

# Transformation



BC TEAL Board of Directors.....	2
BC TEAL Newsletter Committee.....	2
Letter from the President.....	3
Letter from the Editor .....	4
Transforming Teachers' Perceptions of Arab Students.....	5
Transformation through Storytelling in an EAL Classroom .....	9
Applying Principles of Team-Based Learning to the EAP Classroom.....	11
Integrating Technology from the Ground Up—Making the Most of Technological Affordances.....	13
Murder Mystery Lesson Plan.....	16
The 2015 “Climb for the Cause” is a HUGE Success! .....	18
Bridging the Gap: Curriculum Renewal and Alignment.....	19
My Cambridge Delta Experience.....	22
My Experience with English: The Game of Chutes and Ladders.....	24
My Experience of Learning to Read and Write Farsi as L1 and English as L2: A Long-haul Journey to Bilingualism.....	27
Twitter for Professional Growth.....	30
Writing Contest: BC TEAL Vancouver Island Region.....	32
From Resistance to Resistentialism in the Classroom: Technological Solutions.....	35
The Weight of Transformations.....	37

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# Letter from the President

The newsletter editor has a real knack for choosing themes that truly resonate with me. The last issue on Professional Development is a topic I'm passionate about. This time he's chosen transformation, another topic that fascinates me. Transformation, essentially, is all about change. Hopefully positive change.

I am one of those people who love change, and am often labeled a "change agent." I always want to try something new or in a different way or think about how structures and processes can be tweaked or curricula adapted or a new mythology put into place. Imagine my shock when I learned that most people aren't so embracing of change, and that for me to get people to warm up to my ideas, I first need to cozy up to the "early adopters" because there are a lot of people who really feel comfortable with the status quo.

And so, my role as a change agent can be a precarious one, as people will not necessarily always be onside. And implementing change isn't always done out of curiosity. I will happily acknowledge that there are times and certain situations when status quo works. There are also times when status quo needs to be disrupted, and it can be uncomfortable. But there are times when the result is beyond anyone's expectations.

Transformation, to many EAL teachers, may often be contemplated from the vantage point of their students: through helping to hone language skills and navigate the nuances of English, teachers can facilitate their students' linguistic transformation, which may lead to positive changes in the personal, academic, or professional lives of the learners.

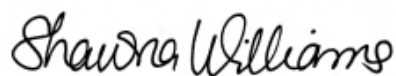
Professional development, the cornerstone of BC TEAL, is also a pathway toward transformation. Indeed, in the last issue of this publication, Dr. Li-Shih Huang emphasized Avalos's understanding of professional development as being about "transforming [teachers'] knowledge into practice" (see LiShi's excellent article in the Fall 2015 issue [<https://www.bctéal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/BCTeal-Newsletter-Fall-2015-Final-2.pdf>]).

Being engaged as a volunteer or board member of BC TEAL can also lead to transformation. My EAL teacher education did not at all prepare me for the roles I've taken on within the Association: newsletter editor,

conference co-chair, and president. My skills-set has transformed to now include copy editing, event planning, chairing meetings, and public speaking, to mention just a few. I've also witnessed such transformation in many of the people I've worked alongside during my close to ten years with BC TEAL. Changing not only their teaching practices, but growing and transforming as EAL professionals outside of the classroom as well.

This will likely be my last letter as president of BC TEAL as my term comes to an end later in the spring. It has been a remarkable four-year journey and as I prepare to pass the torch along to the next president, I know that my commitment to the association and the profession will remain strong. We have a wonderful community and I'm so proud to have served as your president.

Sincerely,



Shawna Williams  
President, BC TEAL



# Transformation and English Language Teaching

It was during the lull between sessions at the Tri-TESOL conference that the theme for the current issue of the BC TEAL newsletter, transformation, was born. A colleague was talking about how when teachers reflect back on their careers, there can be moments when they can say “this changed me.” Hearing those words was transformative in itself as my career played itself out in my mind, and spots started to stand out from my many days and semesters of teaching.

Sometimes those transformative moments happen at conferences. I remember my very first conference and going to the plenary address. Before that, I hadn’t thought much about how my students learned English, assuming that hard work and diligence was the key, along with a strong dose of aptitude. As the speaker unfolded her ideas, the way I thought about my learners and the social world around them suddenly changed, and I began to question my assumptions.

Sometimes those transformative moments occur when you least expect it. One morning in early winter I was walking to the private English school where I taught when an odd feeling overcame me. I stopped and realised what it was. I was happy. The realization changed me, and I enrolled in graduate school very soon after that.

Sometimes those transformative moments occur when you’re lending a helping hand to the profession. A long history of working in flea markets made me ideally suited to volunteer with the publishers’ displays at conferences. Between hauling boxes of books and duct taping down extension cords, I managed to have long conversations with publisher representatives from all over the country. That changed me. Not long after I was an author myself.

Thus was born the theme for the current issue. The issue opens with articles connecting to the classroom experience, and the transformative moments that can be found there. Understanding the language and

culture of students from Arabic speaking background is followed by reflections related to student stories in LINC classrooms, and team based teaching in EAP settings. The role of educational technology is also examined before the regular classroom activities corner. Next, there is an update from the TEAL Charitable Foundation and a recent winner of the Nan Poliakoff Memorial Award. Diploma and doctoral students also have a voice in this winter’s issue, along with a teacher looking back at his literacy development in his first, Farsi, and additional, English, languages. Professional development follows, with a look at twitter, a collection of winning entries from the writing contest on Vancouver Island, and an article inspired by the EAL week meeting in the Okanagan region. Finally, this issue closes with a thoughtful reflection on coming back to British Columbia after teaching abroad.

Throughout this issue, the contributors have thought about and shared their own moments that changed them. As readers go through the articles in this issue, these moments may resonate with them and, in turn, encourage more moments of transformation.

Scott Roy Douglas

Editor, BC TEAL Newsletter

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# Transforming Teachers' Perceptions of Arab Students

by Zahrae Al-Zaim

Canada is a multicultural society in which most immigrants and refugees eventually integrate and share a set of Canadian cultural values. By the time the second generation of immigrants comes to the classroom, they will have undergone the Canadian educational system and will likely be able to participate and contribute in class as their teachers might expect them to do. However, that may not be the case for international students, including those from an Arab background. Often,

they are here for a certain amount of time and are to leave after getting their degrees. They are typically not here to integrate. They bring different cultural baggage to the class which may surprise, astonish, or even shock their teachers sometimes. The purpose of this article is to look at some of this cultural baggage from a new perspective. It has been my experience that many Arab students come from a world far removed from Canada, and without being able to understand their cultural and educational backgrounds; it becomes more challenging to assist them as educators.

First things first, before moving on to their educational backgrounds, let's define an Arab, Arab culture, Arabic, Ramadan, and Eid.

**Arab:** An Arab is anyone whose parents are from the Arab world even if she or he was born outside an Arab country. In the Arab world, where a person's parents are from determines nationality. For example, my parents were born in Syria, so I am considered Syrian and not Saudi Arabian although I was born in Saudi Arabia.

*Canada is a multicultural society in which most immigrants and refugees eventually integrate and share a set of Canadian cultural values.*

**Arab Culture:** Arab cultural practices are not limited to one set of cultural standards; they may differ from one city to another and not just from one country to another. There are some major trends that pervade the whole Arab world, and this article can only attempt to cover a few. There is a thin line between religion and culture, and for many people that line does not exist. In reality, although religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have influenced some of the

Arab cultural practices, many of the customs practiced today are not derived from religions.

**Arabic:** The Arabic language consists of 28 characters that are written in cursive form and from right to left.


There are two kinds of Arabic: Standard Arabic (Fusha) which is used in all print forms, to write tests, and the news, and spoken Arabic which is used to text, chat online, and communicate verbally. Every country has its own variety, and each city has its own dialect. Not all Arab countries understand each other's varieties. For example, A Jordanian may not understand a Moroccan's variety but will probably understand the Egyptian one.

### How important is religion?

Religion plays a big role in the lives of many Arab students. Since about 80% of Arabs are Muslims, knowing about Ramadan and Eid is important.

**Ramadan:** From a religious viewpoint, Ramadan is a time of spiritual rejuvenation; people focus on their spiritual needs rather than bodily ones by refraining from eating or drinking from dawn to dusk for one

*Continued on page 6*



lunar month. Culturally speaking, Ramadan has become a social event. The more devout will spend the night in worship while the less pious will stay up all night socializing. In either case, one can imagine the big change students face when they spend Ramadan in Canada without the Ramadan spirit or family support. Although teachers cannot alter the local lifestyle, they can still support students in a different manner. Teachers can avoid asking students questions that may make them feel judged or unaccepted, such as: are you tired or hungry, do you like fasting, isn't it hard to fast in the hot summer, and don't you feel thirsty. Instead, it would be more supportive for teachers to actually experience fasting for a day and having iftar (break fasting) with the students in an attempt to try something new and help students feel a little less lonely.

**Eid:** Ramadan is followed by Eid Al-Fitir which is typically a three-day celebration in most Arab countries. About 65 days after Eid Al-Fitir, Muslims celebrate another Eid—Eid Al-Adha. Giving the students a day off on each Eid will give them a chance to attend the congregational prayers and celebrate with their communities.

### **Working with Arab students**

Having covered where the students are coming from, this article will now focus on what occurs inside class. It might happen that while a teacher is having a conversation with a student, the student shuts down for some mysterious reason. It is quite common to have experienced this at least once in a teacher's career. She or he may start asking themselves: What happened? What did I do wrong?

### **Here are a few issues to take into consideration when working with Arab students**

For many students, their image is everything. Addressing any of their undesirable classroom behavior in the presence of others is considered humiliating. It is recommended to have a one-on-one

talk with the student after class. In most cases, she or he will respond better to a teacher's requests and rectify her or his actions after a private chit chat with the teacher.

Sometimes it is my experience that Arab males can be very sensitive but proud as well. They may try to hide any feelings of vulnerability: depression, sadness, or hurt, and choose a passive aggressive mode to cover them up. Some words that may hurt their feelings are: grow up, you're such a baby, stop acting so childish, and don't be silly. Some may take these expressions as a joke and some will not. It all depends on how much trust the educators have established with their students and how they say them.

