



CONN TESOL QUARTERLY

The Connecticut Affiliate of the National TESOL Association



“To serve the teachers of English to speakers of other languages and their students.”



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“One language sets you in a corridor for life.
Two languages open every door along the way.”

–Frank Smith

Message from the CO-CHAIR

The ConnTESOL Board is reaching out to every superintendent and director of schools in Connecticut to ask for their support in extending awareness of our 47 years of service.

Our organization, ConnTESOL (*whose mission is to serve teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and their students*), is reaching out to you for two reasons:

- 1) To broaden awareness of ConnTESOL's services, and
- 2) To request your feedback through our short survey to improve our services.

ConnTESOL has served Connecticut teachers for more than 47 years. We host an annual conference highlighted with well-known keynote speakers and various workshops. We also offer our followers and members a quarterly newsletter with information that is relevant to all teachers, specifically with regard to their EL students. Lastly, we support EL students in furthering their education through our sponsored scholarships.



We want to make sure that ConnTESOL continues to meet your needs for many years ahead. Please visit our website to complete our survey or click the link provided.

We would also love to have your email address to keep you posted on what ConnTESOL is doing in Connecticut. Please include your email at the end of the survey.

Our website will soon provide you with the convenient option to make your membership contributions using PayPal. ConnTESOL is a 501C3 Non-Profit organization. Please verify with your tax preparer if your total contributions are fully tax deductible.



The Board of ConnTESOL is looking forward to hearing your voice through our online survey. You may also contact us directly with comments and suggestion at our new email address BoardMembers@ConnTESOL.org.

Many thanks for helping us to determine ways to serve you best.

Cracking the Code

Submitted By David Weinreb

As a teacher of 6th grade Spanish-speaking newcomers in New Haven, I sought to discover: How do emerging bilingual students benefit from technology-based learning, such as computer science? I have helped to co-create a partnership with Yale computer science undergraduates (CodeHavenYale.com) to bring coding to my classroom. My students work alongside mentors on a weekly basis to explore the world of computer programming, and I've studied their growth as programmers, their perceptions of college and computer science, and their developing language literacies. With many compounding factors, my students have experienced meaningful growth in these competencies and skills, and showcased a strong case for the integration of STEM education as a means to empower English Language Learners.

The world of computer science promises many opportunities. New research from the Horizon Media's WHY Group claims that 65% of Americans went as far as to agree that "most students would benefit more from learning a computer coding language than a foreign language." In our classroom, students do both. I teach all subjects to a 6th grade bilingual class at the Fair Haven School in New Haven, CT. My students are all newcomers from Spanish-speaking places (Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Co-

lombia, and the Dominican Republic) with emerging English proficiency and a penchant for engaging in the digital world. I set out to explore how language learning and digital literacy may inhabit some aligned learning pathways.

The interplay between the digital literacy skills and language acquisition among adult English Language Learners has been somewhat studied;

a LINCS report entitled Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction states: "adult ELLs need to develop digital literacy skills," and goes on to list necessary skills for technology-rich work environments." There seems to be a lack of research focused on youth; however, this is not

for lack of interest from the students themselves.

According to Google and Gallup's Diversity Gaps in Computer Science Report, "Black and Hispanic students are more interested in CS (computer science) than are White students, but Hispanic students are less likely to have an adult in their lives who works with computers and technology and are, therefore, potentially less likely to have direct CS role models." The profession also showcases these results: the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that among those employed in computer and mathematical occupations, 8.6% are Black and 6.8% are Hispanic (2015).

At Yale's SOM Education Leadership Conference in 2016, I met Microsoft TEALS guru and

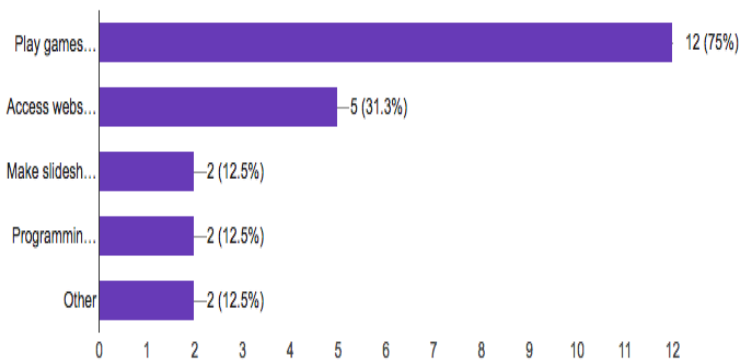


Yale students working with Mr. Weinreb's class.

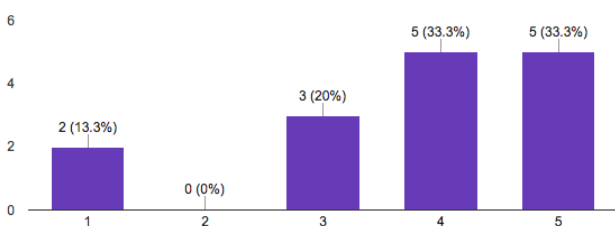
Yale alumnus 09' Nathaniel Granor, and began discussing the dearth of coordinated computer science programming in New Haven, and middle schools across the country. New Haven Public Schools has not yet developed any policies or programs to support the teaching of computer science at the K-12 level, unlike New York City's ambitious Computer Science for All. I began asking questions around how I could empower my students in this important field of study.

