President’s Corner

Happy New Year MITESOL Members and Friends!

What a cold and snowy start to our year. I think we have all forgotten what winter can be like – ferocious. I think about the many students I serve in my district from places such as Africa and India and how different this climate must be for them. Just another transition for many of the English Learners we serve throughout our state. Transitions are always a part of life for the English Learners and the families across Michigan. The best part of being part of MITSEOL is meeting the many people in our state who are dedicated to meeting the needs of these students and their families every day.

The October Conference, “Realizing Transitions,” was a huge success thanks to the amazing team of co-chairs Rick Rojas, Andrew McCullough, and Carmela Gillette. Additional support came from the dynamic board members and wonderful volunteers from MITESOL. Over 325 people enjoyed over 60 sessions and the two keynote speakers: Dr. Randi Reppen and Dr. Catherine Reischl. The conference reminded me how many educators at all levels are on the same journey to provide the best education to speakers of other languages. It also afforded me the opportunity to meet many different people at all educational levels across this state and to hear about the great things that are happening here in Michigan.

As educators, we are consistently dealing with transitions and change. This year has been a very busy one with the change of the state’s English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) and Standards to the WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Consortium’s Standards and Assessment. This is an exciting change for the K-12 community, but one that is filled with a great deal of work. We will begin our testing this February and look forward to the new reports and proficiency descriptors. The resources provided from WIDA will help us better understand where our students are in their language acquisition and how to better service their needs. WIDA has also worked hard to align with the new Common Core State Standards which in turn will help us guide our students into the transition to the general educational curriculum.

It has been a great honor to be the president of MITESOL. I have had the opportunity to work with some very talented and very smart people. We said good-bye to Morgan Cox as our membership coordinator. She is moving on to another field and we wish her all the best. Morgan was also instrumental in helping to change our membership process and website to Wild Apricot which is a web resource that will give us much more capability in years to come. Please note we will be moving completely over to the website this February. We also changed many of our board members and committee chairs. I hope you will take time to look up the new board members and their bios (ed. note – see p. 3-5 of this issue).

The TESOL conference in Portland is fast approaching from March 26th - 29th. If you are planning on presenting at the conference, please let us know and we will post your session on the website. Also, if you would like to write up anything about your experience at TESOL, please let us know so we can post. The MITESOL reception this year is at the Rock Bottom Brewery. More information is on p. 7 of the newsletter. We hope to see many of you and your friends at the conference and at the reception.

Cheers and Stay WARM, Jeanine Clever
From the Editors...

It has been a fierce winter in Michigan! With snow, ice, below freezing temperatures, and school closings all piling up, spring seems like a distant memory. Remember when we claimed to love the seasonal changes in this state? That love is definitely being put to the test this year for many of us, but March is here already, and it has to warm up eventually. It does have to warm up eventually, doesn’t it?

Hopefully this issue of MITESOL Messages will encourage you to stay positive throughout the rest of the winter season. Great things are happening in ESL education around the state, and we have a very diverse issue for you! Please look for your colleagues on p. 8 of this issue under TESOL Convention Presenters and Upcoming Publications. Keep us in mind as a way to announce your own upcoming presentations and/or publications as well!

In this issue’s Updates from the Field, members report on their experiences and offer practical new classroom activities. “The JUSTE Program” (p. 10) describes the experience of two visiting scholars from Japan, Katsunori Shirai and Yutaro Nishida, at Western Michigan University. Jim Desler gives practical advice for starting and leading a professional development book club with colleagues starting on p. 11. Practical tips for providing effective grammar explanations to learners are highlighted in Michael Busch’s “Explaining Grammar Concepts to Learners” on p. 12-13. Catherine Reischl, one of our keynote speakers from our 2013 MITESOL Conference, provides a novel way to use informational videos in “Recording and Revisiting Short Videos to Improve ELs Informational Writing: Two Strategies” on p. 14-15.

Keep looking forward to spring, and we promise that it be warm by the time the next issue comes out in August!

Sincerely,

Allie Piioppo & Aiman Mueller
MITESOL Messages Co-Editors
apiippo@emich.edu
aiman.w.mueller@att.net

Correction to the August Issue

The MITESOL Messages editors wish to correct an oversight on our part from the August 2013 edition of the newsletter.

On pages 10-14, we mistakenly changed the title of the article. It should be: Developing Critical Thinking through Creative Writing: The Three-Step Short Story and Evidence It Works. In addition, we omitted the author’s middle initial, which should have been published as Patrick T. Randolph.

We value accuracy and welcome corrections!

Editors Allie Piioppo and Aiman Mueller
We extend our thanks to several outgoing executive and advisory board members, all of whom have supplied fantastic energy, ideas, and hard work to the organization: Joel Boyd, Ricardo Rojas, Morgan Cox, Karen Morrison, Lisa Hutchison Lockhart, Zuzana Tomas, Carmella Gillette, and James Parren. Warm thanks to each of them.

