



Three Rivers TESOL Newsletter

Summer, 2018

Fall Conference in October

by Suzanne Meyer, 3RT President

The 3RT Fall Conference is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, October 20th, so start thinking about what you might like to share with the local professional community, such as a successful teaching experience, research that you've completed, and/or discussions relevant to the field.

The theme of this year's conference is assessment, so related topics are encouraged. However, any relevant submission is welcome. Submissions follow strands, including:

AE: Adult Education

CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning

IEP/HE: Intensive English Program/Higher Education

PK-12: Pre-kindergarten-12

TE: Teacher Education

Within each strand, you will also be asked to indicate a session type, such as Panel Discussion, Poster, Practice-Oriented Session, Program Administration, Research, or Teaching Tip.

Information about submission deadlines will be available via the 3RT website, Facebook and via distribution list messages.

Articles for upcoming editions of the 3RT newsletter will be solicited from conference presenters, especially those rated highly in the conferences surveys, as a way to presenters to share further to benefit those unable to attend.



Janet Pierce retires

Dr. Pierce, an ESL teacher in the Franklin Regional School District and a past president of Three Rivers TESOL, has retired after 27.5 years working in the TESOL field.

TESOL Teacher and Leader

Janet Pierce Retires

by Greg Mizera

Janet Pierce remembers when she started teaching ESL in western Pennsylvania more than 27 years ago. She was the only ESL teacher in her area, she had to travel constantly from school to school, and there were very few books or materials available that were specifically created for non-native English learners.

"It was very isolating, and then I heard about Three Rivers TESOL and (international) TESOL and I said, 'oh, I have a community,'" she recalled.

Pierce, an ESL teacher in the Franklin Regional School District, retired at the end of the 2017-18 school year. In addition to teaching ESL, she taught French, she served as the coordinator for English Language Learners in her district and she was the president of Three Rivers TESOL in 2008-09. Along the way, she also earned a PhD in English Composition and TESOL from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Pierce said she realized early in her career that she needed to teach the language of the various subject areas that her students were also studying—science, social studies, math and so on. That made the English they were learning in her class more immediately helpful.

She also realized that she had to keep in touch with the parents of her ELLs.

"One of the biggest challenges is helping parents understand that even though students may have reached a high level of social English, they may not have reached as high a level of academic English," she said.

Non-native English-speaking parents may hear their child speaking fluently and easily with native speakers, and wrongly conclude that he or she can stop taking ESL instruction. As a result, the child's academic English knowledge may plateau and leave him or her unable to cope with all the demands of school.

Pierce advises new ESL teachers to "hang in there, be versatile, care, and realize that you have students from all over the world with different preconceptions about how to learn...It's up to you to help them understand what they need to do."

Pierce plans to remain active. She's going to mentor a new ESL teacher in her district, and she's also hoping to write some historical fiction, perhaps using some of her former students as inspiration for her characters.

TESOL Convention Travel Grant

Did you submit a proposal to the TESOL International Convention in Atlanta next year? If your proposal is accepted, consider submitting an application for 3RT TESOL International Convention Travel Grant to help you cover your expenses. 3RT will provide members in good standing up to \$500 each (\$1000 total) to attend.

To be considered for the grant, complete the application form available at the 3RT website and submit it along with a written statement to president@threeriverstesol.org by November 1, 2018.

The 3RT board will review submissions with the following criteria in mind:

- The applicant demonstrates need of financial assistance to attend the convention;
- The applicant's attendance at the International TESOL Convention strongly benefits the ESL/EFL community;
- The applicant's attendance at the International TESOL Convention strongly benefits the applicant's career goal;
- The applicant has a solid plan of disseminating his/her learning at the International TESOL Convention;
- The applicant agrees to submit a newsletter article to Three Rivers TESOL describing his/her experience at the convention.

Once the board has reviewed applications, grant award winners will be notified and receive a check by 1 February, 2019.

Take advantage of 3RT's support of its members' professional development!

An Interview with an English learner

As an initial entry in what we hope will be a regular feature in the 3RT Newsletter, we talk to a second language learner about his/her experiences learning English in Pittsburgh. In June, we talked to Xiaohangyang Chen (Max), a first-year student at Duquesne University. Max is a freshman undergraduate currently enrolled in the university's Gateway Program. The Gateway is designed for students seeking admission to Duquesne while improving their academic English skills. Max was interviewed by Mike Burke.

