

Memories of TESOL 2007 Conference

MITESOL held our annual TESOL Reception at Typhoon, a Thai restaurant right near the water. Over 65 MITESOLers and friends attended. Here are a few pictures from our wonderful party.



Left to right: Jessica Rorai, Carol Wilson-Duffy, Susan Dyste, and Tomoko Kawasaki



Heidi Vellenga and Susan Dyste



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Teachers of English to
Speakers of Other
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President's Corner

by Sue Dyste

Life's Unexpected Changes

I don't know about your life, but in my life when I usually really want something to happen, it doesn't. Yet just when I am sure it won't ever happen, it does. That is the story of my life right now. Ever since I moved back to the U.S. from Japan, I have wanted to relocate overseas. Now, forty years later, it has happened. When you read this, I will have already resigned from my position as MITESOL President and will have moved to Shanghai as a trailing spouse.

I am pleased to announce that my departure won't be felt by the MITESOL Membership. That is due to the great group of MITESOL leaders on the Executive and Advisory Boards.

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From A to Z That's My English

By Dorothy Zemach

When students ask how I can tell if a paper is plagiarized, I tell them I can smell it--and Hyun Jae's paper reeked (names have been changed to protect the guilty). He'd clearly taken most of his book report on *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1998) off various Internet sites; one dead giveaway was that he hadn't changed the capital letters at the beginnings of sentences when he pasted them onto other sentences, as in "In the book, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, Written by J. K. Rollings, I believe that courage is the most outstanding theme." And clearly he hadn't copied the author's name off the book itself. (Why is that while teachers mind plagiarism, they mind bad plagiarism even more?)

(Continued on p. 4)

TESOL Advocacy Day

by Jackie Moase-Burke

On June 20, 2007, Jackie Moase-Burke joined a dozen other TESOL members, representing eleven U.S. based affiliates, in Washington, DC for TESOL Advocacy Day 2007. This event featured a day of issue briefings and workshops, capped by visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. The goal of Advocacy Day was not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning

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Board Talk

by Jacquie Osborn

MITESOL is going green! Not a day goes by now without a reminder of how limited and fragile our world is. "What are you doing to go green?" and "Do you know the size of your carbon footprint?" are common topics around the water cooler. Members of the Executive and Advisory boards are aware of these concerns and frequently discuss the issues at board meetings. This past year in an effort to "Go Green," the board explored the possibility and then initiated online registration for the Fall Conference. While there were a few complaints, some initial technical difficulties, the majority of the membership overwhelmingly approved and applauded the change. Of course there is a cost for the service but with the cost of paper and postage mounting annually, the organization actually saves money. Since the online registration was so successful, the projected savings lead us to the next step. This will be the last paper newsletter. All newsletters and directories will be online in the future. One last thought, in addition to the saving of resources and money, this format makes the directory available at all times, not just at printing. Once it is assembled, usually in March, it will be possible for a member to request a copy of the directory any time throughout the year. "Going Green" will allow this organization to run more efficiently and economically, so thank you for your support.

From the Co-editors

by Hadeel Hermiz and Carmela Gillette

As summer is winding down, we turn our thoughts to fall and another school year. For MITESOL, fall also brings one very important thing: our annual fall conference. This year's conference looks to be shaping up quite nicely, and this issue of *MITESOL Messages* hopes to give you a sneak peak of what it will entail. First, in following with our theme of "going green" conference registration will be completed online. See page six for details. We've also included some information about our plenary and featured speakers, and the TESOL publication, *Essential Teacher*, has graciously allowed us to reprint one of our plenary speaker's columns. In addition, fall conference time is election time, so we've included information on those who have been nominated for board positions and those positions that still need volunteers to fill them. We can speak from experience and say that getting involved in MITESOL is a worthwhile endeavor; we encourage you to pitch in! Finally, our President's Corner is a farewell message from our outgoing president, Sue Dyste. Sue, we wish you well on your next adventure. Thanks to all of our contributors, and we hope to see you all in Ypsilanti.

