

English Language Learning Magazine

# CONTACT

November 2021

**Pedagogical lessons for  
remote/blended online  
classrooms PLUS An  
anthropological approach to  
diversity in ELT AND MORE...**

VOLUME 47 NUMBER 3, November, 2021  
ISSN # 0227-293  
Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario  
<https://www.teslontario.org/write-us>

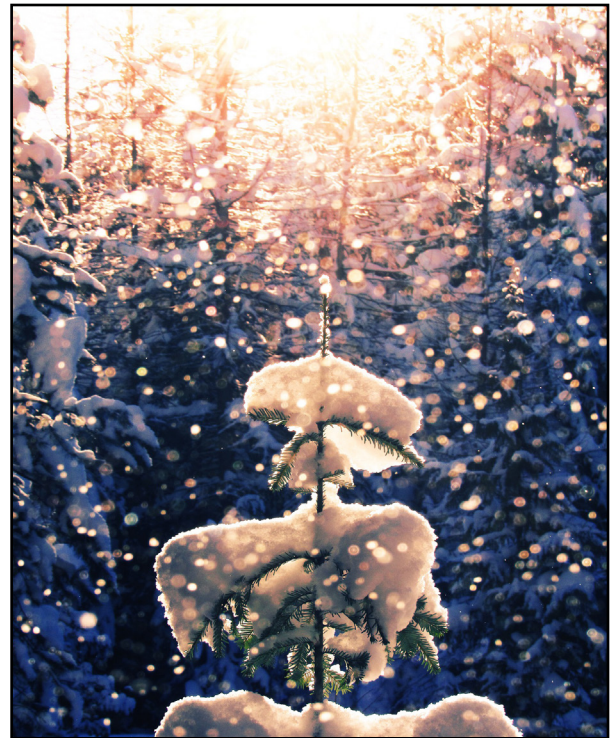
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Roberts, D. (2021). [Snowy tree] [Image]. Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/trees-nature-winter-season-snow-6676720/>

# Calendar of Events

December	January	February
December 7 – <a href="#">TESL Dialogue: Engaging Students Using Non-Traditional Platforms</a>	January 6–9 – <a href="#">2022 MLA Annual Convention</a>	February 5 – <a href="#">Getting involved matters: Developing critical citizenship in ELT</a>
December 10–11 – <a href="#">New Directions East Asia 2021</a>	January 8 – <a href="#">Surviving Burnout</a>	February 7–10 – <a href="#">51st Annual NABE Conference</a>
December 10–11 – <a href="#">ReSIG: International Festival of Teacher-Research International Conference: Teachers Research Online 2021</a>	January 27–29 – <a href="#">AMTESOL 2022: Reach Across, Reach Out, Reach Up</a>	
December 10–12 – <a href="#">4th International Academic Conference on Education</a>	January 30 – <a href="#">HSP Power Tools</a>	



# Editor's Note

Hello and welcome to another issue of *Contact* magazine.

Volume 47 comes to a close with 8 articles on topics including the pandemic's effects on teaching, plurilingualism, identity, and tips on teaching literacy, to name a few. As always, thank you to the writers for their contributions. Our next issue will feature the works and research of the presenters from the TESL Ontario 2021 Virtual Conference.

In this issue, Karen Englander and Bruce Russell discuss the technological pivot an EAP Pathway Program underwent during the 2020-2021 academic year and the insights gained by instructors. Mostafa Kosari discusses the racial barrier in ESL classrooms and how an anthropological approach can mitigate it. Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales reports on the use of a closed Facebook group for ESL argumentative writing and the incorporation of corrective feedback techniques and student perceptions of feedback and revising. Ricardo-Martín Marroquín supports a continuation of students learning their L2 at home and why there may be a need for a student and their family to express themselves by means of the L2 at home. Gulnigar Baham researches self-identity and undergraduate students, specifically L2 writers with L1 identities. Ivana Stanisavljevic proposes a pedagogical and policy-oriented shift in education from a monolingual to plurilingual model to benefit students'

educational, professional, and personal domains. Chahyun Kim examines CALL (computer-assisted language learning) through different multimedia in English classes. Finally, Zainab Almutawali provides tips for teaching literacy. There is plenty to learn about—Enjoy!

Happy Holidays from *Contact* magazine!

Thank you for reading. Take care.



Nicola Carozza  
[editor@teslontario.org](mailto:editor@teslontario.org)



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## CONTACT

*Contact* is published three times a year (March, August, and November) by TESL Ontario. March is our conference issue. It is published for the members of TESL Ontario and is available free online to anyone.

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

## Personnel

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EAB members	Hedy McGarrell Hanna Cabaj
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Design	Nicola Carozza

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ISSN # 0227-2938

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## Contact TESL Ontario

TESL Ontario #405 - 27 Carlton St.  
Toronto, ON M5B 1L2  
Phone: 416-593-4243 or 1-800-327-4827  
Fax: 416-593-0164  
<http://www.teslontario.org>

Enquiries regarding membership or change of address should be addressed to the TESL Ontario Membership Coordinator at [membership@teslontario.org](mailto:membership@teslontario.org).

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# Pedagogical lessons for remote/blended online classrooms

By Karen Englander & Bruce Russell, University of Toronto, Canada

## Abstract

An English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Pathway Program of a major Canadian university suddenly pivoted to remote teaching and learning, as did so many other university programs across the country in the 2020–2021 academic year. The Pathway Program, took the opportunity of this “pivot” to research how students and instructors fared with the new technology-mediated curriculum and found key practices as useful for instructors. In this article, we describe the Community of Inquiry framework that underpins our study and the insights gained for instructors who retain at least some remote teaching activities in their classrooms. Implications of this study indicate that there are five ways in which instructors can potentially alter their pedagogy to further student satisfaction for online study. Each activity furthers the social, teaching and/or cognitive presence that students can experience and suggests practices that instructors can consider for their own remote teaching.

*Keywords: remote teaching, online learning, Community of Inquiry, pathway programs, EAP*

An English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Pathway Program of a major Canadian university suddenly pivoted to remote teaching and learning, as did so many other university programs across the country in the 2020–2021 academic year (CAUT, 2020). The program, referred to here as the Pathway Program, took the opportunity of this “pivot” to research how students and instructors fared with the new technology-



mediated curriculum and found key practices to be useful for instructors. In this article, we describe the Community of Inquiry framework that underpins our study, the research methodology, and the insights gained for instructors who retain at least some remote teaching activities in their classrooms.

The Community of Inquiry framework was first posited by three instructors at Athabasca University in Alberta more than 20 years ago. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) were investigating how students responded to the then new “discussion boards” that were asynchronous message threads being incorporated into some university teaching activities. Since that time, the Community of Inquiry framework has been used for designing curricula and understanding student experiences in many other online teaching settings as reported in the 2010 special issue of *The Internet and Higher Education* and other work (Archer, 2010; Mo & Lee, 2017; Swan & Ice, 2010). In our Pathway Program, it was used to inform both curriculum design and a research study focused on remote teaching and learning in the 2020–2021 academic year.

Three presences comprise the Community of Inquiry framework, and they are identified as central to the student’s experience in online teaching and learning. *Cognitive presence* is the “most basic to success in higher education” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 89). It focuses on the students’ ability to “construct meaning” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 89) from course materials, engage in critical thinking, and be intellectually stimulated.

*Social Presence* is sometimes characterized as simply a sense of belonging in a community of learners. It is the student’s ability to “project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as ‘real people’” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 89). Pedagogies of collaboration through activities of peer teaching and peer review, small and large group discussions, and paired writing are especially affected by the students’ sense of being seen and valued as a “real person” in online-mediated environments.

*Teaching presence* has a two-fold function: It captures the design of the educational experience through learning activities and assessments and the facilitation of learning through teachers’ discourse. In short, it is the role of the teacher as perceived by the students in their educational experience. These three presences, separately and together, describe the educational experience available to students.

In the Pathway Program research, we used the Community of Inquiry framework to investigate students’ experience and instructors’ experience. The results that we report here are drawn from data collected through student questionnaires (n=178) and 30 hours of instructor meetings and interviews. Data analysis revealed five best practices for instructors to implement that enhance students’ experience as part of an online learning community. These practices and the data that informs them are reported here.



1) **Your presence makes the difference.** The 178 students who participated in our questionnaire study rated their experience of “teaching presence” as the most satisfactory, over cognitive and social presences. They said, for example, “My instructors are so great that I have more passion in the classes.” Students remarked that instructors were “dedicated”, “helpful”, “patient”, “friendly”, and “committed.” For example, “Teachers tried to let us understand and wanted to help improve our English level.”

Despite reports that students’ sense of belonging is the primary criterion for success in online learning (Mo 2021; Richardson et al., 2017; Straythorn, 2020), we found that it was students’ sense of the teachers’ involvement that most highly correlated with their online satisfactory learning experience. Our students rated their sense of social presence—their connecting with other “real” students—as the least satisfactory. They said, for example, that it was “difficult to build connections with the class or the school” and “it is hard to make new friends online.” Given that, overall, the students rated their satisfaction with the Pathway Program as 4.3 out of 5. It was the high engagement of instructors with the students that made for a successful online learning experience.

Therefore, best practice indicates that instructors need to engage with the students through synchronous classes, one-on-one feedback, and patience with the students’ navigation of the online learning experience.

2) **Keep cameras on.** Promoting students’ sense of social presence is facilitated by seeing each other. Students and instructors reported that participating in synchronous activities was much more satisfying when everyone kept their cameras on. Not all instructors in the Pathway Program required students to have their cameras on, and they described this as wanting to protect the students’ privacy. They said that some students seemed embarrassed when other family members entered the view, or they did not like having others see their home. This was particularly relevant for students who did not have a private study space.

However, the anonymity of only a voice, or the microphone muted and no picture, seemed to foment student disengagement. One instructor reported calling on a student during a synchronous class only to find out that she was not even there. Students lamented the difficulty of “making friends” with classmates, and the absence of the faces of their classmates exacerbated this. One student said that in the synchronous “break out” rooms, sometimes students would have no face, and this seemed to lead to no discussion. Cognitive presence—the intellectual interaction with course content—was enhanced when students brought their faces and their voices to synchronous learning activities.

3) **Create “lecturettes”.** Our Pathway Program classes are usually three hours long, twice a week, and take place in the classroom. That had to be transformed for online delivery. The new learning cycle for our language-focused courses became (i) a 70-minute synchronous class, (ii) asynchronous independent tasks intended for approximately 50 minutes, and (iii) a one-hour pre-recorded lecture that students watched

prior to the synchronous “live” class. Much like a flipped classroom, the pre-recorded video lectures were the means for presenting most of the curricular content.

We quickly learned that students found watching the one-hour lectures was, at best, tedious. Instructors then began experimenting with shorter lectures, breaking the content into smaller chunks. These became known as “lecturettes”. Instead of 60 continuous minutes, there was a series of 5-, 10-, or even 20-minute lecturettes. They would be numbered as Number 1, Number 2, etc., so students knew the order for watching them. This method allowed students to stop, pause, rewind if necessary, and take a break, without losing the continuity of the content, as each became complete in itself.

Some instructors asked the students to perform an asynchronous task at the end of the lecturette (e.g., complete a worksheet, look up information, write a reflection) to reinforce the content before opening the next lecturette in the series. Students’ cognitive presence was stimulated in this manner, without being oversaturated and disengaged.

By using lecturettes, the curricular content was more easily integrated and more readily welcomed into their learning activities.

4) **Make learning affordances explicit.** As described above, the learning cycle we designed at the Pathway Program had three elements: synchronous “live” class, asynchronous independent tasks, and flipped lesson lecturettes. We assumed that all the students would recognize the importance of all these elements and give them equal weight, but instructors found that they did not. Some students thought that they only really needed to attend the live classes. Others thought the real content was in the lectures, so the live class was just for socializing. Some felt that the asynchronous tasks were simply optional extra work. Because online learning with this learning cycle was new to the students, the affordances of each was not necessarily clear.

As a result, instructors found that it was important to make the affordances of each element in the cycle explicit to the students. Not only did each element contribute to the students’ mastery of the course content, each one facilitated the different presences that comprise the Community of Inquiry framework; for example:

- The lecturettes supported students’ cognitive presence. They could watch, learn, study, review, and consider the content for cognitive engagement with the course content.
- Similarly, the asynchronous tasks supported cognitive presence. If students decided to collaborate with a classmate on the tasks, their social presence was enhanced. For the activities where instructors provided personal feedback, students gained teaching presence through that interaction.
- The synchronous classes involved all three presences. The instructor made his/her teaching style overt and engaged with students, which provided teaching presence to the students. Cognitive presence was



stimulated through the content. Students were able to make their social presence known through large group discussions and small group activities within breakout rooms.

While instructors did not necessarily discuss the three presences with the students, the affordances of each type of activity was discussed. By being explicit about the affordances, instructors guided the students to take advantage of all the elements of the curriculum.

**5) Reconsider assessment.** Assessment activities were affected by the remote platforms in ways that we did not expect. Happily, the number of academic integrity violations was lower than previous years in our Pathway Program, and this runs contrary to many reports in the mainstream press (Roberts, 2021; Sonoran, 2020) which discussed widespread “cheating” in university courses. However, we did find the manner of academic integrity violations was different than in the past.

