

Our Stories with MTESOL/MTESL



As part of the mini-conference to celebrate 50 years of TESOL studies at ASU, our former students were invited to share their "stories" – about what they've been doing since finishing their TESOL degrees. In this collection, they share their stories on what, where, and when they've been teaching, their biggest challenges and successes, as well as the most interesting situations they've encountered.

I earned my M. TESOL degree in 2003 after completing under the direction of Dr. Elly van Gelderen the applied project “Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages within the Context of Peace.” Upon graduation I taught ESL for four years as an adjunct instructor in the English Department of Mesa Community College. I returned to full-time studies at ASU and in 2009 earned a Master of Education degree with emphasis in curriculum and instruction for secondary education grades 7-12 English. For this degree, I completed under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Swadener the applied project “Creating Order in a Secondary School English Language Development Classroom.” After completing student teaching at Westwood High School, in Mesa, I became a full-time instructor in Westwood’s ESL program, whereupon I continued teaching the five language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking.

The biggest challenge I faced, particularly when teaching in high school, was motivating students to learn, especially students who attended school only because of mandatory public education requirements, and who were often sources of disciplinary nightmares. Another big challenge was aligning curriculum in order to represent different cultures that composed the classroom. As Francisco Jiménez maintains, “. . . what we study in school, or the curriculum, is like a mirror. If we look in the mirror, and we don’t see ourselves, then we become invisible.” I therefore taught ESL via Jiménez’s own book trilogy: *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*; *Breaking Through*; and *Reaching Out*—and my students loved learning in this manner, for now when they looked in the mirror, they saw themselves.

Ultimately, I experienced quite a few successes from teaching ESL, as students of mine fulfilled their dreams of continuing their education in college, many of them receiving scholarships to do so. Some of these exceptional students even desired to be teachers themselves! My most pleasurable success stories occurred in my last two years of teaching at Westwood. During each of these years, a student of mine survived the rigorous process of qualifying for—and thus delivering—a graduation night commencement speech in front of thousands of well-wishers. Such an honor had never before been achieved by a Westwood ESL student!

These days I am retired and living with my wife in her birthplace of Managua, Nicaragua. My main activities include swimming, studying guitar, practicing mindfulness, and reading lots of philosophy and literature.

- Charles Adolewski

Since completing my MTESL in December 1996, I've had three major changes and challenges in my teaching career. Immediately after graduation, I was offered adjunct positions at MCC and GCC to teach ESL grammar and writing. Besides the huge adjustment from student to teacher, most challenging for me was teaching myself the grammar I hadn't learned since seventh grade. However, I found the intensive self study of Betty Azar's



grammar texts extremely gratifying. In fall, 2001 I was hired as faculty associate for the AECF at ASU where conversation classes were added to my schedule. In this relaxed classroom structure, I had a more vivid glimpse into the nuances of the world through the coming together of Saudi Arabian millionaires and Vietnamese farmers; it was both mind opening and fulfilling. After five years though, I was ready for a change, so I decided to pursue a Master's in Elementary Education. Upon completion in 2006, I traveled to Shanghai to visit my brother. While in town, I had an interview with the German owner of the international Montessori school my nephews were attending. Impressed with my credentials given that most foreign teachers in Shanghai were hired simply because they spoke English, she offered me the lead teacher position for the 3-6 year old classroom. I decided to go for a year of useful experience. At that time, Chinese passport holders were not allowed to attend international schools, so I had a classroom of 15 students from 12 different countries. In contrast to teaching in the US, I had three Chinese assistants and an "ayi" who took care of the kids' and classroom's practical needs. In this environment, not only with the students, but also with my staff, my MTESL degree and previous experience were invaluable. The children were acquiring their own language while also learning English and Mandarin, which was a challenge in itself, but I was also teaching English and Western culture to my classroom assistants. While frustrating at times, the experience was the challenge and reward that I'd craved. Obviously, the difference between teaching children and teaching adults is the rapid progress of the latter. This was the change I had been seeking—instant gratification. Now I've been in Shanghai for 13 years. After 8 years teaching Montessori, I resigned and established a classroom in my house to tutor local kids. This has been my third, most significant challenge: I knew how to teach adults, and I knew how to teach kindergarteners, but I didn't know how to teach those in between. So I pooled my knowledge from these opposite ends of the spectrum, did a lot of research and developed a successful curriculum. I'm enormously grateful to the MTESL program at ASU for giving me a career full of changes and challenges.

