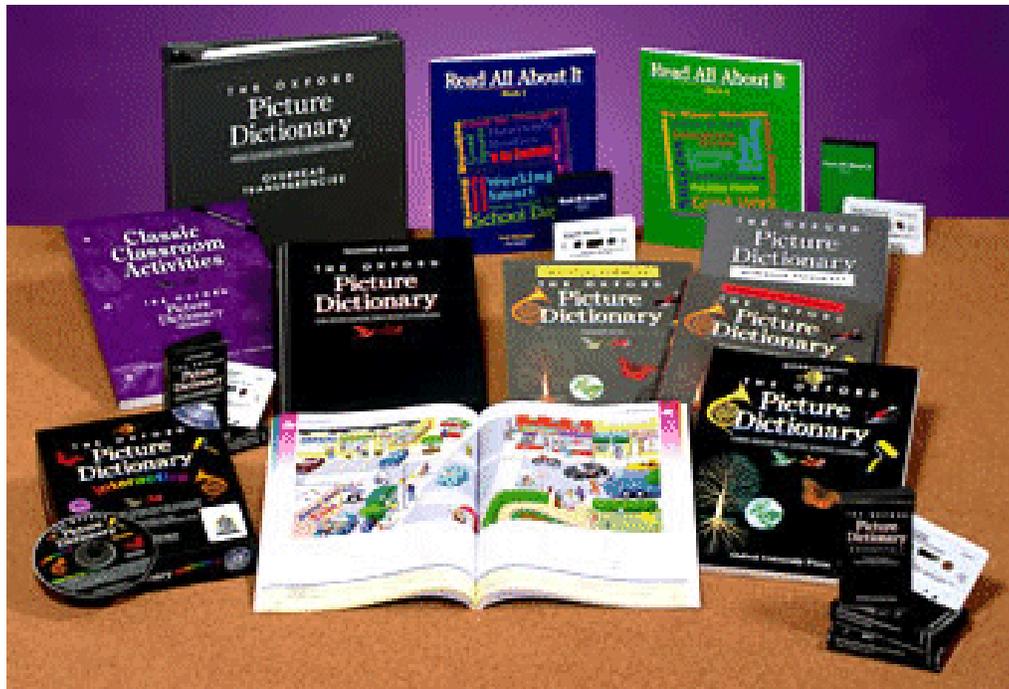
Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire about English language facts and compare their responses. Again, she used the coloured

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***“Do you like to read the dictionary?”***

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The Oxford Picture Dictionary Program for vocabulary learning, for beginning to intermediate adult ESL learners and young adults.

**“...teachers can ask students to hold up their coloured cards to get an idea of the strategies they use..”**

(Continued from page 5)

answer cards to quickly gauge how participants fared in the “test” (another good way to get students involved and interested).

### Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In the next part of the plenary she focused on vocabulary learning strategies.

Adelson-Goldstein asked participants to reflect on a checklist of vocabulary learning strategies. Which strategies are appropriate for learning L1 words and/or L2 words? Which strategies do participants have their students use in class? Which strategies do participants think students use on their own?

Applying the answer card strategy in the classroom, teachers can ask students to hold up their coloured cards to get an idea of the strategies they use. Their answers immediately give the teacher an idea of what strategies to develop in the classroom. Examples of some strategies listed under “encountering new words” were: *ask classmates for meaning, use a monolingual dictionary, use a bilingual dictionary, guess meaning from context*, etc.

Some vocabulary learning strategies, loosely identified under “ownership”, were: *group words that are related, look for cognates, connect a word to a personal experience, keep a vocabulary notebook*, and so on.

Adelson-Goldstein then described some effective vocabulary learning strategies under the following

(Continued on page 7)

Jayne Adelson-Goldstein's parting points about teaching vocabulary

1. **Raise** your students' awareness of the breadth of English.
2. **Teach** a variety of language learning strategies.
3. **Include** the five stages of vocabulary acquisition within lessons wherever possible.

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Adelson-Goldstein then described some effective vocabulary learning strategies under the following categories: **Determination**: analysis, L1 cognates, dictionary, **Social interaction**: checking with classmates, group work, **Memorization**: association, imagery, categorizing, **Cognitive growth**: repetition, word lists, labels, vocabulary notebook, and **Metacognitive development**: projects, media immersion, self-testing, conscious learning. She linked each of these five areas to sample classroom activities (e.g. **Social interaction**: labeling pictures in a group).

The second part of the plenary focused on five stages of vocabulary acquisition, for each of which she described classroom activities:

- **Get it** - classroom comprehension strategies: visuals, prior knowledge.
- **Remember it** - retention strategies: match, categorize, games.
- **Recognize it** - recognition out of original context strategies: variety of visuals, reading experiences, switch language focus but not topic [e.g. listening to reading].

- **Use it** - production in speaking and writing strategies: interview, info gaps.

- **Own it** - use of higher-level thinking skills strategies: problem solving, cross-cultural issues, negotiation.

One idea Adelson-Goldstein stressed in the **Recognize it** stage was the importance of varying the context in which new vocabulary is presented, a concept especially important at higher levels.

To illustrate the point, she gave the oft-experienced example of an instructor taking a class on a field trip. Instructors sometimes expect students to actively demonstrate the vocabulary they have learned in the classroom but are frequently disappointed to observe that the students were mystified by questions put to them by tour guides.

This example illustrated the point that the context of the classroom input (including the teacher's voice) must be varied as much as possible in the classroom, especially as learners advance in proficiency, to ensure maximum vocabulary retention. Adelson-Goldstein then gave many examples of how activities can be created to vary the context using the same material.

For example, a low level activity such as *identify new vocabulary with a picture dictionary* can be extended by using pictures from other sources.

Adelson-Goldstein ended this informative and helpful plenary session with three reminders about teaching vocabulary that will serve any of us well. ■

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*“Instructors [were] frequently disappointed to observe that the students were mystified by questions put to them by tour guides.”*

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### PLENARY SPEAKER:

## Dr. Nina Spada

Report by: Clayton Graves

### *The Evolution of Communicative Language Teaching: Myths and Reality*

**T**he notion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been in our consciousness for more than 25 years.

Over that time, the term has derived different definitions and interpretations, informed by developments in language learning theory, research and teaching practice.

These differences have resulted in conflicting conceptions about what CLT actually means and how teachers might implement it in second language classrooms.

Most descriptions of CLT emphasize the communication of meaning and messages, but there has been considerable disagreement about whether CLT should also include focusing learners' attention on isolated analysis and practice of language forms.

Nina Spada began by delineating two conceptualizations of CLT that have emerged over time: what are sometimes called a 'strong version' and a 'weak' version. The former advocates language instruction that focuses exclusively on meaning derived from naturally-occurring language input. The latter version advocates an approach to instruction that, while it values meaningful authentic input, also prompts learners to focus on language form in addition to meaning.

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***"...there has been considerable disagreement about whether CLT should also include focusing learners' attention on isolated analysis and practice of language forms."***

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Dr. Nina Spada is a Professor and Coordinator of the Second Language Education Program in the Curriculum, Learning and Teaching Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education - University of Toronto. She is the co-author of the award-winning textbook, *How Languages are Learned*, Oxford University Press. The first edition of the book won first prize in the applied linguistics section of the Duke of Edinburgh Book Competition.

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In general, theoretical support for the 'weaker' version has come mainly from the UK, while advocacy of the 'stronger' version has been more pronounced in North America.

One of the major influences in the 'strong' version has been the writings of Stephen Krashen, emphasizing what he terms 'comprehensible input'. Another has been the 'interaction hypothesis' of Mike Long.

In Krashen's view, the most effective instructional approach is to create conditions for learning L2 that are similar to what learners experienced in learning their first language. This fundamental notion led him to propose what has come to be called the 'comprehensible input' hypothesis.

In following this path, teachers attempt to provide learners a lot of varied, meaningful input just slightly beyond their ability – but still comprehensible. The assumption is that in order to make sense of this linguistic input, learners would be drawn naturally to integrate the new information into their developing language systems.

Intuitively, many teachers have been drawn to Krashen's hypothesis, since on a 'common sense' level it somehow seems to describe how we learn anything. His notions have also been used by many to guide the development of instructional programs for language learning and the materials used to support them.

Two questions naturally arose about Krashen's ideas, however: how do we determine what input is actually slightly beyond the learner's capacity?

## MYTHS

### Some Myths about Communicative Language Teaching

An exclusive focus on meaning  
No isolated grammar instruction  
No explicit feedback to learners

And how does that language input become comprehensible to the learner? What are the mechanisms to accomplish such learning?

One of the ways, according to ideas described in Mike Long's interactionist hypothesis, is that as learners interact with both native and non-native speakers, they negotiate meaning through such things as requests for clarification. Long famously asserts that you don't have to teach component grammatical forms to 'do conversations'. It is enough that the learner *participate* in conversations.

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***"Intuitively, many teachers have been drawn to Krashen's hypothesis..."***

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Underlying this approach to language learning is the conviction that such practices as isolated grammar instruction and explicit corrective feedback are inappropriate at best and counter-productive at worst. Another implication is that the use of the learner's first language is not necessary, and perhaps detrimental, as s/he negotiates meaning in L2.

At the classroom level, reading activity, for example, should simply draw from a broad array of authentic resources. The exponents of this approach deny the usefulness of focused analysis of texts, and they especially decry such analysis of specially composed or 'unnatural' texts, constructed in such a way that they focus the learner's efforts on specific linguistic elements and structures.

Dr. Spada pointed out that recent research has begun to question some of the commonly-accepted implications derived from Krashen and Long, especially as they affect actual classroom practice and the development of ESL programs.

Out of a growing body of observation and research, certain new understandings are emerging. There is no doubt that in communicative programs learners actually do develop high levels of fluency and facility in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

But on the other hand, considerable numbers of learners in CLT classes also struggle with many aspects of language – grammar and phonology being two of the more noticeable ones. And of these, grammatical difficulties

are particularly evident. The question is 'why?' Why aren't some L2 learners within CLT programs reaching their full learning capacities for becoming fluent in the second language?

Some explanations have been proposed:

1. **Insufficient time** – research is showing that learners need several thousands of hours of exposure to L2 to become comfortable with the new language.
2. **Inadequate input** – the simple fact of lots of exposure in no way guarantees that the input will be sufficiently deep or rich or varied to equip learners with a broad range of flexible language competencies. (In an aside, Dr. Spada noted that we have all met the grocery clerk who has a lot of language but can't read labels and warnings about the products s/he sells.)
3. **Incomprehensible input** – this problem often shows up in academic contexts in which university and college level learners struggle with course learning materials containing complex rhetorical features they cannot fathom.
4. **The ambiguous focus** of a lot of instruction – one telltale feature of inadequately-focused instruction is that learners are often not aware when an instructor has shifted

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*“At the classroom level, reading activity, for example, should simply draw from a broad array of authentic resources.”*

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the focus from the meaning of content to its linguistic form. When teachers fail to explicitly signal this shift, learners who are having difficulty may become even more confused. And even if instructors do give feedback, it must be understood by the learner in order to be helpful.

A prevailing myth about CLT is that communicative teaching should allow for no explicit feedback to learners about their errors. The notion of error is that it is simply evidence of a natural learning process and that correction of errors is disruptive to meaning. Many researchers and teachers alike swear allegiance to this notion.

But other observers and practitioners are now coming to advocate the use of what they term ‘form-focussed instruction’ to describe teaching strategies in which instructors who note language problems intervene by providing such feedback. Response to learners’ errors, claims Spada, should include both explicit and implicit messages. Explicit feedback could include such things as explanations of a grammatical rule to highlight a particular usage. An implicit form of feedback might be as subtle as a raised eyebrow or puzzled look.

Recent research is beginning to show that form-focussed instruction does, in fact, improve both the L2 learners’ knowledge and their ability to apply that knowledge. In general, effective instructional interventions help learners to develop more accuracy in

their use of language and do not negatively influence their fluency. Thus, while the approach to CLT may still imply a primary focus on meaning, attention to form is proving to be useful.

CLT adherents who adhere to the ‘strong’ version have traditionally advocated against grammar instruction. Learning the grammar of a language, they claim, should always be contextualized and embedded within authentic input in order to be meaningful, and thus useful, to the learner.

On the other hand, form-focused grammar instruction, which gives deliberate, intentional practice appears to help learners, particularly in learning new words and formulaic sequences, general rules, and exceptions to those rules. Intensive and specific practice also seems to help L2 learners notice features of texts that are often missed in less focused instruction. There is evidence that this approach also aids recall and retrieval of newly-learned information and helps learners to monitor their use of the new information.

How can we embed and integrate a focus on form within meaning-focused input? One way, says Spada, is to manipulate the frequency of a particular language feature by choosing instructional material carefully.

In addition, we can make the learner’s input salient by underlining targeted linguistic elements and using typographical enhancements such as boldface fonts. We can also draw attention to text organization signals to help learners notice and integrate these features into their language processing.

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***“How can we embed and integrate a focus on form within meaning-focused input?”***

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These are examples of meaning-based receptive language learning activity, but what about meaning-based output from learners? L2 learners must, after all, be communicators with language. The learning potential emerges, says Spada, from the fact that all learners are going to meet situations in which they both want and need to say something, but lack the necessary language to do so.

To allow for practice in producing language useful in situations outside the classroom, effective teachers can take initiatives to organize pair and group interactions, stimulate learners to present and share information, support and guide their efforts to interact through language, orchestrate interview situations – all activities with a communicative purpose.

Observant and resourceful teachers often notice those learners who continue to make errors that have become fossilized, or those who use circumlocutions as a strategy to deal with imprecise language. It is becoming increasingly clear that such learners benefit from both isolated and integrated form-focused instruction and will continue to need both even as their fluency and independence grow.

One of the more useful notions to emerge in communicative language teaching theory is called Transfer-Appropriate processing. It derives from the idea that we retrieve knowledge best in contexts that are similar to those in which we originally acquired it.

When we learn the meaning of a word, for example, we encode it with

a record of the perceptual and other cognitive processes that were active at the time that we learned it.

An interesting sidebar in Spada's address drew attention to the fact that learners who perform well on tests often don't perform well in communicative contexts.

However, in many self-identified CLT classrooms, implicit feedback to learners occurs frequently. The justification is that it doesn't interfere with the other learning processes that are going on or deflect the learner's attention away from constructing meaning.

One feedback mechanism often used effectively is the recasting of learner's language. In this type of feedback, the teacher reformulates the learner's utterance, for example:

Teacher: Do you watch TV last night?

Learner: Yes. I see *Survivor*.

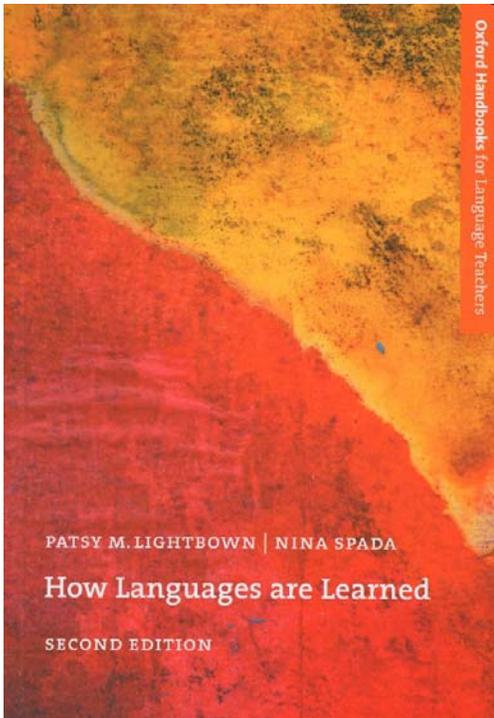
Teacher: Oh. I *saw* it, too.

