WATESOL NEWS

Dear WATESOL Colleagues,

I hope that 2019 finds you well. I'm honored to start the year as President of WATESOL!

I assumed this role at the end of our 2018 annual conference, which featured an inspiring keynote from TESOL International President Dr. Luciana de Oliveira entitled, "Building Community and Collaboration in the Classroom: Examples from Teachers." With more than 45 workshop, poster, and professional networking sessions – as well as exhibitor displays, a raffle, and breakfast and lunch – the conference was a truly enriching day!

What was your favorite moment at the conference? Mine was a very simple one: Looking out at the lunch tables and hearing the buzz of animated conversation. Moments like this are what I love about WATESOL events: They present golden opportunities for sharing ideas or resources, learning about other programs, hearing what newly-rediscovered acquaintances have been up to ... and meeting new people – practitioners, graduate students, program administrators - who share a love of TESOL!

Indeed, these goals exemplify the theme of "community" that we chose for our conference – and that we hope to foster throughout the year. To that end, we kicked off 2019 with a January networking happy hour at The Board Room in Washington, DC, co-sponsored by our SIGs (special-interest groups), NNEST Caucus, and Advocacy Committee.

As a matter of fact, did you know that ...

- we have three SIGs (Adult, K-12, and Higher Education) – and you may join all three of them, thanks to a change to the WATESOL constitution approved last year?

- our NNEST Caucus welcomes both native and nonnative English-speaking teachers?

- our Advocacy Committee will host a special Advocacy Day this spring, with a book signing, panel discussion, and workshop?

Betsy Lindeman Wong
WATESOL President
2019-2020

Betsy Lindeman Wong is an ESL program coordinator for Nova's American Culture and Language Institute (ACLI), Annandale campus. A teacher trainer for Nova's TESOL certificate program, she has written e-learning materials for Burlington English and co-authored a multimedia textbook and teacher's guide for Pearson Longman. She holds an MA in ESL from Hamline University and an MA in French and TESOL certificate from American University.

And ... We need your ideas! We're looking to reach out to our special groups this year for inspiration as we continue to offer "tried and true" forms of professional development, such as presentations and workshops – as well as new ways to foster growth among our members.

What's in store for 2019? In addition to informal get-togethers, we hope to offer webinars, such as last spring's highly successful proposal-writing workshop – as well as study circles to help small groups connect research to practice. We also plan to offer a miniconference on Saturday, Feb. 23 at Carlos Rosario Adult School. We'd like bring to our members presentations accepted at national conferences such as TESOL, COABE, and AAAL, or AERA. Please check our website for more information.

What else? A recent online survey of special-interest group members revealed a desire for more PD related to differentiated instruction and multilevel teaching. *Great idea!* We'd also like to reach out and explore some broader topics of interest to those in TESOL, such as meeting the needs of DREAMers and undocumented students; creating a comfortable space for LGBTQ learners and teachers; and launching entrepreneurial initiatives related to ESL or TESOL.

If you have an idea for a professional development topic or event, please let us know!

Last but not least, many thanks to all of you for making WATESOL such a rich and innovative professional network – run entirely by volunteers! And I'd like to give a special shout-out to our Past President, Rebecca Wilner, for all of her careful and caring work to ensure that WATESOL continues to thrive.

Hope to see you all at a WATESOL event soon!

Betsy Lindeman Wong

JOIN US!

Join us at TESOL in Chicago!

We will have a booth in the Expo Hall.

Wednesday, March 13th

9:30-10:30 am

CONGRATULATIONS

WATESOL Travel Grant Recipients:

⇒ Greer Mancuso, PhD student, George Mason University

⇒ Megan Fullarton, MATESOL student, American University

Jim Weaver Professional Development Award

⇒ Mark Sherman, Teacher, Lado International Institute

WATESOL NEWS

From the editors

Dear WATESOL Community,

Happy New Year! As your new WATESOL newsletter editors, we are delighted to publish this edition of the newsletter and hope you find it to be practical, relevant, and thought provoking.

We would like to thank our outgoing newsletter editors Stephanie Gallop, Lindsey Crifasi, & Silvia Hildesheim for all of their hard work on the newsletter over the past two years. And thank you, Stephanie, for answering so many questions as we put together our first issue!

Please enjoy the articles and we hope to see you soon at a WATESOL event!

Your Newsletter editors,

Kelly Hill Zirker and Heather Gregg Zitlau

IN this issue:

Interested in submitting to the newsletter?

Contact newsletter@watesol.org for questions. Contributions can include: connecting research to practice, current topics of interest to the membership, and teaching tips.

Guidelines include:

- 1,500 words or less
- Up to 5 citations, following APA citation style
- 2-3 sentence author biography
- Author photo (digital head shot)
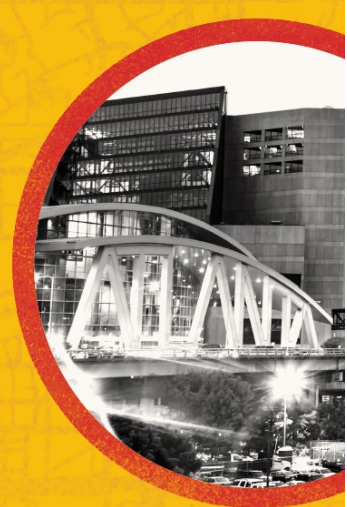- Include a byline with your name, email, and affiliation

TESOL 2019
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION & ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPO
ATLANTA, GEORGIA, USA | 12-15 March 2019

Look for our WATESOL members presenting at TESOL this year!

