



ORTESOL NEWS

OREGON TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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ORTESOL Participates in TESOL Advocacy Day 2012

Judit Szentirmay

TESOL Liaison for ORTESOL

On June 18-19, 2012 Judit Szentirmay (TESOL Liaison) joined over 40 other members of TESOL International Association in Washington, DC for TESOL Advocacy Day 2012. Now in its seventh year, the program featured a full day of briefings and activities around education legislation and advocacy, followed by a day of visits to congressional offices on Capitol Hill. With representatives from over 20 U.S. affiliates in attendance, the goals of Advocacy Day were not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for participants on elements of advocacy. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of approximately 100 representatives and senators. Below is her report of her experience at TESOL Advocacy Day.

As numerous policy issues are under consideration in the U.S. Congress, the agenda included topics for both K-12 and adult education. To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. This year, I met with staff from the offices of the Oregonian senators and representatives: Laura Berntsen Legislative Assistant for Senator Ron Wyden, Matthew A. Traylor Legislative Aid for Senator Jeff Merkley, Stephanie Phillips Legislative Assistant/Legislative Correspondent for Congressman Earl Blumenauer and Carly Katz, the Legislative Assistant for Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici to discuss several issues of English as a second language (ESL) instruction under the recently introduced Workforce Investment Improvement Act (WIA) of 2012 (H.R.4297). During the brief meetings, I focused on the importance of programs that serve low-level and degree seeking ESL students, the reauthorization and expansion of English Literacy and Civics Education Program (EL Civics), and the need of adequate funding for these programs, for professional development of instructors, and for creating more full-time positions in the field.

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Judit Szentirmay with Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici

To fully prepare for Advocacy Day, each participant was required to do several things in advance. For example, participants had to set up their own individual meetings with their Congressional representatives. To assist with this, TESOL International Association provided directions and guidance, as well as the list of specific representatives and senators to contact. While TESOL International gave us a lead, it was a first for me and I was excited but also nervous to set up the appointments. Getting support and suggestions from Barbara Page (ORTESOL K-12 SIG, Advocacy Day 2011 attendee) made me feel more relaxed and confident. Through the scheduling process I learned that reaching the scheduler was important, but corresponding via email with the legislative assistants proved to be more fruitful. All the young assistants were very kind and helpful, but it took several calls and emails to get the appointments. Confirming these appointments a day before the meeting also helped me to feel more welcome. During the visits all the staffers were attentive and hospitable. Although it would have been even more empowering to meet with the actual senators and representatives, I decided to schedule an appointment with them in the Portland offices. I was honored to introduce myself to Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, exchange a few words with her about the purpose of her visit, and have an opportunity for having a photo taken with her.



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Participants were also sent talking points and background information on key issues so that we could begin to familiarize ourselves with the issues in advance. To help make our congressional meetings more effective, participants were also encouraged to find examples from our own programs to illustrate the talking points. I used examples from my own experience at MT Hood Community College and described the effectiveness of EL Civics, giving specific details that I had learned from Susan Kuhn, the coordinator of this program at MHCC.

The program started with three briefings from experts on key issues and legislation. The first briefing featured staff from the offices of Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) discussing what legislators know about ESL and ELLs, and what they need to hear from teachers. To discuss the current status of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), a staffer from the House Education and Workforce Committee was featured on the next panel. Dr. Rosalinda Barrera, director of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) at the U.S. Department of Education, closed out the morning with an update on the activities of her office.

During these briefings I learned that providing details and examples from the field could often help staffers and legislators see the effects of certain bills more clearly. Following these briefings, a series of activities were held to review aspects of the legislative process as well as how to prepare for meetings with members of Congress. Participants had the opportunity to role play as members of Congress in a mock hearing to discuss a piece of legislation, as well to have a mock debate on the floor of Congress to try and pass legislation. Participants were also provided key information to prepare for our meetings and given the opportunity to plan for those meetings. The purpose of these briefings and activities was to help the participants practice and prepare for our meetings on Capitol Hill that afternoon. The activities, including some mock meetings, helped me to build my presentation around a few important points that I was able to support with examples. Since the meetings would last for about 15 minutes, practicing delivering relevant information with a partner gave me a lot of confidence.

