



TEAL NEWS

ASSOCIATION OF B.C. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

June 2006

TEAL 2006 Conference

The Conference That Was Conference Co-Chair Reminisces

*By Karen Brooke
Second Vice-president
Conference Co-chair*

Another conference has come and gone! The 2006 Annual TEAL conference took place on March 9, 10, and 11 at the King Edward Campus at VCC. The theme this year was “The Cycle of Knowledge”. We had 224 people attend on Friday, and 185 on Saturday, for a total of 298 people.

This was my second year organizing the conference, and it was certainly a lot easier this time around, as I had a much better idea of what to expect on the big weekend and what to do to make things run a little more smoothly.

We also had a great team of volunteers this year who put in long hours making everything happen. You may have seen these hard working people at the registration desk, wheeling around televisions, helping with technical problems, serving food at the wine and cheese, and cleaning up after the event was over. Most volunteers didn’t get to attend all of the workshops, and many of us didn’t get to attend any at all! But I really feel that it is the volunteers, and in particular Mary Lovelace and myself, the conference chairs, who got the most out of the conferences.

For the past two years I have had the opportunity to work closely with some of the most dedicated people in the field



Nearly 300 participants attended workshops like this one during the March TEAL 2006 Conference

as we planned the annual conferences. I have corresponded with some of the most passionate teachers I have ever met. These people chose to advance the standards of English language teaching by presenting workshops to their colleagues, sharing how they had developed as educators. They came from all sectors of the language teaching profession: from private schools, ELSA programs, and public colleges, from Vancouver, from other parts of BC and Canada, and even from other countries. I also had a chance to work closely with people in the ESL field who are not directly involved in teaching. I have got

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Teaching Tips Ideas?

We have a new column planned for future newsletters – Teaching Tips! These tried-and-proven tips will come from you, the teachers of BC TEAL. If you’d like to share ideas with others, please contact Vivian Chu at globalun@telus.net

BC TEAL Conference

... from page one



ten to know software developers, publishers, test designers, and school administrators from many different institutions as we worked to do all of the planning that led up to the big weekend. For me, the conference is the time when I finally get to put faces to the hundreds of names I've learned through e-mail contact.

I won't pretend that planning a conference isn't a lot of work. Some times in the months before the event, I was quite sure that I would lose my mind! But I am also sure that I got far more out of the experience than I put in. I now have a much broader understanding of the ESL field in the province. I feel that I can walk into almost any institution in Vancouver and know at least a few of the teachers and administrators working there. And most of all, through the contact I have had with the most dedicated teachers in the profession, I have constantly had my own passion for teaching renewed. It's a great feeling! I hope that everyone involved with TEAL will consider volunteering at least a bit of their time. The rewards are well worth it!

Join a SIG

Interested in coordinating or joining a SIG? Contact admin@bcteal.org for more information.

Connecting to Culture through Print Media

Reviewed by *Cristina Peralejo*

One of the challenges that ESL teachers are faced with is how to instill a sense of connection and appreciation for the host environment that surrounds their students. "Connecting to Culture through Print Media," presented by Erin Melvin of SFU's Language Culture and Interpretation Program successfully demonstrates how this is a possibility.

By totally immersing students in the current print-media that is available to North Americans, Melvin encourages her students to explore aspects of North American culture before dealing with language issues. By doing so, she hopes to bridge the cultural barriers that make it extremely challenging for many ESL students to go beyond the words of a text in order to comprehend its underlying meaning. One of the opening activities of the workshop illustrated this point well when she handed out magazines to each pair and asked everyone in class to come up with a magazine "character study". This involved exploring the magazine and answering such questions as: "What is the price of the magazine? Who is the audience it is intended for? What are these peoples' hobbies?" And even the question, "What do these people fear?"

Upon attending this workshop, I became intrigued by this approach of emphasizing the context of a work, rather than the actual words that make up the work itself. I also recognize the difficulties of attempting such an approach with any class below an intermediate level as the students would not only be quickly overwhelmed by the material, but also lack the language to be able to discuss such topics. One activity involved students examining several articles written about the same topic. The articles, which came from different sources, were written from a variety of viewpoints. Students were then asked to identify words and phrases that alerted them to the author's bias. This exercise would be feasible, but challenging, for even an upper intermediate class.

While many teachers do bring realia such as newspaper or magazine clippings into the classroom, the majority of the passages that they use still come from ESL textbooks where texts have been distilled to suit a variety of levels. This workshop gives ESL teachers good ideas about how to use a variety of authentic material in class in order to help students become better acquainted with North American culture, and ultimately, better language learners.

Connect ESL
www.connectesl.com

A Vancouver-based resource website serving local education professionals and language institutions

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BC TEAL News

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Contributors

We welcome articles of general interest to associated members. All material is submitted to the editorial board before being approved for publication. Copy may be edited for length, style and/or clarity without prior notice to authors. Please be aware that submissions may be reprinted.

Copy should be submitted directly to the editor as an email attachment. Advertising material and inserts must be submitted in JPEG or PDF formats. For information on advertising rates, contact the Advertising Manager or the BC TEAL office.

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We, the Willing

Jeremy Harmer challenges our commitment to language teaching in his keynote address

By John Attard

The title to Jeremy Harmer's keynote speech at this year's BC TEAL annual conference, 'Coalitions of the Willing?' carries that discomfiting interrogation mark which challenges our commitment to the profession of language teaching, both as individuals and collectively. Whether one believes that teacher development happens interactively or intra-actively, the *willing* part can hardly be compromised with.

Harmer was the personification of 'willing' at the conference. He didn't just hobnob with the great and good of the profession as plenary speakers so

so much work for no pay? The answer is quite clearly – they are willing.

For me, this was a period of double inspiration. Harmer's talk coincided more or less with the hundredth anniversary of a publication by one of Jeremy Harmer's most illustrious predecessors, Otto Jespersen. A wonderful article in the IATEFL TTEd SIG Newsletter by Martin McMorrow (2006) celebrates the century since Jespersen's classic oeuvre 'How to Teach a Foreign Language' (*Martin McMorrow's article is reprinted on page 18*)

A hundred years later, Jespersen is as



Jeremy Harmer

Are we all willing? You would have to say 'no' when you consider the attitudes of some parties in the ESL industry. We need to encourage ESL practitioners to join our coalition of teachers at BC TEAL in working towards better teaching quality. We need to persuade schools to uphold education standards in the face of commercial pressures. The reputation of our profession as a rightful member of the education fraternity depends on our willingness to work together toward this goal.

The challenges are great. Yet, inspired by the memory of Jespersen, the presence of Harmer and the strength of both their writings, we soldier on. We do so because we care about language learning and teaching; we do so because we are passionate and enthusiastic about what we do – we do so because we are willing.

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Jespersen, O. *How to Teach a Foreign Language*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1904.

McMorrow, M. "Rereading Jespersen: One Hundred Years On." *The Teacher Trainers and Educators SIG Newsletter* IATEFL: March, 2006.

Harmer didn't just hobnob with the great and good of the profession. He spoke with every teacher who cared to engage, from the newest entrant to the veteran; and he was enthused by it.

often do at such events. He spoke with every teacher who cared to engage, from the newest entrant to the veteran; and he was enthused by it. He spoke of the personal development that comes through engaging with both the great and the great unwashed, teachers and students.

