



# The RI-TELLER

The Newsletter for Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners

Issue 4

Spring 2012

Special Interest Articles:

High Stakes of Standardized Testing

What I Learned about Co-Teaching 5

Improving Listening at Central Falls High School 8

African Voices 10

### Individual Highlights:

Special Interest Groups Announced

6 Professional Development Videos 2

Spring Conference Information 4

Why Join RITELL? 6

Coordinating Council 12

Interview with Susan Roblat-Walker 12

Special Interest Groups Listed 14

Conferences 17

Chris Bourret / Joe Lopes  
Editors

## The High Stakes of Standardized Testing RITELL Supports Bill to Eliminate NECAP Tests in Graduation Decisions

The number is staggering: 44.6 percent. If Rhode Island's educational regulations were in effect today, 44.6 percent of R.I. students would be at risk of being denied a high school diploma.

Even more alarming is the percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs) who would be impacted by the current situation. Based on 11th grade math scores on standardized tests in the Fall of 2011, 90 percent of

the state's ELL population would be in jeopardy of not receiving a diploma, a shockingly high percentage.



Students at State House hearing

The cause of this dilemma, of course, is low test scores in the math portion of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). It is a scenario that RITELL is unwilling

to accept, and it is for this reason that RITELL supports a bill introduced by Rep. Eileen S. Naughton (D-Warwick), which would prohibit the use of standardized test scores in graduation decisions.

**'... the most important conversation in our state right now'.**  
**Education Commissioner Deborah Gist**

In her testimony at the State House, RITELL Coordinating Council member Dina Silvaggio urged legislators to not use tests *Continued page 9*

### Special Interest Groups Announced

RITELL is pleased to announce that the Special Interest Groups have leaders and are forming. The following Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and their leaders are as follows:

**Adult Education** - Barbara Gourlay and Jill Scott

**Early Childhood/Elementary Ed**- Amanda Sox

**International Voices** - Carolina Bisio and Anta Lo

**Dual Language** - Elisa Rivera, Berkis Rodriguez, and Darlene Pugnali.

If you are not able to contact the leaders of the SIG you are interested in, the contact people on the coordinating council will be able to connect you to them (see page for Coordinating Council contact information).

The leaders of the SIGS

will be recruiting for members to join. Each SIG will hold at least one event per year and this will occur in a variety of ways.

Representatives will be at the spring RITELL conference on May 12th to invite members to join all SIGS that interest them.

This is another step for RITELL as we work to build a strong organization that meets the professional needs of the ELL/Bilingual teachers the state.

*See page 14 for SIG announcements*

## Six Professional Development Videos for ESL Teachers on Co-teaching and Collaboration:

Nancy Cloud, Director,  
M.Ed. in TESL Program,  
Rhode Island College  
[ncloud@ric.edu](mailto:ncloud@ric.edu)

These short clips provide both the rationale for and/or approaches teachers have used to co-teach and collaborate with colleagues in order to support their ELLs.

### 1) Literacy and Co-Teaching Curriculum at Q029 <http://vimeo.com/14843325>

This video illustrates the Literacy Curriculum and Co-Teaching Model at PS 29 in Queens being implemented for ELL students. All ESL services are delivered through a push-in rather than a pull-out model in which ESL teachers partner with classroom teachers during content area studies.

Teachers study research-based practices and develop new, effective ways to teach academic language and vocabulary at varying grade levels.

The benefits of this practice are:

- ELL students scoring higher on the statewide proficiency test and making more significant progress on state ELA and Math assessments than native English speakers.
- Teachers are collaborating and planning more. Teams of teachers (classroom, ESL and content) that may not have come together to collaborate are now working together, sharing their collective expertise and knowledge.

### 2) Effective Instruction for English Language Learners in the K-12 Setting

University of Minnesota Site on Collaboration for ELLs

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CI/faculty/projects/bigelow/collab.html>

Collaboration between ELL and mainstream teachers in a K-12 setting can be very beneficial to students who are still learning English. It can also promote professional development for teachers. This site explores the topic of collaboration through teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of collaborating.

### 3) WIDA Video on Commitment to Co-Teaching <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKCur0DvRo>

Three elementary teachers discuss their efforts to co-teach to serve all of their students' needs, including ELLs.

