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Dear Fellow Educators,

This year, I am even more grateful than ever to be an ESL teacher by training and trade and WAESOL President by selection. I work with some of the most dedicated and knowledgeable people in the teaching profession. We understand the struggles that impact students from diverse ethnic backgrounds because we spend time with them in our classrooms, listen to their stories, and have empathy for their experiences. The language teachers and students I have known over the past 24 years have taught me more about resilience and perseverance than any class or personal life experience I have personally encountered. With this in mind, I look forward to the WAESOL Conference on October 21 at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle with its opportunities for dialogue, engagement, and learning from each other.

This fall, the conference theme of Sharing, Reflecting, and Expanding Our Practice promises to allow for a wide range of knowledge and experiences to be shared. I encourage you to consider how you might share what you are doing in your classrooms and the lessons you are learning with the rest of us. I remember as a young ESL teacher going to a conference and learning so many simple to implement ideas that made so much sense but that I wouldn’t have thought about if it hadn’t been for that opportunity. We all have interests, ideas, and epiphanies that can benefit others in the profession if we will only share.

One such moment that I remember vividly was attending a presentation called “The Cultural Snapshot,” which was a project used at Gonzaga in the early 2000s. The concept was so simple, but I hadn’t really thought of it in the context of teaching. Essentially, the idea was that if you are new to a country/culture, you tend to take pictures of the things that are unique or different. These differences make excellent food for discussion and elaboration. That simple idea spurred on a plethora of fun and innovative activities for me over the years, being an enthusiast photographer myself. I simply had never thought of bringing that aspect of myself into the classroom, and I wouldn’t have if not for attending the conference and engaging with other professionals about how it could be used for teaching.

Once again, I am excited and grateful for the profession that has brought so many challenges and joys to my life. I look forward to meeting and engaging in dialogue with all of you who are able to attend the Fall conference on October 21, 2023. Bring your stories, ideas, and concerns, and let’s find ways to expand both our practice and our profession.

Best wishes,

David Martin, PhD
He/Him
2023 WAESOL President
Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of WE—WAESOL Educator—online. This issue has entailed quite a learning curve for us as we migrate to an online submission and publishing system. This involved rethinking and rewriting our submission and peer reviewer guidelines mid-stream! We thank our authors and our dedicated peer reviewers for being patient with us as we worked through the bugs in the process/our own ignorance, all of which has meant that the issue is out later than usual. I would like to personally thank our dedicated Editorial Board members: Ali Asiri who designed a layout algorithm which impressed us all; James Hunter, the impetus and site administrator for the OJS system, and Alex Tang, who helped get the ball rolling and was tireless with feedback and suggestions. It wouldn’t have happened without you.

There is still much to be learned but I hope that you will agree that the interface is better now—clearer, more appealing, and easier to navigate and share with friends, colleagues, and to your LinkedIn/Insta/FB/Threads accounts! If you have any suggestions, please let us know. The journal will henceforth be published at educator.waesol.org, but will continue to feature excellent articles informed by research, practice, and the insights of our brilliant authors.

This issue includes many excellent articles on tech tips—from how to use the variety of assistive learning tools in Word, to effective ed tech links for UDL implementation, a multimedia storytelling app called Toontastic to use with kids and kids-at-heart, and a multilingual messaging app that can improve school–home communication. There is an interview with Kayla Guyett, Tribal Language Liaison for OSPI, on the Since Time Immemorial curriculum, reflections on practice from a teacher in occupied Palestine, one who is retiring and heading to the dessert, and another who is responding to the Sally Wellman Excellence in Teaching Award. (Consider nominating a colleague for this award!) Project-based Language Learning and STEAM are highlighted in two classroom-based projects organized around human rights in one case and air pollution in the other. I hope the articles will inspire you and energize your teaching.

I hope also you will share with us what has invigorated your practice, a presentation you have given, professional development you have led or participated in, or something that you’re doing in your classes that is working well for you. The deadline for submission for the winter issue is November 15 (and for the summer issue is April 15). We look forward to your contributions.

We at WAESOL Educator hope you will share our journal with your friends and colleagues by sending them a link to your favorite article or to this whole issue! Notice the links to social media below: follow us and give us a shout-out!

All the best!

Bridget Green
She/her
WAESOL Editor

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**Mission**

*WAESOL Educator* is the biannual, professional, peer-reviewed, online journal of the Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL) organization. *WAESOL Educator* publishes articles concerning the teaching of language in elementary and secondary education, higher education, adult education, and bilingual education, as well as teacher preparation for pre-service and in-service teachers.

The two main goals of *WAESOL Educator* are

- to share information related to language teaching practices, materials, research, and professional development opportunities;
- to support and mentor potential authors who teach, conduct research, administer programs, and/or study in classrooms with multilingual learners.

All manuscripts receive a double-blind review.

**With thanks to our Peer Reviewers**

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In conversation with Kayla Guyett: Since Time Immemorial curriculum—tribal language education in Washington state

Kayla Guyett and Christina Mitma Momono

Kayla Guyett, of the Jicarilla Apache Tribe, presented with Dr. Laura Lynn at the WAESOL 2022 Conference on Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State. This curriculum was developed in collaboration with the federally recognized Tribes of Washington to teach about tribal history, culture, treaty rights, contemporary tribal and state government institutions and relations, and the contribution of Indian Nations to the state of Washington. The curriculum is required teaching in all Washington state schools (RCW 28A.320.170). Kayla is the Tribal Language Liaison for the Office of Native American Education at the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). She works to implement the curriculum, provides teacher training, and assists in educating others on tribal languages, Tribes, and how communities are guests on indigenous lands. In her position, she also works with Washington state schools and assists with tribal language learning programs.

Christina Mitma Momono, WAESOL’s current Past President, was fortunate to interview Kayla and learn more about her role and vital work. Christina Mitma Momono is of the Inca/Quechua peoples of South America and knows the sacredness of indigenous recognition. The following is an excerpt of their recorded conversation.

CMM: How long has Since Time Immemorial tribal sovereignty curriculum been implemented or available for use? How was it established?

KG: Since Time Immemorial tribal sovereignty curriculum has been available on the website since 2015. However, teaching and understanding tribal sovereignty and perspective has been here since time immemorial, and there have been years and years of work and legislative dedication as Tribes pushed and persuaded it to be in the public schools. We have been pushing really hard to make sure materials are out there. We are making sure it’s translated into Spanish right now. Our most recent legislative ask is ensuring that we have a way to track what implementation looks like at the districts. It is important for us to understand the details.

CMM: What is one of your favorite lessons in the Since Time Immemorial curriculum?

KG: The Elementary Pathway Lessons. They are a conglomerate; my favorite is the storytelling unit. It really touches on the importance of histories and stories for our tribal peoples (see Image 1). I love how our students can relate to and learn from those traditions and oral histories. There are many teachings built into them. I love how students are able to see what they want to see in the learning and the teaching and how it affects them.

CMM: Can you tell us about tribal language learning in Washington state?

KG: There has been a history of OSPI supporting tribal languages in the classrooms. It is important to remember that tribal language learning and oral traditions, things that are about tribal sovereignty, or tribal ways, have been happening since time immemorial. We [at OSPI] are just kind of here as a state agency to help that along. We have approximately 34 districts in Washington state who are engaging with and working in tribal language learning at some level. It’s really just important to know that tribal language learning in a classroom can’t happen without tribal consultation and support from the tribe. We always want to ensure that the tribe approves of the plan for language, we want to support them, and be conscious of giving back to the tribe, assisting the tribes with their...
needs. A lot of our public-school districts partner and work closely with our tribes to offer after-school programs and elementary language learning. Also, there are quite a few credit-earning world language classes at the high school level. Tribal language can meet the world language graduation requirement. Tribal Language Learning is happening throughout Washington state, which is very cool.

CMM: What do you want educators to be mindful of when talking about the Time Immemorial curriculum or tribal language learning education?

KG: One of the things I always want to prepare educators for when they start using the Since Time Immemorial curriculum is being transparent about not knowing elements of the curriculum. It is not something we were taught in school. Most of the time, many of us went through a public school system, and tribal sovereignty and tribal history were not talked about or discussed. It was really swept under the rug, or we were given a skewed version of it.

Also, it is important for educators to be open and give themselves grace. This is all new learning. Educators usually go into a classroom and know what they’re teaching, but in this instance, they may be learning the information for the first time. They may be learning about tribal sovereignty and about Washington state’s 29 federally recognized Tribes (see Figure 1) for the first time. It is also important to understand that the students and parents may be unfamiliar with this as well; it is likely their first time experiencing this.

Additionally, for tribal language learning—I cannot harp on this enough—it cannot happen without the Tribe. It should not happen without their approval, support, and without collaboration and consultation. Tribal language and culture cannot be separated. Tribal language and culture are sacred. It’s not just about making sure they’re okay with it, but really walking a fine line of what is appropriate for each partnership.

CMM: How many certified tribal educators are there in Washington state? What are the challenges and rewards of being a tribal educator?

KG: There are 1,587 Native educators in Washington state who hold a teaching certification. There are 88 First Peoples certified educators. First Peoples educators are educators that teach tribal language, culture and oral traditions, and they must have tribal approval before they receive this certification from the state. The biggest challenge for tribal language is, we often just don’t have enough teachers. I always tell people, I can have an unlimited budget, but I cannot create people to teach. It takes years and dedication to be able to learn and then teach tribal languages.

Figure 1: Washington state tribal map from OSPI
One of the biggest challenges that we have is that a lot of these languages were taken, they were removed, stripped away from people. Sometimes languages weren’t passed down for fear of retaliation. A lot of tribal languages are currently in this mad dash to make sure that they can keep as many of the resources as current as possible, and record elders. We are trying to make sure that the last fluent speakers of tribal languages’ teachings can be preserved. It’s a lot to encompass.

I probably won’t see this come to fruition in my work lifetime. Our future is likely in the kids who are in fourth and fifth grade right now that can go through the system. They will likely be our future teachers for generations to come, but we will continue to make small steps and build foundations for the work to continue. One of the most fulfilling parts of teaching language and culture is just being able to give back to your community. Our Native students need to be able to see Native teachers in these roles so they know there is a place for them when they leave school.

Another big challenge that we’ve been working on centers social emotional learning and development and creating space for healing the generational trauma our peoples carry as a result of educational practices. Our students, our parents, our grandparents, our aunties and uncles feel so disconnected from the system that having Native educators and administrators and teachers really helps bring them back into learning. This allows them opportunities to collaborate in our communities. It helps our Native students and communities succeed together. This is hard work, and the reconnection comes from the hearts of our people, not of the systems. No one does it for the money, that’s for sure. Yeah. [She laughs.]

CMM: Would you like to share a case study or highlight a few case studies and their impact?

KG: I have two that I just love to share. One is a legacy program—the partnership between Port Angeles School District and Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. Lower Elwha Klallam has a strong tribal language program (see Image 2). The very First Peoples educators ever certified came from Lower Elwha. They’ve been rolling up their sleeves for this. They are a really great example of offering tribal language as a world language credit at the high school. Not only do tribal students take the classes, but other non-tribal students take the class as well. They have a diverse group. The class is open for everyone. The transcending existence of language has done a lot to repair tension between native and non-native communities in this area. When we talk about natural resources, the generation who has learned the tribal language helps to articulate the tribal perspectives—even though the tribal perspectives have been around since time immemorial—it allows for greater understanding. If you’re learning language, history and culture go with that, widening depth and cross-cultural competence. Beyond this great accomplishment, the program has also had students graduate through their high school courses and who have now become language teachers. I think there are three students right now who have graduated and have gone into the language program and are now teaching at middle and high schools. So, it’s really cool to see the fruition of that, see it come to life.

Another case study to highlight is between the Snoqualmie Tribe and the Lake Washington School District. We have a large population of Urban Indians here in Washington state, especially around the...
Sound. Urban Indians are defined as people who were moved from their lands or Tribes due to different removal or relocation acts imposed on them during different eras throughout American history.

We have a large population in the Seattle area that come from Tribes outside of Washington state. Many are not physically connected to their reservation; many are not able to return to their tribal lands and some have never been there at all. With this in mind, some students have a really hard time grappling with self-identity. Part of this is due to the lack of connection to their land, language, and families. Lake Washington and the Snoqualmie Tribe have done a really good job of bringing in those families, those urban Native youth, and having them lead the learning. The Snoqualmie Tribe approved funds for students to talk about or learn their own language. The program happens in an after-school setting and allows the students to learn and make progress in their own language. The facilitators from Lake Washington help guide them by presenting words in English that they can look up in their own languages, for a variety of topics such as greetings, drum making, plants, colors, and emotions. The students look up the words in their tribal language resources and later share out the language they’ve learned as a whole group. It can be really scary to learn a new language and all of these kids are totally just embracing their learning.

It’s great that it’s generational, intergenerational. The kids aren’t embarrassed or anxious about sharing the words they’ve learned, and seeing parents and grandparents also engage is profound. It was really, really fun to go and see the work they’ve been doing.

CMM: Oh, that’s beautiful. I love that those programs exist and are impactful. One more question for you today. Why is it important for people to allow space and time for tribal languages?

KG: I would say it’s not just important to allow people to make space, I would say it’s essential for people to make the space and time for tribal languages. Once again, when we think about tribal languages, it’s not like we lost these languages. It’s not like one day we all woke up and decided not to speak the language. It’s not like we suddenly forgot how to speak them. The languages were forcibly taken. They were removed, and people were punished for speaking them. A big stance of mine is that it’s my duty, it’s what I work for as an educator that space needs to be carved out for tribal languages to exist in our education systems today. Language should be allowed to come back in the very same system where it was torn away. It should be allowed to thrive where we have all this trauma, where English only and English first programs and curriculum were forced upon tribes. It’s my job to make sure that everything that we see in English should also be seen in the teachings of tribal language.

A lot of times I like to remind districts that even if you have a tribal language class in your school or an after-school program, it never stays in that classroom or with that group of students. It always starts to seep out into the school community. If done right, it should never alienate any group of people. It was always meant to be sort of community learning because we’re all in this together. I always like to remind folks who think or might say “it’s not my language”, “I don’t know my language”, or “I don’t want to learn the language from here” that we need to expand from these viewpoints and grow. Traditionally, wherever you went, it was your job to learn that language. That was a skill that you had to have to survive. It’s really important now that we recognize that we are on the lands of a specific tribe, where they have a specific language. We should be open and engage in this specific language because it really draws that connection and that relationship to the land and its culture and history and people. It just makes so much more sense when we learn the language of the land that we are on.

