

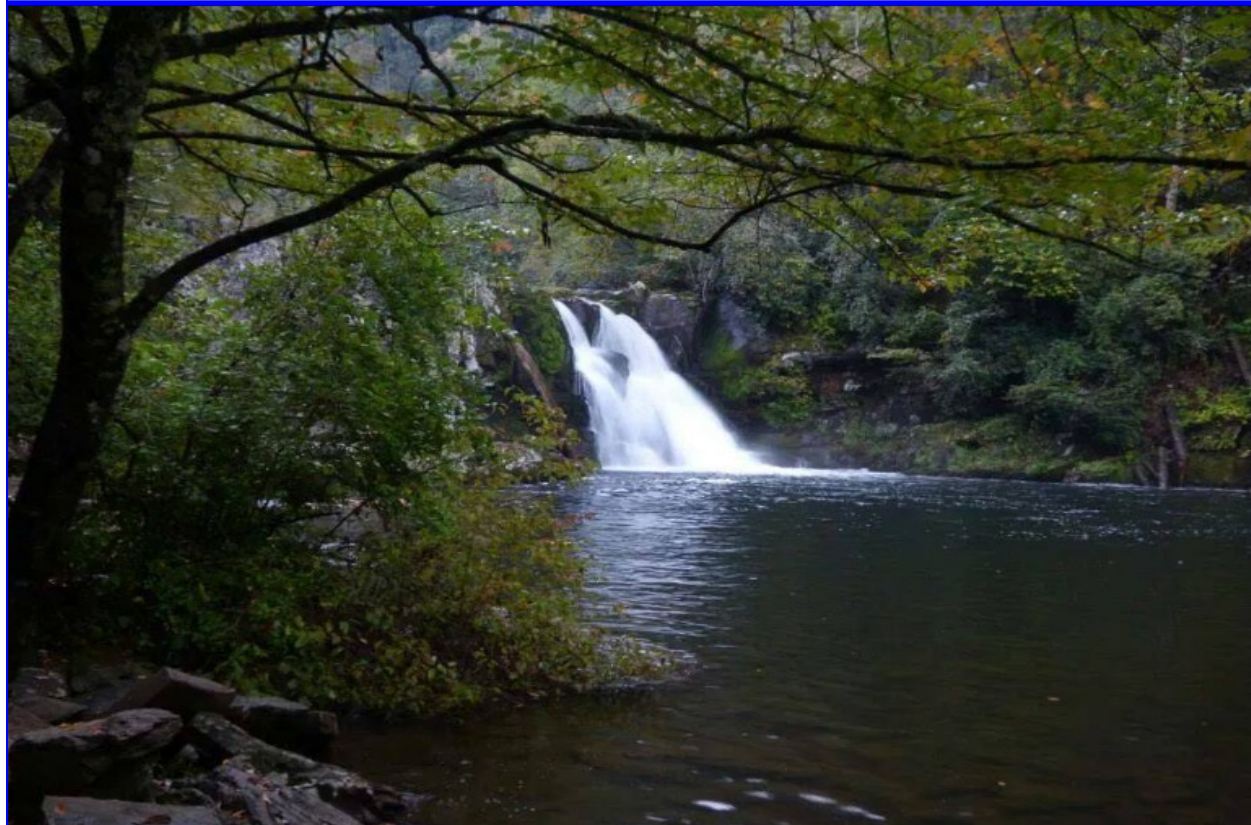


TENNESSEE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Summer-Fall 2014

Newsletter

Vol. 35, Issue 3



Fall Break at Cades Cove, Tennessee

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Message from the President

Fall 2014

TNTESOL Members,

You are the best, and I want to thank you for your continued support of this awesome organization.

Schools are open, students are in attendance, and every day teachers are raising the bar and challenging students. The life of an ESL teacher is filled with unique and complex demands. With that being said, there is a truly spectacular teacher that deserves to be recognized. The TNTESOL Teacher of the Year nominations have opened. Nominees should be TNTESOL Members and K-12 ESL teachers with distinguished careers in English language teaching and a history of service to students, schools, and the community. This annual award is a great way to honor a teacher and recognize individual accomplishments.

Mark your calendars. The 2015 TNTESOL Conference will be held in Bristol, Tennessee. The conference dates are March 5-7. This year's conference chair, Tammy Harosky, has planned a variety of sessions, as well as a special Friday night event. Registration has begun, so please check the website.

At this time, I would like to thank Jan Lanier for the outstanding leadership and support she provides to all ESL organizations and LEAs across the state. There is no Message from the State in this issue due to Jan's statewide WIDA training schedule. We look forward to hearing from her in the next issue of the newsletter. I would also like to thank the entire TNTESOL Board for their continued leadership and guidance of our State ESL organization.

Enjoy this exciting time of year, and remember the TNTESOL newsletter is a vital component of this organization. Please share your ideas in the upcoming issues, and let's continue to collaborate for the betterment of all individuals.

Yours in Education,
Lee Ann Kelly
Collierville Schools
TNTESOL President



Communication



Linked In — Search for and join Tennessee Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TNTESOL).

