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### President's Message

Greetings Fellow VATESOLers,

I trust your year has gotten off to a great start and that you are enjoying the beautiful spring weather. Spring is a time of rebirth, regeneration, and renewal. This is a time to think about spring cleaning—getting rid of those old things that are outdated, outmoded, and unused. This is a great time to reevaluate our methods and systems, a time to look at what works and what doesn't.

Your VATESOL Board has been doing some spring cleaning by looking at the way we've been doing things. We've seen that there are things in place that must be updated. We're looking at new and better ways of communicating with membership, increasing K-12 ELL educator membership, social media, and improving our "brand".

Speaking of the VATESOL brand, we had good response to our booth at this year's VESA conference. We were situated in the exhibitor area which gave us greater visibility. A number of VESA attendees stopped by our table to learn more about the VATESOL mission and vision. I believe we will increase K-12 membership because of our presence. Please encourage your K-12 colleagues to join our organization!

VATESOL is a valuable organization that can and will do much more to support membership. Your board is in the process of planning this year's Fall Conference. From what I've seen so far, I believe the 2015 conference will be even better than last years. Be on the lookout for details from your conference team.

This is a year of exciting growth and change for VATESOL. I ask that you consider offering your skills and talents to help us further the VATESOL mission:

VATESOL, Virginia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, is a professional organization dedicated to promoting professional development, strengthening instruction, and supporting research opportunities at all levels for teachers and administrators of ESL/EFL/ESOL.

Please contact me or any of our board members to see how you might help us to increase ELL education in Virginia. I wish you all a joyous spring!

Your faithful colleague,

Paul Phillips, President VATESOL  
Pphillips1958@outlook.com

## Special Interest Group (SIG) News

### Teacher Ed/Program Admin SIG Chair, Jo Tyler

[jtyler@umw.edu](mailto:jtyler@umw.edu)



VESA is the Virginia ESL Supervisors Association. They hold a state-wide conference every year in Richmond on the first weekend in February, and it is an excellent place for teacher educators to learn about the latest issues in PK-12 ESOL.

This year's conference, on February 5-6, was a great success with approximately 300 attendees, three keynote presentations, 25 breakout sessions, and updates on the latest federal regulations. In addition they always have a large exhibit hall where publishers display current textbooks and teaching materials for PK-12 English language learners. Attendees can order complimentary exam copies from the vendors while there.

VESA's membership consists of all the ESOL coordinators in the school divisions throughout Virginia. As a result they are able to reach out easily to all the ESOL teachers across the state. I always enjoy attending the conference because I see many of my former

students there. It is also a good place to network with the ESOL coordinators from the school divisions near my university, enabling me to forge strong connections in the community.

The VESA conference is also a great opportunity for the students in teacher education programs to give presentations about their research and innovative teaching ideas. This gives our pre-service teachers a chance to not only connect their course work to practical application, but also to develop their professionalism.

For these reasons, I highly recommend that teacher educators attend the VESA conference every year and encourage their students to participate as well. Keep an eye on the VESA website for information about next year's conference at <http://www.vesava.org>

*Jo Tyler is chair of the Teacher Education/Program Administration SIG of VATESOL and professor of linguistics and education at the University of Mary Washington.*

### Higher Ed. SIG Chair, Kama Offenberger

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Before becoming an instructor at the VTLCI, I previously taught freshman composition at several community colleges and universities in the area. Working with American students, I saw incidences of plagiarism every semester, but in most cases it was done knowingly and with

some degree of intentional deception.

Since I began teaching ESL, it has been important for me to shift my mindset. Plagiarism is

a foreign concept to most of our international students, and although I get frustrated with all of those copied and pasted papers that pile up on the desk, I also recognize that some of them are written without any awareness of wrongdoing.

For many cultures outside of the United States, knowledge is seen as shared, and it is actually a form of flattery and respect to copy the research of an educated scholar. This is, of course, entirely contradictory to standards of academic integrity in American university classes.

However, over the past several years, there seems to have been a shift in the perception of plagiarism in other cultures. Dishonesty in

academic research and publishing has become increasingly controversial, particularly in China. NPR, Forbes, and USA Today have all published pieces about the “plagiarism epidemic” in Chinese research. This means that understanding and avoiding plagiarism will most likely be important not only for our students’ classroom experiences in the United States, but also in any academic work that they might publish in their own countries.

In my experience, one of the biggest roadblocks in teaching students about plagiarism is the fact that it is undeniably boring. Below are a few different resources that I have used to add some variety and interest to the typical plagiarism lesson.