CMM: Yeah, it’s much richer. Great. Thank you. I jive with that perspective 100%. Thanks again for sharing your knowledge and for doing all you do.

KG: haʔł kʷ (i) adsəslabcəbu t—Watch over yourself well.
Summary: This paper provides a brief overview of sociocultural approaches toward English teaching and learning for migrant adult learners. It considers Washington state’s vision for its Adult Basic Education programs and recent practice-oriented research in the field. The shared approaches include transparency in content and language objectives, translanguaging pedagogies, and an identity approach using the language of empowerment and reflection journaling.

Keywords: sociocultural theory, content objectives, language objectives, translanguaging pedagogy, identity approach, adult basic education.

Introduction

Our modern world is characterized by cross-border movements and/or displacement of people (Dao, 2019). Immigrants come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons. Some may come to reunite with their family members, some seeking refuge from unjust wars, others fleeing socioeconomic situations, as well as religious and political oppression in their home countries. In recent years, the state of Washington has welcomed thousands of immigrants, notably from Mexico, Central and South America, and Ukraine (U.S. Department of State-Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2022). For example, as of 2021, 17 community and technical colleges in Washington have achieved the status of Hispanic-Serving Institution or emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2021). The immigrants’ diverse backgrounds bring both challenges and opportunities for educational and professional training programs.

For instance, in the school year 2016-2017, approximately 48,000 adults needed basic education and training in Washington state. Fifty-three percent of these adults were identified as English language learners (ELLs), and those numbers tend to increase over time (Kerr et al., 2017). While migrant adult ELLs often face challenges in finding access to educational resources and other forms of support, they bring a wide array of cultural backgrounds and linguistic experiences to the classroom. These funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) are varied in terms of exposure to the English language, first-language (L1) literacy and educational level, socioeconomic-political situations, asylee status, exposure to discrimination, and mobility. These characteristics have important implications for curricular design and instructional practices, given that sociocultural-emotional and -economic factors have an impact on ELLs’ educational achievement and motivation (Echevarría et al., 2017). Furthermore, Washington’s Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs are geared toward the central idea of embracing students’ cultural capital and voices by incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies (Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, 2020).

In this spirit, this paper shares teaching tips informed by sociocultural theories and approaches toward teaching and learning languages. The following instructional strategies have been implemented across adult English Language Acquisition (ELA) courses in our ABE program—which is housed in an emerging Hispanic-Serving college in northwest Washington State and traditionally serves students across Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties. In the 2022-2023 school year, our ELA program serves approximately 500 ELLs, most of whom are of Hispanic and Slavic ancestry.
Transparency of content and language objectives

One equity-focused strategy ESOL practitioners should incorporate is being explicit in both content objectives and language objectives. By providing these two types of objectives, we can help ELLs get equal access to curricular content despite their lack of proficiency in the target language (c.f., Echevarría et al., 2017). In ABE contexts, content objectives refer to professional skills that are transferable to students' career paths and daily situations. Meanwhile, language objectives focus on the (academic) language skills needed to achieve the state content standards. Language objectives should augment the content knowledge and different language demands such as communicative functions (e.g., requesting information), grammar, writing and conventions, reading comprehension, vocabulary instruction, and word study (e.g., morphemes and phonemes) (Lindahl & Watkins, 2014).

Below are some examples of content and language objectives in an instructional unit (Tables 1 and 2), derived from both the state and the national College and Career Readiness Standards which foreground employability, translatable skills for further education, and self-advocacy (American Institute for Research, 2016; Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, 2020). As a recommended practice for all practitioners, the objectives should be communicated at the beginning of each lesson so that students have transparent directions and expectations. Furthermore, activities, or the means of achieving the content and language objectives, should be made explicit as well. See Figure 1, an actual slide used in one of Dao’s ELA Level 5 lessons.

Translanguaging pedagogies

García and Li (2014) define translanguaging as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (p. 5). This perspective emphasizes the fluid and dynamic use of language and the idea that multilingual individuals draw on their entire linguistic and cultural repertoire when communicating. In this sense, a translanguaging lens breaks down language hierarchies and promotes greater equity and inclusivity in language education. In the context of migration, the field of applied linguistics/TESOL has entered the post-multilingualism era in which "boundaries between languages, between languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELA Level 2</th>
<th>Language Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Objective</td>
<td>Students will be able to communicate their educational and/or career goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Objective</td>
<td>Students will be able to conjugate verbs in Simple Present Tense and use Adverbs of Frequency to describe their habits (what they do) to achieve their goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Example of Content and Language Objectives in ELA Level 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELA Level 5</th>
<th>Language Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Objective</td>
<td>Students will be able to compose a basic professional email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Objective</td>
<td>Students will be able to apply basic rules of using punctuation and capitalization in English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Example of Content and Language Objectives in ELA Level 5
and other communicative means, and the relationship between language and the nation-state are being constantly reassessed, broken, or adjusted” (Li, 2018, p. 22). To address this shift, García (2017) suggests that translanguaging pedagogies—intentional and strategic teaching practices informed by the translanguaging theory—would benefit migrant adult learners in ways that give “agency to minoritized speakers, decolonizes linguistic knowledge, and engages all of us in the social transformations that the world so sorely needs today[…]

Adult migrants are the best example of this living between and beyond borders—national, political, linguistic, social, ideological” (p. 24). Driven by these perspectives, below are some instructional approaches that have been implemented by incorporating our adult ELLs’ linguistic repertoire:

i. **Purposeful translation**

In this example, Boesiger, who is bilingual in Spanish and English, purposefully translates keywords into languages spoken by her students. She also includes links to Google-translated instructions and directives (texts in red) to work towards creating a more inclusive environment in which students feel included, learn new words, practice digital literacy, and are better able to complete tasks on Canvas learning platform (see Figure 2).

ii. **Purposeful use of technology**

In one ELA Level 1 class, Peña, who is bilingual in Spanish and English and well-versed in technology, makes use of his funds of knowledge and resources to explain concepts and/or give directives to his students, who mostly speak Spanish and Ukrainian.

In the excerpt below (see Table 3), Peña used Spanish to incorporate the Spanish-speaking students’ repertoire to directly connect with them and further explain the “to be” verb and its accompanying pronouns (lines 1 and 2). When using Google Translate to explain the concept, he strategically spoke in short sentences to ensure a higher precision of the translation and thereby create a meaningful moment for understanding (lines 3 and 4). The excerpt also demonstrates the ways in which Peña fluidly switched between English, Spanish, and Ukrainian (using technological support from Google) to make learning experiences relevant and inclusive for multilingual learners in his class.

iii. **Purposeful use of “bridging” moment**

In this last example, Dao, who is a Vietnamese-English bilingual and an emerging Spanish learner, has been intentional in his approach to teaching vocabulary. His strategies include (a) explicitly asking his Spanish-speaking students to establish a metalinguistic connection when it comes to cognates (e.g.,
responsible—responsible) and (b) crafting questions that allow translanguaging and thus invite inclusivity (e.g., “How do you say this in Ukrainian?”). In doing this, Dao strategically “bridges” students’ first language and the target language—English, thus creating a fluid and interactive space for students to make cross-linguistic connections and develop their multilingual competencies.

**Language of empowerment: An identity approach**

From a sociocultural perspective, Norton (2013) conducted extensive research on language and identity and provided an overview of current research on language learner identity formation while exploring the relationship between identity and language learning. In her view, “every time language learners speak, read, or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, but they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation” (p. 4). In other words, *language identity* refers to how individuals see themselves and are seen by others in relation to their language use across sociocultural contexts. In the context of migration, adult ELLs often feel estranged, excluded, and inferior as they tend to perceive their L1 as of little value during the resettlement process (Norton, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers of adult ELLs create meaningful moments and opportunities for students to *invest* (Norton, 2013) in their bilingual and/or multilingual identities.

For example, informed by an identity approach to language acquisition, Dao has been using the *language of empowerment* to explicitly value bilingualism (e.g., “Being bilingual is a superpower”) and show appreciation for his students’ background of immigration (see Figure 3).

In another example, to instill a sense of empowerment and identity in English, Boesiger often uses *reflection journaling* (c.f. Tang, 2023) in more advanced ELA classes. On the first day of class, students are asked to answer the question “Who are you?” in writing. She

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Peña</td>
<td>Okay, class, I’m going to explain the following part in Spanish first and then in Ukrainian. Okay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peña (directing himself to the Spanish speakers)</td>
<td><em>Como puedan notar, el “I am” en español es “yo soy”. Pero ahora tenemos “you are, we are, they are” y noten que todas usan el mismo verbo “are”. Y no es tan complicado como en español, lo cual sería: tu eres, nosotros somos, y ellos son.</em> (As you can see, the “I am” in Spanish is “yo soy”. But now we have “you are, we are, they are” and notice that they all use the same verb “are”. And it’s not as complicated as in Spanish, which it would be: <em>tu eres, nosotros somos, y ellos son</em>.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peña (speaking out loud to Google Translate application in short sentences)</td>
<td>The ‘to be’ verb is like a Transformer. Some transformers can be a car, a plane, and a robot. It’s the same with the ‘to be’ verb. It can be ‘am’. It can be ‘are’. It can be ‘is’. But all three represent the same “to be” verb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Excerpt—Example of purposeful use of technology*
communicates with students that there is no specific answer or length of response. She further explains that she and each student are their own audience. She reads the journals to learn from the students' responses, which in turn inform her teaching throughout the quarter and then puts them in a safe place. At the end of the quarter, students respond to the same prompt. This time after students have finished journaling, Boesiger returns students their journals which they crafted at the beginning of the quarter. With her guidance and support, students read and compare their two journals. Students are then encouraged to discuss their observations in small groups and/or with her and the class. This journaling activity allows students to critically reflect on the formation of their multilingual identity as well as their language acquisition journey.

Conclusion

To conclude, we would like to emphasize that every migrant learner comes to the classroom with "linguistic assets and other funds of knowledge we ought to acknowledge" (Echevarría et al., 2017, p. 4). We also hope that the provided teaching tips and examples help our fellow ESOL practitioners become more aware of how to make meaningful connections with students' lived experiences and cultural capital and turn theory into practice. In this way, we can incorporate socially just and equity-focused pedagogies for effective instruction, as well as ensure ELLs' academic success and social well-being.
References


Cite this article

Universal design for learning in multilingual contexts: Unlocking potentials

Ali Asiri, Estefaní López Contreras & Hassan Alwadei

Summary: This article examines using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to enhance English language development in multilingual learners, focusing on implementing technology. By providing insights into effective UDL implementation, it aims to support educators and practitioners in empowering Multilingual Learners (MLLs) to achieve language proficiency and academic success. Drawing on previously published research, we explore the benefits and challenges of UDL implementation for MLLs in ESL/EFL contexts, offer potential strategies for UDL and technology integration, and provide a practical example with CommonLit integration.

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning, UDL, English Language Learners, ELLs, Multilingual Learners, Educational Technology

Introduction

With a focus on scientific understanding of human learning, the universal design for learning (UDL) has been developed to be a comprehensive framework to enhance and optimize teaching and learning experiences for individuals of all backgrounds. The promise of the framework is to foster flexibility and responsiveness to learners’ variability that can optimize teaching practices and facilitate learning for all students (CAST, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014; Rao, 2019). By addressing the primary barrier within instructional environments, the inflexible, “one-size-fits-all” curricula that many teachers are required to cope with (CAST, 2011, p.4), the UDL framework gives a blueprint for developing instructional objectives, materials, and assessment techniques that make learning experiences accessible to all students, thus reducing the need for individual accommodations that address learner variability.

Within this framework, three overarching principles help educators provide choices, scaffolding, and flexibility to facilitate the learning process. These are to provide:

1. multiple means of engagement,
2. multiple means of representation, and

Each of these principles focuses on a particular aspect of learning to accommodate the broadest possible spectrum of students without needing future adjustments (Meyer et al., 2014). Therefore, the implementation of these principles promotes learning experiences that are multi-dimensional, multi-sensory, meaningful, and engaging. To achieve the goal of implementing these three principles, the framework is supported by nine guidelines and 31 checkpoints (CAST, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014; Rao, 2015).

The first principle, engagement, supports how students get motivated and stay engaged during learning activities. It guides teachers to create a learning environment where students interact flexibly with content. Varying the kind and degrees of challenges for students can help with engagement and keeping students’ attention in the classroom. For example, one of the guidelines under this principle is recruiting students’ interests before diving into the content of the lesson. One way for teachers to achieve this is by offering learners choices on things like selecting a topic, projects, etc. This approach can help learners to develop self-determination and agency, and help them feel connected to their learning. The second principle, representation, looks at how the teacher presents information. One way this could be done is by adding visual aids, and/or changeable font size (as will be shown later). Once this
principle is implemented, learners will have various information presentation methods, such as written and spoken languages, videos, and images (CAST, 2018; Kieran & Anderson, 2019). Lastly, the principle of action and expression helps teachers provide learners with ways to demonstrate what they know and are capable of in multiple ways (CAST, 2018; Evmenova, 2018). Similarly, it allows teachers to foster the development of executive functions and communication (CAST, 2011). For instance, teachers can integrate technology and use multiple media in learning tasks that help students monitor their progress, plan strategically, and respond to tasks in different ways or formats (an example is provided later). This principle also considers materials and assessments, and their accessibility for students to interact with these at ease regardless of their variability (CAST, 2018).

Although the UDL framework is most frequently associated with meeting the needs of students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs, the framework's principles can also provide a robust framework for enhancing Multilingual Learners' (MLL) learning experience. On most occasions, traditional approaches to language instruction may not be sufficient for MLLs, who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Torres & Kao, 2019). In recent years, however, UDL has gained attention for its potential to enhance language development for MLLs since it shifts the focus from viewing students as disabled or unable to learn to the understanding that the curriculum may be hindering their access to content (Meier & Rossi, 2020).

By providing multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression, UDL can support the individual needs of multilingual learners by diversifying instruction and increasing the understandability and accessibility of content for these students. Teachers employing the UDL principles can benefit from greater flexibility and personalization in their instruction, thus creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of their background or learning abilities, which can ultimately help them improve their English proficiency.

