



## President's Corner



Greetings to you all, and happy August! I hope your summer has offered moments of rest, renewal, and some much-needed sunshine. Whether you're gearing up for a new semester or still savoring these slower days, I'm glad you're taking a moment to connect through this issue of *MITESOL Messages*.

As we look ahead to a new academic year, I know this season can bring change for many. Some of you may be returning to familiar classrooms and programs, while others may be stepping into new roles or exploring different areas of the field. Wherever you are in your journey, I hope you feel connected to the shared purpose that brings us together: supporting and advocating for multilingual learners. Our work may take different forms, but it remains essential.

**MITESOL Conference**

MITESOL continues to be a source of energy and inspiration for me, and I'm excited to share details about our upcoming **2025 MITESOL Conference**, which will take place on **Saturday, November 8 at Eastern Michigan University**. It is hard to believe that this year marks **MITESOL's 50th anniversary**, a remarkable milestone and an opportunity to reflect on the many ways this organization has made a lasting impact on the community of educators dedicated to serving multilingual learners in Michigan and beyond. It has been an honor to serve as President and to be part of hosting this special celebration as we look back on our rich history and look forward to what is possible.

On a personal note, returning to EMU to organize this conference truly feels like coming home. As a proud MA TESOL alum (Class of 2018!) and former ESL lecturer at EMU, I am deeply grateful for the ways the EMU TESOL community has shaped my growth as a TESOL professional. That foundation has guided me through the many roles I have held since graduation and continues to ground my work today. One memory that stands out is from 2018, when I had the privilege of assisting **Dr. Ildikó Porter-Szűcs**, Professor of ESL/TESOL in the Department of World Languages and a former MITESOL President, with that year's conference. It was also held at the EMU Student Center, and it is a joy and an honor to return to that same space this fall.



EMU Student Center | *Photo Credit*

Throughout 2025, the MITESOL Board has been actively preparing for our annual conference. As Chair of the conference, I'm especially grateful to work alongside my Co-Chair, **Frances LaMielle**, whose dedication and collaborative spirit have been invaluable throughout the planning process. I also want to extend my sincere thanks to the entire conference planning committee for their ongoing work and thoughtful contributions as we prepare for this milestone event, and to **Meredith Bricker**, Past President, for her mentorship and steady support throughout the year.

This year, we are especially appreciative of **Andrew Park**, an EMU TESOL undergraduate student who has been supporting the committee as part of his two-credit TESOL professional development summer course. His inquisitiveness, attention to detail, and intentional contributions in graphic design have made a meaningful impact. It has been a joy working with Andrew, and we are excited to have a TESOL student actively involved in the planning process, something we have not had in quite some time. As TESOL students prepare to enter the field, MITESOL not only offers them valuable experience in professional engagement and organizational impact, but they also bring fresh perspectives and renewed energy that inspire and strengthen the work we do.

Our theme, **Elevate, Motivate, Unite**, reflects our shared commitment to supporting multilingual learners in Michigan. Through this theme, we aim to elevate best practices, motivate one another through collaboration and shared learning, and unite our communities to meet the evolving needs and challenges multilingual learners face today.

We are thrilled to kick off the conference on Saturday morning with a keynote by **Dr. Raichle (Raj) Farrelly**, Director of TESOL Certificate Programs and TESOL teacher educator in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her academic interests focus on teacher education, particularly supporting second language teachers of refugee-background students. Her dissertation examined the experiences and challenges of L2 teachers working with adult emergent readers who have had interrupted schooling and limited literacy opportunities. Dr. Farrelly teaches courses on language teaching methods, oral English skills, adult emergent literacy, and pedagogical grammar. She recently completed a three-year term with the TESOL International Association (2022 to 2025) and has presented widely at national and international conferences. One of her co-authored books, *Fostering International Student Success in Higher Education* (with Shawna Shapiro and my dear professor-turned-colleague Zuzana Tomáš), was an important resource during my graduate studies and continues to influence my work with multilingual learners today.

We are also pleased to welcome [Dr. Katie Welch](#) as our luncheon keynote speaker. Dr. Welch is a university instructor, linguist, teacher trainer, and active contributor in the TESOL field. For two decades, she has taught and trained teachers across K-12, adult education, and higher education settings. She spent seven years teaching in the School of Education at UNT-Dallas, where she conducted research in educational linguistics and social-emotional learning and designed award-winning courses. When not in the classroom, Katie provides professional development for ESL teachers through partnerships with Cambridge University Press, Literacy ConneXus, and the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (T-CALL). The U.S. Department of State designated her as an English Language Specialist, selecting her for special projects to train university faculty in Poland (2021) and Turkey (2023). Katie has also contributed extensively to the Dallas-Fort Worth area TESOL community through a lengthy tenure as President and Treasurer of TexTESOLV. She was recently named TexTESOLer of the Year for 2024.

### **MITESOL Conference Registration is Open!**

Registration is now officially open for our 2025 conference, and we can't wait to welcome you to Eastern Michigan University on November 8. Join us for an engaging in-person conference focused on strengthening our teaching and learning communities. Together, we will explore strategies to foster collaboration and support that extend beyond our classrooms and institutions. For more details and to register, please visit [our website](#) or go directly to [this page](#). **Early bird registration is open through September 30.**

Our conference will feature a full schedule of live, in-person concurrent sessions designed to help us learn from one another and grow as educators. You'll also find an advocacy table and plenty of opportunities to network with fellow attendees and exhibitors. Attendees can look forward to excellent food and refreshments throughout the day.

### **Pre-Conference Networking Event: MITE-SOcial: This is 50!**

To kick off the conference, we will be hosting a pre-conference mixer on the evening of **Friday, November 7, 2025, from 6 to 9 p.m. at Eastern Michigan University**. This event will also serve as the launch of our 50th-anniversary celebration.