The Newsletter Co-Editors reserve the right to edit any material submitted for publication to enhance clarity or style. Submissions may also be shortened to fit available space. The author will be consulted if changes are substantial.

President's Corner

(Cont. from p. 1)

The ichiban leader, Carol Wilson-Duffy, will be doing double duty as President/Past President until the October elections and then next year will again serve as Past President. When you see Carol, be sure to thank her for her continued sacrifice on MITESOL's behalf.

Our 2007 goals are well on the way to being met. The MITESOL website and the online proposal submission system have been updated and are functioning well. The MITESOL brochure and *The Selected Proceedings of the 2006 MITESOL Conference* have been published and will be available at the 2007 conference. Also, MITESOL is fostering collaboration with other professional organizations. MITESOL and the Michigan Department of Education's Office of School Improvement have been sponsoring professional development workshops throughout this summer and continuing into September.

At the April 2007 MITESOL Board Meeting, we decided to "go green" and do as much "paper-less business" as possible. Last year, an overwhelming majority of the membership who renewed online, 96.4%, requested electronic copies of *MITESOL Messages* and the MITESOL Directory. Therefore, this issue of *MITESOL Messages* will be the last mass distribution of a hard "snail-mailed" copy. We do know that some people like having a hard copy and because of that, the 2008 membership renewal confirmation will include information about how to request hard copies of the newsletter and directory. Along those same lines and in an effort to have a centralized database, all 2007 conference registrations and all 2008 membership renewals will be submitted online. That does not mean, however, that payment must be online. You will still be able to pay by check or PO, but all of your registration/membership information will need to be submitted online. The online system will provide a nearly immediate confirmation of your registration and membership renewal. I trust you will appreciate the ease of conference registration and membership renewal this year.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to have served MITESOL as President-Elect and President. I will greatly miss my friends and colleagues in Michigan. If you find yourself headed to Shanghai, please email me. I would love a visit from a Michigander. I wish you all the best. Enjoy the 2007 MITESOL Conference; I am sure it will be the finest ever!

Sincerely yours,
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From A to Z*(Cont. from p. 1)*

In my writing classes, I discuss plagiarism at great length, but this book report had been written for a reading class, where I had not discussed plagiarism. Hyun Jae may not have been aware that he'd done anything wrong, but it was unlikely: The assignment had asked for a brief, one- to two-paragraph plot summary and two pages on the student's personal reaction and application of various reading strategies. However, I still couldn't assign a grade to three pages of downloaded material, most of it not even very good, and none of which matched the assignment.

I knew from experience that no one likes to be accused of something that the teacher, at least, considers cheating and that sensitively explaining the problem and asking Hyun Jae to remedy it might take some time. So I e-mailed Hyun Jae and asked him to schedule a 20-minute appointment with me.

When he came to my office, even before sitting down he said, "I knew I shouldn't have copied my book report from the Internet." That took about 3 seconds. It took another 3–4 minutes to determine through a question-and-answer session that he had actually read the book and applied the reading strategies. I was done, but he made no move to leave. Fifteen minutes of our scheduled time remained, and he kept sitting there and looking at me expectantly. On an impulse, I asked, "Do you want to know how I caught you?" Curiosity proved stronger than embarrassment, and I had him come over to my computer with his paper.

I pointed out which sentences had struck me as not reflecting his voice and showed how I could type any string of seven words into a search engine like *Google* (<http://www.google.com>) and come up with the Web site he'd copied from. He was fascinated and had me do this several times. Then he said, "Try one of my sentences." We found a string of seven words he'd written (with no grammatical errors), plugged them into *Google*, and--nothing. He looked most impressed and rather proud. "Wow. That's my English." We tried a few more times with his own phrases and never found a match.

If you've never done this, try it: Type "Written by J.K. Rollings, I believe that" into a Web search engine and see what you get. Isn't it amazing how many essay sites copy from each other? Then try a string of seven words from this article. A few strings of common words, such as "When he came to my office," will find matches, but they won't lead to an identical sentence, and most combinations will not bring any matches.

