



# Three Rivers TESOL Newsletter

Summer 2019

## Three Rivers TESOL 2019 Fall Conference Reflection in Teaching and Professional Development

October 19, 2019 8:30- 3:30

College Hall, Duquesne University,

600 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15282

The Three Rivers TESOL Fall Conference offers professional development opportunities to exchange ideas and practices and build professional networks in the community. The plenary speaker, Dr. Thomas Farrell, Professor of Applied Linguistics at Brock University, Canada, (<http://www.reflectiveinquiry.ca/>) will talk about Reflective Practice. 3RT invites you to share your learned insights and reflection from teaching, research, and professional development opportunities.

Detailed information about Call for Proposals is at the end of the newsletter. Submit your proposal at <https://forms.gle/k1dNoBJP6cSKppXXA> or go to <https://threeriverstesol.org/wp/> by **Friday, September 20, 2019 at 5 pm (EST)**.

Please note that the membership and registration structure have changed beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year. You do not have to be a member to attend the Three Rivers TESOL 2019 Fall Conference (with the exception of Publisher Memberships). Institutional Members (those currently teaching at member institutions) will have their conference registration taken care of by their institution.

Individual Membership: \$20; Conference Registration: Early – \$20; Late – \$25

Student Membership: \$15; Conference Registration: Early – \$15; Late – \$20

Institutional Member: \$150; Conference Registration: \$15/institutional member attending

Publisher Membership: \$75; Conference Registration: no additional fee

Early Bird registration ends on October 15, 2019.

## Professional Development Announcements

3RT is pleased to announce that 3RT was able to sponsor interested 3RT members to various Professional Development Opportunities this summer. The 3RT board will continue to sponsor 3RT members with TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit, 3RT Professional Development Grant, and TESOL Travel Grant. In addition, the board considers sponsoring 3RT members to established conferences when held in Pittsburgh. The grant awardees are expected to submit an article to 3RT newsletter. We encourage you to apply for 3RT professional development opportunities when it is suitable for your interest.

- 1) Megan Evangeliste, the 3RT secretary from Duquesne University, went to TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit in Arlington, VA on June 17-19, 2019. One 3RT board member is given the priority to go.
- 2) Sandy Gianella, ESL teacher in Lincoln Elementary school, is the 3RT professional development grant awardee for 2019-2020. Her research topic is about using VR and AR with English Language Learners in classroom.
- 3) Kathy Lipecky, the vice president of 3RT from Duquesne University and Mariana Syrotiak, the lottery winner from Gannon University will be participating in Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) Annual Symposium in Pittsburgh on Aug. 28-30, 2019.

More professional development opportunities are coming:

### 4) Virtual Reality Workshop at CMU

by Suzanne Meyer

Those of you who were fortunate enough to hear Stephan Caspar speak at the 3RT Spring Seminar may recall that in his work directing the Kenner Room at Carnegie Mellon University, he explores the utilization of technology as a gateway to language learning, cultural competency, and globalization. Caspar will host a workshop to allow ESL instructors discover one technological medium, virtual reality (VR), and its applications in classroom. Specifically, instructors will be able to 'discover VR' by trying headsets and learning about different content formats. Workshop activities will include appropriate student learning outcome (SLO) generation, materials selection, and other developing lesson plan activities. Using VR in contexts with limited access to equipment and funds will be addressed.

The session will be held from 9:30-11:30A on Saturday, 7 September in CMU's Kenner Room in the Tepper Quad. Prior VR experience is not needed. There is no fee for the event, but registration is required as space is limited and a maximum of 15 participants will be accepted in order to allow every participant access to equipment. Register for the workshop at: <https://tinyurl.com/3RT-VRWorkshop>

### 5) 2020 Consortium on Graduate Communication

Hello fellow Three Rivers TESOL professionals! We wanted to let you know of a professional development opportunity coming to Pittsburgh next year at Duquesne University. We will be hosting the 2020 Consortium on Graduate Communication Summer Institute from June 18-20. This event, as the website states, "provide[s] opportunities to discuss our growing professional field of Graduate Communication and share strategies for providing graduate communication support. As in previous years, the institute will offer formal and informal formats for professionals across disciplines to share knowledge and ideas, converse, and learn." Over one hundred professionals from across the US and around the world attend, most of whom work with international students at their institutions. If you would like more information, you can visit the CGC website at: <https://www.gradconsortium.org/> or contact Janine Carlock at [carlockj@duq.edu](mailto:carlockj@duq.edu). Your ideas (and offers to help out) are welcome. All are invited. Attendees (including myself) tend to express the feeling that the exchange of ideas and the energy generated at this gathering is uniquely exciting. We look forward to your participation!

## TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit

by Megan Evangeliste, Duquesne University



**Megan Evangeliste, Secretary of 3RT, is the International Admissions Coordinator and Adjunct Professor for the School of Education, ESL/TESOL at Duquesne University. She previously served as a K-12 ESL teacher in Pittsburgh Public Schools.**

I had the honor of attending the TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit in Washington, D.C. this June as a representative of 3RT. During the conference, the Pennsylvania delegates had the opportunity to meet with the offices of Senators Toomey and Casey and Congressmen Lamb, Reschenthaler, and Boyle to discuss the benefits of passing the Reaching English Learners Act.

The Reaching English Learners Act, HR 1153, Senate Bill 5545, is a bill that is part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Title II, currently being looked at by Congress. The bill provides grants to K-12 teachers to obtain their ESL credentials, and also supports LEAs and universities to provide teacher training programs. As ESL professionals, this is an essential "ask" of our state representatives to

adequately support our students' language needs through high-quality teacher training programs.

It is detrimental to our English learners that less than 1% of K-12 teachers are trained ESL Specialists. As the population of ELs increases, the need is that much greater. In the K-12 setting, ESL Specialists are often not given the same respect or support as classroom teachers. With the passing of the Reaching English Learners Act, the PA TESOL delegates explained that the profession will be given a pathway to legitimization. Providing deepened and sustained support to our ESL Specialists will result in high-quality teaching for our students.

When meeting with our state representatives, I shared the need to recruit and retain highly-skilled ESL Specialists. In my experience preparing pre-service teachers at Duquesne University, approximately only two in twelve teachers are going into ESL K-12, with the overwhelming majority of teachers electing to teach English abroad. Teaching abroad often results in better pay, benefits, and respect from the community. Instead, we need to not only be preparing future teachers with proper training and experiential learning, but also considering how to retain and support ESL Specialists in the K-12 setting throughout a career.



## Voices from Our ESL Community

### In the Public School Community: Meet Abdel Khila

by Suzanne Meyer, 3RT Past President



What do the English Language Development (ELD) – the state's terminology for ESL – students at Boyce Middle School have in common? The support of their instructor, Mr. Abdel Khila!

Khila, a Pitt graduate with a degree geared toward SLA and the teaching of French, started in in the Upper Saint Clair school district in 2007. He soon broadened his teaching horizons with an ESL certificate. While he still teaches French, since 2012 his primary focus has been teaching ESL.

As an ESL teacher, he initially worked for three years with elementary school students at Eisenhower Elementary School. At the middle school, his students are 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a host of countries, including students from Afghanistan, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Japan, the

Netherlands, Taiwan, Turkey, and Vietnam in the past year with abilities across a spectrum starting at true beginner. Some of the students are rising students from the district's elementary schools, whereas others are new to their studies when they arrive at Boyce. Depending on the students' levels, he may 'push-in' to the classroom, assisting students in their assigned classes, or he may 'pull out,' working with students in his classroom on any subject needed but likely serving as a replacement English Language Arts (ELA) teacher while the students' linguistic ability develops.

Given the diverse backgrounds, ability levels, and types of interactions with his students, Khila employs a wide range of pedagogical strategies, but returns to ideas of comprehensible input, inductive methods of study, and emphasis on reading as a means to access and scaffold language skills across the board. As students progress, their work increasingly aligns with the mainstream curriculum, and as students near the program exit, there is an increased focus on linguistic structure, e.g., with grammar, and structured use of language, such as in text-dependent analyses (TDAs). Khila also assists his students with modified testing opportunities and, generally, by providing support in terms of study (independent learning) and testing strategies.