Students seemed to be able to use technological applications for remote assessment activities in ways that are not possible in the classroom. For example, students were able to use an app that provided transcripts of the lectures used for listening assessments, eliminating the need to listen. They also found apps that translated text from English to Chinese so that they were able to read in their L1 rather than in English. Written answers could be first written in Chinese and then translated by an app into English. In one case, a student who used this strategy even submitted their original Chinese answer. It was also possible for students to communicate with each other through a social media app (e.g., WeChat) at the same time that an individualized assessment was taking place. We note that this last strategy reveals a positive social presence among the students. In other words, some did rely on classmates as a sign of a social bond. However, as one instructor wryly noted, “they didn’t always know who was the smart one”. This manner of connection also excluded the students who did not speak Mandarin, although they were only 9 of the 220 students.

Assessment activities are now being reconsidered, especially as online learning is continuing in some form in our Pathway Program. We are exploring speaking assessments that involve several students simultaneously where they record themselves and then submit the audio/video to the instructor. Multimedia assessment that requires students to use video, PowerPoint, Padlets, and other technologies are possible. Students providing individual voice responses to exam questions rather than written ones could limit the academic integrity violations of their classmates. In addition, by considering the affordances of applications, new and more meaningful assessments could be possible.



## Conclusion

Remote teaching and learning in English for Academic Purposes has motivated a sudden transformation of curricula and pedagogy, and this was certainly true of the Pathway Program at a major Canadian university. To inform that transformation, we took advantage of a well-documented framework called the Community of Inquiry, which posits three presences that contribute to students' satisfaction: social, cognitive, and teaching. We note that authors have critiqued the original Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999, 2010) framework for not considering other presences. Neither learning presence or learning outcomes are accounted for in the framework (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009; Shea et al., 2012). However, we agree with the argument made by Akyol et al. (2009) that it is the "nature of the educational transaction" which is of interest in the framework, and in our study. Because our interest is in the nature of the educational transaction, we did not correlate student grades with the presences. Neither did we compare grades in this 2020–2021 cohort to students' grades in prior years when the Pathway Program provided face-to-face classroom pedagogy.

While we transformed our curriculum of the Pathway Program for remote teaching and learning, we simultaneously undertook a research study of its efficacy using the same Community of Inquiry framework. Combining student questionnaires and analysis of instructor discourse, we were able to determine, most importantly, that students were largely pleased with the program. They rated it as 4.3 "stars" out of 5.

Our analysis of the student and instructor data using the Community of Inquiry framework did allow us to identify five best practices for remote teaching and learning. Those five best practices are:

1. Your presence makes the difference.
2. Keep cameras on.
3. Create lecturettes.
4. Make learning affordances explicit.
5. Reconsider assessment.

Indications are that some form of remote teaching and learning will continue in higher education. This may be required by public health policy or adopted as part of blended delivery going forward. The best practices described here can help instructors to make research-informed decisions about their own pedagogy as they continue to explore the affordances and difficulties of online EAP curricula.



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### Author Bios

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Karen Englander, PhD, is the Research Officer at the International Foundation Program of the University of Toronto. She is an established scholar in the sub-discipline of English for Research Publication Purposes with two recent books: *English for Research Publication Purposes: Critical-Pragmatic Approaches* (co-author James Corcoran) and *Pedagogies and Policies for Publishing Research in English* (co-editors James Corcoran and Laura Muresan). She has published two dozen peer-reviewed articles in English and Spanish. Karen is a former professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Mexico, and York University, Canada, teaching EAP, TESL/TEFL, and applied linguistics.



Bruce Russell has been Director (Academic) of International Programs at the University of Toronto since 2004 where he oversees programming and instruction. Bruce is interested in how language support can be tailored to meet the needs of both international and domestic English language learners in post-secondary contexts. His research interests include specific purposes language assessment, content language integrated learning, translanguaging, and reliability and validity issues in language assessment. Bruce is pursuing his PhD at OISE with an emphasis on language assessment.



# An anthropological approach to diversity in ELT

By Mostafa Kosari, Canada

## Abstract

This paper presents a discussion of the racial barrier to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the context of English Language Teaching. Although diversity is welcomed in ESL classrooms, giving all the students and teachers equal opportunities to participate and keeping all of them equally engaged is not necessarily an easy task when it comes to a formidable barrier called *race*. To achieve this aim, one perspective ESL employers, teachers, and students can adopt to reduce racial bias is an anthropological approach, which this paper is attempting to promote.

## *Survival of the fittest*

When the sociologist Herbert Spencer coined the phrase *survival of the fittest* in 1864, he had no idea how his misconception of Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution would arouse such a bitter controversy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with dire repercussions in our present day.

In *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839/2004), where Darwin's discoveries on the Galapagos Islands are documented, Darwin mentions that at first, he suspected that all the diverse-looking birds he saw there were new types and exotic. However, after further investigation he came to the reasonable conclusion that every single one of the bird types belonged to the same species: the finch. For him, this was the case of natural selection, which means one species had naturally been selected and modified within a confined space for different purposes. So, natural selection is the mechanism through which change takes place (Fleck, 2020).



In this case, the final result is a different finch for every island, each *adapted* for survival in that particular region, but they are all finches with only different adaptations to their immediate surroundings. Therefore, it would be wrong to say that any one population is better or worse than the other one due to the fact that if they are misplaced, they will not be as functional.

## Being *superior*

In his third book, *The Descent of Man* (1871/2004), Darwin applied all he had learned from finches to human beings. Just as each finch made necessary adaptive traits to survive in its specific environment, without any one of them being *superior* or *inferior* to the other one, human diversity is not a marker of *superior* or *inferior* societies.

Human beings have adapted in much the same way. Phenotype, or physical characteristic, is simply the pure chance of location and climate. For example, people with white skin have been less exposed to the sun. Scientifically speaking, if this process is repeated for thousands of years, melanin or the natural skin pigment is reduced and instead different traits that are more useful for that specific environment are developed (Fleck, 2020). Conversely, people who have dwelled in a region with regular exposure to the sun, have darker skin because melanin is naturally developed to protect their skin against the ultraviolet radiation. Also, “skin colour varies as much within races as across them” (Lamey, 2019).

Similarly, our cultures are the result of our adaptations to our immediate surroundings and not due to a linear progression from primitive to advanced. We have changed simply because we have lived in different regions of the world due to migration over the past 100,000 years (Fleck, 2020). This is plenty of time for any population to establish their unique culture and for their outward appearances to change due to interaction with different climates. In other words, it is *circumstance* that makes a culture into what it is. Not biology.

## Race

Given this logic, race is not biological. Race is not rooted in our genes. Although, as the geneticist Reich says, some traits are influenced by genetic variations, human populations are remarkably similar to each other from a genetic point of view (2018). For Hardimon, “Asian, white, and black racial groups exhibit different patterns of skin colour and hair texture because they descend from different populations that originated in Asia, Europe, and Africa, respectively. Hardimon calls this the *minimalist* concept of race. It sees race as biologically real but trivial” (Lamey, 2019).

According to the anthropologist Ashley Montagu, race is a social concept (Reich, 2018). We know this because the science of genetics has not discovered a *superior race* chromosome. If it had, and if people of



different nations originated from different species, humans for the last 100,000 years, since the beginning of migration from Africa, would not have been able to interbreed. Thus, it would be fundamentally wrong to consider one nation *superior* because of its technological advances and material wealth due to the fact that it has been the circumstance of that specific nation and not the biological *race* that has led to such adaptation. With the circumstance having the upper hand, and not the *race*, another nation, that could be considered less *sophisticated* out of prejudice, might have progressed in art and literature instead. Interestingly, both nations are still at the same level of evolution with only different *adaptive traits*.

## Diversity in the ELT market

Embracing these adaptive traits in Canadian ESL careers, rather than dehumanization, we can build a nation that enjoys substantial benefits from diverse skills and adaptation. However, this is only possible by being anthropologically aware of the fact that *race* is not based in our genes, and it is the circumstance that makes humans develop certain physical features and specific cultures. Knowing this fact, we human beings can put aside an unreasonable dislike and distrust of people who are different from us in some way and focus more on diversity, equity, and inclusion. As educators, with proper education, we can avoid closing our eyes to race prejudice and promote a humanistic and humanitarian approach.

## Race and bias in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The reason some of us are still biased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and think that one *race* is *superior* to another is because of the wrong way the earlier western anthropologists observed the nations. These anthropologists, unfortunately, observed and judged the non-Western societies and their cultures through a Western lens and Western cultural norms. This method resulted in dismissing people from those countries as *outsiders*. It is easy to imagine how a child born in the West can easily adopt racist attitudes because of being overexposed to such false information in the media. Therefore, as the evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin has mentioned, “human racial classification is of no social value and is positively destructive of human relations” (Lamey, 2019).

## Social interaction

However, through the media, we can encourage interaction. The good news is our brain is plastic. This means that the brain can “physically be molded based on social interactions” (Fleck, 2020, p. 131). If this is the case, the same media that has misled many year after year can change brains by encouraging proper unbiased interactions. Undoubtedly, through the tool of social interaction, employers, ESL teachers, and students can enormously benefit from *effective communication* in order to promote inclusion and engagement in the diverse classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and keep in mind that “racism is cunning and able to take on new shapes” (Lamey, 2019).





## Conclusion

To encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion in ESL careers, employers, ESL teachers, and students must not involve visible physical appearance. What they need to do is relevant reading of a given country's daily reality. They need to observe a culture from the perspective of the people of that culture and stop judging them with Western *moral* norms. This way, they can learn to respect fundamental cultural differences. With a non-Western lens, they can also learn that the evil acts individual people commit are not reflections of all citizens of a given country. In a multicultural learning environment, we all need to maintain standards of taste and decency.

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### Author Bio

Mostafa Kosari is an OCELT who has been teaching English for over 20 years. Starting to learn English at age 10 in Iran, he got highly interested in the English language and decided to pursue his college education in this field. He received his BA in Translation and his MA in English Language and Literature. Mostafa is experienced in teaching EFL, ESL, EAP, and test preparation courses. When he is not teaching English, he enjoys reading novels and articles, bike riding, and playing the piano.

# Facebook as a tool for enhancing students' argumentative writing

By Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales , Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

Argumentative writing is one of the most difficult written genres in higher education for both English as a second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) learners. These learners often face difficulties using complex syntactic forms and appropriate elements of argumentation (Ka-kan-dee & Kaur, 2014). Hence, there is an imperative need to explore the use of effective strategies to improve ESL/EFL students' argumentative writing ability at the tertiary level.

Corrective feedback, referred to as utterances that indicate to a learner that their output is erroneous in some way (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017), may be a particularly effective method of giving individual and specific guidance for the improvement of argumentation.

In ESL teaching, many recent studies have investigated the viability of Facebook as an educational tool (Wasoh, 2014; Sheperd, 2015). Several features of Facebook that enable peer feedback, collaborative learning, information exchange, and resource sharing can be used for teaching purposes. For example, students can provide feedback on each other's work using the *comment* feature, or even record information they consider relevant using the *notes* feature, which functions as a notebook (Barrot, 2016).

This paper reports on a study that investigated the use of a closed Facebook group for ESL argumentative writing. Specifically, the study aimed to (a) explore difficulties that ESL students experience when writing argumentative essays in a closed Facebook group; (b) examine corrective feedback techniques used by students when correcting their peers' argumentative essays; (c) investigate how students integrate received peer corrective feedback while revising their texts in a closed Facebook group; and (d) uncover students' perceptions concerning the use of Facebook in argumentative writing.



## Who participated in the research

Twelve francophone students (seven female, five male) registered and participated in a written communication and textual revision class as part of a TESL university program in Quebec.

## What the participants did on Facebook

The participants produced three argumentative essays in a closed Facebook group. For each essay, the learners produced one draft before receiving peer feedback and one afterwards. The writing and feedback activities were completed as part of the routine classroom activities following the steps described below:

- Students received 3 hours of training on peer corrective feedback (PCF). Training consisted of a teacher's presentation of PCF on both linguistic errors and content, followed by students practicing how to provide PCF using rubrics from the teacher.
- The teacher proposed a controversial topic to be discussed in the closed Facebook group. The proposed topics were euthanasia, marriage in the millennial era, and the death penalty.
- Students participated in each topic discussion at least three times, using 80–100 words per comment to make their own claims, including evidence and assumptions regarding the topic (See [Figure 1](#)).
- Students wrote an argumentative essay on the discussed topic and posted it in the closed Facebook group. The essays consisted of an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Students provided corrective feedback to one of their peers' argumentative essays. The teacher determined who provided feedback to whom. Content feedback was provided (see [Figure 2](#)) according to the following criteria:
  - Accuracy: The content is trustworthy, exact, and undistorted.
  - Relevance: The content is pertinent and current.
  - Representativeness: The content is true to context.
  - Adequacy: The content is plentiful and specific.
- Students provided corrective feedback on linguistic errors in their peers' drafts according to the types of errors proposed by Guénette and Lyster (2013) and posted to the group in an attached file (see [Figure 3](#)).
- Students revised their argumentative essays to incorporate the peer feedback they had received.
- Students published their final version of the argumentative essay in the closed Facebook group.
- Once the course had finished and grades had been submitted, the students were contacted by the researcher and invited to participate in the research project. Students who were interested in participating could do so by allowing the researcher to use their written productions in the closed Facebook group as data and participate in a semi-structured interview. All students agreed to let the researcher use their written productions, and six accepted the invitation to be interviewed.
- The video recorded interviews were conducted by a research assistant and took place in the students' language of preference (English or French).

