Message from the President

As Virginia’s state budget continues to be slashed, our school districts and institutions of higher education have been left with budget deficits so daunting that programs, services, and staff in many areas, including ESL, are being reduced or eliminated. Undoubtedly, it is a challenging time for Virginia teachers at all levels.

At this formidable time, staying connected to our professional network is one of the best strategies we can have. As our leader, I would like to take this opportunity to direct you to the TESOL and VATESOL resources presented in this newsletter. Moreover, I encourage you to be an active member and share other resources and tips through the VATESOL Listserv.

Another way to strengthen your ESL connections is to participate in the VATESOL fall conference on October 2, 2010. Our sponsor this year is the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Conference Chair, Laurie Weinberg, has chosen the theme, Rekindling Our Joy for Language Teaching. It will be an inspiring conference! Conference proposals are due June 30, 2010 and can be downloaded from the VATESOL web site.

This month, I will attend the TESOL Convention in Boston as Virginia’s Affiliate Leader. At TESOL, I will also be attending the SETESOL meeting with our SETESOL Liaison/Conference Chair, Lily Mirjahanegi, who will share our plans for VATESOL’s SETESOL Conference on October 13-15, 2011. The SETESOL conference will be in Richmond, Virginia, and we are very excited that it will coincide with the very popular Richmond Folk Festival, whose site is just a short walk from the conference venue! More TBA!

I want to end by expressing VATESOL’s warmest appreciation and gratitude to Denise Ricks, VATESOL’s Legislative Liaison. Denise has been very actively involved the last few months keeping the membership informed of legislative issues affecting us as Virginia educators and citizens. Thank you for your service, Denise.

Keep in touch, everyone.

Best wishes,

Jennifer Kuchno
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

“If you continually give, you will continually have.”

(See page 2 for Jen’s ESL resources list)
VATESOL AND TESOL RESOURCES

VATESOL RESOURCES: www.vatesol.cloverpad.org

VATESOL Online Membership Directory
To access the Directory, go to the VATESOL web site and log in to the “Member Only” area. You will need your login and password that you created when you first became a member. Membership Chair: Natasha McKellar, nmcke001@odu.edu.

VATESOL Newsletter
Published twice a year and distributed via the Listserv. Includes: Articles about ESL, graduate student research, ESL students’ work, jobs, ESL events and conferences.
Editors: Leslie Bohon, llbohonatkin@vcu.edu, Judy Snoke judy_snoke@comcast.net, Solange Lopes-Murphy, lopesmsa@jmu.edu

VATESOL Listserv
The VATESOL Listserv is an email list of all the members in the Virginia Association. Members share job listings, ESL events, relevant articles, etc. Email the VATESOL Listserv: vatesol@lists.vcu.edu.
Remember, messages to the listserv are public and access is restricted to members only. Listserv Manager: Ron Corio, rcorio@vcu.edu

Special Interest Groups (SIGS) - See the web site for more information

TESOL RESOURCES: www.tesol.org

TESOL Career Center http://careers.tesol.org/

TESOL Membership Directory (Members Only)
https://iweb.tesol.org/LogIn/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fMembership%2fMemberDirectorySearch.aspx%3f token%3d&token=

TESOL Awards, Scholarships, and Grants (for TESOL Members)
http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/bin.asp?CID=125&DID=2166&DOC=FILE.PDF

Funding Opportunities in TESOL

Online Education Opportunities – includes online teaching certification
http://tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=244&DID=1716

TESOL Academies: “professional growth with the added benefit of peer networking”
Annual VATESOL Fall Conference – Saturday, October 2, 2010
University of Mary Washington
College of Graduate and Professional Studies
Fredericksburg, VA

Theme: “Rekindling Our Joy of Language Teaching”

VATESOL is so pleased to announce our keynote speaker for the Annual Conference:

Richard Lederer

Richard Lederer is the author of more than 30 books about language, history, and humor, including his best-selling Anguished English series and his current book, Presidential Trivia. He has been profiled in magazines as diverse as The New Yorker, People, and the National Enquirer and frequently appears on radio as a commentator on language.

Dr. Lederer's syndicated column, "Looking at Language," appears in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States. He has been named International Punster of the Year and Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel winner.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS for the Fall conference will begin on April 1 (no kidding!) and close on July 1, 2010. Proposals will be accepted electronically only, so please access the proposal form on the VATESOL website, http://www.vatesol.cloverpad.org/

General guidelines:
• Title of presentation
• Proposal - 150 word maximum - Describe the objectives and content.
• Abstract - 50 word maximum - If accepted, this may appear in the program.

Do not write any names on the proposal or abstract. Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of clarity and interest to the conference audience.

