



## TOEFL: *The Next Generation*

### TOEFL-iBT (internet Based Testing)

Scott Crossley  
University of Memphis

At the 2005 TESOL International convention, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) unveiled its new version of the TOEFL called TOEFL iBT (internet Based Training). This short article will introduce the readers to this new standardized test and discuss some of the recent changes that have been implemented as well as some of the old facets of the previous TOEFL that have been eliminated.

Perhaps the most important change that has been made to the TOEFL, according to ETS, is that the new exam assesses the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Additionally, many of the language tasks that are expected of the taker involve more than one language skill. They involve assessment where a test taker might listen to a conversation and write a response to it or read a passage and speak an opinion. In addition to the new speaking section, the writing section has also been expanded and note-taking is now allowed as well. True to its new moniker, the TOEFL-iBT is delivered over the internet and the scores are also reported on-line. The test is now also longer, taking up to four hours to complete.



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ETS states that it changed the TOEFL in order to meet the modern needs of English second language learners and the academic expectations that most TOEFL takers will find once they enter a university. Accordingly, the new TOEFL attempts to better test communication skills in an academic environment and reflect those skills through the use of more integrated language. The new TOEFL-iBT is thus based more on communication practices than on knowledge of language.

The biggest change to be found between the new TOEFL-iBT and the old TOEFL is the lack of a structure section. This classical section, meant to test learners' knowledge of English grammar, has been excised, and the grammar previously tested explicitly is now tacitly tested in other sections such as the speaking and writing section. Further, the lectures and conversations are longer and may include American, British, or Australian accents. The test also includes the assessments of a learner's abilities to discern language pragmatics such as the attitude, purpose, or certainty of the language used in a passage. The TOEFL-iBT also tests through the use of such assessment tools as charts and categorizations, although the traditional multiple-choice questions found on older versions of the TOEFL are still prominent. This change comes in addition to the previous modifications already discussed, such as the permissibility of note-taking, an expanded and required writing section, and a speaking section.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thanks to Diann Nance and everyone at Clarksville-Montgomery County for planning, organizing, and bringing to fruition another great TNTESOL conference. We arrived at Clarksville aspiring to learn new theories and techniques to help ELLs; we were blessed to hear some of the true greats; and we came away most definitely INSPIRED. Another big thanks to Clara Brown of UTK for helping bring Stephen Krashen to Tennessee. We were very fortunate to be able to host him; it was a good moment for TNTESOL. And another Thanks to Carol Irwin, our state consultant, who presented the new CELLA assessments at our preconference. We know our assessment system for ELLs needs to be strengthened, and we ASPIRE to carry out to our best ability the new mandates of TN Department of Education.

The luncheon at the Custom's House was a great finale, and Sandra and I just arrived in Jackson from the conference, a beautiful trip through the country! *Of course, it wasn't meant to be a trip through the country.* I got off the route three times trying to read a Map Quest set of directions in reverse. (After the second turn around, Sylvia, who was following me, gave up and went her own way.) Just put yourself in my place; what would be the reverse of "take a slight right?" You know, I'm in the habit of planning to the "nth" degree for conferences, productions, and presentations, but the planning and precision stops abruptly when the lights are out and the audience go their separate ways. Then I slip into what might be termed "meander mode".

Colleagues, we cannot afford for our organization to go into "meander mode". The need is too great. Our peers, our principals, and our pupils are depending on us to lead them in the right direction. That is why we as an organization need to refresh our goals. We have restarted that process with our goal-setting session Saturday morning at the conference. At that meeting "a few,



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The format of the new TOEFL-iBT has also changed. It is now internet-based, and there are no longer any computer tutorials. The speaking part of the exam is digitally recorded and transferred and depends more on human raters. The section formats have also changed. In the new TOEFL-iBT, the reading section consists of 3-5 passages and takes 60-100 minutes, while the listening section is made up of 4-6 lectures and 2-3 conversations and takes 60-90 minutes. The new speaking section comprises six tasks and takes 20 minutes and the mandatory writing section consists of one integrated task and one independent task and takes 50 minutes.

