

VATESOL Newsletter

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2006 - 2007

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President's Message

Judy Marlow

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SUMMERTIME – for me a time to finally DISconnect from stresses and responsibilities that have dominated my life at school for the past 10 months. Many of us in VATESOL have the luxury of an academic school year that gives us time to relax, retreat, recreate and renew our energy so we can REconnect when the school year starts again. What a blessing! For those 12-month VATESOL educators who keep the systems going all year long, I say THANK YOU, and may you also be blessed with opportunities to renew your energy.

Last week, on July 4th, I took a little road trip in the Blue Ridge Mountains, to visit 4 of the 6 rock-faced churches that are part of the story of the remarkable ministry of Robert W. Childress, also told in the book, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain*, during the first half of the 20th Century.

Shrouded in the mists of the Virginia Blue Ridge is a place called Buffalo Mountain. On a clear day you can see its rounded summit some five miles west of the Parkway. From that distance it is not an impressive peak. But to the people who have lived within its long shadows it casts a powerful spell...

Walled in by surrounding hills, the people of the Buffalo lived in a land of Brigadoon, captive to the unchanging ways of generations past. Theirs was a heritage of proud independence – but also of poverty and ignorance, fear and superstition, violence and sudden death...

(From Prologue, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain*, Richard C. Davids)

I read this book a few months ago and was

impressed by the power that emerges when people make connections with one another. Young Bob Childress was educated by a missionary teacher and sent to The Hollow from Guilford College. The relationship that Bob had with this teacher inspired him to seek further education beyond his geographical and cultural home. Eventually, he became a minister, and for 30 years provided education, and spiritual and social leadership for people living in rural isolation in this Blue Ridge Mountain area of southwest Virginia. He helped feed and clothe the poor, comforted the indigent and awakened lives. He helped secure improved transportation, such as roads and bridges financed by government funds during the Depression.

Bob Childress had incredible energy - way more than I could ever hope to have. But what he also had, that many of the teachers I know model daily, was an openness and ability to make connections with people in and beyond his community. As educators in 2007 we connect to students, teachers, administrators, families, social service agencies, legislators and of course to one another.

The fall VATESOL Conference will have CONNECTIONS as its theme. How we connect to one another varies according to our work situations and personal preferences, but the need to connect is always present. Our students benefit from the connections we make with one another as we learn new ways to use technology, communicate with administrators and legislators, share our personal teaching strengths and stories and discover that we have much in common with other VATESOL members throughout the state.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Richmond on October 6. We will renew friendships, strengthen our connections and

empower one another to continue teaching students, who will teach others, and perhaps eventually move mountains in their own lives.



Vice-President's Message—Fall Conference

Kieran Hilu

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Please reserve the date of **Saturday, October 6th** to join us in Richmond for the annual VATESOL Conference! Our focus this year will be "**Connections**" - We felt that so often we are engrossed in our own work, it is easy to become isolated and lose touch with what is happening in other areas of ESL around the state. It is our hope that with this conference, we can strengthen connections and learn how to more easily make new connections.

Our **keynote speaker, Dr. Gary Sarkozi** from VCU, will address how we can use technology better in communicating with each other and our students. We are also planning a panel discussion involving professionals in several areas relevant to refugee and immigration concerns, with break out sessions following. We will have a **Share Fair** so participants can present posters or share favorite ideas for teaching and learning. And, as important--if not more so--will be the presentations from fellow professionals around the state.

We encourage you to share your expertise this October. You have until **the end of July** to send in your idea for a poster/share fair idea or a proposal to present a session - we are planning for 20 sessions and want to hear from everyone in all SIG areas!

This is a chance to connect, re-connect, network, and broaden our understandings and re-energize - in a city with great restaurants and shopping. We have secured special rates from two hotels, including the historic Linden Row Inn and are planning a dinner experience for Friday night for those interested in exploring local ethnic restaurants. The conference should be great, so mark you calendars and **plan to "connect" in Richmond this October!**

!!NOTE: proposal form and other information is located at the VATESOL website!!

www.vatesol.org

Membership Report

Jen Kuchno

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New Application Form: *There is a new form that combines both the membership application and conference registration. Please note that there are two pages to the form. If at all possible, please submit only one form and one check. The membership year on the application has been changed to October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008 to comply with the VATESOL Bylaws (Article I).*

Membership Promoters: In 2006-2007, VATESOL had only 164 members. We need you to help promote VATESOL! This is your association. To address the need for VATESOL membership promotion, the Membership

Coordinator is seeking volunteer Membership Promoters to serve on the VATESOL Membership Committee. Promoters are needed for Higher Ed./Intensive English Programs, Adult Education, and K-12 ESL Programs. No experience needed. All work can be done via the Internet and e-mail.