MB: Where are you from?

Max: Shenyang in the northeast of China.

MB: How old are you?

Max: I'm twenty years old.

MB: How long have you been in the United States?

Max: Since January 10th.

MB: Why did you want to study in the United States?

Max: Of course, as we all know the education in the United States is almost the best all over the world. And the education in China, especially at the university, is not very good. And the life that is provided is not very good. I heard that from my friends.

MB: How did your parents feel when you said you wanted to go to the United States and study?

Max: Actually, the idea of going to another country to study was my

mom's opinion. It was also my opinion, but the opinion was from my mom. My mom was happy that I had strong motivation to learn abroad.

MB: What are you studying? What is your area of interest?

Max: Actually, right now my major is Business Administration Management, but I want to change it to Economics.

MB: Why do you want to change it?

Max: My friends told me management is too general. You can't learn specific skills from management. But if you learn accounting, finance or economics you can learn specific skills.

MB: I know you are a Gateway student. Can you tell me about the Gateway Program?

Max: My English level did not arrive at an undergraduate level. I needed to learn in the ESL program. When I graduate from the ESL program I can study academic courses.

MB: Do you think the ESL classes have helped you?

Max: Yes. Some of them are very useful for me, for example the reading class. I have improved in reading a lot. I can read books much faster than before last semester. And grammar and notetaking are useful. They help me hear and understand better.

MB: What classes do you not find useful and why?

Max: For me, speaking and listening class is not useful for me. I came here in January and my roommate was American. I can talk about everything with him, right? Actually, I know how to pronounce words, and I can state my own opinion myself.

MB: Do you think that now that you have studied ESL you will do better in your academic courses? Or, do you think you could have gone directly into Economics, and you would have been ok?

Max: You've got me there (laughing). At first, I thought I can do it right now. Now, I think I needed the ESL, and I will be more confident. I still need to study hard.

MB: What is the difference between teaching and learning in China and the United States?

Max: In my country, I know that Chinese education is teacher centered. The teacher teaches student whatever teacher wants. They don't ask student's opinion. They just teach it, and students don't have a chance to talk about it. But here it's free for student, right? Every student has a chance to talk about something. They all have a chance to state their own opinion. It's a good thing, I think. It's different.

MB: How would you describe the people you interact with?

Max: When I first came here I made a lot of Chinese friends of course (laughing). I don't know why. But I am glad to make American friends.

MB: And is that difficult?

Max: At the beginning, it is very difficult.

MB: Why do you think that is?

Max: Because of the language. It is the main point. In the beginning, my speaking was not very good, and I was nervous to communicate with American people. Fortunately, I have American roommate. And next semester, my roommate will also be American.

MB: Thank you so much Max.

A Teacher's Perspective

Ievgeniia Lavrenishyna is a part-time ESL instructor at Literacy Pittsburgh (formerly Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council) and the IEP at Saint Francis University. Since she has been teaching in two different ESL contexts, we thought it would be worth interviewing her to learn about her ESL teaching experience. This interview was mainly focused on teaching ESL students at Literacy Pittsburgh. She was interviewed by Soyoung Burke.

Q: How did you become an ESL instructor at Literacy Pittsburgh?

A: When I started my master's in TESOL in Duquesne University in 2015, I was interested in the organization, Literacy Pittsburgh (<https://www.literacypittsburgh.org/>) received 12-hr training and became a volunteer ESL tutor during February to September in 2016. This was a great beginning of my career in teaching. As following the updates and job posting on social media, I applied for a teaching position and became a part-time ESL instructor teaching two classes, 10 hours a week since February 2018.

Q: Who are the students and what do you teach?

A: My classes are designed to teach refugees with a high beginning and lower intermediate level of English. However, the majority of the participating students are scholars/professors from their home country and spouses of research fellows from Japan and China while a few were immigrants from Ukraine, India, and Cameroon.

My two courses are for 'survival English' and 'life skills' teaching how to answer emails from their kid's teachers and how to ask and answer questions in stores and offices.

Q: What are some unique aspects and challenges teaching ESL at Literacy Pittsburgh?