Tabitha Kidwell
University of Maryland; *Beyond intercultural communication: Preparing tomorrow's language and culture educators*

Tabitha Kidwell & Luis Pentón Herrera
University of Maryland, *Literature Circles 2.0: Building Literacy in the 21st-Century TESOL Classroom*

Jordan Brown
American University, *A Chinese Student Describing and Implementing Directness in EAP Writing*

Stephanie Gallop and Heather Gregg Zitlau
Georgetown University; *Grading Group Work and Other Real-world Assessment Challenges*

Stephanie Gallop and Kelly Hill-Zirker
Georgetown University/US Department of State; *Improving Visual Design: Tips for Creating and Using Effective Materials*

Leslie Sapp
English through Drama Specialist; *Motivation, Participation, and Ongoing All-Skills Practice via Process-Drama*

WATESOL Gathering
TESOL 2019

Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 pm

Der Biergarten
300 Marietta Street, NW, Atlanta
https://derbiergarten.com/

Meet your fellow WATESOLers after K. David Harrison's opening keynote for casual German fare – or a drink or pretzel! The restaurant is a short walk from the convention center.

Queer ELT Classroom Practices: Suggestions for Educators

Joshua M. Paiz, *The George Washington University,* jpaiz@gwu.edu

Joshua M. Paiz holds a Ph.D. in TESL from Purdue University, where he specialized in sociocognitive approaches to languages and cultures and oversaw work on the Purdue OWL. He is currently a teaching assistant professor in EAP at the George Washington University and worked for three years as an L2 writing specialist at New York University – Shanghai. His current research interests focus on LGBTQ+ issues in ELT, web-tools to scaffold L2 writing, and the acquisition of professional language, literacy, and identity in a second language.

Introduction & Positionality

At this year's WATESOL conference, I gave a pedagogy presentation on queer-inclusive practices for English language teaching. I have worked with this topic extensively over the past few years (see Paiz, 2018, forthcoming). Recently, I have been working to respond to disciplinary calls for us to create classroom spaces that are inclusive of sexual minorities (e.g., Nelson, 2006; Merse, 2015; Rhodes & Coda, 2017). This response has been focused on addressing a question that I often face when I present on my research: "The theoretical work is all well and good, but what do I do with it? *How do I make my classes more inclusive for LGBTQ+-identified individuals?* Myself being an ELT practitioner, an LGBTQ+ scholar, and a married gay man, I have a vested interest in answering this question.

In this article, I will introduce you to what it means to queer one's educational practice and how it can contribute to wider diversity and inclusion initiatives at an institution. I will then touch briefly on why making the language classroom inclusive for sexual minorities is important work that should be valued and carried out by all of us—no matter our own sexual identity. I intend to close out with some suggestions on how to make the classroom more inclusive. Before I begin, however, understand that I am sharing one view of queering the classroom and not suggesting a unitary, normative pedagogical framework (see Merse, 2015; Paiz, 2018).

What Does it Mean to Queer ELT?

Many queer theorists argue against pinning down a single, stable definition for the term queer, arguing that to do so would make it normative to such a degree that it would lose its theoretical power (see Merse, 2015). As I have argued elsewhere, however, we are a practice-oriented profession;

therefore, we need to operationalize our key terms if we are to empower educators and enable them to use theory and research to guide their teaching practices (see Paiz, 2018, forthcoming). So, what I am sharing here is not *the* definition of what it means to queer ELT, but rather an operationalized definition that will serve as our initial starting point and that will evolve over time and in new contexts.

For our purposes, *queering the classroom* refers to deploying critical pedagogies aimed at laying bare the various normative discourses in either a target or local culture that create, police, and constrain available identity options for individuals. These identities are often (re)negotiated and (re)mediated through various cultural and linguistic resources. Additionally, queering our educational practices means equipping students with the habits of mind to be critical about all normative discourses, not just ones centered on sexual identity, so that they can better advocate for themselves and others in both their L1s and their L2s. A key facet of queer approaches is that they seek to engage with and create space for non-normative identities and worldviews through the use of inclusive educational content, alongside critical readings of that content. They also function through the use of critical inquiry as a pedagogical approach. *Critical inquiry* is based on the notion of a restive problematizing of what we assume to be right, just, and true (see Pennycook, 2001).

> *"Queering our educational practice means equipping students with the habits of mind to be critical about all normative discourses, not just ones centered on sexual identity"*

In short, queering ELT requires us to create pedagogies that encourage our students to ask questions about why our social world is the way that it is; who benefits from its current configuration; who is marginalized by the status quo; and what, if anything, can be done to create a more inclusive and equitable world. Instilling these habits of minds in our language learners is an important step in increasing educational access and equity for both LGBTQ+- and straight-identified students. Moreover, it is an important part of building a critical pedagogical toolkit. In the next section, I will turn our focus towards why sexuality and sexual literacy deserve a place in the language classroom at all.

Why Should I Worry about Queer Concerns in a *Language* Classroom?

