“Realizing Transitions: Common Core, College, Career”

Selected Proceedings of the 2013 Michigan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference

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The Selected Proceedings of the 2013 MITESOL Conference
Preface

This volume in the “Selected Proceedings” series is a compilation of just a few of the more than sixty papers, workshops, teaching demonstrations and other presentations that made up the 2013 Michigan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (MITESOL) conference. On October 4-5 members and other MITESOL supporters met at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center on the beautiful campus of Michigan State University in E. Lansing for the annual conference. Organized under the leadership of Jeanine Clever, President-Elect and Conference Chair, and Rick Rojas, Conference Co-Chair, the conference focused on the theme “Realizing Transitions: Common Core, College, Career.” To highlight the theme, several sessions concerning the state-wide implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Standards were featured. Attendees also enjoyed the usual MITESOL conference ingredients: There were special invited speakers, breakout sessions, exhibitor displays, Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings, a Friday evening reception, and a Saturday luncheon and business meeting. More than 325 people took part in this opportunity to gather for professional development and networking along the autumn-tinged banks of E. Lansing’s Red Cedar River, just visible outside the Kellogg Center’s windows.

Perhaps most memorable were presentations by the two invited speakers. On Friday evening, speaker Dr. Randi Reppen (Northern Arizona University) delivered a keynote entitled, “It’s Elementary: A Look at Academic Language from Elementary School to University,” which explored the complicated factors that influence the learning of the language favored in academic contexts. Saturday’s Plenary was presented by Dr. Catherine H. Reischl (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor). In her talk, entitled “Getting Reinvigorated: Using Curricular Changes to Renew Your Teaching Practice,” she asked us to view curricular changes as opportunities to reimagine our teaching practices.

Realizing Transitions: Common Core, College, Career, Volume 8 in the “Selected Proceedings” series, contains six articles that attest to the quality of the presenters and the presentations heard by attendees at the conference. For the convenience of our readers, these articles are divided into three sections: 1) Plenary Presentation, 2) Issues in TESOL, and 3) Teaching Techniques and Materials Development. While these are the traditional divisions set for this publication, each article can inform and provide inspiration for the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) at every level and in any context -- K-12 through university or out in the community, much as the conference theme implied.

The first article in the collection is Reischl’s Plenary presentation “Getting Reinvigorated: Using Curricular Changes to Renew Your Teaching Practice.” In it, Reischl uses Marge Piercy’s poem “To be of Use” to initiate a discussion of how teachers are called “to be of use” to their students by creating and doing “work that is real.” She describes the innovative summer program she and other teachers, university professors, and teaching interns created to teach third- through eighth-grade English language learners (ELLs) in Ann Arbor over the past four years. The program is a wonderful example of how teachers can comply with changing standards while providing meaningful instruction. Reischl is Clinical Associate Professor of Education in the School of Education at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
In the following section, Issues in TESOL, readers will find four diverse papers, each focused on a different issue of concern to those in the field. In “Bridging Home and School: Using ELL Funds of Knowledge to Enrich English Language Arts Teaching,” the first selection in this section, Dawn Evans, Assistant Professor of English at Grand Valley State University, writes about how to bridge the gap between the language and culture of home and the classroom, with particular reference to “funds of knowledge” pedagogy. The funds of knowledge approach, most often associated with Moll and his co-researchers (see, for example, Moll & Greenberg [1990]), is based on the validation of the cultural gifts that students bring to the classroom. These will often remain invisible without a concerted effort from teachers to get to know more about their students’ families and home environments. Evans, who is Canadian, explores the literature on funds of knowledge and offers examples from her own experience working with students of Tahltan First Nations ancestry in British Columbia.

Kristin Homuth and Allison Piippo’s “Using American Culture as a Context for English Language Learning” is next in this section. Drawing on their own experiences abroad, where the importance of knowing culture as well as a language became quite apparent, Homuth and Piippo enter the debate about the place of culture in the ESL classroom. They demonstrate how culture can become an integral part of each lesson, using examples from their own teaching. Homuth and Piippo have contributed to previous volumes of the “Selected Proceedings” series. In addition, Piippo’s name is probably familiar to most MITESOL members as she has served as co-editor of previous volumes of the Proceedings and is currently the co-editor of MITESOL’s bi-annual newsletter. Both authors work in higher education: Homuth is Curriculum Administrator and Instructor at Language Center International in Southfield, Michigan, and Piippo is an ESL lecturer at Eastern Michigan University.

In the next paper, “Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Acquisition: How and Why EFL Countries Should Adopt this Practice,” Tamanna Mostafa presents a detailed summary of research on the issue of extensive reading. Drawing on her own experience as an English language professional in her native Bangladesh, along with data from multiple research studies, Mostafa stresses the importance of extensive reading. She explains how it can be implemented in any classroom, even in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting, where money, space and/or cultural roadblocks might be obstacles. After coming to the United States in 2010, Mostafa taught at Michigan State University and Central Michigan University.

Christine M. Pearson’s “‘Food for Thought’ When Working with Those ‘Hungry for Success’” rounds out this section. Pearson’s paper explores the issue of how lack of healthy food affects our students’ performance in the classroom. After establishing why English language learners, in particular, may be affected by poor nutrition, Pearson gives a short “tutorial” on how the brain functions, a review of research focusing on the effects of important micronutrients on brain functions, and ends with specific suggestions for teachers interested in combating this problem in their schools. Pearson served as editor of several previous volumes of the Proceedings.

While the articles already mentioned focus on issues we might all experience in the classroom, they also offer a variety of solutions for these same issues. Focusing more on the solution to another issue in TESOL – vocabulary teaching – is Patrick T. Randolph, whose paper “Breaking the Ebbinghaus Curse for Vocabulary Acquisition
with the R.E.S.T. Method” completes this volume in the “Teaching Techniques and Materials Development” section. Randolph’s original presentation at the 2013 conference received the most participant votes for best presentation and was nominated for the honor of being one of only eight presentations chosen to represent TESOL International's "Best of the Affiliates" at the 2015 TESOL conference in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In his paper Randolph, Faculty Specialist at Western Michigan University, looks at the problem of how to facilitate memory and usage of new vocabulary words by ESL students. He gives a detailed explanation of his R.E.S.T. method and explains how the technique was enthusiastically embraced by his students. Randolph recently co-authored *Cat got your tongue?: Recent research and classroom practices for teaching idioms to English learners around the world*, published by TESOL Press.

Working as a mentor editor with this group of authors was an amazing experience. They were patient, generous, and kind and wonderful to work with. As the new lead editor of the *Proceedings*, there was a lot to learn. First and foremost, I have to thank the contributors for their involvement in this publication. While I worked with each of them as a mentor editor, they are the authors of the work presented. They retain the copyright on their work and should be contacted with questions about their articles or requests for permission to reprint.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my co-editor Alyce Howarth for her help reading and commenting on all the original submissions. Despite being on sabbatical in southern Turkey, she was able to provide a great start to the project. It was quite interesting working so closely with someone across so many time zones.

It is my hope that readers will find inspiration among these pages and plan on submitting their own manuscripts to future conferences and volumes in this series. I look forward to seeing what the MITESOL 2014 at Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids campus, brings.

**References**


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