

MEXTESOL and ELT: A Journey Through the Eyes of Terrence Nevin Siders Vogt

Elizabeth Flores Villalobos¹, Alexander Bain, Irapuato, Mexico
Liliana Lizett Llanas Reséndiz², Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico
Susana Vanegas Uriostegui³, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico

The *MEXTESOL Journal* is celebrating its 40th anniversary. To celebrate this milestone, it is our intention to pay tribute to Terrence Nevin Siders Vogt, who participated in the 20th anniversary interviewing one of the MEXTESOL founders, Vincent Carrubba. Throughout his career Nevin has also interviewed other outstanding English Language Teaching (ELT) figures such as Chris Joslin, Kenneth “Mike” Johnson, Bertha Gómez Maqueo, Ruth María Flores Maldonado, Marcela Díaz, and Peter Hubbard.

Nevin holds a Bachelor of Education from Ohio State University, U.S. and a M.A. in Applied Linguistics from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM). He has been the Department Chair in the Bachelor in Adult Education (B. Ed) at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* (UPN) since 2011. Some of Nevin’s research interests are in English prosody through TV, curriculum design and in language teaching through digital environments. He has also been an active participant in the design of several lessons found in *Especialización en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera* (EEAILE).

As this interview is intended to be part of the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the MEXTESOL Journal, we began by asking him about the impact that this organization has had on his professional life.

Nevin: MEXTESOL has been a crucial part of my personal growth in many ways for 15 years. When I lived in the U.S., as a novice teacher, I could not afford to attend TESOL events, so I was delighted to be warmly welcomed into its Mexican affiliate. After attending only one or two Saturday sessions, Ulrich Schrader, who has been involved in MEXTESOL for over 30 years and is currently the academic consultant of National MEXTESOL, asked me to give a workshop... A couple of years later, he invited me to edit the MEXTESOL Newsletter. From then on, I spent the rest of my years giving workshops, writing, editing, and organizing conventions. Attending other events in the field of education, I learned many of the things that should be done, and brought them to MEXTESOL. I was once even a candidate for national president on a platform for moving in a more academic direction. In the subsequent period, I was Chair of the Mexico City Chapter.

About MEXTESOL I have mixed feelings: it is enough to say I was always a proverbial black sheep. I did learn a lot about teaching, and to this day still have many good friends I first met there.

¹ lizflores8025@hotmail.com

² lilianalizett@yahoo.com.mx

³ susana_vanegas@hotmail.com

Due to Nevin's wide experience in the ELT field, we were interested in his opinion about the changes that he has witnessed in this profession over the years.

Nevin: Our profession has changed quite dramatically! I often say that the pendulum swung back and forth in the twentieth century. Up through the 19th century, techniques were limited to grammatical analysis and translation. A strong movement toward oral speech began around that time and continued through the middle of the century, [and was] impelled to a great extent by an imperialism that expanded to cover the globe, and carried out two world wars, that forced its citizens to interact with cultures on literally every continent. This idea came to be justified on a theoretical level in the Communicative Approach in the 70s and 80s, but which also received a backlash because it led to teaching informal expression at the cost of more formal presentation, at times even leaving writing totally aside in all its forms. A return to attention to structures was, fortunately, enriched by the concern for meaning and communication, and leading to views that attempt to combine semantics and syntax, such as the Lexical Approach, which closed the period often derided as the "Approaches Epoch".

Having read one of his published articles (Sosa & Vogt, 2014), we were interested in knowing more about Nevin's research on cultural awareness and authenticity.

Nevin: Cultural awareness and authenticity are frequent and crucial topics in the language and psychology classes I teach, as well as in teacher training publications and workshops. However, I can only claim credit for researching the latter, with many of the findings in my Master in Applied Linguistics in 2011. The principle I hold to is that no communication happens without intent, so the most important sources of authentic communication are the speeches and writings that occur in the classroom itself when students share their opinions and explanations.