- Lycoming College has an online game called “Goblin Threat.” It’s interactive and students must get the right answer before moving forward.  
<http://www.lycoming.edu/library/instruction/tutorials/plagiarismGame.aspx>
- In addition to checking students’ papers for plagiarism myself, I often have them check their own papers and/or demonstrate how to use a plagiarism checker for the class. If your school doesn’t subscribe to a program like Turnitin, there are also some effective free online plagiarism checkers. Two I have had luck with

are [www.duplichecker.com](http://www.duplichecker.com) and [www.plagchecker.com](http://www.plagchecker.com).

- Northern Illinois University also has two interactive games related to plagiarism. However, they’re timed and more difficult than the Lycoming game, and would only be appropriate for advanced students.  
<http://www.niu.edu/ai/students/section05/games/index.htm>
- Teaching students to paraphrase is crucial but often difficult. When introducing paraphrasing, I ask students to paraphrase nursery rhymes. They’re short and fun, but also allow room for the structure and vocabulary changes needed for a strong paraphrase. “Humpty Dumpty” has been an especially successful choice.

I would love to hear from you about your experiences with plagiarism in the classroom, how you respond, and any new ways that you have found to help students fully understand the serious consequences it can have in the future. Please email them to me at [kw9703@vt.edu](mailto:kw9703@vt.edu).

*Kama Offenberger is an instructor at the Virginia Tech Language & Culture Institute in Blacksburg, VA.*

## Adult Ed SIG Chair, Jenna Kelly

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Hello! I am sure you are as excited as I am that it looks like the snow is finally behind us! I recently switched jobs and am now the EL/Civics Lead Teacher for Literacy for Life, but the same focus remains. How do we weave Civics education into our program? As you recall, civics education is defined as “An educational program that

emphasizes contextualized instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures,

civic participation, and United States History and Government in order to help students acquire skills and knowledge to become active and informed parents, workers and community members.” In my last newsletter, I wrote about weaving in Naturalization and Rights and Responsibilities. This time, I am going to talk about US History and Government and Civic Participation. In my opinion, these are the easiest and most likely are things you are already doing. US History and Government can be weaved in all year long whether it is doing a snippet at the end of each class called “On this day in history” or just focusing on major events that coincide with your classes like Martin Luther

King Day or Presidents Day. Civics Participation is fun for me because this can be connected to a lot of the life skills that we teach. Also, Civic Participation is a great topic for doing project based learning. Have your class set up a food drive or plan a car wash to benefit a charity. Have your students present their ideas for a charity event or way to volunteer and then as a class, vote on which idea you all will do. Then, in class, you teach the skills they need to finish the task and they learn while also learning to think about how they can benefit their communities. I hope this sparks some

ideas in your head. Keep up the good work and please let me know if you have specific questions of topics you would like me to address. You can contact me at [jkelly@wm.edu](mailto:jkelly@wm.edu).

*Jenna Kelly is the Adult EL/Civics Lead Teacher for Literacy for Life. She has fifteen years of teaching experience, both collegiate and in Adult Education programs.*

## Elementary Education SIG Chair, Stephanie Sebolt

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I recently read a very informative article on the Colorin Colorado website about formative assessment. Below I provide a summary of some important points.

Ongoing assessment is an important component of our teaching practice as we strive to promote continuous English language development for our students. Depending upon the level of English language development of our students, some informal assessments must be modified, particularly for our Level 1 and Level 2 ELs.

Two types of informal assessments include performance based assessment and portfolio assessments. Performance assessments can be used to check ELs understanding of daily lessons and units of study. For example, teachers can prepare activities whereby students prepare a short oral presentation, a writing sample, or a demonstration. It is important to assess both the process and the product. For beginning students, you can scaffold the task by allowing the students to work in teams, providing sentence stems to facilitate speaking and

writing activities, or providing pictures of a story that the student will summarize.

Another way to provide ongoing assessment is through the use of portfolios. Portfolios serve to demonstrate growth over a long period of time. I keep a portfolio of my students' writing to show growth over the entire school year. Portfolios can also include tapes of presentations to demonstrate speaking growth, completion of a graphic organizer to demonstrate the student's knowledge of content area topics, and teacher created checklists for speaking, reading, writing, and listening activities. Portfolio assessments are an excellent way to show growth to the parents during a parent-teacher conference.

