



Fall 2011

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President's Message

by Diane Hardy

This past weekend, while shopping at a local farmers market, I stopped to pick up an assortment of flowers. There, I was greeted with the big smile and the infectious enthusiasm of the woman offering to help me. Her first words were, "Don't you love the fall?" Without waiting for a reply, she quickly went on to tell me that fall is her favourite time of the year. She commented that she waits in anticipation for the change of energy that autumn brings and for the striking colours that engross our daily travels as we pass through the season. Her descriptive narrative and genuine love of this time of the year were contagious.

Fall is a short-lived season that manages to usher in so much with it. Although the relaxing days of summer have just ended, fall does not offer much time for sentimental nostalgia. It quickly invites us to shift focus, like a beacon calling us to pay attention, to contemplate and to appreciate the ever-changing landscape of our world.

Autumn also brings with it a holiday that asks us to stop and give thanks for the bounty of the harvest. It's a time for conscious reflection and genuine gratitude. As I reflect on this, I realize that gratitude has been a common theme for me during my year as President of ATESL. I find myself sincerely humbled by the generous spirit and giving nature of those whom I have had the pleasure to work with. At the top of my gratitude list is our Past President, Audrey Olson. Audrey has been a tireless supporter of ATESL. Her intellect, passion and advocacy have not only made us stronger as an organization but have inspired us as individuals.

Further, I feel enormous gratitude for Carolyn Dieleman, who recently retired from Alberta Employment and Immigration. Carolyn has been instrumental in driving our province to assume a leadership role in the field of ESL. And, as a voice for ESL, she has been a unique and inquisitive authority who has engaged Albertans from all sectors -policy makers, educators and citizens. She has been an influential mentor to all of us - coaching us to critically think about and hear the voices of ESL stakeholders.

As we approach our annual conference and AGM, I am also grateful to this year's conference planning committee. Planning for an event of the scope and nature of the provincial conference is a huge undertaking, and I would like to extend the Board's gratitude to all of those who have volunteered their

President's message

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Oct. 21-22, Calgary

Igniting

**language
learning
leadership**

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL)

is a professional organization which promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.

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2011 - 2012

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time and expertise to ensure a memorable experience.

Finally, I am grateful to have worked alongside the ATESL Board during this past year. Members of the Board have worked tirelessly to support our organization and I thank them for their continual efforts to address the needs of membership. I am also sincerely grateful to have worked closely with Ivan Sundal, ATESL Business Manager, and Irene Wood, ATESL Administrative Assistant. Their ongoing support is invaluable.

This has been a year of learning for me both personally and professionally, and, like the colours of fall, this past year has offered me bold and rich experiences. As this is a season of transition, I find it appropriate that our incumbent President-Elect, Patti Lefebvre, will assume the role as President of ATESL in October, and I look forward to her leadership. The change of energy that autumn brings is palpable.

Keynote Speakers at the ATESL 2011 Conference

Norbert Schmitt

is Professor of Linguistics, second language vocabulary specialist, and author of eight books and numerous journal articles.

During his keynote presentation, Professor Schmitt will be discussing the amount of vocabulary learners need in order to function well in English and how to choose which vocabulary to teach. He will also critique and suggest new boundaries for the concepts of high and low-frequency vocabulary.

The presentation will then introduce the notion of mid-frequency vocabulary, discuss the importance of ensuring that second-language speakers acquire these words, and suggest pedagogically sound ways to make this happen.

The presentation is sure to be informative and provide new ways to look at second-language vocabulary acquisition.

Stephen Lewis

As the chair of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, he is dedicated to stopping the spread of AIDS in Africa and is a board member of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. In addition, Mr. Lewis performed several roles during more than two decades working with the United Nations, including the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations.

Mr. Lewis is the recipient of multiple honorary degrees and awards, including the Companion of the Order of Canada, the country's highest honour for lifetime achievement, and the Pearson Peace Medal, for 'outstanding achievement in the field of international service and understanding'.

Mr. Lewis will explore the ways in which education transforms lives and how it can be the greatest instrument for social change.