Moreover, these are pedagogically useful as justified by Wilson (1997), which I refer to as often as I get the chance. Whole Language, as an approach, recognizes that students learn the subsystems of language as they engage in whole language use. It is only while students are using language that the teacher can observe the students' control of subsystems, the needs they may have, and plan the appropriate strategies.

As mentioned earlier, Nevin has interviewed different personalities in the field, and we asked him to share his experience about interviewing people he admired and the feelings he had while carrying out those interviews.

Nevin: I interviewed several founders of MEXTESOL for the 20th Anniversary Edition of the Journal. Besides that, I have performed a few other interviews. An important one took place last year when I systematically interviewed a significant portion of the first year students in a college credit course.

However, I have also been a journalist off-and-on over the years, and occasionally interviewed people doing newsworthy actions. Two people I particularly admired were Peter Hubbard (1983), the author of A training course for TEFL, and Mario Herrera (2004), co-author of the book Backpack.

Mario Herrera made a strong impression on me the first time he spoke at a convention. I was a bit nervous beforehand when preparing the questions for his interviews. But both Hubbard and Herrera were very friendly from the first moment and happy to be recognized for their leadership in the profession, so they were quite pleasant events.

The reason I admired Hubbard was confirmed while we were settling down to begin the interview and I confirmed that he was the author of one of the best textbooks on teaching English I had studied in my B.Ed.

Considering ourselves novice interviewers, we were interested in learning from an expert. Nevin expressed the challenges and preparation involved in the process; furthermore, he mentioned some of the experiences he has faced.

Nevin: Preparing the questions is always tricky. From the second question on, one must try to anticipate not only the answers one wants to hear in the preceding questions, but also try to anticipate what else the interviewers may say so as to keep the communication open in further questions.

In case I do not make myself clear, I have an example. Students of mine this last week prepared an interview for someone who had been in juvenile detention. They asked first whether or not the interviewee actually committed the offense, then later whether or not he felt remorse, and further on whether he would do it again. I pointed out that if he denies having done it, or if he affirms that it had been the right thing to do, then the later questions would become *non sequiturs*.

During the interview, Nevin referred to a remarkable personality in the field, N. S. Prabhu, who has written about second language pedagogy and focused on task-based approach, and he mentioned his interest in interviewing him.

Nevin: The man who is credited with being the originator of the Task-based Approach is N. S. Prabhu from Bangalore. For one thing, he has generally not been given the credit he deserves as the originator. Secondly, among those who do recognize this pioneering work, several differing, that is conflicting, interpretations have been attributed to him, and it would be nice to hear what he has to say on those issues.

Interested in his professional pathway, we asked Nevin about his current projects.

Nevin: I help the language center where I work with classes and online activities to learn English, and I previously wrote materials for a postgraduate course. I also teach educational psychology where the knowledge of language and human development is crucial. I currently have some books in the process of publication at my university.

He ended by saying how honored he felt to be considered as an authority in the area and thanked us for the interview.

To close the interview, we would like to thank Nevin for his time and for providing us with the opportunity to learn more about his experience and knowledge. We hope we are not the only ones who benefit from his professional development of ELT in México, but that other people who are interested in the area will find this interview useful. It has been an honor and an enriching experience to interview one of the editors from the MEXTESOL Newsletter who has played a relevant role as an advocate of ELT professionalization in our country.

References

- Hubbard, P. (1983). *A training course for TEFL*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Pinkley, D., & Herrera, M. (2004). *Backpack: Starter*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education ESL.

- Sosa, A. D. O., & Vogt, T. N. S. (2014). Research and practice into cultural awareness and authenticity. *European Scientific Journal*, 1,369-371.
- Turbill, J., & Cambourne, B. (1997). The changing face of whole language. Special Issue, *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 20 (2), 1-6.
- Wilson, L. (1997). Defining whole language in a postmodern age. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 20(2), 116-121.