Throughout the initial stages of CodeHaven's growth, my students took bilingual perception surveys, which sought to measure students' existing comfort and experience with computer science as well as their interests in college and computer science.

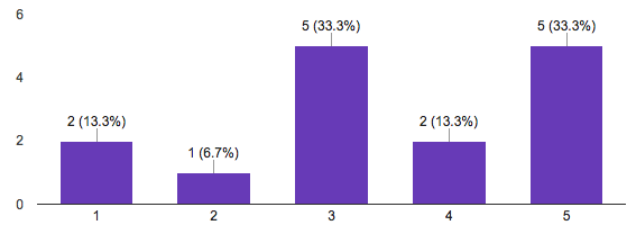
I feel comfortable using technology to/ Me siento cómodo usando tecnología para
(16 responses)



I'm interested in attending college/Estoy interesado en ir a la universidad
(15 responses)



I'm interested in studying computer science in college/ Estoy interesado en estudiar informática en la universidad
(15 responses)



Given my students' enthusiasm for gaining digital literacy skills, gameified learning, and learning language, I was confident significant growth would be evident. Edutopia article Technology Aids English-Language Learners asserts "Technology mixes things up, captures students' attention, and engages them in a way the traditional classroom instruction doesn't" which certainly holds true for my students, many of whom had not previously used computers before entering my classroom.

Since last September, teams of undergraduates have been visiting weekly. Mentors and I co-teach lessons focused on conditionals, bugs, and loops, anchored by a Code.org multilingual Accelerated Course. While Code.org allows students to easily toggle between languages, we chose to program in English, capitalizing on the opportunity to expand our language skills but also out of industry reverence (9/10 of the most popular programming languages, C, C++, Objective - C, Java, JavaScript, PHP, Perl, Visual Basic were developed in English speaking countries).

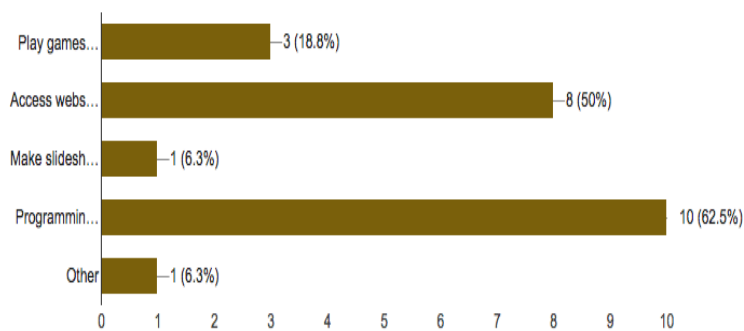
Students regularly discuss their experiences with each other and submit weekly Google Forms to provide feedback to the mentors. Professor Maggie Hawkins of the University of Wisconsin warns, "Students don't really acquire language by performing computer tasks divorced from an au-

thentic learning environment...They need social interactions that make them actively use language to negotiate meaning.” Hence, we’ve engaged in a tremendous amount of unplugged activities and pair programming, where students must physically move and work collaboratively to solve challenges.

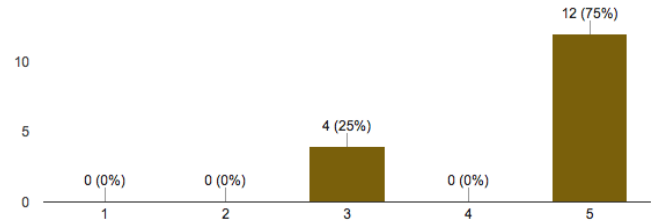
I began coding with some research and many hunches about what might support my students’ growth. I knew the partnership would help my students explore new skills, meet diverse college mentors, and authentically practice English (there are few Spanish-speaking computer science students at Yale, indicative of the greater trends we seek to shift). Though it is difficult to control for other factors, there are a myriad of quantitative and qualitative results which strongly indicate meaningful growth.

Our student perception surveys showcase that my students have grown tremendously in terms of their comfort with technology; they have diversified their usage since the beginning of the year, recording videos, sharing screens, building slide decks, and of course, engaging in computer science.

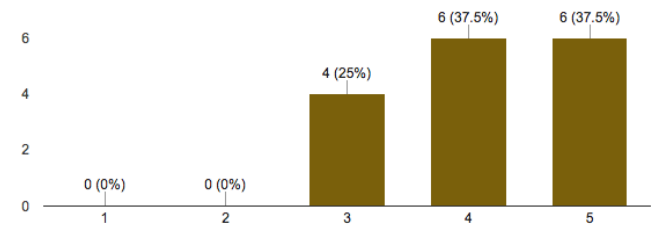
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My students had previously seen technology primarily as a vehicle to access games; by the mid-point survey, 8 more students (50%) said that they feel comfortable using technology for programming. One student remarks “I like and I'm excited the coding and new sites and new ways to use the internet in a safe way for me and my family,” and discusses her interest in fixing computers (see page 8).