Deadline: July 1, 2010
Accepting electronic proposals only
E-mail your proposal to Laurie Weinberg
E-Mail: eslaurie@aol.com

2010 VATESOL Conference
Mark your calendar!
Where: University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, VA
When: Saturday, October 2, 2010

2011 SETESOL Conference
VATESOL will host this regional conference!
Mark your calendar!
Where: Richmond, VA
When: Thursday-Saturday, October 13-15, 2011
**Articles by our members**

*Writing On Demand* by Ron Corio

A review of three textbooks available to ESL teachers for on-demand writing

English language learners (ELLs), when applying for entry to an English-language university, whether from the United States or abroad, must take a test to demonstrate their writing ability. This may be a standardized test such as the TOEFL or IELTS or a placement test administered by the university. The tests require the student to write a response to a prompt in a limited time, e.g., thirty minutes. If the test results meet the university’s writing standard, the student can enroll in first-year composition class. If not, the student is placed in an Intensive English Program (IEP) writing class. In IEP writing classes, students are often assigned in-class writing as a way to demonstrate what they can write on their own, unaided by outside help or resources. In some cases, students must pass a timed-writing exam in order to advance to the next level of writing instruction and eventually to university composition classes. The writing teacher needs to prepare students for these writing tests and may wonder how to best do that, something their teacher training may not have addressed.

The “how-to” is not the only dilemma for teachers who want to prepare students for writing tests. Critics argue that writing tests do not reflect the academic and real-world writing tasks that students will face and that preparing students for writing tests takes time away from teaching writing that involves brainstorming, drafting, revising, peer review, and editing.

Public school writing teachers have been preparing students for writing tests like the SAT, ACT, AP, and state SOL for years. Their experience has resulted in literature on helping students prepare for writing tests. Thus, a logical place for the IEP teacher to look for guidance is the experience of public high school writing teachers, which leads to books that address writing in response to a prompt and within a limited amount of time, that is, on-demand writing.

In addition to offering the “how-to,” that teachers need, the three books discussed here, offer interesting perspectives about the relationship between classroom writing and on-demand writing and some suggestions for integrating the two, addressing some of the concerns of critics of writing tests.

*Writing on Demand* by Anne Gere, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi

In *Writing on Demand*, the most theoretical of the three books, the authors begin with a cogent description of the current state of writing assessment and how it has come to this point. The question, they say, becomes how to prepare students to write well in these tests.

Because writing on demand is a crucial skill for high school and college students the authors believe it is imperative that teachers help them learn that skill. They acknowledge that this is no easy task because teachers often must rely on self-developed materials, follow a curriculum that is often disconnected from writing on demand, and be put in the position of teaching to the test in lieu of teaching a more robust concept of writing. Nevertheless, they argue, focusing on objetcting to writing on demand distracts from time to consider ways to make more effective methods to teach students how to write on demand.

In the nine chapters of the book the authors explore the needed concepts and skills necessary for teaching classroom writing and on demand writing from different perspectives. A convenient feature of the skill activities in this book is that the materials needed are available on a companion Website and can be downloaded and printed for classroom use.

In each chapter they explain the theory behind a concept that applies to writing on demand and include skills-based mini-lessons based on that concept. For example, in Chapter 1, *Thinking Backwards*, Gere, et al., urge teachers not to begin by immediately having students write on demand. The first step, they contend, is to lead students through the process of evaluating model writings and building rubrics and then constructing prompts that elicit the desired writing characteristics. Beginning this way, students will internalize the writing characteristics readers like and strive to produce them in their writing.

The authors see most writing as writing on demand and believe that seeing high-stakes writing tests as something different from other writing gives those tests an exaggerated power over teaching and curriculum. In this book they aim to show continuities between teaching and testing, provide guidance for teaching the writing processes, and suggest ways to think about the relationship between classroom writing and writing tests. They list five classroom-tested assumptions that underlie their book: (1) good writing and writing on demand are
not contradictory; (2) assessment is an integral part of effective writing instruction; (3) writing prompts can be approached rhetorically; (4) close reading fosters good writing; and (5) criteria for evaluation belong in the classroom.

**On Demand Writing by Lynette Williamson**

Williamson, a high school English teacher, also coaches speech and debate. She welcomes standardized writing tests because they expect the same writing processes from students whom she teaches. People are expected to write on demand constantly, says Williamson, who is happy to prepare students for such writing tasks. She compares the on-demand writing test to the impromptu speech in a debate, and her book includes strategies and activities she uses to prepare debaters for impromptu speeches. Williamson believes that the preparation and practice of the impromptu speaker are identical to those of the impromptu writer. Her book is a collection of activities that use alternative strategies to prepare students for on-demand writing.

The book is organized into eight chapters, each of which includes from two to seven activities. For each activity, Williamson provides the rationale, the time it will take, materials needed, and the procedural steps. Handouts and sample activity outcomes are included. The book has a nine-section appendix with scoring guides, commenting tips, and sample writing-on-demand papers. This book is available on the Web in PDF at no cost for any non-profit entity (see link in Works Cited).

