



# Three Rivers TESOL Newsletter

Winter, 2019

## Greg Kessler keynotes fall 3RT conference at Pitt



Prof. Kessler with 3RT President Suzanne Meyer

Do ESL teachers assess their students well? Greg Kessler isn't sure they always do.

Kessler, an associate professor at Ohio University, specializes in technology and language teaching, and he shared some of his ideas with Three Rivers TESOL members in October at the group's fall conference.

Kessler spoke about many of the technological advances that have appeared in the ESL field: gamification, social media, virtual and augmented reality. However, education and assessment in particular hasn't always kept up with these advances.

Kessler focused on artificial intelligence and its applications in areas such as automated speech and writing analysis. He also outlined how analytics, combined with online learning, is making it easier to pinpoint learners' progress and their weaknesses. The result is a greater emphasis on individualized, well-paced and well-targeted learning.

Does that mean human teachers are superfluous? Far from it. Kessler argued that teachers will remain crucial to students' success, partly because they will be the primary filter between technology and their students. Teachers have to be directly involved in decisions about how to use technology in teaching and in assessment.

"Most of all, they need to be prepared to understand, evaluate and integrate future iterations of technology that will emerge throughout their careers."

## Adult Learning Theory in the ESL Classroom

by Alexis Cherewka (Penn State)



How do adults learn? What happens when adults don't learn? This presentation addressed these questions through Knud Illeris's (2004) framework, *The Three Dimensions of Learning*. This session introduced the key components of this adult learning theory, identified potential barriers to learning, and applied them to situations in the adult English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classroom. This theory draws inspiration from fields such as adult education, psychology, and sociology (Illeris, 2004).

Illeris's (2004) theory of adult learning recognizes the relationship between the cognition, emotion, and society. Following this theory, the *content* is the object of learning, and it can be something such as knowledge, skills, opinions, or attitudes. The second dimension, the *incentive*, is essential to learning this content; it is defined as the feelings, emotions, and motivations that guide learning. Finally, the *interaction* occurs through the learner's experience, which is situated in the historical, cultural, and social existence in the world.

The three dimensions: content, incentive, and interaction, occur simultaneously through the *internal and external processes* of learning (Illeris, 2004). The content of learning is "obsessed" (Illeris, 2018, p. 4) with the incentive. In other words, if the objective, or intended content, of the classroom is English language

acquisition, then this goal will be reliant on emotion, motivation, and volition of the learners. The content and incentive begin with "impulses" (Illeris, 2018, p. 5) from the interaction. The impulses illustrate that through our experiences in the social world, we build the emotion, motivation, and volition to learn.

Although understanding how learning occurs is important, the exploration of *nonlearning*, or happens when learning does not transpire, is just as meaningful. Illeris (2018) stated that it is the task of the teacher to "support and encourage . . . a breakthrough" (p. 10) before the planned education can take place. *Resistance* and *defense* are two types of nonlearning, which have potential to occur in the context of teaching ESOL to adults. Resistance is common in the classroom and is caused by the active, immediate response to the learning situation, while defense occurs in place of an immediate response to the learning situation (Illeris, 2004).

This section examines nonlearning in the context of students sharing their opinions in class discussion. Three possible outcomes of this situation are considered: students acting on their resistance, students confronting their resistance, and students building defense. The first possible outcome is that students act on their resistance and are reluctant to express their opinions. This resistance can be a result of their psychological process of learning, part of their interaction in their historical, cultural, and social environment, or a combination of both.

However, the students may choose the second outcome and confront their resistance. For these students who challenge their reluctance to share their opinions, personal growth is possible. If the students fully participate in the discussion and change their attitudes toward the sharing their opinions, this has the potential for positive impact on the students' future learning (Illeris, 2004).

The students have a third option of not confronting or acting on their resistance, and this often leads to defense building. In this possible

outcome, the students participate the discussion showing no signs of resistance and, at the same time, not changing their attitudes toward the discussion. These students finish the discussion with negative feelings toward sharing their opinions, participating in a classroom activity, or possibly learning English. This negativity has the potential to lead to defense, which occurs in place of a more immediate resistance to the learning.