The integrated tasks also have different means of assessment. The reading section involves inserting sentences into passages and also uses charts and summary type answers to test recall. The listening section assesses more pragmatic information and the examples are based on more academic registers such as lectures, conversations with teaching assistants, and practical examples that come from other aspects of academic life, such as speaking with librarians or staff at the housing office. The listening section is also assessed using ordering of events and matching objects to categories in charts. The speaking and writing sections are integrated to include tasks such as listening and responding or reading and responding. Additionally, these sections are scored based on standardized rubrics and are judged by two to three expert graders.

The new TOEFL-iBT is scheduled for launch in the U.S. on September 24, 2005. It will be introduced slowly throughout the rest of the world through 2005 and 2006. Until the TOEFL-iBT is universally in use, the paper and computer TOEFL exams of the previous generation will still be available. Further information about the new TOEFL-iBT can be found at [www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl) and a free sample test and tour is available at [www.ets.org/toefl/nextgen](http://www.ets.org/toefl/nextgen). ■

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the proud, the earlybirds" put their ideas together and prioritized some goals.

The number one goal was to reinstate the regional meetings for training and development. I can see "TNTESOL brings the conference to you" with one meeting in the western region and another in the east. These could be done in mid-September when the need is great. We could have some of the presenters from that end of the state to do their presentations for classroom teachers, administrators and colleagues. Carol Irwin could bring everyone up to "snuff" on news from the State DoE. This could be a time for our university ELL educators to "shine." Perhaps Friday would be a good

day, and it might be possible to have the meetings in some of our under-represented locations and make membership in TNTESOL integral with the cost of the meeting. What are your ideas and what responsibilities are you willing to shoulder? It's time to get that TN volunteer spirit!

The second and third priorities involved communication: to promote more interaction between public schools and universities and to enhance communication via our website with chatrooms, etc. Diane Mackey was gracious to step up to be our webmaster. Thank you Diane. I know communication is tops on her agenda. As for increased interaction between the universities and public schools, it is up to those of us who work in the universities, myself included, to take the initiative on this one. University of Memphis and Memphis Shelby County schools have provided an excellent model for us with their ONTRACK grant program for classroom teachers to get basic knowledge about multicultural aspects of ELL, language acquisition theory, and instructional materials adaptation and techniques for teaching ELLs. What can each of us do on our local level? Getting involved in the regional meetings could be a good start.

Goals four and five involved the State Department of Education: goal four was to support the state consultant in new initiatives and directives and goal five operated in the reverse direction, for the State Consultant to help support TNTESOL frontliners by presenting ELL needs strongly with training for administrators supported with muscle from Nashville. I think we need to work together in mutual support on this one.

Goal six was to create mentoring relationships between systems. The systems who have been through the same situations a few years prior, I am sure, are willing to assist those who are facing the same problems they have successfully maneuvered. There is no need for each system to "reinvent the ELL wheel." We will discuss how to facilitate these relationships based on common delivery models (pull out, center schools, etc.), but in the meantime, just ask! Everyone I have ever asked for help in this state has always assisted me to the "nth" degree.

So we are "on the road again!" We have some great goals set by the membership. Let's don't meander! Let's choose our route and follow it this year! Then in Gatlinburg in spring of 2006 we will be able to look back on this year and say we have truly made progress in the challenging profession we have chosen and that our professional organization, Tennessee Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages has truly been an integral part of making that progress a reality!

Have a good spring and rest some this summer. E-mail with ideas big and small!

Keep Aspiring to new Heights and beware the Meander Mode!