Arab women are sometimes seen as weak and/or dependent. When it comes to their academic performance, teachers may notice that some Arab women are better able to deal with their frustrations and will rise above their failures, while their male counterparts may not want to try again, fearing failure. The women feel empowered by their strong will, and it is the same will that they rely on with their male relatives when they feel like it. One thing that may frustrate them is having to prove over and over again that their perceived dependence is not a sign of weakness. Women and men have split the roles between them and in most cases a woman feels content that she can count on someone when she wants to.

Understanding Arab students' cultural backgrounds and how that impacts their performance in class will give educators an idea of how to work in order to help them achieve their educational goals. Teachers may all be aware that the educational system Arab students underwent in their home countries differs from the Canadian one. However, the extent of the difference between the two educational systems is the main question. It is worth mentioning that the educational approach is changing in some countries, such as the United Arab Emirates. That being said, most of the students that teachers encounter in their classes today have undergone the traditional educational approach.

*Continued on page 7*

**In my experience, there are five things teachers need to know about the educational system in most Arab countries:**

1. Students are expected to memorize everything in order to pass classes and eventually move on to the next grade.
2. Students are expected to sit with their backs straight, in rows and look towards the front, trying to absorb as much as they can of what the teacher is saying. They are not allowed to take any initiative. They have to wait for the teacher to tell them exactly what to do and when to do it.
3. Students' grades get deducted for making mistakes. Questions are not greatly encouraged. If they ask any, either their classmates make fun of them or some teachers do not know enough about the topic or do not care to answer.
4. Participation means raising your hand whenever you know the answer. There is no place for guessing. Outstanding students are the ones that shoot up their hands the most and answer all the questions correctly.
5. Their final grades are split into 20-30% for homework and participation and the rest for quizzes and tests. There is no project, pair, or group work. Some disciplines, but not all, introduce presentations in the first year of university.

I have met a number of learners from Arabic backgrounds who have had a tough time at school. Unless they have excellent memorization skills, they probably feel like failures in education, and that puts them one step behind other students. Lack of confidence is one of the roots of their demotivation. Teachers' encouragement and support is crucial to help build their confidence.

Not being allowed to show any kind of initiative in class explains why some students may seem to be laid back and need a reminder to take their pen and paper out (if they have any) and start taking notes (if they know how). Instructors need to teach them how to take the initiative. It will take them time to start knowing when and how to take the initiative.

Since many learners may be used to an educational system that does not encourage mistakes or guessing, that explains why some may think twice before speaking in class. They will not offer any answers unless they are 100% sure that what they know the right answer. If they make a mistake, they will feel very conscious about it and apologize.

Now that how some Arab students may understand the idea of participation has been covered, Canadian teachers can understand why Arab students sometimes love shouting out answers that they are sure of and keep silent when they are not.

Some teachers may believe that Arab students do not do their best in class, thinking that they seem to be lazy or passive at best. Since Arab students were likely never graded for classwork, the concept of classwork grades may be foreign to them. It would be helpful if teachers invested more time into explaining exactly how assessments happen in their class and what pair work, group work, or presentations entail. Teachers sometimes assume that all students comprehend what these mean. Teachers may forget that they have come to college or university classes with 12 years of practice while Arab students have probably not had any until the day they arrive in the Canadian EAL classroom.

After having become more familiarized with the educational system backgrounds of Arab students, one question may come to mind...

*Continued on page 8*



### How can educators give them extra support?

Like with all other students, it is important to set the boundaries early on in the relationship. Teachers can tell them what is expected of them early on in the course and reintroduce the topic throughout the course. Teacher can also remember that, in my experience, Arab students probably do not mind having strict teachers as long as they are engaging and dynamic.

Teachers can also introduce time management and study skills tips into the curriculum. The lifestyle of Arab students may have been very relaxed, so they might not know how to manage time or prioritize. Since they are probably used to memorization, they may not know how to study, or what preparing for a test in a Canadian class entails. Teachers can teach them something of learning styles, share their personal experiences on how they used to prepare for tests, get the whole class to share with others, bring in former students who were successful in school, and get those successful students to share their personal experiences.

Last but not least, I could not stress the effectiveness of using positive reinforcement with this group of students enough. Teachers should praise them for

all their stronger skills and encourage them to work on their weaker ones. I've encountered a number of learners who work harder when they get praised. It helps them believe in themselves and gives them a push forward. Teachers should try not to forget to follow up to see how they have progressed.

As educators working with students who come to Canada from all over the world, it is fundamental to understand the cultural background and educational system that made them the students they are today. I believe it is incumbent on teachers to transform their perception of Arab students in order to be better able to assist and support them on their educational journey in Canada.



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# Transformation through Storytelling in an EAL Classroom

by Theresa Howell



It is through the telling of stories and the listening that I have learned about how important story can be for breaking down barriers. In my classroom, I have witnessed many adult lives from around the globe. As an EAL instructor for a federally funded settlement English language program, I have had newcomer students that range from recent refugees from war torn regions to skilled immigrant workers from first world locations. Within the refugee population, many stories have crossed my path that could rivet the average person's attention and immobilize their senses. As a child from a diverse life of circumstance as well as being an empathetic human being, I have learned that listening with intention and no judgement is imperative. Years of training and work in the child and youth care field mixed with an anthropology undergraduate degree has allowed me some background into what is required and needed within these storied disclosures. As counselors we were taught to be present and listen. Also as an ongoing anthropological practitioner, the incorporation of cultural relativism whereby a person suspends any ethnocentric judgement in order to appreciate and understand other cultures (O'Neil, 2013), is important. It is one of the main tenets in cultural anthropology studies. Therefore, I stand present in quiet resolve while holding no judgement allowing the stories to unfold. For me, as an educator, this is critical.

As I say this, I reflect on an adult refugee student who came from Iraq via Dubai. I'm sharing her story here. Her name was Sherry. She was a pretty young lady with hazel coloured doe-like eyes. Her strawberry blond hair and petite stature hid a woman whose

mental strength was twenty times her physical size. At the time we met, she was verging on 28 years old; two years older than my eldest daughter but many lifetimes apart. Actually, she wasn't in my class but the class level below ours. However, every Thursday we had a "Conversation Club" whereby the level 4 and level 5 students would come together to talk about cultural events and other issues that stimulated them to speak in a more relaxed context. The instructors and local volunteers alternated weekly facilitation roles for these conversation circles.

During these times, one of the two instructors would sit in with a group while the other instructor would float from group to group monitoring the volunteers' involvement.

*"...we live in story, we act in story,  
we remember in story;  
storytelling echoes our humanness."  
(Randall, 1995)*

From previous interactions, I gleaned some specific information about Sherry via another instructor. "She is so difficult. She spouts up about being Christian when others are talking about their Islamic beliefs; it disturbs the other students." This seemed to be the instructor's way of saying she didn't want any religious tension in her classroom. I realized in this moment that something was awry and started building bridges of trust with Sherry. Each day that she arrived to school, I would greet her with a smile and morning salutation to let her know her presence was appreciated and welcomed.

As time wore on she took time to stop and hold some small chit chat before going into her classroom. However, it was the one Conversation Club day that really broke through the phantom barrier into a new sense of connectedness. We were in our groups; Sherry and four other students were in the one I was

*Continued on page 10*

# LINC Reflections

facilitating this particular Thursday morning. We were discussing the upcoming Remembrance Day holiday and its meaning. We opened up the discussion with questions for the students to ponder and reflect upon thereby initiating conversation. One of the questions touched on their opinion about war. As the responses moved around the table the majority of the students responded in the standard way of stating that it is horrific and wished we could all live peacefully.

As it came around to Sherry, I could see her eyes gloss over with tears. She started to say, "Every day, I thank GOD I'm in Canada". As a couple of tears found their way down her round, rosy cheeks, I grabbed the tissue box and quietly put it between us. Quietly, I responded with a reassuring, "Yes, we are all thankful you are here too, Sherry." As she wiped the tears from her cheeks and eyes, she went on to tell her story of her last day in her small village in southern Iraq. Her family was locked inside their home. "My mother, father and brother were crouched down while the shelling and gunfire were ringing out in the streets outside our home. We were Christian." A primary Islamic state was the desired preference. As the gunfire got closer, her father demanded that she run and hide. Being a respectful daughter, she obliged. As she shrunk and hid inside an underground dugout that their family had made, "I heard heavy footsteps above. Then, a flurry of screams and shots being fired rang out. This moment lasted forever," she said. "Once all the noise stopped, I looked carefully from my underground hideout. When I crawled out of the space from where I was hiding, I found my mother, father and brother lying dead in pools of blood that surrounded their bodies. I ran over to my mother and held her bloody head in my hands and cried to God. WHY!?!? Later on that evening, once the guns were silent, my uncle came by and whisked me away. We made our way southeast to Dubai."

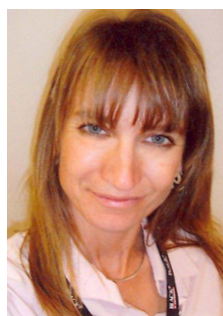
As she unfurled her story, our group began to realize that none of us could reconcile with this set of circumstances thrust upon a young girl. As an educator/counsellor, I knew I needed to sit mindfully attending to this moment and that was the best action

I could take. She went on to talk of how through many years of living in Dubai she soon learned to find her way independently. It was then that she had applied to Canada as a refugee. She knew if she was able to start a new life somewhere far away from the memory that haunted her, it would allow her some solace. She told us that when she was on the plane to Canada, she cried. She established that they were not tears of sadness but of happiness. She knew that she was given this gift as she said "from GOD." No matter the reasons, she was finally finding happiness in a life that had its lion's share of sadness. As she wound down, I pulled her close and gave her the biggest hug. The only thing I could think to say was, "You are such a brave young woman. Your honesty inspires me. Thank you." We were all stunned by the story. It reshaped our perspective. From that day onwards to the moment Sherry left the program, new bonds between students were formed. The Muslim students were especially empathetic and a group of them would surround her at breaktime making an effort to build back the broken trust created by others.

