



Message from the President

Lily Mirjahangiri

I send greetings to all of you across the state and hope you are enjoying the summer. I had wonderful opportunities to meet with many of you at TESOL 2012 in Philadelphia. As I stated in my last president's message, it is always a delight to connect with you and to hear your comments and suggestions as we work toward our goals for VATESOL. Your ideas are always welcomed as we work toward setting new goals to better serve our students and teachers across the state.

With our hearts and minds set on summer when we can read our favorite books and watch the movies we've long awaited, I invite you to share your book and movie reviews with a focus on teaching and learning for the next edition of the VATESOL Newsletter. Please stay tuned for the next "Call for Submissions" from our newsletter team!

I would also like to remind you to mark your calendars for the VATESOL 2012 Regional Conference, Saturday, October 6, 2012; Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. This year's theme is *Advocacy & Inclusion: Breaking Barriers and Building Community*. Visit www.vatesol.cloverpad.org for conference registration and hotel reservation information. Many thanks are due to Laura Ray, 1st Vice President and Conference Chair and to her planning team for their 'round-the-clock work making arrangements for our upcoming conference.

On behalf of the VATESOL board, I wish you a wonderful, relaxing, and refreshing summer.

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.

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Role Play Activity: Buying American Fast Food

Christine Hoppe

Because I have lived abroad in eight different countries, I learned at an early age to mingle with the natives, to speak their language, and to get to know their culture, always exploring their markets, restaurants, festivals, and museums.

For this reason, while teaching ESOL to absolute beginners here in our multicultural community of Norfolk, I especially empathize with my international students-many of whom have just arrived here and have culture shock. And it is often so hard for them to understand English too which Americans speak so quickly.

One day I went to a Taco Bell restaurant for lunch and I decided to speak with a Maltese accent- just to see what my foreign students might experience if they ordered fast food in hesitant English. I noticed that the cashier spoke very fast and she could not always understand my accent. But she did ask six very basic questions in order to take my order, a set group of questions that she had learned to recite in the orientation training sessions, no doubt. I later taught my literacy 1 students these

Treasurer's Report

Kimberley Cossey, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

April Balance: \$50,120.26

May Balance: \$50,020.26 (\$100 prize check was the only withdrawal)

3 checks pending - \$150 total for the writing contest winners.

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standard questions so that they could cope better when buying cheap American food in a rush.

Here is a typical dialogue which we role played, lining up to talk to the hurried cashiers with menus and prices available and a big sign that said: "Taco Bell: Think Outside of the Bun."

Cashier: For here or to go?

Customer: For here, please.

Cashier: What do you want to order today?

Customer: Um....I want two tacos and a bean burrito, please.

Cashier: Crunchy or soft tacos?

Customer: Oh...I prefer the hard tacos.

Cashier: What else do you want with that?

Customer: Let's see...I want one large iced tea, please.

Cashier: Sweetened or unsweetened?

Customer: Ah....sweetened tea. With sugar.

Cashier: Anything else?

Customer: No, that's all. Thanks.

Cashier: OK. 2 tacos, a bean burrito, and one sweetened iced tea. Total: \$3.75.

Customer: (giving her the money) Here you are.

Cashier: Here's your change, ma'am. Have a good day!

The students really enjoyed this role play task and later they shared with me that they were able to order fast food in Norfolk much more quickly since they now understood the types of typical questions that the cashier would ask them. In fact, they can now buy fast food at any restaurant now. Perhaps we should consider including such simple dialogues in our ESOL textbooks as our students learn to cope with survival skills in the U.S.!

Christine Hoppe is an ESOL instructor at Granby High Evening School for Adults and secretary of the Multicultural Alliance of Virginia.

A Memorable Teaching Moment

Jeanne M. McGee

My first experience teaching ESL classes was in Miami, Florida in 1991. When I switched from teaching native speakers to ESL, I had not had any training in strategies for second language acquisition. I did, however, have three small children at home and I had observed the way they acquired language so I decided to use this knowledge to help my students learn English.