Further, Andrew Domzalski (photo left) will move from president to Past President/ATECR responsibilities, Jeanine Clever will move from president-elect to President/ATECR Liaison (photo right), and two others will take new roles on the executive board:

**President-Elect—Colleen Brice** ([bricec@gvsu.edu](mailto:bricec@gvsu.edu)) Grand Valley State University

Colleen Brice is associate professor of TESOL in the Department of English at Grand Valley State University, where she teaches courses in linguistics, TESL, and ESL writing for undergraduate and graduate students. Her research interests include issues in second language writing, teacher education, and LESLLA (low-educated second language and literacy acquisition). Her work has appeared in Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, International Journal of English Studies, TESOL Journal, and Language.

**Membership Coordinator (2 year term)—Jane DeGroot** ([janedegroot@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janedegroot@sbcglobal.net)) Literacy Center of West Michigan

Following a career in fund-raising and development in western Michigan, Jane DeGroot completed a masters degree in TESOL from Grand Valley State University in 2006. She then accepted a ten-month teaching position in the Democratic Republic of Congo through the English Language Fellow Program. Since her return in 2008, she has served the Coordinator for Customized Workplace English (CWE) at the Literacy Center of West Michigan (Grand Rapids). Jane has enjoyed being a member of MITESOL since 2003 and SIG leader for English for Special Purposes since 2009 until accepting the position of Membership Coordinator last October.
MITESOL News

MITESOL Leadership 2013-2014

There is movement among advisory and support positions as well. Jaana Terhune (left photo left) will move from CALL SIG to K-12 SIG, Marian Woyciehowicz Gonsior (middle photo left) will move from Exhibits Manager to Conference Proceedings Editor, and we welcome Andrew McCullough (right photo left) back to the Post-Secondary SIG position he’s held in the past.

We welcome plenty of new members as well. Seven, actually!

Treasurer—Jim Desler (desler@msu.edu) Michigan State University

Jim Desler has been an ESL instructor at MSU since 2009. He also has K-12 experience.

CALL SIG (2 year term)—Suzan Naoumi (suzan.naoumi@farmington.k12.mi.us) Farmington Public Schools

Suzan Naoumi is an ELL Teacher in Farmington Public Schools. She graduated from Wayne State University in 2002 with Bachelors in Elementary and Math Education. In 2007, she completed Masters in Education with an ESL certification. She has been working with ELL students for the past 10 years and enjoys the love of learning languages. She speaks Chaldean and Arabic. On a personal note, she has been married for 5 years, and has 2 little girls: Chloe and Grace.

Workplace SIG (2 year term)—David VanOver (davidpyanover@hotmail.com)

David Van Over went to Siena Heights University for his undergrad where he majored in language arts and minored in elementary education. He received a Masters of Education in Literacy Studies with an emphasis in TESOL from Grand Valley State University. David is currently an elementary and middle school ELL teacher in the Grand Rapids area, and an ELL tutor for Global LT. He has also taught adult reading classes for Grand Rapids Community College, adult ESL classes for the Literacy Center of West Michigan, and fourth grade in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Professional Development SIG (2 year Term)—Michael Pasquale (michael.pasquale@cornerstone.edu) Cornerstone University

Michael Pasquale is Associate Professor of Linguistics and the Director of the MA TESOL program at Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He earned his Ph.D. in Linguistics from Michigan State University. His research interests include studying the relation of folk linguistics, SLA, and language policy.
MITESOL Messages: February 2014

MITESOL Leadership 2013-2014

**Exhibits Manager (2 year term)—Sharon Pearce** *(sharon.m.pearce@gmail.com)* CaMLA

Sharon Pearce earned her M.A. in Linguistics from Oakland University and also holds a B.A. in Spanish from Western Michigan University. She is currently an Assessment Associate at Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments (CaMLA). Previously, she taught ESL for adults for several years and worked as an administrator at Language Center International. She has also taught EFL in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In her free time, Sharon enjoys live music, coffee, and playing with her cats.

**Public Relations Officer (2 year term)—Sally Freels** *(sbfreels@madonna.edu)* Madonna University

Sally Freels is adjunct faculty at Madonna University, Livonia, Michigan. She received her MATEsOL from Madonna University. Currently teaching as an adjunct, she previously taught English to Spanish speaking adults, in Southwest Detroit, as a part of a family literacy program supported by Southwest Solutions. She has also worked as an ESL tutor in the Madonna University Writing Center. Prior to her MATEsOL career, after earning her BA from the University of Utah in Art History, Sally earned an MA in Nonprofit Management from Regis University, Denver. She subsequently spent twelve years as a nonprofit fundraiser at the University of Utah, Wayne State University, Cranbrook Schools and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. After a little soul searching, Sally decided it was time to pursue the career she had always wanted. She chose the Madonna University MA TESOL program as it was a perfect combination of her favorite things: languages, diverse cultures and teaching. Sally is an avid traveler and challenges herself to visit two countries a year. She lives in Ferndale, Michigan and is engaged to her favorite German travel companion.

**Socio-Political Concerns (2 year term)—Harry Posner** *(hposner@my.madonna.edu)* Madonna University

Harry Posner has a long standing commitment to issues of peace and social justice. After working with at risk youth and adults for over twenty years, Harry earned his MATEsOL from Madonna University. He is currently employed as an adjunct professor at Madonna University and with the State of Michigan on a full time basis. Harry has experience advocating for various causes and has been involved with numerous grassroots advocacy organizations.

