Summer 2005

2005 was a banner year for the TESOL Certificate Program. Forty-five participants from around the world converged at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York to learn from the staff, each other, and their English students about the joys and struggles of teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language.

Some are now teaching far away. Andre Querijero of the Philippines is teaching English at Ho Chi Minh University. Denise Ko returned to Hong Kong. Strother Purdy moved to India with his family where he teaches in an international school (Denise Goodman spent time in India this year, as well). Adrienne Husney is in Italy; Jan Jun and Lucia Chang are teaching in Korea, and Nicole Whitsett is teaching in Japan.

Closer to home, Zeena Deeb is busy teaching Chinese and Dominican students at Union Settlement on the Lower East Side. Since her students’ levels vary, Zeena loves the work, but finds it challenging. Jesse Curtis is working in a literacy program in Newark; Trisha Powell is in a literacy program in Brooklyn; and Raquel Vogl and Daniel Chiel are working at Rennert in New York.

Very close to home, Kane Niwa began a program in International Education, Carol Lu began a program in Instructional Technology at TC (Laura Lu is at NYU), and Gloria Galindo is studying Mandarin in the Community Language Program at TC.

Ann Cannizzaro (ME), Mas Ichida (NY), and Mike McPherrin (NY), returned to public school teaching, and Alyson Gilberg (MD) is back teaching at the private school, St. Timothy’s.

In My Dreams — Immigrant Writers in New York

I relive in the past time
When I want to be a child
I discuss with God
To reconsider about wars.
(Si Thu)

In my dreams
I am a bird
I fly in a permanent blue sky
I sing a song of Freedom
I have no constraint, no fence
I can go everywhere.
My limits are the limits of the world.
(Robert)

These are just two of the wonderful poems written by ESL students in Bill Zimmerman’s (2005) class at the College of Mount Saint Vincent Institute for Concerns in New York, based on the poem In Praise of Dreams by the Nobel Laureate Wislawa Symborska.

In addition to Bill’s work at the Institute, he conducts conversation classes for immigrants at the Riverside Learning Center and continues tutoring youngsters in the St. Timothy’s Church after school program on the Upper West Side.

Bill is also a prolific writer of books filled with ideas on how to inspire writing in students of all ages and gives workshops for ESL educators at CUNY, the Literacy Assistance Corporation (LAC), and the New York Public Library. Bill is currently working on an interactive Web comic strip game for teachers and students writing stories. For a list of Bill’s books and other ideas, check out his website at: www.billztreasurechest.com
When I was nine, my mother showed me a photograph taken right after the Korean War. She was posed with a group of 15 children organized loosely into two rows. They were all in ill-fitting clothes, boys and girls dressed alike, with closely cropped heads to ward off lice. Only five were actually her brothers and sisters. The others were war orphans whom her father had found on the streets of Seoul and taken home.

My mother would laugh as she told me of having to sleep in a crowded bed with several pairs of feet in her face, or of splitting the rare apple so many ways you could see right through a slice. At the time, of course, she resented how her father kept bringing more people home when it was hard enough for the family to survive.

During and after the war, hopelessly impoverished parents would buy their children a piece of candy and leave them at railroad stations, in the impossible chance someone would take them in. My grandfather was a soft touch, and sometimes would have a child or two by the hand as he came home from work. They stayed until they found family or were able to go off on their own. My grandfather even put several kids through high school and college, and one adopted son became a high-ranking secretary in President Roh’s administration.

My sister and I were raised on such stories, and my grandfather’s example of generosity and good will became firmly entrenched in our lives. We were never required to volunteer at this or that, but we found that doing so was deeply satisfying. My grandfather also prized education to a high degree.

When I graduated pre-med from Harvard, I took a job as a private science tutor. At first, it was merely a way to help out my mother after my parent’s divorce. But, I grew to love it in a way that surprised me. A pivotal moment came when a chemistry student (whose own mother had described her as “only interested in lipstick and boys”) showed me the first A minus of her high school career. Her pride was wonderful to see, and her new self-confidence spread to her other classes as well. It was at this point I knew no other job could give me as much pleasure and satisfaction as teaching.

Teaching science seemed like a natural path, but I found myself increasingly drawn to TESOL. I am a “Generation 1.5 Korean-American” fortunate to have learned English at four, but the experiences of my parents and relatives taught me how intimidating the language barrier can be.

My mother began work as a real estate agent in Manhattan in 1998. Until then, she had spent her life as a Korean housewife who devoted herself to raising her children; during her twenty years in the U.S., she never saw the need to speak English fluently within her own insular world. She suddenly found herself divorced and forced to support herself in one of the most challenging jobs in New York.

