

# ESL Content Teachers Collaborative

School of Teaching and Learning

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## Letters from the Directors



Karen Newman  
*Project Director*

Here at Ohio State, our winter quarter (and hopefully, the unusually cold weather!) has passed the mid-way point, and we at the ECTC are gearing up for our upcoming second workshop with this year's cohort of content and ESL teachers, as well as our second online course, T&L 887D46 Community-Based Field Experience. This course will be taught by Karen Macbeth, Ph.D., and we're excited to welcome her to our ECTC team. Dr. Macbeth's background and interests in language education are extensive, as you'll read in her article in our newsletter.

This year, we also have another new team member, Sage Thompson, who joins the ECTC as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Sage is a licensed Language Arts teacher and is currently completing her master's degree in TESOL here at Ohio State, and her teaching background includes working with adult ESL learners through the Columbus Literacy Council and Columbus City Schools Adult Education Program, and teaching EFL in Hungary and China. Sage is also an avid ballroom and Latin dancer, so if one of your 2009 New Year's resolutions includes learning how to dance, Sage will be happy to share suggestions with you!

We are fortunate to have these two dynamic instructors with us this year, and we know you'll like getting to know them and working with them. We're also looking forward to following up with our first-year cohort members to assess the impact of their ECTC training on current teaching practice, as well as to planning our annual ECTC summer workshop. We hope you enjoy reading this second edition of our newsletter, and we encourage you to stay in touch with us!

Warmly,  
— Dr. Karen L. Newman

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*Dr. Samimy writes:*



Keiko Samimy

Overall, the ECTC has been very productive in our recent research endeavors. We are excited to report that this spring the ECTC directors will be guest-editing the journal *Theory Into Practice*'s special-theme issue entitled, "Integrating ELLs in Content Classes." In addition, we have submitted an article, "What Content Teachers Want: Assessing and Meeting the Professional Development Needs of Secondary Teachers of English Language Learners" for publication in the journal *Teacher Education Quarterly*. We are also working on two articles which should be ready to be submitted for publication soon!

Best wishes,  
– Dr. K.

*Dr. Romstedt writes:*



Kathleen Romstedt

Our current Methods Class focuses primarily on how people learn language and what teachers can do in the classroom to facilitate this process. Even small changes in lesson delivery can have a big impact on an English language learner! In addition, we explore the role of culture in learning and how building awareness of cultural differences can benefit both teacher and learner. Community building is also a big part of our class! Members of our online cohort get to know each other professionally in a way that might not be possible in a face-to-face class that only meets for a few hours a week. Reflection on teaching practices is another benefit offered by the class. Teachers keep journals of their experiences and often report transformation in their views of ELLs and of how they might better meet their needs. It's exciting to see all of the discussion and to read the success stories posted online!

Sincerely,  
– Dr. Romstedt



## Learning Through Observing

By Dr. Karen Macbeth

**J**oining the program faculty this spring is Karen Macbeth, Ph.D., who will teach the *Field Experience* course. She has over 30 years of ESL experience in a variety of settings, including a stint as a teacher trainer in West Africa through the Peace Corps. She currently serves as the curriculum coordinator of Ohio State's ESL Composition Programs on Columbus and Newark campuses, where her duties include designing curricula, supervising instructors, and teaching academic writing. She also teaches courses in area endorsement programs and for OSU's Foreign and Second Language Education Department. She specializes in classroom research.

*Karen Macbeth was born in Wisconsin, grew up in Georgia, and now lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband, daughter, and beloved dog Sweet Pea.*

I love being immersed in the second language writing niche, but actually my research interest can be found in *any* classroom. I focus on the practical actions and instructional activities that lend cultural outsiders access to a curriculum that is often densely infused with cultural practices.

Even on our own turf, we all encounter situations in which we are cultural outsiders to a community of practice. We are unfamiliar with what we are being asked or expected to do.

For example, last summer some friends and I attended the wedding of the daughter of a Jewish colleague. The daughter was marrying the rabbi's son, so every tradition and protocol was on parade, much to the awe of us non-Jewish outsiders. At the reception, one of my friends returned to our table breathless from participating in the exuberant *horah* that encircled the room. "I didn't know you could dance the *horah*," I exclaimed. "I can't," she said. "I just copied the guy next to me." Then she looked concerned and said, "I hope there aren't different steps for males and females." We laughed. In order to join the fun, she'd used a typical strategy: take instruction from the natives.