The teacher implicitly corrects but doesn't stop the conversation. Recasts such as these are often helpful, particularly if the learner notices the correction. One problem, however, is that occasionally learners simply interpret the recast as a confirmation of what they said and in fact do not pick up on the teacher's correction at all.

Another instructional strategy used by many teachers to encourage learners to self-correct is to leave conversational gaps in expectation that the

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“...effective teachers can take initiatives to organize pair and group interactions...”



*How Languages Are Learned* (Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers) by Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada

(Continued from page 12)

student will self-correct, having inferred that the pause is made to prompt rethinking and recasting of the previous utterance.

In general, prompts have proved more beneficial than recasts for lower proficiency students; however, they appear to be equal in effect with higher-level learners.

Evidence is also beginning to accumulate that explicit feedback on error is beneficial to learners in con-

tent-focused classrooms. So, overall, there appears to be growing support for the 'weak' version of CLT.

In conclusion, Dr. Spada posed the question of whether the terms 'strong' and 'weak' to describe different approaches to communicative language teaching are useful at all. Perhaps it is time to abandon the terminology. In fact, she queried, have we entered a 'post-method era' in L2 language teaching? Methods, after all, are not always accurate prescriptions for actual classroom behavior.

Perhaps a more useful enterprise would be to focus on helping teachers do two things: expand their knowledge base and critically reflect on their own developing instructional repertoire.

Rather than getting bogged down in definitions, it might better serve our purposes to think critically about what we do in the classroom, moment by moment, to encourage and assist learning, whether it fits a previously defined instructional methodology or not.

But finally, says Spada, if we must hang out some shingle to identify our approach to L2 learning, a revised conceptualization of communicative language teaching should probably include: providing lots of comprehensible input, encouraging different types of output - both meaning-based and focused on form, arranging opportunities for learners to focus on language and content both separately and together, and providing clear feedback to learners when they need it. ■

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***“...Dr. Spada posed the question of whether the terms ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ to describe different approaches to communicative language teaching are useful at all.”***

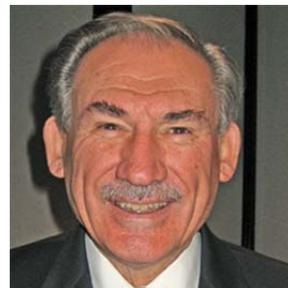
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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### TESL ONTARIO'S SECOND ANNUAL PANEL DISCUSSION

## Making connections for a common goal

Report by: Clayton Graves



Panel speakers (left to right, top row): Hanna Cabaj, Cliff Fast, Eleanor Good. (Second row): Calum MacKechnie, Dennis Mock, Joan Reynolds

*“...the purpose of the panel is to raise public and professional awareness...”*

**T**ESL Ontario's Second annual panel discussion is a forum for bringing together major stakeholders in the ESL field. As Executive Director **Renate Tilson** explained in her opening remarks, the purpose of the panel is to raise public and professional awareness of prominent ESL issues and point the way to cooperative solutions.

The six-member panel included representatives from adult ESL, LINC, elementary and secondary schools, universities, colleges and the private school sectors. This year's panel also welcomed a spokesperson

from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

**Hanna Cabaj** is Coordinator of the Continuing Education Adult Education Program with the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). She began by tracing the development of adult ESL programs since the 1960s and LINC since 1992. Fundamentally, as she pointed out, the credit road has always included some type of formal educational assessment, whereas the non-credit route has traditionally focused on language training for settlement purposes.

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Thirty years ago, the demand for adult ESL classes in Ontario communities was often expressed as simply a desire to ‘talk in English with my neighbors and friends’. The focus was decidedly local, informal and social. As for instruction, the prevailing understanding was that anyone who could speak English was equipped to teach ESL.

That was then. Today, in contrast, adult ESL programs in Ontario - both non-credit and credit - comprise a connected professional community with province-wide standards in training and accreditation, proficiency descriptors, organized curricula, assessment procedures, delivery standards and infrastructure supports. The development over the last thirty years has been steady and sure, moving from incidental and informal to a professional status.

As part of this developmental process, in 2000 TESL Ontario instituted a system of certification for non-credit instructors that mandated specific requirements, including a university degree, training from a recognized institution, a supervised practicum, and proof of proficiency in English. The certificate was made renewable every 5 years and required membership in TESL Ontario as well as ongoing professional development.

Cabaj drew attention to one of the most significant developments in adult ESL over the last 15 years - the emergence of the *Canadian Language Benchmarks*, a set of language descriptors which set national standards for proficiency.

As she pointed out, the CLBs have given everyone in adult ESL, whether as part of the federally-supported *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada* (LINC) or the province’s own adult education system,

a common language for describing language development and they are now moving into the college levels. Over that time the *Benchmarks* have also influenced curriculum development, assessment, program delivery, professional development, and the publication of learning materials.

Curriculum documents in ESL, she noted, are increasingly based on the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* and they have even helped local jurisdictions such as the TCDSB to realign their own curricula in that school board’s adult ESL programs.

The addition of a standardized assessment tool (A-LINC), and placement tests, has been further enhanced by initiatives in assessing the language skills of foreign-trained professionals, such as nurses, with the *Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses* (CELBAN).

The result has been that assessment instruments are themselves now speaking the same language nationally, an innovation that also helps to place learners appropriately when they move from program to program.

The last decade has also brought great improvements in standards of delivery of ESL programs, notably in student registration, assessment and placement procedures. An electronic data management system now provides accurate descriptions of classes offered at different sites and LINC service providing organizations (SPOs) are required to include a professional development budget line in their proposals for funding.

Resources for instructional use of computers as a necessary part of the language learning process are now also standard elements of ESL program planning, as are special provisions for literacy training, LINC classes, En-

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***“The last decade has also brought great improvements in standards of delivery of ESL programs...”***

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*(Continued from page 15)*

hanced Language Training courses for internationally-trained professionals and English for Special Purposes, among others.

Settlement support services have also been enhanced through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Host Programs which provide social support and assistance to newcomers, the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP), and the recognition of foreign professional credentials and training.

Moreover, there is now general recognition that language training most effectively occurs as part of the overall settlement process for newcomers to Canada. The news that as of 2007 school boards can now accommodate settlement counselors has added a welcome detail to the total picture.

All of these initiatives have been part of a larger goal of creating and maintaining a professional community with connections across sectors so that learners have access to full services and a clear learning path.

**Cliff Fast**, Operations Manager with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), serves as the lead in the implementation of LINC programs for the province, coordinating the work of the Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee (ORLAC), service-providing organizations and related professionals in the

delivery of language training across the province.

The overall goal of their coordinated efforts is to help plan expansions of services in delivering basic language instruction in order to facilitate newcomers' social, cultural and economic integration within the society.

Part of that endeavour includes the work of LINC Assessment Centres, which now use assessment tools that

are national in scope, bringing coherence to the process across the country. The program is also marked by common curriculum guidelines, benchmarked proficiency standards, and consistency in content themes. CIC maintains two offices in Ontario and the agency oversees 134 LINC service providing organizations (SPOs) in the province. These maintain 1452 different classrooms con-

taining 21,038 seats for learners. In the period April 2006 - March 2007, LINC Assessment centres processed more than 32,000 learners.

The centre in each community handles assessment processes, referrals and placement of clients. They also engage in program promotion, and help to connect organizations across the province. In addition, the centres organize graduation ceremonies and

*(Continued on page 17)*

*“...there is now general recognition that language training most effectively occurs as part of the overall settlement process for newcomers...”*

This Second Annual Panel Discussion on ESL was aptly titled, “Making Connections for a Common Goal.” An important part of that connecting process is becoming informed about the myriad ways in which ESL professionals are cooperating and meeting the challenges that confront us.

(Continued from page 16)

open houses, sponsor community meetings and conferences, deal with special issues and enable the sharing of best practices.

Furthermore, the centres initiate local professional development, participate in regional conferences and maintain an automated reservation system, a useful program management tool to support each community in managing their services. This tool also provides statistical feedback to CIC to help in future planning.

CIC also supports local professional development in such areas as child-minding, instruction, and administration within the LINC system. With the help and support of CIC, conferences are now held for administrators, child minders, ISAP and ELT.

Though CIC-funded programs are not open to Canadian citizens or refugee claimants, the agency does permit students to finish the level they are enrolled in if they acquire Canadian citizenship in that period, whereupon these learners are eligible to go into provincially-funded ESL programs, open to refugee claimants, refugees, landed immigrants and Canadian citizens.

**Eleanor Good** of the Thames Valley District School Board is presently employed as Learning Coordinator for ESL/ELD and Native Languages with the Thames Valley District School Board. Her responsibilities include providing leadership and program support to elementary and secondary ESL teachers, in 110 schools with 2200 ESL students.

She began by reminding us that it is the ESL learners themselves who are the *raison d'être* of our life and work. This focus was never more poignantly expressed than in the words

of one ESL learner, Eugene Garcia: "As I sit here I wonder, dear teacher, if you are able to tell when I am sinking in my spirit and ready to quit this incredible task. I walked a thousand miles, dear teacher, before I met you."

As she traced the recent history of ESL in Ontario, Good characterized the period of 2005-2007 as full of momentum and excitement.

One of the recent key initiatives has been the 2007 publication of a new Ministry ESL curriculum for Grades 9 to 12, a significant document that will guide schools and administrators towards a more standardized approach to both content and methodology in high school ESL across the province.

Good pointed out that high school students in Ontario need 4 English credits to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, and 3 of those credits may now be in ESL, a change that brings English language learners more clearly into the mainstream.

At the Elementary levels, however, ESL at this point is still not viewed as a subject, but as a resource for teachers who have L2 learners in their classes.

The 2005 publication, *Many Roots/Many Voices* was also in many ways a breakthrough document. Filled with ideas, resources and teaching/learning strategies, this user-friendly publication for instructors and administrators is already helping to make schools more inviting for ESL students and their parents.

Initiatives are also underway for supporting English language learners in kindergartens, and the Ministry of Education also promises a new resource document focused on students who come into Ontario schools with limited prior schooling.

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***"...it is the ESL learners themselves who are the raison d'être of our life and work."***

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In addition, a new version of the STEP document has provided teachers and administrators with an assessment tool for new arrivals, so that school staffs will have proper and adequate resources in place when students arrive. Thus, the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) have moved to more prominence in the educational system.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. For example, schools and teachers need to continue to improve their understanding of the needs of L2 learners and the nature of second language learning at both the theoretical and practical levels.

The need for increased funding and resources for ESL and ELD also remains, along with a more sharply defined system of accountability for the use of resources so that they find their way to meet ESL needs and are not re-directed to other uses. Recently, the Ministry has announced intentions to fund ELLs for five years, because research and practical experience shows that they need a longer time of support as they move towards fluency and competency with the language.

The Ontario ministry and school systems province-wide also have a role in continuing action and advocacy for ELLs, including continuing efforts to destigmatize ESL, in a concerted effort to avert school failure and dropouts.

In order to make schools more inclusive and inviting, efforts are underway to help schools and communities not only recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists within the province, but to highlight the demands for inclusion more clearly in school planning. Through co-ordinated initiatives with community groups such as *People for Education* and settlement

workers, the goal of making our schools more properly inclusive remains a challenge.

**Calum MacKechnie** is the Director of York University's *English Language Institute*. Since 1985 the English Language Institute has provided non-credit ESL courses for international students. MacKechnie has worked all over the world as a director of ESL Programs in universities, as head of adult ESOL services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, as director of International Education Associates in Langley, Washington USA and Dean of International Studies at the Northwest School in Seattle. For a number of years he also worked in Spain as Director of Studies for International House.

An important and exciting element of MacKechnie's presentation was providing an introduction to *Languages Canada*, a newly formed organization of both public and private language training providers, with a goal to make Canada into a prominent centre for international language study of English and French.

MacKechnie described the fragmentation that has existed for some time in Canada in the provision of language instruction for clients who are offshore. He contrasted Canadian efforts with those of both the UK and Australia, where provision of language services is well-organized and focused on attracting international language students.

He added that, within the federal and other governments, there has been increasing pressure for Canadian language training bodies to standardize and focus their efforts and resources so that Canada, too, can become a 'destination of choice' for those deciding to go abroad not only to study English but also to learn how to teach it.

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**“...there has been increasing pressure for Canadian language training bodies to standardize and focus their efforts and resources...”**

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In 2006, the Canada Language Council (CLC), whose membership was primarily in public sector language training, and the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS), which represented private providers, voted to create the new association to include all the accredited public and private language service providers. By March 2008 all members of the two bodies must have transferred their accreditation protocols to the new body.

Marketing the new association has already begun, with representation at the Berlin Fair in 2007 and at a conference in Calgary. The face of *Languages Canada* will be even more evident at a *Languages Canada* Conference, March 4 – 7 in Ottawa. The motto of the new body is “Two Languages/One Voice”, for its goal also includes French language learning.

The first and strongest efforts must, however, be to get those who wish to learn English and French to recognize Canada as their number one destination for quality English and French language training.

Within this mandate, *Languages Canada* is dedicated to assuring an international client base of the highest quality of its members’ language training/learning services. The organization will provide networking and professional development and work with all stakeholders in ensuring that Canada’s language training meets or even exceeds international standards. All members will have to adhere to strict quality assurance standards and maintain a rigorous adherence in their accreditation.

Another goal is to develop a self-sustaining operation which, through its own efforts as well as through government and corporate

participation, will make the organization viable.

*Languages Canada* has already stirred much interest in this country and abroad as the new venture lays a solid groundwork for our country’s future as a destination at the top of the list for language study. Visiting their website at [www.languagescanada.ca](http://www.languagescanada.ca), will keep interested parties up to date on the undertaking of this new venture.

**Dr. Dennis Mock** is President and Vice-Chancellor of Nipissing University in North Bay, a primarily undergraduate university with a reputation for excellence in teacher education, arts, science, business and nursing. In the period 1989-2000, he was at Ryerson University, latterly in the position of Vice-President, Academic.

Dr. Mock began by characterizing his own and Nipissing University’s role in ESL as one of support and advocacy for ESL providers in the north. Just as ESL teachers bring special sensitivity to the needs of learners, the University has a commitment to deliver personalized learning to help its L2 students become productive and happy participants in the society, one student at a time.

This is possible partly because the average class size at the university is 34 students, a fact that helps Nipissing to score consistently near the top for student satisfaction and access to faculty in the annual national survey of universities.

One of the features of the campus, which Nipissing shares with Canadore College, is the sizeable aboriginal population of 236 students, whose first language is Cree. There is also a small cohort of international students, many of whom require language support. Since a considerable number arrived in Canada 10 years or more ago,

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***“Languages Canada has already stirred much interest in this country and abroad...”***

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they also exhibit traces of fossilized language in their expressive language output and benefit from ESL instruction.

The University also links with North Bay newcomer groups through a Community Service Learning organization, offering L2 learners homework help in English, mathematics and science. There are also links with a native Canadian secondary school, a local literacy council and a local library.

The University also has a diversity committee devoted to special needs and interests in education. At present, Nipissing is working with others to create a North Bay Newcomers Network with a goal to attract more newcomers to Canada to the north. The committee gives presentations and maintains links with communities and government bodies across the north.

Because of the strong focus and work of the university's ESL professionals, the university now has a considerable number of ESL success stories. Dr. Mock related one in particular. Emily Ying, a high school physics teacher from China, who has been here for just four years. A year after her arrival, though she and her family had immersed themselves in Canadian life, she was unable to speak the language.

Three years later, with the help of focused ESL instruction and assistance she now tutors students in mathematics and science, in English. Meanwhile, her husband has graduated in computer science and recently got a job with a North Bay software company.

They now share in the community both as participants and contributors.

**Joan Reynolds** has been involved in the field of second language learning and adult education as an in-

structor and supervisor for over 15 years and is currently Chair of the Language Studies Department, International and Immigrant Division at George Brown College. Her special interests include occupation-specific bridging programs and workplace preparation for international professionals.

