



ITBE

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Four Years or More for ELL High School Students

By Lila Birchfield

High school is a four year commitment, right? If you are an ELL student, maybe not. It just might take a little longer to earn a diploma, but that is not all bad. An extra semester or even a fifth year of secondary education can make a difference in an ELL student's chances for post-secondary success or the ability to find good employment after graduation. The bar has been set higher for graduation. Beginning in the 2008-2009 school year, the Illinois State Board of Education required that students take the following classes for graduation:

- 4 years of language arts
- 2 years of writing-intensive classes (One class may be a language arts class, and the other may be in another content area.)
- 3 years of mathematics
- 2 years of science
- 2 years of social studies (one must be U.S. History)
- 1 year from art, music, foreign language, or vocational education
- 4 years of physical education
- 1/2 year of health education
- 1/4 year of consumer education

Local school districts set additional coursework for graduation that exceeds the above state-mandated minimum. The academic demands and social issues of high school are challenging for all students, but for students whose first language is not English, high school can be a daunting experience.

While each ELL student is unique, they all face two major hurdles upon arriving in an Illinois high school. They must adjust to the school's climate; that is to say, the way of doing business in any particular building. Where are their classrooms? What is the bell

schedule? Where do they eat lunch? How do they open their lockers? Where do they catch the bus? What is a pep rally and where do they go? Newly arrived ELL's experience the same issues as any student new to a building, but they often don't have the language to ask for assistance. Sometimes, ELL students continue with classroom expectations ingrained in them from their native countries. They stand when answering a teacher's question. Only when they hear snickers from their American classmates do they realize their "error." On rare occasions, these differences can have serious consequences such as when an immigrant student new to the school brought her paring knife to the cafeteria. She was carefully peeling her apple when the Dean approached her and took her to his office to discuss her suspension for bringing a weapon to school.

The second and more difficult issue is the ELL high school students' acquisition of English. The younger students in the primary grades do not have the same intensity of language needs as the older students. The academic demands aren't as high, plus they have more years ahead of them to develop strong English language skills through repetition and practice. High-school-aged ELL students do not have the luxury of time. Once they leave their counselor's office with a class schedule in hand, they are expected to complete the same graduation requirements as their English-speaking counterparts. ELL students must learn

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About the Newsletter

The newsletter is a publication of Illinois Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages•Bilingual Education, a non-profit professional organization, founded in 1970, which disseminates information, provides a forum, and serves as an advocate for students, educators and administrators in the field. Illinois TESOL•BE is an affiliate of TESOL, an international organization.

Membership in Illinois TESOL•BE is open to all interested individuals. To join, please use the form in this issue of the *Newsletter*; for further information about membership, call (312) 409-4770 or visit our web site at www.itbe.org.

Submission Information



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Advertisement Information

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Graphics and layout by Kerri Bonds.

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English while simultaneously mastering the content of all those required classes.

Ideally, high school ELLs receive their language arts instruction in ELL English classes. These classes, which can range from Pre-literacy English classes to Advanced English, provide a balanced curriculum where ELLs develop competency in all four language domains. During the enrollment process, an incoming ELL student takes the WIDA APT screener test to determine appropriate placement into his or her English class. These classes count toward their language arts graduation requirement. Most beginning and intermediate ELL students take sheltered content classes to round out their schedules. These classes form the Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) required by the Illinois School Code. As soon as an ELL student's language skills permit, he or she will take regular classes including honors or AP.

Sheltered content classes open academic doors for ELLs. In high schools with a large population of ELL students, there will be more sheltered classes offered. In sheltered content classes, students learn the academic language of the course while they develop and strengthen their English skills. The teacher of a sheltered class has a dual role--English teacher and content teacher. It is imperative that teachers receive instruction on language acquisition as well as strategies and methodologies for teaching second language learners. The students' mastery of the content depends upon the teacher's delivery of it. In schools where there are fewer ELLs, students will find that fewer sheltered content classes are offered. In this era of limited educational funding, it is not always economically possible to offer a variety of sheltered classes. Therefore, most teachers across Illinois will have ELLs in their classes and will need to adjust their teaching to accommodate these students.

Can an ELL student fulfill Illinois' graduation requirements in four years? It depends upon many factors. Is the student entering as a freshman at age 14 and has he/she had previous English language instruction? Is the student literate in his/her first language and does his/her family hold education as a priority? If the answer is yes to these questions, that student will probably reach parity with his/her American counterparts and will graduate in four years. Unfortunately, this is not the typical case. Students arrive at all ages; some are as young as 13, having already finished the eighth grade in their home country while others are 19 and are

a few credits short of graduation. They receive credits for schoolwork done in their home country as well as other American high schools they may have attended.