- Megan Barclay-Grundler

I finished my TESOL degree in May of '18, and since then I have found gainful employment a 5-minute walk from where I used to attend class, at ASU's very own Global Launch. I was lucky enough to be a student worker there during my master's program, so the post-graduation transition was relatively smooth. Since starting there last year, I have taught core classes within Global Launch's Intensive English Program at all levels, and have also worked in a variety of special contexts. These include a Saudi teacher-training program and the development of an English-teaching initiative for Major League baseball players. My pre-MTESOL language-teaching experiences were almost exclusively in monocultural environments; I have found that managing classrooms with multiple cultures represented is the biggest challenge I have faced thus far. However, I do not wish for this to sound as though I am lamenting such an arrangement. On the contrary, my years of teaching and MTESOL training have made me appreciate this all the more. As for successes, it has been gratifying to work for an organization that offers myriad opportunities for teaching in standard ESL classes, collaborating on challenging projects, and contributing to ASU's overall vision for a more global and inclusive 21st century. These successes also coincide with my biggest (pleasant) surprise in the last year and a half: the wonderful support and encouragement I have received from my colleagues. I have felt as welcome, and as professionally inspired, at Global Launch as I was in the MTESOL program. Because of this, I plan on staying at ASU for the foreseeable future, though I do see an eventual move abroad once the Arizona summers take their cumulative toll. Wherever I do end up settling, I hope to always maintain a connection to ASU and the MTESOL program.

- Tom Becskehazy

I graduated in 1996 from the MTESOL program at ASU with the intention of working overseas as an English instructor. I had already worked as an instructor for adult education for Phoenix Rio Salado Schools and as a mentor and tutor for ASU undergraduate services/athletic department while pursuing my graduate MTESOL degree with ASU.

After graduating in 1996, I took a position with the IPA of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah where I instructed adults in a Saudi government sponsored English language program. At night, I also worked to develop an English language program with a private adult conversational English program.

In the Fall of 1997, I took a position as English instructor in Bangladesh at Jahangirnagar University through the United States Information Agency. On the weekend, I also worked with the local NGO BRAC (www.BRAC.net), to set up a conversational adult English program that focused on different industries.

In the Fall of 1998, I took a position as English instructor in Hsinchu, Taiwan with the Taiwan government International Trade Institute, CETRA. While in Taiwan, I established a website focusing on local trails and culture and tutored both adults and children in private English lessons.

While working as an English instructor in 1999 in Taiwan I received and offer to write for the Taiwan News in Taipei and an offer to work as a technical writer in Hsinchu. I took the offer to work as a technical writer for Mustek Systems as the lead English manual writer for all new products for the company. I worked with Mustek Systems until 2001 and returned to the US to pursue a position as technical writer for Cotton Incorporated in Cary, NC.

After leaving Cotton Incorporated in 2002, I pursued a degree in nursing and have been working as a nurse in Raleigh. My biggest challenges in teaching were in developing relevant content for diverse populations, but I always had great support from my fellow teachers.

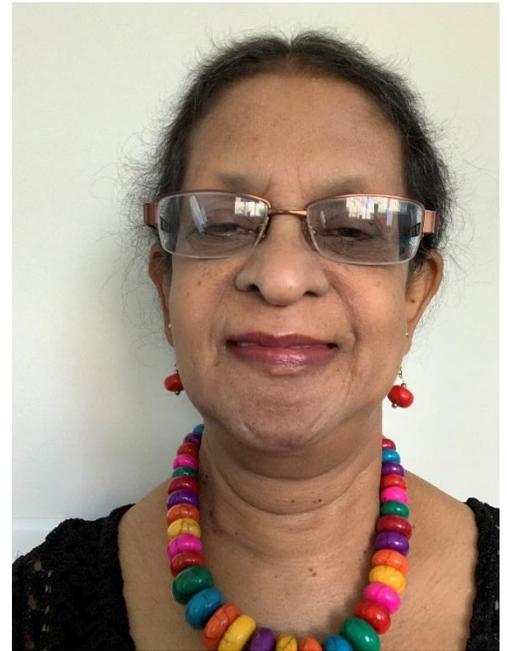
My greatest successes were establishing rapport with my students while also learning more about each country through my travels and work outside of my English instructor role. My most exciting adventures were during my travels throughout the deserts of Saudi Arabia with expat organizations, travels with the local running clubs of Bangladesh, and multiple trips up and down the island of Taiwan and over to China.