He also spoke of coalitions and what an inspiration they are. It was stirring stuff. Why do people associate the way they do in such a completely altruistic way? Harmer had the perfect example to hand – and he used it. Why should anyone want to organize a conference regardless of the expense in time, effort and money? Why did BC TEAL organizers, helpers and presenters perform

relevant today as he always was, in my view even more so. As ideas came and went, the principles espoused by the great linguist and educator endured. The idolized Communicative Language Approach couldn't take this fort! But most of all McMorrow marvels at Jespersen's enthusiasm for, and dedication to, language, teaching and learning. He was willing and he willed; exhorting teachers to "teach in the right way, then there will be life and love in it all" and "(modern languages) want to be treated as living, and the method of teaching them must be elastic and adaptable as life is restless and variable". The constant reference to "life" in these quotes is testament to the passion with which the great man embraced language.

Reducing the Paperwork Load for English Teachers

Reviewed by Ellen Park

This was a very innovative and inspiring workshop led by Rick Binder of UCFV. He first set the tone of the workshop by getting the 15 or so participants to introduce themselves briefly. I really warmed to his attractive and laid-back personality. I think many of the other participants did too. The whole atmosphere was one of camaraderie and anticipation. This getting-to-know-you was useful later as we got into groups that reflected the level of students we were teaching.

The workshop was based on Mr. Binder's method of classroom peer editing. The editing for essays in his class is done in editing "stations." Each "station" is responsible for looking at one point and one point only, be it topic sentences, number of complex sentences, use of linking devices, etc. This makes it easier for the students to edit as they only need to focus on one thing. In addition, this method makes it possible to group a strong student and a weak student together to work at the same station so that the weaker students have a chance to practice and learn from their peers. Added to this is the fact that each person has to write down their name on every essay that is edited, which establishes accountability. Where a student has a disagreement with or is confused about editing, they can go to the appropriate person and get additional feedback.

This type of peer editing really puts the onus on the students to take responsibility for their work as a writer and as an editor. Moreover, as each student is aware of their audience, they'll be motivated to write better. Last but not least, this decreases the workload for teachers as they can now focus on logical progression, cohesion, unity and other facets of writing.

In this workshop, I worked with teachers who were teaching intermediate level students. We discussed what type of stations we would design for writing informal letters. Other groups discussed what kind of direction should be given to beginners and very advanced learners.

Having not used station-type exercises in my classes, I'm very eager to try this out. I'm slowly building the students up to be able to handle different facets of a discursive composition. I can't wait for the day when I can put into practice the great ideas I got from this workshop.

Perfect Curriculum: Integrated Skills

Reviewed by Ellen Park

This very energetic and practical workshop led by Branca Mirmic was based on the new IBT TOEFL test preparation course. However, Branca stressed that it was suitable for any upper-intermediate or lower-advanced class. Personally, I felt she was absolutely right. I came away from the workshop with ideas that I've since used in my General English intermediate class.

Branca has such a bubbly and likeable personality that when I glanced around the room everyone's eyes were riveted on her and it seemed as though all ears were straining so as not to miss a word.

The theme of this workshop was "environment." Branca led us through a series of communicative activities that could easily be adapted for any class. First, there's the mini-discussion activity where students stand in two rows facing each other. They are assigned a topic which they discuss with their partner for about two minutes. Then, one row moves forward so that everyone has a different partner. Students are encouraged to work on different ways to support their point of view each time, e.g. using

examples, using specific reasons, agreeing or disagreeing etc. These mini-discussions are very similar to the types of tasks that students will have to do for their integrated speaking test in the IBT TOEFL. However, anyone can use this technique in their classroom.

Branca showed the participants clips from the Discovery channel about compost and its uses. Although I've enjoyed watching this channel, I had never thought about using it for my class. The topic led smoothly into a CALL activity about recycling in B.C. This, in turn, led the way for a planned field trip to a recycling plant. The entire unit was extremely cohesive and seamless.

Branca also shared some very enlightening techniques that she uses in her classes to help her students get the most out of any text. One of these was taking notes as they read a text. Although we may do this when we read on our own, we rarely encourage our students to do this. We may emphasize note-taking during listening, but we assume that students will be able to

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Mae Sagar

Understanding Student Resistance to Learning

Reviewed by John Attard

As I looked through the conference program, this particular workshop caught my eye. Its title suggested that we had to understand a learner problem before rushing to do something about it. It struck me that this approach is more valuable than all the classroom gimmicks and novelties we deploy to keep restless students interested. Working from principles such as learner variables seems to be a more sensible way to approach language teaching than the hit-and-miss, "let's see if this works" school of pedagogy.

Not having read the abstract, I joined the session not knowing what angle the presenter would take. Was the "resistance" due to lack of motivation, rebellion or unfamiliarity with learning/teaching methods?

It proved to be the latter reason, Ms. Sagar attributing such unfamiliarity to the students' "belief systems". I found this most encouraging, as I have noted the lack of psychological preparedness with which students arrive for language learning in an ESL context.

Ms. Sagar presented a model promulgated by Harvard professor William Perry which tracks the intellectual development of students in their studies. Professor Perry charted this development from a position of absolutism (which he calls "dualism"), to a state he calls "multiplicity" to finally arrive at an ultimate ideal state of "relativism". My heart sank at this point as I interpreted the latter term to mean the *laissez faire*, "anything goes" relativism so loved by Western sociologists.

I needn't have worried. In Professor Perry's model, it is "multiplicity" that describes this radical view of relativism. In the context of this study, "relativism" means critical thinking, something I

embrace wholeheartedly. Far too often students accept what the books say or teachers tell them as the absolute truth. Not only are books and teachers not always right, but also, such blind acceptance is an inefficient, even counter-productive, way of educating oneself.

The theory states that students' development goes from "dualism" to "multiplicity", which I admit I found to be counter-intuitive. I expected the students to proceed from a position of absolutism to a more enquiring and open-minded disposition, with the danger of subsequent slump into relativism (Western-style). Yet the model suggests that students go from "dualism" to "multiplicity" before finding the happy medium in critical thinking "relativism".

I think it could be quite demanding on the teacher to keep track of learning development and language training. Another problem is whether students are prepared to wait for such learner development to happen. When asked, Ms. Sagar suggested that if the teacher can move the students from one stage of the model to another he will have achieved something, and she does present some activities appropriate to move students from one stage to the other.

I think this kind of approach works when the teacher has time to forge a relationship of trust with the students. In General English programs in Vancouver the student isn't likely to wait to be convinced of what the teacher is trying to do and might continue to resist learning if it doesn't suit his style.

However, if the teacher is prepared for the effort and the students are willing, this approach will be beneficial to them in their improvement of English, and also something they can take away

David and Peggy Kehe

More than just talking

Activities to build conversation/discussion strategies

Reviewed by John Attard

David and Peggy followed up last year's presentation on writing with one on speaking; and they demonstrated that they are equally comfortable dealing with either.

The main thrust of their argument, which is also laid out in the preface to their book *Conversation Strategies*, is for the teaching of *strategic competence*. This concept, as applied to interactive speaking, adds a dimension which further helps define the umbrella term "communicative competence". The participant in effective conversation needs to have multiple competences: schematic, systemic - and strategic.

Subject knowledge and language are not enough to negotiate a successful conversation; you need to manage the exchanges in an efficient and sensitive fashion. David and Peggy put us through our paces, giving us lots of practice with the functional exponents and the discourse cues needed to achieve such competence.

But what impressed me most was David's introduction to the workshop. He drew an analogy with his days as a budding tennis player and told of how much enjoyment he and his teammates would get from whacking tennis balls at each other - until their coach pointed out that their game wasn't improving very much!

