## President's Letter

Dear Colleagues,

As I end my term as President, I would like to express my humble gratitude to everyone who has and will continue to work tirelessly to ensure NYS TESOL runs true to its vision and mission. It has been an honor to have this opportunity to work with such dedicated individuals and to serve you and the organization.

Many who volunteer for this organization and believe in what NYS TESOL stands for know that it is not easy. As a small not for profit organization, NYS TESOL ensures that the voices of our members, non- members and ELLs statewide are heard. We can only continue with the help of such volunteers who spend countless hours warranting that educators and administrators continue receiving professional development that they may not otherwise receive. This is crucial in developing a voice of our own for our ELLs. So, once again I urge everyone to get involved.

Furthermore, I would like to encourage all to attend NYS TESOL 48th Annual conference in Albany. Vice President of Conference, Gretchen Oliver and her team have been working tirelessly to prepare for the biggest professional development and networking event for the year. Please visit the annual conference website for more information on keynote speakers and tentative schedule. Please note that the Annual business meeting will be held on Saturday November 3rd, from 8:00am-9:00am. This meeting is open to all.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the board members who are finishing their tenure and I wish Juliet Luther much success as she begins her presidency. I am very confident that she is more than qualified to continue in our collective efforts to meet the mission and vision of NYS TESOL. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the Board in 2018–2019.

I hope to meet many of you in Albany in November.

Sincerely,

*Ravneet Parmar*

Ravneet Parmar

President, NYS TESOL

## Fostering Collaboration with Digital Flipbooks

By Angela M. Thompson

Collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy are only a few of the many skills that teachers need to foster in their students. This is not a small task and finding an efficient and effective tool that helps keep things interesting for teachers and students is incredibly useful. Flipbooks can be that tool to make a creative, collaborative project to further their students' English language learning and digital literacy. As Harris (n.d.) argues the use of technology is not a skill that needs to be worked up to after "basic Skills" are developed; students of all skill-level can begin to access them (as cited in Frank and Castek, 2017, p.66). Flipbooks allow for an easy entrance into the use of technology. Through accessing Google slides and the website Flipsnack, teachers can create an environment where students match their experiences with a language goal and work together to create a tangible product that shows a bit of who they are as people as well as what they have learned.

Teachers can seamlessly incorporate a collaborative flipbook project into one of their existing classes by beginning with low tech activities as support and then move into digital ones. Starting with a class based writing activity focused on a chosen theme students can begin the project using traditional paper and pen/pencil. For example, a theme of "Special Celebrations and Holidays" lends itself to this kind of project because students will share information about their native countries' celebrations in addition to encouraging them to do internet research about an occasion. This aspect of the project fosters digital literacy and critical thinking in collecting and choosing the information they will include, while also promoting their English language acquisition, since they need to share information previously unknown to others in multiple ways from conversation to writing on an electronic platform.

Example of a flipbook using the holiday and celebrations theme:
https://www.flipsnack.com/Angelathompsonesl/

From a grammar perspective, the possibilities are endless. For example, if your focus is on unreal conditionals, students could write about what they would do, "if I had a million dollars." But instead of this being a one time communicative activity, it can form the basis of a flipbook project with many classroom activities supporting the students' learning beyond the grammar which lead up to the longer writing project. These activities could include listening and reading using a cloze exercise with the song "If I had a Million Dollars" by the Bare Naked Ladies. Working with verb tenses, students in pairs can share their writing through dictation and the

listener writes down verbs heard from their partner and identifies tense. Finally, the students handwrite a few sentences describing what they would do if they had a million dollars in order for it to be included in the next stage of the project. All four basic components (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are utilized in these activities culminating in a flipbook which expands on and becomes a concrete and shareable example of their learning.

Once the students have completed the activities that form the basis of the project including the writing assignment that will be included in the final flipbook, they can then begin to collaborate online through a Gmail account using Google slides. If students do not already have a Google account they can quickly create one and download the Google Slides app to have the tools ready to begin collaborating on their flipbooks. Next the teacher makes the master Google slides document that will be the format for the flipbook and shares it with the students' Gmail addresses Then the teacher demonstrates the basic features of Google Slides – adding a new slide, inserting and manipulating images, etc. in case some students are unfamiliar with the application. Students then begin to type their handwritten assignment onto a slide assigned to them (by giving the students a slide number or by putting their name on a slide). Depending on what format the teacher chose for the slides, students can then also share photographs, links, or graphics on their slides, but are reminded to keep the slides consistent since the end goal is to turn it into a cohesive and visual flipbook. This is the point where teacher and student feedback is very important and reinforces the collaborative nature of the project.