Ms Reynolds began with some statistics. In 2005, more than 140,000 immigrants arrived in Ontario.

Some 60,000 arrived with advanced professional and/or technical qualifications, but the vast majority of these were in need of further education and training, particularly in the English language. In total, about 70 per cent of immigrants to the Toronto area arrive here already highly-trained.

Around the province there are 24 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs), including two in which French is the language of instruction. These colleges serve 200 communities from one end of the province to another.

There are 150,000 full-time students and 350,000 part-time learners. In the college population, 15 per cent have another language in addition to English, and in the Greater Toronto Area, 31 per cent do not have either English or French as their first language.

Moreover, in the faculties of business studies, fully 66 per cent of students at Ontario's CAATs were born outside Canada. The same statistic holds for those enrolled in technology and health services faculties.

Currently, less than one-half of the high school graduates in Ontario go on to any kind of post-secondary education. This statistic is significant for the province's CAATs, since it is also

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***"...the university now has a considerable number of ESL success stories."***

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true that there are 94 million post-secondary students in the world.

The future of recruitment for Ontario's colleges seems clear: recruitment of Ontario high school students will diminish, but for overseas students it will increase. Reynolds pointed out that presently at George Brown College, 60 per cent of full-time registrants don't come directly from high school.

Though many candidates arriving at George Brown and other colleges are often already very well-educated, many are also working in jobs that they find unsatisfying. And fully two-thirds are females. They are coming in order to improve their job prospects, and most are confident of their ability to succeed.

The principal barriers that confront them, however, are time (they are anxious to get on with their studies and their lives), money (most have to earn a living as they study), and frustration at the lack of acceptance of their foreign credentials.

In response to the demand for competent professionals in the health care field, over the last two years, many foreign-trained nurses have enrolled in Enhanced Language Training programs and succeeded in moving on to certification. LINC courses aimed at internationally-educated professionals are also now in place at Mohawk, Centennial, Sheridan, Sir Sandford Fleming, Algonquin, La Cité, and Boreal Colleges.

Mentoring programs are also meeting with success, as are resource centres for employment. In addition, Bridging Programs are beginning to close the gap between re-training and job acquisition. Presently there are 12,000 enrollees in such programs.

One such bridging project aims to train college-level teachers for tech-

nology, hospitality and community services. Applicants are required to have sufficient educational credentials and teaching experience in their home countries, and to have passed language qualifications at CLB Level 7.

The training course includes high-level language training, an Introduction to the Workplace module updated training in teaching techniques, an online learning component and career coaching, with workplace experience at a CAAT. So far, students from China, India, Bulgaria and Hungary have been enrolled.

Another recent initiative is a program titled Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIIT). The goal is to develop a more effective integration process for foreign-trained professionals. One part of the project included researching the language demands of the CAAT programs themselves. In a welcome move, this project has also helped CAATs to make stronger connections among themselves.

Challenges and needs for the future include language training that is occupation-specific. In addition, many see the need for more flexible delivery models and sustainable long-term financing.

Part of the picture includes the critical role of standardized assessment tools and the need to build on existing partnerships among concerned stakeholders.

As Ms Reynolds pointed out, the field is a going concern, with some successes already registered but new and emerging challenges to confront.

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***“...over the last two years, many foreign-trained nurses have enrolled in Enhanced Language Training programs and succeeded in moving on to certification.”***

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### Choosing Your Textbook

Session presenter: Cheryl McCarron



Cheryl McCarron owns The ESL Shop, a store that specializes in ESL publications and materials. With experience as an ESL teacher and in the publishing industry, she brings a wealth of knowledge to the task of choosing suitable materials for classroom use at all levels.

*“After a disastrous fire destroyed her first business...Cheryl regrouped.”*

**W**ho could be better qualified to help teachers in choosing a new course textbook than someone who evaluates ESL learning materials every day and is an ESL teacher into the bargain?

That someone turned out to be Cheryl McCarron, owner of The ESL Store, a shop in the west end of Toronto, specializing in ESL learning materials.

After a disastrous fire destroyed her first business across the street in November 2006, Cheryl regrouped and reopened at her new location in 2007. Located near a major public transit hub in the city, The ESL

Store is accessible to most teachers in the Greater Toronto Area.

Cheryl began the session by asking the workshop group what features they consider most important in choosing a new course text.

The list of their criteria included flexibility, attractiveness, thoroughness, quality of information, relevance to the learners' needs, the fit of the material with the CLB levels and cost.

Before the session divided into small teams to evaluate sets of books that she had brought, Cheryl asked the

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workshop group to develop their initial suggestions.

That discussion yielded an annotated checklist of questions under five criteria: content, vocabulary and structures, exercises, format and physical features, and cost.

### Checklist for choosing texts for classroom use

#### 1. Content – topics, coverage and relevance

- Is the content important to the learners' lives?
- Is there an obvious carryover into their communicative needs in life outside the class?
- Does the material fill important gaps in learners' knowledge?
- Is there a variety of topics in the book?
- Does the material explore just a few topics in depth or many topics in less detail?
- Is the structure of the text material predictable for learners and new teachers?
- If a given theme is not immediately appropriate, can a teacher easily adapt the con-

tent and make it work with the class?

- Are the themes/topics in the book organized in a logical way?
- Is the content appropriately graded by difficulty level?
- Does the practice material move at an appropriate pace?
- Are the learning activities clear to the students?
- Is the content accurate and up-to-date?
- Are the topics the same as those found in other similar books?
- Have the authors found original angles from which to approach standard topics?
- Is there a subject/topic/skill index anywhere in the book?
- Does the content link learners to other media? – internet, TV, newspapers, online companion websites
- Does the material provide correlations with the Canadian Language Benchmarks?

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**Text  
Selection  
Checklist**

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**2. Vocabulary and Structures – amount, variety, application to outside world**

- Does the text focus on one language skill, two related skills, or cover all four?
- Is there enough vocabulary introduced in each lesson to match learner's abilities?
- Is the vocabulary recycled through the teaching/learning themes?
- Are the sentence length and amount of text in a given activity/unit reasonable, sparse, or overloaded?
- Does the language represent common North American usage and expressions?
- Does the material include elements such as a glossary or a dictionary?

**3. Exercises – suitable for level, varied types, transfer of skills acquired**

- Is the number of grammar points appropriate for the level of students?
- Is the sequence of grammar points appropriate and logical?

- Do the language structures increase in complexity to suit the growing fluency of the learners?
- Will learners be able to understand on their own the instructions that set out the tasks?
- Do the exercises develop comprehension and test knowledge of important reading and comprehension skills such as main ideas, details, and sequence of ideas?
- Are skills integrated with the idea content or practised separately?
- Are there good transitions within the four language skills in a unit?
- Are the exercises closely related to the reading or speaking activities that accompany them?
- Are there different types of comprehension activities?
- Is more support offered to learners at the beginning of a unit/activity than at the end?
- Do the exercises refer to realistic activities and situations?
- Do the exercises provide practice in different types of written work (sentence completion, spelling and dictation, guided composition)?

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*Text*  
*Selection*  
*Checklist*

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#### **4. Format and Physical Features – design and layout, graphics, satellite materials**

- Are the type size, the font and the placement on the page appropriate, clear and easy to read?
- Does the textbook have useful and interesting ‘add-ons’? – CDs, DVDs, tapes, tests or test generators
- Are the pages pleasing to the eye and well-organized in layout and design?
- Do the headings and titles accurately identify what the units/activities are about?
- Is there a variety of types of graphic material – photos, line drawings, charts, figures, graphs, cartoons, sidebars and boxes?
- Do the graphics aid comprehension of the material or do they distract and confuse?
- Are the pages crowded with information (overloaded) or very open?
- Is the physical size of the book convenient for students to carry around?
- Is the book durable and well-constructed?

#### **5. Cost – manageable, reasonable, inclusive**

- Is the book too expensive for students or the school to purchase?
- How many copies of a given text would be needed?
- Are extra features included in the cost of the book or are they separate?

With this checklist, the session then divided into small teams to look critically at an array of texts of similar types: grammar texts, integrated language programs, listening modules, writing, speaking, and so on.

Because this session drew participants into the discussion right from the start, it was a valuable two hours of professional development. Teachers were able to share their experiences, concerns and questions on this important aspect of classroom life – the choice of texts. ■

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***Text  
Selection  
Checklist***

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### VSL—Video as a Second Language Session presenter: Bruce Burron



*“...they learn a lot of new technical vocabulary related to video production.”*

**V**SL - Video as a Second Language - is part of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at the English Language Institute of York University.

The program attracts international students primarily from China, Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Some of the students in the program stay for as short as two months, while others remain up to a year. Students who successfully complete the course fulfill the language requirement in their course of studies at York.

The video production course is both content and skills-based, with the end product being a 10 – 12-minute video. The course engages the students in co-operative learning and at the same time helps them to achieve more native-like speech, as they not only interact while producing the final video, but also adopt speaking roles in

the film. The processes of rehearsal and performance are especially helpful in improving students' pronunciation, especially intonation. At the same time, they learn a lot of new technical vocabulary related to video production, computers and acting. Since they are also engaged in writing many drafts for their scripts, their writing exhibits considerable improvement.

The course begins with two weeks of theatre exercises to build group solidarity and help students become more comfortable with each other in a new setting. The exercises enable them to interact in ways that are often outside their 'comfort zone', particularly in putting their bodies into positions that, for some at least, are new and strange.

In one exercise, referred to as “mirroring,” pairs of students face each

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other and try to replicate the exact movements of one another other without speaking. Another calls upon them to stare at each other in an effort to make the partner self-conscious. Curiously, this activity helps the students lose some of their self-consciousness when they are called upon to give presentations, as they often are in their academic courses.

Another theatre exercise asks them to cooperatively build a fantastic machine, inventing the moving parts with their bodies and adding sounds that the machine might make. Still another is an experiment in improvisation, called “Last Seat on the Bus.”

Following the theatre exercises, students tackle the major learning project. It begins with analyzing videos to get plot ideas and brainstorming their own story concepts. For the next six weeks, teams of students take on writing, rehearsing, shooting, editing and producing their video.

During the scriptwriting segment, the instructor helps the teams to produce short dialogue lines since these are easier not only to perform but also to remember. Sometimes, students need extra material to help in the flow and focus. Rehearsals start even as the script is being completed.

This last stage – shooting the video – takes perhaps the longest time; a whole day’s shooting might yield only two minutes of usable material. In this process, there is a lot of repetition, but this is helpful, as the student actors stumble over their lines and have to do many ‘takes’.

Each interruption is, of course, an opportunity to try something again or revise the script. The actors usually begin with just their ‘reading voices’, but their goal is to arrive at a point



Bruce Burron teaches at York University's English Language Institute.

where they will use the ‘real’ speaking voices of their characters. Some even have to be reminded that they are not their character. Burron often finds, to his initial surprise, that when they become involved with the video the less confident classroom speakers often end up taking more risks with the language than the more fluent speakers.

Recently a class in the York program produced a video titled “Godzilla vs. the Tower.” They began by viewing a Godzilla movie and choosing the most promising plot elements. It, in fact, became a sort of template for their own production – a parody of the many Godzilla movies produced over the decades.

Group discussion after the viewing sessions helped the scriptwriters to settle on characters, some of whom had to come from an outside world. In this story, they decided to

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***“...when they become involved with the video the less confident classroom speakers often end up taking more risks with the language...”***

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*(Continued from page 27)*

include the awesome CN Tower in Toronto as a major character. The cast was rounded out with an evil scientist (a Professor from York) named Dr. Advil Evil, a bumbling mayor and his security staff, a news announcer and some disaster victims. The story also included some sympathetic human characters, including a homesick university student named Ping and her Korean grandmother back home.

The plot centred around an unbelievable disaster at York University.

As the voice-over dialogue explained, “We were just starting noun clauses when suddenly a monster appeared....”

The remaining plot elements involved scenes of conflict, homesickness, confusion, and the ultimate triumph of the ‘good guys’. Shooting was done in classrooms, film studios and downtown Toronto locations. The production team also built sets and props for the video.

What benefits do the students get out of the classes? As Bruce Burrton explains, “They learn a lot of ‘nuts and bolts’ English – from the language they need to interact appropriately, to the technical vocabulary related to drama and technology. The students also acquire a lot of useful colloquial language. But in addition there are important affective outcomes, such as learning how to cooperate in analyzing and carrying out a project. It is also noticeable that virtually all the students show a marked improvement in self-confidence.”

At the level of pronunciation, they discover the importance of sentence, word and syllable stress in English. Repeated practice with their lines in the script also gives them practice in accurately conveying not only meaning



Monster film demonstrates sharp clauses.

***“We were just starting noun clauses when suddenly a monster appeared...”***

but also emotional intent. To make the point, Burrton often demonstrates with humorous sentences such as: “What’s that in the road ahead? and “What’s that in the road? A head?”

An effective aid to English intonation, Burrton has found, is singing the intonation patterns for these young adult learners. When it is evident that the meaning of their utterances has got lost, he provides corrective feedback.

With all these positive outcomes, it is no wonder that this approach to learning English works. It produces a good dynamic for the classroom and students are eager to come to class and devote extra time to the project. And not only that, each student in the course leaves with a product in hand that demonstrates their progress in the language. It is a ‘win/win’ situation for all. ■

## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

# Implications of Academic Listening Comprehension and L1/L2 Note-Taking

Report by session presenter Jeannie Haller

**O**ne of my children carries around a keychain stamped with the expression, “*I Smile because I Have NO IDEA WHAT’S GOING ON.*” When I asked about its significance, she told me that as a server at a nearby *Starbucks* she regularly deals with customers who rattle off their orders for foreign and extravagant (at least to me) beverages.

I’ll give you one such order: “*Give me a half de-caf, half-caffeinated, vente sugar-free vanilla, non-fat, 180-degree latte.*” She smiles and pretends to understand the customer’s order, while frantically trying to interpret it.

This conversation reminded me of the dilemmas that university students sometimes face in college and university lecture halls. They listen, they transcribe, and they pretend to understand, but occasionally – perhaps even often – don’t know what is really going on.

I explored this issue in a recent research paper, as I was curious about how both non-ESL and ESL students go about interpreting lectures and taking lecture notes.



Jeannie Haller is a graduate student in York University's Applied Linguistics Program.

My findings were not surprising, but they did point out some of the problems that both non-ESL and ESL students face in the lecture hall. In what follows, I shed some light on these issues and suggest some ways that teachers and lecturers (myself included), might better help our students understand our lessons.

### The Study:

I studied 14 subjects, equally divided between non-ESL (7) and ESL university students (7). I photocopied and analyzed three consecutive sets of

(Continued on page 30)

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***“Give me a half de-caf,  
half-caffeinated, vente  
sugar-free vanilla, non-  
fat, 180-degree latte.”***

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lectures notes from each informant. Each informant also completed a questionnaire. This was followed by a short interview.

### Findings:

1. Both groups faced academic listening comprehension problems.
2. All the subjects in both groups expressed a need to improve their note-taking skills.

The ESL students experienced much greater difficulty in both listening and note-taking than the non-ESL group.

I divided my findings into two major sections: academic listening comprehension and academic note-taking. In each section I examined five features:

- The role of background knowledge.
- Lecturer's rate of speech.
- Lecturer's use of visual aids.
- Students' recognition of important points.
- Students' recognition of vocabulary and idioms.

### Background Knowledge

Not surprisingly, both groups found listening to lectures much easier if they had prior knowledge of the subject. Previously-known concepts and terms were more easily grasped. However, in my qualitative findings (the interviews) I discovered a significant difference between each group's attitudes.

The non-ESL participants without background knowledge in their courses were much more relaxed and less concerned about listening to and understanding the material, and taking notes, than the ESL informants. Their ESL counterparts, on the other hand, expressed great anxiety and frustration in these classes, especially as fatigue set in near the end of a lecture.