Illeris's (2004) understanding of defense derives from Freud's psychoanalytical theory. *Identity defense* and *ambivalence* are two types of defense, which are applicable to our teaching context of adult ESOL students (Illeris, 2004). Identity defense is a character breakdown and is usually the result of a life change (Illeris, 2004). For many of our students who are learning English and are new to the United States, this transition to a new country is a monumental life change. In addition to identity defense, ambivalence, or "wanting and not wanting to do something" (Illeris, 2018, p. 9), might also appear in our classrooms and can create a complicated relationship with the learning.

Freud, A. (1970). *The ego and the mechanisms of defense: Volume II*. (C. Baines, Trans.). New York, NY: International Universities Press, Inc. (Original work published 1936)

Freud, S. (1943). *The future of an illusion*. (W.D. Robson-Scott, Trans.). E. Jones (Ed.). (3rd ed.). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1928)

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## Thinking in Threes

by Carol Harmatz

(University of Pittsburgh)



As ESL writing students become proficient in constructing clear topic sentences, they learn to “think in threes” as they develop paragraphs with three supporting ideas. Once mastered, the basic paragraph (topic sentence, three supporting ideas, concluding sentence) becomes a staple of essay-writing. Speaking classes can exploit the same clarity of thought by encouraging students to do organize their ideas in both impromptu speeches and more formal presentations.

The organizational paradigm helps speaking students respond to speaking tasks and use a beginning, a middle, and an end. An impromptu speech about the weekend, for example, becomes a simple task of choosing a controlling idea (*fun, busy, or tiring*) and then adding three examples. Preparing a short presentation on a given topic becomes doable even for beginning

students in this way. Regardless of whether the teacher chooses the controlling idea or small groups discuss the choice on their own, knowing what to speak about automatically shrinks the enormity of what new English language learners are being asked to do in a speaking assignment.

“Thinking in three’s” allows students a sense of freedom with which they can focus on other aspects of language production. Shy students gain the confidence of knowing what they are going to say. Students who can speak rather easily but whose thoughts are disconnected now have a method with which to think about what they want to say. Hopefully, these students will be encouraged to listen to themselves as they speak, which will not only enhance what they say but also how they say it. Indeed, “thinking in threes” provides both the speaker and the listener with a roadmap of sorts and increases the likelihood of successful communication.

Capitalizing on what ESL students have already learned and practiced in writing class can also be used in more advanced speaking activities, one of which is providing coherent impromptu responses. Train students think in threes, and they will build up the confidence and speed necessary in professional and academic settings, including discussing topics related to coursework, responding to questions in interviews, speaking up in meetings. Two ESL activities come to mind. The first is to elicit a long random list of speaking topics from

the class. Put the topics on small cards for students to use in pairs, groups or individually. This is particularly useful as a warm-up activity or as a constructive filler when there are ten extra minutes. The second activity involves training students to be able to talk about anything. Identify random objects in the classroom, such as *a desk* or *a marker*, and have students produce a one or two-minute talk about one of them. How? Choose a controlling idea (*types of work surfaces, useful or useless objects on a desk, disadvantages of sitting at a desk all day*), then divide it into three, and talk. Not only will students practice thinking outside of the box, but they can practice this silently whenever they have a few minutes of spare time, for instance, while waiting for the bus, standing in line at the supermarket, etc.

As speaking tasks become more complex, formal presentation skills improve by being able to think in threes. Powerpoint presentations organized around a topic and three supporting ideas are easy to follow, and slides can focus on visual as opposed to lexical support. Likewise, as students become facile in controlling the direction and depth of what they want to say, speaking from notecards with key words becomes a realistic next step. Indeed, learning to think in threes is a skill that will serve English learners well into their long-term language development.