Once everyone agrees that the Google slides are finalized, the teacher can then save the slides as a PDF and then upload the offline project to Flipsnack and transform it into a simple but visually sophisticated digital flipbook which is easily shareable through a link. Flipsnack allows you to create flipbooks of 15 pages or less for free, but if you want more pages, it requires a monthly or annual subscription.

As a collaborative tool and physical expression of learning, a flipbook is a beneficial project for the students as well as the teachers and their institutions. Flipbooks reduce paper usage, promote digital literacy learning, engage students both within as well as outside of the classroom, nurture creativity and collaboration, and promote student accountability and identity as well as highlights program endeavors. Above all else for the student, it is something they produced in a new language that they can be proud of and share with family or other students. What a fun way to learn together while sharing ideas!

**References**

Frank, T.H. J. and Castek, J.  From digital literacies to digital problem solving:
Expanding technology-rich learning opportunities for adults. *Journal of Research & Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary & Basic Education.*  6 (2), p.66-70.

Angela Thompson has an M.S.in Nonprofit Management and a TESOL certificate from the New School. She has also been an active volunteer and teacher in the ESOL community for six years and is currently a Lead Instructor at the New York Public Library where she teaches WIOA, ESOL, and ABE classes. She can be reached at angelathompson@nypl.org

## Why ESOL Teachers Should Be Language Learners

## By Michael Putnam

The teacher had spoken to the class, but Miguel looked surprised when all the other students opened their books and commenced to work. He fumbled for his book, peeked at his neighbor's page, and struggled to keep up while pretending to know what was going on.

Sound familiar? There's a difference though. This was not a student of English, nor was he struggling to keep up with a group of native speakers. This student was me. I was in a Spanish language class and everyone in that class was more proficient than I was. Afterwards, my brain was flashing predictable thoughts and feelings. "I should quit, I'm wasting my time." "I'm an idiot; I'll never be able to keep up." One feeling caught me by surprise though: "That's how my students feel, all the time." Suddenly, I was hooked on language learning.

I started that class because the irony of a monolingual person teaching students to speak another language began to stare me in the face. Indeed, Australian linguist Elizabeth Ellis argues: "It's normal for ESL teachers to be monolingual, there's no requirement [to speak other languages], and no questioning of this state of affairs" (Ellis, 2002, p. 513).

Much of Ellis' work is devoted to exploring this problem. My experience can dovetail on her exploration because, unlike Ellis' respondents, I am studying a language consciously *as an ESL teacher* and intentionally reflecting about how I can help my students based on my experiences *as a language learner*.

Neither Ellis nor I would suggest that it is imperative to be a language learner or "plurilingual," to use Ellis' term, in order to be an effective ESL teacher. It is simply a matter of advantages. There's no question that I could see students lost in contexts like the one described above, but before I became a language learner my sympathy was abstract. I had no personal experience to draw on: I didn't know what that felt like. Language learning has given me that experience and with it, the ability to enter into the world of my students personally and professionally. In addition, language learning has given specific insights into how to help my students learn. Both sets of insights make me a better teacher.

**Language learning helps you understand your students**

On the broadest level, if you study a language seriously enough to become casually bilingual yet far from fluent (Grosjean, 2010), as I am, you will understand for yourself what it takes to learn a language. I call learning a language the most enormous and complex puzzle you will ever encounter, and yet, as I tell my students, the pleasure comes from seeing the big picture develop as you lock in tiny piece by tiny piece.

Ultimately, however, the real challenge of language learning is, for beginners in particular, how not knowing a language is like a disability. It literally disables you from being who you are with those around you. Jim Cummins (2007) wrote: "One of the most frustrating experiences for newcomer students is not being able to express their intelligence, feelings, ideas, and humor to teachers and peers" (p.4). I experienced this as not being able to find myself in French. Without being able to communicate my personality, I felt barred from myself, almost as if the language barrier were experienced both internally and externally. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of this experience is this: with time, effort, and good friends, I was able to overcome this profound challenge. Now, I can share in the trials and model positive outcomes for my students from personal experience.

On a more micro, day-to-day level, experiences present themselves all the time in which the language-learning teacher can identify shared experiences and encourage: "I know exactly what you mean" or "That happens to me all the time." This kind of encouragement runs deeper if students know it's rooted in shared experience. For example, a common experience in reading is this: a student knows every word in a sentence, but does not understand what those words mean when they're put together in this new way. Think idioms. This still happens to me all the time and I can share strategies from personal experience to overcome it.