A: Students are motivated and excited to learn. I like the flexibility of choosing topics and speed of lessons. The class is also to teach American cultural norms and experience American culture. For example, a surprise baby shower for a pregnant Chinese student was organized, and the class covered vocabulary related childcare, a discussion of childcare system in the USA, and games for a baby shower.



Ms. Lavrenishyna (center) and two of her students at a recent celebration.

However, there are some challenges. One is open enrollment where students can withdraw from a class, and new students on the waiting list join in the middle of the semester, and two is students' circumstance with their roles in jobs and family, and transportation. Also, despite the use of English placement test, students' proficiencies vary in their English language skills in class. So my challenge is to give attention to those who need English the most while not to drag other students down.

Q: What are similarities and differences between teaching at Intensive English program at a university and ESL class at Literacy Pittsburgh?

A: The goal is the same to teach English, but with different tools. IEP teaches academic English with the skills, such as how to lead a discussion, participate in a debate, deliver a research-based presentation, and take notes. ESL students at Literacy Pittsburgh learn English through life skills and culture. In addition, my ESL students in my survival English class seem to learn it faster than IEP students because they learn in class and use it outside the classroom.

Q: Is there anything you like to share with Three Rivers TESOL?

A: If you want to begin your career in ESL teaching, be involved in an adult literacy organization, get trained, and be a volunteer. This will lead you to have invaluable teaching experience with students from all over the world. It is a great way to start your career in ESL and get a rewarding experience.

*Thanks to Ms. Lavrenishyna for her stories and insight. Her classes do not represent a whole picture of the ESL program at Literacy Pittsburgh. The ESL courses are offered for different English levels of students in various locations in Pittsburgh.

Report from the 2018 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit

by Soyoung Burke

The 18th annual TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit was held at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town hotel, Virginia from June 18th to 20th, 2018. Most participants were K-12 ESL teachers, and some were professors and ESL program administrators. Many represented themselves as affiliates of their regional TESOL of their state. I was able to join as an affiliate of Three Rivers TESOL. Three other representatives from Pennsylvania were Susan Morris-Routledge (Assistant professor of secondary education in California Univ. of PA), Courtney Knowlton and Dawn Adamoli (K-12 ESL teachers and the current and previous president of Penn TESOL East). The learning experience was very educational and meaningful to me.

During the first two days, seven general sessions and four breakout sessions informed the participants about education policy updates, legislative initiatives, and support (from Rep. Langevin for Rhode Island). In the afternoon, advocacy training prepared us for Capitol Hill meetings for the third day. The four PA representatives visited six offices (Sen. Toomey, Sen. Casey, Rep. Lamb, Rep. Shuster, Rep. Boyle, and Rep. Evans) in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. In the office meetings, we met the staff and delivered our messages with our

personal teaching and learning experience and stories. First, we expressed our concern at the nation's critical shortage of English language teachers for the fastest-growing population of English learners (EL) and our support of the *Reaching English Learners Act* (H.R. 4838) by providing grants for the training of future teachers of English learners. Second, we advocated the unique role of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), as a separate office, not within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). If separated, OELA will improve its role of ELs in all contexts (pre K-12, adult education, and higher education), provide research data and promote bilingualism and multiculturalism. Third, I highlighted the important role of international education and cultural exchange. Cutting the budget of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) for fiscal year 2019 would impact employment by lowering enrollment of international students in higher education.

We hope that our personal stories and the prepared information from the training highlight what we advocate for ELs to the 115th U.S. congressmen. This professional development has taught me more about our role as advocates of our ESL students and how to influence the legislative initiatives on TESOL policy.

**Currently, updated information and ideas are actively shared in the 2018 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit Discussion Board. If anyone is interested in accessing data from

OELA and Immigration Policy, please feel free to contact me.



Dr. Burke at the TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit in Washington, D.C.

Congratulations Three Rivers TESOL Professional Development Grant Awardees!

In June, 3RT Professional Development Grant were awarded to Christie Vanorsdale and Eva Wegrzecka-Kowalewski for the following research projects, respectively: “Communicative Language Teaching in E-Learning: How Confident are Instructors?” and “Infusing Critical Thinking into ESL Curricula of Intensive Language Academic Programs.” Look for articles about these research projects in future editions of the 3RT newsletter.