



# ORTESOL NEWS

OREGON TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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Portland State University \* PO Box 751 \* Portland, OR 97207

## One Step Closer to the 2014 TESOL Convention: Explore, Sustain, Renew: ELT for the Next Generation

Monika Mulder (TESOL 2014 Local Co-Chair) and Lisa McKinney (TESOL 2014 Volunteer Coordinator)



**TESOL 2014 Team Leaders:** (front row, from left to right) Heather Dittmore & Monika Mulder (Local Co-chairs), Kathy Lobo & Julia Austin (Associate Program Chairs), Lisa McKinney (Volunteer Coordinator Team Leader) (Back row, from left to right) Joyanna Eisenberg (Bag & Program Distribution Co-team Leader), Winnie Cragg (Poster Session Team Leader), Patricia Schilasky (Job MarketPlace Team Leader), Debbie Anholt (Hospitality Team Leader) Luciana Diniz (Local Co-Chair), Katie Mitchell (Site Visit Team Leader), and Gabriel Diaz Maggioli (PCI Team Leader).

Our ORTESOL booth was a big success! Staffed by 2014 TESOL co-chairs, team leaders, and a number of ORTESOL members, the booth attracted a great number of attendees, all enthusiastic about the next convention in Portland, Oregon. We distributed promotional materials, answered questions about Portland, and invited everyone to attend our conference next year.



**ORTESOL Booth:** (from left to right) Patricia Schilasky (Job MarketPlace Team Leader) Katie Mitchell (Site Visit Team Leader), and Debbie Anholt (Hospitality Team Leader).

At the end of March, 2014 Oregon TESOL representatives attended the 2013 conference in Dallas, Texas. For five days, the Oregon representatives promoted TESOL 2014, shadowed team leaders and co-chairs, participated in team meetings, and attended special events such as the Presidential Reception.

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Shadowing the 2013 TESOL leaders was an intricate part of preparing for TESOL 2014. The Oregon representatives spent valuable time working side by side their counterparts, experiencing firsthand the challenges and the rewards of organizing and hosting an international TESOL conference.



2013 & 2014 Volunteer Coordinator Team Leaders.

The Touch Base meetings chaired by John Schmidt were definitely one of the most valuable experiences for the entire team. These meetings provided us an opportunity to share our daily experiences and observations, to talk about planning and promoting the 2014 convention, and finally to organize a fabulous convention in Portland, Oregon.

Although the convention is ten months away, you can get involved right now! Submit a proposal, become a proposal reviewer, or volunteer!

**1. Submit a Proposal to Present.**

All proposals must:

- be submitted online through the TESOL website using the Precise Abstract Management System:

<http://www.tesol.org/docs/tesol-convention/tesol-2014-call-for-participation.docx?sfvrsn=12>

- be submitted by Monday, June 3 at 5:00 Eastern Standard Time:

<http://www.tesol.org/convention2013/2014-convention-proposals>

**2. Become a Proposal Reviewer.**

All proposal reviewers must:

- fill out an application: <http://reviewform.tesol.org/form.php>
- complete the reviewer training prior to June 1, 2013 :

<http://www.tesol.org/convention2013/2014-convention-proposals>

- be a member in good standing with TESOL
- have internet access and Adobe Acrobat

If you have questions about the review process contact : [conventions@tesol.org](mailto:conventions@tesol.org)

**3. Volunteer at the Conference.**

If you would like to volunteer at the 2014 TESOL Convention contact Lisa McKinney at [mckinnlj@pdx.edu](mailto:mckinnlj@pdx.edu)

We hope to see you at 2014 TESOL in Portland, Oregon from March 26-29, 2014!



Our final Touch Base meeting.



## Online Teaching in the Tropics

Shannon Tanner

### Introduction

When I set out for Central America in September of 2012, freshly minted MATESOL in hand, I had few plans and many goals. Aside from the wanderlust that initially drew me to this career path, my main objective in leaving the United States was to gain international experience teaching at a university and to improve upon the linguistic foundation that I had gained years earlier as a Peace Corps Volunteer by immersing myself in the Spanish language.