The mixer is open to all conference attendees and offers a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and make new connections. We will celebrate MITESOL's history with a photo display, slideshow, and a fun trivia activity. If you have any photos, stories, or reflections from your time with MITESOL, we would be grateful if you would consider sharing them to help us honor our past together. Light refreshments and drinks will be served. More information about this event will be available soon. Please mark your calendars now.

Finally, in accordance with MITESOL bylaws, I will continue to serve my year-long term as President until the business meeting at the upcoming conference, where I will pass leadership to our President-Elect and Conference Co-Chair, **Frances LaMielle**. Reflecting on this past year and MITESOL's 50-year legacy of advancing English teaching and advocating for multilingual learners across Michigan, I am deeply grateful for the dedicated board members and colleagues I've had the honor to work alongside. Their collaborative spirit and tireless dedication have not only inspired me but enriched my professional growth. It has been a true pleasure to serve, and I look forward to seeing our community continue to elevate, motivate, and unite as we support the future of multilingual learners and TESOL professionals across Michigan and beyond.

On behalf of the entire MITESOL Board, we wish all our members a successful start to the fall semester. We look forward to seeing you soon!

#### **Alexandra**

President & 2025 Conference Chair | [mitesol.org](#)

Assistant Academic Director, Michigan Language Center | [mlc.edu](#)

Email: [president@mitesol.org](mailto:president@mitesol.org)

Website: <https://www.mitesol.org>

Socials:



#### From the Editor



*Hello MITESOLers!*



Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to spend time with friends in the Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin hiking on a “waterfall tour”, visiting four waterfalls over eight days. I noticed that each one had a unique rhythm and flow. Watching how water carved new paths reminded me of our work as English language teachers: guiding learners, adapting to different needs, and creating spaces where ideas can flourish.

Fifteen years ago, as a first semester MA TESOL graduate student at EMU, I attended and volunteered my very first MITESOL conference at the encouragement of **Dr. Wendy Wang**, Professor of ESL/TESOL in the Department of World Languages. At the time, I

thought this was a small, local event put on by the TESOL professors at Eastern, not realizing it was much bigger than that! I still remember the excitement of connecting with colleagues and discovering new ideas. This year, we return to that same campus—and it feels like coming full circle, reflecting on how much our community has grown over 50 years. It also gives me an opportunity to reflect on how much I have grown and how my teacher training prepared me for my professional journey. Just as each waterfall contributes to the strength of a river, every member, past and present, has shaped our organization and its journey.

Kristin Homuth

MITESOL Messages Newsletter Editor | [newsletter-editor@mitesol.org](mailto:newsletter-editor@mitesol.org)

Graduate Studies Language and Learning Support Specialist, College for Creative Studies | [ccsdetroit.edu](#)



*Bond Falls, Ontonagon County, MI*

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### SUGGESTION BOX



If you have any [questions, comments, or suggestions](#) about [MITESOL Messages](#), please use this [Google Form](#) to leave anonymous feedback.

## MITESOL

### More Updates from the Board



#### President-Elect Updates

Happy August! I hope everyone has been able to enjoy some rest, relaxation, and time with friends and family over the summer.

This year as President-Elect is really flying by. I am so thankful to be working alongside Alexandra and Meredith. They are truly a wealth of experience and information and collaborating with them has really been a gift. Having been brand new to the board when I was elected, I especially appreciate their patience and support.

I'd like to mark some of the highlights of my MITESOL throughout 2025 thus far.

- On March 19th, MITESOL hosted a reception during the TESOL 2025 conference in Long Beach, California. We had a great time enjoying delicious middle eastern food at Ammatoli. We were fortunate to host 15 people including IATEFL Poland representative Anna Gebka-Suska, SummitK12's Vice President of Strategic Partnerships Benny Soto, and 2025 MITESOL keynote speaker Dr. Katie Welch.



MITESOL Reception at TESOL 2025



From left to right, MITESOL Past President Meredith Bricker, Dr. Ildiko Porter Szucs (EMU), Anna Gebka-Suska (IATEFL-Poland), and MITESOL President-Elect Frances LaMiel.

- MITESOL's annual webinar this year was on April 23rd and was focused on advocacy in reaction to rapid policy changes implemented by the Trump administration. The "Know Your Rights" presentation was led by Maggie Haveman-Gould, Program Director & Co-Executive Director at Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates (LIA) and attorney William Trenary former Staff Attorney at LIA. Bill and Maggie were extremely informative. MITESOL is grateful to have had Burlington English and News Readers Press as sponsors for the webinar this year.
- Past President Meredith Bricker and I attended the Newcomer Summit hosted by Michigan Association for Bilingual Education (M.A.B.E.) and the Michigan Department of Education's Special Populations Unit. The summit was at the Kellogg Center on the campus of Michigan State University. As is always the case when I'm at MSU, it's fun to reminisce about my time as a graduate student. I had the best time meeting new people, running into old friends, and learning. Just being in a large group of like minded people was really uplifting and filled my bucket.

Over the summer we've really amped up our work to prepare for the conference in November. We are so excited to be celebrating MITESOL's 50th anniversary this year and have some fun things in the works! Please consider joining us on Friday evening, November 7th, for our 50th Anniversary celebration. We are so thankful this year to have Anthony Taylor back as a volunteer to help the planning committee. Anthony is a former board member and served as Professional Development SIG Leader.