### 4) Teaming for EL Success—two short clips <http://www.openfilm.com/videos/teaming-for-el-success:jen-leazer-on-collaborating>

<http://www.openfilm.com/videos/teaming-for-el-success:john-wolfe-on-collaborating>

In less than one minute each, two teachers share the basics of how they do their collaboration and co-teaching at the secondary level.

### 5) Cobb County ESOL: Videos on Collaboration and Co-Teaching

<http://flesolcobbcentral.typepad.com/esol/2011/11/videos-on-collaboration-co-teaching.html>

Describes how secondary teachers worked together at the Shanghai American School to serve their ELLs. Includes specific strategies used by the ESOL teacher to guide the students' content area writing (history) and how the students, both mainstream and ELL related to the approach. *Continued page 3*

## Six Professional Development Videos

*continued*

### 6) Co-teaching at Johnson School, Bensenville, IL

<http://vimeo.com/7711257>

In an effort to better serve the needs of English Language Learners, the teaching staff at Johnson School, an elementary school, decided to begin co-teaching science and social studies so that ESL teachers are in the room and can spend more time with students reinforcing vocabulary and background knowledge. This video shows collaboration from the students' perspective.

Show your support for RITELL by purchasing a nifty RITELL tote or fashionable RITELL T-Shirt at our next conference.



**Check Out Our Conference Information on Page 4**

### RITELLER Featured Links:

#### 1. Way To Go RI:

Source for college and career planning in RI. Information, units and activities for K-Adult learners. Teachers can register their class for free on site.

<https://secure.waytogori.org/Default.aspx>

#### 2. TESOL English Language Bulletin:

The TESOL English Language Bulletin is a weekly news bulletin presented as a service to members of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and members of RITELL are also eligible to subscribe to this service. It's free! Follow link below to subscribe.

<http://multibriefs.com/optin.php?tesol>

Show your colleagues page 6 and encourage them to join RITELL! The more members we have, the stronger we become in serving you!



**Join one of our new Special Interest Groups. See Page 14 for more information.**

# RITELL Spring Conference

*Collaboration between content and ESL teachers*

Saturday, May 12th

Rhode Island College Student Union Ballroom

8:30-12:30- Annual Business Meeting 12:30-1:00

Collaboration and Co-Teaching in the ELL Classroom

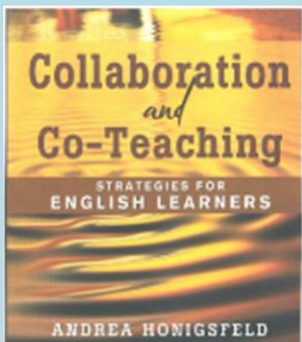
Conference Fees are \$10 for members, \$5 for students, adult educators, Part-time teachers and retirees; non-members \$40

Register on line: [www.ritell.org](http://www.ritell.org) Half year membership rate available for non-members (\$20 regular membership; \$12.50 students, part-time/adult teachers, retirees).

## Opening Session

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have afforded both new challenges, but also unique opportunities for all educators working with English Language Learners (ELLs) to collaborate and co-teach for student success.

In their collaboratively delivered keynote session, Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria Dove will describe elements of a collaborative service delivery model that addresses both the challenges and opportunities of implementing the CCSS.



**Author Book Signing**

**RITELL Raffle**

**Earn CEUs.**

## Breakout Sessions:

**PreK-5 Co-teaching Strategies for K-5 ELLs**  
(Maria Dove)

**Grades 6-12 Co-teaching Strategies for 6-12 ELLs**  
(Andrea Honigsfeld)

**Adult Educators – Collaboration in Adult Education**

Dr. Philip Less

Administrator, Adult Basic Education and GED Programs

Office of Multiple Pathways

RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Conference Sponsors: Conference sponsor: Lou Karger, New England Representative, Alta Books (ESL games, teacher resource books, and activities for language learning) and Crabtree Publishing Company (non-fiction and leveled reading for K-9, publisher of Bobbie Kalman Books)



*RITELL Member  
Article*

## What I've Learned about Co-Teaching

Kimberly Lebrun

Teamwork . Collaboration. Cooperation. By the time I was entering into the field of education, I thought I had mastered these concepts, largely because of my involvement in sports and helpful personality. But I found myself in the role of a co-teacher in five different classrooms, with five different teachers, and five different sets of rules, and I found that maybe I hadn't mastered them at all.