My friend had asked her question too late. Of course, in such a merry setting it didn't matter, but not all settings are as tolerant. Sometimes we are lucky – it turns out there aren't different steps for males and females in the *horah*. Sometimes we miss-step despite our sensible courses of actions because there is more going on than what we have eyes to see. It is no different in classrooms, especially for English language learners, who are deciphering school culture, academic content, and language. Their actions may at times seem puzzling to us, but often we discover that they had very logical reasons. When we teachers fine-tune our observation skills, we discover surprises about things we thought we knew well. Field experience is about doing thoughtful observation and learning to be instructed by it. We learn about ourselves, our students, and our practices. We learn to look closely at experienced professionals. We learn to expect more of ourselves. I am excited about working with the ECTC teachers in the spring. The 'field' is always a fascinating place. ☞



Karen Macbeth & Sweet Pea

## News and Announcements

### ***Conferences***

Mark your calendars for upcoming ESL-related conferences of interest to all teachers who work with English language learners. For more information, visit the individual conferences' Web sites. Check with your district about accruing professional development credits by attending any of these conferences!

- National Association for Bilingual Education: February 18 – 21, 2009  
Austin, Texas  
<http://www.nabe.org/conference.html>
- TESOL: March 26 – 28, 2009  
Denver, Colorado  
[http://www.tesol.org/s\\_tesol/convention2009](http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/convention2009)

### ***ECTC at TESOL!***

At the national TESOL Conference in Denver this March, Dr. Keiko Samimy, Dr. Karen Newman, and Dr. Kathleen Romstedt will be presenting their paper entitled, “Transformative Engagement: Content Teacher Identity and ESL Professional Development.” The ECTC is very proud to be able to share research and insights into professional development with a national (and international!) audience of fellow TESOL educators.

### ***Reminders for 2008-2009 Teachers***

For the upcoming spring quarter, teachers will automatically be registered for the next ECTC course—T&L 887D46 Community-Based Field Experience; no online forms needed! In addition, please mark your calendars for the second ECTC workshop, which will be held at the university's Marion Campus. Workshop II will take place in April, and details will be emailed to you shortly. We are looking forward to seeing all six districts together for the first time in 2009!

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### *ECTC Graduates, Please Stay in Touch!*

How is your school year going? Any updates you'd like to share with the ECTC? The ECTC team encourages our graduates to stay in touch! Send us updated information about your recent activities, conference attendance or presentations, and experiences working with ELLs, so that we can share your successes with colleagues. Click [here](#) to email us.

### **The ESL Content Teachers Collaborative (ECTC) Newsletter**

**The ECTC Newsletter is a quarterly newsletter for participants and friends of the ESL-Content Teachers Collaborative of the College of Education and Human Ecology, School of Teaching and Learning, The Ohio State University.**

*Project Director:* Karen Newman

*Project Co-Directors:* Keiko Samimy, Kathleen Romstedt

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***Increase student participation with mini-marker boards!***

Classroom lap boards are a great tool in any classroom. Students can express their ideas without the commitment of using a piece of paper, and they can use their boards to show you their answers. Each student gets to “write on the board” without being put on the spot in front of the class. This is great for ELLs who may sometimes lack confidence in front of peers. It’s also a useful way to engage the whole class so that all students can participate instead of only a few. Here are a few fun ways to use these boards in your classroom:

**Check for understanding** – The teacher asks a question, and students jot down the answer and hold it up for the teacher to see. Works great with math problems, science concepts, spelling words, short answer questions, etc.

**Team review game** – Give each group one marker board, and students take turns being the “writer.” Give a time limit while group members work together to come up with the answer. Give points to the teams with the correct answer. (This works really well if you can’t purchase enough boards for each student to have their own.)

**List game** – Give each team one board. Then give the students a category, such as mammals, countries in Asia, cell mitosis, etc. Each student must write one word and then pass it to the next student on their team. The first team that finishes gets a point. (Variation: students can draw a picture if they don’t know the English word.)

Students enjoy writing on the boards, and it gives them a little more wait time so that everyone can have a chance to answer. Also, if students realize they’ve made a mistake, they can erase part or all of their answer and fix it. Overall, they’ve been a hit in my classroom, and I hope you’ll find them just as practical and fun!



\* **Tip:** To save money, go to a home improvement store and buy “shower board.” Often they will cut it to your specifications for free, and it’s a lot cheaper than ready-made boards at a teacher supply store. Use old socks for erasers.

\* **Tip:** To prevent whiteboards from staining, ask students to use Expo whiteboard cleaner and a paper towel to clean the boards about once a week.