How Role Play Simulation Enriches the Learning of Internationally Educated Health Professionals

by Deb Bennett, PhD, Department of General Education, Mount Royal University and

Karen Dodge, MA, Communication Skills for Health Professionals Project Coordinator, Languages Institute, Mount Royal University

During the fall of 2010, we conducted a scholarship of teaching and learning research inquiry exploring how internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) value role play simulations in enriching their communication skills and knowledge. Inquiry participants were attending the “Professional Communication for Internationally Educated Health Professionals” (PC-IEHP) communication course, which used formalized role play simulations as a central component. The course, originally developed at Kwantlen Polytechnic University with funding from BC Health, supported IEHPs to develop the skills required to interview a “patient”, such as gathering information, building relationships, and explaining and planning. The Languages Institute at Mount Royal University received funding from Alberta Employment and Immigration (AE&I) to pilot the curriculum during 2010. The aim of PC-IEHP was to improve the communication skills and language proficiency of immigrant midwives, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physicians and physical therapists through a performance-based instructional model (Watt & Lake, 2007). This approach involved two language instructors who focused on the appropriate language and cultural components, a health professional consultant to provide clinically-based feedback and information, professional and non-professional actors as simulation “patients”, role rehearsals within class and filming of performances. In this article, we present a brief summary of this inquiry’s findings by sharing the voices of students.

Method

An interpretive qualitative approach was utilized for this study as it offered the opportunity to gain insight into student learning and experiences with role play simulations. Within this approach, experiences are explored with an attempt “to make sense of and interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). It presents the possibility for discovery as new perspectives and interpretations emerge through conversations, questioning, and dialogue. Sixteen of the seventeen students from the fall 2010 cohort consented to be involved in this study. These inquiry participants, who had been a resident of Canada for an average of 1.9 years, included 7 nurses, 8 physicians and 1 pharmacist. Their countries of birth were Bolivia, China, Colombia, Egypt, Iran, Japan, Syria, Philippines, Taiwan, Ukraine and Venezuela.

The study’s data consisted of pre and post-course free write data sets, weekly one minute papers, and post-course semi-structured interviews. The pre and post-course free writes identified changes in students perceptions of role plays during the course by asking “What do you think about role play simulations?”. Weekly one-minute papers that posed questions such as “What did you learn by receiving or giving feedback?” or “What did you learn by observing yourself and others?” offered students the opportunity to reflect on what and how they learned through role play simulations. Post-course interviews offered new insights into student learning and growth as well as how communication skills became integrated into other contexts and settings. The data was analyzed through a line-by-line, word-by-word manual coding and categorizing procedure (Berg, 1989). We individually began this portion of the data analysis process before meeting together to identify central themes.

Findings

These insights can help inform EAL course design and delivery of curriculum. Within our inquiry, student voices describe how role play simulations support the development of communication skills, how they facilitate acculturation and contribute to professional identity formation, as well as how their learning and experiences become integrated to other contexts and settings.

Filmed role play simulations enrich learning of communication skills and knowledge through observation and modeling. Filmed performances were a key component of awareness raising and the development of an individual's language and communication skills: "And the camera, it was like a mirror. By seeing myself I could see that I learned during the class that I applied during the role play". Students spoke of both seeing and hearing their non-verbal behaviors. They also described a new awareness of grammatical errors, pronunciation, and the use of medical terminology. Identifying areas for improvement in skills such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and listening also occurred for these students. A significant learning component of role play simulations included the students' ability to both give and receive feedback. By observing their colleagues' film clips in the computer lab, they learned communication skills techniques from each other: "When I watch a video for someone who is fluent in English or who knows how to use what we learn from the course or practice what we learn from the course I like that because I learn from him, so that is very good for me. And at the same time when I watch someone who is in a lower level than I am, it is good for me just to say, 'Yah, I am improving,' or, 'I am good and I can continue to be better.'" Filmed simulations ensured that each student had the opportunity to learn from providing feedback to others as well as further reflect on their own performance.

Role play simulations facilitate acculturation into the Canadian health care context.