I looked around the rooms and realized that what I thought co-teaching should look like was not being realized. In all of the classrooms that I worked in, I wanted to be involved, and most moments of most days, I could find a role that I could fill in these rooms. However, then direct instruction would happen and, for all intent and purposes, I would spend as many minutes as I could walking around the room, monitoring, redirecting, but in a lesson that is straight direct instruction where the students are focused, I would find myself drifting towards the windowsill. In my head, I think it was better than sitting down. After a year of doing this, I realized that I had to make a change. So at the end of that year, and every year since, I have made only one promise to myself: Be better at this next year. And with this mantra, I started to do some research, attend conferences, discuss with other professional; I started to gather ideas on how to make this work just a little bit better than the year before.

**"I will..." statements...**At the end of a conference that I had attended, the presenter asked us to write down a few "I will..." statements listing what we will do when we return to our schools. I completed her

activity, return to school the next week, and realized that I had put all of those statements into action. I learned the power of "I will..." statements and resolved to write them every year. At the start or end of the school year, resolve to write a few "I will..." statements to guide your focus for the next year.

**Find a role you can do...** Two teachers in the room can make everything run smoother. Find a way to be actively involved in the room and supporting the ELLS. For instance, in math class, I write on the tablet/whiteboard while the math teacher is going over the content. Anytime I need to interject for language support I do so, either through the notes or by making a comment. The class runs smoother, and this works for both of us.

**-Baby steps are more than okay:** It is important to realize that this is going to take some time, and the amount of time varies depending on a whole host of reasons. Whatever your situation, know that some things will click with some people easily and quickly, where others may require a little more time. Don't get frustrated or give up. Use resources to help find the path that will help the most. For instance, I have consulted, *Collaborative Teaching in Secondary Schools: Making the Co-Teaching Marriage Work!*, by Wendy Murawski and *Collaboration and Co-Teaching: Strategies for English Learners*, by Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria Dove. Find resources that will help guide those steps, even the small ones.

**Defining your role in the room:** I skipped this step my first three years of co-teaching. As a teacher in the room, it seemed obvious to me what I was doing in there; however, the students were a little lost. At some point during the year, some of the non-ESL students would refer to me as the assistant. This year, I took the time to define my role, not only to the students, but also to my fellow co-teachers, and I found that this set the tone. *Continued page 7*

# Why Join RITELL?

## Six Essential Reasons

RITELL is the only association in Rhode Island that maintains an affiliation with TESOL. Joining RITELL can help you present yourself as a serious professional who is a member of his or her professional association.

### **Highlight your membership on your resume:**

There are few better ways to show your serious commitment to the field and distinguish yourself from others who don't join or participate in their professional associations.

### **Pay special member fees and use RITELL resources:**

At RITELL Conferences in the fall and spring, pay

discounted fees. Designed with our members' needs in mind, visit the RITELL website regularly to stay up to date in your field. [www.ritell.org](http://www.ritell.org).

### **Receive the association's newsletter--The RI-Teller:**

Receive the *RI-Teller* twice a year and stay up to date on issues and developments in the field. Learn of changes in state policies, gain valuable information that can help you teach your students more effectively, and learn of professional conferences of interest to be held in our region.

### **Job Postings:**

Receive job postings through *RIWorks*, our e-bulletin that

will notify RITELL members of ESL and bilingual/dual language positions as they are announced.

### **Networking:**

Network with colleagues who can offer you ideas, strategies, resources and encouragement.

### **Advocacy:**

Benefit from the advocacy efforts of RITELL on behalf of Rhode Island ESL and Bilingual professionals, as well as ELL students and their families.

### **Get involved!**

RITELL members are the backbone of our professional association. If you are looking for a way to contribute, RITELL is a wonderful option for you. Join others and make a difference!



*Don't miss out on the opportunities and benefits RITELL can bring!*

## Contribute to RI-TELLER!

We welcome book reviews, articles, lesson ideas, notices or relevant meetings and any other news of interest to ESL educators in RI.

