

# **MEXTESOL JOURNAL**

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## From the Editor

This is a very special issue. We have two invited papers, a refereed paper, an informative report on a new teacher training degree program and another interview with one of our founders.

The first invited paper, *Free Voluntary Reading: It Works for First Language, Second Language and Foreign Language acquisition*, is by Stephen Krashen perhaps one of the most controversial and influential men in our field. This is a written version of his entertaining and informative plenary delivered at the last national convention in Zacatecas in October, 1996. The plenary and the article deal with a useful and enjoyable technique to increase “comprehensible input” for foreign language learners.

Our second invited paper, *The TEFL Pendulum and the Teachers’ Unrest: How Can we Find a Balance?*, is, in part, a comment on Krashen’s ideas and on other ideas presented at the Zacatecas convention. Manuel Luna, a well-known name in Mexican, ELT, presents his opinions about the state of TESOL today in Mexico.

In our third article, *The Limits and Possibilities of Current ESL Theory and Practice*, by Ghazi M. Ghaith from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, is a clear critique of writing theory--especially, “writing as a process”. One of the referees of the article (which are read anonymously) commented “I enjoyed reading this article and found it interesting for all English teachers whether they teach writing or not....To me this is a fascinating topic and the writer has written an informative article of the limitations of process writing.” This article also includes a very comprehensive bibliography on writing theory.

The next article is one of what we hope will be a trend in the future. In order to inform our readers of how they can get those all important “papers, degrees, etc.” that are needed to teach nowadays or in order to help them become better professionals, we will try to occasionally inform you of innovative degree programs in Mexico designed for the in-service teacher. These articles can also give other institutions suggestions for the development of similar programs in different geographical areas of the country. The

present article deals with a new open program at the ENEP-Acatlán (Escuela Nacional de Estudios Profesionales) near Mexico City.

Our final article is an interview with Ruth Maria Flores Maldonado, another of our founding members. Ms. Flores was a public school teacher when MEXTESOL was formed and her point of view is a bit different from those published previously.

You might notice that this issue has no book reviews.... Well, what can you do to help remedy this situation? You could write one...please.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

The Editor



## Editorial Policy

The MEXTESOL Journal is dedicated to the classroom teacher in Mexico. Articles and book reviews related to EFL teaching in Mexico and in other similar situations throughout the world are accepted for publication. Articles can be either practical or theoretical and written in English or Spanish.

**Refereed Articles:** Articles are refereed by members of the Editorial Board and by other experts in a field related to that of the article. The refereeing process is not blind and, if necessary, a referee will be assigned as a mentor to guide the author through the publication process. Refereed article will have a footnote referring to the fact that the article was refereed. The MEXTESOL Journal retains the right to edit all manuscripts that are accepted for publication.

**Unreferred Articles:** In order to open the publication process to more authors, unreferred articles will also be accepted. These articles will be read and judged by the Editorial Committee and edited by our Style Editor.

**Book Reviews:** The Journal welcomes previously unpublished reviews of professional books, classroom texts, video- or audiotaped material, computer software and other instructional resources. Reviews are not refereed.

**Submission Guidelines:** Three copies of the manuscript, including all appendices, tables, graphs, references, your professional affiliation and an address and telephone/fax number where you can be reached should be faxed or sent to the address below. Submissions are also accepted by e-mail. If you fax your manuscript, be sure also to mail three copies to the Journal since fax service in Mexico is not always reliable. Whenever possible include the article on either 5.25" or 3.5" diskettes, prepared to be read with IBM or Apple compatible program. **Please specify if you want the article to be refereed or not.**

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## Manuscript Guidelines

1) Articles should be typed, double spaced and preferably no more than twenty pages long. References should be cited in parenthesis in the text by author's name, year of publication and page numbers. (For example: "The findings were reported (Jones 1979: 23-24) although they cause no change in policy.")

2) The list of references in an article must appear at the end of the text on a separate page titled "References". Data must be complete and accurate. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of their references. This format should be followed:

For books: Jones, D. J. 1984. How to spell. New York. ABC Press.

For articles: Moore, Jane. 1991. "Why I like to Teach." *Teacher's Quarterly*. June, 6-8.

*Note:* A copy of these guidelines in Spanish is available on request from *The Editor*.

Si usted quiere obtener la versión de este texto en español, favor de solicitarla a *The Editor*.

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# Free Voluntary Reading: It Works for First Language, Second Language and Foreign Language Acquisition <sup>1</sup>

STEPHEN KRASHEN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA <sup>2</sup>

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This claim could not have been made ten years ago, but it can be made now: Free voluntary reading, reading because you want to, is one of the most effective tools we have in second language and foreign language education. It is also the easiest and most pleasant to use.

## The research: A brief look

We have known for a long time that free voluntary reading works for first language development: Children who participate in sustained silent reading programs (SSR), free reading in school, outperform those who devote similar amounts of time to traditional language arts instruction in a variety of measures of literacy development. This research goes back to 1939 and includes over fifty published studies (Krashen 1993).

In recent years, impressive evidence has appeared that supports the idea that free voluntary reading (henceforth FVR) is of great benefit to second language acquirers as well. As in first language development, those who report more FVR in their second language show greater literary development and this result holds for English as a foreign language as well as English as a second language. Here are a few examples from this literature:

Gradman and Hanania (1991) reported that the best predictor of performance on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) for students planning to study in North American English-speaking universities was the amount of “extracurricular reading” students said they had done.

- Constantino, Lee, Cho and Krashen (in press) reported similar findings for English as a second language; reporting that the

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<sup>1</sup> This is an invited paper.

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amount of free reading international students living in the U. S. said they did before taking the TOEFL was an excellent predictor of their score on this examination.

- Constantino (1995), in a case study of four international students in the U. S., also reported that increased pleasure reading had a very positive effect on TOEFL performance among her three subjects who did extensive reading; her subject who did only formal study did not do well on the exam.
- Lee, Krashen and Gribbons (in press) reported that for international students in the United States, the amount of free reading done was a significant predictor of the ability to translate and judge the grammaticality of complex grammatical constructions in English (restrictive relative clauses). The amount of formal study and length of residence in the U. S. were not significant predictors.

In school FVR has also been shown to be successful with second language acquirers. I present here only samples from this literature. See Elley (1991) for a more complete survey.

- In the Fiji Island study, Elley and Mangubhai (1983) reported that children who engaged in sustained silent reading easily outperformed those in traditional EFL classes on tests of English reading, writing, listening comprehension, and grammar. These results were replicated in Elley's Singapore study (Elley 1991).
- Mason (Mason and Krashen, in press) developed a version of sustained silent reading for university EFL students in Japan, termed "extensive reading," in which students do self-selected reading of pedagogical readers as well as easy authentic reading. In contrast with sustained silent reading, a minimal amount of accountability is required, e. g., a short summary of what was read. In three separate studies, Mason found that extensive readers make greater gains than comparison students who did the traditional form-based EFL classes.
- Pilgreen and Krashen (1993) reported that high school ESL students who participated in sustained silent reading gained nearly one month on a standardized English reading test for each week they participated in the program.