TennesseeESL@Yahoogroups.com — moderator Deborah Sams



Facebook has a private TNTESOL group with closed membership. If you would like to join, please contact the TNTESOL webmaster.

Follow TNTESOL on Twitter



Advocacy Day — Do you know of issues that need to be brought to the attention of political leaders? The TNTESOL Advocacy Representative, Debbie Vaughn will listen and bring your concerns to Washington. Contact her at vaughnd@k12tn.net.

TNTESOL is an active and vital organization and we encourage and promote all TESOL professionals. If you know someone who would be interested, please let us know. We look forward to hearing from you.

The **TNTESOL Newsletter** is published three times a year. Submissions are accepted on a variety of topics. We welcome book reviews, issues in the fields of K-12, Refugee ESL, Adult Ed, Higher Ed and more, as well as articles on teaching strategies, news related to TNTESOL or the field, jokes, classroom anecdotes, even recipes.

The style for submissions can be informal and articles are typically 500-1000 words. Of course, exceptions can be made! A bibliography is not necessary unless the article is research-based.



Photo by Victoria Duff

Send your ideas via email attachment along with your personal information by the issue deadline to:

Andrea Bontempi, Newsletter Editor
newsletter@tntesol.org

Deadlines

Issue

December 1, 2014	Winter 2015
April 1, 2015	Spring 2015
August 1, 2015	Summer/Fall 2015

Reflections from a Novice


Jenna Patton
Henry County K-12 ESL
Paris, TN

I received my master's degree in ESL online through Carson-Newman University in May 2012. Before I began teaching ESL in November 2012, I was a high school Spanish teacher. When I made the decision to leave the regular classroom and become an ESL teacher, I figured that my three and a half years of experience would be sufficient exposure to prepare me for this new journey. Boy was I mistaken! For starters, I had never been exposed to actual elementary students. Granted, high school students are just taller, older versions of elementary kids, but interactions with these adolescents did very little to prepare me to enter "Little People Land". I had no clue what was awaiting me when I signed my contract as the sole ESL teacher for Henry County.

As stated in my job description, I would be responsible for all ESL students at all five of the county schools. "No biggie," I thought. "I will only have 20 or so students total. That beats six classes a day of 25+ students per class!" As I sit back and think about those first few months on the job, I can't help but laugh at myself. I came home in tears more times than I can count. While my professors and mentors at Carson-Newman did an excellent job equipping me academically, I was nowhere near prepared for the emotional roller coaster ride that comes with the position.

I had no idea the number of hats I would be wearing. Not only am I responsible for providing these kids with the academic and social language skills they need to survive in the classroom, but I am also a mother to those students who had to be separated from their own mother for reasons I may never know. I am a cheerleader who travels to watch them play soccer and basketball just so when they look up in the stands, they have someone cheering just for them. I am a shoulder to cry on when someone makes fun of them for not understanding. I am a sounding board when they just need to yell, scream, and cry because they miss their home, their friends, and their family. I am an encourager when the stress and demands of their situation begin to overwhelm them. I am a disciplinarian when they need to be reminded to make good choices. I am a friend when they feel like they have none. I am a lifeline when they and their parents have no other way to communicate. I am an advocate when there is no one there to fight for them. I am nurse when they are sick. I am a warm smile when they are having a bad day. I am an encouraging note hidden in their locker when they need to be reminded they are special. I am a big hug when they have something to celebrate. After only a year and a half of teaching ESL, I have learned that I am not just a teacher to these kids; I am everything to them.

When I am juggling the schedules of 20 students at five different schools or lying awake at night trying to come up with some way to reach the kid who is so angry about his situation that it seems we will never make any progress, I am able to do these things with a smile on my face and in my heart because these kids mean everything to me, too.





<http://www.tesol.org/convention2015>

TESOL is accepting applications/nominations for several different awards and grants. Funding for TESOL 2015 in Toronto, Canada is available. Applications must be received by November 1, 2014.

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Look for details, registration, call for proposals, hotel information, etc. at www.tntesol.org



ESL Teacher of the Year Nominations

TNTESOL is looking for K-12 teachers who exemplify

- ✓ Quality instruction
- ✓ Leadership in the field of ESL
- ✓ Community leadership

Submit a nomination NOW at the TNTESOL website!
(tntesol.org)

Nominations end on November 1, 2014!

Members may submit or receive nominations.

Not a member? Want to nominate a non-member?
Join now at tntesol.org!

Benefits of membership include:

- ✓ Network with other professional ESL educators
- ✓ Learn the latest curriculum and instruction ideas for ESL
- ✓ Share statewide news which effects ESL policy and education

Don't wait until it's too late

Nominate a worthy ESL educator from your area today!