In terms of bilingual literacy growth, the results have been very strong. Though there are a variety of compounding factors that make it difficult to isolate computer science as the leading cause of growth, many students cite our computer science experiences as contributing to their development as emerging bilinguals, as you’ll see in Appendix C. One student says: “ami I love that so I can learn more app and I can improve my English. And much to read in both languages.” Another student said, “I’m learning new vocabulary terms that are specific to coding in Spanish and Eng-

lish.”

Students were asked about their interest in attending college, as well as their interest in studying computer science. As is visible in Appendix B, student perception has shifted significantly in terms of interest in college (fairly mixed results in September, strongest interest rose from 33% to 75% over four months). In terms of interest in computer science, the September administration had 3 students rate this at 1 or 2; by January, all students ranked this 3, 4, or 5. Several students cite how programming can help them be successful in college and find jobs in the future.

Finally, let me discuss the progress and success of CodeHaven. In collaboration with the Yale computer science students and with weekly feedback from our students, we've built model lesson templates and expanded the mentor team. Undergraduate leaders also won a Google igniteCS grant for \$6,000 which is helping to support the long-term sustainability of the program. Codehaven is now working across four schools, serving over 120 New Haven students.

Though our scope is limited, and partnerships like Code Haven may not be feasible in many environments, our work suggests that English language learners possess a meaningful advantage as students of computer science. Furthermore, they stand to benefit significantly by empowerment through computer science in terms of problem solving, language learning, and the development of the digital skills necessary to be competitive in future professions. Colorín Colorado,

states, “Computer programming relies on the use of sequencing and logic...[to] methodically and critically analyze content to find answers. Coding can also be a very collaborative and creative venture, with students working together to solve a problem or create an action.” I see my students relish multiple methods of solving equations as we begin our studies of expressions and equations, and they certainly have demonstrated tremendous proficiency at collaboratively writing and presenting immigration rights-focused skits.



Students exploring technology.

My students are learning essential professional skills, growing in habits of mind such as persistence and problem solving, authentically practicing their English skills, and developing relationships with a diverse set of local university mentors. I understand that complex projects

require effort, energy, focus, and assessment, and I am optimistic about the prospects for our work.

Connecticut is currently in the process of creating a state plan for K-12 computer science, and adopting national standards. I, along with teachers from the CT Computer Science Teachers Association, hope that this can lead to dedicated funding and clear certification pathways for teachers. I may not be a computer scientist, but I am a proud TESOL teacher. I believe that TESOL teachers and students can fuel the rich conversations and advocate for expanding computer science education for all of Connecticut's students, and especially to empower our English language learners.

Using Triangle Talk to Build Academic Conversations

Submitted By *Monica Lahiri Hoherchak*

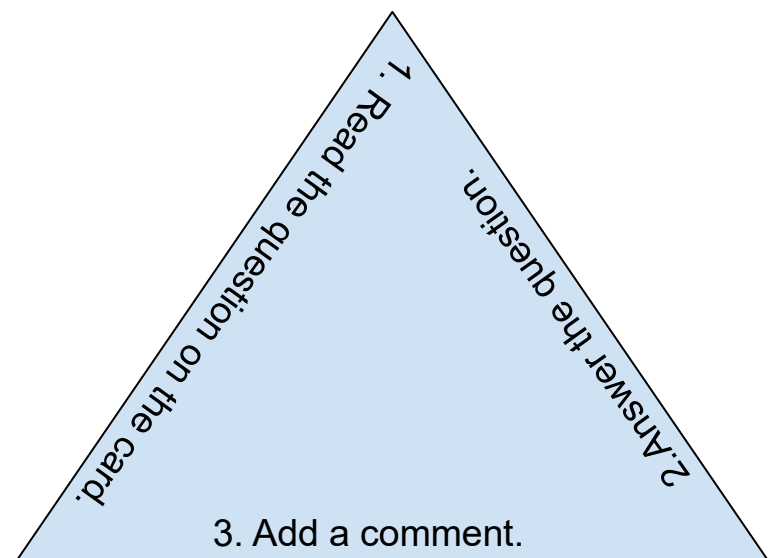
It is understood that we want our English learners (ELs) to develop their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This is the type of language they need to succeed in school, college, and beyond. Allowing students opportunity to practice their academic language in the classroom is critical to developing this skill. We can do that through structured academic conversations. According to Zwiers and Hamerla (2018), “Academic conversations are sustained and purposeful conversations about school topics” (p.1). This is a combination of academic language and oral conversation. It is crucial to remember that academic language is more than just vocabulary; it is the syntax and grammar of academic text and writing; it is the formal language register that we expect in school and in many professions. All students, especially ELs, need oral practice using this language in the classroom. This will help them to comprehend their English and content area texts and be able to write about them. Triangle Talk is an interactive strategy one can use with any content and any age level to build structured academic conversations.