The most impressive evidence for the value of reading in a foreign language environment is the case of Lomb Kato, perhaps the world's champion polyglot, a professional interpreter who has acquired 17 languages. While Dr. Lomb typically spends some time on grammar study and gets as much aural input as possible, her primary source of input is reading. Dr. Lomb has lived in Budapest her entire life, and has not always been able to get aural input. She strongly recommends reading as a means of improving language ability, noting that acquirers' tastes vary and people have to read what they are genuinely interested in. She notes that books have clear practical advantages as well:

A book can be put in our pocket, it can be thrown away, we can write in it, we can tear it, lose it and buy it again...we can read during breakfast, after we wake up, and we don't have to phone it when we don't have time to read (unlike a private teacher)...we may be bored with it, but it is never bored with us" (Lomb Kato, *Igy Yanulo Nyulveket*, section translated by Natalie Kiss, from Krashen and Kiss, 1996.)

### **Using FVR in FL education: SSR**

The most obvious use of FVR in foreign language education is at the intermediate level. Simply adding SSR to intermediate level EFL will certainly pay off. Research suggests that the following factors are relevant:

*Access:* Students read more when there is lots of interesting reading material easily available (Krashen 1993). One reason Pilgreen and Krashen's study (1993) may have succeeded was that a large supply of interesting reading material was available in class; students did not have to bring their own books each time.

Interesting reading includes comics, magazines, and newspapers. There is good evidence from the first language research literature that this kind of "light reading" is a conduit to heavier reading. Those who have done lots of light reading find "serious" reading to be much more comprehensible and enjoyable (for comics, see Krashen 1993; Ujiie and Krashen 1996; for the impact of magazine reading, see Rucker 1982; for a study confirming the strong effect of newspaper reading in English in Ghana, see Smart 1978).

*Comfort:* Students read more if they have a quiet, comfortable place to read (Krashen 1993). This is not a luxury, but is, rather, an important factor for language development. Noting that eating and reading go well together,

Trelease and Krashen 1996) have suggested that refreshments be provided in the school library in order to encourage free reading.

*Other factors:* Students read more when they see others read (Krashen 1993), and when teachers read interesting books aloud to them (Trelease 1995). There is, on the other hand, evidence that rewards are not necessary to encourage reading (Krashen and McQuillan 1996); the best incentive appears to be supply of good reading material and a comfortable, quiet place to read. Greaney and Clark (1973) is a spectacular demonstration of this: Boys who participated in a successful SSR program that lasted only eight months while they were in the sixth grade were found to be doing more free voluntary reading than comparisons six years later.

The effect of sustained silent reading will not be obvious immediately. It may be weeks until students find reading material they like, and months until they read enough so that progress is obvious. According to the research, in fact, long term SSR programs (eight months or longer) show much more consistent results than short-term programs do (Krashen 1993).

### **Sheltered popular reading**

A very useful adjunct to sustained silent reading is a class on popular literature. Even foreign language students who are well-read in their first language may not be aware of the options for pleasure reading in the second language. Sheltered popular literature exposes students to the different kinds of light but authentic reading available, moving from comics and magazines to novels. Such a course is taught as *literature*, that is, with discussion of the values expressed in the reading as well as the insights they provide on the culture (for suggestions, see Dupuy, Tse and Cook 1996). Our hope is that such a course will help students discover one or more kinds of light reading they would like to do on their own.

If students become enthusiastic readers of any type of reading, they will progress enormously; better readers are typically “series” readers (Lamme (1974); see also Cho and Krashen (1994), readers of *Nancy Drew*, *The Black Stallion*, *John R. Runis*, *Sweet Valley High*, *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street*, etc.). Reading narrowly builds language and literacy competence rapidly, thanks to the familiar context and resulting high level of comprehensibility. In addition, acquisition of any written style would facilitate comprehension of any other; while there are differences among different types of prose, there is also substantial overlap; someone who can read

light fiction easily has acquired much of what is needed to read academic prose (see discussion of Biber 1988; Biber and Finegan 1989, in Krashen 1995).

### **FVR at beginning stages**

The beginning foreign language student will find authentic texts too difficult. There are two solutions to this problem. One is simply to find the best pedagogic readers and make them available for free voluntary reading. A second is a recent innovation called “Hand-Crafted Books” (Dupuy and McQuillan, in press). Hand-Crafted Books are written by intermediate and advanced second and foreign language students, corrected by the teacher, and are to be read by beginners. Writers are instructed not to look up words while writing; if intermediate students don’t know a word, the chances are good that beginners won’t know it either. Hand-Crafted Books thus have a good chance of being interesting and comprehensible; they are written by peers who are slightly more advanced than the readers. Beatrice Dupuy, the inventor of Hand-Crafted Books, is a professor of French; she reports that she now has a collection of 400 student-written (and often student-illustrated) Hand-Crafted Books written by her French 3 students for her French 1 students.

### **FVR is pleasant**

Given the chance to read, both second language and foreign language students prefer reading to traditional instruction. McQuillan’s sample (McQuillan 1994) consisted of students who had just completed a semester of university level intermediate Spanish or ESL, both of which focused on popular literature. 80% of the sample said they preferred reading to grammar instruction, Dupuy (forthcoming) reported similar enthusiasm for free reading. Her fourth semester university French course focused on self-selected reading with no accountability or grammar instruction. 86% of her students had never read for pleasure in French before taking the course, but 82% said they were likely to do so after the course, and 94% felt more confident in reading French and more knowledgeable about the different types of literature that were available. Such reports are consistent with observations made by readers in their first language (Krashen 1995).

Free reading thus appears to have only advantages and no disadvantages. It leads to improvement in all aspects of literacy and may even contribute to oral/aural proficiency (Cho and Krashen 1994). Studies show,

in fact, that it is more effective than traditional instruction, and it appears to be much more pleasant.

The implications are obvious: Students need time to read and a place to read, with access to lots of interesting reading material. Incentives and “accountability” do not appear to be necessary; they might, in fact, get in the way of reading for pleasure.

Another advantage of FVR is that it is not expensive. For the price of a few computers, any school can have a reasonable light reading library and can even serve refreshments, free of charge.

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## **The TEFL Pendulum and The Teachers' Unrest: How Can We Find a Balance? <sup>1</sup>**

MANUEL LUNA F. <sup>2</sup>

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Looking back over the past forty years it becomes clear that some remarkable and dramatic changes have taken place in educational strategies and didactic approaches in general and in EFL teaching and learning in particular. Most changes have been for the better but there have also been some excesses. The latter may be the reason why some people have felt the need to go back to basics.

The TEFL pendulum has made quite a swing from constraint to creativity and seems to be about to swing back. However, some major achievements should be secured at any cost. They include a holistic and pragmatic learner-centered approach, adaptability, diversity and a link with the real world. This obviously implies reflective teaching and learning to enhance EFL skills as well as to aid personality formation.