I love to write in Spanish. Once I wrote a story that used a word from a thesaurus that appeared interesting and appropriate. According to my teacher, outside of novels by Gabriel Garcia Marques no one uses that word. How could a language learner possibly know that? This happens to my students all the time. And as a student myself, I understand completely.

I quite intentionally and constantly tell these stories to my students. They help create a deeper bond of shared experience—one that would be impossible to forge otherwise. In addition, I feel like there is a leveling effect. My experience with language learning puts me on a more equal plane with my students.

**Language learning helps you build teaching strategies**

Get students discussing controversial topics. The normal laborious process of discussion is listen, translate to the L1, think of an answer in the L1, translate, respond in the L2. Recently, when discussing the problems of the internet, this entire process transformed into a natural conversation. The only explanation I have is that my passion about this topic focused my concentration on the language in a way that I had never experienced—somehow it overrode my self-consciousness. Now I try to re-create that experience for my students.

Prohibition of L1 in the classroom misunderstands the realities of language learning. I'm a fairly advanced language learner, but when reading a complex text, I constantly translate. I cannot process the text without the L1. Maybe someday, but not yet. I reference the L1 because I *must*; my L1 is the *only* reference I have to what communication is. I allow translation in my classroom because I know how efficiently it increases comprehension.

Listening is the most difficult skill. Every other skill can be mitigated. Reading and writing can be done in isolation and thus slowed down. On a recent journey to Spain, I prepared before I spoke. I would anticipate and review necessary vocabulary before going into a shop. The difficult part? Understanding the response. I would ask people to speak slowly, but 99% of them didn't.

In conclusion, Nelson Mandela has said: "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." In an ideal world we could learn the language of our students. However, the multilingual classrooms of most ESL instructors in NY make that impossible. Nevertheless, if you take that leap and learn at least one of those languages, the very fact that you're doing what your students are doing will touch their hearts. It will be better for your students; it will be better for your teaching, and you will be a better global citizen. Finally, when someone learns you're an ESL instructor and they ask if you speak another language, you will be able to answer: "Yes, I speak …"

**References**

Cummins, J. (2007). Promoting literacy in multilingual contexts. What works? *Research into practice. Research Monograph, no. 5.* Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario, 1-4.

Ellis, E. (2002). *Bilingual students - monolingual teacher*. Paper presented at Second University of Vigo International Symposium on Bilingualism, Universidade de Vigo, Galicia, Spain.

Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Michael Putnam is an adjunct professor of ESL at St. John's University and New York Institute of Technology. He has studied Spanish with numerous teachers around New York for 10 years, and lives in Brooklyn with his wife and teenage daughter. He can be reached at
putnamm@stjohns.edu

*Tech Tools– This is an ongoing column featuring reviews and practical and creative pedagogical uses of technology. Please send article submissions to the column editor, Genie Smiddy at* editors@idiom.nystesol.org

## In a Nutshell: Unlocking the Power of Simplicity

By Eugenia Coutavas and Genie Smiddy

Many years ago, one of my Japanese students required extra tutoring for some minor writing problems, especially capitalization and punctuation. After meeting with him to review why he repeatedly made these small errors, I discovered he was translating how he texted English into how he wrote academic essays. That was perhaps my first 'A-Ha moment' regarding technology and how it was effecting my students' English production. Fast forward twelve years and I am still grappling with how my students interact with "technologized forms of language" (Chun, Kern and Smith, 2016, p. 65). Although this example regarded writing, it seems to me that technology has become an unavoidable part of our students' lives in all skills. Why not embrace that and use it to meet the same goals we had before tech use became so ubiquitous? Instead of students using technology only for their personal use or to "avoid" the stresses of the classroom, why not use technology in order to more fully engage them in the class in what may feel more natural since tech is so much a part of their lives.