It is relatively uncomplicated for ELs to acquire social language or BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), but the challenge for many ELs is to acquire academic language. Creating opportunities for academic conversations in the classroom allows students to work developing this type of language orally, which is the typical precedent to written language. This is not only

helpful for ELs, but also for native speakers, as they can benefit from structured activities to practice academic language.

For this activity teachers have their students work in groups of three. The teacher provides the triangle at the center of the group, with one task on each side of the triangle. Students then take turns on different sides of the triangle completing the oral language task. Rotate board so that each student can have practice with each job, and different kinds of language-use opportunities. The teacher can set a timer for these rotations.

In this example of triangle talk in a literature circle, the teacher would have a set of questions in a cup or in a pile in the middle of the triangle for students to pull from. The teacher may also offer sentence frames to help answer the questions. If he or she prefers, the teacher can have the questions posted on the board instead of in a cup, which helps to direct the order of questioning in the groups.



Questions:

- Who is the main character in the book?
 - Can you describe the main character?
 - What is the problem in the story?
 - How is the problem solved?
 - What is the theme of the book?
 - Would you recommend this book to a friend?
- Why?

For task three, the teacher may consider having a list of appropriate comments on display. This will help to guide the conversation as students are building both their language and conversation skills.

Comments the teacher can choose from:

- I would like to read that book too!
- That reminds me of...
- I never knew that before. Can you explain it to me?
- I like...
- That sounds interesting, tell me more.
- I agree because...
- I disagree because...

After students complete an activity like this, they will be much more successful at writing about the same topic because they have had the opportunity to self-edit their language. Students have also listened to their peers and perhaps heard new vocabulary or a different perspective. This interactive strategy ends up helping to develop academic writing.

Working in groups of three is ideal because the teacher can do a short activity and allow all three students the opportunity for each task in the triangle. Depending on the class however, the groups of four. Then the activity can be called teacher may want to have students work in

Quadrilateral Questioning. Even groups of five are possible with Pentagon Parley! (No need for the alliteration, but it's another opportunity to add new vocabulary to your activity)

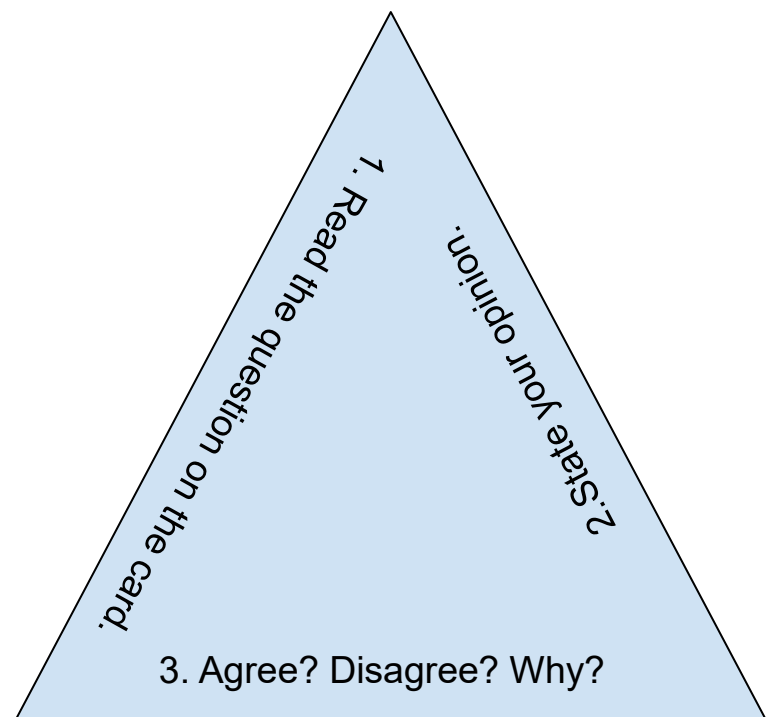
If you make it a QUADRILATERAL - task four. Provide evidence from the text.

If you make it a PENTAGON - task five. Add an additional comment or question.

You can use this activity to practice simple grammatical rules, like verb tenses:

- 1) Pick a card and read the word
- 2) The past tense of ___ is ____
- 3) Use the verb in a sentence
- 4) (This verb means ____)
- 5) (The opposite of ____ is _____. Or The antonym of ___ is ____.)