**UDL and Multilingual Learners**

Multilingual learners are students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) but are consistently exposed to multiple languages (WIDA, 2020). Because of their cultural and linguistic diversity, MLLs may receive and analyze information differently, which could result in barriers to learning (Rose & Meyer, 2020; Torres & Kao, 2019). To optimize MLLs' learning experiences, teachers should ensure that new content is perceptible, clear, and comprehensible (Torres & Rao, 2019). Similarly, educators should provide ample opportunities for MLLs to receive input, produce output, and participate in interactions while also providing feedback as often as possible (Torres & Rao, 2019).

Considering the importance of language development (LD) for MLLs' academic success, teaching practices should take into account language proficiency in assessment and lesson design. From this perspective, the UDL framework can help teachers predict and plan for MLLs' needs and help reduce learning barriers (Torres & Kao, 2019). When multiple means of engagement are included in the instruction, MLLs are more likely to build skills, sustain their interest, and deepen their understanding and retention of new content. Linking MLLs' background knowledge is not only beneficial to learning but helpful in promoting language learning.

Likewise, varying the ways of presenting new information while integrating content and language in instruction can help MLLs assimilate new knowledge (Torres & Kao, 2019). Furthermore, incorporating multiple ways to express knowledge is critical for MLLs since their English language proficiency may limit how much of what they know they are able to clearly demonstrate. Fostering interactions in the target language can help MLLs produce and interact with language successfully. All things considered, the progressive scaffolds UDL proposes for learning enhances strategic learning and language development.

The flexible and adaptable nature of UDL lends itself particularly well to supporting the unique language development needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Therefore, applying the principles of UDL to language instruction can help educators ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality education and that the learning experiences are tailored to meet their needs and abilities. On that account, technology integration can be one way to implement the UDL framework. Technology can be a powerful tool for implementing UDL since it allows for greater flexibility and personalization in instruction (see Table 1 for more examples). However, successfully integrating technology and UDL requires careful planning, training, and support.

**Technology Support**

When considering the use of technology, there are some critical points to keep in mind. First and foremost, to
effectively implement technology into a classroom, it is important to ensure teachers and students have access to the technology itself (e.g., computer, notebook, etc.) in order to develop their digital skills. Another key factor is to use checkpoints to achieve the main guidelines. This can help ensure that the technology is being used in a way that supports best practices and avoids potential pitfalls.

Another important consideration is whether achieving the desired outcome without using technology is possible. In many cases, simpler solutions may be just as effective, or even more so. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that UDL does not necessarily equate to the use of technology. While technology can certainly support UDL principles, it is not the only way to implement them. Finally, it is important to understand that no single technology will cover all guidelines and checkpoints. Table 1 shows some educational technologies that may support UDL implementation in classrooms with the best suitable guideline for them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Messaging applications</td>
<td>Digital Graphic Organizers</td>
<td>Online and mobile apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Hangout</td>
<td>Poppet</td>
<td>UDL Book Builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>Chart of online Graphic Organizers</td>
<td>StoryJumper</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Book Creator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Checklists</td>
<td>Literacy Support App</td>
<td>Multimodal presentation tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example created in Google Forms</td>
<td>Voice Dream Reader</td>
<td>Voicethread</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educreations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Explain Everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online bulletin board</td>
<td>Text-to-Speech</td>
<td>Infographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padlet</td>
<td>Newsela</td>
<td>Adobe Spark</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piktochart</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easel.ly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Sharing</td>
<td>Text Customization</td>
<td>Story creation and animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FlipGrid</td>
<td>CommonLit</td>
<td>Puppet Pals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Toontastic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Samples of education technology for each UDL principle adopted from “Technology and UDL,” Rao, K. and Torres C., 2020. https://schoolvirtually.org

Since no single technology supports all UDL principles, guidelines, and every checkpoint, it is important for teachers to carefully evaluate tools and use them to maximize their benefits while minimizing potential risks. The following is one way to evaluate a technology that may help support some of the UDL principles, guidelines, and/or checkpoints.

**CommonLit Example**

**CommonLit** is a platform built on a foundation of over 2,000 high-quality texts to offer free reading passages for grades 3–12, and which is complemented by aligned interim assessments, growth-oriented data, and expert-led teacher development. While it is not meant to meet all principles, it does a good job of serving each of them. What follows are examples of how CommonLit can be used to implement the three principles of the UDL framework.

**Provide Multiple Means of Engagement**

CommonLit offers engaging content that meets learners’ interests by providing various topics and genres (see
Figure 1: CommonLit list of topics and genres

Learners have the autonomy to select any topic, making finding a topic that matches their interests effortless. Additionally, CommonLit offers learners opportunities to self-regulate their learning by providing comprehension-check questions throughout the reading, which allows them to assess their understanding and reading strategies.

**Provide Multiple Means of Representation**

CommonLit is a helpful tool that provides multiple means of representation, including pictures to enhance understanding, a text-to-speech tool for audio support, built-in definitions, and footnotes (see Figure 2). While CommonLit does not provide scaffolding for reading, teachers can use the tool to activate background knowledge, highlight big ideas and critical features, and guide information processing and visualization. Teachers can do so by inserting questions to scaffold content and ensure it is understandable. These questions can be inserted throughout the reading to check for prior knowledge and to assess comprehension. By using CommonLit and incorporating scaffolded questions, teachers can support students in accessing and comprehending complex texts.

**Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression**

Although CommonLit only partially meets the criteria for the category, it provides alternative options such as digital highlighting and annotating of readings. It also offers a variety of question types for students to express and communicate their ideas, including short answers and multiple-choice questions. To meet this criterion more fully, teachers must create and customize these questions to fit the needs of their learners. Additionally, CommonLit provides a feature for monitoring learning progress by collecting all student answers, reading levels,
highlights, and annotations. The generated report is an essential tool for students to reflect on their progress and develop lifelong learning skills. Overall, despite not satisfying all the category criteria, CommonLit offers a range of options that support student learning and development.

**Final Thoughts**

Implementing the UDL framework, with the support of technology, can significantly benefit multilingual learners in terms of their language development and overall educational experience. By offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, UDL can help and guide teachers to meet the diverse needs of these learners and promote their academic success. Furthermore, the application of online technology can provide educators with powerful tools for implementing UDL principles and enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of language instruction. By leveraging the power of UDL and technology, educators can help empower MLLs to achieve their full potential and become successful, engaged members of our increasingly diverse society.

**References**


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**Cite this article:**

Implementing project-based language learning with adult multilingual learners of English

ALEXANDER F. TANG

This article demonstrates how Project-based Language Learning (PBLL) can be implemented in an intermediate-high ESL class with Adult Multilingual Learners of English (MLEs) who are immigrants and refugees. Through a human rights project adapted from Ellii (formerly ESL Library), the teams of students researched and reported on topics of their own choosing. Pedagogical implications are shared on the best practices for using PBLL in the classroom. This article concludes that instructing Adult MLEs can be enhanced by using PBLL to contextualize instruction, promote learner autonomy and build project management skills.

Keywords: Project-based Language Learning, PBLL, Adult Multilingual Learners of English, Human Rights; Adult Basic Education; project management skills

Introduction

Recently, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s National Foreign Language Center (NFLRC) offered a 5-module open-enrollment Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on “Envisioning Project Based Language Learning” from October 22, 2022 to March 31, 2023 (n.d.). The MOOC offered an extraordinary insight into how Project-based Language Learning (PBLL) can enhance classroom instruction. Upon completing the MOOC, I reflected on my past experiences as an instructor of Adult Multilingual Learners of English (MLEs) and realized that I had implemented this form of action research last year in an intermediate-high ESL course that I taught in 2022. As a scholar-practitioner, I found that in the adult immigrant and refugee ESL classroom, PBLL hasn’t been used extensively (Beckett, 2005; Doherty and Eyring, 2006; Hoose, 2017; Lee, 2014; Petersen, 2008; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Sidman-Taveau, 2006; Tims, 2009), as it is often classified as a “dessert project”, something that is used in addition to prior instruction in a prescribed unit in a course. From a pedagogical standpoint, I was interested in sharing my experience using the latest research in the teaching-learning cycle. This paper aims to

- describe the seven essential project design elements and teaching practices of the Gold Standard of Project-based Learning;
- highlight the importance of coaching instructors of Adult MLEs in project management skills through scaffolding and reflecting;
- suggest how to implement PBLL in the classroom with Adult MLEs.

According to the Buck Institute of Education (BIE), Project-based Learning (PBL) is a “teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects.” PBL differs from “doing a project,” or from a “dessert project”–a short, intellectually-light project served up after the teacher covers content of a unit in the usual way–but is instead a “main course” project, in which the project is the unit (BIE, 2019). In PBL, the project is the vehicle for teaching and the important knowledge and skills students need to learn. The project contains and frames curriculum and instruction (2019). High-quality PBL ensures students are getting the “main course” and BIE promotes a research-informed model for Gold Standard PBL. Language instructors who use teaching practices from the Gold Standard PBL can create transformative experiences in the classroom.
The Seven Essential Project Design Elements

These elements (see Figure 1) provide a framework for developing high-quality projects for the classroom. According to BIE (2019a, as cited from Hainline et al., 2021), the seven elements are:

1. **A challenging problem or question** The project is framed by a meaningful problem to be solved or a question to answer, at the appropriate level of challenge.
2. **Sustained inquiry** Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of posing questions, finding resources, and applying information.
3. **Authenticity** The project involves real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact, or the project speaks to personal concerns, interests, and issues in the students’ lives.
4. **Student voice and choice** Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create, and express their own ideas in their own voices.
5. **Reflection** Students and teachers reflect on the learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, and obstacles that arise, and strategies for overcoming them.
6. **Critique and revision** Students give, receive, and apply feedback to improve their processes and products.
7. **Public product** Students make their project work public by sharing it with and explaining or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.

The Seven Project-based Teaching Practices

These practices help teachers, schools, and organizations improve, calibrate, and assess their practice (see Figure 2). According to the BIE (2019b), these practices are:

1. **Design and plan** Teachers create or adapt a project for their context and students, and plan its implementation from launch to culmination while allowing for some degree of student voice and choice.
2. **Align to standards** Teachers use standards to plan the project and make sure it addresses key knowledge and understanding from subject areas to be included.
3. **Build the culture** Teachers explicitly and implicitly promote student independence and growth, open-ended inquiry, team spirit, and attention to quality.
4. **Manage** activities Teachers work with students to organize tasks and schedules, set checkpoints and deadlines, find and use resources, create products and make them public.
5. **Scaffold student learning** Teachers employ a variety of lessons, tools, and instructional strategies to support all students in reaching project goals.

6. **Assess student learning** Teachers use formative and summative assessments of knowledge, understanding, and success skills, and include self and peer assessments of team and individual work.
7. **Engage and coach** Teachers engage in learning and creating alongside students, and identify when they need skill-building, redirection, encouragement, and celebration.

**The context**

I implemented PBLL in an intermediate-high ESL class with Adult MLEs that were immigrants and refugees in an adult basic education program in Seattle, Washington during the spring of 2022 in the greater Seattle Area. The program serves over a thousand MLEs in their ESL program, and the students are working professionals, stay-at-home parents, or pre-college students hoping to transition into matriculated college level courses. They speak a variety of languages, such as Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Portuguese, Somali, Amharic, and Vietnamese. In this course, I employed the Gold Standard of PBL which allows critical learning experiences through a Human Rights Project offered through Ellii (formerly ESL Library, an online repository that English Language practitioners can subscribe to use for a fee). The students developed critical reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, which help them to transition from intermediate-high ESL to College and Career Readiness ESL in the summer of 2022.

**Participants**

All nine students were Adult MLEs from diverse parts of the world: six from Latin America, one from China, and two from Ethiopia (see Table 1). After conducting a short questionnaire with the class, I learned that none of the students had done a Human Rights Project before in an English class. In the past, I had taught this intermediate-high ESL course without infusing Project-based Language Learning elements, which didn’t seem to engage students sufficiently in human rights injustices and violations around the world. For that reason, I thought it was necessary to implement elements of PBL in my class (Teaching Practice 1: Design and plan).

**Human Rights Project**

During the first week of this unit, I asked an initial challenging question (Design Element 1: A challenging problem or question): “What human rights issue needs more attention?” After that, the students read Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The students then discussed the following questions:

1. What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
2. What human rights have people fought for in the past?
3. What human rights have people been fighting for recently?

Afterwards, the students discussed, and then completed a chart (see Figure 3) to identify “My Human Rights & Freedoms” (Design Element 2: Sustained inquiry). Each student read the description of the human right listed and checked the box next to it if they agreed that it was, indeed, a human right. They were then encouraged to add any human rights not listed in the blank boxes at the bottom. Students then worked in pairs or small groups to discuss what responses/additions they had in common.

Since some of the students said that they have never heard of these, I thought it was critical to review historic human rights violations to provide context (see Figure 4). The students learned some of the many traumatic injustices that the Jewish people faced which led to the Holocaust as well as the ongoing antisemitism that is perpetuated globally. In addition, they learned from indigenous perspectives of the First Nations people about forced assimilation by the Canadian government. This provided a model for language use that they could follow as they took on the role of researchers and reporters in the next stage of the process.

Then, the students took notes on human rights violations currently happening from digital news sites and newspapers, such as Human Rights Watch (Design Element 3: Authenticity), a trustworthy news source on human rights. Following this exercise, the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Project Group Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>LGBTQ Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>LGBTQ Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Women On Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Women On Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Women On Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiayu</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Women On Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salam</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Ethiopian Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abebe</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Mid 50s</td>
<td>Women's Rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Students' demographic information

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conducted a class survey to decide which human rights issues they wanted to learn more about, so that they could form project groups centered on an issue of their choice (Design Element 4: Student voice and choice).

The topic chosen by Group 1 was Women’s Rights in Latin America, which centered on the liberation of women’s lives in what some might characterize as misogynistic culture(s) perpetuated by toxic masculinity. The topic of Group 2 was LGBTQ+ Rights, which argued for accepting queer-identified individuals for who they are and supporting LGBTQ+ youth in their development by being comfortable with their sexuality. The topic of Group 3 focused on human rights injustices in some African countries such as violence between some religious groups in Ethiopia and Somalia. In their groups, the students discussed a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Reflecting on the meaning of this motivated the students to begin the research on their projects that they would later report to the class (Design Element 5: Reflection).