Welcome! Please welcome Stephanie Knackstedt, our first Membership Promoter! Stephanie's role will be to promote VATESOL in Virginia ESL teacher education programs (students) and in Virginia Community Colleges' ESL programs (teachers). Stephanie graduated from Virginia Tech in 2001 and is currently a graduate student at Marymount University in Arlington where she is completing her M.ED in ESL. If your school district, university, or college has information for Stephanie, please contact her at: stephanie_knackstedt@marymount.edu.

SIGS: We have two new SIGS to try to meet the needs of our members. The Board has approved a Rural Programs SIG and a Technology SIG. Members may now sign up for two SIGS. If you are interested in leading one of these SIGS, let us know. We are also seeking SIG leaders. This is a fun way to get involved. Almost all the work is online via e-mail.

Treasurer's Report

Kathleen Cahoon

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We have a balance of \$4963. 23.
Since December last year, we have taken in \$739.50 in membership dues.

Meeting the Challenge of Content Instruction

Based on Keynote Talk. VATESOL Conference 2006

NOTE: We are reprinting the address by Judith O'Loughlin, published in the November 2006 newsletter, because she has sent us additional information that was not provided in that article. We hope you enjoy reading this piece again, with information that had been missing now included.

In the January 30, 2006 **New York Times**, Bob Herbert reported in an article entitled "The Lost Children," that big city high schools with large numbers of Latinos are "hemorrhaging students." Describing Latino and other minority students as children who "fall through the cracks," Herbert stated several startling statistics. Only one-twelfth of all Latino students in the U.S. acquire college degrees. Even more startling is the fact that only 1/2 of all Latino students entering ninth grade ever graduate from high school. Minority students, who drop out of high school, Herbert states, are much less likely to be regularly employed, own a decent home, ever marry, or escape poverty. They are much more likely to end up in prison. *

With school age population projections that certain U.S. states in all regions will have enrollments consisting of up to 50% minority students by the year 2050, and that Virginia will have 30-40% of its students from minority backgrounds, there is certainly much to think about. How do we keep minority children, and specifically, language minority children from "falling through the cracks?"

Picture the world of language minority children as symbolically represented by "two cups of tea." In the first cup of tea, ELLs converse socially about tea, drinking it, types of tea, the taste of tea, and other such topics. This social conversation might occur, as do

most social conversations, in a face-to-face setting, in which students can visually determine if they were understood, can make repair, and can enhance conversation with intonation, hand gestures, and realia.

In our second “cup of tea” students are in middle or high school U.S. history class, in a lesson, which might occur any time during the fall of any school year. Students are asked to read a passage about The Boston Tea Party in their textbooks. They are confronted with a text dense with unfamiliar vocabulary [e.g. consumption, taxation, representation, protest, etc.]. They must also face complex sentence structure, often with a variety of tenses in the same sentence, frequent use of the passive voice, few visuals that support comprehension, and a text filled with references to unfamiliar past events.

Although learning about and remembering the events leading up to the Boston Tea Party ends when students leave the academic environment of school, the skills needed to read, comprehend, and interpret information are needed for life after school. Think back on Herbert’s startling information about “the lost children.” Without learning academic language, represented in such lessons, how will minority students, who leave school before graduation, develop the ability use the academic functions of English. In school students learn how to not only acquire information, but also to combine information in various ways—sequencing, classifying, combining it to identify patterns, determine solutions, predict outcomes and implications, justify decisions---all skills needed for employment and survival in the “real world” outside of school.

The frustration for many English Language Learners and their teachers is that, although social language develops within one to three years, academic language takes up to seven years and beyond. To facilitate the

development of academic competence in English or any second language requires, what Jim Cummins refers to as “embedded” language learning instruction. Embedded academic learning means that the learning materials, textbooks, instructional sequence, and the instructional classroom are “embedded” by the teacher with visuals, manipulatives, word walls, supplementary support materials [e.g. alternative texts, bilingual dictionaries, technology websites, etc.] and strategies instruction.

The importance of embedded instruction becomes quite clear when you only look at the challenges for a content area, such as mathematics usually thought of as easy for second language learners—after all, isn’t mathematics a universal language? Then, why is mathematics so difficult for English Language Learners?