- Shane Collins

After finishing my TESOL degree, I completed a Ph.d in Rhetoric and Composition/Linguistics from Arizona State University, and then worked as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer for Writing Programs at ASU for seven years. In 2008, I accepted a tenure-track position in the Basic Composition department at Utah Valley University, about 40 miles from Salt Lake City. I was granted tenure in 2014 in the same department. Currently I teach three sections of writing to students each semester, many of whom are international students.

My greatest success in the last few years has been two-fold. The first is writing and publishing a writing textbook called *Everyday Writing* with my co-author, Dr. Gregory Glau. I have also presented at several conferences over the years on matters of pedagogy, and have done a lot of applied classroom research to understand better how students learn and what they want from teachers. I am currently engaged in a research project that is studying the impact of peer feedback on student writing when that feedback is provided before students even start to attempt the assignment.

My second success as a teacher is helping students become confident writers who are not afraid to express their thoughts when they communicate. My greatest challenge in Utah has been dealing with cold weather, and with the snow. However, it is a very beautiful state, and I am very fortunate to be living in such a beautiful area.



- Chitralekha Duttagupta

After finishing my TESOL degree in 2015, I worked as a U.S. English Language Fellow in Yangon, Myanmar. As a Fellow, I taught university English language courses and EFL teaching methodology to future English teachers. I also traveled around the country to give arts-integrated English language workshops and presented at regional TESOL conferences. I had a laundry list of duties as a Fellow, but it gave me an invaluable opportunity to explore what I liked most and least about the field. For example, I had an opportunity to collaborate with methodology faculty to update the English teaching methodology curriculum at the university. While I am unsure whether or not our modifications were put into practice, I discovered that curriculum evaluation and design was something I really enjoyed doing. This experience in curriculum evaluation and design was very useful once I transitioned to work as an English (First-Year Composition) instructor in the United States. Although I took a multilingual writing course and served as a writing tutor during graduate school, this was a new subject and context for me. That being said, I was confident in my ability to design and execute my courses systematically, and after two years of multiple part-time contracts, I was offered a full-time position teaching English composition at Estrella Mountain Community College. Two paths remain consistent – arts integration, and curriculum design and evaluation. I received arts-integration training as an ASU Molly Blank Fund Teaching Artist, continue to use arts-integration in my English courses, and work as a studio artist for the Tempe Elementary School District/City of Tempe Studio Artist Program. This year I am assisting the National Coalition of Core Arts Standards in developing new assessments in secondary school visual arts, and last year I was the curriculum review consultant for a new TEFL course at UC Berkeley International House.

- Kandice Kardell

I finished my MTESOL in 2015. During my studies, I worked full time as a middle school English and ESL teacher. I moved to Washington, DC and taught high school Spanish after finishing my degree. At my school in Washington, I lead our network's first-ever international student trip and journeyed with twenty students to Barcelona. I have since moved to Madrid, Spain, where I teach English for children and adults in a public cooperative high school and at a local English academy run by an American. Last year, I worked with Madrid's southern Go! American English program in collaboration with the US State Department (see a photo of our end-of-year prom at the US ambassador's residence in Madrid!). We launched our own model UN program and a community leadership project. During the year and in the summer, I write training programs for Teach for America. I facilitate their language teacher development program at the Philadelphia national institute. I am hoping to transition into educational consulting here in Madrid and have been offered a position at a local university.