Once the groups were formed, project requirements were discussed, which included the following sections that were necessary for their final product, with “checkpoints” that were soft deadlines to measure progress in the project (Teaching Practices 2 and 4: Align to standards and Manage activities):

- About (a brief overview)
- Mission, vision, and vision statement(s) (group purpose, future goal, and shared beliefs)
- Background information (research to find evidence/specific examples)
- Human rights activist (identify a person or organization/group’s advocacy on human right/freedom)
- Signs and slogans (to hold at the demonstration)
- Presentation (convince classmates to join the demonstration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Human Right Violation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Africans, forcibly taken from their homeland, were enslaved in American colonies.</td>
<td>The right to life, liberty, and security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jews were placed in concentration camps and killed.</td>
<td>The right to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indigenous children were torn from their families and sent to schools to learn how to become part of European-Canadian society.</td>
<td>The right to equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Over 1,000 workers died after the collapse of a rundown Bangladesh factory.</td>
<td>The right to equal protection by the law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Women in Saudi Arabia were prevented from driving due to their gender.</td>
<td>The right to rest and leisure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>LGBT people in Gambia were placed in prison for life based on their sexual orientation.</td>
<td>The rights of a child/minor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Approximately 70% of the Tutsi population was killed in an act of genocide in Rwanda.</td>
<td>The right to education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Girls in Pakistan were told they were no longer allowed to attend school.</td>
<td>Freedom of movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>People with dark skin had to use different washrooms than people with light skin.</td>
<td>Freedom of religion &amp; beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prisoners in Syria were tortured.</td>
<td>Freedom from racial, gender, age, and other discrimination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: My Human Rights and Freedoms from Ellii’s Human Rights Project lesson plan

Figure 4: Human Rights Violations from Ellii’s Human Rights Project lesson plan
As this project spanned the course of five weeks, I assisted the students with each project requirement and offered extra assistance by providing feedback (Design Element 6: Critique and revision). It was important to structure constructive feedback for students and to guide them through the revision process as they were learning more about their topics in their individual groups (Teaching Practices 5: Scaffold student learning). The students were reminded that they would be graded both individually and as a group based on four evaluation areas: Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity (from Ellii). Teams created ‘team norms’ outlining which parts of their project each would be responsible for (Teaching Practice 3: Build the culture) and then each student signed an agreement acknowledging their responsibilities. Students provided weekly updates to the team as well as to me so that their classmates and I could assist when needed. During the final week of the school term, the groups shared what they had learned in a 20-minute presentation (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). I graded these with the assessment information provided by Ellii (p. 19).

Once the presentations were completed, the students wrote a final two-page reflection paper on their experiences with PBLL. Their reflections revealed that they enjoyed working in groups together (“enjoyed working with group members with diverse perspectives and backgrounds on human rights issues”) and that they were able to foster more understanding of “different human rights issues around the world.” Students noted they were able to critically evaluate human rights issues in certain contexts such as women’s rights in Latin America and LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. They also noted that it was a collaborative experience that they developed new skills in such as developing intercultural competence working with people from diverse backgrounds that they have never worked with before. In line with Hoose (2017), the students reported in their final written reflection that preparing for the presentation and answering questions about their topic was the most enriching and challenging part of the PBLL experience.

From a simple knowledge of pragmatics, with “rich target input and output and linguistic development afforded through the use of technology, which attends to important psychological components in learning” (Sidman-Taveau, 2006), they were able to progress to language learning strategies and higher order language skills (Teaching Practices 6 and 7: Assess student learning & Engage and coach). Their reflections and my own experience have convinced me that PBLL benefits the students in many ways. First, students are able to demonstrate practical pragmatic abilities such as knowing when it’s one’s turn to speak and being able to express disagreement in culturally appropriate ways (for example, “Since we have different cultural backgrounds, I have some difficulty understanding this point. Would you be able to explain more in detail?”) (NFLRC, n.d.). The project management skills that the students developed were meaningful and transformative, as was evident when they continued to work together as colleagues in combined ESL courses titled “ESL 081 A/B: College and Career Readiness”, which I taught in the summer of 2022 (Tang, 2023). This is in line with similar findings in Adult ESL classes reported by Petersen (2008).

As the course wrapped up, I was unable to share my students’ work (Design Element 7: Public product) since most classes during the spring of 2022 were offered virtually, and I was the only instructor to hold classes in-person. The students said that they did not want to have their work shared virtually with other instructors as they were worried about their privacy. Respecting their wishes, I did not share their final presentations as a public product. However, after consulting with the students again later to see if they would be comfortable sharing their work for this paper, they gladly obliged.

**Pedagogical Implications**

According to Tims (2009), Project-based Learning helps Adult MLEs practice and improve English because it promotes hands-on learning as well as provides the possibility of integrating the four language skills (p. 9). With the assistance of Ellii’s Human Rights Project, this long-term semi-structured project (Doherty and Eyring, 2006) allowed me to lead the students’ learning on historic human rights violations which transformed into self-directed learning on the human rights topic of their own choosing. In this study, the groups of students established and monitored accountability and worked together towards a common goal during the eleven-week school term, and accountability was monitored within groups. This long-term semi-structured project allowed me as an instructor to introduce new project management skills that may have inspired, challenged, or frustrated students. Also, similar to Lee (2014), the students in this course noted in their final reflections that they enjoyed the different stages of PBLL and were motivated to participate in future projects designed with the PBLL elements. There were no “clashes” found between the instructor and students, which was initially noted in
Beckett (2005), and there were no “clashes” between students in groups, perhaps because of the team agreement they had all signed.

Reflecting on the Golden Standard PBL, I believe the seven project-based teaching practices were necessary for ensuring student success with the assistance of the Human Rights Project lesson plan prepared by Elii. I planned and implemented a Human Rights Project by allowing student voice and choice of their topic of interest, as well as addressing key knowledge objectives in subject areas required in the intermediate-high ESL program learning standards. Through building culture in the classroom, I was able to promote student independence and growth, open-ended inquiry, team comradery, and attention to quality explicitly and implicitly. I encouraged self-management of activities by scaffolding tasks, setting deadlines, requiring weekly scheduling check-ins by student teams. I scaffolded student learning by using a variety of tools and instructional strategies and by offering to support them in finding resources so that all students could reach their project goals.

Conclusion

Project-based Learning is different from more traditional approaches because it engages both teachers and students in a collaborative exploration of open-ended questions for which they do not yet have answers (NFLRC, n.d.; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016). The power of the PBLL framework integrates many different aspects of proficiency (intercultural learning, content knowledge, collaboration, critical thinking, communication) into a single endeavor (NFLRC, n.d.). The primary factor that drives meaningful, enduring learning is a pressing “need to know” initiative on the topic. Remember, optimal critique and revision should occur throughout the project. By implementing the Golden Standard PBL, I was able to support the Adult MLEs in the intermediate-high ESL course in developing the necessary project management skills, which prepared them for the final course of the basic skills program, Career and Career Readiness ESL. In addition, they were able to critically reflect on their transformative Project-based language learning experiences.

Figure 5: Title and vision of Group 1

Figure 6: Title and vision of Group 2
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Cite this article:

STEAMing English: Should I breathe or should I no?

JASMINA STUHLI

Summary: This article provides an example of a project-based learning centered on the theme of air pollution. The project was carried out in a primary school with students from 12 to 13 years old in English foreign language lessons, using the STEAM approach. The primary objective was for the students to research the causes and effects of air pollution in their community and hence become more engaged in community issues, apply scientific research to issues meaningful to them, and learn to protect themselves from air pollutants.

Keywords: STEAM, air pollution, research, experimenting, peer learning

Introduction

I have been working as an English language teacher for 17 years at a primary school located in a rural area of Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina. My students, aged 6 to 14, learn English as their first foreign language. The Tuzla region is known for a large coal power plant and a long history of coal mining, with heavy reliance on coal as the main source of heating in winter. As the city is situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, air pollution is a serious local problem.

In October 2022, I completed a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) called STEM Out of The Box: A STEM approach to non-STEM subjects (Molina et al., 2022). The final assignment was designing a learning scenario which I then implemented in my English language classroom. According to the World Health Organization, Tuzla is one of the most polluted cities in Europe (SRNA, 2018), so the objective was for my students to learn about the causes and effects of air pollution and how to protect themselves. The project was implemented in the 8th grade with 12- and 13-year-old students. Although this topic is not a part of our standard English language curriculum, teachers may make alterations to the content of their classes, allowing me to develop this project-based unit in which students outlined their hypothesis, implemented a two-week field experiment, and presented their results.

Project-based learning through STEAM

STEAM is an educational approach to learning and teaching which combines Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Math, at the same time allowing learners to develop and improve 21st-century skills: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. In recent years, I have been incorporating STEAM in my English lessons to introduce my students to STEAM-targeted language. According to Mason (2020), this would involve things like vocabulary and readings on different STEAM projects.

The project activities involved several phases:

- Science and Technology: researching air pollution, consulting a physician, and presenting findings;
- Experimentation: demonstrating air pollution through scientific experiments;
- Engineering: building alternative power production models;
- The Arts: fostering creativity through song rewriting;
- Math: calculating CO2 absorption by trees;
- Public presentation: showcasing project results at the Tuzla Center for Ecology and Energy and on local and national TV.
Science and Technology

First, during the introductory lesson, we discussed the causes and effects of air pollution. My students were able to identify a few causes (e.g., cars, houses, and the power plant) and effects (e.g., coughing, heavy breathing, and sore eyes). I then played an educational video Air Pollution for Kids (Learn Bright, 2021) to teach my students new information about air pollution. During this lesson, I also presented Canva, a digital tool my students hadn’t used before, but continued to use during the project (and later on in other school subjects when making presentations). Students then listed what they knew from our discussion and what they learned from the video, which resulted in a single class poster on causes and effects of air pollution (see Figure 1).

Next, we brainstormed a list of topics to research, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5), the number of children affected by air pollution in Tuzla and globally, and types of diseases caused by air pollution. The students were instructed to prepare presentations, paying careful attention to sources and using data provided by different health institutions. They formed groups of two to four and had two weeks to collaborate and research one topic to prepare presentations.

Before the actual presentations, I used an image of the body organ system displayed via projector to pre-teach medical terms such as lungs, bloodstream, respiratory, and cardiovascular system, etc. A peer feedback form (see Table 1) was then distributed. Volunteer students read the elements to be assessed, and translated them into their first language(s) (L1). When students presented their findings, their classmates were captivated by the material. Their presentations taught us that PM 2.5 are very small particles found in the polluted air which can get into our bloodstream, affecting our lungs and heart, that children are at greater risk as they usually breathe through the mouth rather than their nose which results in greater amount of inhaled pollutants, and that polluted air frequently causes or aggravates cardiovascular diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, asthma, lung cancer, stroke, allergies, etc. Because of the advanced English words related to health and science, I scaffolded throughout the presentations using L1 as necessary. Nevertheless, it was clear that visual aids made it easier for the students to acquire new items more quickly. The presenters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My classmates understood their topic and prepared well.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates’ talk was clear.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates’ presentation was interesting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The balance of text and images in the presentation was excellent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understood my classmates.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve got all the information about the topic.</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1: Peer assessment form
were assessed through a simple checklist. I opted for peer rather than teacher assessment in order to provide a more comfortable learning environment for students and to offer them a diverse range of perspectives on their work, beyond the teacher’s viewpoint.

After the presentations, a class Zoom meeting was arranged with Lejla Alidžanović-Nurkanović (see Image 1), a physician at the University Clinical Center Tuzla so that she could verify my students’ findings. Speaking in English, Dr. Alidžanović-Nurkanović not only confirmed the information students had gathered, but also explained that the number of ill people, especially children, considerably increases in winter owing to poor air quality. She communicated with the students using level-appropriate language with short, simple sentences, avoiding medical terminology (choosing ‘lungs’ instead of ‘pulmonary’, ‘heart’ instead of cardio’) and pointing to the body part or system being talked about. She provided valuable recommendations on how to protect oneself such as using available applications to monitor air quality, remaining inside when the air quality is hazardous, reducing outside physical activity, wearing appropriate masks, and using air purifiers inside. During this meeting, several students with high proficiency in English acted as translators for their classmates.

Experiments: Hypothesis, observation, result

To continue the learning process and provide better understanding of air pollution severity during the winter, we conducted a scientific experiment. In this experiment, the students constructed air pollution catchers by applying petroleum jelly to white paper plates and placing them in various locations around the school and their homes for observation over a two-week period. This activity encouraged engagement in the scientific method by hypothesizing outcomes, observing the catchers, and ultimately recording their findings to either prove or disprove their hypotheses. The language of STEAM is centered on the scientific method and problem-solving, which involves observing, questioning, predicting, experimenting, and discussing (Miralimovna, 2022).

Although the majority suggested placing the catchers above their front doors, some suggested using contrasting locations near the school grounds to see if differing test environments would result in different findings. Given the school’s rural location, a forest (Figure 2) was selected as a healthy test environment, with the students designing protective covers for the catcher. Conversely, the school coal boiler room (Figure 3) was identified as an unhealthy test environment. Depending on the location, the students...
gave different hypotheses such as *I expect the catcher above my front door to remain pretty clean in two weeks period*, *I assume the catcher in school boiler room will be very dirty in a short period of time*, and *If I put my catcher in the forest, it will stay clean during the observation period*. At the end of the two-week period, students presented the findings. The class’s hypothesis that the air we breathe is very dirty was proven true. The contrast in results between the clean (forest) and dirty (school boiler room) test environment was striking (see Figures 2 and 3). Although PM 2.5 particles cannot be seen by the naked eye, the changes on the school boiler room catcher were quite visible.

I also introduced a practical demonstration of temperature inversion, a natural phenomenon common during the city's winters. Under normal conditions, temperature decreases with an increase in altitude; however, under certain conditions, the situation becomes reversed and the temperature starts increasing with altitude rather than decreasing. As the cold air stays down (blue water in our experiment), and warm air goes up (red water), it creates “a trap” for air pollutants (invisible layer between the two colors) (see Image 2) near the ground and prevents the dispersal of smog. This experiment demonstrated to students that it is not just the human factor causing or contributing to air pollution. Additionally, it helped us learn or practice vocabulary concerning everyday household items (jar, tube, funnel, wood skewer, and kettle) and cooking-related verbs (pour, stir, and boil).