## What the findings showed

Findings revealed that, the most common errors in the three argumentative essays were grammar, followed by lexical errors. In addition, the most common error type was sentence structure in all three essays, followed by verb form and word form in Essay 1 and punctuation in Essays 2 and 3.

As for the different peer feedback techniques used by English L2 students in writing argumentative essays in a closed Facebook group, results showed that, overall, students used more direct correction in Essay 1, more indirect error identification in Essay 2, and both direct correction and indirect feedback in Essay 3. Since both direct and indirect written CF may be used to improve the overall accuracy of rewritten texts, and there is no consensus in research concerning which is more effective (Nassaji, 2016), the observed variety of peer feedback techniques is suggested to be positive.

In terms of corrective peer feedback on content, students provided pertinent positive and negative feedback on relevance, adequacy, and accuracy. In representativeness, however, both positive and negative feedback was found to be non-pertinent. This suggests that students had difficulty judging if the evidence provided in their peers' essays accurately portrayed the object of study in an undistorted and non-selective manner.

As for how English L2 students integrated received peer feedback when revising their texts in a closed Facebook group, findings showed that in all three essays, students were able to correct their English errors by successfully incorporating the received peer feedback.

Concerning student perceptions towards the use of Facebook for argumentative writing, all the interviewed students considered the main advantages of using Facebook for argumentative writing to be that it was accessible, fast, convenient, and easy to use. Likewise, all interviewees reported that the received corrective feedback from their peers helped them improve their use of English. One student mentioned that both providing and receiving peer feedback was a learning experience:

*I would say I learned as much by giving comments as by receiving them, since by seeing others' mistakes, I could understand and tell myself I should watch this or that, reflect on whether or not my argument was supporting my main idea or my thesis. (Student A)*

Furthermore, students highlighted that feedback helped them notice their own mistakes:

*It helped for the English, since there were some mistakes that I didn't detect myself, for example. There were even some things I didn't know I*



*learned because of the feedback. Someone was giving me feedback, and then, I was correcting. (Student B)*

Finally, all six students qualified their experiences using Facebook in argumentative writing as positive and motivating. The reasons for these positive perceptions were related to the advantages mentioned earlier:

*It was a really positive experience for me since Facebook is a very accessible media. It was also positive since even in other people's essays, we could find mistakes and get feedback on them and that would help us, even if we weren't the one who wrote the essay. (Student C)*

## Conclusion and pedagogical implications

In summary, the present study suggests that L2 learners experience difficulties using appropriate grammar structures and providing accurate evidence to demonstrate the validity of their claims when writing argumentative essays. Findings reveal that students provided a variety of direct and indirect feedback to their peers, and in general, they were able to incorporate this feedback (both corrective and content) into their revisions. This suggests that peer feedback is an effective strategy to improve ESL students' argumentative writing. Results also show that students perceived the closed Facebook group as accessible, convenient, and easy to use, both for providing and receiving peer feedback.

These findings are pedagogically significant since they highlight the benefits of using a closed Facebook group in argumentative writing and reveal that students are able to both provide feedback and incorporate it into their writing using this platform.

Nevertheless, there are some considerations that teachers should contemplate before incorporating Facebook mediated corrective peer feedback in their practice. Despite all the interviewed participants in this study focusing on Facebook's advantages, this platform may also present certain limitations as a learning environment. Some students might feel that a social network is not an appropriate space for formal academic learning because of the blurring of the social and educational domains (Van Doorn & Eklund, 2013); students might also fear cyber bullying (Rimour & Arie, 2018). This could prevent students from having a positive approach to the task and constructing a collaborative relationship with the partner, which would hinder the effectiveness of PCF in L2 learning. Therefore, teachers must ensure the safety and security of the environment, providing clear guidelines to circumvent these or any other potential difficulties related to the use of Facebook.



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### Author Bio

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Maria-Lourdes Lira-Gonzales is professor and chair of the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Program at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Her research interests include corrective feedback and the impact of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) in foreign and second language writing.





# Thou shalt not speak English at home

By Ricardo-Martín Marroquín, Redeemer University, Canada

## Abstract

In this paper, I will explore various reasons why English may be endorsed to be spoken at home by English language learners. There is a strong consensus by second language teachers that learners of a second language (L2) should focus on developing their first language (L1) in a more academic means, adding that solidifying their foundation in their first language, would also support second language learning. Furthermore, language skills are interchangeable from one language (L1) to another (L2). However, the point of this article is to entertain and even to support a continuation of learning the L2 at the student's home for reasons explained in further detail. In addition, the notion is not to weaken the argument that speaks of the continual development of the L1, which facilitates L2 learning, but rather to help teachers understand why there may be a need for a student and their family to express themselves by means of the L2 at home.

*Keywords: ALPHA, more knowledgeable other (MKO), English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language Learner (ELL)*

English language learners (ELLs) or simply English learners (ELs) are oftentimes encouraged to continue to develop their first language (L1) at home by speaking their own language, in addition to reading and writing (Coelho, 2016; Cummins, 2000). English learners or English language learners are those students who speak a language other than English and are now learning English as a second language. In this article, I will



call English as second language learners simply as English learners or EL. It is also important to note that students whose mother-tongue is English, are also developing their skills in their L1 (English). However, this article is not to reflect on them as English learners but rather on those who are learning English as a second language. The idea is precise, to the point, and it carries much validity and reasoning. If you were to ask ESL teachers about this matter, the consensus would lead towards the developing of the L1 at home, given that this would have a positive impact when learning an L2. This is quite accurate and agreeable by several language intellectuals such as Elizabeth Coelho and Dr. Jim Cummins. Hence, continuing to work on the L1 will facilitate language learning in the L2. Cummins (2000) suggests that the skills learned in L1 are readily interchangeable in the L2, pointing that when a student learns a new language (L2), the concepts learned in the L2 will also be readily applicable for the L1 and vis-à-vis. Therefore, continuing to develop an L1 would only reap favourable outcomes towards learning an L2. This is mainly the reason why second language teachers encourage parents to speak the L1 at home. The idea is rational, it makes much sense and it weighs a convincing argument. I too am in favour of students developing their L1 while still learning English as a second language. However, the idea of this article is not necessarily to point the obvious, but rather to explore an alternative notion that differs from what we just discussed. In fact, I will be focusing on a response to a distinct message that often comes from a (homeroom or ESL) teacher, “thou shalt not speak English at home,” and this is mainly due to the fact that the parent and/or the child does not speak English well enough or even with a heavy accent. Although the development of the L1 is recommended as literacy skills are transferred from one language to another, there are substantial reasons why a parent may want to speak English, or even allow English in their household. Here are a few reasons that will be discussed in further detail:

1. Students may learn a new academic-based concept/specific expectation in English (L2)
2. The parent’s level of L1 may be low or only available in an oral capacity
3. The parent’s academic English level may be higher than their social language (CALP higher than BICS), or a parent is eager to learn English and/or is attending adult ESL class
4. The Graeco-Latin influence and other cognates in English and a specific L1

As a second language educator, but more so as an immigrant and English learner (having come to Canada at the age of eleven), I can relate well with the arguments above. However, my opinions are not merely a reflection of my own experience, but rather an addition to an exploration that I have also been able to carry through. My personal experience further ascertains what other immigrant families have shared with me. For this reason, I find it important (as a second language educator and also as second language and culture learner) to express the reasons why English may be allowed and/or spoken (L2) at an immigrant’s home, and why teachers should not frown upon it if such is the situation, and rather



encourage it. It is crucial for me to indicate that when a newcomer learns English as an L2, they also learn the culture. In other words, the language is not learned exclusively/separately from the L2. For this reason, we (as teachers) need to remember that the differences that may exist in culture and become more culturally responsive when teaching English as an L2 and remember of the cultural curve that the learner navigates. In my years of teaching in the education sector, I have heard several times an educator dissuade a family from using English at home. Furthermore, sending a clear message that English shall not be spoken in the absence of the teacher and the classroom, but instead for the parent to continue developing the L1. “Leave English to the experts at school and focus on speaking your own language”; or “please allow the literacy development of your L1 to take place at home, while we (teachers) focus on mastering your child(ren)’s English skills”; or even “so that your child does not learn the wrong way, please let us focus on their English skills”. However, there is a level of negativity attached to the messages above, and an expansion of learning English at home may be neglected as a result. As previously stated, I too agree that the implementation of the first language to further develop the literacy skills of the learner needs to be crucial in the newcomer’s family. Nevertheless, we may not object to the parents’ intentions and goals. That is, parents may also mention that their purpose as an immigrant family is to learn English as fast as possible. Therefore, shifting the intended focus of a teacher for the family. There is no denying this, and in fact, a teacher may need to take a parent’s request and/or objective in mind, rather than *put it on trial*.

English learners are acquiring English (L2) in a variety of contexts. They are learning a new language as they navigate the diverse academic curricula (Cummins, 2000). As their learning takes a major leap, there are going to be new ideas that may not have been already learned in their own cultural context. Take photosynthesis or ecosystems for example. An ELL in grade 7 may start learning about these concepts without having any prior knowledge or having not learned them in his L1/cultural context. He may be learning about how ecosystems work and the different types there are. Furthermore, he may be using technical terms that may also exist in his L1, but has not had the opportunity to learn them in the L1. During the new classroom setting, the student may be learning and may be able to explain with some detail, while also incorporating academic language to this new concept. However, it may complicate the learning process if the parent or even the teacher would want the student to explain the newly learned concept by exclusively utilizing the L1, especially if the student does not have the necessary language skills (L1) to be able to perform such a task. It may become difficult and even impossible if the parent, the more knowledgeable other of the L1, does not hold the skills to guide the student with the appropriate vocabulary when explaining this new concept (Vygotsky refers to the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) as the adult who helps and guides the learner through the learning process to achieve a learning goal.). We could also apply this example to a more complex and/or current topic, such as social justice, bullying, or digital citizenship. For digital citizenship, a student may



have learned new lexicon pertaining to technology, ethical code, and behavior. A child may learn about the norms of appropriate and responsible conduct when using social media or online platforms via their phone, computer, or any other device. Simply put, the vast language could be novel to the child, and not having knowledge of how to interpret this newly learned material in their first language, may become troublesome, and even break the lines of communication when speaking with a parent.

In many cases, the parent may not be able to help the child, and this could be because the parent may not know about this new concept. Perhaps the parent does not know the appropriate technical terms for the topic because they did not have the opportunity to learn this. It may be a novel topic and/or this is not their field of expertise. For this reason, as a teacher, one must use caution when expressing to the parent and the child that the L1 should only be spoken exclusively at home, without the interference of English as an L2. This could create a lack of information being shared at home with the parents from the child. At the end of the day, one must remember that the main point of language is to communicate ideas, to exchange thoughts, and even to share feelings. However, if we must hold on to a rigid thought that no English be spoken at home, we may lose on the opportunity for the student to share and to digest the newly learned concepts in the L2.

For the past four years, I have been working with ELLs and their parents. After establishing a welcoming, positive, and inclusive setting, I have been able to ask questions to better know the students and their family, and understand their goals and needs. These questions are:

1. Has the student been able to consistently go to school (has there been a pause in their education)?
2. Can the student speak, read, and write (up to the grade level) in their mother tongue?
3. Can you (the parent) speak, read, and write in your mother tongue (same as the student)?
4. Do you speak another language other than your child's first language? Or do the parents (if there are 2) have the same mother tongue?

After tabulating the results, I discovered very common and expected results; nevertheless, there was specific information that I was not anticipating. The results were that nearly all of the parents spoke the same mother tongue of their child. However, there were two specific cases where the parent did not speak the same L1 as the child; the first case because both parents met in a neutral country, and each, coming from a different background (mother from India and father from Thailand) spoke a different language (L1), and therefore learned English (limited in language skills) as a second language (L2), which in turn became the child's L1. Undoubtedly, the student's level of English was consistent with the parents' skills, which generated a challenge to the student with regards to the L1. In fact, this student, I would have considered an English language learner (English—1<sup>st</sup> language) without necessarily being an ESL student. In the second



case, there were two parents who were bilingual and both decided to choose their L2 (English) as the L1 for the child.

Furthermore, the majority (a very high percentage) of students had acquired the grade level skills in their L1 before learning the L2. In rare cases, I found out that the student (due to political turmoil, war, or living in a refugee camp) could only speak their L1 but had very limited skills for reading and writing in their L1. In this case, such information helped the ESL/ELD department to allocate or at least to provide the appropriate ELD support. Finally, the majority of the parents had a proficient to superior grasp in their L1. However, there were cases where the parent did not read or write in their L1 though they were able to communicate orally. This could have been for reasons such as no opportunities to study, fleeing political turmoil and/or the need to work, even from an early age. There were a few cases where the parent could not read and/or write in their L1 and therefore, could not help their child acquire the necessary skills to communicate in the L1 apart from an oral aspect. These parents wanted their child to excel in Canada, focusing much attention on academics, though not necessarily being able to support them with their learning, or at least feeling insecure along with a lack of recourse to support a proper acquisition of the L2 along a fine development of the L1.

