



TESL NS Newsletter

March 2014

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN NOVA SCOTIA

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome to English Town

by Sophie Paish

When I found myself with a little time off work in November, I decided to travel to Spain and take part in a volunteering program that I had heard about a few months before. The company that runs the program is named *Diverbo: Pueblo Ingles*, which means English town.

Diverbo programs are eight-day English camps for adults held in Spain throughout the year. The concept of the program is that 20 Spanish (paying students) and 20 *Anglos* (native English speaking volunteers) are put up in a hotel for the duration of the program and must speak in English the entire time. There are no fees for any Anglo who participates in the program; accommodation, three meals per day, and activities are all free. The only thing that volunteers must pay for is their flights to Spain and, if so inclined, any alcoholic beverages—other than the wine that finds itself on the table every lunch and dinner time.

Applying to Diverbo

It's not necessary to be an ESL teacher to participate in the program, but you've got a pretty good shot at being accepted if you

are! There's a straightforward online application process which includes a short survey about interests, education, work, hobbies, and personal characteristics.

From Halifax to La Alberca

After being accepted into the program, it wasn't long before I found myself near the Plaza del Sol in Madrid for the volunteers' welcome lunch. The following day, the volunteers all met again and got on a large passenger bus that took us to the location of our program, La Alberca. La Alberca is a small town in the province of Salamanca, approximately an hour's drive from the city of Salamanca. Participants in the Diverbo program in La Alberca (lovingly nicknamed "LA" by the Spanish participants) were lucky enough to be staying at the Abadía Templarios Hotel in private villas.

Each villa had two bedrooms; an upstairs room for a Spanish student and a downstairs room for an Anglo. The villas encircled a large building which housed the dining room, bar, and activity rooms. We spent most of our time there.



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Sam Worthington explains how the "The Jack of All Tasks" can be adapted for any class.

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TESL X NS

From the Editor



Jennifer MacDonald,
TESL Newsletter Editor

One of the best parts about teaching is the creativity it affords you. Faced with a new class, new topic or new lesson, you get to ask yourself, "What's the best way of doing what I'm trying to do?" Post-lesson reflection then allows us to evaluate what went right and what could be done differently. And this is the moment when teaching innovation can happen, be it trying a new kind of activity, switching up your classroom management style, or re-visiting how you explain a particular grammar point.

This issue involves TESL NS members sharing their reflections—on activities, materials, or language itself—and passing them onto you. Take their reflections, and combine them with your own, and see where it takes you. Spring is the perfect time to refresh and renew some aspect of your teaching practice.

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TESL NS Newsletter

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SPRING CONFERENCE 2014

Call for Submissions

The TESL NS Spring Conference will be held May 24 at Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) in Halifax.

The conference will be an opportunity for TESL NS members to present their areas of interest and expertise and to network with other professionals from across the province.

Presentation proposals will be accepted until April 24 via the [TESL NS website](#). Presentations, workshops, and discussions on any aspect of research or practice in ELT are welcome.

Here are the top five reasons *you* should present at this year's conference:



1. Share and Share Alike

As teachers, we rarely get the chance to peek inside the classrooms of our colleagues. Presenting at a conference is one way to counteract the closed-door syndrome and to allow your peers a chance to share in your teaching practice.

2. Refresh Your Teaching

Even if you're presenting on something you've been exploring in your practice for years, the act of putting together a talk or discussion on the subject may bring about new conclusions. And the post-presentation Q & A session is bound to leave you buzzing with new ideas.

3. Add to Your Resume

A conference presentation looks great on your resume, as it shows professional engagement, research ability, speaking skills, and a dedication to continuous professional development.

4. Exemplify Lifelong Learning

The act of reflecting on a topic in order to prepare a conference presentation helps us develop as teachers. On a daily basis, we encourage our students to push their boundaries and be lifelong learners; it's only fair that we embody these values in our own professional practice.

Letting go of the rules: How I learned to stop worrying and love language

by Tiffany MacDonald

As a manager and student advisor, I have many conversations in which students seek clarification about a particular language point. Nine times out of ten, the students are asking about a stylistic preference, not a steadfast rule. In most cases, they have learned different things from different teachers.

In cases like these, the students often end up confused. For clarity's sake, we sometimes oversimplify language points, especially for students at lower levels. But the English language is rarely simple, and that's a notion to be explored rather than feared. The "rules" are sometimes individual or in-house preferences, and equipping your students with knowledge of the role that style and context play in language will empower and engage them.