For this year's conference, we have some phenomenal invited speakers:

- Kelly Alvarez, Michigan Department of Education's Special Populations Unit English Learner Consultant.
- Dr. Ildiko Porter-Szucs Professor of ESL/TESOL, Eastern Michigan University; longtime MITESOL leader, having served as Newsletter Co-Editor, Treasurer, Secretary, and President. Her session was voted Best of Affiliate Presentation at last year's conference.
- Dr. Charlene Polio, Michigan State University Professor in the department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures Second Language Studies. Dr. Polio specializes in the area of second language writing and research methodology.
- Dr. Pam Schwallier Director of EL & Bilingual Programs, West Ottawa Schools

I wish you all the best as we head into the 2025-26 school year and I'm looking forward to connecting in person and learning alongside you at our 50th anniversary conference!

Frances LaMielle

President-Elect, MITESOL | [president-elect@mitesol.org](mailto:president-elect@mitesol.org)

Multilingual Learner Teacher Consultant, DeWitt Public Schools | <https://www.dewittschools.net>



### Past President Updates

Dear MITESOL Friends and Colleagues,

What a pleasure it has been to serve as President and Past President of MITESOL! I feel so fortunate to have gained a welcoming and dedicated community of colleagues and friends during my time in these roles. I'm proud to have played my own small part in the strong traditions of advocacy and professional development that have been upheld and nurtured by this organization over the past fifty years, and I'm thankful for the influence of so many previous generations that continues to help us all in the development of our profession.

For many of us in the field, this past year has been tumultuous. We have experienced uncertainty and loss in our professional lives and great concern about so many of our students. In the face of these challenges throughout the year, I've come to rely on the strength and motivation I receive when I unite in community with others. MITESOL, with its many events and activities planned by fellow educators and advocates, has been an ongoing source of positive community for me. I wonder if you, like me, are seeking ways to build community. Have MITESOL events provided community for you? I hope the recap I share below provides future community-building ideas for all of us as we move forward together.

Our largest event of the year is of course our annual fall conference, and I can't wait for this year's November 8-9, 2025 conference at Eastern Michigan University, which is the culmination of many months of hard work from the conference committee and especially co-chairs Alexandra and Fran! These conferences offer a unique opportunity to learn through informative workshops, presentations, and discussions, and as always, there will be opportunities to gather with colleagues from your particular interest section (K-12, post-secondary, or adult education), discuss many relevant topics, and advocate for our learners.

Other sources of in-person connection available to MITESOLers throughout the year include additional conference and advocacy opportunities. Many of you have attended the Newcomer Summit, a day of summer professional development held in collaboration among MITESOL, the Michigan Association for Bilingual Education (MABE), the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), and the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO). Perhaps you will be our next MITESOLer to engage with our every-other-year opportunity (coming again soon in 2026!) for one MITESOLer to travel and present at IATEFL Poland on behalf of the partnership between us. MITESOLers also gather together in Washington DC in the summer to attend TESOL Advocacy Action Days, where we meet with TESOL advocates from around the country to express our legislative priorities to the U.S. Senators' and Representatives' offices from our state.

While I am grateful for those vital professional development and advocacy events, I also gain valuable community from MITESOL's planned social gatherings. At the 2024 conference, it was wonderful to re-start MITESOL's two-day conference tradition by enjoying some food and drink with many of you at our Friday night reception, and I hope you'll join us again for this year's Friday night pre-conference event at EMU! MITESOL boasts a long-standing tradition at the annual International TESOL Convention in which we convene at a local restaurant for a MITESOL Reception in the host city, most recently Long Beach, Tampa, and Portland. If you'll be attending Big TESOL in 2026, look for information at the beginning of 2026 about the MITESOL Reception we'll host in Salt Lake City! I've really enjoyed these chances to get connected and meet new folks over a delicious meal, and I hope we can add in more casual get-togethers in the future.

Virtual meet-ups hold a vital role in facilitating MITESOL's community. I particularly want to highlight our annual (free for members!) spring webinar event which is put on by our webinar committee, and the monthly advocacy meetings which were hosted by Sharon Umlor, our Advocacy and Policy Coordinator, during 2024. We also can't forget the unique role our social media connections give us. Are you connected with us on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn? There are other asynchronous online ways to connect with MITESOL – you may want to consider working with our Newsletter Editor, Kristin Homuth, writing an article for our biannual newsletter, MITESOL Messages, or connecting with our MITESOL Journal editors to submit a research article to our internationally-read journal. Each of these channels provides access to and correspondence with fellow Michiganders in our profession.

You may want to consider a MITESOL leadership position as a way to build your professional community! Board members meet four times a year, our webinar and conference committees meet once a month, and our communications team also meet once or twice a month. These meet-ups add up to lots of connections and community, and I'm thankful for the relationships that have been built from these opportunities. (Check out our current board vacancies at [this link](#) if you may like to join us!)

Our three-member presidential team (President-Elect, President, and Past-President) has benefited from the additional community that goes along with our leadership roles. We meet weekly to discuss MITESOL business, and we've had unique opportunities to join with the wider International and state TESOL community - attending TESOL's affiliate leadership workshops and working with members of MABE, MDE, and LEO on the Newcomer Summit Planning Committee. As I transition off of the board in November and a newly-elected President-Elect joins this group, I will greatly miss this special and memorable time we have spent together and the friendships I've gained from it, even while I look forward to seeing what the future holds from MITESOL from the new relationships that develop in our leadership! Are you a future MITESOL President? Talk with one of us to learn more!