At that time, in the area where I was teaching, nearly 100% of my students were from Cuba. They appeared smaller, younger and considerably more naïve than their American counterparts. Consequently, I decided my ninth-grade group would be open to singing songs as a fun way to learn. They were more than open; they were delighted.

We sang Beatles songs, current pop songs and children's songs, but their favorite by far was "The Star Spangled Banner." They would belt out the lyrics with great gusto and I could not suppress the smile on my face as I prided myself in having found a fun way to teach language and at the same time, slip in some good old American patriotism.

Later, after they had been writing for a while and building vocabulary, I decided I would have them write the lyrics to some of the songs and since they had developed such an affinity for our national anthem, I asked them to try to write the first verse. I had created a cloze activity providing them with difficult, key words and leaving out the shorter, more familiar words to see if they could spell them on their own.

When I collected the papers, I quickly came to the realization that all along, most of my students had been asking Jose if he could see by the dawn's early light. Perhaps they thought our anthem was a tribute to Jose Marti, their national hero.

I came away from this experience with the understanding that mimicking language, much as small children do when they are learning, is fun and serves a purpose. However, the results, albeit entertaining, may not always guarantee comprehension.

Jeanne McGee is the academic coordinator at the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute.

Special Interest Groups

Teacher Education & Program Administration



Jo Tyler: Two New Books Probe Achievement and Culture

Assault on Kids: How Hyper-Accountability, Corporatization, Deficit Ideologies, and Ruby Payne are Destroying our Schools (2011) is a collection of thought-provoking articles edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul C. Gorski, and Theresa Montaño. *Gaining on the Gap: Changing Hearts, Minds, and Practice* (2011) is a collection of articles,

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Adult Education



Daniela C. Wagner-Loera: Teaching Tip

Do your students struggle with making inferences in reading? Can they easily understand the deeper meaning of readings? If not, this tip may help you help them.

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Higher Education



Linda Sanford: Winners Announced

Greetings, higher ed colleagues! It's been a long process, but I'm very pleased to announce the winners of the VATESOL Writing Contest. We received thirty-three essays from four different schools: J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (JSR), Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and both locations of the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute (VTLCI) in Blacksburg and Falls Church.

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Secondary Education



Angelique Clarke: Strategies for Reading Aloud

As professionals, we know that one has to read to become a better reader. However, it is extremely difficult to get ESOL students or students with lower abilities to read aloud in class. These students would rather refuse to read than to face potential ridicule from mis-cues, substituting a familiar word or similar word instead of reading the correct word, like saying, "marry" instead of "martyr."

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Elementary Education



Carol Zurat: a Picture-Perfect Book for All Ages

Yes, I really think I have found a silver bullet! It is a Caldecott Award Winner from 2008. Did I say it is about 500 pages? This intrigued me, so I went online and read the reviews. I quickly gave Amazon.com a quick order for the author's book and couldn't wait to see it. The box was small but very heavy.

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Tyler

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edited by Robert G. Smith, Alvin L. Crawley, Cheryl Robinson, Timothy Cotman, Jr., Marty Swaim, and Palma Strand, about how one school district succeeded in closing the achievement gap. Both books bring cultural relativism to the forefront, illustrating the benefits of understanding cultures objectively as sets of normative values rather than subjectively evaluating them.

These two books have roots in Virginia. One of the editors of *Assault on Kids*, Paul C. Gorski, is an assistant professor at George Mason University where he teaches classes on social justice education. The story that unfolds in *Gaining on the Gap* is about how one of Virginia's most culturally diverse school districts—Arlington Public Schools—closed the achievement gaps for racial and ethnic minorities.

In this brief review one representative article from each of the books has been selected for discussion. The goal is to illustrate how the two books complement each other as resources for developing teachers' cultural awareness and intercultural skills.

