

ESL Realities



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Letter from the President



Dear Members,

The past year has certainly been one where the “realities” of the ESL world are coming into full play. I work with LINC instructors across the province of BC, and our reality was shifted significantly this year as the settlement language programs, formerly called ELSA and coordinated through the provincial governments, were “repatriated” to the federal government in an attempt to centralize settlement language delivery across Canada. We are now under the direction of CIC and our program name has changed back to LINC, as it’s called in the other provinces. This change has meant that we must face the reality of adapting our practices to fit the new model.

At the same time as settlement language programs were repatriated, the funding process for EAL learners at the post-secondary level changed. We now face the looming reality of the ESL funding shortfalls at many of BC’s public post-secondary institutions. Without these programs, many learners will fall through the gaps, as their language needs will not be met. This will hinder their ability to move into employment and academic opportunities. Unable to access these opportunities these learners will now be unable to integrate economically or socially into Canadian society.

The ability of the EAL learner to integrate into his/her new culture is paramount. This is another ESL reality: as EAL instructors we accept that we have a critical role to play in helping immigrants to better

integrate into society as immigrants who have limited English proficiency, for the most part, face incredible barriers that hinder their full social and economic participation in communities. A part of this reality means that EAL instructors who work with immigrants need to develop or refine the required skills and competencies (e.g., working with literacy students, working with students who have uneven skills), through professional development—often using their own funds. To mitigate these costs BC TEAL has been a key provider of affordable PD opportunities within the profession for almost 50 years.

There is one other ESL reality. This reality is key. This reality is positive. When our students have success in our classes, we can feel proud that we are helping them, in our own ways, to become more engaged in their BC Communities—whether short-term as an international student or life-long for immigrant populations. As EAL professionals, we contribute every day to “Celebrating Learner Success.”

With ESL realities sometimes having a sense of burden, it is refreshing to remind ourselves that most of us came into this profession out of a desire to help our students, and to celebrate their success with them. That ESL reality is the best one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shawna Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shawna Williams

President, BC TEAL

Letter from the Editor



Welcome to the Fall 2014 Issue of the TEAL News.

Teaching in the English as a second language field can leave us feeling almost as if we are in a state of permanent flux. This is mainly caused by the changing nature of our classrooms: the countries our students come from; their reasons for coming and their intended length of stay—temporary or permanent. As well, for those of us who work with immigrants, this state of flux is also caused by changes in government policy: who gets funded, when, where, and for how long.

This state of flux is just one ESL reality. In this issue, you will find different explorations of this theme. Scott Douglas summarizes the plenary address he gave at the recent Selkirk conference titled “Multilingual Classrooms and Higher Education:

Leveraging Content to Support Academic English Language Acquisition.” Douglas discusses the reality of Canada’s linguistic landscape with reference to academic English and



provides instructional strategies to integrate language learning. In a twist on an old column “Snippets from Abroad” an ESL/TESL instructor shares the reality of being in a student’s shoes as she experiences learning a new language. In “Classroom Corner” an activity is shared that will challenge how students and teachers alike view their roles in the classroom. In “Reflections” the writer shares his views about some of the real language challenges his students face.

Finally, there is also an article discussing some of the realities our students and we as ESL providers are facing due to government funding changes.

I hope you enjoy the articles and, as always, remember, if you feel inspired, submit an article for the next TEAL news and make your dream of sharing what you know with others, a reality.

Chris-Anne Stumpf
Editor, TEAL News



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BC's Current ESL Reality

by Lisa Robertson

BC's publicly funded post-secondary ESL programs have provided high quality, relevant English language training to domestic students for several decades. However, for the 2014/2015 budget year, the province has indicated that the \$17 million budget for these programs will be cut. Without a provincial commitment to stable, ongoing funding, 9000 domestic ESL students, both immigrants and citizens, will no longer have access to post-secondary ESL classes and to the pathways that these classes provide to further education and employment.

The province first announced the cuts in December 2013, when it became clear that the federal government would cease funding public post-secondary ESL programs in BC. The affected students and programs, together with the support of faculty associations, student societies and immigrant organizations voiced their concerns and the province responded by allocating a one-time transition fund for those institutions affected.

Hardest hit by the cuts is Vancouver Community College, with extensive faculty layoffs and cancellation of the ESL program to begin in December 2014. The remaining institutions are continuing their domestic ESL programming through to Spring 2015, and at that point face a range of impacts from program reductions or cancellations and faculty layoffs to a change in focus to programs oriented to the needs and wants of international students.