During the course, students discussed the diverse health care systems and cultures of their countries of birth and of Canada. For example, a patient-centered care approach was new for them: "Canadians like to be participants of the decisions and this is something different from my country because they[sic: patients] come to us and they expect us to tell them what to do – it is like parenting health care – but here it is different." Specific communication skills such as empathy were developed through this learning experience: "I think what was helpful for me and most important was the patient care approach so how asking patient questions, how to empathize with the patient. The culture is different. For example in my country usually we say the things more directly and try to avoid some phrases." In addition, students dealt with scenarios such as, delivering bad news that challenged their own cultural norms of practice: "...in Venezuela, if the patient has, for example, a cancer most of the time his or her relatives ask us to hide the truth." At the same time, the recognition of Canada's multiculturalism was an important learning for students: "I think the role play is the best way to teach health professionals especially here in Canada. Because Canada is multi-cultural. We are newcomers, we don't know too much about the cultures – not only the Canadian culture but how to deal with other cultures." As the student comments suggest, role play simulations seemed to contribute to a developing awareness of effective communication skills within a multicultural context.

Role play simulations contribute to professional identity formation within new contexts.

The process of immigration appears to have a profound effect on the confidence of newly immigrated health professionals. Although they are aware of the hurdles that face them on arrival, they undergo culture shock and it may take months or years to regain their sense of professional self. PC-IEHP gave them a unique opportunity to "practice" their profession through role play simulation and redevelop their sense of professional identity: "It was acting but at the same time was doing a little bit of nursing again....it is more being in contact with my career." The health professional-patient structured interview (Silverman, Kurtz & Draper, 1998) allowed them to use their clinical knowledge alongside their knowledge of English within the context of a specific scenario. The scenarios themselves were "really close to the real situation...and it makes me feel like I am a nurse and I have to act like a nurse". These insights which were described during the post-course interviews seem to be a powerful experience for these students.

Communication skills learned within role play simulations are integrated to other contexts and settings.

Students' narratives suggest that the practice of effective communication skills and concepts through role play simulations facilitate student integration of these newly developed skills and approaches to additional contexts and settings. The transfer of learning from the classroom to personal life was a common experience described: "I know that there has been an impact on my daily life because communication is not something we do only with patients; when I improve my communication I am doing it with my family, with my friends and even my neighbours and people I meet on the street, that is the same." Students spoke about the way the skills they learned helped to improve their family relationships, to resolve conflict and show empathy as well as creating increased levels of confidence in their communication at work. These unique integration experiences have implications for teaching and curriculum delivery in both EAL and communication courses.



Using Podcasts in EAL Programs

by Martin Guardado, Kevin R. Meyer and Yuping Mao

Role Play Simulation continued ...

Conclusion

The performance-based instructional model with its role play simulation has been central to the students' understanding of the appropriate use of language and communication skills within the Canadian healthcare context. It increased their awareness of Canadian multiculturalism, helped them to regain confidence in their professional self, and encouraged them to apply their learning outside of the classroom. By enhancing their ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with patients and colleagues across cultures through role play simulation, the students were better prepared to enter their healthcare professions in Canada. The project continues today as "Communication Skills for Health Professionals" with funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Alberta Health and Wellness.

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The use of podcasting technology in language learning classes presents unique challenges and, at the same time, holds a great promise for digital natives—those who have grown up with digital technologies—as well as newcomers to technology. This case study investigated how a non-profit organization (NPO) integrated podcasting technology into an English as an Additional Language (EAL) course for learners of English. The results of this investigation yielded insights into the practical ramifications of introducing this type of technology into language teaching. We describe the effectiveness of podcasting in this particular program, and focus specifically on the instructional benefits and challenges of using podcasts.

The Project

Podcasts are "audio files that can be played on the computer or downloaded to MP3 players" (Sprague & Pixley, 2008, p. 227). Podcasts have become a powerful medium for disseminating content in audio (and video) format to vast audiences quickly and inexpensively, even when the target audiences are distributed geographically across the world. There are three major ways to integrate podcasts into education: accessing podcasts created by others, teacher created podcasts, and student created podcasts. The case study focuses on the use of teacher- and student-created podcasts in an EAL program delivered in a community organization in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, by posing the following research question: What are the instructional challenges and benefits of using podcasts in EAL training?

The NPO in this study has over 30 years' history, and the majority of its service recipients are Chinese immigrants. The organization provides a wide range of services to help immigrants integrate into Canadian society linguistically, culturally, and socially. English language training is a priority service provided by the organization. Podcasting, identified as an innovative pedagogical tool by the program administrators, was implemented in two EAL courses with a focus on pronunciation taught by the same instructor. The initial objective was to address what they identified as a need to support the development of speaking and reading skills in their programs, and to promote autonomous learning by giving students a tool—podcasting—which they could take home and use at their leisure.

