



President's Letter

Dear NYS TESOL members, colleagues and friends,

Welcome to the spring 2018 edition of *Idiom*. First, I would like to express my gratitude to all the writers, who took the time out of their busy lives to write for the newsletter. It is such efforts that inspire others to learn and teach new ideas.

Now, it is with great pleasure that I share with you the announcements and the wonderful events that will take place throughout the year! The 48th Annual Conference will be held November 2-3, 2018 at the Marriott Albany, NY. This year's theme is: ***Experience: The Heart of Teaching and Learning***. VP Conference, Gretchen Oliver and her team have been attentively preparing for this event. Please consider sharing your ideas and expertise with other educators by presenting at this year's conference. NYS TESOL is also proud to present [travel grants](#) for our members to attend the conference. Also, I would urge you to encourage your students to participate in the [Student project contest](#). Details on the topic and deadline will be posted soon on the student project contest webpage. Winners will be honored at the conference and receive a small gift.

Furthermore, there are several events happening this spring throughout the state. The 39th Annual Applied Linguistics Winter Conference on the theme of ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***, will be held April 21st at Teachers College of Columbia University, and the Long Island ESOL (LIESOL) Conference will be held March 24th at Molloy College in Rockville Centre. Calls for proposals for both these events are now open. These events are great opportunities to expand your knowledge and network by presenting and attending other workshops. For a complete list of upcoming events and other information, please see the event calendar on the main page of [NYS TESOL webpage](#).

Finally, I urge you to simply not be members but be ACTIVE members in the organization. Get involved!!! Stay up to date on new information, help NYS TESOL be your voice to advocate for our students and others. There are many unique opportunities available to prosper together. Please feel free to email me at pres@nystesol.org to find out how you can get more involved in the organization and make a difference.

Yours in NYS TESOL,

Rauneet Parmar

President, NYS TESOL
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Teacher Emotional Intelligence and the ESL Classroom

By Sharona Moskowitz, PhD Candidate

Consider a hypothetical scenario: you are in front of the class teaching, when suddenly mid-lesson, you notice a small group of students in the corner who seem to be distracted. Slowly, they begin smiling at each other knowingly, as if sharing an inside joke. The smiling turns into hushed giggles, which suddenly erupt into a paroxysm of hysterical laughter.

How do you react? Do you get nervous, feeling your power slipping away, and stop to reprimand the students in front of the class, your momentary anger eclipsing your ability to keep a cool head? Or do you have the opposite reaction, smile at the group signaling that interruptions don't throw you off, and make a joke about the possible source of their laughter? Perhaps in a different vein, you simply say nothing, ignore, and continue teaching.

A teacher's reaction to such a typical scenario may be a reflection of not only personality and teaching style, but the teacher's level of emotional intelligence. Introduced into the parlance of mainstream culture by Daniel Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is generally defined as the ability to recognize, understand and manage feelings in oneself and others. For an ESL teacher, those social skills are crucial. Considering that language itself is essentially a social endeavor loaded with all sorts of implications about culture, identity, and self-representation, an emotionally intelligent teacher will most likely be more effective at connecting with students and establishing a community of learners within the classroom.

Emotional intelligence is proven to be a strong contributing factor to the student-teacher relationship and teachers who score higher on emotional intelligence tend to have a more positive relationship with their students and enjoy lively classroom interactions (Dewaele & Mercer 2018). Furthermore, teacher emotional intelligence may have a positive effect on student achievement by strengthening the students' own self-perception of aptitude and ability (Curci, Lanciano & Soleti 2014). As educators, we know that no matter how rigorous our professional training, no matter how seemingly foolproof our lesson plans and our confidence in the subject matter, ultimately our relationship with our students will be the key component that textures the everyday realities of our classrooms.

New teachers often lament the absence of explicit instruction on basic classroom management skills in their pre-service training. Even with adult students, novice ESL teachers may find



themselves in a classroom that feels out of control with learners who are impatient and disruptive, or conversely, physically there yet not exactly ‘there,’ a vacant look in their eyes as they sit lost in the privacy of their own thoughts. Picking up on emotional cues from students and adjusting teaching behavior accordingly could positively impact instruction and ultimately be a boon to student outcome.