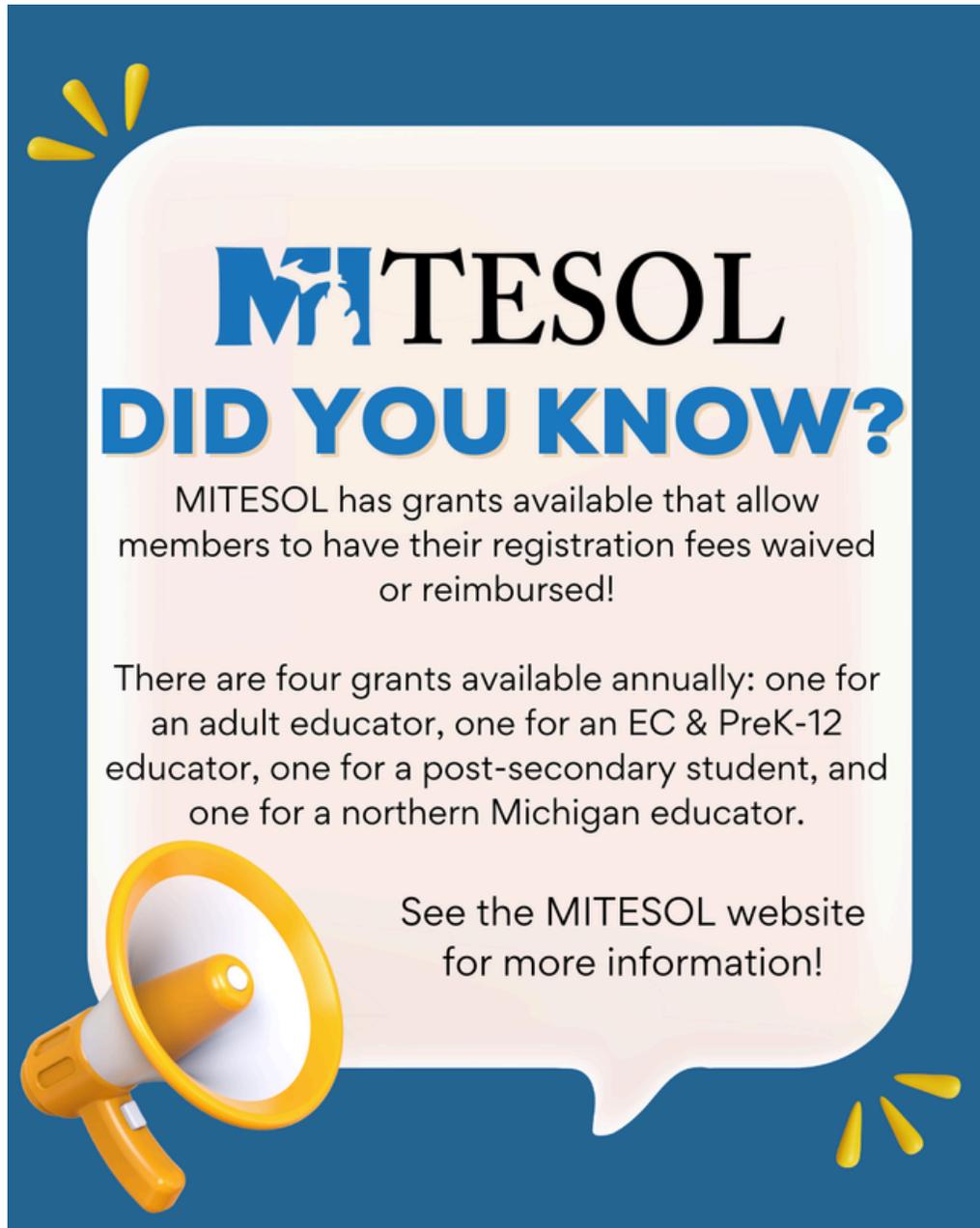
I want to thank the many MITESOL members I've had the chance to collaborate with and learn from in the past year, and I look forward to developing my place in this community in new ways after I conclude my leadership role in November. With all the diverse representation that MITESOLers have across the TESOL community, I hope that you too have felt this sense of community when you interact with our professional organization. May the coming year provide you with the community and renewing connections you need to strengthen and motivate you to move through the days ahead.

Thank you, MITESOL members!

Meredith Bricker

Past-President and 2024 Conference Chair | [past-president@mitesol.org](mailto:past-president@mitesol.org)

Lecturer - University of Michigan, English Language Institute | <https://lsa.umich.edu/eli>



**MITESOL**  
**DID YOU KNOW?**

MITESOL has grants available that allow members to have their registration fees waived or reimbursed!

There are four grants available annually: one for an adult educator, one for an EC & PreK-12 educator, one for a post-secondary student, and one for a northern Michigan educator.

See the MITESOL website for more information!

## Secretary Updates

Jennifer Bashara

Secretary, MITESOL | [secretary@mitesol.org](mailto:secretary@mitesol.org)

- The Board is preparing for the 50th Anniversary 2025 MITESOL Conference, November 8 at Eastern Michigan University
- Welcome to New Board Members!
  - Karyn Goven, Conference Exhibits Manager
  - Maria Lograsso, K12 IS Leader
  - Christy Osborne, Advocacy and Policy Coordinator
- The Board is continuing to recruit for Webmaster, Treasurer and Adult Ed Interest Section leaders (Contact a Board member if you are interested!)
- The Board Members' business meeting will be held during lunch at the conference and by-laws will be voted on

## Advocacy Coordinator Updates

Christy Osborne

Advocacy Coordinator, MITESOL | [advocacy@mitesol.org](mailto:advocacy@mitesol.org)

I am thrilled to be joining the MITESOL board as Advocacy Coordinator. In our field, educators and leaders naturally lead advocacy efforts for immigrants and multilingual students. In this moment, it is imperative that our MITESOL community stand together for equitable change in federal and state policy and practice: continued funding for English Learner programs (i.e., Title III, section 41 and migrant), immigrant rights, and equipping districts and universities to protect and serve students and families. In this role, I hope to lead advocacy efforts alongside our MITESOL community, uniting our voices and expertise as a lever for collective change. Please feel free to contact me: [advocacy@mitesol.org](mailto:advocacy@mitesol.org)

Christy Osborne has served in various roles dedicated to educating K-12 English Learners (ELs) and supporting ELD Programs at the district and county levels. As an English Language Development (ELD) consultant at Oakland Schools Intermediate School District, Christy is an advocate for educational excellence, equity and opportunity for K-12 multilingual learners and families. As part of the leadership and continuous improvement unit, she consults with schools with high incidence EL populations who are identified through State Systems of Support. She earned her Master's degree in Linguistics with a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) endorsement from Oakland University.