The biggest challenge is finding consistent work for foreigners, but teaching and conversing with students in a foreign language is immensely rewarding. The biggest reward is always working with students and seeing how much they can learn, and how much fun they can have while learning.

- Kathryn Kosmider

As soon as I finished my TESOL degree I took a job in Izmir, Turkey teaching English to first year college students. The most difficult part was that most of the students didn't actually want to learn English, so there was a lot of external motivation (exams) in the program. When I first got there, I, the fresh new graduate, could point out everything that was wrong with their program. This, of course, was not received well, so I had to learn to pick my battles and push for change slowly. I ended up in many different roles there, including as a teacher coordinator and test writer. The biggest success teaching-wise was starting the conversation club during my last year there. We had quite a bit of interest, and it helped motivate students who otherwise didn't have any opportunity to speak English outside of the classroom. It sounds like a simple thing here, but it was a huge change. I'm happily back at ASU for now, but it was an adventurous 9 years in Turkey!

- Jessica Kurak (Guyette)

Immediately after I graduated from the MTESOL program in 2015, I got admitted to the Ph.D. program in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics with a teaching assistantship here at ASU. As a graduate teaching assistant, I have been teaching first-year composition courses in both traditional and online formats for the past four years. This semester I am also teaching a World Englishes course online.

The biggest challenge for me was learning to navigate the dual role of student and teacher as a beginning doctoral student. First, while I was socialized into U.S. higher education and academic culture as a graduate student during my MTESOL program, I was not used to teaching U.S. undergraduate students. Secondly, U.S. college writing instruction was completely different from my past teaching experience in Cambodia. All this in conjunction with the expectations that I have to excel in the graduate courses and my teaching performance made it all the more challenging for me. However, thanks to the TA practicum and seminar courses, countless conversations and consultations with my supportive TA colleagues and professors, I slowly but surely gained full confidence in teaching. This doing-being-becoming process was anything but easy, yet it enabled me to learn to reconceptualize and embrace 'imperfection' as something normal and part of being human. And that has helped me to find a balance between teaching and my own studies because I am no longer worried about not being perfect in my teaching, my course work, and most importantly, my research papers.

Another valuable achievement to me was teaching courses in applied linguistics and second language acquisition to Cambodian students in the MA-TESOL program at my former university, the Royal University of Phnom Penh. I am very proud and grateful that I am able to put the knowledge and skills I gained in the U.S. into great use and contribute to the professional development of my fellow Cambodians and the ELT in Cambodia.

- Narin Loa

Hello to all my fellow ASU MTESL alumni! My name is Jay Myers, and I graduated from the program in December 2012. Aside from the briefest of stints at ASU's American English and Culture Program, I have done all my ESL teaching at Phoenix College. My linguistics passion has always been in morphosyntax, so it has come as a surprise to me—in hindsight—that most of my ESL teaching has been in pronunciation (both intermediate and advanced pronunciation). In fact, I have taught 26 sections of ESL pronunciation over 14 semesters, and I enjoy pursuing this topic of ESL instruction that some of my fellow ESL professors (as they confess to me) do not like to tackle. Thank goodness for my background in applied linguistics (thank you, Elly!), as I drew on that background during those first tough semesters figuring out just how to teach those troublesome English phonemes! Besides the pronunciation classes, I have taught a variety of additional ESL classes, many at the second-year level (when the students learn to make more-complex English sentences). I like teaching those second-year classes since—in Maricopa Community Colleges' ESL curriculum—that is where the students take on English's modal system (the specialty of my graduate work). As those of you who know me are aware, my ESL pursuit is a late-in-life total change in career to pursue my long-held personal interests in both linguistics and teaching. I am so glad that I took the risk to change careers. Teaching—especially teaching adult immigrants—rewards me every day. Most of the students are engaged and motivated to learn, and they sometimes ask amazing linguistic questions about English! All of it is enough for me to scratch that linguistics itch that I've always had. I'm not sure how many more years my stamina will last; however, I am certain that I will be teaching ESL for as long as I can. I often tell my friends and family that these previous 10 years since I left my first career have been the happiest years of my life. I send my thank-you to all the faculty and administrators in ASU's English Department for creating and sustaining such a fantastic program. Congratulations on the first 50 years of success and many warm wishes for another terrific half century ahead!