**Prompted to Write by Meredith Pike-Bakey and Gerald Fleming**

This book is designed to help middle and high school students pass the on-demand writing component of tests such as the SAT. The authors provide a collection of integrated lessons that help students improve their ability to write on demand. They stress the importance of quality prompts and in the book offer lessons built around prompts that have proven to work after years in development and use in classrooms.

Part I, Instructional Process, includes seven chapters that begin with *Bridging the Testing/Teaching Gap* and continue on how to use the book. Part II, The Lessons, is made up of fifteen genre-based lessons, each of which includes readings, pre-writing activities, a writing prompt, checklists for revising/editing and self-assessment, and a scoring rubric.

**Conclusion**

To the teacher looking for methods for preparing students for writing tests, these books offer a variety of skills-based activities with rationale, step-by-step procedures, and materials. In addition, they offer critics of on-demand writing ways to integrate the steps of process writing into the preparation for writing tests.

Gere, et al point out, that time is better spent finding ways to incorporate the concepts of process writing into the teaching of on-demand writing skills. All of the authors see on-demand writing as a needed skill and believe that teachers can help students prepare for on-demand writing tests without compromising valuable writing processes. This positive approach to the task of preparing students for writing tests may be the best thing that the books offer.

For the teacher looking for an on-demand writing “how-to” and for pedagogical support for integrating on-demand writing skills with process writing skills, these books merit examination. The Gere book should be the first choice, but all three will arm the teacher with resources for preparing students for on-demand writing while still teaching classroom writing skills.

**Works Cited**


Ron Corio teaches writing, reading and listening classes at the English Language Program at VCU. Ron also manages VATESOL’s listserv.
Articles by our members

Seventeen by Lynn Thorpe and Keon Cha
The authors share their ELP student’s appreciation of reading.

Shortly after I met C.K., a seventeen-year-old from South Korea enrolled in my intermediate level reading and writing class, he expressed concern about his insufficient reading skills. I shared my personal experience. When I got to graduate school, I realized I was not a proficient reader. I was slow at best, and reading was a tedious, boring necessity. Obviously, I could read well enough to have achieved entrance to the world of higher education, but I was not and never had been “a reader”. This is partly because I could never sit still long enough to get through a book or even five chapters. I was too slow to remember what I had read. I tried to get out of reading in high school with my friend, Cliff Notes. Nonetheless, I knew there was something to reading because my mother and grandmother would devour 3-5 novels a week, and seemed to enjoy doing so.

Finally in graduate school at Virginia Tech, I enrolled in an Adolescent Literature class taught by Robert Small. We had to read many short, interesting books. Stephen Krashen, (1985) in Insights and Inquiries, emphasizes that reading a quantity of self-selected books for pleasure builds reading skills. One day, as I sat outside reading my eleventh young adult novel, time dissolved and I finished the book. That was the first time, as an adult, I had read an entire book cover to cover. That moment was life changing.

C.K. listened carefully and began his own reading marathon. Then he wrote an impassioned journal entry about his conviction that reading lots of easy books was far superior to most other students’ method of practicing TOEFL exercises and wasting valuable time practicing English by shopping. I asked him to write an essay to encourage students to read more easy books. Here it is:

Let’s say you spend three hours learning English every day. You might spend all three hours solving TOEFL problems. Usually a script in TOEFL includes ten problems for ten minutes each. Even if you don’t rest in those three hours, you can only study 18 pages a day because three hours are 180 minutes. What if you spend those 3 precious hours reading children’s book? You can read 180 pages a day because they’re much easier to read. 18 versus 180, isn’t that simple?

Many TOEFL fans say that by reading TOEFL scripts, they’re reading better quality. However, many English teachers I know say that’s not necessarily true because they understand these three advantages of reading easy books.

1. Reading easy books helps you get used to reading in English.
2. Reading easy books prepares you for more difficult reading.
3. Reading a lot of easy books helps you read faster and better.

I do not mean that you should read easy books forever. If you think the way you’re reading is too boring because it’s so easy, you can make one or two steps forward. However, before you feel bored, you should read as many easy books as possible.

The public library is very close to VT. There you can find separate areas for Children’s books and Juvenile books. Here are my recommendations:

Scooby Doo series (Age 6)
Nancy Drew (Age 10-14)
James Patterson series (Age 10-17)

Please do not think that TOEFL textbooks make your English academic. Actually, for international students, all reading materials are equally academic because we’re now learning English. I hope you will consider reading more so your study of English will be more successful.

The End.