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**Theresa K. Howell** has been a LINC Instructor at ISSofBC for 8 years. She is currently in the process of achieving her MA in Arts Education at SFU. This piece is from her thesis "Storied Lives; Storytelling and Change" and all names have been changed to protect people's identities.

# Applying Principles of Team-Based Learning to the EAP Classroom

*by Amber Shaw*



When looking to push into new transformative teaching experiences, a good conference is always a sound place to start. I was very fortunate to be able to attend the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) conference this past summer in Vancouver. The theme of the conference was “Achieving Harmony: Tuning into Practice.” My biggest take-away was the realization that in order to have more transformative experiences for myself and for my students, I need to purposefully create those opportunities for transformation.

There are many things that get in the way of me creating these opportunities though. True transformative experiences usually involve a certain amount of risk. I had to ask myself: How much risk am I willing to take as an instructor? How much risk is my institution willing to take? What about the students? In the end, I decided to face my fears and try something new.

**Background:** General Information about Team-Based Learning (TBL) can be found at the [Team-Based Learning Collaborative \(2013\)](#). I became interested in TBL after going to a STLHE workshop by Jim Sibley and Ernesto Ocampo Edye entitled “Team work that works: An introduction to team-based learning.” I left wanting to give TBL a try in my English for Academic Purposes (EAP) setting. I was particularly interested in the larger group work model used in TBL, which uses groups of between five to seven students (Sibley et al., 2014). My students are all taking first-year university classes with integrated EAP courses as part of their first-year program. Each class has approximately 25 students and meets for 50-minute weekly blocks.

**Risk Taken:** The incorporation of some of the principles of TBL into one of my courses involved risk. This risk included getting over the fear of using permanent large groups instead of rotating small

groups in my class. Small group work has always been a part of my classroom, and I was unsure about switching to this new model.

**Requirements:** The addition of a new learning outcome to my class was a requirement. The additional learning outcome was framed as the course helping students to learn through intercultural group work and communication. This new approach also required fronting a lot of the prep work for the semester. Planning and organization was critical, and in the end, was well worth it. I also had the support of my director and colleagues.

**Transformations:** The use of large groups created mini-classrooms with dedicated leaders and assigned student roles. Students took control of their own learning, and most of the groups monitored their own behaviours, deadlines, and progress. Overall, students used English more often than in my traditional small group activities. As diversity was built into the large groups, English became the common communication tool necessary to complete the assignments.

**Payoffs and Advantages:** Using TBL groups allowed me to give more formative feedback to a large number of students. I also seemed to learn the students’ names faster as I interacted with them in their stable teams. Another advantage was being able to ensure that there was more linguistic diversity within each group than I was previously able to accomplish with the use of small groups.

**Disadvantages:** The only disadvantage I can identify is having to move the classroom tables into group configurations, which can take a couple of minutes of class time. However, after the first few classes, the students got faster at helping to move the tables at the beginning and end of class.

*Continued on page 12*

**Next time:** I would spend more time introducing the importance of the new group work learning outcome. I would also make the groups spend more time and effort selecting an appropriate group name that reflects their identity as a learning community.

**Reflection:** This was definitely the epitome of me “doing something different” by allowing students to take control of their own learning. Students took the group assignment quite seriously. Many of the groups set up Facebook pages, booked meeting rooms and had meetings outside of class time. They also utilized many of the online tools available to them through our university’s online learning system. Having four groups of six to seven students each, created cooperative learning spaces within each group while still producing a competitive atmosphere overall between the groups. This seems to have motivated more students early on. Some of the groups that I worried about the most, in the end had the most success, as early setbacks seemed to have driven the groups to succeed.

**Unexpected Issues:** Even though most of the students were very good at utilizing social media to complete their group tasks, there were many groups that struggled with basic technology and information literacy skills. This was the first time I had realized that students half my age were not necessarily as tech savvy as I am. My own technology literacy has been a new fear for me in the past five years as I continue to age, while the students stay 19 forever. While I was troubled to see some of the students struggling with basic technology skills, I have to admit that I felt more empowered to integrate a scaffolding of these skills into the assignments.

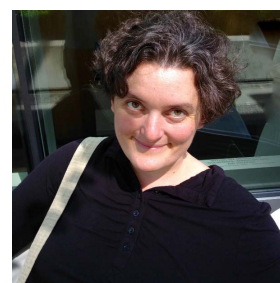
**Conclusions:** I found the application of many of the principles of TBL for language learning quite successful. It allowed for more scaffolding, task-based learning, and improved motivation and student buy-in. While I have not applied all of the principles of TBL to my classroom, I will continue to expand this model in the coming semesters. I am also curious to know what other instructors’ experiences are with using TBL in a language learning classroom.

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# Integrating Technology from the Ground Up— Making the Most of Technological Affordances

by Brian Wilson

I have a confession to make. When talking about educational technology, I've used the words *affordances*, *leverage*, and *integration* more often than I probably should have. In fact, I've even played "Meeting Bingo" with them. In my defence, however, I continue to use these terms because there often doesn't seem to be a common, easily accessible vocabulary or set of practices when discussing instructional design, educational technology, and language learning. Too often when doing so, educators get bogged down in talking about the tools and how to operate them, instead of thinking more deeply about what students are to gain by engaging with the various technologies. It is possible to be swayed by the sexy, trendy, but perhaps not overly effective new tool or, conversely, to abandon a promising, if somewhat clunky, piece of software simply because it seems not intuitive or easy enough to use.

With that off my chest, let me be completely upfront in saying that I don't think there is one must-have tool, technology, or even approach. Nor would I support the notion that new is *always* better. Sometimes paper and pen really is best. What I do support, however, is the idea that not only should educators take advantage of what today's tools have to offer, but it must be done in a principled, pedagogically sound manner. In other words, *integrating* technology, and digital technology in particular, is more desirable than just simply *using* technology, and in order to make the most of that distinction, language educators need to be able to articulate *why* they have chosen to use the tools that they have. They need to be able to demonstrate alignment between the underlying pedagogy, the approach to language learning and the instructional methods employed when designing and delivering technology-enhanced lessons. The challenge is: How best can instructors do this?

The first question to ask when considering whether to introduce a new tool or technology into the classroom is: *What will this enable me to do that I could not otherwise accomplish?* There is little to be gained by simply replicating an existing method or activity unless an improvement in learning outcomes can be realized. This is especially true if the proposed tool or resource requires student registration, disrespects their privacy, or contributes to a digital divide. By identifying the particular affordances of a technology early, educators can then better design their lessons so the desired alignment between pedagogy, approach and methods can be realized. For example, if a set of stand-alone, online, multiple choice grammar questions is completed by students sitting individually in a language lab with little or no relation to the preceding or following lesson, it will be hard, if not impossible, for the instructor to argue that this aligns with a pedagogy that adopts a constructivist orientation, a communicative approach or a methodology that is task-based. If the instructor can't justify why having students sit in a computer lab provides a *better* learning opportunity or contributes to a principled approach to language acquisition, then that particular technology may be a poor choice. It's not that spaces like language labs or tools like online quizzes are inherently good or bad. Rather, it's a question of identifying how that technology needs to be used in order to take advantage of what it offers. In the case of online quizzes, for example, as a means of fostering some self-directed study or providing focused, adaptive practice on a particular concept, they might provide an ideal means of supporting the learner and his or her particular challenges, but this can't simply arise from the too often default position of using lab time simply because lab time has been scheduled.

*Continued on page 14*

In addition to offering new and varied ways of tackling ongoing language acquisition challenges, what makes many of the tools currently available so enticing is that they enable educators to transition their classrooms from that of being a walled garden into a *networked public*. The real power of Web 2.0 and social media is that it enables both the students and the instructors to develop interactions that are primarily relational, instead of informational. That is, the relationship developed between members when using these tools is often more important than the nature of information that a social network contains (Ito et al., 2008). This enables educators to better integrate technology by considering *how the students will interact* rather than *what information they will acquire*. Take Twitter for example. Simply having students engage in an ongoing dialogue with each other on a variety of topics is likely to have more benefit than either simply transmitting information from teacher to student or by focusing on accuracy at the expense of (digital) fluency or literacy.

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996) provides a useful pedagogical foundation upon which to integrate technology choices with instructional methodology. Central to this theory is the assumption that 21st century learners operate in a multi-modal, multi-cultural, and multi-media environment and that “curriculum is a design for social futures” (The New London Group, 1996). In other words, as fundamentally and unequivocally important as traditional concepts of literacy are, students now live in an era when also being digitally literate can make the difference in a student’s ability to successfully navigate between various forms of language and multiple modes of expression. In fact, it can also have a direct impact on career and employment opportunities. It is no longer adequate for students to gain proficiency *only* in the traditional areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening—they are necessary, but not sufficient, for students to thrive. The four pillars of multiliteracies are: situated practice; overt instruction; critical framing and transformed practices. While a full discussion of multiliteracies is by no means possible here, these pillars do provide salient questions for the instructor to ask before choosing a particular tool or technology.

- **Situated practice:** Will the students be immersed in authentic experience and engage in meaningful practice, including those from the students’ everyday lives, workplaces and public spaces?
- **Overt instruction:** Will students gain a systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding what is being learned? Will they develop the metalanguage necessary to do so?
- **Critical framing:** Will students be able to gain mastery, thereby extending and applying their knowledge in new and enriched contexts?
- **Transformed practice:** Will students, through application and reflective practice, be able to transfer their meaning-making capacity to other contexts or cultural sites?

To help put the concepts of affordances, networked publics and multiliteracies into context and provide a wrapper for holding them together, Garrison, Anderson & Archer’s updated model for a Community of Inquiry (Garrison, 2011) provides three key questions to ask when considering the instructional design of a technology-enhanced course: *How will it impact the social presence? What is the instructor presence going to be? What is the cognitive presence required?* If a technology is able to leverage any one of these domains more fully, not only will the interactions between students, instructors and technology be more intentional, but in all likelihood, learning outcomes can be improved, but for that to happen, instructors need to make sure that any adoption of technology can address any or all of these domains while still aligning pedagogy, approach and method.