**Engineering and power production**

Wanting to broaden my students’ understanding of alternatives to coal-fueled power production methods, I collaborated with my colleague Sanela Džinić, who teaches Technical Culture. The subject guides students to apply knowledge in technology in everyday life. During her lessons, students made models of solar-powered houses, windmills, and hydro-electric plants. These activities provided an opportunity for students to engage in various construction processes and learn about power production. Their models were successful in generating electricity. Again, collaborating in pairs or groups, the students prepared and gave short presentations to their classmates.

A Practical Demonstration of Temperature Inversion

To demonstrate normal weather conditions, pour blue-colored cold water into a jar, then place a tube at the bottom of the cold-water jar and slowly pour red-colored hot water into the cold one through the tube. You will see that the two colors mix.

To demonstrate temperature inversion, pour red-colored hot water into the jar. Again, place the tube at the bottom of hot water jar and slowly pour the blue-colored cold water into the hot one. You will see that cold water stays down, and red goes up. There is an invisible layer between the two that doesn’t let them mix.
naming different parts of their models in English (solar panels, wind turbines and blades, transformers, generators, etc.).

**Math in English**

Another colleague, Mersida Muminović Muminhodžić, who teaches math, also lent her expertise by providing a formula for calculating the number of trees needed to absorb the CO2 emissions from the Tuzla coal-burning power plant. First, students needed to learn that in one year, this plant emits 2,471,215 tons of CO2, and one average tree can absorb 21 kg per year. Next, using the formula, and the data that an average 12–15m tree takes 3m x 3m of space and the size of Tuzla canton (a country’s territorial division) is 2,649 km², my students were able to calculate that 39% of the canton should be covered in trees to absorb CO2 produced by the power plant alone (see Figure 4). This task helped students go beyond the typical expectations of their learning because students study numbers in primary school in their English lessons, but they don’t normally do any calculations. However, in this activity, they have managed to explain mathematical calculations in the L2.

Rewriting songs can help students develop a contextual lens by analyzing the original song’s lyrics, themes, and messages and then adapting them to fit the context of their topic. This process fosters critical and creative thinking about how the song’s content can be reinterpreted to convey their message about a real-world problem, in our case air pollution.

**Public presentations of project results**

Upon completing the project activities, students visited the Center for Energy and Ecology in Tuzla. The purpose of the visit was to meet with high school and university students working on the project *Youth for Clean Air* and exchange the information gathered and results obtained in the projects. The meeting enabled my students to share

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**The arts and creative writing**

Although many of the activities in this STEAM project involved either writing or speaking English, creative writing emerged as a favorite amongst the students. As I used the song *Should I stay or should I go* (The Clash, 1982) to title our project *Should I breathe or should I no*, the students were encouraged to showcase their creativity in rewriting the original song to reflect the theme of air pollution. See Table 2 for some students’ examples:
their knowledge, practice public speaking skills, and learn more about our hosts’ activities in advocating for changes with local community members, industry representatives, and government officials. Finally, one local and one national TV station visited the school to report on our project results, which additionally highlighted the significance of my students’ work.

**Conclusion**

With the above-mentioned activities, I successfully integrated all five STEAM areas in my teaching scenario while simultaneously enabling my students to improve 21st-century skills: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. The students studied air pollution and its effects on human lives, developing their skills in stating hypotheses and conducting scientific experiments as well as their critical thinking skills by gathering and analyzing data and evidence to test those hypotheses. The students used technology to do their research and prepare their presentations, and some lessons were given in the form of a video or a video meeting. The students also presented their findings to their classmates and to peers at the Center for Energy and Ecology Tuzla and two TV stations, which provided them with additional opportunities to improve communication skills and feel the impact of their work on the larger community. Making models of renewable and green power production, the students engaged in some engineering processes and managed to produce electricity themselves. They also worked in small groups, which developed teamwork and their collaboration skills. My students expressed their artistic sides in their creative presentations, but most important (for a language teacher) in creative writing. Finally, they sharpened their mathematical skills by using English in their calculations. The students’ writing and speaking using STEAM-related vocabulary was my biggest reward. Overall, these STEAM activities have provided a well-rounded learning experience.

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**Cite this article:**

Reflections on Practice

Changing the narrative: Living and teaching in occupied Palestine

MARY GOODRICH

Summary: A reflection of a Department of State English Language Fellow’s experience and growth during a year of teaching in Occupied Palestine.

Keywords: Palestine, open education, relationships, co-teaching, culture

Exposition: Setting the scene

I prepared as best I could: tapping the teaching materials of kindly colleagues, choosing the books that would weight my suitcases, and, after procrastinating for months, organizing and color-coding my Google drive. I studied the challenges that Arabic speakers face when learning English; I read some history of the region and paid more attention to the news.

While I hoped my efforts would ready me for the challenges of teaching in Palestine, the reality proved much different.

Twelve months ago, a season of life was drawing to a close: my daughters were grown and launched, my husband wanted to move from academia into a full-time writing career, and after teaching at Gonzaga University and in the Spokane community for more than six years, I was ready to teach overseas again. The US Department of State’s English Language Fellow Program offered the perfect opportunity to try something new.

After a lengthy application process, I was offered a teaching position at Al Quds Open University in Ramallah, Palestine. Centered in the Holy Land, eight miles north of Jerusalem, Ramallah would be the perfect base for exploring the Middle East. My husband is a Roman and early Christian historian—we both longed to spend a year in the country. On the other hand, wasn’t it dangerous? Feeling completely ignorant, I tried to recall past stories of terrorism, bombings, and riots—violent upheavals that had once commanded little of my attention.

How would I characterize my first encounter with Palestine? Excitement. Trepidation. Curiosity. So many emotions ran through me as I rode in the taxi through the dusty, olive-treed landscape. It was hot. I was tired from the long flight, the orientation meetings, and the ten-hour time zone difference. Soldiers aimed automatic weapons in our direction as we went through our first checkpoint, crossing into
the West Bank. Our driver didn’t speak any English; we had a difficult time finding our apartment; I began to wonder if this had been a terrible mistake.

My concerns also embraced the professional part of my life. I arrived not knowing what (or when) I would be teaching. My university administrators had dismissed my inquiries: we would figure it out once I reached Ramallah. Not only were the curriculum and term dates flexible, but the idea of an “open” university system was also new to me. My host university’s mission is to “bring education to the people.” This incorporates online learning, blended learning, and mobile education—whatever will help students progress toward a degree. While I admired the intention, I wondered if it stood the test of reality: classes only meet once a week, for sixty or ninety minutes. Students are not required to attend class; they are responsible for managing their own learning. Our time together is intended to practice and reinforce what they have studied at home or online. It operates a bit like a flipped classroom, but on a university-sized scale.

**Rising action: The language of occupation**

Ramallah is a city in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Although nearly a suburb of Jerusalem, the city stands on the opposite side of a separation wall, a world apart (see Image 2). Life under occupation magnifies the challenges of delivering and receiving a university education.

I feel this most powerfully when I travel. I teach two days each week in Ramallah, and two days at my university’s branch campuses, which are scattered the length of the West Bank. On travel days I leave Ramallah early in the morning in a shared taxi, pass through checkpoints manned by armed soldiers, make detours when necessary for safety or because soldiers have unexpectedly blockaded roads, and arrive in troubled cities like Jenin, Nablus, and Hebron. Security and safety problems can force a cancellation minutes before I am ready to leave Ramallah—I am never certain that I will be teaching on a given day until I am standing in a classroom. For me, occupation disrupts my best laid plans—an inconvenience and a source of ongoing frustration.

My students experience a different reality. For more than 50 years, Palestinians have been denied the right to control their lives and make choices that Americans take for granted. My students have never known any other way of life. Education in Palestine cannot be divorced from the pervasive context of occupation. Each day brings another senseless death, a dehumanizing event, a terrifying situation. Contact with the students, the secondhand sharing of their experiences, adds another layer to how I perceive this situation: terrible things are happening to people I know and care about.

*I’m sorry teacher, I cannot come to class. All of the roads around my village have been blocked.*

*I can’t concentrate to do my work. The soldiers came and took my young brother yesterday. I don’t know if we will see him again.*

*I want to be a teacher, but there are no jobs. What is the point?*

*I had to wait at the checkpoint for three hours.*

*I my two cousins were killed last night.*

*I couldn’t do the assignment. I don’t have access to a computer or reliable internet.*

*Image 2: The Separation Wall: separating Israel from West Bank, Palestine*
I’m sorry I couldn’t come to class last week. I was arrested because of something my cousin is suspected of.

I want to study abroad, but it is impossible to get a visa.

I’m tired and have a headache. The teargas from the raid near my house came through the window last night. I couldn’t sleep.

I have no hope that things will ever get better.

Restrictions on movement, trauma, and a denial of opportunities hinder their education. Yet, my students continue to work, daring to dream of a better future for themselves and their people. Palestinians embrace the concept of Sumud—steadfastness and resilience, both in a personal and collective sense. It is also “a socio-political concept [that] refers to ways of surviving in the context of occupation, chronic adversity, lack of resources and limited infrastructure” (Marie et al., 2018).

I witness Sumud daily.

**Climax: Finding my way**

It might be a cliché at this point, but it doesn’t make it any less true, that you and I are first and foremost teachers of students. Teaching is relational. We are in this profession because we want to connect and engage with students in meaningful ways (see Images 3 and 4). “The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter” (Noddings, 1984). But what does relational teaching look like in practice? How can I make any sort of difference to students when I pass through their lives so quickly? I am realistic enough to know that a weekly one-hour class, no matter how inspirational, is unlikely to transform anyone’s life, except perhaps my own.

It has taken me a long time to process what is happening in Palestine, politically, socially, and personally. I am beginning to understand the role I fill in this unique context, hindered by its external constraints. As Noddings writes, “I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and non-selectively present to the student—to each student—as she addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total.” Reorienting around the centrality of relationships has allowed me to find and feel a sense of peace about what I am achieving in this disturbed situation.

When I first came to Palestine, I found it disconcerting when my students solicited my opinion of their country, their cities, their families, and themselves. I was battered with constant requests for praise and affirmation. Initially
I misinterpreted this as a thinly veiled way of ego stroking, bragging, or a way of asking for compliments. I understand the exchange differently now. When you grow up believing that you are “less than”—forgotten or ignored by the wider world—you are consumed with the need to feel that you matter, that someone hears your voice. I came to Palestine as an English teacher; I am becoming a cultural ambassador and a witness who sees and acknowledges my students’ struggle, resilience, and value (see Figure 1).

**Falling action: Wrapping up loose ends**

In addition to teaching undergraduates, my job also requires me to offer professional development sessions for my colleagues. Although I have nearly thirty years of classroom experience, I have only spent six years in TESOL. Still learning, I am always eager to imbibe the wisdom of my colleagues. However, in Palestine, my role has shifted and I am the native speaker, the English “expert.”

My “expertise” is displayed in departmental training workshops. Leading sessions for my English department colleagues has been intimidating. Most have doctorates; almost all have taught English longer than me. Nevertheless, because I have been selected by the State Department and am a native English speaker, I possess an undeserved authority. I get through these intimidating sessions by reminding myself that an effective trainer is a facilitator, rather than an expert. And if nothing else will do, fall back on the tried and true “fake it ‘til you make it” approach. I admit I still lack confidence, but it is getting easier.

Less stressful is the opportunity to co-teach several of my classes. This has proven a mutually beneficial experience, far more than simply dividing the workload or sharing teaching tips. By watching how I structure a session, my co-teachers are learning interactive teaching strategies, how to have student-centered classrooms, and where to find great resources. Conversely, they guide me through an unfamiliar educational system, teach me how Palestinian culture impacts the classroom, and serve as models of flexibility in the face of unexpected adversity. The give and take of these relationships is exciting and satisfying.

**Resolution: Transformation**

Three months before writing this reflection, I had to decide if I wanted to return to Palestine for a second year. The inherent difficulties and ever-simmering possibility of a national descent into violence needed to be weighed. Against
these negatives I could place the warmth of the people, the joy of teaching my students, and the challenges that are so unlike what we experience in the West.

Over the past eight months I have seen and experienced all sorts of amazing things. I have floated in the Dead Sea (see Image 5), explored the wonders of Petra, and ridden a camel across the desert sands of Wadi Rum (see Image 6). I have eaten delicious foods prepared by loving hands, celebrated Christian holidays in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, participated in Muslim celebrations, and grown close to my colleagues and students. My first year here has increased my understanding of the beauty and richness of Palestinian culture, and heightened my empathy for those who are forced to live as second-class citizens. The recipient of overwhelming and unexpected kindness, I have been taught to find joy even in terrible adversity.

Will I return? Do I like teaching in Palestine? Yes, unequivocally yes. The experience has been transformational.

References


Cite this article:
Retirement address: Outgoing bits of wisdom

MARY JEANNOT

This article is a summary of an address given by Dr Mary T Jeannot, founder of the MA/TESOL program at Gonzaga University, to a gathering of her students, colleagues, and friends, on the occasion of her retirement. Sprinkled with inside jokes and deep exhortations, Jeannot reminds us that humor, depth, leadership, and a sense of adventure build community, deepen connections, and belong in the classroom.

Keywords: ambiguity, invention, adaptation, joy, wisdom

Hear I forget, see I remember, do I understand. (There’s a little audiolingual irony for you.)
Do as I say, not as I do!
Don’t be a hypocrite.
Don’t drink Diet Coke. [opens a can of Diet Coke to laughter]

Just because you’ve been to a country once doesn’t mean you’re an expert. (But I went to Tianjin, China, and I’m now an expert!)

Floss! At least, floss every tooth you want to keep. (Lucia Huntington gave the same advice to ESL students 25 years ago—invention)
With the times being as they are, don’t play with kids too enthusiastically. You never know when you will be called to the principal’s or dean’s office.

Be grateful always. Find something to be grateful about even on your worst days. Forgive easily and don’t hold grudges.

Take life one day at a time.

The conversation doesn’t end here. It didn’t originate here, and it doesn’t end here.

... 

Cultivate a spiritual life! Pray to something bigger than yourself.

Remember, perception is not reality. Thinking is not reality. Don’t think. Breathe.

Triangulate to find truth.

Exercise. Always. Even when you don’t want to. Preferably some kind of yoga or forest bathing.

Respect your elders.

Use APA 7th edition. Put your commas next to the word, periods after the parentheses, and page numbers for direct quotes, etc.

And never use etc!

Avoid excessive use of passive voice and there is, there are. There are things that have happened to me! Change to: I have made them happen! The former evokes self-pity; the latter, agency and self-awareness.