In *Assault on Kids*, Gorski's article entitled "Unlearning Deficit Ideology and the Scornful Gaze: Thoughts on Authenticating the Class Discourse in Education" points out that what is sometimes called the "deficit view" or "deficit thinking" is actually an ideology because it is "based upon a set of assumed truths ... woven into the fabric of U.S. society and its socializing institutions, including schools" (p. 153). As defined by Gorski, a deficit ideology is "when we mistake difference—particularly difference from ourselves—for deficit" (p. 152), and it results in placing the responsibility for inequality on those who suffer from it (p. 168). According to national opinion polls, most Americans believe that poverty, for example, is caused by things that stereotype the poor—drug abuse, lack of morals, lack of motivation, limited language (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001, as cited in Gorski, 2011, p. 161). However, as Gorski reveals, this common deficit view emerged in the mid 1970's. Prior to that time the popular understanding was that poverty resulted from broader social conditions like prejudice and repression (Rank, et al., 2003, as cited in Gorski, 2011, p. 162).

Each article in *Assault on Kids* not only critiques one or more deficit ideologies in the educational literature, but also concludes with the author's recommendations for reform. Gorski offers several steps toward combating deficit thinking, including becoming aware of and reflecting on one's own tacit assumptions about the causes of poverty and

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Wagner-Loera

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Create a presentation of about 10 slides. First show a picture of a heart and ask the students what they see. You will hear, "a heart", "love", etc. Then show them a green screen and ask again what they see. You will guide them slowly into seeing that colors and shapes have more than one meaning, i.e. that they are symbols. Then show the picture of the woman below.



Have the students discuss what they see and how they can explain it. Have them help each other see both perspectives. Give the students two more of these types of pictures and have them discuss their ideas.

Then read *The Story of an Hour* by Kate Chopin and see if they can use their newly gained knowledge and interest in looking for context clues to draw inferences. Good luck!

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

Tyler

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educational inequalities. In a society in which deficit ideologies are engrained in the national consciousness, this process requires us to confront our own hidden biases (p. 168).

While Gorski and the other contributors to *Assault on Kids* address educational inequalities through critical theory at a socio-political level, the authors of *Gaining on the Gap* focus on the concrete ways that a single school division brought about reform. Indeed, the transformation of the Arlington Public Schools occurred through the kind of reconceptualization and reflection that Gorski recommends. In Arlington, the process is referred to as “cultural competence,” as discussed in the article by Marty Swaim entitled “Teaching Across Cultures.” Swaim has been a social studies teacher and the president of the Arlington Education Association. Her article is about a course with the same title that she taught to Arlington teachers through George Mason University. It focuses on how teacher reflection and research led to changes in teachers’ understanding of culture and the consequent changes in their teaching practices.

Swaim explains that, as defined in the Arlington experience, cultural competence means understanding “race and culture from a student’s point of view” along with teachers’ own “self-examination and discovery as adults” (2011, p. 123). The course that she taught “began with the goal of learning about others, and came around to a concurrent goal of knowing about ourselves” (p. 126). It included researching the cultures of students, reading and discussing literature about racial history and racial identity, and examining majority constructs such as white privilege and racism.

Swaim’s article is full of quotes from teachers, most of whom are white women teaching in majority-minority schools, about how their understanding of race and culture changed as a result of their reading and research. Swaim echoes Gorski (2011) in observing that

These teachers show change in one of the most important aspects of behavior in building a successful classroom for all students: knowing who they are themselves. Their responses show honesty about race that is basic to building relationships of trust and interest and thus starting students on the complex road to success. (Swaim, 2011, pp. 127-128)

The final component of Swaim’s course was an action research project in which teachers explored how concrete changes in their behavior and instruction would impact student success. Several of the teachers focused their research on using students’ academic and cultural strengths to promote success, rather than focusing on remediating student weaknesses. One ESOL teacher, who “knew students had stories to tell”, found that through using dialogue journals, students discovered purpose for written and oral language, students’ personal stories could be connected to course content, and the class as a whole became more cohesive (Swaim, 2011, pp. 129-130).

Both *Assault on Kids* and *Gaining on the Gap* focus on the dangers of blaming students and their cultures for educational inequalities and on the benefits of a broader, more relativistic understanding of cultural dynamics. Both books carry the message that understanding the systematic societal and institutional basis of inequality is the cornerstone of any reform effort—whether national, district-wide, or within a single classroom. The provocative critical theory of *Assault on Kids* is a robust complement to the practical case study narrative of *Gaining on the Gap*. Together they forge a sound foundation for understanding the true relationship between culture and achievement.