Khila loves supporting and working with his students. Though that's true with all of his students, he notes that it's especially true of his ESL students. Being an immigrant to the US himself, arriving in to the US in 1997, Khila can often see himself and his own past experiences through his students' eyes. He wants to be present for social support and cultural adjustment in addition to

language support. While he faces familiar challenges of the field - inability to anticipate enrollment, discerning learning disabilities in the language learning context, and advocating for students - Khila says that he has come to expect great variety, and there is no 'one size fits all' approach anyway as each child's situation is unique. He looks for the opportunity for each child to blossom when s/he's ready.

Abdel Khila welcomes interaction from others in the community – to exchange classroom visits, for example. He can be contacted at: [akhila@uscgsd.k12.pa.us](mailto:akhila@uscgsd.k12.pa.us).

## In ESL K-5<sup>th</sup>: Meet Margo Machuga

by Megan Evangeliste, 3RT Secretary



**What is your professional title?**

K-12 ESL Instructional Specialist, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**What are your main duties?**

A: As the K-12 Instructional Specialist for PPS, I support the six K-5/K-8 regional sites that support our ESL students. This support is provided to both ESL teachers as well as classroom teachers. The core of the job is positioned around

coaching teachers in various capacities throughout the school year. This includes one-on-one instructional coaching cycles, supporting teams through professional learning communities, and supporting a full staff through professional development opportunities.

As a 12-month employee, the job also includes a summer component. In the summer, we analyze WIDA scores and other data as well as prepare and present for Leadership Week and our back-to-school summer in-services. Being that this position is relatively young, we also work as an office to monitor and adjust each summer in order to best provide support for the upcoming school year.

**How are teachers supported in the district?**

For the most part, I support teachers through one-on-one instructional coaching cycles, supporting teams through professional learning communities, and supporting a full staff through professional development opportunities. Support does vary, however, based on need and school vision.

**How is teachers' growth measured throughout the school year?**

Teacher growth is measured at the building level through a formula that takes into account the RISE rubric, SLO growth, and student surveys. This evaluation process is independent of my position; our director takes the supervisory role in the office.

The measurement of teacher growth is a process that we are continuously trying to improve upon, as growth is an important part of an effective coaching cycle. A key data point that is considered is student growth,

primarily on the yearly WIDA ACCESS assessment. It is expected that all non-dually identified students gain a .6 movement on their overall score each year. Oftentimes, many students make a larger gain than this projected goal.

### **What is the most rewarding part of this job?**

For me, the most rewarding part of my job is seeing the growth in capacity that happens in teachers for the ultimate betterment of the students. It is truly my honor to provide teachers with resources, best practices, and concepts that can elevate their practice and perhaps spark an “ah-ha” moment. I personally love being a lifelong learner and truly treasure this opportunity to be a teacher of teachers. I recognize that it is a privilege to be a part of PPS in this capacity and therefore strive to consistently better my own practice through professional developments, serving as a member of a city-wide PLC, and keeping up with the latest research publications and texts.

### **What are the challenges?**

Some of the biggest challenges are trying to find ways to ignite interest in the coaching cycle in teachers. But truly this is a challenge I welcome as I have always kept my focus on differentiation and how to best meet the needs of all learners. This concept is true for both children and adults alike as we are all human and therefore perceive and process information differently. This is a challenge that truly helps to grow me as a coach and educator and keeps me motivated to continuously better my work.

### **What would you tell a potential K-12 teacher who is interested in joining the field?**

Education is never stagnant. It is constantly changing, both in policy and practice. As teachers, we need to be pliable and resilient. I would share the reality with potential teachers: the challenge as well as the beauty in teaching. Because truly teaching is a reflection of life; it is often messy but is oh so rewarding.

## **Testing Supervisor in Higher Education: Meet Kathy Lipecky**

by Michael Burke, 3RT Treasurer



The duties of the testing coordinator at Duquesne University begin prior to the start of the semester and usually don't conclude until after all final grades have been entered into the university database. Before the start of any given semester, we receive a roster of incoming students. From there, we determine who we will be tested based on their first language, existing English language proficiency scores, and departmental requirements.