Pictured below are leadership who are diligently continuing in their same positions on the executive or advisory boards:

- **Ellen Brengle** Secretary
- **Heidi Enck** Communications Coordinator
- **Akiko Ota** Adult Ed SIG
- **Aiman W. Mueller** Newsletter co-Editor
- **Allison Piippo** Newsletter co-Editor
- **Pamela Bogart** Listserv Manager
- **Justin Dykhouse** Webmaster
Board Notes

Ellen Brengle, Secretary

Especially at this time of year, I love looking back at Allison’s and Aiman’s August edition of MITESOL Messages with the gorgeous photo of the Grand Haven pier (my home town). It reminds me that, yes, summer really does return every year, even when it seems so far away from today’s cold, white world.

Back on a glorious, sunny day in August 2013, the board met at President Jeanine Clever’s lovely house with a great view of one of southeastern Michigan’s little lakes. Plans for the upcoming MITESOL 2013 conference in East Lansing were finalized at that meeting, continued progress was reported toward a complete transfer to Wild Apricot to handle our administrative needs, and a proposal to make an exchange of duties between the past and current presidents (ATECR liaison and TESOL liaison) was explored. At this meeting we were also made aware of the board members who were planning to step down, and of the interest from others who would potentially step up to volunteer for these positions.

Autumn brought the usual flurry of activities needed to put finishing touches on yet another excellent MITESOL conference. Kudos are extended to the conference chair, Jeanine Clever, and to her co-chair, Ricardo Rojas for an outstanding, well-attended conference. MSU again offered an excellent venue for that conference which featured two exceptional keynote speakers as well as many engaging smaller sessions from 4:00 P.M. Friday through 4:00 P.M. Saturday.

At our November transition meeting, we said good-bye to several board members who will be greatly missed. A special thanks is extended to our past Membership Coordinator, Morgan Cox, who took the initiative to explore the possibilities, and then to enlist in a trial program of a new source (Wild Apricot) for handling our conference and membership registration, as well as our website and bill-pay functions. This significant change will continue to be beneficial to MITESOL both financially and especially logistically. Additionally, we welcomed seven new board/task force members, whose willingness to contribute their expertise and energy to MITESOL is deeply appreciated.

Plans are now underway to settle on a winning theme for our next MITESOL conference to be held at Eberhard Center at GVSU October 17-18, 2014. Looking forward to seeing many of you there!

Socio-Political Concerns SIG Update

Harry Posner, Socio-Political Concerns SIG Leader

Politics is in the air and as we move into this election season, education promises to take a central role in the political debate. In his State of the State address, the governor spoke about Michigan putting out the welcome mat for immigrants. This is an opportunity for the ESL community to speak up. We will be watching this issue as it unfolds and keeping you informed. This is an exciting time for us to make our voices heard and to bring the importance of ESL issues to the forefront.

Keeping up on the various issues important to the ESL community is a daunting task. As the new chair of the Socio-Political Committee, I need your help. If you become aware of issues you think would be important for our larger membership, please pass that information on to me so that we can get the word out. You can email me at hposner@madonna.edu.

Additionally, I would like to develop an advisory team as part of the Socio-Political Committee. If you would be interested in assisting with the gathering and dissemination of important issues, please contact me. With your help, we can not only keep our membership informed of the important issues, but also help mobilize our members to make sure our voice is heard.

I look forward to hearing from you!
MITESOL Reception
TESOL 2014
Join your friends at the Rock Bottom Brewery
Thursday, March 27th from 5:00-9:00 pm

206 SW Morrison St.
Portland, OR
97204-503-796-2739

Please RSVP to the following Survey Monkey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GFKDWFC

THANK YOU to Our Sponsors!!

Cornerstone University
Eastern Michigan University TESOL Faculty
The English Language Center, Michigan State University
The English Language Institute, University of Michigan
The English Language Center, Michigan Tech University
Michigan Presenters at TESOL 2014

Congratulations to the following presentations by Michigan presenters at the TESOL International Convention in Portland, Oregon March 27-29. Please look for their presentations in the program and support your Michigan colleagues by attending their presentations!

[Ed. note: We thank Heidi Enck, MITESOL Communications Coordinator, for keeping us in the loop regarding these presentations and we sincerely hope that we did not neglect to include any Michigan presenters from this list. In the future, please feel free to submit notice of any presentations, publications and/or other professional achievements for publication in future MITESOL Message editions! Send an email to Allison Piippo at apiippo@emich.edu or Aiman W. Mueller at aiman.w.mueller@att.net.]