Gorski, P. C. (2011). Unlearning deficit ideology and the scornful gaze: Thoughts on authenticating the class discourse in education. In R. Ahlquist, P. C. Gorski & T. Montaño (Eds.), *Assault on kids: How hyper-accountability, corporatization, deficit ideologies, and Ruby Payne are destroying our schools* (pp. 152-173). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Swaim, M. (2011). Teaching across cultures. In R. G. Smith, A. L. Crawley, C. Robinson, T. Cotman, Jr., M. Swaim & P. Strand (Eds.), *Gaining on the gap: Changing hearts, minds and practice* (pp. 123-146). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jo Tyler is professor of linguistics and education at the University of Mary Washington and chair of the VATESOL Teacher Education/Program Administration Special Interest Group.

Sanford

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The students and their instructors are to be commended for their efforts. The essays reflected thoughtful consideration of the contest theme and presented their unique perspective as language students. All contestants received a certificate of participation.

Many thanks also go to the essay readers: **Liz Bowles, Leslie Bohon-Atkinson, Angeliqe Clarke, Susan Neu, Elsie Paredes, Audrey Short, and Kama Weatherholt**. I don't think our readers were expecting quite so many papers to evaluate, but they all graciously completed a long and hard task at an especially busy time of the year! Special thanks go to Audrey Short and **Laura Ray** for their guidance and generous sharing of information concerning the logistics of this contest. And last, thanks to **Robert Frank**, Director of Longwood's International Affairs, for contributing funds for the monetary prizes.

The first place prize of \$100 was won by Frantzcize Prince of J. Sargeant Reynolds for her essay entitled 'Inclusivity and Advocacy' (see Frantzcize's essay on page 10 of this issue). Frantzcize is from Hinche, Haiti, and arrived in the United States in August, 2011. She left her country after the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, and benefitted from the support of the I Have A Dream Foundation from Richmond, Virginia. Currently she is enrolled in J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. Frantzcize did volunteer work in a clinic in her home city, Hinche, and she spent one year in the nursing school before coming to the U.S. Her goal is to become a nurse and help women in Haiti in the safe delivery of their children. "I am the kind of person who likes to share her thoughts and express herself through writing," says Suze. "My motivation to write this essay derived from my appreciation for the theme, Advocacy and Inclusivity. It is a good reminder that we should show compassion and understanding to the people around us every single day."

Two students, Abeer Almaimouni, from the Blacksburg Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute, and Carine Bucibaruta, of J. Sargeant Reynolds, tied for second place and received \$75 for their winning essays. Abeer Almaimouni submitted an essay entitled 'ESL Students, Campus, and Community.' Abeer, an electrical engineer from Kuwait, has always been passionate about her studies. After obtaining her bachelor's degree from Kuwait University (KU), she worked part-time as a teaching assistant at KU and then as a trainee engineer in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. She then took a more challenging job as an electrical maintenance engineer at Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). Abeer states, "The fact that I was the first female engineer in the Electrical Maintenance Division represented a major challenge to me. I had to work in a very male-dominant working environment, and I needed to work in hazardous areas and very harsh physical conditions. After working for two and a half years in the maintenance field, I had earned a great deal of respect from my colleagues and my superiors for my hardworking nature and dedication. Despite being grateful for the opportunities with which I have been presented, I always knew that my passion has always been oriented towards academic work, where my job would revolve around teaching and research work." After completing a research fellowship at MIT in the summer of 2012, Abeer enrolled in the VTLCI to study academic English. She completed her English studies this May (2012) and will start graduate work in electrical engineering this fall at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Carine Bucibaruta, currently a student at J. Sargeant Reynolds, tied for

Tasty Teaching Tip

Nancy Ball

Students in my adult education ESOL classes love candy. Here's an idea using Starburst candy in a conversation activity.

