Message from the President

Lily Mirjahangiri

Dear Colleagues!

I extend my warm greetings to all of you, and hope you have had a great start to 2012. I was delighted to meet with many of you at the VESA conference earlier this month in Richmond. Hearing your comments, ideas, and suggestions is always instrumental in building closer connections and setting up effective goals for VATESOL to better serve the teacher and student population both inside and outside of the classroom.

The VATESOL board continues to work on the current goals of our organization, which include but are not limited to maintaining effective communication with TESOL and our Southeast TESOL affiliates, enhancing VATESOL's web site and its features, and expanding outreach for a larger membership.

Laura Ray, our 1st Vice President and Conference Chair for VATESOL 2012, has been working tirelessly to complete the preliminary phases for our conference coming up next October. Please stay tuned for more updates on VATESOL 2012. The call for proposals and the registration time line should be available by early April.

On behalf of the VATESOL board, I invite all of you to mark your calendars and save the date for the 2012 Regional Conference, which will be held on Saturday, October 6th at Old Dominion University in Norfolk. The theme of the conference will be *Advocacy & Inclusion: Breaking Barriers and Building Community.*

Best Wishes!

Lily Mirjahangiri is an instructor in the English Language Program at Virginia Commonwealth University, Assistant Coordinator of the Academic Support Centers at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, and the VATESOL President.

The Ins and Outs of Planning a Conference

Laura Ray

Conferences require a considerable investment of time, energy, and money, no matter whether it is on the local, regional, national, or international scale – this holds true for the hosting organization as well as for those who plan on attending as participants, presenters, and vendors. People often look to the success of an organization's conference as a way to gauge the quality of the organization itself. Therefore, it is essential to have a detailed plan to ensure that you will pull off a well-organized, dynamic, and engaging event.

As you are moving through the planning process, it is important to be flexible, be creative, and think outside of the box, because there will be many bumps along the road. It is usually a good idea to start planning for a conference while you are 9-10 months (or more) away from the desired date of the event. Establishing a timeline with clear deadlines is crucial, but also giving yourself some "wiggle room" in case of any surprises along the way can be just as important.

Treasurer's Report

Kimberley Cossey, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

BB&T Account Balance as of 3/7/12: $51,666.47

Total Deposits from 11/7/11 to 3/7/12: $722.00

    $440.00 check deposits for Membership Dues
    $282.00 PayPal deposit (has not yet posted to the account)

Total withdrawals from 11/7/11 to 3/7/12: $1627.67

    $347.67 in SETESOL refunds & Speaker Fees
    $200.00 TESOL Affiliate dues
    $1080.00 for Web Hosting Services (has not yet posted to the account)

Ray

Also, one of the first things you need to do is recruit a conference team, which may consist of positions such as program chair, associate program chair, exhibit chair, proposal chair, registration chair, and webmaster. Putting the right people in place is essential, so that you can all work together to carry out the plan for the conference.

Once you have a conference team in place, there are many details to consider. When choosing the date, it is advisable to be consistent from year to year by scheduling the conference around the same time. Also, you should consider potential conflicts with other conferences or events that may serve the same professional audience. Finally, you could think about cultural events happening in the city or region that might attract people to the conference. Location is also very important, and it can sometimes be a challenge to find a venue that is conveniently located and has all of the amenities you will need – catering, parking, convenient and affordable accommodations, for example.

After you have a confirmed date and location, you have to work out all of the other details. This includes the budget/expenses, theme, schedule (e.g. sessions, workshops, plenary speakers, receptions, etc.), proposal guidelines, keynote speakers, and registration fees. Obviously, there are many pieces of the puzzle to fit together, but it can definitely happen with the combined efforts of a great conference team.

This is the first time that I have ever been in charge of planning a conference, and it has been a challenging but enjoyable experience thus far. Three of the biggest lessons I have learned to far are to be flexible, be prepared for surprises, and do your best to build a strong conference planning team that consists of people you can count on.

The English Dictionary: a Tool?