ESL Teachers Take Leadership Roles in the Middle Tennessee Writing Project

Sunita Watson
ESL Teacher, Rutherford County Schools
ELL Coordinator, Middle Tennessee Writing Project

It is truly a great feeling when ESL teachers are at the forefront of educational change and leadership! On September 20, the Middle Tennessee Writing Project (MTWP) held its annual Fall Writing Conference at Middle Tennessee State University. The Fall Conference incorporates practitioner presenters from around the Middle Tennessee area into four strands of presentations: Learning to Write, Writing to Learn, Writing with Technology, and Writing with English Language Learners. I am the ELL Coordinator for the MTWP and was privileged to watch and learn from some of the following presenters:

Brenda Mulanda is an ELL teacher at Hobgood Elementary School in Murfreesboro City Schools. She presented a strategy called "Stop, Think," which encouraged ELL readers to stop and process at the end of short chunks of complex or difficult text to build vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. She also demonstrated how to draw conclusions using text in



Brenda Mulanda and Sunita Watson are the co-coordinators for the MTWP ELL Open Institute in June.

such a facile way that I don't think I knew how to teach drawing conclusions before I saw that method! I was immediately able to use that strategy with students the following week! Another informative ELL writing presentation was given by Leah Soule, Family Literacy Specialist at YWCA, and Lisa Williams, Writing Studio manager at Watkins College of Arts, Design, and Film. They presented on the benefits of one-on-one conferencing with ELL writers. MTWP was also fortunate to have TNTESOL Journal Editor, Dr. Johnna Paraiso share some writing strategies that would be compatible with the new WIDA standards. Jean McMahan, a TNTESOL past President, taught about how to implement writers' workshop at the high school level with changing ELL populations. What really lifted my spirits was seeing that these ELL sessions were mostly full! Both general education teachers and ESL teachers alike were together learning strategies to boost student writing.

The Middle Tennessee Writing Project offers a variety of programs throughout the year. The Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) is a two-week long intensive seminar in which teachers pursue their own writing to learn what it means to be a writer and a good teacher of writing. In addition to the Fall Conference, the MTWP offers a number of workshops and professional development opportunities throughout the year.

Part of the mission of the MTWP is to cultivate teacher leadership qualities and opportunities. I am pleased to announce that ESL teacher leaders from Rutherford and Maury Counties and Murfreesboro City Schools will be partnering to promote either a local or community family literacy night in the Middle Tennessee area for parents of English learners. Parents will learn about some of the writing their children are exposed to and will be able to experience some collaborative writing using digital media.



Leah Soule and Lisa Williams present about one-on-one conferencing with ELLs at the MTWP Fall Writing Conference.



Sarah Chumney, Sunita Watson, and Sherry Hall plan upcoming events for ELLs at an MTWP leadership meeting.

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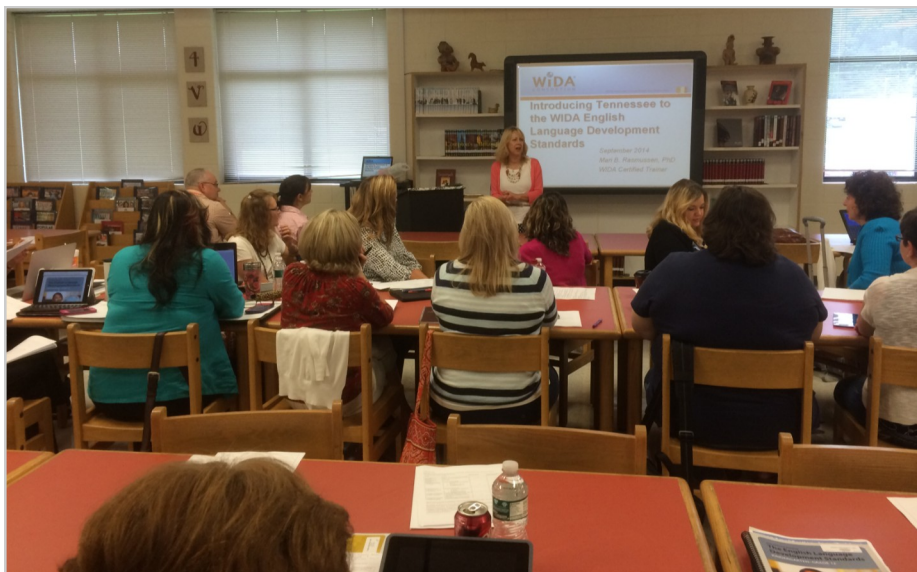
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Exciting things are happening in Middle Tennessee! I look forward to seeing many of you at the TNTESOL Conference in Bristol next spring. Be on the lookout for sessions with a writing focus—you never know . . . you might just get a little taste of what is happening in the Middle Tennessee Writing Project to benefit English learners!



ESL teachers from Rutherford and Warren Counties attend the ELL Open Institute.

WIDA is Here!



WIDA Training with Dr. Mari Rasmussen at Sequoyah High School in Monroe County

TNTESOL participates in 2014 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit

Debbie Vaughn
TNTESOL Advocacy Liaison

On June 22-24, 2014 Debbie Vaughn joined over 60 other members of TESOL International Association in Washington, DC for the 2014 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit. In its ninth year, the program featured a full a day of issue briefings and activities around education legislation and advocacy, followed by a day of visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. With representatives from approximately 25 US affiliates in attendance, the goals of Advocacy Day were not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for participants on elements of advocacy. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of over 100 Representatives and Senators. As contrasted with TESOL Advocacy Day in the past, which typically focused on a single piece of legislation, the TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit had a broader policy agenda. The program of the Summit was essentially divided into two parts: policy and advocacy. The goal was to not only learn more about federal policy issues impacting ESL and ELLs, but to provide a hands-on learning experience on elements of advocacy.