Have students stand in pairs in a large circle around the classroom. Give each student a Starburst fun pack (two candies). One student from each pair unwraps a candy. When that student pops the candy in her mouth, her partner must begin to talk and continue to talk until her partner's candy is all swallowed. The speaker can choose any topic or you can set a topic or verb tense to practice. For example, tell students to use past tense to tell their partner what they did last weekend. The student who is chewing on the Starburst only listens and does not speak. When the candy piece is finished, the partners switch roles. The speaker becomes the listener while eating his piece of candy. Then rotate partners and do again. This activity sparks lots of speaking practice and plenty of laughter too! Look for bags of Starburst fun size packs on sale after Easter and Halloween.

Nancy Ball teaches adult education ESOL classes in Fredericksburg.

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Sanford

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second place with her essay, 'Being an Advocate for HIV/AIDS Patients.' Carine came to the U.S. from Burundi, a small and beautiful country in East Africa, in 2010. She still remembers the difficulties she had speaking English when she first started to work in the U.S. She decided to take English language classes and enrolled in the ESL evening program at Mont Vernon Middle School. Now she is a student at JSR and plans to enroll in the nursing program once she finishes her ESL classes. Currently, Carine works as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Manor Care. Concerning her essay, Carine stated, "What motivated me to write about this topic is the fact that in my country HIV patient are still very discriminated in family, at job, and in their communities. My aunt and her children were among them. I wanted to tell their stories so that this would never happen again."

Hamdan Alhosani, a student at the Falls Church VTLCI, received \$50 for his third place essay, 'ESL Community and Inclusion.' Hamdan comes from the United Arab Emirates where he received a prestigious Distinguished Student Scholarship, awarded to only twelve high school graduates throughout the UAE each year. Hamdan completed the advanced level at the VTLCI with perfect attendance over four terms of study, and a 4.0 GPA. This fall, he will enroll in Virginia Tech in the mechanical engineering program. Hamdan has always enjoyed science and won several global competitions while in high school. He likes the state of Virginia because it is beautiful, and the people are friendly.

Linda Sanford is the Assistant Director for Academics at the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute.

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Saturday, October 6, 2012

*OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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*For more information on registration and hotel reservation,
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Clarke

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While we can fully sympathize with such feelings, we must find a way to overcome such barriers in order to help the student improve academically. In trying to resolve this problem, I have found two strategies that my students enjoy which have stopped the refusal to read problem I was facing. The two strategies, my teaching tips for the month, are Bump Reading (some people call it Popcorn Reading) and Read and Recite.

Before I begin explaining these strategies, I feel the need to say that, as a professional, you must make a decision to do what works for you and your students. Recently, I was told in a workshop that my use of one of the strategies (Bump Reading) has been research proven not to work; yet, it has worked beautifully in my classroom. It has not only kept students engaged, but they were able to answer formative and summative questions about the material after the activity.

Bump Reading is a whole class activity. To set this up, I explain what we will be reading about in class and why I want them to read it. Then, I tell students that they must read a minimum of one complete sentence. After they have read, they may bump to any of their classmates. I allow students to bump in the middle of sentences. (This keeps everyone focused). If a student cannot read the very next word after someone has bumped the reading to him, he has to stand until a classmate is willing to bump to him again. The students love trying to catch their peers not paying attention! I always start reading first because I want students to hear what good reading sounds like. Before I bump to someone, I remind students that we all struggle with reading sometimes, and we should help each other pronounce the difficult words. (Occasionally I mess up on purpose so students have to "help" me). Students request this activity frequently. So, despite being told that I should abandon this strategy, I will continue to pull this out of my teacher toolbox along with the use of other strategies.

The second activity that I do is called Read and Recite. In this activity, I pair readers together. One student becomes Student A, while the other becomes Student B. Student A reads the first paragraph. When Student A finishes, Student B must paraphrase or recite what they learned from Student A. Then, Student B reads and Student A paraphrases. My job is to walk around and monitor students and their progress. I ask students questions to check for their understanding while I monitor. I like this strategy because more students get to read. Plus, it allows ESOL students to work on their speaking skills when completing the recitation part of the activity.