Beverly Hearn  
([LHearn@charter.net](mailto:LHearn@charter.net)) ■

## AFFILIATE NEWS

### REPORT FROM THE AFFILIATE COUNCIL MEETING, TESOL 2005

**San Antonio, TX**

(8:30 Thurs March 31, 2005, Marriott Riverwalk)

Jan Lanier & Beverly Hearn represented TNTESOL at the affiliate meeting. There were reports from thirteen committees of TESOL given at the meeting. Some of the highlights included :

- The Affiliate Coordinating committee is restructuring itself in order to be more responsive to the membership's needs.
- The Virginia F. Allen Scholarship awards a three-year membership in TESOL to three people in each affiliate. TN would be entitled to three. Let us know if you are not a TESOL member and would like to be nominated for a free membership & subscription to TESOL Quarterly for three years.
- The *Essential Teacher*, a general publication of TESOL, will soon be available electronically to members.
- There were two resolutions presented: one for retired members to get a lower membership rate, and another requesting international students to be treated with dignity in the Visa Process.
- The Standards Committee has its vignettes for the PreK-12 standards revision on the TESOL website available for feedback.
- **TESOL 2006 will be in Tampa March 15-18, 2006.** They would like to present "Best of" presentations from each state or affiliate. TN will need to nominate a presentation.
- Elliott Judd, the incoming TESOL President, expressed the desire to increase the information flow and to expand leadership opportunities and the pool of talent for TESOL. If you are interested in becoming active in the TESOL leadership, plan to be at the Leadership workshops in Tampa.
- Arkansas, Louisiana, & Georgia received their 25 year awards.

The TNTESOL board will be seeking nominations for the TESOL 3-year scholarship & for the best of TNTESOL presentation. Please respond to any board member you know or to Beverly Hearn by e-mail [LHearn@charter.net](mailto:LHearn@charter.net) if you are interested in taking advantage of these TESOL opportunities. ■

### Affiliating SETESOL?

Janette Lanier

I went to TESOL in San Antonio with SETESOL on my mind. I firmly believe that we need to be a leading part of the Southeastern group and watch it become an affiliate. Both Frank Leech and I had researched what needed to be done to transform this friendly, but rather unstructured group into an affiliate of TESOL. Had SETESOL been a recognized affiliate during the 2004 SETESOL Conference, TESOL would have advertised our conference in the TESOL publications. We could have gotten address labels and member lists for mailings. Most of all, we would have had a regional Board that would have known of plans within Southeast TESOL for which affiliate would be responsible for hosting the conference.

All of the state affiliates except for New Orleans and Florida sent representatives to a meeting. It was decided at that meeting that Frank Leech, Ron Eckert (KY), and I would begin turning the accords into the documents needed for SETESOL to become an official affiliate of TESOL. This will cost each affiliate, including TNTESOL, less than \$100 per year. For that fee, each TNTESOL member will also be a member of SETESOL. We will have a board that will communicate on a regular basis and plan the regional conferences. This will be discussed at the May Executive Board Meeting. If you have comments, insights, reservations, please communicate them to the Board members. I believe that SETESOL will become an affiliate within the next year. It is TNTESOL's decision whether or not to be a part of that affiliate. This year the SETESOL Conference in Myrtle Beach will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SETESOL Conferences. We have hesitated for a long time. SETESOL needs to be a recognized affiliate. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**May 21** – TNTESOL Board Meeting, Nashville

**2006 TN TESOL Conference: Gatlinburg,**  
April 27-29, at the Park Vista Hotel & Resort

### ADDRESS CHANGE?

If you mailing address changes, please notify Lee Martin, *TNTESOL Newsletter* editor:  
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## Determining a Language Disorder in English Language Learners

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University of Memphis

Providing appropriate intervention services for English Language Learners (ELL) in the public schools is a major concern for the fields of both Education and Speech-Language Pathology. A primary issue when discussing intervention services for ELL students is how to assess language difficulties appropriately. Is the student having difficulty because he or she is learning a second language, or is the student having difficulty because there is the presence of a language disorder? In order to ensure that ELL students are receiving an accurate language assessment, both the speech-language pathologist (SLP) and the ELL teacher need to work together in order to obtain valid information about the student's language skills.