To build higher level academic language, like the language of opinion, try:

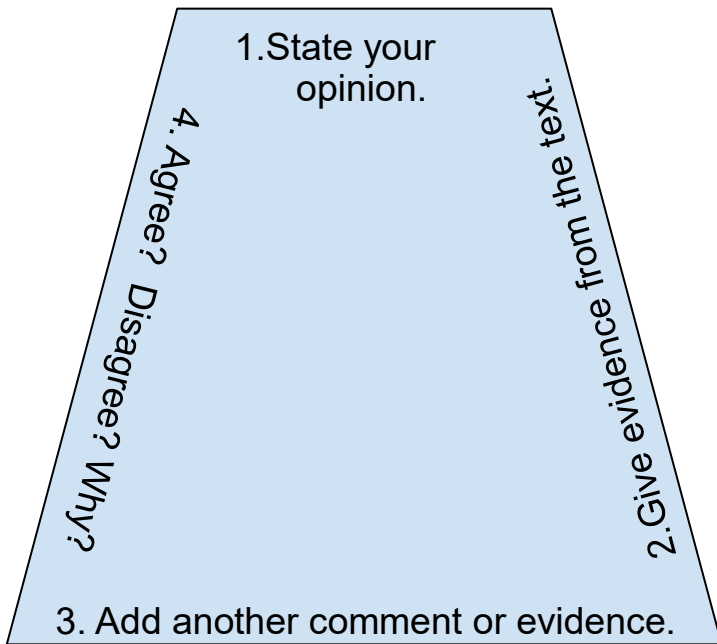


Or debate:

You may start this conversation with an overarching question about your topic. Perhaps: Is it important to conserve water?

Give students sentence frames to help them participate in this academic conversation.

These can be posted on the whiteboard or chart paper for all to refer to.



1.Say your opinion:	2. Glve evidence from the text:	3. Add another comment or evidence:	4. Agree? Disagree? Why?
In my opinion.... My position on this topic is ... I think ... I believe	I read On page The text explains	I hear you saying ... I heard you say that... In the text	I see your point about ___ but... You said ___ but I disagree because... I understand, but on the other hand...

(If there is a fifth task it could be Give a Conclusion)

Conclusion:

In conclusion...

In summary...

To wrap it up...

Let me end by saying...

Finally....

When a group activity is structured in this formalized way, it has been found that students are more successful in using the academic language of the content area. This academic conversation not only develops their conversation skills, but also leads to a deeper understanding of the content area and a more expressive way to communicate that understanding.

References:

Zwiers, Jeff, and Sara Hamerla, *The K-3 Guide to Academic Conversations*. Corwin, 2018.

ASPIRE

Information Provided By Peter Shakar

English Learner Support Services (ELSS) of Fairfield County provides educational programs to underrepresented populations in Fairfield County, with a focus on high school English language learners. Their mission is to foster greater academic achievement, enabling individuals from underrepresented groups to achieve their post-secondary education goals and become productive members of a global society. ELSS was founded in 2016 by a group of former and current university ESL and English professors interested in finding ways to narrow the achievement gap in Fairfield County. They began by asking ELL administrators in the Norwalk schools how they could help. They were told about the plight of SLIFEs (students with limited and/or interrupted formal education) and decided to focus their first project on that group.

In October 2017, ELSS implemented the Academic Support Program to Inspire, Reinforce, and Empower **[ASPIRE]** in collaboration with Norwalk's ELL Department. ASPIRE serves immigrants who are English language learners and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Their goal is to accelerate the students' acquisition of English. By working within the school, their ELL specialists reinforce what is being taught in the classroom. The small group approach allows for individualized attention, which will inspire students to finish high school. The postsecondary guidance sessions will empower interested students to transition to certificates and degree programs.

The Problem ASPIRE Addresses

- ⇒ During the 2016-2017 school year, the Norwalk high schools enrolled about 100 new high school students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Between 2 and 10 new students arrived each month from Central and South America.
- ⇒ Helene Becker, ELL Instructional Specialist, explains that the needs of SLIFEs are far greater than those of students who have attended school regularly. Upon enrollment, all of last year's SLIFEs scored a 1 out of 5 on the English language assessment (LAS). Most of the students also scored low on the math assessment. In other words, most of these high school aged students do not speak any English and some are illiterate in their native language.
- ⇒ Guidance counselors confirmed that a program during the school day would reach more students than an after-school program because some of these students work after school. An in-school program would also ensure the continuity of student enrollment and provide more opportunities for conferencing among the ELL specialists, the regular ESL teachers, and administrators.

ASPIRE is lead by Peter Shaker, M.S.Ed., Program Director, Kirsten Ziotas, Ph.D., Academic and Career Advisor, and Collen Boyd and Taylor Gunn, ELL Specialists.

For more information visit: www.elss-fairfieldcounty.org

Fair Haven + Control = ?

