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English Language Learners in Seventh-day Adventist Schools



Carol Campbell

As I settled myself into a semi-comfortable chair in the 4th-grade classroom, I couldn't help but notice Ana.¹ In preparation for the language-arts period, students were organizing materials and transitioning to the next class. Ana, however, was struggling to complete an assignment from an earlier period. Tears begin to trickle down her cheeks as she gave up on an assignment for which she lacked the necessary background knowledge and vocabulary. Clearly, Ana, as a second language learner, comprehended little of her teacher's oral or written instructions. I learned later that she could read and write fluently in Spanish, her primary language.

I have witnessed this scene played out time and time again in classrooms. I am in and out of a variety of different classrooms on a daily basis, visiting student teachers in both Seventh-day Adventist and public school settings. One recurring observation that I have made in the past decade or so is the increasing number of non-English-speaking students who make up our school populations. Unfortunately, many teachers are unprepared to address their specific learning needs. They struggle to create meaningful classroom experiences that ensure academic success for students such as Ana.

In recent years, immigration patterns have changed in the United States, resulting in a rich diversity of cultures. Schools, in particular, have been impacted by these changes. The number of students new to English has steadily increased, doubling between 1994 and 2004, the most recent statistics available.² This trend is reflected in the enrollment of students in American Seventh-day Adventist schools as well, at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels.

These students are typically referred to as English language learners (ELLs), non-native English speakers, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, or second-language learners. English as a Second Language (ESL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are terms that refer to the programs schools offer for ELLs. In general, these students are in the process of learning English in school, but speak a primary language other than English at home. However, there is also great diversity among these students, for they vary in their proficiency in their primary language as well as in English.³

Due to the increasing numbers of ELLs and the diversity they bring to the classroom, teachers at all levels need to be well prepared to meet their needs. The purpose of this issue of THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION is to help Adventist educators better understand and integrate ELLs into their classrooms. Some of the questions the authors will address are: What are current policy trends and programs that affect the education of ELLs? What are the processes of second language acquisition? What are the recommended classroom practices for elementary ELLs? For secondary and post-secondary ELLs? What assessment practices are recommended for evaluating ELLs? How can Scripture be integrated into language instruction for ELLs? What issues are associated with the non-native English-speaking ESL teacher? How do student missionaries teach English language learners?

As you read the responses of the authors to these questions, note the recommendations they make that apply to your educational setting. Explore the additional

Continued on page 47

for language learners is to pronounce the word “stretched-ed.” Other examples: *kissed, popped, talked, and laughed.*

Conclusion

I am convinced that the use of Scripture in the classroom has enriched my students’ language learning experience. Sometimes a quick lesson in grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation is all that is needed to clear up a problem area, so why not use examples and passages from the greatest Book ever written? But more importantly, the students have the opportunity to think and talk about God as a Being who not only cares about them intimately but also sits in majesty over the universe as the Creator and Sustainer of us all.

Over the years, my students have commented about what learning Scriptures means to them. One student’s response particularly touched my heart. She wrote an essay entitled “The Worst Day of My Life,” describing how she had received a negative medical report and had to return for further testing. Alone and far from home, she waited anxiously for the test results. She wrote that dread and fear filled her mind. But then she had been assigned this text to memorize in class: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should collapse and the mountains slide into the sea” (Psalm 46:1, 2). This text, she said, had comforted and sustained her. Above grammar and pronunciation, above spelling and vocabulary, the student had learned the greatest lesson of all: God’s Word can enlighten not only our intellectual and academic lives, but our spirits and hearts as well. ✍



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has worked in Christian education and pastoral ministry with her husband for almost 30 years, and says that it is “the deepest desire of my heart to share the gospel message of peace with my students.”

Resources

The following sources are helpful reference works for teaching ESL:

Ron Cowan, *The Teacher’s Grammar of English* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Richard Firsten, *The ELT Grammar Book* (Alta Book Center Publishers, 2002).

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1. Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publ. Assn., 1923), p. 516.
2. Jack J. Blanco, *The Clear Word* (Hagerstown, Md.:

Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1994). All scriptural references in this article are taken from the *Clear Word*.

Guest Editorial

Continued from page 3

sources highlighted in the issue as well, many of which can be accessed online. Following the Master Teacher’s example, Adventist educators need to assume the responsibility of continually adapting their instructional methods and materials to meet the needs of all learners, including the culturally and linguistically diverse. Let us prepare ourselves to meet this challenge and to reap the rewards! ✍

The Coordinator for this special issue on Teaching English as a Second Language, Carol Campbell, Ph.D., is a Professor of Education at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. Her areas of emphasis are reading, language arts, children’s literature, and early childhood education. The JOURNAL staff express their gratitude for her advice and assistance in the planning and production of the issue.

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1. Not her real name.
2. Suzanne F. Perego and Owen F. Boyle, *Reading, Writing, and Learning in ESL: A Resource Book for K-12 Teachers, Fourth Edition* (Boston, Mass.: Pearson, 2008), p. 3.
3. Ibid, pp. 2, 3.

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