Although she was successful with her Korean-speaking clients, the prospect of talking to American agents and attorneys filled her with such anxiety that she continually asked for my help.

She had always been a strong and determined person, so I was shaken by how mere words and syntax had the power to undermine her sense of self-worth so deeply. Terrified of appearing uneducated and ignorant (when in fact she had graduated from the top women’s university in Korea), she would ask me to dictate complete sentences for upcoming phone conversations while she laboriously wrote the words down in a notepad.

As the years pass and she gained confidence in her ability to speak extemporaneously, her transformation was astonishing.

To those who are new to this country, or those who, like my mother, enter the mainstream culture for the first time, language is truly power. Helping non-native speakers gain a degree of power and control over their lives by teaching them to master English is a true and worthy accomplishment.

My grandfather’s death several years ago was a great loss for us. I wish I could tell him of my decision to teach, because I think he would have been pleased. I often think of that photograph from the war, and how emblematic it is of his life’s work. I count myself lucky to have found a vocation I love, one that in some small measure might continue the story that has been passed down by him to us.
Teaching in Chinatown

When Jan Schoonover (2005) got her M.F.A in painting from the Chicago Institute of Fine Arts, she never imagined that she would one day be teaching English and Art on a grant in a Chinatown, New York public schools. But, she loves it.

Jan has eight students who all live in extended family situations near the school and speak Mandarin at home. Most have ‘American’ first names and ‘Chinese’ last names, such as Daniel Chan and Elisa Wong. Jan says all the signs in the school are in Chinese and most of the teachers are fluent Chinese speakers. The parents do not speak English, but bring notes to communicate with Jan. Jan’s first project with the students was a journal with writing and drawings. She promises more pictures of her students and their work.

“The first time I gave instructions in English, one six year-old put his head down on the desk and cried.”

Worksite ESL Classes for Central Park Employees

Developing worksite ESL classes can be as gratifying and challenging, Diana Schoolman (2000) found when she designed a program for Central Park Conservancy workers through Marymount Manhattan (now Mount Saint Vincent) Institute for Immigrant Concerns.

In addition to having students on different literacy and English proficiency levels, Diana quickly learned that attendance can be spotty in worksite training programs were work has to come first.

However, the classes were a great success. Her students said, “We learned a lot” (Jose); “It was great that nobody laughed when we made mistakes” (Lucy); and “What I liked best was the friendship and respect we all felt for each other” (Hector).

“I love teaching. It’s challenging in such a good way. And I’m SO thankful for the TESOL course. Without a lot of the things I learned this summer, I’d be utterly lost!”

Raquel Vogl

Author! Author

Congratulations to Hyun Ju Lee (2004) on the publication of her book for young Korean students of English:

My First English Diary, by Nexus (Korea).

Do you have news and photos to share? If so, please send them to us:

tesolcertprog@tc.edu
Allegra Elson (2003) (left) was recognized by Pittsburgh Magazine in their ‘Forty Under Forty’ article for her work with the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, among other organizations.

“Through my teaching, I am able to help my adult students connect with their new city. Pittsburgh needs their strengths and talents. In seeing the value of this city, they may choose to stay, enriching all our lives.”

Eunjeong Kim (2003) and her new husband Rob Zollner dressed in traditional Korean wedding attire.

Morocco to Brooklyn

Since finishing the TESOL Certificate Program, Josh Asen (2004) has been on the kind of odyssey most people only dream about.

First, he was off to Morocco on a Fulbright to make a documentary about hiphop in a Muslim country, teaching a bit of EFL on the side. Next, he was accepted into the New York City Teaching Fellow Program. Now, he’s having a wonderful experience teaching ESL in a Bay Ridge, Brooklyn elementary school. According to Josh, the school has “a large Arabic-, Spanish-, and Chinese-speaking population, the three languages I’m studying right now. So, it’s a great match!”

Insider Job Tips

VIETNAM

Andre Querijero (2005) really enjoys teaching in Vietnam and wrote to let us know that ILA Vietnam is hiring. For more information, e-mail: recruitment@ilavietnam.com

Or contact:
Steve Baker
ILA Vietnam
Ho Chi Minh City
402 Nguyen Thai Hoc
Phuoc 7-
Vietnam

BOSTON AREA

Brooke Toomey (2005) is now Director of Studies at Embassy CES in the Boston area and says that Embassy CES is interested in hiring TESOL Certificate Program graduates. If you are hired for the summer, you can stay in the dorms and help run student activities. For more information, contact:

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Do you have an inside track on any jobs? If so, please let us know.