In the 1950s, constraint was the word, which to a large extent, summed up the general attitude towards life and the educational adventure in Mexico, in those days. Gradually we have witnessed in the classroom the appearance of some new and far more pragmatic approaches which to a great extent have led us to more creativity and also to some unrest.

In the 1950s due to the spirit of the times--specially the sacrosanctity of the prevailing institutions: church and state on the macrolevel, family and school on the micro level--the educational approach was permeated with a desire for correctness and order.

Correctness in the language class then meant the pursuit of accuracy, which though in itself is no sin, led to "over attention" to details and rules. Therefore, a memorizing process using repetition, often without full attention or comprehension of the learning materials and the art of mechanical reproduction were highly valued.

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Order meant unquestioning respect for authority and doctrine and the rigidity of discipline in schools, which also implied restraint in the language class: a lot of teacher talk, hardly any pupil talk, let alone conversing or discussion.

The intellectual and socio-political movements of the late 1960s helped to break down the isolation of a lot of public and private schools. Increasingly they began to join in with what was happening in the community and the world at large. Slowly in the 1970s, and much faster in the 1980s, we saw some striking changes in the EFL classroom.

For the past 15 years, everybody has been talking about usage and use, signification and value, cohesion and coherence, forms and functions (in short, about “communication”): theoreticians, curriculum developers, textbook writers, teachers, etc. “Communication” implies more importance being attached to experimental language use and fluency than to correctness. It also requires a holistic approach to language teaching and learning, confidence building and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher and the learner.

Since the 1980s educational and EFL teaching orientation to the real world outside the classroom has been in vogue and therefore adaptability has become a prerequisite. The communicative and the notional-functional approach have become widely accepted and the teaching and acquisition of relevant lexis should enable us to appropriately express not only our thoughts and wishes but also our emotions and feelings.

Furthermore, we have to link “Pragmatism” to the notional-functional use of language by the learners so as to stimulate both their productive skills and self-discipline. We have learned to look beyond our national borders and to recognize that cosmopolitanism and intercultural awareness are essential parts of EFL teaching and learning.

It has been widely accepted that “language is more than simply a system of rules.” Language is now generally seen as a dynamic resource for the creation and negotiation of meaning. And there is a big difference between “learning about” the language and “knowing how” to communicate. That is, we need to distinguish between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use these rules effectively and appropriately when found in a real communicative situation. This is what Hymes calls “communicative competence”: simply the ability to communicate.

We should try to achieve reflective learning so that learners can be able to deduce the functioning rules of the language, that is, let learners discover the rules by themselves. Let them experiment with the language they already know, elaborate their own hypothesis, try it out, restructure it, and learn. English should not be the only aim of learning; instead, it should be the means through which learners can get to know other ways of looking at things, of broadening their theory of the world. In addition, we need to contrast and explain the Anglo-Saxon and Latin cross-cultural differences, since teaching a foreign language does not only mean transmitting the linguistic and the communicative systems, but also, telling learners about the culture, the social status, the degrees, the roles, etc. of the people who speak that language natively.

This is an illustration of the shift from what Michael Lewis calls the Present-Practice-Produce paradigm to the Observe-Hypothesize-Experiment paradigm (in *The Lexical Approach*, 1993). Some time ago, some linguists supported the idea that it was not necessary to teach grammar, that the ability to use a second language (the knowing “how”) would develop automatically if the learner were required to focus on meaning in the process of using the language to communicate. Subsequently, a lot of materials on the subject appeared on the market, including textbooks which only taught notions and communicative functions. However, in recent years, this view has been seriously challenged, and it now seems to be widely accepted that there is value in classroom tasks which require the learner to focus on form. It is also accepted that grammar is an essential resource in using language communicatively, since we use different grammatical forms to signal differences of meaning.

At the last massive national MEXTESOL conference in Zacatecas we had the opportunity to listen to some inspiring talks and workshops, and we even heard about the need to develop a fifth skill: “grammaring.” On the other hand, we could still hear some voices saying that grammar is not important in the acquisition of the language; that there are some new techniques and alterations of old techniques which provide interesting aural and written input, that we should concentrate primarily on “reading”.

As with any other paradigm, these two opposite points of view can only lead to unrest in the language teaching field. Louis Kelly said some twenty years ago: “Nobody really knows what is new or what is old in present-day language teaching procedures. There has been a vague feeling that

modern experts have spent their time in discovering what other men have forgotten ...”

Certainly, for the lazybones-English-teachers (who are simply not interested in updating their classroom practice and who are a source of constant complaint for the parents who see the intellectual appetite and academic prospects of their children undermined) these paradigms cause no perturbation at all; but it is definitely disturbing for the very dynamic and often young teachers who want to experiment with some new, often learner-centered, teaching techniques. These young and young-at-heart teachers often cause discomfort/inconvenience to the management as well as to some rusty fellow colleagues, not to mention some anxiety among tradition-loving parents. These teachers are the Socrates or Juan Bosco type educators who swim in the opposite direction, away from constraints of all sorts so as to be able to enjoy the fruits of creativity to the benefit of their pupils and themselves. However, fanatic excesses always harm a good cause.

Quite often the need is felt to strike a balance between concepts, methods, approaches and strategies. Thus, what we need is an Eclectic Balanced Activities Approach recognizing that communicative ends are not only achieved through communicative means.

What we need is “commitment” on the part of the teacher and the learner. Didactically it presupposes an eclectic approach as well because of the abundance of teaching and learning methods and strategies that have come to the fore of late. Teamwork among teachers as a form of in-service training can be a great help in overviewing and evaluating the latest trends.

But how can the concepts of “commitment” and “eclecticism” be introduced in the English classroom and what are the implications for teachers meeting these ideas for the first time? Traditionally, the role of the teacher in the English class is to provide correct models, to give learners specific exercises as classwork or homework and to provide explicit instruction and corrective feedback.

The role of the learner is the rather passive one of coming up with the correct language forms, repeating the models chorally, copying, not doing the homework and trying to obtain the minimum passing grade. What has the result been? Teacher’s overload and students’ underinvolvement.

However, in the majority of the cases, the existence of such paradigms has resulted in the development of a sharper consciousness towards what we are doing. We need to redefine learner and teachers roles, now that we have decided to apply the principles of humanistic education to language teaching and learning. Teachers have to accept that learners have a right to have their views incorporated into the selection of content and learning experiences, and need to provide learners with the appropriate opportunities for them to make choices. Learners, for their part, need to develop a range of skills related not only to language, but also to learning and learning-how-to-learn. Let us, at any rate, keep windows and minds open for fresh air and new ideas and learner-centered methods that may enhance the personalities, intellect and skills of our students as human beings and citizens of the world.

Without inspiring and committed parents, friends and teachers, many students may increasingly become intoxicated by the addictive lure and glamour and glitter of today's sacred cows: idols, drugs, advertising, the dream world of eternal youth, TV, the information superhighway of Internet, virtual reality, speed, passion for power and money, extreme nationalism and xenophobia, fundamentalism, permissiveness, egoism. Teachers cannot only rely on ideas, methods, tenets and remedies from the past and the present to cope with the challenges of tomorrow. All of this needs to be under constant reappraisal. Anthony de Mello in "Wellsprings" said: "On the day you cease to change you cease to live".