Though much educational technology is meant for learning language specifically as in the examples of Duolingo or Grammar Up or as repositories of content as in NewsELA, Voice of America Learning English, and English Listening Lesson Library Online, others that aren't focused on those goals still become powerful tools in language development, particularly because they allow students to use language creatively and in a low-stress activity like an ice-breaker or introduction. This is where I have found certain applications great additions to my repertoire. I always begin my semesters with low-stakes opportunities for students to describe themselves, their home countries, their current living situations, etc. Admittedly this could be done in class, using tried and true techniques teachers know, but I like to find out other things about my students, for example, how do they get back and forth from school? What does their dorm room really look like? What is the view from their window? Do they have any tattoos? Again, all this can be described in a traditional conversation or survey, but sometimes the details are lacking because the language is not there yet, or students are just too shy. Pictures are the answer because they form the input that is the basis for the vocabulary the students may need to push themselves to use as well as a stand-in for language they may not have lessening their

anxiety if they do not have the words they need. Wouldn't it be great if instead of hiding their smart phones beneath their desks to try to avoid their anxiety, they could use them to transform a couple of pictures into a story and easily display it to the whole class while learning a new app in the process?

About two years ago, I discovered the Nutshell app and have been using it ever since for brief low-stake assignments. Nutshell is a free app that is currently only available for iOS devices. It was created by the makers of Prezi, an alternative presentation tool to Power point and is essentially a storytelling app; it allows you to tell a story by snapping three consecutive pictures and then transfers the photos into a brief movie. Users can then add text or graphics to further personalize the story. Completed Nutshells can be shared through email or posting them to social media.

The name, of course, refers to the compressed nature of the story, which is perfect for a first-class assignment - 'tell me about yourself in a nutshell.' It also dovetails nicely with all the idioms I like to assign! Once students download the app to their phones, they make their Nutshells and share them by either texting or emailing me. Sometimes I have students narrate their Nutshells to the class; sometimes I will be the only one to see them. It is a fun and fast way for me to get to know them and if I have them share the Nutshells, for them to learn about each other at the beginning of the semester.

This is an example of my ice-breaker exercise:

Instructions

1. Download the Nutshell app to your smart phone. You can follow instructions here.

2. Create two or three nutshells about yourself.

3. Upload them to our class site OR email them to me/yourself. Be prepared to narrate them in class during a very brief informal presentation.

These are some examples of Nutshells I make as previews to introduce the app and to show the students what their Nutshells may look like. To keep things simple and personal, I often stick to getting-to-know-you themes like: *Where do you live/work? How do you get here*? *What is your favorite food or place to eat? What's the view from your window?* This way, no matter if they are high beginner or advanced, everyone will be able to participate, even if they collaborate with another student if they do not own an iphone.

And here are some of my students' examples:

Subway buskers

Busy studying

Student lunch

Student classroom

Even though this is a pretty straightforward story-telling app, that doesn't limit its usefulness or ability to tap into higher order thinking or language skills (Alismail, 2015). Looking at these few examples, it is clear that the students needed to choose what and how they will capture and communicate their stories. Though these are personal, this app can be adapted to a more "academic" topic too. For instance, a teacher could show images from Norman Rockwell's *The Four Freedoms,* visualizing his idea of the freedoms FDR reasserted in his 1941 State of the Union (FDR Presidential Library and Museum). The images symbolize some of the ideal values of America but as products of the time, they also omit other aspects such as diversity in religion, race…This allows the class to discuss what still exists as well as what has changed in the U.S. Then, they brainstorm ideas that would show a modern version of these values or others they choose to highlight. Then the students could try to capture images that symbolized those ideas. To do this, they need to think about what aspects of the country, good and/or bad they wanted to focus on, take the photos or videos, add their text and then explain their rationale in class.

This may seem gratuitous - using the latest app to do something that could be done in class, but I feel strongly that students respond well to teachers who are open about incorporating technology into classroom discussions and the research on using technology to improve 21st century skills supports it as well. And like the way we incorporate tech into the rest of our lives, it lets the students personalize and modernize their stories through a glimpse of their daily lives and perceptions that words alone could not do. In a Nutshell: up to date, easy to use, fun to watch.

**References**

Alismail, H.A.(2015). Integrate digital storytelling in education. *Journal of Education and Practice (6) 9*, 126-130. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1082416

Chun, D., Kern, R. and Smith, B. (2016), Technology in language use, language teaching, and language learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100, 64–80. doi:10.1111/modl.12302.

FDR Presidential Library and Museum (n.d.). FDR and the four freedoms speech. Retrieved
from https://fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms.

Eugenia Coutavas has been an ESL teacher for more than 20 years. She has taught various
populations in New York City but now mainly focuses on higher education. In addition to
teaching, she has also worked as a teacher trainer and used to write a column for the NY State
Tesol publication *Dialogue*.

Genie Smiddy is a Senior Language Educator at St. John's University and has taught English for
academic purposes since 2014. During that time, she also taught freshman composition at Hunter
College. She can be reached at smiddye@stjohns.edu.