In an essay about language, Stephen Fry claims that there is no right language or wrong language any more than are right or wrong clothes. Context, convention, and circumstance are all. "As language educators, we may find that this statement both excites and horrifies us. After all, we spend so much of our time correcting papers and teaching the rules of language use. But we need to enliven our classes with context and creativity so that our students can find their own voices and experiment with the English language instead of obsessing over not making mistakes.

So the next time you are teaching your students to put (or not to put) commas after introductory phrases, tell them that sometimes, they will see short phrases without commas. Let them look at example texts to see the differences. When offering corrections, focus on the errors that impede clarity. Tell them what your institution prefers. To do this, you have to decide what your in-house stylistic preferences are and get all of your instructors on board. It is important for your students to know that language isn't cut and dry. They will then learn to ask their future workplace or consult their professor's chosen style to know if they should use the series comma or avoid the

non-restrictive *which*. Let your students know that language is constantly changing. Get them to draw parallels in their own languages. Build up their understanding of the way language is used in different contexts so that they can use language as a social tool to help them build better relationships.

It doesn't help students to say, "Never use *but* or *because* or *and* to start a sentence" or "Never use *hopefully* as a sentence adverb." Surely, the students have seen examples of these so-called mistakes in the real world. And by forbidding them from committing certain grammatical "sins," we also cultivate fear in our students. Encourage them to play with language instead. Give them the tools to understand context and levels of formality, and do so early on in their language learning, which is arguably the most formative period of their language learning process.

This is not to say that we shouldn't teach our students the rules of language and grammar. We should. But don't underestimate your students' ability to understand when there are no rules—only preferences—or when it is okay to bend the rules. You will see the results of this approach in your students' level of engagement with the language as well as in their actual use of it.

Tiffany MacDonald has been working in the ELT industry for ten years. She has taught both abroad and across Canada. She began working at East Coast School of Languages as a teacher in 2008, and she is now the Manager of Academic Services.

Running Dictations: The Jack of All Tasks

by Sam Worthington



Dictations are an engaging way to tackle any number of language points.

Running dictation is truly the “jack of all tasks” in an ESL classroom. With elements of speaking, listening, reading, and writing—even spelling and punctuation—running dictation is diverse and engaging enough to adapt to a host of levels and learning objectives. It’s my go-to task to enliven a rainy Friday afternoon or inject some movement and energy into an EAP lesson. While there are many iterations of this activity on various TESL websites, I came upon it in the highly useful *Games for Language Learning* (Cambridge).

Materials

All you need are sentences and space. Create, copy, or adapt a series of sentences, each one printed on a separate strip of paper (ideally numbered for ease of reference). These could be part of a longer text out of sequence, or simply stand-alone sentences. Teachers can adapt the number of sentences for class size and desired duration. Teachers looking to enliven textbook materials could photocopy and enlarge a reading passage and then cut it into manageable pieces.

Method

Divide the class into partners and allow each pair to determine who will initially be the *reader* and who the *writer*. Another approach (depending on class size) is to work with groups of three in which there is a *reader*, *runner*, and *writer*. This can be helpful if you have a small classroom but a useable hallway or nearby open space.

Have the sentence strips posted either around the classroom, or in the adjacent space, and explain to the students that their task is to copy down all of the sentences. The

reader will head to each posted sentence (in any order), read it, then return to the *writer* and dictate the sentence. They can return to each sentence as many times as necessary. Encourage *readers* to point out any punctuation to the *writer* and to spell out any words they might have difficulty with. In groups of three, the *runner* will now be the intermediary between the other two partners, responsible for relaying the dictated sentence. Have the partners switch or shuffle roles when they complete half of the sentences. As each group finishes, have them check their writing against the original sentences to see how accurate the dictation was. This can be done either by having them circulate together at the original sentence stations, or by supplying a printed list to finished groups so they don’t impede the ones still working.

Outcomes

One of the great things about running dictation is its versatility. Sentence length and content can be adapted to learner level and curriculum objectives. Teachers can use the task to preview or reinforce target vocabulary or grammar in the selected sentences. Also, to provide a follow-up activity, give students paper strips to write on instead of a single sheet. After completing and correcting the dictation, they can then work together to put the sentences into a desired sequence. Lower level ESL classes could arrange descriptions of chronological activities or sequences of tense, while EAP students might organize the sentences in

academic paragraph or essay. To keep the ball rolling, sentences could then be paraphrased or used to provide citations for a subsequent writing task on integrating sources and quotations.

In selecting partners, the teacher can deliberately pair students of varying level and nationality in order to foster teamwork, communication, and even a little friendly competition within the class.