Remember that chatgpt is NOT a person. Technology isn’t God; we can behold it and stand in awe, but nothing is more sublime or sacred than human mystery.

Lola. find your Lolas. When you find your Lola, listen. [Lola refers to the essential cultural informant in Basso, 1988, pp. 99–130.]

Which leads to: Embrace mystery. In fact I’d go so far as to say Embrace ambiguity! [laughter as this is a famous refrain for Mary]

There is always something to learn no matter what. Let errors be your friends. Notice them, make adjustments.

Acknowledge the many memberships, subcultures, and tribes to which you belong. Listen to how the language changes—in your L1, your L2, in other’s L1s and 2s...

Be a linguist. Be a sociolinguist. Strive to be multilingual!

When your classes start to get boring, sing!

Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate! You did not give birth to yourself. Be generous in giving others credit.

Sit in the front row and smile. Laugh at jokes no matter how dumb. It doesn’t matter if you understand. Just make laughing and listening noises and nod your head.

[...silence]

Don’t talk too much, you insult the imaginative capacity of your listener.

[...silence]

[...silence]

One of the last things my Mom said to me before she died is, “I wouldn’t have sweated the small stuff.” So take heart in your youth: Don’t sweat the small stuff. None of it matters in the end.

In our house growing up we had a burlap banner (reminiscent of groovy things in the 70s) that read: The most lost day of all is the day in which we do not laugh. (So central to our family Weltanschauung that mom and dad used it as their epitaph.)

Avoid profanity, swear words. Don’t use nice in your writing (unless you are invoking Joey from Friends). Proper, versus, master, delivery—these are all swear words. We don’t deliver, we teach. Especially avoid the word piece, as in the ESL piece; diversity isn’t a piece. Social justice, language—not pieces.

If you’re a man avoid mansplaining, manspreading, manhandling, and man-ipulating in any culture, in any language.

Always use a pencil when you read student papers. The eraser comes in handy if you are grading while hangry!

And speaking of grades: Relax. Chill. Letters are a social construction.
The most important word in the English language is c-c-c-context! The words "no" and "help" are equally important.

In 1999, the MA/TESOL program was my baby and when she became a teenager, the apron-strings were turned over to the formidable and indefatigable Dr. James Hunter. In the last few years, he has run the program nearly single-handedly and of course always with grace, dignity, humor, and humility! Always putting us first, right? And now four of us are leaving the island and James stands alone! [Sings The cheese stands alone, hi ho the dairy-o, the cheese stands alone.]

But before I am completely forgotten, the legacy that must be left is this: At the heart of our program is linguistic and cultural theory/practice built on the foundation of critical ethnographic exploration. If we abandon emic/etic pursuit, insight, reflection, and research, then we abandon the original goals/invention of the MA/TESOL program. And the core of our research should be ethnographic in scope. Please don’t forsake it for bigger samples and an elusive “objectivity” that doesn’t exist anyway.

Your cumulative work in TESOL should be your legacy, a bit of your soul. Spend time thinking about the multiple needs out there that you can help fill with creativity, ingenuity, passion, and your own GU MA/TESOL invention! It is our TESOL birthright to rebel, invent, and adapt--maybe more than we would like.

And finally,

Go to the desert. Be a Bedouin! Bedouins adapt themselves to the environment, develop strong tribal bonds; the Bedouin is never alone.

“This act of reconnecting with the past, I was starting to realize, is largely what I was undergoing on my trip through the desert as well. I was wriggling free from the firm grip of modern life and inching toward something else, something more instinctive and untaught. I was breaking away from modes of thought I had used since I was a teenager—reason, skepticism, logic, learning—and moving toward modes of relating to the world—emotion, intuition, trust—that I probably hadn’t relied on so much since I was a child. In doing so, I felt myself slide farther away from the rigid, controlled person I was at the beginning of this process. I was less of an upright wooden chair, to use the local vernacular, and more of a roll-out carpet. I was conforming to the land” (Feller, p. 297).

References


Cite this article:

Summary: With the rapid development of technology, various assistive technologies have emerged to help English Learners (ELs) improve their skills and to benefit teachers by making their content more accessible. Microsoft tools have made great strides in assistive technology and have embedded these innovations into their popular Office productivity suite. However, users are often unaware of the myriad functions hidden within the menu bars in each tool. Many of these contain beneficial accessibility features. This article will discuss eight different types of assistive technologies that are integrated into Microsoft tools that teachers likely already use on a regular basis.

Keywords: assistive technology, Microsoft Office, language learning, technology, immersive reader, translating, subtitling

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2019, 10.4% of K-12 public school students (approximately 5.1 million students) in the United States are identified as English Learners (ELs) (2022). Learning a new language or learning academic content in a new language can be a daunting task for many individuals, especially those who struggle with language acquisition. Fortunately, with the rapid development of technology, various assistive technologies have emerged to help ELs improve their skills (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2019). In recent years, Microsoft has made great strides in assistive technology and has embedded these innovations into their popular Office productivity suite. However, users are often unaware of the myriad of functions that exist within the menu bars (also called “ribbons”) present in each of these tools, many of which contain accessibility features that can benefit ELs and their teachers. This article will discuss several assistive technologies that have been integrated into Microsoft tools. For organizational purposes, these features have been divided among the four foundational language domains of Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Reading.

Assistive technologies for ELs: Listening

Presentation Subtitles

Built into PowerPoint is the ability to activate automatic subtitling in
presentation mode. Located within the *Slide Show* menu, enabling subtitling activates your system’s microphone which captures spoken audio from the presenter. The recorded speech will then appear as subtitles below the slides while in presentation mode. Furthermore, PowerPoint includes the ability for presenters to have these subtitles translated to other languages (see Figure 1). This goes beyond rote vocabulary translation with subtitles automatically rewriting themselves as presenters’ complete sentences to match the grammatical syntax of the target language. With over 60 languages supported, this technology allows ELs to connect their first language to English and facilitate their language acquisition process (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2019).

Since listening comprehension is challenging for ELs (Poehner et al., 2019), subtitles in English or in first languages allow ELs to follow the dialogue and understand the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. This technology can also help ELs with pronunciation and with understanding the meaning of words in specific contextual settings.

**Read Aloud**

Also known as text-to-speech, Read Aloud functionality allows ELs to hear written text read aloud at the speed of their choosing. This can help ELs improve their listening skills and can also be used to check the pronunciation of unfamiliar words to develop fluency and help with reading comprehension (Kaplan & Murray, 2018). Read aloud functionality can be accessed across most of the Office suite such as in the *Review* menu in Word, the *Home* menu in Outlook, and in the address bar in Edge web browser when engaging with web-based content.

**Assistive technologies for ELs: Speaking**

**Reading Progress**

Reading Progress uses an auto-detection process to identify errors in accuracy in fluency in the recorded reading. These errors are then categorized and color-coded (purple for mispronunciations, grey for omissions, turquoise for insertions, blue for repetitions, and orange for self-corrections) based on a reading sensitivity scale set by the teacher (see Figure 2). This information is then displayed for review along with the recording, allowing teachers to determine areas that need improvement and to adapt lessons to ELs’ individual needs.

**Reading Coach**

As a follow-up option to Reading Progress, Reading Coach offers ELs the opportunity to independently improve their speaking fluency. The Reading Coach will automatically identify five words that the EL struggled with while reading a passage out loud. The tool then uses speech recognition, text-to-speech functionality, and automated feedback to generate exercises that help the EL practice their pronunciation alone. Reading Coach is

![Figure 2: Teacher’s interface in Reading Progress for Microsoft Teams on Desktop (Note: The student’s image and name have been blurred to protect their identity.)](image-url)
available as a built-in option that can be included in Reading Progress activities in Teams. Alternatively, it can be accessed directly in Office 365 applications under the Reading Preferences tab in Immersive Reader.

**Assistive technologies for ELs: Writing**

**Dictate**
Speech-to-text software allows ELs to dictate text into their devices which is then converted into written text. As commonly used on the phone, this assistive feature is also available within most of the Office suite, such as in the Home menu within Word. This can be helpful to ELs who struggle with writing but are proficient in speaking, as they can focus on transferring their ideas onto the page by speaking rather than worrying about spelling and grammar (Wang & Zou, 2019). Furthermore, Microsoft’s dictation software offers auto-punctuation which can help ELs grasp the English language’s complex punctuation rules.

**Assistive technologies: Translate**

**Translate**
Within the Review menu of many Office applications is the Translate function. ELs can translate passages or whole documents to over 100 supported languages. Not only an efficient tool for multilingual communication purposes, Translate also serves as a convenient tool to help ELs check their English writing coherence by translating their text back to their first language. Furthermore, this feature provides additional context for translated words, such as the part of speech, definitions, synonyms, and alternative translation options (see Figure 3). Translation features are also included in all Microsoft applications that include Immersive Reader.

**Assistive technologies for ELs: Reading**

**Reading View**
Although there are many reading views available, the most popular among Microsoft accessibility tools is Immersive Reader, which is in a wide range of Microsoft supported applications. These applications include the Office suite, Edge, Flipgrid, OneNote, and Canvas.

![Image](image1.png)

Figure 3: Using the translate feature in Microsoft Word on Desktop to translate a passage from English to Dutch (Notice the additional translation options for the highlighted word “furthermore” below the translated passage.)
Located in the View menu in Word, Immersive Reader gives ELs options to break down complex words into syllables, increase line spacing, highlight individual reading segments, color-code different parts of speech, and read aloud specific words or passages (see Figure 4). These features can promote ELs’ vocabulary development and prosody by practicing decoding strategies.

**Picture Dictionary**
Available as part of Immersive Reader within web-based office applications, the Picture Dictionary can be used to display visual support for vocabulary learning. When ELs encounter an unknown word, they can select it to see an image of the word alongside a translation to provide multiple layers of support in learning new vocabulary (see Figure 4). The Picture Dictionary can be activated under the Reading Preferences tab in Immersive Reader.

**Conclusion**
Assistive technologies have the potential to revolutionize the way ELs approach the learning process. Presentation subtitles support ELs listening comprehension, Reading Coach makes practicing speaking fluency easier than ever, Dictate facilitates the writing process, and Picture Dictionary enhances the understanding of new vocabulary. As technology continues to evolve, even more innovative and effective assistive technologies will emerge to help ELs achieve their language learning goals.

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**Cite this article:**
Transforming language development for MLLs with UDL and Toontastic 3D

EstePHANIE S. LÓPEZ CONTRERAS

This review discusses Toontastic 3D as an educational tool to support multilingual learners (MLLs). The Toontastic 3D app helps to promote communication skills, English language development for MLLs, and content learning. The app is evaluated using a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. The review concludes with a summary of Toontastic 3D’s features and suggestions for its use in the classroom.

Keywords: MLLs, multilingual learners, English language development, UDL, Universal Design for Learning, technology-enabled learning

Toontastic 3D

Among the many available educational apps, Toontastic 3D, launched by Google Education in 2017, is a multimedia storytelling app that offers a fun and user-friendly platform for students to bring their stories to life by presenting three-dimensional animated characters and environments. Toontastic 3D can help promote English language development in multilingual learners (MLLs), support multiple literacies, and provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. It all depends on how a teacher decides to use the app.

In Toontastic 3D, students create a background and movable characters and then narrate their stories or reports. Students can record their voices and choose music and sound effects to make their stories more engaging (see Figure 1). This free app works with iOS and Android devices, including phones, tablets, iPads, and Chromebook computers. However, it is not available for desktop computers or web browsers. Toontastic 3D contains no ads, works offline, and does not require an account or login, making it easier for teachers to use in their classrooms.

Once students have completed their project, it will be automatically saved in the app’s library. But the user can...
also export the project and share it with others. Once students export the story, it will be saved to the device’s photo library. They can then send their stories using a messaging app, upload them to social media, or attach them to an email. Figure 2 shows an example of how a story is saved and where the export option is found.

While Toontastic 3D is intended for grades 1-6, specifically for Language Arts and Science (Google Education, n.d.), it can also be used in other subject areas and upper grades because it does not have pre-set disciplinary content. Similarly, the app is meant for storytelling, but there are no limits to the purposes it can be used for. Some examples include preparing biographies by creating settings and backgrounds that match the character’s story, creating dialogues with their peers by recording each other’s voices, and creating book reports or summaries through the different options of story creation the app offers. Figure 3 shows the story creation main menu.

**Figure 2: Saving and exporting a story**

**Toontastic 3D and Universal Design for Learning**

Rooted in neuroscience and education research, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) uses digital technology to create learning environments that foster flexibility and responsiveness to learners’ variability (Rao, 2019; Torres & Rao, 2019). By intentionally incorporating choices, scaffolds, and supports in pedagogical practices, UDL aims to make the learning experience accessible to all students, thus reducing the need for individual accommodations. UDL posits three overarching principles—multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression—to provide equitable opportunities for all students to achieve high standards from the beginning (CAST, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014).

From a UDL perspective, Toontastic 3D adheres to these UDL principles by overcoming some challenges inherent in traditional learning, particularly in regard to those faced by learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Toontastic 3D provides meaningful activities that allow students to use the target language. Additionally, students learn at their own pace and in a manner that suits their preferences, freeing up teachers to help students manage emotional responses during language learning. Toontastic 3D meets the UDL principles in the following ways:

**Multiple means of engagement**

Toontastic 3D can enhance student engagement by providing choices in context and tools for learning. Traditionally, students would create stories with pen and paper or using a preset technological tool, whereas Toontastic 3D gives options for characters, colors, sounds,
settings, and backgrounds to best match students’ creations. It can also promote relevance, value, and authenticity in classroom activities through personalization (CAST, 2018) as learners make choices about story types and length, characters, music, and animations. Additionally, it supports effort and persistence in collaborative work, encourages peer interactions, and can also promote timely feedback if the activity completed in the app is, for example, shared among students and they write comments on each other’s creations. Creating narratives using this app can foster imagination and promote active participation, too.

**Multiple means of representation**

In the UDL framework, representation has to do with how students perceive and comprehend content presented to them (CAST, 2018). Toontastic 3D is one example of providing options for representation since it offers alternatives to auditory and visual information, and it helps illustrate information through media. The app can also help students process information and vocabulary items and enhance overall comprehension. Moreover, it can help make cross-curricular connections, such as applying language skills to a science project.