Presenters:
Patrick T. Randolph, Western Michigan University
Paul McPherron, Hunter College of the City University of New York

Title: Cat Got Your Tongue? Classroom Practices for Teaching Idioms
Thursday, March 28, 3:00–3:45 PM, Room B115 (in the Convention Center)

Presenter:
Patrick T. Randolph, Western Michigan University

Title: Using Adverbials to Generate Song Lyrics and One Act Plays
Thursday, March 28, 2:00 PM, Room A103 (in the Convention Center)

Presenters:
Patrick T. Randolph, Western Michigan University
Nick Margelis, Western Michigan University

Title: Speaking Projects That Work: From Simple Narratives to Cultural Examinations
Friday, March 29, 9:30 AM, Room E144 (in the Convention Center)

MITESOL Member Publications

Authors Paul McPherron (Hunter College of the City University of New York) and Patrick T. Randolph (Western Michigan University) will have their book, Cat Got Your Tongue?: Recent Research and Classroom Practices for Teaching Idioms to English Learners Around the World, published by TESOL in June of this year. The book is a blend of recent research, survey results, and useful “Monday morning-ready activities” for teachers of ELLS. The authors would like to thank those in the MITESOL community who participated in the teacher survey on idioms. The results of this survey appear in chapter six of the book. For more on this text, go to the TESOL 2014 online catalog.

Ed. Note: Please feel free to notify us of upcoming or recent publications for inclusion in MITESOL Messages—we are honored to recognize our members’ achievements.
Building on last year’s success, Michigan State University’s English Language Center will team up with National Geographic Learning to host a Learning Symposium. The event will be held Saturday, April 12th, 2014, on the MSU campus in East Lansing. The day’s expenses – registration, parking, and meals – will be covered by National Geographic Learning, making the Learning Symposium the most affordable, high-quality professional development conference you will ever attend.

Last year, the National Geographic Learning | MSU Learning Symposium was centered on the topic of integrating content-based instruction through relevant materials. National Geographic Explorers Tim Samaras and Trevor Frost provided the content, wowing attendees with multi-media presentations of their adventures. National Geographic Learning representatives exhibited their latest publications and demonstrated ways to make use of other National Geographic resources. MSU faculty members presented during concurrent break-out sessions. They offered insight into the content-based courses they teach and the strategies and methods they employ.

Neil J. Anderson, our keynote speaker, concluded the day with his presentation on reading fluency, providing both a framework for curriculum-level changes and activities that attendees could use the next day in their own classrooms.

One attendee admitted that heading into the symposium she was relatively unfamiliar with content-based instruction, but said that “in a mere morning and afternoon, [the Learning Symposium presenters] have taken me from hesitant to really excited to try applying these ideas in my teaching practice.”

Another participant wrote of the Learning Symposium, “It was the most helpful and professional development event I have attended in years!”

The 2013 event was so well received, in fact, that the MSU English Language Center and National Geographic Learning have decided to make the Learning Symposium an annual event, each year focusing on a different aspect of English language instruction. The Learning Symposium planning team is excited to announce that this year’s event will be titled “The World in Words: Teaching and Learning Academic Vocabulary.”

Following this theme, noted authors and presenters will shed light on the world of vocabulary instruction and acquisition, and how vocabulary relates to the other aspects of language teaching and learning.

National Geographic Learning has announced that this year’s keynote speaker will be Pamela Hartmann, co-author of their Inspire series. She will speak on “Inspiring Discussion with National Geographic.” Hartmann taught in Korea and then in Greece before returning to California, where she taught at UCLA, USC, Santa Monica College, West Los Angeles College, Pepperdine University, and for thirty years in the Intensive English Program at Evans Community Adult School, in the Los Angeles Unified School District. In recent years, one of her interests has included research in the teaching of vocabulary.

This year’s Learning Symposium will again feature a National Geographic Explorer presentation and concurrent session presenters from around the nation and the Great Lakes region. Currently, presentation proposals are being reviewed and selected. Presentation speakers and abstracts will be available on the website as soon as the selection process has been completed.

For details or to register, please visit the Learning Symposium website: natgeo2014.elc.msu.edu

Keep up to date and follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/learningsymposium See you in April!
The JUSTE Program

Katsunori Shirai, Shizuoka, Japan and Yutaro Nishida, Hyogo, Japan

The Japan-U.S. Training Exchange Program for English Language Teachers (JUSTE) started in 2011, and each year since then about 100 Japanese English teachers have come to the United States annually for professional development. The program has three major aims: first, to make English education in Japan better than what it is today; second, to improve our own English so that we can teach our students in English; and third, to deepen natural understanding among a wide range of people between Japan and the U.S.

We are members of a group of fourteen Japanese English teachers who returned home at the end of January after participating in the six-month JUSTE program at Western Michigan University. Learning about second language acquisition was one of our main goals for this program, because few of us had studied it in Japan. We strongly hoped to gain techniques to raise our students’ abilities, especially in speaking and listening. We also wanted to learn logical and effective ways to teach English.

The six-month program was divided into three phases. During Phase 1 we brushed up on our English skills. The purpose of Phase 2 was to learn TEFL methods and practical techniques. In Phase 3 we visited public schools in Kalamazoo to get ideas to teach English, get to know education in the U.S., and have the students know more about Japan and its culture.