It is first necessary to define what a language disorder is. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines a language disorder as "impaired comprehension and/or use of spoken, written, and/or other symbol systems" (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). A language disorder can affect an individual's understanding and use of syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics, and/or pragmatics. For some students with a language disorder, only one of the language areas might be affected. However, it is more common for students with language disorders to have multiple language areas affected. While ELLs might indeed present with difficulty in one or more of these language areas, it is important to remember that not all language difficulties are language disorders. Accurately gathering information about the ELL student's language skills is where the SLP and the ELL teacher need to collaborate and to support one another for the benefit of the student; however, only the SLP can make a diagnosis of a language disorder.

Where do SLPs and ELL teachers begin their collaboration when assessing an ELL student's language skills? Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ensures that any child who is learning English as a second language has the right to receive a language assessment that encompasses speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Furthermore, the assessment needs to include the determination of proficiency levels both in the student's native language and in English. ASHA (n.d.) also states that assessment needs to be completed in the student's native language. Thus, an ELL student's native language has to be considered when determining the difference between English proficiency and a language disorder. Increasingly, there are more standardized assessments of language skills for Spanish speakers. For example, the Preschool Language Scale – 4 has a Spanish edition that is used to assess receptive and expressive language skills in young children (Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002). Hodson (1985b) has also developed the Assessment of

Phonological Processes-Spanish in order to assess a child's Spanish phonological skills. However, there are not always standardized assessments in languages such as Turkish, Vietnamese, or Swahili. This is where an interpreter can assist in the assessment process (Please see [www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/interpret/htm](http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/interpret/htm) for additional information on working with an interpreter).

Even though standardized assessments are not always readily available in an ELL student's native language, standardized assessments do not always provide an accurate and/or complete picture of a student's language skills. Informal assessments, such as language samples, portfolios, and rubrics, are also valid measures of language skills (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.; Kayser, 2001; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). While they might take longer to transcribe or to score, informal measures typically provide more authentic information about the presence or absence of a language disorder. While the ELL teacher plays a key role in assessing language skill, only a SLP can diagnose a student with a language disorder.

Other essential components of a thorough language assessment for an ELL student include obtaining background information and a medical history and completing a hearing screening (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.; Kayser, 2000).

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**TN TESOL** is an active and vital organization and we encourage and promote all TESOL professionals. If you know someone who would be interested, please let us know. We look forward to hearing from you.

The **TN TESOL Newsletter** is published four times a year. Submissions are accepted on a variety of topics. We welcome book reviews, issues in the fields of K-12, Refugee ESL, Adult Ed, Higher ED and more, as well as articles on teaching strategies, news related to TNTESOL or the field, jokes, classroom anecdotes, even recipes. The style for submissions can be informal and articles are typically 500 words. Of course, exceptions can be made! A bibliography is not necessary unless the article is research-based.

Send your ideas via e-mail, an attachment, and your personal information by the issue deadline to Lee Martin, [lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu).

### Revised

#### Publication dates

July 2005  
October 2005  
January 2006  
May 2006

#### Deadlines

June 15  
September 15  
December 15  
April 15

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Swallowing/feeding (Kayser, 2000) and oral structures and movement are also areas to consider when assessing ELL students. Background information is critical to conducting an accurate language assessment. There will be several specific pieces of information that the SLP and ELL teacher will want to obtain during the background information/medical history interview. Possibly through the use of an interpreter, the SLP and ELL teacher need to ask questions regarding the student's overall development and language abilities in his or her native language. This understanding of how the student is performing in his or her native language is another essential component to conducting an accurate assessment of the ELL student's language skills. Typically, if a student is having difficulty with his or her native language learning process, there will also be difficulty with learning English. This pattern might be indicative of a language disorder. The interview for background information is also a time to discuss the parent/caregiver's concerns, to learn about the student's native culture, and to discover how long the student has been speaking English and the environment in which he or she speaks it. Through the background information interview, the SLP and ELL teacher obtain a better understanding not only of the student's language and communicative skills at home but also of the student's native culture. Information about the student's birth and medical history (i.e., ear infections, serious illnesses) is also helpful as that information can provide further understanding as to the student's language development. A caveat is needed here. When conducting the background information/medical history interview, the SLP and ELL teacher need to be sensitive to the fact that either some parents/caregivers might not know the answers to the questions or might be uncomfortable answering them. It is important to obtain the information; but the information also needs to be as accurate as possible and obtained through a healthy, respectful interview.