To fully prepare for the Summit, participants were required to do several things in advance. For example, participants had to set up their own individual meetings with their Congressional representatives. For many, this was a first. To assist with this, TESOL International Association provided directions, guidance, and a list of specific representatives and senators to contact. Additionally, TESOL International Association connected attendees with other participants from the same state to encourage collective advocacy.

To maximize the impact of the Summit, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. Debbie Vaughn states, "It was amazing how well all the planning went. I started in March by contacting both Senator Lamar Alexander and Senator Bob Corker from Tennessee. In addition, I set up meetings with Representative Phil Roe. All were very accommodating to our busy (crammed!) meeting schedule, and I had the opportunity to visit with staff members at every office. I also was invited to attend "Tennessee Tuesday", where I spoke with both Senators Alexander and Corker about English Language Learners in Tennessee.

Participants received background information on key policy issues so that they could begin to familiarize themselves in advance. To help make their Congressional meetings more effective, participants were also encouraged to find examples from their own programs to illustrate the talking points they would use in their meetings. In each 'visit on the Hill', Ms. Vaughn spoke with the Senators' and Representative's aide about three issues pertinent to Tennessee: Adult Education of English Language Learners, through the Workforce Incentive Act (WIA); teacher evaluation models (relative to fair assessment of language learners); and the ongoing issue of stagnant funding for a rapidly growing population of ELs.

Following a welcome reception and brief overview of policy issues the evening before, the policy focused portion of the program started the morning of June 23. The morning kicked off with speakers Carlos Martinez and Emily Davis from the US Department of Education. Martinez provided a general overview and update from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) while Davis, an ESL teacher

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and Teacher Fellow Ambassador, discussed teacher preparation and teacher quality initiatives at the department. Other presentations included a discussion from the US Department of Justice on civil rights of English learners, a Student & Exchange Visitor Program update from the US Department of Homeland Security, an overview of Common Core State Standards and ELLs, and an update on Adult English Language Learning programs from the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Following these briefings, the Summit shifted its focus to advocacy with a series of activities to help participants learn more about the advocacy process, and to prepare for their meetings with members of Congress. Participants were led through grassroots advocacy training activities and spent time planning for their meetings with legislators. As a veteran affiliate representative, Vaughn (on her third tour of duty as your appointed advocate), was able to share some critical advice: be on time, leave early, and don't expect to spend more than 15 minutes per visit.

At the end of the day, the participants shared their experiences and what they learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit. Overall, all of the participants agreed that this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL International Association. Ms. Vaughn had these closing thoughts:

"The entire experience of the 2014 Advocacy & Policy Summit reminds me of the importance of speaking up on behalf of the students we serve, and their families. These are critical issues that affect literally thousands of Tennesseans. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve as your Affiliate Representative and am already looking forward to next year!"

Additional information about the 2014 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit will be available soon online at <http://www.tesol.org>.



Senator Lamar Alexander, Debbie Vaughn, and Senator Bob Corker

Travel Grant Winner

Focus on Writing: The Importance of Asking Questions

Keith Pruitt, Ed.S.

Words of Wisdom Educational Consulting

It is indeed a great honor to once more be selected as a travel grant winner for the presentation Focus on Writing: The Importance of Asking Questions. In this article, a synopsis of the presentation will be presented for your consideration.

In the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a renewed, and somewhat unique, importance has attached to writing. Unique in that, for the first time, students reading ability will be measured in written response to ascertain understanding. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman have ably stated that written expression has now received its proper place alongside reading, speaking and listening to present a more rounded application of literacy (Calkins, et. al., 2012).

This, however, presents new challenges for teachers who previously were unaccustomed to teaching in this manner or in teaching students how to write. Keep in mind there are two types of writing obligatory in such instruction. Teachers are expected to have students construct **responses to literature** in which students respond to very specific prompts regarding what they have read. For example, one such response might ask students to compare the characters of Wilbur and Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*.

The other type of writing required in CCSS is process writing. Learning how to write requires the same level of dedication to craft as does learning to read. Below is an exemplar text from CCSS Appendix B. For what grade do you suppose this is intended?

Today before we had writing groups Mrs. John read us a story about frogs. We had to write about frogs. We had a tadpole in the science center. It has two back legs and when it has two front legs its tail disappears and it cannot eat when its mouth is changing. Then the skin gets too little and the frogs pull off their skin and they eat it. Some of the frogs blow bubbles. Frogs laid eggs that look like jelly and the fish eat some but some hatch to tadpoles. It grows bigger and bigger and bigger.

Is the expectation that all Kindergarten students be able to write this with perfection? No. This is merely the goal that has been set for what is considered (not sure by whom) to be what students at the end of Kindergarten should be able to achieve. Whether it is realistic or not is debatable. However, what it points to is a strong emphasis on ability in writing that must be addressed and taught.