For more information, contact Joe Lopes or Chris Bourret at either

[westerlyjoe@hotmail.com](mailto:westerlyjoe@hotmail.com)

or

[cbourret@verizon.net](mailto:cbourret@verizon.net)



Next Issue: Fall 2012

## Check Us Out Online!

[www.ritell.org](http://www.ritell.org) is up and running. In the coming months, the site will contain event information, job openings, advocacy positions, educational resources where teachers can post ideas for lessons and other material. And check out our Facebook Page at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Ritell-an-Affiliate-of-Tesol-International/181353538598462>



## What I've Learned about Co-Teaching

*continued*

The co-teachers gained a better understanding of my role, and likewise, so did I. By verbalizing my responsibilities out loud, I affirmed my plan for the year. On yearly basis, we are collaborating and co-teaching with a range of professionals, making sure that everyone understands the job we are expected to perform is essential to keeping it all straight.

**Asking open ended questions and being persistent:** Instead of asking questions that end with yes or no, ask questions that initiate the conversation. For instance, "How can I help with the writing lesson tomorrow?" There is still a chance that the other professional could say, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it." However, it is a lot harder for them to say no if you are persistent, continuing to ask open ended questions, and insistent of becoming an active member of the class.

The tips, although not a complete list by any means, are provided to help guide our thinking in improving collaboration. In the last year, we have seen the age of accountability grow to new heights. Teacher evaluations, Student Learning Objectives, and Professional Growth Goals have raised the stakes of the game (and our anxiety). It is important to remember that as a co-teacher, we have a job to do too.

It is not acceptable to hold up the windowsill, but also know that we lack the training in order to be fully effective. Think about students in a cooperative group. You put them in these groups, give them a great task to accomplish, and you turn your back for a minute and they are off task – some are talking, some organizing their materials, etc. We have all seen this happen. What we have learned about cooperative groups is that students need to be taught how to function in a group.

If we accept this as true, then my question becomes when did we learn how to share a classroom, collaborate and co-teach? I know it wasn't a course in my educational career. Know that the reasons we struggle with this at times is because it is something new, unfamiliar, and unprecedented. We are all adults and professionals, but we need time, guidance, and the skills taught to us for this to be really effective. So don't beat yourself up about not having this down pat yet, instead continue take those steps towards teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation.



Kimberly Lebrun is 8th grade ESL Collaborative Teacher at Hugh B. Bain Middle School, Cranston.

**COMO? IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS AT  
CENTRAL FALLS HIGH SCHOOL**  
**Pam Garabedian, Sheila Lawless-Burke, Michael Paul**

At Central Falls High School, ESL teachers have been participating in a WIDA-supported project called LADDER. Due to low test scores for listening on ACCESS, the state assessment for ELLs, our goal is to devise improved techniques for the teaching of listening skills in a second language. In this brief report, we want to point to a few techniques we are using and, also, describe some of the challenges many teachers and students have in dealing with listening comprehension.

**Strategies and Techniques**

- Finding inspiration from our late colleague Nancy Carnevale, we have employed daily dictations as a warm-up. Texts are usually three or four sentences taken from reading they are about to encounter in class. Students self-correct or exchange papers with a partner for correction. Students at all levels cite this as one of the most helpful assignments they have in learning English.
- Using a worksheet, pairs of students are assigned a vocabulary word to define and give examples for. Also, they identify key words for the term. They teach the word to the class, who take notes on the vocabulary words. Later, they are given an assessment in which they can use their notes to define the vocabulary words.

- Dictoglos is a listening/note-taking technique that involves the teacher reading aloud with students writing key words from the passage. After several passes on the same passage, students can read the passage and check their note-taking.
- Socratic Seminar involves a small group of students discussing a student-chosen topic. Students develop questions and practice responses. A host in the group asks questions and tries to get reticent students more involved. The audience (the rest of the class) uses a graphic organizer to follow one of the students in the seminar.

**Challenges of Teaching Listening Skills**

Listening is the step-child of the learning modalities. Most listening exercises are dependent upon other modalities of writing and speaking to encode what was heard. The best listener may perform the poorest on a dictation due to low-literacy skills. The shy student may be insecure about responding to something the student heard. Interpreting pictures like the ones found in the listening part of ACCESS test are subject to cultural interpretation. In our classrooms, all of the learning modalities are interdependent, but listening seems even more so.

We are fortunate to have some excellent teaching materials, the centerpiece being the EDGE series from National Geographic. But even here “listening” involves taking part in a panel discussion or a debate. *Continued page 9*



## IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS AT CENTRAL FALLS HIGH SCHOOL *continued*

Other challenges include:

- Ambient noise from the school and surrounding community. Its source can include running refrigerator trucks that deliver food to the school or construction work crews. It also may be found in the hallways with noisy students.
- Lack of technology including computers, speakers, headphones, or CD players.
- Lack of common planning time to share ideas and help reinforce classroom initiatives.