## Using Socrative for classroom comprehension checks and formative assessments

by Bill Price (University of Pittsburgh)

At the Three Rivers TESOL 2018 Fall Conference, I facilitated a workshop (see [tinyurl.com/bpsocrative](https://tinyurl.com/bpsocrative)) about incorporating Socrative ([socrative.com](https://socrative.com)) into ESL curricula. Socrative is a free student response system service (similar to the “clickers” popular in the 2000s) that enables students to respond to questions using their own smartphones or any other internet-connected device (El Shaban, 2017; Savage, 2017). To use Socrative, the teacher creates an activity through Socrative’s website; the teacher launches the activity; students use their devices to join the activity through Socrative’s website (no special app or login required); and students complete the activity. The teacher can monitor students’ answers and accuracy in real-time and display this information to students via a classroom projector or monitor if desired.

Teachers can create three different types of questions on Socrative: multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. In my language classroom, I have used Socrative in three primary ways: (1) to collect short written work that will be shared and discussed with the class—especially for sentence-level writing practice; (2) to track the class’s overall accuracy on specific skills being taught, such as using the correct verb form in a given context or choosing appropriate transition signals; and (3) to convert “paper” activities (including items in the textbook or on handouts) into interactive digital activities.



Socrative has been a highly successful tool in my language curricula. In most language courses I teach, I use Socrative about once or twice per week. On curriculum evaluations, students have consistently rated Socrative activities as being one of the most helpful and useful things we do in the classroom, and it’s not hard to see why. For multiple-choice questions, students can get immediate right/wrong feedback along with an explanation of the correct answer. For open-ended written activities, students enjoy all the benefits of sharing their work with the class and getting formative feedback, but without the anxiety many feel in personally going up to the board to write out their response by hand. As a teacher, I benefit from being able to see a much more comprehensive picture of my students’ accuracy and understanding of target skills in formative activities than a traditional “cold-calling” approach would allow for. My institution also benefits from the fact that digital activities enable me to reduce the amount of paper and toner I use.

Although the majority of Socrative’s features are available for free without any sort of subscription, Socrative does offer paid “Pro” versions of the service designed for K-12, Higher Ed, and Corporate contexts. In 2018, I was awarded a small grant from the Robert Henderson Language Media Center at the University of Pittsburgh to purchase a Socrative Pro subscription, try it out, and report back on its suitability for language teaching. After trying it for a semester, I found that Socrative Pro didn’t offer any “must-have” features for my needs compared to the free basic version of Socrative. Perhaps more importantly, I didn’t find that the Pro version offered my students any added value versus the basic version. However, of the various Pro features I tried, I most enjoyed using the “multiple rooms” feature, which enabled me to have a separate “room” for each of my classes. Rooms act sort of like folders: they keep activities and results from one class separate from those of other classes. If you’re a heavy user like me, keeping your classes separated from each other can help prevent clutter and confusion when you use the website. I don’t believe that this feature alone justifies the price of a Pro subscription, however. I recommend that instructors try the free version of Socrative first to see if it meets all of their needs before considering a paid subscription to the Pro version.

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# Successful Collaborative Writing Requirements

by Ahdab Saaty (Indiana University of Pennsylvania)

Effective collaborative writing and learning research requires that the study's context meets the conditions for successful collaboration to avoid potential setbacks (Hewitt, 2001). Thus, researching the way Saudi female TESOL graduate students co-construct a written text in a wiki-based collaborative writing task and the way they interact throughout the completion of that task, I applied the rules for successful collaboration (Saaty, 2018). The latter emphasize that to avoid failure in collaborative projects, it is important that from the beginning, the researcher determines the task, the participants' readiness for collaboration, as well as the way collaborative work will be organized and delegated. I also considered adopting factors for successful collaboration (e.g. Green & Johnson, 2015) in the context of large-scale inter-institutional collaborative projects. Specifically, I focused on participants-related factors, such as their selection according to their background, knowledge, motivation, desired diversity, but also shared common ground. Additionally, I considered important project-related factors, such as clear goal-setting, and, most importantly, task selection that yields itself to collaborative rather than to individual completion. Here, I provide a summary of the requirements for the participants' readiness for collaboration, the collaborative writing task, and the wiki technology used in conducting the task. These requirements could help researchers and instructors to avoid potential setbacks in collaborative writing.

