



CETC Newsletter

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A periodic newsletter for TESOL members.

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Leadership Updates

From the Editors

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Welcome to another issue of the *CETC Newsletter*, which we hope you will find to be useful and interesting. Apart from the usual preconference information, we have some important updates from the caucus leadership and some practical, informative, and thoughtful articles.

In This Issue

This issue begins with updates from CETC leaders, including letters from the current chair, Eleanor Pease, and incoming chair Gena Bennett. We also have a piece from former chair Mary Wong about TESOL's current review of caucuses, and how it may impact CETC. If possible, please be sure to attend the meeting at TESOL 2007 to voice your point of view concerning caucuses within TESOL. We are including two lists that we hope will encourage networking among members: one listing CETC events and some presentations that caucus members will be offering at the upcoming convention in Seattle, and another providing information on some members' recent publications. Finally, we also have some news and updates from CETC.

Our articles section offers a wonderfully varied range of short and longer pieces, starting with an account by Doreen Szeto, a Christian teacher whose recent attempts to implement direct vocabulary instruction in her class offered her an opportunity to reflect on recent research and improve her teaching practice. Though the article is longer than the ones we normally publish, we were impressed by the professionalism of this piece and feel it offers both practical and useable reflections and information (including helpful appendices!), so we are pleased to share it with you. Next, Karen

Asenavage reports briefly on her research on Christian teachers working in limited-access countries; Russ Mason considers how love, faith, and hope might facilitate learning and promote peace in our classes; and Doug Sadler offers some worldview reflections for TESOL. Finally, in this issue we also have two articles that come out of presentations at the CETC colloquium at TESOL 2006 in Tampa: Darla Gamache writes about relationships and how to enhance them in our working contexts, and Tom Scovel presents a Christian perspective on research.

We thank these authors for their contributions and for their willingness to share their hard work with us and you through the newsletter. Caucuses are meant to be a place for networking, so we hope the information and articles here will help you connect with others in TESOL. We plan to have another issue of the newsletter in your inbox in June, so if you would like to submit an article or suggest a topic or idea please let us know. [Please note: the deadline for us to receive draft articles for possible inclusion in the upcoming issue is April 30, 2007.] We hope to meet many of you at TESOL 2007 in Seattle and welcome your feedback on the newsletter.

Blessings,
Michael and Meredith

Letter From the Chair

Eleanor Pease, CETC Chair, 2006-2007, eleanor.pease@nyack.edu

One of my responsibilities has been to work on membership. Each month, using a list, I send out a membership renewal reminder. TESOL has made this an easy process and I've enjoyed seeing your names and not only reminding you to renew, but also offering to you the services of your leadership committee. Some of you have responded with questions and when I couldn't answer, I forwarded them to someone who could. In most cases I sent your inquiry to Pam Williams, director of member services. It's wonderful to work with people like Pam who give instant responses.

A second privilege was spending some time on the phone with Sandy Briggs who will serve as TESOL president in 2007-08. Sandy was encouraging and helpful, offering a personal touch that is important in a large organization.

I have enjoyed the personal contacts that I have made through serving as your chair. Although the e-list keeps us all in touch, I appreciate those who contacted me directly with questions and comments.

One of the assets that we have as a caucus is the group of leaders who have preceded this leadership committee. Some of you may not know about the CETC Steering Committee. This committee is composed of past leaders who continue to support and advise. I won't list names for fear of leaving out someone—but you know who you are and I want to give you my special thanks for the time you spent sending me e-mails with encouragement and advice on specific issues we have faced during my tenure as chair.

Gena Bennett is getting ready to have the CETC beads put on her to symbolize becoming chair. This ceremony will take place during the CETC open business meeting on Thursday of convention week. I know that you will give her the same level of support and help that you have given me.

As we look at the future, we are not sure what the status of the Christian Educators TESOL Caucus will be. Please be sure to read Mary Wong's article in this issue for an update on the review of caucuses that is currently taking place. For many years before the caucuses were formed, Christian educators met informally during the TESOL convention. A change in the caucuses (or their structures) will not change the passion that we have for teaching English to speakers of other languages, nor will it change the camaraderie that we have enjoyed as Christians with mutual interests and goals.

As I left the airport after my graduation last summer, I saw a very large poster with the name of my university on it. The message, written in large letters, was "Congratulations, graduates. The greater good just got better." I like the suggestion that as an educator with a newly acquired PhD, I can become an agent of social change. Our members "Span the Globe" and in offering the gift of language, they make a difference in their world.

I'm hoping to see you in Seattle.

[Dynamic Change: Letter From the Incoming Chair](#)

Gena Bennett, CETC Chair 2007-08, genabennett@yahoo.com

Change, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (www.m-w.com), "implies making either an essential difference often amounting to a loss of original identity or a substitution of one thing for another." We may need or want a "change of pace" or reserve the right to "change our mind," but many of us don't eagerly embrace change. It's no wonder—it can be difficult to assume a new identity or get used to the substitution of one thing for another; yet, change is inescapable.

The theme for this year's TESOL convention is *Spanning the Globe: Tides of Change*. In the preprogram, the convention program chair says that "the TESOL 2007 team wanted to draw attention to the international strengths of our profession as well as recognize the dynamic, changing nature of our role as global educators" (p. 1).

Something that is *dynamic*, again according to Merriam-Webster, "is marked by usually continuous and productive activity or change." Well, if there's going to be change, it should at least be productive!

Change may come to the Christian Educators in TESOL Caucus this year. The role of caucuses within the TESOL organization may change. But we know that no matter what changes, one thing will always remain the same: God is in control.

As difficult as it may be for us to accept change, change is from God. In Daniel chapter 20, we're told that "*He* changes times and seasons." Furthermore, it says "*He* knows what lies in darkness" (emphasis added). No matter what changes we face, they are from God and under his control.

I hope you are all able to join me in Seattle this year to celebrate Tides of Change. As always, a wonderful smorgasbord of presentations awaits us. A list of caucus activities and presentations by CETC members has been included in this newsletter. That information will also be available at the CETC booth. Please be sure to stop by the booth to say hello and network with your fellow Christian educators. You can even volunteer to staff the booth to help let others know about CETC and our activities. And don't forget to pick up your CETC button at the booth, too!

Let's embrace the changes God brings our way with an open mind and heart. Better yet, let's commit to ensure that those changes are dynamic!

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him." (Dan 20:21-22)

["Perhaps This Is Not Such a Bad Thing": TESOL's Review of the Caucuses](#)

Mary Wong, mwong@apu.edu

You may have read *The Lost Horse* by Ed Young, which is based on an old Chinese fable, *sai weng shi ma*. "Sai had a great horse," it begins. His friends told him he was blessed to have such a steed, but he replied, "This might not be such a good thing." Later his horse ran away and his friends came to comfort him, but Sai replied, "Perhaps this is not such a bad thing." Soon the horse returned with another horse as beautiful and strong as the first. Sai's friends came and congratulated him, and as before, Sai said, "This might not be such a good thing." One day when Sai's son was riding the new horse, he fell off and broke his leg. Again Sai's friends came to console Sai and again Sai said, "Perhaps this is not such a bad thing." Later that year hostile nomads invaded the land and all able-bodied men were sent to fight and many did not return, but due to his injury, Sai's son was spared. Sai's son had learned from his father to trust in the ever-changing fortunes of life. When I read this story to my 6-year old son years ago, he asked, "I don't get it Mom. What does it mean?" I paused to consider how to explain Chinese fatalism to a 6-year-old; then I said, "Sai and his son thought that they were powerless to control things, so they just trusted in fate." My son smiled and replied, "Oh, like we trust in God?"

As a member of the Caucus Review Ad Hoc Committee¹, I have been asked by the *CETC Newsletter* editors to provide some information about why this ad hoc committee has been formed and what it may mean for the future of the Christian educators' caucus. You may have seen the letter sent out on the caucus listserves December 1, listing the charge and activities of the committee. TESOL is

concerned about being vulnerable to legal action based on discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and sexual orientation, so the committee has been asked to review the caucuses and make recommendations to the board. The caucuses could remain as they are or reform into different types of entities such as standing committees, interest sections, or informal groups among other possibilities. If change is what the board decides upon, the nature of each community would determine the type of entity it would become. The Christian Educators in TESOL Caucus does not seem to be a strong candidate for either an interest section (which focuses on professional interests) or a standing committee (which reports to the Board on work that is cyclical in nature).

The ad hoc committee is eager to hear from TESOL members about their views of the caucuses. Many of you responded to the survey sent out online in January and stated your opinions of what the caucus meant to you. You can view the results on the TESOL website. There will also be an open meeting on Wednesday March 21 in Seattle at the TESOL convention in which all members can come to voice their concerns to the committee, and again I hope many of you will be there to ask questions and state your mind. As you will see in the survey results, there are several people who question the existence of a Christian caucus and feel that a professional, international organization should not have a faith-based caucus as it may appear to outsiders that TESOL supports one religion over others. Although another faith-based group could form, the fact that CETC is so large and is currently the only faith-based caucus does raise concerns. I feel certain that there is no predetermined agenda on the part of the ad hoc committee members to rid TESOL of certain caucuses. But as the survey results indicate, there is a concern among the general membership of TESOL regarding the existence of some caucuses, especially the Christian Educators in TESOL Caucus.

Some people have suggested that CETC could amend its name and mission statement, and include the phrase "and friends" to avoid this problem. Like the LGBTF (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Friends) Caucus or IBPFT (International Black Professionals and Friends in TESOL) Caucus CETC could be the Christian Educators and Friends in TESOL Caucus or even perhaps the All-Faith Caucus. However the fact that TESOL has a governing structure for these communities may still leave TESOL vulnerable to legal concerns, and there are other issues as well. Some people feel that caucuses should not have parity with affiliates and interest sections because caucuses comprise only a third of the membership and do not have the same power (such as adjudicating convention proposals) or status as the other two entities.

Several questions come to mind. Should CETC members try to keep the caucus as it is with all that TESOL provides in terms of a list-serve, newsletters, colloquium, convention meeting room, space in the program book, and a governance structure? What might be the advantages of meeting informally at TESOL, forming our own listserves and newsletters, and submitting proposals to interest sections instead of relying on our guaranteed colloquium? Would CELT (Christians in English Language Teaching), an informal group not associated with TESOL, but which has successfully conducted several conferences, be a venue in which we meet, network, present, and pursue professional issues related to our faith and work? What can we learn from the survey results? How might members of the Christian community within TESOL seek to affirm TESOL's mission of professionalism, inclusiveness, and diversity?