Neal Hall

Just prior to the 2010/2011 SOL tests last year I learned that the English dictionary was available to English Language Learners (ELL) students as a test accommodation when their native language dictionary is not available or when it is specified in their Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan. This accommodation is very helpful for students whose first language is not widely used and it is difficult to find a good dictionary that translates their native language to English. Initially, I thought that this might be some sort of an error, and I also did not feel comfortable adding an accommodation right before SOL testing to any of my ELLs' LEP plans. The accommodation is in the November 23, 2011 Revision to the *Limited English Proficient Students: Guidelines for Participation in the Virginia Assessment Program* document. This year, I added this accommodation to some of my ELL students' LEP plans, and began to instruct these students how to use the English dictionary as a means for leveling the playing field with regard to SOL testing. Here is the accommodation as it appears in *Limited English Proficient Students* document:

English Dictionary (accommodation code 29)

LEP students may use an English dictionary when a bilingual dictionary in the student's native language is not available or when the LEP Student Assessment Participation Plan specifies an English dictionary. The English dictionary must meet these guidelines:

The English dictionary must be a general dictionary without a thesaurus section.

The English dictionary must be a paper dictionary. Electronic dictionaries are not allowed.

Either a school-owned or student-owned English dictionary may be used.

The English dictionary should be familiar to LEP students. SOL testing should not be the first time a student uses the dictionary.

The dictionary must not be altered with hand-written notes in the mar gins nor include additional materials, such as class notes.

A dictionary is indispensible for anyone doing research or academic study. With high stakes SOL testing it is tempting to include the English dictionary in the LEP plans for all of my ELL students. Since ELL students can count in multiple subgroups on SOL tests their test outcomes can greatly impact a school's AYP scores. However, over the years most of my ELLs have done fine without it. This raised the question, "Who should receive this accommodation?" The "Plain English" Math SOL accommodation clearly states which ELL levels qualify for this version of the test [grades 3 through 5 who have a WIDA® overall English language proficiency level within the range of 1.0 through 3.5; grades 6 through 8 who have a WIDA® overall English language proficiency level within the range of 1.0 through 3.3; grades 9 through 12 who have a WIDA® overall English language proficiency

Special Interest Groups

Teacher Education & Program Administration

Jo Tyler: Teacher Ed and Program Administration

Dr. Tyler is on Spring Break. Her column will resume in the next issue.

Adult Education

Daniela C. Wagner-Loera: Teaching Tip

Grammar. Should we teach it? If yes, how? If not, why not? Many of us have come across this question in recent times. Most of us are still required to use a grammar book to satisfy our students' or program needs. So, here is a tip on how to integrate grammar in a different, yet traditional way satisfying the students, the system, and foremost – the teachers.

Higher Education

Linda Sanford: New Program at Longwood

The VATESOL Writing Contest is underway. I hope everyone received the flyer specifying the rules and the writing prompts and have a bevy of students who are busy writing. I have received some feedback that the themes, and corresponding prompts, are difficult for some of our students to understand, so please feel free to discuss the themes and prompts to make the competition accessible to all interested students.

Secondary Education
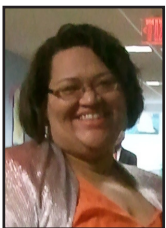
Angelique Clarke: Implementing Kagan's Strategies

Recently, I have had the pleasure to attend a couple of Kagan workshops. Spencer Kagan bases all of his professional development materials on student engagement. These strategies, based on student collaboration and participation, are perfect for the ESOL classroom!

Elementary Education

Carol Zurat: Working with Shy Students

We all know that the silent period precedes a time of cautioned speaking for our newcomers, regardless of age or grade level. Some students are just prewired to be perfectionists, wanting to say every word flawlessly.

Hall

level within the range of 1.0 through 3.5; grades 6 through 8 who have a WIDA® overall English language proficiency level within the range of 1.0 through 3.3; grades 9 through 12 who have a WIDA® overall English language proficiency level within the range of 1.0 through 3.5 (Algebra I only); or grades 3 through 8 and Algebra I who have been enrolled in United States schools for less than 12 months, regardless of their English language proficiency level]. I considered this when I began thinking about recommending the English dictionary accommodation to the LEP committee.

As Accommodation Code 29 is currently written the English dictionary is available to any ELL student if it is documented in their LEP plan. I consulted with the administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and test coordinators in the three buildings that I work in to set a policy for the ELL students that I work with. We reached a consensus that for ELLs, where dictionaries in their first language were not available, and all level 1 & 2 students an English dictionary accommodation would be written into their plan. Further, Levels 3 through 6 would receive the accommodation on a case-by-case basis. Only a few of my level 3 through 6 students, who were struggling, were provided this accommodation, and it has helped them tremendously. They are doing better on tests, improving their grades, and have higher self-esteem.