Sam Worthington writes and says words. He helps others write and say words at Dalhousie University.

Using Twitter for Professional Development

by Jennifer MacDonald

Twitter has a bad reputation for representing the most superficial and mundane in the social media world, but when used correctly, Twitter can be a powerful and flexible part of any teacher's professional development plan.

What is Twitter?

Twitter is referred to as a micro-blogging site because messages, or tweets, are limited to 140 characters. You connect with others by "following" them. When you log into your Twitter account, what you see is your "timeline", a real-time stream of tweets by the people you follow. By default, all your Tweets are public—everything you say gets broadcast to your followers' timeline. (These are the basics of Twitter; to get into the details, [see this page](#).)

Tapping into the Right Conversations

So how can I use Twitter for professional purposes and not just to tweet what I had for breakfast? Think of it this way: There is a large group of people out there talking about issues surrounding language education. What you want to do is first find these conversations, then listen to them. You do this by following people in the field of ELT (English Language Teaching), as whatever they tweet will automatically show up in your timeline. If you'd like, you can then participate in these conversations by tweeting your own ideas. But that's optional; it's perfectly acceptable to "lurk" on Twitter—following others, but not tweeting anything yourself. Many users start off on Twitter this way.

Building your PLN

How does one find interesting people to follow? Many refer to this process as [building your Personal Learning Network \(or PLN\)](#). The easiest way to start is to find others who have already compiled lists of figures in ELT and start following those people. ([Here's a Canadian list](#).) You can also follow

organizations such as TESOL International or TESL Canada, companies such as Oxford or MacMillan, and universities and language schools.

Made-to-Measure PD

There is a constant stream of interesting people talking about ELT on Twitter. They often link to articles and blog posts, discussing pertinent issues with other users, post lesson plans, or retweet news. What's wonderful is this is a never-ending stream of information. When you have a few minutes, you can log on, see what's scrolling by on your timeline, and follow a link or two. You can access Twitter on your desktop computer, your smartphone, or your tablet, and it's the perfect way to productively spend a few minutes on your commute or your coffee break.

For the Advanced User

Hashtags make it easy to follow particular topics. [Here's a primer on hashtags](#). Several related to ELT are #ELTChat, #tleap, #CdnELT, #TESOL, and others. There are even hashtag chats ([explanation here](#)). [#ELTChat is one that happens weekly](#).

Personalizing Your PD Plan

Nova Scotia is not Toronto or London—face-to-face PD in the realm of language education is limited to a few events per year. Tapping into the conversations on Twitter can allow teachers to simply and easily keep abreast of current issues and refresh our classroom teaching with new ideas at our own speed, when we want to, and for free.

Jennifer MacDonald is Acting Head Teacher, ESL Programs, at Dalhousie University. She has taught English in Quebec, Argentina, Slovakia, and Spain, and she holds an MA in TESOL from the Institute of Education, University of London. Her interests include materials development and educational technology.

TESL NS EVENT REPORT



Activity Swap February 27

Professional development is more than just conferences. Inasmuch as TESL NS's mandate is to support PD for ESL professionals in this province, a recent event was organized to complement the formal conferences offered twice a year. The goal was twofold: to allow for some informal socializing and networking and to give teachers the opportunity to exchange teaching ideas and resources in an informal setting.

We gathered at the Dalhousie University Club Pub for food and drinks, and then the activity swap shop started. We cycled around, speed-dating-style, and had two minutes to chat with each person present, both getting the chance to hear their idea, and sharing an idea of our own. When the hour was finished, everyone went home with a pile of handouts, a list of interesting website, and a headful of new ideas to bring into the classroom.

Keep an eye out for TESL NS emails and our website for future professional events.

www.teslns.com

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Do you enjoy writing or graphic design? Contribute to the June issue of the TESL Newsletter.

SEND AN EMAIL TO
editor@teslns.com



La Alberca, Spain is the location of Diverbo, Pueblo Ingles..

(Welcome to English Town, continued from page 1)

A Program Coordinator and a Master of Ceremonies organized our daily activities. From 9:00 am to 10:00 pm every day, we were busy. It was tiring for us; I can't believe how tiring it must have been for the Spanish speakers!

Each day, we had hour-long one-to-one sessions, group conversations, formal presentations, activities, and theatre shows. At 10:00 pm, despite being ready for bed, we would stay up chatting, playing games, and getting to know the participants, both student and volunteer.