On June 19, participants went to Capitol Hill to have meetings with members of Congress and staff. I got familiar with the metro system and the location of the buildings on the Hill the previous day. Since I hate to be late, I wanted to give myself plenty of time before the first meeting. I was fortunate to have a comfortable schedule, except that the last appointment overlapped the previous one. Even though I was late for this meeting, I was welcomed warmly. I was impressed with all the staffers. They were not only hospitable, but knowledgeable as well. Most of them were very familiar with the issues regarding English language learners and assured me that they would report on my visit and continue supporting adult ESL education.

At the end of the day, the participants shared our experiences and what we learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit. After listening to other participants,

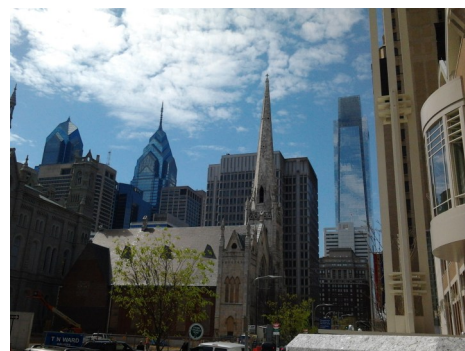


Participants at TESOL Advocacy Day 2012

-lish language learners and assured me that they would report on my visit and continue supporting adult ESL education.

At the end of the day, the participants shared our experiences and what we learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit. After listening to other participants, I understood even more so how fortunate I was representing Oregon where the legislators have been supportive of English language learners. Overall, all of the participants agreed this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL International Association. As a relatively new American citizen, I felt honored to be able participate in Advocacy Day 2012 and am planning to continue my advocacy to support English language learners in Oregon.

Additional information about TESOL Advocacy Day will be available soon online at <http://www.atesol.org>. If you are interested in learning more about your Congressional representatives current legislative issues, go the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at <http://icapwiz.com/atesol>. Please feel free to contact ORTESOL and your TESOL Liaisons (Judith Szentirmay and Katie Mitchell) with any questions regarding advocacy.



Ten Things That Really Do Work to Improve Student Pronunciation

John Runcie

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“There is really nothing that works.” This is the conclusion that many experienced ESOL teachers have come to when it comes to trying to improve student pronunciation. However, after many years of teaching Communication and Pronunciation classes, I have come to a different conclusion. This article will briefly review ten areas of focus which truly do help students improve their pronunciation and their abilities to communicate clearly.

When we talk about improving student pronunciation, I believe we should strive for results that are empirical, measurable, and definitive. If our classes are large, it may be impossible to monitor our students or give the individual attention they may need. Sometimes we also focus on things that are not reproducible outside the classroom or things that are difficult to measure. The result is that often our students leave our classes with the same issues and the instructors often feel like they are doing nothing more than chasing the wind. What we need is an integrated approach where we can monitor and encourage individual progress.

Learning to successfully communicate in a second language can be overwhelming if too many specifics are addressed. When I learned to play golf, I was overwhelmed with all the little things that I had to remember to do in order to hit the ball correctly. Put the ball a certain distance from an imaginary line running from the heel of your left foot; keep your eye on the ball; keep your left arm straight; keep your head still; move the club head slowly backwards while.... Ok, so you get the point that for a novice, learning to play golf is not easy. Likewise, for our ESOL students trying to overcome accent problems or other speech issues it can be a daunting task. As teachers, we never want to overwhelm or discourage our students, but to instead give them encouragement, hope and practical tools which will facilitate success.