Reference:

Colorin Colorado. (2007). Using informal assessments for English language learners. Retrieved from <http://www.colorincolorado.org>

*Stephanie Sebolt is ESL teacher of K-5 ELLs in Roanoke County. She is also an adjunct for the University of Mary Washington and Virginia Tech.*

## Secondary Education SIG Chair, Naadira Mubarak

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Happy Spring Time! It's a pleasure to join the VATESOL team as the Secondary Education SIG Chair.

I took on the chair position of the Secondary Education Interest Group because I realize that secondary ESL students entering American schools are in a challenging position.

Specifically, I am referring to adolescent students who are newly arrived from other countries. The most critical cases are students who are coming from countries embroiled in civil war, drug wars, natural disasters, or other catastrophes that have interrupted their schooling. Many of our newly arriving adolescent ELLs have not had a "school experience" so not only are they facing the challenge of learning a new language, but they are also facing the 'culture shock' of navigating the American school system. It is next to

impossible to expect these students to earn all of the high school credits they will need to graduate when they are trying to learn English at the same time. Our high school teachers, administrators, and policy makers will need to create other options for these students such as bilingual vocational education programs. If these students are offered classes that lead to meaningful work, they may have the motivation to stay in school. We want to develop our ELLs into citizens who can succeed in our society. I will bring more discussion on this topic in our next issues. Feel free to send your thoughts to me at [nmubarak@nps.k12.va.us](mailto:nmubarak@nps.k12.va.us)

*Naadira Mubarak is the ESL Specialist for Norfolk Public Schools. She has had a varied career in general education and ESL. In addition, she has taught and provided teacher training in Kuwait and Qatar.*  
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## Treasurers Report



Treasurer's report as of 2/11/15:

BB&T account balance as of Feb. 5: \$39,938.47

PayPal balance as of Feb. 11: \$12,827.09.

## Member Articles

### Advanced ESL Learners' Perceived Difficulties in Writing Research Papers

Pinar Gurdal



As a reading and writing teacher for advanced ESL students in an intensive English program, one of the most challenging tasks is how to guide students in writing a research paper. Our students in advanced ESL classes usually become

intensely discouraged when they realize how daunting a task it is to combine their language and critical thinking skills to produce a research paper. They are introduced to the concept of finding information that would supplement, support, enhance, or contradict their knowledge about a topic in the upper intermediate levels. At that level, our goal is mostly to have them become familiar with the writing format, be able to choose worthy sources to a certain extent, and ultimately, improve their reading and writing skills. Although improving our students' reading and writing skills is a priority in every level, we emphasize the skills that allow students to analyze, identify relevance, paraphrase, create questions, and synthesize in the advance levels. This classroom based action research inquiries into the difficulties students encounter during the research process, how those difficulties reflect on the writing process, and students' expectations of teachers. Data collected towards that inquiry is based on students' own perceptions. The author hopes that the findings of the study will help the author to facilitate more effectively students' effort in writing research papers and to produce long lasting and beneficial effects in terms of students' college education. In addition, having students reflect on difficulties of writing research papers helps enhance their metacognitive awareness of the writing process.

#### A Review of Literature

Lin (2007) describes an independent learner as the learner who goes beyond being a literate individual

by understanding the value of information literacy (2007). An information literate student continues learning throughout life by enquiring to identify research needs, evaluating information, communicating that information effectively, and developing an insight into the issues surrounding the use of information. Our students come to us as well educated students in their native lands; however, their approach to learning can be passive and without the critical analysis in the learning process. When asked to choose a topic they are interested in, they do not know which topic they wish to look into. When they eventually research their topic, although assistance from their teachers is available (Lin, 2007), they need individual assistance to initiate the process of finding the material. The role of the teacher as the resource provider (Harrison & Killion, 2007) turns into guidance provider which may not be sufficient encouragement for students whose past educational experiences may be contributing negatively to their adjustment to their present educational style (Lin, 2007).

Kasper (1998) who taught content-based ESL courses uses a text that contains readings in ten different disciplines. His students are asked to choose a possible subject area in one discipline, such as environmental science. The subject area can be, as an example, greenhouse effect. He chooses this pedagogical approach claiming when students are invested in a learning experience with a subject that they are interested in, developing language skills takes a more natural and meaningful direction as they are evaluating information they actually wish to know about. The author's students who took part in this research consistently expressed their willingness to write about topics they have an interest in.

Alvarez's (2007) research findings also reflect the difficulties of students in terms of critical reading, which leads to difficulties developing and articulating original ideas. In her research, she looked into techniques that would help students with finding and evaluating sources.