## Participants' Readiness for Collaboration

For successful collaboration, the participants should:

- Be selected with the study's research goals in mind;
- Be screened depending on their educational, computer-use background, and working style attitudes;
- Have the same or very similar educational background;
- Have adequate availability, skills, knowledge, common interests, and shared culture and experience;
- Have considerable similarities but also differences as diversity encourages a rich discussion and possibilities for individual contributions (Green & Johnson, 2015).

## Task Design

Besides the participants' readiness for collaboration, the collaborative task is an essential component of a collaborative study's research design.

Tasks should:

- Reflect the study's purpose, participants, topic, and wiki affordances;
- Promote meaning negotiation and target a single convergent outcome (Wong & Waring, 2010)
- Have instructions that generate discussion among participants and require them to jointly synthesize and consolidate their ideas;
- Represent adequately authentic professional tasks in the participants' field of study (e.g., TESOL syllabi, curricula, programs, publications, and job descriptions) to prevent the collapse of collaboration due to task inadequacy;
- Require the participants to complete the task within a reasonable time (e.g., three weeks or a semester).
- Not require participants to meet face-to-face or do anything else outside of the wiki;

- Encourage the participants to use the wiki “Discussion” module to work collaboratively to complete the task;
- Facilitate the task with helpful prompts for a greater focus on collaboration;
- Keep essay length to 600 or 800 words;
- Keep essay structure following familiar academic or other relevant rhetorical patterns of essay content and organization.

### Wiki Technical Affordances

Furthermore, the wiki technical affordances are important in facilitating collaboration. Thus, the wiki technical properties:

- May or may not facilitate effective collaboration depending on what they afford and how its affordances are used (Lund & Rasmussen, 2008);
- Should be made clear to the participants to help them use effectively wiki affordances and wiki modules (e.g., the wiki “Discussion” and “History” modules) to complete the collaborative task;
- Should be introduced to the participants in a handout that is accompanied by adequate training on using the wiki and its affordances;
- Should be controlled by providing the participants with a single discussion topic, that is with one discussion thread which enhances the possibilities for collaboration in terms of creating convergent comments;
- Should be controlled by providing a single discussion topic for yet another reason, that is to prevent the rapid topic changes through opening new threads, thus, maintain a single-thread linear discussion that supports an enhanced collaborative discussion cohesion, that is one linear discussion or one thread with all comments related to it (Hewitt, 2001);
- Last, but not least, the wiki affordances should determine the content of the task prompt and the specific strategies to be given to the participants to guide them when using the different wiki modules and to encourage them to communicate within the wiki modules to complete the task.

To conclude, in my study, the close examination and preparation of the context in which collaborative writing in the study occurs paved the way to its successful completion. Selecting participants with shared knowledge and background as well as with diverse attitudes and preferences regarding collaborative tasks, the design of this study’s task as one that is best completed collaboratively but also as one that is enabled by the wiki’s affordances, and the use of the wiki as an asynchronous linear single-threaded discussion allowing for convergent comments, all created favorable conditions for this study’s focus on collaborative writing. The aforementioned conditions are considered crucial in avoiding potential setbacks to successful collaboration. These could be essential in other collaborative writing studies and pedagogies set in different educational contexts.

This newsletter highlights some of the presentations from the 3RT 2018 Fall Conference, held on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Articles were solicited from presenters based primarily on the evaluation forms participants used to rank conference sessions. The board’s hope via this initiative is both to encourage broad-based participation 3RT and to allow conference presenters to further share their work in a manner benefitting those unable to attend the conference. The board thanks the presenters for taking the time to follow up on their work and contribute to this issue.