Submitted By Xiu Cheng, Student from Yale

Two miles from Yale's campus, 30-year-old Dave Weinreb began his morning sobbing with a group of teenagers, aged ten to fourteen, around a wooden roundtable. The students' "5 Questions to Answer in 5 Minutes" were abandoned and their desk chairs, the ends of which were stuffed with drill-opened tennis balls for noise reduction, were devoid of their energetic bodies. It was November 9, 2016, the day after the presidential election: a time of celebration for some and an unprecedented day of emotional bitterness for Dave and his students. They were huddled in the back of the room, nearby a poster that featured a student's comforting reminder:

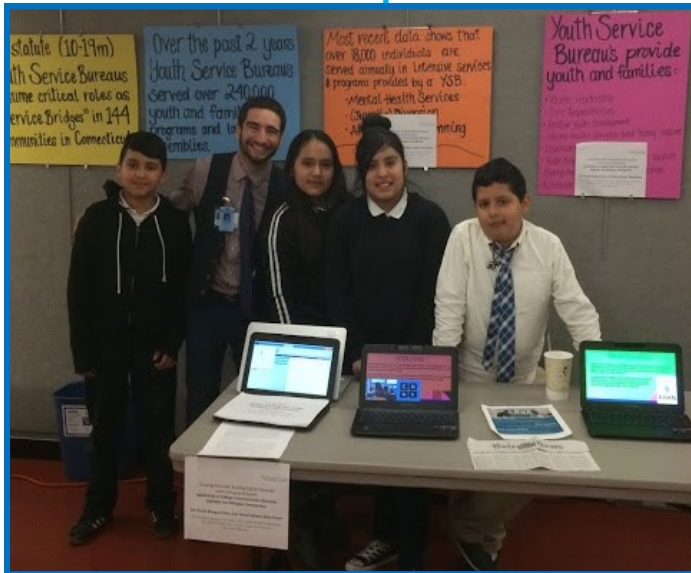
"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream" – José Juarbe

The wall behind the quote was completely covered with blue and green and pink and orange floral tapestries. The color scheme matched the rainbow "PACE" banner that was hung next to miniature flags from all over Latin America. These flags represent just a selection of the countries that the students, who speak Spanish as their first language and consider Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Ecuador as their first homes, recently left to show up at Dave's door of Fair Haven Pre-K to 8th

Grade School, 3rd Floor, Room 319. Unlike Dave, who grew up privileged as a Caucasian in West Chester, New York, some of his students immigrated to America as recent as a few weeks before.

After dropping his students off for gym class that morning, Dave asked himself, "What the hell

am I supposed to do for the rest of the day?" His students were the immigrant children that the newly-elected 45th president of the United States of America threatened to further marginalize. Wallowing in misery, Dave had no idea until he returned, red and puffy-eyed, to pick up his class. One student named Lisbeth pulled him aside.



Mr. Weinreb, second from left, and some of his students

"Mr. Weinreb, this sucks," Dave mimicked to me in Lisbeth's stern voice with his hands on his hips, "This is how the world is, but we can't be upset all day long. Can you *please* fix your face so we can go learn math?"

In other words: *Get it under control, Mr. Weinreb!*

Dave perked up as he relived the moment, reenacting how he "fixed his face" by loosening his furrowed eyebrows into excited arches and turning his frown into a smile that revealed a set of straight, white teeth framed by a neatly groomed beard.

"Yes, Lisbeth! I can do that!"

That was the Dave I knew when I visited his

classroom on Friday afternoons to teach computer science. He is at once vivaciously animated and a fireball of energy, but also intimidatingly threatening when warranted, a unique switcheroo superpower seemingly conferred to our most memorable elementary and middle school teachers. Five-feet, six-inches tall, he can easily be lost among his students dressed in uniforms of white polos and navy khakis if it were not for his patterned button-downs accessorized with entertaining ties—the first time I sat down with him for a conversation, it featured an assortment of PEZ dispensers.

His voice is quite distinguishable too. It is characterized by a warm and comforting oscillating intonation that rides high and sharp at some words and low and dull at others—drawing you in and out, in and then back out again, no doubt influenced by teaching children, who always have short attention spans, for the past seven years. When he switches between English and Spanish—a language he found unnaturally difficult to master when he was a student—it is seemingly effortless. His instructions lack any hesitation or filler words as if he had stitched the languages together so well that you can't tell they were two separate vernaculars.

This mesmerizing quality of his voice also exudes a captivating sense of control. Whenever I visit his classroom, I am in awe of the authority he confers with just a few words.

“Eyes,” Dave would randomly shout, in the middle of a lesson or a coding activity.

“See you,” the students replied in English, slowing the rate of their writing.

“Ears,” Dave would shout back.

“Hear you,” the students chanted, now facing him in unison.

As I sat in on his class, observing as a bystander in the library nook, I soon realized that this quality of control was not limited to just his voice. It is also manifested in how he manages the rowdiness of his classroom with tick marks that accumulate to a missed recess period, in the Yale College and University of Pennsylvania—Dave's alma mater—pennants thumb-tacked to

Whenever I visit his classroom, I am in awe of the authority he confers with just a few words.

the bulletin boards, in the “Great Plates for Your Family” and “Help Your Family Eat Healthy Everyday” posters that decorate the four walls, in how he asks his students about the nutrition facts when we reward them with Welch's fruit snacks after a coding lesson, in how he then gently asks us to bring

in healthier snacks next time, *please*, with a genuine smile. Dave can't control what happens at home or outside the school grounds, but inside room 319, from the first to final bell ring, he teaches his students how to be disciplined and cultivate healthy eating habits and dream with unrestrained hope for college and the future beyond.