**Multiple means of action and expression**

This UDL principle refers to the ways in which students can demonstrate what they know and have learned (CAST, 2018). Although Toontastic 3D has many advantages, the app may not be ideal for students with some physical disabilities since it does not provide alternatives for those who are visually impaired or hard of hearing. However, it can be a beneficial alternative for multilingual learners and students with learning disabilities as it offers an alternative for task response and provides scaffolds for practice and performance. The app can also support planning and strategy development since it offers templates for composing stories or reports (CAST, 2018). This can help students understand the task, the sequence they need to follow, and the steps they need to complete. Toontastic 3D can also support executive functions when students provide feedback to each other and reflect on their completed project.

**Toontastic 3D and English Language Development**

**Supporting grammatical development**

Although the app does not support grammatical accuracy per se, teachers can include grammatical accuracy as part of the focus of the task or include it as part of the rubric. For example, teachers can request students narrate stories using past tenses or make predictions using future tenses. What the app does allow the user to do, however, is to express themselves. Therefore, in the narration, students need to produce an understandable idea or argument for the audience to comprehend.

**Supporting language skills**

Toontastic 3D supports students’ oral fluency skills by promoting comprehensible pronunciation, prosody, phonemic awareness, fluency, and the ability to organize and sequence language during the narration. The app also supports listening comprehension as students can listen to their recordings as often as needed, and all instructions are given orally. Conversely, the app does not support reading skills as there is minimal text, and instructions are not captioned. The same happens with writing. Because it is intended for oral communication, the app does not have a function for writing. Hence, writing skills are not explicitly supported. However, teachers can plan complementary activities to support reading comprehension and writing skills by asking students, before they begin their narration in the app, to write out notes for the story’s plot and for delivery and then having peers read and respond to these. This process allows learners to expand their working vocabulary and learn from each other.

**Final Words**

Although the app supports multilingual learners’ English language development, teachers should consider some of its limitations before using it in their classrooms. For example, while the app is very user-friendly and intuitive, it requires some modeling since it does not include instructions to follow while students work on their creations. In addition, since learners have to narrate the story at the same time that they move the characters, it may take time for some to become adept at doing both at once. However, the advantages of Toontastic 3D—that it works offline, does not require learners to create an account or log in, and does not have preset content—outweigh the downsides, making it a good app for classroom implementation.

Finally, Toontastic 3D is a good option for MLLs and UDL implementation since it promotes language development through listening and speaking practice in a supportive and engaging environment. At the same time, the app supports the UDL framework by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. Students can use various characters, settings, sounds, and animations to create their stories, keeping them engaged and allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge in fun and innovative ways.
**References**


**Cite this article:**

TalkingPoints: A powerful tool for communicating with multilingual families

TERRI J. EASTER

Summary: This article highlights TalkingPoints, a multilingual messaging app that can improve school–home communication between educators and multilingual families. With its user-friendly interface, real-time translation capabilities, and support for multiple languages, TalkingPoints is a valuable tool for professionals who work with multilingual families looking to increase parental engagement and develop family partnerships.

Keywords: multilingual messaging app, school-home communication, multilingual families, parental engagement, family partnerships

Introduction

In contemporary classrooms, educators face various challenges in effectively communicating with multilingual families. Parental involvement and communication are key factors in student success. However, language barriers may pose a significant barrier in educators’ engagement with multilingual families. An effective solution for overcoming these challenges is the app TalkingPoints, a free, multilingual application, which allows educators and parents to communicate in their preferred language with ease (see Figure 1). TalkingPoints provides a user-friendly interface where educators can type messages in English which are sent to parents in their preferred language, and parents can respond in their preferred language as well. TalkingPoints minimizes language barriers and allows parents to meaningfully engage with their student’s teachers. TalkingPoints provides two distinct experiences: one for educators, and one for families.

Teacher experience

The TalkingPoints teacher application is accessible via computer and mobile devices. Educators can create up to five classes for free. Once your classes are set up, the application allows for the creation of individual messages and whole class announcements. The platform allows users to attach photos, website links, and documents. Messages can be scheduled in advance. In my classroom, this has proved helpful when sharing information regarding exam schedules, deadlines for the grading period, and general information distributed by the school that may require further explanation. While the software may have translation errors, it aims to prevent miscommunications by evaluating the readability of the message. When a message exceeds a third-grade reading level, a flag appears suggesting the user revise their message (see Figure 2) and provides access to advice for improving communication (see Figure 3). The most frequent feedback I have received from the readability flag feature focused on simplifying the complexity of my...
sentences or the use of acronyms. Examples shown on the TalkingPoints website include suggestions for alternative phrasing for ASAP and reducing a complex sentence into several simple sentences. These features reduce the ambiguity in conversations and allow for more clear communication.

TalkingPoints allows educators to monitor family engagement by indicating whether a parent is receiving messages by text or through the application. If parents use the application, TalkingPoints provides read receipts to educators indicating that the family has opened the message. Additionally, TalkingPoints offers an extensive library of resources on its website to improve engagement. The resource hub includes helpful information for developing family engagement plans, translated handouts for introducing TalkingPoints to families, and a professional development guide for aiding in school or district-wide implementation.

Family experience

In addition to the translation features, TalkingPoints provides specific features to aid in communication on the Family TalkingPoints application. The app provides in-application definitions of technical terms, which become highlighted in text. To access the meaning of terms (e.g., IEP or individualized education plan, assessment, or other technical terms), the parent only needs to click the highlighted term (see Figure 4). TalkingPoints also offers additional features to enhance accessibility and clarity in communication. These features include text-to-speech, which enables the application to read aloud messages to families, speech-to-text, which transcribes parents’ messages, and a "Help me, I don’t understand" option, which allows families to request human translation support to clarify any misunderstandings. These features highlight TalkingPoints’ commitment to providing comprehensive and accessible communication solutions for multilingual families and educators.

Recommendations

TalkingPoints is a valuable resource that enables both educators and families to overcome language barriers and improve engagement. When implementing TalkingPoints in your classroom, it is advisable to use the TalkingPoints resource hub to find handouts to share with families. At the beginning of the year, I uploaded my families’ contact information from a spreadsheet and sent home a translated flyer—provided in the resource hub—which explained the app and how to use it to the families.
addition to using these resources, modeling the use of TalkingPoints and aiding families in accessing the application and features ensures that parents are comfortable with the platform. During our open house event at the beginning of the year, I included TalkingPoints as a topic of conversation. For families who needed further explanation, this was an ideal time to model the use of the application to increase its ease of use. For those who couldn’t attend, there are videos available on TalkingPoints’ YouTube channel. At the beginning of the year, I used TalkingPoints to intentionally build a positive relationship with my students and their families by sending quick compliments about my students using the individual messaging feature. As the year progressed, I used it for consistent communication with families regarding upcoming events, grades, student progress, and concerns.

In my experience as a high school English second language teacher, this consistent communication strengthened the relationship between our families and me. Families felt more comfortable in communicating to set up appointments, checking their students’ grades, or expressing their concerns. Students knew their parents and I communicated frequently, which resulted in fewer missing assignments and misbehaviors, as well as stronger relationships between the students and me. My experience with TalkingPoints is supported by research conducted regarding the effectiveness of the technology. For example, Park et al. (2022) conducted a comparative study including schools that utilized TalkingPoints and schools that did not adopt the technology; schools that implemented TalkingPoints had reduced absenteeism and statistically significant increases in both English language arts and mathematics. Overall, TalkingPoints is a resource that can foster more equitable communication between teachers and multilingual families. Its user-friendly interface, real-time translation, and support for multiple languages make it a valuable resource for educators. I highly recommend TalkingPoints to other professionals in the field who would like to increase multilingual family engagement.

References


Cite this article:


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Brains are still better than machines

LUIZA MARQUES PORTO MOREIRA


In the EFL/ESL field, teachers often face situations that center on the question of how people learn. *How we learn: Why brains learn better than any machine...for now* is entirely dedicated to educators who want to understand more about the most powerful machine humans have: the brain. This book is divided into three major parts that explain how we learn. In this work, the author provides information fundamental to any TESOL teacher.

The first part of the book is dedicated to defining what learning is. According to Dehaene, there are seven different definitions for learning, but two particularly stood out to me. The first one, “Learning is adjusting the parameters of a mental model,” explains how human brains adapt their internal language model to the phonemes they grew up with. These modes have different levels, from speech sounds at the earliest stages to more complex parameters such as grammatical rules. The second one is “Learning is optimizing a reward function.” Dahaene explains how computer scientists changed the feedback system in the machines to make them more effective while playing games. In the past, machines would only receive a reward at the end of the game, not knowing exactly why they lost points during the game. Now, machines learn through trial after trial, and the main goal is to learn from their mistakes and enhance their intelligence. Dahaene compares this artificial reward system to the brain’s reward system and its capacity to predict the rewards or the punishments we might get. This made me reflect on the assessment system promoted by schools.
Wouldn’t students benefit more from constant feedback?

After describing the learning process, Dahaene compares the human brain to artificial intelligence. It is enlightening to see what artificial intelligence (AI) is missing and why our brain still learns better than any machine. “In the field of learning, the effectiveness of the human brain remains unmatched” (Dahaene, p. 30). According to Dehaene, AI can only perform operations that our brain does unconsciously. In contrast, the conscious brain can do much more, such as questioning beliefs and refocusing attention, which are key elements in any learning process. However, Dahaene recognizes that computer science is evolving fast, and that AI is already capable of performing operations at human-like levels. In addition, it is believed that learning from sharing in social contexts is exclusive to our species, as we voluntarily use language to share information. Our brain can also learn on a single trial, such as when we learn a new word. Humans can immediately learn and use a new word by integrating it into pre-existing networks, such as when conjugating a new verb. In other words, the human brain can reuse rules in different contexts.

In the second part of the book, Dehaene brilliantly explains essential features that are innately human. He refutes the idea that babies' brains are like white sheets of paper. He argues that newborns have complex circuitry and well-organized neuronal structures that support the concept of the sensitive period in the early years of life when neuroplasticity occurs at its highest level. Dehaene suggests that the capacity for learning reduces with age but never really reaches zero, which suggests that adults can benefit from learning at any age. He also posits the existence of one universal human nature, even though he does not deny individual differences and traits. The book details the microcircuits that are involved in the process of learning such as neurons, synapses, memory, and neuroplasticity, as well as other factors that influence the learning process such as the environment, nutrition, and the sensitive period.

In the third and final part of the book, Dehaene suggests four pillars that constitute learning: attention, active engagement, error feedback, and consolidation. According to Dehaene, these four elements are crucial for successful learning, and teachers who can activate them in class will help learners to succeed. However, it is becoming increasingly challenging for teachers to keep their learner’s focus and attention while our brains receive constant massive stimuli. Therefore, it is essential that teachers become aware of the neural mechanisms of the brain in order to provide more efficient teaching methods and strategies. It is also essential to understand what a synapse is so that we can adapt our strategies to make them stronger. Stronger synapses lead to more efficient long-term memory, which improves recall.

Dehaene suggests that a passive individual does not learn. However, he warns against confusing active learning with constructivism and discovery learning methods. He points out that students should never be left alone with their learning—they need to receive meaningful content, be engaged, have efficient pedagogical guidance, and constant feedback, in order to remain motivated and curious. All teachers should note that this book highlights the importance of receiving efficient feedback and how this can impact the quality and speed of the learning process. As the author aptly notes, “...every error offers an opportunity to learn” (p.200).

Dehaene stresses that what happens in our brains when we sleep is one of the most critical discussions in neuroscience: It is during the night when we sleep that our brain consolidates important information and discards what we do not need. Therefore, having a good night’s sleep is just as important as having attention while learning.

Thanks to advanced research in neuroscience, psychology, and artificial intelligence, we know much more about how the brain learns. In how we learn: Why brains learn better than any machine...for now, Stanislas Dehaene offers an informative guide to help teachers understand what their learners are going through when facing new content. Even though technology, especially AI, has changed and improved a lot since 2020, I highly recommend this book to teachers of students of all ages because it provides essential information that assists educators in improving their classroom strategies and methodologies.

Cite this article:

Only recently did I come across *Show, Tell, Build*. However, it is a work I wish I had read much earlier in my seven-year English language teaching career at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. *Show, Tell, Build* is an excellent work that addresses the needs of ELLs taught alongside their English-proficient peers. The book is a must-read for educators, administrators, and parents of English language learners, as it presents an array of instructional techniques and tools to meet the needs of ELLs regardless of students’ grade levels, proficiency levels, and subject areas. As an instructor for English as a Second Language (ESL), I believe that this book offers valuable insights on how to mitigate the performance disparity between English Language Learners (ELLs) and students who are native English speakers.

According to the authors, the motivation for writing the book is the increasing number of ELLs in U.S. schools and the persistent achievement gap between these students and their English-speaking peers (p.1). Despite this there remains a limited availability of practical resources that provide clear guidance on how to teach ELLs. Existing resources often present ELLs as a homogenous group, failing to recognize the diversity within this population and the different needs of individual students. Nutta et al. fill this gap by providing a practical guide grounded in research. The book presents 20 key instructional tools and techniques teachers can use to help ELLs achieve academic success. *Show, Tell, Build* is built upon the theoretical and
practical foundation of their previous book *Educating English Learners*, in which the authors suggest various practical tools that teachers can integrate into their classrooms. For example, the "Show" strategy encourages teachers to use visuals and real-life examples (i.e., models, realia) to help ELLs comprehend complex concepts, which can benefit all learners in the classroom. The "Tell" strategy emphasizes the importance of clear and concise language in instruction and support for reading and writing (i.e., leveled text, modified text, sentence frame) which can improve communication between teachers and parents of ELLs. The "Build" strategy encourages teachers to scaffold learning and provide opportunities for ELLs to practice language skills in authentic contexts (i.e., instructional conversations, learning new language through songs and poems), which can improve academic achievement for all learners. Thus, the book helps the whole school community—teachers, administrators, and parents—to build a support system for the ELL students' academic learning improvement and close the achievement gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers.

The organization of the book includes ten chapters describing different tools and techniques that teachers can apply in the EL classrooms. Part I, The Academic Subject Protocol, consists of ten chapters focusing on the theory and practice that play an important role in teaching academic subjects to English learners. For instance, one chapter delves into using "realia" or real-life objects in the classroom to help learners connect new vocabulary or concepts with tangible items, enhancing their comprehension and recall. Part II, The Language Arts Protocol, consists of ten chapters exploring verbal and nonverbal communication. While Part I emphasizes learning the subject through language, Part II stresses the importance of acquiring and gaining knowledge about the language. For example, in one of these chapters, the authors highlight the value of 'total physical response' (TPR) techniques. This method involves students physically acting out verbs or concepts to strengthen their understanding and recall of new language elements. In the book's final section, the authors revisit the implications of these two protocols in EL-integrated classrooms and offer advice for teachers on broadening their tool use and technique application. This segment supplies various examples and instructional guidelines for educators.