The academic year begins with the administering of placement exams. At Duquesne University, we use the Accuplacer exam for initial

placement. Accuplacer, which is produced by College Board, is a computer-based adaptive test. We selected Accuplacer because of its administrative flexibility and instant turnaround time. In addition, graduate students and International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) take the SPEAK test. Students are registered into classes based on the results of their placement exam. During the first week of class, we administer a diagnostic test to further ensure proper placement.

Between midterm and final exams, we perform benchmark testing. Benchmark exams are proficiency exams designed to capture language ability at a given time. Lower proficiency students retake the Accuplacer so they can see progress from their point of entry. Higher proficiency students that are placed in upper-level IEP classes take the institutional TOEFL (ITP). The ITP scores can be correlated with both the TOEFL internet-based exam and the IELTS exam. The ITP permits students to see where they stand with regard to English language requirements, whether at Duquesne or elsewhere. This provides feedback on the program curriculum and gives students a general idea as to their current proficiency level.

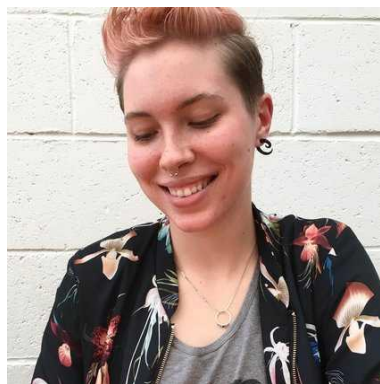
Because neither the Accuplacer nor the ITP contains a writing component, we also administer an in-house writing exam for placement and benchmarking to all students in the program. An adapted TOEFL writing scale and prompt are used. Instructors who are responsible for marking the essays take part in norming sessions every semester.

Finally, most final exams are standardized at the program level, and teachers are informed of task types and particular SLOs. Following final marking and grade entry, we

perform an item analysis on those standardized exams to ensure reliability. When all of that is finished, it's time to start again!

## All For All: Meet Jenna Geiman, Working to Connect Immigrants and Refugees in Pittsburgh

by Megan Reiley, 3RT Webmaster



Jenna Geiman, Education Engagement Coordinator at All for All, took the time to answer some questions about the work All for All is doing with internationals in the Pittsburgh area. As stated on their [website](#), “All for All connects people organizations, and communities to actions that build a welcoming and inclusive region for all.” One aspect of their organization that some of you may be familiar with is their [Professional Learning Community](#), which brings together a cohort of ESL teachers for a year-long professional development program with workshops, hands-on research, and the chance to share ideas with fellow ESL teachers. In this interview, Jenna Geiman shares more about the work that All for All is doing and how ESL educators can

participate in their mission and activities.

**How is All for All working to improve the lives of internationals living in Pittsburgh? Is there a specific demographic, community, or professional field that you focus on?**

As our name suggests, All for All works with all international populations in Pittsburgh—from immigrants who have been living and working in the region for decades to newly arrived refugees. While we don't have a focus in terms of the specific demographics of immigrants and refugees we serve, we target our work by addressing three key areas: building capacity, institutional fluency, and community engagement. Through our work building capacity, we partner with other local organizations to strengthen existing programs, like the Immigrant Workforce Program in partnership with Literacy Pittsburgh and Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS). Our institutional fluency work is aimed at making larger systems—like public education, local government, and the healthcare system—more equitable through programs like our English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher professional learning community (PLC). Community engagement involves connecting directly with immigrants and refugees to encourage relationships between foreign-born and US-born populations and participation in social and civic life.

**Specifically, how do you reach out to the international community or individuals who work with them like ESL teachers or resettlement organizations?**

We do a fair amount of direct outreach to teachers and school staff, as well as being plugged into networks of educators and education advocates like the Global Education Coalition through The Global Switchboard and the Education Justice Network through the Education Law Center. Through our ESL teacher professional learning community, we have built a growing network of ESL teachers across the region who work directly with immigrant and refugee students. We're also lucky to have a lot of wonderful partners, from resettlement agencies and direct service providers like AJAPO and JFCS to community-based organizations like the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh and Casa San Jose. By forming strong relationships across all levels of immigrant inclusion work, we're able to connect individuals to the services and resources they need, support other organizations in their welcoming efforts, and fill in gaps where necessary with our own programs.