TESOL can only benefit from affirming and supporting the rich diversity of its members. Just as TESOL values the many diverse languages and cultures of the world, so it must value and support the diversity of perspectives and identities within its membership. Although those in the majority may not see the need for members of communities of underrepresented groups to meet together around professional issues, many of those inside such communities of difference, especially those who are underrepresented as in the case of the black and gay caucuses, may feel the need for this support. What does being black, gay, part-time, a non-native speaker, a person committed to social justice or even a Christian have to do with teaching English? It is clear from the survey that to many TESOL members this means nothing at all, but to some of those within these communities, it means a great deal. It is why we teach and who we are. If these groups are working towards supporting the mission of TESOL, why should TESOL not support them? The question is how TESOL can best do this.

CETC existed as an informal group for over a decade before it became an official caucus in 1996. Wes Eby, the CETC historian, first CETC chair, and one of the founders of CETC told me that CETESOL [CETC's predecessor] drew large numbers to their open informal meetings for years. People found out about the meetings and turned out even though the meetings were not listed in the program for several years. When Wes stated that God will continue to bless the work of CETC, whether it remains as it is or becomes an informal group once again, his words reminded me of the sage in the Chinese fable I mentioned earlier. This review "might not be such a bad thing." It is causing us to reflect upon who we are, how our faith impacts what we do, how others view us, and the value of diversity of our membership. I hope we will think and pray about how to best respond to this in a way that glorifies the one whom we live for and in whom we have a common bond, Jesus Christ.

Mary Wong is a former chair of CETC and currently serves on the TESOL Caucus Leadership Council. She is Director and Associate Professor of the graduate TESOL Field-based programs at Azusa Pacific University.

¹ The Caucus Review Ad Hoc Committee was formed by President Jun Liu September 2006 in response to legal and other concerns relating to the TESOL caucuses. The committee members are

Elliot Judd (chair), David Nunan, Mary Romney, Aysegul Daloglu, Mary Wong, Lia Kamhi-Stein (board liaison) and Chuck Amorosino (staff liaison).

TESOL 2007 CETC Events and Member Presentations

Michael Lessard-Clouston, michael.lessard-clouston@biola.edu

Earlier this year I encouraged CETC members, through the caucus e-list, to tell me about any presentations that they would be making at the upcoming TESOL 2007 convention in Seattle. I then compiled the list below. If you will be at the convention, why not attend some presentations by fellow caucus members? If you won't be there and are interested in these topics, please consider contacting presenters to get further information from them after the conference. For easy reference, I have also included important CETC and caucus events.

Tuesday March 20

Terri Mossgrove: "L1 Inner Speech of Nonnative English Teachers: God is a Polyglot." Part of the TESOL Graduate Forum; time and location TBA.

Wednesday March 21

9:00-11:15 a.m.: Karen Asenavage (with Sonja Franeta, E. Michelle Maitland, Tomas Wallis, Jack Longmate, and Karen L. Newman), "Becoming Advocates of Social and Global Change" (All-Caucus Colloquium), Convention Center, Room 2B.

5:00-5:45 p.m.: Anne Bruehler, "Transitioning from Language Teacher to Teacher Trainer," Grand Hyatt Seattle, Leonesa I Room.

5:00-6:00 p.m.: Open Meeting to Discuss Caucuses, Convention Center, Rooms 2A/2B.

6:00-6:45 p.m.: Meredith Bricker (with John Stowe), "Practical Time Management for Composition Instructors" (Discussion), Sheraton Seattle, Madrona Room.

7:00-7:45 p.m.: Gena Bennett and Meredith Bricker, "An Affective Look at Corpus-Driven Activities" (Discussion), Sheraton Seattle, Madrona Room.

7:00-7:45 p.m.: Susan Kerr, "Why Use Folktales with ESL Adult Students" (Discussion), Sheraton Seattle, Metropolitan B.

Thursday March 22

9:30-11:15 a.m.: Mary Shepard Wong, Kitty Purgason, Peggy Hull, and Shawn Kemp, "Images of Christianity in the Media" (CETC Colloquium), Convention Center, Room 3A.

10:30-11:15 a.m.: Kitty Purgason, "Get into Groups! Made More Efficient and Effective," Convention Center, Room 606.

3:00-4:45 p.m.: Eleanor Pease (and others), "Institutional Expectations of Students after ESL/EFL" (Caucus Interconnections), Convention Center, Room 3A.

4:00-4:45 p.m.: Andy Xuesong Gao, "Biographical Studies in Chinese Learners' Strategy Use," Sheraton Seattle, Willow B Room.

5:00-5:45 p.m.: Brad Baurain, "Local Academic Publishing and Teacher Development," Sheraton Seattle, Cirrus Ballroom.

5:00-6:30 p.m.: CETC Open Business Meeting, Convention Center, Room 3A.

6:30-8:00 p.m.: All Caucus Social Event, Convention Center, Rooms 605/606.

Friday March 23

7:30-8:15 a.m.: Doreen Szeto, "Teaching Pronunciation to Chinese Learners of English" (Discussion), Convention Center, Room 307.

9:30-11:15 a.m.: Gena Bennett (with Averil Coxhead, Jan Frodesen, Diane Schmitt, and Norbert Schmitt), "Using Corpus Findings to Develop L2 Writing Materials," location TBA.

4:00-5:45 p.m.: Mary Shepard Wong and A. Suresh Canagarajah (with David I. Smith, H. Doug Brown, Ryuko Kubota, and Bill Johnston): "Spiritual Dimensions and Dilemmas of Language Teaching," Sheraton Seattle, Cedar Room.

Saturday March 24

7:30-8:15 a.m.: Gena Bennett (with Larry Zwier), "Corpora and Materials Writing Beyond Vocabulary" (Discussion), Convention Center, Room 602.

Recent CETC Member Publications

Michael Lessard-Clouston, michael.lessard-clouston@biola.edu

Nowadays not only academics but also graduate students, practicing teachers, researchers, and others involved in TESOL are encouraged to share their experience, insights, observations, and research with others in the field through a range of professional publications, and I thought it would be interesting to see what CETC members have been up to in this regard. Accordingly, at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007 I encouraged CETC members through the caucus e-list to let me know about their recent (since 2005) TESOL-related publications in the form of articles (in journals, magazines, conference proceedings, newsletters, or edited volumes) or books (student texts, professional, or academic), so that I could compile and publish a list in the newsletter. I was not disappointed with the result, and am delighted to include the following list of articles and books in APA format. In bringing these contributions by CETC members to your attention I hope that you will learn about some of the professional activities and interests of people in the caucus. Although all these publications create a growing list of things to read, I think this is an excellent way to serve others and to let our light shine (Matt. 5:16).

One item did not fit into the list because it has not yet been written. Brad Baurain (bbaaurain@wheatonalumni.org) noted that he will coedit (along with Phan Le Ha) the forthcoming "multilevel/mixed ability settings" volume in the Classroom Practice Series to be published by TESOL. Though the Call for Participation is not yet available, the scheduled publication date is summer 2008, so anyone wishing to learn more or thinking about contributing can contact Brad.

Kudos to the authors noted here for your contributions to the field. Please note that this list includes only publications members told me about directly. If you would like to let others know about recent or future publications, please send the information to me. If there is an opportunity we will run another list sometime.

Articles

Baurain, B. (2005). Solving the multilevel dilemma. *ESL Magazine*, 48, 12-15.

Bricker, M. (2006). Is culture dead? Part 4: Identifying difference in an ESL classroom. *ICIS Newsletter*, 4(1). Retrieved January 4, 2007, from http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/article.asp?vid=184&DID=6513&sid=1&cid=751&iid=6505&nid=3244

Gao, X. (2006a). Understanding changes in Chinese students' uses of learning strategies in China and Britain: A socio-cultural re-interpretation. *System*, 34, 55-67.

Gao, X. (2006b). Understanding Chinese students' teacher-dependence. In T. Farrell (Ed.), *Language Teacher Research Asia* (pp. 61-74). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Gao, X. (2006c). Interpreting Chinese students' motives in a weekly English discussion group: A case study. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 16, 129-143.

Gao, X. (2006d). Strategies used by Chinese parents to support English language learning: Voices of "elite" university students. *RELC Journal*, 37, 285-298.

Kubanyiova, M. (2006). Developing a motivational teaching practice in EFL teachers in Slovakia: Challenges of promoting teacher change in EFL contexts. *TESL-EJ*, 10(2), A-5. Retrieved January 4, 2007, from <http://tesl-ej.org/ej38/a5.pdf>

Lepp-Kaethler, E. (2006). Integrating pronunciation into EAP vocabulary development. *TEAL Manitoba Journal*, 22(2), 4-8.

Lessard-Clouston, M. (2006a). Definitions in academic lectures: A preliminary report. In G. Anderson & M. Kline (Eds.), *Proceedings of the CATESOL State Conference*, 2006. Orinda, CA: CATESOL.

Retrieved January 4, 2007, from www.catesol.org/Lessard-Clouston.pdf

Lessard-Clouston, M. (2006b). Breadth and depth specialized vocabulary learning in theology among native and non-native English speakers. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63, 175-198.

Mischler, J. J. (in press). The oral narrative competence of two non-native speakers of English. In *Proceedings of the Sixth High Desert Linguistics Society Conference*. Albuquerque, NM: High Desert Linguistics Society.

Snow, D. (2006). Selling self-directed language learning. *Review of Applied Linguistics in China*, 2, 64-91.

Books

Esayan, M. B. (2006). *Learn to translate by Bible translating*. Taganrog, Russia: Taganrog State University of Radio Engineering. (For more information contact the author at marinayesayan55@hotmail.com)

Penner, J. G. T., & Barnes, H. A. (2005). *Think first, then write: 101 writing topics to photocopy*. Vancouver, BC: All About Communicating in English (AACE). (Book and CD-ROM; for information contact acejgtp@telus.net)

Snow, D. (2006). *More than a native speaker* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.

Snow, D. (2007). *From language learner to language teacher*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.

Tiessen, G., & Lepp-Kaethler, E. (2006). *Faith journey I. The life of Joseph: Following God's dream*. Otterburne, MB: Providence Bookstore Publishing. (Bible-based English language curriculum; for more information see <http://prov.ca/bookstore/tesol.aspx>)

Tiessen, G., & Lepp-Kaethler, E. (2006). *Faith journey II. The life of Peter: Following God's plan*. Otterburne, MB: Providence Bookstore Publishing.

Zwier, L. J., & Bennett, G. (2006). *Teaching a lexis-based academic writing course*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

News From CETC

Portrayal of Religion in ESL/EFL Textbooks Survey: Please Contribute to the Wiki!