The search results led us to a discussion of how remarkable it is that, when so many people speak a language, you can still put seven words together and come up with something completely correct yet completely your own. English has not been used up; not everything worth saying has been said. We drew analogies to music (one can still write love songs) and art (one can still paint landscapes and portraits) and discussed the value of quoting others and being original. No doubt it was the most effective lesson on plagiarism I've ever given, even though it didn't happen in a classroom or as part of a planned lesson.

*(Cont. on p. 5)***From A to Z***(Cont. from p. 4)*

I offer the story of Hyun Jae to you as a lesson plan. Have the students discuss what his motivations might have been (his answer: he didn't start until the night before the assignment was due, and his U.S. roommate suggested this technique as a great timesaver; however, other equally plausible answers would be worth discussing in class), whether it was wrong, how he was caught, what he learned. I'm sure Hyun Jae would be flattered if his story could bring even one student to understand how he felt when he said, "That's my English."

Reference

Rowling, J. K. (1998). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. New York: Scholastic.

Reprinted with permission from
(2004). *Essential Teacher*, 1(3), 19-20

TESOL 2007 -The Tides of Change, Seattle, Washington

by Carol Wilson-Duffy

This year an estimated 7,500 ESL and EFL professionals from around the world attended the TESOL conference during the week of March 21st to 24th. The weather, although a bit rainy, was cool and inviting—a nice get away from the cold weather of Michigan! Besides attending the many workshops, insightful plenaries, wonderful restaurants and brew pubs, Susan Dyste, and I were responsible to attend the Affiliates Assembly. Here is a brief update of the meeting.

Affiliate members voted not to support a proposal tying TESOL convention planning to plans for an organization with CCCC, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and voted in support of a proposal encouraging TESOL to be more proactive and inclusive in communicating with English teaching professionals and stakeholders in other countries outside the United States. In comments during the discussion leading to this affirmative vote on the "Resolution on International Advocacy," affiliate representatives spoke to the importance of three main issues: 1) the need for TESOL to have a collective voice; 2) there being at present too much policy focus on the United States in TESOL initiatives; and 3) the fact that more than 150 countries have TESOL members. The Affiliates Assembly unanimously endorsed the resolution, with the following text:

Resolved,

That whenever possible TESOL frame its position statements and advocacy efforts with reference to international standards and conventions and use language that makes them applicable in multiple geographic contexts.

Making Connections: MITESOL 2007

Friday, October 19 – Saturday, October 20, 2007

EMU Student Center, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti
900 Oakwood, Ypsilanti 48197

On-line registration* begins August 15, 2007

Visit www.mitesol.org and click on Online Conference Registration

Pay online with a credit card or mail in your payment to MITESOL after registering online

Be sure you mail your check or purchase order within 14 days after registering to:

MITESOL
P.O. Box 3432
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Encourage a colleague to attend by registering a
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Questions? Want to volunteer? Contact Lisa Hutchison
hutchisonlm@southfield.k12.mi.us

Hotel Accommodations – MITESOL rates

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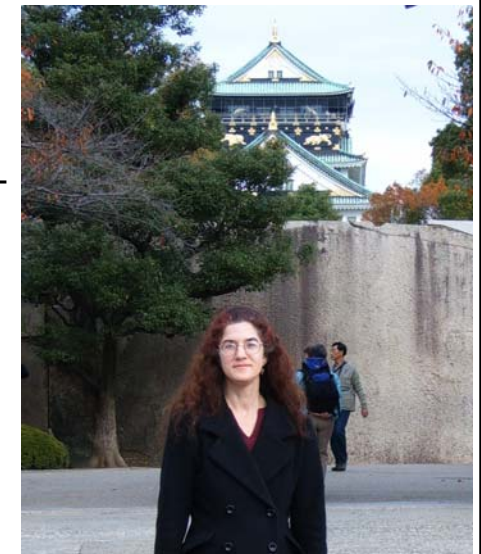
Located on South Huron Street just south of I-94