### Lecturer's Rate of Speech

Although an equal number from each group felt that lecturers often spoke too quickly, the ESL students struggled in trying to follow the professor. They expressed feelings of fear, helplessness and frustration as they tried to keep up with the flow of information.

This sometimes led them to give up completely - not listening and taking no notes at all. By the end of some lectures the ESL students reported that they felt exhausted and over-

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***“ESL counterparts... expressed great anxiety and frustration in these classes.”***

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(Continued on page 31)



### Linguistic Profile York University Students

- 44 per cent of undergraduate students were born outside of Canada.
- 40 per cent of undergraduate students had been in Canada less than five years.
- 41 per cent speak a language other than English at home.
- 68 different languages reported.

—Source: York University Undergraduate Student Survey 2002

(Continued from page 30)

whelmed. One ESL student described the experience this way:

It would be easier if he slowed down. I kept my head down and wrote the whole time. Nothing went in my head during lectures. Just on paper. I never asked one question the whole time because I was writing, writing, writing. Maybe twenty more minutes just to let us ask questions, to catch our breath, and to be more relaxed would help us. It would help me, I know.

In similar situations, however, the non-ESL students simply expressed boredom, or confessed that they became easily distracted.

Interestingly, two of the ESL students who wrote in their questionnaire that following the lecturer was 'easy', confessed later in the interview that there were times when their class-

mates' questions made them realize that they had completely misinterpreted important concepts.

### Lecturer's Use of Visual Aids

Flowerdew & Miller (1997, p.42) declare that making notes on both oral and visual aspects of a lecture presents "a more complex challenge to comprehension than does note-taking based on a simple spoken delivery."

My study revealed that both groups found visual aids such as PowerPoint, outlines and *chalk-and-talk* instructional techniques useful, but some from each group criticized PowerPoint presentations. They often noted that PowerPoint presentations distracted them from following the presentation while they were trying to take lecture notes.

(Continued on page 32)

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***"ESL subjects stated in the follow-up interview that they 'often' missed important points of a lecture..."***

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(Continued from page 31)

One non-ESL informant expressed it this way: “I looked at visuals and didn’t write.”

In a general sense, however, most found the visuals that accompanied lectures useful. One suspects that variety in the type and presentation of visual material may be the key here. In other words, instructors who vary their technique of using visuals may more be more successful at presenting the information they want to get across than those who rely on the same type of visual for all the content.

### Recognition of Important Points

Some of the non-ESL students occasionally missed important points in a lecture.

As one informant stated:

Sometimes the professor says too many important things and then quickly moves to the next thing. It is unclear what will be important for the exam. Yes, because like, he sometimes stresses almost everything! Like this is important for the exam! So, like, you don’t know what’s important for the exam.

Another non-ESL student reported:

I can write and not listen. It’s all going through my ear and I’m not listening, only writing.

Still, when I examined the non-ESL students’ notes, I found that these students often did *not* discriminate between important and unimportant points. In his notes, the student tried to write down *everything* the professor said and did not edit out unnecessary words such as articles and prepositions.

Most of the ESL subjects stated in the follow-up interview that they ‘often’ missed important points of a lecture because they became ‘stuck’ on unknown vocabulary and idioms. Moreover, in their preoccupation with note-taking, they often did not recognize the lecturer’s discourse markers.

One ESL student spoke of her frustration with a professor who spoke too quickly without using apparent discourse markers:

I took this personality course last semester and the prof, she was so fast! Sometimes she was kind of murmuring so I couldn’t follow her. Sometimes, and usually, I missed important points that were not very clear. She just kept on saying and saying and saying and she didn’t make any stops or breaks. Nothing. Like, she’s just talking and talking and fast and sometimes it’s in her mouth, like it’s kind of babbling and not making very clear. So, that course, that course, those lectures just freaked me out. I tried to follow her and I could not. I used to get stressed.

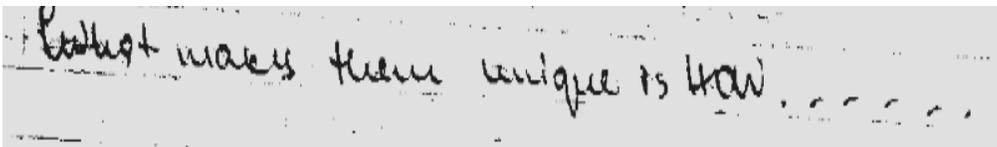
She mentioned feelings of isolation and lowered self-esteem as the course progressed:

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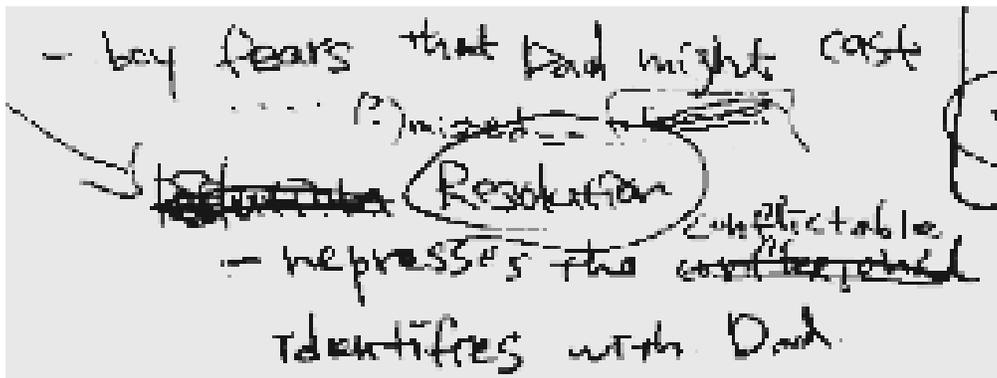
**“Non-ESL students had fewer problems recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary and idioms ...”**

- We have examined four schools of ethics over the past few weeks
- Utilitarian – the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people within the market

Some students attempt to transcribe, word for word, what the lecturer has said, including all the articles. Their notes often do not discriminate between important and unimportant.

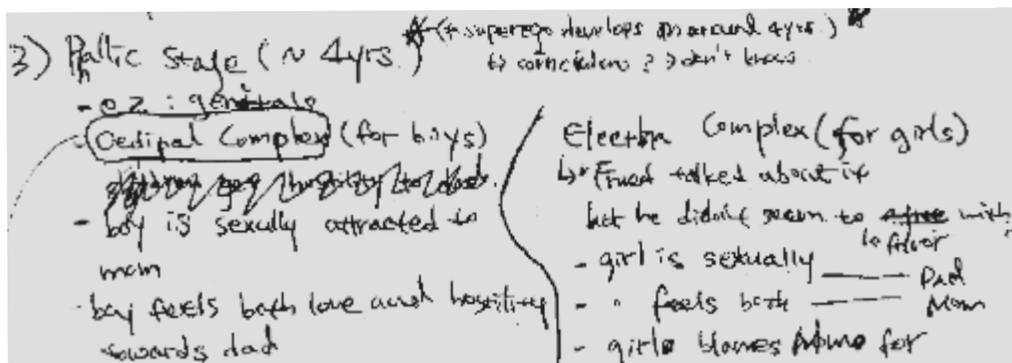


This ESL student's notes show many incomplete sentences that support her claim. Note how she uses ellipses dots that trail off as she appears to lose the train of ideas.



Another ESL subject expresses similar frustration in her notes, which contain many incomplete sentences, cross-outs and question marks

Samples of Student Lecture Notes



Another example of incomplete sentences and cross-outs.

(Continued from page 32)

I thought that I'm the only one that had this problem and that this is my second language, or what I heard is not as perfect as other students. I don't know if other students had the same problem, too. She was, like, very fast so I thought that it's me probably. So, I thought that students with their first language would be more comfortable. So, I don't know...

### Recognition of Vocabulary and Idioms

Non-ESL students had fewer problems recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary and idioms although one informant dryly stated, "Chemistry profs are a little difficult to understand."

Again, the ESL group had more difficulties, with more than half the group stating they 'often' or 'very often' become 'stuck' in class. "I become frustrated and stop writing," said one ESL subject.

### Recommendations

It seems clear that first-year students may need to be *formally* taught note-taking techniques and how to listen actively to lectures, as part of their program. Indeed, a compulsory course in these two areas might in fact be contemplated for *all* students.

Clear and comprehensible instruction by qualified instructors about academic note-taking and listening would no doubt also help students to be better prepared and more organized for the demands of the lecture hall.

In addition, administrators might also institute a course of professional development for instructors at post-secondary levels that would focus on effective academic presentation strategies.

The content might include how to modulate their delivery, how to include strong discourse markers and how to monitor their use of idioms and subject-specific jargon.

It seems clear from this study that both non-ESL and ESL students would benefit from intensive and adequate preparation for effective listening and note-taking in their academic lectures. ■

### References

Flowerdew, J. & Miller, L. (1997): The teaching of academic listening comprehension and the question of authenticity. *English for Specific Purposes*. 16 (1), 27-46.

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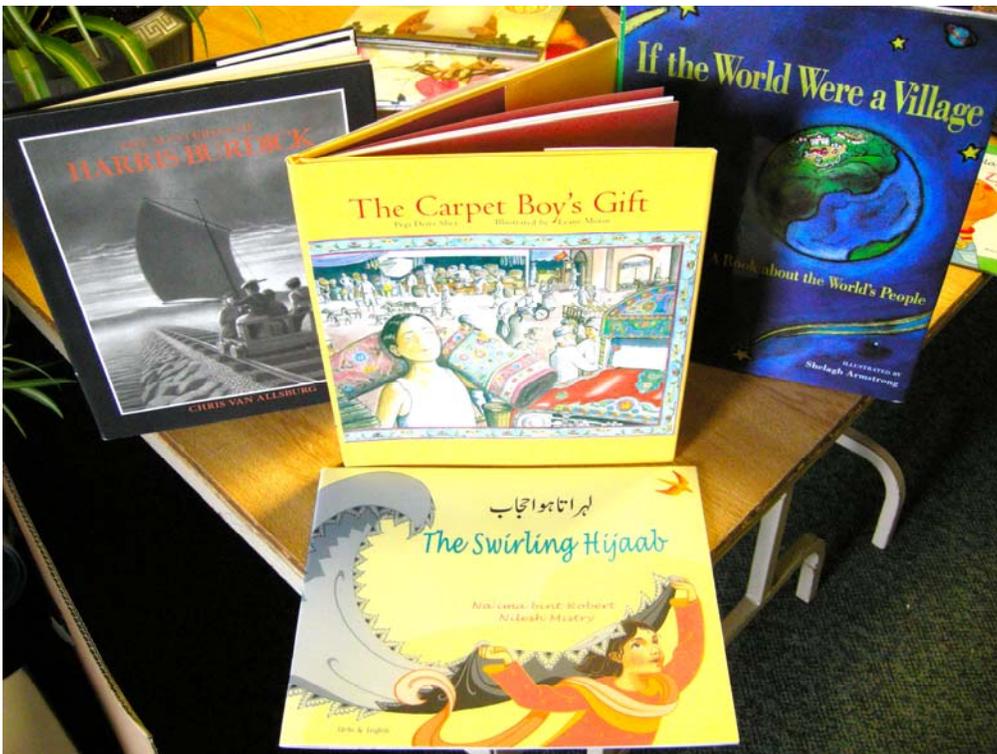
***"It seems clear that first-year students may need to be formally taught note-taking techniques..."***

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

# High Interest Picture Books for English Language Learners

Report by presenter Matthew Jackson



Children's picture books are a rich and appealing resource for language learning with adolescent and adult ESL learners.

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*“I wondered if my enthusiastic overtures of using picture books with adults would be politely dismissed...”*

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**P**icture books for adults? Don't such books belong in elementary schools? The array of quality picture books I had managed to put on display at November's Making Connections Conference seriously challenged the popular view that books with pictures are for youngsters.

However, I must confess that, faced with 17 experienced educators of Adult ESL, I wondered if my enthusiastic overtures of using picture books with adults would be politely dismissed as the ranting of an eccentric presenter.

Could my presentation do justice to the benefits of using picture books with adults? Furthermore, could I avoid being labelled eccentric?

Working with Japanese teachers in the summer had taught me a lesson in respecting the experiences and cultural capital that adults bring to class.

Unlike young children, adults have many rich life experiences that they are able to draw on. Activating

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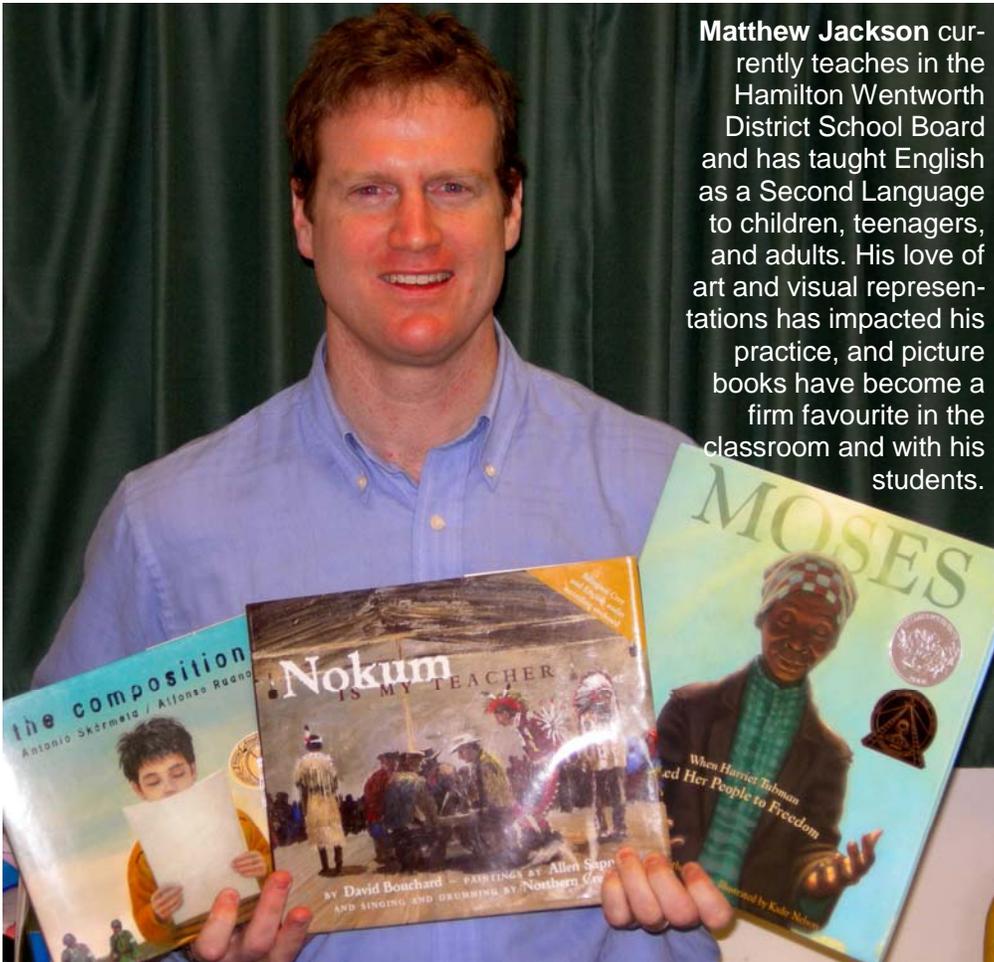
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*“...why should adults be any less appreciative of visual aids than children?”*

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### How to start using picture books

- Expose yourself to a wide variety of quality picture books by perusing an independent bookstore and getting a feel for some the visuals and content of the books.
- Focus on your class and the needs of the students. The cultural backgrounds and personal experiences and interests of your students are a great place to start.
- Explore specific study units using picture books. Units on migration, global issues, and current events can resonate with new Canadians.
- Carefully consider the appropriateness of picture content for age and level of students, and for its portrayal of culture, gender, religion, and other issues that require sensitivity.
- Display the books and encourage students to explore them. Build time into instruction to allow students to view, read, and discuss the books. Break times can become informal book viewing times for some students.
- Reading a picture book, or parts of a book, aloud can be done with all ages. It allows students to relax and develop receptive language, while the pictures help to scaffold content and meaning.
- Empathize with the character in the book. How did s/he feel? What challenges did s/he have to overcome when they arrived in Canada? Pictures often convey feelings and emotions better than words. Discuss challenges faced by the students. Some students may want to talk about the character rather than themselves, others may want to relate personal experiences.
- Picture books around a similar theme, such as shopping and markets around the world can be displayed while that theme is the focus. The sensory detail in the pictures can stimulate memories and create opportunities for rich dialogue.
- Ask for student feedback. What issues are they interested in? Use this for future planning.
- Develop a collection of theme or issue based picture book resources that can be used repeatedly.