David said that the same goes for speech performance by language students. It can be more fun, and is certainly easier, for the students just to gab along than to practice the strate-

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Perfect Curriculum: Integrated Skills

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remember salient points without taking notes when reading. Branca stressed it's important to develop this skill in our students from the beginning.

I also particularly enjoyed her brainstorming exercises, one of which was an alphabet brainstorm. After writing letters of the alphabet on one side of the paper, students work with a partner to brainstorm words or phrases related to the theme (environment) and which start with a different letter of the alphabet.

Although the workshop felt a bit rushed, I think it was one of the most intense and "meaty" workshops I attended. If any of you are interested in communicative, task-focused approaches to teaching TOEFL or any other advanced classes, don't miss the next workshop from Branca!

More than just talking

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gies needed for successful and meaningful interaction outside the classroom. But does free practice make a successful communicator?

The session introduced a whole list of techniques used by good conversationalists and good discussion participants. The list included clarifications, rejoinders, interruptions, summarizing and a host of others. Explaining these techniques to students would take time, patience and a good many false starts, but the pay-off would be the learners' eventual development into efficient and engaging interlocutors. These learning strategies recognize the importance of the classroom as a place of rehearsal for 'real world' conversation.

For me, this session was an object lesson in the need for teachers to prepare students for fluency speaking and equip them with strategies that will be needed for conversation and discussion in real time speaking.

More than just talking, indeed!

Portraits of Empowerment through the Photonovel

*A Project Funded by BC TEAL's Charitable Organization's
Aids and Health Education Grant*

By Laura Nimmon

About a year ago, I was sitting in my mother's kitchen looking outside through the criss-crossed window at the yellow and red leaves that the fall always promises. I sat back and sipped a coffee and opened up the daily edition of the *Globe and Mail*. I was startled by an article that discussed research findings by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI, 2004). The article relayed that when immigrant and refugee women move here their health is better than that of Canadian-born women, but slowly deteriorates after they arrive, making them a very vulnerable population. A stated hypothesis for their decrease in health is that language barriers prevent them from accessing Canada's health care system and mainstream health information, which is normally written at a grade nine level.

Upon reading this article, I knew that I immediately had found a topic that I was passionate about for my MA thesis in language and health literacy education at the University of Victoria. I then

became interested in reviewing research that focused on effective and ineffective ways to inform immigrant and refugee women about health information. As a result, I found that using a participatory educational approach was most effective. Using photonovels (formulated like comic books, but containing photographs) as a tool to educate ESL speaking immigrant and refugee women became particularly appealing because it involves learners in the development of health materials. As a result of this participatory process, the women have an opportunity to draw on their own language knowledge (making content in the photonovels comprehensible to others of a similar language level).

Aside from the linguistic advantages, the photonovel is an empowering tool for learners because it builds community, increases feelings of self-esteem, is culturally relevant, helps the women take responsibility for their own health and encourages critical thinking about their reality.

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Book Review

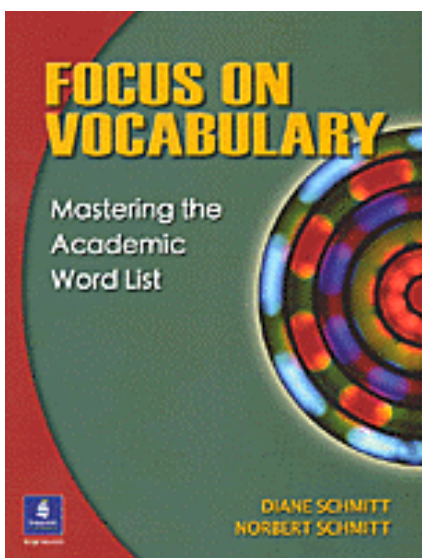
Exposing Students to the AWL

By Marti Sevier

Schmitt, D., & N. Schmitt. *Focus on Vocabulary: Mastering the Academic Word List*. New York: Longman, 2005.

Abstract:

Focus on Vocabulary is an accessible and clear textbook that provides significant exposure to all 570 words on the Academic Word List in solid academic contexts. The book enables learners to become more independent acquirers and users of vocabulary long after they have finished the book.



Full Text:

The past few years have seen a tremendous rise in the interest of teaching vocabulary in ESOL, and no wonder: after years in the doldrums, learning new words is now seen to be of central importance in language learning. Though reading has been described as the most efficient means of language input (Krashen, 1994), common sense dictates that it is hard to read if you don't know the words. Indeed, Paribakht & Wesche (1998) view the learning of vocabulary and reading as interdependent. This view of interdependency is underscored by David Qian (1999), whose research demonstrates that vocabulary size is an

accurate predictor of reading skills. However, vocabulary knowledge is complex: without a wide knowledge of words, including pronunciation, forms, and collocation, learners will “fail to thrive” in their language development.

It is this very complexity of vocabulary knowledge that prompts further concerns. One such concern is the problem of choice: Which words does an instructor select for learners? Another concern is related to methodology: how important is context to vocabulary learning? How does one integrate vocabulary learning into one's ESOL curriculum? Then, too, how many times do learners need to encounter and process a word before they learn it, that is, shift it from short-term to long-term memory?

Written for learners of academic English, *Focus on Vocabulary: Mastering the Academic Word List* provides answers to many of these questions. Using the Academic Word List (AWL; for a complete discussion of the AWL and its rationale, see Coxhead, 2000) as a starting point, this 240-page book aims to provide a minimum of four exposures to each word on the 570-word list.

Focus on Vocabulary is broken into six units, with 28 chapters; of these, 21 are based on readings taken from a broad range of academic course material. Before plunging directly into the units, however, both instructor and learner would be well advised to read the overviews. “To the Teacher” offers a clear and concise mini-course in vocabulary that explains the reasons for the approach taken in the book. “To the Student” takes EAP learners through the types of vocabulary knowledge that they will need university courses (e.g., meaning, spelling, pronunciation, word families, collocation) and gives a detailed description of how students can use vocabulary cards to help them retain what they learn. A separate

teacher's manual, with practice tests and an answer key to the exercises, is also available.

Units are based on diverse topics, from sociology to business to biology to music. They are structured in a similar manner, beginning with a brief prereading discussion in “Getting Started,” moving to a knowledge-scale activity in which learners rate how well they know the 24 target vocabulary items in the reading, and then the reading itself, with the items highlighted in bold font. (Length varies, but they are usually around two pages long, approximately 1,200-1,500 words.) The readings are followed by comprehension questions and then sets of tasks that focus on meaning, form, and collocation. Concluding each reading unit is an expansion task—discussion questions that usually lead into writing. The fourth chapter in every unit is entitled “Strategy Practice” (there are three of these in all). Dictionary use is featured in each of these, but other types of word knowledge and learning tips are also covered.

The Strategy Practice chapters help learners to become more independent in their vocabulary acquisition. Each chapter begins with work on dictionary use. My own students are deeply attached to their expensive electronic dictionaries that frequently provide incorrect information and few, if any, sentence examples about words, but possess the advantage of portability. These chapters help students learn how to systematically navigate their dictionaries by asking questions on topics such as the use of abbreviations and the phonetic alphabet in entries to the use of abbreviations and ways of learning from example sentences. The use of affixes is also threaded through these units.