Research has shown us that teachers, both LGBTQ+ and straight, have conflicted feelings about introducing issues of sexuality and sexual literacy in the language classroom (see Macdonald, El-Metoui, Baynham, & Gray, 2014; Pawelczyk, Pakuła, & Sunderland, 2014). This sense of conflict may be, at least in part, because language teachers may find themselves in institutionally marginal positions as faculty that teach support or "remediation" courses. In this power under, often contingent position, they may worry about the effects of negative responses from various stakeholders—students, administrators, parents—on the viability of their employment. I can completely understand these worries. I would, however, argue that we must work to mitigate these risks and to create more LGBTQ+ inclusive learning spaces. We must do so because a great deal can be lost when we silence LGBTQ+ voices—understanding that non-engagement is also a form of silencing (Nelson, 2006; Paiz, forthcoming; Pennycook, 2001). One thing that is risked when we ignore LGBTQ+ lives is students' continued engagement with the language learning process. Liddicoat (2006) provides a striking example of how

"Why is it that I only see straight, nuclear families in this unit on relationships? Who benefits from this presentation of the world? Who is margin-alized or silenced?"

ignoring sexuality can lead to casting students as deficient language learners—destroying their motivation to learn and to add to our classroom communities.

How Can I Meaningfully Make My Class More Inclusive?

I believe that the most powerful way forward comes through the application of queer inquiry to our pedagogical approaches (see Nelson, 2006; Paiz, forthcoming). Using queer inquiry as a foundation requires us to create space to ask questions that trouble the status quo, that interrogate social givens. It requires asking questions such as: Why is it that I only see straight, nuclear families in this unit on relationships? Who benefits from this presentation of the world? Who is marginalized or silenced? What are the impacts of this? Beyond learning to apply these kinds of critical questions to your teaching, and equipping students to ask them and to find the answers on their own, here's some advice from my upcoming book, *Queering the English Language Classroom: A Practical Introduction for Teachers:*

1. Come to understand the breadths and limits of your understanding of LGBTQ+ issues and be willing to learn alongside your students.

2. Find space throughout the curriculum to include LGBTQ+ representation so that you can avoid the "inoculation approach" of one and done, which creates the impression that LGBTQ+ issues only matter on the day of instruction.

3. Engage in critical reading and discussion with your students on topics, highlighting for them the emergent and negotiated nature of knowledge and communication. It is not about finding *the answer; it is about understanding those around us and how we are all awash in discourses that elevate some and marginalize others.*

4. Tie LGBTQ+ content and discussions to language learning. For example, in a short story that talks about a "spouse" or "partner" have students imagine that couple. Then ask them to find the language in the short story that supports or challenges their suppositions.

5. Make it about respectful engagement. Model respectful disagreement and make disagreement OK. Our students do not need to see the world exactly as we do, but they do need to know how to respectfully engage with LGBTQ+ issues as they come up in their daily lives. It is not about changing hearts and minds; it is about moving the needle of understanding and acceptance.

6. Remember that attitudes and experiences of LGBTQ+ issues and lives vary across the globe. Be willing to learn about this variability alongside your students as you come to interrogate the different ways that we shape, perform, and understand identities through languages.

References

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WATESOL Presents

2019 SPRING MINI-CONFERENCE

Saturday, Feb. 23, 9 am - 1 pm
Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School
1100 Harvard St NW, Washington, DC 20009

Looking for new ideas and approaches in TESOL?

$5*
Advance Registration Only
*includes breakfast!

Join fellow WATESOL members for a day of sharing & networking!

Register:
watesol.org

SIGs, NNEST, and Advocacy Spotlights

In this issue, we are pleased to share an overview of the Special Interest Groups (SIGs), NNEST Caucus, and WATESOL Advocacy Committee. Who are they? What do they do? Who should you contact for more information? Read on to find out!

For more information, go to https://www.watesol.org/Groups.

Adult Ed SIG

Jessie Ebersole—Chair
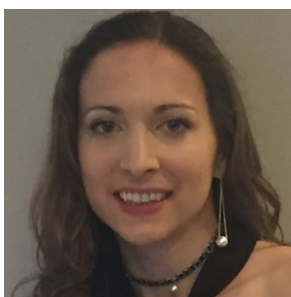
Jessie is the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Washington English Center. She has previously taught international students in American University's Extended Accelerator Program, and done volunteer work with adult learners with beginning English skills.

The Adult Education Special Interest Group is a community of educators that is open to all who are interested in Adult ESOL, whether you are new to the field or a longtime practitioner. During WATESOL's Fall 2018 conference we met over lunch and used padlet to brainstorm ways to build community and collaboration in our classrooms and programs. We also shared free and low-cost resources with each other. We look forward to continuing these conversations in 2019.

The Adult Ed SIG partners with the K-12, Higher Ed, NNEST, and Advocacy groups to host community happy hours and other events. Are you interested in a study circle, invited speaker workshop, or online workshop? WATESOL's Event Interest Survey is open, and we welcome your feedback on the types of events and event topics that you would like to see in the coming year. Please also feel free to contact Jessie Ebersole, the Adult SIG chair, at adultedsig@watesol.org to share your input at any time.

Higher Ed SIG

Louise Godley—Chair

Louise is a lecturer in the IEP at the Maryland English Institute, University of Maryland. Louise has an MA in TESOL from American University, and a BA in History and Archaeology from the University of Winchester in the UK. Louise is a native speaker of British English, and is a fluent speaker of Australian English. However, she can just about function linguistically in the US. She lives with her partner and their two cats, Claude and Augustus.

What is the Higher Ed SIG?

Tell me more…
The Higher Ed SIG is the special interest group for ESL teachers and administrators who are currently working in - or interested in - higher education environments. This SIG was established to provide a professional development forum for members to get together to share experiences and resources; to discuss issues particular to our field; and to provide an opportunity and a network for collaboration.