While obtaining background information about the student, the SLP and the ELL teacher need to exchange

information about the student's academic performance. Collaborating with the student's content-area teachers would also be needed at this step of the assessment. It is essential to obtain as much information as one can about how the student functions, in regard to language skills, across the home and school environments.

Hearing plays an integral role in speech and language development, and thus, it needs to be considered in a complete assessment of these skills. Kayser (2000) also suggests that the SLP ask the parents/caregiver about the student's swallowing and feeding. While these areas do not necessarily signify a language disorder, they are areas that might need to be addressed through speech-language services if they are found to be areas of impairment. A review of the student's oral structures (hard palate, lips, tongue, teeth, etc.) and movement should also be included in a thorough assessment as difficulty in these areas can often signal articulation or phonological disorders.

As speech-language pathologists and educators, conducting an accurate assessment is one of our greatest privileges, responsibilities, and challenges. Nowhere is that better seen than with ELL students. It is oftentimes challenging to discern whether an ELL student is having language difficulty because of the learning of a new language or because of the presence of a language disorder. This article proposes that the SLP and the ELL teacher work closely with one another in order to ensure that the student receive the most accurate and authentic assessment possible. The assessment to help determine if the language difficulties arise from a language learning process or from a language disorder should consist of the following components: informal assessment techniques, background information/medical history interview, standardized measures (if applicable and/or possible), hearing screening, a check of the student's swallowing/feeding, and an examination of oral structures and movement.

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### Additional Resources

- [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)  
[www.bilingualtherapies.com](http://www.bilingualtherapies.com)  
[www.ncela.gwu.edu/databases/EAC/ALPHA.htm](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/databases/EAC/ALPHA.htm)  
[www.temple.edu/commsci/goldstein\\_spanish.htm](http://www.temple.edu/commsci/goldstein_spanish.htm)

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## Coming to America: Bantus in Transition

Janette Lanier

At the 39th TESOL Convention, I attended a session hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Nairobi, Kenya. The presenter, Ms. Pearson, discussed the programs that are used in Kenya to get the Bantu refugees ready to come to the United States. The goal of the IOM is to make the transition more tolerable from the refugee's native land to the United States. She explained that the majority of the people coming into the camps were "just coming out of the bush." She talked about the first camps they were moved into being a difficult transition. There have been 12,000 Bantus in the past year and a half resettled into the U.S. We are to expect another three thousand before July. The Bantus are proving to be a difficult group to assimilate into the American schools.

The Bantu people who are to be sent to the U.S. as refugees are moved into a rather primitive camp. They may go to education classes, but this is totally voluntary. Only about 50% of them go to classes. Education has not been a formal part of their culture, so the need is not evident to them. They are generally living naked in mud huts within the camp. Most of them have never considered privacy for urination or defecation and Pearson stated that all of them were pre-literate. This is the biggest challenge to us as public school teachers. They do not have the concept that other ELL student will have. During the time they are in this camp, they are taught to use a fork, to wear clothes and shoes. They learn about bathing and other hygiene matters. When the departure date is known, they are moved in to a transition center. The transition center has American-style bathroom and kitchens. For 60 hours, the Bantus learn how to turn on kitchen appliances, take a shower, flush a toilet, etc. Pearson said that although the training is extensive, it is short and they often forget the 5 days of training that is immediately followed by a trip to the U.S. The counselor from IO comes on the airplane with each group to see that they arrive safely and to try to oversee the initial settlement.