The first session of the course consisted of beginners, and ran five days a week for four weeks. The majority of the students in this course were senior citizens with limited educational background, and mostly of Chinese origin. At the beginning of the course, the computer lab was set up with Audacity software, a freely downloadable application used for recording and segmenting digital audio. Subsequently, the instructor launched the project by recording and uploading podcasts to the NPO's

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server. Then, the students were instructed to download, listen to, and re-record in their own voices using the instructor's pronunciation as a model. This was meant to provide a clear comparison to students' own pronunciation and the instructor's pronunciation. Class time was divided into two parts. In the first 90 minutes, the instructor introduced new material to students, and the students later practiced individually with Audacity software on the computer.

By contrast, students in the second course were mainly in their 30s and 40s, and had a higher formal educational level. This course ran for 11 weeks, with three to four hours a week and was made up of intermediate to high-level language learners.

Method

Taking a case study approach, we investigated the application of podcasts in an EAL program. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the instructor, students, and two key administrators of the podcast language-learning project. All the interviews were audio recorded, except the one with the instructor, where the researcher took field notes and the instructor typed and e-mailed written responses to all the interview questions. The interviews with the instructor and the administrators were conducted in English, but all the students chose to be interviewed in Mandarin. All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Instructional Challenges

Our guiding question sought to examine the instructional challenges and benefits of using podcasts in EAL classes by focusing on one particular case. The first challenge emerging from the data was the need for prior training in using the technology. It was clear that the instructor's lack of experience with using Audacity became an important hurdle in the project. Not only was the instructor unfamiliar with the software, he also had not used podcasting in his teaching. Claire, one of the program coordinators, explained, "he at first showed some hesitance because he never used that before; he probably never heard of it before. He wasn't familiar with it." Sally, the other coordinator, agreed, "he had a lot of difficulty in the beginning. It took him a week to get used to using the podcasting. When he finally got going it was almost the end of the class...it was a challenge." Therefore, there was a steep learning curve for the instructor who needed to master the technology himself before engaging the students with it.

Another challenge, which was not unrelated to the need for teacher training, was the need for clarity of instructions given to students. Claire seemed to express some uncertainty about the extent to which the students had mastered the technical aspects involved in using the program, saying "I don't know if they already mastered the technique of finding the files, downloading them and following on the handout as they do in the classroom." Claire's concern was confirmed by Angela, a student participant: "Sometimes I got confused about the recordings I took home since I was not sure about which courses they were from, and could not match the recordings with the handouts."

An instructional challenge, which is not necessarily only tied to technological implementation, came in delivering the course content and introducing the new technology to students with varying English language skills. The instructor noted that the students had "a real mixture of backgrounds. The level of education was generally quite high; however, there were a few who were illiterate in their first language and a few who were university educated." According to some student interviews, having students with different proficiency level in English together in one class made it hard to satisfy various learning needs. They also identified a need to integrate the technology in teaching language, instead of purely focusing on teaching the technology itself.

Benefits of Using Podcasting

Both coordinators and the instructor talked about the success of the project with excitement and cautious optimism for the future. One of the anticipated outcomes of the podcasting project was the promotion of autonomous learning in the students and all concurred that this goal had been met. All three emphasized how students did embrace the above goal and, every week, the students were excited to get the podcasts downloaded onto their own MP3 players or on USB drives to take home with them and listen at their own pace and on their own time. They further explained that some students asked their children or grandchildren to help them install the software on their home computer in order to practice English. While all six student interviews expressed appreciation for being given the option of practicing English

anywhere with the podcasts, most of them reported never or rarely actually listening to the recordings outside of class.