Students older than 18 with very limited English language skills and no previous high school credits are often encouraged to enroll in the Adult Education program in their local community college because it would be difficult for them to complete all the high school graduation requirements before the age of 21, the cutoff age for high school attendance. At the community college, they can develop their English language skills in an age appropriate setting. Additionally, there are social implications with adult students, eighteen and older, attending high school classes with much younger children.

There are 5.1 million ELL students in schools across the United States. They come from all over the world and from all socio-economic backgrounds. Some arrive in the United States with strong academic preparation and are eager to learn English, graduate from high school, and enroll in college. The majority of ELLs have some conversational English which they learned in their home country or in their previous American school. What they lack is the subject matter vocabulary. Upon first speaking with these students, school officials can be fooled into thinking that they have fully developed English. In Illinois, the APT screener is administered to properly assess each ELL student's level of English proficiency in the context of academic language.

About 23% of ELL students were actually born in the United States. Their parents are often non English speaking. These second generation ELLs are sometimes placed in bilingual classes or dual language classes at the primary level; this is especially true for Hispanic children. Bilingual classes allow students to develop cognitively in their home language while acquiring English language proficiency. According to



Photo compliments of H. Valdez

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the Illinois School Code, Section 14C-3, high schools are required to provide bilingual classes if there are 20 or more students with limited English proficiency in the same language classification. Bilingual teachers and bilingual certified aides provide language and academic support for these students.

ELL students graduate every year from Illinois high schools. While high school graduation is a milestone for which any young adult should be proud, it's an even greater accomplishment when you consider the extraordinary measures that ELLs have taken to wear the cap and gown and receive their diploma. It's a truly amazing experience to work with young people as they move from novice to near native-like speakers of English. It's a journey that ELL English teachers and ELL Sheltered Content teachers, and instructional aides travel with their students. While the students do the really hard work, we must be there supporting them

with strategies to make English a little more comprehensible. We must be there to provide assistance when too many unknown words get in the way of meaning. In the end, we share the pride our students feel when they receive their diploma, no matter the length of time it took to complete the trip.

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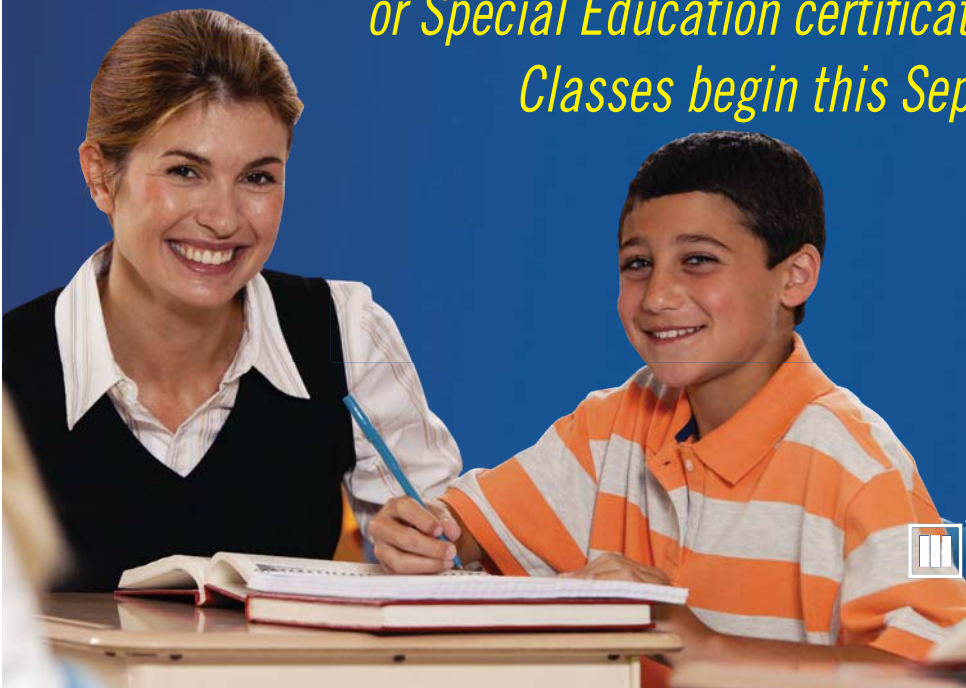
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Observations on Students' Struggles

