



THE RI-TELLER

*The Newsletter for Rhode Island Teachers of
English Language Learners & ELL Professionals*

www.ritell.org

Issue 15: Spring 2018



RITELL Abroad

Photo Credit Alexander McMillan

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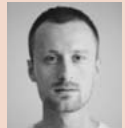
16-18 Featured Blog: Adventures of an ELF Jane George



Before moving his family to Vietnam and coordinating the English as an Additional Language program at the American International School, GRAHAM OAKLAND worked for seven years as an English Language Learner specialist/coordinator at The Met High School in Providence, Rhode Island. During his time there he also served as an adjunct professor in the Masters of Education program in Teaching English as a Second Language program at Rhode Island College and taught an oral communications course at Johnson and Wales University. When he isn't teaching, he is busy convincing his family to accompany him on warm water surf trips.



DR. KEITH FOLSE is Professor of TESOL at the University of Central Florida, where he teaches in the MA, PhD, and undergraduate certificate programs. For almost forty years, he has taught ESL/EFL in the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Japan, and Kuwait, as well as French in the U.S. and Spanish in Japan. He is the author of 68 textbooks on a variety of subjects from grammar and vocabulary to reading and writing. Dr. Folse is a frequent presenter at conferences worldwide, especially on the topic of best research-based teaching practices for vocabulary.



ALEXANDER MCMILLAN is an instructional coach of technology at the American International School in Saigon hailing from Eugene, Oregon. He's been living there since 2008 and enjoyed a career in photography before working at AIS. As a photographer he specializes in portraiture for personal and commercial use. His portfolio can be found at alexander.vn.



JANE GEORGE has traveled a non-traditional professional route to where she is today. She got her first teaching job in Japan while on a round-the-world backpacking trip. She taught there for about 10 years altogether. In addition, she has taught as an adjunct in Boston, Hawaii and Providence. For the last 18 years she has been working in North Kingstown as an itinerant ESL teacher. She was on the board of RITELL for 10 years. The English Language Fellow program she is currently participating in is one that is open to all ESL teachers with master's degrees. She thinks that everyone should apply for this program because it is not only good for U.S. relations with the world, it is a great professional and personal experience as well. She is currently teaching pre-service teachers English as well as their teachers new techniques for teaching English communication skills.

MITCHELL SANDERS is a talented student of photography who specializes in portraiture and astrophotography. At 20, Mitchell has an unusual amount of experience in the field and has worked with well known artist mentors for years. Currently based in southern Rhode Island, he attends Salve Regina University in Newport and is continuing his freelance photography business and artistic endeavors.

EDITORS



DOUG NORRIS is the vice-president of the RITELL Coordinating Council and a lead teacher with the R.I. Family Literacy Initiative. He also serves on the Library Board of Rhode Island. He holds a master's degree in TESL from Rhode Island College and a

bachelor's degree in Communications/Journalism from Long Island University. In previous lives, he was the arts editor of Independent Newspapers of Southern Rhode Island, the Rhode Island editor of Art New England, and the news director at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. In his spare time, he is a vagabond traveler, freelance writer, occasional poet and amateur photographer.



ANKE STEINWEH is a member of the RITELL Coordinating Council and teacher at North Providence High School. She also serves on the ELL Advisory Council of Rhode Island. She holds a master's degree in

Elementary Education from the University of Rhode Island and is a K-12 ESL Specialist. She received her undergraduate degree in English and Psychology from Rhode Island College where she was also an editor of Rhode Island College's literary magazine many moons ago. Hailing originally from Germany, she lives with her husband, three children, two cats and five chickens in the south of our beautiful state.



LAURA FARIA-TANCINCO is a member of the RITELL Coordinating Council and has taught Adult Ed ESL in universities & institutions all over RI. She has been in the ESL field for 10+ years. She began her ESL

journey in 2006, after a degree and professional attempt in Graphic Design left her wanting more. She moved to Quito, Ecuador where she lived and worked for 2.5 years before backpacking around South America. Upon her return, she began adjuncting at colleges and universities around RI. She completed her M. Ed in TESL from RIC in 2015 and is currently the Coordinator of the ESL Intensive Program and Project ExCEL at RIC. She always says, the best people in the world arrive in her classroom. She enjoys all the challenges & rewards that come with the profession.

NEWS & NOTES

Recognition

Hesson Honored for Dissertation

Dr. Sarah Hesson, Assistant Professor and Director of RIC's TESL and Bilingual Education programs, recently won third place in the National Association for Bilingual Education's 2018 Outstanding Dissertation Award competition. Her dissertation, *Bilingual Latino Middle Schoolers on Language and Racialization in the US*, explored bilingual Latino middle schoolers' understandings of their language practices as well as the links between language practices and processes of racialization and discrimination in the US. The research was conducted in the context of an after-school program aimed at documenting students' experiences, and using those experiences as a basis for

generating individual and collective critical understandings among participants. The dissertation concludes by suggesting the need to center our understandings of bilingualism and language advocacy work on the lived experiences of bilingual youth and their communities. Dr. Hesson's hope is that this study will illuminate new possibilities for engaging with young adolescents in ways that foreground youth's voices and experiences, generate opportunities for critical dialogue, and inspire social transformation.