A range of advocacy efforts are underway to raise awareness of the devastating impact of loss of these ESL programs on immigrant integration into BC's labour market and broader communities and to call on the province to restore the funding. These include

- VCC ESL Matters Campaign
<http://www.eslmatters.ca/>
- Federation of Post Secondary Educators
<http://www.fpse.ca/take-action-esl-funding>

- Douglas and Camosun College Student Societies - Save ESL Task Force
- BC TEAL Policy and Action Advisory Committee, Sub Committee on Public Post-Secondary ESL

From paint-ins on the lawn of the BC legislature to student demonstrations and testimonials, from town hall meetings with MLAs to press releases, students, faculty, and instructors individually and collectively continue to use all means available to raise awareness and ultimately to restore funding for ESL programs. Most recently, students and instructors sat in the gallery of the legislature while MLA Kathy Corrigan, NDP spokesperson for Advanced Education, introduced a private members bill: "Be it resolved that this House recognizes the importance of public, post-secondary English language learning programs to a skilled labour force in B.C. and to the health of the provincial economy as a whole."

Karen Shortt, President of the VCC Faculty Association and ESL Matters spokesperson, sums up the current situation:

In a little over one month, 40 years of English language teaching expertise, curriculum development and community support will disappear from Vancouver Community College unless the Provincial Government acts quickly to restore funding to ESL programs. Over 2,300 ESL students will have no classes to return to on January 2nd. There is no alternative in the educational system that can absorb this tremendous loss. We continue to petition the Government to provide funding and meetings with the College and the Ministry are taking place. We remain hopeful.

For more information contact Joe Dobson jdobson@tru.ca, Chair of the BC TEAL policy and action advisory committee, or Lisa Robertson robertsonL@camosun.bc.ca, Chair of the PAAC subcommittee on Public Post Secondary ESL.

Multilingual Classrooms and Higher Education: Leveraging Content to Support Academic English Language Acquisition

by Scott Douglas

This article is a summary of the plenary talk delivered at the BC TEAL Interior Conference on October 4, 2014.

Canada's Linguistic Landscape

In the ten year period from 2003 to 2012, around 2.5 million newcomers arrived in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013a). As a result, Canada's linguistic landscape is becoming richer, with many newcomers bringing with them a wide variety of home languages other than English or French. In fact, in large cities such as Vancouver or Toronto, over 30% of households speak a language other than English in the home (Statistics Canada, 2012), and even regional centres such as Nelson, BC find that 11% of the population come from language backgrounds other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2011).



This enriched linguistic diversity has been joined by increasing numbers of international students, many of whom are also from non-English speaking backgrounds. In 2012, 100,000 international students arrived in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013b), and Canada has the goal of doubling the international student population to 450,000 learners by 2022 (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2014). The desire to increase the number of international students is also strong in provinces such as British Columbia, with a target of growing the number of international students from 2012 to 2016 by 50%, or 47,000 students (BC Advanced Education, 2012).

Thus, growing numbers of students from non-English speaking backgrounds are making their way to higher education at English-medium post-secondary institutions in Canada. The stakes are high for these

students as well as for Canada's economic well-being. Advanced levels of English language proficiency are needed to facilitate studies in a variety of academic disciplines, and successful academic outcomes from these studies are needed to sustain the positive economic impacts of increasing linguistic diversity. Finding ways to support the acquisition of academic English and the mastery of disciplinary content is essential. However, these supports should not jeopardize the pursuit of knowledge for students who already have the levels of English that facilitate post-secondary success. A possible solution lies in content and language integrated instruction. By using instructional strategies that augment the learning experience, content and language objectives can become integrated to support all learners regardless of language background.

The Developing Nature of Academic English Language Proficiency

The increasing numbers of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds studying in Canadian institutions of higher learning has not been without controversy in the popular press. Looking through articles connected to the increase in international students over recent years points to growing concerns over students not having the necessary language skills despite being admitted to post-secondary studies (MacQueen, 2013; Paillard, 2012). The press also report worries that students are entering programs for which they are not prepared, and their progress is being delayed because of a lack of English (Cassidy, 2013). In fact, there are accusations that standards are being ignored so that institutions

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can increase international student enrolment (Crowley, 2014), and that the increase of international students lacking the English to succeed at university leads has a detrimental effect on academic standards in higher education (Friesen & Keeney, 2013).

However, regardless of language background, articles worrying about the state of the English language being used by all students can be found in the press. It seems that students from non-English speaking backgrounds are not the only targets for failing to meet the academic English language standards of higher education. Across the country, according to the press, the writing skills of all students need work because of poor essay structure, terrible grammar, and a wide variety of errors (Gilmore, 2010). Claims have been made that students are submitting writing assignments that are riddled with poor spelling, punctuation errors, and colloquial language (Kelly, 2010). According to one newspaper article, students are unable to create an argument in writing and are being restricted by a limited range of vocabulary (Wilce, 2006).