I arrived in Nicaragua with the intention of visiting friends and family for a few weeks, after which I would continue on to Costa Rica where I was sure that my university dream job awaited me. While in Nicaragua, I browsed Costa Rican employment websites, and found many positions available at language schools, most of which required a lot of traveling around San Jose and outlying areas in the evening with minimal hours and minimal pay. Needless to say, this was not what I had had in mind when I left behind a full-time teaching position that I loved in Portland in search of a more “prestigious” position at an academic institution in Central America. As the weeks passed and the prospects in Costa Rica failed to materialize, I began researching employment options in Nicaragua. I went on a couple of interviews, and not having reached the point of desperation, turned down a couple of offers. Then one afternoon in a ridiculously hot internet café, I

came across a lone ad for Online English Instructors. At first, I was skeptical. I knew nothing about online teaching, and what I thought I knew about online work in general seemed suspect. But after re-searching the company, I decided to apply and I have been teaching English online ever since.

Despite my initial misgivings, working online has turned out to be an excellent option for me while living abroad. When I finally moved to San Jose in December, I quickly learned that the horrible traffic I had heard so much about was a reality. While it is one thing to be stuck on a bus in rush hour traffic on your way home from a museum, it is something completely different to be stuck on that same bus, 20 minutes late to your first day of a class that is located across town “in a two story building with a black gate, 275 meters north of the Coca-Cola.” (Readers who have lived in Central America will appreciate this reference.) Also, when I arrived in San Jose from Nicaragua, I did

not have to worry about finding a job, which was a great relief, especially after I learned that I would need to get a work permit if I wanted to be eligible for a university position. And since Costa Rica is not in the business of handing out work permits to non-resident *gringas*, I was grateful to have a position that paid on average \$2.00 more per hour than the jobs in the language schools, where I could actually get hired. Furthermore, the money I save on transportation, coffee runs, childcare, and professional attire makes for a nice vacation every three months when I have to renew my visa.

Another benefit of teaching online is that lessons are created for me and assessment is minimal. Don’t get me wrong, I love a good planning session just as much as the next ESL teacher, but there is something to be said for leaving my work at the office, so to speak. And while at first I worried that online teaching might not be the best move professionally, I have found that it has been an excellent opportunity to improve my skills as a teacher. Not only have I greatly increased my knowledge of technology and the web-conferencing programs commonly used in hybrid courses in universities across the globe, I have also been challenged to adapt and refine my skills to fit the online platform in the following areas:

### Learner Engagement

As any good teacher knows, engagement is a necessary requisite for acquisition. In the traditional classroom, engagement can be fostered and measured over time through the natural process of getting to know students and their preferred learning styles. In the virtual classroom, it is necessary for the online teacher to be able to quickly gauge students’ ability and proficiency level and adjust language and tasks appropriately. In the traditional classroom, measuring engagement is often done informally, through visual observation. Eye contact, head nodding, and note-taking are the hallmarks of learner-engagement. As these visual cues are not available in the online classroom, it is necessary for teachers to rely on participation as the only real indicator of engagement. Participation can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. While regular, timely verbal responses and active participation are one way of measuring engagement in the online classroom, often a highly engaged student will also be participating through the chat box, even when it is not his or her “turn”. Student chat participation can be anything from making jokes, providing support to fellow classmates, answering questions, or commenting on lesson content. As in the traditional classroom, managing student and teacher talk time is essential to making sure that all students have the opportunity to participate, so encouraging chat box participation is a good way to keep students engaged without upsetting the balance of student talk time.

*Online Teaching in the Tropics, Continued on Page 4*

*Teaching Online in the Tropics, Continued from Page 3*

### Explanations and corrections

In the interest of limiting teacher talk time, the ability to give clear and concise explanations and corrections is essential. As a teacher who prides herself on going the extra mile to ensure students' understanding, even if that involves standing on a desk, this was a challenge at first. In the traditional classroom, one of the most valuable resources that teachers have is their bodies. So many things can be communicated through the right facial expression or a simple hand movement. Without this resource, teachers must rely on images and explanations. While images are very important in the online classroom, finding the right image can be time consuming, and for grammar points, images are of little use. These factors have made it necessary for me to fine tune my ability to provide brief and clear explanations.