WATESOL has begun the process of reinvigorating the SIGs and other member groups, and we need you! We began 2019 with a winter happy hour, co-hosted with the Advocacy Committee and the NNEST Caucus. We'd like this to be the first of a series of regular events to get WATESOL members together in an informal way, in addition to our more structured conferences and mini-conferences.

If you have ideas for future Higher Ed SIG events, suggestions for speakers/sessions at WATESOL conferences, or you have a burning question or issue you'd like to share, please get in touch via higheredsig@watesol.org

NNEST

Eda Aladagil Yoon

Born and raised in Turkey, Eda immigrated to the U.S.A. in late 2012. She is currently a full-time lecturer at the Maryland English Institute, University of Maryland.

Who are we?

The acronym NNEST stands for Non-Native English Speaking Teachers. Established in 2004, The WATESOL NNEST Caucus is comprised primarily of committed TESOL professionals, both native and nonnative, who teach and/or work with English Language Learners from diverse backgrounds. We also, however, welcome and encourage the participation of language educators from all backgrounds in the group.

What can we do for our members?

We are a support network for local non-native language teachers. Our support includes but is not limited to helping non-native teachers in addressing and resolving employment issues, promoting professional growth, and providing networking opportunities and job search advice to our members. In addition, our caucus raises awareness among stakeholders of the benefits non-native teachers bring to the classroom and promotes NNEST and NEST collaboration.

Future Plans

We kicked off 2019 with a winter happy hour, which we hosted in conjunction with the Advocacy Committee and the SIGs. We plan to make the happy hour gatherings a recurring event in an effort to bring members together more frequently. Among our immediate plans is also to create a study circle in which we read assigned articles and have productive face-to-face or online discussions to stay current on NNEST related issues or other topics our members are interested in. The NNEST Caucus also values your opinion and would like to hear your input regarding prospective events. You can let us know by taking the WATESOL Event Survey, which was sent out with the NNEST Caucus welcome email.

WATESOL K-12 SIG

Becky Miskell—Chair

Becky Miskell is an ESOL teacher at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. She has taught and supported secondary language learners in DC Public Schools and in Fairfax County Public Schools for many years. Becky enjoys traveling and learning languages.

Are you a K-12 ESOL educator looking to connect with other K-12 colleagues? The WATESOL K-12 SIG is a professional learning community (PLC) where elementary, middle, and high school ESOL teachers come together to discuss current issues in ESOL instruction, to share resources, to collaborate with each other, and to further our professional development.

Why join the K-12 SIG?

We all work in varied contexts; however, what unites us is our commitment to the education of K-12 students who are developing their English language skills. The K-12 SIG community is a varied and supportive professional learning community of practitioners from across the Washington area with whom to network, share resources, and explore current research (including our own).

On the recent WATESOL interest survey, members identified areas of interest. Among them were differentiated instruction, the interactive classroom, assessment, and materials design. Following the kick-off event, plans are in the works for a workshop during which participants will have the opportunity to share what is working and lessons learned. Come, share a differentiated lesson plan, favorite resources, or materials that you have used successfully. Also on the agenda are guest speakers and professional book studies. Ideas for K-12 SIG events, speakers and books? Topics of particular interest to the K-12 community? For more information, reach out to k12sig@watesol.org.

Advocacy

Polina Vinogradova—Chair

Thank you for trusting me to lead WATESOL advocacy efforts this year. The mission of the Advocacy Committee is to support and showcase advocacy work of local English language educators; develop WATESOL advocacy agenda to support equity in English language education at a local level; and join national advocacy efforts of the TESOL International Association. To support these efforts, we invite you to attend the following events.

WATESOL Advocacy Committee Meeting: Date and Time TBD
Stay tuned for details in the near future

WATESOL Advocacy Day: April 13, Saturday, 9:30am – 3:00pm, American University

Registration information coming soon. You'll be able to register for the morning event, afternoon event, or for the whole day .
    9:30am-10:00am: Check-in and coffee
    10:00am – 12:00pm: Part I – Advocacy Panel
Teachers As Allies: Teaching Undocumented Students in Anti-Immigrant Times
    Panelists: Elaisa Sánchez Gosnell, Sandra Duval, Anne Marie Foerster Luu, and Lori Dodson
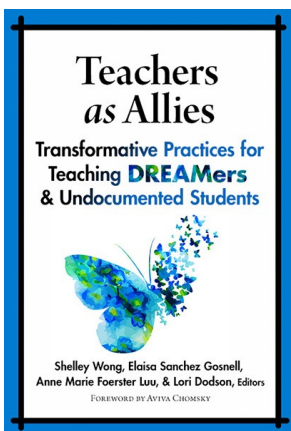The book *Teachers as Allies: Transformative Practices for Teaching Dreamers and Undocumented Students* (Wong, Sánchez Gosnell, Foerster Luu, & Dodson (Eds.), 2018, Teachers College Press) will be available for purchase.
12:00pm-1:00pm: Lunch
1:00pm-2:00pm: Part II – Workshop
Creating LGBTQ+-inclusive Classes in TESOL Contexts
    Presenter: Joshua M. Paiz

2019 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit: June 17-19, Holiday Inn Arlington at Ballston (4610 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203)