The special problems facing Bantus in our school are numerous. They do not understand the need or importance of education. They do not have the necessary background knowledge to aid them in fitting into the American school. They do not understand hygiene. For example, even though they are taught to wash and use deodorant, they do not understand the

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concept of using a product that takes away a person's scent. They may accept the idea of a bath, but washing clothes seems excessive. The expense of laundry may also be prohibitive. There are always the typical African conflicts of losing their cultural values to American values. For instance, in Africa the family, and often the community, shares and works together. If one person has money and another needs it, they share. The teens may get jobs here and notice that their American peers get to keep their money. Immediately, there is a culture clash.

From Ms. Pearson's presentation it was evident that these Bantu children are going to be a challenge for the public school system. One audience member told stories of a child who did not understand not being allowed to answer the call of nature in the hallway of a middle school. Language is a must, but teachers must also remember that the culture gap must be bridged before language learning is effective. The parents are likely to join adult education programs looking for explanations for American behaviors mixed into survival English lessons. Keeping an open mind may allow many of us educators to see into a pure and simple culture in which family is valued and friends are treasured. ■

## OELA Newsline

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition provides an online newsletter titled "OELA Newsline". All you need to do is simply go to their website to subscribe, free and confidential:

[www.ncela.gov.edu/eneews/subscribe.htm](http://www.ncela.gov.edu/eneews/subscribe.htm)

The newsletter provides information helpful to all ESL professionals, e.g.

- No Child Left Behind
- News in the Nation
- Research, Publications, and Resources
- Education Conferences and Institutes
- Education Opportunities
- Job Opportunities

*OELA Newsline* is published for OELA, U.S. Department of Education, by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA) at The George Washington University. ■

## DISCOVER A NEW WORLD OF EDUCATION

Sponsored by the United States Department of State, the Fulbright Teacher and Administrator Exchange arranges: direct one-to-one classroom exchanges to over thirty countries for teachers at all levels. Most exchanges occur for an academic year. Argentina, Mexico, and the United Kingdom offer fall-semester exchanges. The United Kingdom and Morocco offer six-week exchanges.

In addition to the teacher exchanges, there are administrative exchange opportunities in Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Mexico, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Jordan, and Uruguay currently offer opportunities to host incoming administrators during site visits to the United States. Germany offers a two-week special program for U.S. principals to study school systems there for several weeks.

The program also offers eight-week seminars in Italy or Greece for teachers of Italian, Latin, Greek or the Classics.

Prospective applicants must meet the following general eligibility requirements:

- U.S. Citizenship
- Fluency in English
- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Be in at least third year of full-time teaching
- A current full-time position

The application deadline is October 15, 2005 for the 2006-2007 program year. For more information and/or an application please visit our Web site:

[www.fulbrightexchanges.org](http://www.fulbrightexchanges.org) or call (800)726-0479. ■



## Tennessee Adopts New ELL Language Assessment

Laurie Escarre & Michelle Regg  
Memphis City Schools

ESL teachers across the state are excited about the newly adopted assessment for ELL students. Tennessee has adopted the CELLA (Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment) as the new assessment for ELL students effective Spring 2005. All Tennessee ELL educators recently attended training regarding the CELLA with Carol Irwin from the State Department. Ms. Irwin gave us much needed information and insight into the implementation of the CELLA.

What makes the CELLA unique? The CELLA is the new state-mandated assessment for all ELL's in grades K-12. This test replaces the previously used IPT (Idea Proficiency Test). The CELLA meets the No Child Left Behind assessment requirements for Title I and Title III. It will replace the reading and language arts portions of the TCAP and will be used as part of the AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) calculations for all ELL students in grades

3-8. The CELLA is available in four levels – Level A (K-2), Level B (3-5), Level C (6-8), and Level D (9-12). All levels test speaking, reading fluency, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing. The test administrator, using rubrics, scores the speaking and reading fluency portions of the CELLA. The listening, reading, and writing portions are scored by ETS.