While teaching an ELD ALPHA (Accelerated Language Program in Hamilton Area) program to students in Grades 6 to 8, I encountered several families that wanted to provide an opportunity for their children to excel and surpass them (the parents) academically. Although busy due to work, these parents were involved and tried to make time to come to the school and meet with me to talk about their child's learning. They showed their appreciation towards the teachers and the academic institution by making sure that their child would continue their learning at home, providing them with the necessary resources to do so, and even by coming to the school and bringing food for our cultural celebration, which ended up happening every month (this was at the student's request). Their lack of knowledge in both L1 and L2 posed a challenge to help the child at home; however, it did not become an obstacle by which becoming defeated. It was very interesting that the parents would communicate with their child by implementing both the L1 and L2. It would have been very difficult and troublesome to ask these parents to exclusively communicate by means of their L1 at home with their child, and not use English whatsoever. Maybe, we could have sent a wrong message or even broken the lines of support and communication between the school and the home. In addition, how about the parents that spoke a different L1 (i.e. the mother speaks Spanish and the father speaks Portuguese) and made their L2 (English) the common language at home?

While supporting ELLs from an affluent area in town, I came across parents whose level of academic English (reading and writing) was higher than their oral skills. These parents were able to comprehend a



message whether aural and/or in a written form, better than they could articulate oral sentences. Hence, their receptive language skills were more developed than their expressive skills in the L2. Although this was not the norm for all immigrant parents, they had a higher level of education. That is, because of their professional designations, since some of them were doctors and/or had worked in the medical field, while others were medical students finishing off a degree (post-graduate) in our city. These parents certainly had a higher degree of English (L2) and their native language (L1), though their accent could have caused a level of misunderstanding from the part of the teacher. Their children on the other hand were mastering their L1 but were also new learners of English (L2). Sending a message home to these kinds of parents was no issue, as they were able to receive it and respond back to the queries of the teacher. Certainly, believing that all ELL parents cannot speak, read, and write English (or a combination of it) may not be necessarily true, and as teachers, we need to be cognizant of this and therefore, show respect and acceptance to the parent by allowing them to communicate in English. Furthermore, the parent may show enthusiasm to speak English at home due to the fact that they are living in an English-speaking country, or that they are now working in an English setting or even that they are eager to put into practice the new language skills (in L2) that they have acquired during their own ESL classes.

Stephen Krashen, linguist and educator, speaks directly about the notion of “comprehensible input” and its importance when learning an L2. This concept allows the L2 learner to acquire language in a communicative and social way. Keeping Krashen’s thought alive, as an educator, I try to support my students’ understanding by using cognates as comprehensible input. For this reason, I find it interesting to hear an interpreter speak to a client utilizing the L1, but what I find more intriguing is when I hear or recognize certain terms in English that have been given a specific accent. Languages tend to borrow certain lexicon from other languages and would often times make it their own. There are many *borrowed terms* even in the English dictionary that come from the Spanish language. For example: mosquito, patio, burro, mustang, canyon, and sierra.

All of these words have found themselves incorporated in the English vocabulary, and likewise, there are many *borrowed terms* that happen between two languages. These words are borrowed from the Spanish language. Furthermore, this also tends to happen between any two languages such as English-French, Latin-English, Latin-Greek, Arabic-English, etc. Utilizing cognates or same root words would only help the ELL find out that there are many terms in their L1 readily available (with the same meaning) in the L2 (English). When I teach Spanish or Italian at Redeemer University, I always finish my first day of my introductory class by letting my students know that they already hold a good percentage of lexicon in the L2 (Spanish or Italian). Sometimes the student understands what I mean. I explain that the cognates that are visible in both languages have either the same root (such as Graeco-Roman) and/or is a term that has



been borrowed from a different language (these are terms that are added from one language to another). I mention this to support L2 (Spanish/Italian) learning with my students. Similarly, I also mention the same message to my ELs by using a list of words from their L1 found in the English language. To facilitate language learning through vocabulary building, I try using cognates intentionally. For example, with my Arabic speaking students I will try to support them linguistically by using Arabic rooted terms in English. These are (and certainly not limited to): cotton, guitar, coffee, candy, arsenal, safari, and pants.

The above list only mentions a few words from an Arabic origin that can facilitate understanding.

When learning a second language, there are many methods and/or strategies that promote faster learning and or the best way to learn, or even both. In this article, I wanted to show the reasons for why English could be (and in certain cases should be) allowed with ELs and their parents. At times, we may think as educators we could be doing a disservice to the English learner when we promote the L2 at home. However, I wanted to show why the L2 may be of importance at home, too. Finally, as an educator we want to send a positive and inclusive message to all parents. When we tell parents to not speak English at home, the parent may receive the message as: “Since you do not speak English well, please leave the teaching to us”; or simply “you are not allowed to speak English to your child because you do not speak it like me” or even “your accent is too thick, and your child is learning English the way you speak it.” All of these messages will not allow for an open communication with the parent and may also sound negative and ill-mannered to an immigrant. For these reasons, I find it crucial to allow the parent and the child to speak English (L2) at home and not to substitute the L1 but rather to help the family feel included in the learning/teaching of the L2.

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### Author Bio

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Dr. Ricardo-Martín Marroquín is an adjunct professor at Redeemer University and the Assessor for the HWDSB. He holds a doctoral degree DML with a focus in teaching a second language (L2) from Middlebury College (Middlebury, VT). In his doctoral thesis, Dr. Marroquín discusses and provides several activities regarding cinema and theatre and how these activities may be implemented when teaching an L2. He has written 3 novels called *El sobrino de las tías* (Spanish), *Our Silent Journey*, and *Memoirs of an Inner-City Teacher*, (Fall 2021).





# Identity in undergraduate L2 writing: A juxtaposition of academic voice and internal voices

By Gulnigar Baham, Humber College (Kansai Foreign Languages University), Canada

## Abstract

Despite mounting research on the potential that cultivating self-identity affords students, it is often forgotten in most academic contexts, whether in instruction or assessment, that L2 writers have an L1 identity. In all avenues of higher education, researchers agree that multiple, complex, and simultaneous identities of students are advantageous for their advancement in academic writing (Cohen, 2011; Cummins, 2001; Leki, 2008); however, institutional practices, persisting social conventions, and student-teacher relationships (or lack thereof) place a greater pressure for L2 undergraduate students specifically. International and immigrant/generation 1.5 undergraduate students arrive in their new settings with their L1 knowledge base and are often expected to forego rhetorical strategies of their L1, as well as their linguistic and cultural repertoire, to write academically in their L2. While “no single theory can account for” and solve these issues (Cumming, 2016), lack of affordances in their multiple identities is at the root of many writing problems that L2 undergraduate students face.

## The academic voice: Introduction

The concept of *identity* or *subjectivity*, as an ever-evolving entity, has emerged from the margins and has taken center stage in social sciences, applied linguistics, and critical pedagogy of the last two decades. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory has established a framework for which language interactions mediate learning and negotiate identities. In the zone of proximal development (ZPD), students engage in language



interactions and build upon their knowledge through social mediation. Activity theory suggests a complex network of actions that is performed on language and by language, unraveling many new perspectives in psychoanalysis and behavioural studies in relation learning. We have realized that language learning in today's increasingly mobile and diverse societies develop in complex multilingual and plurilingual contexts, by exhibiting affordances through acceptance of multiple student identities (Piccardo, 2017; Galante, 2019). We have even transcended beyond the learner to focus on the knowledge base and conceptualizations of language teachers and the impact of their pedagogical identities (Johnson, 2009).

Despite all this effort to move forward, high stakes attached to academic writing and its assessment shows that modernist dichotomies are still prevalent in practice. Granted, a shift in perspectives is never instantaneous and there is still a lot of ground we must cover in L2 writing research. This autobiographical piece aims to contribute my simultaneous and often conflicting—in the face of social conventions—perspectives on writing.

I tread carefully as I write about the prolonged dichotomies in undergraduate L2 writing, not to rebuild further dichotomies of modernism/postmodernism, positivism/relativism, or structuralism/poststructuralism. My purpose is not to deprecate and dismiss decades of practice and research in order to raise concern for the complex intricacies of human behaviour and its effects on L2 writing. Rather, I hope to provide my experience on the traditions and conventions of undergraduate studies that have impacted my writing development in English as one of the 1.5 generation of L2 students.

Equally important is the distinction that I intend to make of the struggles that postgraduate L2 English students face and the struggles of L2 English students who have begun their undergraduate studies. It is clear that, from the structural perspective, the expectations for writing vary according to discipline, genre, and program of study. From the sociocultural perspective, however, undergraduate L2 English students demand more mediation and support to succeed in their writing, regardless of profession or program, and thereby find their voices in their identity negotiations.

## **L2 English writers in undergraduate settings**

In a stark juxtaposition to the complex nature of L2 writers, beyond their linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds, and their various sets of learning skills, English academic writing is traditionally, and perhaps ironically, structural. There are many genre-specific formats and rules to follow since the expectation for written communication is stricter than for oral communication. Assessment of writing ability mostly determines the success of students' academic careers and ultimately decides if they are able to pursue graduate academic careers. Therefore, with such grim consequences, it is only natural that L2 English



undergraduates take blind leaps in their academic careers to adapt and conform to all rules to please the readers (who also happen to be the real assessors of their writing).

In addition, undergraduate settings pose a challenge to all students even without the added complexities of functioning in a foreign language. In a longitudinal analysis of attrition rates in a Canadian university, Wintre et al. (2006) identify the leading cause of high attrition rates in undergraduates is emerging adulthood and personal struggles. Regardless of discipline, undergraduate students step into adulthood—from “the ages of 18 through to the late 20s are [in] a period of exploration during which individuals attempt to clarify their identity in a variety of different areas” (Wintre et al., 2006, p. 112). During a similar journey of self-discovery, L2 English undergraduate students in Western institutions often face subtle internal conflicts between their core L1 identities and their newly established L2 identities, as a result of those tiny but strong traces of conventional practices in post-secondary institutions.

Unlike graduate students, undergraduate students juggle and process a mountain of new information with equally little social support (Okuda & Anderson, 2018). It is often their first exposure to highly technical and discipline-specific language; while at the graduate level, L2 students have established some sense of familiarity with their topic of interest, allowing them to assert their voice and identity in their work. On the other hand, undergraduates must also learn additional cultural references and colloquiums to fit in their respective discipline specific communities.

Add to that the fast-paced, mass-produced, impersonal learning environments, the significantly lop-sided instructor to student ratio of most undergraduate lectures, the lack of specific support for L2 students, various parental pressures (financial, ideological, etc.), and the persisting effects of culture shock, undergraduate studies are a battleground of identities for L2 English undergraduate students.

## **Identity as disadvantage; Assimilation as success**

Often L2 English undergraduate students’ entire knowledge base and cognitive processing is in their L1. This, of course, shapes their identities and their ways of negotiating power (Cummins, 2001). As a result, by the time L2 students arrive at their undergraduate institutions, they have multiple and complex linguistic and cultural identities.

Today, even in the face of all of the backlash towards the “deficit” approaches and “native-speaker” idealizations, most of us are “fixated on helping learners of English develop the ability to produce texts, usually academic, that are reader-friendly to those we privilege as native speakers of English” (Belcher, 2012, p. 132). And in our aspirations to assimilate and help assimilate, students and even teachers have shoved aside their L1 identities as disadvantageous to their L2 English academic careers (Cummins, 2001; Johnson, 2009), constructing an L1/L2 binary.



In reality, the majority of English speakers are non-native. English is often an additional language that expresses our individual identities. Accordingly, as long as we have an additional language, our writing, whether in L1, L2, or L3, is largely shaped by the identities manifested by all of our linguistically coded knowledge. Assimilation in this context involves cultivating identities in all of our linguistic repertoires. Yet, aforementioned academic settings of undergraduate studies make this entirely difficult to achieve. As a result, similar power struggles in writing identity ultimately drain and reshape the writing identities of L2 undergraduate students (Ivanič, 1998).

## The *alien* voice

Writing voice can be defined as the nuanced, assertive, and descriptively present ways that writers convey their meaning (Javdan, 2014). In English, the writer's voice is a criterion in successful academic writing. However, perception of that *voice* is very limited, monolingual, and monocultural in most undergraduate writing.

In a recent study of four Korean L2 English students in their first-year composition class at a U.S. university, Lee (2016) makes interesting discoveries about the differences of authorship and voice in two different genres of writing: narrative and argumentative. Jimin, one of the research subjects in the study, reveals that she feels more confident with narrative writing as she does not have to follow a "certain conventional style", thus being "honest" with herself (Lee, 2016, p. 181). Another student, Yuna, admitted that the conventions of argumentative writing made her second guess her choices, compounding her writing apprehension in the genre. Lee suggests that narrative writing allowed the student subjects of the study to express their own identities in an authoritative voice (Lee, 2016). Furthermore, the students' lack of authoritative voice in the argumentative writing is a result of feelings of alienation they experience from the conventions of the genre, as well as their reluctance toward accepting it as their own because of a lack of representation in the genre.

While it is true that such *alien* perceptions of voice can present itself in graduate L2 English students, it is more prevalent in undergraduate students due to their lack of experience in social, academic, and professional settings. These rhetorical struggles are aggravated by identity and power negotiations inherent in undergraduate studies. In the brief period when they are most impressionable, undergraduate L2 English students find themselves ready to forego all previous knowledge in order to *harmonize* their identities.

Similar to identity, L2 rhetorical voice is dynamic and constantly developing as a result of continuous academic input and output. L2 English writers' voice is a dialogic process that must be cultivated in relation to their other language identities, as it is impossible to separate.

The following section, a narrative meta-analysis, will mirror the previous, academic voice, in structure only.