There is one more room in the school where he feels in his element—in control—because it is quiet enough for him to hear his own thoughts and no one can ever find him there. Except, it's not a room per se. It is more of a space between

two entrances with one set of doors leading to the exterior of the building and another set that leads into the hallways. It is perhaps a place you would wait for a rainstorm to calm down before making a run for your car or somewhere you would pause for a minute to zip up your jacket before bracing the bitter New Haven winters.

One Friday morning when I visited him for a conversation, Dave brought me here instead of his classroom. The space lacked any furniture except gray carpeting on the ground, an artwork installation hanging from the ceiling, and a rickety, two-seater wooden park bench. As I grabbed my laptop from my backpack to record notes and exchanged small talk, our conversation was abruptly interrupted by a petite lady with a tight bun up-do. I assumed she was the security guard, but later found out she was the assistant principal. She was holding the door open with one hand and what I had thought was a walkie-talkie in the other.

Moving towards Dave, she picked up a conversation they recently left off. As I awkwardly stared down at my keyboard, unavoidably eavesdropping about who I assumed was an unruly student, I noticed how quiet Dave suddenly became—more solemn and less energetic than a few minutes before.

“I told him, ‘No weapons of any sort—fake, real, or otherwise. Please don’t create it out of paper—please don’t bring in a knife,’” she said, as I finally glanced up and over at her hands, which revealed a plastic toy gun coated with a shiny

metallic polish, “Next time he will be suspended.”

“Thank you for being just. Thank you for not suspending him right away.”

She explained that when she learned the student has only been here for two months—a Puerto Rican just like herself—she warned him, “Let me tell you something about schools in the United States. They’re getting so out of control—unfortunately—with crime and violence that you can’t bring this to school...*because students freak out,*” finishing in a whisper.

But that wasn’t Dave’s primary concern. He

must have still been relieved that she did not suspend the student.

For Dave, suspension means that students cannot attend school for a certain period, which then translates to missed instruction time and opportunities where they can reflect on their choices and learn from their mistakes.

When they’re not here, he can’t control what they learn or how

they learn or whether they even learn at all.

This was the source of his frustration when I visited him one week later. Upon arrival, he skipped the pleasantries and immediately jumped into explaining that two of his students had returned from a suspension that day. One was visibly apologetic and asked for forgiveness, while the other showed no remorse and flaunted his misdemeanor.

“Suspensions are dumb,” Dave said with a sigh, in between mouthfuls of an unpeeled, straight-from-the-farm carrot dipped into apple

“Suspensions are dumb...The message of ‘Go home, there isn’t a place for you’—I don’t agree with it.”

sauce, “The message of ‘Go home, there isn’t a place for you’—I don’t agree with it.”

When I prompted him to describe his vision for alternatives to suspension, he replied that that he can assign a special project or simply help students learn how to apologize. Instead of sending them home, he wants to emphasize one message: “Fundamentally, I want my students to realize how their individual choices are affecting their longer vision of who they want to be.”

It is the same message conveyed by the artwork that is hanging in the space he brought me that one morning—perhaps another reason why he cherishes the hidden spot so much. Designed by a local artist, Kent Bloomer, the overhanging metallic sculpture is arched at an angle such that when you stare up as you enter from one set of doors and walk through the space, a tessellation of overlapping metal panels eventually morphs into the distinguishable bodies and wings of eagles—the mascot of Fair Haven. Just as the perspective of the artwork changes as one enters the school, Bloomer believes that the students, through their own initiative and control, can change their visions of the world by entering the gates of knowledge.

Dave is still personally working on Bloomer’s message; he is learning to realize how his choices can affect how others perceive him. Ever since his one-year trip abroad in Bombay, he understands that how he controls his words and emo-

tions and energy can affect his interactions, whether they are with school administrators, his fiancé, who he followed from New York to New Haven when she started graduate school at Yale, or his students.

“In India, I had no control,” Dave explained with a tinge of nostalgia, “Everything else about Bombay tells you that you’re small, you’re a moving pawn, and the world is happening all around you. So, don’t try and get control because it’s going to make you nuts.”

Dave knows that there will be days when he cannot control the state of the country, or the New Haven public school system, or even his own classroom. There will be days when he feels small because the president of the United States does not believe in the future of his students. There will be days when he feels like a moving pawn because the school administration is a bureaucracy and suspensions will happen despite how ineffective he believes the system to be for

the students. During those troublesome days, there will be countless moments when his students do not want to listen and would rather be disruptive than complete an assignment.

Dave tells me that during those times, he asks himself, “What’s my next move?”

His answer? “I *don’t* know,” punctuated with an exasperated sigh.

And he’s learning to be fine with that: letting go and relinquishing absolute control.

“Fundamentally, I want my students to realize how their individual choices are affecting their longer vision of who they want to be.”