By Richard Burrell

Days before I walk into my classroom on the first day of school I hang posters that mean something to me and try to cover that hideous beige that all schools seem to be required to use. Art work that students have done in the past dot and decorate the cinder block walls and I think of the hands that drew and painted what I never could. The first few days are always the hardest, for me as well as for them, and these pictures help to ease us all into a place of security and patterns. As I walk into my classroom on that first day, I see a cross section of what makes this world great. Insecure "adult children" stare at me in silent expectation. I never quite know how to reach them in those first few hours and so I blather on about cell walls and volume, force and mass, life and reason. They learn... slowly at first as they grasp and entangle themselves in the language we as Americans expect them to use; and I learn from them as well. I learn what they need and what makes their lives unique and difficult and many times, through trial and error, I learn how to change my teaching style to help them better. I hope to share with you a little that I have learned from them and I pray that you will not begrudge my emotional language as this is who I am and this is what makes me a good ESL teacher. ESL students are just as scared as their teachers, and their fears bind them so securely to failure. It is your job Madame or Monsieur to unravel them from what drags them toward mediocrity and encourage them while teaching them content and language. It's a beautiful dance, and if you are reading this then I know you must feel the same as I do about these unique and incredible people.

One of those most difficult things that any ESL student encounters is the plethora of silent expectations that we as American and western teachers expect. We *must* understand that the students who come from all over the world will have a variety of previous experiences and that as an ESL teacher we must become cognizant of as many of their experiences as we can. Not only does this mean that we learn about them

individually but also their cultures, languages and countries. Learning about your students can be an extremely powerful tool. I implore you to read about their countries, meet their families, eat their food and listen to their stories. This will inform your decisions about what these students may or may not know. After a particularly trying first day of school I learned that none of my students knew how to buy food in the cafeteria. I quickly adjusted that day's lesson plan to include "how to buy lunch in the cafeteria." Generally speaking the second and most pressing concern so many of them had, was about credits and the expectations they must meet to receive their diploma. I now go over these seemingly obvious and innocuous things with them every year. It is an incredible disservice to assume that these students will figure things out for themselves! We must arm these students with the weapons they need to assess and diagnose their own problems while finding answers on their own. We as educated Americans take so much for granted. We all know how to use a dictionary and, generally speaking, know the right people to talk to when we have a problem. Not only may these children have linguistic obstacles, but nobody has ever told them what they must do to succeed in our society! It is imperative that you take nothing for granted.

Another unfortunate and common hallmark of an ESL student is poverty. I cringe to even bring it up as it has become such a social stigma in our materialistic society, but it is a fact that many of these students come to this country with their families in order to find work and better opportunities for future generations. On many occasions I have been left speechless by a student's poverty. My immediate thoughts trend towards teaching them about hygiene and social norms concerning hygiene in this country. It's a fact that we Americans like to smell nice. Additionally, if something does not smell nice we tend to think that it is our God given right to groan and complain about disagreeable smells! One way of combating this,

besides hygiene lessons, is merely expanding their wardrobe a little. Sometimes students wear the same clothes over and over again without washing them because they don't have other clothes! You can help them by taking them aside and explaining how "weird" we as Americans are and still make the child feel safe and comfortable. Also, don't just talk to them, give them clothes! A pair of 5 dollar jeans from goodwill will not break the bank. Another way you could offer clothes to children is by trying to involve the community by having other teachers bring in second hand clothing or toys. A Christmas party where students are able to buy gifts for their families with fake money is a great way to make them feel special.

Finally I'd like to talk about gender expectations. I left this for last because this problem is perhaps one of the most insidious and hardest to nail down. Not only are they difficult to identify because they vary so greatly from culture to culture but much of the pressure is familial and thus harder to observe. When students come from other countries to the United States they enter a world of implied egalitarianism and equality. It's a seemingly great thing, but only if you know the rules and how to work in that system. Young men are too often put to work to help support the family and because of this they have less time and energy to succeed in school. There is also a social

expectation that these students will flunk out of high school and they are only there to learn as much as possible until this happens. The women are trapped in their own ways as well. Arranged marriages are still happening in our schools and young women are still being married off and getting pregnant at surprisingly young ages. I could also write a whole paper just on how Latina women are expected to act when it comes to reproduction and sex. Young girls are expected to appreciate being idolized and manipulated like an object all the while they must be as chaste and ladylike as the Virgin Mary. This dichotomy is stressful to say the least, and puts our young students in incredibly hard positions. More often than I would like, I hear about girls getting pregnant and staying home to raise the child because of the strict guidelines set out by the Catholic Church. Family values are wonderful, but so is an education that will help the next generation achieve even more than their parents.