Because of the current claims of the poor use of academic English for students from both non-native and native English speaking backgrounds, it may seem like a crisis is brewing for higher education. But in reality, these reports echo assertions that have also been made in the past. For example, as far back as the 1870s, there were general worries that university students had poor writing mechanics and were unable to express themselves correctly in writing (Connors as cited in Bazerman, Little, Chavkin, Fouquette, & Garufis, 2005). In fact, half of the students taking Harvard University's writing entrance exam in 1874 failed to pass the test (Bazerman et al., 2005).

It appears that, for students making the transition from high school to university, academic English writing skills are still in a stage of development for everyone, regardless of language background. For students in university, four more years of development lie ahead as they refine their vocabulary, reading, writing, discussion, presentation, social, and critical thinking skills. Instructional strategies that support multilingual learners and their acquisition of academic English language skills may also be of benefit to all students regardless of language background.

Expanding instructional strategies employed in higher education looks to strengthening learning rather than eroding standards.

The Challenge of Academic English Language Proficiency

Academic English language proficiency can be a challenge for everyone entering higher education. Cummins (1981), as interpreted by Roessingh (2006) and Douglas (2010), has conceptualized academic language proficiency as being distinct from conversational language proficiency, with academic language proficiency involving ever increasing levels of cognitive challenge and decontextualization. Students are grappling with the cognitively challenging world of ideas. Advanced academic language proficiency exists in the realm of what Frye (1963) called the language of the educated imagination, in that words are used to access ideas. Furthermore, this academic language lies beyond a lexical bar of Greco-Latin cognates that exist primarily in print (Corson, 1985; 1997).

Conversational language proficiency, which has lesser levels of cognitive challenge in the Cummins model, can take English Language Learners approximately two years to acquire (Cummins, 1981). However, the acquisition of conversational language proficiency can mask a lack of academic language proficiency that only becomes evident once students are required to tackle academic tasks such as reading textbooks and writing papers. For the acquisition of academic language proficiency, estimates from five years (Cummins, 1981) to seven years (Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000) to eight or more years (Collier, 1987; Thomas & Collier, 1997) have been put forward. It takes time to acquire the levels of academic English language proficiency commensurate with the challenge of post-secondary studies. Nevertheless, for students with strong skills in their first academic language, Cummins (1981) proposes that these skills can transfer from the first language to the second language, providing a common underlying proficiency for both languages. The challenge, however, is that when students move through their post-secondary studies, they may eventually outpace their first language proficiency as they encounter concepts they are unfamiliar with in either language. Because of the time it takes to gain

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academic English language proficiency, instructional strategies that support both content learning and language acquisition can be of great benefit for not only multilingual learners, but all learners who are novice users of academic language conventions.

Reading and Writing Thresholds for Post-Secondary Studies

In trying to understand what academic language proficiency entails, it can be useful to consider the lexical demands of post-secondary studies. Vocabulary knowledge plays a key role in reading and writing skills, which in turn contributes to academic success. The more words a student knows, the better those words facilitate expression and free up cognitive space for critical engagement with a topic.

The reading demands placed on post-secondary students are heavy, with students needing to be able to comprehend 98% of the running words in a text to properly comprehend and engage with that text (Nation, 2001). In order to reach the 98% coverage of a typical text students may encounter in their post-secondary courses, they need to know between 8,000 and 9,000 word families in English (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). Knowing these 8,000 to 9,000 word families will result in only one unknown word in every 50 running words of text. At this point students can begin to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by context or simply look up words in the dictionary and, in the case of multilingual students, access their academic language proficiency in their first language.

The writing demands placed on post-secondary students are also heavy, running the gamut of a variety of genres from essay exams to laboratory reports. To reach 98% of the output of their English proficient peers, students with developing academic English language proficiency require the ability to deploy between 5,000 and 6,000 word families (Douglas, 2013). With this productive vocabulary knowledge, students may be left searching for a precise vocabulary term just once in every 50 words they write, allowing, in the case of multilingual students, for access to their academic language proficiency in their first language by using a dictionary or other means.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content can be a powerful driver for acquiring academic English language proficiency. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) have summarized an approach that integrates both content and language learning as employing language to learn rather than mere language learning. It is a top down approach in which language is the medium for achieving content objectives, with language objectives being matched to content objectives. The ultimate goal is a two-for-one gain in both language and content learning.

A popular engine for language learning in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom, content-based approaches also have powerful implications for content courses across the post-secondary disciplines. Adopting instructional strategies from content-based approaches supports all learners regardless of language background. Furthermore, the adoption of these strategies supports the ongoing acquisition of academic English language proficiency students in multilingual classrooms. As a result, discipline teachers in courses such as History, Biology, or Engineering can look to EAP instructional strategies to support the mastery of both content and language learning.