*If you do not have internet access, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:
MITESOL Conference Registration, P.O. Box 3432, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

2007 FALL CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

• Friday Evening Plenary Speaker: Dorothy Zemach - ESL Material Writer, Editor

Dorothy E. Zemach is an ESL materials writer and editor from Eugene, Oregon. I taught for over 18 years in language schools and universities in the US (including four wonderful years at Central Michigan University), Japan, and Morocco. I'm a columnist for TESOL's *Essential Teacher* magazine and have written numerous textbooks, of which my favorites are *Paragraph Writing* (Macmillan 2005, with Carlos Islam), *College Writing* (Macmillan 2003, with Lisa Rumisek; this book was written while we both taught at CMU), and *Writing for the Real World* (Oxford University Press, 2005). My current interests include EAP and business English, testing, the teaching of writing, and humor in ESL materials and the profession. Recent contributions to the profession include organizing the TESOL Idol Talent Contest for TESOL 2006, and getting Henry G. Widdowson to say, on stage at TESOL 2005, "Well, butter my buns and call me a biscuit."



• Saturday Featured Speaker: Dr. Wafa Hassan - Academic Specialist, Arabic Language Instruction Program, Michigan State University

Dr. Wafa Hassan is a graduate of the George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development with a specialty in Bilingual Education and Special Education. She worked as K-12 Curriculum Supervisor and Director of Education at the Saudi Academy in Fairfax, Virginia.



Dr. Hassan is a member of the National Standards for Learning Arabic K-16 Task Force. She has conducted workshops for teachers of Arabic on a regular basis in the States and internationally. These workshops included many subjects on pedagogy, second language acquisition, bilingual education, teaching children with learning difficulties, learning styles, motivation, and curriculum and materials development.

Dr. Hassan is currently the Academic Specialist for the Arabic Language Instruction Program at Michigan State University. She is developing Arabic Curriculum for high school students cooperatively with Dearborn Public Schools.

2007 FALL CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

(cont. from p. 7)

- **Saturday Featured Speaker: Dr. Carlos Lopez - Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Oak Park School District**

Dr. Carlos Lopez has been in multicultural and bilingual education for over twenty years. Dr. Lopez has served as a classroom world languages teacher, university instructor, building principal and now district administrator. He was the Divisional Director for the Office of Bilingual Education, and Executive Director of Accountability for Student Achievement for Detroit Public Schools before taking his current position with Oak Park Schools as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, where he directs Specialized Student Services, including Title III / ESL Programs.

Dr. Lopez received his Ed. D. degree in Educational Administration and Curriculum and Instruction from Wayne State University, where he has also done post-doctoral work.

Dr. Lopez has served as a presenter at numerous conferences, including School of the 21st Century and Governor Granholm's "Turning Low-Performing Schools Around" Conference. Dr. Lopez is currently writing the Social Studies Content/ English Language Proficiency Levels Linking Document for the state.



FULBRIGHT—TEACHER EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Sponsored by the United States Department of State, the Fulbright Teacher Exchange directs one-to-one classroom exchanges to twenty-five countries for teachers of all curricular levels, kindergarten-post secondary.

Most exchanges occur for an academic year. Argentina, Chili, India and the United Kingdom offer fall-semester exchanges. Morocco and the United Kingdom offer six-week exchanges. Italy and Greece offer eight-week classical seminars for teachers of Latin, Greek or the Classics.

In addition to the teacher exchanges, there are administrative job-shadowing opportunities in eleven countries. Jordan, Thailand, and Uruguay currently offer opportunities to host incoming administrators during site visits to the United States.

Prospective applicants must meet the following general eligibility requirements:

* U.S. Citizenship * Fluency in English * Bachelor's degree or higher * Be in at least third year of full-time teaching * A current full-time position

The application deadline is October 15, 2007 for the 2008-2009 program year. For more information and/or an application please visit our web-site: www.fulbrightexchanges.org or call (800)726-0479

TESOL Advocacy Day

(cont. from p. 1)

experience for affiliate representatives on elements of advocacy. By the end of the day, TESOL members had visited more than 40 representatives and senators.