# The Limits and Possibilities of Current ESL Writing Theory and Practice <sup>1</sup>

GHAZI M. GHAITH, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT, LEBANON <sup>2</sup>

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Since the 1960s, a gradual shift has taken place in English as a first language (L1) writing theory and practice. The literacy notions of the traditional product-oriented methods were gradually abandoned for a process-oriented approach to instruction. Consequently, writing began to be perceived as a complex, nonlinear, recursive, and generative process that involves predrafting, and revising. It also involves consideration of purpose and audience and consultation of the writer's background knowledge.

The above transformations in L1 writing theory were echoed in English as a second language (ESL) situations. This suggested that writing is a process of natural generation of ideas with focus on meaning and communication that precedes concerns about form and grammar. Consequently, ESL writing instruction became to a large extent, focused on the literacy beliefs of heuristics, experimentation and emergent fluency rather than mechanical accuracy and fidelity to form. Thus, although with caution, ESL student-writers were encouraged to manage their writing acts by proceeding somewhat independently in a discovery mode in order to determine and solve the problem of their composing.

However, despite the wide acceptance of process-oriented instruction, there has always been some questioning of its validity, especially in ESL situations where student-writers are still acquiring the syntactic and semantic systems and the cultural ethos of a language other than their own. For instance, while Hairston (1982) hailed the process approach as a "paradigm shift" and Witte & Cherry (1986) argued that the new approach is perhaps "the most exciting development in the field of compositions studies", others denounced the new approach as "chimera", "hazard", and advanced "carcinoma" (cited in Susser 1994, 31-32). Dissatisfaction with the process approach even grew stronger as many experts and practitioners such as Applebee 1986, Miller 1992, Roen 1989, Silva 1990 and Zamel 1987 ex-

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pressed concerns that the process-oriented pedagogies have not introduced much improvement neither in L1 nor in ESL classrooms.

The purpose of this article is to examine the limits and possibilities of current ESL writing theory and practice in light of available theoretical bases and research findings in order to suggest ways to improve practice.

## **Methodology**

In order to identify the limits and possibilities of current L2 theory and practice, I used Silva's (1993) thorough review of ESL writing research as a blueprint. Consequently, I drew on the works of Arndt (1987), Benson, Deming, Denzer and Valeri-Gold (1992), Carson, Carrel, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn (1990), Choi (1998), Dennett (1990), Raimes (1985), Reid (1992), Silva (1992), You and Atkinson (1988), and others to identify the threads that appear to be running through theory, research, and practice. I content analyzed the above line of research reports and categorized findings in two main categories: (a) limits and (b) possibilities of current ESL theory and practice.

## **Findings**

The findings are reported according to a scheme comprised of the two main categories: (a) limits and (b) possibilities of current ESL theory and practice. The first category includes the subcategories of theory, placement, staffing, materials, and classroom practice.

### ***Limits of current ESL theory and practice***

#### *Theory*

Silva (1993) maintains that there is "at present, no coherent, comprehensive theory of L2 writing" (p. 668). This is primarily due to the newness of ESL writing as an area of inquiry and to the acceptance of a largely unexamined assumption that there is one universal writing process in both L1 and ESL situations. Second language writing specialists appear to have turned to L1 composition theories in order to get insights into ESL writing. These L1 theories are necessarily monolingual/monocultural and are based on the writing processes of native English speakers in North American colleges and universities (Silva 1993). However, the field of ESL writing is beginning to look beyond L1 writing theories in order to develop multilingual / multicultural theories that would improve ESL instruction and even

enrich the L1 theory of writing, but the attempt appears to be still in its formative years.

Furthermore, the “process” concept has been sometimes contentious both in L1 and ESL situations. For example, Susser (1994) maintains that the term process has been “used in three different ways: (a) to mean the act of writing itself, (b) to describe writing pedagogies, and (c) to designate a theory or theories of writing” (p. 32). This created confusion and contributed to much debate and little consensus among writing theorists and practitioners.

### *Placement*

The placement options and procedures that appear to have been prevalent over the past few decades constitute another limitation in current ESL instruction. These options and procedures suggest that the majority of ESL student-writers in American colleges and universities are either mainstreamed into regular L1 freshman classes or placed in basic writing classes despite numerous differences among the learning styles and instructional needs of the three groups of student-writers. Furthermore, placing ESL student-writers solely on the basis of the achievement scores on standardized multiple choice tests further aggravates the problem. Most of the tests are not sensitive enough to measure writing proficiency. Consequently, student-writers could be placed at the wrong level (Benson, et al 1992).

### *Staffing*

Another problem that appears to affect proper ESL instruction lies in the area of teacher preparation and staffing of ESL writing classes. For example, in teaching language in general and in teaching ESL writing in particular, teachers who are trained in and “profess to use a certain approach may not do so in actual” practice (Susser 1994, 40). In fact, studies have shown that teachers who consider themselves adherent to process writing may violate the principles of process-oriented pedagogy (Courtland & Welsh 1990, Courtland, Welsh & Kennedy 1987, Inghilleri 1989, Zamel 1985, 1990, Winer 1992). These studies point out that teachers of ESL writing may not be fully aware of the significance of their pedagogical strategies. For example, they may confuse intervention, which is a hallmark of process-oriented pedagogy concerned with meaning, with correction of mechanical errors. Consequently, these teachers may send conflicting signals and give their students contradictory advice.

Furthermore, the majority of ESL classes in American colleges and universities appear to be staffed with non-ESL specialists. Consequently, ESL student-writers have been taught by teachers who may not be ready to deal with their specific instructional needs. For example, Joseph (1992, cited in Braine 1994) stated that the ten teachers of writing whom he interviewed reported that “ESL students were reluctant to talk in class and didn’t let teachers know if they understood instructions, had different proficiency levels from native-speaker students and needed more explanations, which the speakers found tedious” (p. 43). The same teachers responded negatively when asked if they were aware of rhetorical differences across language and cultures. This indicates that these teachers are not equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to handle ESL writing issues such as the transfer of organization and thought patterns from their native language into English, which is harmful for the academic achievement and development of ESL student-writers. As Benson et al (1992) maintain, ESL student-writers need “an instructor who understands the second language acquisition process and how to communicate about language in the ways, the writers, have learned language (p. 66)

### *Materials*

Instructional materials should also be selected to meet the teaching objectives of particular groups of student-writers. In ESL situations, for example, the need may exist for books that focus on language difficulties, idioms, prepositions, tenses, subject-verb agreement, vocabulary building and so forth. Such books, however, may not be appropriate for basic writers who have either covered them in elementary school or as part of their acquisition process of the language. Likewise, developmental textbooks that emphasize literature-based writing assignments might not be appropriate for ESL writers who may feel that their needs to develop their linguistic skills have been left unattended (Benson et al 1992).