**Matthew Jackson** currently teaches in the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and has taught English as a Second Language to children, teenagers, and adults. His love of art and visual representations has impacted his practice, and picture books have become a firm favourite in the classroom and with his students.

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***“Many adult learners of English find the intricacies and inconsistencies of the language a real challenge.”***

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(Continued from page 35)

these in a meaningful way became a goal that led me to read aloud *Kamishibai Man* by Allen Say to a group of Japanese teachers.

Seeing their reaction to a familiar tale of Japanese childhood and noting their appreciation for the thoughtful choice of reading material convinced me that quality picture books can activate schema and provide visual scaffolds that help with English language acquisition. After all, why should adults be any less appreciative of visual aids than children?

The picture books on display at the conference contained true works of art that the adults in the room were quick to appreciate. Allen Sapp’s oil paintings of Cree community life in northern Saskatchewan, in *The Song within My Heart* by David Bouchard belong in a gallery, yet here we can access them through an outstanding story about a young boy who is getting ready to go to a pow-wow.

Ted Lewin’s paintings in *How Much? Visiting Markets Around the World* create such intricate visual detail that the reader can almost smell the

(Continued on page 38)



Renowned painter Allan Sapp is a Cree elder in Saskatchewan. In *The Song Within my Heart* his evocative illustrations complement David Bouchard's lyrical story of a young First Nations boy preparing for his first pow-wow.

***“Stories of starting life in a new land provide excellent stimuli for adults ...”***

*(Continued from page 37)*

aromas and hear the sounds of the flower markets of India or the floating market of Thailand. Rich sensory detail is much easier to describe using Lewin's paintings as a starting point.

Frane Lessac's illustrations in *On the Same Day in March* by Marilyn Singer takes us around the world exploring weather and lifestyle across continents. E. B. Lewis's outstanding illustrations in *My Rows and Piles of Coins* by Tololowa M. Mollel transport the reader to the markets of Tanzania.

*Shy Mama's Halloween*, by Anne Broyles, relates the story of a Russian mother, recently arrived in the United States, and her struggle to understand Hallowe'en as her children embrace it. *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi tells the story of a Korean girl who is deciding which English name she should choose to replace her Korean name. Stories of starting life in a new land provide excellent stimuli for adults to share and explore their own reasons for migrating.

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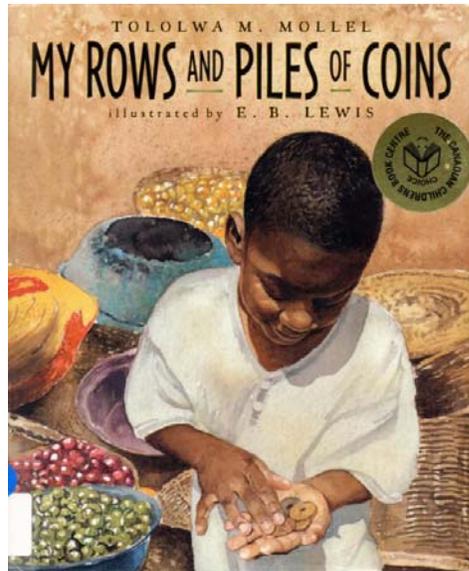
Many adult learners of English find the intricacies and inconsistencies of the language a real challenge. Humour is a good way of alleviating language learning frustration. Have you ever wondered what the saying, “As snug as a bug in a rug” would look like? The peculiarities of idioms are brought to colourful life in *Monkey Business* by Wallace Edwards.

Homonyms and homophones can be a tricky topic. Is *wave* a verb or a noun? What’s the difference between stairs and stares? The perils of English grammar are visually represented in *Did You Say Pears?* by Arlene Alda.

Stories of oppression and war are increasingly told through the medium of picture books as sensory detail, mood, and inference can be most effectively conveyed through art. The life of Harriet Tubman is revealed through Kadir Nelson’s outstanding artwork in *Moses* by Carole Boston Weatherford. *The Carpet Boy’s Gift* by Pegi Deitz Shea retells the story of Iqbal Masih, 12, who was shot and killed in Pakistan for daring to campaign against child slavery.

There is an increasing wealth of bilingual picture books available, and the inclusion of first language alongside English is a useful teaching tool. *Redh Raydhinig Huudh!* by Maya Marlabaad provides the classic story with Somali/English text – a great resource for exploring cultural literary traditions. A personal favourite is *Journey through Islamic Art* by Na’ima bint Robert and Diana Mayo. This story, in Urdu and English takes a young girl on a journey through the wonderful art and architecture of the Islamic world.

Words aside, there are stories told through visual representation only. *Museum Trip* by Barbara Lehman is a visual story sequence that tells the story



of a boy on a class trip who is transported into a world of mazes hidden behind a secret door in a museum.

Chris Van Allsburg’s *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* provide the most mysterious black and white pictures that scream “Engaging”. These books prove that critical thinking and creativity need not be restricted to the level of English one has acquired.

As the teachers attending the presentation explored the resources, they enthusiastically picked a favourite book and related details of how they would use this with the adults they teach. It appeared they too could see the benefits of using quality picture books with adults learning English.

I asked them to record their lesson ideas for our mutual benefit, from which I have created a lesson plan database using picture books. Finally, and this should definitely be noted, I was not viewed as eccentric!

If you would like a copy of a detailed bibliography, a picture book lesson plan database, or any further information, please email Matt at: [mattthew.jackson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:mattthew.jackson@hwdsb.on.ca) . ■

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**“Finally, and this should definitely be noted, I was not viewed as eccentric!”**

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### Including Immigrant Parents in Public Education

Presenter: Annie Kidder

**A**nnie Kidder, the Executive Director of People for Education stood in for the two scheduled speakers for this workshop. She began with a brief overview of the organization that she heads.

The primary mission for People for Education is to advocate for a strong publicly-based education system that gives all students in the province an equal chance of success in school. Their work is informed by PFE's ongoing research on school policy, and is detailed for the public in an annual report.

The relevance of PFE for English as a Second Language is that many immigrant parents feel distanced from the education system in Ontario. They feel they have neither a place in nor any say about how it works; in other words, they feel they don't belong.

In response to this widely expressed sense of exclusion, Kidder and her colleagues began a parent inclusion initiative two years ago. As she explained to the workshop session, "To many immigrant parents, the education system is a mystery behind a lot of doors to which they don't have the key."

For example, they don't understand the report cards that are sent home. And, though they might like to, they often can't help their kids with homework, because of their own limited English language resources; they may not even be able to understand school texts. They are also nervous



Annie Kidder is the Executive Director of People for Education

about asking questions of local school officials, including the teachers.

Moreover, they don't know how and when to advocate for their children's needs. They do value education, but feel they're unable to successfully intervene when their youngsters want to

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*"To many immigrant parents, the education system is a mystery..."*

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(Continued from page 40)

drop out or when other problems arise.”

Kidder and others have found that networking with each other is often the best way for immigrant parents to become informed. To help in this PFE produces easy-to-read Tip Sheets in all the major languages in Ontario.

Kidder also suggests that ESL teachers consider using the Tip Sheets as part of the curriculum content for ESL courses, since it is ‘authentic’ learning material and related to a topic that many adult ESL learners want to know more about. Additionally, she adds, “Why can’t the school Report Card also become part of the content in adult ESL courses?”

Most immigrant parents have come to Canada with dreams both for themselves and for their children. They want to be successful in life, and accept that that goal often starts with a good education. But as many have noted, Ontario school systems often need to be nudged and persuaded to recognize and respond to the aspirations of immigrant parents.

At present, PFE is preparing a Tip Sheet on Special Education, for two important reasons. The first is to alert parents to the fact that some immigrant students are misdirected to a Special Education class simply based on their language skills, whether or not it is an appropriate place for them.

On the other hand, some ESL learners who actually ought to be going to special education are never directed there.

Kidder’s group is trying to get the message across to parents that special education is not a “bad” thing, but that it is also not rude for them to ask school administrators – repeatedly if necessary - for a meeting or an expla-

nation about special education for their children.

Kidder then threw open the topic of special education to the workshop attendees: “What are you hearing from the parents that you teach in your ESL classes?” she asked. “Firstly, do they talk about their kids’ education at all? Secondly, do you encourage them to do so?”

Like all parents, ESL parents often find themselves in a perennial dance around the issue of homework. But, as Kidder pointed out, the ongoing conversation ESL parents have with their kids about school is usually more important than helping them with their homework. She often explains to parents, “It’s the kids’ homework, not yours. So you don’t need to feel guilty about backing off. After all, your kids have to learn how to do their own homework.”

Some schools have found that the promotion of a Homework Club helps a lot of immigrant students, and they learn to help each other. One of the workshop participants praised this idea, but also stressed that a more organized effort to set up homework clubs across whole school systems would yield even better results.

Another important message for ESL parents is that reading to their kids in the family’s first language, whether it be Urdu or Punjabi or Vietnamese will not harm their children’s language development.

Unfortunately, a surprising number of parents think the opposite. When second-language youngsters are deprived of sharing the literature of their first culture, they often begin to lose the language. They also lose cultural and cross-generational connectedness that such experiences bring.

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***“Part of the work of People for Education is to help immigrant parents become advocates for their children. “I am convinced that parents are trying to understand the system, but is the system also trying to understand the parents?”***

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Still another problem that occurs is that some immigrant parents don't realize that they are pushing their kids in school as hard as they are. It is not uncommon for family struggles to arise within the immigrant family, especially with teenagers.

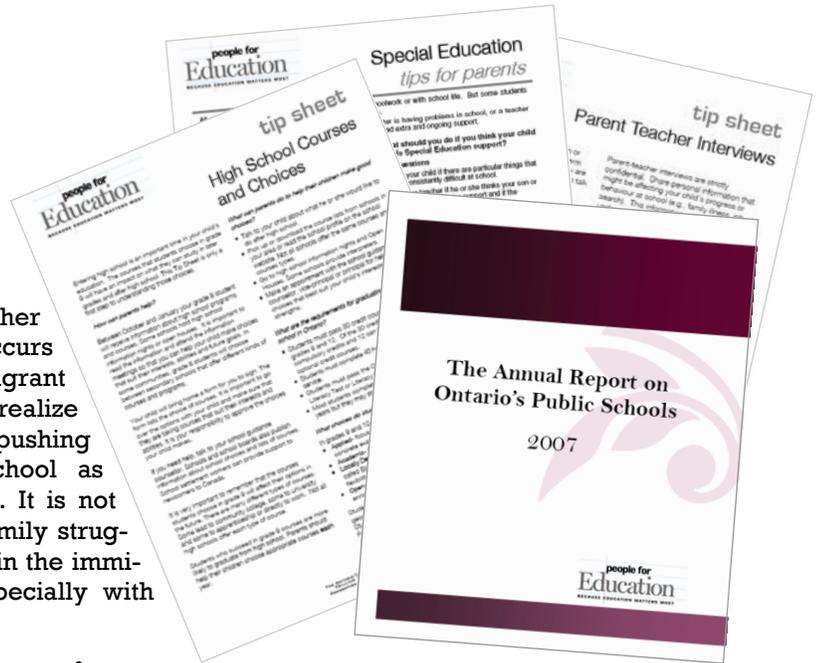
It is common, for example, for parents to actually go to their children's school only if something is wrong – if there is a problem.

The provincial government has set up a parent engagement office, but even though the initiative is well-founded, Kidder doesn't think it is working very well – yet.

A perennial question among immigrant parents is "How do I transfer my culture's values to my children?" The North American way of life seems, to some parents, like an assault on children and on their traditional family culture.

A community of parents and concerted, focused action seems to be the best route to follow in helping immigrant families feel included in the society. And the education system is a logical place to start. As Kidder asserted, "If you can get past the feeling of not belonging, schools can actually help parents – but you have to get your foot in the door first."

School boards often tell people that if they do these ten things, the problems will be solved. But often the situation is more complex than the official recipe recognizes. For example, institutional solutions often fail to take into account the power of peer pressure in conflicts of culture that are a



People for Education helps parents connect to their local schools through multilingual Tip Sheets, workshops and outreach to community leaders. The materials are also useful tools for ESL instructors.

part of immigrant teenagers' lives. And in high school, students can get into difficult situations that will affect the rest of their lives.

Kidder took a moment to return to the role of People for Education. One of its principal goals is to demystify the education system and impress on parents the importance of connecting. Parents need to know that there are places they can go for help. At the most basic level, they need to know that school systems can arrange for translators when they need to communicate with their kids' school.

High schools are hotbeds of anxiety for everyone: students, teachers, parents, administrators, but especially for ESL teenagers. They are trying to keep up with their peers in the curriculum, translating at breakneck speed, and they sometimes haven't had the five to seven years of language learning that would help them to succeed, though they may be highly intelligent, focused and dedicated.

(Continued on page 43)

*"The North American way of life seems, to some parents, like an assault on children..."*

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When Boards of Education felt forced to cut the School-Community Advisors they used to have, another possible connection of ESL adults to their community schools disappeared.

Luckily, some community agencies and now even some school systems have tried to plug the gaps produced by such cuts. St. Christopher House in Toronto, for example, sponsors a program for immigrant parents called "Getting Ready for School". Other agencies have followed suit. At city schools such as Davenport and Alexandra Park, for example, the children go to what looks like a kindergarten while their parents are informed about the school system.

Similarly, the Peel Board of Education holds conferences with one- to two-hour sessions that explain to parents how the school system and the classroom work in Ontario schools. What is important is that these sessions are presented in Urdu and other languages.

Many people adhere to the notion that a healthy society is defined not only by who is included but who is left out. Another issue that plagues immigrant communities is the disconnect between pre-school care and school care.

Though this situation is rapidly changing, some flyers that explain what is happening in schools and what parents need to know are still not produced in the home languages of many parents. "How do we expect parents to feel included and connected when such situations still exist?" asked Kidder.

LINC child-minders, who sometimes have a closer relationship with ESL parents than their adult teachers, are often the better conduit for communication. Community Settlement work-

ers can also be effective message bearers for immigrant parents about the school system.

The education system in Ontario is certainly changing. Almost daily, new issues arise to challenge existing notions and practices. For example, many ask whether there are plans for all-day kindergarten, for special schools with an Afro-centric curriculum, or the integration of kindergarten and day care. Everything seems to be in a state of flux.

A continuing issue is the labeling of ESL kids, by other kids and even by some teachers. Some teachers don't expect very much of immigrant kids and even label them. And what is clear is that when immigrant students get labeled, they act up, drop out, and in extreme cases end up in street gangs, especially if they have had little or even no formal schooling in their country of origin. This is very troubling, but what Kidder sees as hopeful is that people in the province are talking about the issues and the media are now a greater part of the information flow.

Still, the society has to take firm action to address the challenges, for they don't go away. The percentage of schools with ESL students has gone up every year over the last decade, but the percentage of schools with trained ESL teachers has gone down. What messages does that situation send?