Continued next page

Focus on Vocabulary has much to offer: it is well organized, with systematic recycling of vocabulary and skills. Because the readings are taken from textbooks across the disciplines, there will be a wide appeal and instant credibility for pre-entry students who want to work with “real” course material. Expansion tasks called “Exploring the Topic” provide opportunities for students to reflect on the topics they have read about. In short, this book is written with both teachers and learners in mind. It would work well as the core text in a stand-alone vocabulary course or, with supplementation, an academic reading course. However, because the focus is on vocabulary, it would be helpful if the Expansion tasks focused a bit more overtly on getting students to *use* the target items in a less structured way, in their speaking and writing. Despite this quibble, teachers of advanced learners, whether new to the profession or veterans, will find *Focus on Vocabulary* accessible and clear. Providing significant exposure to all 570 words on the Academic Word List, in solid academic contexts, it will enable learners to become more independent acquirers and users of vocabulary long after they have finished the book.

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Marti Sevier teaches Academic Skills in the English Bridge Program at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. This review has also appeared in the TESOL Higher Education Newslette.r

Little Bytes

By Ellen Park

I really love www.puzzlemaker.com, a website by Discovery School! It’s one of the best teaching tools I’ve ever come across on the Internet. It makes all kinds of word puzzles and games from word hunts to crossword puzzles. I’ve used this website to make my own puzzles for vocabulary review or back-up activities. I’ve also had my own students make their own puzzles, which they then exchange with other students.

Here’s how I used it with an intermediate class to review some phrasal verbs that they learned.

1. Divide the students into pairs. Each pair shares one computer.
2. Go to www.puzzlemaker.com. You’ll see the heading “Create Puzzles Online” in bright magenta letters.
3. Pull down the menu from “Try Other Puzzles!”
4. You will see 10 different puzzles you can make. If you click on “Criss-cross Puzzles,” you’ll see a new page with four steps.
5. Step 1: Enter the title of your puzzle. (I usually get the students to use their names in the puzzle.)
6. Step 2 and 3: Just leave the settings as is. (I’ve played around with settings before, but the puzzle didn’t come out right in the end.)
7. Step 4 is the tricky one. The instructions read: Enter the words and clues. On each line enter a word followed by a space and then the clue for that word.

The point that you need to stress to your students is that the computer reads that first space as the signal for the words left of that space to be in the puzzle while the words right of the space are put into the clues. In that case a sample entry for the phrasal verbs my students were doing would look like this: *come along arrive; I was so lonely until you came along.* (Notice there is no space between the units of

the phrasal verb as it will go into the puzzle.)

8. After students have entered all the words and clues for the puzzle (I usually set a minimum of ten), they click the bar at the bottom of the page. The computer will automatically make a crossword puzzle. They can simply click the print icon on the menu bar and abracadabra, instant puzzle.

9. Note: When I make a puzzle, I print out the solution. This can easily be done by clicking the bar at the bottom which reads “Solutions to puzzle”. However, when I have my students create their own puzzle, they have to print out two copies and make the answer key themselves.

One possible disadvantage is that you need about 45 minutes for this activity, although this could be an advantage some times when you don’t want to prep a lot! It might be difficult to book that kind of time in the computer lab. In that case, get students to write out the clues in class and then just type them in when in the computer lab.

Sometimes the server gets overloaded and the puzzle will get jammed - very frustrating for students who have worked so hard on it! So have a back-up plan, just in case.

Finally, one more note of caution: I’ve found this website is not compatible with all operating systems. In some cases, you need to cut and paste the completed puzzle onto a word-processing program in order to print.

There are many other puzzles on this website. Each one was really amazing. Discovery also has many other tools for teachers. It’s definitely worth browsing through. I highly recommend it!

Do you have any websites that you find useful? We are always looking for tips for Little Bytes. Please write to newsletter@bctea.org.

Book Review

The Essentials of Teaching Vocabulary

By Averil Coxhead

Reviewed By Marti Sevier

Abstract:

Despite some concerns, the Academic Word List, developed by Averil Coxhead, has become a mainstay of EAP vocabulary instruction in the past six years. Averil Coxhead's *The Essentials of Teaching Vocabulary* promises to be a source of inspiration and useful ideas for instructors who wish to incorporate more vocabulary instruction in their curricula.

Since its introduction in 2000, instructors of EAP have flocked to Averil Coxhead's Academic Word List (AWL) with the feverish zeal of true believers. And why not? It is a well-organized, manageable (only 570 items) list of frequency-based words that have been culled from a corpus of commonly used university textbooks from a wide range of academic disciplines. If the 2000 word General Service List (GSL) is its foundation the AWL can be described as the roof of a structure of essential vocabulary for English for Academic Purposes learners. Equipped with a mere 2570 items, then, they should be able to comprehend 90% of what they read (Nation & Waring, 1997).

Moreover, web-based applications such as Tom Cobb's The Compleat Lexical Tutor and Sandra Haywood's Academic Vocabulary site, not to mention a host of new textbooks dedicated to teaching the AWL, have generated what has become a growth industry.

Yet niggling doubts remain. For me, they began with the GSL, when I administered the online Vocabulary Levels Test (productive version) to my EAP students in the English Bridge Program at Simon Fraser University. My students expressed frustration with some of the GSL items on the test, such as

"treasure", tested in the sentence, [The pirates buried the trea on a desert island](#), or "dozen", as in [There are a doz eggs in the basket](#) (Nation & Laufer, 1999, adapted by Cobb). I personally can't remember the last time I encountered the word "treasure" in conversation, though I admit "dozen" has its value for the writing of shopping lists. Still, my students were not impressed. Yet comprehension of these words is the gateway to accessing the AWL.

Further qualms arose when I took up the task of scanning material from my students' textbooks and then putting the resulting text through the Web Vocabulary Profiler. Frequently a headword's family member ("academic" instead of the headword "academy" for example) was far more frequent than the headword itself. These and other concerns are given fuller voice in Neufeld and Billurođlu (2005), who argue that these two lists need renovation, since many of the items on the GSL are relatively infrequent and that the Academic Word List contains items that are not, strictly speaking, academic, but should be placed instead on a list of more "general service" words.

That said, I, like publishers across the English-speaking world, have a lot invested in the AWL. Despite its flaws it is too good to toss. So it was with great interest that I turned to Averil Coxhead's *Essentials of Teaching Vocabulary*. Who better than the developer of the list to write a book on ways of teaching it?

For the time-stressed instructor, the length (166 pages) of *Essentials of Teaching Vocabulary* is encouraging, but more so is its scope: beginning with a brief introduction to general and academic vocabulary, the book is divided into

four main sections. Part 1, "Essentials before you start teaching vocabulary", chapters focus on needs analysis, principles of learning vocabulary, acquiring new vocabulary and teaching academic vocabulary. Part 2 moves into strategies for learning vocabulary, both direct and indirect, with a discussion of the use of vocabulary cards and vocabulary notebooks. Next, Coxhead moves into classroom work, looking at how vocabulary can be taught through the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Finally, in Part 4, Coxhead discusses vocabulary testing. A set of appendices give the sublists of the academic word list, a version of the vocabulary levels test and Coxhead's "Top Ten Resources", a list of ten books for vocabulary teachers. More useful, I felt, was the set of Endnotes, which contain examples, references and definitions, which conclude each chapter. Directions are given to the HMCO website; a passkey to worksheets on the site can be obtained upon purchasing the book.

Throughout, the material is readable and accessible. Each chapter begins with a set of questions which highlight key points. These are followed with samples of tasks that can be easily done in the classroom, for example, using students' vocabulary cards for

- quizzes
- grouping
- dictations
- exercise creation
- crossword puzzles

As a teacher of academic reading, I found Coxhead's discussion of skills-based classroom work most interesting. Tasks help students to *notice* new voca-

Continued next page ...