Reading is fundamental to academic success. If you have a favorite strategy to share, e-mail me at angeliqueclarke@gmail.com for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Angelique Clarke is a nationally board-certified teacher at Chesterfield Community High School.

Zurat

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What a surprise to see a thick dictionary-shaped hardcover book. It took two hands to pick it up! How could this be a picture book? They must be kidding. What I found were pages and pages of ONLY pictures, black and white superb pencil sketches with incredible detail. Series of text followed the pictures.

Although the book is listed as historical fiction and a graphic novel, it is based on the true life of genius French filmmaker, Georges Méliés. He is known as the father of special effects, being the first to use time-lapse photography and multi-exposures in 1896. After a highly successful film career, Méliés fell into poverty just prior to World War I, sadly living as a candy and toy salesman in a French train station till his death. The events in the story closely parallel these later events.

After extensive research in France, author Brian Selznick put together a series of sketches that tell a story as if one were watching a silent movie! The plot involves a mystery involving secret plans to get an automaton, a mechanical man, restored after a tragic fire, orphaning poor Hugo.

For a non-reader, or Level 1 ESOL student, regardless of age, this is an incredible teaching tool. You will find your student, young or adult, drawn into the story from the vibrant, tender drawings. This book was made into a movie and received five Academy Awards this year! You can read it aloud and discuss the pictures, with the option of showing the movie. Martin Scorsese bought the screen rights. Should I say more? This is a gem in any classroom. Enjoy!

Selznick, B. (2007). *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Carol Zurat is the VATESOL Elementary Education Special Interest Group Chair.

New American Horizons – A Review

Daniela C. Wagner-Loera

The New American Horizons Foundation, founded in 2009, is a nonprofit team project that offers easily accessible and affordable language training for Teachers of Adult English learners worldwide. Their goal is to help teachers assist immigrants in adjusting to their new lives. New American Horizons offers video lessons to allow teachers of adult language learners to improve their teaching strategies from the convenience of their homes. The foundation is copyrighted by Creative Commons and currently works with eight expert teachers and their students. The main direction is in the hand of a team of four, one of which is MaryAnn Flores who works as Program Coordinator for Fairfax County Public Schools, VA.

The goal of New American Horizons is to support teachers in helping students to fully participate in the US society. In order to successfully participate in everyday life, students need to gain speaking and listening skills, as well as literacy skills. The professional videos offer teachers an opportunity to view certain strategies and ideas and learn their benefits and learning outcomes through observation of classes in session.

The critical shortage of Adult ESOL classes and teachers will now be bridged by New American Horizons. The videos demonstrate not only the actual classroom activities, but also the lesson outcomes and explanations thereof. Observing and understanding how the lessons are built and what the outcomes are, will help teachers to strengthen their own classrooms and improve their own teaching skills.

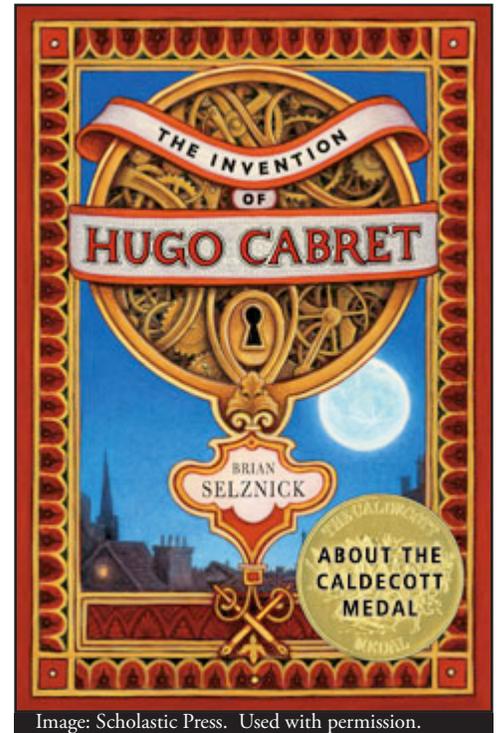


Image: Scholastic Press. Used with permission.