### Results So Far

We hope to have post-test results in May, but at this time, we are pleased with how engaged and satisfied these activities are for students. Many students believe that these efforts have helped with listening and other areas, as well. They enthusiastically have given us feedback, which shows they are metacognitively engaged.



*Pam Garabedian, Sheila Lawless-Burke, and Michael Paul are teachers at Central Falls High School*

## The High Stakes of Standardized Testing

*continued*

that are “neither valid nor reliable for ELLs” when it comes to making decisions about graduation and or promotion.

Instead, RITELL recommends that ELLs be tested in their native language whenever possible. In fact, RITELL argues that ELLs should not be tested in any subject in English until students reach the Developing Stage on the ACCESS for ELLs test, noting that it is illogical for the Rhode Island Department of Education to mandate high-stakes testing of students it fully acknowledges as not being proficient in English.

Education Commissioner Deborah Gist defends the use of standardized testing saying it is “the most important conversation in our state right now.”



*Education Commissioner Gist Speaks at Hearing*

In her testimony, Gist said the regulations are fair and reasonable explaining, “We want to force the system to help students continue to gain the skills they need.”

While this conversation moves along, the manner in which those skills are to be gained is at the root of the debate. RITELL, nonetheless, offers the following steps:

- afford greater opportunities for ELL and content-area teachers to share strategies with mainstream colleagues to ensure success for ELLs. *Continued Page 10*

## The High Stakes of Standardized Testing *continued*

- provide high-quality teacher professional development to content-area and classroom teachers to ensure that they know how to "shelter" instruction for ELLs.
- fund after-school and summer ELL programming, and strengthen community partnerships.
- improve technology in classrooms to strengthen instruction.

Aligned with the stance taken by RITELL is Julie Motta, chairwoman of the Rhode Island LEP/ELL Advisory Council, who says ELLs need more instructional support in reading and writing, not high-stakes testing. Motta stated in her written testimony, "We hold extremely high expectations for our English learners... However, there are many other tools (other than the state assessment) that can be used by educators with our students to allow them to prove that they are fully proficient."

**RITELL advocates for all teachers who serve ELLs. Let us know the issues important to you!**



## African Voices



**Focus On  
Liberia:  
In Their Own  
Words  
By Anta Lo,  
M.Ed TESL**

Liberia is a small country in the western part of Africa with a population of 3,887,886 (CIA Fact book.) There are approximately 31 languages spoken in Liberia among which are Kpelle spoken by 20% of the population, Bassa 13%, Grebo 10%, and Gio 8%. The literacy rate in Liberia is 25% (Ethnologue: Languages of the World). More than 25,000 Liberians fled their country during the civil war, according to a documentary by *Voice of America In Focus*.

Among those refugees, an estimated 15,000 live in Rhode Island (VOA NEWS). In their own voices, Liberians interviewed in this documentary share their affection for their attachment to Rhode Island. They settled in the Ocean State not only because they have family, relatives, or friends here, but also because they want better educational opportunities for themselves and their children.

Both adult and K-12 schools have significant numbers of Liberians many of whom face enormous literacy challenges. As they struggle their way through the American education system, their instructors also scuffle to broaden their understanding of students' backgrounds. In an attempt to comprehend the obstacles they face in rebuilding their lives and education, I interviewed two Liberian students who attend Dorcas Place Adult and Family *Continued page 11*

## African Voices: Focus On Liberia

*continued*

family Learning Center.

The name of my first Interviewee is Manjay Touray. She is 23 years old and has been in the United States for only three years. Her primary language is Mandingo or Mande which is spoken by less than 8% of Liberians.

She went to Koranic school



*The Author, left, with a student*

(she is a Muslim) in Liberia where she only learned how to read and write in Arabic. Her first English reading and writing lessons took place in her US high school's ESL pull out program. "I struggled with all subjects because everything was new to me, the letters, words, spelling...and I was placed in 11th grade!" she confided. Her main educational challenges in Liberia were the numerous interruptions of schooling due to the civil wars that started in the 1980s and continued into 2003. However, education in the US has a whole range of novelties she was not sure how to figure out. To the question of what the most difficult subject was, she answered "writing" because she struggled with spelling the most.