AU TESOL Summer Workshop: June 28-30, 9:00am – 5:00pm, American University Main Campus
    TESOLers as Advocates: It's What We do!
    Presenters: Luciana C. de Oliveira and Heather A. Linville

Presenting at any conferences other than TESOL? So are these WATESOL members:

AERA Annual Meeting

Tabitha Kidwell
University of Maryland; A cultural balancing act: The learning, practices, and beliefs of novice Indonesian teachers of English

AAAL

Tabitha Kidwell
University of Maryland; Beyond intercultural communication: Preparing tomorrow's language and culture educators

Joshua M. Paiz
The George Washington University; Practical Considerations in Queering ELT;

CCCC

Joshua M. Paiz
The George Washington University; Literacy, Performativity, and Inclusive Pedagogy

COABE

Heather Ritchie
Carlos Rosario School; Developing Student Agency - When Learners Have the Power to Learn

Heather Ritchie and Elani Lawrence
Carlos Rosario School; Blended Learning in an ESL for Families Program for Low to High Beginning ESL Learners

Heather Ritchie, Melissa Zervos and Lindsey Crifasi
Carlos Rosario School; Exploring What Works in Professional Development for Administrators as Providers and Teachers as Learners

Q&A: Reflections on a trip to the border

Megan Calvert, *Montgomery College,* calvert.megan@gmail.com

Megan Calvert has been working with English language learners since the year 2000 and has taught in France, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. She currently teaches Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) classes and writes ESOL curriculum at Montgomery College.

What program did you do and where?

I participated in a one-week BorderLinks delegation trip to Tucson, AZ in November 2018. BorderLinks is an organization that creates educational immersion trips in order to raise awareness about border policies and migration. It was an incredible opportunity for me to learn more about the issues that affect many ESL students in the US.

What did you do while you were there?

During the time that we were there, we participated in a number of activities with our delegation leader, Josue, who was himself a DACA recipient who had migrated from Mexico as a child. For example, we visited an Arizona courthouse to observe an Operation Streamline trial of about 75 undocumented migrants who were all brought into the courtroom in chains and tried en masse. We heard the story of an undocumented trans woman who received terrible abuse both at home and in detention centers before helping to start an organization called Mariposas Sin Fronteras. We traveled to Nogales, Mexico for a day with a different leader (Josue couldn't cross the border) and learned the story of Jose Antonio, a 16-year-old boy who lived at the Mexican border and was brutally shot to death by a US border patrol agent. We also did an exercise called "*Canasta basica,*" which had us find and calculate prices of one family's weekly groceries in a typical large supermarket in Mexico. We learned that the average salary for a *maquiladora* (factory) worker just barely covered food for the week, with almost nothing left for rent, health care, transportation, or other basic needs. We also went into the desert one day and walked the migrant trails in order to leave life-saving water for migrants who might be passing through.

What was one of the most impactful experiences you had?

The most impactful part of this experience for me was definitely the desert walk. I had just read Luis Alberto Urrea's non-fiction book *The Devil's Highway,* which describes the 2001 desert crossing of a group of 26 migrants which resulted in 14 deaths. As we walked through the increasingly warm day, breathing in the dry air, I thought about the horrific experiences Urrea described. He had written about how some of the walkers went mad, stripped naked, and ran against the spiky cactuses as though embracing a loved one. While there, we looked at a map showing red dots for the places where migrants' bodies had been found. The whole area where we left the water looked like a paper target riddled with red bullet holes. They told us there had been more than 7000 documented deaths in the area since 1990 and that many more bodies had likely not been found.

The most upsetting aspect of all of it though was that these deaths were actually by design. The US policy of "prevention through deterrence" is a strategy that means that easily crossed urban areas of the US-Mexico border were walled off and patrolled while more treacherous desert areas were left open. The idea originally was that fewer people overall would cross if it became more dangerous to do so, even if more people did in fact die in the process. It seems that they underestimated the levels of desperation and fear that cause people to cross in the first place.

What did you learn from the experience that you would want other ESL teachers to know?

One of the most important things I learned was that I held a certain level of prejudice against undocumented students compared to those who had come legally to the US. I think on some subconscious level I had been classifying my students into "good" and "bad" based on their official paperwork or lack thereof. I think many of us do. When you start to understand, however, all the forces that drive people to migrate, the fact that our borders used to be much more open to Mexican migrants who were coming here as temporary workers, the history and arbitrariness of borders that shift (many Latinos in the Southeast think of the Mexican American war when they say, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us"), the incredible struggles people face before, during, and after their migration, it can really open your mind. I would encourage any ESL teacher, whether you work with undocumented students or not, to become more educated about migration policies and question assumptions we have about what the "right" way to come to this country is.

What resources would you recommend for ESL teachers who want to know more about immigration issues?

Read *Undocumented* by Aviva Chomsky. This book starts off with the argument that borders are unnatural and whatever citizenship we have is simply pure accident of our births. At first it seems quite radical, but I think it's really an excellent point - why should any of us have a right to live and work in a certain geographical area simply because we were born within its artificial lines? Humans have been migrating for nearly all of our existence. As US citizens, we're relatively free to move from one area to another and we're often unaware of how difficult it is for others who come from "less desirable" countries. I would also recommend the film "Harvest of Empire," which succinctly examines the destructive history between the

US and Latin America and which can be found on YouTube. *Devil's Highway*, mentioned above, is also a great read. And *Enrique's Journey* is another excellent book that tells the story of one teenage boy's treacherous journey from Guatemala on the roofs of trains to find the mother that had left him years earlier.