## Farewell to Outgoing Board Members!

The Board would like to thank Sharon Umlor, Advocacy and Policy Coordinator, and Austyn Sabin, Treasurer, for their dedicated service to MITESOL over the years. They will both be missed!



## Updates from the Field

### *EMU and MITESOL: A 50-Year Legacy of Leadership and Community*

Jo Ann Aebersold, Betsy Morgan, Wendy Wang, and Ildi Porter-Szucs, EMU ESL/TESOL Faculty and former MITESOL Presidents

The 2025 MITESOL Conference at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) is not just a celebration of MITESOL's 50th anniversary—it's also a moment to recognize EMU's deep, enduring role in shaping and sustaining this professional community. From the beginning, EMU's ESL/TESOL program has been instrumental in building MITESOL's identity, reach, and impact across Michigan and beyond.

We at EMU have contributed to MITESOL at every level. Our undergraduate and graduate students have regularly served as volunteers and presenters, and our faculty and alumni have consistently stepped into leadership roles. In fact, **ten** EMU-affiliated ESL/TESOL professionals have served as MITESOL presidents and as conference chairs:

| Year of Presidency | President           | Year EMU Hosted Conference     |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1984               | Cathy Day           | 1983                           |
| 1986               | Patrick Buckheister | 1985                           |
| 1988               | Jo Ann Aebersold    | 1989 (co-chair with Cathy Day) |
| 1996               | Betsy Morgan        | 1995                           |
| 2008               | Lisa Hutchison      | 2007                           |
| 2011               | Wendy Wang          | 2010                           |
| 2019               | Ildi Porter-Szucs   | 2018                           |
| 2020               | Liz Sirman          | 2020                           |
| 2022               | Jennifer Musser     | 2022                           |
| 2025               | Alexandra Covell    | 2025                           |

**Betsy** shared vivid snapshots from her time on the board and as president in the 1990s.

*During my vice presidency, I coordinated two conferences—the second one at the EMU-owned Marriott Conference Center in Ypsilanti (then known as Eagle Crest). I remember managing logistics, dealing with last-minute hotel name changes, and attending with my infant son in tow.*

*As president, I advocated for ESL certification in Michigan, working alongside Cathy Day, Nancy Schewe, Jackie Moase-Burke, and Sandra Hagman. I testified in Lansing and helped navigate the proposal through a complex approval process. I also served as Higher Education Special Interest Group leader, Newsletter Editor, and Membership Coordinator—roles that required sending physical letters and checks, in the early days of email.*

*MITESOL was invaluable as to me a professional organization, but also as a supportive, friendly community. I still have close friends whom I met at MITESOL.*



Three MITESOL presidents with EMU connections: Wendy Wang (second from left), Ildi Porter-Szucs (third from right), Liz Sirman (right)

**Wendy** chaired the 2010 MITESOL Conference at EMU, which coincided with MITESOL's 35th anniversary.

*Though many of the materials are now locked away on old, inaccessible computers, I still have the hard copy of the 2010 program, listing past presidents—including Cathy, Jo Ann, and Betsy—and marking the long history of EMU's influence.*

*My path to leadership led through the Professional Development Special Interest Group, a role also held by Cathy and Betsy before me. Others at EMU who contributed heavily to making MITESOL great have included James Perren (then EMU ESL/TESOL faculty) and Kay Stremler (then EMU ESL lecturer), who co-chaired the 2010 conference with me. They did an incredible job to ensure the quality of the conference, and their attention to detail made it possible for the conference to run smoothly. James also played a foundational role in launching the MITESOL Conference Proceedings. Kim Anderson (then EMU ESL Program Director) was heavily involved in MITESOL as Secretary and presenter.*

*For me, the conference was a microcosm of EMU's ongoing commitment to MITESOL: a walk down memory lane of MITESOL is a proud reminder of the various roles EMU ESL/TESOL faculty, lecturers, graduate/undergraduate students, and alumni have played in building and strengthening MITESOL... from grassroots participation to top-level leadership.*

**Ildi** oversaw MITESOL's transition from the membership management site Wild Apricot to SilkStart and a shift in how leadership roles were distributed. Reversing the organizational roles of President-Elect and President, the President-Elect became responsible for organizing the MITESOL reception at TESOL as a warm-up for the real deal: organizing the annual conference. Going forward, the President took over conference chairing responsibilities, with the incoming President-Elect assisting as co-chair—a change that required a much-appreciated double-duty commitment from Tina Kozlowski and Colleen Brice.

But the most memorable part of the 2018 EMU-hosted conference was the student leadership. Thanks to EMU graduate TESOL student Mary Tillotson's idea of offering course credit for professional engagement, more than a dozen graduate and undergraduate students helped design and run the conference from the ground up.

Their work resulted in a groundbreaking pre-conference day with two professional development strands: one led by K–12 teachers, and another for post-secondary professionals. This included workshops on inclusive practices like how to pronounce students' names and a panel led by Wendy Wang and Betsy Morgan featuring international TESOL students.