These are just three things that I have noticed my ESL students facing. I am sure that there are many more, and I know that those unique problems will require unique reactions and solutions from teachers. Next school year should be a lot of fun, but now it's time to recharge and catch up on my reading. Now where did I leave those funny pages?

Dedicate Adult Education and Family Literacy Week 2010!



Last year, the House of Representatives made a one-time dedication for National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week. This was a highly successful effort in raising awareness nationwide of the importance of adult education and family literacy.

This year, Representatives Polis, Honda, Grijalva, Hinojosa, Yarmuth, and Sarbanes are co-sponsoring House Resolution 1472 to dedicate the week of September 13, 2010 as National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week. However, in order to have the resolution brought to the House for discussion and approval, at least 20 more co-sponsors are needed by mid-July.

Contact your representative now and urge him or her to co-sponsor the legislation. If he or she has already co-sponsored the legislation, thank them! Visit TESOL.org for more information.

Passing the Torch

A Presidential Farewell

By Maja Teref, ITBE President



Every June marks the end of one ITBE board and ushers in a new one. As ITBE's 2009-2010 President, I am humbled to have been given the opportunity to serve on a board comprised of ineffably dedicated educators who give of their free time in order to continue and preserve the legacy of this volunteer organization.

This past year has been filled with accomplishments which are certain to take ITBE to a new level. First, both the Fall and Spring workshops have been extremely well attended; moreover, our autumnal event, headed by Professional Development Chair Diana Booth, broke ITBE's attendance record in recent memory. Not surprisingly, our spring event followed suit.

Even in these difficult times, your support, care and desire for professional development was yet again unwavering when you showed up in record numbers to attend ITBE's annual convention, "Changing Times, Changing Lives," this past February. Admittedly, the plenary addresses by Dr. Janet Zadina, Dr. Patsy Lightbown, and Luis Urrea were arresting, the breakout sessions unforgettable, and the organization of the entire event seamless owing to the hard work of the Convention Committee led by Jill Blair.

Next, with your generous input, the ITBE board has decided to make an environmentally-friendly decision and switch to the electronic format of its newsletter. We are very proud that, as an organization with as many as a thousand members, we are investing into the future of our planet by conserving paper.

This year also marks the fourth year ITBE has been involved in TESOL's Advocacy Day. The In-Coming President Elisa Marquez has braved the hot weather on Capitol Hill fighting for the reauthorization of NCLB (No Child Left Behind) while meeting with prominent Illinois Congressmen in order to provide them with much valuable and data-driven input.

At this point, I would like to welcome the new ITBE Board members: Debbie Sternecky, Kathy Larson, Larry Berlin, Olga Gusak, Sana Alawi, Jana Prvulovic, and Tammy Truitt. My heartfelt gratitude goes to the board members who are leaving the board: Kasia Stadnik, Betsy Kubota, Diana Booth, Juli Campagna, Shannon Olson, and Richard Sasso.

I am honored to have served you,

Maja Teref

2009-2010 ITBE President

Spring Workshop Report

By Kimberly Sanford

The Interactive Classroom was the theme of ITBE's Spring Workshop on April 10, 2010. Nearly 100 educators gathered at Niles West High School in Skokie to learn more about engaging their students with interactive classroom activities. The workshop featured two plenary speakers, numerous breakout sessions, SIG meetings and a host of publishers' exhibits.

Rob Jenkins, Professor of ESL at Santa Ana College in Southern California and co-author of the textbook series *Stand Out: Standards-Based English*, was the first plenary speaker of the morning. His presentation, entitled "Motivating, Nurturing, and Letting Go: Student Persistence and Ultimate Success", dealt with meeting student needs and stimulating learning. Participants' feedback to Jenkins' plenary address was overwhelmingly positive, and many chose to stay in the room to attend his follow-up session during the time slot for breakout sessions.

The Spring second plenary address was given by Dr. Alan Seaman, Associate Professor at Wheaton College and director of the MA TESOL program there. He spoke on the topic "Activating the Imagination: The Creative Arts in Second Language Teaching" in which he shared ways to engage the imagination of language learners through the arts. Participants especially enjoyed the interaction and practical activities involving poetry, visual art and music.