Once educators have considered how they will design their courses, what technologies and activities will enable their students to reach the desired learning outcomes more effectively, and how a community of inquiry can be fostered, they can then use their chosen instructional methodology (e.g. task-based, PPP, TTT) to decide how best to structure their lessons. Every technology comes with its own inherent logic, cultural and political assumptions, and impact on its users, and

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the “tool” itself cannot be separated from these. In fact, it would be an oversimplification to try to separate the function of a technology from its form. Therefore, it is extremely important when choosing technologies that educators don’t become complacent and simply try to emulate existing face-to-face classroom practices. For example, in *Mobile pedagogy for English language teaching: a guide for teachers*, Kukulska-Hulme, Norris, and Donohue (2015) introduce the mobile dimension into the existing challenge of integrating technology in an attempt to help instructors bridge their existing expertise with their desire to take advantage of the possibilities that mobile learning offers so that instead of asking students to turn off their phones and put them away in frustration, instructors can develop a framework through which they can better make use of the tools while still creating an active and engaging learning environment.

In *How Learning Works*, Ambrose et al. (2010) argue that the seven principles of good teaching (knowledge, structure, motivation, mastery, practice, climate, metacognition) are rooted in cognitive science, and that these principles support a set of strategies and provide a checklist of sorts that can be used as a reference against which an instructor can determine the likely success of a particular set of activities. For many experienced educators, these seven principles and the resulting strategies will seem like common sense, but they are worth remembering if only to remind ourselves that above all, pedagogy and good teaching must provide the foundation for our informed choices in technology, not the other way round.

## Resources

The pedagogy of multiliteracies:

<http://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/newlondon.htm>

Community of inquiry:

<https://coi.athabascau.ca>

How learning works primer:

<http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Colums/Ambrose.pdf>



Using technology vs. integrating it:

<http://teachbytes.com/2013/03/29/whats-the-difference-between-using-technology-and-technology-integration/>

Mobile pedagogy:

[http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/E485%20Mobile%20pedagogy%20for%20ELT\\_FINAL\\_v2.pdf](http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/E485%20Mobile%20pedagogy%20for%20ELT_FINAL_v2.pdf)

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# Murder Mystery Lesson Plan

by Edward Pye



“Murder” is an active vocabulary review and speaking activity that will really engage your students and have them working together closely in teams. It is ostensibly called “Murder” and it works great when you are teaching a topic related to crime; however, the format of the activity can be changed to any topic you can think of. In a recent lesson plan, I adapted it to travel and have used it before for medicine and sports. For the purposes of this article, I will model it using the murder theme.

### Objectives:

- Review vocabulary through description.
- Practice speaking skills by creating questions and answers.
- Have students working together in teams to problem solve.

### Preparation:


- Before the class, cut up about 40 strips of paper. How many you need exactly will depend on how many teams you make.

### Steps:

1. First, you need to make teams. Depending on the size of the class, you can do teams of two, three, or four. The activity works best if you have at least four teams but not more than 10, so if you have 12 students then go for four teams of three. Put the students into teams, have them sit together, and have them choose a team name. Write the team names on the board.
2. Next, you need to explain the premise of the activity; Someone has been murdered (I usually choose another teacher or someone that the students all know, but that isn't in the class), and the teams need to use their investigation skills to figure out the murder weapon, the scene of the crime, and the murderer.
3. Put three columns on the board; murder weapon, crime scene, and suspect.
4. Start with weapons. As a class, brainstorm different kinds of weapons and write them up on the board. Get them to think of unusual weapons, which adds a little bit of fun to the activity.
5. You need to brainstorm enough weapons so that there are two for each team and one extra. If you have four teams, the class needs to think of nine weapons. If there are five teams, then 11 weapons.
6. Do the same for the crime scene and the suspect categories: two for each team and one extra. With the suspect category, I have them name a student in the class, as well as a fictional job that the student has, for example, “John the Doctor.”
7. All of these items (weapons, crime scene, and suspects) need to be written on individual pieces of paper, so choose three students, give them some strips of paper, and have them write items down as you write them on the board; one item for one piece of paper.
8. When all the brainstorming is finished, have the students copy all the information into a notebook, so they can refer back to it.
9. Now, the teacher should re-collect the individual pieces of paper, keeping them in their categories.
10. Without showing the students, choose one weapon, one crime scene, and one suspect and put it in your pocket. Those three pieces of paper are the actual murderer, the crime scene, and the weapon that was used, and this is the information that the students need to find.
11. Next, randomly hand out all the other items to the teams. Each team should get two weapons, two crime scenes, and two suspects. Make sure they keep their information secret from the other teams.

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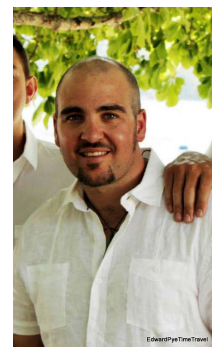
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12. Explain to the students that their goal is to find the three pieces of information that you put in your pocket. They now have two items from each category, so they can eliminate those things from their lists. Give teams three or four minutes to talk together and make sure they all understand what their items are.
  13. They then have to eliminate the other things from each category by questioning students from other teams about their items. Have the students stand up and go around the class meeting students from other teams to question them about their team's items.
  14. There is one rule here. The students cannot simply go to another student and ask "Does your team have the gun?" They must ask indirect yes/no questions by describing the item. They can ask three yes/no questions; for example, "Does your team have a weapon that is made of metal?" If the student answers "yes" then the student can ask another question "Does your team have a weapon that can shoot bullets?" and finally "Is it a gun?"
  15. By getting a yes answer, the student knows that that team has that weapon, and thus this is not the actual murder weapon (because the actual weapon is in the teacher's pocket.)
  16. If the student gets a "no" answer they must change partners.
  17. Give everyone about 10-15 minutes to go around and question students from other teams about their items. The goal with this part of the activity is to get students interacting and describing items with as much accuracy as possible. This reinforces vocabulary and understanding of the characteristics of the vocabulary.
  18. When that time is up, tell them to go back to their teams and compare the information they have found. Most teams will not have found all the answers because their initial attempts will have been disorganized. Tell them that you are going to give them five more minutes, but this time,

tell them to make a plan. Perhaps one student only asks about weapons, one only about crime scenes, and the other, only about suspects.

19. When the five minutes is up, have them come back together in their teams and compare again to see if they found the answers that are in your pocket. They may have found the exact answer, or they may have narrowed it down to two or three choices. If they still have possible choices, they have to take a guess.
20. Have the teams write down on a piece of paper what they think are the actual three pieces of information. Collect them, and write them up on the board next to their team name.
21. Now it's time to reveal the actual answers and see which team was the best at investigating. The team that has the most correct answers is the winner.

This is the murder version, but it can be done with many different topics. For something like travel, you can change the three categories to country, landmark, and holiday activity and then have students try to figure out what you did on your vacation. For medicine, you can do symptoms and then get them to try and figure out the actual sickness. The format can work in many different ways.

**Edward Pye** is a New Zealander with an English literature degree from Otago University. Before moving to British Columbia, he taught in South Korea for eight years. Since then, he has worked as an Educational Programmer on UBC's Okanagan campus and as an EAL instructor at Okanagan College.



## The 2015 “Climb for the Cause” was a HUGE Success!

by Jennifer Pearson Terrell



Shawna Williams, Scott Douglas, Takayuki Itoga, Nathan Hall, and Joyce White with the BC TEAL Banner after completing the 2015 “Climb for the Cause”



Fifty-two participants took part in the 2015 “Climb for the Cause - Grouse Grind”

Bright and early on Sunday September 21st, 2015, fifty-two climbers took part in the most successful “Climb for the Cause” ever. The “Climb” is held annually in support of awards for young refugees who have shown courage and determination adapting to a new language and a new culture in Canada. The awards provide opportunities for refugees to study in an academic or vocational program at a post-secondary institution in British Columbia.

This year’s “Climb for the Cause—Grouse Grind” saw a wide range of participants including adults and kids as well as out-of-towners from around the province. This year’s “Climb” also welcomed teams of English language instructors from the Immigrant Services Society

(ISS) and the English Language Institute at the University of British Columbia. In addition, our very own BC TEAL Administrative Manager, Sandra Boehm was the first woman to summit while the incredible Michael Galli completed the “Grind” no fewer than four times in a single morning. The 2015 “Climb for the Cause” raised an amazing total of over \$12,000 for the new Taiga Galli Refugee Award.

Our appreciation to “Climb for the Cause” Co-Chairs Andrea MacKenzie and Michael Galli and all the TCF Board members who helped make this year’s “Climb” a HUGE success!



Congratulations to the first three finishers in the 2015 “Climb for the Cause”—Stuart Reed, Vern Weber, and BC TEAL’s Sandra Boehm



Michael Galli, who summited four times, and Nathan Hall, the 2015 BC Conference Co-Chair, celebrating the 2015 “Climb for the Cause”



## Bridging the Gap: Curriculum Renewal and Alignment

*by Jas Gill (winner of the Nan Poliakoff Memorial Award) and Susan Curtis*

I was honored to receive the Nan Poliakoff Memorial Award to attend TESOL 2015 in Toronto in March of this past year. In my early work with BC TEAL, I had the pleasure of working with Nan Poliakoff in a number of capacities, and I always admired her professionalism and her commitment to our field. The annual TESOL convention provided me with the opportunity to build on my past experience and learn more about current research and practice in the field of second language teaching. I also presented a paper which Susan Curtis and I originally presented at TEAL 2014. Our presentation was on a long term curriculum renewal process that the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of British Columbia embarked on three years ago. The title of the paper was “Bridging the Gap – Curriculum Renewal and Alignment.”

Over the course of the conference, I also completed a certificate in the area of English language teaching (ELT) leadership. As part of a new initiative in the area of professional development for its members, TESOL offers an [ELT Leadership Management Certificate Program](#) to ELT professionals from various organizations and institutions. The program consists of a full day session on leadership and management fundamentals and two elective workshops chosen from the following: Financial planning, hiring, effective meetings, team building, and time management strategies. Joining ELT professionals from a range of organizations and institutions, it was interesting to find common threads applicable to each of us. The sessions were comprehensive and provided me with many practical ideas that I have been able to apply directly to my work. TESOL offers a range of certificate programs both at the annual convention and in a variety of other formats. I would highly recommend these to all ELT professionals.