There is still time to be part of a project sponsored by the caucus to examine the portrayal of religion in ESL textbooks. Results will be presented in a colloquium at TESOL 2007 in Seattle, and we need your input. Please take a look at the ESL/EFL texts you're using right now and contribute to our survey. More details and how-to can be found at <http://religioninESLtexts.pbwiki.com>. The password is cetc (lowercase). We're hoping we will have contributions from teachers around the world using all kinds of texts. Please spread the word among like-minded colleagues. The deadline to contribute is March 10 (so that presenters can review the contributions and prepare for the TESOL 2007 colloquium).

Attending TESOL 2007 in Seattle? Be Sure to Visit the CETC Booth!

The CETC booth is an important part of the annual TESOL convention; it's a great place to meet up with fellow CETCers and get the pulse of the caucus. Please stop by the convention first thing this year for two important reasons. First, volunteer! Volunteer 1, 2, even 3 hours to host the booth; you can answer questions, talk with other members, and explain our caucus to others. Second, pick up your CETC button! TESOL has provided buttons for all caucus members this year, so get yours early to proudly display your CETC membership. See you in Seattle!

CETC Election of Officers

Although you will be receiving information about the election of CETC officers separately (and may already have voted by the time you read this), please note that elections are being held early this year for the position of incoming chair, 2007-08. The incoming chair will serve the caucus for 3 years: 2007-08 as the incoming chair, 2008-09 as the chair, and 2009-10 as the outgoing chair. The candidates for incoming chair 2007-08 are Andy Bowdler and Michael Pasquale.

CELT 2007 Conference at Seattle Pacific University

As noted previously, a Christians in English Language Teaching conference will be held Tuesday, March 20, 2007, the day before the TESOL 2007 Convention begins, in Seattle, Washington. The conference theme is "Spirituality and Professionalism" and featured speakers include Suresh Canagarajah and David Smith. Further information about the conference was provided by conference

chair Kathryn Bartholomew in the last issue of the newsletter, or may be found at the SPU TESOL program Web site: www.spu.edu/depts/tesol/.

CETC's New E-list Moderator

We thank Andy Bowdler, who filled in as CETC's interim e-list moderator recently. We are also happy that Anne Bruehler (Anne.Bruehler@indwes.edu) is now our new e-list moderator. Anne has taught in a variety of settings, including community ESL classes to refugees and immigrants, an intensive English program, and a 2-year college. She currently is coordinating the TESOL undergraduate program at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana. Please contact her with suggestions or ideas for topics that people might discuss on the caucus e-list.

Relevant Wikis

Networking! It's one of the major benefits of CETC. Please visit and contribute to the following wikis (interactive Web sites) started by Kitty Purgason of Biola University.

- Learn more about the CELT conferences held in the past and coming up in the future at <http://christiansineltconferences.pbwiki.com>. The password is celt (lowercase).
- Learn more about successful church-based ESL programs and useful materials for such programs at this forum for people interested in serving immigrants and international students through quality church-based ESL programs at <http://churchesl.pbwiki.com>. The password is agape.

Web Site Submissions Are Welcome!

Please remember to check the CETC Web site occasionally, at www.cetesol.org. You might also consider contributing an announcement, notice, or article, or adding to the bulletin board discussion there. Web manager Frank Tuzi is looking for content, and would welcome your ideas or contributions. As with all CETC leadership, his contact information is listed on the "About the CETC Community" page at the end of the newsletter.

Articles and Information

Teaching Vocabulary: My Initial Experience and Activities



Doreen Szeto, doreen@UCLAlumni.net

Introduction

Learning another language involves learning new vocabulary. Thus, as students learn English they should be learning new words. Researchers have proposed that vocabulary is the most important aspect of language learning because of its central role in reading, writing, listening, and speaking effectively (Folse, 2004; Thornbury, 2002). It is commonly believed that vocabulary is sufficiently taught in ESL courses; surprisingly, however, Folse (2004) discovered that "vocabulary is not systematically covered in most curricula" (p. 10).

If vocabulary is so important, why isn't it emphasized in ESL/EFL programs? One possible reason is the advent of the communicative approach; its emphasis on incidental learning suggests that learners' exposure to and experience in the second language (L2) will automatically result in vocabulary acquisition (Downey, 2003; Thornbury, 2002). Yet recent research suggests that this expectation may not be valid (Read, 2004) and implies that deliberate vocabulary instruction is crucial to learners' L2 development.

As an instructor for a high-beginning-level noncredit ESL class for adult immigrants in southern California, I know that my students need to learn new vocabulary in order to communicate more

fluently in English. Previously, I spent little time explicitly teaching vocabulary; I relied on the word lists that were presented and recycled in the textbook lessons. At the end of each unit, the students reviewed the words by completing a crossword puzzle. Last fall, my school adopted a new textbook and I was surprised to find very few new words introduced in each unit. I realized that if I wanted my students to learn vocabulary, I needed to find ways to teach and encourage them to learn new words. I therefore decided to implement deliberate vocabulary lessons in class to increase my students' vocabulary knowledge. In this article, I describe my initial experience with and activities in teaching vocabulary.

Background

Because my class meets four times a week, my goal was to teach a vocabulary lesson with 20 to 30 new words each week and administer a quiz after a week of learning and review. Initially, I had difficulty deciding how to teach. Nation (2006) has suggested that there are four ways to teach and learn vocabulary: through meaning-focused input (via listening and reading), meaning-focused output (via speaking and writing), language-focused learning (deliberate attention to vocabulary learning), and fluency development (practicing familiar vocabulary). Most of my instruction focused on the third and fourth categories. I wanted to teach vocabulary explicitly, as research shows that "given the same amount of time, deliberate learning always results in more learning" (Nation, 2006, p. 495). I also hoped to provide opportunities in class for students to practice both old and new words in order to develop their fluency.

I piloted my new vocabulary lessons during the same term in which I took an MA TESOL course on teaching vocabulary. Thus, as the trimester progressed, I experimented with a few different methods of vocabulary instruction. The more I learned about how to teach vocabulary, the more I noticed shortcomings in my teaching methods and areas in which I could improve or make changes. In what follows I discuss three types of vocabulary lessons (semantic sets, word parts, and phrasal verbs) that I taught in the fall 2006 trimester.

Semantic Sets

When I studied my L2, I learned vocabulary in semantic sets, and it seemed to be a logical and efficient approach to creating word lists. As a result, I was surprised to discover Tinkham's (1993) research, which found that "learners had more difficulty learning new words presented to them in semantic clusters than they did learning semantically unrelated words" (Folse, 2004, p. 5). The concern is that teaching vocabulary in semantic sets might lead to confusion as students learn particular sets of words. Nonetheless, I spent the first part of the trimester teaching vocabulary in semantic sets, since I had already prepared the vocabulary lists. Also, each unit of the textbook covers a different topic, and I wanted to provide students with more vocabulary that they could use in class activities. I hoped that making associations with objects or people would prevent students from mixing up words within the semantic sets.

I tried to structure my lessons to include some key principles of vocabulary learning, such as frequency and repetition (Coxhead, 2006). Because the vocabulary was related to topics discussed in the textbook, I hoped that students would have many opportunities to encounter the new words and practice using them by expanding on the activities. Also, because we spent a few weeks in each unit, students had an opportunity for spaced retrieval of the words to increase their memory of them (see Coxhead, 2006). In choosing what vocabulary to teach, I sensed that students might have already learned some words in previous classes. Thus, I wanted not only to expand my students' breadth of vocabulary knowledge but also to develop their depth of knowledge of words that they already know. Essentially, word knowledge has three main components: form (phonology, orthography, derivations), meaning (connotations), and use (collocations, register) (Coxhead, 2006; Downey, 2003; Thornbury, 2002). Additional dimensions include pronunciation, grammar, and word families (Coxhead, 2006). My primary goal was to teach the form, meaning, and use of vocabulary, as well as its pronunciation and grammar.

The first vocabulary list that I taught involved countries and nationalities (see [Appendix A](#)). At the beginning of the year, students were getting to know one another and learning to introduce themselves. I compiled a list of 25 countries, including the home countries of my students and the corresponding nationalities. I dictated the country names, then elicited the nationalities from students. They appeared to be familiar with most countries, although the pronunciation and spelling of some of the less common nationalities (e.g., Bangladeshi) were somewhat challenging. When the entire list was on the board, I read each word and had the class repeat it in chorus to practice the words' pronunciation. After a week of using this vocabulary in class, students were given a quiz. For each item, I provided the name of a student and a prompt asking for either a country or a nationality (e.g., "What is Jose's nationality? [He's from Mexico.]"), and students wrote the appropriate response ("Jose is Mexican."). The students corrected their own papers as I reviewed the quiz answers orally.

The following 2 weeks, students learned to ask about people using *wh*- and yes/no questions. During this time, I taught them vocabulary for 40 common occupations (see [Appendix B](#)). Each week I dictated a list of 20 jobs to the class, then wrote each item on the board for students to check for accuracy. Then, small groups brainstormed verbs associated with each job (e.g., "What do doctors do? They *examine* patients. They *take care* of people"). I elicited these words and added them to the list on the board, providing verbs that students didn't know. This exercise was intended to show students the words they knew and those they had not yet learned and needed to study. Once all the

vocabulary was on the board, I reviewed the pronunciation of the words in isolation and in sentences. Later in the week, I gave students a crossword puzzle in which the clues were job descriptions and the answers were the names of the correct occupations. I quizzed students at the end of each week by showing them photographs of different people; students had to identify each occupation and write a one-sentence job description. I reviewed the answers orally by eliciting responses from the class; again, students corrected their own quizzes.

The next vocabulary lesson was about entertainment, as that was the theme of the textbook unit. I first taught students the word genre. Then, I divided the class into three large groups and assigned a topic (movies, TV programs, music) to each, and students worked together to brainstorm genres in each category. I elicited words from the groups to compile a vocabulary list for the class and added some other words. In this way, I used my students as a source for learning new vocabulary (see Thornbury, 2002). I selected nine words from each topic, hoping that students would be familiar with most of them so this would be a review. We used many of the words in class activities as students practiced inviting friends to entertainment events; they looked at entertainment listings from the newspaper and the Internet and had to identify the various genres. I also played music clips and students practiced discerning the genre of each song.

The last semantically themed lesson was on community places (see [Appendix C](#)). Students were learning to give directions; to supplement this lesson, I gave them a list of 29 places in the community. Because the students were familiar with most of them, I did a word association exercise in which I reviewed the occupations and verbs associated with various places (e.g., "The bank is a place where you *deposit* or *withdraw money*"). In addition to asking for and giving directions to some places, students played a flashcard game in pairs; one student put cards with pictures of various places on a grid out of sight of the other student, then described each location to his/her partner, who had to listen, identify the location, and place the corresponding picture on his/her own grid. The quiz was a crossword puzzle for which the clues were fill-in-the-blank sentences and the answers were places (e.g., "During Christmas, the _____ is always crowded with people mailing packages").