## Tech-savvy Teachers: Assessing ESL Students' Progress Using Web-based Tools

by Mykhaylo Zakryzhevskyy

(SUNY Plattsburgh)

These days ESL instructors can create effective assessment materials with the help of web-based tools allowing them to be more tech-savvy with minimal effort and maximum gain. A variety of free, easy-to-use, and time-saving tools is an advantage to busy teachers. However, using such tools does not just save time. Language assessment is “the process of systematically gathering data from learners to make interpretations about their language abilities and decisions about their future” (Chapelle and Voss, 2016, p. 116). In this data-driven world, ESL educators are able to collect data in order to improve teaching and help learners succeed. Also, teaching students how to use such tools can help them be more independent and motivated to learn English on their own.

Computer-assisted Language Learning, or CALL, has many advantages in assessment creation. Technology allows for customization in the process of assessment creation when using authoring tools (Kessler, 2013). This ability to customize along with efficiency that technology yields in assessment creation (Laborda, 2007) makes web-based tools ideal for assessment purposes. For example, Newsela, an online reading tool with inbuilt Quiz and Write functions to assess reading comprehension, allows teachers to change difficulty levels according to the needs of the class. Moreover, Ted-Ed has ready-made lessons that come with assessment materials featuring various question types. This web resource provides downloadable reports and an opportunity to create customized lesson plans and

matching assessment materials. Furthermore, several classroom response systems, such as Kahoot and Poll Everywhere, can be useful for the creation of quizzes, discussions, and surveys to track results in real time or download students' progress later. BookWidgets has an abundance of pre-made templates for quizzes, crosswords, memory games, mind maps, and many more evaluative activities and lets instructors create their own digital tools for classroom assessments. All of these resources feature pre-made templates and ready-made tests on a variety of topics that can be later customized to a certain level of ESL proficiency.

It is true that CALL allows learners to both be assessed and learn in the process in computerized assessment environments (Chapelle & Voss, 2016). For instance, the Quizlet Live feature on Quizlet, a popular vocabulary learning platform, provides personalized class reports and can be used for post-test debriefing activities. Both teachers and students can access its in-built testing feature, which can be used as an evaluation and revision tool. Technology promotes learner autonomy, motivates learners to control and monitor their own progress and self-assess their success (Benson, 2013). Web-based assessment tools can be easy to use for both instructors and students and can work across platforms, which allows for flexibility, as students can take their learning anywhere and keep track of their progress using teacher-created assessment materials for practice outside of class.

Even with the ease of use and flexibility of these tools, it is important that we adhere to the following assessment creation principles. We need to keep backward course design in mind, meaning identifying students learning outcomes (SLOs) before creating assessment materials. Once these are set, every effort must be made for assessments to be tied to course goals, objectives, and SLOs. Also, to

avoid test anxiety, assessments need to be based on practice activities in class with regular feedback to students. Finally, when writing instructions for tests, grammar and vocabulary need to be carefully checked to ensure these instructions are accessible to learners at their current level.

These days ESL instructors can become more tech-savvy when it comes to creating assessments. These materials can be designed with their students' proficiency level in mind, they are customizable, flexible, and accessible and, ultimately, can inspire students to continue learning outside of class and be in charge of their own progress. There is an abundance of choices of web-based assessment tools, but whichever tool the instructor decides to utilize, they should remember technology cannot be used for the sake of using technology, but it is the students' needs that should drive the appropriateness of the selection of a resource.

### References

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## Three Rivers TESOL Professional Development Grant

Do you have an idea for a professional development activity that serves the ESL/EFL community? If so, apply for the Three Rivers TESOL Professional Development Grant!

Applicants must complete the grant application form and must submit a project proposal that includes:

- 1) an outline of the goals, objectives, and rationale of the project. The goals and objectives should be reasonable, measurable, and well-written, with detailed description of how the proposed PD project benefits ELL students.
- 2) a detailed description the implementation plan and projected budget. If the project has multiple steps, descriptions of each is required. The implementation plan should include the evaluation methods used in the PD project.
- 3) a proposal for how the PD project will be shared with a wider audience.

For further information about the grant guidelines, see: <https://threeriverstesol.org/wp/grants-awards/>. Please forward questions and comments to [president@threeriverstesol.org](mailto:president@threeriverstesol.org).