It is always overwhelming to decide on which sessions to attend at TESOL as there are dozens in each time slot. This year, I decided on a bit of a different strategy and rather than attending sessions in a wide range of areas, I focused on a few topics that were most relevant to my current work—curriculum, professional development, and program administration. This approach made the task of choosing sessions much easier, as I was able to choose by relevant content areas. The presentation that Susan Curtis and I prepared encompassed the above areas and I’d like to outline this presentation here rather than providing an overview of the sessions I attended at TESOL.

### Curriculum Renewal and Alignment Project

The goal of the curriculum renewal project at the University of British Columbia’s English Language Institute (ELI) was to review our curriculum and assessment tools to better align our program with internationally recognized proficiency exams, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB). The impetus behind this project was the growing need to situate the ELI programs more clearly in an international context and to ensure that the ELI’s Certificate in English Language (600 exit level) was equivalent to UBC’s other English language admission standards. Over the previous ten years, we had conducted smaller curriculum revisions, but the overall framework had not undergone a comprehensive review. With the changes to our student population, a greater interest in English for academic purposes, and an increase in students who were admitted to UBC on the condition of passing our 600 level, we felt that a complete overhaul was necessary.



*Continued on page 20*





In the initial stage of the project, we compiled a curriculum team of three instructors, each responsible for a skill area (reading, writing, listening/speaking), to review the existing curriculum and work with our administrative team to make recommendations for changes. In the research stage, we reviewed international exams such as IELTS, TOEFL, and the Cambridge ESOL suite of exams and the learning outcomes outlined in the CEFR and CLB. We also researched the work of international associations such as EAQUALS in expanding the CEFR descriptors for English at the different levels (see the [Core Inventory for English](#)). Based on this research, the curriculum outcomes for the Intensive English Program (IEP) were then revised and the [program levels were aligned](#) to the relevant proficiency exams, the CEFR, and CLB.

Changes in the curriculum led to a review of the program structure and a new English for academic purposes (EAP) program was established. With two distinct programs and a new curriculum now in place, there was a need to produce new standardized midterm and final exams, adjust placement tests and procedures, and revise marking rubrics for speaking and writing. This process started with the writing of exam specifications and was followed by exam writing sessions where instructors gathered to write new exams in all skill areas. The change in the learning outcomes and assessment tools also required new standardized student course descriptions and a complete review of the text books and resources for each course. For most courses, new texts were chosen to match the realigned levels. Along with these changes came the need to reorganize our resource library with new categories. We used the opportunity to cull old titles, relabel books and update our database.

There are always challenges when an organization takes on such a large review process. A tremendous amount of time was invested in the old curriculum and faculty were very familiar with the expected learning outcomes and resources. The key to achieving the deliverables set out in the new curriculum was to set a time line that was well paced, so that all instructors were able to comfortably adjust to the new levels and expected outcomes. Significant resources were also allocated to a long term project that required a commitment at all levels of the institute. Throughout the process there was extensive faculty consultation,

and piloting of the new curriculum and assessment tools was critical.

Now, three years after the start of our Curriculum Revision Project, we have a renewed confidence in the clearly articulated levels in our IEP program, a new EAP program for upper-level students, and a new set of assessment tools. We recognize, however, that what we began three years ago will continue on in the years to come; the curriculum process is never complete. Going forward, we need to set in place measures to ensure that our program stays in alignment with other UBC English language admission standards and be alert to any signs of slipping. UBC is monitoring the progress of our conditionally admitted students as they move through their degree programs to see how they compare with other international students admitted to first year UBC programs; so far, our students' success has shown us that we're on the right track.

The presentation was very well received at TESOL as organizations across North America are embarking on a similar exercise of aligning their programs with internationally recognized exams and frameworks. When programs are aligned in this way, students benefit by being able to earn qualifications which are recognized across educational institutions, institutions are more easily able to place incoming students from other jurisdictions, and funding agencies are better equipped to identify qualified applicants to their programs.



**Jas Gill** is the Managing Director, Academic Programs at the English Language Institute, UBC. She has served on numerous conference committees and boards of professional ESL/EFL organizations and has taught in Kenya, Japan and the United Arab Emirates. Jas's professional interests include vocabulary acquisition, assessment, and teacher training.

**Susan Curtis** has taught at the ELI since 1991 and is currently a Head Instructor (IEP & EAP Programs). She has also taught in Japan, Singapore and Qatar. Her professional interests include corpus-based language studies, digital literacies, vocabulary acquisition, curriculum development, and assessment.





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# My Cambridge Delta Experience

*by Alex Inglis*

Only now, a few months after completing the Delta am I fully able to reflect on what I learned and did, and now I am beginning to implement some of the new techniques I learned. It is a huge relief it is all over, but now I would like to share my experiences with those who want to learn more about the course or those interested in taking it. The Delta is a diploma in teaching English to speakers of other languages developed by Cambridge English Language Assessment, which is a part of the University of Cambridge. I won't give a description of the course itself as this information can be found on the Cambridge English website ([www.cambridgeenglish.org](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org)), but I will briefly describe what I learned, how my teaching beliefs and practices have changed, and give some suggestions for those interested in doing the course.

I took the course over a three year period from December 2012 to this past summer. One advantage to taking the Delta is that you can complete the modules in any order you want and you can take as long as you need. I completed modules 1 and 3 straight away while I was managing a local school in Vancouver. However, to be ready for the second module, I travelled and went back into the classroom. Two years later, I enrolled on module 2.

It is here where I got the most out of the course. This is not to say I didn't get anything out of the other two modules. Module 1 gave me the opportunity to brush up on current research, methods, and theory. I also loved the textbook analysis aspect of the module. It was fun dissecting exercises and activities to learn about the aim and theory behind them. I also fell in love with pronunciation and discovered a new found appreciation for the IPA. Module 3 gave me the opportunity to design a course, which was both challenging and interesting. One thing it did teach me was that knowing your learners and completing a thorough needs analysis is vital to any successful


course plan (and any class for that matter). Both modules 1 and 3 were tough but the toughest was to come.

Everything I had heard about Module 2 was true. It was a monster, and it certainly pushed me to my limits. I went in with my eyes wide open and was well-advised before embarking on the course to see this module as a process. Module 2 really challenged my ideas about my own teaching. I thought my teaching was learner-centered and that I created a supportive learning environment in which all students thrived. I thought personality, energy, and building rapport were hallmarks to good teaching. I thought I was flexible and able to adjust my teaching and lessons to the emerging needs of my students. I thought all these things, and they were true to some degree, but they alone were not enough. The Delta has a good way of pushing you beyond your comfort zone.

A portion of the course is dedicated to a professional development reflection paper. I found this to be a very rewarding process. It allowed me to see that my biggest problem lay in my ambitious planning and the quantity of material I wanted to get into a lesson. This had a knock on effect with everything that happened in my lessons. Because I planned too much, this made timing tight, which didn't allow me or the students to study the language or skill with the necessary precision and depth. It also meant I rushed through activities, which meant I was not working at the pace of every student, but moving with the fastest ones. To compensate, I ended up speaking too much, thus shutting down potential learner contributions and emerging language. Doing module 2 forced me to both recognize and find ways to resolve these issues.

Upon completion of the course and after taking the above areas into consideration, I have tried various techniques in my lessons. I have tried to be more

*Continued on page 23*



inclusive by asking for broader input from different students in order to stop me from moving on after the first response. I have also engaged the class in whole discussion sequences, where different responses and answers are discussed. I have noticed a slightly slower pace in my lessons, thus making sure the whole class moves as one. I have also tried to keep my instructions and explanations more concise by scripting these beforehand. Most importantly, I have tried to relinquish some control and lessen my role to slow down and focus on the learners' needs as they are happening in the moment. To summarize, I have attempted to allow the learning to happen instead of forcing it to happen.

Revisiting my core beliefs as a teacher from earlier stages in the course, they have not changed too much, but the way I use these to inform my teaching has. I do believe teaching should be learner-centered, engaging, and dynamic, but how I do this now has become clearer. It means slowing down, not being over-organized, balancing participation among learners, but at the same time knowing when to intervene on behalf of the students to bring out their best and to demand more from them.

Finally, and most importantly, the Delta has taught me to look closely at why I do things in class and to always have a reason for doing something. I also try new things on a more regular basis. For example, cuisenaire rods and drilling are underrated teaching tools, and if done appropriately can add great value to any classroom setting. I certainly feel more confident in my teaching. My advice to anyone wanting to take the Delta is to make sure it is what you want. There will be some tough times and you will have to remind yourself as to why you are doing the course. Next, read, read, and then read some more! Also, be organized. And finally, build a network of family, friends, and people you know who have completed either the Delta or an MA. They're most important and they'll help you get through. I know they helped me!



**Alex Inglis** has been working within the field of EAL since 2008 and has experience in both teaching and management. He holds a M.Sc. in Comparative and International Education from Oxford University and has taught in Vancouver, the United Kingdom, Chile, and Uganda. He is now teaching at a language school in Vancouver.

# My Experience with English: The Game of Chutes and Ladders



by Natalia Balyasnikova

Drawing inspiration from Suresh Canagarajah's article titled *Teacher development in a global profession: An autoethnography* (Canagarajah, 2012), in this article I examine my own journey from an English language classroom at a Russian school to a teaching English as a second language (TESL) doctoral program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). I see my academic life experiences as a process of socialisation to various communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that shapes who we are and what we do.

### At the start

I started learning English at the age of 11, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As I was learning new strange sounds and words, the country around me was changing. Perestroika brought new hopes and excitement for the people, along with the confusion and loss of all existing social and educational paradigms. English was not among my favourite subjects in school. I was not a good student, and my teachers had nothing nice to say to me. "She will never speak a foreign language because she doesn't understand the rules," I overheard one of my teachers telling my mother. The teaching methodology heavily relied on the grammar-translation method, with very little emphasis on practice. Even younger learners memorized densely worded grammatical rules formulated by Soviet linguists, and failing to repeat the rule word by word resulted in low grades. Very little attention was paid to students' individual learning styles, visual support, group work, and creative tasks. The results of this teaching philosophy for me were devastating: after completing six years of English language courses in

school, my proficiency was limited to memorized dialogues, poems, and short monologues about my family, my hobbies, and myself. I felt zero confidence in speaking because I was terrified of making a mistake. The label of "not capable" has become a part of my learner identity and I have struggled to prove otherwise.

