

**Expanding Our Perspectives:
From the Classroom to the Community**

**Selected Proceedings of the 2014
Michigan Teachers of English to
Speakers of Other Languages
Conference**

October 17 – 18, 2014

Editors

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Expanding Our Perspectives: From the Classroom to the Community

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Michigan Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages Conference

Grand Valley State University

Eberhard Center, Pew Campus, Grand Rapids, MI

October 17 - 18

Editors:

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The Selected Proceedings of the 2014 MITESOL Conference

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Preface

This volume of the *MITESOL Proceedings* includes just a few of the papers that were presented at the Michigan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages' (MITESOL) annual weekend conference on October 17-18, 2014, at Grand Valley State University's Eberhard Center, Grand Rapids, MI. The 2014 conference theme, "Expanding Our Perspectives: From the Classroom to the Community," invited a closer look at the increasing diversity of the MITESOL membership. We were reminded that our members not only include those who hold somewhat traditional jobs as classroom teachers but also those working in the community with immigrants and refugee populations. As the numbers of immigrants and refugees attending U.S. schools rise, so too will the need for English language professionals prepared to teach them the skills they need to be successful.

The two-day conference included some seventy presentations, panel discussions and workshops, spread over seven concurrent sessions, Friday evening and all day Saturday. Attendees also were able to attend two keynote presentations and two invited workshops. The keynote speakers introduced many members to the acronyms LESLLA (Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) and SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), growing populations of English language learners in the state of Michigan and around the country. Friday afternoon featured a presentation by Kathleen Olson, best-known as an author of several texts for ESL students, who led a group in "Creative Rereading Activities to Provide Essential Repetition for All Learner Levels." The invited workshop on Saturday was by Andrea DeCapua, a well-known author and educational consultant and one of the keynote speakers. DeCapua also led twenty fortunate ticket-holders in a workshop, "Putting Theory into Practice: MALP Projects for Your Classroom," in which she discussed and led attendees in activities designed to make teachers feel confident in the implementation of the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP), an instructional model she co-authored, to develop classrooms that are culturally responsive. Clearly, Conference Chair Colleen Brice, along with her assistants Jane DeGroot, Membership Coordinator, and Ashley Garrigan and Sharon Pearce, Exhibits Co-Managers, worked tirelessly to present an entertaining mix of professional development opportunities, along with colorful publishers' exhibits, tasty food, and an enjoyable reception, featuring live entertainment.

Friday night's keynote by Andrea DeCapua was about "Bridging the Gap: Connecting SLIFE with U.S. Classrooms." She spoke passionately about the need for teachers to work to accommodate the priorities of English language learners within the often-conflicting demands of Western-style education. The Saturday keynote was given by Patsy Vinogradov, Director of ATLAS (the Adult Basic Education Teaching and Learning Achievement System) at Hamline University, St. Paul, MN, and regular contributor to the annual LESLLA symposium. Her talk "Literacy, Language, and the Lifespan: Tapping our Teacher Know-How" continued our discussion of LESLLA issues.

Readers of this volume, *Expanding Our Perspectives from the Classroom to the Community*, will find five articles based on presentations enjoyed by attendees at MITESOL's annual conference. As in the past, the articles have been divided into different categories to guide readers. The selections include research papers, issue papers, and papers exploring the topic of Teaching Techniques and Materials Development.

Christen M. Pearson's "Too Much Stress and Not Enough Food for Thought (or Learning)" opens the volume. In this paper, Pearson, Professor of English linguistics and TESOL at Grand Valley State University, continues her investigation, begun in previous volumes of the *Proceedings*, of how undernourishment affects learning ability. In the paper included in this volume, Pearson discusses the results of correlation studies run on data from a questionnaire shared with parents of more than 200 internationally adopted children—primarily from Russian-speaking backgrounds—at three years of age and older. The implications for teachers of such children as they attend U.S. schools are discussed, especially as they relate to language-learning issues.

"Complexity Theory and SLA" follows as the second paper in this volume and another in the research paper section. In this article, presenters Marian Woyciehowicz Gonsior, Andrew Domzalski, and Bogusława Gątarek, colleagues from Madonna University's MATESOL program, explain how complexity theory, which originated in the natural sciences, can inform our teaching of English language learners. While some may object to such a cross-disciplinary borrowing, the theory has been shown to provide a useful alternative lens through which to view second language acquisition (SLA). For those readers unfamiliar with complexity theory, the authors cover the key points of the theory and show what it can add to traditional theories of SLA. Influenced by research on the same topic by Diane Larsen-Freeman, they suggest ways that English language teachers can reflect tenets of the theory in their own practice and the importance of teacher trainers introducing the theory to teachers they mentor.

The next section, Issues in TESOL, contains the article "Assessing the Speaking of LESLLA, SLIFE, and Community College Students" by Ildiko Porter-Szucs, assistant professor of ESL/TESOL at Eastern Michigan University. In this paper, adapted from the presentation Porter-Szucs gave with Crystal Collins and Kristin Graw at MITESOL 2014, Porter-Szucs writes about the always difficult subject of assessment, in this instance, the assessment of speaking. The paper focuses on the hazards of finding an assessment instrument that truly assesses only speaking skill, without allowing another skill area (for example, familiarity with using computers or reading ability) to skew the results. While MITESOL cannot endorse a particular assessment tool, Porter-Szucs shares her own insights into what teachers should look for in an assessment instrument, particularly when using one as a placement test.

We look at additional tips for teachers in the final section, which contains two articles. The first is "Synesthesia's Magic: Tell Me about the Personality of Your Word" by Patrick T. Randolph, Senior Lecturer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Not sure what synesthesia is or how it might be used to improve your students' ability to learn new vocabulary? Don't worry. Randolph defines the term and provides a brief history of its usage to begin his paper. He then

explains his technique of having students develop character sketches of the new vocabulary words they meet in his courses. Readers will appreciate his in-depth description of the process, including a list of day-to-day activities and a grading rubric. Included comments from former students speak to the success Randolph has had with this unique spin on vocabulary learning.

Rounding out the collection of articles is an additional teaching tip presented by Teresa F. Renkema, Professor of Intercultural Communication at Kuyper College, who looks at the topic of differentiated instruction. In “Implementing Differentiated Instruction in the Classroom,” Renkema explains how to achieve the seemingly difficult goal of providing teaching tailored to each student in the classroom. After giving useful background information and clearing up some misconceptions about differentiated instruction, procedures for implementing differentiation are explored. Renkema completes her analysis by a look at the literature on differentiation that appears to corroborate its effectiveness in supporting learners in the classroom. Renkema’s personal recommendations, based on her own experience in the classroom, provide a firm basis for her suggestions.

A publication such as this one requires countless hours of interaction between and among editors and authors. We, the editors, have had the wonderful experience of working with these authors--some since the end of last year--on revision and development of their submissions. In turn, they have been most gracious in their response to our comments. The experience of being able to work with MITESOL colleagues from across and even outside Michigan on this publication has been rewarding. Reaching the final publication stage feels like coming to the end of an arduous yet invigorating journey.

As happens every fall, plans are now being finalized for the next MITESOL conference. Soon, the Kellogg Center on the campus of Michigan State University will be bubbling over with activity as MITESOL members from all corners of the state, and beyond, come together for our 2015 gathering. See you in East Lansing!

Marian Woyciehowicz Gonsior

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