English language learners:

1. Have limited experience in applying reading comprehension strategies, such as inferring and determining essential information. There is a direct correlation with identifying key information and mathematics proficiency.
2. Have limited mathematic vocabulary. Everyday language takes on a more specific meaning in content learning
3. Have varied background knowledge and experiences that may be a mismatch to American culture.
4. Have difficulty understanding the complex syntax of mathematics within word problems, inability to understand and interpret logical connectors [e.g. then or so]

What can teachers do to meet and overcome the challenges of content instruction? To begin, instruction should both address content and language needed to access content. Teaching the language of the content, not isolated discrete-point language skills provides students with a real purpose for learning. The National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] recently published a position paper on the "Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs." In the paper the NCTE made the following recommendations on selecting materials for instruction of ELLs, as well as the implications for the focus on instruction, in the language arts/English classroom:

Choose:

1. A variety of texts around a theme
2. Texts at different levels of difficulty
3. Reading and writing materials that represent the cultures of the students in the classroom
4. Materials that represent both literature and informational texts
5. Texts with natural language
6. Texts with nonlinguistic cues that support comprehension

In addition, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach [C.A.L.L.A.] and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol [S.I.O.P.] research indicate the importance of developing a systematic lesson plan that introduces language and content objectives to students to set the purposes of and for learning. Both lesson plan sequences indicate that students need an introductory part of the lesson that builds background knowledge, concepts and vocabulary that links current learning to

past learning and world knowledge. Although English Language Learners cannot speak English, they do have a wealth of background experiences and world knowledge in their first language. Specific strategies instruction should be modeled and taught, as well as practiced in cooperative grouping configurations. Finally, review and assessment should be an ongoing process to assess comprehension, language development, and allow for re-teaching and adapting strategies instruction to lesson revisions.

English Language Learners need to learn through an integrated approach that teaches both content and language together. They need to learn through an approach that taps into their strengths as learners, respects their culture and language, provides them with opportunities to interact in the classroom, and uses multiple learning modalities and a variety of materials. In this way we empower and enable English language learners to use strategies on their own, to learn in the classroom, and not "fall through the cracks."

Article Resources:

www.ncte.org

www.phschool.com/professional_development/earning_strategies/short_takes.html

www.siopinstitute.net

www.cal.org

[http://www-](http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/research/crede/index.html)

[gse.berkeley.edu/research/crede/index.html](http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/research/crede/index.html)

<http://calla.ws/>

* The **NY Times** article is referenced in this article. The most accurate numbers and statistics about the U.S., regions, and by state can be found at the Office of English Language Acquisition website.

The statistical information there represents data on English Language Learners. Mr. Herbert's article "The Lost Children" looked at all Latino students, not just those who were

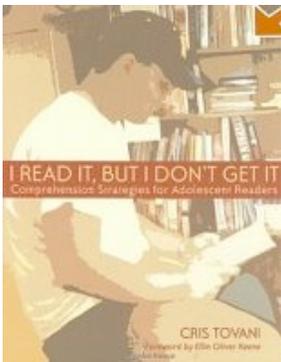
currently English Language Learners. You can access those statistics at:
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/stats/>

"Fake Reading" Strategies for ELLs

Jo Tyler

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A few weeks ago I read a book entitled *I Read It, but I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*, by Cris Tovani



(Stenhouse, 2000). It is a short book of 140 pages, written by an experienced reading teacher, with occasional citations to research and almost no mention of English language learners. It did not leave much of an impression when I first

read it. A short while after reading it, though, I began to be haunted by one of the main themes of the book that speaks directly to a key issue in TESOL, especially in this era of standardized testing and No Child Left Behind. I will get to that shortly.

The book begins with a scenario from the first day in Tovani's high school class for struggling readers. She comes to class knowing that the students don't want to be there and that they resent being labeled "poor readers." But she surprises them.

"I never read a book from cover to cover until I was in college," she confesses; "I hated to read and I found lots of ways to get by without reading." After the students' initial skepticism, Tovani engages them in a discussion of some of the strategies they use to pass a test or write a report "without reading the book."

"I get the Cliff Notes!"

"I ask my friends to tell me what's in it!"

"I skim the back cover and the first and last chapter!"

"I go to the video store and rent the movie!"