From page 10 ...

bulary and evaluate and recycle it, in, for example, “read and re-tell” (Coxhead, 2006, p. 84) and ranking activities which, among other things, require students to rank texts according to:

- the most important ideas
- the centrality of target words to main ideas
- the sequence of ideas in the text
- the intensity of the learners’ reactions to ideas in the text

The final section, on testing vocabulary, is somewhat brief and barely touches upon the principles of testing and some examples of quiz formats, but the practical approach seen throughout the book ensures that the construction of tests will not be too onerous.

All in all, this is a good teacher’s reference and resource book. It is written by an experienced teacher and researcher who understands the needs of her audience. Coxhead has skillfully balanced a clear discussion of vocabulary acquisition theory with ideas that will help instructors to teach effectively.

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Marti Sevier teaches Academic Skills in the English Bridge Program at Simon Fraser University. She is a member of TESOL and BC TEAL.

Teaching Tip:

Waiting For the Late Comers

By Jane Wangersky

In an ideal world, your students would all be in place at the moment your class officially began, pens out and ready to get to work. In the real world, of course, they drift in, some early, some late, until the cutoff time, if there is one.

This doesn’t have to be wasted time. To get the students to use it productively, write a few questions on the board and give them some reading material where they can find the answers.

I used to write a newsletter covering announcements from our program, world news, and sometimes an irregular verb. The questions could be any thing from “Why does Ukraine have to hold more elections?” to “When is the Public Health Nurse visiting?” to “What is the past form of ‘take’?”

You could do this with almost any reading material at the right level – a page of the text for the day, a short article from the paper, even a comic strip.

When it’s time to get the class underway, go over the answers orally. Not everyone will have had time to find all the answers. But the ones who did will have jump-started their learning for the day, and the ones who didn’t – well, maybe they’ll try harder to be on time for the next class.

Jane Wangersky taught ESL in New Westminster from 1997 to 2005. She now edits The ESL Free Press (www.eslfreepress.com), an online daily newspaper for adult ESL learners and their teachers. She is the author of Each Week for a Year: Readings for ESL Students on Everyday Life in Canada, available on www.Lulu.com.

Resource Room:

Articles Attack!

By Cristina Peralejo

If you’re anything like me, then you are probably pulling your hair out over how to get your intermediate students to use articles, let alone use them correctly. Recently, as I was teaching my class a unit on articles, I had a realization—most of my students cannot hear the articles in a sentence. Articles are words that don’t carry as much meaning or importance as other words in a sentence so they get swallowed or garbled when we’re speaking. I decided that I needed an activity that would involve students both listening to and speaking with articles.

I thought of a descriptive activity where students would feel at ease describing something that they know very well. I settled on a description of their house. I asked my class to picture their house: the different rooms, the furniture, the garden, and finally the neighbourhood. They were allowed to jot down some notes about the different

features on a piece of paper. Next, I divided my class into two groups, A and B. A’s would be describing the house first, while B’s simply listened to the description. Then, I gave each person in the class 10 dollars in play money. Every time B heard a mistake about articles (**only** articles) he or she asked for a dollar from A. After about five minutes, the pair switched roles and A had a chance to win their money back if they listened carefully.

The result? An extremely focused and challenging exercise. I had never seen my students so attentive while listening to each other. I did circulate and point out some mistakes that some students didn’t catch. I also had them repeat the exercise with different partners several times. At the end, the top three people with the most money were dubbed the Masters of Articles. Now, they are much more attuned to the use of articles when speaking and listening.

March 17, 2006

BC TEAL Annual General Meeting

President's Report

By Sarah ter Keurs

It has been another challenging year at BC TEAL, and again, thanks to the hard work of the board and the committees we are looking forward to a much brighter 2006.

I began my term as President with some goals for TEAL and like last year, I want to report back to you as it relates to the goals that we set for ourselves. Much of the year was spent transitioning between Administrative Assistants, and we are very fortunate to welcome Gwen Attard to the position.

1. TEAL will become BC's recognized authority on the Teaching of English as an Additional Language

The essence of this goal is to increase awareness and public knowledge. The Membership committee continues to visit lower Mainland English language providers to inform them about TEAL. The visits have been very positive and we plan to expand these efforts over the next year to ensure that all language teachers in BC are aware of TEAL.

2. TEAL will be the leading source of information for ELT professional development and training

The ELSA Net provincial representative continues to update us with news in the ELSA community and there continues to be a strong channel of communication between the two organizations.

The TEAL News, despite a few glitches this year, continues to be a wonderful source of classroom ideas, thoughts about the profession and stories from abroad. We look forward to the possibility of expanding the newsletter in the coming year in order to decrease the size and increase the frequency of the delivery.

3. TEAL will continue to contribute to the criteria governing professional practices.

We continue to support TESL Canada's Professional Standards by referring inquiries to TESL Canada. TEAL also supports the work of the Canada Language Council in their efforts to advance standards and promote excellence in English language training in Canada.

4. TEAL will continue to provide effective, ongoing professional development opportunities for ELT practitioners throughout the province.

Our annual TEAL conference continues to be the highlight of professional development for many English language professionals. I'd like to thank the TEAL 2006 Conference Committee chaired by Karen Brooke and Mary Lovelace for making this conference, such a success. In addition to our annual conference, TEAL has put on one smaller PD event called, "The TEAL Sessions". These Sessions are held in February and in October and are focused on one particular theme in language teaching. Unfortunately, our February Sessions were cancelled due to lack of registrations. Hopefully that was just because of the timing as it was very close in date to our annual conference.

Discussions continue with professionals outside of the Lower Mainland, so that we might work with local groups to support PD events in other locations in the province.

5. BC TEAL will possess the human and financial assets and structures to support and extend its mission.

TEAL has dramatically increased its benefits to members which, in turn, will help to increase our membership and extend the reach of our mission. TEAL members are now eligible to register for Health and Dental Benefits through Maritime Life. Other new benefits for TEAL members include discounts at the UBC Bookstore and at the YMCA.

The board recently re-defined the category of Institutional Membership. The launch of Institutional Membership happened this fall and we hope to encourage participation from as many BC institutions as possible. Institutional Membership has been expanded to include many new benefits and we look forward to welcoming new Institutional Members to BC TEAL this year.

Finances continue to be a concern for TEAL and, while we are happy to see that membership is creeping upwards, we must work harder to continue to increase the number of memberships in order to ensure the viability of our association. Please encourage your colleagues to come out to an event or find out more about TEAL through our website. If your institution is not yet a member, please provide your administrators with the information so that you can take advantage of even further benefits.

I want to thank the Nominating Committee, chaired by Jennifer Pearson Tereil, for recruiting a great Board for the coming year. My presence on the board will continue as I take on the role of Past President and I am looking forward to acting as chair of the Nominations committee. This AGM also marks the last TEAL board meeting for a few of the directors. Each of these people has put in innumerable hours of volunteer work to support your organization. I would like to thank, on behalf of all members of TEAL, Kirsten Bunton, who has been on the board since 1997 and has held numerous positions, the most recent as the treasurer.

I am looking forward to taking on the role of Past President and will work as chair on the Nominations committee in addition to being the TESL Canada representative for BC.

BC TEAL AGM 2006
ELSA Net Report

This has been another year of changes for those involved in ELSA (English Language Services for Adults) delivery. A few more successful and long standing ELSA programs were discontinued and clients had to be reshuffled in the early months of fall. We seem to be on a steadier track, with the province and sector working closely to determine direction and supports for this provincially administered and nationally funded program. We are crossing our fingers that the new Conservative governing party will hold to funding increases negotiated

under the last federal government, but this is yet to be confirmed.