Spring 2018

Newcomers the Focus of RITELL 2018 Spring Conference

The theme of RITELL's 2018 Spring Conference is "Welcoming and Supporting Newcomers in Our Classrooms." Newcomers arrive in the U.S. from the far reaches of the world, bringing life stories and perspectives that speak to the worlds they have left. Keynote speakers Suzanne McNamara and Annie Smith, co-founders and Senior Instructional Coaches of Bridges to Academic Success, will present "Getting to Know the Newcomers We Serve" on May 5 at Rhode Island College in the Student Union Ballroom.

Bridges is a collaborative project of the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society, the Center for Advanced Study in Education, and the Graduate Center at CUNY.

McNamara and Smith will also present a breakout session designed for educators of secondary students on "Supporting Newcomers to Build Academic Thinking, Language & Literacy through Content." Two other breakout sessions will be presented. Karen Mangone, a K-5 ELL Teacher at Whiteknact Elementary School in East Providence, will present "Practical Ideas, Resources, and Activities for Teaching Newcomers" for elementary educators. A presentation for adult and secondary educators titled "Community Support for Newcomers: Resources and Testimonials" will feature Sabine Adrian, ESOL Program Coordinator at the RI Institute for Labor Studies and Research, along with testimonials from Providence College student Diana Canals and BRYTE (Brown Refugee Youth Tutoring Enrichment) Summer Camp Leader Mechack Niyomukiza,

RIDE News

RIDE Announces Flavia Molea Baker as new EL Coordinator

Flavia Molea Baker, President of RITELL's Coordinating Council, has been hired as the new EL Coordinator for RIDE in the Office of Student, Community & Academic Supports (OSCAS). Most recently, Flavia worked as an ELL/ELA teacher at Cumberland High School. She has also served as an adjunct faculty member at Rhode Island College in the TESL Graduate Studies program and in 2016-2017 she participated in the RIDE-sponsored Emerging Leadership Program. In addition to international experience in the government policy arena, Flavia has been a strong advocate for English learners. Flavia began her duties at RIDE in February.

STAY CONNECTED

Visit www.RITELL.org for teacher resources, conference information and much more!



Just Because You're A Native Speaker Doesn't Mean You Can Teach ESL

Keith Folse

I've heard it so many times in my career: If you can speak English, you can teach ESL. After all, what's the big deal? It's English, and you speak it. What is there to know?

Okay, at this point, please cringe with me. I've heard this nonsense multiple times in my career. I've heard it from native speakers who are interested in traveling the world and see teaching ESL as a way to fund their travels. When I was teaching overseas, I heard this from native speakers who had landed an ESL job primarily because they were a native speaker and in that area of the world. Quite unfortunately, I've also heard this message from administrators unwilling to pay for professionally trained ESL teachers. Now cringe with me again.

Those of us who have taught ESL for many years know that there is much more to teaching English to nonnative speakers than being a native speaker. Just because you can speak English does not mean you know English from a second language point of view. Yes, your pronunciation is great, and you may certainly be fluent, but being able to speak English is not the same as teaching it, especially to nonnative speakers.

HERE are many things about English that a native speaker has never thought about. To illustrate this, I offer these five examples of common "simple" questions that ESL students often ask in class:

1. Why does CATS end with an /s/ pronunciation but DOGS ends with a /z/ sound? We write the



There are many things about English that a native speaker has never thought about.

letter –s for plural for both, so why do they sound different?

2. For past tense, you add the letters –ed, and you pronounce them as a new syllable, so NEED becomes NEED-ED and WANT becomes WANT-ED, with 2 syllables. **So why doesn't WASH become WASH-ED? Why doesn't LIVE sound like LIV-ED?** Instead, WASHED ends with a /t/ sound, and LIVED ends with a /d/ sound.

3. Why do you use TO with I WANT TO GO, I NEED TO GO, and I HOPE TO GO, but we don't say I CAN TO GO, I WILL

TO GO, or I SHOULD TO GO? So should I put TO between two verbs (WANT to GO) or not (CAN GO)?

4. Why do you say THE United States and THE Netherlands, but you don't say THE Canada or THE South Korea? Is it related to the size of the country or its location?

5. Why is it wrong to say I DON'T HAVE MANY HOMEWORKS or SHE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH FRIENDS? Is there a real difference between MANY and MUCH?

How many (not much!) of these five questions can you answer now? If you are an experienced ESL teacher and know the answers, did you know this information when you first started teaching ESL? I most definitely did not, and pretty soon my students realized that I did not.

To be sure, it is okay for a teacher not to know everything, but it is definitely not okay for a professional to say "I don't know" repeatedly. Just imagine if your doctor or mechanic told you "I don't know" multiple times.

When I first started teaching ESL almost four decades ago, I was a young native speaker with a lot of energy, some coursework in linguistics, and several years of foreign language study (French and Spanish). I had no real training in teaching ESL, but luckily for me, that did not stop the director of the school from hiring me. I was a native speaker, so I should be able to teach English to some people who did not even know the language, right? (Cringe with me again.) Surely I knew

more than the students did.

I loved languages, and I wanted to do well at my first job. I was a detailed planner, so I prepared my lessons very carefully, perhaps too minutely, but I was a nervous newbie on a mission. Despite all my planning, however, students would often ask me questions in the middle of class that were not really the focus of that day's lesson. As a young, novice teacher, these student-generated questions quickly became the bane of my teaching existence, and I grew to fear these hot seat questions that baffled me so much.