Breakout sessions included topics such as building community in the classroom, teaching grammar interactively, technology in the classroom and understanding Mexican culture. As always, ITBE is incredibly grateful to all of those dedicated individuals who participated and presented at the Spring Workshop. Thanks for making our professional development opportunities a success.



A Chance at Bilingual Education in Suburban Illinois

By Kelly Pilleux



Learning two languages confuses children. What if she doesn't learn to read in English? They shouldn't come here if they don't want to learn our language. Aren't English Language Learners considered special education? We shouldn't have to see Spanish on our school newsletters.

Although I am the mother of two Hispanic children, these are all questions I've gotten and comments I've heard from neighbors, friends, and even family. My grandmother continues to forward e-mails complaining about the amount of Spanish that now exists in the U.S. even though she lives in Arizona, her daughter-in-law is Mexican and her great-grand children Chilean, and my own mother complains when she has to choose English at the ATM. It's infuriating. When questioned it is obvious they were not referring to *my children*, who speak Spanish, but the children and adults who already speak other languages and are trying to learn English. If they are in the U.S., shouldn't they just know English? They don't see the two groups as simply people becoming bilingual.

I am from a small town in Ohio where we didn't see a second language at all until the late '90s. Even then, this was only from a Honda plant and one Mexican restaurant. I grew up in a 100% English environment. But as the world changes and we venture out of the bubble of our youth, our views broaden. Language was an easy decision for us when it came to our children, Sofia and Andres. Their father and I both hold Master's degrees in Linguistics so we did not have to question the effects bilingualism could have on our children because we had already studied the research and facts. We had already seen what advantages bilingualism had brought for us. I may have grown up in an English-only environment, but after attending college on a diverse campus and marrying a Spanish/English bilingual speaker, my environment changed. We had the invaluable advantage of

being able to teach our children two languages from birth, as opposed to my thousands of dollars in school loans we still have for learning a second language. And every day we explain to our four-year-old daughter why she should be proud of being bilingual—even though some neighbors, classmates, country-wide opinions, campaigns and legislation will eventually ask her and her baby brother to question that.

I don't think I have to explain in depth in a TESOL newsletter the advantages of learning other languages from early on. To support my daughter's bilingualism we enrolled her in a local language immersion program for children called Language Stars where she spent almost three years. They have a resourceful website that lists research on the benefits of early language learning and are happy to discuss it with any interested parent.

http://www.languagestars.com/why_research.htm.

In Naperville they offer Spanish, French, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, and German. I was amazed at how her vocabulary in English multiplied after beginning the classes in Spanish when she was 18 months old. Learning to speak the two languages together sped up her fluency in both languages. I now have a four-year-old who was reading books in English at age three and unfortunately for me, road signs, advertisements, cereal boxes and words I would try to hide by spelling to her father. Just this year she began reading in Spanish—both way before kindergarten will begin for her over a year from now.

It did not occur to me that when we moved to Illinois four years ago that I should have looked into which public school districts offered Dual-Language Programs. I didn't think about the fact that children in one house may have the opportunity to study bilingually while their neighbors may not. It also didn't occur to me that some programs may be just beginning in some areas and have limited spaces for students. Luckily, some school districts in my area (308 Oswego, 203 Naperville) offer Dual-Language

Programs. The website for the Dual-Language Program at Naperville Community Unit School District 203 answers the question *Why Dual-Language?*

Research studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Two-Way Dual Language Programs in educating both dominant English students and English Language Learners and developing biliterate, academic, and cross-cultural competency for the global market (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas and Collier, 2002). Thomas and Collier found that English Language Learners who participated in Dual Language education outperformed comparable monolingual schooled students in academic achievement after four to seven years in the program (Soltero, 2004).

The Center for Applied Linguistics states that “Proficiency in more than one language is a valuable skill to be cultivated and nurtured in our schools and communities. With a population proficient in a variety of languages, the United States can operate more successfully in our global society and continue to build our understanding of other nations and cultures.”

Admission to local Dual-Language Programs in my area is not guaranteed. When I first discovered that my daughter’s chance of being accepted into our local districts’ Dual-Language Programs was up to a lottery, I couldn’t believe that such an asset to a child’s future was determined by pieces of paper from a hat.