TESOL Advocacy Day 2007 was focused exclusively on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. In turn, affiliates representing the constituencies of those members of Congress were selected and invited to send a representative to Advocacy Day. Since Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI 5th), Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-MI 3rd), and Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI 7th) serve on the education committees in Congress, MITESOL was one of the affiliates selected to send a representative to TESOL Advocacy Day.

To participate, each affiliate representative was required to do several preparatory activities. For example, participants had to set up their own individual meetings with their Congressional representatives. To assist with this, TESOL provided guidance, as well as the list of specific representatives and senators to contact. Contacting the Reps. offices was the beginning of establishing a relationship with the staffers who were responsible for helping to draft the reauthorization language for NCLB. Each office graciously set up appointments with key staffers. Ms. Moase-Burke found that the staffers were knowledgeable and interested in engaging in substantive conversations about the merits and challenges of NCLB and how its reauthorization might be drafted to enhance the education of English Language Learners in Michigan.

Participants were also sent talking points and background information on NCLB so that they could begin to familiarize themselves with the issues in advance. In preparation for the meetings, Moase-Burke used the talking points to prepare information and anecdotes about ELLs in the representative's district to provide a local context of discussion of the implications of NCLB on local Michigan students and local school districts.

TESOL Advocacy Day commenced with a welcome from TESOL President Sandy Briggs. The participants were also joined by President-Elect Shelley Wong. The morning workshop was led by John Segota, Advocacy and Communications Manager, and was comprised of two panel briefings. The first featured congressional staff from both the House and the Senate discussing the "view from the Hill" on NCLB reauthorization, and the key issues under debate. The second briefing featured representatives from the National Council of La Raza and the International Reading Association to discuss the activities and viewpoints of each organization regarding the reauthorization.

Following these briefings, participants attended an interactive workshop on how to have an effective meeting with one's congressional representative. This workshop was led by Ellen Fern and Krista Heckler of Washington Partners, LLC, TESOL's legislative consultants.

(Cont. on p. 11)

Nominations for Board Positions

Executive Board Positions

- President Elect: Karen Gelardi**
 Karen Gelardi: Ed specialist in Curriculum and Instruction w/an ESL endorsement from Wayne State University, Masters in Urban Education from Cambridge College, Bachelor of Science with a ZA endorsement from University of Detroit Mercy. She is currently an ESL consultant in the Rochester Community schools. She has taught for over 15 years at the elementary level both as a classroom teacher and as an ESL teacher/consultant. She was a classroom teacher for both Detroit Public schools and Pontiac schools before coming to Rochester Community Schools.
- Secretary: Carol Kubota**
 Carol Kubota is the Director and owner of a small language school in Battle Creek, Mi. The school has been around for almost 10 years. She has also taught in Japan for four years and in Mexico City, Mexico for four years. Her experience includes teaching at Western Michigan University for six years. She enjoys traveling and is always looking for new ways to improve teaching ESL. She has a MATESOL degree and various other certificates. She believes that learning is ongoing, it never ends.
- Membership Coordinator: Rita Krause**
 Rita Krause received her BS in Elementary Education and Early Childhood from MSU. She has taught pre-K, Kindergarten, 1st, 3rd, 5th grades as well as middle school at MSU, Our Lady of LaSalette and the Troy School District. She earned her MAT in Early Childhood from Oakland University and her Ed Specialist, ESL/EFL, from Wayne State University. She currently serves as a member of the Oakland County ESL Leadership Team and has presented workshops for MITESOL/Michigan Department of Education Professional Development.
- Treasurer: Laura Holtz**
 Laura Holtz currently is an instructor at both Oakland Community College and Schoolcraft College. She received her masters degree in TESOL from Eastern Michigan University.