In general, there was a sense that the podcasting class had made a difference in the students' learning, and particularly in their ability to remember daily expressions as well as in their improved pronunciation. Overall, students indicated having a positive experience using podcasting for language learning. One student summarized the advantages that podcasting has for language learning as "direct, convenient, and easy." The majority of students claimed that podcasting helped them to reduce communication apprehension, practice pronunciation more in class, feel more engaged, and participate more actively in class, improve their overall learning outcomes, and would recommend podcasting to their friends. According to Pete, the instructor, Audacity helped his students become independent learners of English as "the software naturally helps impart a greater sense of reward in the students when they notice an improvement in their actual ability to use the language." It was clear that Pete felt podcasting was a great tool for language learning, and in particular, he felt the project had been successful, especially considering that it was such a "rushed experiment." The coordinators concurred. Sally stated, "it is a really wonderful tool...that needs to be utilized and explored...it is an absolutely ideal tool."

Additionally, the administrators and instructors indicated podcasting gave them the opportunity to eliminate time-consuming tasks, such as creating cassette tapes for each individual student, an approach they had used in the past. And, from a logistical perspective, podcasting offered an economical alternative, both in terms of time and other resources.

Conclusion

Given that this podcasting initiative was exploratory and innovative in its particular setting, a variety of challenges emerged before and during its implementation. An important recommendation in light of these findings is the need to improve communication among stakeholders. Communication among the parties was not always effective, which at times generated misunderstandings. For instance, both the teacher and the administrators believed that students were highly motivated to use the podcasts on their own time while many students reported not engaging in such activity. Clear instructions should also be provided to students in the classroom activities to ensure that the most useful features of the technology are not missed or underused. Audacity is a fairly user-friendly tool that can facilitate students' ability to record their own podcasts and compare them with those of the teacher. Step-by-step guidance may help students maximize the benefits of this technology. Instructors could provide students with detailed instructions on using Audacity in accordance with their course objectives and integrate take-home activities into the curriculum to more successfully encourage students' usage of Audacity outside of the classroom. Finally, the body of literature on technology-enhanced language teaching has taught us that no tool should be expected to do everything in order to be beneficial. There were no unreasonable expectations put on Audacity in this program, but time pressure and other constraints prevented its full implementation. Given that Audacity was originally designed with objectives outside language learning in mind, however, its use in this case study can be seen as innovative and an important basis for future projects.

References

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ATESL Mission Statement

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization that promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English. We do this by:

- encouraging and providing professional development opportunities that are consistent with generally accepted principles of adult learning and with currently understood principles of second language learning and teaching;
- liaising with other organizations, local, provincial, national, and international, engaged in education;
- creating awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants, and English language learning by communicating with government, business, and the general public;
- encouraging awareness of issues of accountability and program standards by communicating with English language program providers and learners;
- encouraging the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance by administering an ESL teacher accreditation process;
- working collaboratively with government to develop policies and procedures which govern the provision of English language programs and related services for immigrants to Canada;
- encouraging and supporting the participation of learners in the decision-making processes that determine their educational choices.

ATESL wishes to welcome members to the next conference, to be held in Edmonton, November 2-3, 2012 at the Edmonton Crowne Plaza Hotel

Student Writing

In the spring of 2011, the ATESL Board sponsored a student writing contest in order to support adult English language learners in the sharing of their ideas and creativity in the written form. We published the first place story in the June edition of the ATESL newsletter. Here is the first of the two stories that each received a \$100 cash prize for 2nd place.

My first dog

by Marianna Hudak

Once, a long time ago, when I was a little girl, the Second World War ended. My grandmother and I traveled by train and in the carriage a lot of soldiers sat on the floor. We sat on our bags, next to an old Russian soldier. He had a gray wolf dog. The dog's name was Rip. It had shiny gray fur and gray eyes. It was friendly. After a while, the train stopped next to the reeds. The train worker said "You are getting off for a break." A lot of soldiers ran into the reeds and the dog ran too.

When the train left, everybody came back, but the dog was missing. The old soldier called his dog "come here, come here." The train left very fast. I saw the dog suddenly ran from the reeds and run to the train. But the train didn't stop. I saw from the door the dog falling away from the train and then I didn't see it anymore. The old soldier quietly dried. Then at the next stop he went out of the train and we did too.

Afterward I thought of the dog every time and everywhere. Once, my father came home and said to me, "Surprise – what is in my coat pocket?" And there was my first dog, a small gray wolf dog. It had shiny gray fur and gray eyes and I named my dog Rip. We were very popular in the town. I won't ever forget my first dog.