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<th>Books/series</th>
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<td>Scooby-doo</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Nancy Drew series</td>
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<td>James Patterson series</td>
<td>10-17</td>
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<td>Other juvenile books</td>
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<td>American classics</td>
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Books he read in Korea  
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<td>The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings</td>
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<td>The Bible/New Testament</td>
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Further comments from C.K.:

*Of course, it was has been very tough and sometimes I really wanted to quit. However, there also has always been a strong realization of getting better and better. Suddenly, I found myself enjoying reading in English. There have been many additional gifts. Reading has helped me improve my listening, speaking and writing in English because it has made me familiar with various patterns of English sentences and has also helped me learn cultural information.*

In learning a second language, there doesn’t seem to be enough time to step through reading levels and no time to read for pleasure, especially if students don’t enjoy reading in their native language. When they enter an American university, the quantity of reading is overwhelming and the level of difficulty is great. Most will not consider reading children’s or young adult novels. However, there are many graded readers that can hold interest. If you can spark their curiosity for children’s books, ask your school or public librarian what book series are popular.

While writing this article, I was reminded of the importance of interest to drive the motivation to read. During a typical pullout session with a second grader, we read something he likes (usually a dinosaur book of some kind). This particular day, I didn’t have a new dino book and had forgotten about the shark book we’d started before the long snow break. I tried to get him to read something about time zones in different countries. He skimmed through and said, “I don’t want to read this. It’s boring.” For a moment I argued with him, and saw a rebellious side I had never seen before. So I pulled back and said, “Okay. Find something you want to read.” He found the shark book and proceeded to finish it with non-resistant pleasure. In academic life, we don’t always get to choose. However, when students are still learning to read, considering their interests is a strong path to success.

Lynn Thorpe and Keon Cha are instructors at the Virginia Tech English Language Institute in Blacksburg, VA.

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**Treasurer’s Report, by Charlotte Young, VATESOL Treasurer**

Balance BB&T Bank: $9,831.08

Income for 2010:
Paypal payment (membership dues): $400
Check payment (membership dues): $60
Subtotal: $10,291.08

Outgoing for 2010:
Affiliation fees: $197
Total balance as of 2/26/10: $10,094.08
A recent cartoon in The New Yorker magazine showed two children playing in a sandbox. One says to the other “It’s all learning—is—fun and invented spelling, and then—bam! —Second grade.” For that child and many others, especially English language learners, transitioning from everyday language to academic language is like a blow to the solar plexus—“Bam!”

We typically think of academic language in terms of the vocabulary of the content areas—
In math: multiply, subtract, sine, cosine
In reading and literature: consonant, blend, simile, iambic pentameter
In science: mammal, electron, hypothesis, photosynthesis
In geography: climate, minerals, volcano, alluvial plain
In history and government: civil war, bicameral legislature, manifest destiny
But academic language is much more than the words we use to label the concepts being taught in the content areas. In addition to being able to associate those words with the concepts and store those associations in memory, academic language poses additional challenges to English language learners. Cummins (1994) articulated the difference between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

By emphasizing interpersonal communication on one hand and cognitive demands on the other, he pointed out a crucial difference between everyday language and academic language—the element of context. In Cummins’ terms, CALP is context-reduced, while BICS is context-embedded:

... in context-embedded communication the participants can actually negotiate meaning (by indicating when a message has not been understood, for example) and the language use is supported by a range of meaningful interpersonal and situational cues. Context-reduced communication, on the other hand, relies on linguistic cues to meaning; thus, the successful interpretation of the message depends heavily on knowledge of the language itself. (1994, p. 40)

In other words, everyday language permits users to use visual and spatial cues in a shared context to understand what’s being communicated, but academic language requires the learner to already have a good knowledge of the language because most of the contextual cues available for comprehension are linguistic cues. This is precisely why academic language is more cognitively demanding than everyday language. For learners who have undeveloped knowledge of the language—“Bam!”—the cognitive demands of academic language are multiplied.

So what are the linguistic features of academic language—besides the obvious demands of content area vocabulary mentioned above? Here are just a few:

**Pronouns and antecedents.** Conversationalists use the pronouns *I* and *you*, but these are typically absent from academic language, and it takes a lot of linguistic resources to comprehend and produce language that is not personalized with these pronouns. In face-to-face conversation, speakers can point to objects, use words...
like here/there, today/yesterday or now/later, and identify objects using pronouns like it and them. However, in context-reduced environments, full noun phrases are required in place of or in addition to such simple cover words. In academic language, readers and writers need strong language skills to be able to identify the antecedents of pronouns and definite noun phrases. One very tricky word in English is the little word it, which—“Bam!”—is not always a pronoun. Often in academic language it is used as an empty subject in sentences such as It is clear that geography played an enormous part in the settlement patterns of humans throughout history.

**Linking words.** In everyday speech, the most common words used to link ideas are and, but, and then. When children tell stories, they present events in chronological order, often using the combination and then between each event statement. In academic language, on the other hand, events are combined in sentences using temporal linking words like before, after, until, now that, and in turn. In the following sentence, the events are presented in reverse chronological order by placing the adverbial subordinate clause at the beginning of the sentence: Before Jefferson was inaugurated, Adams appointed John Marshall to the Supreme Court. To comprehend such sentences readers must not only recognize that there is a reversal of temporal ordering, but also—“Bam!”—store the subordinate clause in memory while reading and comprehending the main clause.