### Pronunciation

Another way that the lack of visual cues and physical proximity can be problematic is in the area of pronunciation correction. Being a primarily visual learner myself, I have come to rely on the tricks like 'the moving piece of paper' to visually demonstrate the difference between /p/ and /b/ in the classroom. I also regularly use mirrors to help students see place and manner of articulation, and I often have students place their fingers on their throats to feel the vibration of a voiced sound. Without these tricks of the trade to rely on, I have been required to improve my working knowledge of articulatory phonetics and the ability to explain them succinctly.

### Conclusion

So while my goal of teaching at a university will likely have to wait until I leave Costa Rica, I am confident that the skills I have been honing in the online classroom will be of value there as well. In the meantime, I am enjoying the challenge of finding new ways to facilitate learning and communicate with my students in the virtual platform. And when my wanderlust kicks in again, and I find myself dreaming of life in Thailand, I will go confidently, knowing that I will have a job when I get there.



## Smartphones in the ESL Classroom

*Helen Hahn-Steichen*

*Portland Community College*



Upon reaching the limit of communication, a Spanish-speaking student looked up the word in Urdu in an online dictionary and showed the phone screen result to her conversation partner. Immediately they understood each other and continued the exercise. Over the last few years, more and more of the students in our community ESL program have been coming to class with their own handheld computers—that is, their smartphones. Generally they use it during class for dictionary lookup and spontaneous fact-checking. Although cell phone usage in the classroom can cause irritating distractions, it can also be a useful learning tool that can be worked into a regular lesson plan. In fact, as a teacher, I can do more than use its dictionary or online ESL websites. I can use the smartphone's many other features in class as well.

There has been a general reluctance in the U.S. to integrate cell phone learning in the classroom. As Prensky (2004) commented: "For as U.S. educators are busy banning cell phones in schools, millions of students in China and Japan, the Philippines, and Germany are using their mobile phones (respectively), to learn English; to study math, health, and spelling; and to access live and archived university lectures" (p. 3).

Gradually, there has been a change in attitude towards the cell phone in schools. A humorous YouTube video begins with educators waging war on cell phone use in the classroom then transitions to show how some schools successfully use cell phones for learning. (OnOttButton, 2009). Success in using cell phones for EFL purposes in China gives Cui and Wang the confidence to conclude that "the integration of cell phones would present a brand new and refreshing experience to both teachers and students" (p.78).

In my community ESL class, I try to tailor the curriculum to fit how the students actually use English outside of the class. I know that they use their cell phones not only to make calls but also to do research and text with their children. If I can provide exercises to promote ways to use English as part of their daily life, I will in effect help them to practice regularly. As an example, community colleges in Southern California found that students who were using cell phones as part of their classroom activities practiced what they learned while waiting for the bus or on break during work. (Branka, 2011)

*Smartphones in the Classroom, Continued from Page 4*

### Some Practical Uses in Lesson Plans

#### **Listening / Writing**

At least once a term, I give the dictation from the hallway and call a student's cell phone with the speakerphone option. The students write what they hear. I have even encouraged students to text the dictation sentences to my email address. The typical reaction I get is a look of horror as if I told them they could cheat on a test. Indeed, the texting tool provides three possible words to help with the text entry and spelling. However, if they can type enough of the word correctly or choose the correct word, they are still learning.

#### **Vocabulary / Spelling / Grammar**

Using that same texting tool, spelling words can be given and the students can guess at how they might spell the word. If they type some of the first letters correctly, they will get three possibilities. By going through these motions and finding the correct word they are taking the first steps in becoming familiar with a new set of vocabulary words. Another benefit in allowing texting is to raise students' awareness about what words

occur together in high frequency, which is to notice collocations. The texting tool suggests words that typically occur together. If the students notice what possible words generally follow certain words, they will reinforce their understanding of collocations and grammatical structures. For example, if the lesson is about perfect modals, you can have them text "could've" or "must've" and show them that "been" is one of the suggested next words. (Note that "been" is not the top three suggested if one types the modal and "have" separately.)

Since texting is a frequent means of communication for the students when they are outside of class, it is a good medium for them to practice English.