Furthermore, Benson et al (1992) state that most of the currently available supplementary materials in the form of teaching guides, transparencies, test packets, and computer software programs are intended for the native speakers of English. Meanwhile, there are quite a few such programs available for ESL instruction. It is also equally important to assign topics that are culturally relevant and relevant to the student-writer’s background knowledge. Topics that are culturally biased could be unfamiliar and even offensive to ESL writers, which complicates the problems of writing and may lead to failure and withdrawal.

*Teaching practices*

Classroom practice should focus on the specific instructional needs of ESL student-writers. These needs encompass a wide range of lexical and grammatical as well as rhetorical and strategic concerns. The needs may also vary from one instructional group to another. For example, Yu & Atkinson (1988) have shown that ESL student writers have problems relative to (a) substituting lexical items for words that have similar sounds, (b) improper word choice, and (c) incorrect word class across nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Furthermore, ESL student-writers were found to mix tenses and misuse active and passive voice. They may lack communicative competence and tend to use and repeat inappropriate vocabulary. Fluency was also found to be problem as one student-writer only managed to write “101 words for English composition in one and quarter hours” (Yu & Atkinson 1988, 274).

In addition, reader orientation is another area of concern in ESL writing given that considerable numbers of student-writers come from cultures that embrace non-linear thought patterns. Consequently, such writers may fail to compose according to the expectations of an audience who values linear thinking. In fact, Scarcella (1984) reported that ESL student-writers were found to be limited in their ability to orient their readers, although they had written lengthy but ineffective orientations. This is because the attention-engaging strategies of such writers and their clarifying device were rather restricted compared to those of their native speaker counterparts. Arndt (1987) also reported similar problems with ESL student-writers and suggested that “the teaching of L2 writing must always have a twofold aim: not only must it help inefficient writers become more efficient in regard to their writing strategies; at the same time it must help all writers price more effective L2 texts” (p. 265).

Likewise, teachers should provide feedback that addresses the specific instructional needs and expectations of the various groups of student-writers (Leki 1991, Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994, Benson, Deming, Denzer, Valeri-Gold 1992). While certain student-writers expect feedback on the content, style, and rhetoric, others may value corrective feedback of their lexical and grammatical miscues. Consequently, ESL classroom practices need to enrich the lexical and grammatical resources of student-writers as well as equip them with the strategic and discourse as well as cultural knowledge in order to help them improve their fluency, manage the complexity of their composing, and engage their readers.

## **Possibilities of current ESL theory and practice**

Despite the aforementioned limits, the process-oriented pedagogies have several possibilities in the ESL classroom. These possibilities do not need further belaboring. It suffices to mention that these pedagogies have been widely accepted in various ESL situations and could improve instruction, if implemented properly. For example, these pedagogies provide opportunities for involving students in their own writing, an experience of ownership and self-sponsoring of writing is often said to be empowering. Furthermore, the process approach to writing is supported by widely accepted beliefs about teaching composition such as the beliefs that (a) composition cannot be taught via sets of identifiable rules and (b) the classroom can be a setting for real communication. Both beliefs are congruent with making meaning and peer collaboration that are hallmarks of the process approach.

In addition, the process-oriented pedagogies “seem to be providing unifying theoretical and methodological principles” (Raimes 1991, 441). These approaches also help student-writers to manage the complexity of their writing and are consistent with the process syllabus for language as defined by Nunan (1988): “a syllabus that focuses on the means by which communication skills will be brought about” (p. 159).

## **Conclusion**

In order to actualize the possibilities of process-oriented ESL writing instruction, the need exists for developing multilingual/multicultural theories of ESL writing that would provide insights into understanding the unique nature of the writing process across language and cultures. Further research is needed to explain the linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and cultural variables that influence L2 writing.

Second language student-writers should also be placed in special classes to receive instruction specifically designed to address their learning needs. Classes should be staffed with ESL specialists who are cognizant of and sympathetic to the needs of ESL student-writers. It is also advisable to conduct in-service training workshops to sensitize English faculty to the needs of ESL students, ensure proper preparation of ESL instructional materials, and increase coordination between programs in composition students and ESL studies.

The instructional needs of ESL student-writers need to be assessed not only on the basis of standardized test scores that might not be sensitive enough to measure writing proficiency. Rather, these tests should be supplemented by writing samples to be administered prior to enrollment in classes. Finally, ESL classroom practice should focus on the learning needs of student-writers whether needs be lexical, linguistic, strategic, or rhetorical.

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## Open University Degree Program in Language Teaching

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Our paper today is a progress report on a project for designing an Open University Degree Program in Language Teaching. This project has been underway at the Acatlán campus of the National University (UNAM) for the past 2½ years. We hope that it will be opened initially in the areas of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish as a Foreign Language, and then later extended to other languages.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the increasing importance of foreign languages in our present-day world. On the one hand, as the world has grown smaller in a sense, people need to speak languages in common in order to communicate with each other. On the other hand, the greater appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity in our world has sparked serious interest in the maintenance of the languages of every cultural group. Consequently, language teaching has taken on considerable importance, and with it, the matter of teacher training in this field. Even more, there is a concern for training the trainers.

To give an example, the UNAM cannot keep up with the demand for foreign-language courses. The main campus and five branch campuses of this university handle a total of over 20,000 foreign-language students in any given semester, and many more potential language students are unable to enroll. There are simply not enough qualified teachers at the university level for so many students. By qualified, we refer to teachers who have (1) a good command of the language, and (2) a sound theoretical-methodological basis for formal classroom teaching.

Traditionally, these teaching positions have been filled by graduates in the area of literature, English, French, Italian, and German. The problem is that there are too few such graduates and, aside from their

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foreign-language preparation, they are trained as specialists in literature and not in language teaching.

As a result, most of the foreign-language teachers have come from many different educational backgrounds and run the gamut from no training in foreign-language teaching to extensive coursework and occasionally even a university degree in the field.

Our experience in the UNAM is that in general teachers work to improve their foreign-language skills and are particularly eager to keep up-to-date in their field. The number of people attending events such as this one is a clear indicator of that.

While several new options have been created to help train foreign-language teachers, they are still limited. Teacher-training courses are offered within the UNAM at the CELE and at the FES-Cuautitlán. Other public and private universities, and organizations such as the Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, have well-respected training courses. University-level degree programs have also been started in the past 10 or 15 years in several cities in Mexico. The ENEP Acatlán has offered a degree in the teaching of English since 1985. At the graduate level, the CELE has a Master's in Applied Linguistics which covers language teaching as well as other areas.

Even so, the problem of providing foreign-language teachers with a viable option for learning this profession and receiving a recognized university degree is a long way from being solved. Some of the main problems are:

1. Most existing degree programs focus on training English language teachers--and those who teach other languages have very limited opportunities.
2. Some teacher training courses are of short duration, and are focused on teaching practical techniques, often to the exclusion of the theoretical bases underlying classroom activities. These courses are often costly. In the best of cases, they don't award the trainee a university degree, now increasingly a requirement in public and private schools at secondary and university levels.