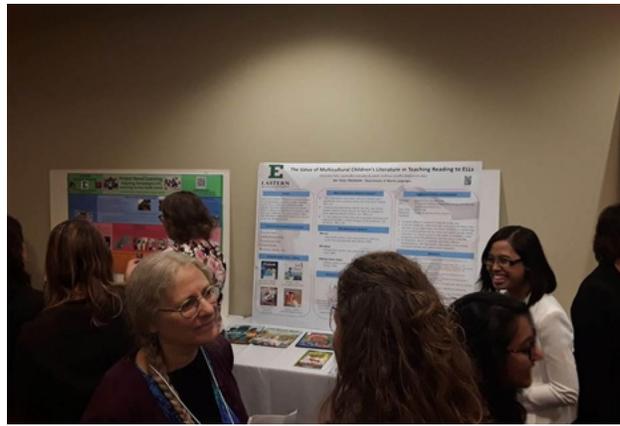
Our students filled key leadership roles: Jennifer Musser managed venue logistics, Margita designed the conference booklet, Anna Burbo Tu created the logo, and others organized entertainment, including a salsa session with live music and instruction. The event drew 400 participants from around the world.



A core group of graduate and undergraduate EMU TESOL students thinking through the workflow of conference organization led by conference chair Ildi Porter-Szucs in 2018. From top left: Amelia Barnard, Ildi Porter-Szucs, Heather Sanchez, Silvija Marnicovic, Hannah Reynolds, Sierra Johnson, and bottom row from left: Amie Van Horn Gabel, Mary Tillotson, Jennifer Musser, Jill McDonald, and Margita Vojtkulakova Kamaj.



*All hands on deck: EMU TESOL graduate and undergraduate students preparing for the 2018 conference.*



*From EMU TESOL student to MITESOL President Alexandra Covell and co-presenter Judith Hoffman talking to attendees at their poster session. Alexandra has gone from an MA TESOL student and presenter in 2018 to the MITESOL President in 2025.*

What is remarkable about us—EMU ESL/TESOL and MITESOL folks—is that we turn challenges into opportunities. The geopolitical landscape around us is in constant flux, but together we continue to do good. EMU’s ESL/TESOL program and its alumni have served as a steady pillar within MITESOL’s 50-year history and we will continue to do so in the next 50 years.

### *Fast Track or Deep Dive? Comparing My TEFL Certification and TESOL Major*

Erica Lowe  
Eastern Michigan University  
[elowe5@emich.edu](mailto:elowe5@emich.edu) | [ericaloweo3@gmail.com](mailto:ericaloweo3@gmail.com)

I’ve known that I wanted to teach abroad since I was in high school. Back then, I often came across debates about whether a degree in any subject would be enough to secure a teaching job or if a quick online TEFL certification would be enough. Since I ended up pursuing both, I’ve gained firsthand insight into how different these two paths are.

I am currently an undergraduate TESOL major with an English Linguistics minor at Eastern Michigan University, but before diving into my degree program, I decided to enroll in an online TEFL certification course. My goal was to familiarize myself with the field and strengthen my résumé while I worked toward graduation.

Studying TESOL at the university level has been an in-depth exploration of everything language-related. It’s not just about learning how to teach English; it involves studying linguistics, phonetics, and second language acquisition. As I embark on this journey, I’ve encountered research papers and theory-heavy classes, but I’ve also had opportunities to put what I’m learning into practice. Even more opportunities for enrichment and growth as a teacher are ahead of me with methods, internship, and assessment class as well as possibly studying abroad. Just within my first semester as a TESOL major, I already feel more confident in my ability to teach. The structured, in-depth instruction I’m receiving is continuously expanding my knowledge, refining my teaching approach, and shaping my beliefs about language education.

On the other hand, earning my online TEFL certification has been a completely different experience. It was highly flexible and not time-consuming at all. I could complete lessons at my own pace, and the course covered essential topics like lesson planning, classroom management, and teaching grammar. However, unlike my TESOL program, the TEFL course lacked hands-on teaching experience, and the feedback I received was minimal. While it was a quick way to obtain a certification, it didn’t offer the same depth of knowledge or practical experience that my TESOL program provides.

The most important people in English language teaching are of course our students! What about their perspective? Do they have a preference for a TESOL-trained teacher over a TEFL-trained teacher? I was curious about this so I asked a few English learners to share their thoughts. A 21 year-old university graduate from South Korea said “Well, I’d trust an experienced teacher the most. But if I had to chose, I’d trust a teacher with a TESOL degree a little more.” A business man working in international trade from Uzbekistan said “I’d go with a teacher who has a TESOL degree. It feels more solid and professional.” An undergrad architecture major from Slovakia told me: “It doesn’t matter to a learner. I’ve never heard of these certificates before you mentioned them. All that matter is if you can teach.” From this slightly mixed bag of answers, I think the main takeaway is that skills, knowledge, and experience might play a bigger role than degrees and certifications.

So, which one is better? Honestly, it depends on what you’re looking for. If your goal is to start teaching as soon as possible and you don’t necessarily need an in-depth education, an online TEFL course is a solid option, not to mention the fact that many employers only require their teachers to hold some level of a TEFL certificate. However, for me personally, I am serious about building a long-term career in teaching English, and a TESOL degree is absolutely worth the investment. Having experienced both, I can definitely say that each has its place. A TEFL certification is great for getting started quickly, but for truly mastering the craft of teaching, nothing compares to the depth of a TESOL program.

### *From Michigan to the Capitol: Advocating for English Learners at TESOL Advocacy Action Days 2025*

Carrie Machkouri, M.A. TESOL  
MITESOL - Membership Coordinator | Literacy Center of West Michigan - IET and Systems Coordinator  
[cmachkouri@literacycenterwm.org](mailto:cmachkouri@literacycenterwm.org)

#### **Introduction**

In June, I had the honor of representing MITESOL at TESOL Advocacy Action Days 2025 in Washington, D.C., serving as MITESOL’s affiliate representative with guidance from our outgoing Advocacy Coordinator, Sharon Umlor. As an adult ESL instructor who believes in connecting learners to resources that support their goals, advocacy felt like a natural extension of that.