ELSA Net is set to release an update to an old favorite - the recently expanded 'Directory of ESL Courses & Employment Programs for Immigrants in BC'. This is a comprehensive listing of what is available by way of ESL and labour market related training for newcomers to Canada. Please go to www.elsanet.org and follow the links to our interactive database - the launch is set for the end of March 2006.

Brenda Lohrenz
ELSA Net Provincial Coordinator

BC TEAL AGM 2006
**Membership
Committee
Report**

This has been an exciting year for the TEAL Membership Committee. First of all I'd like to welcome Michael Galli and Carmen Larsen to the membership committee. Michael will take over as Membership Committee Chair. I also want to thank Judith Bromley who volunteered many hours by calling ESL schools asking if they would like a Board member to come and make a presentation to their school.

Last year we introduced a new and improved TEAL institutional membership which has attracted many ELT institutions. We're hoping to keep promoting this new package. We are also happy to announce that we now offer a special rate for ELSA members. We visited some language schools in Vancouver to help make teachers and institutions aware of the benefits that TEAL has to offer. We realized that many ESL teachers are not aware of the existence of TEAL. We need to reach these teachers.

We organized a phone campaign calling lapsed members to get feedback, encourage them to renew their membership and informing them of the TEAL conference. Membership numbers are still not as high as we'd like. The membership committee will continue to work hard to improve benefits and attract new members.

Catherine Evashuk
*BC TEAL Membership Committee
Chair*

BC TEAL AGM 2006
Website Report

Overview

The past year included a major redesign and rebuilding the site in order to improve service and prepare for major additions.

The revised site was launched in July and a new hosting provider was arranged. Hosting is now provided by Mecca Internet Solutions. In addition to providing significant savings for TEAL, the new site and hosting package offers our members a more reliable site with new features and many minor upgrades.

Four major new features have been added this year:

- **Institutional membership and administrative area**, which allows members of the redefined category to post contact and program information.
- **Online library and document manager**, the next step of which is to encourage members to submit materials for posting.
- **Conference management** including the ability to submit, manage and

print conference proposals online. This feature should help to reduce the time required to manage workshops and sessions in addition to allowing organizers to manage information in a central location.

• **Events Management**, which allows members to sign up for TEAL's professional and social events online.

The site is now entering a more mature phase, with the major developments completed for now. The upcoming year will focus on refining existing features and streamlining membership services.

Please see page 14 for a statistical summary of Website traffic statistics.

TEAL continues to strive to be a leader in ESL associations. New features will be considered as technologies and membership needs change.

Brian Wilson
BC TEAL Website Committee

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED!**

TEAL is always looking for volunteers. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact admin@bctéal.org

BC TEAL 2006 Website Statistical Summary

Summary

First visit	Summary			Last visit
01 Mar 2006 - 00:01	Month Mar 2006			08 Mar 2006 - 06:36
Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
492	823 (1.67 visits/visitor)	4647 (5.64 pages/visit)	22977 (27.91 hits/visit)	276.42 MB (343.93 KB/visit)



Jan 2006 Feb 2006 Mar 2006 Apr 2006 May 2006 Jun 2006 Jul 2006 Aug 2006 Sep 2006 Oct 2006 Nov 2006 Dec 2006

2005 From Hosting Transfer

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2005	0	0	0	0	0
Feb 2005	0	0	0	0	0
Mar 2005	0	0	0	0	0
Apr 2005	0	0	0	0	0
May 2005	0	0	0	0	0
Jun 2005	0	0	0	0	0
Jul 2005	51	58	266	906	10.89 MB
Aug 2005	1276	1885	6191	19670	404.54 MB
Sep 2005	1357	2030	8512	33395	472.74 MB
Oct 2005	1147	1779	9079	42351	527.27 MB
Nov 2005	1084	1652	7216	30171	446.56 MB
Dec 2005	958	1525	6923	30255	422.02 MB
Total	5873	8929	38187	156748	2.23 GB

2006 to March 8th

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2006	1475	2507	12184	54707	673.89 MB
Feb 2006	1521	3017	17424	82133	937.60 MB
Mar 2006	492	823	4647	22977	276.42 MB
Apr 2006	0	0	0	0	0
May 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Jun 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Jul 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Aug 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Sep 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Oct 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Nov 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Dec 2006	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3488	6347	34255	159817	1.84 GB

News from the TEAL Charitable Foundation

About the Foundation

The TEAL Charitable Foundation (TCF) provides awards, scholarships and bursaries to support ESL teachers, students and programs. Awards range from \$1,400 to \$4,000. The application process is relatively simple. There are application forms available online for each of our awards. Simply print one and answer the questions on the form. We ask for basic information about the project/conference/travel etc. as well as two letters of reference and a resume. The Board reviews each application and selects the applicant that most closely matches the criteria for the award. The winners of these awards are regular teachers, students and program staff just like you. Please take the time to review the details and criteria for each award on our website at www.bctea.org/. Look for the TEAL Charitable Foundation tab on the left hand side of the home page.

The Board of Directors

I would like to introduce myself. My name is **Cheryl McNicol** and I am the new TEAL Charitable Foundation Chairperson. I joined the Board of Directors in 2004 and I'm looking forward to an exciting year as Chair. I am currently teaching Business English at Vancouver Community College in the TESOL diploma and TESOL certificate program, as well as the Intensive TEFL program. At the YMCA of Greater Vancouver, I am working as a Business Advisor in a program called the New Ventures Network. In this position I train, advise, and mentor new entrepreneurs in the Lower Mainland. I have worked in the business community for over 25 years and hold an Honours Bachelor of Commerce degree and a TESOL Diploma.

Tracey Bell stepped down as Chair in March 2006. I would like to thank her for her leadership, energy and support

throughout the past year. She is continuing on with the Board in the Past President position, so I am fortunate to be able to draw upon her expertise when needed.

Simon Turner has accepted the position of Vice Chair and he has been a member of the Board since 2004. I look forward to working with Simon more closely over the next year. His enthusiasm, professionalism and sense of humour will certainly be appreciated.

There have been no further changes to the TEAL Charitable Foundation since the last newsletter. However, I would like to thank all of the current Board members for their dedication and commitment to the ESL community. **Parviz Nathoo** is our treasurer and has been a member of the Board since 2004. **Lenard Langlois, Anita Irani,** and **Yasmin Jamal** joined the Board in 2005. **Lisa Vernon** is our newest recruit and she officially joined the Board in January of 2006.

2006 is our 20th Anniversary

This is a really exciting year for all of us on the TCF Board of Directors because it is our 20th Anniversary. The TEAL Charitable Foundation was created by B.C. TEAL in 1986 to ensure greater financial stability for the organization. Constituted under the B.C. Societies Act and registered as a charitable organization with Revenue Canada, the TEAL Charitable Foundation is the world's largest foundation operated by an ESL Association.

To celebrate our 20th Anniversary we are holding a golf tournament at Mylora Golf Course on No.5 Road in Richmond on Saturday, August 12. The cost is \$50 per person for 18 holes of golf and dinner. To book your tee time, contact Kevin at krein32@shaw.ca. I hope you can join us for a day of celebration, exercise and fun.

BC TEAL AGM 2006

Newsletter Committee Report

The newsletter committee has grown in the past year. We now have 11 members who are actively involved in the newsletter. It is our goal to improve the content and address the needs of the TEAL membership in the following year.