Advisory Board Positions: Special Interest Groups

We have three SIG leadership positions that are open. If you are interested in leading either of these SIGs, please email Carol Wilson-Duffy at wilson77@msu.edu.

- Adult Education**
 This Special Interest Group (SIG) supports Michigan Adult ESL teachers and administrators by encouraging and promoting communication, information-sharing, research, publication and awareness of Adult level English as a second language and bilingual learners, in any setting in which they may be learning English.

Nominations for Board Positions

(cont. from p.10)

- K-12**
 Members of this Special Interest Group teach children in public and private schools through out the state. Various configurations of instruction are possible, many of which are in use in Michigan.
- Post-Secondary Student Programs Special Interest Group**
 This Special Interest Group (SIG) supports Michigan ESL teachers and administrators in universities, colleges, community colleges, Intensive English Programs (IEPs), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, writing centers and language schools.

TESOL Advocacy Day

(cont. from p. 9)

Participants were provided key information to prepare for their meetings and given the opportunity to role play. The purpose of the briefings and the workshop was to help the participants practice and prepare for their meeting on Capitol Hill that afternoon.

After lunch the TESOL affiliate team was off to Capitol Hill. Conversations with the staffers were very constructive. MITESOL thanks the Offices of Rep. Kildee, Rep. Ehlers, and Rep. Walberg for spending time to discuss NCLB.

Lloyd Horwich, Rep. Kildee's staffer in charge of all educational issues, spent significant time discussing in detail the challenge facing legislators as they draft the reauthorization language of NCLB as well as what specific suggestions might shed any new light on resolving the challenges facing legislators. Challenges included how NCLB might provide some accommodations while continuing to require accountability of achievement on both the MEAP and MME.

Rachel Post from Rep. Ehler's office and Bruce Miller from Rep. Walberg's office also discussed issues impacting ELLs such as, accountability, accommodations, and the impact of high stakes testing on ELLs and the schools they attend.

At the end of the day, each participant shared their experiences over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit. One common thread in the debriefing is that our local affiliate organizations, such as MITESOL, need to actively contact Michigan representatives. Overall, all of the participants agreed this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL.

Additional information about TESOL Advocacy Day, including photographs and video of the interactive workshop, is available on the TESOL web site at <http://www.tesol.org>. If you are interested in learning more about your Congressional representatives, and the legislative issues TESOL is tracking, go the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/tesol>.

SIG Updates

CALL SIG Using Technology with Discretion

By Angela Predhomme

As teachers, many of us feel excited to be able to offer our students new and exciting ways of learning. Motivation is a key element in the learning process, and many of our students are responsive to new, technologies as many of them are more skilled with it than we are. However, as we strive to stay current and incorporate these things into our classrooms, we need to be aware of the fact that as technology may be an effective and motivating tool for some English learners, it can be a hindrance and a source of anxiety to others. As the title of this article suggests, technology is most beneficial when used with the discretion of teachers who are sensitive to the learners' needs.

The students that we work with are from widely varying backgrounds. Some may have a low level of L1 literacy, while others may not only have a high level of L2 literacy, but also advanced computer literacy. Sometimes, we encounter these different types of students in the same classroom. Then, what do we do with that great idea for the online homework discussion? What do we do when some of our students absolutely love the idea of using technology, while some students are anxious and worried about looking foolish to their peers? As teachers, it is important that we are aware of these potentially silent anxieties and inequities in computer literacy. As my wise professor from EMU spoke of in our class about language acquisition theories, we need to take into consideration the "affective variables." In other words, we need to think about and monitor how our students feel about their learning experiences. We need to be aware that technology is something that can create a lot of emotion, or "affective response."

How, then, do we approach using technology in the classroom? One idea that I came across caught my interest. It's called Flow Theory, and this method is detailed in a study published in *The Modern Language Journal* by Joy Egbert of Washington State University (2003). The article, "A Study of Flow Theory in the Foreign Language Classroom," is available as a PDF download from our MITESOL website. It is on the CALL SIG articles page, which is under the "membership" menu on the main page.