Whether emotional intelligence can be changed or not is a cause of debate. However, there is some evidence that learning to regulate and modify emotions can increase effectiveness in teaching, especially in newer, less-experienced teachers (Sutton 2004). A study of middle school teachers’ emotion regulation strategies found that 97% of 400 teachers surveyed believed that increasing positive emotions in themselves made them more effective, employing a range of strategies such as self-talk, visualization, deep breathing and controlling their facial reactions. Beliefs among teachers in the same group varied when it came to opinions about showing negative emotions, such as anger and disappointment (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight 2009). This is not to suggest that teachers can or necessarily should pretend to be what they are not. For example, it would be silly and unrealistic to suggest that a soft-spoken introverted teacher somehow morph into a hyperenergetic cheerleader in front of the class. Teaching style is to a large extent individual, a complex mosaic of teacher beliefs seasoned over time by experience and tempered by real life considerations such as budget, time constraints and available resources.

The impact of teacher emotional intelligence on ELLs is still a developing field of research. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to argue that more attention to teacher emotional intelligence in the ESL classroom could be beneficial by making teachers more aware of the factors that precipitate emotional responses and more able to adapt and manage the mood of the class as well as their own. Teachers who effectively perceive emotions might be more tuned in to the needs of the class and of individual students. Additionally, a focus on emotion management skills could promote ESL teachers’ self-awareness by making them more aware of their own triggers and how to handle them. This is of particular importance considering that “socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supporting and encouraging relationships with their students...and acting as a role model for respectful and appropriate communications and exhibitions of prosocial behavior” (Jennings & Greenberg 2009: 492).

As we all know, students pick up on teacher reactions to various situations, both positive and negative. The student-teacher relationship is often reciprocal, with students and teachers influencing each other's moods and sometimes absorbing and reflecting each other's beliefs and behaviors. Given that, an emotionally intelligent teacher might be better capable of creating a more manageable and productive atmosphere.



So next time you encounter a bout of uncontrollable laughter in the classroom, perhaps you will take it in stride, maybe even laughing along with the students at whatever private joke they may be laughing at (it very well may be you!).

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Web-based Resources for Middle School ELLs

By Samantha McManus, Celena Chin, and Ozge Yol

Among the difficulties of working with middle-school English Language Learners (ELLs) is the shortage of materials that are both interesting and age- and level-appropriate. Too frequently, students are provided with materials meant for lower levels. These materials, while at the right grade level, often are not engaging for pre-teens and young teenagers. As such, students often become uninterested in the classwork, a particularly dangerous predicament given the many disadvantages they already face. To remedy this issue, we offer some ways of using web-based technologies to provide engaging and age-appropriate materials to ELLs based on our experience in an after-school writing program offered to middle school ELLs. Although we implemented these resources with middle schoolers, they are appropriate for ELLs at various proficiency levels.

Integration of technology into classroom instruction has positive effects on all learners, and teachers recognize the benefit of ELLs' access to technology in an environment that maximizes their language and content learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Additionally, lessons integrated with technological tools increase the motivation of learners and their repertoire of learning strategies (Andrei, 2014; Chen & Liu, 2015), which has a positive effect on learning and language development of ELLs. Therefore, with guidance and support from teachers, ELLs can be provided with various technology based and engaging opportunities to enhance their language development and skills.

The first of these is a website for supporting learners' literacy and language skills - Rewordify (<https://rewordify.com/>), a website that allows users to simplify an entire website in addition to allowing them to copy-and-paste text into its website for adjusting the difficulty of a text to the level of learners. It is best for students who can *almost* read at grade-level and only need help with a limited number of words. For example, Rewordify can be used when studying current events. If students are reading an article from *The New York Times*, teachers can paste the article into Rewordify to define or replace difficult words. This feature allows students to read the same content as their peers, allowing them to participate in class debates, discussions, and other assignments which derive from readings.