IN the Preface to *The Grammar Answer Key: Short Explanations to 100 ESL Questions* (Folse, 2018), I offer this anecdote from my first year of ESL teaching, which may resonate with some of you as a "been there, done that" moment as well:

*In teaching a lesson one day on was and were, I wrote this example sentence on the board: **George Washington born on February 22, 1732.** My goal for this class was to get the students to talk about why we use was here instead of were, and I also wanted them to verbalize why was is a better choice than is.*

I thought the lesson was very successful. The students talked about why was is better than were, and they discussed why was is better than is. My students really seemed to understand the material. To close the lesson, I then did what all good teachers do. I asked the class if they had any questions. Sure enough, a hand went up. I was of course anticipating a question about was or were. If not that, then maybe a question might be about the pronunciation of Washington. No, those were not topics for this student's question that day.

I now refer to these on-the-spot student queries as 'hot-seat-questions' because the teacher is in the proverbial hot seat in front of the whole class. These questions are a normal, natural part of the learning process in any classroom.



"Teacher," the student began. "You told us to say in January, in February, in March. But now this sentence about Washington says on February. I thought in February is correct."

Now imagine my surprise. I was anticipating a was-were question, not a query about prepositions. I knew how to answer a question about was in great detail, but I most definitely

did not know why we use in instead of on in this sentence. I tried to come up with some sort of explanation on the spot, but I really didn't know the reason why we use in or on with certain time words.

In my first few years of teaching, I tried hard to handle these unexpected grammar questions better. To reach this goal, my strategy was to arrive at school extra early to talk to the much more experienced teachers in the teachers' lounge. Those teachers seemed to know everything (pp. vii-viii).

I now refer to these on-the-spot student queries as "hot-seat questions" because the teacher is in the proverbial hot seat in front of the whole class. These questions are a normal, natural part of the learning process in any classroom. As a non-ESL trained native speaker, I really struggled with the content of these questions. With time, however, I became better at providing answers, and after a few years, I could even anticipate who would ask what kind of question at which level. For example, a Spanish speaker at the beginning level is more likely to ask about be vs have (Why do you say I AM HUNGRY, not I HAVE HUNGRY?). An Arabic speaker is more likely to ask if we need

THE in I LIKE TO EAT THE RICE. A Japanese speaker may ask why you need the word A in THERE IS BOOK IN MY BAG. The more you teach, the more you'll become familiar with which questions are more likely from which language groups.

In *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners* (Folse, 2016), I have an entire chapter filled with examples of nothing but hot-seat questions. In my experience, the same or very similar questions tend to pop up, so teachers can gain valuable teaching knowledge if they read hot-

seat questions and answers.

At the RITELL Conference last October, I talked about some of the most common hot seat questions that tend to stump new (and experienced) ESL teachers. As a new teacher, I felt frustrated at how much I did not know about my own language. I do have some good news, however. Although you might think the list of hot-seat questions is infinite, in reality the opposite is true. Although there are many possible questions about English from an ESL point of view, the actual questions that students ask tend to repeat themselves. The same or very similar questions start to pop up, which means that teachers can and most definitely should learn about the most common questions as part of their ESL teacher preparation.

Although there are many possible questions about English from an ESL point of view, the actual questions that students ask tend to repeat themselves.

In my latest research project, I collected questions from ESL teachers all over the world for the past eleven years. I received more than 500 submissions, but there were only about 150 different questions really. I then went through this list and chose what I considered to be the top 100 questions, and this is the basis for my most recent book *The Grammar Answer Key*. It contains the information that I wish I had had four decades ago when I taught my first ESL class and quickly learned the very real feeling of the idiom “a deer in the headlights.”

Here are some answers to the five ESL questions presented earlier. More explicit answers can be found in *The Grammar Answer Key*.

1. The plural ending –s is pronounced /z/ much more than /s/. The suffix -s is pronounced /s/ only when the original word ends in the sound of /f/, /k/, /p/, or /t/: giraffes, ducks, antelopes, rats.

2. For past tense, the letters –ed are pronounced as a separate

syllable only when the original verb ends in the sound of /d/ or /t/ already.

3. In general, we separate two verbs with TO (WANT TO GO, NEED TO GO, PLAN TO GO), but we do not use TO after modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, must, should, had better*).

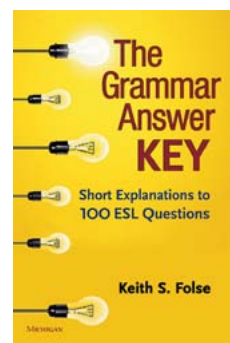
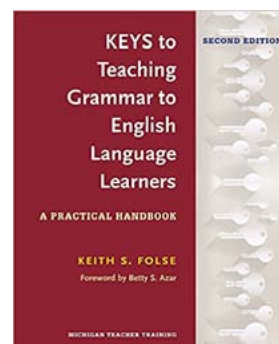
4. In English, countries that sound plural use THE. Therefore, if a country ends in –s (the Netherlands) or has the words united, union, kingdom, or republic, we use THE.

5. We use MANY for nouns we can count and MUCH for those we cannot count. Homework is uncountable; we don't say 1 homework, 2 homework, etc., though this is possible in many languages, such as Spanish (2 *tareas*).