Though ELL students at all levels are eligible to receive an English dictionary (via Accommodation Code 29), in my professional opinion, I am reluctant to recommend the accommodation for all of my ELL students because it might prove to be problematic. If a student receives an SOL test accommodation then that accommodation must also be made available to them throughout the school year as a classroom modification. Therefore, an English teacher giving a vocabulary test to a more fluent ELL would have to allow them the use of an English dictionary on the test, and this would not provide the student much incentive to commit the meaning of new words to memory and expand their vocabulary. ELL students desperately want to fit in, and this may cause problems. Using this accommodation would likely require the ELL to be tested separately from the rest of the class to avoid trouble that may arise when non-ELL students wonder why their "fluent-sounding" friends are allowed to use a dictionary.

In practice, it is very helpful for ELLs when they are completing assignments or taking tests. Many key terms in social studies, science, mathematics, and language arts are defined and help lead to the correct response. The English dictionary is an excellent resource for our ELL students.

In the course of this year, several of my ELL students have benefited from using the English dictionary on classroom quizzes and tests. Interestingly, both higher level ELL students and former students I have talked with about this accommodation were very pleased when I told them that both lower level and struggling ELL students now had this resource available. They all agreed that it would have made their English language acquisition much easier if it had been available to them.

Neal Hall is an English teacher at Roanoke County Public Schools.

Wagner-Loera

Designate a specific grammar day (in an integrated course) or designate a special hour for this activity. While you will assign your regular homework in the book, you will also collect writing samples from your students frequently. Each week you will read the writing assignments for different errors. Pull these errors out of the students writing and start a power point. Create up to three slides with different sorted errors each and title these slides "What's Wrong?" slides.

Here are suggested rules for an intermediate level: Tell students that it is not important to find out whose error they are correcting. Students have 7 minutes to copy down the sentences on the "what's wrong?" slides of the power point. Then they have 5 minutes to find, underline, and correct the errors. When they have all 3 slides copied, they will work in groups and correct the errors together and also try to determine the overall grammar issue on each slide. Walk around and provide help. Once they have discussed all three error fields, you can show them the answers as well as rules to explain what went wrong.

These are real life examples for the students to work with. The have fun working with their own errors and quickly make a connection between the 'optimal textbook' and 'real life English'. Enjoy!

Send your teaching tips to daniela.loera@gmail.com.

Sanford

I look forward to reading our students' work.

Now, for some breaking news in the world of Virginia higher education ESOL programs, word is that there is a new kid on the block. Congratulations to Longwood University (LU) on the opening of their English as a Second Language Program (ESLP) in January 2012. Keith Boswell, past interim director of the English Language Program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), joined LU as the new director of the ESLP. Former VCU instructor Paul Phillips has also joined his staff. The program offers four levels, beginning through advanced, and enrolls conditional admission as well as English -only students. Keith is enthusiastic about Longwood's new program and has enjoyed the experience of designing a new program from the floor up. He was particularly complimentary of the university's warm, welcoming, and supportive administration. For a closer look at Longwood's ESLP, go to their website at www.longwood.edu/internationalaffairs/eslp.htm.

Additional news comes from the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute, which has been certified as an IELTS center and will offer their first test on March 17th. As students from this area of the state previously had to travel to either Charlotte, NC, or Washington, DC, to take the IELTS, this new Blacksburg site will offer a convenient location for international students in Southwest Virginia.

In closing, please let me know about newsworthy events in your programs, as well as any other items of interest. I would like to get some thoughts about what is of current importance to those of you in the Higher Ed SIG. I will compile a list and pass them on in an upcoming column. Perhaps the list will spark some ideas for presentation proposals for the 2012 VATESOL conference. It would be great to continue to offer a wide variety of sessions geared towards our interests, so please let me hear from you. And, finally, for those of you lucky enough to be going to TESOL in Philly, enjoy!

Renew your membership online:

vatesol.cloverpad.org

Zurat

Short phrases and then simple sentences do not come as freely to them. Unfortunately, for those perfectionists, or those with a low risk tolerance and fear of failure, that period can become prolonged.

There may be many facets of these students that we don't understand. Their home history may be so traumatic that they often do not want to remember or talk about it openly.