#### **Speaking / Pronunciation**

When I first modeled Google's voice recognition tool, I was surprised at how many of my students were unaware of this feature on their phones. They asked me after class about how to use it.

Although the voice recognition tool is far from perfect, it can still be used to see how closely the student is able to mimic the correct sounds. For example, I might identify minimal pairs for students to work on and have them pronounce the words using the voice editor in the texting tool to see if they get the correct words to display. I have also encouraged the students to use the voice recognition tool in google.com to do specific searches. For example, I might have them search "Oregon Zoo" if /z/ is a problem sound..

#### **Internet Browsing**

As fluent speakers of English we have a relatively easy time doing searches in English. However, due to different word order or limited vocabulary, simple web searches can sometimes be a problem for our students. Another activity which I would like to try is to describe a

## Newsletter Staff

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Pati Sluys

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situation and have the students try to come up with a set of search terms. Not all the students have a smartphone so this would require setting up teams around a smartphone owner. The group can work towards getting the most accurate results fastest.

Of course, not all classes allow for such flexibility in lesson planning. However, since cell phones are being used every day outside of class, the more we can integrate English language use into our students' normal cell phone use, the more they will practice. I keep in mind what my Methods instructor, Lena Koessler, (Portland State University) once told us, "Work with the energy that's there." Smartphone usage is a powerful energy in our classrooms today; let's tap into that energy to make it a part of learning English.

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## TESOL 2013: Report from Our Grant Recipient and ORTESOL Representative

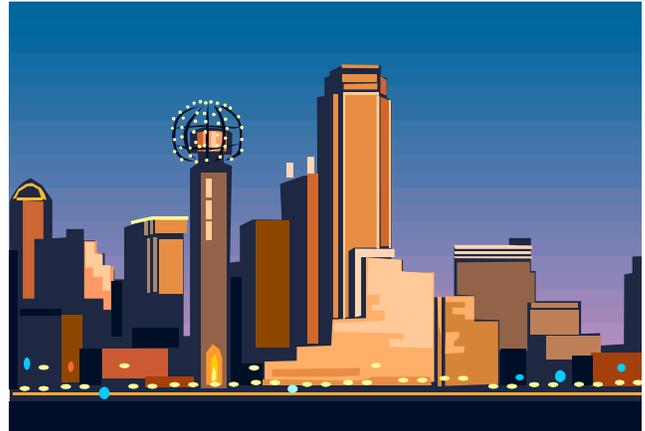
*Eric Dodson  
Portland State University*

I had the honor and unique opportunity to represent ORTESOL at the 2013 International TESOL conference in Dallas, Texas. My time at TESOL 2013 was a rush of energy, excitement, and learning, as I collaborated with other affiliate representatives, plunged into the international conference for the first time, and helped spread the excitement about TESOL 2014 in Portland.

On the day before the conference began, I attended a strategic planning workshop for TESOL local affiliates. I joined representatives from nearly one hundred other local affiliates for a series of discussions facilitated by organizational strategist Paul Meyer. The workshop covered detail-oriented issues such as managing meetings and ensuring strong communication with members, but we also covered big-picture issues and the need for continuous improvement.

It was a dynamic opportunity to share with others about what makes ORTESOL a successful organization, and to think about common challenges that face English language teachers and learners. At every opportunity to have a group discussion, the conference room practically roared from dozens of energetic conversations. I recall one moment where I realized, while discussing the changing needs of English language teachers and learners, that my table included someone from every continent (other than Antarctica). At the same time, we shared a great deal of common ground, and we were able to help illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of each other's respective organizations.

During the final part of the workshop, in order to connect long-term strategic planning with practical goal-setting, we were asked to think about a big, audacious goal for our local affiliates. To be honest, I had a difficult time narrowing down the potential options. When it was my turn to



share about ORTESOL's stretch goal, however, someone pointed out that we already had one: hosting the TESOL 2014 conference. The session ended shortly after, but all week long, I continued to hear from fellow attendees about how excited they were to come to Portland.