It is for this reason that the 10 key things list was developed. This list is certainly not a comprehensive list, and you may quibble with my choices or priorities. If so, then I encourage you to make up your own “top ten” list that is relevant to the needs of your students. I believe by keeping the list short and focusing primarily on those things which really will make a difference in the clarity of speech and understandability that we give our students hope. We also give them something definitive to measure or evaluate. I encourage my students to choose only one or two things from this list, things which they



struggle with or have the biggest difficulty. If they focus on a couple of areas to begin with, later when they feel more confident, they can work on other areas from the list.

What is on this list of Ten things that Students can do to improve their Pronunciation?

First, students need to focus on helping the listener understand. The purpose of speaking is not to just speak or make noise, but the purpose for communication is to facilitate understanding. We often get our students so focused on their phoneme problems or issues with prosody (stress, rhythm and intonation) that they forget that the purpose of speaking is to help their listeners understand. So, I teach my students to read the faces and the body language of their listeners. If they can see people do not understand, then they need to stop and rewind. They should then ask the listeners what they did not understand. They should ask their listeners to give constructive feedback or reasons they could not understand. When there is a breakdown in communication, they need to remember the other nine things from the list of 10 things which will help facilitate clear speech and better communication.

Second, students need to learn to listen to others and to themselves. This is probably the hardest thing on the list to do. We have two ears and one mouth, but usually we don't really listen to others or to ourselves. However, when we can hear the mistakes that others make or more importantly when we can hear the mistakes that **WE** make, then we can begin to **self-correct**. If we cannot hear our mistakes, then we are doomed to continually repeat them. When we can hear our mistakes, we can self-correct, and at that point our ability to overcome speech or pronunciation issues really accelerates.

Third, the students need to learn to speak slower. Sometimes ESOL learners in their desire to sound “native-like” will speak too fast. I teach my students that if they slow down the speech rate, their speech becomes more understandable. Speaking slower allows them to focus on the speech issues or problems that they are trying to improve. I had a student at Clark College who was fluent in English,

TESOL Report from Grant Recipients: Part 2

Jesse Blackburn-Morrow
Portland State University

The summer edition of the *ORTESOL News* contained a report from one of our Nattinger Grant recipients. Below is a report from our other grant recipient, Jesse Blackburn-Morrow, in which she shares the highlights of the content of the TESOL 2012 convention in Philadelphia from the perspective of a first-time attendee.

The TESOL 2012 convention (*A Declaration of Excellence*, March 28-31) welcomed educators to Philadelphia with a powerful reminder of our capacity for advocacy. Standing up for students' rights is "in the genes" of ESOL teachers, said Len Riser of the Education Law Center. TESOL honored Mr. Riser for pushing a Pennsylvania school district to properly serve its immigrant students—by staffing enough certified ESOL teachers, and helping families understand official documents affecting their children. Opening speaker Alberto Carvalho then implored educators to join him in more fully exercising this role as ELL advocates ("In Pursuit of Excellence for All"). The superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools has spoken out for students fearing family deportation. Mr. Carvalho also turned around the failing district, through a personalized, learner-driven education model that better serves its many ELL students. One piece of that is their iPrep Academy: tech-rich, partially virtual, with a challenging curriculum including research and internships.

My presence in that audience was a first-time opportunity made possible by ORTESOL's Nattinger Travel Grant and 1-year TESOL membership grant. (These awards enabled me to expand my ELT professional development beyond what is available locally, since at the time, I was teaching and consulting privately without institutional support.) I'd like to thank ORTESOL by sharing some benefits of attending, and a bit of what I learned regarding mobile device learning, word clouds, and native languages for richer ESL and cultural revitalization. (I'm also happy to discuss veteran instructor Janet Giannotti's 20 indispensable "truths" of classroom management. Please email about that or any other topics here!)