In retrospect, teaching semantic sets had some benefit because of the connection to course content. However, once the topic changed, the vocabulary was no longer recycled in class, as it was with our previous textbook. Also, most of the words were nouns, so I had to teach word associations to expand students' ability to use them communicatively. In the future, I might still teach words in semantic sets, but other practical vocabulary could be useful, too. I also struggled with how to motivate students to study the vocabulary outside of class. Initially I wasn't sure if the vocabulary was too easy; if students felt confident in knowing the words, they were not likely to study them. Also, I treated the quizzes as informal assessments; students corrected their own quizzes, and I didn't collect them. I hoped that this format would create less stress and serve as a progress check to indicate to students the words that they knew and those that they had not yet mastered. On the other hand, the informal nature of the quizzes may have led students to take the weekly vocabulary less seriously, as there was no accountability or scored feedback from me.

Word Parts

In the second half of the trimester, I decided to teach word parts, having read that this is an important word-learning strategy (Coxhead, 2006; Graves, 2006). I started with prefixes because they "often add a strong lexical meaning to the word" (Nation, 2005, p. 591). In addition, "learning the meaning of common prefixes can help learners guess what a word might mean," so students could use this knowledge productively in the future (Coxhead, 2006, p. 46). From a list of the 20 most frequent prefixes in English (see White, Sowell, & Yanagihara, 1989), I chose *in-*, *im-*, *il-*, and *ir-*. I also used 24 adjectives from high-frequency word lists because students are likely to encounter them often.

Thornbury (2002) noted that word formation can be taught by teaching rules or by presenting many examples to raise students' consciousness, enabling them to infer the rules by themselves. In my lesson, I tried to use both techniques, with an emphasis on the former. First, I explained the concept of prefixes in English as letters that are added to the front of a word to change its meaning. I introduced the negative prefix *in-*, then taught the students the adjectives with their English meanings. I presented the words in four groups (by prefix) and asked students to look at the adjectives and come up with rules to explain the appropriate prefix choice for each word (i.e., "When does *in-* become *il-*? Before an adjective beginning with the letter *l*"). Thus, students could think about and infer the spelling-change rules for the negative prefix.

After the discussion, I gave students a list of the prefixes and adjectives with their English definitions; the list also had spaces for students to fill in the L1 translation of each word if they wanted (see [Appendix D](#)). During the week I didn't spend much time reviewing the vocabulary in class, partly because I had not prepared activities that would encourage its practice (the words were not connected to the textbook-based activities). As a result, at the end of the week I found that students still had a lot of difficulty with the words because they had had little opportunity to use them and had not studied them at home. Another factor that could have impeded their learning is that 24 new adjectives may have been too ambitious for 1 week. Many students do not study at home, and the class time was perhaps not sufficient to help them learn the words. Nevertheless, students demonstrated on their weekly quiz (which I collected and scored) that they understood the negative prefixes and how to choose the appropriate one to give the adjectives a negative meaning (so they at least learned the form, function, and use of the prefixes!). Yet because students still had

difficulty with the adjectives I decided to review the vocabulary for another week.

The second week, I surveyed students about their vocabulary learning strategies and found that they used some cognitive ones, such as written repetition and word lists. I decided to introduce the concept of using word flashcards, as researchers have observed that this is an effective and efficient strategy for learning vocabulary (Nation, 2005; Thornbury, 2002). I encouraged my students to use word cards to study vocabulary by showing them flashcards from my L2 learning experience and explaining how I created and used them. Then I gave students papers with the 24 adjectives printed in a 3x8 grid on one side (one adjective per square); they were instructed to cut out the cards and write definitions on the back. I didn't provide ready-made cards because "making the cards is the first important meeting with the words that allows later retrieval" (Nation, 2005, p. 591).

During the week, I noticed that a few students had rubber-banded their word cards together in a small stack or had punched holes in them and put them on a ring. I also used word cards in class review activities; one involved a memory game in which students had to flip over two cards at a time and try to match a word on one card with its meaning on another. Some students took the games home to practice the words. Students who reported using word cards to study performed better on the retest the following week; they also indicated on a survey that they would probably use word cards in the future to learn and review new vocabulary.

Phrasal Verbs

As I thought back on my lessons during the trimester, I realized that I had been inadvertently engaging in direct vocabulary instruction every day. Each morning, I started the class by teaching a phrasal verb. The previous year, I noticed that phrasal verbs are used frequently in conversational English; because my students were learning English in order to communicate, common phrasal verbs would be important to them. I spent the first few weeks of the trimester teaching and reviewing the four general types of phrasal verbs: intransitive, transitive (separable and inseparable), and three-word phrasal verbs. For students I just classified them as "Type 1" through "Type 4" and provided explanations and examples of each. In the first week, I taught 20 common phrasal verbs that I tend to use in the classroom (see [Appendix E](#)), in order to familiarize students with the form and use of the different types of phrasal verbs.

For the rest of the trimester, I taught one new phrasal verb each morning. I wrote the daily phrasal verb, its meaning, and its use (type of phrasal verb plus an example sentence) on the board, and I began class by teaching and explaining the phrasal verb. Students often responded with questions. Some created their own sentences and asked if they were acceptable uses of the phrasal verb. Others suggested synonyms or rephrased the phrasal verb to clarify their understanding. Sometimes these verbs had multiple meanings, and students recalled hearing them used in other contexts. For example, when I taught *take off*, with the meaning "to leave somewhere suddenly," students asked about using it to describe other actions such as "removing an article of clothing" and "the departure of an airplane." In response, I taught the additional meanings of the phrasal verbs suggested in case other students were unfamiliar with them.

Almost all of the students copied the phrasal verbs into their notebooks every day, and I have heard some of them use the phrasal verbs in their conversations. One week a student observed, "Teacher, there are so many phrasal verbs!" because we had been learning at least one every day. It seems that teaching a daily phrasal verb has been beneficial for my students, as it exposes them to common verbs used in conversation and introduces at least one new vocabulary item each day.

Concluding Thoughts

In my class I teach listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Thus, students also learn vocabulary indirectly from both meaning-focused input (listening and reading) and output (speaking and writing) (Nation, 2006). For example, sometimes students ask me to define unfamiliar words that I use in class. Also, they obtain a lot of new vocabulary through in-class reading activities; however, the main objective of these activities is to develop reading fluency or strategies, so I don't intentionally recycle the words in class once the activity is completed.

One of the shortcomings I noticed in my approach to teaching vocabulary is that I did not provide a lot of time for students to really put the words to work; I could have provided more activities to enable students to integrate the new words with their existing knowledge and use the vocabulary in a variety of ways. By helping students learn words in context as well as in isolation, I can expand their understanding of vocabulary use, as well as train them in additional vocabulary learning strategies. Also, I could work to increase the repetition of the words throughout the trimester, so that they are not simply forgotten after the test is over. In terms of choosing vocabulary, I want to teach fewer semantic sets and begin to include specific items from the General Service List or the Academic Word List to challenge students with words that are frequently used in English. Finding a method to choose useful high-frequency words for my students and to create exercises and in-class review is one of my goals for future trimesters.

It has been suggested that vocabulary is not actually taught; rather, successful vocabulary learners are those who have developed good learning strategies, such as using mnemonics or word cards, guessing from context, utilizing coping strategies and dictionaries, being familiar with spelling rules, and taking good notes (Thornbury, 2002). Last trimester, I focused on teaching some direct

strategies, such as using word cards; as students become familiar with using these I hope to teach them some indirect learning strategies, such as extensive reading and guessing meaning from context (Coxhead, 2006). I would also like to train my students to use a monolingual English dictionary. Ultimately, I hope to equip students with the tools and strategies to become autonomous vocabulary learners for the remainder of their L2 learning experience.

In addition to teaching ESL, Doreen Szeto is completing her MA TESOL at Biola University in La Mirada, California. When she isn't teaching or studying (which isn't often!), she enjoys playing board games, traveling, and eating dark chocolate.

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Appendix A. Vocabulary List: Countries and Nationalities

	Country	Nationality
1	the United States	American
2	Canada	Canadian
3	Mexico	Mexican
4	Argentina	Argentine
5	Brazil	Brazilian
6	Colombia	Colombian
7	Peru	Peruvian
8	France	French
9	Italy	Italian
10	Spain	Spanish
11	Britain	British
12	Egypt	Egyptian
13	Lebanon	Lebanese
14	Syria	Syrian
15	Bangladesh	Bangladeshi
16	Cambodia	Cambodian
17	China	Chinese
18	India	Indian
19	Japan	Japanese
20	Korea	Korean
21	Malaysia	Malaysian
22	the Philippines	Filipino
23	Taiwan	Taiwanese
24	Thailand	Thai
25	Vietnam	Vietnamese

Appendix B. Vocabulary List: Occupations

	Occupation	What he/she does
1	computer programmer	program, write (software)
2	photographer	take (pictures)
3	interpreter	translate/interpret
4	musician	play (instrument)
5	pilot	fly (plane)
6	manager	manage
7	chef	cook
8	flight attendant	serve (people on a plane)
9	salesperson	sell
10	graphic designer	design, draw
11	carpenter	build, construct
12	mechanic	fix, maintain (maintenance)
13	police officer	patrol
14	firefighter	put out (fires)
15	doctor	take care of (patients), examine (patients)
16	waiter	serve (customers)
17	professor	teach, educate, lecture
18	receptionist	answer (phones)
19	travel agent	arrange (trips), plan
20	architect	design (buildings)
21	bus driver	drive
22	engineer	design, create, construct, build
23	mailman	deliver mail
24	painter	paint
25	construction worker	build, construct
26	student	study
27	secretary	type, write, organize
28	cashier	handle (transaction), check out
29	plumber	fix (leaks), repair
30	nurse	take care of (patients)
31	athlete	play (sports)
32	dentist	fix (teeth), examine
33	pharmacist	prepare (medicine), sell
34	housekeeper	clean, take care of
35	waitress	serve
36	homemaker	manage (household)
37	accountant	keep (records), prepare (reports), calculate
38	lawyer	defend, represent, advise, practice
39	disc jockey	play (music)
40	florist	sell, arrange (flowers)