Only later I discovered how lucky we were that the program was even offered. I can’t claim to be familiar with all of the history and country-wide legislation changes on bilingual education from John Adams to present. But I can say that my children are so lucky that we apparently chose to live in an area that is still fighting for bilingual education. I can only wish I had this opportunity as a child. Whether it is legislation, the availability of qualified teachers, funding, space, or many other issues, there are so many children who do not get invaluable opportunity from public schools to stay proficient in two languages. My family, for one, is grateful to the administration, teachers and past parents of my area school districts who have probably fought for a long time to even begin to build a Dual-Language Program, providing children on both sides with an advantage they won’t fully comprehend for many years to come.

A listing of Dual-Language Programs offered in Illinois can be found at <http://www.thecenterweb.org/irc/pdf/dualdirectory2009.pdf>

Kelly Pilleux earned her Masters of Arts in Linguistics from Ohio University 2004 and is currently the International Student Advisor at North Central College.



Kelly's children, Sofia and Andres, will grow up speaking English and Spanish.

Teacher Grant Project Report

By Michal Eskayo

I believe students want opportunities to be creative and are hungry to work with new technologies. With each small video project, blog or glog project that I assign, I get back more than I anticipated. Often, my students create and produce things I could barely do myself. This creative desire among students motivated me to apply for the ITBE Teacher Innovation Grant this past fall. I thought that if my students could create four-minute videos with captions, music and credits at the end, they might enjoy some new equipment and access to more advanced technology. The ITBE grant enabled me to purchase eight Flip video cameras, which are devices about double the size of an average cell phone that can record for two hours. The camera has a USB drive attached for quick downloading. Unsure of the specifics, I wrote the grant with just a vague idea of how I would put them to use.

The only part I was certain of was that the project would focus on visually representing the students' first two essays of the semester. Student in my ESL Integrated 100 class (a bridge course) spend the first six to eight weeks of the semester reading and writing about cultural identity. They read essays and short stories by Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros and Jhumpa Lahiri and compose two essays. The first essay is a narrative/exemplification essay entitled "Lost in Translation" in which students describe an aspect of their culture, past experiences, or past life that they have a hard time practicing, discussing, sharing or experiencing in this country. In other words, they discuss the parts of their culture that have been *lost in translation* since they arrived in this country. The second, "History, My History", is a cause-and-effect essay inspired by Sabine Contrepois' student project that she conducted in the suburbs of Paris with children of immigrants in which she asked students to

interview their parents about their family's history and how and why they ended up living in France. These essay topics inspire the students in my class to explore their personal stories and compose rich content.

In addition to the reading and writing, students create a blog where they post their work, add photos and comment on their classmates' writing. It seemed that their investment in telling their own stories and their support of each other's work made the addition of the video component a natural extension of these assignments.

During the course of completing these assignments, many students commented that their essays – this history essay in particular- did exactly what the original project in the French classroom did for the young immigrants. They learned their own stories as if for the first time. And as a logical consequence, they discussed how the stories told by their classmates were very similar to their own. This type of exchange is important validation for many new immigrants regardless of their age.

Excerpts from the *Lost in Translation* essay:

All those thoughts became accentuated when I said my farewell at the airport to my parents and relatives. At that time we had to leave each other, making myself a new life in an all new world was not as easy and clear as it was in my mind before. I felt like a baby who is about to go out of her mother's body. I even felt like the umbilical cord had just been cut for good as my airplane took off, flying farther and farther from my family, my friends and my different social and religious groups.

-Wenceslas

Adapting to a new world will never be easy as dreaming, but my life just keeps on changing. Provisionally, I lost my way, as the captain of the boat in the storm. When the sun comes out, what have been lost may be found out again, or there's something that I only want to let it go. Sometimes I found that I was somewhat like the gold dreamers. We are all looking for what we want no matter if it is a dream or real. In the transforming of life, people will always find out a new direction for the future. I'm in the process of pursuit and I have a dream that the life will be fabulous someday. -Jimmy

What did the project consist of?

This assignment was designed as a group project with the goal of creating a visual representation of either of the aforementioned essays. The goal was to produce a 5-7 minute video that would present the most interesting aspects of what they wrote. If they chose their first essay, they would focus on the challenges of immigrating and studying in a new country, of getting accustomed to the culture, stumbling through their first days, months and year. If they chose the second essay, they could present parts of their history and their family's history, the event or situation they wrote about, and take us on a journey back to their home country through video.

What did they produce?