This interesting theory is not based around language learning, but it is rooted in the psychology of motivation. Author Egbert cites a body of work by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the psychologist mainly responsible for this theory. The application of Flow Theory has been studied across many different disciplines, and I suggest that it may be especially pertinent to the use of technology in education.

In essence, this theory of motivation incorporates components such as clear goals, tasks that are not too easy or too difficult, and a sense of personal control on the part of the learner, among six other elements of the theory. In Egbert's study, Flow Theory was found to be successful in the language classroom, but admittedly difficult to measure.

(Cont. on p. 13)

Using Technology

(cont. from p. 12)

As we know, the challenge of any teacher is to take complex academic research and apply it to our daily lives. As I stated above, I think that this theory has a lot of potential if applied to the use of technology in ESL. Specifically, if students are given choices and if they have a sense of control over technology tasks or their use or non-use of computers, then in theory, this would alleviate some anxiety and increase motivation. Furthermore, increased motivation has repeatedly been proven to result in increased learning overall, which, of course, is the goal that we all share.

So, in brief, we must remember that technology can either be really exciting and fun, or really scary; it evokes emotion. We, as teachers, should maintain a heightened sense of awareness of our students' feelings toward the technology being used. Several models of motivation exist, but Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory is one that may be particularly effective with the use of technology in language learning because it gives the learners choices. This sense of control may be an important factor in the success of CALL, computer-aided language learning.

SIG Updates

ESL x Special Education SIG What's FAS, Crack/Cocaine, and Marijuana Got to Do with It?

by Christen M. Pearson, PhD

ESL children from migrant, refugee, and many immigrant situations—populations typically served by MITESOL members across the state—are often at higher risk of learning disabilities (LD) in general, and language learning disabilities (LLD) in particular, due to the following: poor maternal nutrition during the pregnancy, lack of medical care—prenatal and postnatal—due to both cost and access, and living conditions lacking in sanitation (including lead exposure), clean water, and/or heat. In addition to lack of the basics of sanitation, adequate nutrition, and appropriate medical care, the complexity of the problem is frequently compounded by additional risk factors that affect all populations, that of drug and alcohol use/abuse and the effects of tobacco and environmental smoke.

For ESL teachers, this question is a conundrum: when a child is having difficulty learning English and literacy skills, when is it an ESL problem and when does it involve something more, something that special education personnel might be more highly trained to handle?

(Cont. on p. 14)

What's FAS, Crack/Cocaine, and Marijuana Got to Do with It?

(Cont. from p. 13)

A first step in this direction is to know the constellation of areas that point to the potential source of the problem and then make a referral to the most appropriate resource specialist. Before looking at these problem areas, though, a question: In thinking about the effects of fetal exposure to substance use/abuse on early and later child development, which causes the most damage long-term, as evidenced by LDs and LLDs? Now, before reading on, go further with this. Rank order, from most severe to least severe in causing problems, the following substances: alcohol, crack/cocaine, tobacco, and marijuana.

What now follows is a brief outline of the potential problems of fetal exposure to the above substances—moving from the more typical ranking of crack/cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco—across eight main areas: birth and early physical development, malformations and other physical problems, sensory difficulties, cognitive development, attention and memory, language development, social and behavioral challenges, and academic performance. Specific characteristics across these areas are taken directly from Ratner and Harris (1994) via Fahey and Reid (2000), though commentary belongs solely to this author.

Crack/cocaine, typically thought of as the “strongest” of the drugs in the above list, has the potential to cause problems in all eight areas. These problems include: prematurity, prenatal growth retardation, low birth weight and malnutrition, and small head circumference; increased blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and seizures of the infant, small limb size, urinary tract abnormalities, and problematic feeding patterns; lack of responsiveness, problems with visual tracking, and impairments of the auditory system; disorganized play lacking in representational skills and problems with abstract concepts; problematic sleeping patterns, memory reduction, depression, irritability, hypersensitivity, excitability, and problems with maintaining alertness, organizing, and self-regulation; language comprehension and production problems, lack of turn-taking and visual speaking cues, and poor pragmatic skills; unresponsiveness to human interaction, difficulty in attachment, abrupt and/or inappropriate behavior, problems recognizing emotions in self and others, and higher incidence of autism; declining academic performance and learning disabilities. As can be seen, most, if not all, of these impact language and learning potential either directly or indirectly.