Native speakers have no trouble saying whether something is correct or wrong. We know that 2 *home-works* sounds wrong, but we do not know why it is wrong. In fact, many teachers new to ESL offer general explanations to students such as “We don't say that” or “It just sounds right” or, the worst, “It's an excep-

tion.” No, it's probably not an exception. You just don't know the real answer to that student's question.

Teachers need to know how to answer the most common ESL questions. As illustrated in this short article, relying on native speaking skills is not a viable solution. Teachers need to learn about English from a non-native point of view. In this way, they can be better prepared to plan lessons that will address students' most common questions about how to use English.



References

Folse, K. (2016). *Keys to teaching grammar to English language learners: A practical handbook (2nd Ed.)*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Folse, K. (2018). *The Grammar Answer Key: Short Explanations to 100 ESL Questions*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Fall Conference Resources

Helping Kids Understand English Grammar through Multicultural Books and Mini-lessons

Patty Ridlon

What we know as teachers:

- Grammar conventions taught in isolation seldom transfer to writing or speaking.
- Few grammatical terms are actually needed to discuss writing.
- Sophisticated grammar is fostered in literacy-rich and language-rich environments.
- Marking “corrections” on students' papers does little good.
- Progress may involve new kinds of errors as students try to apply new writing and speaking skills.

Teach Grammar Creatively

Teach Grammar in Context

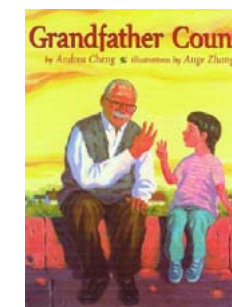
- Develop an understanding that is grounded in context first.
- Once students see the language in context then take time to clarify the structure and usage.

Don't Over Explain

- The less you talk about grammar and the more you can actually show it, use it and practice it, the better.

Incorporate Grammar into Other Activities

- Games are a great way to revisit and emphasize grammar points
- Reading and writing



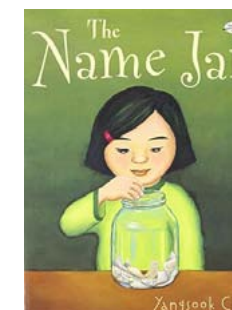
Picture Books

Grandfather Counts

Andrea Cheng

Focus: Compound Sentences

- Mom tried to get him to go out, but most of the time he just shook his head and went back to his reading.
- I found a small piece of broken concrete and used it to write Helen on the wall.
- He took my hand and helped me copy his name.



The Name Jar

Yangsook Choi

Focus: Irregular Verbs

- stood/stand
- felt/feel
- said/say

Second to last page:

- meant/mean
- stood/stand
- took/take
- did/do
- got/get

Additional Resources

Additional Picture Books for Mini Lessons

When This World Was New D.H. Figueredo

The Lotus Seed Sherry Garland

Come On, Rain! Karen Hesse

Lessons could focus on parts of speech, such as: Nouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, Adjectives, Adverbs, Contractions, similes

Sandwich Swap Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

Lessons could focus on parts of speech, such as: Irregular Verbs, Past Tense Verbs, Transitions, Adjectives

Lee and Low Books <https://www.leeandlow.com/>

Publisher focuses on multi-cultural titles

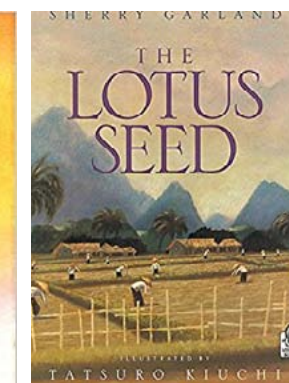
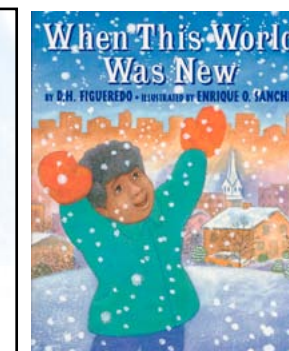
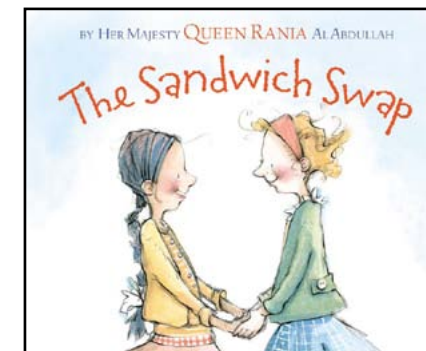
Additional Resources

Translanguaging Christina Celic & Kate Seltzer pages 170-182 focus on grammar

<http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2012/06/FINAL-Translanguaging-Guide-With-Cover-1.pdf>

Larry Ferlazzo's Edublogs <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/>

Close Readings



5 Questions with...

Rachel Greenberg

2017 RITELL Nancy Carnevale Teacher of the Year

Recipient of RITELL's Nancy A. Carnevale Teacher of the Year Award for Excellence in ELL Teaching (PreK-12), Rachel Greenberg is a 3rd grade Emergent Bilingual Classroom Teacher at Asa Messer Elementary in Providence. Now in her third year at Asa Messer, Greenberg previously taught at The Learning Community for three years. In the spirit of the award's namesake, she was honored as a person whose approach to teaching is that of "teaching from the heart," and for employing research-based second language acquisition strategies in teaching students, and for building high expectations in her classes based on the belief that, with the right supports, students "can do."