It was great to spend some time in TESOL's Electronic Village (EV). As an EV volunteer considering presenting, I was able to get a sense of the different types of sessions: mini-workshops; technology showcases; the informal, one-on-one "Ask an Expert" sessions; and the *a la carte*, chat-and-rotate EV Fairs. Volunteering was easy, meant a few bucks off the registration fee, and gave me the chance to meet some great folks. For example, I had been looking for answers on mobile and self-directed learning tools, so I was pleased to connect with the R&D manager for a Brazilian online EFL academy regarding his experience.

Susan Gaer had more great ideas for the "21st Century Mobile Classroom." This presentation focused on leveraging the ubiquitous stu-



dent cell phone for classroom engagement. Ms. Gaer addressed apps and activities for 1) instant photo sharing, 2) audio and transcript evaluation, 3) instant student response, and 4) QR (Quick Response) codes.

The workshop "Word Clouds in the ELL Classroom" (Dougherty and Holmes) expanded my notions of how these word frequency visualizations can be used. I'd previously found Wordsift (www.wordsift.com) to be useful in an academic vocabulary class for intermediate and advanced students. This tool helps you understand a pasted-in text (e.g. its theme, main idea, or main character) and thoroughly explore individual words within. The site shows whether a word is in the AWL or other lists, and provides an interactive network of associated vocabulary, an audio pronunciation, example sentences from the text, and random images and videos tagged with that word.

Leaving the ed tech world, I was glad to see the ELT perspective being shared by Todeva, Turpin, and Burkett in "Native Language and Community Revitalization: Untapped Resources for English Teaching." These presenters recognize the reality of English as a "language killer" coexisting with its status as an empowering lingua franca. Worldwide, another language disappears about every two weeks. With the shift from the heritage language to a global one, slips the mooring of an entire community to its cultural values and unique knowledge of environment. From friends, family, and professional contacts in New Mexico and in Oregon, I've seen and heard the effects of (often unanticipated) language shift—from questioned identity, to undermined parental authority, to disrupted communication with the spiritual world.

Education has often had a powerful impact on which languages are valued and used. The way dominant languages like English are taught can marginalize and demoralize (especially young) learners, causing them to drop their home language, or it can produce confident learners with stronger English and the skills to maintain the language and culture of their home communities. Todeva, Turpin, and Burkett urged us to consider how we can ensure the latter outcome.

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ORTESOL is an association of professionals concerned with the education of students for whom English is a non-native language. Newsletter submissions may be mailed to the editor at the address below or e-mailed to j.n.eisenberg@gmail.com. Those accepted for publication may be edited. The newsletter is not responsible for the opinions expressed by its contributors. Send all inquiries concerning the organization to ORTESOL, c/o Dept. of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University, PO Box 751, Portland, OR 97207.

Window on the World: The English Language Fellow Program

Carla Mortensen

English Language Fellow in Batumi, Georgia

Carla Mortensen wrote this article for the ORTESOL News just before she left to become an English Language Fellow in the country of Georgia. She is now living and working in Batumi, Georgia.

This fall I will leave the cozy nest of Portland State's IELP for the distant shores of Batumi, Georgia (the one next to Armenia, not next to Alabama). There I will teach English at the local university and work with area secondary school teachers to improve their writing curricula. My excitement knows no bounds, but the path to this adventure is a somewhat long and tortuous one. So sit back and sip an imaginary glass of Georgia's famous white wine while you listen to my tale.

Thirty years ago (give or take), I joined the United States Foreign Service. Since childhood, I had dreamed of traveling around the world, seeing exotic locales, and creating the opportunity for communication and understanding among peoples. Sadly, one tour of duty overseeing plumbing repairs, building security upgrades, and enforcing volumes of outdated regulations under the leadership of a intensely militaristic ambassador blew my starry-eyed cobwebs away in short order. I resigned the service after one tour, tail between my legs, and dove into higher education administration, a career that served me well for many years.

Once I began my training for the MA-TESOL, those long-slumbering dreams began to stir once again. I found myself learning from professors

and fellow students who shared those former dreams of foreign travel and service to a larger and more communicative world. It was as if I had come home at last. As I settled in to learn our craft, I knew that someday I wanted to carry those skills away from the safe confines of the United States and into those foreign lands that had inspired my youth.