We have a new Editor, Therese Neufeld. She took over as of the February 2006 issue. Along with Ellen Park, the former editor, there are Marie Morgan and Tanya Hays filling the position of co-editor. Marie Morgan is also our new Newsletter Committee Liaison. David Morton is our layout manager. Lena Warrington is our advertising Manager, and we have Marti Sevier, Vivian Chu, Cristina Peralejo, John Attard, Marina Crawford, and Noreen Cross as our regular columnists.

In our last issue, we started a new way of printing articles, namely, including just an abstract in the actual newsletter while uploading the rest of the article on our TEAL website. We hope that this new method will allow us to print a wider variety of articles. We hope this will especially enable us to print more practical articles with complete lesson plans that could be easily downloaded from the website. We would love to hear your feedback on this.

As you may have already seen in the newsletter and in your conference packet, we have some questions regarding how you read your newsletter. We hope that we can get a high number of responses so that we can incorporate the results into future issues of the newsletter.

At the moment, we are focusing on the June issue of the newsletter. We would like to ask all who are interested to lend us a helping hand by submitting some reviews about presentations that they have attended at the conference. We will try to run these in the next issue.

BC TEAL

Treasurer's Report

THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION - DECEMBER 31, 2005

(unaudited)

ASSETS

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash and term deposits	\$ 47,315
Refundable sales taxes	310
Prepaid conference expense	300
Prepaid expense	2,450
	<hr/>
	\$ 50,375

LIABILITIES

CURRENT LIABILITIES

Employee payroll deductions payable	\$ 704
	<hr/>

NET ASSETS

Unrestricted funds	49,671
	<hr/>
	\$ 50,375

**THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2005

(unaudited)

REVENUE

Conference 2005 (schedule)	\$ 21,826
Interest and other income	348
Fundraising	82
Newsletter	935
Provincial memberships	30,602
Rent	2,400
Sessions 05	4,389
	<hr/>
	\$ 60,582

EXPENSES

Accounting	1,300
Bank charges	146
Credit card charges	1,416
Insurance	588
Miscellaneous	74
Newsletter	841
Office equipment and lease (note 2)	4,929
Postage and stationery	29
Rent	10,808
Salary and benefits	14,689
Telephone	2,532
TESL Canada Federeation	7,576
TESOL membership	317
	<hr/>
	\$ 45,245

EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSE

\$ 15,337

Rereading Jespersen One Hundred Years On

By *Martin McMorrow*

Reprinted with permission from the author and IATEFL TTEd SIG Newsletter

Perhaps, like me, you have had a day at school when nothing quite went right, from the jamming photocopier to the mislaid homework. On days like this, it is hard to find what you most need – inspiration. Not ideas or resources, but something at a more basic level. A deep feeling of worth and a sense of purpose. What they used to call a vocation. Perhaps that is going too far. It certainly seems far from reality, if recent news stories are to be believed:

A recent survey of U.K. schools showed that 31 per cent of teachers of German and 25 percent of those teaching French have no formal qualification in the subjects (*The Guardian Education*)

A Dutch school has responded to the shortage of English teachers by having older pupils teach the first-graders. (*BBC News 24*)

An article entitled “The slavery of teaching English” in which the conclusion succinctly pointed out: “What was a language teacher in the end? A nobody. A mere failed somebody else.” (*Daily Telegraph*)

I had not originally intended this article to be about vocation. Seeing that Otto Jespersen’s famous (but long out of print) volume *How to teach a foreign language* was celebrating its centenary, I thought of writing a historical piece looking at methods then and now. Perhaps it was just my mood, but as I read and reread the book, the history and methods faded from view. But what stood out, not fossilized in history, but living and vibrant in voice and feeling, is Jespersen’s great enthusiasm for everything about language teaching – for language, for the pupils and for the chance to make a difference – an en-

thusiasm enhanced rather than diminished by the distance.

Enthusiasm for Teaching

Jespersen sees language teachers as having a crucial role in social progress – a view tinged with pathos considering the events a decade after this book first made its appearance – and perhaps in recent decades more fully realized:

Teachers of modern languages should ever remember that it is their mission to make their countrymen know and understand foreign nations ... language teachers all over the world may ultimately prove more efficacious in establishing good permanent relations between the nations than Peace Congresses at The Hague. (p. 180)

This sense of mission is carried over into every aspect of classroom practice:

The teacher must make the pupils feel interested in the subject; they must have a vivid conception of the reward that their work will bring them, so that it will seem worthwhile for them to exert themselves. (p. 8)

Being a great phonetician, Jespersen naturally sees the teacher’s role as being to ignite a passion for the sounds of the language, starting with the learner’s own language and then moving on to the sounds of the new language:

The very first lesson in a foreign language ought to be devoted to initiating the pupils into the world of sounds. (p. 146)

Grammar

Jespersen was neither the first nor the last to see an overemphasis on grammar and translation as the great curse of lan-

guage teaching. Few put the case more strongly than he does in this book:

It never seems to have occurred to the authors of some (textbooks) that there might be a limit to the amount of rubbish that can be offered children under the pretext of teaching them grammar (p. 13)

Grown persons can of course put up with a little boredom, if they think they can attain anything by it; but in their heart of hearts they find such things killing, and so they are; yes, even killing for the linguistic sense. (p. 15)

What Jespersen makes perfectly clear here is that in rejecting grammar teaching, he is not rejecting grammar as such, but rejecting the false grammar of meaningless sentences. In its place, he wishes to embrace a natural grammar of meaning explored through the interaction and students and texts mediated by the teacher. He echoes the words of one of his mentors, N.M. Petersen from 1970 (and of course many writers since) in stressing the natural acquisition of grammar through comprehension and interaction:

We simply cannot avoid thus unconsciously forming types or patterns to go by, in using a foreign language, as soon as the conditions for these typical formations are at hand. ... As a matter of fact, when we speak or write a foreign language, we employ a number of such rules which we have never seen formulated, and, what is more, also rules which have never at any time been consciously formulated by any grammarian. (p. 117)

If grammar learning is seen as the product rather than the focus of language

learning, then the teacher's role is fundamentally changed. Instead of having pupils analyzing 'dead' sentences, the teacher is to bring the words on the page to life and create meaningful encounters with the new language:

The first condition for instruction in the foreign languages would seem to be to give as much as possible in the foreign language; he must be steeped in it, not only get a sprinkling of it now and then; he must be ducked down in it and get to feel as if he was in his own element, so that he may at last disport himself in it as an able swimmer. (p. 48)

Listening and talking

The role of the teacher in talking to the students is raised to an almost priestly level. It's not enough that the learners look and listen to the teacher:

For they must drink in all his words and follow his slightest movements. (p. 78)

He is not, of course, suggesting that lessons should comprise the teacher haranguing the poor students. But I do wish I had heard something like this when I was starting as a teacher and thought that communicating meant no more than switching on a tape recorder, because anything else would be falling into the dreaded 'TTT'!