Since returning from Spain, I have recommended Diverbo to many people and wouldn't hesitate to return the next time I find myself in Europe. The experiences gained during this short time were significant and the new friendships forged were certainly welcome.

Originally from Bristol, England, Sophie Paish (M.Ed) has taught English in Slovakia, Japan, Ontario and Nova Scotia in a variety of settings. She currently lives in Halifax and teaches EAP at Dalhousie University. She enjoys travelling, meeting people from different places and bumbling her way through conversations in French and Spanish.



Diverbo brings together English-speakers and Spanish-speakers for a week in small-town Spain.

Lesson Plan: The Grammar Matrix

by Simon Moll

This simple interactive activity for lower-level learners engages students with the multifaceted shifts occurring as factors of tense and affirmative and negative verb forms, as well as with the rules for questions and sentences which influence form and phrase order.

Step One: Throw a 4x4 matrix up on the board and run a left side column with the verbs 'to be', 'to do', and 'to have'. Across the top row, label the aforementioned aspects of tense, affirmative/negative and statement/question.

	Past/Present Tense	+/-	.../?
To be			
To do	I do my homework I did my homework She does her homework. He did his homework.	I don't do my homework I didn't do my homework She didn't do her homework.	Do I do my homework? Did I do my homework?
To have			He does his homework Did he do his homework?

Step Two: Provide an example sentence in any space to demonstrate the intersection of the verb and the feature in question, e.g. 'to do', present: 'I do my homework.' This can also be supported by an example of the irregular 3rd person singular form: 'He/She does his/her homework.'

Step Three: Select a student as the chosen one to enter the grammar matrix. Invite them to approach the board and fill in an adjacent space, e.g. 'I don't do my homework.' At this point, the student at the board may opt to fill in the third person singular example, 'He does not do his homework', or they may ask the class for some suggestions. With a positive class dynamic and minimal guidance from the teacher, this activity can result in rich dialogue and autonomous collective negotiation of options to arrive at the correct answer. The student at the board hands the marker to another student and you continue.

Variations: Asking a the class to copy the entire frame in their books, changing from singular pronouns to plural, and contrasting other regular and irregular verbs are possible variations. The nuances of possessive pronoun use and the role of 'do' in questions and negative forms emerge as challenging grammar points that the class can ponder together, creating a supportive atmosphere for grammar confusion and consciousness.

Simon Moll is a curriculum developer and applied linguistics practitioner based in K'ijipuktuk Mi'kma'ki (Halifax, Nova Scotia) His research interests are focused on the political economy of colonial correction and the commercial construction of "Canadian" credentials.

Labour Market Language Programs for the Settlement Sector

by Amanda M. Marshall

Did you know that 87% of employers insist on a "high level of proficiency" in language (Brampton Board of Trade, 2007)? We all need exceptional communication skills and proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the workplace. Hence, you may not be surprised to know that employers have identified a lack of English language fluency as one of the top two workplace-related issues for immigrants (BC Employer Consultation report, 2012). Immigrants to Nova Scotia can face a number of adjustments and barriers when it comes to settlement, integration, and employment. With the welcomed and critical influx of highly-skilled newcomers to Nova Scotia, settlement organizations like Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) have had to keep these two statistics in mind when developing and expanding employment supports. Amid language programs designed to support individuals in their day-to-day lives and their academic aspirations, ISIS has found a niche for labour market language programs.

As a means of offering top-notch labour market language support to enhance employment and workplace success, ISIS provides English language classes to immigrants preparing for the workplace and those already employed. These language classes fall under an umbrella group of programs called the Labour Market Language (LML) programs. Funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, the LML programs consist of short- and long-term courses that focus on English for work and business. There are both online and face-to-face courses that give clients the opportunity to develop and enhance their specific and general workplace English. Additionally, English in the Workplace is a long-standing program that bridges the job-specific needs of the employer with the individual needs of the employee in a jointly beneficial language program. To quote one learner, "this personalized English teaching method improved my English language skills at least

three times faster than the other methods. It's a kind of magic!"

Nova Scotia's economy is dependent on growth and a strong workforce. With this in mind, ISIS is dedicated to delivering professional communications programs to newcomers that build skills and confidence for successful integration into the Nova Scotia labour market. In the words of another learner, "[this] is very useful to new immigrants particularly those who are and will be working in a Canadian culture workplace. This really is appreciated and helpful! Please keep it up."

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Strong language and communications skills are crucial for success in the workplace.