### Methodology

This study was conducted in the author's two 500 and 550 level reading and writing classes (i.e. advanced levels). The 16 students in those classes were asked to write an essay on their research practices that they employ prior to writing a research paper and the writing process itself. Specifically, they were asked to identify and discuss the difficulties encountered during the research process, how those difficulties were reflected on their writing, their expectations from their teacher in terms of their difficulties, and the benefits of writing a research paper. The author collected the data in essay format and the essays are analyzed to find common themes.

### Results

It was interesting and expected at the same time that the students shared the same difficulties with doing research and writing. There was not one single sort of difficulty that was not repeated in another student's essay.

### Difficulties – Research

- Choosing academic sources is a challenge. It really is not easy to see why an article on the Internet can be and another one cannot be used. If the material searched does not contain content that supports the student's thesis, frustration follows.
- The length of the content can be intimidating if it is long, and may be perceived as not trustworthy if it is short. They definitely stay away from lengthy materials although they know that they sacrifice valuable information.
- Going to the library is simply not done although the students are familiar with library practices. They associate library with books and they do not have time to scan books.
- They do not know how to incorporate material that does not support their thesis.
- Vocabulary is challenging. Lack of vocabulary skills affects reading, and consequently, choosing appropriate sources, and ultimately, getting the information from the sources.
- Research is very time consuming, and time is always a restricting factor.

### Difficulties – Writing

- Although I ask them to produce writing as much as they can first, they get intimidated by the format of a research paper. Trying to get the format correct at the beginning causes discouragement. Paraphrasing is always difficult.
- Organizing the introduction is extremely difficult. One cause of this is putting the main ideas in this section. Verbalizing main ideas without cluttering them with details is very challenging.
- Forming the thesis statement is hard, especially they are working on an assigned topic as opposed to a topic of their own choice.
- Combining the ideas in the sources with the student's own ideas is overwhelming.
- Conclusion becomes a repetition; they cannot produce a creative conclusion.
- Length of the paper is always a source of complaint which stems from all the difficulties listed above. The papers required to be written in this level are always considered too long.

### Perceived benefits

- Grammar is perceived to be the most problematic area in writing and they consider writing a research paper is good practice in grammar.
- Learning the writing format is good practice.
- Learning how to use in-text citations and how to format references makes them feel confident as they have never had to become familiar with this topic.
- Some students liked creating specific questions about a topic and looking for sources based on those questions.
- They become aware of the importance of academic vocabulary in writing.

### Expectations in the classroom

- Students expect teachers to make corrections to their assignments as they consider the corrections the most significant way of improving their writing skills.
- One important suggestion was to have small assignments throughout the term focusing on sharpening research skills and getting familiar with writing format prior to producing a sizeable research project. The students feel quite strongly about being able to choose their own topic.

### Discussion

With a research paper assignment, a big reward for me is to see my students' ideas, opinions, and thoughts although it is a great effort for them to paraphrase what they read in their sources. A bigger reward is that they realize that all their cognitive and linguistic resources need to be used. I believe the biggest reward for all of us is that they can express themselves without inhibition, and be critical about others' work. My findings from this action research confirmed some practices that I have held on to during my years in teaching ESL and reminded me that when our students take strides to become independent learners with a critical and inquiring mind, their language skills improve. Following are some points I planned to take action on in the light of work done on this topic and the findings:

I will continue to emphasize the importance of vocabulary with special emphasis on parts of speech and usage in writing. Vocabulary is the first to blame for making reading hard and first to attribute to when students understand what they are reading. Reading is the most significant activity to improve vocabulary skills and we have to assess reading comprehension regularly as reading comprehension starts with vocabulary skills.

The major difficulty students have with writing a big research paper is caused by a lack of scaffolding activities in preparation for the big assignment. I will provide small research assignments as scaffolding activities in upper intermediate and advanced level classes. One assignment can be finding three academic sources on a particular topic, another assignment can be to write one essay based on those sources as a timed writing activity.

The concept of organization should be constantly emphasized in writing at lower levels. I assigned a presentation on advantages and disadvantages of nuclear energy in my 200 level class. I provided them with a presentation outline. The students worked with the sources I gave them. When they wrote, it was all their sentences albeit very broken ones, and they loved the work they created. This type of activity helps students get familiar with organization of ideas.

My students can benefit a great deal from study skills and time management skills. I will continue to demonstrate how to use the data bases and identify relevant articles; arrange trips to the library to help

overcome fear of using the library; and continue to work on paraphrasing, a skill which is of utmost importance in writing research papers. When an article looks discouraging because of its length or content, I will encourage my students to take notes while reading and make connections with the research paper.

