

### **In This Inaugural Issue**

The Mid-America Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, now better known as MIDTESOL, was established in 1978. After 33 years of growth, MIDTESOL started publishing its Annual Conference Proceedings to document the exemplary presentations that were made in each of the annual conferences. At its fortieth anniversary, in addition to publishing Weekly Features and MIDTESOL Matters, MIDTESOL is proud to announce the inaugural issue of the MIDTESOL Journal, which officially replaces the Annual Conference Proceedings. English language teaching professionals are not unlike professionals in others fields. They love what they do and aspire to do their job even better. MIDTESOL's primary goal is to serve its members as well as English language teaching professionals worldwide in their pursuit to excellence in teaching English to people whose native languages are other than English. To that goal, MIDTESOL Journal will provide its readers with dissemination on various topics in English language teaching. In this inaugural issue, four articles are included.

In the first article, Randolph described an easy-to-use technique to help students make full use of the rich cultural and linguistic environment where they learn English. Randolph's students are more fortunate than many others who are not able to learn English in an English speaking environment. Assigning students to make observations of their surroundings and write a structured paragraph to describe what they have observed using the details from the observation is a clever way to keep students eyes away from their mobile devices and pay attention to the cultural as well as linguistic information that could enhance their understanding of the language

and culture in their learning environment. Observation, as Wajnryb (1992) noted, is a tool for learning. While Wajnryb saw observation as a means for educators to seek professional growth and development, Randolph taught his students to use observation to learn language and culture. What Randolph discussed is typical of what all classroom practitioners do. They creatively design and implement learning activities to motivate their own learners as well as themselves in the learning and teaching process.

The authors of the second article, Prancisca and Fergia presented an interesting way to help students learning English in a context where English is not the medium of communication. They discussed the benefits of helping students to read in English more easily using materials familiar in terms of content to students. Prancisca and Fergia provided an example project in which students read about traditional foods and traditions related to the foods described. The obvious advantage is that students find the reading materials easy to read thanks to the familiarity of the content presented in the text. Content familiarity is one factor that may enable students to read with more ease. In fact, in his discussion of the variables that affect reading Alderson (2000) pointed out different kinds of background knowledge that may have an effect on reading such as content knowledge and knowledge of the language. Prancisca and Fergia have taken advantage of their students' content knowledge to help them develop their knowledge of the target language.

The third article by Tran discussed lessons of her own as an International Teaching Assistant (ITA) in a U.S. higher education institution. Comparing and contrasting her Vietnamese culture and what she observed during interaction with American students led her to generate suggestions

for mitigating cultural shock that other ITAs may experience. Culture is an elusive concept that may morph in various forms depending on the people one interacts with and the interpretations of each individual. In fact, Fox (1999) indicated that “culture is relative and changeable in space and time” (p. 90). Language may be mastered within a certain period of time, but to know a culture well, one may have to be exposed to extensive interaction with people of a target culture. Academic culture particularly varies even from class to class and institution to institution. Each instructor may expect their students to behave differently in their class, and each institution has their own policies that shape their academic culture. Even people who use the same language (English) as in this case, Tran and her students, may have different behavioral expectations in the classroom. General cultural instruction and guidelines may be useful for ITAs and their students, but an open and inquisitive mind is key for both ITAs and their students to successfully work together to achieve their common goals academically and culturally.

Motivation is probably one of the most popular topics of interest for classroom teachers. In fact, Dörnyei (2001) indicated that motivation has been argued to be one of the most important issues in second language acquisition and that it is crucial for language teachers to possess the skills of motivating their learners. Students may be in class for an array of reasons such as to meet the requirements for a degree or program, to make their parents pleased, to learn a new language and culture for their jobs. As individuals differ tremendously in the way they learn and in how they can be motivated, the need for further inquiry into how learners motivate themselves has been and will always be of paramount importance for second language researchers and classroom teachers. In the fourth article, Faqeeh described her research on motivation among Saudi students learning English in the United States. She found that the vision of seeing themselves using

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English successfully is the motivation for them to learn English. It seems envisioning the end result can be an effective motivating strategy when learning is hard and progress seems intangible. Imagination and mental visualization can be so powerful that it may enable one to make such imagination and mental visualization a reality. It is hoped that the articles in this issue can motivate the reader to engage in sustained conversation regarding innovative ways to serve learners.

Thu H. Tran

MIDTESOL Journal Editor

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