For content instructors in the disciplines, integrating language and content learning is not about sabotaging the academic standards of a course through lowering the amounts of reading or decreasing the levels of learning. These standards can be maintained. Instead, content and language integrated learning is about broadening language skills and learning disciplinary content at the same time (Srole, 1997). Academic expectations do not have to be lowered, and academic rigour does not have to be decreased. Rather, language learning becomes an important integration with content because language is a means for the mastery of disciplinary content. Content objectives do not have to be changed, and instructional repertoires can be expanded (Snow, 1997).





Examples of Instructional Strategies for Content and Language Integrated Learning

There are a number of good practices used in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classrooms that translate well into disciplinary content classrooms with the goal of supporting both content and language learning. Some examples content instructors can use in multilingual classrooms include:

Consistently Using Warmers

Warmers make the most of the first five minutes of class with a short activity to get students thinking about the day's topic and reminding them of what they already know connected to that topic. Warmers activate students' background knowledge and prepare them to acquire new knowledge. It is a chance to set up students' frameworks of what they already know so that mapping on new concepts to that current knowledge is less of a challenge. Examples of warmers include having students share a personal anecdote in connection to the day's topic, brainstorming a list of everything students know about a topic, developing questions in connection to the day's topic, writing sentences including key concepts connected to the topic, completing a graphic organizer such as a Venn Diagram with their ideas for how two concepts may be similar or different, or labelling a picture as best they can. The key is getting students thinking about the topic so that they are ready to fully engage in the learning to come.

Developing Real-Time Awareness

Being aware of speech in real-time can help instructors to enrich their language so that it supports understanding on the part of the students. Vocabulary is a key area where this instructional strategy is important. If instructors are using vocabulary that may be unfamiliar for multilingual students, they can embed definitions by explaining academic vocabulary and key terms within the context of the sentence. An instructor may say something like this: "Before beginning an experiment, it is important to develop a hypothesis, which is an idea you have based on what you know so far, but it hasn't been proven yet." The definition is added in real-time to what instructors are saying.

In addition to vocabulary, instructors should be aware of any idioms and cultural references they make. Idiomatic language can be a real challenge for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. If instructors use idioms, as with unfamiliar vocabulary, an explanation can be added at the same time. For example, instructors might say to a student: "You are on the right track. You almost have the correct answer." or "I'm not sure when we are going on the field trip. Let's play it by ear, that is, see what happens naturally, before we decide on a specific date." Cultural references include such ideas as "big brother is watching," "I feel like I am in the movie Blade Runner," "you have the Midas touch," or "this situation is a Kafkaesque nightmare." These kinds of references all can benefit from brief real-time explanations.

Finally, part of developing real-time awareness is speaking naturally at a slower pace. Instructors may be tempted to artificially slow down and simplify their speech. However, they should avoid staccato type bullet speech in their lectures. Instead, it is a good idea to speak naturally, but at a slower space with normal phrasing. Rather than pausing between each word, instructors with multilingual students should pause in the spots in which they would normally pause, but adding a couple of seconds to the pause to help students from non-English speaking backgrounds process the information. This will also help all students with note taking and the absorption of ideas. In addition, enunciating important terms and vocabulary clearly with the emphasis on the stressed syllables can help all students process key information. While instructors are doing this, they can animate their delivery with appropriate body language and hand gestures.

Employing Essential Questions

Wiggins & McTighe (2005) see essential questions as being grounded in the core concepts of a curriculum, and encouraging inquiry and discovery. Instructors can start each day's lesson or series of lessons around a theme with an essential question. These questions have no specific correct answer, and they elicit more than just yes or no from the students. Essential questions encourage rich responses while focusing attention on the topic as students look for answers. Essential questions also prime students to use their language skills to deeply engage with course content.

Essential questions further encourage higher thinking skills and may lead to more questions, curiosity, and lively discussion. These are all key elements of language learning. All students, regardless of language background, benefit from the use of essential questions in the classroom. Examples of essential questions include “what happens when a language disappears?” (linguistics), “why is global cooperation important?” (political science), “what energizes people” (health science) (Caplan & Douglas, 2011).

Taking Advantage of Graphic Organizers

Content instructors with multilingual classrooms can use graphic organizers to support learning. Good graphic organizers can provide a framework for understanding and a tool to organize and map new knowledge. Instructors can aim to have at least one graphic organizer per lecture. Graphic organizers can be filled in during a lecture, while watching a video, reading a textbook excerpt, or working on a writing assignment. Graphic organizers can also make great brainstorming tools, warmers to activate students’ background knowledge, and closers to solidify or demonstrate learning. They are something students can come back to when revising previous learning. Examples of graphic organizers include: Venn diagrams, fish bone diagrams, t-charts, time lines, ladder charts, concept maps, and starburst diagrams. Frayer models, first developed by Dorothy Frayer at the University of Wisconsin, can be useful graphic organizers when introducing or reviewing a core concept. A Frayer Model is a diagram with four parts. It is used to help students uncover the central definition of a key term. The term is placed in the middle of the chart, with essential characteristics, examples, non-examples, and the definition in the corners. Students work together to complete the chart, and then develop a definition. They can be great warmers, reviews for a previous lesson, or closers that demonstrate learning. See Figure 1 for an example of a Frayer Model.