Teaching Reading to English L2 Adults: Best Practices

Caroline J. Cherry, Jim Weaver Scholarship Recipient, caroline.j.cherry@gmail.com

Caroline J. Cherry is a master's student in TESOL and works as a part-time ESL teacher for Linkages to Learning. In her free time, she enjoys practicing yoga, nature walks, and volunteering at a local animal shelter.

Last spring, I was honored to receive the Jim Weaver Professional Development Grant to fully fund tuition for the course *Teaching Reading Skills, taught by Alice-Ann Beachy. It's one of several courses that comprise Montgomery College's TESOL certificate program.*

Even though I completed the four required courses to receive a TESOL/TEFL certificate from Montgomery College several years ago, I did not feel my training in ESOL pedagogy was complete without a reading skills class; fortunately, this course filled that knowledge gap.

While *Teaching Reading Skills* included instruction for pre-literate learners as well as best practices for teaching children, my review will center on strategies aimed at adults who are Level 1 (high-beginner) and above, as that is the population with whom I have the most experience.

An effective lesson plan for building reading skills should include learning activities in the **pre-reading, reading**, and **post-reading** stages. Each stage is important and should not be skipped in order to ensure the best learning outcomes.

"Each stage is important and should not be skipped in order to ensure the best learning outcomes."

To illustrate the types of activities that would be useful in each of these stages, I will use my final class project, a lesson plan, as an example and explain the specific steps I would take in an actual class. This particular lesson is designed to be taught over the course of several class periods and is geared toward adult high-beginning/low-intermediate students. The text upon which the lesson is based discusses potential dangers of cellphones and how to safely use them while driving and walking.

♦ ***Pre-Reading activities***: Two effective pre-reading activities are activating students' **background knowledge** of the topic and teaching **key vocabulary** associated with the topic and text to be read.

To find out what students already know, I start by holding up my phone and asking students if they have cell phones, what brand or model they own (iPhone or Android) and when they purchased their first smartphone. After a few students contribute their responses, I ask if anyone thinks cell phones are dangerous. A common response may be, "when driving."

Following background knowledge activation, I ensure that students understand key vocabulary associated with the text and topic. In this case, such words include: smartphones, electronic devices, texting, react, and emergencies. Some activities to help students learn and remember these key words and phrases include working in pairs or groups to spell out the words using word tiles, filling in the missing word in a sentence with the help of a word bank, and taking turns reading each of these sentences out loud with a partner.

♦ ***Reading activities***: Useful exercises during the reading phase include **identifying key words, stating the main idea of each section** and **predicting** what the next paragraph may be about based on the previous one.

I inform students that we'll read the whole article later, but first, we'll do some fun activities to help with comprehension. I then pass out only the first page of the article, but with everything but the headline and first three paragraphs covered; I ask the class to read the headline and the first three paragraphs two times slowly. Then, they open their notebooks, and, without looking back at what they read, they jot down the three or four most important words in this section. Afterward, they write a complete sentence stating the section's main idea.

I ask several students to tell me the words they wrote and their main idea sentence, which I write on the whiteboard. I then ask them to look at the photos, read the captions and tell me what's happening in the photos and how each photo relates to the text.

When they're finished with that task, they predict what they'll read in the next paragraph, then uncover the paragraph and read it. Afterward, I ask if their predictions were correct or not. We continue this exercise with each covered paragraph until the text is complete. Finally, they silently read the entire piece.

Another effective reading strategy, used to build **fluency**, involves reading aloud while employing the appropriate expressiveness based on the text's tone (serious, playful, etc.), pausing correctly with commas and periods, inflecting the voice when reading a question, and raising the voice for an exclamatory sentence.

To help build my students' fluency, I have them read the article they'd been working on silently, paying attention to tone and punctuation marks. Then, I read a paragraph out loud, and students echo-read; that is, they read the same paragraph I just read out loud, together. Next, everyone records themselves reading two paragraphs on their phones, then they listen and re-record if they wish. Finally, I come around to each student, listen to their recordings, and offer encouragement and constructive feedback.

Our final activity involves exercises centered on **pronouncing** multisyllabic words using a separated syllable activity and correct syllable emphasis.

♦ *Post-reading activities: Last but not least are assessments designed to ensure that students* **comprehend** *and* **recall** *important facts from the text.*

For this lesson, I give each student a five-question quiz. They write short answers to simple questions designed to gauge basic comprehension of the article's most salient points.

In sum, best practices for teaching reading skills include a variety of learning activities during the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading stages designed to activate background knowledge, define and understand key vocabulary, ensure comprehension, and build fluency and phonological knowledge.

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Real-world Assessment Challenges in the Language Classroom

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With a good understanding of rubric design and a solid grasp of validity, reliability, and other key assessment principles, a language teacher should be able to evaluate **any** work that her students produce - right? If only it were that simple. Even with solid theoretical training and well-designed assessment tools, language instructors routinely face a number of real-world challenges in the assessment process. Here, we examine three of these challenges and provide suggestions for dealing with each: mitigating halo bias, grading group work, and assessing interactive listening and speaking.