## Internal voice: Introduction

Reminiscing my undergraduate years, I often find myself fortunate to have been thrown into the secondary schools of Toronto at a relatively young age (I transferred between several schools.). Conforming to my immigrant parents' expectations and idealizations, I achieved *native-like* oral fluency before I was admitted to university. I had a strong writing background in my previous languages because my mother, a journalist, strongly encouraged me to keep a diary from as far back as I can remember.

In my high school ESL and academic English courses, my teachers praised my syntax, style, and imagery. However proud I was to receive praise for my English writing, I never felt at home in the English language. With course readings, I often lost interest when I did not understand the intertextual or cultural references. Writing was important to me; writing was “an act of identity” (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, p. 228). Soon, I determined that in order to write like the *native* speakers I needed rigorous exposure to the culture and language. So, I enrolled in the English literature program at York University.

## L2 English writer in an academic setting

As soon as my first semester began, I realized how foolish a decision this was. I knew nothing about what it was like to transition from high school to university. I was still under immense culture shock, as I had only been in Canada for 4 years. Time flew as I slowly figured out, among other things, the locations of my classes, my college affiliation, my commute to and from school, what a course syllabus was, and the amount of discipline I needed to keep my new exposure to freedom in check. All the while, my first-year course readings consisted of Shakespeare, The Bible, specifically Genesis, Plato's Republic, Beowulf, and seemingly endless amount of English literary traditions, theories, and genres.

## Identity as disadvantage; Assimilation as success

In my mind, perpetuated by the remnants of colonial era dominance of the English language and its persistence in practice today, despite the multicultural diversity of Toronto, the only way of acquiring knowledge of English literature and culture was by extensively studying British and American cultures. My course choices reflected this, and subsequently I was in the midst of an elitist culture that cultivated perfection and idealized superior *native* writing, alienating me as the *other*. Under this influence, *I* was consciously alienating me. This resulted in the most difficult two years of my academic career. I returned from the brink of dropping out, becoming one of the numbers in attrition statistics.



## The *alien voice*

When it was time for writing, I was no longer the star writer of the class. I learned every single academic writing format the hard way, through trial and error, and as a result of many low grades. Needless to say, I did not do so well in my first year, or in my subsequent years for that matter. When I realized that I had to find help, ashamed to speak to my professors, I went to the writing centre. The centres' strict no proofreading policy pushed me away further. The writing coaches questioned my ideas time and time again, while providing no support for the complex structures suddenly imposed in undergraduate writing. My problem was not finding ideas or inspiration. I had plenty of ideas, but I struggled to fit it in the molds of literary academic papers in English. Writing in my previously acquired languages bore no resemblance to English writing conventions. My papers often came back with the TA's scribbles about lack of quotes and references or that they did not understand the point I was making. Suddenly, the language and culture I desperately hoped to identify with alienated me. Despite my oral fluency and my extensive L1 writing background, I felt incapable of writing. It took me a long time, after I had long completed the courses, to understand the concept of rhetoric.

Of course, I realize that my situation is somewhat unique. Not a single one of my ESL friends and peers enrolled in an English literature program. However, I am certain, from cross-discipline conversations with my ESL peers, that others experience similar disconnect between their internal voice and academic voice.

## Conclusion

As I write, I am simultaneously a teacher of English as a Second Language to international adult learners and a student of Language and Literacies Education at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). Frequently, I find myself reassessing my pedagogical decisions in my EAP classrooms, as my learner/teacher identity confronts the institutional policies of my place of employment. I understand that my writing instruction shapes the identities of my students; however, both my students and I find it difficult to steer clear from conforming to monolingual ideals prevalent in English language learning. The struggle is immediate, yet this is a battle we must choose to fight because lexical and structural issues in student writing can be instantly corrected; however, apprehension, demotivation, and overall alienation of L2 writing voice is difficult to salvage.



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### Author Bio

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Gulnigar is an assistant professor at Humber College's off-shore English program at Kansai Foreign Languages University. She has since completed her M.Ed in Language and Literacies Education from OISE, University of Toronto. Having taught ESL to all ages since 2014, she has recently been focused on delivering EAP and TOEFL programs to post-secondary students.





# English as a lingua franca: Reverting the school system back to a monolingual ideology—Why it’s dangerous and how to move toward a plurilingual ideology

By Ivana Stanisavljevic, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Canada

## Introduction

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is the most commonly taught, learned, and used L2 worldwide. English is sought out as a valuable commodity. Parents want their children to learn it because of potential job and personal gains, and people worldwide seek to learn it for these exact reasons. It reigns supreme within the seemingly invisible pyramid of languages. English is *king*. As a lingua franca, it is the dominant language of international business, science, and technology (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57). Whatever the context, the rule of thumb seems to be, “When in doubt or when in a communicative bind, resort to speaking English.” Tourists who visit foreign countries can rest assured that they will be understood if they have knowledge of English. International companies increasingly use English as their corporate language. English has a great potential for promoting international understanding (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57). It is assumed that the best way to solve the world’s communicative problems is to use English as a lingua franca. As an educator, I find this view to be very problematic. It reverts the world back to a monolingual ideology or world view. If English is presented to students as the only language worthwhile and the only one worth their communicative effort, as educators we send forth the message that their home languages do not matter and have no place in the education system. I would like to propose a pedagogical and policy-oriented shift in education from a monolingual model to one of plurilingualism, which in my opinion, will benefit students more in their educational, professional, and personal domains.

I will begin by defining the monolingual ideology, its world view, as well as the implications of this view. The following section will focus on the definition of receptive bilingualism and plurilingualism as well as the answers this view aims to propose for the world’s communication problem. In section three, I will examine today’s educational system from the educator’s lens and to show how it is still based around a monolingual world view. I will utilize examples from my practice to show how English as a lingua franca is



still used in education and how this view reiterates a monolingual ideology. Following this section, I will propose an educational shift toward plurilingualism. This proposition will be aided by examples from my teaching practice that have proven to be somewhat successful in this shift. The paper will be concluded with a consideration for a needed shift in the educational system's view of English as a lingua franca, as it is an ideology implemented out of sheer convenience and one which places sole importance on English literacy rather than literacy as a whole. I will emphasize the importance of teaching literacy as a holistic concept, through which student will be able to utilize their entire language repertoire. Finally, I will conclude with my final consolidating thoughts on this question.

## Monolingual ideology

As Lüdi et al. points out, monolingual ideology represents a so-called wisdom, an original state, one which has been intended by God and legitimized by human beings (2010, p. 55). This idea has been found in the Bible, Greek philosophy, and all throughout history. This view has built the myth of nation as reflected in a common language (one nation, one language). An example of this idea is shown in Plato's *Republic*. In the *Republic*, Plato states, "And can there be anything better for the interests of the State than that the men and women of a State should be as good as possible? There can be nothing better" (Plato, ca. 375 B.C./1993, p. 53). In this quote, Plato emphasizes the importance of the state and reiterates the idea that the needs of the state are ultimately the only ones that matter. The needs of the individual are secondary and ultimately non-essential if they interfere with those of the state. The collective thinks and acts as one being, and no one is to stray from this norm. It is precisely this type of view that is reflected within the monolingual ideology. This is what Lüdi et al. refer to as a "one language, one nation ideology" (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57).

Individual bilingualism is perceived as dangerous, as it strays from this *unified* societal view in which the nation speaks one language and acts as one being. The monolingual answer to the challenge of communication in an increasingly globalized world is the use of English as a lingua franca (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57). The rule of thumb of the tourism industry, for example, is that English is used as the default or fallback language within any exchange of communication with foreigners, in which the national language is not an option. The rule is grounded in the experience that English is the most commonly used L2 in the world (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57). English is acquired by many individuals not only as a second language but also as a third or fourth language, and in many cases, it is one of the languages in the multilingual's linguistic repertoire (Melo-Pfeifer, 2012, p. 124). As a result, it has a great potential for promoting international understanding. English as a lingua franca is the dominant language of international business, science, and technology (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 57). It is seen as a mediation tool and an essential resource within plurilingual interactions. The knowledge of English is the one resource that is assumed all learners have,



and as a result, it acts as a gap-bridging tool in all communicative events in which understanding may be lacking. The original one nation, one language ideology still exists in modern day, and it does so through the use of English as the lingua franca. The knowledge of English seems to be the one universally unifying principle that drives forward the *one language, one nation* ideology into a more modern context toward a *one world, one language* philosophy.

## Shift toward plurilingualism

The prevalent image of linguistic diversity has always been a patchwork of homogenous language communities that were in contact through trade or marriage but still fundamentally monolingual (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 55). This is the view that a lot of people still have about plurilingualism. Like a train, it is assumed that each language runs on its own track and never meets or comes into any contact with any of the other languages that an individual may speak. As a society we have worked very hard to place languages into specific categories out of which they dare not venture. “The process of constructing linguistic utopias and imagining homogenous linguistic communities [...] was categorized by the search for clear categories and scientific purity” (Piccardo, 2016, p. 6). This process has involved putting up walls and entirely separating or isolating languages from one another. Languages, however, do not exist in isolation from one another, but, rather, they work in sync with each other. Plurilingualism as a philosophy sums up this idea perfectly.

Plurilingualism is a unique, overarching notion, implying a subtle but profound shift in perspective, both horizontally, toward the use of multiple languages, and vertically, toward valuing even the most partial knowledge of a language as tools for facilitating communication (Piccardo, 2016, p. 7). Everyone within a plurilingual society ideally speaks their language and is understood by the other members of society who do the same. Going back to our train track analogy, plurilingualism presents a view in which all the languages that a person speaks or comes into contact with, run on train tracks that are constantly intertwining and crossing paths. Plurilinguals mobilize the whole range of resources (all the languages that they speak); they do not stick to one language at one particular time but intertwine elements of different languages most creatively (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 62). Plurilingual speakers exploit their entire language repertoire in order to obtain the maximum gain from their choice of language. English is not used as a lingua franca in this instance to bridge the communicative gap; rather, any language within the speaker’s repertoire is used to do so. In order to measure the success of a communicative event, we do not have to assess the quality of the language spoken but answer the question whether or not the goal of the interaction has been achieved (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 64). This is done through any means; English can be but does not necessarily need to be present. The only criterion for determining the success of the communicative event is whether or not the message has been transferred clearly, through any language necessary to do so.



## The view on language education in present day Ontario

My current teaching position as a Grade 6 core teacher allows me to witness educational policies surrounding language and literacy first-hand within the classroom. I will briefly explain the ministry's expectations surrounding language that are passed down to me through administrators and policy makers.

Literacy as it is taught and tested in our schools is still conceived as linear, text-based reading and writing skills (Cummins, 2006, p. 3). At the elementary level, we test students twice a year in their reading level through the administration of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The test deems whether these students are where they are *supposed to be* with their reading; whether they are at the level is deemed to be *grade appropriate* by the standards set out in the DRA. During school hours, students are to read only books that are marked to be their appropriate reading level. When we speak of literacy in the classroom, it is always English literacy to which we are referring. This view of literacy can be especially problematic for students for whom English is a second or even third language. Home languages other than English or French are viewed as largely irrelevant to children's schooling (Cummins, 2006, p. 3). At best, they are treated with benign neglect and ignored; at worst, educators consider them an obstacle to the acquisition of English or French and discourage their use in school and at home (Cummins, 2006, p. 3). Ontario schoolboards have imposed a model of integrating English as a second language learners into regular stream classes. This instructional shift is in many ways deteriorating and useless, as it solely seems to promote English literacy, English norms and only assigns any real value to the knowledge of English. There is no value assigned to the home language:

The thinking is that the child's bilingualism needs to move toward "ultimate attainment," an endpoint in which the process is complete. Subtractive bilingualism, however, is often what language-minority students get. Students enter school with an L1, and while the L2 is added, the first language is subtracted. (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 387)

The ultimate goal is always the complete acquisition of English. Whether the L1 is in the picture or not by the end of this process, does not seem to be an important detail. Parents often ask me how their son or daughter is doing in English class. My first question to them is usually whether or not they speak their L1 at home. More than 90% of the time, the answer is that they speak only English at home, and they say this proudly believing it is the answer that I wish to hear. This is a problematic point of view for students and for these parents to have for a few reasons. If ELL (English language learning) students' prior knowledge is encoded in their home languages, then these languages are relevant to their learning of English and academic content (Cummins, 2006, p. 6). What this point shows is that students need their prior language knowledge in order



to be successful in the present moment of academic and language content which they are facing. The second major problem that the neglect of the home language creates in the classroom is that it causes students to frequently internalize a sense of shame in relation to their home language and culture (Cummins, 2006, p. 7). English (or French in Quebec) becomes the language of belonging and acceptance within the institution of the school (or preschool) system (Cummins, 2006, p. 7). Students' primary goal is usually to achieve a sense of belonging. If they are to sacrifice their prior language knowledge in order to achieve this, more often than not, this is what they will do. In the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board alone, there are over 50 home languages. However, the only language which is visible and the only one to which any concrete value is assigned is English. The school board does offer international language programs on weekends, but this is the sole place and context in which these home languages are at all visible. This practice very clearly resorts back to a monolingual ideology as it places English into the position of a *lingua franca*, the one language that has any real value and posits it as a language that can aid in the barrier of communication. While Canada is a seemingly multicultural society, we still seem to hold onto a *one language, one nation* philosophy as it is still instilled within our education system.

## A move toward the plurilingual classroom

Thus far we have looked at monolingual versus plurilingual teaching and learning philosophies, as well as explored the stagnant and monolingually based language system still in place within Ontario schools.