### Going up a ladder...

In 1996, my mother took me to the USA, where she was working as a visiting professor at Brown University. I arrived in the US without any background knowledge about this country. Because of my limited English language proficiency, I attended special classes with other ESL students. Our classes were nothing but fun,

and I enjoyed coming to class. It was a safe space, free from direct judgment. In contrast to my previous experience, this community was democratic and free from "negative labelling" (Labov, 1982). This is where I learned the power of positive reinforcement

and a collaborative learning environment, where everything from posters on the walls to stickers used for grading were designed to increase students' interest and motivation. This pedagogical model had its own impact on me. While I felt like an outsider during the lunch break, I thrived in my ESL classes and saw this education as a fun after school club where we played games and sang songs.

### ...or down a chute?

My return to Russia was traumatic: I came back with an accent in my native language and giant gaps in my

*"It seemed that the rigor, efficiency  
and devotion to quality I had  
so admired in 1989 had been  
undermined" Rosabi (1991).*

*Continued on page 25*





theoretical knowledge about the English language. All those games and songs left me completely unprepared for the exams required to graduate from high school and enter university. I could speak, but I had a hard time with writing, spelling and grammar. I again felt incapable. I had to hit the books and cram for entrance exams. Has anything changed since I was in elementary school? Not much. This transformation from a fluent speaker to a struggling student wasn't easy and unfortunately my experience is not unique. Many returning students have to learn how to adapt to different educational systems and expectations and they have to do so very quickly.

### Climbing up...

When I graduated from university, brand new diploma in hand, I was a trained teacher. What that really meant was that I was, as Canagarajah writes, filled with a “blur of confusing terms and labels” (2012) of theories, methods, and approaches all mixed in together with extensive knowledge in literature, linguistics, history of the UK and the USA, comparative pedagogy, but little teaching practice. For me, having a solid theoretical knowledge in linguistics, psychology, theories of language acquisition, approaches to teaching, and classroom techniques was crucial to becoming a teacher. Recently, however, the increased mobility of many Russians, the possibilities of travelling to English speaking countries, and the influx of native-speakers have weakened the positions of theoretically trained, but less proficient professionals. This brought other issues to light, such as the quality of materials used for teaching, native-speaker privilege, and high labour turnover. I had two jobs: as a university instructor and as a teacher at a private language school. At the private language school where I worked, my students explicitly expressed that they needed to learn “survival English” for communicative purposes. I had to play the role of an English speaking, ever-happy entertainer, and a

guidebook for tourists. At university, I had to project an image of a serious, scholarly, reserved lecturer. Important lesson here—while the private sector of the EFL world in Russia was moving towards a client-service provider model in education, the formal education sector still valued “correct” British English, a “correct” way of teaching, and teachers’ authority in class. Learning to navigate between these two diverse communities was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. I have lived through the turning point in English language teaching in Russia and had to learn to navigate from the periphery to the centre of the community of practice at the same time when the community itself was undergoing a major change.

### ...and starting over

After 12 successful years as a teacher of English in Russia, I decided to come to Canada for a doctorate degree. I left my job, family, and friends to start a new chapter of my life in one of the best universities in the

*“A contemporary teacher of English in Russia is less educated theoretically and more pragmatically oriented” Ter-Minasova (2005)*

world. And again I am learning: new words, new literacies, and new ways of being. This learning process brings new questions. As a former teacher, I wonder if those of us, who return to the “battlefield” of teaching practice will ever be recognized for trying to implement all of our complex

theories in their classrooms. Nevertheless, I am hopeful. I have been fortunate to experience different teaching systems, styles, and methods. The fact that as a child I had been exposed to different styles of teaching, allowed me to develop my own teaching practice by calling on all my lived experience. Therefore, my learner’s story can provide yet another argument in favor of the exchange of experiences and the collaborative search for best practices. Had my teachers been exposed to other teaching philosophies or given freedom to experiment with alternative approaches to teaching, my learner’s identity would have been formed in a very different way. However, years of formal training in linguistics, history, and literature are helping me in my studies in graduate



*Continued on page 26*

school. This is another message I am hoping to send by sharing my story: learn from your students; talk to your colleagues, especially those who come from other countries, and most importantly don't be discouraged if you find yourself at the starting point again. Never stop learning and this transformation will be a ladder you can use to climb up again.

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Natalia moved to Canada in 2013 to pursue her degree in TESL with a focus on adult education, community-based research and intercultural communication.

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# My Experience of Learning to Read and Write Farsi as L1 and English as L2: A Long-haul Journey to Bilingualism

*by Raheb Zohrehfard*

As an English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as an additional language (EAL) teacher, reading and writing constitute an essential part of my daily professional life. Yet it is baffling how I first acquired these skills. In an attempt to write this narrative essay, I intend to review and delve more closely into my literacy practices and educational endeavor as a learner of English. Doing so also gives me an opportunity to describe the obstacles I have conquered and the successes I have accomplished throughout the years. My current status as a graduate student in a university in Canada as well as my position as an EAL teacher in a language school requires me to engage in learning about current theories about second language acquisition (SLA), reading and writing academic papers, giving presentations and teaching EAL to adult speakers of other languages who come to Canada for all kinds of reasons. As such, my present reading and writing activities gravitate more toward English than Farsi and more toward academic than non-academic texts. Currently, I have little time to read for pleasure and except for texting telegraphic messages, I do not write to friends and family. Although the predominant language that I use now is English, I am more adept at and more comfortable with reading and writing in my first language in general. This is perhaps thanks to the fact that all my reading and writing activities from elementary school to high school were in my first language. However, interestingly enough, when it comes to reading science or literature books, I am a more fluent reader and writer in English. This is perhaps because I majored in English language and literature, and I read and analyzed many demanding works of literature as part of my course assignments as a bachelor's student back in my home country, Iran.

I received my primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Iran. My educational background may not be largely different from what most other peers of mine experienced in the 1980s. In fact, there is a large population of people my own age who are still sharing some nostalgic memories of the past—the kinds of stationery we used, the storybooks we used to enjoy reading, and our favorite characters we used to talk a lot about at school. Not only did I engage in various reading and writing activities at school, but I was also surrounded by a very rich environment for literacy at home. I began to study EFL when I was in the seventh grade (the second grade of junior high school) and I continued to take English courses until I graduated from a four-year program at a university in Iran. However, it was not until four years ago, when I had a chance to take the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and more recently September 2014 when I immersed myself in an English-speaking environment, that I continued to develop advanced oral and written skills in English. Although this was a late start to develop advanced second language (L2) proficiency, I believe that the first language (L1) literacy at home and in school served as a foundation for my acquisition of L2 literacy.

### My L1 Literacy Development

My experience in reading and writing began as I entered a public elementary school in my city Shiraz in 1986. When I was a child, my mother and my older sisters used to read to me children's books with colorful illustrations. My sisters read bedtime stories of which "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "The Rolling Pumpkin,"

*Continued on page 28*



as far as my dim and distant memory serves, were my favorites. There was no formal instruction in reading and writing when I was in kindergarten for a year, but I do remember my teachers reading stories to us. My formal education in reading and writing is still very vivid in my mind. It all began by introducing the Farsi alphabet in very short contextualized stories, followed up by much writing practice. As we proceeded to the following chapters, the stories became longer, and we were also introduced to contemporary Persian poems along with new vocabulary and word family exercises after each lesson. The eight-year war between Iran and Iraq broke out when I was three months old, and by the time I was in grade 2, my education was interrupted. During this time, the education I received was mainly through television programs. Farsi language learning in elementary school included mechanical exercises. Writing reports on scientific observations in elementary school and science labs in middle school and high school were also another part of the education I received where the scientific and linguistic accuracy of the reports were tested. Writing was an important part of my education in both essay exams on a number of subject matters such as social sciences, history, biology, geology, as well as Farsi dictation.

## My Experiences of Learning English as L2

The English language instruction that I received from the seventh grade in a public school through to my undergraduate program was probably quite similar to that of other students in the 1990s. As a seventh grader, I had already developed a significant level of L1 literacy and metalinguistic awareness, which I think facilitated my learning of L2. However, since the instructional emphasis in English classes tended to be on grammar and vocabulary and there were only a few opportunities to use English for real purposes, my English proficiency developed very slowly during the middle school and high school years.

My level of motivation kept oscillating. On the one hand, I was very motivated to learn English and become a fluent speaker, and on the other hand I did not feel I was making progress. My excessive desire to learn English pushed me to work twice as hard as

other students as I always imagined myself to be a professional English speaker living in North America. I now realize how notions of investment, agency, and imagined identity (Norton, 1995; 2011) played significant roles in my learning experience. I started using the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and in less than six months I learned how to use the dictionary, grasped the phonetic rules, and was able to use vocabulary definitions in English. Reading, grammar, and vocabulary were the primary focus, and writing was mostly practised through translating isolated sentences from Farsi to English or vice versa. Having entered university, I was fortunate to work as an English teacher for a local private language institute. This was the time I started to develop a passion for teaching English. Drawing on my past experience as a learner and meanwhile reading Larsen Freeman's (1986) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* as part of the bachelor's program at my university helped me delve into issues of teaching and learning and served as a basis for determining my future identity and community, of which I am still an active member.

By the time I completed my first degree in English language and literature, I already had four years of teaching experience in an EFL context. However, whereas I was enjoying teaching English, I was still grappling with theories formulated around teaching while I was acquiring quite a taste in understanding how theories can be put into practice as well as how practice can be theorized (Kumaravadivelu, 2005). My interest in and gradual predilection toward theory made me decide to take a fast-track training course called CELTA in Chiang Mai, a northern city in Thailand, hoping I could face more challenges in both evaluating my English in a native-English speaking environment and simultaneously deepening my insight into the practical side of theory. Surrounded by English speakers from England, the US, Australia, and Scotland, I studied the principles of effective teaching (Scrivener, 2011), gained a range of practical skills for teaching English to adults as well as young learners, and got valuable hands-on teaching experience for different teaching contexts. I also realized that teaching EAL would be more rewarding for me and beneficial to others.