One of the strategies used in teaching comprehension is teaching students how to ask questions. Stephanie Harvey and Ann Goudvis have achieved a great measure of success in their comprehension instructional processes exemplified in the Comprehension Tool Kit. So we teach students to ask questions while they are reading. For example, as students read the opening scene of *Bridge to Terabithia*, the teacher asks for them to formulate questions posed by this scene to which they will search for an answer in the text ahead. One student might wonder *why it is so important for Jesse to become the fastest runner in the fifth grade*. Another student may question *how Jesse's early morning running in a cow pasture will help him achieve his goal*.



Such constructed thinking helps students understand text at a deeper level. Can we also use questioning to help students master writing? Yes. Here is a picture. What is happening in the story? Yes, this picture represents a story. When we get students to use visual representation and start asking questions, we can achieve the seeming impossible—we can get students writing. So what do you think is happening in this picture?

Another strategy point I can gain from this picture is

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point of view. I can teach students that a story is often impacted by the point of view. The story in this picture is different from three different standpoints, the cat, the fish, and the child. What happens next? I don't know. It all depends on your story.

So with this picture, I would ask a pairing of students to think of three questions prompted by the picture. I would then point out that these three pictures will become the beginning and focal points of their narratives.

Another exercise that serves well in questioning is the Hershey Kiss exercise. Here I place a Hershey Kiss between two students with this caveat: you do not have the word *chocolate* in your vocabulary. You may not use that word at all in this exercise. One student acts as a speaker, the other a recorder. (You may use more than two students working together for the exercise.) Then I begin the questions. *Describe what this looks like. (Pause) Touch it and describe what it feels like. (Pause) Opening up the top of the wrapper, describe what it smells like. Remember, you do not have the word chocolate in your vocabulary. (Pause) Touching your tongue to the piece of candy, describe how it tastes. (Pause) Now putting it in your mouth completely unwrapped, describe what it does in your mouth.*

This fun exercise helps students think in terms of details and description, an area of difficulty for most students.



In order to transfer the questioning method in comprehension as we teach reading and solidify the approach in writing, Harvey and Goudvis (2008) in supporting acquisition and usage of background knowledge, use a modification of the T-chart. Based loosely on the popular K-W-L, they ask students about their knowledge by asking them to list what they think they know, for example, about redwood trees. Then they engage a text such as Benchmark's book *Trees*. Afterward students list what they learned on the second section of the T-chart. Here is where the learning starts shifting gears. On a separate chart, each student then lists the most important thing they learned from this book, and on the second section they write questions that have come about because of their reading for which they would like answers. (*I wonder* on their chart.) It might look something like this:

I Learned	I Wondered?
Coast redwood trees are the tallest trees on earth.	How tall is the tallest redwood tree?
Some redwood trees are among the oldest living things on earth.	How old is the oldest redwood tree reported?
	The tallest is reported to be 350 feet tall. That is like a 35 story building.
	The oldest redwood tree lived to be about 2000 years old. That means it first took root when Julius Caesar ruled Rome.

They can then use sticky notes to post the answers they find to their questions.

Just think of all the CCSS engaged in this process! Some will complain that it takes time to do all

of this, and I would agree. But the learning that takes place is rich, and best of all the students are doing the work and making the memories.

The ultimate application of questioning comes when having conferences with students about their writing. Most students follow the course of least information and write in simplistic form. So we get a paper that looks like this:

We went to the store. We bought some clothes. We had fun.

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Then we begin asking questions: *Who went to the store? How did you go? What store did you go to? When did you go to the store? What kind of clothes did you buy? What was there about this that was fun?*

Now instead of the three bland sentences prior, we have something containing far more depth:

Carlos, Maria, and I went to the Wal-Mart on Thursday evening. Maria drove us in her Mazda convertible. Carlos bought some new shirts to wear. Maria bought a new dress. I bought a new pair of boots to wear to work. We had a lot of fun at the Wal-Mart. I like being with my friends. We tell jokes and like being together.

While this is a tremendous improvement over the former writing, we still are not through asking questions. Now we ask further: *What was it like inside the store? Did you have the top down (on the car)? What was the weather like? Describe the shirts, dress and boots. What color were they?*

By just asking some simple questions, the teacher has fleshed out the skeletal remains into a meaty, robust piece of writing that has body and volume. But there are some considerations in teaching writing.

1. Write often, model often, and release often. Just as reading takes practice, writing also requires dedicated time in which students are applying the strategies and skills taught. This is the only way they will master them. And they must see you modeling such in order to capture the visual sense of expectations. Take the time to let them write. No writer ever became a master who didn't practice a great deal.

2. Use a writing progression in teaching writing. Build the blocks of learning together. You will not be able to do everything at one time in your teaching; do not allow your expectations to be greater than the learning. (Popham, 2007)

3. Design a continuum of writing assessment. If you go to the Reading and Writing Project (www.readingandwritingproject.com) you will see under assessment that Lucy Calkins and the folks at Teacher's College have already put together an assessment for writing that is widely accepted as valid including the exemplars for each level. Merely print out these exemplars and compare the writing sample of an on demand piece to the exemplars to place the student. Periodically assess students' progress with other on demand pieces that then can continue to be compared. Do a final piece at the end of the year and the portfolio will show the progress or lack thereof.