Halo Bias

Halo bias refers to the fact that "teacher expectations can influence the way in which a student's performance is interpreted" (Batten et al., 2013). In other words, an instructor might unknowingly be harsh or lenient when grading based on either her overall impressions of a student or the quality of a student's prior work. Consider this, though it may be uncomfortable: have you ever found yourself looking - subconsciously, perhaps - for legitimate ways to deduct points from a paper written by a student who is often late or who is disrespectful and disruptive in class? Or have you ever said to yourself, as you stare down a stack of papers waiting to be graded, "I'll start with Fei's paper; I'm sure hers will be good"? If we're honest, it's difficult to deny ever having similar thoughts. Halo bias is an intuitively understandable phenomenon, and one that may be impossible to completely avoid; nevertheless, it's worth some effort to be

> *"An instructor might unknowingly be harsh or lenient when grading based on either her overall impressions of a student or the quality of a student's prior work."*

sure that each product that we assess is evaluated based entirely on its quality, not on our perceptions - positive or negative - of the student who produced it.

Suggestions for Avoiding Halo Bias

1) Anonymity: Removing students' names from assignments is the simplest way to reduce halo bias; this can be done in a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Canvas, or on paper-based assignments by having students use ID numbers instead of names or folding back corners of a page. In the process approach to writing typically taken in the language classroom, it can of course be difficult to treat an assignment anonymously even if a student's name has been removed; after working with students through several drafts, you might know whose paper you are grading regardless. When possible, however, grading anonymously is probably the best way to avoid halo bias.

> *"Grading anonymously is probably the best way to avoid halo bias."*

1) Grading individual elements: Rather than grading each student's assignment individually using all the criteria on a rubric at once, a second suggestion for avoiding halo bias is to break the grading process up by components. For example, on essays, you might grade shorter paragraphs or sections, or overall essay components, on each student's paper, then start again from the top of the stack to assess grammar. Focusing on just one criterion at a time can make it easier to impartially evaluate the work; at the same time, it also can mitigate another type of halo effect. With this approach, one element of an essay is less likely to impact the scoring of the other elements; for example, the impression created by accurate sentence-level grammar will be less likely to lead to an undeservedly high mark for an argument that is not particularly insightful or that lacks good supporting details. Tasks can often be broken up into discrete parts, and you can experiment to figure out what works best in your own setting.

> *"We find it helpful to first ask ourselves whether, in this particular instance, it is more important to accurately reflect the "real world," where a team's work is often judged as a whole, or to consider a student's individual contribution to a project for both a fair grade and more targeted feedback."*

2) Talk about it: Your colleagues have most likely encountered halo bias and have either found solutions or need to brainstorm with others about how to avoid it. Talking about halo bias is a good way to recognize this uncomfortable issue and to share solutions for it.

Grading Group Work

Group work is a cornerstone of cooperative learning and is widely encouraged in education pedagogy (Slavin 2014; Tran 2014). Assessing group work, however, can be a challenge because often "the work of the individual is lost in the product of the group" (Nordberg, 2008), problematizing the alignment of grades with individual performance (Almond, 2009).

When approaching the evaluation of a group project, we find it helpful to first ask ourselves whether, in this particular instance, it is more important to accurately reflect the "real world," where a team's work is often judged as a whole, or to consider a student's individual contribution to a project for both a fair grade and more targeted feedback. The "real world" and the "what's fair" approach could both be valid choices, but the solutions that follow put greater emphasis on "what's fair" and on our role as language instructors.

Suggestions for Grading Group Work

1) Teamwork reports: After completing a group assignment, students can report on how they specifically contributed to the process, and on what may or may not have been successful during the project. They can also rate or comment on the contributions of their teammates.

2) Including teamwork as a grading criterion: Using a teamwork report and/or instructor observation to guide you, this could complement assessment of individual work and demonstrate to students the importance of cohesion in a group product.

3) Tailoring grading tools according to group roles: When students complete segments of a project that cannot be assessed using identical criteria, consider differentiating them accordingly. In a panel presentation, for example, the student who plays the anchor role might be assessed on effective introductions, facilitation, and closing remarks; students who serve as panelists could be graded on the quality of their individual content and the clarity with which they present it.

4) Coaching students through the process: Students who are not accustomed to doing group school work in their home countries or who have had limited professional experience on a team will struggle with this if there are limited guidelines. Help students understand roles and expectations of a group task by asking students to identify a leader to help organize and delegate specific tasks, have students submit periodic "progress reports" to indicate which team members are doing which tasks, and give students an opportunity to work in class so that you can observe or anticipate conflicts that may arise in the process.

5) Allowing students to deliver their parts of a project individually: Disrespect from group members, such as failure to complete an assigned component or speaking too long in a group presentation, can often be unavoidable or unplanned for, at no fault of his or her teammates. In these cases, if time and resources permit, allowing students to present their own work in an alternative way may be more gracious than penalizing an entire group for one student's poor choices.

Assessing Interactive Listening-Speaking Tasks

Growing attention has been paid to developing assessments of real-time, unplanned speech events as distinct from assessment tools focusing on pre-planned presentation skills (Fulcher, 2014). Successful participation in group discussions is a common performance objective in intensive English programs and in professional English training. Students need to develop relevant skills and demonstrate linguistic capacity in these situations, but evaluating a student's ability to produce coherent, accurate, and comprehensible speech in them, along with relevant content and pragmatically appropriate language, can seem to be an overwhelming challenge.

Suggestions for Assessing Interactive Listening-Speaking

1) <u>Prioritize features to assess</u>: Each of the features listed above is indeed important, but in most cases grading and giving feedback on all of them at once is not necessary. For a given discussion, consider choosing features that correlate with a current or recent curricular focus. Prior to starting the task, be transparent with students about those criteria being the basis for their grades, and give targeted feedback on those alone. With guidance and clear instructions, you might also ask students to self-assess or to assess their peers' contributions for particular criteria.