*Continued on page 29*





## Conclusions and Implications

As a child who grew up in Iran during the 1980s and 1990s, I had a rich experience in L1 literacy, both at home and in school. I was always surrounded by books and was given ample opportunities to express myself in writing for both academic and social purposes. A foundation for academic literacy skills was built through language activities in elementary, middle, and high school, such as extensive reading, report writing, and copying from text books, which might have helped me develop metalinguistic awareness for analyzing structures of written language and discourse.

In theory, I would have been able to transfer my L1 literacy skills to L2 while I was growing up. However, I did not develop my advanced literacy skills in English until later in my life because of a lack of immediate needs for using English. What helped me develop L2 literacy in reading and writing were immersion experiences in the target language where immediate needs were present. Arranging get-togethers in coffee shops and in places before and after classes definitely helped me enhance my fluency in both speaking and writing. Reading literary works such as novels, short stories, and literary criticism, and writing comments and analysis as group activities and course assignments paved the way for the development of my academic reading and writing skills. I believe that learning is a long-haul journey, and I believe that my proficiency and fluency hinges very much on the degree to which I manage to socialize myself into academia (Duff, 2010; Kim & Duff, 2012), and the feedback I receive in terms of style and mechanics of my written production. Reflecting on my own experience as both a learner and a teacher, I learn much better from my mistakes and repetition of the correct forms.

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**Raheb Zohrehfard** is an MEd (TESL) graduate from the University of British Columbia. Having come to Canada as an international student, he completed his Master's degree while working as an EAL teacher in the International Language Academy of Canada. His sphere of interest lies at the confluence of sociolinguistics and immigrant language learning and integration.



## Twitter for Professional Growth

*by Nathan Hall*

Twitter is a strange creature: vilified by some, while lauded by others. My journey in Twitter began with a mix of curiosity and trepidation. I was required to join as part of my Master's program, but my account sat dormant for many months. Thinking I had nothing to share, I chose to simply follow others from whom I felt I could learn.

Fifteen months later, I still hadn't tweeted and I felt it was time for me to either close my account or bring it to life. That was January 2012, and my New Year's resolution was to start a blog and to use Twitter to share my posts in hopes of connecting with others. Not knowing what to post on my blog, I took inspiration from a technology blog I regularly read, Daring Fireball. This site uses short commentaries along with links to news articles and websites that discuss Apple products. The posts are short and simple, while still adding a bit of personality and reflection. I started up a website, found a news article I thought was interesting, and posted a commentary along with a quote and a link to the original article. With that completed, out went my first tweet.

Not surprisingly, I didn't even get a single reply, but it managed to give me confidence to tweet more. The proverbial ice was broken and I felt free to share more openly. Slowly, I made more connections as I learned how to use hashtags, followed people who were tweeting on subjects I cared about, and participated in Twitter chats. My blogging began to evolve as I started creating my own content instead of just commenting on what others had written. Over time, I met some of my fellow tweeters at conferences and workshops, creating instant friendships with many of them. Eventually, tweeting became more natural and less contrived. Most of all, I grew as a teaching professional. The act of reflection forced me to consider, and often reconsider, what I knew or believed to be true about language teaching, and by sharing that with others, the act became reciprocal.

For those of you who are where I was back in January 2012, deciding whether to join Twitter or not, allow me to share some of my ideas about how you can use Twitter to grow your Personal Learning Network (PLN).

1. **Be yourself:** One of the things I learned from others is to allow people to see the real you. Dean Shareski, an educator and trainer from Regina, created a video "warning" others that he would be tweeting about life, work, and everything in between. Just as in an office, school, or any other workplace, we don't just talk shop; we share about what is happening in our lives. Education does not define me, even if it is something I deeply care about.

You might not be comfortable sharing personal information online, which is understandable, but you don't need to share too much. Be willing to open little windows into others areas of your life so people can connect with you on a personal level. We all hate the major disconnect we feel when we communicate with a large business. It might be their automated phone system, or form emails we receive in reply. We feel connected through personal means of communication. That's how I feel about Twitter. The joy is in the connections, not just the content.

2. **Don't be afraid to copy:** I'm not advocating plagiarism here, I'm simply suggesting that if you don't know how to tweet or blog, find someone who does and then emulate their techniques or style until you create your own. That is what I did with my blogging, eventually creating my own writing style. It is also what I did with my tweets. I found people who were more experienced on Twitter and I watched how they interacted with others and worked within the confines of this medium.

*Continued on page 31*

3. **Join in:** For me, the most rewarding aspect of Twitter is making connections with people from around the world. I experience this the most during conference live-tweets and twitter chats. When I first started live-tweeting at conferences, I was amazed at how well this tool allows people from around the world to join in with those who are physically attending the conference. It enhances my own experience at the conference by forcing me to condense what I am learning into manageable, bite-sized pieces. On top of that, it gives me the opportunity to take part in other sessions I am unable to attend.

I also love participating in Twitter chats. These are scheduled times when people tweet using a single hashtag, such as #LINCchat. People share ideas, links, problems, and questions on a single topic. These live, online discussions are also a time to find like-minded people to follow. You can go back over the tweets by searching the hashtag, even if you were unable to attend during the live chat.

Twitter is not magic, nor will it make you into a better teacher. What it will do is give you a voice and connections to those whom you would normally never have the opportunity to meet. It is a venue in which the conversation can happen. What you do in that space is entirely up to you.

**Nathan Hall** is an Instructional Resource Coordinator for LISTN, an EAP instructor and TESL Trainer for Douglas College, and a Community Coordinator for Tutela. He is a member of both the BC TEAL board and the TESL Canada Research and Outreach Committee. He is an avid blogger and Twitter user in the areas of language teaching and educational technology. You can find out more at [info.nathanhall.ca](http://info.nathanhall.ca).



BC TEAL event during EAL Week in the Thompson region was well attended.



# Writing Contest: BC TEAL Vancouver Island Region

*Organized by Jennifer Peachy, BC TEAL Vancouver Island  
Regional Representative*

As part of EAL Week in British Columbia, BC TEAL's Vancouver Island Region held a writing contest. Submissions were judged anonymously by BC TEAL members from off-island. Here are the winners.

## **FIRST PLACE**

(Prize: \$250 Amazon Gift Certificate)

### **Motivation, Improvisation, Innovation**

*by Beth Konomoto (Victoria)*

Whenever I think about motivation, I always think back to the teachers that motivated me. Most of these teachers were my music teachers. They had to be engaged in what they were teaching otherwise the purpose of communicating through the music was simply lost. I feel like EAL is a lot like a music group practising for a show. It's a balancing act between great planning and acting in the moment. But, just like improvisation in jazz music, you need to know the rules before you can break them. So, I always try to talk and listen to other teachers who do things better than I do. I find them here at various schools in Victoria, or at conferences, or more often now—in the great big world online. Once I start using an idea in class, I personalize it for the students I'm teaching and for myself. If there is meaning in what we do every day, it gives us pleasure and motivation to continue, no matter how small the meaning may seem. This meaningful feeling comes and goes, just like the chorus of a song. Keep working hard; the chorus will come around again.

*Teaching EAL in Victoria at Camosun  
and UVic keeps **Beth Konomoto** busy  
and happy.*



*Continued on page 33*





## SECOND PLACE

(Prize: \$100 Amazon Gift Certificate)

### Selected Haiku

*by Alison Brown (Victoria)*

Inspired by the Japanese written art form, the haiku, I have composed these using some of the typical yet endearing experiences that we, as EAL teachers, face on a daily basis.

#### *Teaching Toys*

Strong scent and not cheap  
The smell of the whiteboard pen  
Wish they'd last longer

#### *Lesson Planning Support*

I need a fun game  
To teach this boring grammar  
Colleagues always share

#### *About Hearing Cute Mistakes*

Ask about weekend  
"I was potato sofa"  
English is so hard

#### *Not Just Traditional Studying*

Learning can be fun  
Festivals, food, music, dance  
Language is culture

#### *Feedback We Won't Soon Forget*

Handwritten letter  
"I lost the shame in your class"  
Happiness and tears

#### *Finding the Perfect Activity in Time*

Minimal prep time  
It's photocopiable  
Lesson starts in 10

#### *Grammar Questions*

Difficult question  
Where should I check for answers?  
Azar, blue bible

#### *A Last One about Whiteboard Pens*

Most days: blue, black, red  
Today is special... purple  
Excitement ensues

#### *The Perfect International Class*

Class teaches itself  
Everyone gets along well  
Sadness when it ends:

**Alison Brown** is an ESL/Science teacher with 13 years' experience teaching in Canada, Japan, China, Mexico, and Kazakhstan.



*Continued on page 34*



### THIRD PLACE

(\$100 Chapters Gift Certificate)

#### What Motivates Me as an EAL Teacher

*by Pearl Fredericksen (Nanaimo)*

What is it that makes my face light up, and gives me that little surge of inner joy when I am teaching?

It is seeing a student's face light up when they learn something that is meaningful to them, that will be useful to them in their walk of life.

Sometimes it is something I realize is important for the student to learn, even though the student has not yet realized it. Although the student may not respond favourably in the moment, I foresee that they will appreciate it later.

It is the sharing and understanding of minds and hearts. It is hitting on a topic that touches our emotions, and assisting students to express themselves.

It is that special unique dynamic between teacher and student(s) that boils up into a stimulating atmosphere. It can seem magical.

It is also the sharing with other EAL professionals, the joys and difficulties that we encounter, laughing together, encouraging each other, and sharing ideas.

What motivates me as an EAL teacher? All of the above and more. Teaching EAL is more than a career, it is a motive of my heart.



**Pearl Fredericksen** has taught EAL in Taiwan, China, the Vancouver area, and Nanaimo. Currently she is living in Nanaimo and enjoying tutoring her homestay students over the supper table.