Providing students with a sense of what college work looks like gives students motivation to write the research paper. I will continue assigning one small project which is to have my students get a college level book in their major and give a small presentation on the challenges with the language in the textbook. I believe this activity will heighten their awareness of their academic vocabulary skills. I will continue the practice of inviting college students at Virginia Tech who used to be our ESL students to class to talk about their writing struggles and how they overcame the difficulties.

I have gained valuable knowledge by conducting this classroom-based action research. I believe it is an effective way for teachers to discover problems and find tentative solutions to the problems. The best part is we get to put results to practice immediately.

### References

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*Pinar Gurdal is an ESL instructor and has taught English all her life in formal or informal capacity. Currently, she is teaching at the Language and the Culture and Language Center of Virginia Tech.*

## “Professor, I Love You!”

Elizabeth R. Bynum



Much to my surprise, the exclamation, “Professor, I love you” came from one of my least talkative students. Wedad had been held back one level and was becoming more and more insecure about contributing to most class discussions, even when mandated

by a grade; however, after the differentiated activity was completed, she could not contain her excitement for the concept she had finally understood. Her expression of gratitude, although shocking, was music to my ears. She is now a leader in guiding others in the class and one of my greatest assets.

Lorri J. Santamaria wrote, “The best teaching practices are those that consider all learners in a classroom setting and pay close attention to differences inherent to academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic, diversity” (Santamaria, 2009, p. 215).

You see, the reason for Wedad’s breakthrough in learning was because I had incorporated an activity that connected with her learning style. What is just a game, and maybe even unprofessional to one student, can be the catalyst for discovery to another. If we are to reach each student, it is imperative to differentiate our instruction. Finding the time to discover each learning style represented and incorporating simple variants in traditional lectures may be taxing in the beginning but as more and more connections are witnessed, the effort in creating differentiated planning is very little to ask.

### Discovering Dominant Intelligent Trait

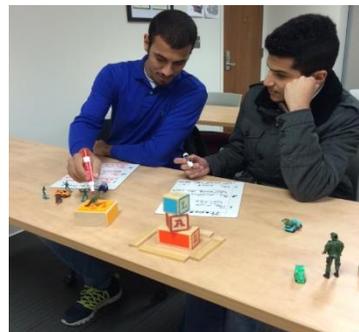
The simplest way to discover a student’s learning style is by administering a short personality activity which reveals a person’s dominant intelligent trait, thereby placing them in the category of learning which is easiest and most entertaining for them. Two easy activities are

based on Robert Sternberg’s “Triarchic Theory of Intelligences” and Dr. Howard Gardner’s “The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.” The scores from these two activities will enable you to place each student in the categories for their best learning environment: Analytical, Creative, Practical, Linguistic, Logical/Math, Musical, Spatial, Body/Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, or Interpersonal.

### Creating Differentiated Groups

After completing the questionnaires, create an index card for each student. This card will include their strongest learning styles and a category of students with whom they share learning styles. This way you can best group them and create activities that are most beneficial to that style of learning. Each student will have more than one strong style which makes it easy to change their grouping from one day to the next. I try to incorporate at least two differentiated lessons a week, scaffolding as I encourage group learning.

### Creating Differentiated Activities



Next, it is time to create activities or assignments that ignite the brain to induce connections more readily. The best practice is to rotate the style of teaching. For example, you may choose an activity for

the visual and tactile/kinesthetic learner on a day you are teaching a grammar concept such as prepositional phrases. Bring in a container of small objects to position *next to, between, above, under.....* and so on to allow students to touch the concept and visually see it come

to life. I used my grandson's blocks and ninja turtles for this activity. One student, who regularly "dozes off" in class was alert and asking to create more examples with the objects during our break. Abdul had never shown interest in grammar up to this activity. Keep in mind I teach adults! The next day, you may incorporate a lesson activity for those who are auditory learners by writing while listening to classical music.

It is up to you when and how you bring in the different ways of learning, but it is important to get out of the box and JUST DO IT! No doubt, it is easier to take out the text book, lecture, assign homework from the workbook, give assessments, and start all over again the next day. We teach to our learning style because it is the fastest way to prepare, but I guarantee, you will see results from students with whom you never thought you could connect, and you will not want to go back to the "One Style Method of Teaching" again.

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*Elizabeth R. Bynum is an ESL Professor at VTLCI Capital Region. She has been teaching in different cultures around the world for the last twenty years*

**Please send email to [vatesol@gmail.com](mailto:vatesol@gmail.com) if you need to contact VATESOL or any board members**