- Jay L Myers

Just a few days before Christmas, I was shedding tears outside the professor's office in the Language and Literature Building. The grade, my first semester grade in the United States had been posted on the door. Just looking at it hurt not only my eyes, but also my heart. Instead of getting the A I had hoped for, it was only a B. "Young lady," the professor had said to me, "I don't know what the hell was wrong with you. You were always silent in my class." Years later, I can recall the way he uttered the lines, like yesterday. Still, I am grateful to the TESOL program of Arizona State University. It was the program that insisted in admitting a student from China and offering her with in-state tuition. Without this generous opportunity, I would never have been able to be granted the visa to come to study for my master's degree. The TESOL program helped me make progress and achieve confidence. If that professor ever met me now, he would be surprised at how bubbly I have become expressing myself in English. He would be more amazed that I have been helping language learners like myself to overcome barriers to settle in this new land of hope and to be successful. Yes, from a young woman who was too shy and too limited to express her opinions in English, I have thrived as a middle school and later a high school teacher. Upon the completion of the teaching certificate, I became the Language Art teacher at Roosevelt School District in Phoenix, Arizona. After three years of being a homeroom teacher of 6th graders, I decided to move into Phoenix Union High School District where I could apply more of the knowledge that I had learned from the TESOL program at Arizona State University. I have been teaching ELL students in Phoenix for 18 years. I have been very fortunate to be part of the academic life of my students whose native language is anything but English. Being a non-native speaker of English, I have been able to share my struggles as well as frustration in learning English. I have helped them with skills and strategies that I learned as a graduate student at ASU. Some students regard me as their role model of learning English. Abigail, one of my former students who graduated from Cesar Chavez High School, received her master's degree in Spanish Literature from ASU. She credits part of her success to me. Every time she goes out shopping, she would bring back loads of books. When her mother, a traditional Hispanic woman, complains about her daughter's devotion to reading instead of hunting for a husband, Abigail would say to her mother, "Blame it on Ms. Qin! It was her who made me fall in love with reading." Denisse, another student, sent me birthday wish from the US military base in Afghanistan. In her message, she said, "you made a big impact on my life." When we finally met each other after her return, she told me that she would share stories about her favorite teacher Ms. Qin with her military friends under the stars in Afghanistan. And this, is the meaning of being a teacher. To make a big impact on people's life!

- Jian Qin



I think I knew I wanted to be an EFL/English teacher when I did a speech in 5th or 6th grade. The speech was about Alice in Wonderland. At the time I lived in Poland and I was going to a dual language school, where I was taught British English as a FL. I did so well and my teacher was very proud of my verbal summary. From a very young age, I always liked listening to American music and I loved watching

American TV, even though I moved around a lot with my immediate family. I also had a beautiful study abroad experience in HS, when I traveled to Spain and learned Spanish at a university and learned about the culture through a home stay. Since graduating with my MTESOL degree, I have been working primarily as an English teacher. In terms of TESOL, I worked for a university IEP since graduation for a couple of years, before deciding to go back to school to pursue a PhD in LAL. The biggest challenge I faced in my first couple of years teaching was...well, it was a lot of different things. There is nothing quite like learning from experience! As a student or someone who doesn't teach, you don't really realize how much work goes into teaching. It looks very easy and fun in class, and while it is, some things I struggled with as a new teacher included, but were not limited to: time management, feedback and the amount of paperwork, student conduct, etc. In an IEP, learning happens very quickly, so that made many things difficult. In terms of success, I think that moving up to full-time teaching from starting out at the IEP as an intern was a success for me. I seem to have more successfully been able to help out Basic 2 Ss. That was a level I most enjoyed. A rewarding teaching experience is when you see that you've helped students to make progress in their learning. I just love people, learning, and English. To me what is interesting about people is when they share their culture with others. I just love languages, cultures, people, etc. When I graduate, I will travel and move abroad and teach EFL. I'd like to go somewhere where I can learn a new writing system, and where people use sounds I have never had to verbalize.

- Olja Sipka