4. Provide students with clear goals and effective feedback. Make sure students are crystal clear on your expectations by providing mentor text for comparisons. Effective instruction includes effective feedback that is specific to the challenge presented. Telling a student they did a good job, period, is not nearly as effective as saying, *I really like the way you addressed the need for improvement in adverb usage. You did a very good job in your descriptions of this character's actions.*

As you engage students in writing, may I suggest three pieces of advice: 1. Don't try to get all the lions out of the jungle the first day! Target the instruction. 2. Offer constant feedback, but let the children do the work. Don't correct their papers with red ink that makes it appear someone has bled on their paper! How discouraging! Instead, place a sticky note on the paper suggesting they look further at how they have used punctuation, or whatever the specific task being examined. And, 3. Use a writer's workshop model that incorporates six trait writing. There is no more effective mechanism for teaching

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instruction in writing. Do your research. There are already many fine tools out there. Do not reinvent the wheel.

Just as it is important to teach students to read in order to develop literate young people, we must also take the time to teach them how to write. By using these strategies of questioning, students can soon discover the joy of being an accomplished writer.

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Relevant Issues and Effective Classroom Strategies of English as a Second Language Teachers

Lee Ann Kelly
Collierville Schools

There is not a single word that can effectively describe the life of an ESL teacher. The beauty of this field is that you can travel the world without ever leaving your classroom. Each day is filled with challenges and a multitude of rewards.

The participants of this round table discussion brought unique and creative strategies and ideas that work effectively to increase student achievement. Participants divided into groups and were given an issue to solve. The groups had to create steps to solve the issue using the perspective of a teacher, administrator, or educational representative. Coming back as a whole group, issues and solutions were discussed and individual feedback was provided. The camaraderie and discussions that took place were extremely worthwhile. It was clearly evident that although Tennessee is diverse, we share common issues and frustrations.

The participants were also asked to develop recommendations for the State of Tennessee Department of Education. This time period allowed for Jan Lanier, ESL Director, Title III Consultant, to provide guidance from the Tennessee Department of Education.

Overall, this session allowed for strong collaboration between educators and other educational representatives. Even though everyone is special in his or her own way, together we are strong.



**START
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ENGINES...**

Registration is now open

2015 TNTESOL Annual Meeting and Conference

MARCH 5-7, 2015

Bristol/Kingsport, TN

Visit our website www.tntesol.org to REGISTER and learn more about Keynote and Invited Speakers, Conference Schedule, and Vendor Opportunities.

For more information,
contact **Tammy Harosky**,
Conference Chair and Second Vice President,
at 2vicepresident@tntesol.org

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Deadline: February 1, 2015

TNTESOL is accepting conference proposals for the **2015 TNTESOL Conference** that will take place from **Thursday, March 5, 2015 to Saturday, March 7, 2015** at the Meadowview Convention Center in Kingsport, TN.

Proposals are being accepted in areas related to teaching English Language Learners. Presenters are requested to submit the information provided on pages 1-3 of the proposal form. Go to www.tntesol.org for more information and the online application form.

Search for 2015 TNTESOL Members-at-Large (Elected Positions)

TNTESOL is now accepting nominations for **Member-at-Large!**
If you are interested in serving on the TNTESOL Board or have a recommendation,
please contact the nomination chair and First Vice President, Cary Wright,
for any recommendations, comments, and/or clarification.
Thank you for your continued support of TNTESOL!

Members-at-Large

- These positions are voted on by the general membership
- Must be a member of TNTESOL or willing to become a member
- Members-at-Large serve a three-year rotation on the board
- Attend board meetings. Board meetings take place in the greater Nashville area on a chosen Saturday, traditionally in June, September, and December. The annual board meeting takes place at the annual conference.
- Members-at-Large serve on a minimum of two standing committees
- Actively participate in events and on committees
- Recruit membership in your region
- Gather and disseminate information in your region
- Are responsible for one article submission to the TNTESOL Newsletter

Visit our website www.tntesol.org for more information
or email 1vicepresident@tntesol.org

Nominations close at midnight on December 31, 2014.



Model Determination: Smyrna Elementary Student Overcomes Language Barriers to Become Student President

James Evans
Rutherford County Schools

For Smyrna Elementary fifth-grader Moe Loe, her first day of school four years ago was isolating and lonely. Her family had recently moved to the United States from Thailand "wanting freedom," she said, but none of them spoke English, which made the prospect of starting school in a foreign land intimidating.

"I was shy. I was going to class but I didn't know my teacher's name," Loe said. "So I was just walking around the hallway. Then Mr. Duke, our principal, he came to me and asked me what my teacher's name was. But I didn't speak any English so I didn't say anything."

Loe eventually found her way and picked up English rapidly thanks to her relationship with English as a Second Language teacher Jenna Gibbons. In fact, Loe has progressed so well that in September, she was elected Student Council president. On election day, Loe gave her speech in the office over the announcements to the rest of the school. She said those around her in the office became emotional as they listened to her.