Appendix C. Vocabulary List: Community Places

	Location	A place where you...	Associated jobs
1	city hall	(office of the city government)	mayor, politician
2	courthouse	(building with judicial courts)	judge, lawyer
3	police station	police headquarters	police officer
4	fire station	fire equipment headquarters	firefighter
5	hospital	see a doctor (emergency)	doctor, nurse
6	clinic	see a doctor (nonemergency)	
7	library	borrow books	librarian
8	bank	deposit money	banker, accountant
9	post office	mail packages/letters	mailman
10	grocery store / supermarket	buy food	cashier
11	gas station	fill up your car	attendant
12	hardware store	buy tools, construction materials	
13	drugstore / pharmacy	buy medicine	pharmacist
14	bookstore	buy books	
15	car dealership	buy a car	salesperson
16	gym / health club	exercise, work out	trainer
17	hotel	spend the night	housekeeper
18	travel agency	make reservations for a trip	travel agent
19	laundromat	wash and dry clothes	
20	restaurant	eat	chef, waiter, waitress
21	coffee shop / café	drink coffee, study	waiter/waitress
22	barber shop / salon	get a haircut	barber, stylist
23	stadium	watch a (sports) game	athlete
24	theater	watch a movie or play	usher
25	aquarium	see fish	
26	museum	see exhibits	docent
27	amusement park	go on rides	
28	office building	work	businessman
29	parking garage	park your car	attendant

Appendix D. Vocabulary List: Prefixes (*in-*, *im-*, *il-*, *ir-*)

- **What are prefixes?**
 - Prefixes are letters that are added to the front of a word to change its meaning.
- **What do the *in-*, *im-*, *il-*, *ir-* prefixes mean?**
 - [*in-*, *im-*, *il-*, *ir-*] + adjective = opposite meaning
 - *in-* becomes: *im-* before *m*, *p*, and *b*
 - *il-* before *l*
 - *ir-* before *r*

	Adjective	Translation	English definition
1	dependent		needing someone or something to support you
2	complete		whole, with nothing missing
3	accurate		correct, exact
4	appropriate		right, suitable
5	<i>in-</i> convenient		useful, near and easy to get to
6	frequent		happening often
7	sincere		honest, really meaning what you say
8	significant		noticeable and important
9	mature		behaving like an adult
10	possible		able to be done, happen, or exist
11	patient		able to wait for something without getting angry
12	polite		behaving in a nice and respectful way
13	<i>im-</i> perfect		without any mistakes or problems
14	proper		correct or suitable
15	practical		sensible and likely to succeed or be effective
16	moral		behaving in a way that is correct and honest
17	legal		allowed by the law
18	<i>il-</i> literate		able to read and write
19	legible		clear enough to read
20	logical		using reason
21	regular		ordinary, usual
22	<i>ir-</i> responsible		taking care of someone or something
23	relevant		related to the topic being talked about
24	rational		based on facts and not affected by emotions

Appendix E. Vocabulary List: Phrasal Verbs (In the Classroom)

Phrasal Verb	Object position	Meaning
1 stand up	1 —	to rise to your feet
2 look up	2 look <i>sth</i> up look up <i>sth</i>	to search for information in a book
3 go over	3 go over <i>sth</i>	to study <i>sth</i> carefully, to repeat <i>sth</i>
4 come up with	4 come up with <i>sth</i>	to think of an idea
5 speak up	1 —	used to ask <i>sb</i> to speak louder
6 turn in	2 turn <i>sth</i> in turn in <i>sth</i>	to give <i>sth</i> to <i>sb</i> in authority
7 put down	2 put <i>sth</i> down put down <i>sth</i>	to place <i>sth</i> you are holding onto the floor or another surface
8 show up	1 —	to arrive at a place
9 take out	2 take <i>sth</i> out take out <i>sth</i>	to remove <i>sth</i> from somewhere
10 hurry up	1 —	used to tell <i>sb</i> to do <i>sth</i> more quickly
11 write down	2 write <i>sth</i> down write down <i>sth</i>	to write <i>sth</i> on paper
12 come in	3 come in (<i>sw</i>)	to enter a room or building
13 pick up	2 pick <i>sth</i> up pick up <i>sth</i>	to take hold of and lift <i>sth</i>
14 sit down	1 —	to lower your body until you are sitting on a chair
15 throw away	2 throw <i>sth</i> away throw away <i>sth</i>	to get rid of <i>sth</i> that has no use
16 put up	2 put <i>sth</i> up put up <i>sth</i>	to display <i>sth</i> where it can be seen
17 make up	2 make <i>sth</i> up make up <i>sth</i>	to invent <i>sth</i>
18 fill in	2 fill <i>sth</i> in fill in <i>sth</i>	to complete a form (write <i>sth</i>)
19 run out of	4 run out of <i>sth</i>	to finish or use <i>sth</i> up
20 find out	2 find <i>sth</i> out find out <i>sth</i>	to learn a fact; to learn the truth

Note. *sth* = something; *sw* = somewhere

CETs in Limited-Access Countries



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There have been many voices raising questions and calling for discussion about Christianity, missions, identities, and the moral and ethical responsibilities involved in teaching English. To date, however, the majority of the voices have not been Christian. To be sure, there are scholars among us, as Marsden (1997) notes. But the Christian scholarly response with regard to these issues is sorely lacking and deficient in data. It is often said that a person with an experience is stronger than a person with an argument. I'd like to propose that a person with an experience and an argument supported with data is stronger yet.

In response to articles written in recent years by Alistair Pennycook, Julian Edge, and others, Mary Wong and Suresh Canagarajah asked a variety of authors, including me, to contribute to a unique

book with the purpose of encouraging dialogue and scholarship. Over the years, I have read thoughts, opinions, and experiences, but have seen few quantitative or qualitative research reports about Christian English teachers (CETs). Therefore, my response to the request was to develop and implement a modest survey among those who would self-identify as CETs in limited-access countries, which are countries in which

government generally respects the religious right in practice and does not interfere with the private practice of religion; however, it controls virtually all places of worship, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby greatly limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. (Bureau of Democracy, 2002)

The survey was advertised and distributed, but the target sample number is not known because the number of CETs is difficult to define or determine. Of the 87 completed surveys, 44 were valid. The remaining 43 responses were not included because they were incomplete, duplicate, or completed by those not teaching English as a second or foreign language or those not working in limited-access countries. Respondents reported from 16 different countries in six geographical regions. Nonnative English-speaking (NNES) teachers were also represented.

Key Survey Questions

There were five key research questions. In this article, I summarize the results for three: Can a demographic and teaching profile of CETs be developed? Are CETs working "undercover"? "What can they tell us about their experiences?"

Findings Summarized

The findings represent a very small, focused group of CETs, and by no means can the findings be generalized for all CETs. However, a portrait of a CET in a limited-access country does emerge from this study. The average CET in this survey is a 44-year-old married American woman with an MA in TESOL. She has been teaching TESOL in her host country for at least 3 years, although a large percentage of those surveyed had been teaching for more than 10 years. She has had some leadership and administrative responsibilities including teacher training. There is a slightly greater probability that she is not affiliated with a mission organization. Her employers, colleagues, and friends know about her religious beliefs, and she specifically reports that she is not using her visa for other than its intended purpose (she is not using it as a cover to proselytize). She is active in her host country culture and among the people. She is aware of the culture and the changes she needs to make to be sensitive to the culture. In a limited-access country, being aware of and respectful of religious and political restrictions is important. But some respondents indicated behaviors or actions that may not have been respectful, and 5 percent either did not answer or stated that they did use their visa for other than that which it was intended. Some areas in which the average CET is culturally aware include language, dress, eating habits, social discourse and behavior, and participation in family, local, and national events. The discourse of respondents who have been in the host country longer, for 5 to 10 years, may indicate an ease and an ability to talk about beliefs more openly with respect to nationals and their culture. CETs note an interest in religion by nationals in limited-access countries either because religion is such a fabric of life or because it is not. However, CETs reported experiencing unexpected difficulties from expatriates regarding Christianity. For example, one noted: "Being badly treated by some of my fellow American colleagues, because of my religious beliefs, was unexpected." CETs also raised the question of the unethical use of English teaching among mission organizations and missionaries. One suggested, "Seriously consider the ethical implications of being a missionary." He commented, "I struggled when students asked whether I was a missionary. I knew in my heart I was not, but I was affiliated with a sending agency." In fact, I (Karen) was told that it was best for me not to be affiliated with a mission agency because I was too high profile and might bring harm to others. Respondents indicated a collision between faith, teaching, and politics, particularly in China and the Middle East.

Directions for Future Research

The results of the survey uncovered a group of CETs not previously heard or considered: those unaffiliated with missions. This population of CETs adds a new dimension to the usual missionary or volunteer picture of CETs. From my perspective, the results of the survey and comments of the respondents suggest more research is needed in the following areas: impact of the CETs' length of time in the host country; NNES teacher CETs; CETs' identity and power; their choice of curriculum or supplementation, assessment, and classroom management; CETs' classroom discourse structures; CETs and gender issues; CETs in administration; accurate reporting of the impact of Christianity and colonialism in Asian countries; deeper investigation into why some expatriates have such strong and perhaps valid feelings against Christianity; and finally investigation into the "politics" of missions examined particularly in light of their use of ELT and curriculum. The foundation for future CET research is broad, and the need for scholarship on CETs is great.

This survey merely scrapes the surface of what is both a minefield and a treasure chest of untapped data. To be sure, throughout history, CETs have been both passionate and fallible, as all humans are. I am thankful to those who have called on us as CETs to ask the difficult questions and to Mary Wong and Suresh Canagarajah and their book's contributors. But, I believe we need to gather more data and not simply anecdotes. I believe that there should be more CET scholars who report the data that present the true picture of the Christian English teacher even if it isn't as rosy as we expect. I proposed at the outset of this article that a person with an experience and an argument supported

with data is stronger than one with simply an experience or data. In the Kingdom, our experience with Jesus is enough. In the world, that experience is more credible with facts. In both, truth is essential.

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn 8:32)

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Love, Faith, and Hope: Facilitating Learning and Promoting Peace in the Classroom and the World



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Introduction

After a typical hectic day of teaching, faculty meetings, and student appointments, the average ESL teacher may have enough energy and presence of mind to grade quizzes designed to evaluate students' understanding of a particular grammatical rule. However, she may not feel that she has enough time or energy to evaluate to what degree the *intangible* requirements of learning were present in the classroom. And yet, it is these intangible elements that create the springboard for learning and most greatly facilitate or hinder it, for as Harmer (2001) stated, "Education should address the 'whole person,' not just a small language learning facility" (p. 74).

What qualities must an educator bring to the student-teacher relationship in order for effective teaching to take place? What is the fundamental interpersonal dynamic that can inspire a lively motivation to learn? Such questions go straight to the heart of human relationships. For many of us, our deepest personal beliefs led us to our vocation as educators, and it is those same convictions that constrain us as we return day after day to meet the challenges of the classroom.

Each of us must develop a personal philosophy of teaching that addresses such core motivations, both in ourselves and in our students. Before any pedagogical methodology or classroom management plan can be applied, certain intangible needs of the human spirit must be addressed. As an educator, I feel that I must bring three fundamental elements to the teaching and learning process: love, faith, and hope.