To each of these strategies, Tovani declares, "That's what I used to do," and she sometimes trumps them with even more devious strategies of her own. She acknowledges the students' ingenuity in finding successful short cuts and substitutions for reading, strategies she refers to as "fake reading." Finally, she tells her students that in this class they will learn some more strategies, but they will not be strategies for "fake reading" (the students are already experts at that); instead, they are strategies for really comprehending what they read.

The remainder of the book describes those strategies and the methods used by Tovani to engage these skeptical, resentful students in making meaning from text. There's nothing new here—strategies like contrastive text analysis, think-aloud protocols, and word study have been around for a while. It wasn't until some time after reading the book that I found myself thinking more and more about her first chapter and the strategies for "fake reading." Something was troubling me, but it took a while to figure out what.

In the meantime, I read an article entitled "Generation 1.5 Students and College Writing" (Harklau, 2003). The term *generation 1.5* refers to English language learners who have graduated from U.S. high schools but enter college with minimal language skills needed for academic success, especially in writing. In essence they are unable to "show what they know" in writing, a critical skill for success after high school.

While the majority of native English-speaking high school graduates enter college ready to utilize and hone these academic language skills, generation 1.5 is left behind. In order to fulfill the spirit of NCLB, K-12 ESOL

programs need to address this readiness issue and ensure that English language learners have the skills to advance their education after high school (Hartman & Tarone, 1999, as cited in Harklau, 2003, p. 2). Citing Blanton (1999), Harklau emphasizes the importance of critical literacy in K-12 ESOL programs:

. . . critical literacy makes a crucial difference in academic success because it involves more than learning to read and write. It demands that students be able to engage in questioning, discussing, evaluating, and writing about what they have read. (Harklau, 2003, p. 2)

Questioning, discussing, evaluating . . . these are precisely the strategies that Tovani emphasizes in her book on reading comprehension. To me, the most important of these is questioning. In fact, one of the “fake reading” strategies that Tovani describes being used by struggling readers is *not* questioning, which is effective because it helps them read faster and even to pass fluency tests. Her students, she explains, assume that having questions is a sign of being a poor reader, and they arrive at this assumption logically from their experience—students ask questions when they don’t understand something, so in order to “fake” comprehension, a good strategy is to not ask any questions.

In contrast, Tovani clearly describes how proficient readers constantly ask questions while reading, and she explains that this mental questioning process is precisely what makes them proficient—it is the central core of reading comprehension: “What’s going to happen next?” “How can this be true?” “Why did he/she say that?” This questioning strategy provides a mental framework for understanding text while reading. If you read without thinking about questions like these, you may be an efficient reader, but not a proficient one. Questioning is how one gains knowledge—it is what makes people understand more, not what shows that they understand less.

At last I have arrived at the crux of the problem for ELLs that had been nagging me since reading the first chapter of Tovani’s book. What kinds of critical literacy strategies are ELLs learning in school? Are they learning how to ask questions to construct meaning, or are they learning that questions should be avoided as a sign of incomprehension and something that slows down the fluency rate? Are they learning how to engage with ideas in a text or are they learning the strategies of “fake reading”? Cliff Notes, skimming, and watching a video may be effective reading scaffolds for ELLs; they can help students with limited English pass the standardized tests designed for native speakers. But if these are the strategies that ELLs are taught to rely on permanently, then they are not taught the skills needed to advance after high school. Instead they are taught strategies that will leave them behind.

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

References

- Harklau, Linda. (2003, October). *Generation 1.5 students and college writing*. Digest EDO-FL-03-05. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. Retrieved June 22, 2007, from <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0305harklau.html>
- Tovani, Cris. (2000). *I Read It, but I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

VATESOL

Utilizing ODU's Student Activity Hour in the Listening/Speaking Curriculum

Karen Medina, Ed.D.

The problem: At the English Language Center (ELC) at Old Dominion University (ODU), we were aware that many Intensive English students felt disconnected from normal student life at the university. They were not only concerned about their general comprehension (and comprehensibility), but they did not understand body language, or how to make small talk, for example. Use of differing registers in a variety of social interactions was similarly a mystery, along with their discomfort with using the telephone. At the same time, staff and instructors alike saw the need to modify the curricular content of the on-going speaking/listening classes to better meet the students' practical everyday communicative needs.