I found out just how many English educators were looking forward to coming to Portland when I volunteered at the ORTESOL booth. Some people came by to learn where the next convention would be, but many more already knew and just came by to share their enthusiasm and get recommendations for what to do, eat, and drink next year. Dallas may have been a great host, but people from around the world are excited to come to Portland. Helping out at the ORTESOL information booth was a good reminder that it will be important to have plenty of friendly volunteers to help welcome the world next March.

As a first time attendee, I was amazed at the number of people I met who were doing fascinating work in diverse fields. The plenary speakers and presentations allowed me to learn first-hand from prominent researchers such as Bonny Norton, Thomas Nakayama, William Grabe, Norbert Schmitt, Diane Schmitt, and Brian Morgan (to name only a few). However, it was the chance to connect with fellow attendees who had shared interests that made TESOL 2013 a special time for me. Nearly every time I talked with someone new, it would lead to an exchange about teaching techniques, student needs, current trends in research, or their excitement about coming to Portland next year.

My final role as an affiliate representative was to attend the TESOL affiliate session, where I heard more about the seven "best of affiliates" sessions at TESOL this year and the colloquium on International TESOL led by representatives from TESOL Japan and Argentina.



*TESOL 2013 Report, Continued from Page 6*

TESOL President Deena Boraie talked to the affiliate representatives about the importance of the local organizations to teachers, English learners, and TESOL International. Or, in her words, how "affiliates are the key to TESOL."

Perhaps her most exciting announcement was about the new additions to the TESOL organization; she led the group in welcoming TESOL Sudan, TESOL Kuwait, and ELTA Albania as affiliate members. With those additions, there are now 109 local affiliate organizations that are part of TESOL, making it a truly international organization.

After these announcements and remarks, the main business that we attended to was drafting our recommendations to TESOL's governance task force regarding the way that decisions are made, communicated, and executed in the organization. Our work was to make sure that affiliate organizations such as ORTESOL would have a voice in that process of adapting TESOL's institutional process, hierarchy, and strategic goals.

This was an imposing task, to put it lightly, but my fellow representatives quickly began brainstorming using butcher paper, forming small groups to take on specific issues, and, seeing as we were all teachers, generally found ways to scaffold the task.

In the brainstorming phase, I definitely felt like a student in a complex language activity. While taking notes on a piece of butcher paper, I started talking with a representative of one of the Texas affiliates about the lack of communication between affiliates, and the possibility of setting up an affiliate exchange for conferences, in order to promote new perspectives and inform members about developing issues in other parts of the nation and world. For me, this was important and timely, as I was just beginning to see the scope of the TESOL organization, its membership, and the connections that I hadn't been aware of before coming to the convention. Fortunately, this session provided the opportunity to share our recommendations with decision-makers.

In the next phase of the process, I worked with a small group of representatives from Michigan, Washington state, Japan, Kuwait, and France. Our task was to write a summary of the brainstorming notes and discussions on the topic of responding to issues of importance to the TESOL profession. The ensuing conversation, proposed language, and deliberation over difficult choices included topics such as policy changes at the federal and state level, trends in immigration, and, above all, the



need for local TESOL affiliates to have a way to communicate regarding these.

At times, the difference between our perspectives, our members' teaching contexts, and our beliefs as teachers led to spirited debate. However, it was a sense of purpose and duty to express the needs of ESOL teachers and learners that brought us together and allowed us to incorporate our various perspectives in a one-page document. Also, as with any group project, it helped to have a very patient scribe.

As we finished the activity, the facilitator reminded us to think about the principles we had discussed as we continued to attend sessions and interact with other attendees. Indeed, this reminder helped frame the rest of the conference for me. As a first time attendee, I was excited to find out about the larger community of English language educators. As the Oregon affiliate representative, I was honored to advocate institutional changes that reflect ORTESOL member needs. And finally, as an Oregon native, I was proud to hear so many people who were looking forward to coming to Portland in 2014. I am thankful for this wonderful opportunity.

### Correction from the Winter Edition

In the Winter 2013 edition of *ORTESOL News*, we published an article by David LaDuca from Chemeketa Community College called "Choosing an Active Approach to Pronunciation Training: A Reaction to Passive Approaches." His name was incorrectly published as David DeLuca. The correct spelling is LaDuca.



ORTESOL  
Department of Applied Linguistics  
Portland State University  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207



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