Similarly, Newsela (<https://newsela.com/>) provides the same readings at different Lexile levels, many of which ranging from 300L to over 1000L. Teachers can set goals for all students with a



variety of options on different topics. For example, we integrated Newsela in our after-school writing program. Volunteer teachers picked topics that their students were interested in and adjusted the difficulty level based on the proficiency of the ELLs in their groups. Because the readings were at their levels and of interest, the students had greater understanding and enjoyment of the texts.

News in Levels (<https://www.newsinlevels.com/>) is another great resource especially for emerging students, as the simplest articles in News in Levels are about four to five sentences, with vocabulary pulled out and defined. Each article is written in three levels and have audio recordings with varying speeds. This can be beneficial to ELLs who are more proficient in listening as they can use this to develop their confidence in reading. We used News in Levels in our after-school writing program to provide contextual support to emerging ELLs, who were unable to read the article, but could listen and understand the slower recordings of them. It helped those learners to grasp the content with ease while providing the opportunity to support and improve their reading skills at their own pace.

In addition to these resourceful websites, gamification can also be integrated in the classrooms for developing literacy and oral skills of ELLs. While providing learners with materials in an accessible, entertaining way, games also offer a chance for more reserved ELLs to become actively engaged in the classroom. Tellagami, (<https://telligami.com/>) a mobile application for iOS, allows students to create short videos with animated characters and pre-recorded messages to make a fun and informative video. This app can be used to accommodate ELLs, who struggle with the confidence to speak in front of their class, by pre-recording a speech or presentation. In this experience, students can create animated characters and backgrounds, which can be a unique experience fostering creativity.

Brainpop ESL (<https://esl.brainpop.com/>) is another resourceful gaming outlet and provides leveled “units” with games, videos, quizzes, and flashcards to practice reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. With its own placement test, Brainpop ESL is geared towards ELLs of all levels, so teachers do not need to worry about finding the right unit level or adapting it for an ELL. While the tasks can be assigned to learners as homework, this website can be integrated into pull-out classes with learners at different levels to allow them to work at their own speed in an engaging environment.

These are only some of many web-based resources that can fill the need for engaging, age and level appropriate content for ELLs. Whether looking for games to engage learners or appropriate reading materials, there is an abundance of material available for ELLs of any age or ability just one click away.



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Bridging the Home and School Connection for English Language Learners

By Jo Ann Miles and Debra Calluzzo

Many factors affect English Language Learners (ELLs) in their ability to make academic gains in school. One such factor is the role parents play in their children's education. Moss and Young (2012) consider parents or caregivers who read and have books in the home provide powerful models for their children. Research and practice have both demonstrated that parent involvement is central to academic achievement.

Immigrant families often feel disenfranchised from the educational process particularly in an academically rigorous environment (Schrodt, Fain and Hasty, 2015). To address this issue, two elementary school teachers from the English as a New Language (ENL) and Reading departments collaborated to develop evening literacy workshops to involve the parents of ELLs in their children's education. As Allington (2006) suggests the necessity of bringing books into the home to build personal libraries is vital to developing literacy skills. Therefore parents were provided with bilingual instructions (Figure 1), reading kits and leveled books to build home libraries in hopes that immersion in a literacy rich home environment would foster a love of reading. In order to do so, the program focused on strengthening a connection between home and school by providing reading instruction to parents and children of which the children consisted of 14 Spanish speaking ELL kindergarteners (lacking pre-k experience) and first graders reading below grade level due to summer regression and limited English contact. Knowing this context of the students and the necessity to boost their literacy practice, teachers demonstrated a variety of instructional strategies illustrating the multiple ways children learn and how parents can assist their children's literacy skills outside of class.

To develop alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness, teachers provided practice through games and kinesthetic activities. Children identified letters by playing games like *Fly Swatter*, *Room Walk* and *Letter Hunt* (Figure 1). *Push into the House* and *Flap Your Wings* helped children notice and identify initial and final consonants by having children push the correct letters off the roof of a drawing of a house or to flap their arms when hearing words beginning with particular letters. Teachers also used chants and movement to clarify similar sounds or letters when the children were confused by them. All of these new concepts were then practiced at home with the families completing word searches.