Phase 1 lasted four weeks. We had a two-hour speaking/listening class and a two-hour reading/writing class each day. Both focused on academic English. Our teachers had us preview some chapters of the textbooks we would use in Phase 2. The discussions and writing we had to do from those readings started our reconsideration of how we were teaching back in Japan. We also made a presentation to our teachers about what the Ministry of Education expected from us in this program, which was a very good review of our purpose for being here.

Phase 2 took place through the Fall semester at Western Michigan University. The objective was to learn more about TEFL methods and apply them to our situations in Japan. The textbooks were Brown’s Teaching by Principles, Lightbown and Spada’s How Languages are Learned, and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching. While we were learning the methods and principles, we tried to apply them to our situations at the same time by doing micro-teaching. We made lesson plans and actually taught in front of other teachers by taking them as students. The discussion that followed made us notice many things we hadn’t realized. During this phase we also observed classes at the Center for English Language and Culture for International Students, Western’s intensive English program. Seeing how ESL is taught in an intensive program was very useful for us. We also audited a university teacher education class to learn more about the process of becoming a teacher in the U.S. and the teaching situation here.

For Phase 3, we started visiting different elementary schools in the middle of October and finished in the middle of January. Our goals were to observe what education is like in the U.S., find ideas we can use in Japan, and have the students know more about Japan. Each of us was assigned to an ESL teacher who acted as a mentor and allowed us to observe both normal classes and pullout-style ESL classes. As we observed and talked with our mentor teachers, we had many inspirations about teaching. We not only learned how to be better English teachers, but also how to be better teachers overall. We made some presentations and demonstrations about Japanese culture and society. The students enjoyed these, and seem to have a better understanding of Japan now.

There were many highlights to our stay in the U.S. We visited the Japanese embassy in Washington D.C., the Consulate in Detroit, the Hinko International School in Livonia, and the Japanese School of Battle Creek. The MITESOL conference in October was a special experience for us. We were stimulated by many of the presentations there to explore topics such as extensive reading and presentation skills. We are grateful to the MITESOL presenters for the interesting ideas they showed us.

We were hosted by American families for more than five months. They had us experience many aspects of American culture by living together. What we encountered with them is one of the biggest gifts we brought back to Japan. We were very happy to live with nice and wonderful families. Our mentor teachers at public schools tried their best to help us know what we’d like to know and get techniques and materials to use in Japan. We are sure we’ll make use of many things we’ve learned from them. Talking about education with them was interesting in that we had different points of view.

We greatly appreciate everyone involved in this program in the U.S. and Japan. We are very glad to have had this opportunity to be here. Coming back to Japan is not the end of the program but the beginning of our responsibilities. Some of us have talked about our concrete plans. We are prepared to spread the logic and methodology of effective teaching not only to the teachers at our schools, but also to the local English teachers. Furthermore we keep trying to understand more about American people and culture, so that we can tell our students and people in Japan about them. We will lead English education in Japan with gratitude in our minds. Thank you, Kalamazoo. Thank you, Michigan.
Professional Development Book Club

Jim Desler
English Language Center at Michigan State University

Do you desire to grow as a teacher but feel that an occasional workshop, conference, or article is not doing the trick? Would you like to go more deeply into a specific subject but don’t have the discipline to do it on your own? If so, perhaps a book club with a few like-minded colleagues is the solution for you.

After teaching ESL at Michigan State for four years—a school with many opportunities for professional development—I felt like I was growing as a teacher but not in the way that I wanted. I was getting more comfortable with lesson prep and class management, getting more familiar with a variety of textbooks and technologies, and hearing the latest techniques for teaching vocabulary or the latest research related to error correction. Don’t get me wrong; that’s all very nice. It’s just that I felt I was growing very broadly and shallowly, perhaps even imperceptibly, and that did not satisfy me. Rather than grow a little bit in a lot of areas, I wanted to grow a great deal in one area.

Part of my strategy to grow deeply in a particular area was to form a book club. After choosing academic writing as my area of focus, I invited colleagues who were going to teach writing in the coming semester if they would want to participate with me. Four said they would, and that was important for two reasons: One, I was not going to read an entire academic book on my own; I needed deadlines and obligations. And, two, I wanted other experienced teachers who would share their insights with me.

Next we had to choose a book. I asked the club members to suggest books and also solicited recommendations from a few TESOL professors. After spending a couple of weeks considering options, we chose Writing Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching by Joy Reid, et al. This turned out to be a good choice because each chapter was somewhat independent, allowing us to pick and choose the ones we were most interested in. It was also research-based and recent (2008), two criteria that were important to us.

The next challenge, besides everyone getting hold of the book, was choosing the frequency and format of our meetings. Rather than meet too often and feel overburdened or unprepared, we decided to meet every three weeks. Three weeks would give us time not only to read a chapter but also to apply something from the chapter in our classes if we were so inclined, and immediate application was important to me. If I did not use what I learned from this book, the notes would just end up in a file along with all the handouts I’d collected from TESOL conferences over the years.

Regarding the format of meetings, we were rather loose. People shared what they thought was valuable from the chapter, what resonated with them, what they had applied already or thought they might apply soon. We shared related resources and experiences with one another. As the leader, I often prepared questions to get us into the material, but they were rarely needed. We made it a ground rule that we would not spend the hour criticizing what we’d read but rather focusing on what was useful. As the meeting was only an hour, I made sure that we avoided chitchatting or getting sidetracked.