Tech Corner

By Jennie Farnell



ESL Fast Speak

Synopsis: ESL Fast Speak is an app based on the very popular website rong-chang.com. The app in fact looks almost identical to the layout of the website, making it very easy to use for those familiar with the website. There are three listening options for users: easy conversations, easy speak, and speak English fast. English learners and teachers have relied on Rong-Chang for years as a resource for beginning learners; having it available as an app makes it more accessible today when many learners use the internet primarily through their smart phones. Rong-Chang is a solid go-to for beginning English learners in America due to the practical situations presented in the dialogues. The app will probably appeal most to adult learners due to the controlled input and traditional presentation. Although there are ads on the pages, they appear to be fairly benign and family friendly. Younger users will probably find the interface clunky and non-intuitive; it basically operates just as the website does, requiring users to go “back” or “home” by clicking the button at the bottom of the page. Although not perhaps a first choice for speaking and listening practice, it does offer users a large collection of realistic situations which adults living in the United States will face. ESL Fast Speak can be a useful resource for learners and teachers, especially those in adult education or survival English classrooms.

Platform: iOS, Android

Cost: free

Age: high school and up

Proficiency: beginning to intermediate

Pros: free, large collection of dialogues, practical vocabulary and realistic situations, accessible to beginners; audio files accompany readings

Cons: clunky interface with ads on pages; non-interactive; no vocabulary explanations or practice exercises; no recording option built into the app; no feedback to users

Voice of America: Learning English

Usage: Podcasts

Site Bio: “Learning English is VOA’s multimedia source of news and information for millions of English learners worldwide. Our audio programs and captioned videos are written using vocabulary at the intermediate and upper-beginner level. Our programs are read one-third slower than normal English speed. Online texts, MP3s and podcasts let people read, listen and learn American English and much more.”

Link: <http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>

Epic

Synopsis: Epic meets the goal it intended to meet – encouraging kids to read through affordable access to a large selectin of voluntary free reading materials – extremely well. At a family subscription rate of \$4.99 a month and free to educators, it’s quite affordable across economic levels and, especially for the price, has a rich, varied collections of materials. Epic is not designed to be an assessment tool; hence the lack of interactive quizzes or activities. Rather, it’s meant to help kids develop a joy for reading by allowing them to choose materials based on their own interests and desires. Although it is designed with native speakers in mind, it is an especially useful resource for ESL/ELL teachers as the majority of the library is targeted to ages 12 and under. While the fiction books may be too “young” for older English language learners, the non-fiction books and articles should appeal even to older learners. The one thing that is lacking is an identification of lexical level. Currently books are organized according to age and within the age bracket do contain a range of lexical levels; however, especially for English language teachers, having a lexical level readily available would be a useful feature since at this point teachers would need to cross reference the title with an outside search of the text’s lexical level. For books that are less popular, it could be difficult to locate the reading level. However, otherwise, Epic is an impressive new offering in online reading options; with its ease of use, convenience, affordability, and cross platform availability, it should be a go-to tool for pre-K-12 English language teachers.

*Tip for private K-12 educators – signing up online for a teacher’s account requires a recognized public school email address; however, Epic’s administration has been generous in granting access to verified private school teachers. You will need to email the site, provide your school documentation, and request access.

Link: <https://www.getepic.com/>

Platform: PC (including Chromebooks), iOS, Android

Cost: Free for educator classroom (up to 36 seats); \$4.99 / month for parents

Age: 12 and under (based on native speaker reading levels)

Proficiency: beginner and up

Have a website or app you think deserves a shout-out?

Let us know!

We are always looking for new and useful tools for classroom use or for our students to use at home. Email us at newslettereditor@conntesol.org with the name of the website or app, what it is used for, and your review of it. It, and you, just might be featured in our next newsletter!

ELL Resource Teacher Study

We would like to invite you to participate in a study by researchers at Central Washington University. We are examining the position of ELL Resource Teachers who primarily serve English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Language Learner (ELL) students in our K-12 public schools. We want to know how your education prepared you for this role, and how we can better prepare ESL/ELL teaching candidates for this position in the future.

This research will help teacher educators to better prepare ESL/ELL teacher candidates for the variety of professional roles they may encounter in their work. Your assistant will help guide the preparation of countless teacher candidates!

To be eligible for the research study, you only need to be currently or formerly employed as an ESL/ELL Resource Teacher serves ESL/ELL students in the k-12 public schools.

The electronic survey will take around 45 minutes. It is open-ended, so we can hear your thoughts. Your responses will be confidential and comply with all Central Washington University protocol for research with human subjects.

If you would like to participate in this study, please follow this link: [Electronic Survey](#)

Let Us Feature YOU!

Don't miss out on this opportunity! We want to feature the voices of those who are immersed in the English Learner field each day. Current newsletter articles of interest include "Politics and English Learners", "Through the Eyes of a Teacher", and "Research on Best Practices". Have something else in mind? Feel free to submit that too!

The submission deadline for the next newsletter is March 23, 2018.

Email us at newslettereditor@conntesol.org

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CONN TESOL QUARTERLY

The Connecticut Affiliate of the National TESOL Association

Get involved! It's never too late to become more active in ConnTESOL. Our ConnTESOL organization has vacant positions that may be of interest to you. Please consider joining our team to support Connecticut teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

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