As part of our preliminary work in developing this program, we checked records in the language centers of the UNAM and several other universities. We found that in the UNAM slightly less than half of the foreign-language

teachers had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, and of these only a third were in the area of foreign languages. Findings were similar in other universities, and the situation was more serious in the CCHs, where only about a quarter of the teachers had any degree at all.

3. Those teachers who want to do university studies in the area are often unable to enroll in a traditional full-time on-campus college program because of their job or family commitments or because they live far away from universities offering degree programs.

4. Many of these same reasons are also valid in the case of people who are not teachers at present but would like to be.

What does this mean in terms of our field? Often it means that teachers are not able to advance professionally within the institution. In the UNAM teachers without a university degree are not able to fill full-time professorships nor obtain the concomitant benefits or job security. No matter how many courses they take or workshops they participate in, no matter how excellent their work is in the classroom, they are locked into a low-level position. This can be demotivating.

Finally, the Rector of the UNAM, recognizing the vital importance of offering more and more flexible options to meet the needs of people living in our increasingly complex world, issued a directive that all schools in the university were to explore ways to adapt their programs to open-system education.

All of this led to the current project to design a degree program in language teaching in the open system of the university at the Acatlán campus of the UNAM. The project was planned in three major stages (see Table 1). The most extensive work for our committee to date has involved the first point, presenting a proposal for such a program in the open university system. This is because the programs in the open-university system have special characteristics, and both academic personnel and students function differently from their traditional roles. For one thing, learning groups work both on-campus and off-campus. But perhaps the most significant difference is that independent study is basic, and consequently study materials assume great importance. The advantages of this type of system are numerous, the most important being that its flexible nature permits it to offer education to a broader sector of the population.

### TABLE 1: PROJECT STAGES

#### 1. *Pedagogical Proposal In Accordance With Open University System (SUA) Norms*

- 1.1 General Objectives of the Program
  - 1.1.1 Graduates
  - 1.1.2 Prospective students
  - 1.1.3 Career opportunities and job market
- 1.2 Program Design
  - 1.2.1 Description of areas
    - 1.2.1.1 Language system and use
    - 1.2.1.2 Pedagogical training
    - 1.2.1.3 Research methodology
    - 1.2.1.4 Spanish
    - 1.2.1.5 Specialization (Language)
    - 1.2.1.6 Electives
  - 1.2.2 Course of study
    - 1.2.2.1 Curriculum design
    - 1.2.2.2 Credits
    - 1.2.2.3 General requirements and course prerequisites
- 1.3 Areas: Objectives, Content Outline and Bibliography
- 1.4 Courses: Objectives, Content Outline and Bibliography
- 1.5 Work Modes and General Criteria for Evaluation of Learning
- 1.6 Admission, Registration and Degree Requirements, Course Prerequisites

#### 2. *Development Of Instructional And Study Materials For Each Area*

- 2.1 Guidelines for Materials
- 2.2 Study Guides
- 2.3 Course Outlines
- 2.4 Anthologies

#### 3. *Definition Of Requirements Of Academic Personnel*

The following is a brief discussion of the points which have been defined to date.

The general objectives for the Degree in Language Teaching, Open University System, UNAM - Acatlán Campus, are:

- To benefit the UNAM and other institutions (high school and university levels) in Mexico by making specialized professional formation for language teachers available and thus adding to the number of professionals with university degrees in our field.
- To create the conditions for language teachers and others to complete a degree program in the field by offering a systematic, orderly and reasonable option for doing so.
- To relate the content of the B.A. curriculum (this project) to the daily reality and needs of teachers in the schools where they are working.

The prospective student in this type of program is one who:

- takes responsibility for his/her own learning
- has good (independent) study habits
- can tie together theory and practice
- has a good command of the language s/he has chosen to teach
- shows interest in learning more about the chosen language
- likes teaching (has a vocation for teaching)
- communicates well with other people
- has a feeling for the problems involved in learning an L2 and will try to master the practices which best facilitate this process

- is creative and has a critical attitude when looking at different alternatives and approaches for solving problems which involve research applied to foreign-language teaching.

The general admissions requirements to register in this program are:

- high school diploma (diploma de preparatoria)
- fulfillment of the language requirement in chosen specialization (Those with a certificate awarded by the UNAM-CTIE (Comisión Técnica de Idiomas Extranjeros) or a diploma from either the CELE or the FES-Cuautitlán Teacher-Training Course are exempt from this requirement.)
- passing grade on the admission exam to UNAM

The graduate of this program would be a career teacher with a command of his/her chosen language (specialization) in many aspects, i.e., semantic, linguistic, cultural, etc. S/he would be able to compare the chosen language of his/her specialization to Spanish. S/he would have a psycholinguistic, psychopedagogical and methodological knowledge about language teaching and learning which permits him/her to develop both the teaching and research elements in the field of his/her specialization.

We have put together an eight-semester program and divided it into the following six key areas. Five are common-core areas, and one is called "specialization", varying according to the language selected: English, French, German, Italian or Spanish for Foreigners.

For each of these areas, we have defined the general objectives, the basic content outline, the formative tasks, and justified its importance within the whole program. The courses have been related both vertically, that is, with respect to the other areas, and horizontally, with respect to the series of courses in the same area.

## 1. Language system and use

This area includes courses in general linguistics at the introductory level, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis. The purpose of these courses is to look at the structure of language systems in general, at the universal properties of human language, from phonetics and



phonology, morphosyntax, lexicology, word formation, and semantics through discourse analysis.

This area will provide the basis for in-depth study of the specific language selected, and will enable the student to read and analyze bibliography about linguistics, make hypotheses, and arrive at conclusions applicable to his/her teaching situation.

## **2. Pedagogical training**

This area begins with general, more theoretical courses covering education, pedagogy, learning theory and methodology, including its history and development in our field, and then moves to more specific and practical courses focusing on teaching different aspects of the language, different types of discourse activities, and the skill areas. Courses also include evaluation and testing, classroom observation, teaching assistantship, micro-teaching, and practice teaching under supervision.

More than a knowledge of classroom methods, the goal of this area is to build habits, such as creating a positive classroom atmosphere, handling the various concerns of classroom management, planning and decision-making in terms of specific teaching aims.

## **3. Research methodology**

Courses in this area include basic research techniques and research in language teaching. Practical application will involve course design and materials preparation, and finally senior seminars are included to help students set up independent research leading to a thesis or other project approved for satisfying graduation requirements.

Besides being qualified teachers, graduates will be able to design courses and prepare materials on a large or small scale, and to carry out formal research should the opportunity arise. More likely they will be able to do some informal research in the classroom on foreign-language learning. We are looking not so much for full-time researchers, but for teachers with a researcher's mentality, that is, someone who constantly reflects on, questions and analyses his/her own teaching experience, with a view to a solving problems and making improvements, a mentality so necessary to professional advancement.