In one semester, we met six times and discussed five of the nine chapters. Although that does not seem like a lot, if your goal is to apply what you learn, it might actually be too much material. In fact, though we considered continuing for this semester, I felt that I had learned enough and needed to focus on applying it rather than trying to learn more.

What have I applied? Two things, mainly. First, because I realized that many of my students’ awkward sounding or unintelligible sentences were caused more by lexical than grammatical inadequacies, I now put a greater emphasis on vocabulary, word forms, and collocations. I was regularly teaching vocabulary before, but now I’m learning how to do it better—yes, more reading—and I’m able to demonstrate its importance to them and teach them how to be better vocabulary learners. Secondly, I now give students a broader range of writing assignments rather than focusing primarily on essays because I have realized that this broader range reflects the kind of writing they will actually be required to produce once they finish with ESL and begin working on their degrees. These assignments include short answer test questions, making and supporting claims based on data, more frequent summaries and responses to readings, even writing properly formatted emails.

(Continued on page 15)
Explaining Grammar Concepts to Learners

Michael Busch, English Language Program, Saginaw Valley State University

One of the most difficult skills for a new teacher of grammar is learning how to provide effective explanations. The problem is not only what should (or should not) be said about the grammar, but also how to explain concepts in a way that is comprehensible and beneficial for L2 learners. In this article I discuss what is meant by a grammar concept and then describe what I would consider to be the qualities of effective explanations.

Grammar concepts are specific to a particular theoretical system of language description, such as generative grammar and systemic functional linguistics. While there are many theoretical systems of grammar, the system that is almost always found in commercial ESL textbooks is an old one—pedagogical grammar—the lineage of which can be traced to the linguistic structuralism of the 1950s, 19th century foreign language textbooks, and classical antiquity (Linn, 2006). Following Greek and Latin ideas about the nature of language, grammar concepts were believed to consist of pure essential forms that could be known by identifying a set of attributes; subsequently, a grammar concept consisted of the sum of its parts, which practically speaking referred to individual words that were classified into functional categories. This “sum of its parts” tradition lives on today in ESL textbook explanations that emphasize structure over meaning. These textbooks present charts showing formal characteristics and confine grammar practice to restricted response exercises, such as fill-in-the-blank and multiple choice, that focus on form and do not require an explicit knowledge of the grammar or communicative understanding. Students are presented with descriptive rules about form, while conceptual understanding and pragmatic meaning are given little, if any, attention.

A definitive taxonomy of grammar concepts that teachers can present to learners does not exist outside particular theoretical systems of grammar. The table of contents in a textbook gives the illusion that a definitive set of concepts exist, but in fact no empirical evidence suggests that such concepts are comprehensive or that they can be ranked from simple to complex. Grammar concepts are numerous, representing many phenomena and ranging from those created in specific theories to everyday cognitive operations. Consider, for example, the more technical syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, embeddedness, chains of cohesion, spatial qualities, transitivity, and clines of meaning, and then consider the more abstract operations of identification, classification, sorting, analogy, ranking, and conversion. Teaching from a comprehensive list of concepts would be impractical, and concepts that are difficult to separate complicate the development of such a list.

In an ESL context, the central problem of explaining grammatical concepts to learners is the difficulty of communicating the relationship between meaning and form. Meaning occurs prior to linguistic form, so instructors need to build their explanations around meaning first and structure second. Evidence for the importance of teaching meaning is articulated in Van Patten’s (Farley, 2005) “Primacy of Meaning Principle,” which states that learners process input for meaning before focusing on form. Van Patten argues learners process (a) content words before anything else, (b) lexical items over grammatical form, (c) non-redundant information before redundant information, (d) meaningful before non-meaningful grammatical forms, and (e) elements at the beginning of the sentence before those in medial or final positions.

Teaching grammar concepts with an emphasis on meaning has been explored in the research literature, but practical strategies of how to achieve this goal in the classroom have been less forthcoming. The reality of teaching comes with the usual constraints on time, students’ proficiency level, the instructor’s depth of understanding about the grammar, quality of explanations found in the textbook, and students’ beliefs about and previous experiences with grammar concepts. The instructor needs to assess the students’ depth of understanding about the target concept, but this can be extremely difficult in an L2 context where the instructor and students are unlikely to speak the same language. Possible strategies for discovering students’ personal understandings about grammar include the use of journals, interviews, peer explanations, student generated presentations of the grammar, and podcast recording in which they describe their reasons for using the target structure. Unfortunately, these activities require a high level of proficiency, and thus they are best suited for advanced learners. They also do not address the instructor’s role in providing explanations.

From the instructor’s point of view, explanations need to have four qualities. First, the scope of explanation should be succinct. Instructors need to summarize their classroom discussions to the group and at the same time omit information that can be found in the text or that is implied in the concept itself. Based on my own teaching experience I would suggest as a rule of thumb to limit explanations to approximately 10 minutes or less with most of the class time devoted to language practice.