Love

The first foundational element of my personal philosophy of effective teaching is what Confucius called "ren" (jen): loving kindness; the mutual concern or social "glue" that holds any group together. Love is the primary thing. It is the door to all that is most deeply human, the portal through which the creative energies of life flow, and the key to engaging the states of consciousness in which real learning can occur.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1987) has described student self-esteem as a deficiency need. He meant that it is a basic human need, one that must be met before higher cognitive needs can even be engaged. Surely, lacking a sense of one's own value as a human being is one of the learner alienations which Earl Stevick (1976) suggested that we must first overcome in the process of connecting with our students. We speak of lowering students' "affective filters," but how can we

effectively open their hearts and minds to learning?

First and foremost, we must love our students, and by this I am not referring to the experience of warm feelings. They may come later, but initially love is a choice. It is an attitude I must assume on purpose, perhaps even contrary to my feelings. Speaking of the kind of love the Greeks called "agape," the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1958) wrote: "Agape means understanding, redeeming good will for all men. . . . [It] is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. . . . Agape is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality" (pp. 104-105).

To me, love means first of all respect for students, a kind of respect that has been described as the "ethic of caring." To do this, one must have and express sincere personal concern for one's students as individual people. One must exercise empathy, that form of emotional intelligence that enables one person to imagine what it must be like to be in another's shoes—a capacity that gets short shrift in a world dominated by fear and criticism.

An atmosphere of love and respect allows for the development of genuine human relationships, which are the basis of classroom rapport and the foundation of the exchange and process we call learning. Loving rapport implies open and honest communication: expressing clear parameters and expectations (and enforcing them with gentle firmness when necessary), listening with awareness and sensitivity to student needs, and being responsive and flexible in our efforts to meet those needs. Being a loving human being requires discipline and "toughness," just as it calls for sensitivity and humor.

Raymond Chandler's (1958) fictional detective, Philip Marlowe, was once asked how such a tough man could be so gentle. Marlowe responded, "If I wasn't hard, I wouldn't be alive. If I couldn't ever be gentle, I wouldn't deserve to be alive" (p. 175). Love blends these qualities, producing an environment of respect and trust. If, as Pearl S. Buck once noted (in Reedy, 1984), "love dies only when growth stops," then love, growth, and learning must all be bound up together in the human spirit.

Faith

Faith is the second fundamental element that I, as an educator, feel that I must bring to the table, and it is founded upon the first. As the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6, "faith works by love." And one might add that learning works by faith. In 1968, seminal research done by Rosenthal and Jacobson showed that "when teachers expect students to do well...they do: when teachers do not have such expectations, performance and growth are not so encouraged and may in fact be discouraged in a variety of ways" (Rhem, 1999, p. 1).

As teachers, we create an atmosphere of positive expectation when we believe in our students' ability to succeed. When we set high standards and trust that our students can and will attain them, they will strive with surprising energy to do so. Success tends to breed success, so coupled with our faith in our students must be a system of well-ordered intermediate goals. As students see a clear path and indicators of their progress along the way, they will be encouraged to apply themselves to the task of learning. We must also demonstrate our willingness to help them achieve the class objectives, step by step. Furthermore, we must believe in our own skills and competence and in the value of our instruction.

Faith may be defined as the spiritual faculty that perceives what has not yet been made manifest to the senses. It is the confident assurance that what we see with our inner vision will become a reality, and it is the thing that gives substance to our dreams and hopes.

Hope

Therefore, the third fundamental element in my philosophy of effective teaching is hope. As Rabbi Hugo Gryn once said, "Man can live three weeks without food, three days without water. But he can't live three minutes without hope" (quoted in Ezard, 1996, p. 6). Hope has to do with one's expectations of the future; therefore, it enables the patience and perseverance necessary to reach one's goals.

We can and must instill hope in the hearts and minds of our students by encouraging them. It is essential to recognize a student's strengths and achievements as well as his or her weaknesses in order to not squelch the spirit of the learner. Each student needs to feel free to find his or her own way, and there is always something that may be praised in every person, if not in every word or action. The hope that one's goals are actually within reach stokes the fires of motivation and restores a spirit of excitement and adventure to the learning process.

In regard to teacher behaviors, there are two important elements that nurture a spirit of hopeful encouragement: fairness and organization. First, the teacher is responsible for maintaining standards of fairness, particularly in the areas of making assessments, managing the classroom dynamic, and meting out discipline. As educators, I believe that we as educators must model the message. We must serve as good examples of the kinds of motivation and interaction we desire in the classroom. This requires personal openness. It also requires saying what we mean and sticking by what we say.

The second thing that I believe is integral to maintaining an encouraging, cooperative, and hope-filled atmosphere in the classroom is organization. Adequate teacher preparation enables mastery of the elusive art of pacing, enhances sequencing, and allows for true flexibility and spontaneity on the part of the teacher. It facilitates unexpected departures from the lesson plan, allowing for immediate responses to those 'magic moments' of learning when real inquiries arise on the part of students. A well-organized teacher is in a better position to foster a true learner-centered classroom which, in turn, inspires students' hopes for a lively and effective learning experience that directly responds to their immediate, personal needs.

Concluding Thoughts

By opening myself to love, faith, and hope, and by attempting to bring these qualities to all of my interactions with students, I find that I have better success with

- building relationships and class rapport
- stimulating student interest and motivation
- enhancing the learning experience
- preventing behavioral problems before they start
- establishing a basis for conflict resolution when it is necessary.

Not only do the three elements of love, faith, and hope flourish in the most productive learning environments, but they also undergird all healthy relationships, enabling individuals, communities, and countries to live in peace.

We in the ESL field are intensely aware of the fact that our students represent the face of the nations of tomorrow's world. Some of those who sit in our classrooms today, struggling with English syntax and pronunciation, may someday soon sit in the seats of power internationally, struggling with global issues. Our concern as educators for peace in the classroom extends to the whole world. By bringing our most cherished values into our classroom interactions, we may not only be helping our students learn, we may also be sowing the seeds of world peace.

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Worldview Reflections for TESOL



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Introduction

Sometimes it's tempting for us as language teachers to just go to work every day and grind through the never-ending stream of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The weekly cycle of lessons and the constant parade of new faces passing through our classrooms can become a bit wearying. Christian language teachers in their home countries may sometimes feel a bit envious of those who go to teach abroad and take the title of "overseas missionaries." We hear their reports in church and they are prayed for, but for many others, family commitments or other factors mean that going

overseas just isn't an option. Are we doomed, then, to live a second-rate life, in which our faith and our vocation are divorced? I believe that the Christian faith provides a worldview that shows how interested God is in the ESL/EFL classroom and what goes on there. As we begin to catch this vision, the classroom can become a sanctuary where we, and our students, can meet God. In this article, I reflect briefly on four areas that might form a worldview framework for thinking about our work in TESOL.

The Image of God

Christianity teaches that humans have been made in God's image. Entire libraries have been written concerning the meaning of that image. In ancient Near Eastern thought, the "image of God" referred to the king's being and function—who he was and what he did. As a result, an image was believed to carry the essence of what it represented.

In traditional Christian exegesis from Irenaeus' time onward, the terms *image* and *likeness* (in Hebrew, *Tselem* and *d'muth*, respectively) referred to the natural qualities human beings possessed, including reason, personality, free will, self-consciousness, and intelligence. These are the qualities that make them resemble God. Karl Barth, quoted in Mouw (1976, p. 18), wrote that "The image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation . . . The juxtaposition and conjunction of man as male and female." We may go further to say that human beings were created for positive social cooperation with each other, to perform certain tasks in obedience to the will of the creator. People were not created just to be social, but to be social in certain ways, as Mouw (1976) made clear.

We reflect God's image not only by existing in community, but also by our capacity for speech. Every human society has language of some sort. Without it, human community could not function, nor could one engage in governance and self-reflection or express conscience, intelligence, or spiritual discernment. Jan Comenius, a 16th-century bishop in the Moravian church and an educational innovator, viewed language as a domain in which human lordship and stewardship are to be responsibly exercised. Languages, in his view, are to be deliberately cultivated as instruments to be used to the benefit of humanity and the glory of God.

This framework confirms something I have always felt in the language classroom: when we deal appropriately with language—whether teaching it or refining our abilities in it—we are touching something that is very close to the heart of God. Our capacity for language and speech are part of what mark us as being made in His image and belonging to Him.

The Cultural Mandate

The creation narrative tells us that after human beings were created in the image of God, he blessed them and said: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This dictate is known in some circles as the cultural mandate.

I have noted that human beings were made to exist in community. At first the community was a small one, consisting of only two persons. This command mandated them to form larger communities throughout the earth, which necessitated speech and communication, without which community cannot exist. Community also necessitates, among other things, a shared history, shared values, and shared worldview. In other words, there must be a culture.

Richard Neibuhr (1951) defined *culture* as

the sum of all that has spontaneously arisen for the advancement of material life and as an expression of spiritual and moral life—all social intercourse, technologies, arts, literature, and sciences. . . . The spearhead of such culture is speech; the foremost expressions of its spirit are found in the arts. (p. 31)

In commanding humans to multiply and exercise dominion over creation, God was implicitly blessing and endorsing the activities and mechanisms of human culture. We cannot say, as some groups have in the past, that culture is inherently evil. Here, before the Fall, God is commanding humans to build and participate in culture. Since the Fall, however, human culture has revealed both God's creational goodness and human fallenness, which makes participation in it more complicated for Christians.

The functioning of a human culture necessitates that certain tasks be performed. There must be agriculture, commerce, manufacturing (however primitive or sophisticated), government (however structured), education (informal or institutionalized), and inevitably some form of the arts as well. As the cultural mandate came from God, we may conclude that those who engage in the tasks that are inherent in human culture are obeying a divine command. To put it more pointedly: Those who teach are doing God's work. This is true whether they are teaching language or something else. The same may be said of any other occupation that is inherent in the functioning of human culture. Businesspeople, artists, farmers, and those who work in healthcare all have a part to play in fulfilling the cultural mandate.

The Shalom Vision

Ever-present in scripture is the theme of how God originally intended his creation to be. This theme,

the Creator's original intentions for the harmonious functioning of human, animate, and inanimate creation, is called the Shalom Vision.

The original meaning of *shalom* is difficult to translate. It is closer to "wholeness" or "completeness" than to the usual English translation of "peace." Shalom promises wholeness of a very personal and individual kind, but it is not for isolated, insulated individuals. Interdependence is at its heart. Shalom includes social justice; the protection of widows, orphans, and refugees (aliens and sojourners; we might call them immigrants); the struggle against poverty, exploitation, and oppression; the protection of life; and prosperity. An overview of the prophetic statements is beyond the scope of this brief article, but the following passages show the broad contours of the shalom vision: Isa 9:2-7, 35:1-10, 54:9-17, 65:17-19.