Applications are reviewed by the board, and award amounts of up to a maximum of \$500 are available. The annual deadline for the grant is 20 April.

The Three Rivers TESOL Professional Development Grant is open to both members and non-members, so feel free to share this information with colleagues as well.

## Three Rivers TESOL International Convention Travel Grant

Congratulations to Three Rivers TESOL International Convention Travel Grant recipients Soyoung Burke, PhD, St. Francis University, and Lilia Savova, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. These 3RT members will be presenting at TESOL International in Atlanta, GA in March, 2019. Dr. Burke and Ms. Savova will each present a poster session, entitled "Global Buddies: Intercultural Communication Competence for International and Domestic Students" and "Directions in Materials Design: The Local/Global Dichotomy," respectively. Look forward to newsletter articles from each award winner describing their respective experiences at the TESOL International Convention.

## Affiliate Complimentary Memberships

Seven raffle tickets for affiliate complimentary memberships were drawn at the end of the 2018 Fall Three Rivers TESOL Annual Fall Conference. The winners included Sarah Bradshaw, Andy Decker, Jacqueline (Jackie) Gross-McDowell, Rachel McTernan, LuAnn Pengidore, Christy Van Poolen, and Shuzhen Zhang. Congratulations!

Raffle winners are required to be a new TESOL member or someone who has not been a member in more than five years. Renewing TESOL member or current TESOL members do not qualify.

## Save the Date: Three Rivers TESOL Spring Seminar

Mark your calendar for the 3RT Spring Seminar, tentatively scheduled for Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The seminar is an excellent opportunity for professional development as well as catching up with colleagues.

This year's seminar will be held at the University of Pittsburgh, and the seminar format is currently under discussion. If you have any ideas about events or topics that you would like included at this or future spring seminar events, don't hesitate to let the board know. The 3RT board wants to represent the interests of its members!

Additionally, voting for the 3RT Board will conclude on the day, and new board members will be announced. See "Three Rivers TESOL Board Elections" (next page) for more election information.



*Three Rivers TESOL was founded in 1989 and is an affiliate of the TESOL International Association, serving western and central Pennsylvania.*

## Three Rivers TESOL Executive Board Elections

Consider taking a leadership role in the field!

Three Rivers Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages (Three Rivers TESOL) serves the Central and Western Pennsylvania area and is an affiliate of International TESOL. The organization's goals include stimulating professional development in the areas, encouraging and improving teaching of ESL in the areas, establishing national contacts through affiliation with TESOL and providing opportunity for group study/discussion of problems.

To achieve these goals in practical terms, the board hosts the annual fall conference and spring seminar, awards grants, and explores new initiatives, for example.

The Three Rivers TESOL Executive Board is comprised of volunteers, typically those serving the ESL/EFL community, filling the following offices:

| Position              | Commitment   | email                          |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| President             | 1 yr. (not typically elected; filled by rising Vice President)                             | president@threeriverstesol.org |
| <b>Vice President</b> | <b>1 yr. initially (followed by year-long commitments as President and Past President)</b> | vp@threeriverstesol.org        |
| Past President        | 1 yr. (not elected; filled by exiting President)   | pastpres@threeriverstesol.org  |
| <b>Secretary</b>      | <b>2 yr.</b>   | secretary@threeriverstesol.org |
| Treasurer             | 2 yr.  | treasurer@threeriverstesol.org |
| <b>Webmaster</b>      | <b>2 yr.</b>   | webmaster@threeriverstesol.org |

Elections will be held in 2019 for the positions highlighted in bold.

- Vice President: The Vice President 'learns the ropes' to become president and has first choice to attend TESOL Advocacy summit when funding is available.
- The Secretary takes minutes at meetings and assembles contributions for newsletter production
- The Webmaster keeps website / FB page up-to-date and manages membership and conference registration. The Webmaster position is currently being filled by the Interim Webmaster, Megan Reiley. According to the 3RT Constitution, the position must be included in the election for a official assignment of a two-year term.

If you are interested in running for a position, feel free to contact current board members with your questions at the addresses included above.