Second, instructors should intentionally teach and use metalinguistic terms found in the textbook and supplement these terms with additional grammar concepts if necessary. Using grammar terms and the names of concepts such as continuum or inversion will lead to more in-depth explanations and provide important information that is often missing in the text. Some researchers have argued against such an approach (Negueruela Azarola, 2013), but learners expect explanations from the instructor, and textbooks’ descriptions are by default inadequate. Presenting grammar terms and concepts also help the instructor in subsequent discussions and feedback to students. A point over-
Explaining Grammar Concepts to Learners (Continued from page 13)

looked by researchers but well known to teachers is the prior knowledge about English grammar and access to supplemental L1 explanations that L2 learners have through the Internet, their classmates, and grammar handbooks written in their native language and purchased in their home country. Adult ESL students are likely to have at least some background knowledge and the ability to find supplemental information about the target structures in their native language. To date, researchers have not examined the role of learners to access information independently, although in research interviews learners report the use of journals (Schmidt, 2010) to analyze grammar structures and receive assistance from home stay families, friends, and classmates (Zhou, Busch, Gentil, Eouanzoui, and Cumming, 2006). There also exists an erroneous assumption among some that learners do not have the cognitive skills to analyze language without formal instruction (Doughty, 2003).

The third quality of an effective explanation is that it should offer a high level of challenge in that instructors need to lead learners to simultaneously process meaning and form (Skehan, 2013). An important point to keep in mind is that meaning does not need to be salient, but challenging. Examples of instructional strategies to foster challenge include comparison of similar or identical grammar structures with different meanings, humor, graphic representations, narratives, figurative language, analogy, positive and negative evidence, and multiple examples of the same concept rather than just one exemplar.

A fourth quality of grammar explanations is the capacity to offer information that is not typically known but is common knowledge among professionals. Instructors who have made an effort to study grammar in detail can provide special insights unavailable to novice learners. An example is utilizing discourse analysis studies (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007) and computational descriptions of target structures and their frequency of occurrence (Bennett, 2010). ESL grammar textbooks rarely contain observations about the probability of occurrence or provide examples of concordances, yet these play a vital role in understanding how grammar is used in real contexts. Consider that 70% of passive constructions do not contain a by-clause or that in using articles the is used 80% of the time (Biber, et al, 1999) if a word is the subject of the sentence and needs an article (e.g., She has a brother and sister. The brother is a university student. The sister is still in high school.) Another example of professional knowledge is the use of metaphor, such as describing the concept of embeddedness in adjective clauses as a “box inside a box” while showing a picture of Chinese wooden boxes, or using the metaphor of family to explain adverb clauses with the main clause as a parent, a subordinate clause as the child, and sentence fragments as orphans.

To conclude, explanations are a dominant feature of the grammar classroom. Teachers engage in explanations of grammar concepts on a routine basis, but to be effective requires an understanding of the relationship between meaning and form. Teachers are more likely to be successful if they are brief in their presentation, selective about what to include and exclude from discussion, develop a metalinguage to discuss the grammar, find ways of representing the relationship between meaning and form that are challenging, and offer insights that only a professional instructor could provide.

References
Updates from the Field

Recording and Revisiting Short Videos to Improve ELs Informational Writing: Two Strategies

Catherine H. Reischl, Clinical Associate Professor of Education, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (creischl@umich.edu)

Language is fleeting. It comes at you fast, it’s in your face, and it’s just as suddenly gone. A teacher or a peer utters a word or phrase and it becomes part of the morass of input that beginning, intermediate and advanced ELs are trying to take in, sort out, and comprehend. In my work with K-8 English Learners and their teachers, we’ve been using cell-phone videos to offer a bit of respite from this non-stop barrage of language. We’ve found that video recording key aspects of lessons and doing repeated viewings of these videos with ELs to build vocabulary and understanding provides rich input for students as they take on informational writing tasks. I offer two examples of how to use video in this manner below, in the hopes that these ideas inspire many other uses of video as well.

Supporting procedural writing: Teachers of K-4 students routinely engage their students in procedural writing, where children learn to sequence and organize steps using bullets, numbers, and graphics, add significant details, and use vivid verbs to clearly explain processes. Practice using the language and organizational structures of procedural writing supports all students in their writing development and ELs can find this to be a particularly accessible form of writing.

In recent work in first and second grade classrooms, where students have been writing “how-to” texts, I have found that when conferring with ELs during the initial drafting of a how-to text, it is helpful to interview the child about the process and ask the child to enact the process, either with real materials or by miming the process. For example, recently one of my teaching interns worked with a student who wanted to write about how to put on ice skates and get safely to the ice rink. As she conferred with this child, the intern directly asked the child to show her the steps. The intern pulled out her smart I-phone and video recorded the student enacting the process, prompting the student frequently to say aloud what she was doing, and supplying key vocabulary as necessary. This entire video was about 2 minutes in length.