Nicholas Wolterstorff (1983), professor of philosophical theology at Yale, put it thus:

In shalom, each person enjoys his or her rights. There is no shalom without justice, but shalom goes beyond justice. It incorporates not only the absence of hostility, but right, harmonious relationships with God and delight in his service. [Shalom] means harmonious relationships to other humans, a delight in human community. [Shalom] incorporates right relationships with nature and delight in our physical surroundings. We shape the world with our labor and find delight in its results. Shalom is both God's cause in the world and our human calling. We are not to stand, hands folded, waiting for it to arrive. We are workers in God's cause. (p. 86)

Donald Snow (2001) argued that the Christian model of mission should be found in the life of Jesus, who, in addition to preaching, also engaged in ministries of service and compassion. The parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46) makes it abundantly clear that those who engage in service ministries such as feeding the hungry, offering hospitality to strangers, and clothing the naked are rendering those services unto the Lord himself.

It is true that most Westerners see learning another language as an option, a luxury item. We often fail to realize what a powerful impact learning English—or failing to do so—can have on the lives of many in other countries. English is not just another language, but the language of international trade and activity in many realms. In Nigeria, the Philippines, China, and elsewhere a mastery of English is necessary to open doors to academic and vocational opportunities.

English has grown beyond its origins as an artifact of colonial rule. It has come to play a huge role in international communication, and its mastery, or the lack thereof, plays a role in providing or denying access to interaction with the world community and its resources. Without a sufficient mastery of English, a person cannot access the vast majority of the world's scientific, academic, and technical information; cannot work in major international organizations, travel, or tourism; and cannot access most of the information on the Internet.

In a very real sense, the fate of students—their eventual ability to get a good job—may depend on how well they master English. Likewise, the ability of a nation to compete internationally may depend on whether it has the critical mass of people with the necessary English skills. Thus, Christian English teachers may see their work as a real ministry of service that has a powerful potential to help students and their communities to meet basic physical needs (Snow, 2001). In other words, it can help to bring *shalom* to the world.

Hospitality to the Stranger

The Israelites were given laws governing how they were to treat those who were strangers or sojourners among them. A *sojourner* was one from another country/culture whose stay, though perhaps lengthy, did not necessarily indicate permanent residence. The key thought was that by being in a new and foreign culture, the sojourner was, in some way, at risk.

The Mosaic law gave the sojourner specific protection and privileges. Hebrew laws regarding the Sabbath, gleaning, and cities of refuge all explicitly include the sojourner in their protection (Ex 22:21; 23:9,12; Lev 19:10,33-34, 23:22, Deut 24:19-21, Ps 94:6; 146:9; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7,29; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). The root thought behind many of these commands is that the stranger, being without family or friends, in a new language/culture, far from home, is in a position of vulnerability.

In *The Gift of the Stranger*, David Smith and Barbara Carvill (2000) described the sense of vulnerability of the language learner in a new culture:

You will not feel known by them. You won't count. . . . As a stranger, you'll never know beforehand whether you'll be welcomed or met with studied indifference, aloof tolerance, or even cold hostility. . . . You'll feel lost and powerless. . . . When shopping you won't know the actual value of the merchandise you're buying, and thus, you'll never be sure if you're being exploited or treated fairly. And as a woman, you can't afford to trust the eager helpfulness of young men. Worst of all, everybody will speak so rapidly at you and past you that you just won't understand. (p. 59)

In many cultures, a teacher is in a position of respect and authority. In a school setting where the grades a teacher issues may determine a student's future, the degree of power is considerable. However, even when no grading is involved, a teacher is still in a position of influence. In light of the additional fact that English is a scarce and precious commodity, English teachers have an added degree of leverage over the lives of their students.

Effective English teachers must adopt the role of host. In an ESL setting, the teacher is at home in his or her own culture and possesses all the power and security that goes along with being on "home turf." The student is in a new culture, wrestling with a new language, far from home, family, and friends—and highly vulnerable. The teacher's adoption of the attitude of being a host to the learner can have the effect of lowering the stress level for the students and making mastery of the new language more achievable. As Smith and Carvill (2000) put it:

The host creates a space where non-members of a group can feel temporarily at home. . . .
The host cares for the well-being of the guest whose dignity as a human person she honors and respects. (p. 84)

Even when teaching English in another culture, the teacher is still the host in the classroom, setting the tone, directing interaction, and evaluating the performance of the students. The fact that English has become the international language, the mastery of which often opens doors to the basic necessities of life, means that as teachers of this important language we are hosts to the world, whether teaching at home or somewhere else. We still hold the keys by which the door of opportunity may be opened.

Conclusion

The creation narrative tells us that we are image-bearers, and as such we have an innate capacity to learn and employ language. We may marvel at the diversity of God's creation and celebrate the fact that he has gifted us with the physical capacity to produce speech and the mental capacity to learn multiple languages. In the language classroom we are handling divine matters—the capacity for speech, which reflects *imago dei*, the image of God.

When God commanded the first humans to multiply and fill the earth, he was implicitly endorsing all the roles and mechanisms of human culture. Because education is implicit in the functioning of human culture, teachers who work for the betterment of their students are entitled to say that they are doing God's work, and that their labor serves to fulfill the cultural mandate that God gave to our ancestors.

Perhaps the most powerful case for viewing TESOL as Christian vocation comes from the Shalom Vision. Teaching English well can promote understanding between people groups, encourage liberation for those in various forms of bondage, and enable communities and individuals to access resources that will enable them to become more self-sufficient and secure.

Those of us who teach English are in a unique position to exhibit hospitality toward the sojourner among us. English teachers are able to communicate acceptance to newcomers, employ their knowledge and connections to serve their students, and thus lower stress and promote learning. To put it succinctly: Those who love the sojourner are engaged in the work of the Kingdom.

In my own experience I have found that teaching with this worldview in mind leaves a door open to allow God a place in the classroom. When that happens, our lives may be positively impacted, whether consciously or unconsciously, by his presence.

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[Using Classroom, Professional, and Community Relationships to Enhance the Learning Environment](#)



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"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." (Col 3:23)

As Christian English language teachers, we are called to serve our students and the institution at which we teach. However, impacting the community where we work does not mean putting pressure on students to accept our beliefs because of our position of authority in their lives (Purgason, 1997). Rather, I would argue, we are called to embody the love of Christ. This love is evidenced by the way we teach our students, being intentional with the topics and opportunities that we give them in the classroom; the way we work with colleagues to create an environment of peer learning within our institutions; and the way we work with others in the community who want to invest in our English language learners.

Classroom Relationships

As Christian teachers, we can serve our students by listening to them. Audio or written journals are one way to get to know our English language learners. Students have opportunities to share their thoughts on adjusting to a new culture, what is happening in their lives, and reactions and thoughts on class discussions and classroom dynamics. These journals allow us to dialogue with our students in a personal conversation and get to know them more personally, even in large classes. Many of my students have really opened up within their journals, allowing me an opportunity to speak into their lives in a very profound way. Also, because of their openness, I can respond with a similar openness by sharing what is important to me. Other opportunities that we can take advantage of to get to know our students include chatting with students during breaks between classes, going on field trips with them, and inviting them to our homes.

In addition to using occasions to get to know our students outside of the classroom, we can also bring authentic discussions into the classroom to get to know our students more personally in that environment as well. Opportunities to discuss life issues with our students are all around us. By being intentional and taking advantage of these opportunities, we can introduce our students to a worldview that is different from their own. We frequently have the opportunity, for example, to ask students to think critically about different values and how they are represented within different religions. For instance, while I taught in Turkey, the movie *Les Misérables* was released in local theaters. There are a few scenes in the movie in which a few of the Christian characters display grace through their actions. These scenes provided me with an opportunity to discuss grace, what it is, and how it is important to Christian cultures. We were also able to compare grace with important values within the Muslim faith and discuss the similarities and differences between these two faiths. As we choose authentic current material to teach our students, we have an incredible opportunity to select materials that can lead to critical discussions in class that can allow students to look at topics, perhaps for the first time, from a different perspective. We can do this not only with a variety of text-based media, but also with movies that raise topics of life, sacrifice, and death (Purgason, 1994).

Colleagues' Relationships

As Christian ELT leaders, we should also listen to and learn from our colleagues. If we are working with nonnative English-speaking teachers from the same culture as our students, we can learn from them not only about our students' culture but perhaps even our host country if we are teaching abroad. Furthermore, teachers with seniority in our institution will provide us with the background of the program and how we can best teach and work within this environment. Listening to our colleagues is the key to building relationships with them.

Christian ELT leaders can play a key role in serving the teachers that they work with to assist in creating community among the teachers in their institution. By creating relationships with the teachers at the university in Turkey in which there was a spirit of respect and learning among the teachers, I was able to work with colleagues to create peer workshops. In these workshops, teachers within our college presented areas of their current research to their peers as well as teaching techniques that they were using in the classroom. These peer workshops helped to sustain and build the community among the teachers. They also provided a place to discuss current research and to

provide new ideas to other teachers.

Community Relationships

When I returned to the United States to teach English and later to direct an IEP program, I learned that many community organizations work with international students to provide support as they adjust to life in a new culture. Therefore, I was able to work with organizations outside of the university to create a better environment for my students and to meet even more of their needs. Within Southern California, many local church and parachurch organizations worked with my students to provide them with bedding, supplies to start life in the United States, and in some cases even used furniture for international students to use while they were studying. These same organizations created programs to invite the international students into American family homes during the course of the semester and planned parties for the students on American holidays, so the students could experience these American cultural events. Also, after relationships with these organizations were created, all of these activities happened with little or no work on my part. Students' needs were met, and they felt loved by people outside of the teachers and university staff that they saw every day. These community relationships allowed them to start to interact with Americans outside the university and see a bigger picture of American life. However, I did work with the leaders of these outside groups to make sure that the people working with the students were not pushing the international students to become Christians because doing so might push them away from rather than closer to God (Snow, 2001). Therefore, these groups intended to serve the students with Christ's love and listen to the students and share life with them rather than just speak the Gospel at them at every opportunity.

As with all teachers, there are many ways that we as Christians can influence the environment in which we work, both positively and negatively. As we are called to work as for the Lord rather than for others, we are called to create a classroom and working environment that is better after we leave it than when we entered it. Some might argue that any good teacher would look for such opportunities to better the environment where they work. I know that many non-Christian teachers are using many of the suggestions provided in this article and seek to create such an environment. However, the difference is that as Christians, we are called to serve others around us. It is not an option. We are called to be intentional, to take advantage of opportunities that are put before us to love others and add to their lives. I think we can do this by listening to our students and fellow teachers, sharing our lives with them, creating excellent lessons for our students and opportunities for development for our fellow faculty, and looking for other opportunities from which our students might benefit. The ideas in this article are an introduction to many different ways that Christian ELT leaders can influence the environment in which they work. I encourage you to look for new opportunities to care for your community and to work at it with all your heart as if you are serving the Lord as you minister to your students and the others in your workplace.