Temporal re-ordering is not the only cognitively demanding aspect of language involving linking words. Several of our linking words can be extremely confusing because while they appear to express temporal relations—“Bam!”—they can actually express something quite different. Examples include consequently (despite its root word it does not indicate a sequence, but a cause-effect relationship), once (means ‘after’, as in Once you have measured the fluid, you are ready to conduct the experiment), and after all (used to declare a fact, as in After all, women slightly outnumber men in the total population). There are also linking words that serve both temporal and other functions, such as since (can be used to express a cause-effect relationship) and while (can be used to express a contrasting relationship).

**Contraction and auxiliaries.** Contractions are punctuation marks used in writing to represent a standard feature of spoken English—the tendency for all speakers to reduce or delete unstressed syllables. In academic language contractions are used much less often than in speech, so academic language requires students to spell out the auxiliary verbs that they rarely hear in everyday language. For example the spoken statement *We’ve been studying economics* might sound more like *We been studying economics* (especially to speakers of Spanish whose language has no contrast between /b/ and /v/ sounds). In academic language the statement *We have been studying economics* adds the auxiliary verb have, which if omitted—“Bam!”—stands as a glaring grammatical error.

**Syntax.** The sentence structures used in academic language are more complex than in everyday speech. The main reason for this is that, unlike the social function of everyday conversation, the function of academic language is to explain information that is not already familiar to readers. Therefore writers must connect these new ideas to information readers already know by organizing the new information in relation to familiar concepts. In order to express these relationships, such structures as subordinate clauses, nominal clauses, relative clauses, participial phrases, and the passive voice are very common in academic language. If writers are using such structures—“Bam!”—readers need to be familiar with them.

Here is a sample sentence from a 7th grade science text explaining the familiar phenomenon of a shooting star: The heat created as the particles streaked through the atmosphere caused the meteor to glow white-hot, burning itself up before it could reach the Earth’s surface (Morrison, et al., 1993, as cited in Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 139). Clearly just knowing how to identify the subject and verb of a sentence is not enough to help a student decipher this information. The subject noun phrase in this sentence contains 10 words, two of which are verbs (created, streaked); in addition to the main verb, caused, and the infinitive to glow, the sentence ends with a participial phrase containing yet two more verbs (burning, reach)—for a total—“Bam!”—of six verbs in one sentence. Even knowing all the content vocabulary (particles, atmosphere, meteor, etc.), a student would need a sophisticated knowledge of English syntax to learn anything about shooting stars from such a sentence.

There are many more features of academic language that students need to learn about in order to develop CALP. From the few examples discussed here, it is easy to see why Cummins used the terms cognitive and proficiency in relation to academic language. Often it is the features of language that are least obvious to native speakers which cause the most difficulty for English language learners. Teachers who develop awareness of these linguistic features can really help their students develop true proficiency with academic language. You can turn that “Bam!” into “Shazzam!” by adapting techniques such as Guided Reading and Think/Pair/Share.
for explicit instruction about pronouns, linking words, auxiliaries, and syntax. When students have explicit knowledge about these linguistic features of academic language, the cognitive load is lessened and they can focus more on the content area vocabulary they need for passing tests.

References

Jo Tyler is Professor of Linguistics and Education at the University of Mary Washington and Chair of the VATESOL Teacher Education and Program Administration SIG.

Message from Laura Ray, Higher Ed SIG Chair
lray@odu.edu
Social Media Issues Impacting Higher Education

I felt a little awkward when I accepted my mom’s “friend request” on Facebook; but when I received a notification that my boss wanted to “friend” me, I knew that my [virtual] life would never be the same. (By the way, I accepted her request!) By the time the latter happened, probably about a third of my “Friend List” already consisted of my present or former ESL students, colleagues and other professional contacts.

In the ever-expanding world of social media, the area between our personal and professional lives is becoming increasingly gray. Facebook, MySpace and Twitter are just a few of the popular social networking sites that some of us have been using to share our information with the intended audience being family, friends and personal acquaintances. However, the use of these sites for professional purposes is becoming more prevalent – universities are no exception.

The use of social media can be a valuable tool for institutions in higher education. The Old Dominion University English Language Center recently launched a Facebook group, which is used to keep current and former students and faculty connected, post information about events, share photos and video, and provide easy access to language resources for students. I often contact my students through Facebook because many of them are more likely to regularly check and respond to Facebook messages than their regular e-mail.

On the other hand, there are potential drawbacks and concerns to be aware of. Recently, the article “Not So Private Professors” in the March 8, 2010 edition of *Inside Higher Ed* (http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/03/02/facebook) discussed an unfortunate situation in which a sociology professor was placed on administrative leave as a result of questionable posts that she made on her personal Facebook page.

If using social media sites is new to you, you may want to refer to this useful guide of some “Do’s and Don’ts” published on the University of New Hampshire website (http://saveface.unh.edu/facebook/). In addition, if your university has not yet established an official social media policy, you can further protect yourself by becoming familiar with existing social media policies at institutions, which is easily done through a simple Google search.