Moving from individual sounds to words and then to short written text comprehension is a



necessary but challenging step that needs to be slowly introduced and then further reinforced by practice with the children's parents. To introduce the students to the idea of more text and greater content the children were given a simple leveled reader with one line of print. At this point, emphasis was placed on directionality, word and letter discrimination, word spacing and punctuation. In later sessions, teachers used a more advanced reader with three lines of text, return sweep and varied forms of punctuation to extend their literacy. To achieve a higher order of comprehension in these readers, teachers previewed the content with picture walks and encouraged student predictions and text connections. Teachers introduced question words with a visual aid in the shape of hand labeled: who, what, when, where and why to establish then reinforce the ability to address comprehension questions. Then at home, families underlined these skills by completing comprehension questions and a sequencing activity.

For each literacy skill the teachers hoped to develop in their students, the parents received many resources and materials to continue to strengthen their children's literacy outside the classroom. At each session, teachers distributed a homework packet that included letter and word hunts for vocabulary development and graphic organizers and sentence starters for writing that reviewed the work from that day's class that allowed the students to make text connections. Parents also assisted with rudimentary components of the writing process: letter formation, directionality, word spacing, spelling and punctuation. The teachers also modeled how to use literacy kits that included magnetic letters, sight word cards, alphabet chart, whiteboards and sentence strips at home to practice letter and sound recognition skills, vocabulary and writing skills and teachers further modeled the games children played in class to develop alphabet skills, so the parents could repeat them at home (Figure 1) reinforcing both literacy and fun aspects of learning.

Including the parents in their children's literacy education demonstrated a positive outcome in improving their children's reading and writing as well as the parents' comfort in doing so. The results of pre and post testing showed that all 14 students made progress and the six students who spoke little or no English demonstrated the greatest gains. These students scored 0 out of 13 on the pre-test sight word inventory and subsequently achieved scores from 4 to 9 on the post-test making the average gain to be 5 sight words showing a great improvement overall in the students' literacy. But the parents also felt they and their children benefitted from the program as can be seen in the exit survey. This survey evaluated the parents' responses to the program and indicated that everyone found the workshops worthwhile and increased their confidence in assisting their children with their schoolwork. This highlights the fact that not only do parents who become literacy models boost their faith in their abilities to help their children, but also form a successful home-school connection which may reinforce the awareness of a reading world beyond the school walls creating a recipe for longer term academic success.



Figure 1

Directions for Parents

Direcciones para los Padres

- Letter Practice:** Use the ABC chart to say the letters and sounds daily. Say the letter, say the picture, say the sound.
Practica las letras y los sonidos sobre la carta diariamente. Decir la letra, el foto, y el sonido de la letra.
- Room Walk:** Find something in the room that begins with each letter.
Hace “Una Caminata por la Sala.” Encuentra una cosa en el cuarto que empiece con cada letra.
- Letter Hunt:** Do one page of the Letter Hunt each day. Your child can draw a picture if they cannot write the word. Look for objects in house, books or magazines.
Hace una pagina de “Buscar las Letras” diariamente. Su niño(a) puede dibujar si no puede escribir la palabra. Buscar objetos en casa, libros o revistas.
- Fly Swatter Game:** with the magnetic letters.
Ask your child to tap the letter or sound that you name.
**Juega el “Juego de Matamoscas” con las letras magneticas.
Pida a su niño(a) que toca la letra o el sonido que usted diga.**
- Book Talk:** Ask 3 questions during reading and after.
Discusion sobre el libro. Preguntar tres preguntas durante la lectura y despues de concluir el cuento.
- Writing Practice:** Use the white board to practice writing letters and words from the story. **Usar la pizarra magnetica para escribir letras y palabras del cuento.**
- Sentence Strip Writing:** Use the sentence strips to write sentences from the book. **Usar las tiras de papel para escribir las frases del libro.**
- Sight Word Cards:** 1. Say the word. 2. Trace the word with your finger. 3. Track the word and say it again. **Decir la palabra. 2. Usar su dedo indice para trazar la palabra y deletrearla. 3. Trazar la palabra y decirla al mismo tiempo.**



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