*In each issue, the ECTC team presents a brief teaching idea for you to use in your work with English language learners.*

**Dong, Y. R. (2004).** *Teaching language and content to linguistically and culturally diverse students: principles, ideas, and materials.* Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. Pp. xii + 259. ISBN: 1-59311-088X (paperback).

How can teachers make modifications for their ELL students that are both content-challenging and ESL-responsive? What strategies lead to greater student participation in class *and* measurable academic improvement? These are the questions that mainstream content teachers face daily as they attempt to modify instruction for their ELLs.

Yu Ren Dong—a pre-service teacher educator in New York City—spent several years observing U.S. high school classrooms to discover how in-service teachers provide effective instruction to their ELLs. His book—*Teaching Language and Content to Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students*—introduces readers to many of these students, the difficulties they encounter in the content classroom, and the strategies their teachers used to improve performance and participation, thereby promoting “second language acquisition for academic success” (p. ix).

The author describes how second language acquisition issues and cultural differences actually appear in the classroom “in real life.” Chapter 1, for example, shows how Chinese and English concepts of family relationships affect vocabulary (e.g. in Chinese, there is a single term for “a father’s sister’s son who is older than the speaker.”) To address these realities, Dong offers several suggestions on how teachers can change their daily teaching routine to take advantage of these linguistic and cultural differences.

Dong reminds us that ELLs enter the classroom with a depth of prior experience, career hopes, and a strong desire to succeed not only in their ESL classes but in their mainstream classes as well. Throughout the book, he profiles many ELL students themselves and describes how content teachers learn about their backgrounds and use this knowledge to create ESL-responsive lesson modifications. In Chapter 2, eight ESL students are introduced in-depth, as well as the particular difficulties each student experienced in a certain content area. Dong then recounts the strategies used by their mainstream teachers to get each student engaged in the material and producing concrete examples of academic progress.

Chapter 3 addresses two issues regarding assessment: 1) making assessment an integral part of daily instruction and 2) preparing ELLs for standardized testing. To help teachers assess ELLs in the “silent period” or with low English proficiency, Dong includes a sample observation matrix as well as a reading evaluation protocol that can be used by teachers during class. He also illustrates how teachers prepare ELLs for reading the complex and culturally-determined language and instructions of standardized tests. An analysis of actual exam questions is also provided.

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## Book Review, Continued

Since ELLs often have a rich reserve of prior knowledge, Dong discusses in Chapter 4 how teachers can capture prior knowledge (e.g., via knowledge surveys) and use it to understand students' home life and culture. In addition to the surveys, a list of multicultural books (categorized by ethnic background and language proficiency levels) is provided, which can serve as a useful resource for teachers to add to their toolkits.

Vocabulary proves to be one of the biggest hurdles in second language acquisition. In Chapter 5, teachers will find some practical strategies that can be taken and directly used in helping ELL students to learn words and concepts. In addition to general strategies that apply to all content areas (such as incorporating rich visuals, using concept maps, matching synonyms/antonyms, building words using prefixes and suffixes, creating multilingual glossaries), Dong also provides content-specific ideas (such as "graffiti math") that address the vocabulary concerns of teachers in different content areas.

Some methods for assisting ELL students' content reading are presented in Chapter 6. These methods would help in bridging the gaps between language and conceptual knowledge and making complex reading comprehensive and meaningful for ELL students. For example, the method of parallel reading provides students with different versions of a text drawn from literature for younger L1 English speakers and ESL resources, which are tailored to different levels of English proficiency. In jigsaw reading, the teacher can divide a reading passage into manageable chunks to enhance students' reading comprehension, increase interaction with each other, and maximize limited instruction time.

Writing can help ELLs develop better understanding of both conceptual knowledge and the ability to communicate their understanding to different audiences. Chapter 7 introduces some ideas for engaging ELL students in writing of different genres, such as poetry, journals, essays, reader response, personal narratives, learning autobiography, etc.

Although Dong describes many listening and speaking activities throughout the book, Chapter 8 specifically focuses on listening and speaking instruction in content classes. Dong suggests various oral activities that can be used to encourage ELL students to speak up in class using content knowledge they have learned. Some of the activities include role play, story-telling, simulation game, conversational cooperative learning, etc.

Throughout his book, Dong encourages teachers to view ELLs' native languages and cultures as "resources" which can make classroom learning more relevant to these students' lives. The strategies he describes are well-grounded in second language acquisition research, and they are straightforward and easy to follow. This volume will prove to be a worthy reading and a good resource for anyone who is interested in providing a quality education for all students. ☞