With a CTESL and M.Ed., Amanda Marshall is a life-long learner and professional in the field of TESL and in educational counselling. Having worked as an instructor, administrator, manager, and now educational counsellor, Amanda's passion and dedication to adult education has grown in many ways. Currently, Amanda is Team Lead and Labour Market Language Counsellor at Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (www.isisns.ca).

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Website: www.mikesimpson.ms/training/LMS



The Local Newspaper

By Nurudil Temel



Have you ever realized that our free *Metro* newspaper is a great teaching tool for EAL Literacy learners and can provide a wide spectrum of activities?

These newspaper exercises familiarize students with the format of newspapers and generate fun ways to practice many different skills. They can also help learners to understand layout, left-right and top-down directionality and where to find information. Skimming and/or scanning parts of the newspaper enable learners to practice reading in a real setting.

Asking learners to bring a copy of the newspaper to class can help them prepare for class and learners will start identifying the resources they need. If they fail to complete this preparation task, we could still turn this into a learning opportunity to practice polite requests: "Newspaper, please!" "May I have a copy of today's paper, please?"

At the foundation level, large prints are a good starting point. Learners may point to, circle, cross out, or underline the target letters according to a given oral stimulus. They may also cut out letters from newspaper headlines. Cutting will help them develop their fine motor skills which is necessary to form letters accurately.

Counting the number of same letters in a target word and/or finding other words starting with the same letter are fun ways to practise the alphabet. Big, clear, and coloured pictures in the newspaper supply good resources to learn new words or to recycle the current vocabulary.

After building some confidence with the instructions and having had enough practice at the letter level, attention may be switched to high frequency sight word recognition. Learners listen for basic instructions to find, circle, cross out, underline, or spell the target word. Gradually, volunteer learners may take the role of the teacher and give instructions to their class mates. Giving brief, simple instructions, and using courtesy words will improve speaking skills and will help turn learners into active doers from passive receivers.

Words appearing more than once can be used as tools to review and practise the concept of 'same'. After completing given instruction such as circle/underline/cross out the word, the teacher may direct the learners to a different page in the paper where they will see the same word and carry out the same instruction.

Number Recognition

Number recognition is a challenge for many literacy learners. However, mathematical connections are related to everyday experiences and life skills. How can we prepare our learners for the challenging world of numbers using the local newspaper? Finding a target page will be a good start to recognizing numbers. We can generate exercises around identifying one- or two-digit numbers or finding numbers in random order. This will make learners work back and forth in the newspaper. At a later stage, the instructor may lead the learners to a page where there is no printed page number. Learners will flip over the pages to find the correct page. Once they found, they will locate the right spot to write the page number: top or bottom? Right or left? All these will help learners improve their cognitive skills as they practice sequencing and the concept of before or after. By making use of advertisements like plane tickets or car prices, learners can develop a better understanding of money values as they sequence, compare, and/or sort quantities and amounts into sets of same value. The main objective of this type of exercise is to access information from real sources and to integrate reasoning and background knowledge with math skills.

Understanding that print and symbols convey meaning is necessary to achieve better reading skills. Illustrations and symbols that are common and relevant to learners' lives can be used as clues to meaning. In that respect, checking the weather, identifying the weather symbol and taking the necessary precautions for a specific weather condition is a great life skill. Finding out daily high and low temperatures

Free newspapers such as the Metro Daily can be a useful tool for EAL Literacy.

may be a good way to practise numbers with a minus sign.

Studying schedules of local events is another activity that will benefit our learners. Finding out about the date and/or opening and closing times of events, open houses and/or businesses, will not only develop their numeracy skills related to time but also help them manage their time and give some clues on what is considered late in Canadian culture and how calendars can help us plan and organize time.

Newspaper bingo is a fun game that can be used as a warm up or a closing activity. The game targets the four skills. For this activity, we need many different issues of the newspaper. If you have copies from the past month or year, that will be great! Take the copies to the classroom. Depending on the time you want to allocate and the level of your class, ask learners to choose a given number of different newspapers (two to five is usually a good start). Once they choose, ask them to copy the date of the papers in their notebooks to create their individual bingo cards. When the cards are prepared, a newspaper is selected from the pile at random and its date is read aloud. This can be done by the teacher or ideally by individual learners. The caller needs to read and pronounce the date accurately as their classmates listen carefully and cross out the dates in their notebooks.

No matter how we choose to include newspapers into our daily plan, they will definitely keep our learners up to date with the world's important news.

Nurudil has a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Teaching and 20 years of classroom experience both with adults and young learners. She has been working for ISIS since 2007. She currently holds the position of EAL Literacy Instructional Assistant.