Where can parents look for help? Often the best place is in community organizations, since there is no clearing house for immigrant parents to access. People for Education and agencies such as settlement.org and the Centre for Information and Community Services are providing some of the impetus, but there is still a long way to go. ■

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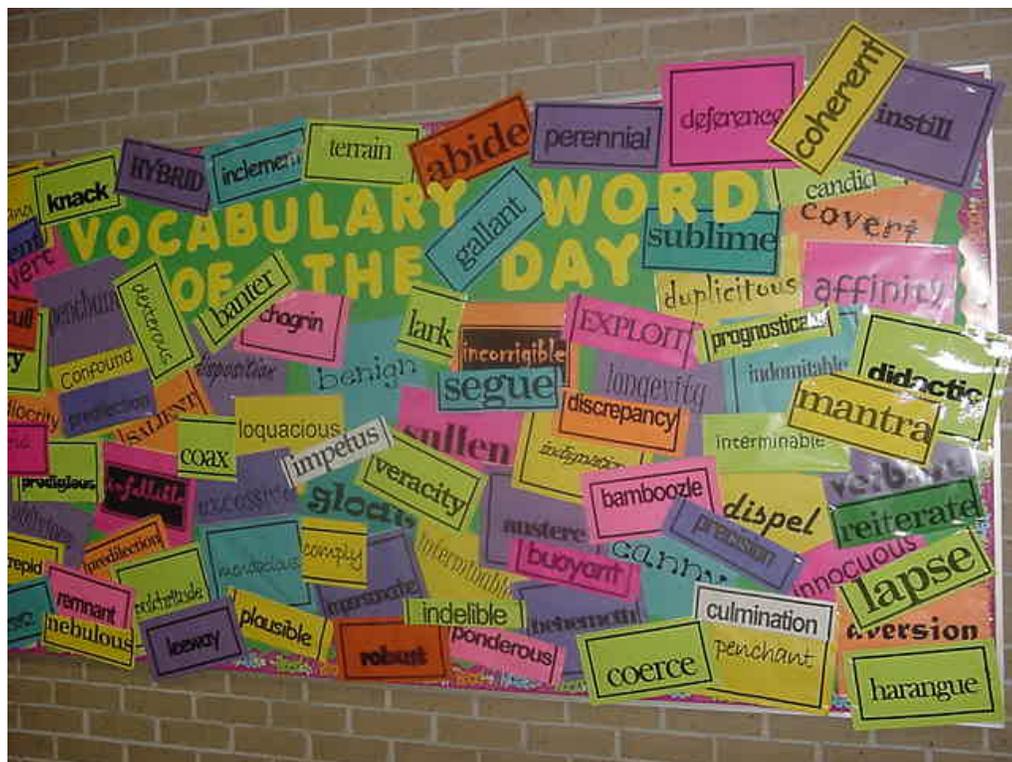
***"...a healthy society is defined not only by who is included but who is left out."***

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### Closing in on a Million

By Marg Heidebrecht,  
Mohawk College, Hamilton



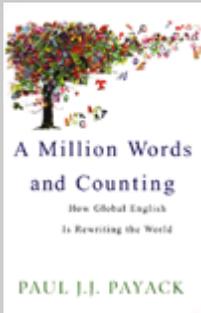
“The workshop included an introduction to the ‘word wall binder’...”

**C**losing in on a Million, a workshop for people interested in strategies for reviewing and practising vocabulary, arose from a recent article in *The Globe and Mail*. The February 2006 article included a reference to Paul Payack’s calculation that the millionth word would soon be added to English. This was a reminder of the need to find more effective ways of supporting language learners as they face the large (and growing!) number of words needed for life in Canada.

The workshop included an introduction to the “word wall binder”

which is an adult-appropriate variation of the “word wall” used by many of our elementary school colleagues. Teachers of children post 26 large charts (one for each letter) around their classrooms. As new words are learned, the teacher or students add these words to the appropriate chart. Sometimes pictures are included or other prompts to support learning the words. As daily lessons proceed, students are surrounded by the words they will need to continue talking and writing about the theme being studied or a particular learning task. The words are easy to see and can be used as a reference for

(Continued on page 45)



The Global Language Monitor (GLM) tracks the growth and evolution of the English language around the world. According to Paul JJ Payack, the president and chief word analyst of GLM, “To enter the English language, a word has to meet certain criteria, including frequent appearances in the written and spoken language, use in the media, and presence of a large geographic footprint; it must also stand the test of time. In the past, this process would unfold over many years, even decades or centuries. However, the internet, with instant global communications to billions of people, has radically accelerated the cycle.”

The Global Language Monitor uses a proprietary algorithm, called the Predictive Quantities Indicator (PQI) to track the frequency of words and phrases in the global print and electronic media, on the internet, throughout the blogosphere and other language databases. It is a weighted index that factors in long-term trends, short-term changes, momentum and velocity.

According to GLM’s statistics as of February 27, 2008, the number of words in the English language stands at 995,118. Among recent additions is the word “smirting” (the art of flirting while being banished outside a building to engage in smoking), Bluetooth (a technology to connect electronic devices by radio waves, and “Obamamentum” (the impetus of support for American Democratic presidential hopeful, Senator Barack Obama). Its variants include “Obamafy,” “Obamanomics” and “Obamarama.”

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***“The words are easy to see and can be used as a reference for later writing.”***

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*(Continued from page 44)*

later writing. It is an effective strategy for the elementary school context but needs re-thinking for use with adult learners.

Instead of posting charts around the room, the word wall binder — an adaptation more suited to adult ESL learners — uses a 3-ring binder to record new words. The binder includes not only 26 pages for each letter of the alphabet, but also pages for common stress patterns. This means that the word “apple” would be written on the “a” page, but also on the “ / ” page. The stress slash is the symbol for two-syllable words that have stress on the first syllable.

Each day a different student is the class recorder. He/she keeps the binder for the day and adds new words. The words that are recorded come from four places, words that:

1. Are pre-taught for the purposes of that day’s lesson.
2. Some/many students don’t know that appear in the course of the day’s lessons, activities and conversations.
3. The teacher notices him/herself

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using and then realizes the students need to learn them, too.

4. Students bring to the teacher from their own reading or listening outside the classroom.

At the end of the week, the teacher records all the words and distributes the word list the following Monday. The list is updated as needed, usually weekly.

After explaining the process for gathering and recording words, a series of workshop activities were presented to provide opportunities for review and practice. These included word puzzles, sorting by sound/part of speech/number of syllables/themes, group/team games, and activities based on students' learning styles, and more.

For the purpose of the conference workshop, a list of 60 words that have recently been added to dictionaries was used to show teachers the kinds of new words to add to their own vocabulary and to have some fun with word play and double meaning. This list was not intended to be used with learners, but did serve to illustrate the procedure for classroom use.

The idea of vocabulary lists emerging from the classroom rather than being imposed on the classroom requires a shift in thinking for some instructors, but its value lies in the fact that it provides learners with words that have context and meaning.

As language instructors, we do a good job of teaching new vocabulary, especially if we remember to include context, meaning in context, synonyms, antonyms, pronunciation, dangerously close associations and

collocations. In our attempt to cover more ground, we sometimes forget to give students enough practice and review so that they can transfer new words from short-term to long-term memory.

It is the regular engagement with this task which will move learners ever closer to that new mark of one million words. ■



Marg Heidebrecht has been teaching ESL in Hamilton for 16 years. She's currently teaching LINC 6 at Mohawk College. She also teaches for Oxford Seminars, a company that offers short courses for people who want to travel and work overseas. Her hobbies include cycling, hiking, reading and travelling.

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***“The idea of vocabulary lists emerging from the classroom rather than being imposed on the classroom requires a shift in thinking for some instructors...”***

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## TESL Ontario Fall 2007 Conference

### PICTURE GALLERY:

## 2007 Fall Conference, Toronto

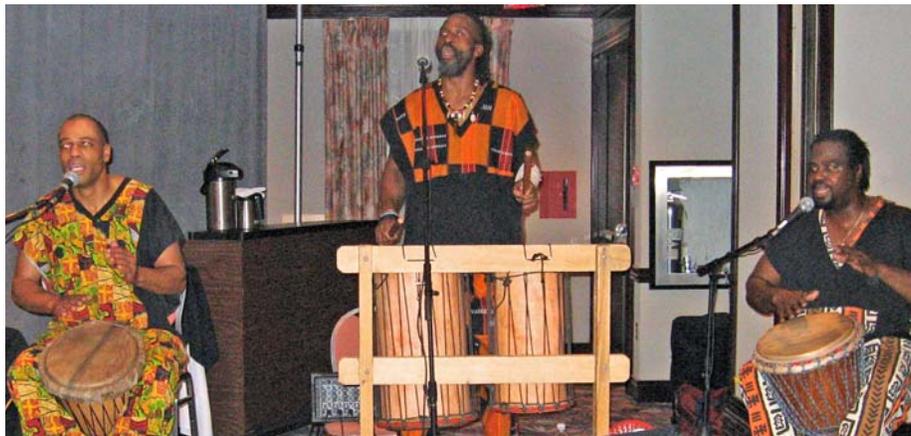
Learning, sharing ideas, feasting, relaxing, making new friendships and renewing old ones.



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*Images from the  
2007 Conference*

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*Images from the  
2007 Conference*

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BOOK REVIEW:

# Letters to a Young Teacher

Review by Robert Courchêne

**J**onathan Kozol is well known for his books outlining the many problems found in the public school system in the United States (*Savage Inequalities*, *The Shame of the Nation*, *Illiterate America*) as well as his advice to teachers, based on 40 years of visiting schools and talking to teachers across the US. In his latest book, *Letters to a Young Teacher* (2007), he distills his experience in a series of letters written to Francesca, a young first-year teacher in an inner-city school in the Boston area (where Kozol began his career).

Over the course of her first year, Kozol visited her classroom on a number of occasions, using the friendly letter format to respond to her questions, based on his personal experiences and research. While the style in the book is familiar, Kozol succeeds in raising some of the most pressing problems in public schools (and teaching in general) as well as offering encouragement and advice to Francesca (see the list of chapters).

According to Kozol (2007b), his purpose in writing this book, “which represents a year of correspondence with a highly motivated first-grade teacher whom I call Francesca, [is to] to share with her the strategies I’ve learned from other urban teachers who have managed to resist the inclination to throw up their hands and leave their jobs, no matter what frustrations they experience” (p.1). While his letters to Francesca are friendly in tone, the subjects dealt with are critical for new teachers working in inner-city schools.

In chapters one to six, Kozol talks about the important role that teachers play in the lives of children.

## Lies

Telling lies to the young is wrong.  
 Proving to them that lies are true is wrong.  
 Telling them that God's in heaven and  
 all's well with the world is wrong.  
 The young know what you mean.  
 The young are people.  
 Tell them the difficulties can't be counted  
 And let them see not only what will be  
 but see with clarity these present times.  
 Say obstacles exist they must encounter  
 sorrow happens, hardship happens.  
 The hell with it. Who ever knew  
 the price of happiness will not be happy.  
 Forgive no error you recognize,  
 It will repeat itself, increase,  
 and afterwards our pupils  
 will not forgive in us what we forgave.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

from *Yevtushenko: Selected Poems*.  
 New York: Dutton, 1962

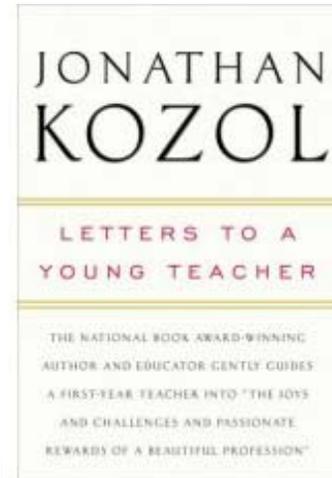
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***“...the subjects dealt with are critical for new teachers working in inner-city schools.”***

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He tells Francesca that to be effective she must be willing to break the rules in order to establish a rapport with the students and their parents. Though strongly discouraged from doing so by his principal in his first year of teaching, Kozol made house visits to talk to parents

(Continued on page 50)



*Letters to a Young Teacher*, Jonathan Kozol, New York: Crown Publishers, 2007. 288 pages. Also available in Kindle edition.

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***“...the reason many parents did not come to parent-teacher meetings had nothing to do with their concern for their children’s education.”***

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(Continued from page 49)

in order to understand their day-to-day living patterns, their aspirations for their children. Through these visits, he realized that the reason many parents did not come to parent-teacher meetings had nothing to do with their concern for their children’s education.

Kozol also counsels Francesca to learn from the older teachers in the school (he admits that all are not suitable role models) and not to make the mistake of looking “upon veteran teachers in their schools as unsophisticated or not ‘innovative’ in whatever way that term is being used, depending on the package of most recent innovations that may happen to be held in favor in a given period of years” (p.36).

In the letter entitled “Wild Flowers,” Kozol tells Francesca of the importance of letting children be, letting them express their creativity as opposed to continually putting the “kibosh” on anything that is not mandated by the curriculum.

He cites Fred Rogers (the writer and host of the children’s television program *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* on PBS) as an important mentor and source of inspiration: “At quiet times, children give us some glimpses of things that are eternal.” (p. 45).

Allowing children to follow their natural curiosity, their special interests, instead of constantly calling them back to be on task, fosters learning and a positive ambiance in the classroom. Kozol returns to this theme in chapter 9: ‘Aesthetic Merriment,’ in response to a question asked him by Francesca:

While you were watching them (children observing a bug) you asked me whether anyone I know who’s setting education policy these days ever speaks about the sense of fun that children have, or ought to have, in public school or the excitement they take when they examine interesting creatures such as beetles and lady-

(Continued on page 51)

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bugs and other oddities of nature that they come upon - or even whether they are happy children and enjoy the hours they spend in school with us. (p.100)

Kozol talks about the excitement created by bringing a caterpillar into the room and watching it pass through its life cycle or having a tooth timeline with a sign for each student's tooth.

This anecdote reminds me of one of my mother's stories - a student brought in a huge wasp's nest in the fall and suspended it in the corner of the classroom. On the first warm day in spring, to the student's glee, the classroom suddenly became all abuzz in more ways than one. Fifty years later, the students never stop reminding mother of this.

For Kozol, it is important for young teachers to create a sense of wonder, to break out of the traditional teaching framework, to allow students to take the lead.

In chapters seven to 16, Kozol tackles what he sees to be the most critical issues in U.S. public schools today, issues he has dealt with in his books, based on his constant visits to classrooms.

For instance, Kozol is very critical of the use of the term diversity by both researchers and school administrators, as illustrated by this example :

In a school I visited last fall in Kansas City, for example, I was provided with a document that said the schools curriculum "addresses the needs of children from diverse backgrounds." But as I went from class to class, I didn't see a single child who was white

## Chapter Listing

1. A Life among Schoolchildren
2. Establishing the Chemistry
3. Reaching out to Get to Know the Parents of our Children
4. Teaching the Young but Learning from the Old
5. Wild flowers
6. The Little Piper: Reflections on the Kids Who Make it Clear that They're Determined not to be Like Us
7. The "Uses of Diversity"
8. Beware the Jargon factory
9. Aesthetic Merriment
10. High-Stakes Tests and Other Modern Miseries
11. The Single Worst Most Dangerous Idea: Education Vouchers and the Privatization of Public Schools
12. It Is Evil to Tell Children Lies
13. Loss of Innocence: More Reflections on Middle Schools and High Schools
14. Teachers as Witnesses
15. Seeds of Hope: Sources of Resilience
16. Epilogue: Bye for Now
17. Afterword: A Retrospective Conversation with Francesca
18. Appendices
19. Notes on each Chapter.