2) <u>Record discussions</u>: Even with a limited number of features on which to focus, providing reliable, useful feed   back on group discussions is a challenge. Recording the discussions allows you as an instructor to improve both reliability and the quality of feedback that you give to students. Recording also has the added benefit of increasing student buy-in. While a student might question your critique of a poorly-expressed thought, a grammatical mistake, or an impolite interruption of a   classmate if he or she receives your comments alone, a recording provides evidence that cannot easily be contested.

Assessment is, for many language instructors, one of the least enjoyable aspects of the job. Effective language teachers, though, seek to excel even in areas they might not particularly like. *Perfectly* unbiased, proportionate, detailed and reliable feedback is perhaps an elusive goal - but the strategies outlined here will bring us closer to it.

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Tech Tools Corner

By Lindsey Crifasi

There's no doubt that this is a difficult time for immigrants. The imagery of a wall, the demonizing of the caravan, and no sign of relief for DACA or TPS recipients, or the DREAMers. I have been inspired this year to include self-care in my weekly lessons in the form of yoga and breathing, two activities that I practice in my own life. My hope was that if my passion showed through as I led the class in deep breathing and chair yoga, they would be able to see and feel its effects. Turns out, it worked! As we were doing end-of-semester reflections in class, my 17-year-old student said his favorite memory was doing yoga on Fridays. My 20-year-old said he loved the breathing exercises. SUCCESS!

Not everyone is into yoga and that's fine! We all bring something unique to our class. However, if introducing relaxation techniques or just personal wellness in your class interests you, here are some free tech tools you can use.

1. **Happier** - This app's story is best told by its founder, Nataly Kogan, "Happier is a very personal project for me, which grew out of my experience as a refugee to the US and my subsequent journey to find genuine happiness. I took many wrong turns, spent decades chasing the BIG HAPPY through achievements and success, trying to run away from any negative feelings of pain, sadness, or stress." Add pictures to gratitude journals!
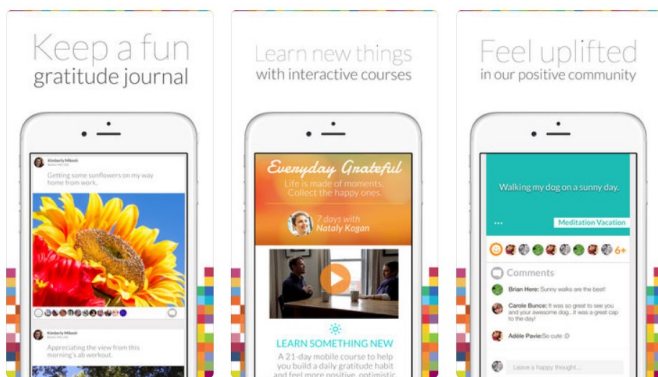

2. **Aura** - An app for relaxing through music, sounds of nature, journaling, guided meditations and more. From a review on iTunes, "What I like about Aura so far: I am a suck-er for gamification, so having me gain XP toward higher mindfulness levels resonates. I like how it is broken up into meditations, life coaching and sounds/music for different effects."
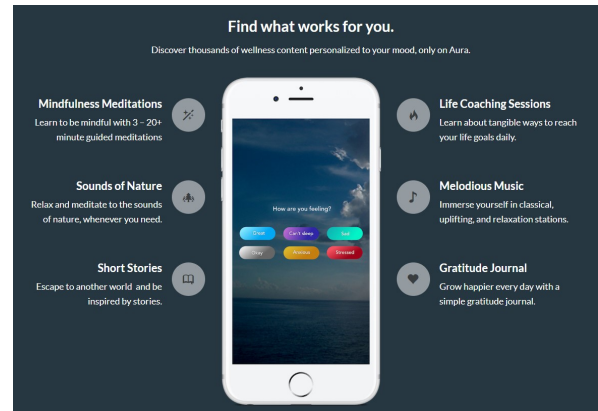
3. **Sleep Cycle Alarm Clock** - Sleep Cycle uses patented technology to analyze your sleep and wake you up when you're in your light sleep phase. You'll get detailed sleep analyses and graphs. Just set the phone next to you bed and let the app do the rest. It wakes you up using "carefully selected alarm melodies."
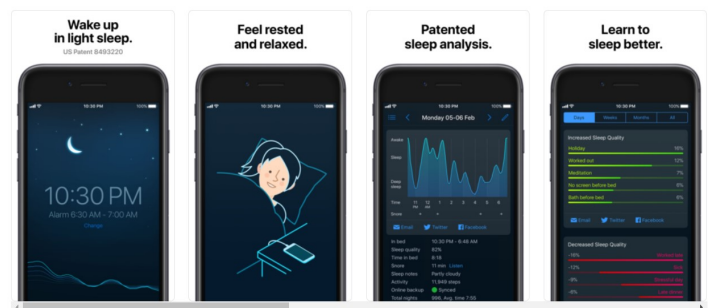
Headspace, Calm and MyPossibleSelf are all great options and very much worth exploring, but may be prohibitive to our student population due to level of English and pricing.

Be kind to yourselves and model the good habits for your students. You'll see your enthusiasm for self-care will be inspiring to them. Including some time for using the apps in class will increase odds that students will use them outside of class.

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