#### 4. Spanish

This area will include three courses: first, morphosyntax of present-day Spanish, second, oral and written expression in Spanish, and lastly, 20th century Spanish-American narrative. No matter what language is chosen for "specialization", it is important for future teachers to have a basic understanding of the structure of Spanish to use as a point of reference, since their students are going to be Spanish speakers. The second course is included because, as students, as university graduates, and as future professionals, teachers are expected to have an excellent command of both written and spoken Spanish. The course in literature is offered to provide general cultural background and, again, will serve as a point of comparison when looking at the literature in the specific language selected.

#### 5. Specialization

The courses in this area are not for learning the language, but for learning about the language in order to be able to teach it and about the culture which is both implicit and explicit in it. There are courses on the structure and use of the particular language, covering phonetics, phonology, morphology, word formation and lexicology, syntax, and stylistics.

Another block of courses covers the contemporary culture and civilization of the places where the language is spoken, and includes the art, literature, history, geography, socio-political systems, traditions and customs, and other features of these cultures.

#### 6. Electives

At least two electives will be included, which the students may select from a series of choices. These courses are not necessarily related to each other, but represent different specific areas or issues of interest in which the students can broaden their knowledge of a particular subject and propose solutions to problems based on this knowledge.

To receive a degree, the requirements are:

- 100% credits covered
- reading comprehension requirement in a language other than native language or chosen language specialization fulfilled

- social service completed
- completion of one degree option (thesis, etc.)

Some of the career opportunities contemplated for graduates are as a teacher and/or researcher at the high school or university level in either public or private schools, or in businesses that need to train personnel in a foreign language.

At this time we have completed the project through stage 1.3 (Areas: objectives, content outline and bibliography), and the objectives, content outline and bibliography (1.4) for the courses in the first two semesters have been written up. Work modes and general criteria for evaluation of learning (1.5) must still be defined. Admission, registration and degree requirements and course prerequisites (1.6) have been completed.

The second phase of the project, the development of instructional and study materials for each area, will be done by specialists in the field. We have set up guidelines for the development of these materials and as soon as these are approved, we will publish a call for those who would like to work on developing materials (study guides, course outlines, anthologies) for each of the courses. While chosen authors are writing materials for the first two semesters to be submitted to the University Boards for the approval of the program, work will continue on the course objectives, content outlines and bibliography (1.4) for the remaining semesters. Calls will be published for the development of materials for these later semesters.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anyone interested in writing course materials or in eventually enrolling in the program may call 623-1511 (Coordinación del Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros, UNAM-ENEP Acatlán) for further information.



## Interview with Ruth María Flores Maldonado <sup>1</sup>

T. NEVIN SIDERS V., MEXTESOL

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*Journal:* What do you recall about the first convention?

*Flores:* I remember I was walking with Bertha (Gómez Maqueo) to the Sunday (business) meeting. And all the objects that were going to be raffled among the teachers were on the floor in a big circle, and I told her, “Look at my TV set!” “Why, is it yours?” she said. “No, I’m going to win it,” I said. And in fact I won it, and it was the first thing I ever won in a raffle.

*Journal:* Excellent! What else do you recall from the first convention?

*Flores:* Well, I remember the atmosphere. All the teachers were very friendly, and there was this sense of friendship and that we shared the same interests; that sort of thing.

*Journal:* What do you recall about the place? Where was it?

*Flores:* It was in Tampico. It was lovely, I don’t remember the name of the hotel, but it was a nice hotel. Of course there were just a few teachers, really, compared with the numbers we have now in the convention. But, we had social activities as well as cultural ones. And we had an evening by the beach with fires, and some food and dancing and singing. (smiles warmly) It was lovely!

*Journal:* About how many people attended?

*Flores:* I remember perhaps 60 maybe, or less. Not many.

*Journal:* What do you recall of the predecessors to MEXTESOL? You were saying you went to some organizing meetings.

*Flores:* Yes, a colleague of mine from *Prepa 6* <sup>2</sup> invited me to these pre-meetings, to these meetings that were going to lead to MEXTESOL. She said “Why don’t you go to CEMAC? <sup>3</sup> There is a group of teachers who are

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth María Flores Maldonado was interviewed on Saturday, January 18, 1997 in Mexico City.

<sup>2</sup> *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria 6* in Mexico City.

<sup>3</sup> Today CEMARC.

trying to make a association of English teachers in Mexico, and I am sure that you would like that.” So I went there, and I met these teachers and we worked together, and the result was MEXTESOL.

*Journal:* You worked in the public schools [Ms. Flores is retired.] MEXTESOL has worked very hard over the years to try to offer teachers its knowledge, and also to receive recognition for our event from the Secretary of Education. In some states we have had quite a lot of success; the state Secretary of Education officially opened the convention in Zacatecas. What do you recall of your experiences, and can you give us any advice for the future?

*Flores:* Yes. At the beginning it was very difficult to try to get all the teachers from the public schools to go to MEXTESOL. Some of them liked it very much, and these are the ones who always go. The main thing was that they used to go to the convention, and that’s all. They didn’t follow up during the year, and they didn’t go to the monthly meetings or anything. Mainly just for the convention.

*Journal:* Why do you think so?

*Flores:* Well, I suppose they have many other activities and many other responsibilities at home, etc. And some of them are just not interested. which is a pity, because I used to invite all my colleagues in *Prepa 6* and the *Normal Superior*. Well, people from the *Normal Superior* were interested. But mainly the private institutes are the ones who really worked hard, and a few of us from the public school, but unfortunately not everybody.

When I was president of the Mexico City chapter, 1983 to 1984, we had a meeting every month and we had enough people, at least 25, 30 every month, which was very nice for us. Then, when we had a lot of people was in the mini-convention every year. We used to have it at *Colegio de México*, and we had many people attending, about maybe 200, and it was a real success.

*Journal:* What advice would you have about reaching into the public schools again?

*Flores:* Well, we should invite them, and keep on inviting them, and giving them perhaps recognition. SEP<sup>4</sup> gives them extra points, and recognizes their attendance to our meetings or to the regional convention.

And besides the lectures have to be, some of them, especially for *secundaria* teachers, which is very different from teaching in a private institute. Teaching in a public school is *completely* different.

*Journal:* What do you remember of the academic history of the events we've given?

*Flores:* Well, at the beginning the same teachers from the private institutes gave the talks, most of them. Then the British Council started bringing lecturers, and the [U.S.] embassy used to send two speakers to the national convention. And we had many important people coming for our conventions, especially when we had conventions in Acapulco. It was the place where the hotels were better for our conventions, with such attendance.

*Journal:* What were some of the topics, and people who spoke? In the interview with Vince Carrubba we reviewed how the profession has changed over the years.

*Flores:* Let me tell you something I remember. At the beginning, the Americans and the British were the speakers, mainly. But then we Mexicans started. I was very afraid to take part in one of the conventions as a speaker, but at the *Normal Superior* where I used to work, I remember Sergio Gaitán prepared a workshop in which another teacher, Marilinda Rosales and I were going to work with him. And he gave us all the strength we needed to face a convention group, you know. And that was very good, because that was the first time. And then the next year we had a different one, and so on. At the beginning I used to present the workshops with him, and later on I did by myself. So, that was nice when there were Mexicans giving the talks, workshops, as well. And as I said we received many guests from the States and from England and interest grew and many more people attended conventions.