### FOURTH PLACE

(Prize: \$50 Amazon Gift Certificate)

#### Best Practice Equals Motivation

*by William Moore (Nanaimo)*

For best practice to take place the first requirement is understanding your specialization and your role. Only with an ongoing “needs analysis” can this best practice be extended through the semester—year—career. Just as music has rhythm and beat, so too your practice must have these expressed as routines and workload variations including variety, the unexpected, and the anticipated. It isn't enough to teach and test—practice, practice, practice to the beat of the drum. But by far the most important ingredient in this musical melee is to enjoy the experience. Your enjoyment will be reflected back at you tenfold as your students discover that you are not evil or cruel, or worse—disinterested. Feet on the ground dancing to the drum—hands shaking hands, twirling partners, careful exuberance. Both leading and following as students find their way through the mind of an educated person to realize their ability to cope with newness, with knowledge, with both outward and inward struggle. Explore the unknown with your companions in the search for truth, and your students will teach you more than you could ever anticipate. That is “best practice,” producing “motivation” for all.



**William Moore** is a grammarian. He eats grams—about 200 every meal. His passion is developing alternate explanations of English grammar. Twenty plus years of teaching has resulted in some amazing insights.

# From Resistance to Resistentialism in the Classroom: Technological Solutions

*by Mark Rosvold*

The transformation of classroom challenges has rapidly shifted in the last few decades to include the technological aspect of resistentialism. So with teachers facing this additional barrier, the BC TEAL Tech Talk held in Kelowna as part of EAL Week was both pertinent and encouraging. Yet, before the BC TEAL event and the strange idea of resistentialism can be discussed, some historical context is in order.

In the 20th century, the world saw war and conflict on a scale previously unseen. Whether it was the tyranny of dictators or the explosive response manifest in the atom bomb, the previous century was one of epic change and fear. From this fear burgeoned the Cold War and with it came extraordinary levels of competition.

While their parents worked on assembly lines, children of the 1950s sat in their desks, learning arithmetic and grammar for longer periods of time than ever before (Smith, 2012). Taxed and pressured to perform, resistance crept in under the cloak of hyperactivity. Where the Huckleberry Finns of the past may have been treated with leniency, their competency was now rigidly monitored and demanded (Smith, 2012). Yet try as the pedagogical system did, children still had energy and continued to resist under such expectations.

Similar high expectations sometimes appear to be ubiquitous when it comes to English language learning as well. For this, teachers must only look to the importance placed on various standardized English language tests that rank EAL students, and the pressures EAL students face to acquire English, and educational credentials, and subsequent careers.

Over the past few decades, the challenges teachers have faced with student resistance to high demands have transformed and become interwoven with

greater complexity: resistentialism. This term was initially used to describe resistance to someone's efforts by inanimate objects. Yet as technology's presence increases in the classrooms, teachers have become aware that they sometimes face resistance in the classroom.

For teachers face it not only on a personal level when they have to think on their feet and find tech solutions mid-lecture, they also have to deal with it alongside the resistance they may receive from their students. This means that from time to time teachers may now be facing a certain number of students with resistant behaviour, who are expected to perform in highly demanding systems, with technological barriers and hiccups on top of that. So, what can be done to ameliorate some of these challenges?

Some ideas to address the issue of resistentialism could be found in the recent Tech Talk that was part of the BC TEAL Okanagan Region activities for EAL Week. At this talk, Crystal Nykilchuk and Jeanie Ortis spoke about tech solutions to some problems faced in the classroom.

With virtually every student in a classroom holding a phone, one of the biggest barriers to providing moments of education lies in drawing attention away from their personal screens. It is almost as if the role of teacher has morphed into becoming an educator capable of entertaining and holding the focus of a generation that has a world of distraction at their fingertips.

Thankfully tech savvy minds out there have created tools to assist teachers in this task. A great example shared by Crystal Nykilchuk is Prezi ([www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)). Showing its intuitive nature and sharing that it was

*Continued on page 36*

designed by an architect and artist, Crystal revealed Prezi to be both simple and imminently useful with its visual versatility and manipulability. Of course, during the demonstration, resistentialism poked its head in and sprinkled the room with a touch of technical issues because of the Wi-Fi connection. Not fazed, Crystal problem solved with Bernardo Souza, the sales representative from Oxford University Press, and moved forward; the one thing that resistentialism cannot thrive around is determination. So, when technology decides to be fickle, the only response is perseverance alongside basic technical knowledge.

Finally, as the event was wrapping up, Jeanie Ortis provided an excellent little gem for EAL instructors that quickly rivets students' attention. Playing a game through Kahoot!, an educational website ([www.getkahoot.com](http://www.getkahoot.com)), the entire group was actively and energetically involved. A highly competitive and interactive game, it requires each student to use their personal device in order to play. Beyond being fun, it also allows instructors to track students' responses on a spreadsheet once the game has ended.

Although there will always be certain students who seem resistant to learning, the painful transformation from mere classroom resistance to resistentialism can be lessened. With tenacity, and technological innovation on the side of teachers, students are sure to benefit.



*Crystal Nykilchuk Presenting at EAL Week in Kelowna*

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# The Weight of Transformations

by Nathan J. Devos

“Transformation” is a word in the English lexicon that carries a lot of weight for me. Without opening a dictionary, my understanding of the word is as follows: Someone or something going through considerable change that involves alterations which might not be expected, cannot be reversed, and may be surprising to those observing from outside. In this case, positive transformations are exciting to watch and fascinating to be a part of, like watching a caterpillar transform into a butterfly or a small seed transform into a massive sunflower. Meanwhile, negative transformations, being equally complex, appear tragic, like the downward spiral of substance abuse. However, as I consider the word “transformation” further, less complicated and more positive images surface as well, like, for example, my childhood memory of a toy Transformer that I finally got one Christmas after begging for it for months. For me, this memory is also valuable as it helps me construct a complete understanding of what this word might actually mean. Maybe that is what makes these words so weighty, the basic fact that they can conjure up both complex explanations and humble images at the same time.

In order to connect transformation with second language learning, I think I need to include the word “identity” to build that bridge properly in my mind, however. Without considering identity in this process, a certain conceptual gap remains between how language learning may indeed be able to transform an individual. Like the word transformation, identity is a term that also requires some serious thinking and often cannot be explained quickly. Again, if I try to describe identity, I would say that it is something each person possesses and is profoundly intimate to what marks us as the individuals that we are. It additionally develops over time and is influenced deeply by family, culture, heritage, religion, and personal experiences. It might especially be the last of these factors, personal

experiences—and specifically for my reflection, learning a second/foreign language as an adult—which may cause a very noticeable transformation in a person. Indeed, many adult language learners can tell you that their identities and personal journeys of language learning are inextricably linked.

My own journey of foreign language learning and transformation began in 2003 when I moved to Europe to immerse myself in a new culture. I wanted to explore its history mostly and, by way of numerous detours, landed in a city in northern Germany, about an hour from Hannover. I believed naively then that I could quickly learn the language and travel around the country, passing myself off as a cosmopolitan and native speaker. However, I was just as hastily humbled as I sat in my first intensive basic German class and struggled to pronounce, “*Hallo, ich bin Nathan. Ich komme aus Kanada.*” From that moment on, a much deeper understanding and empathy grew within me as I recognized how extremely difficult yet transforming foreign language learning can be. I spent the next ten months—five hours per day and five days a week—with other immigrants from Turkey, Russia, Poland, Spain, Peru, Japan, and more, laboriously trudging through grammar, speaking, writing, listening, and reading tasks. I watched as some students aptly grasped phonemes, grammatical structures, and discourse conventions, while others painfully sank in the depth of these. A small handful quickly gained confidence and pushed the teachers to move on. Meanwhile, others merely stopped attending or hung their heads in class, hoping the teacher would never call their names. I also consciously recognized in this process how my identity had become extremely vulnerable. Where I used to feel confidence in my first language, perhaps being humorous, witty, deep, thoughtful, and well-spoken, I suddenly became timid, formal, serious, self-conscious, and exposed in my

*Continued on page 38*



second language. I lucidly remember the shock to my identity as people lost patience with me when I couldn't find the right words, sometimes snickered at their mispronunciation, or even looked outright confused when the sentences that I had strung together became illogical and incoherent. The humbling feelings of shame and embarrassment I experienced in these moments remain crystal clear in my mind to this day. However, I believe that it was with persistence and perseverance through such situations that a process of positive transformation through language learning did indeed occur within me.

Acquiring a truly bi- or multilingual identity can be a positive transforming process; however, not every speaker of another language gets to experience this. In total, I spent twelve years in Germany. After the language courses, I enrolled in a university, finished a Master's degree, went on to teach in a postsecondary institution, and completed my PhD. During this time, I was lucky enough to travel back and forth to BC on numerous occasions. It was during my travels that it became clear to me that I had transformed my monolingual identity into a bilingual one. Biliteracy and biculturalism gave me an amazing sense of feeling truly comfortable in two countries. By the same token, I consider myself very fortunate as my bilingual identity was openly received in Canada and Germany, something speakers of other less prestigious languages who have other cultures, races, and religions may never experience. Indeed, I know young people from the Middle East and Eastern Europe, just for examples, who have endured stigmatization and felt that they must linguistically assimilate to the point of almost forgetting their first language. Subsequently and over time, they experienced complicated feelings of neither being accepted in their country of residence nor in their country of heritage. This predicament is found not only in Europe, however. Upon returning to

Canada permanently this past summer, I have actively sought conversations with newcomers to Canada to share immigration experiences. Despite the majority of reports being positive, I am still saddened by some of the stories I hear. Rejection, unacceptance, or simply a dearth of open-mindedness and flexibility seemingly prevail in some institutions, irrespective of our present age of internationalization and globalization. I am disappointed when I hear these stories, mostly because I know how incredibly vulnerable one is as an adult language learner, yet at the same time how incredibly enriching transforming from a monolingual identity to an accepted bilingual identity can be. Thus, any unnecessary roadblocks set by others along this path can make this already arduous journey negative and more difficult.

In the end, the weight of the word "transformation" and its impact on individual personal experiences should not be taken lightly as language learners transform and acquire bi- or multilingual identities. Like the word itself, this process can be complex, and language teachers can play an important role in turning these journeys into positive memories of the past for those who chose to—or are even forced to—undertake this transformation.



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