Do you use websites such as Facebook, Twitter or MySpace for educational purposes or would you like to? E-mail me at lray@odu.edu with testimonials, questions, comments, concerns or suggestions.

Do you have any other issues you would like to share with the Higher Ed SIG? Please e-mail me at lray@odu.edu
More Higher Ed News by Alicia D. Chadegani

A description of the Integrated Skills level 100:

We are a small classroom of four international students. All students are from Saudi Arabia and their first language is Arabic. Because of the pronunciation differences between English and Arabic, the /p/ and /b/ sounds tend to be a particular challenge, as well as the /t/ and /th/ sounds. They are learning so much at this level. Each student has a chapter test and a spelling test each week. We thoroughly review before each test. This group has a lot of energy and they are very pleasant to teach.

We are using Pearson and Longman’s blue SIDE by SIDE third edition of book one for their textbook and workbook. So far we have gone through chapters 1-6. Listening, speaking (including pronunciation), reading, and writing is included and practiced throughout each lesson. The students are tested on their listening, speaking, reading, and writing in each chapter test. Usually we watch the DVD segment that goes along with each chapter, as a review before they take the chapter test. This is good practice for their listening and speaking skills. Additionally, they can also review for a test by working on matching activities, speaking activities or by playing a board game that is included in the Side by Side Communication Games & Activity book. The board games usually get them singing their answers so they really enjoy this activity as a chapter review.

In addition to their textbook and workbook assignments, they are to read and record how many pages they read each week. If they read ten pages a day for five days, they receive ten out of ten points. They are also required to write in their journal on a daily basis. If they write one paragraph a day for five days, they receive ten out of ten points. Late work only receives half the credit. It is interesting to read what they have written in their journals and to see their progress throughout the term. I correct what they have written and give them corrective feedback about a mistake that keeps coming up. Many times, the tense is wrong or the use of articles. In the beginning, it was difficult for them to write anything at all.

This week is the seventh week and next week will be the last week before Spring Break. They have to turn in the thirty minute timed writing by Thursday this week. Therefore, this week they are practicing how to write about themselves and then I give them the timed writing test later in the week. We are having a great year and this semester is already unforgettable!

Alicia D. Chadegani is the Instructor of the course “Integrated Skills 100” at the VT Language and Cultural Institute

Message from Chris Urynowicz, Secondary Education SIG Co-Chair
christine.urynowicz@mpark.net

Some thoughts on differentiated instruction

I recently read an article entitled, “What Research Says About…Differentiated Instruction” by Tracy A. Huebner, Senior Research Associate at WestEd, San Francisco, California. It was very interesting and informative. The research she cited was impressive.

The model of differentiation has become a major focus in public education. Differentiating curriculum to meet the needs of the individual students in the classroom is a process delivered by the classroom teacher to modify instruction therefore, meeting the students’ needs instead of expecting the students to change or adapt themselves in order to meet the demands of the curriculum. The whole idea of differentiation is to individualize instruction for the students that are grouped into the classroom so that the students learn effectively and achieve academic success.

It is clear to me after reading this article that in order for the model of differentiation to be successful, school leaders, who would be responsible for implementing the model must develop a plan with an extensive understanding of differentiated instruction including the necessity for professional development and training for teachers who will be responsible for the delivery of the plan in the classroom. Building administration will need to be totally supportive of the plan because of the level of commitment for teachers and of the high expectations for the classroom teachers to use the model successfully with the students in their classrooms. There must be an obvious, open, supportive approach in order for teachers to become motivated and in some cases more support for teachers who tend to be
resistive to such a change in order to make a smooth transition to a differentiation model in their classrooms. For many educators it may be an initial experience that makes support of the model even more imperative to ensure success of the model in the classroom. Teachers will need help and support.

Teachers using differentiation in the classroom, true differentiation, will focus on the more essential ideas and skills that students need to master rather than ancillary tasks and activities to occupy time in the classroom. It will be possible for teachers to actually learn how their students learn and provide for the individual learning styles through differentiation. Students will gain individual attention for their needs, interests, and abilities in smaller group settings with more variety in student centered tasks such as free reading time or student choice of activities.

As far as my own professional opinion of differentiation, as an English as a Second Language teacher, I have been using differentiation in my classroom for years. It is the only way to teach and reach English Language Learning students.

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Article by Neal Hall, Roanoke County Schools
Differences between Elementary and Secondary ESL Students: An ESL Prospective

For twelve years I taught at the elementary level, the last few years as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher. I was ready for a change. When an opening came up at a high school in my district, I decided to make my move.

Now that I am in my third year at the high school level, I have noticed many similarities in the two age groups. Most ELLs (English language learners), regardless of age, are very respectful of their teachers and want to do well in their studies. Their parents generally support education and accept the teacher as the authority when making educational decisions in their child’s studies. Both age groups want to improve their English skills to better understand classroom instruction and adapt better in American culture. Of course there are some differences as well.