"It was like sad or something. They cried," Loe said.

Smyrna Elementary School has a high population of students who don't speak English as a first language. In fact, nearly 40% of the students are classified as English Language Learners. But it's an obstacle the school has embraced and teachers have risen to overcome. Loe is a testament to their dedication.

"We have a lot of challenges to face like any school, but I think our school is unique in that way," Gibbons said. "Moe Loe is truly a success story."

Smyrna Elementary's ESL program is structured so that students are given time based on their specific needs and skill level. The ESL teachers — there are eight at Smyrna Elementary — first must help students overcome their language barrier so they can progress to other academic areas.

"We start with school tools — shapes, colors, visuals and songs. In the newcomers class, we are the reading teachers," Gibbons said. "Every language learner is different. Some pick it up very quickly and others don't. Moe Loe was like a sponge, she absorbed it. When she started writing in English, all of a sudden I think it just clicked. She would say, 'Can I just write more?' and I said, 'Yes, please keep writing.' She was very determined from the very beginning."

Loe then went on to start helping others who didn't speak English. Gibbons keeps a photo of Moe Loe helping one of her peers in the first grade. With shorter hair in small pigtails, the picture shows her hunched over a table going line by line with a male student.

The intent is to wean students so they can return to a traditional classroom with the skills and knowledge they need to persevere. Students begin by spending 90 minutes daily with an ESL teacher and then they eventually spend less and less time.

"We follow them for two years to make sure they are successful in the classroom. If they need additional help, we can pull them back in," Gibbons said. "We basically catch them up so they can go back into the classroom. Although I would love to have Moe Loe all the time, we want them to move out of the newcomer group. It's kind of like a stepping stone to be able to be successful."

It's obvious teachers and students admire Loe for her unwavering resolve. That quality was featured in her campaign speech, which explained how she overcame her early shyness at school.

"I soon realized that I had to get over my fear if I wanted to succeed," Loe said in her speech.

"Because of my determination, I went from speaking no English to becoming an Honor Roll student.

"I hope you vote for me," she continued. "I would be honored to be your Student Council president, but more importantly, I hope to be a role model and a friend."

Article originally appeared October 2, 2014 on the Rutherford County Schools' homepage, www.rcschools.net. Used with permission.



(TOP) Smyrna Elementary ESL teacher Jenna Gibbons, right, developed a special bond with fifth-grader Moe Loe, left, when she came to the school four years ago and could not speak any English. Through the ESL program at the school, Moe Loe has flourished and was elected Student Council president in September. (BOTTOM) ESL teacher Jenna Gibbons keeps this photograph of Moe Loe helping one of her peers when they were in the first grade.



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An Interview with a First-year Teacher

Abasi McKinzie
Shelby County Schools

In an effort to reach out to beginning ESL teachers to offer support and encouragement as they embark upon their new career, I would like to present an interview that I conducted with two first-year teachers at the end of the 2013-2014 school year. They both are awesome teachers who have constantly surrounded themselves with opportunities to grow and learn as professionals. The first interview presented in this edition of the TNTESOL newsletter is with a teacher who works in a somewhat rural area of Tennessee who distinguished herself as a serious professional before ever becoming an ESL teacher by attending the TNTESOL conference in Memphis while she was still in college. The second interview will be printed in the next issue of the newsletter. I believe that the insightful comments provided by these teachers will strengthen the resolve of both new and experienced teachers and confirm to us all that we chose correctly in making teaching our profession.

Krista Bradley is a K-5 ESL teacher who received her Bachelor of Arts degree in TESL from Union University in 2013.

Krista, how was your first year of teaching?

I have learned so much! The adult sphere is significantly different from the university in many ways. To have a full-time job and be held accountable for the education of young minds is a crucial responsibility. Education is a selfless career with high stakes and huge rewards. This year has obviously been full of teaching, yes, but also of learning from peers, students, administrators, and as a new working adult.

The first semester was challenging. Adjusting to a new set of expectations, responsibilities, peers, students, and space took time. I enjoy where I work, who I collaborate with, and what I do. This first year has pushed me in a positive way. I have relied on my faith in God to bring me through this year. He has been faithful! I have seen growth in myself, and I see areas where I want to grow more.

The second semester has been full of random snow/ice days (or weeks...) and the realization that the year is coming to a close. Students are preparing to be tested, and teachers are making the most of the remaining time. It has been a wonderful, challenging year. Time has flown by! I am grateful for every experience.

What type of ESL program does your district utilize?

My district utilizes a pull-out program.

How would you describe where you teach?

I work in a small town in a rural county between two larger cities. We have a few county elementary schools in our district and a couple of special school district schools. We have one middle school and one high school for the county. My city definitely has that small-town feel, which is different for me, since I've never lived in a small town. It takes getting used to, especially since I travel from one of the larger cities to my school every day.

We may be a smaller, rural community, but our county has provided many resources to enhance student learning. Every teacher has a lot of technology and other resources (computer, smart board, iPad, iPod, online programs, and curriculum resources) to utilize in our instruction. We are given opportunities to order things throughout the year that we can use in class. We are also provided with professional development opportunities throughout the year.