The history: Speaking/listening classes are conducted on a minimum of 5 levels, making use of a variety of graded texts and materials. However, there was little opportunity for students to actually apply what they were learning in class in the college community. In addition the students had often complained of not feeling a part of the university because they could never attend the Thursday Activity Hour wherein the regular ODU students had the opportunity to meet with their various clubs and activities. This was because the lack of classroom space necessitated ELC use of classrooms when they were most available, and the activity hour allowed for many empty classrooms which could be used. One staff member and one faculty member decided to try to address both challenges by canceling formal Listening/Speaking classes during the Activity Hour so that students could use the time to

interact instead with the campus community, utilizing especially designed and level-appropriate exercises created by their instructors. These included attending lectures by visiting faculty and university counseling services, along with participating in activities available to all students such as the annual organization fair. The director requested that pre-and-post student surveys be taken in order to gauge the effectiveness of the experiment.

Description of steps taken to meet challenge: A simply worded questionnaire was designed to gather student responses to nine separate measures of comfort/discomfort in social situations common to international university students. This was administered during the second week of classes and then again during the last week of class, five weeks later. This was repeated for each of two seven-week spring sessions. Responses were then compared to see if there had been any positive movement in the level of comfort in social interactions and/or feelings of connection to the University community.

Results: Only the responses of students who took both the pre-and-post surveys were tabulated; these numbered 44. The majority of the students (22) were in the Advanced level, 16 were in the two highest levels and 6 in the most basic level. The Intermediate level did not report. Results were analyzed to determine how many students had tabulated an increase in their confidence at the end of the 7-week period, how many recorded no change, and how many actually regressed. The greatest increase in student confidence were noted by responses to the following questions:

1. I know/don't know what ODU campus activities are available to me.

36% of the students reported a change in response from "don't know" to "know."

2. I know/don't know when it is O.K. to use bad language and when it is not.

38% of the students reported a change in response from "don't know" to "know."

3. I feel/don't feel that I am part of the ODU student body.

24% of the students reported a change in response from "don't feel" to "feel."

4. When I go to a party, I can/cannot make "small talk."

23% of the students reported a change in response from "cannot" to "can."

5. I usually can/cannot understand what Americans are thinking by their body language.

23% of the students reported a change in response from "cannot" to "can."

Significance: As can be seen from the above, only a small proportion of the students reported a significant change in their comfort level in 5 of the 9 measures. The majority of students appeared not to have experienced much change in their degree of comfort, and some students even reported a decrease in confidence. Students did not report much change on questions which measured their general comfort level talking with Americans whether in person, or on the telephone. They remained unsure about understanding directions and in how to go about asking for oral clarification of speech which they misunderstood. However, when small groups of students were gathered into informal focus groups during the first spring session, they expressed great satisfaction with the change in the listening/speaking curriculum which allowed them to make use of the activity hour. They

uniformly reported this as helping them to feel more a part of the larger university. However, these students did self-select to be members of the focus groups.

What we learned: We learned that most students did not rate themselves highly on the nine measures when they were first surveyed and the majority did not report a significant change after seven weeks of the new student activity hour component. Students in the three upper levels reported experiencing a greater increase in confidence than did those in the lowest level. This might suggest that the Advanced I students, who reported the greatest amount of favorable change, might be particularly ready to profit by the added opportunities to interact with native speakers. Because the student body was more fluid

From the first spring session to the second, (unlike the fall), it was not possible to locate enough students who had been both surveyed in the earlier spring session as well as the latter. As a result, the majority of students surveyed had only been with the program for seven weeks. It would be useful to repeat the experiment in the fall, pre-testing in early September and then again not until mid-December when classes end, when it could be supposed that more students might have begun to experience an increase in confidence levels. These informal survey results will help in future planning for this aspect of the Listening/Speaking curriculum.

VATESOL

Why Join VATESOL?

- Build your professional ESL resume by getting involved in a TESOL affiliate
- Network with other ESL professionals
- Gain access to the member-only VATESOL LISTSERV and job postings in Virginia and beyond
- Access the VATESOL web site and newsletter
- Apply for Mini-grants for professional development/research
- Volunteer Opportunities (many positions can be done online)
- Discounts on VATESOL conferences
- Membership \$15.00/regular and \$7.50/ students
- Free memberships for student volunteers
- Get the 2007-2008 Membership/Conference application forms online at www.vatesol.org.

available at
<http://www.tesol.org/PositionStatements>.

John Segota

For a look at our past VATESOL Newsletters, go to our website:
www.vatesol.org



TESOL Position Statement on Teacher Credentialing

At its recent meeting, the TESOL Board of Directors approved TESOL's Position Statement on Teacher Credentialing for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages in Primary and Secondary Schools. The full statement is