The other student I spoke with is named Kebbeh Teeway. She is 39 years old and has lived in the United States for 8 years. Loma, spoken mainly in the North by a minority of Liberians, is her first language.

Kebbeh had a very scattered education because of the wars, but went up to sixth grade. The language of instruction was English. So she had basic reading and writing skills. "My education in Liberia was repeatedly interrupted by the wars. I had to live in many refugee camps to survive which is why I do not have strong reading and writing skills," she said.

To the question concerning what their teachers could do to maximize their learning, they both answered that they process information more slowly than other students, and need teachers to be patient and break down information in smaller and easier to handle chunks.

What I took away from speaking with Manjay and Kebbeh is that more research is needed on the underlying literacy and cultural differences between English Language Learners from the same country to inform assessment, placement, and teaching practices. Although they are both from Liberia, these young women grapple with distinct sets of literacy challenges. Manjay who was schooled in Arabic may have writing problems that are more similar to her Lebanon classmates for example than her Liberian ones. She may need more explicit instruction on say run-on sentences, punctuation, and redundancy all of which are acceptable in Arabic writing than her other Liberian counterparts.

On the other hand, Kebbeh who has learned the Roman alphabet and acquired some reading and writing skills may have more transferrable skills that an informed teacher can tap into to enhance instruction or differentiate for this particular student. *Questions or suggestions to alo@ric.edu*

### Helpful Links:

<http://www.ethnologue.com/home.asp>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQwvjhEbi7s>  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

# RITELL Coordinating Council

**President:** Nancy Cloud

**Vice President:** Andrés Ramírez

**Recording Secretary:** Dina Silvaggio

**Membership Secretary:** Jane George

**Treasurer:** Lauren Bentley

**Advocacy Representative: Full Council: Send Inquiries**

*c/o Nancy Cloud*

**Editors:** Christopher Bourret and Joe Lopes

**Representatives at Large:** Pat Morris; Suzanne DaSilva; Anta Hane



Among its activities, Coordinating Council members organize and work at RITELL Conferences, manage the [www.ritell.org](http://www.ritell.org) website, advocate & present position statements for Teachers of ELLS, help form and support Special Interest Groups, and actively recruit new RITELL members.

## A Conversation with Susan Rotblat-Walker Reflections on a Remarkable Career

Sitting down to a conversation with Susan Rotblat-Walker, it's easy to see her undeniable energy, and her compassion for helping English Language Learners. She has left an impressive legacy in the field of second language teaching and learning in Rhode Island.

"My work didn't end," says Rotblat-Walker. "The work I started is still alive in the work of others."



*Susan Rotblat-Walker*

Rotblat-Walker's legacy has its roots in 1979 when she and her family settled in Bristol. After stints working as an adult ESL teacher, education director

*Continued right*

## A Conversation with Susan Rotblat-Walker

*continued*

and professional development specialist at Project Persona and Brown University, Rotblat-Walker was subsequently hired as an ESL Education Specialist at the Rhode Island Department of Education. That was in 1986. Twenty five years later, this remarkable advocate of ELLs ended her career at RIDE, retiring in September.

"I've always had a passion for justice and equity for newcomers to the United States," explains Rotblat-Walker, who once lived in Japan as a child and later returned to teach English as a young adult. "Those experiences shaped my world view. That other cultures should be valued and are as important as our own American culture."

As she looks back on her career *Continued page 13*



## A Conversation with Susan Rotblat-Walker *continued*

at RIDE, Rotblat-Walker focuses on the supportive communities she helped build. Back in 1986, the state was just beginning to fully implement the ESL regulations, and Rotblat-Walker remembers being part of a team that conducted ESL visits at various schools. As she reflects on those days, she recalls ESL students were often segregated from the mainstream population and were designated the sole responsibility of ESL teachers.

Referring to ELL programs across the state today, Rotblat-Walker notes, "We're in a far better position now, compared to where we were 25 years ago. There is much more awareness of ELLs. These students are now the responsibility of the whole school."

Few would argue that Rotblat-Walker was instrumental in those changes being realized. She was a member of the team that designed and implemented the School Improvement and Accountability system, which became part of SALT process in Rhode Island. Also, during the 1990s, Rotblat-Walker developed an ESL teacher's network to create teacher-to-teacher connections throughout the state. She returned full circle, serving as an ELL Education Specialist at the time of her retirement.