Enter the English Language Fellow Program. Jointly administered by the Department of State (my former employer, ironically) and Georgetown University, "the EL Fellow Program has placed more than 1,000 Fellows in over 80 countries since 2001. All fellowships are funded professional positions, not volunteer opportunities. Assignments are for a 10-month period.... Fellows cultivate international experience teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language in all regions of the world at universities, non-governmental organizations, foreign ministries of education, bi-national centers, teacher-training institutions, and other related language education institutions." Peace Corps for ESL teachers with real money and a higher standard of living! Where do I sign?

When I first began to learn about the program (much more to see at elf.georgetown.edu/), I was greatly encouraged by Wendy Asplin of the University of Washington, our regional coordinator. Wendy is a veritable fount of helpful information for prospective candidates, but more importantly, served as the wise voice of experience through my long and somewhat daunting application process. We are indeed fortunate to have such a resource. She encouraged me to complete the lengthy application process when my energy lagged and saw me through several "crises of faith" during the ups and downs of the matching cycles.



ELF, Continued from Page 5

I was surprised and happy to learn that I am but only one in a long line of applicants selected from our region and schools. Other former Fellows include but may not be limited to: Ann Singer (Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Africa), Erica Davila (Mozambique), Stephanie Funderburg (Russia), Lara Messersmith-Glavin (China), Fidelia Twenge-Jinnings (Thailand), Gretchen Coppedge (Nepal and Pakistan), Elizabeth Cole (Algeria), Margot Volem (Turkey), Sandy Clark (Brazil) and Becky Quick (unknown). I apologize to anyone I omitted or any incorrect information; this is the best information I could find. I am thrilled to be among this group, and want to do everything I can to encourage others to consider the program if so inclined.

What about Batumi, Georgia? Coming from a 'new' country and state such as the US and Oregon, it is hard to imagine living in a place which has been a center of human activity for thousands of years, mentioned by the Greeks as a deep coastal harbor. The country which now exists as the Republic of Georgia has deep cultural, linguistic, and religious roots dating back to the 4th century CE, even though it has been under the political and military control of nearly every empire that swept across the region: Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and Russians. Calling itself "The Land of Castles, Legends, and Wine," Georgia is only now throwing off the glum inertia of 70 years as a constricted Soviet republic and turning its face enthusiastically to the West, dreaming to become a major tourist destination. To that end, English proficiency is a strategic goal of the current Georgian government and strongly supported by our own (more aid per capita than nearly any other country). In my small city, I will be joining Peace Corps volunteers, Teach and Learn in Georgia volunteers, and an eclectic mix of other American government program workers (check out the English Language through Civic Education website at <http://www.elceonline.com/> for some innovative ideas in teaching participatory government).

So, as I pare down my worldly goods, shop for heavy-duty rain gear and electrical converts, and wistfully kiss my pets goodbye, I am also looking forward to the challenge of taking my ESL skills abroad. In so doing, I hope this brief overview will inspire you to consider doing likewise. In the meantime გა მ ო ს ა მ შ ე ი დ ო ბ ე ბ ე ლ ო და ს ა უ კ ე თ ე ს ო ს უ რ ე ი ლ ე ბ ი (farewell and best wishes.)



TESOL Grant Recipient, Continued from Page 4

Most teachers I know already try to acknowledge students' cultures in class, and consider language backgrounds in predicting ease or difficulty with aspects of English. The presenters suggest we can go deeper than that. In a 'plurilinguistic pedagogy,' learners are coached to be "anthropologists of their own experience." This approach embraces and builds students' skills at navigating cultures and languages. Framing these other resources as equal in value to the local English and culture, teachers guide students to discover patterns of form and use in their home language, and by comparison and contrast, in English. Learners conduct "cross-cultural and linguistic explorations" in the classroom, and out in their "real and virtual communities," potentially even serving some community goal. Critical thinking is necessarily fostered, while the target of symbolic competence is favored over "native-speaker-like." Examples included work with Xhosa and Laotian communities.