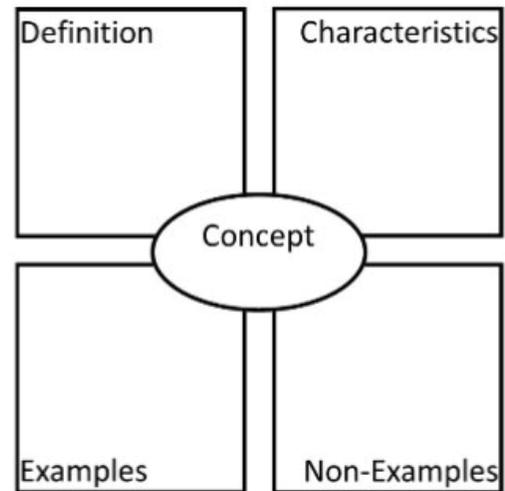


Figure 1 Example Template of a Frayer Model

Conclusion

Canada’s linguistic diversity is becoming enriched by an influx of newcomers and international students bound for higher education. As these students make their way into disciplinary content areas, instructional strategies that support language learning as well as content mastery will benefit not only students with developing levels of academic English, but also their more proficient peers. Examples of instructional strategies that work at integrating content and language learning can be found in EAL classrooms. In addition, authentic post-secondary content that can be adopted for language learning can be found across the disciplines. Thus, a two way flow of content and instructional strategies can benefit higher education as a whole.

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- Scott Douglas** is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus. In addition to teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses in additional language teaching and learning, he enjoys thinking about English for Academic Purposes and Content-based ELT materials design.



Changing Perspectives



The reality is that many new to our field, or new to our culture, may feel uncomfortable when teachers aren't assuming a traditional role. This classroom or professional development activity is an excellent way to demonstrate learner-centred teaching to new TESL trainees, to peers from outside our field who have ESL students in their classroom, and to students from teacher-centred cultures.

The purpose: to define teacher and student roles.

As facilitated by: Dr. Ken Beatty

Step 1: Participants are put into groups and provided with paper and a pen

Step 2: Groups are asked to brainstorm and list all the things that the teacher does in a class—not only general roles, but also specific duties.

Step 3: Groups are asked to brainstorm and list all the things the learner does in a class—again, not just roles, but duties.

Step 4: These lists are put up on a white board.

Step 4: Participants are asked to consider whether the learner can assume any of the roles that were assigned to the teacher.

Step 5: Any roles the learner can assume are erased from the teacher side and put on the learner side.

I have participated in this activity once so far and have peers who have participated in it more than once. Each time only one or two roles, usually in regards to discipline, were left on the teacher side. In the words of one participant “I love, love, love, this activity as it forces you to re-evaluate your position on classroom roles.”

Overall, this activity helps the new teacher and the language student to understand the learner-centered classroom; as well it helps the language student gain a sense of the expectations of Canadian language teachers.

Shared by Chris-Anne Stumpf, PhD
Editor of the BC TEAL Newsletter

TESOL 2014: Reflections

by Karen Densky

I remember my first TESOL convention. It was in Vancouver in 1992, and I was just beginning my teaching career. I entered the Pan Pacific Hotel and Conference Centre having no idea of the magnitude of what I was about to experience. I clearly remember entering the exhibitors' area that consumed the space of a football field and thinking "I'm part of a something much bigger than I had ever realized." I still have that sense of awe when I arrive at a TESOL conference, don my name tag and conference bag, and prepare to be immersed in a sea of like-minded souls for the next seventy-two hours.

Delivering my session "Feeding it Forward: Renewing and Revitalizing the Teacher Observation Process" in Portland in March was definitely a career highlight for me. The room was packed with over 100 participants! This may have been due to the prime time slot I was given (early afternoon on Day 1) or the location (right across from the exhibitors' area). Nonetheless, I sprinted through my presentation hoping that the participants were able to take away something practical and get motivated to try something new in relation to conducting teacher evaluations.

The high from delivering a successful presentation was compounded by the numerous emails I received in the weeks following the conference; I had emails from teachers from several countries and began conversations about the possibilities of collaborating on research related to my presentation. These types

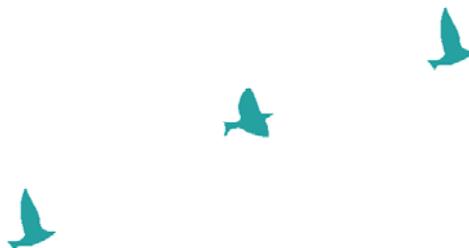
of international connections are truly one of the benefits of attending a TESOL conference.