While *Show, Tell, Build* provides valuable techniques and strategies for language learners, its applicability may be limited in certain settings and countries for several possible reasons, such as cultural differences, education system, and sociopolitical factors. Additionally, the book primarily focuses on classroom-based instruction and does not address the broader sociocultural and political contexts that impact ELLs such as immigration, discrimination, and biases. These reasons may limit the direct application of the strategies outlined in *Show, Tell, Build* across diverse settings and countries, though the core principles might still provide valuable insights for educators everywhere.

In a nutshell, the authors of this book walk the reader through each strategy and provide examples of how to best implement it. The strategies are practical and easy to use, making the text an invaluable resource for any teacher of English language learners. With such solid information and impactful examples, *Show, Tell, Build* is an important resource for practitioners attempting to help language learners acquire English skills, which in turn impacts ELLs' ability to succeed academically.

Cite this article:
Molly Popchock was nominated by a colleague for the Sally Wellman Excellence in Teaching Award. What follows is an excerpt from the nominating letter:

Molly Popchock has almost 30 years of experience as an ESL professional teaching all levels from preliterate to advanced level 6. During this time her passionate advocacy and commitment has made her a leader in ELL instruction. Since 1993 at the Institute for Extended Learning, later Spokane Community College, she has tirelessly advocated for, instructed, and guided refugees / immigrants, as well as served as a leader, role model and mentor to countless English Language teachers.

Molly created, implemented, and oversaw countless new and established programs. She wrote the JRESL (job readiness) curriculum. She partnered with community entities like Keytronics and St. Luke’s Rehabilitation providing students opportunities to learn work-related ESL at their job sites. [...] She received the SCC Excellent Faculty award and Deccio award for outstanding advocacy and promotion of diversity. She has always been willing to share her knowledge by repeatedly presenting at the Spokane Regional and WAESOL conferences. She has always opened her classroom to volunteers and practicum students for the benefit for her students and ESL professionals.

Molly Popchock: Response to Sally Wellman Excellence in Teaching Award

English language teaching is a commitment—like a religion, like a way of life: to stay free, to be a link to a different world, to be different, to be a champion for others, to serve as advocate, to be the one who represents all the positives and negatives of the English-speaking culture, to be an outcast at times because of the xenophobic nature of society, to be humble, ever recognizing that there is so much to learn from those we teach. This is the persona of the teacher, the basis for the building of respect for other people so that the world can become a set of interdependent communities, a world of peaceful existence.

Sally Wellman

Reaching out to you as the recent Sally Wellman Excellence in Teaching Award awarded by WAESOL in Sally’s name, I’m humbled and grateful. My history with Sally and her influence and power date a long way back, and I’m here as a testament to that influence. Her presence along with her creation of the ESL Minor endorsement program at EWU were both a testimony to her commitment to and her goal for the college and the students coming through. I got lucky to be one of those in the first endorsement cohorts. I never got to meet her in person, but she was everywhere. As she said, “English language teaching is a commitment—like a religion, like a way of life: to stay free, to be a link to a different world, to be different, to be a champion for others, to serve as advocate, to be the one who represents all the positives and negatives of the English-speaking culture…” She knew what she was talking about, and she guided so many of us in an era when ESL, ESOL, EFL were coming into the fore, we were becoming a legitimate degree and profession.
I will never forget how I fell into it, through the course Teaching in a Pluralistic Society with Dr. Salisbury—having to volunteer, making it then to the AEC and ESL with Doug Mayhew. I’ll never forget how it felt, just as Sally said, “Once you start into English language teaching, you’ll never be the same. English language teaching changes a person, affecting self-concept and altering egos forever.”

That experience led to my ESL endorsement program which led to my Master’s in TESL with Dr. Lester, Dr. Urcia, Dr. Reeves... It was a good ride—all of us older, with families, and making our choices for the profession we believed in. I can say that that beginning spurred many, many leaders into this profession today and throughout these years. Into the Adult Ed Program came many: Karen Snell, Kathy Laise, Lisa Randall, Bill Heinz; into Gonzaga: James Hunter, Martha Savage, Bridget Green; into Mukogawa; into Whitworth.... We got wisdom and guidance through that program from masters like Janet Yoder, Susan Stannard, Mary Brooks, and Evelyn Renshaw. We worked hard, we worked together, we built strong and meaningful programs, we were a force. I believe now, upon reflection, we were that force that Sally Wellman challenged us to be. When the state standards, in all of their iterations (SCANS, ICANS, EFF, WA State Learning Standards, IDEA, then CCR Standards) came for us in Adult Ed, we were ready.

I acknowledge all of those before and all those who have been on this journey with me: Doug, Charmaine, Michael, Leon, Karen, Kathy, James, Linda, Lucy, Mary Ann, Cielito, Sabina, Joan... We worked so hard and for so long. We were dedicated, we were committed. As Sally said.

It was an era, and I am grateful for having been part of it. I hope and think, I feel, that I helped to make it Sally’s wish, a commitment to those we have served. Those who taught us so much about the world. I know that Sally was absolutely right when she said that that perspective will change our lives forever. Grace and Peace. I’m honored to have been recognized by you. Give it up for Sally, she did a great and important thing. I think collectively, we worked her vision. Now we leave it to the next generation, many bright stars among them, to carry on this important work of English language teaching.

I don’t have a single Statement of Beliefs, but I do have beliefs. I believe teaching is a vocation, teachers don’t or didn’t necessarily want to be teachers, but something along their educational journey or their life journey gave them real examples of good teaching. All teachers, I would proffer, were given that calling from good teachers that they have had. It is like an elixir when you are in the presence of great teachers—it draws you to it, if that is in your heart and skill set. To be a great teacher? You need that passion to serve, that drive to continue to learn and always elevate your field, a commitment to work with your peers to bring the best to your work, always for the benefit of the students you serve. You need to be organized.

Teaching is about serving, working, it is about thinking of the goals of your students, your institution, above your own. That is a big sacrifice and one we good teachers pay for. To be honest, the balance is hard to find, but when you’re in it, your loved ones remember that this is why they love you and are with you. Teaching is a vocation. When it’s not, get the hell out. But if you stay, give everything you have to make it the most for all you serve: for your students. Keep their lives, their goals, their purpose as your driving force. You’ll never lose with that.

Thank you,

Molly P –

References
   https://waesol.org/grants-awards/sally-wellman/

Cite this article:

WAESOL Educator | Vol 48 Issue 2 | Summer 2023

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Augmented reality in education: Empowering teachers and engaging students

ALI ASIRI

Visualization has long been recognized as a valuable concept for enhancing text comprehension, particularly for ESL students. In line with this, the goal of my project is to leverage the power of augmented reality (AR) in classroom teaching by providing teachers with the necessary tools and resources to create and utilize AR experiences effectively thus enriching students’ understanding of content through visualization of text. The project strives to make AR accessible to all teachers and students, ensuring that everyone is benefiting from this innovative educational approach. Ultimately, I believe the project will further demonstrate the immense potential of augmented reality to revolutionize education, making the learning process more effective, accessible, and impactful.

In support of this project, the WAESOL Project Fund was crucial to the development of the project as it gave me access to the necessary tools and assets to develop AR experiences. This fund is also helping to build comprehensive how-to guidance and practical examples, explicitly focusing on using software like Unity for educational purposes. The aim is to empower teachers with the knowledge and confidence to create authentic AR experiences or access the ready-to-use materials resulting from this project. The invaluable support of the WAESOL organization, through funding and belief in the project’s cause, has been instrumental in driving this initiative forward.

It is essential to understand that there are many phases to this project; it is not a one-time endeavor but an ongoing initiative that seeks to involve all teachers and students in the journey of AR integration. As of now, I have developed a number of AR experiences using the Unity engine which
has allowed me to build (see Images 1 and 2) and test at the same time using Unreal AR glasses (see Image 3). The ultimate goal of this phase is to develop, test, and categorize these AR experiences based on how they could be used (e.g., things you see in the classroom, things you see at an office). Future steps include the development of a library for all the AR experiences, development of the guidance/how-to steps on using and developing AR experiences for teachers and developers. Furthermore, the project aspires to help teachers incorporate AR-building activities into their classrooms, fostering students’ digital literacy skills as an integral part of their educational journey.

The integration of AR in education holds great promise. I hope this project will empower teachers, facilitate immediate usability, provide a supportive ecosystem for AR adoption, and lay a foundation for transforming the educational landscape. By leveraging the potential of augmented reality, education can become a truly immersive and transformative experience, equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world. I would like to thank WAESOL for their support and I look forward to sharing the findings of this project and any takeaways.

WAESOL professional development grant recipient report

WING SHUEN (ALICE) LAU

“Diversity always has power, meaning, and beauty.”

Sammy Ramsey, Opening Keynote Speaker at TESOL 2023 International Convention & English Language Expo

I am grateful to have been the recipient of the WAESOL Professional Development Grant 2022 to attend the TESOL 2023 Convention in Portland from March 21 to 24. At the convention, I had the privilege of meeting ELT educators from all over the world. This year, I am also honored to receive the TESOL Leadership Mentoring Program Award 2023, which allows me to engage in more roles in the organization which includes more than 13,000 members coming from 184 countries. With the support of both WAESOL and TESOL grants, I was able to attend the awards ceremony and TESOL convention in person. This was an incredible and unforgettable experience for me to connect with so many dedicated TESOL leaders in such a globalized community.

TESOL 2023 convention had an overarching theme of “Inspiring Innovation; Empowering ELT Professionals.” All the presentations and workshops I attended offered innovative and practical ways to teach English language learners. In particular, sessions such as “SEL in ELT: Effects of Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices,” “Translanguaging as a Strategy for ELs Social-Emotional Learning,” and “Integrating Social-Emotional Learning Practices into Daily EL Lessons” provided concrete teaching examples of how to promote the wellbeing and identity of both educators and students through everyday classroom practices. Other presentations such as “Culturally Sustaining Teaching Practices for Young MLLs” and “Embedding Diverse Children’s Literature in Preservice Teacher Education” offered valuable resources for educators to develop ELT strategies that connect with learners’ prior knowledge and cultural assets. For example, speakers Deborah Howard and Juyoung Song proposed the idea of creating a collaborative writing space (e.g., a dialogue journal) for multilingual learners and cited useful literacy resources for inclusive reading practices (e.g., Unite for Literacy). I found these topics specifically relevant to my research work that explores varied and interdisciplinary pedagogies (e.g., culturally responsive teaching and social-emotional learning) related to teacher education and literacy instruction for English language learners. A project that I am currently working on is to examine the integration of specific domains of social emotional learning, with a particular focus on supporting multilingual learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Additionally, I was delighted to have opportunities to meet face-to-face with some of my research collaborators at TESOL 2023 in between sessions. TESOL connects us through our shared interest in empowering a greater diversity of voices in the ELT field. I was particularly motivated by Sammy Ramsey’s keynote speech, which stressed the value of diversity. To me, diversity is not just a buzzword, it’s a fundamental principle that ELT educators can adopt to help students gain a deeper appreciation of the vast variety of language usage in the world.

2022 Project funding grant

HANNA HONG

Scholars have demonstrated that to better understand classroom teachers’ implementation of practice and institutional processes, it is critical to examine how teachers construct their understanding of instruction. Literature also shows that teachers’ instructional practices are situated within a complex system of macro and micro conditions that send teachers a variety of messages about instruction, creating multiple and potentially competing logics among teachers in a school. I applied for the WAESOL grant in order to fund this qualitative study that would extend this line of research by investigating how the organizational environment shapes general education elementary classroom teachers’ understanding of instruction and practice for multilingual learners (MLs). By highlighting how the organizational environment interacts and shapes teachers’ logics when thinking about instruction for MLs, the findings could lead to ways for schools to identify conditions for change and to realize equity practices for MLs.

Since receiving the project grant, I have made significant progress towards achieving the study’s objectives.

Achievements:
1. identified a school site and recruited participants who aim to improve their instructional practices for multilingual learners;
2. conducted in-depth interviews of key participants;
3. carried out observations of formal social interactions (professional learning communities, co-planning, building professional developments, etc.).

Future Plans:
1. complete data collection and analysis;
2. disseminate findings to the local school community and to educators and researchers through academic publications and conferences.

Thank you to WAESOL for supporting this research project. The grant has enabled me to thank teachers with a small gift card for their time following in-depth interviews. I look forward to sharing findings with the WAESOL community in early 2024.
### Mark your Calendars

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 10, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">Call for Proposals</a> due for WAESOL Annual Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 17, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">WAESOL Grants, Awards, and Scholarships</a> deadline</td>
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<td>October 20, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">WAESOL Pre-Conference Workshops</a>: Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 21, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">WAESOL Annual Conference</a>: Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA</td>
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<td>October 27-28, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">WABE Fall Institute</a>: Tacoma, WA</td>
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<td>November 15, 2023</td>
<td><a href="#">WAESOL Educator</a> Winter 2023—Article submissions due</td>
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<td>April 15, 2024</td>
<td><a href="#">WAESOL Educator</a> Winter 2024—Article submissions due</td>
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### Peer Reviewers Wanted

The peer review process helps authors to
- improve their writing,
- confirm what works well in articles, and
- receive feedback on what could work better.

Being a peer reviewer will
- provide a valuable form of professional development,
- extend professional development in our community, and
- help the Editorial Committee to select the strongest submissions.

**EMAIL EDITOR@WAESOL.ORG TO APPLY.**
48th Annual WAESOL Conference
October 20th - Preconference Workshops • October 21st - Conference
Seattle Pacific University

KEYNOTE
Dr. Denise Furlong, k-12 and adult educator, teacher trainer, and award winning author of *Voices of Newcomers: Experiences of Multilingual Learners*.

REGISTRATION

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<th>Early Bird Registration through October 1st:</th>
<th>Registration October 2nd - October 16th:</th>
<th>Week of Registration October 17th - October 21st:</th>
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<td>$85 for WAESOL members</td>
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Up to 9 Clock Hours available for both days.

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