WHEN did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

I wanted to be a teacher from a young age, but when I got to college, a professor told me that I should drop out of the program because I couldn't read quickly. Due to my naivety, I believed him and changed my major to Geography. Once I began my career, I realized something was missing. After much reflection, I went back to school for my MAT and began teaching.

WHO were your most influential teachers and how did they influence you?

In elementary school I was greatly influenced by my 5th grade student teacher Ms. Crouse. She made learning fun. I remember we turned our classroom into a village from the Wild West. We dressed up in period clothes and even had a class general store.

In high school, Mr. Zibelli, my history teacher, was a huge influence on my approach to learning and teaching. He made world history come alive. He turned our classroom into a model UN, recreated the Red Scare and McCarthyism and helped us learn about immigration through "An American Tale."

I truly believe that if you are to help students succeed, they need to feel respected, safe and cared for.

I see both Ms. Crouse and Mr. Zibelli's influence in my classroom today. I look for ways to engage my students through their interests, and create whole class projects where everyone has a way to contribute.

WHAT do you think are some of the biggest challenges teachers face today?

There are many challenges that we face every day! One of the challenges I frequently encounter is the bureaucratic red-tape involved in a large school department. Often there are multiple answers to a single question and sorting through them to find a way to solve your problem is tedious. I find that, to be an advocate for my students, it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission!

Another problem teachers face is reaching every student all the time. In every classroom there are students that range in ability levels from K-5. It is very difficult to balance teaching each student in their zone of proximal development while still hitting core content. I've found that using blended and personalized learning has helped, but it is still a daily challenge to help each student grow to their full potential. It comes

down to really knowing your students well. I think that the biggest challenge I face each year is creating a classroom community. I truly believe that if you are to help students succeed, they need to feel respected, safe and cared for. At the beginning of each year especially, and throughout the year, we work together to create our classroom community. We call ourselves the Greenbergians of Greenbergia (after my last name.) Some years it takes longer than others, but we always get there.

CAN you describe one moment in a classroom - either as a teacher or a student - that helps explain why teaching is so important to you?

There isn't one moment that can express why teaching is so important; it's a culmination of moments. It's the smile that the students have when they enter the room, the light bulb moments when knowledge is acquired, seeing students teach each other, moments where they correct themselves, so many!

Recently, I had a student move out of district. His last day was sad since we'd miss him, but my students rallied and wrote cards, drew pictures and supported him until his mom came to get him. This really showed our community coming together to support each other. Those are the moments that are the closest to my heart.

HOW did you learn that you had received the Nancy Carnevale Award and what does it mean to you?

I learned about the award through an email from RITELL. I was thrilled to win the award because it means that I can provide my students with an experience that connects students and their families through literacy.

ONE of the short readings I introduce in my classes is a letter to the "This is Your Page" section of Elizabeth Claire's Easy English News. In it, a Mexican-American woman describes how when she first arrived in the United States, the only words she knew in English were "coffee and donuts." When she went shopping for clothes for the first time, the cashier tried to exchange pleasantries and asked her how she was. But the woman didn't know how to respond, so she just said, "Coffee and donuts."

The story gets a laugh from my classes every time, and often prompts students to share their own first words and first conversations in English. Unlike the example above, however, many of these memories recall moments of anxiety, stress and fear.

During a class at Rhode Island College's Outreach Center, one woman from Colombia said her first-ever English conversation was with an immigration officer at the airport. She was so nervous that she just kept saying she spoke no English – "No speak English!, No speak English!" – and almost became hysterical, talking rapidly in Spanish. The officer then took out all of her belongings and began sniffing them, checking for drugs. Then he brought dogs over. It wasn't until a Spanish-speaking officer came by that she finally relaxed.

First encounters with culture can be just as confusing as first words. One man, Francisco, also from Colombia, said that, when he arrived, he stayed with a friend who told him

Coffee & Donuts

Doug Norris



...To utter your first words spoken in another language to a native speaker or to otherwise engage with the culture can be a surreal or traumatic experience.

But as confidence progresses in a language, we can look back at those initial conversations and encounters with a sense of wry wisdom and humor."

that all of the machines in America were intelligent. For example, he said, in Colombia, there is always an attendant to pump the gas for you, but here, you did it yourself and the machine took care of payment. The first time Francisco pumped gas in America, he got back in the car,

and his friend asked him if he had thanked the machine. Francisco said he had not. His friend said that was very rude. So Francisco got out of the car, went back to the pump, leaned over, cupped his hands over his mouth and said: "Thank you!"

His friend wasn't just pulling his leg. A few days later, Francisco joined him as he went to the post office to deliver a letter to his home country. After dropping the letter into the slot, his friend put his mouth near the opening and said in a firm, loud voice, "Go to Colombia!"

Even for travelers, to utter your first words spoken in another language to a native speaker or to otherwise engage with the culture can be a surreal or traumatic experience. But as confidence

progresses in a language, we can look back at those initial conversations and encounters with a sense of wry wisdom and humor. Now, in our class, "coffee and donuts" has become a way of saying hello and goodbye to each other, a sort of personalized version of "Aloha." And Francisco's stories are frequently repeated and expanded upon. After a recent class, one woman said she went to a local ATM and said, "Give me a million dollars." It didn't work, but at least she gave the command in English.

So You Wanna Teach English Internationally?