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[A Christian Perspective on Research: Beams in Darkness and Broken Lights](#)



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Editors' note: This article is adapted from a presentation during the CETC colloquium entitled "Professional Integrity and the Christian ELT Leader" at the TESOL 2006 convention in Tampa, Florida. We are happy to include this version here.

Introductory Comments

I'll be the first to admit that I have chosen a difficult, perhaps impossible, topic to address in any cogent or coherent way. To begin with, for dualists, there is a distinct disconnect between any "Christian" perspective and "scientific" research, and one illustration of this contradiction is encapsulated in a popular list of reasons why God never received academic tenure. He had only one major publication (which many doubt he wrote himself); it wasn't published in English; no researchers have been able to replicate any of his results; he sent his son to teach his classes, and so on! Given this challenge of attempting to view scientific inquiry from a Christian viewpoint, it is important to spell out the specifics of my title and topic. The following then is "a"—certainly not "the"—Christian perspective, so naturally I speak only for myself and not for or about the large and diverse global community of fellow believers. And because my work deals mainly with psycholinguistics, I'm considering only one tiny portion of scientific inquiry. Finally, to balance out this prosaic discussion, I am concluding with a bit of poetic metaphor as implied by the subtitle.

Science, Religion, and Dualism

I, for one, don't buy into the dualistic philosophy that pervades so much of contemporary American thought, whether it is religious or secular. For example, it's popular in the TESOL profession to divide research into quantitative or qualitative, assessment into objective or subjective, curricula into grammatical or communicative, bilingualism into additive or subtractive, and so on. I view as equally problematic the facile and popularly pervasive contrast between religion and science which in the United States is further fostered by a unique history of separating church and state. Besides the simplistic reductionism engendered by such an approach, dualism also promotes a metaphor of antagonism, as if one viewpoint must invariably be at war with the other; hence, the ubiquitous use of *versus* as in "science vs. religion."

Nevertheless, I'm not arguing for a total rejection of all dualistic contrasts; after all, the Bible is replete with *either/or's*, and my own work has sometimes been based on dichotomies. In my research on foreign accents, I have based much of my evidence on a binary judgment task, in which, after hearing a brief snippet of audio taped speech, judges decide whether the voice is or is not a native speaker of the judges' mother tongue (Scovel, 1988). However, I think it's important to consider most phenomena or experiences as occurring within a range, rather than as one of two extremes, and I concede this is difficult to do considering our culture and the digital age we live in. Even more important, as a Christian, I believe it is helpful to foster holistic thinking, a mindset that is emphasized by the monism of the early books of the Old Testament as well as by the passages on unity in the gospels and epistles of the new covenant.

In sum, I find contradiction, coherence, and mystery in both my attempts to follow Christ and my strivings as a language scientist and language teacher. For many decades I have wrestled with a contradiction in my research: Despite my consistent reluctance to put much credence in neurological data (Scovel, 1982), I continue to hold a longstanding belief that the primary cause of foreign accents is neurological, not social or psychological (Scovel, 2006). In both my roles as a teacher and as a Christian, I value coherence as a personal goal, especially the way Clarke defines it: "I posit coherence as the ideal to strive for, the situation which exists when our actions are in perfect alignment with our intentions" (2003, p. 129). Finally, both as a disciple of Christ and as a scientist, I value the mystery that pervades our personal and professional lives and ultimately see it as divine in origin. Certainly, this last insight is not original, and I appreciate the way great leaders in our profession such as Stevick (1990) have written about the mystery that underlies all our learning and teaching.

Psycholinguistic Research on the Uniqueness of Human Language

I have been careful to present alternatives to the dualism that is so culturally popular because biological evolution, the topic I now address, is a classic illustration of a binary and often antagonistic perspective. Although there are actually a variety of stances Christians and non-Christians have taken (Peters & Hewlett, 2006), Christians are seen as opposed to biological evolution, and nonbelievers are viewed as staunch supporters, but in the spirit of contradiction, coherence, and mystery, ever since I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, I have been fascinated with the way that much of secular, scientific research supports my theocentric beliefs as a Christian.

In my very first introduction to linguistics, almost half a century ago, I was taught that there was no evidence that human language was different from any other kind of animal communication and that human speech was overlaid on natural anatomy (Hockett, 1957). We have teeth in order to masticate, not to produce interdental fricatives. Later, when I studied for my doctorate at the University of Michigan, the scientific paradigm had shifted completely, and secular writers such as Chomsky (1965) but especially Lenneberg (1967) proffered convincing evidence that human speech was unique to our species, and further, that certain parts of our anatomy evolved/were created/were designed (choose your favorite verb!) specifically for producing human language (Aitchison, 1976; Hauser, 1997; Lieberman, 1991).

Another congruence I see between psycholinguistic research and my biblically based beliefs is the stance most language and cognitive scientists take toward the diverse and intensive attempts to

teach apes human language. Despite strong claims for success in these endeavors, virtually all of these coming from those who work closely with the "linguistic apes" (Savage-Rumbaugh, Shanker, & Taylor, 1998), and despite the favorable publicity fostered by the media, most language scientists are convinced that apes, like all of God's creatures, are highly capable communicators, but they do so using systems that in no way come close to human language, even after assiduous instruction (Candland, 1993; Pinker, 1994). Having said this, I need to emphasize that although this scientific research strongly supports the biblical "image of God" uniqueness of human creatures, it does not, in any way, absolve us from our duties as good stewards in our dominion over all the other creatures God has created.

Another area of psycholinguistic research in which I have found both interest and comfort as a believer during my some half-century of study and inquiry is support for universal grammar. Granted, like all scientific theories, counterarguments exist and variations abound (Drabowska, 2004; Tomasello, 2003), but beginning with Chomsky's reformulation of 19th-century interests in the unified nature of language variation (Chomsky, 1965), the foundation of almost all contemporary linguistics, including non-Chomskian and nongenerative explanations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), is that all of the world's some 10,000 language varieties exhibit many more similarities than differences, and these correspondences are a reflection of how the human brain functions. One does not need to refer to Genesis 11:6 and the Tower of Babel account to see how a believer might be comforted by this research. Again, there is confirmation about our unique relationship with our Creator and the potential for all humankind to communicate with each other and with him.

Psycholinguistic Research on the Critical Period for Human Speech

For a period of almost four decades, the area of research that I have worked in most closely is the so-called critical period hypothesis. Like all scientific hypotheses, it originally began as a fairly narrow and simple claim (Lenneberg, 1967), but has now evolved into a broad area of complex and sometimes competing perspectives (Long, 2007). My nascent interest in possible constraints on language acquisition came from my undergraduate training in biology and later from the influence of the work of Lenneberg, who happened to be at the University of Michigan when I was pursuing my doctoral studies. It is only now, much later in my professional life, that I have paused to consider this area of research from a Christian perspective.

From my longstanding study of this topic, I am convinced that there is a biological constraint on the acquisition of speech (not language) and that this critical period spans about the first decade of an individual's life. Specifically, anyone who acquires a second language after puberty will have a foreign accent but will still have the potential to acquire every other aspect of that language completely. As I have already emphasized, this is a complex issue often complicated, not clarified, by an enormous amount of research, and for anyone interested in recent views on this topic, I refer you to Han (2004) and Long (2007) or to my own work (Scovel, 2006). Irrespective of the scientific findings and perspectives on this topic, however, I see several ways in which my Christian beliefs are coherent with this narrow domain of scientific research.

If I am correct, and there is indeed a critical period for speech, but not necessarily for language, this research underscores the primacy of speech in human communication, a view that is part of a longstanding tradition in modern, descriptive linguistics (Jusczyk, 1997). The primacy of human speech harkens back, quite naturally, to my earlier discussion of the uniqueness of human communication, and thus relates to the Christian and biblical concept of *imago dei*. Notice that beginning with the Genesis accounts, God "spoke" the Creation: He did not "write" it or "do" it. And throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God communicates by voice, by speaking. Notice too that although Jesus was highly literate in Hebrew, all of his preaching, prophecies, and indeed almost all of his healing was by and through speech. His ministry was truly vocal!

Over the years, I have enjoyed the ways in which my research on biologically based foreign accents has parallels in scripture. I intentionally chose the famous passage from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes as the title for my first book (Scovel, 1988), and I began that work with what I call the earliest documentation of foreign accents: the famous "shibboleth" account in Chapter 12 of Judges. Even in the New Testament, there is evidence of how our accents immediately give us away, as in the account of Peter's denial of Christ (Mt 26). But foreign accents are only a small part of the information our voices carry, and a great deal of research demonstrates that our speech identifies our emotions, our gender, our age, and, of course, our specific identity (Scovel, 2000). Once again, I am struck by the way certain biblical stories illustrate this area of psycholinguistic research. There is, for example, the marvelous account of Mary encountering but not recognizing the risen Lord at the tomb until he speaks her name, and then she instantly recognizes who he is. If we are primarily (of course not exclusively) programmed to communicate by voice, and if the spoken word is so important in scripture, does this not have special significance for us as disciples, especially for those of us who have chosen to profess our faith through the profession of language teaching?

In these modern times, when literacy is valued over orality, when so much of communication is visual, when so many people communicate or even learn from video monitors, and where even ubiquitous cell phone communication is never face-to-face, it is easy for us who are so highly literate and technological to forget that there is something primary, biological, and, I would suggest, even holy in the human voice. I find it humbling to discover that much of my research life as a language scientist serves as a constant and convincing reminder that God's voice and our voice are central to our ability to communicate with him and with each other (Johnson, 2004).

Concluding Comments and Verse

I conclude by returning to the theme of mystery, for scientific research, if it is anything, is the pursuit of the unknown. It is a complete mystery to me that any individual, let alone millions and millions of people, can acquire even just the grammar of English in the first decade or so of life, and do so without reading a single book on language acquisition or taking my (enormously elucidating!) course on English grammar. It is even more mysterious to me that any individual, let alone millions and millions of people around the globe, can acquire these grammatical patterns on top of their mother tongue, or in many cases, on top of several other languages. Forty years of reading and research have brought me no closer to understanding these mysteries, for they are ultimately unexplainable. But the gift of tongues is not just a mystery; it is an act of grace. And so, as a language scientist, I can only join the many disciples over the generations in declaring *Soli deo Gloria*.

We have but faith: we cannot know,
For knowledge is of things we see.
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness; let it grow.

Our little systems have their day:
They have their day and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of thine,
And Thou, O Lord, are more than they.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson ("In Memoriam A.H.H.", 1838, from Harrison, 1959)

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