**What changes have you seen in the Pittsburgh or Western Pennsylvania area in the past year or two with respect to internationals and the international community?**

Our region is diversifying. Recent numbers from Pittsburgh Public Schools show that English Learners in the school district come from over 50 countries and speak 95 native languages, up from 46 last year. From our conversations with teachers and partners across the region, many of the greatest reported increases in immigration and refugee resettlement are in areas outside Pittsburgh such as Crafton Heights, Moon Township, and the South Hills. Districts that

might not have had more than 10 English Learners five years ago now have over a hundred. These populations represent both primary and secondary migration and reflect a combination of skilled immigrants, often from China, India, and the Middle East, who come to work at universities or in the tech and medical fields, as well as refugees from Central America, West Africa, Syria, and Nepal. Schools in these areas have a particularly critical role in setting a welcoming tone by providing appropriate student and family support, following best practices for ESL education and teaching US-born students how to be respectful and inclusive of people of different backgrounds.

### **What is All for All most excited about in the near future?**

This fall, we're hosting our third annual All for All Summit. This year, the conference will take place over three days from October 10th-12th and will include speakers, community tours, and a multicultural celebration hosted in collaboration with Pete Spynda, coordinator of events like Pittonkatonk and Weather Permitting. We're excited to bring together more people than ever to learn about creating a more welcoming and inclusive region and celebrate our diversity with music, food, and dance.

### **What would you encourage ESL teachers in the Pittsburgh area to do to be better connected to/aware of the larger international community?**

There are so many wonderful organizations doing important work in the immigrant and refugee inclusion space across the city and

surrounding region. Sign up for newsletters—ours, and ARYSE, Casa San Jose, and Literacy Pittsburgh will be particularly relevant to those in the education field. Many organizations have volunteering opportunities as well, particularly for ESL teachers and other educators. Keep an eye on both local and national news sources, such as [fwd.us](http://fwd.us) which specifically covers stories around both immigration and the criminal justice system including the school-to-prison pipeline. Attend events like All for All's From Other to Us dinners, which bring immigrant and refugee community members together with US-born Pittsburghers to cook and share a meal. Finally, don't be afraid to reach out and talk to people—whether it's contacting one of us at All for All; a teacher at another district who's doing work you admire; or starting up a conversation with your immigrant and refugee neighbors, students, or families. This work is all about the people, and you can always find someone willing to share their knowledge and experiences.

### **What are some of the upcoming All for All events, workshops or professional development opportunities that might be of interest to the local ESL community?**

Our education programming picks back up in September with the second installment of our Refugee Education Workshop Series with Dr. Xia Chao (Duquesne University). This workshop will be held at City of Asylum on Monday, September 16 from 5:30-8PM—check the events page of our website for registration. We'll also be starting a series of ESL teacher meet-ups, where attendees will be able to network and learn

about topics related to working with immigrant and refugee students from different subject-matter experts. These will be open to all interested ESL teachers and Early Childhood Education (ECE) providers who work with immigrant and refugee populations. Both these programs are free, and as with all our education programming, Act 48 credits will be provided. We hope to see you there!

## **In Teacher Education: Meet Dr. Nihat Polat**

by Terra Merkey, Duquesne University



### **How do you feel about teaching future TESOL teachers?**

I love the field. I think the field has a transformative effect on the lives of people all around the world. English is the language of science, technology, research, so it contributes to the welfare of people all around the world. When I help them to become good teachers, I know they are going to change the lives of people by teaching English to them, and I was one of those. I always appreciate my teachers –

people who taught me English in secondary school.

If they help you appreciate the language experience, they don't make it intimidating, they make the whole experience pleasant for you, you will continue to learn and that learning has changed my life.