The challenges have been great for Rotblat-Walker, but the success she's accomplished has been greater. Still, there is one issue that unsettles her mind even today, and that is the public's perception of teachers.

"I'm distressed for the lack of support and affirmation of teachers," she says. "They shouldn't be prejudged for students not meeting the standards or for falling below grade level."

She explains that ELL teachers work tirelessly for the betterment of their students, not only in the classroom but also out in the community, where their students' lives are too often a struggle for survival. And that is why Rotblat-Walker stresses the need for more resources to ensure the teacher and school partnerships she helped create in the 1990s live on and become stronger in the future.

"We've forgotten that a school is built in a community and that we need to nurture parents to be part of that community," she says.

Rotblat-Walker, who now spends much of her time serving on the National Board of the United Church of Christ, concludes this conversation by quoting the famous author, E. B. White. "He once said, 'I wake up each morning torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.'"

Explains Rotblat-Walker, "Like E.B. White, when I wake up in the morning, I don't know whether to improve the world or to enjoy being saved by the world."

Either way, Susan Rotblat-Walker will continue on her life's path with undeniable energy and compassion.

Susan lives in Bristol with her husband, Howard. They have one son, Stuart who works at Syracuse University, and two grandsons, Ty, 4, and Sam, 2.

For those who know Susan well, there is no better way to end this article than to simply say in Italian: *grazie mille.* - *by j. a. lopes*

# RITELL Special Interest Groups Announced

## International Voices



We are extremely excited to introduce International Voices which is one of four recently formed RITELL SIGs (Special Interest Group). We hope you like the idea of unity and solidarity embodied in our logo.

The goal of International Voices is to create a collaborative community of ESL /EFL professionals who share the same career needs and interests. The creation of this particular SIG is all the more important because of the growing diversity of ELL professionals from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Rhode Island in particular, and in the United States at large. As an affiliate of TESOL International, RITELL works at bringing Rhode Island ELL educators together in close nit partnerships through SIGs such as this one.

Consequently, through continuous collaboration and involvement, International Voices hopes to offer a space where members are able to discuss pressing issues related to their work, share best practices, instructional materials, and potential job leads, and learn from one another in the process. In a nutshell, as the name indicates, we want to give a voice to all the members who have the same dedication towards the vibrant population of English language learners we teach and learn from every day.

As co-chairs of International Voices, we invite all interested individuals to join us in this exciting and challenging journey and look forward to adding new members at the spring RITELL conference.

Co-chairs:

Anta Hane Lo

MA in English from Senegal

M.Ed in TESL from Rhode Island College.

Carolina Bisio

B.A. in English as a Second Language -  
Universidad Nacional de Rio Cuarto -  
Córdoba - Argentina.

M. Ed. in TESL Program Student at  
Rhode Island College.

## Dual Language/ Bilingual SIG “Language Travelers”

The Dual Language Special Interest Group Leadership Team is comprised of second grade teacher, Elisa Rivera, and first grade teacher, Berkis Rodriguez, from Veterans Memorial Elementary School in Central Falls and Darlene Pugnali, Assistant Director, from the International Charter School in Pawtucket.

One of the goals of the Dual Language Special Interest Group is to enhance current program designs to ensure *Continued on page 15*

## Dual Language/ Bilingual SIG “Language Travelers”

*Continued*

that all students become bi-literate and bilingual. We hope to have teachers collaborate to determine the progress being made and offer suggestions to effectively meet this goal. We want our practice to be research and data driven to ensure that academic achievement is attained in both languages.

A great resource we have been using is the Center for Applied Linguistics website ([www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org)). This website offers numerous online resources and free downloadable materials with information about Dual Language programs and methods. At one of our meetings, we used the checklist found on [www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org) to assess the Dual Language program at the International Charter School. This checklist aligns to the report on Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education. By using this checklist, the ICS team of teachers was able to determine the areas which need enhancement in our current program. The Guiding Principles range from Assessment and Accountability to Family and Community.

Upcoming Event: First Regional Dual Language Conference, Saturday, May 19th, 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the International Charter School. More information and details about the conference will be made available on the International Charter School website [www.internationalcharterschool.org](http://www.internationalcharterschool.org) after April 1st.