Graham Oakland

Photo Credits: Alexander McMillan



MY wife and I have always been afflicted with the travel bug. We met as teachers in Costa Rica, and although our parents were sure we would get “the bug” out of our systems within a few years and promptly return home, instead we became enamored with each new experience and diverse culture. In the end, we moved even farther across the ocean to Taiwan. Working in Costa Rica and Taiwan provided, not

only the opportunity for full immersion into their respective cultures, but a jumping off point for traveling across much of South America and South East Asia. Each experience was deeply enriching, expanded our horizons and left us yearning for more. It wasn’t until our first son was born that we finally felt compelled to return home, seeing the value of raising a child with family nearby. Fast-forward seven years and the travel-bug crept back into our lives. So,

with itchy feet and another child in tow, we made the decision to move back overseas.

As parents, we wanted our children to experience the rewards, as well as the challenges, of being immersed in different cultures and exposed to different world views. On the one hand, we knew that exposure, from a young age, would foster awareness and appreciation for the diversity of ways that people live and interact across the globe.

However, there loomed a great feeling of uncertainty as to how such a shift might affect the trajectory of their growth and development. Were they too young to cope with such a major paradigm shift? Were they too old and rooted in their community to leave it all behind? Was I too rooted in my own educational community; too attached to my students, my peers, and the comfortable familiarity of my school (The Met School), where I loved working? Ultimately,

my wife and I agreed that if there was ever a right time to relocate, it was now -- while the kids were still young and seemingly pliable enough to adjust and adapt. With a little trepidation, I began the search for an international teaching position.

The process was lengthy, but ultimately, I found and accepted a position as a high school ELL Specialist at the American International School in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

(AIS). The first step towards securing such a position was to create an online teacher profile with one (or both) of the major recruiting agencies: [International Schools Services \(ISS\)](#) or [Search Associates](#). I chose ISS, because to be perfectly honest, they were the first site I clicked on. Once my account was created, I had full access to all the job listings and locations that aligned with my qualifications and interests. It further enabled me to register for job fairs held in various locations around the world,



tailored specifically to international educators. The job fairs run from early December through March, during which time the majority of international schools do their hiring. ISS and Search Associates coordinate with each other, resulting in back to back job fairs, one agency after the next.

While most American schools are still filling vacancies until the end of the summer, almost all international schools require teachers to submit

a letter of intent to stay or leave by early November. Due to high annual turnover rates, schools begin hiring for the following school year as early as late November/early December. In the hope of providing myself with options, I decided to attend the Atlanta job fair in December 2015. This was my first experience with an international job fair and, quite honestly, I was unprepared. The job fair, itself, was held in the Grand Hyatt Hotel, with the intention that most of the attendees would stay

at the hotel, providing ample opportunity for networking and exploring potential opportunities. The first day, all the hiring schools set up tables in a gallery format across the convention center and applicants walked the halls asking questions, collecting information, and presenting their resumes. Some schools took the opportunity to review resumes immediately and set up interviews on the spot, while others simply provided background on their school, collecting resumes for future consideration. The

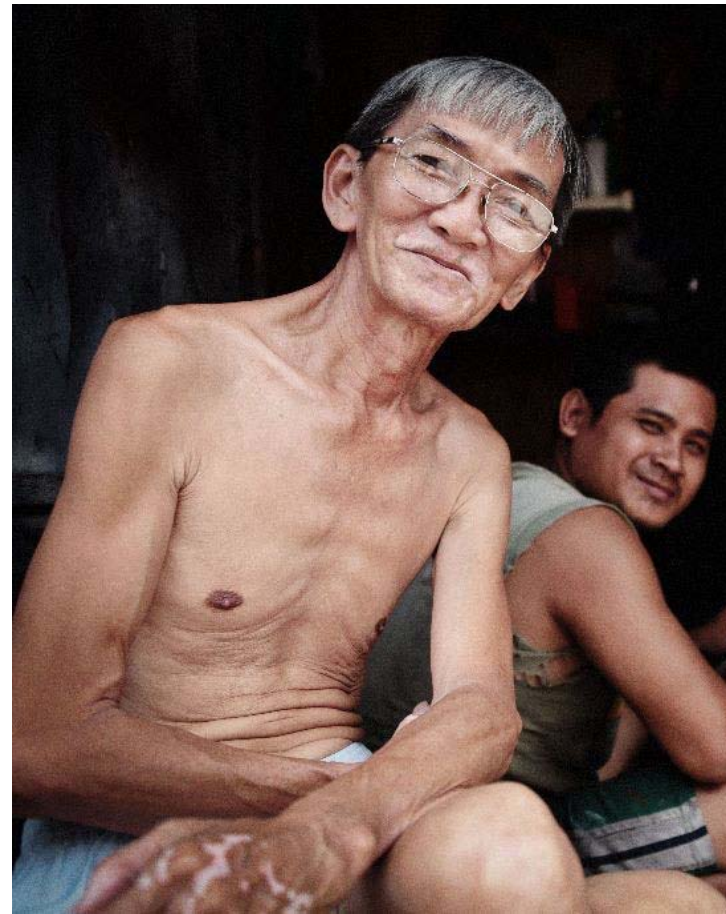
recruiting agencies set up a mailbox system, allowing hiring schools and applicants to correspond throughout the event; whether to provide invitations for interviews, leave behind information, or send follow-up thank you notes. The interviews were held in hotel rooms. It was all rather overwhelming at first, but after a few runs, the setting quickly became familiar. Ultimately, interviews ended with either an offer, a request for a follow up interview, or a disclaimer that “we

have many applicants and will let you know by the end of the weekend.”