Besides their height, the biggest difference I notice between high school and elementary ELLs is a sense of urgency. The older students are eager to graduate and move on with their lives. Whether they have been in U.S. schools for many years, or just recently arrived, the fact that their time in school is running out is very apparent. Where in the elementary school I pulled my students out for language development, my high school students come to me either as part of their class schedule or on their own in search of help. At the elementary level I could work with the ELL to develop the language skills with the reassurance that they would catch up with their native English speaking peers as they progressed through our system with the redundancy built in where lessons are reinforced or reintroduced as they continue into middle and high school. Unfortunately, the celebrity status, of being from some far off exotic land and speaking in a strange tongue, that many of my elementary ELL students seemed to enjoy, is short lived in high school. They are not as readily accepted by the majority students and this limits their exposure to acquiring English in informal and relaxed settings with their peers. This further increases their isolation, anxiety, and sense of urgency. These older students are eager to graduate and move on with their lives. This also contributes to other problems.

Our teenage years are some of the most difficult in our lives. Imagine reliving those years in a foreign country where you did not fully understand the language or the culture and had to complete your education. The decision to move and remain in the United States is usually not made by the ELL. Often, ELL students have no one at home to help them. Their parents may understand little English themselves, many of their parents work in the evenings when their children come home, and some do not have the background to help. At home these high school ELL students often fill in as parents and care for younger siblings. Some of them also must work to help their family make ends meet and are not able to dedicate the time needed to study at home and complete their homework. Many high school ELL students struggle, become frustrated, and some think about dropping out. The ELL’s regular ed. teachers often have too many students to dedicate enough time to meet the ELL’s individual needs, so they feel very alone.

There are many teachers that work well with ELLs by modifying assignments and closely following the accommodations that I build into their support plans. However, there are some teachers that are uncomfortable with adjusting their classroom curriculum for the ELL because it seems unfair to the native English speaking students. This quote from the Virginia Department of
Education website may provide some guidance when working with ELLs and grading their work:

“In grading ESL students, you are encouraged to evaluate achievement in learning the "heart" of your course. For ESL students, the problem is language, communicating what they know. Because listening and speaking skills are acquired before reading and writing skills, students could use diagrams and pictures (where appropriate) to communicate what they cannot write. Where time and setting is suitable, another option could be an orally administered and answered assignment using the tape recorder” (p. 36 (#18) of the ESL Handbook for Teachers and Administrators).

When a student enters the United States in high school with minimal English skills, they are forced to hit the ground running. They require a supportive team that will help them pass their classes, pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, and graduate on time. With NCLB working its way to a 100% pass rate and Race to the Top pitting schools against each other for a piece of the shrinking budget, these students are quickly becoming the focus of many schools throughout the state. After working at the high school level, the ELLs, their parents, their teachers, their guidance counselor, and the school administration all want the same thing: to have these young people move through the system successfully and graduate on time. Getting everyone onboard does not have to be difficult. After determining the student’s fluency level, accommodations need to be put in place, and then the ELL’s regular education teachers need to adjust the curriculum to focus on the key elements that must be mastered. As fluency increases, modifications and limits set on assignments and tests can be scaled back. Computers and the internet have been a boon for the teaching of ELL students. Effective communications between the stakeholders is paramount to the success of helping ELL students graduate.

In the three years that I have been working with high school ELL students, I have learned how to be flexible. I have found that there is no one program that works for effectively educating all ELL students. Like all other students, each ELL is a unique individual and they come to our school with their own talents and abilities. However, the language barrier that impedes their ability to quickly grasp concepts makes them some of our most at risk students in our schools. If we as educators are to be successful, we will need to keep our curriculum malleable to better serve our ELL students.

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Have you ever used youtube.com in your ESL classroom? Would you like to use it more, but are not sure what it has to offer? Do you think of youtube as a smaller version of the Internet: a vast ocean containing both junk and treasure, with no guide for effective use? Even if you have never used youtube in your life, the examples presented here will give you practical, specific ideas that you can do in your class tomorrow. Every example I mention will be something I have done in class.

Let me begin with a few simple, but extremely important caveats. Know the exact location of the video clip; check shortly before class, because the location of the video you wish to show may change. Do not think a given speech or song is the same, just because it has the same title, or the same person performing-check and make sure. Finally, if you teach somewhere that youtube is blocked, go to www.teachertube.com. Teachertube.com does not have nearly as many videos as youtube, but still has many useful videos.

Of course, you can use youtube.com to watch interviews on the news shows, watch the news and/or news reports. But there is so much more you can do to use youtube.com as a teaching tool.

First, I am a strong believer in using music to build class community. I give entire seminars on this subject, and I have done so at numerous ESL teacher conventions, including the 2009 NYS TESOL conference in White Plains. I cannot think of a better way to help build community at the start of a class than to let them listen to either of two songs.