The TESOL 2014 Convention was also significant for me because I was able to secure funding from my university for ten of my TESL students to attend the conference. Observing their "first timer" experience was fun and reminded me of the energy I used to have!

There is always a sort of euphoria that follows a TESOL conference for me. I feel renewed in the commitment I have made to a profession that has fulfilled and challenged me for almost 25 years. The euphoric hangover stimulates me to try new activities, use new resources, and share new ideas for the weeks following the conference, and will hopefully carry me to my next professional development "fix."

For those of you who haven't attended a TESOL conference or haven't attended one for a while, I encourage you to find a way to get there. Try presenting at one of the regional conferences, and then take your work to an international audience via TESOL.

I would like to thank the BC TEAL Charitable Foundation for the work they do in creating and sustaining awards such as the Nan Poliakoff Award which provided funds for me to attend the 2014 TESOL Convention. It was truly an honour to receive this award.



Taking a Walk in their Shoes

Laura Blumenthal interviewed

by Chris-Anne Stumpf, PhD



As professionals we read articles, consult with colleagues, write research papers, and present and attend conferences, all to stay up-to-date

with developments in our field. Our professionalism is such that we do this as an accepted matter of course. But there is another form of research that we do not necessarily have the chance to do nearly as often as we should: The chance to understand our students' needs by "walking a mile in their shoes."

Recently, Laura Blumenthal, TESL and ESL Faculty, Douglas College and a BC TEAL board member, decided to do just that. She chose to spend part of her vacation taking an immersion Serbian course in Serbia. Laura kept a journal of her language learning experience. Titled "Tolerance for Ambiguity," it is open for all to read: <http://kafetzou.tumblr.com/> [note: there are no dates on the posts but they are in chronological order from newest to oldest, so she asks that you start at the very bottom].

I had a chance to talk with Laura about her experiences. Below are some excerpts of our conversation. For more information about her experiences as a learner and insights on how learning a language can help us to be better teachers, check out Laura's blog and feel free to contact her at blumenthall@douglascollege.ca

How did you choose the title for your blog?

When I was studying for my Masters in TEFL we were told that a tolerance for ambiguity was a key characteristic if one was to be a successful language learner. As both a language learner and a language teacher, I have found this to be true.

A language learner?

Yes, I am a polyglot. Actually, friends could describe me as addicted to language. Those who are connected with me via Facebook can attest to the fact that a number of my posts have to do with little questions or observations about vocabulary or grammar points in English and other languages.

Why did you decide to learn Serbian?

Well, I already speak six languages. My mother tongue is English and I also speak French, Spanish, German, Greek, and Turkish. However, although I am involved and interested in the music and dance of the Balkans, I've never learned any Slavic languages, so I decided to learn Serbian.

How did you choose your program?

Like most students probably, I did an Internet search. I wanted an intensive immersion program. I only had three weeks so I wanted to get as much exposure as I could without being too overwhelmed. I chose the 20-hour-a-week program, rather than the 30-hour-a-week one for super high achievers. This program seemed to meet my needs so I decided to bite the bullet and register for it.



View of New Belgrade

So, no one recommended this school?

No. I did it on speculation. I figured if it turned out not to be what I wanted, I could always look for something else once I got there.



Lunch with new classmates

Why did you decide to blog?

I wanted to be a conscious language learner and wanted to be able to reflect on what I was experiencing. It is really easy to forget details and specific feelings so I chose to document my experiences as they happened and share them with my friends and colleagues so that I could read their comments (mostly on Facebook).

In your blog you mention Apps?

Yes. I tried to learn some of the language before I left—I studied with a private tutor, for example, but wanted to be able to practice and learn whenever I had a chance, including on the plane on the way over. So, like our students, I looked for apps to help. One of the things I found was that while there were some useful apps, a lot of the phrases they taught were too long for the beginner student to remember. I give some examples in my blog.

How did you find the first day? Was there an intake procedure or had you been placed by an on-line test before you arrived?

I knew I was a beginner before I arrived, but there was no pre-test. I was given an interview style intake test the very first day and I did well enough to be placed at an intermediate level. The first day in that level revealed I was NOT at that level so I asked to be put in the lower level. I have to say this really showed me the importance of being at the right level. The second day was much better than the first. I struggled less, felt less pressure and actually had a chance to breathe and understand. This experience showed me how important it is that we encourage our students that it is OK to change their level.

How did it feel to change roles—from teacher to student?

That was hard. Sometimes I think it is a curse to be a teacher educator and to enjoy learning, because whenever I take any kind of course, I find myself judging the teacher on his/her pedagogical merit. This can get

in the way of my own learning.

What was one of the biggest challenges?