To join our group and for more information about our event, please email us at:  
[riveraelisa@cfschools.net](mailto:riveraelisa@cfschools.net)  
[rodriguez@b@cfschools.net](mailto:rodriguez@b@cfschools.net)  
[dpugnali@internationalcharterschool.org](mailto:dpugnali@internationalcharterschool.org)

## New Early Childhood/Elementary Education SIG!

The New Early Childhood/Elementary Education SIG is open to any RITELL member who is currently working in early childhood or elementary school settings and for anyone who has a special interest in learning about and working with young English learners in Rhode Island schools. As a member of the Early Childhood/Elementary Education SIG, you will be eligible to attend SIG events at conference meetings and other SIG-related meetings. Our first organizational meeting will be held immediately following the RITELL conference, location to be announced. We will discuss what type of events and topics should be the focus of the SIG and make initial plans for the fall conference. Please contact Amanda Sox Agudelo ([asox@ric.edu](mailto:asox@ric.edu)), acting SIG Chair, if you are interested in becoming a member of the new Early Childhood/Elementary Education SIG or stop by at the RITELL Conference.

## RITELL’s Adult Education Special Interest Group (AE SIG).

Please join us for the inaugural meeting of the RITELL Adult Education Special Interest Group (AE SIG) on Saturday, May 12th, during the Breakout Session of the May RITELL Conference.

You’ll be able to meet other RITELL members who share similar interests and concerns when working with adult English language learners and set the agenda for AE SIG. We will identify future AE SIG events, activities and topics for discussion that will benefit you and your work with adult English language learners. *Continued page 16*

## **RITELL's Adult Education Special Interest Group (AE SIG) *continued***

### **RITELL-Adult Education SIG Mission**

The Adult Education Special Interest Group (AE SIG) serves members of the RITELL community who are teachers, administrators, and researchers working with any adult English language learner in Rhode Island: workers, immigrants, university students, parents of nonnative English speaking school children.

The Adult Education SIG brings together ESL professionals working with adult English language learners to address multiple goals and purposes:

- To foster collegial and professional community engagement for educators and administrators who share many of the same issues and concerns that arise when teaching and working with adult non-native speakers of English a variety of settings.
- To provide networking and strategizing opportunities for its members.
- To gather and disseminate information about best practices, materials and resources related to adult English language learners.
- To survey members and provide them with professional workshops and/or events on current topics and trends.
- To promote professional standards and best practices.

### **The Missions of RITELL:**



### **Advocacy**



### **Connecting Professionals in the Field**



### **Sharing Resources and Best Practices**



Contact information:



Find us at:

[www.ritell.org](http://www.ritell.org)

Mailing Address:

RITELL  
c/o Nancy Cloud  
Educational Studies  
Department,  
Rm. 220 HBS  
Rhode Island College,  
600 Mt. Pleasant Ave.  
Providence, RI 02908

Phone (401) 456-8789

Fax (401) 456-8284

[ncloud@ric.edu](mailto:ncloud@ric.edu)

RI-TELLER submissions

Contact Chris Bourret or  
Joe Lopes at

[cbourret@verizon.net](mailto:cbourret@verizon.net)

[westerlyjoe@hotmail.com](mailto:westerlyjoe@hotmail.com)



## Upcoming Conferences

### Welcome to the first Southern New England Regional Dual Language Conference

Date: Saturday, May 19

Time: 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Location: International Charter School

334 Pleasant Street

Pawtucket, RI 02860

For information regarding fees and to register go to  
<http://mabeconferenceduallanguageprograms.eventbrite.com>

*The Mass. Association for Bilingual Education, along with  
Dual Language Programs and affiliate organizations in MA,  
CT, and RI, is delighted to host this conference for  
teachers, school and district leaders, support staff, and all  
those interested in and dedicated to Dual Language Education.*

Keynote Speaker: Ester de Jong

Associate Professor ESOL/Bilingual

Foreign Language Education, University of Florida

Author of Foundations of Multilingualism in Education:

Principles to Practice

### Rhode Island Adult Education Conference

Rhode Island College

600 Mt Pleasant Ave

Providence, RI 02908

Thursday, May 24, 2012 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Hosted by the RI Adult Education

Professional Development Center

For Conference Schedule and to register go to

<http://pdc2012aeconference.eventbrite.com/>