Many people know about James Taylor’s wonderful, classic pop song, “You’ve Got a Friend”. But another marvelous tune in the same vein is a little known John Denver song, “Friends.” There are many ways to use them. For example, give them the words and have them
sing along after you listen to it once. Then, ask them what they think. The songs can also be shown in the last class, perhaps as an introduction to the class party. Neil Diamond’s, “Coming To America” is another good song to let them listen to/sing along with during the first class.

Youtube can be a great tool for a particular time of year. For example, during a class right at the beginning of fall, I open class by asking them about the fall, and what are some unique features about it in America? After a student mentioned the leaves changing colors, I showed them a clip on youtube of the song, “Fall In New England” by Cheryl Wheeler, which contained numerous scenes of fall in New England. Regarding this song, think about what you could do in class with just one line from it, “…leaves are Irish Setter red…”.

You can use music to teach specific elements of grammar. For example, to teach your students about comparatives, let them listen to a top 10 hit song from 1960 by Donnie Brooks called, “Mission Bell”. I cannot think of a song with more examples of comparatives. When you want to teach contractions, start by listening to the New Seekers hit from the mid 1970’s, “You Won’t Find Another Fool Like Me”. It also is a great song to use if you are teaching a Pronunciation class.

You can also use youtube to introduce a new unit in the book. Let me give you an example. Nutrition is a major portion of the Health Unit, and it impacts on many other sections you will cover. So why not begin by letting them hear a mid 1970’s gem on youtube, a song that in some form or another, sums up the conflicts about eating healthy that we all go through. The song, called, “Junk Food Junkie” by Larry Groce, will make you laugh, and it also will give you some wonderful avenues for class discussion.

What about using videos other than songs? You can use youtube to discuss certain major holidays. For example, for Martin Luther King Day, how about having them see and hear Dr. King delivering his 1963 “I have a dream” speech? You could show an excerpt of that speech or of other speeches of Dr. King. Youtube has marvelous excerpts of many of Dr. King’s speeches.

For Memorial Day, you can show an excerpt of the President’s Memorial Day speech, or the Presidential Proclamations that are always issued for holidays.

You can use youtube to get students enthused about creative writing. For example, I bring in picture postcards: National Parks, State Parks, famous monuments, historic homes etc. Students each select a scene they like. They then have to do a writing prompt. After 10-12 minutes of writing time, I have the students exchange essays with a partner, and give them time to discuss. You can do a youtube version of this. If you have access to a computer lab, put them at computers individually or in pairs. Have them look at things like Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, fall scenes, then do the creative writing exercise.

Songs on youtube can also stimulate creative writing. For example, students can listen to, then write the ending to a song, such as Dean Martin’s “Houston”, or George Strait’s, “Amarillo By Morning”. Both songs tell a story, but you do not know the ending. In “Houston”, does he get there? If so, what happens to him? In “Amarillo By Morning”, does he get to Amarillo the next morning? If so, does his luck change? Another song is “New York’s a Lonely Town” by the Trade Winds. Does he adjust to New York? How? Or, does he go back to California as soon as he can? If so, is he happier there, and why?

You can use youtube to teach about art. You will find everything from film footage of Claude Monet, to an interview of Georgia O’Keeffe, to views of the Sistine Chapel, to Judy Baca’s murals, including “The World Wall” and “The Great Wall of Los Angeles”. You can see paintings of Vincent Van Gogh as you listen to Don McLean sing his famous song, “Vincent.”

You can use youtube as the launching pad into a lesson about the environment. I have had my students listen to a Number 1 song from 1969, “In The Year 2525”, by Zager and Evans. The song discusses the dehumanizing effects of technology, but there is a classic line in the song that can serve as a bridge into an environmental discussion. Near the end of the song is the line, “In the year 9595, I’m kind of wondering if man is gonna be alive. He’s taken everything this old earth can give, and he ain’t put back nothing.” “Big Yellow Taxi” (by Joni Mitchell, among others) is another good environmental song.

Remember that you can take youtube as far as your imagination and teaching creativity will allow. Use that creativity to enhance your students’ enjoyment and learning via this powerful resource.
A professional development opportunity from our colleagues in West Virginia:

Transitions

WVTESOL 13th Annual Spring Conference
Fairmont, West Virginia

Friday and Saturday, April 9 and 10, 2010

Hosted by:
Fairmont State University

WVTESOL, the West Virginia affiliate of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) will hold its 13th annual conference at the Falcon Center at Fairmont State University in Fairmont, West Virginia. We expect it to be an exciting event for English as a Second Language (ESL) professionals.

This year’s conference theme, “Transitions” focuses on the immigrant experience. Dr. Miriam Isaacs, a professor at the University of Maryland will provide the Keynote: Immigrant Voices: Helping Us Understand Transitions.

Please visit the WVTESOL website for more info: www.tesolwv.org