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After watching a few of the available videos on the website <http://www.newamericanhorizons.org/training-videos>, it becomes clear that the experience for the viewer is extraordinary. The lessons are clearly introduced, and while the class is in action in the background, the teacher explains what strategies will be used and why. The video of the class will be interrupted to explain further how the instructor has designed the lesson and what the benefits are. This can be helpful for teachers of any academic background. Whether you have a certificate or a full TESOL degree, anyone can learn from observing a coworker.

New American Horizons offers a unique and affordable way of professional development for Adult ESOL teachers worldwide. The videos are available either online for free or can be ordered as DVDs (at material cost) to be used in teacher training. Currently 3 volumes with a total of 8 different titles are available for teacher training. What a wonderful project; I strongly recommend that every teacher, not just Adult Ed teachers, take a look at New American Horizons.

Daniela Wagner-Loera is an instructor at the Intensive English Program at the University of Maryland.

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The VATESOL Newsletter is published quarterly.

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Editors: Brendan Downey, Paul Philips, & Audrey Short

Contact us: vatesol.news@gmail.com

YOUR

AD

HERE

2012 AWARD-WINNING PAPER

Inclusivity and Advocacy

Frantzize Prince

Imagine living in a world where even a single smile can make somebody's day, or helping someone on a project that can make them feel special. What about standing for what you believe, such as fighting for equality? Well, there are many ways you can make a change in your life and the life of others if you really believe in yourself.

First of all, far too often we ignore the small things that can make a change in somebody's life. For example, if you see physically disabled persons, you can open the door for them or allow them to be first in line. I remember after the earthquake, in January 2010, in my country, Haiti, almost all my classmates lost parts of their body. In the beginning it was very difficult for them to accept their handicap. Because of that, I felt I had to spend all my time with them, letting them know that missing a part of your body doesn't mean that life has come to an end. One of my classmates, Sandra Pierre, lost both her legs. That was a very difficult situation for a 19-year old so I kept telling her that it was going to be alright. I always tried to make her laugh telling her that the most important thing was that she was alive, and that as long as there is life, there is hope. I tried to help her regain her confidence, and I showed her that I still had the same love for her. Even smiling at someone can really brighten their day.

Secondly, everybody is equal no matter their race, gender, or age. You should never say you are better than somebody else because you're not, we are all equal. At school you can help your peers feel they belong by cheering them on during school activities, sharing your ideas with them, and being open to embrace their ideas. You should never laugh at someone's opinion because that can hurt his or her feelings. Everyone has the right to express his or her opinion. I love everybody like I love myself because I consider each individual a miracle. From my experience, I've noticed that I am truly free in my mind and heart when I share my love with the people around me. I remember when I was in twelfth grade that I was the only one in that class who did not have any enemies, so I was free to talk and smile at my classmates. I always had a smile on my face because they were all my friends and our love was mutual. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Last but not least, voicing your opinion is important but it is more effective when more than one voice come together. Share your ideas and be prepared for accepting somebody else's opinion: take it and try to understand their own angle of looking at things. When you are at school and you witness people bullying someone don't laugh at them; get involved and try to talk them out of it. For example, in my country French is our second language but in order to speak French you need to go to school. So, they do a kind of discrimination as not everybody can attend school regularly, and kids laugh about other people's mistakes in using French. As it is shameful if you cannot speak French, some students stay quiet for the whole class because they are afraid of making mistakes. Even at church some people are excluded because of this language barrier. As for me, I speak French only with people I should speak French and never laugh at other people's mistakes. This means to be a leader, not a follower. We must accept that God has created everyone equal.

In conclusion, it can take you a second to make a change, but it could affect a person for a lifetime. Never think you are better than somebody else. Think of love as the number one goal in your life. When people voice their opinion, don't be rude, and remember to be nice to the elderly, the disabled, and the destitute. We are all equal and we should be treated equal. Let's live up to Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. Our dream should be to show compassion and understanding to the people around us every single day.

Frantzize Prince is a student in ESL 51 – Composition III at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. This essay is her original work and it has been revised by her professor for content, organization and clarity.

Prof. Heana Baird

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