Hiring a teacher is a major expense for international schools and the tendency towards high turnover rates present substantial risk. As such, most schools require teachers to sign two-year contracts, providing enough time to recoup their investment in visas, flights and other work-related costs. As is standard with most schools, AIS paid for my family (of four) to fly from Boston to

HCMC and agreed to cover our return flights when my contract is finished. If, however, I decided to extend my contract for another year or longer the school offers annual round-trip flights home for the entire family. While the pay varies from school to school, the packages can be quite lucrative, providing ample funds for both travel and savings, especially if both partners teach.

Obviously, for us, one of our greatest concerns was how this opportu-



nity would impact our children. To be honest, the first year was quite challenging for them. They were unable to understand why we had to “leave all of our family behind,” a question they still ask at times, and sometimes, from their HCMC apartment, they would just beg and plead to go “home.” For my wife and I, it was a first-hand observation of the four stages of acculturation. Now, six months into our second year in Vietnam and life feels completely different from the previous year. My

kids have made many friends, both international and Vietnamese. However, their bond with other international kids is much stronger than it is with their Vietnamese peers. Not only can they relate more to their shared experience of relocation, but traditionally, the Vietnamese familial unit is quite strong and weekends are often spent with their own family.

Unlike my experience in the United States, almost all my friends here are co-workers. Like my children, I have

built a strong connection out of our shared experience, navigating our new surroundings. Aside from the experience of working with students from around the world, the teaching body proves international as well. Nearly every continent is represented amongst our teaching staff. With all the different perspectives, it’s no doubt that I learn new strategies daily, which encourages deeper reflection of my own practice.

Living in Vietnam has many perks - the location and proximity to other South-

east Asian countries stands out. It has provided my family with once in a lifetime opportunities to travel and experience the world through a variety of cultural contexts. In the past year and a half alone, my family was able to travel to other destinations within Vietnam, Bali, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and spend the entire summer break back in the U.S. with family. Of course, living within a different culture has its challenges as well. Cultural norms that are ingrained and deeply rooted in me

often conflict with the cultural norms here, making patience and understanding vital elements toward happiness. Spatial proximity and child-care are the two main differences that come to mind, but I constantly remind myself that these differences are exactly what inspired my family to make this move. In fact, my fascination and curiosity of other cultures was one of the major driving forces in my decision to pursue a career as an EAL educator.



I would be happy to speak with anyone interested in the possibility of teaching overseas - especially in Asia. Please feel free reach out with questions or if I can help in anyway.
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Adventures of an ELF

Jane George

ESL teacher and longtime RITELL Coordinating Council member Jane George is spending a year in Tajikistan to teach English at a university as a U.S. State Department English Language Fellow. As part of her journey, she has created a website and is keeping a regular blog, updating with photos and stories.

For the RI-TELLER, she has agreed to let us re-print some of her work. The following excerpts include her purpose for the venture, and a piece from Nov. 12, 2017, about some of her encounters.

Why am I doing this?

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.

Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

Mark Twain - Innocents Abroad



Photo Credit <https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de>

Hi, I am Jane George and I am going to have an adventure in a far-away place. My employer, North Kingstown School Department in Rhode Island has allowed me to be away from school for a year to go to Tajikistan to teach English at a university as a U.S. State Department English Language Fellow.

This is a dream adventure for me because I have wanted to explore “the rest of the -stans” ever since I traveled through Afghanistan and Pakistan several decades ago as a carefree, young backpacker out to see the world. What I saw then was very poor people, certainly, but I also saw people living in a different time with different resources and probably some different goals. I was fascinated with the fact that these people lived completely different lives with different languages and customs. I only was in the “-stans” for a couple of weeks then, but my curiosity was piqued and now I can finally go back to see the rest of the “-stans.” I hope that through the work of my fellowship I will see a lot of Tajikistan. In the winter, I will go to Kazakhstan for a mid-year conference with the other Fellows in Central Asia, which will give me a few days to see a bit of that very large country. I just have to figure out a way to get to the rest of the “-stans” between now and June, or during the month after the contract ends when my husband Tim and I plan to travel around as much as we can. Visas may be difficult to get and transportation will probably be difficult as well, but we will do our best to see all we can before we come back home.

Central Asia, the crossroads of the ancient world, contributed to and experienced the exchange of goods, ideas, languages, cultures, and religions. What happened here centuries ago can be compared to what we now call globalization. In my time here I hope to be able to learn about this powerful ancient history, the challenges of recent history, and current conditions in Central Asia.

I hope you enjoy the journey along with me.

Monday Market, An Elf Adventure #9 November 12, 2017

Oh, the people you meet...

Last week Friday I walked part of the way home from the American Corner with a young man about 12 years old named Abdullo, who is very eager to learn English. He borrows books every week from the AC library and I think he really reads them. He prompted this entry when he very sincerely asked me if I was born in a village or a city. I told him I was born in a city and asked about his birthplace. It turns out that he was born in a city as well, but his mother and sisters were born in a village. The complete innocence of his question reminded me of what a different place I am in.

Let me introduce you to some of the other people I encounter regularly.