The intern quickly uploaded the video onto a laptop and she and the child reviewed the video together, stopping frequently to write down key phrases together and make a list of the steps. This resulted in multiple viewings of short segments of the video where the child heard her own use of English and the teacher’s carefully phrased questions and statements. The student was highly engaged in viewing herself on film—especially to see herself speaking English—and she had multiple opportunities to hear key language and view the logical sequence she had enacted as she worked to put this oral language into print. While we might routinely ask kids to act out an action prior to writing, and this is helpful to children, it appears to be helpful to ELs to actually view themselves enacting a procedure and to hear the language that is generated by this procedure as an additional support for their writing. All of this supports informational writing development, the kind of writing that most districts and the Common Core Standards require.

A classroom teacher, an ESL teacher either in a push-in or pull-out context, or a well-trained classroom volunteer can all use short videos as part of writing conferences. Key to this process is using the video “text” as a resource for both sequencing and language. Video can be quickly uploaded onto a laptop or I-pad or tablet for viewing or can be viewed directly on the phone device. Most teachers prefer to upload the video immediately and erase it from their phone and to teach the child how to regulate the video viewing on an external device. When the teacher moves on to the next conference, children have this resource to return to as needed.

Supporting acquisition of new knowledge: Again, keeping in mind how difficult it is for ELs to grasp new language and concepts in English and the need that most humans have for repetition of new vocabulary and concepts as they are learning, I have also found it helpful to video record key moments of instruction. Both in informal settings such as field trips and in formal classroom instruction, ELs can return to video recordings of key instructional moments and view them repeatedly, and more thoroughly learn vocabulary and content.

For example, in a recent summer program for 4th through 8th grade ELs, I worked with children on a unit that took them on weekly visits to a local nature center where they learned about injured birds of prey that were sheltered at the center. Each EL eventually chose a bird to focus on and created a brochure for visitors to the center to use as a resource. On the first day at the center, the bird handlers gave brief presentations about each of the birds, highlighting the bird’s rescue story, key aspects of its physical characteristics, and unique behavioral traits. Using cell phones, we video-recorded these 3 – 4 minute presentations, being careful to capture both the handler’s talk and vivid images of the birds in their enclosures. Later in the morning, students chose a bird and spent 40 minutes with sketchpads and pencils, sketching their bird and labeling body parts and writing down questions. When we returned to the school, and quickly uploaded the video presentations, students revisited the videos about their birds, which led them to both answer and generate more questions. As students began to do research online and in books about their birds, again, they revisited the videos, often writing down quotations from the handlers. To paraphrase what one EL said, when I asked her how she liked using the video, “At first when I saw it, everything was all blurry. Now it’s all clear and I can hear what he [the handler] told us.” This student used and cited information she gleaned from multiple sources—the video, National Geographic and Audubon Society websites, and guidebooks—to write a clear, useful brochure, and cited all these sources in her text.
Updates from the Field

Professional Development Book Club (continued from p. 9)

By initiating a book club to focus deeply on a specific area of teaching, I was able to learn more than if I had gone to a few unrelated workshops or tried to do it on my own. After one semester of the club and now five weeks into the next semester, I can see that I am growing as a teacher of academic writing. That’s not something I would have said in the previous four years—at least not with as much confidence.

If you are interested in forming a book club, here are some specific steps to take:

1. Choose an area of focus, something that you will be teaching as you study.
2. Find some coworkers to join you, preferably those who will be teaching the same thing.
3. Choose a book. Contact colleagues and old professors; tell them your purpose and any criteria you have and ask for recommendations. Try to leave yourself or the group some time to review, choose, and acquire copies. Finding a good book may be the hardest step of all.
4. Choose the time, place, frequency, and format for your meetings.
5. Finally, as the leader, keep the group focused and positive. Encourage them between meetings by sharing what you have learned or begun to apply.

The author is in his fifth year of teaching in the English Language Center at MSU. He has also taught ESL in a family literacy program, a middle school, and a private language school in Thailand. After spending a little more time focusing on writing, he hopes to improve as a reading teacher.

Recording and Revisiting Short Videos to Improve ELs Informational Writing: Two Strategies (continued from p. 15)

ESL teachers can’t be everywhere. Video clips such as those described above can be used to record a math, science, or social studies mini-lesson in the child’s home classroom and then revisited with the ESL teacher to reiterate vocabulary and key concepts. Students themselves can do the recording—there’s nothing like focusing on the teacher with a camera lens to keep EL’s attention on the subject at hand. Rather than using cellphones, short video can be recorded on tablets, laptops, or still or video cameras. The key is to record only short, dense, content-rich elements of instruction that can easily be revisited.

The contexts for video use I have described offer simple ways to use technology that enhance opportunities for ELs to harvest both vocabulary and content learning from contexts,—opportunities that might just as easily slip away. The availability and ease of video recording and kids’ familiarity with the technology make it a go-to strategy for capturing language and content. Give it a try!

Catherine Reischl is a Clinical Associate Professor of Education at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She teaches literacy and ESL methods courses and conducts research on the intersection of language, literacy and culture in the teaching of beginning and experienced teachers. She coordinates the ESL Endorsement program that is included in the one year, intensive, field based Elementary Master of Arts with Certification program.