I have found that assigning general education teachers to a case study of an ESOL student in their room has made all the difference in the world. After interviewing the student about their interests and home country life (privately if this seems appropriate), they suddenly feel that they are important. Short sessions with sincere questions are often all it takes for some students to come out of their shyness and begin to talk. Many teachers have told me they saw a smile and a positive "spark" coming from these students. Once they feel validated and important, it is like jump-starting their batteries! It is always a great day when a student finally drops into the "chatterbox café" and never looks back!

Try this tip with your general education teachers. They will be surprised what they will learn and how fast a shy, quiet student may come out of his or her shell.

Clarke

Kagan and ESOL are a natural fit as many of the strategies require students to read, write, think, and speak in a partner or team setting. With this in mind, we grouped all of our students this semester. Because I am working in a collaborative English/History class, we based our groupings on student reading levels. However, in a self-contained ESOL class, you could easily group students by their level (2 level 3 students, 1 level 4, and one level 2) to achieve the same result.

We are only two weeks into our integration of Kagan strategies in our classroom; but, the results so far are promising. Students are making connections with their peers, working in teams to complete tasks, providing support for each other when studying, and encouraging each other to do their best.

One of the things that has become the most transformative for me in terms of pedagogy is the need to assign clear roles to each member of the group. I have assigned roles in the past, but I did not specifically give the students an idea of what things each person should be saying or doing to fulfill that role. I had groups but not much collaboration. When you model for the students how to fulfill their roles, you get better results and productivity. I cannot overstate the value of having a student assigned as an encourager. I have watched the most reluctant student become animated with encouragement from peers.

If you, like me, are new to this process or have had less than successful groups in the past, I recommend attending a workshop near you or purchasing Kagan's Teambuilding book to learn more about setting up collaborative teams and making them work.

Hi all, I am still looking for ways that can improve ESOL teaching, collaboration, and relationship building on the secondary level. Any suggestions for how we can better conI was anect to each other as professionals and help each other to become even better educators can be emailed to be at angelique_clarke@ccpsnet.net. Please put VATESOL in the headline.

Ray

I hope that ESL professionals from the region will find the 2012 VATESOL Fall Conference to meet or exceed the attendees' expectations by leaving them energized with new ideas and satisfied from the overall experience. I can't wait to see everyone in Norfolk this October!

Laura T. Ray is the faculty and administrative coordinator at the English Language Center at Old Dominion University and VATESOL Vice President.

News Note

The VATESOL Newsletter is published quarterly.

All VATESOL members may contribute. See the guidelines on the VATESOL website (vatesol.cloverpad.org).

The Newsletter accepts advertising. See website for ad rates.

Editors: Brendan Downey, Paul Philips, & Audrey Short

Contact us: vatesol.news@gmail.com

The Challenges of Learning English

Edgardo Castro

The English language is probably one of the most difficult languages to learn. As an English language learner (ELL), there are multiple aspects of the English language that make it challenging and profoundly intricate and complicated for many others. According to Hirata & Kelly (2010), foreign languages pose many challenges for learners. This includes learning the four fundamental domains in language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thus, it is hard to acquire an inclusive high level of proficiencies of each of the domain in just a period of time. In the next few paragraphs, I would like to discuss each of the description, namely: idioms, phonics, rule systems, and irregularities coupled with justifications to include morphology, sound patterns, and the application of theory into practice in the teaching and learning on why the English language is difficult and challenging to learn as a second language.

First, idioms and idiomatic expressions and phrases provide an enormous challenge to all ELLs. This particular concern is not as easy as we might think; an ELL must live and stay connected with the community to be able to grasp some of the idiomatic expressions being expressed. In addition, according to Fromkin et al (2011), these phrases typically start out as metaphors that "catch on" and are repeated so often that they become fixtures in the language. Thus, an ELL who is struggling with the basic meaning of the word will absolutely have a challenging diverse interpretation of what it really means.

Next, phonics, on the other hand, is another intricacy of the English language. In fact, every human race, culture, and language has a stimulating history of what it is really about. As a result, if an ELL student knows well the phonics, which, letters and sounds of the alphabet in first language, the better the student to acquire a second language; however this might not always be the case because there are some languages that follow letters and sounds differently. Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2011), emphasized the importance of phonics:

"The key principle is that phonics should not be taught directly. Rather, the child is supposed to make the connections between sounds and letters herself based on exposure to text. For example, she would be encouraged to figure out an unfamiliar word based on the context of the sentence or by looking for clues in the story line or the pictures rather than by sounding it out, as illustrated in the cartoon" (p. 466, para. 2).