I believe this approach can emphasize skillful pluralism: using English and/or the home language as appropriate for a project's planning, research and interviews, analysis, reflection, and final report. Respect can be taught for community experts who might be the sole sources of important information. Educators know of the transformative potential of service-learning; a project so connected to a student's own identity and home community can be even more so.

My predilection for this kind of ELT partly springs from a background (with successful plurilingual colleagues) in field linguistics for language revitalization. Yet this presentation pushed me to ask: How can I build my ESOL classroom environment in this way -- for every setting, level, course, and lesson? Is there more that whole programs can do in this regard?

As for the convention locale, I love Philly -- the murals, the frank-talk locals, and Center City architecture: dense layers of eras and textures and life -- stone, shine, bustle and hollow together in looming depths.... A "dis-recommend" is the Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown, but I enjoyed hanging out with UO and PSU colleagues, and the excellent Rangoon Burmese restaurant in nearby Chinatown.

TESOL 2012 was a great way to improve my teaching and hopefully spread ideas here in Oregon. Thanks again, ORTESOL!

Contact Jesse at j.blackburn.morrow@gmail.com

Pronunciation, Continued from Page 3

Fourth, students need to learn to speak using ‘Thought Groups’. When native speakers talk, they usually speak in connected ideas, phrases, or....‘thought-groups’. Many students when they speak without thought-groups sound like robots or a computer. When they learn to speak in thought-groups, they **will** speak slower, and they will also be able to focus on their specific areas of challenge or difficulty.

Fifth, students need to learn the importance of stressed words. When students use sentence stress, they are saying the most important or content words louder, longer, and more clearly. This is one key way to help the listeners to hear the important information that is being conveyed.

Sixth, teach your students how to find the correct syllable breaks. Many times words are spoken using the wrong syllables and the result is a breakdown in understanding. Students should know how to use a dictionary to find the correct syllable breaks.

Seventh, students also need to understand the importance putting stress on the correct syllable. Words that have more than one syllable have at least one syllable that is stressed or pronounced louder and longer. Our students need to know that it is essential for understanding to put the stress on the correct syllable. It can be difficult or impossible for listeners to understand a word if the stress is put on the wrong syllable.

Eighth, we need to teach students to speak with the correct vowel and to stress the vowel sounds. Many times listeners cannot understand because the wrong vowel is spoken, or perhaps the vowel sound is not spoken clearly or long enough. In some LI’s it is not common to open their mouths much when speaking. However, to facilitate understanding in English, it is essential that we open our mouths to get a clear and correct vowel sound.

Ninth, students need to pronounce the final consonant sounds. Many LI’s do not pronounce final consonants, so they don’t speak them in English. This is not a phoneme problem, but a ‘brain’ or memory problem. First we need to help our students to recognize their importance (singular, plural, verb-tense, possessives, etc.), and then we need to give our students a lot of practice and accountability when speaking. If they are listening to themselves, they can hear when they are not speaking them and then self-correct.

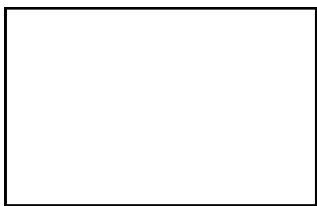
Tenth and last, we need to teach students to breathe out correctly. Correct breathing will help our students sound less like computers or robots and more ‘native-like’. Some LI’s seem to hold their breath when speaking. We should teach our students that many sounds in English are pronounced with an airflow that is often described as either a ‘burst or stream’. Teaching, modeling, practice, and error correction all help our students in this area.

TESOL 2014 will be in Portland!

March 26-29, 2014



Stay tuned for opportunities to be involved!



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