Marijuana is often placed second on the list, most likely due to its illegal status. During infancy, tremors are often noted. Sensory problems are likely, including a lack of responsiveness to visual stimuli. Sleep disturbances occur, along with a performance reduction on memory tasks and attention deficits in school-aged children. Finally, prenatal exposure to marijuana often results in reduced performance on verbal tasks. Though the list is not nearly as extensive as that of crack/cocaine, problems involving the sensory system, memory, and attention, along with language difficulties, paint a picture of a child at-risk in the educational setting.

The results of the effects of alcohol abuse on the developing fetus have come to be known as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Related to this, milder results of alcohol abuse, or even simply alcohol use in some situations, is known as fetal alcohol effects (FAE).

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Children exposed to alcohol in utero can exhibit the following problems: prematurity, low birth weight, and retardation in postnatal growth; motor development that is delayed, unusual facial formation, and malformations of the brain, limbs, heart, and palate; hearing and visual impairments; delays in cognitive development and/or cognitive deficit, concept confusion, and difficulties in predicting consequences; problems in attention, including short attention span, hyperactivity, and distractibility; language development that is delayed with impairments noted in the quality and quantity of the lexicon, including shallow word meaning, along with shortened sentence length; social problems that include immature play routines, lack of skills needed for friendship development, inappropriate social language use, and avoidance of verbal interaction; difficulties in comprehension of academics, abstract thinking, visual/spatial memory, concept development, and problem-solving skills. Since alcohol is a legal substance, not even thought of as a drug by many, the gravity of the above numerous problems is often not realized. In reality, the effects are often just as severe as crack/cocaine and more problematic than marijuana.

Finally, in what is usually perceived by the general public as the least noxious of substance exposure, there is tobacco (including second-hand) and other environmental smoke. Exposure in utero can cause prematurity, low birth weight, complications of pregnancy including bleeding and premature rupture of the membranes, and decreased birth length and head circumference; acute and/or chronic respiratory problems, impaired lung development, higher death rate of both fetus and infant, poor development of fine and gross motor skills, and an increased risk for middle ear infections; problems with both visual and auditory senses, including decreased visual alertness and difficulty orienting to others' voices; poorer performances on cognitive tasks; problems with language skills; and less advanced skills in academic verbal tasks, reading, and math. As can be seen, although the risks are fewer in number than with crack/cocaine or alcohol, the potential effect on language and academic learning is no less severe. Interestingly enough, the potential number of problems are greater, especially in relation to long-term academic success, than that of marijuana use. A question that remains to be answered is: what are the effects on later child development and academic skills of fetal exposure to *multiple* substances?

Looking back, did your ranking match the above order or did you more accurately guess that tobacco and other environmental smoke exert a significant risk of pregnancy and birth complications, malformations, impaired cognitive development, and, perhaps of greater interest to teachers, that of difficulties in academic performance? If so, consider yourself to be well-educated in this area. In closing, in answer to the question posed in the title of this piece—what does crack/cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol have to do with ESL and special education—a lot! And even more so, the effects of tobacco, including second-hand smoke, must also be considered. In a population already challenged by lack of adequate nutrition, medical care, and basics of survival, the effects of the above substances on fetal development can be the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” when looking down the road at language development and literacy acquisition. As ESL educators, we need to be aware of all the potential risk factors, not just the more obvious.

References

Fahey, K. R. & Reid, D. K. (2000). *Language development, differences, and disorders: A perspective for general and special education teachers and classroom-based speech-language pathologists*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.