Innovations come and go. In Jespersen's book, the phonograph makes a fleeting appearance. Now my local college has an interactive whiteboard in every classroom together with a projector linked to the college's central computer. And there's a new national curriculum with CD-ROM's for every unit. But there is a real danger that more is less, since resources and technology have a tendency to block the relationship of love and respect between teachers and learners, which Jespersen clearly sees as the core of teaching:

Teach in the right way, then there will be life and love in it all, and when the examination comes your pupils will know more than if your teaching from the very beginning had been fettered by examination requirements. (p. 9)

Enthusiasm for language

Jespersen's love-affair with language

was a life-long one, which produced books, lectures, articles and even the creation of a new artificial language. It is not surprising to find that this book resounds with enthusiasm for language:

(modern languages) want to be treated as living, and the method of teaching them must be as elastic and adaptable as life is restless and variable. (p. 4)

In his quaint century-old phrasing, he sums up perfectly the middle ground that we language teachers occupy:

We do not learn our native language merely so as to read Shakespeare or Browning, and neither do we learn it for the sake of giving orders to the shoemaker or making out the washerwoman's bill. So likewise in the case of foreign languages, we ought not to exclusively soar above the earth, nor on the other hand exclusively to grovel on the ground; between those two spheres there are large fields in manifold shades where it might be of great value for us to stand in direct communication with other nations. (pp. 9-10)

Classroom language is seen exclusively as texts, since 'model sentences', paradigms and word lists are seen as both unnatural and uninspiring:

Disconnected words are but stones for bread. (p. 11)

He has little time for exercises on specific grammar points, noting the artificiality of the exercise and the lack of transferability to real language, since in the world there are not any texts which revolve around the practice of a single structure. He comments sardonically:

Yes, how pleasant it would be if life could be so arranged to have difficulties come one at a time. (p. 18).

What Jespersen sees as the essential part of the language is exactly the idiomatic, colloquial aspect missing from the grammar approach:

Everything that is idiomatic in the languages is set aside, at all events, for the time being, without consideration for the fact that the most indispensable expressions often are those irrational groups which cannot be constructed merely of words and grammatical rules, expressions like 'What's the matter? I couldn't help

laughing.' ... When the pupil does not get a good deal of that kind of thing as soon as possible ... the result is that when he is left to his own resources, he takes each word of an English phrase that happens to occur to him and translates it literally into the language which he is trying to speak (pp. 16-17)

Rather than burdening students with complex 'grammar' rules laden with exceptions, he recommends a lexical approach to many features crammed into grammars:

The deviating forms must be learned as if they were merely matters of vocabulary. (p. 38)

His commonsense approach to classroom language comes across clearly in his advice on the selection of texts:

1. be connected with a sensible meaning
2. be interesting, lively, varied
3. contain the most necessary material of the language first, especially the material of everyday language
4. be correct French, German etc.
5. pass gradually from that which is easy to that which is more difficult
6. yet without too much consideration for what is merely grammatically easy or difficult. (p. 23)

Surely a more sensible and concise set of guidelines would be hard to find and one that I intend to use to evaluate texts I use in the classroom.

Enthusiasm for learning

I am not sure I would teach the same way as Jespersen did 100 years ago. It is understandable that he placed great emphasis on phonetic script and reading aloud. Times change. But what I would wish to emulate is his enthusiasm and respect for his pupils. These three quotations underline his belief in their ability to learn:

All instruction must spur the pupil on with problems that are not too easy. (p. 28)

Never tell pupils anything that they can find out for themselves. (p. 127)

Questions must be asked: 'with liveliness, tact and constant consideration for the pupils' standpoint.' (p. 105)

What threatens this natural learning

process most of all is, ironically, the State's main instrument for ensuring learning is taking place – the examination system:

The worst canker in our school system is the examinations. Everything is arranged with a view to examinations; the parents, the children, and also unfortunately a number of teachers care for nothing but the results attained in the examinations ... poor pay and long hours, too, naturally lead to a teacher's looking merely to examination results. (pp. 186-190)

I am sure you will agree, this could have been written yesterday. Great pragmatist that he is, he offers a range of suggestions to teachers caught up in this dilemma. First, he argues strongly for professional development for teachers – something that the Comenius scheme is now supposed to provide:

Many and liberal traveling scholarships, so that no conscientious teacher in foreign languages need do without a tolerably long stay among the people whose language he (she) teaches. (p. 190)

Secondly, he recommends teachers to try not to let the exams rule their classroom:

I simply want to warn the teacher against troubling the examination until the examination troubles him.

However the most sustained attack on inertia that he makes in this book is the numerous examples of dedicated teachers trying out new and meaningful classroom activities. One teacher has the pupils draw only those parts of a wagon they could name in German, paying close attention to the teacher's words, so that they could complete their drawings. Another has the pupils doing sums in the foreign language. There are wall charts and singing, even if the next-door teacher looks askance. He reports all kinds of variations on dictation, including the students rephrasing what the teacher's told them or even rewriting historical texts. It seems to me that what he wants to do is reassure teachers they are not alone, but part of a worldwide movement for innovation in language learning.

And the book spills over with his own suggestions, too. Why not have page numbers of the textbooks written as words in the foreign language to help the pupils learn them? And why not learn the geography and history of France in French during the French lesson? And how about recycling language by using pictures as the basis for a talk, then returning the same pictures later, 'which may be treated more fully than before on account of the progress made by the pupils in the meanwhile' (p. 63)?

Conclusion

I have included many quotations in this essay, partly because the book has long been out of print and it is unlikely that you will easily encounter a copy. To me, they breathe the very spirit of enthusiasm. It seems to me that on this, his 100th anniversary, he still speaks afresh to all teachers who, despite having days when enthusiasm seems almost extinguished by the daily grind, still wish to do things to bring the classroom and the language to life:

I still continue to hope that more and more teachers will avoid the old rut, and they will surely find that it pays to get out of it, even if, especially in the beginning, they have to expend more time and energy on their teaching, and on their preparation for every lesson, in order to meet the greater demands of the new methods. (p. 190)

He concludes the book with what, to me, is the most beautiful statement of the heights to which language teaching can aspire:

And since there is a sensible meaning in all that is read or said or done, the interest is awakened and held, and the instruction becomes not only varied, but what especially beseems living languages, it becomes in the deepest and best sense of the word really living. (p. 192)

How lucky we are to share with him a subject, language, which in its inexhaustible capacity for meaning and change, is a daily inspiration for our classroom practice.

Photonovel Project

From page seven

My MA thesis project was generously funded by BC TEAL's Charitable Foundation's Aids and Health Education Grant and it took place in the fall at the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria with a group of wonderful immigrant and refugee ESL speaking women. Most interestingly, the women who attended the sessions collaboratively chose nutrition as their main health concern living in Canada. A public health nurse taught a lesson on nutrition and exercise. The women then created a story line about eating well and developed characters for their story. The women took photographs (like acting stills) and acted in the photos. The story was then compiled and dialogue was put into captions to make it look like a comic book. Once printed, the women expressed how proud they were of their photonovel, titled "From Junk Food to Healthy Living: Tanya's Journey to a Better Life" (to view this photonovel go to www.photonovel.ca) and they mentioned not only how fun it was, but how it helped them make friends in the group and made them feel important.

I would like to sincerely thank BC TEAL's Charitable Foundation for awarding me their Aids and Health Education Grant. Without this funding, the project would not have had such positive results. Thanks to the award, I had the funds to get the word out about the project by distributing the photonovels in BC, and to present the project at the BC TEAL 38th Annual Conference and at the Canadian Public Health Association's 97th Annual Conference. The funding also helped me create the www.photonovel.ca website.

Laura Nimmon is completing her MA thesis on using photonovels with ESL speaking immigrant and refugee women and is also an ESL teacher at the University of Victoria. If your organization is interested in a photonovel workshop for staff on how to create photonovels email her at laura@photonovel.ca. Please also view her website at www.photonovel.ca for examples of photonovels she has facilitated.