I have to give two: 1) input and 2) lack of practice. There was so much input. Not only in class but also outside of class. I know I was getting practice in trying to negotiate simple activities outside of class—shopping, for example but at the same time there was so much being said to me or for me to read and it was on the spot...so the input seemed overwhelming. At the end of my first morning (when I was in the wrong level) my head was spinning with the amount of new vocabulary. Even when I was in the right level there was still so much to take in and remember. This might not have been as bad if we had had more time to plan and practice. I mean really practice. Not just repeat dialogues, or answer the teachers' questions, but to get a chance to make our own questions. One of the things I talk about in my blog is a simple activity of the teacher asking us about our weekend. The conversation was between one student and the teacher and then the next student and the teacher. It could have been a lot more interesting and effective if the rest of the students were encouraged to ask questions of the student who was talking. Also, if we knew we could ask questions maybe we would have paid closer attention.

You did something about that in the class, right?

Well, yes, this is an instance where the teacher in me came out. I, um, well, I decided to break the routine and sort of interrupt and ask the student who was talking about his weekend a question. It was OK with the teacher. Other students started to do the same and it became a great chance to practice.



In class

What were some other things you thought about from the teacher side?

I would say how to more effectively help weaker students. At the beginning level in particular the difference between what students know and do not know can be big. So, obviously, if a student is weak in an area then that student needs to be helped.

The teacher has several options as to how to handle this, and I'm not sure I agreed with the choices my teacher made. I talk about this in my blog.

I also noticed the different strategies being used, for example, to teach grammar. I found myself examining what worked for me and why I liked it and then thinking about how I could use this approach and what I would change. For example, rather than giving students lots of grammar handouts, these teachers usually wrote grammar diagrams on the board and asked the students to copy. This had its advantages and disadvantages, which I outline in my blog.

Did you have homework?

Yes. I was happy to do homework. I still had enough time to explore the city and my main purpose was to learn, so I saw homework as a chance for me to practice what I had learned in school, but at my own speed. It is good reinforcement. There was one teacher whose approach to homework I thought was excellent and really student centred as it allowed those students who were really motivated a chance to learn. I think I will use this approach. I give examples of her approach in the blog post [Domaći zadatak](#).

Actually I really liked the approaches as you described them and started using them in the literacy class I am teaching.

Really?

Yes. At the beginning of the term I had made up homework folders. The plan was assigned homework would be put there to be worked through as a class in tandem. Instead, I changed it so that each student chooses what s/he wants to do and how much. The students who have time and are motivated work ahead, do lots of practice and bring me questions. The only downside—a number of students in this group are really, really motivated so I have more than I had expected to check. I'd really suggest people read that post.

Any final thoughts? Overall comments?

I think a few things.

As a student I realized how important encouragement is. I know we think we know it is important, but it is more important than we think. As teachers we maybe forget how much what goes on in the class affects students emotionally. In the post "Encouragement and Discouragement," I noted what effect little things can have on the learners' emotions.

This includes things like direct encouragement and/or praise of course, but also things, like who the teacher chooses to answer questions and the importance of teacher wait time... There seems to be a direct line between these classroom dynamics and the student's emotions, and being on the other side of the dynamic has opened my eyes a bit. This is an idea I plan to think about more.

Thanks for sharing, Laura.

You're welcome. If anyone has any questions after they read the blog, they can contact me at blumenthall@douglascollege.ca Really, this experience reminded me how important it is to try to see the classroom through the eyes of the learner.

Laura Blumenthal has been teaching ESL since 1988 and TESL since 2000. She's also a lifelong language learner, with at least some degree of fluency in six languages and now she is tackling her seventh. Besides all this, she is very much involved in Balkan, Greek, and Turkish music and dance.



With new friends

Reflections

Reflections on BC TEAL Interior Conference

by Tyler Ballam and John Armstrong



After having some time to reflect and consult with our colleagues here at Selkirk College, we feel that we achieved our goal of providing opportunities for English language educators in the Southern Interior to participate in discussions of topics that were of direct interest to them.

The workshops were full of enthusiastic and engaged participants, most of whom were from outside of our immediate Selkirk College community. This was rewarding because the conference obviously attracted a variety of interested people.



The Pecha Kucha stories allowed everyone to share in meaningful personal and professional experiences, which, in different ways, presented a broader view of our profession. Those creating and telling their stories have expressed their appreciation for this challenging and rewarding opportunity.

Scott Douglas's plenary spoke to the work many academic teachers and students are involved in, not only to the work we do today, but also to ways we can provide support to our wider learning communities. We were inspired by his address to think of new ways to work with our students.

We wanted to give people a chance to talk, and the round tables certainly achieved that, as all were busy with the sound of people chatting and sharing ideas.