*Journal:* Today convention organizers are very conscientious to try to mix native English speakers in Mexico, and Mexicans who are good teachers

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<sup>4</sup> *Secretaría de Educación Pública*

*Flores:* Yes, certainly I think that a well trained teacher has everything in his favor. I'm a very practical person, I don't like only theory. I must have a little bit of theory or some theory, and then more practice. That's why I always gave workshops this way, what I always did was I gave the theory very briefly and then I had all the teachers take part in the practice. I used to teach what we call now *didáctica de la especialidad* which is methodology at the *Escuela Normal Superior*. I suppose I had to give them theory, but I gave them more practice than theory.

*Journal:* What sort of workshops were popular at that time?

*Flores:* I think the most popular ones were those for *secundarias*, with games, songs to make the class a little more enjoyable. Not just to follow the book. Like extra activities in the classroom, those were most popular among *secundaria* teachers especially, and *prepa* teachers as well.

*Journal:* You were mentioning several people who were attending those conventions.

*Flores:* In the first conventions we had people from the Anglo-Mexicano, who were Paul Davis and Richard Rossner, Grace Scott from the Mexican North American Institute. Enrique Gutiérrez he used to work for Oxford University Press, he was one of the first presidents of MEXTESOL. And Nick Shepherd, of course.

Maybe I should talk a little bit more about the Mexico City chapter. It was the largest in the country. As I said there were monthly meetings, and there were many, many people who attended these meetings. Some of them were regular attendees; they always went to the meetings every month. Sometimes we had a little bit of work trying to find speakers every month. We had to find them at the institutes, from the *Normal Superior*, or any other institution. And we always had a meeting. People were happy with that. They really attended because they thought it was useful for them, and they were learning, and they could use what they learned in their own classrooms. There was a group of ladies, who always were there! about five or six.

*Journal:* Did they work in the same place?

*Flores:* No, they were just friends. I don't know if they became friends there or they knew each other before. Some of them were from *secundarias*.



In those days we had people from the *Politécnico*. I don't know if you still have many people some there.

The first convention was in Tampico, and the next one was in Cocoyoc. I couldn't attend that one because I was in England. I had a scholarship. Other than that I attended all the conventions. I think we all looked forward to the convention every year, and we made plans, and a lot of things to get a leave of absence in order to go to the convention. I always managed to get there somehow.

*Journal:* I understand there used to be two chapters in the Mexico City metropolitan area, one in the city and one in Naucalpan.

*Flores:* Yes, I remember that. But it didn't work. Two years, I guess. We used to go to their regional convention there. The first one was OK, the second not so much, and then I think it died out. I suppose they were so close together that one seemed to be enough.

Let me tell you an anecdote. I used to work at SEP and at *Prepa 6*. And once one of the students said; "Miss Flores, Miss Flores, why is it only our English teachers know our names? All the other teachers never know our names, but the English teachers always call us by our names." I said, "Well, because the English teachers are special." It is true. You need to know their names in order to have a class. To move, to participate. To make them participate, you must know their names, otherwise it's dead. At first the largest groups we had were about 32, 33 sometimes, but that was the fourth graders<sup>5</sup>. The fifth grade and sixth grade were much smaller. So it was not difficult to learn their names.

I remember two other teachers: Richard Rossner and Paul Davis. They wanted to get closer to the *secundaria* teachers and see what their needs were. So they took a group of normal students in *secundaria* and they taught that group that whole year. And so they realized what the teachers' needs were and gave workshops about it. It was excellent for us! We got many things.

*Journal:* I've seen some of the SEP textbooks for the *secundaria* and they are *trying* to be communicative.

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<sup>5</sup> First year of high school, 10th graders.

*Flores:* It's very difficult to be communicative because of the size of the groups in English. The children are not interested in English yet, they think it's just another subject. If they get a good class they get interested. Because they think if they go to the English class they're going to learn how to pronounce the words for the pop songs, and that they will understand for them. And when they get there and see "that is a chair," and "that is a table," they are disappointed, they don't like the class.

In conclusion, I myself got many things from MEXTESOL. I always used to go there very happy because I always learned something, something new. And I always had new ideas to use in my classroom, and it gave me the interest to become a better teacher, to study and to learn more about teaching. So, I really am sorry I had to stop going because I have personal problems. I always went there looking forward to something new, something different, or maybe just to see friends and talk to them.

*Journal:* Thank you very much.

## In Memoriam: Sergio Gaitán<sup>1</sup>

JOHN F. FANSELOW AND MARY E. HINES<sup>2</sup>

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Sergio Gaitán, former president of MEXTESOL and second vice president of TESOL (1989-1990) died on August 27, 1996. At the time of his death, he was Head of the Center for Educational Technology Services at the Milbank Library at Teachers College, Columbia University. He had first come [to New York] to begin his doctorate in TESOL as a Fulbright scholar in 1982, after serving as academic director of the Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales in Mexico City, Mexico.

To friends such as Ann Wintergerst, current president of NYSTESOL, Sergio Gaitán is remembered as an inspiring teacher, a talented organizer, a cherished colleague, and a compassionate, insightful, and loyal friend. “He was always a good listener. He always knew what to say and how to generate optimism in what appeared to be a difficult situation.” Ann and others in the Teachers College community marveled at his inner strength, at his ability to make others feel comfortable.

When other friends were asked, “What words come to you when you hear Sergio’s name?” no one had to pause before responding. In addition to compassionate, insightful, loyal, these words keep being said: “supportive, positive, energetic, supportive,” again, “lovely, helpful, positive,” again, “gentle, insightful, loyal,” again and again.

But referring to what friends said as words is really inadequate to describe what we gained from Sergio. *Gifts* would be the better word. He shared these gifts every time he asked, “How are you?” or “How may I help you?” or “What can I do for you?” When he said these words he did so with such love and excitement that it was hard to believe at first that we were all experiencing reality especially in New York. After all, we hear these words all the time. People are taught to utter the words when answering the phone, when responding to inquiries at offices, and in chance meetings. But when Sergio said these words, they were not the words we had heard hundreds of times before. In these few, simple words, we all felt the energy, the excitement, the support, the gentleness, the wisdom, the optimism, that his friends

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<sup>1</sup> This memorial is reprinted from *TESOL Matters*, Vol. 6, No. 6. December 1996 / January 1997. P. 25.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Fanselow and Mary E. Hines are past presidents of TESOL.

mentioned when I asked, “What words come to your mind when you think of Sergio?”

“Heart to heart speaketh” was the motto that John Henry Newman chose when he was named cardinal decades ago in England. Sergio’s life lived this motto. “How are you? How may I help you? What can I do for you?” said with love and acted upon with love--what an amazing gift.

*Note: Sergio Gaitán will be remembered by all his friends and all the people whose lives he touched. Rest in peace, Sergio--The Editor.*