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***"He also believes that all members of faculties of Education should be required to spend time in classrooms..."***

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or Asian or Hispanic, for that matter. The principal, when I pressed her on the demographics of the school, said that 99.6% of the students were black. (p. 74)

He notes that this is a constant pattern across the U.S. and the 'diversity' is often used for what in reality is segregated but people are averse

(Continued on page 52)

(Continued from page 51)

to using this word. Students are led to believe they are in integrated schools when the reality is otherwise. He also criticizes curricula that pay only lip service to diversity, focusing on the superficial - samosas, sambas and saris - which presents a watered-down version of civil rights.

Kozol has spent 40 years visiting classrooms and talking to school teachers and is critical of researchers who talk down to teachers, who believe they are more intelligent because they are able to discuss issues using the flavour-of-the-month jargon. He also believes that all members of faculties of Education should be required to spend time in classrooms, especially for the clientele they are training. Kozol states emphatically that educators who never visit classrooms, especially in inner-city schools, are totally unaware of the gap between their training and the teacher's reality. He tells Francesca that her classroom-based experience is as valuable as theirs and goes on to encourage her to follow her own instincts and not to be bamboozled by jargon.

If we want to teach our children to take pride in their own voices, I think that teachers need to fight hard to take pride in their own voices. The jargon factory in education is a very busy place and it will doubtless keep churning out new words and phrases that are no less cumbersome, or lacking in substantial meaning, than the ones in use today. (p. 98)

Kozol is not anti-research but he certainly believes that practitioners have a wisdom of their own.

For Kozol, two of the most important causes for the decline of the quality of education in public schools

are high-stakes testing and the use of vouchers. There is enormous pressure on teachers to meet standards as determined by high-stake tests that often are negatively biased with regard to Hispanic and black students.

As schools are evaluated on the basis of student performance on such tests, instruction has become test driven; teaching for the test has de-railed the purpose of education - acquisition of knowledge and skills. The students in upper-class neighbourhoods whose home experience and literacy formation parallels that of the school do exceedingly well on these tests. This leaves students in 'priority schools' to focus most of their instructional time trying to push their students to succeed on the tests - the kill-and-drill approach.

In discussing vouchers, Kozol demonstrates how what was supposed to provide students in lower-class neighbourhoods with the means of attending better-funded schools has turned out to be a dismal failure (see also Street, 2006).

As Kozol points out, it is not simply a matter of providing funds for the students; other basic supports must also be offered: transportation to the new schools outside of the home neighbourhood, after-school programs, literacy training to help the students catch up, cultural adaptation, extra-curricular activities. As the voucher does not cover the cost of tuition, let alone these other components, what has resulted is more segregation rather than the hoped-for integration. The students with means go to the more exclusive schools, often leaving only a token number of the target clientele attending such schools. The black and Hispanic students end up in under-funded and under-staffed schools with poor facilities.

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***“...educators who never visit classrooms, especially in inner-city schools, are totally unaware of the gap between their training and the teacher’s reality.”***

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(Continued from page 52)

One of the most important pieces of advice that Kozol gives Francesca as the representative of new teachers is never to tell the children lies (see Yevtushenko's poem at the beginning of this review).

One of these is what I call "The Hortatory Lie," which gives children the impression in some of the worst, poorly funded and most hyper-segregated public schools the relentless message that success or failure in their academic work is a matter wholly of their own self-will, their own determination, their own perseverance, and the external world - the governor, the school board, the determination of the white society to keep them at a distance where they cannot contaminate the education of the middle class - has no role in preventing them from learning. (p.160)

Kozol tells Francesca that students have the right to know that they attend underfunded schools, that they belong to the working poor, that the government will not create the conditions to eliminate existing inequalities. Teachers need to expose students to the lies in the curricula, to how they are perceived by the more affluent members of society.

Kozol sees one of the important roles of teachers as being voices for the downtrodden, the poor. They need to be social activists willing to combat injustices within the system. One of the examples he gives is of organizing the parents to protest the firing of a teacher. Teachers need to bear witness, to stand up for not only others but also for themselves, to dignify their profession. Kozol sees teaching, especially in inner-city schools, as a vocation, one that is

greatly undervalued in American society.

In the *Epilogue and Afterward*, Kozol talks about his experience as a teacher, the wisdom he has gained over the years through his interaction with students, parents, and community workers. He describes in detail how "Mister Rogers", who became his lifelong friend, influenced his life as a teacher and a human being.

At the end of the book, he provides detailed notes on each of the letters, with abundant references for further reading.

One of the underlining themes that runs through all the letters is the importance for young teachers to be resilient in the face of difficulties, to hold strong to their beliefs and to subvert the system from within, especially when faced with unjust decisions. In saying this, Kozol is telling young teachers to heed his example. The books he has written and the presentations he has given all demonstrate that this has been a guiding principle of his life as an educator.

A wonderful and insightful read if you are just starting out or in your 40th year of teaching. ■

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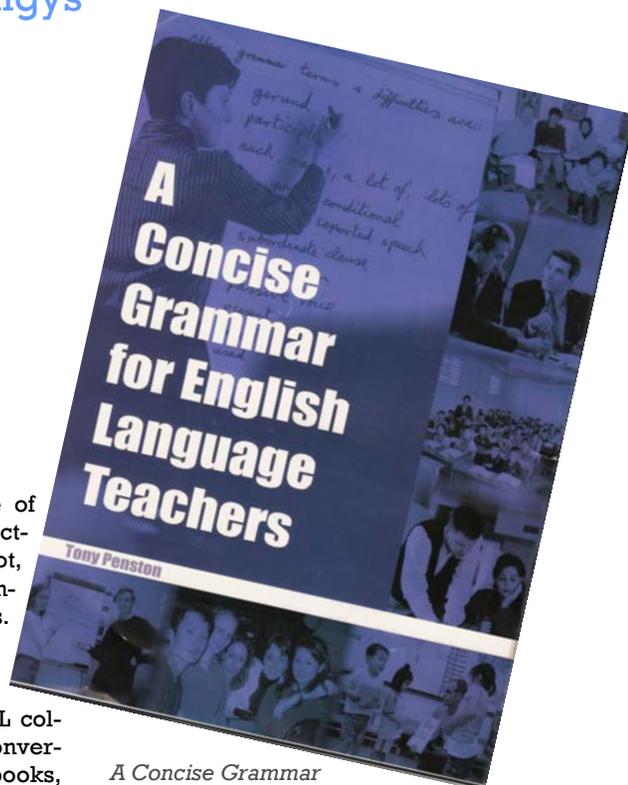
***"Kozol sees one of the important roles of teachers as being voices for the downtrodden, the poor."***

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BOOK REVIEW:

## A Concise Grammar for English Language Teachers

Review by Martha Staigys



**G**rammar texts remind me of cookbooks. Both are collectable and, more often than not, are used for some recipes but not others. Nonetheless, I do have favorites. Don't you?

Perhaps, like me, you have also noticed a tendency amongst ESL colleagues that, when their staffroom conversation comes around to grammar books, each instructor swears by a certain specific title - revered for its content, the only authoritative source, a virtual grammar Bible.

And regardless of whether you already have many such texts on your shelf or never stray from your favourite, there always seem to be a new one coming out. What's an ESL teacher to do? I have adopted the attitude that each new grammar book is at the very least worth checking out for new angles and at most could just cause me to dump my favourite. In the end, though, I have to confess it: I'm a 'grammarphile', insatiably curious about each new grammar text.

Grammar books by nature do not usually have exciting titles nor do they often entice the consumer visually with their graphics. But a recent one that is definitely worth exploring is Tony Penston's *A Concise Grammar for English Language Teachers* (2005). Note that it is a book meant for teachers, not learners

*A Concise Grammar of English for English Language Teachers*, Tony Penston 2005. Ireland: TP Publications, softcover 124 pages \$31.95

This attractive and thorough book was originally titled *A Grammar Course for TEFL Certificate*, but the author changed its title to reach a wider readership. The name change was a wise move, in my opinion, for this book has features that could have easily been ignored by many teachers who should find it immensely useful.

What you immediately note is the proportion of the book. It is longer and leaner (21 x 29 ½ cm) than most. The benefits of the format become apparent as you flip through the pages and note the numerous tables and diagrams throughout. There's a table of verb tenses and samples of usage (page 34), for example, that would have had to be fragmented or set in tiny type had the larger size not been cho-

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*“Grammar books by nature do not usually have exciting titles nor do they often entice the consumer visually...”*

(Continued from page 54)

sen. But in this book it fits into one convenient table. I find that details such as page size and type size are important for readability – as well as for classroom use.

Many grammar books, though as rich as Penston's in content, suffer from a lack of clarity in their design. This book, by contrast, has lots of white space and the spacing between components makes it easy to find specific points. In fact, in some pages the design was planned to encourage teachers to cut out sections -after copying, of course! (See the introduction for copy guidelines.)

The easy-to-read fonts and effective use of boldface type support the clear design. Photographs and illustrations are also used to divide and highlight information. All these design considerations help teachers to use the book as the author intended, as a "concise, user-friendly, comprehensible and easily locatable teacher resource."

*A Concise Grammar for English Language Teachers* is divided into twenty-seven units. In addition, there is a table listing grammar structures into one of six levels, ranging from beginner to advanced. One could easily cross-reference this table to the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Although the book was published in Dublin, North American users will find it useful as both British and North American usage is cited. A teaching note (and this book contains many) comparing the past vs the present perfect (page 25) offers an explanation from both perspectives.

The chapters do not follow a rigid plan; the structure of one unit can vary from another and the order of elements can vary. These elements include sentence branching, teaching notes, tasks, tables of varying sizes and excerpts from other resources used to expand or reinforce a point.

Chapter 1, for example, opens with sentence branching, definitions, teaching notes and then a task. Chapter 14 opens with a definition of phrasal verbs followed by a chart of four types of phrasal

verbs. Further clarification of a grammar point is aided by the inclusion of a cartoon, followed by a task. This flexible approach to the components allows the grammar structure in a sense to dictate in which order the elements should go.

One of the elements to appreciate is the Teaching Notes. You will not regret reading them, as Penston imparts wisdom not only on grammar, but also on teaching methods, and differences between language learners. In Chapter 21, devoted to the use of articles, the author makes note of how Japanese learners, for example have a different way of marking nouns, and he suggests what the teacher should do to aid these learners. These Teaching Notes can vary from brief explanations on how to play a game, to more extensive instruction as in the first chapter in which the author shares his step-by-step approach to fill-in-the-blanks exercises.

Teachers should not skip the Introduction, where Penston offers valuable insights into when and when *not* to teach grammar. He stresses that the ESL teacher is primarily a teacher of communication, and warns against presenting grammar for grammar's sake. The author has also included a useful chapter on error analysis and correction. He offers advice, for example, on the unique problems often faced by learners who speak languages similar to English.

Teachers will also appreciate the tasks in the book. The author often takes an extract from another resource and suggests an expansion of the lesson, as in the lesson on prepositions of time (Page 7). A task can also be a game or feature matching activities. Chapter 13 offers a two-page task in which learners match examples of modals with their uses. The tasks can be long or short. Expansion of tasks appear in the Key to Tasks located at the back of the book.

*A Concise Grammar for English Language Teachers* is not a dry resource. It is visually appealing and very accessible. This book would be a valuable asset to your library, and who knows, it may be **the** book on your shelf! ■

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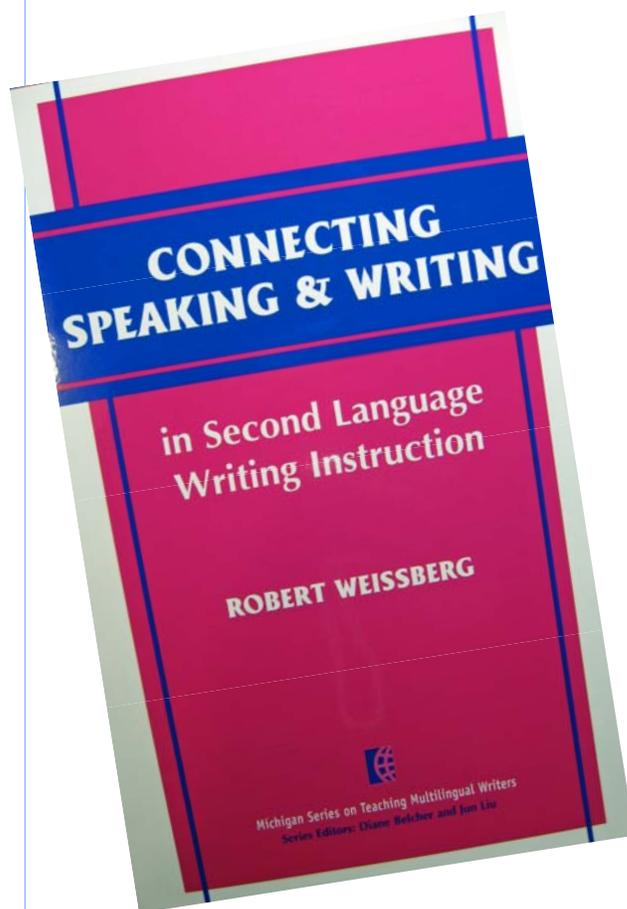
***"It is visually appealing  
and very accessible."***

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BOOK REVIEW:

## Connecting Speaking and Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction

Review by Carolyn Samuel, McGill University



*Connecting Speaking & Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction.* Weissberg, R. (2006). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 171 pages. The book is part of the Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers, edited by Diane Belcher and Jun Liu.

“...Weissberg contends that “dialoguing” about writing helps the learner to refine his/her notion of audience.”

**I**n this volume – written for the broad audience of in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, writing tutors, teacher educators and researchers – Robert Weissberg argues that second language learners benefit most from writing instruction when it is rooted in dialogue.

He expounds on what he calls a “dialogic” approach to writing, explaining that writing is a social activity wherein the interaction of oral and written language enhances the learning

process, and ultimately, the written product.

As well, Weissberg contends that “dialoguing” about writing helps the learner to refine his/her notion of audience. Dialoguing also compels the learner to fine-tune ideas, improve coherence and generally revise text. The dialogue may occur between the learner and any other party involved in the writing process (e.g. learner and teacher, learner and tutor, learner and

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peers). The dialogue may also be between the learner and him/herself.

In a classroom or one-on-one setting, the teacher or tutor should structure dialogue to foster meaningful exchanges that provoke thought rather than use, for example, the classic IRE model (Initiation – teacher poses a display question; Response – learner responds; Evaluation – teacher evaluates by saying the answer is good or bad) which does not necessarily actively encourage a learner to pursue ideas. Weissberg offers detailed guidelines for fostering effective dialoguing in the classroom and in one-on-one situations.

Weissberg supports his argument for a dialogic approach with three types of evidence: “Developmental theories of L1 and L2 writers, sociocultural theory...and empirical studies of oral language use in L1 and L2 writing classrooms” (p. 9). In the first section, on developmental theories, Weissberg illustrates how L1 learners draw on their spoken language to make decisions (consciously or intuitively) about appropriate written language. These decisions can be made based on language knowledge developed from a young age. In contrast, L2 learners do not have the same inventory of knowledge to draw on. Thus, it is through talking about their composition process that learners may develop a meta-cognitive understanding of their writing.

The second type of evidence comes from sociocultural theory, attributed to Vygotsky (1978; 1986) and his associates, which posits that learning results from social interaction. A child’s oral “social talk” is “translated” into a simplified “inner speech” that serves as a “cognitive tool for solving problems” (p. 15). Weissberg cites sociocultural theorists Luria (1969) and



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Leont'yev (1969) as those who “made the speech-writing connection explicit. They claimed that inner speech is the initial basis for writing and that novice writers use it to produce a kind of ‘written speech’” (p. 15). It is this connection that Weissberg uses to support the dialogic approach to teaching/learning writing.

Finally, Weissberg cites empirical studies where the dialogic approach has been implemented in classrooms. The studies describe successful cases from the early grades up to college level, with L1 and with L2 learners.