We now shift our focus toward how to make the necessary changes for teachers to bring their students' home languages into the classroom and how they can create a plurilingual learning environment. I will briefly refer back to the traditional view on language acquisition. The prevalent image of linguistic diversity has always been a patchwork of homogenous language communities that were in contact through trade or marriage but still fundamentally monolingual (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 55). In the current education system, we still hold on to this view. As educators we treat each language as running on its own track, never actually meeting or overlapping with any other languages.

We need to put in place language practices that move the focus from language as an autonomous system that pre-exists its use, and competence as an internal capacity that accounts for language production, toward an understanding of language as a product of the embodied social practices that bring it about (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 389). Students need to have an understanding of language in a holistic sense. Language is not an autonomous entity which lives in isolation; rather, it is a living and breathing being, one which interacts with other languages. These interactions very much affect and reshape language and language use. Students' prior language knowledge aids in their acquisition of new languages. Plurilinguals mobilize their whole range of resources (all the languages they speak) (Lüdi et al., 2010, p. 71). They do not



stick to one language at one particular time but creatively intertwine elements of different languages. The resulting conclusion here is the idea that the lives of people speaking different languages in fact do not run on separate tracks never meeting, as monolingual ideology assumes. They are indeed an intertwined web. This is the type of framework that teachers should aim to put into place. Each student's language needs to be recognized, and the pedagogy in place should be "centred on the singularity of the individual experiences that make up a plurality" (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 391). As such, this pedagogy enables students, as Freire has said, "to learn from each other as well as from teachers, at the same time that teachers learn from the students" (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 393). The work to make this possible starts in the classroom. It starts with a simple negotiation which teachers have with their students. They set their own norms of collaboration for how plurilinguaging will look in the classroom. What plurilingualism looks like in the classroom is not "emerging not from top-down policies, but from educators' and students' negotiation of bilingual practices" (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 391). Changes start with the teacher and the relationship that they build with their students, it is as simple as that. In order to build a plurilingual classroom, these are some of the norms which need to be put into place:

- collaboration among students
- collaboration among faculty
- learner-centered classrooms
- language and content integration
- plurilingualism from the students up
- experiential learning
- localized autonomy and responsibility (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 393)

Not all of these can be achieved instantly as the building of a plurilingual classroom takes patience and time, on the part of the teacher as well as the students. The ultimate goal is a classroom in which 1) all languages are respected and valued equally; 2) students feel that they are in a judgment-free, safe space; and 3) the objective is not perfection but effective and meaningful communication. This may sound like a linguistic utopia at this point; however, it is a utopia that will not be perfect by any means and will take time and effort. In the following section, I will discuss the first steps I have taken in slowly implementing some plurilingual practices into my classroom.

## Plurilingualism in a grade 6 classroom

Throughout the past 10 years of my career, I have taught a lot of students for whom English is a second or third language. The dominant view amongst these students has always been that English is in first place, and then their language (if there even is a time and place for it at all). In a lot of cases I have witnessed a lot



of shame or a level of shyness in students, surrounding their home languages and culture. These students would see English as their opportunity to *fit in* and make friends through its knowledge, since English is the norm. It is the gap-bridging principle that overcomes all communication barriers. I still remember a day in my career, about 2 years ago, when a teacher panel had the rare opportunity to ask a panel of English language learners how the teachers could help them in incorporating their L1 into the classroom. The unanimous response was that these students did not want their L1 brought into the classroom at all but would prefer to hear strictly English. As I reflect back on this, I realize precisely why this was their request. They did not see any value within their L1, as the education system of which they are a part puts forth the message that their language does not matter, their culture is not significant. There is no place for their language in the English classroom.

I set out to create a “plurilingual classroom in which teachers and students pursue an educational strategy of embracing and exploiting linguistic diversity present in order to maximize communication and hence both subject learning and plurilingual/pluricultural awareness” (Piccardo, 2016, p. 7). This would be no easy task, and for this reason I started out slow, with one simple activity that would show students the vast amount of linguistic and cultural diversity in their own classroom; so started my journey. I introduced my students to a task that was centered around exploring celebrations around the world, ones which are celebrated by students in our classroom. This activity familiarised children with holidays, customs, and traditions typical of foreign countries. The activity supported their imagination and narrative competences (Kharkhurin, 2012, p. 22). In our class, each day we would discuss one given celebration that was celebrated by one of the students. The student who celebrates this holiday, would bring in as many different objects, pictures, and other significant artifacts that represent this holiday for them. On the day of their given presentation, the child discussing their holiday would talk about any traditions that they follow, and they would share these pictures and artifacts with their classmates. Upon doing so, all of the other children in the class would form groups, and they would write words on a piece of paper together with some drawings representing their idea of the holiday. The multilingual child would then evaluate all the words and pictures and announce the winning group that would be given a small present related to the specific holiday.

## Let’s go on my holiday activity in action

The first of the celebrations that was talked about in our class was Diwali. The student who celebrates this holiday, brought in pictures of her and her family as well as the sari that she wears on this special night. She drew the Ohm symbol on the board and wrote down words in Hindi that were significant to this celebration. The other students loved learning about Diwali. They asked meaningful questions, requested some more detailed explanations, and tried to pronounce a lot of the Hindi words that were mentioned. When it came to the group activity of writing down words, drawing pictures, and making personal connections, the ideas

were endless. The students were a little hesitant at first, as they were used to answering questions solely in English and to being graded in the traditional manner of linear-based literacy. They were unsure how they could please me, as that is their ultimate goal in the pursuit of getting a good mark. The initial part of the group conversations was reserved and the words that the groups wrote on their papers were all in English. However, as our presenter came around and encouraged her classmates to use the new vocabulary, even symbols in some cases, the group connections to this holiday were quickly becoming much more intricate and meaningful. This was plurilingualism taking place from the students up. The learning was coming from them, as they were the experts who were facilitating their own learning in their learner-centred classroom.

## Plurilingualism in action continued

This activity familiarized the children with historical and cultural differences as well as multilingual vocabulary, which may be significant in this celebration (Kharkhurin, 2012, p. 22). The first of the plurilingual norms that I implemented into my plurilingual classroom was student collaboration. Collaboration allows students to form friendships across cultural and linguistic lines because they have a reason to talk to one another and are not silently filling out worksheets or listening to a teacher (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 395). This made the learning experience interesting for them, as it was content driven and rooted in experiential learning. Collaboration enables all students to engage in challenging and creative projects because students of different levels work together to accomplish a final product, which they would not be able to do on their own (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 395).

The other big piece in successfully implementing plurilingualism through this activity had to do with me releasing my control over to the students. The teacher is not the only *expert* in the room, and considerable control is handed over to the students. Content is made accessible because students work on figuring out the content, language, and implications together (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 394). The teacher is constantly learning within a plurilingual classroom and providing opportunities for their students to teach them.

The goal is not language perfection but, rather, effective communication and collaboration through any means necessary, which in some cases will not necessarily be in English, and this is okay. This is ultimately what was achieved. Literacy was not delivered in a traditional linear model to which students are usually accustomed; rather, there was an emphasis placed on the holistic quality of language and how literacy and communication is not always intrinsically English literacy.

## Conclusion

English holds a great power worldwide. It is one of the few languages that will be understood (even in a small amount) in most parts of the world. It is the most commonly learned L2 in the world and the most





valued. The world of business, medicine, science, and many other disciplines is dominated by English as a lingua franca. In any event of communication uncertainty, the safest bet seems to be to resort to English. In a rapidly globalizing world, English seems to be the solution to the world's communication problem. As we have explored in this paper, there is a problem with this theory. The monolingual ideology reflects the idea that a nation is connected by one common language. This is the norm. Speaking two or multiple languages is seen as straying from this norm and, thus, endangering this linguistic purity. The instilling of English as a lingua franca helps to aid this monolingual ideology, as it places primary focus and importance on this one language. The education system in Canada, unfortunately is based upon this model. Literacy is taught in a traditional and linear way, in which all languages run on separate tracks, never actually meeting. Literacy within this context implies English literacy, and there is no room in this system for any home languages of students. These languages are deemed as useless and a general distraction in the ultimate goal of English linguistic purity. This top-down model from the ministry needs a revamp as soon as possible. The answer lies in a plurilingual model that is student driven from the bottom up.

Plurilingualism offers a holistic view of language as it allows students to see that each language is not a lonely, isolated entity but is, rather, on a path which constantly intertwines with other languages it meets along the way. Within a plurilingual classroom, students are able to see that no language has any greater value than another and to acknowledge that they use their entire language repertoire in literacy, in many instances. Plurilinguals mobilize all of the linguistic resources that they have at their disposal. The goal is never linguistic purity, but rather effective communication. I have outlined the starter steps of creating a plurilingual classroom, one in which every language has as much value assigned to it as does English. This is a mission that is a bottom-up effort, one which will require a lot of time, patience, and hard work but one that is worthwhile ultimately. English while very valuable is not the only language that should be visible in Canadian classrooms.

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### Author Bio



Ivana is a grade 4 Teacher with 10 years of experience with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. She has worked as an ELL/ELD Special assignment teacher and as a grade 6 classroom teacher. She has also taught Serbian as a heritage language. She holds a MEd from the University of Toronto (Language and Literacies) and a BEd from York University and a BA (English and Philosophy) from McMaster University. Ivana is passionate about supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) in their journey toward a new language and a new culture. Her research interests include literacy education practices, plurilingual practices in the elementary classroom and home language policies at school board and ministry levels.

# Incorporating CALL in the ESL classroom: Focusing on animation, movies, Netflix, TED, VOA, Arirang News, NPR, and YouTube

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By Chahyun Kim, Baewha Women's University, South Korea

## Abstract

This study examines the application of CALL in English classes for university-level or EAP students. Multimedia is significant in the digital era and should be applied in the ESL classroom. However, few studies explore how to apply a variety of multimedia resources in the ESL classroom. This study explores students' opinions on the use of multimedia from a class conducted for one semester. The class dealt with one theme each week using various media. Over the semester, eight multimedia resources were used: animations, movies, Netflix, TED, VOA, NPR, Arirang News (a Korean English-language network), and YouTube. At the end of the semester, a student survey was conducted to examine students' motivation, preference, and improvement in English proficiency when using multimedia. The results of the survey, including comments, show that multimedia seems to generate high student interest. Students seemed to feel the approach was effective in improving their four English skills. This indicates the potential of multimedia resources, freely available through the Internet. A variety of multimedia can be applied in the ESL classroom, and listening to students' voices can assist in finding the appropriate way.

*Keywords: CALL, multimedia, VOA, TED, NPR, Arirang News, YouTube, Netflix, animation, movies*



## Introduction

This study aims to examine the application of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) in English classes for university-level students. Multimedia is significant in the digital era. However, practical methods of using CALL have not been dealt with sufficiently, and not many English classes use proper multimedia materials for ESL. This study aims to provide direction for using English-language multimedia materials in university-level classes. It also examines students' motivation, preference, and improvement in English proficiency when using multimedia. In addition, the study explores the implications of incorporating CALL into the current English-teaching paradigm. Lastly, the study aims to explore what benefits CALL can offer. Therefore, the research questions of this study are the following:

1. Are multimedia resources interesting to students?
2. If so, why, in the students' opinion?
3. Do students like to learn English using these eight media?
4. Did students feel the resources helped with any of the four skills in English?
5. What difficulties did students encounter with using multimedia to study English?

## Literature Review

There is some literature related to incorporating CALL in the classroom, especially movies and animations. Lee (2010) deals with English class activities focusing on the movie *Forrest Gump*. Lee's study gave examples of activities using the movie, discussed effective teaching methods, and presented the results of a student survey. Baik (2001) examined multimedia technology in English classrooms focusing on animations. Joe (2016) examined using movies and dramas to improve memorization of English. Jung (2014) examined the effects of animations on students' communicative competence and motivation in college. Lastly, Sung (2006) conducted a survey to examine the effectiveness of the film *Meet the Parents* as a tool to teach college English. The present study's survey is based on the Sung (2006) survey questions.

## Research Method

### Procedure

A teacher taught an English class for one semester (2018-8-27–2018-12-17). The class was Application of Business English for Computers, and multimedia resources (animations, movies, TED, VOA, NPR, Arirang News, Netflix, and YouTube) were used. The class was content-based, and each week dealt with a different



theme (positive thinking, friends, emotions, etc.). For animations, *Inside Out* was used; for Netflix, the American situation comedy *Friends* was used; and for YouTube, a speech by Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, was used. At the end of the semester, a student survey was conducted.

## Participants

The participants were 26 computer science majors in their sophomore year at a private college in Seoul, Korea. The students' attendance rate was very high, and they showed an interest in learning English, as they chose this elective English class. Most of the students studied English with this teacher for one full year. Students' English proficiency scores on the mid-term ranged from 16 to 30 of a possible 30. Eighteen out of the 26 students reported their CSAT (College Scholastic Ability Test) grade. Their CSAT English grade averaged 3.72 (The best grade is 1 out of a possible 9.).

## Measurement Tool

A mini-survey was conducted at the end of the first semester, asking students which English skills they wanted to learn and their preferences in multimedia resources. From the survey, students showed a preference for learning English through movies, animations, and pop songs. Also, most respondents preferred not to study from a textbook but using printouts from multimedia resources. Twenty-six participants answered a more detailed survey. The following table shows the questions in this second survey. Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 ask about the eight multimedia resources. The resources are rated on a scale from 1 (of no value) to 5 (highest value).