This year's event felt especially urgent given current threats to key programs like WIOA/IELCE for adults and ESSA Title III for K–12 students. Policy decisions directly impact program funding, service delivery, and accessibility for the communities we serve.

### **Day on the Hill: Meetings with Legislators**

I met with five congressional staffers, four in person and one virtually, visiting offices of Senator Gary Peters, Representative Hillary Scholten (my district), Representative Tim Walberg, and Representative Lisa McClain, plus a virtual meeting with Senator Elissa Slotkin's staff. I specifically chose Representatives Walberg and McClain because they sit on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which oversees much of the legislation relevant to our field.

The day before meetings, I participated in full-day training alongside TESOL professionals from nearly all 50 states, reviewing pressing federal issues and practicing message development. I'm grateful for mentorship from Sharon Umlor, MITESOL's former Advocacy Coordinator, who helped me prepare tailored leave-behind materials about the needs of our students and learners across Michigan.

I advocated for sustained, timely funding for two critical federal programs:

**ESSA Title III** supports language instruction for English learners in K–12 settings, ensuring equitable access to high-quality education while meeting rigorous academic standards. These funds support bilingual programs, instructional staff, professional development, and family engagement.

**WIOA Title II (AEFLA)** provides funding for adult education programs, including Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE). This supports English language learners in developing language skills while preparing for employment and civic participation through workforce and career pathway programming. Staffers responded with curiosity and thoughtful questions, expressing surprise at funding delays and indicating follow-up plans. Many noted both programs have historically received strong bipartisan support, reinforcing their wide-reaching community value.

### **Ground-Level Impact: Why These Issues Matter**

Walking congressional halls, I carried more than data, I carried real learner stories. Federal legislation may feel abstract, but its impact is visible daily in classrooms and enrollment numbers. We remember students arriving at first ESL classes with nervous smiles, learners mastering job interviews or citizenship tests, parents learning to advocate for their children at school.

Advocacy becomes real through these stories. Delayed funding doesn't just affect spreadsheets, it affects whether classes run, programs hire qualified instructors, or newly arrived immigrants access needed English skills.

### **What's at Stake Right Now**

The need for advocacy continues beyond the June event. Growing concern over delayed funding allocations for both Title III and Title II persists. Without timely appropriations, programs nationwide delay class starts, pause hiring, or scale back services, particularly affecting immigrant and refugee learners who depend on English instruction for work, education, and community access.

More concerning, plans for next year's allocations are underway with potential further cuts looming for the communities that rely most on these services. Decisions made in coming weeks will directly affect programming scope and strength in the year ahead, impacting K–12, adult education, and post-secondary settings.

TESOL International continues monitoring the situation and providing real-time updates. As ground-level educators, we must keep these issues visible and urgent for elected officials. We cannot wait. We must act now to ensure federal investments in English learners remain a national priority.

### **Call to Action**

As educators, we are powerful advocates in both classrooms and the public sphere. Though TESOL's Advocacy Days have passed, conversations continue. Plans for next year's federal allocations are underway, and without active engagement, funding could be slashed further from programs serving those most in need.

Whether sharing a learner's story, signing petitions, or emailing congressional representatives, advocacy is within everyone's reach. Practical resources and tools are available through TESOL International's Advocacy Center to help you take the next step.

Keep up-to-date on current happenings and key resources from TESOL International: <https://www.tesol.org/advocacy/advocacy-resources/>  
Visit their Advocacy Center to easily find and send messages to your representatives: <https://www.tesol.org/advocacy/advocacy-action-center/>  
Read more information about key issues in our field: [bit.ly/2ESOL\\_KeyIssues2025](https://bit.ly/2ESOL_KeyIssues2025)

### **Closing Reflection**

As educators of English learners, advocacy is not a separate part of our role, it is woven into every interaction, every lesson plan, every intake meeting. We advocate when we interpret policies for our learners, when we hold space for their stories, and when we speak up in rooms where their voices are not always heard.

While formal advocacy days like TESOL's Advocacy Days help elevate our collective voice, everyday advocacy - quiet, consistent, and community-rooted - is just as vital. We don't all have to go to Washington, D.C., but we all have a role to play.

Let this be a reminder that policy is personal. The decisions made at the state and national level ripple into our classrooms and programs. As funding conversations unfold for next year, we must stay alert, stay connected, and stay committed to the learners we serve.

Our learners' stories are powerful. So is yours.

## *Life After Your Graduate Degree: How does life look after a Ph.D.?*

Amira Ashraf Eldemerdash  
Western Michigan University  
[socialmedia@mitesol.org](mailto:socialmedia@mitesol.org)

One would think that a person who's been working on their doctoral degree for a minimum of three to seven years would have a really good idea of how they would like their future to look. However, it's not as simple as it seems.

Now that I'm taking my summer vacation, and I can truly say this is the first real vacation I've had in the last seven years, I find myself reflecting. I mention those seven years because I started my MA in TESOL in 2018, graduated in 2020, and then decided to pursue my Ph.D. right away without taking a break. That decision was based on the fact that I knew I'd rather start working on my degree; if I had started a job, it would have been a really hard decision to return to school.

As I reflect on my own experience as a new Ph.D. holder in the field of education, I realize how hard it is to imagine what the future will look like. That realization comes from a number of different factors, some deeply personal, and others shaped by the socio-economic circumstances we're living in under the current administration.

### **Number One: Academia or No Academia**

This is one of the main decisions that every Ph.D. student wrestles with at different stages of their journey: whether to stay in academia or to pursue a career elsewhere.