First, there is the lady next door who I was instructed by my landlady to avoid like the plague. I wasn't sure why, but I did for two months. It wasn't a comfortable situation and it came to a head last week Tuesday when she tried to wrestle the elevator fob out of my hand and off my key chain. Luckily for me, Tahmina was coming over that day to talk to the landlady with me about the rental contract. Somehow, I got this information to the

neighbor and at exactly the time I told her, she appeared. There was a long discussion with Tahmina and then another long discussion when the landlady arrived. Finally, they all decided that I would have to pay the 50 Somoni (about \$4.50) elevator fee that I had been instructed to avoid. When I went over with Tahmina to pay for my two delinquent months, Nigina became my new BFF. She lives alone and invited me to come over for lunch or dinner, or just about anything else that I could need. What a transformation.

Then, there are the teachers I work with every day. These people have chosen a profession that is much more difficult than the profession I

blame for the expectation that I give them “the answer.” We start teacher workshops next week and I hope that they will participate fully in creating sets of communication activities that they can use with any textbook they choose.

The students, of course, are eager to learn English, but don't always seem eager to do the work involved. I still haven't figured out the whole education system here. I generalize greatly, but it doesn't seem to encourage effort, but since they have had little to no practice with spoken English and native speak models have been few and far between, I think they are expecting me to. Therefore, they are generally quite unwilling to speak in a



Photo Credit Jane George

have chosen even though you might argue that we are doing the same thing. They are English language learners themselves and they have been given inferior tools to deliver a complex product and will, because of circumstance, inadequately prepare students who will then become the next generation of English teachers. I would never have had the courage to do what they do. There have been moments when I have felt frustrated because I wanted them to do more in the mentor/mentee part of our relationship, but then I realize that they are not to

classroom situation, unless, of course it is Tajik. Students all come to the university in “uniforms” and must walk the gauntlet of “fashion police” administrators every morning. Three citations regarding inappropriate clothing and their parents are called. For men, it is fairly easy to see what is appropriate (necktie, tucked shirts, belts), but for women it is much more difficult to see what could be deemed wrong. One day, I learned that the university does not condone religious extremism, so a woman who covered her neck with her scarf was considered inappropriately dressed and consequently, written up.

Denis and his Hike Tajikistan group are great entrepreneurs who take groups of foreigners out and about to hike in this beautiful country. They are personable and helpful and they provide cookies and tea for each hike. There is probably no easy hike in this country, so these guys work hard for their money. On one hike, Denis walked me down a very steep gravelly hill that I would have had to slide down otherwise. On a weekly basis, I think these guys earn more than a doctor does in a month!

The funniest experience I have had with people in this country is with bill collectors. In this country bill collectors come to your house or apartment to leave the bill and then come back a couple days later to collect the bill. Everyone told me not to worry because they always came on a weekend and I shouldn't worry that any utilities would be turned off. So, one Sunday morning when a man with a tablet knocked on my door, I wasn't surprised. I did have to get a coat to cover up my nightgown, but that didn't seem to disturb him. What did disturb him greatly was that I did not have the required bill. We could not speak each other's languages and my translation app was not proving too useful. It didn't help that the landlady or my great helper, Tahmina were not answering their phones. I tried everything to communicate with this man, but he just got more and more frustrated. Finally, he gave me his phone number and name and the next day Tahmina called him to explain everything. One day after her call he came back and seemed to apologize and then he disappeared without giving me a bill or collecting any money. I can't explain that any more than this.

Then about a week after he came back, two women came to my door on a Tuesday evening. They had a big

Students come to the university in 'uniforms' and must walk the gauntlet of 'fashion police' administrators every morning.



Photo Credit Jane George

calculator and one of them showed me how much I owed for one of the utilities, I didn't know which one she was collecting for, but I knew how much she wanted. Between the time I left the door to go and get the money and the time I returned to the front door (maybe 45 seconds) the bill collector had begun a very loud and raucous verbal fight with a tenant from upstairs. I stood in the door with money in hand and watched the fight. It continued for many min-

utes and then, suddenly for me because I didn't understand anything, they disappeared up the unlit staircase, to the arguer's apartment, I thought. I still hadn't paid my bill and I still had the money ready. They never came back that night. So, I was surprised a week later, while I was walking home from getting a toner cartridge refill for my printer, I suddenly heard a loud woman sort of screaming. I looked around to see the problem and realized that the woman was screaming at me.

It took me a few minutes to realize that it was one of the bill collectors who had been calling out to me on the sidewalk. At first I just talked back to her and her friend in English (which they couldn't understand, but I couldn't understand them either...) and then after I realized who they were, I moved closer and was confronted by the big calculator again. So, it turns out that each of these women wanted money from me for different utilities, I thought. Neither of these women knew what my name was, so I had to write my name on my hand for them to copy onto the forms and then I paid them right then and there on the sidewalk. I wondered as I pulled out 174 Somoni (\$20) and 140 Somoni (\$16) out of my wallet what Tajik person would have that much money in their wallet while walking home. I was warned that I should always make sure to get a receipt for utilities, or they come again to get the same money. This time I not only got a receipt, but I

took a picture of them as well. One of the women didn't like the first picture (she made a good call) and I took the approved one posted here. I found out the next day that one of the bills was for electricity and the other was for taxes. I will have to get my landlady to pay the tax bill. I still don't know how to pay my water bill.

For more, log on to <https://elfadventure2017.simdif.com>