### Survey Questions

1. Is this resource interesting to you?
2. If so, why?
3. Will you use this resource after class?
4. Would you like to learn English using this resource?
5. Would you recommend this resource to your friend?
6. Did you find the level of difficulty appropriate?
7. Did the resource help with any of the four skills in English?
8. If so, which skill(s)?
9. In what ways do you find multimedia helpful in studying English?
10. In what ways did you find it difficult to study English using multimedia?



## Result

### Degree of Interest

The following table shows how much interest students felt in learning English through each medium: animations, movies, Netflix, TED, VOA, Arirang News, NPR, and YouTube.

#### Resource and Degree of Interest

CALL	Degree of Interest	Score (1-5)	N	Percent	M	SD
Animations	No interest	1	0	0	3.85	.95
	Slightly interesting	2	2	7.7		
	So-so	3	8	30.8		
	Interesting	4	8	30.8		
	Very interesting	5	8	30.8		
	Total			26		
Movies	No interest	1	0	0	4.27	.99
	Slightly interesting	2	2	7.7		
	So-so	3	2	7.7		
	Interesting	4	9	34.6		
	Very interesting	5	13	50		
	Total			26		
Netflix	No interest	1	0	0	4	.89
	Slightly interesting	2	1	3.8		
	So-so	3	7	26.9		
	Interesting	4	9	34.6		
	Very interesting	5	9	34.6		
	Total			26		
TED	No interest	1	1	3.8	3.5	1.07
	Slightly interesting	2	3	11.5		
	So-so	3	8	30.8		
	Interesting	4	10	38.5		
	Very interesting	5	4	15.4		
	Total			26		
VOA	No interest	1	0	0	3.23	1.19
	Slightly interesting	2	7	26.9		
	So-so	3	10	38.5		
	Interesting	4	5	19.2		
	Very interesting	5	4	15.4		
	Total			26		
Arirang News	No interest	1	1	3.8	3.27	1.21
	Slightly interesting	2	5	19.2		
	So-so	3	10	38.5		
	Interesting	4	6	23.1		
	Very interesting	5	4	15.4		
	Total			26		

NPR	No interest	1	1	3.8	3.08	1.32
	Slightly interesting	2	7	26.9		
	So-so	3	11	42.3		
	Interesting	4	3	11.5		
	Very interesting	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
YouTube	No interest	1	3	11.5	3	1.42
	Slightly interesting	2	5	19.2		
	So-so	3	10	38.5		
	Interesting	4	5	19.2		
	Very interesting	5	3	11.5		
	Total		26			

The participants showed the highest interest in movies, followed by Netflix, animations, TED, Arirang News, VOA, NPR, and YouTube. The following table shows the students' opinions about how and why the multimedia resources were interesting.

#### Responses to the Question "Is This Resource Interesting to You?"

- It was fun, and I got to know things I didn't know.
- The professor prepared a variety of material[s], making it interesting.
- The variety of approaches was useful. I like to learn in this way.
- It was easy to understand and comfortable to watch.
- Learned new things.
- Multimedia is valuable when the content is fun.
- It was interesting to study English through animation[s].
- Learning English through *Inside Out* was fun and useful.
- Watching movies kept me alert and interested.
- *Inside Out, Friends*.
- I enjoyed studying screen English together using scripts and video clips.
- Studying speeches and *Inside Out* were most interesting.
- Studying English by looking at video clips.
- I got to access information I would not have in daily life. Before I was not able to watch speeches, but I think they will be useful.
- I always want[ed] to watch American drama[s]; it is good to watch [them] in the classroom.

#### Usage after the class

The following table shows students' preferences for eight media: animation, movies, Netflix, TED, VOA, Arirang News, NPR, and YouTube.

## Resource and Intent to Use after Class

CALL	Will you use it after [the] class?	Score (1-5)	N	Percent	M	SD
Animations	Strongly disagree	1	1	3.8	3.19	1.26
	Disagree	2	7	26.9		
	Neutral	3	7	26.9		
	Agree	4	8	30.8		
	Strongly agree	5	3	11.5		
	Total		26			
Movies	Strongly disagree	1	1	3.8	3.69	1.15
	Disagree	2	3	11.5		
	Neutral	3	7	26.9		
	Agree	4	7	26.9		
	Strongly agree	5	8	30.8		
	Total		26			
Netflix	Strongly disagree	1	3	11.5	3.65	1.25
	Disagree	2	1	3.8		
	Neutral	3	5	19.2		
	Agree	4	10	38.5		
	Strongly agree	5	7	26.9		
	Total		26			
TED	Strongly disagree	1	2	7.7	3.58	1.11
	Disagree	2	2	7.7		
	Neutral	3	5	19.2		
	Agree	4	13	50		
	Strongly agree	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
VOA	Strongly disagree	1	2	7.7	3.19	1.23
	Disagree	2	3	11.5		
	Neutral	3	12	46.2		
	Agree	4	6	23.1		
	Strongly agree	5	3	11.5		
	Total		26			
Arirang News	Strongly disagree	1	3	11.5	2.88	1.4
	Disagree	2	5	19.2		
	Neutral	3	11	42.3		
	Agree	4	6	23.1		
	Strongly agree	5	1	3.8		
	Total		26			





NPR	Strongly disagree	1	2	7.7	2.96	1.26
	Disagree	2	4	15.4		
	Neutral	3	14	53.8		
	Agree	4	5	19.2		
	Strongly agree	5	1	3.8		
	Total		26			
YouTube	Strongly disagree	1	1	3.8	3.38	1.11
	Disagree	2	5	19.2		
	Neutral	3	5	19.2		
	Agree	4	13	50		
	Strongly agree	5	2	7.7		
	Total		26			

Movies generated the most interest in usage after the class followed by Netflix, TED, YouTube, VOA and animations, NPR, and Arirang News. It appears that these students overall preferred fictional stories to news as content. Interestingly, the students rated YouTube for viewing speeches more highly for usage after the class than for degree of interest. Presumably, although less interesting, they found the speeches useful.

The following table shows the participants' opinions about usage after the class. Again, speeches seem to be singled out as useful.

#### Responses to the Question "Will You Use This Resource after Class?"

- It seems to me I can study VOA or speeches on YouTube on my own.
- It is very accessible, so I can study anywhere.
- I can access the materials easily.
- By taking this English course, I got to watch speeches by famous people around the world. There were many useful things, and above all it was fun.
- It was convenient for review. Listening and watching were good for study. Parts we didn't cover in class, I could study on my own.
- It was fun to watch video clips; and the speeches taught life lessons.
- Compared to written words, multimedia generated interest and enthusiasm.
- During vacation I will continue to study English through TED and VOA.

To sum up, the students found multimedia resources accessible since they are on the Internet. Also, many participants said it was more interesting using multimedia than textbooks. If students can have pleasant memories and better experiences studying English, this can increase their motivation in learning English throughout their life. Multimedia resources can assist lifelong learning.

## Degree of recommendation

The following table shows students' inclination to recommend learning English through the eight media.

### Resource and Intent to Recommend

CALL	Would you recommend this medium to a friend?	Score (1-5)	N	Percent	M	SD
Animations	Strongly disinclined	1	1	3.8	3.46	1.22
	Disinclined	2	4	15.4		
	Neutral	3	10	38.5		
	Inclined	4	4	15.4		
	Strongly inclined	5	7	26.9		
	Total		26			
Movies	Strongly disinclined	1	0	0	4.08	1.06
	Disinclined	2	3	11.5		
	Neutral	3	4	15.4		
	Inclined	4	7	26.9		
	Strongly inclined	5	12	46.2		
	Total		26			
Netflix	Strongly disinclined	1	2	7.7	3.92	1.24
	Disinclined	2	1	3.8		
	Neutral	3	6	23.1		
	Inclined	4	5	19.2		
	Strongly inclined	5	12	46.2		
	Total		26			
TED	Strongly disinclined	1	2	7.7	3.54	1.13
	Disinclined	2	2	7.7		
	Neutral	3	6	23.1		
	Inclined	4	12	46.2		
	Strongly inclined	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
VOA	Strongly disinclined	1	2	7.7	3.08	1.23
	Disinclined	2	4	15.4		
	Neutral	3	11	42.3		
	Inclined	4	8	30.8		
	Strongly inclined	5	1	3.8		
	Total		26			
Arirang News	Strongly disinclined	1	3	11.5	3	1.4
	Disinclined	2	5	19.2		
	Neutral	3	9	34.6		
	Inclined	4	7	26.9		
	Strongly inclined	5	2	7.7		
	Total		26			

NPR	Strongly disinclined	1	3	11.5	2.88	1.45
	Disinclined	2	6	23.1		
	Neutral	3	10	38.5		
	Inclined	4	5	19.2		
	Strongly inclined	5	2	7.7		
	Total		26			
YouTube	Strongly disinclined	1	0	0	3.27	1.11
	Disinclined	2	7	26.9		
	Neutral	3	7	26.9		
	Inclined	4	10	38.5		
	Strongly inclined	5	2	7.7		
	Total		26			

The students were most inclined to recommend movies followed by Netflix, TED, animations, YouTube, VOA, Arirang News, and NPR. Once again, the students seemed to prefer fictional content to news.

### Appropriateness to participants' English level

The following table shows how appropriate each of eight media are to participants' English level: animation, movies, Netflix, TED, VOA, Arirang News, NPR, and YouTube.

### Resource and Perceived Difficulty Level

CALL	Did you find the level of difficulty appropriate?	Score (1-5)	N	Percent	M	SD
Animations	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.73	.82
	Inappropriate	2	1	3.8		
	Neutral	3	10	38.5		
	Appropriate	4	10	38.5		
	Highly appropriate	5	5	19.2		
	Total		26			
Movies	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	4.04	.83
	Inappropriate	2	0	0		
	Neutral	3	8	30.8		
	Appropriate	4	9	34.6		
	Highly appropriate	5	9	34.6		
	Total		26			



Netflix	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	4.08	.76
	Inappropriate	2	0	0		
	Neutral	3	6	23.1		
	Appropriate	4	12	46.2		
	Highly appropriate	5	8	30.8		
	Total		26			
TED	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.81	.83
	Inappropriate	2	1	3.8		
	Neutral	3	9	34.6		
	Appropriate	4	10	38.5		
	Highly appropriate	5	6	23.1		
	Total		26			
VOA	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.73	.82
	Inappropriate	2	2	7.7		
	Neutral	3	7	26.9		
	Appropriate	4	13	50		
	Highly appropriate	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
Arirang News	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.69	.84
	Inappropriate	2	1	3.8		
	Neutral	3	11	42.3		
	Appropriate	4	9	34.6		
	Highly appropriate	5	5	19.2		
	Total		26			
NPR	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.46	.97
	Inappropriate	2	4	15.4		
	Neutral	3	9	34.6		
	Appropriate	4	10	38.5		
	Highly appropriate	5	3	11.5		
	Total		26			
YouTube	Not at all appropriate	1	0	0	3.54	.98
	Inappropriate	2	4	15.4		
	Neutral	3	8	30.8		
	Appropriate	4	10	38.5		
	Highly appropriate	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			

Netflix rated the highest for appropriateness to participants' English level, followed by movies, TED, animations, VOA, Arirang News, YouTube and NPR. The following table displays the participants' thoughts about the difficulty of using multimedia for learning English in class.



**Responses to the Question “Did You Find the Level of Difficulty Appropriate?”**

- It was fine; it was not hard.
- Speaking.
- No problem.
- No problems with the level.
- The new American words were hard to understand.
- Writing and speaking were a little bit hard.
- There were a lot of sentences that I could not understand.
- Some content was hard, and hard to understand.
- There was a lot of vocabulary I didn't know.
- Not fun material.
- The material was not difficult, but when there were no subtitles, it was sometimes hard to translate.
- Without subtitles, there were some sentences I could not understand.
- In the speech, the speaking was too fast, and the pronunciation was hard to understand.
- It was accessible. Sometimes I was too interested in the movie to study much, but it was very good.
- The speech was uninteresting and too long.
- For TED, filling in the blanks [was difficult?] because of the speed of the talk.
- Some content was hard, boring, and not sympathetic (for example, NPR).
- The speech was boring, but everything else was good.

The results show that adjusting for the students' level is significant in using multimedia resources. From the perspective of the teacher, it was difficult to find resources at an appropriate level because most were made for native speakers and the English level is high. However, CALL enhances students' motivation in learning English and is easily accessible. Therefore, level-appropriate multimedia resources (especially basic and intermediate) have high potential in English instruction.

### **Improvement in the four English skills**

The following table show students' thoughts concerning their improvement in the four English skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) through multimedia-based instruction.