The student groups exceeded my expectations, of course. They worked on the videos outside of class with the exception of one 3-hour period towards the end of the semester. Two groups created dramatizations: one about the presidency of Fernando Collor in Brazil and another about a newly immigrated Chinese family to the United States. Another group created a newscast with interviews and video to portray their ideas while another produced an existential video about what they have *lost* since coming to the U.S.

Final thoughts

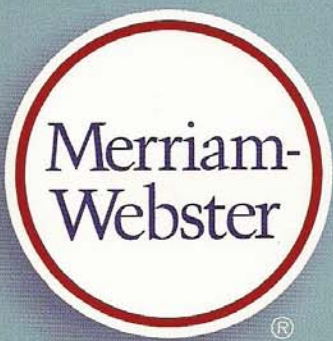
The greatest challenge with this project was not the technical aspect, but finding the time during the semes-

ter to integrate it into our already packed agenda. I was also uncertain about how students would react to devoting so much time outside of class to this idea. When I made the syllabus for the semester, I only noted a final project, but I did not include details. Although it is primarily a reading and writing class, I, of course, expect students to participate, work in groups and do presentations. Therefore, when I introduced the project to the class I emphasized that it would enable them to integrate all their skills while being creative. What shocked my students most was that I entrusted them with these expensive cameras. Although some were wary of the expectations, many were excited for a new opportunity.

It's important to note that this project fit in well with the content and organization of my class. When students enter my class, they expect to work hard, have fun and experience new things. This is a given. Therefore, this project, while potentially time consuming, complemented our work during the course of the sixteen weeks. The introduction of this new technology further motivated my students to engage in their learning.

Please visit my Google Site at <https://sites.google.com/site/itbegrant/> for more information and resources for this project. I have included the handouts for the essay assignments and the project and links to my class blog and the videos.

Did you know the ITBE Board meetings are open to all members? If you'd like to see for yourself what the Board does, join us for our upcoming meeting on August 28th at Roosevelt University. Email president@itbe.org with questions.



A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Bob Marsden (2008) 50 Common Errors: A Practical Guide for English Learners Merriam-Webster: Springfield, MA

Reviewed by William Stone, PhD
Northeastern Illinois University

I like this book. The first positive element comes with the list of contents; individual problem areas are listed, not under overly broad categories such as nouns and verbs, but by sample incorrect sentences. This makes it much easier to locate the specific problem that you are dealing with. That said, the organization is not haphazard: the errors are grouped so that errors with nouns are followed by those with adjectives, those with verbs and those with complex structures.

Each of the fifty errors is dealt with in a similar way. First the sentence with the corrected errors is given followed by a straightforward yet grammatically sound explanation of between one and two pages of what the relevant rules of Standard English are. This is possibly the most useful aspect of the book. The rules are presented in an easy to read and well-structured format that provides enough information without excessive detail. Furthermore, the information is presented in such a way that ESL teachers should be able to create their own exercises to teach the problem area. However, there are also sample exercises to practice the given problem at the end of each section. The majority of the exercises are of the fill-in-the-gap variety, and these are somewhat uninspiring, but there are other types of exercises that call for a little more creativity from the student, and these spice up the book a little.

ESL teachers will find that the fifty errors covered in the book actually are commonly made at the beginning and intermediate levels, and this text provides a useful way to deal with them. The book covers such vital areas as the omission of determiners (*Are you teacher? – *No I'm doctor.), countability in nouns (*He has many money but not much friends.) and verb forms with for and since (*I am sitting here since two hours.) Many of the errors will resonate with ESL teachers. There are also reference sections on the tenses and aspects of verbs (describing form and use very succinctly) and irregular verbs. This brings up my only quibble with the book: the term 'tense' is applied to both verbal tense and aspect. Although this is a very common practice, it rankles with the grammatical purist in me. The price, \$16.95, is another real positive.

LEARNER'S



Tales from a Teacher Abroad

By Marcia Whitney-Schenck

The Twins

Before going to Cameroon, I had researched and written to several children's magazines. I asked each, "Would you be interested in an article written by a student from Cameroon?" Much to my pleasure, *New Moon Girls*, a delightful magazine devoted to empowering girls, expressed interest.

Once in the classroom of sixth graders, I saw that I had another challenge. There were eight girls. Which one? As advised by the Cameroonians and the American adviser, we decided to ask each student to write an essay about Cameroon, and I would pick the best one. Immediately, there was speculation. Would the girl win whose father was a medical resident at the hospital? Her parents were university graduates from Burundi. Or would one of the local Cameroonian girls win? These girls' parents were farmers, not highly educated.