We were really impressed with the participation of



the international students in many aspects of the conference. For them this must have been a very inspiring experience, one that we are sure has boosted their confidence and will encourage them to take on new opportunities in the future.

Finally, planning and hosting this conference has given all of us on the Selkirk International team a real feeling of achievement and joy. It went beyond our expectations and reinforced our sense of community. In all of these ways, I think we accomplished something special!



Sincerely,

Tyler Ballam and John Armstrong, on behalf of Selkirk International
October 10, 2014



Tour and Social



Pedagogical Reflections: Language Awareness for a Good Grasp of Language Usage

by *Shahid Abrar-ul-Hassan*



Developing language awareness in L2 instruction is one of the most effective pedagogical approaches (e.g., Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995; van Lier, 1996), especially when sociocultural approaches form the basis for the L2 pedagogy. Language

Awareness (LA) is a macrostrategy in L2 teaching, which aims at developing critical thinking, reading, writing, and grammar skills (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). LA is defined as “a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to a language in use, and which enables language learners to gradually gain insights into how languages work” (Tomlinson, 2003, pp. 1-2). In L2 teaching, the LA construct for teachers means “the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively” (Thornbury, 1997, as cited in Andrews, 2001, p. 76). It emerged as a reaction to overly prescriptive and explicit knowledge transfer approaches in language teaching. The LA approach places emphasis on encouraging learners’ efforts to grasp the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of language usage while relying on authentic materials.

Utilizing LA as a macrostrategy would entail revisiting grammar as not “merely a collection of forms” but considering it a three-dimensional linguistic feature comprised of form, meaning, and use (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 4). This proposition necessarily requires the use of authentic oral and written communication as opposed to text-based grammar teaching practices, in-class or online. The three-dimensional definition of grammar entails:

Form: How is the unit formed?

Meaning: What does it mean (its essential meaning)?

Use: When and why is it used?

(Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 36)

Authentic communication episodes, which are activities based on contextualized communication, could potentially facilitate L2 learners in mastering the meaning and use aspects of grammar skills. This kind of learning otherwise might not have taken place through traditional written teaching materials.

I have experienced, both as an EAL practitioner and an official language examiner, that English has several pitfalls for EAL learners, such as numerous irregular verb forms and the article system. In fact, the article system is a distinctive linguistic feature of English, which fulfills an important function in language use at syntactical and suprasentential levels. English articles are a stumbling block for those EAL learners who have article-free first language systems. These linguistic features of English are typical trouble spots for learners, and can be addressed through the LA approach by using authentic materials and encouraging learners to focus on a particular linguistic feature (e.g., Andrews, 2001; Tomlinson, 2003). Fostering LA among L2 learners can help them to become aware of “the logic of a linguistic subsystem” in different aspects of a language such as spelling, grammar, and pronunciation patterns (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 159). Thus, learners get to the underlying logic in the form and function of a language system through a discovery process.

For example, building on this process, I promote LA through the illustration of linguistic regularities and irregularities in authentic English texts, such as asking

Continuing on page 20



students to spot the cases of definite and zero articles, irregular past verb forms, and the use of stative verbs. Learners notice and analyze the particular language usage in an authentic text, and then share their findings in small groups. Moreover, to analyze and exemplify the register use in terms of formality, I use two texts: A magazine article and an academic/research article. Students are asked to compare and contrast both texts for some specific discourse features, such as the use of contractions, tag questions, direct speech, and passive voice. Such tasks fulfill the key objective of LA which is to “help learners to notice for themselves how a language is typically used” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 3).

The LA approach can be utilized by incorporating a two-pronged strategy. Firstly, developing teaching activities for reading and writing skills that encourage learners to discover properties of language structure and usage. In an EFL context, for instance, utilizing the L1 of the learners for a comparison and contrast with L2 linguistic features in the classroom can be useful, which alerts learners to possible stumbling blocks, such as articles, relative clauses, and punctuation (i.e., punctuation conventions vary considerably between other languages and English). Secondly, employing authentic texts, such as newspaper articles, fashion magazines, and business advertisement brochures, will show learners how different language forms are linked to various genres. The LA approach will be a major consideration in materials selection for reading or writing skills. In LA activities, learners notice as well as analyze a particular language form in an authentic text, which also provides them a chance to gain awareness of language use and its meaning through contextual interpretations.

Contemporary L2 teaching practices are deeply grounded in the communicative roles and functions of a language, and “the basic function of a language is communication” (MacWhinney, 1999, p. 213). Therefore, an effective L2 program would incorporate a wide range of interactive and collaborative language teaching/learning tasks. Communication events, which could be contextualized and simulated, offer unique learning opportunities to L2 learners to enhance their linguistic resource by experiencing language form,

meaning, and use. The LA approach, thus, results in a good grasp of language usage, which is fundamental to developing linguistic proficiency of L2 learners.

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