Numerous issues are explored throughout the volume. Salient topics include: power structure in the classroom; cultural differences that may have

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***“Numerous issues are explored throughout the volume.”***

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an impact on dialoguing about writing; individual differences/learning styles (e.g. learner reluctance to participate in dialogue or in oral class activities); group work/collaboration in tandem with dialoguing. Weissberg also recommends creating opportunities for learners to dialogue with the teacher or tutor about feedback received.

Each chapter includes a balance of theory and practical application. The latter incorporates descriptions of different task types supported by sample dialogues and examples of student writing. Specific opportunities for integrating the dialogic approach into writing classroom activities are outlined. Each chapter ends with *Suggested Tasks* for the reader that promote reflection.

The last chapter, *Critiquing the Dialogue Approach*, addresses concerns such as the suggestion that it is nothing more than an “updated version of the Socratic method”; that theory valid for an L1 writer is valid for an L2 writer (in that an L2 writer cannot necessarily rely on his/her L2 skills to inform his/her writing); that L2 peers, with varied language proficiency levels, may not be able to engage in effective dialogue and provide meaningful feedback; that teachers may not be prepared to take responsibility for following through with dialogues that lead to unexpected and sometimes uncomfortable conversations with their students. Weissberg addresses these concerns comprehensively, and in the spirit of dialogue, does this by posing questions about the concerns and then responding to them.

Language teachers who are proponents of a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (i.e. promoting fluency and focus on form) will find that the dialogic ap-

proach lends itself well to their classrooms.

Dialoguing about writing may develop learners’ meta-language while also raising their meta-cognitive awareness of language. As an example, an in-class dialogue about the need for transitions in an essay may highlight to learners that discourse markers are equally valuable, for example, in an academic oral presentation. Thus, there may be the collateral benefit of improving communicative competence (Swain, 1985) and quality of speech.

Overall, Weissberg makes a thorough and convincing argument for systematically adopting dialogue in writing instruction. Even though the approach as a whole is more time consuming than transmission-style teaching, which he acknowledges, Weissberg offers compelling evidence that learners truly benefit, which is a sound reason for consulting this well-organized and well-argued volume. ■

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**“Each chapter includes a balance of theory and practical application.”**

## Spell it Like It Is — The ESL Spelling Bee



**H**opping over snowbanks and dodging slippery patches on Toronto's icy streets, they came as singles, duos, and even families, with one competitor, Heba Elshamy from Egypt, clearly approaching her time of delivery.

Their destination was the final night of competition in the inaugural Adult ESL Spelling Competition, timed to coincide with ESL week in the city.

Dubbed 'ESL Spell', the competition is the brainchild of Channah Cohen. In welcoming the contestants on this frosty night, she recalled her own arrival as a 12-year-old immigrant to Canada, with little English, but realizing even then that language was the key to open the door to her future in this land, where she and her family would be safe.

"And now you are here tonight," she continued, "taking up the challenge of making English truly your

own, just as I did so long ago. For with language you can connect to others, and it will give you courage and success. In the spelling competition, there will be only one person who emerges as the final winner, but in my eyes you are all winners, for you have dared to join in the contest. Good luck to you all, and let the spelling competition begin."

Assisted by her team that included Melanie Watt of the Woodgreen Centre, and Daniela Zucchet and Anne MacGregor-O'Neill, both teachers at St. Williams Adult ESL School, Cohen reached out to the wider community for support and sponsorship. In so doing she brought on board the *Toronto Star*, TESL Toronto, documentary filmmaker Caine Chow, graphic designer Bette Forester and others.

Building on the success and interest generated from earlier efforts,

*(Continued on page 60)*

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**"...Cohen was sure the concept would catch fire."**

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Event organizer Channah Cohen congratulates third-place winner Berhane Geza-hagne Amare from Ethiopia.

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***“Through the early autumn, hopeful contestants readied themselves through daily spelling drills...”***

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*(Continued from page 59)*

Cohen was sure the concept would catch fire. And so it did. The inaugural city-wide competition brought out more than 60 of the fiercest competitors, drawn from adult ESL learning centres at all levels and from all regions of the city.

The first night of the finals, held a week earlier, had been covered extensively in the media and heralded the start of ESL Week in the city.

On that evening, lanky 19-year-old Grigori Drobot, from Belarus, triumphed with the correct spelling of ‘preparation’. Through two earlier rounds other competitors had faltered on such words as “cute,” “convenience,” “average” and “heroes.” Second place went to 54-year-old Cindy Gian of Scadding Court LINC who fouled out on the word “recommend”, substituting an “a” for “e.” Third place was taken by Berhane

Gezahagne Amare of Ethiopia, tripped up by the word “acceptance.”

Drobot received the \$100 winning prize, while the second and third-place contestants walked away with \$60 and \$40 in prize money.

Preparation for the competition began in adult ESL centres around the city, shortly after classes reconvened in September. The response for registrations was so great that a lottery system had to be initiated to choose contestants for the final two nights. Pamela Gunn, Manager of Educational Sales in the Consumer Marketing Division of the *Toronto Star*, chose the 60 names from the lottery drum as well as a panel of alternates.

Through the early autumn, hopeful contestants readied themselves through daily spelling drills of words from vocabulary lists sent out by Cohen and her team. Others committed them-

*(Continued on page 61)*



Toronto Star feature story on ESL Spell by Nicholas Keung, immigration/diversity reporter, and two ESL Spell winners: Tier 1 (lower level) winner Grigori Drobot and Tier 2 (higher level) winner Maria Theres Arcos.

(Continued from page 60)

selves to poring over daily newspapers, studying dictionaries, consulting their children's school texts, playing Scrabble games and holding mock spelling bees.

As the 7:00 p.m. starting time drew near, Rustem Isaev, originally from Uzbekistan, waited anxiously for confirmation that he would participate, for he had arrived as an alternate. Sure enough, minutes before the evening's first round began, Channah Cohen approached to indicate that he would go on. A wide smile broke his handsome Tatar features and he thanked her profusely, gesturing a 'thumbs up' to a Bickford classmate.

Cameras throughout the hall clicked as the 30 contestants took their places centre stage in two rows, while adjudicators, timers and scorekeepers readied themselves. Then, with more warm and encouraging words from Cohen, the challenge was on.

Test words for rounds one, two and three came from the Study Lists that all had previously received, and each contestant was allowed one error before eliminations began. The Challenge Round – one hour later – would draw from a special word list compiled by the organizers.

Competitors could ask for a repetition of their word and a sample of its usage in a sentence. In round one,

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*“Round two brought the first eliminations...”*

Among the contestants in Level Two — for learners at higher levels — was Rustem Irsaev of Uzbekistan, in his early 30s, who had arrived from Moscow barely six months before.

Trained in his native land as a surgeon, Irsaev had switched career paths after a year of medical practice in the Tashkent hospital and two years in the Health Ministry. He then moved to his ancestral homeland of Ukraine where he found employment as a manager in an advertising firm and subsequently relocated to the Russian capital before immigrating to Canada.



At 190 cm in height, and of Tatar nationality with Mongol blood, Rustem is a handsome, imposing presence, soft-spoken, with laughing eyes. Enrolled in a LINC Level Three class at Bickford Adult Learning Centre, he had studied English formally for only five months.

With a dream to enter a program in graphic and industrial design at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), a challenge that will require him to pass the TOEFL test, he was taking every opportunity to improve his language skills. The Spelling Competition was just another hurdle in his goal to become fluent in English, his fourth language.

“...‘But I know that word,’ she groaned in disbelief.”



Teacher Susana Aumueller of Springhurst LINC, with the school's certificate of honour.

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words such as *height*, *aggressive*, *recommend* and *obstacle* were handled easily. But misspellings on words such as *destroy*, *influential*, *completely* and *stretch* foreshadowed the painful exits from the stage that were about to come.

Round two brought the first eliminations, with errors on *prejudice*, *continuous*, *initiative*, *occasionally*, *approximately* (Irsaev's downfall). But when Harbans Singh Dhaliwal correctly spelled *financially*, the elderly gentleman from India was greeted with whoops of congratulation from the audience.

In the third round, with the stakes rising, spellers fouled out on *possession*, *sergeant*, and *exaggerate*. When *committee* came out missing one of its 'ts', the stupefied contestant

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clenched her fists and stood with mouth agape, reprimanding herself at her too hasty attempt at the word.

“But I *know* that word,” she groaned in disbelief.

Tension rose as the final challenge round began, with fewer than a dozen spellers remaining. Channah Cohen cautioned each contestant to take their time, listen carefully to the word, ask for a definition and even a sample sentence containing the word.

One by one they fell, each misspelled word (*spaghetti, camouflage, relinquish, villain, quarrelsome* and *mediocre*), reducing the cohort of contestants. The air was split with groans, squeals and sighs as hopes were either dashed or rekindled.

And then there were only three: Zinnat Talukder, Maria Theres Arcos, and Iraci Domingos. Seated near the front and cheering the trio on were teacher Susana Aumueller and Learning Officer Andrea Mesa, from the Bickford Centre, their hearts swelling with pride at the three finalists, all students from their school.

When the word “jocular” tripped up Zinnat, the room fell into stunned silence. The competition was now down to two. When Iraci stumbled on the word “amplifier”, she withdrew with a sigh of resignation she left the stage to join her family.

That left Maria Theres. If she could correctly spell “severance” she would triumph. Every eye turned to her as she approached the microphone, inhaled, pondered the word, traced its letters on her palm, then, haltingly began.

“Severance”, she whispered, closing her eyes to summon up the memory of its nine letters. Slowly she



The founder and director of ESL Spell, teacher and settlement counsellor Channah Cohen, congratulating all the competitors at the awards night.

began: “S... E...V... E... R... A... N... C... E... severance.” A nervous hush blanketed the hall and uncertain, expectant eyes turned to the panel of judges, scorers and timekeepers.

“That is correct,” confirmed judge Sean Morris, after a moment and the hall burst into thunderous, foot-stomping applause.

Tearfully acknowledging her victory and collapsing in joyous relief, Maria Theresa welcomed family, friends and fellow contestants as they rushed the winner’s circle, hugging and kissing and crying all at the same time.

And at the edge of the scene stood teacher Channah Cohen, tears coursing down her cheeks, proud to her deepest core of all the competitors, each one a winner in her eyes. It was, as they say, a night to remember. ■

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**“‘Severance’, she  
whispered, closing her  
eyes...”**

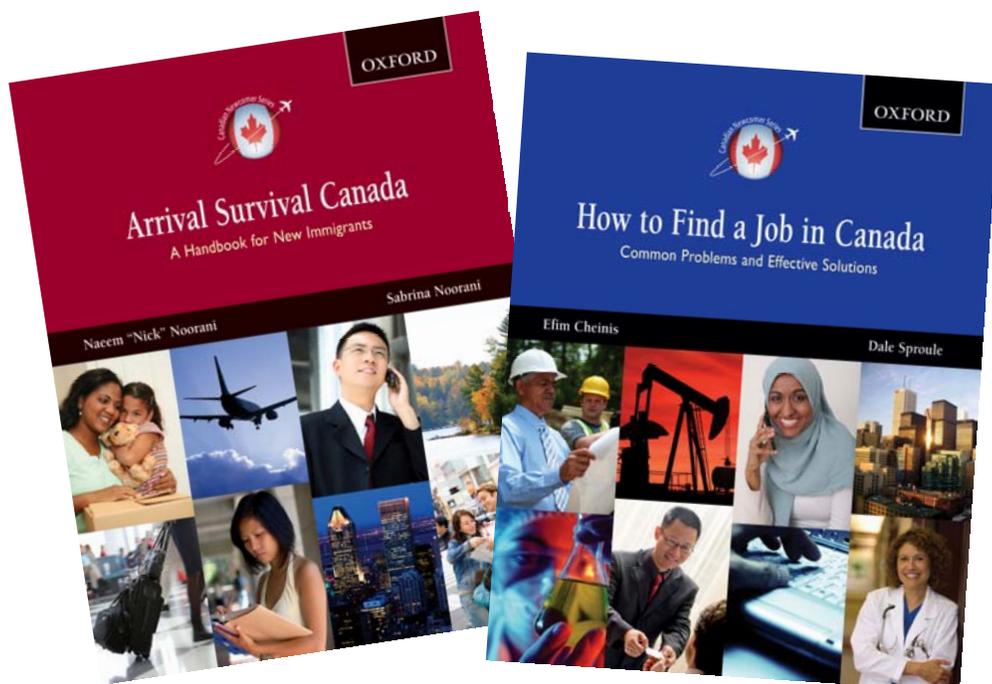
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NEW MATERIALS:

## Canadian Newcomer Series

## First of its Kind

By Jason Tomassini




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*“The Canadian government has heard the complaints of its newest residents...”*

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**E**very year 750,000 people who are looking for a better life apply to immigrate to Canada. On a points-based system that awards a score according to level of education, employment experience, and language ability, 250,000 people are accepted. They pack up all of their belongings and arrive in Canada with the idea that the education and skills that got them here are the same ones that will help them secure employment, only to be frustrated by cultural differences and the complexity of the Canadian system.

The unemployment rate for newcomers is more than double that of individuals born in Canada. In their first year in the country over 60 per cent of newcomers are forced to take

“survival jobs” outside of their field in order to make ends meet. For over 15 per cent of immigrants the struggle proves too difficult and they leave Canada to return home within that first year.

The Canadian government has heard the complaints of its newest residents and has begun programs and funding, but with so many people to help, the resources can only go so far. In order to reach more people some immigrants, and individuals who work with immigrants, have self-published books on settling in Canada and finding a job so that newcomers can research the information on their own. These well-meaning authors don't have the

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publishing know-how to produce a top-quality book nor the experience to ensure that it is widely available to the people that needs it.

It is for this reason that Oxford University Press has begun to publish the *Canadian Newcomer Series*, a series that will help immigrants to Canada in every phase of their new lives. The series was scheduled to launch in March, 2008 with *Arrival Survival Canada* and *How to Find a Job in Canada*.

*Arrival Survival Canada* is an immigrant's guide to the first year of life in Canada and covers a wide array of subjects, such as packing before emigrating, opening bank accounts, creating a credit history, and understanding Canadian culture. It was written by Nick and Sabrina Noorani, who immigrated to Canada from India via Dubai in 1998.

Once here they were bombarded with questions from friends and family asking advice about Canada.

This led them to publish a magazine for newcomers, which also spun into a weekly radio show for Nick. He has since become a leading voice for the immigrant community and is on the boards of many newcomer agencies.

*How to Find a Job in Canada* is a comprehensive job guide that includes topics similar to traditional job guides, such as cover letters, resume writing, and interviewing, but it looks at these from a newcomer's perspective. It also features topics that are specific to immigrant's concerns: preparation before arrival, survival jobs, and newcomer employment services.

Written by Efim Cheinis, a Russian immigrant to Canada who lived through the difficulties of finding a job, and Dale Sproule, the publisher of the

*Canadian Newcomer Magazine*, the book combines their experience and knowledge into a problem-and-solution model written in straightforward language.

OUP Canada hopes that this series will smooth the transition period for immigrants and help in the realization of their aspirations as they strive for better opportunities for themselves and their children. ■



Naeem "Nick" Noorani's career in advertising took him from Bombay, India, to the Middle East, specifically Dubai. After several years of living in the Middle East, Nick and family immigrated to Canada in 1998.

The changes in lifestyle and the challenges they faced prompted Nick and his wife Sabrina to write *Arrival Survival Canada*, a handbook for immigrants. In 2004, Nick launched *The Canadian Immigrant Magazine*, which goes straight to the heart of Canada's multicultural communities, profiling immigrants, their traditions, their challenges, and their dreams.

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**“...they were  
bombarded with  
questions from friends  
and family asking  
advice about Canada.”**

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