I carefully read each essay several times. It was clear that the Burundi girl had a better grasp of the English language, but her words were formulaic. Then there were two other essays, not as well written, but both equally insightful, both equally compelling. When I explained my dilemma to the teacher, he explained that the girls were twins. How could I choose just one of the girls? That afternoon, I E-mailed to *New Moon Girls* in Duluth, Minnesota, and asked if I could submit one essay by two girls — twins. The answer was "yes."

But, then I encountered more difficulties. The twins were the shyest, most introverted, students I've ever met. To get the essay to a publishable form, I needed to know much more about their lives. I even asked the class, "What can you tell me about Remitte and Reveal Gam?" I got such unhelpful replies as "one is fatter than the other."

Finally after much coaxing, the twins and I collectively managed to produce an essay. It described their school, their country, and their widowed mother.

I needed to do one last thing. I had to take a photograph of the mother with the twins. One day after school, I walked about a mile and a half, through thickets of banana trees and fields of vegetables, until we came to Mrs. Gam's small farm. In the backyard, there were pigs which she raised to earn money to send her children to school.

She had been making fufu for us over an open fire — calabash that is dipped into oily sauces. The mother was expressive, warm, and generous, giving us a sack of calabash that was carried back to school by either Remitte or Reveal — I could never tell the difference between the two.

The essay earned the family \$95, and the mother said the money would help pay for the girls' tuition to secondary school. The article, which was published in the January/February 2009 issue of *New Moon Girls*, ended with one of the twins' favorite stories. "There once was a lion and a tortoise that lived in the forest together. They were best friends and shared everything."

“You Don’t Know Tshiluba?”

The Congolese weren’t too forgiving if you didn’t know their language. We had planned to stay only three months in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (January-March 2009), not enough time to learn Tshiluba, a Bantu language, and, although we had been studying French, not enough time to communicate well in French.

One surgical resident in training at the Presbyterian Good Shepherd Hospital challenged my husband, who was teaching hand surgery, with this question: “How could you come to the Congo and not know French and Tshiluba?”

Bob answered that he would have to depend on the resident to translate for him. Later Bob in retelling the story would say, “I didn’t know Tshiluba *existed* until I got to the Congo.”

During my time in the Congo, I helped the local schoolmaster with his English classes, but after some high school students ridiculed my mangled French I was less than eager to teach them. Instead, I created my own classes teaching medical professionals at the hospital. Some wanted to learn English so they could emigrate to South Africa and earn more money.

Without any books, I had to devise lesson plans that they would find useful. I spent an afternoon with a nurse studying all the English vocabulary on a can of milk formula. I had my students play a version of “I Spy,” going to the local market and matching English words with items for sale. We played a board game which I created on the blackboard. On each square, they had to answer a question in English.

And, I worked with Willie. Because of the residual effects of poliomyelitis, he was confined to a wheelchair. He spoke fluent English, gained while studying at missionary schools. I encouraged him to teach English which would allow him to earn money to support himself.

I left him my language books. I remember to this day Willie in his wheelchair, pushed by his cousin, down a sandy road as we made our way to church. It was a glorious Sunday morning, with a clear sky, bright sun, and lush foliage.

Willie beamed at me. “Do you know what my dream is?”

“No, Willie. What is your dream?”

“That someday you will return to the Congo, and we will teach English together.”

Since I left the Congo in March 2009, Willie has established a small school to teach English in the provincial capital of Kananga. He calls it “The Marcia Center.”

Marcia Whitney-Schenck joined the ranks of ESL teachers after receiving her TEFL certificate from LADO Institute in Washington DC. She and her husband, a retired hand surgeon, served nine months in Africa. The preceding excerpts are from her teacher’s blog: www.notjustgrammar.com. This fall she and her husband are teaching in Uganda and Outer Mongolia. Marcia previously was a newspaper reporter, a public relations executive, and a magazine publisher.

Contact: chnarts@aol.com



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- October 23** **Fall Workshop**
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Contact: www.ITBE.org
- December 3** **2010 Northern Region Adult Education Fall Conference**
Hilton Indian Lakes Resort, Bloomingdale, IL
- February** **ITBE's 37th Annual Convention**
11-12, 2011 Holiday Inn Select, Naperville, IL
- March** **TESOL Convention in New Orleans**
17-19, 2011 Contact: www.TESOL.org
- April** **ITBE Spring Workshop**
9, 2011 Prairie State College, Chicago Heights, IL