### What are some of the challenges of teaching?

When you talk about challenges in the teacher profession, you have to consider the context, where you're teaching. Some challenges relate to access to resources, the curriculum, others to teacher quality, quality of the program, student demographics etc. In a perfect situation where the resources are there, the students are highly motivated, you are highly prepared to teach, then the challenges become 'do you communicate well with your students'? Are you motivating them well? Do your students understand why you're doing the things you are doing? It's a challenge for teachers to keep them going, keep them liking the experience of learning the language.

### How do you see the landscape of (foreign language) education changing?

Technology - there is a lot of research on the impact of technology on 2<sup>nd</sup> language learning, on teacher's use of technology in their curriculum and instruction.

There are some philosophical changes as well - the field doesn't focus on teaching from the grammar perspective any more. We focus on exposure to meaningful and contextual affordance, try to promote self-learning for students through apps and other things.

### What or who inspires your teaching?

It's generally people who you learn from - I can name Elaine Horwitz, Diane Schallert, David Schwarzer - all of them used different techniques in their classes that I took at graduate school. Theoretically speaking, Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism influences my teaching.

### What would you say your philosophy of Education is in a Nutshell:

Negotiating or promoting co-construction of knowledge with my students.

## Call for Proposals Guideline:

### Parts of the Proposal:

1. **Session Type (descriptions per TESOL): Please choose one of following the session types for your proposal.**

- **Panel Presentation (40 minutes, 3 presenter maximum):**

Multiple, short presentations on and discussion of a current ELT issue focusing on practice, research, and/or advocacy. Proposals should include a synopsis of issue(s) and a plan for the topic and for each presentation (without listing presenters' names). **Panelists should be recruited prior to proposal submission.**

- **Poster Session (55 minutes):**

A summary of an academically sound, scholarly or creative project presented in a visually engaging format, highlighting work through charts, graphs, maps, etc. Proposals should include the main topic(s) and description of the visual display.

Presenter(s) should plan on short, informative discussions with convention attendees throughout the entire poster session.

- **Practice-Oriented Presentation (40 minutes, 3 presenter maximum):**

Oral presentations that may be delivered individually or as part of a group discussion. Presenters share their ideas, experiences, and perspectives gleaned from their [practice]. These sessions provide the audience with ample opportunities for participation and engagement, and they serve as springboards stimulating further discussion, dialogue, reflection, and action.

- **Research-Oriented Presentation (40 minutes, 3 presenter maximum):**

Oral presentations that may be delivered individually or as part of a group discussion. Presenters share their ideas, experiences, and perspectives gleaned from their [research]. These sessions provide the audience with ample opportunities for participation and engagement, and they serve as springboards stimulating further discussion, dialogue, reflection, and action. Presenters may submit a joint proposal focusing on two related techniques, issues, practices, or research projects.

- **Teaching Tip (20 minutes, 2 presenter maximum):**

Oral summary of presenter's work in relation to practice. Proposals should include a synopsis of the techniques, including brief description of the teaching tip.

- **Workshop (40 minutes, 3 presenter maximum):**

Structured hands-on professional development activity tackling an issue or developing a specific teaching or research technique. Proposals should include session



goals, a synopsis of the theoretical framework, and a description of workshop tasks and procedures. They should also provide interactive activities in which participants share information, participate in simulations, and/or create materials and action plans.

**2. Setting: Please choose one of the interest sections for your proposal.**

- **Adult Education:** community-based programs, refugee programs, vocational-workplace programs
- **Higher Education:** community colleges, 4-year colleges/universities, (post-) graduate academic and professional programs, international teaching assistantships
- **Intensive English Programs:** Intensive English Programs/Private Language Teaching Programs
- **PreK-12:** ELs in PreK-12 contexts
- **Teacher Education and Development:** Issues relevant to

ESL/EFL teacher education and in-service teacher development.

**3. Proposal title: 10 words maximum**

**4. Abstract: 50 words maximum**

**5. Session Description: 200 words maximum**

Additional information about writing conference proposals can be found at "TESOL 2020 Proposal Writer's Guideline"

<https://www.tesol.org/attend-and-learn/international-convention/tesol-2020-call-for-proposals/tesol-2020-proposal-writers-guide>