I am not sure on the total number of ELs in the county, but my school has the largest population of elementary ELs, so I am full-time at one school, whereas the other elementary ESL teacher is itinerant, traveling to both other elementary schools and to the middle school. Out of over 200 students, my school serves 29 ELs. And may I just say, I have the best students? They rock!

The EL population is comprised of Hispanic students whose families all originated in Mexico, and the Hispanic community in my county is very close-knit. Luckily, one of my coworkers is Hispanic and knows most of the families, so she helps me keep in touch with all my families directly, which is a huge help!

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How do you feel that the setting in which you teach affected your ability to effectively interact with your students?

Working in my county and school has been a huge blessing. Having such a supportive Board of Education, ESL coordinator, and principal has made working there enjoyable! Being able to attend several professional development conferences has helped me grow this first year. For instance, my county sent me to TN TESOL! All of that to say, my county takes care of its teachers and provides them with the best situation for instructing students. I also love being able to stay at one school and really invest in the whole school population and focus a lot of attention on the same groups of ELs each day.

Having a Hispanic coworker who is willing to help communicate with my families is a big help, too! We are planning a Cinco de Mayo fiesta for May, and she is helping me organize and plan everything to be fun for the families and to be culturally relevant. I know that Cinco de Mayo is not a big deal in Mexican culture (a common misconception among non-Hispanic Americans) but it's one of the only days in May we can have a party. It is what it is!

How has being a part of TNTESOL helped you this year?

TNTESOL has provided me with information about what professional ESL educators are accomplishing, given me opportunities to network, and provided a fabulous conference where I can grow as a professional educator with a specialized field. It's been beneficial! I have loved meeting other ESL teachers, learning about the laws in our state, and hearing from some amazing speakers.

What is one memorable moment/lesson that occurred this year that you feel you will reflect upon repeatedly as you continue your career as an ESL teacher?

One day, I was teaching one of my more challenging groups, and some of the lower level students had a breakthrough. These particular students typically become very stressed and frustrated- because of their level of proficiency- when completing assignments or reading grade-level texts. The affective filter goes up, and the students shut down. This particular day, however, they were more motivated than usual. They actually took initiative to write a sentence all by themselves! For them, that was a huge step forward, and I was so excited to see a glimpse of excitement for them!

That particular experience helped me realize that students really will rise to the challenges they face when they realize it truly is attainable. I hope to encourage this in them so much more. I hope that someday English doesn't frustrate them. I want English to be a tool used to access academic success.

How does the university experience compare to real practice?

I received a quality college education from Union University, an amazing university with outstanding TESL and Education departments and programs. The information I learned in those fields of study were very insightful, relevant, and innovative, and the professors are leading educators and researchers in their fields. There isn't a bad thing to say about such a wonderful college experience! I have learned, though, that when you jump into a job you have been only studying and practicing some, no amount of education prepares you for every little thing that happens (or not) in your room or in your school.

Being a new teacher is a bigger learning curve than I had anticipated. It truly is about getting your hands dirty and figuring things out as you go! This is not reflective of anything negative about my education whatsoever; it only showed me that real life is, unlike my lessons, unplanned. Activities take longer than anticipated. You don't remember every single "good idea" you learned in college. Students don't understand the things you thought would be easier. Behavior and intrinsic motivation play larger roles in acquiring knowledge than you realized.

I studied under some truly inspiring and knowledgeable professors while attending college. I think the big thing now is to review. I would really benefit, I think, from reading back through some of those books I was required to read while in my undergraduate program. I expect I will have several "ah ha" moments now that I'm in the thick of things. Theories and best practices will likely make so much more sense in real time.

How do you see your future in ESL unfolding?

I want to continue teaching ELs in the United States for a while. I hope, one day, to teach overseas. For now, though, I am happy to continue growing as a teacher and working with the sweet kids I have before me.

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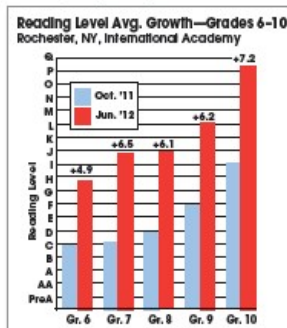


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Call for Papers

The Editorial Board of the **TNTESOL Journal** seeks articles of general interest on any aspect of the teaching of English as a second or foreign language in elementary, middle, high school, college/university, or adult/immigrant education. The topics can be varied and wide-ranging.

The submission deadline for the annual Journal is June 1st.

*Please see www.tntesol.org and click on the publications tab for the **Journal Submission Guidelines**.*



Don't be shy!

The Editor of the **TNTESOL Newsletter** requests your articles, anecdotes, book reviews, photos, etc. for inclusion in the next issue of this newsletter.

Send your attachment in an email to newsletter@tntesol.org

The deadline for submission is December 1, 2014.

*Please see www.tntesol.org and click on the publications tab for the **Newsletter Submission Guidelines**.*



TNTESOL 2015

If you would like to help with the TNTESOL conference, contact Tammy Harosky at trharosky@king.edu Thanks!

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