## Resource and Perceived Improvement

CALL	Did the resource help with any of the four skills?	Score (1-5)	N	Percent	M	SD
Animations	Not at all	1	0	0	3.65	.76
	Virtually none	2	0	0		
	Moderate	3	13	50		
	Improved	4	9	34.6		
	Much improved	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
Movies	Not at all	1	1	3.8	3.77	1.01
	Virtually none	2	1	3.8		
	Moderate	3	8	30.8		
	Improved	4	9	34.6		
	Much improved	5	7	26.9		
	Total		26			
Netflix	Not at all	1	1	3.8	4.04	1
	Virtually none	2	0	0		
	Moderate	3	6	23.1		
	Improved	4	9	34.6		
	Much improved	5	10	38.5		
	Total		26			
TED	Not at all	1	0	0	3.85	.72
	Virtually none	2	0	0		
	Moderate	3	9	34.6		
	Improved	4	12	46.2		
	Much improved	5	5	19.2		
	Total		26			
VOA	Not at all	1	0	0	3.69	.88
	Virtually none	2	2	7.7		
	Moderate	3	9	34.6		
	Improved	4	10	38.5		
	Much improved	5	5	19.2		
	Total		26			
Arirang News	Not at all	1	1	3.8	3.38	1.07
	Virtually none	2	2	7.7		
	Moderate	3	13	50		
	Improved	4	6	23.1		
	Much improved	5	4	15.4		
	Total		26			
NPR	Not at all	1	0	0	3.23	1.08
	Virtually none	2	5	19.2		
	Moderate	3	13	50		
	Improved	4	5	19.2		
	Much improved	5	3	11.5		
	Total		26			



	Not at all	1	0	0	3.69	.88
	Virtually none	2	2	7.7		
	Moderate	3	9	34.6		
YouTube	Improved	4	10	38.5		
	Much improved	5	5	19.2		
	Total		26			

Netflix rated highest for helping students improve in the four skills, followed by TED, movies, YouTube and VOA, animation, Arirang News, and NPR. TED scored better here than for student interest. The following table shows the participants' opinions about improvement in the four English skills.

#### Responses to the Question “Did the Resource Help with Any of the Four Skills?”

- My listening skills improved quickly. It helped to listen to real native speakers.
- Listening and speaking daily helped a lot.
- I normally never read English, but I read it in class.
- It was fun to speak a little English each week.
- Since CSAT I have not been studying English; but this class got me studying English.
- I got to know new vocabulary, so my English improved.
- American situation comedy presented ordinary daily conversations, so I found it useful.
- The speech and American situation comedy helped with listening.
- It was good to listen to the speech and to [the] news.
- Listening has improved.
- Listening, vocabulary—I learned the meaning of vocabulary.
- In daily life I do English reading, but there is less opportunity to do English listening. Listening together helped improve my English skill.
- My speaking improved.
- The memorized sentences helped me to speak more fluently.
- When speaking with my friends, I now use lines from Inside Out.
- Through Friends, I learned colloquial language.
- Listening and expression [have improved?]
- Listening really helped; I tried to speak freely.
- Reading with translating helped.
- Speaking, listening and reading helped the most.
- Doing speaking, writing, and reading around a theme helped to understand the content.

Many of the students showed improvement in listening, followed by speaking, reading, idiomatic expressions, and vocabulary. No doubt the students benefitted from listening to English speakers who spoke with a native accent, at a native speed, and using native expressions. Also, the four English skills improved as students put in more time and effort because of the class; practice is important for enhancing English

skills. CALL can increase input and output and help to improve listening, speaking, reading, and idiomatic expressions. Speaking, shadowing, and reading out loud can be efficient methods for using multimedia resources when studying after class.

## Conclusion

Based on this study, using multimedia in the ESL classroom seems to generate high student interest. The study introduced a variety of multimedia resources to university-level students over one semester, and, through a survey, elicited their impressions of the potential of CALL. As indicated in the survey and comments, students seemed to believe the approach was effective in improving their four English skills. This indicates the potential of multimedia, now easily accessible through the Internet. One limitation of the study was that results can be influenced by content rather than medium. However, this was inevitable as the class under observation was content based. Further studies might better isolate the influence of the medium. For example, the same content might be presented through different media.

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### Author Bio

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Chahyun Kim has been a lecturer at Baewha Women's University in Seoul, South Korea for four years. She is working on her PhD thesis on the evaluation of oral proficiency.



# Quick tips for teaching literacy

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By Zainab Almutawali, Canada

These tips and guidelines are meant for instructors and volunteers who are new to the field of literacy and intend to work with adult literacy learners. I have come up with these tips based on my experience with literacy students, other teachers' experiences and observations, and also my learners' feedback that I always consider when planning my lessons. This is based on experience teaching literacy students from diverse backgrounds and various levels of literacy.

## Background

Understanding the background of literacy learners and their needs is the first step to a fruitful learning experience. Many of our literacy learners are individuals who have never been to school before, have had limited education (one to two years of schooling) in their home countries, or quit school many years ago (received up to nine years of education). As a result, besides lacking any knowledge of the English language, they may also lack reading and writing skills and learning strategies in their first language, which leaves them with no transferable skills to refer to when learning the new language. Many of the learning strategies that we take for granted are not familiar to them and need to be taught alongside the language itself. Such skills may include: using pictures to make meanings, answering comprehension questions, matching words to pictures, filling out a form, unscrambling words, and even forming letters by writing on a line. Understanding the background of literacy learners and how they are different from mainstream learners helps both teachers and learners in many ways; for example, teachers set more realistic expectations and goals that learners are able to work up to, like the number of new vocabulary words introduced, taught and reviewed in a certain period of time. For learners, acknowledging their literacy background results in them becoming more patient and understanding of the time needed to show progress in English. Indeed, many of my learners realize that fact. They compare themselves to other students who went to school in their home countries and can learn English.



## Student attendance

Despite literacy students' limited education, they decide to come to school. Why? For many reasons, such as getting a job, communicating with their children's school, and becoming self-reliant in order to solve practical problems in everyday life. The lack of English skills, and especially reading skills, creates obstacles in these learners' daily lives. To encourage regular attendance, one good practice is to remind students of their objectives of attending English class. It motivates them to remember their ultimate goals and the better future they are working toward. Another useful exercise is to ask them if they use English in their daily life, and if so, when and where they use it. Sharing success stories helps learners realize how much progress they have made, which encourages them to continue learning English. It also informs educators of the context students need English for. I appreciate the fact that these adult learners attend class, and to show my appreciation, I try different ways to help them benefit from each hour they spend in class. Accomplishing something every day no matter how small, whether it is learning a couple of new words, being able to answer a question correctly, or reading a short text by themselves motivates students to continue attending class regularly because they see achievement happening immediately. On the other hand, if literacy learners are overwhelmed by too many new words and longer texts, they will feel helpless and that they are not making any progress, which discourages them from attending class the next day, especially if this happens many months after enrolling in the class.

## Best practices to help literacy learners acquire the language

### Understanding and accommodating students' individual needs

Literacy learners may seem to have similar language needs; most of the time, however, they come with various individual needs that should be considered when teaching a lesson. For example, one learner can have good writing skills but poor pronunciation skills. Another student can have decent oral skills but poor reading skills. A third one can have issues with short-term memory and needs a lot of repetition to retain the newly-learned language. Some health issues may keep another student away from class. A fifth student may have joined the class recently and needs an orientation. As a result, it is almost impossible to successfully teach everyone the same materials at the same pace. With this approach, only a small percentage of the class will be able to benefit from the lessons, and the rest may feel confused and discouraged and will eventually drop out.

On the other hand, if each student is given the attention and instruction needed, and if they get one-on-one support, then I believe that the learners will make remarkable progress in both their language skills and learning strategies. I feel that literacy learners should work at their own pace and should not be rushed



through activities or lessons. I like to remind my fellow instructors that literacy classes equip learners with language skills that will prepare them to successfully join mainstream English classes. Therefore, that should be kept in mind when deciding on the amount of vocabulary and information introduced, language of instruction used, and handouts provided. The method of teaching and the materials used should be accommodated to suit literacy learners' abilities. Literacy instructors should definitely not use complex language for instruction or materials with their literacy students. For instance, educators can use simple sentences, slow speech, visuals, and modified materials.

To ensure that each student's needs are met, it is recommended that the teacher get help in the class from teaching assistants or volunteers. Here are some of the advantages of students working at their own pace and benefitting from one-on-one supervision.

- Educators can ensure that each learner acquires the newly-learned vocabulary because the teacher can teach and assess students one at a time.
- Students are better able to practice reading since other students in the class are busy doing other work and therefore they will not take the turn of slow readers.
- Students feel confident because the teacher is watching them doing the task. I have often noticed that the students prefer to have the teacher observe them while completing a worksheet or answering questions because at this level they are not confident in their knowledge and skills, for the simple fact that they are doing these tasks for the first time. If the teacher is not available though, learners tend to copy from a partner. One-on-one support is essential at this level until learners become confident and more certain of their capabilities. It takes quite some effort and time from the teacher until the learners become confident in their skills, but it is rewarding eventually. Once the students are familiar with completing tasks and worksheets, they will be less dependent on the teacher and will require less one-on-one attention.
- Working at their own pace allows the students to improve certain skills that they may lack that others in the class have. For example: spacing out words evenly in a sentence, positioning letters properly on the line, reading fluently, and improving pronunciation.
- Also, having close supervision enables the teacher to learn how much each student has learned from a lesson, whether the material is level-appropriate and interesting for the learner or what gaps the learner needs to fill in their language skills. Feedback from learners at this level is helpful to assess if topics are not relevant to their daily life, if the vocabulary and information introduced is excessive, and if the language of instruction is overwhelming.

## Repetition

I cannot stress enough how important repetition is at this level. To begin with, new language learners need to encounter newly-learned vocabulary seven times at intervals to retain the new vocabulary. For our literacy students, their lack of educational background and other factors like age, stress, and family commitments result in retention becoming more challenging. I find that it takes about two weeks to teach a topic which means that we go over the same vocabulary for about 10 days. By the end of the second week, the students have retained the key vocabulary and are able to read, write, and use them in speech. For

instance, when teaching about family relations, choose no more than 10 family relations vocabulary terms and design numerous activities and tasks around these words, such as: matching words to pictures, copying words under pictures, spelling words, unscrambling words, solving puzzle problems, playing bingo games, doing class survey about family, talking about family pictures, practicing writing names and ages of family members, filling out forms with family information, reading family ID cards, reading family trees, talking about own family, drawing own family tree, listening to and retelling a picture story about a family's daily routine, and writing short sentences about family. My students appreciate repetition because it allows them to see their progress. When starting a new theme, the teacher can recycle the activities used in the previous topic, such as surveying, filling out forms, matching, sorting, storytelling, and so on. This saves time and reduces the teacher's need to reinvent the wheel with each new theme.

### **Start from prior knowledge**

Instructors need to always build on students' prior knowledge to help advance their lessons. Introducing new concepts that don't relate to students' lives will easily confuse literacy learners and add to their confusion of the language itself. Teachers have to be careful when introducing abstract ideas and new concepts because students might not have had experienced these in their home countries. These may include food sections in a grocery store, food groups, credit cards, bank accounts, and so on. Related to this point are the materials and worksheets used. The vocabulary in the worksheets should not be totally new for the students. The students should be familiar with most of the vocabulary in spoken form. New vocabulary should be introduced gradually and in small doses to ensure retention.

### **Similar Ideas**

Avoid introducing two similar ideas at the same time because students can easily get confused, for example, introducing cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers, or introducing food sections in a grocery store and food groups.

### **Addressing challenges and issues**

Address any issues or challenges when they come up and do not let them accumulate. There might be something that hinders student learning, such as family problems, vision issues, difficult class materials, or pressure from peers. It is important that learners are open and share their feelings about learning and coming to class. It helps the teacher better guide the students, and it helps the students understand their challenges. It also builds a trust relationship between the teacher and the learner.

## Amount of new information

Due to their lack of educational background, words and script do not carry any meaning for illiterate individuals because they have not had to read or decode language in written form their entire lives. Presenting loads of vocabulary and information and handing out many worksheets will overwhelm them. We need to start with a minimum number of vocabulary items, most of which are familiar to our learners in verbal/spoken form.

## PBLA

### Needs assessment

- When a student first arrives in the class, we should assess their needs by asking them the following questions.
- Have you ever been to school before? How many years?
- Have you ever studied English before? What did you learn? Do you know the letters of the alphabet?
- Can you read or write in your first language?
- Why do you want to learn English?
- When and where do you use English in your daily life?
- What topics do you want to learn about? (I show them pictures of 12 themes to choose from).

### Class expectations

Then, I give students some idea as to what to expect from my class. I explain to them that:

- In this class, we learn about different themes and topics that will help them integrate into Canadian society. We practice four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, even if their main goal is to improve their listening and speaking skills, they should expect to do reading and writing activities, as well.
- It is very important to be able to complete tasks independently. While it is okay to ask for help from their classmates, at some point during the session, they are expected to transition from using help from teachers/volunteers/peers to completing assignments and tasks independently. They will be constantly observed and assessed based on their ability to complete worksheets with minimum help.
- Attendance and participation are required to fully benefit from the English classes and to show progress in their English skills. Absences are allowed only for legitimate reasons.
- They will be assessed based on their daily attendance, class participation, ability to follow classroom instructions and complete work independently, as well as assessments that are given throughout the session.

In conclusion, although working with literacy learners can be challenging, it is a rewarding experience and one that is unforgettable. To reach that end, as instructors, we need to understand students' needs and capabilities and use level appropriate materials and assessments in order for our learners to make progress



in their language acquisition. Following these guidelines has made my classes enjoyable. No matter how long the day is my students and I always look forward to our next learning experience.



### Author Bio

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My name is Zainab Almutawali. I have been working in the field of LINC and ESL teaching since 2010. The level of literacy intrigues me because of its uniqueness, unpredictability, and constant demand for creativity. When I am not working, I like to spend time with my family, hike in the woods, or make healthy snacks.