Although things are going smoothly there are always a few logistical problems to be addressed. After talking with several other colleagues at schools with larger populations, we have come to the conclusion that it would be more effective for teachers, both ELL and regular classroom, if the TCAP and CELLA were not scheduled simultaneously. Also many teachers have expressed concern regarding the completion of the CELLA before April 29<sup>th</sup>. With so many students to test are two weeks enough time? Of course with anything new a few problems are to be expected. We are all extremely excited about implementing the CELLA and think that it will allow us to serve our student population more effectively. Teachers are also excited about the locator test that will be available in the fall 2005, which will allow teachers to assess students on their ability level rather than on their grade level. ■

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## Mid-term Enhancement for your English Classes — A Teacher shares his experience

Michael Jumonville  
Vanderbilt University

Teaching writing to adults from other countries is challenging work, especially when the students have different backgrounds, cultures, and learning styles. At Vanderbilt University's English Language Center ([www.vanderbilt.edu/ELC](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/ELC)), our writing classes concentrate on process, form, and communication. I like to think of myself as an open-minded instructor, ready to listen to participants' suggestions and incorporate good, workable ideas into all courses.

At Vanderbilt, we are lucky to have the Center for Teaching ([www.vanderbilt.edu/CFT](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/CFT)), which is dedicated to providing teachers with feedback on their teaching in a confidential manner, without risk of evaluation or censure. This department gathers information about a class only when the teacher requests it, and the information is used solely for professional development, not for promotion or evaluation. I decided to take advantage of the Center's services and met with a consultant who immediately made me feel at ease. We talked about a specific writing class I was teaching, a low-intermediate, basically paragraph-writing course.

With the consultant, I decided mid-course was an ideal time to "take the temperature" of this class, so we set up a meeting with the students at one of the class sessions. I left the room while he invited them to speak in small groups on the methods and style of my teaching. The students completed a brief, open-ended questionnaire. Afterwards, the consultant led the whole class in a discussion of their responses, asking questions to clarify points they brought up, and reconciling varying opinions. I was later given the feedback on one typed form, a system that preserves anonymity. Finally the consultant and I met privately to share and interpret the findings.

There were several contradictions in the students' comments. For example, some of them found journal writing very helpful while others wanted to do less journal writing. Some wanted more homework while others wanted the class to slow down. Globally, I was able to change two aspects of the class based on suggestions coming from the participants:

1. Giving more time to complete each paragraph assignment.
2. Adding oral presentations to writing work.

I explained the reasons for anything I didn't change such as the number of journals per week.

Another service of the Center for Teaching that I used was videotaping the class followed by discussion of the tape with a consultant. The objectives of this process are to make aspects I hadn't noticed about my teaching more evident, and focus on communication with the students, my teaching style, and techniques.

The positive aspects that were shown included pleasantness, attentiveness, positive attitude, good interaction with students, positive reinforcement of their work, a lot of energy and engagement, and good use of gestures. The consultant made several suggestions to improve my work:

1. Be more consistent in asking clear, focused questions, and call on students individually.
2. Pause longer after asking a question or assigning a task. Don't answer your own question.
3. After assigning a task, let students work. Don't interrupt.

I have been able to apply these techniques in all my classes and they really seem to help.

The whole process of mid-term evaluation with a consultant and video study for self-evaluation has been so positive that I have been applying the mid-term evaluation exercise in all my classes. I can now modify teaching and content halfway through my classes, which makes for greater learner satisfaction and teaching effectiveness. I hope my experience will help fellow teachers reflect on their classes and enhance their own learning environments. I would be happy to answer any questions or receive your comments at [michael.w.jumonville@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:michael.w.jumonville@vanderbilt.edu). Have a great summer. ■

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