The third reason why English language makes it difficult to learn as a second language is the Rule System. While it is true that every language has a rule system, such as grammar rules, English has the most complex and demanding rules. For instance, new vocabulary words keep showing up in the language, and some are also being phased out or considered obsolete and not being used anymore. Thus, these complex, high demanding rules of the English language make it harder for ELLs to keep up with the pace of an ever changing rule system. In a study made by Murphy & Hayes (2010), they explore the idea that the input to which English learners (both L1 and L2) are exposed to lead to regular plurals being excluded from within English noun-noun deverbal compounds. The study was made in response to a study done by Haskell et al. (2003), had argued that both phonetic and semantic constraints that are learned from the input can lead to English Native Speakers dissociating regular from irregular plurals within compounds. These are some of the examples how the English rule systems can be complicated and demanding to learn because of the rules linguists and psycholinguists can come up with and revise or totally change what they considered obsolete or old rules. Consequently, Landsbergen et al. (2010) stated, when one takes language as a dynamic, continuously changing system, one of the striking features is that many changes do not seem to be arbitrary, but instead show at least some degree of regularity and directionality.

Finally, irregularities in the English language create confusion and misunderstanding especially for ELLs who are beginning to grasp the idea of whole language approach. These irregularities and inconsistencies may include: spelling, grammar, etc. Spelling inconsistencies indicate the differences between the British and American spelling such as honour/honor as well as many others. Additionally, English grammar is so complex that it takes a lot of practice and understanding to authentic application. For instance, irregular verbs can be confusing to students who are still in the process of understanding the basics of the English language. Fromkin et al. (2011) emphasized the significance of irregularities of English language:

"The grammatical relation of a noun in a sentence is called the case of the noun.

VATESOL Writing Contest!

Organized by the VATESOL Higher Education Special Interest Group

To recognize outstanding ESL writers at a variety of levels. . . . .

$$$ CASH PRIZES $$$

Writing Contest Theme:

"Advocacy and Inclusion: Breaking Barriers and Building Community"

Submission Deadline:

March 31, 2012

Submit to LINDA SANFORD (linda1@vt.edu)

CONTEST GUIDELINES:

Students who are currently enrolled in a Virginia college ESOL class at the time of the submission are eligible to participate in the contest.

-Writings submitted must be original works of 200 to 2,000 words.

-Papers must be submitted by teachers in order to minimize the possibility of plagiarism.

-The topic of the paper should be related to "Advocacy and Inclusion: Breaking Barriers and Building Community."

-All submissions must be in Microsoft Word or Rich Text format and should be sent as an attachment.

-Submissions should be emailed to **Linda Sanford** at **linda1@vt.edu** by **March 31, 2012**.

-Each submission should include a cover page which has the following:

 * Title of submission * Student's first and last name * Student's mailing address * Student's e-mail address

 * Teacher's first and last name * Teacher's school mailing address * Teacher's e-mail address

 * Teacher's daytime phone number AND / OR alternate phone number(s)

 * A note including an explanation of the student's proficiency level and what kind of assistance he or she may have had on the submission.

All submissions, which meet the above stated criteria, will be reviewed by a committee of VATESOL members. Winners and their teachers will be notified by _____ April 23, 2012 _____. If you have any questions, please contact Linda Sanford at linda1@vt.edu.

When case is marked by inflectional morphemes, the process is referred to as case morphology. Russian has a rich case morphology, whereas English case morphology is limited to the one possessive –s and to its system of pronouns" (p. 92, para. 1).

Thus, phonology or the process of making sound patterns can be described from very simple to complex, and depending where the language proficiency levels of our ELLs are, this process can take months or even years to be able to read and comprehend the English language.

In conclusion, as teachers and educators, we should be reminded of the many facets and salient features in understanding our ELLs. These facets include the linguistic components of conversational to academic and cognitive language proficiency levels, designing appropriate lessons, preparing materials and crafts, presenting an actual lesson and demonstration, and sharing continuous assessment and evaluation to stake holders. Aspects of the English language, such as: idioms, phonics, rule systems, and irregularities, coupled with morphology and sound patterns are among the myriad challenges that our ELLs face in the process of acquiring English as a second language.

Fromkin, V. et al (2011). An Introduction to Language (9th ed.).

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Murphy, V. & Hayes, J. (2010, March). Processing English compounds in the first and second language: the influence of the middle morpheme. Language Learning Research Club, University of Michigan. Retrieved from www.http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/