As someone who has always loved teaching and wanted to do my own research, I knew from the get-go that I wanted to be in academia. However, I also realize that this choice comes at a very heavy price. I've always appreciated someone who knows exactly where they're headed, especially when it has to do with teaching. Like, you have to know, right? Do you want to teach?

And that's a loaded question, one packed with all the responsibilities and tasks that come with teaching as a profession. But it's not just teaching. It's research, applying for grants, holding office hours, adapting curriculum, and fulfilling faculty service commitments.

In the last year and a half of my degree, as I started looking at the job market, I began to understand just how difficult it is to land a tenure-track position. So, I'd say that anyone aspiring to be in academia needs to be aware of the challenges it holds, especially if you're aiming for a tenure-track role. The truth is, you might end up wherever the job takes you.

### **Number Two: To Postdoc or Not to Postdoc**

Another option I've seriously considered is doing a postdoc. The thought of being able to learn again feels really attractive to me. I could be hired to do a job similar to what I've already been doing as a research assistant, while still learning new things and applying that knowledge in new ways.

In addition to that, being a postdoc can be valuable beyond just learning, it can be a great environment for networking, publishing, working under a well-known scholar or a strong program, and building a more focused research agenda.

It's worth noting, though, that the salary or stipend allocated for postdocs is kind of similar to what a grad assistant makes. So you need to be aware that you'll be "almost" a student again in that sense. That's why so many Ph.D.s decide not to pursue one, because of the financial constraints and the desire for more stability, especially since most postdocs only last a year or two.

As for me, I haven't totally ruled it out. I truly believe a postdoc could open doors I can't yet imagine, and if the right opportunity came along, with the right balance of support, learning, and funding, I'd still consider it.

### **Number Three: Industry**

I've heard it over and over again from fellow grad students, those who were absolutely certain about what they wanted to do with their future careers. For many, industry represented stability, clarity, routine even, and possibly tangible outcomes in ways academia often couldn't guarantee. The difference in pay between academia and industry/consulting/administrative work can be quite significant, and it often becomes a deciding factor for those seeking financial stability after years of graduate school (Yes, being a poor student for many years).

It's true that a job in industry can offer more stability, better pay, and sometimes even more work-life balance compared to academic positions. There are also growing opportunities for people with PhDs in areas like educational consulting, nonprofit work, edtech, curriculum design, program evaluation, and policy work.

Still, for someone like me, who genuinely enjoys teaching and the energy of a classroom, industry feels like a possibility, but not quite a passion. I think the hard part is knowing how to transfer your academic skills in a way that feels authentic and still meaningful. And honestly, I'm still figuring that out.

### **Number Four: Take a Break**

What about taking a break after grad school? Doesn't that sound good?

To some, it sure does. Every student who has just been through a PhD surely deserves a real break. And I'm not talking about a long weekend in the next town over, I mean an actual, extended break with no work and no responsibilities at all.

But can everyone afford that kind of break?

With the current economy, it seems harder than ever. Rent is high, student loans are real, and the job market is unpredictable. And yet, the emotional and mental toll of grad school doesn't just vanish after defense day. There's often burnout, identity confusion, and just sheer exhaustion.

So while a break might not be feasible for everyone, I think we need to normalize the idea that rest can be part of the plan, not just a reward for productivity. Even if it's just a few months to breathe, read for pleasure, travel, or just be still, it matters.

To sum up, there are different routes one can take after graduate school. There's no right or wrong choice, it simply depends on what your priorities are. Personally, I'm happy to say that I'm enjoying a much-needed summer break here in Michigan. We deserve to celebrate our achievements, take slower steps, and think ahead. I'm spending time with my family, taking time to breathe, doing a few interviews, and reflecting carefully on my next big steps.

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Originally from Alexandria, Egypt, Amira came to Michigan in 2017 to teach her first language, Arabic, at the World Languages department at Western Michigan University as a Fulbright scholar. Currently, she is an instructor at the College of Education and Human Development at WMU. Her research interests include teaching English to refugees and immigrants, culturally responsive teaching and learner/teacher identity.

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### *TESOL as Decolonial Meta-Pedagogy: Reclaiming Human-Centered Learning in the Age of AI*

Shahied A. Shabazz Mujahid, MA TESOL  
Eastern Michigan University  
[sshabaza@emich.edu](mailto:sshabaza@emich.edu)

My fellow and dear TESOL colleagues and comrades, the contemporary moment demands that we rise as vanguards of educational transformation, boldly reimagining our work not as a narrow discipline, but as a site of revolutionary praxis. In this spirit, I call upon us to reconceptualize Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as a Meta-Pedagogical Praxis. This transformative framework transcends the mechanics of language instruction. This approach situates TESOL at the heart of revolutionary pedagogical and ethical engagement with the profound challenges posed by automation, commodification, and technological encroachment. We are not merely instructors; we are builders of agency, shapers of identity, and protectors of human dignity. The time has come to treat our pedagogy not as peripheral, but as a foundational pedagogical model for 21st-century education.

#### **Master's TESOL program at Eastern Michigan University**

I'm a proud graduate of the Master's TESOL program at Eastern Michigan University, and I truly can't say enough about the experience. It far exceeded my expectations! When I was applying to the program, in one of the admissions correspondence emails, for some reason, one of my professors, Dr. Porter-Szucs, who was apparently involved in admissions, had written, "You can do this." I don't know what prompted her to say that, but it had a profound effect on me. Perhaps she recognized that I had been away from academia for some time and was returning as an adult learner. But those four words stayed with me. They gave me the motivation not only to complete the program but to continue.

I am now a doctoral student in the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University, and that early encouragement still grounds me. This moment also reflects the emotional and empathetic involvement often inherent in TESOL educators, whose work extends beyond instruction into the realm of relational, motivational, and emotional support. Given the sensitive and deeply personal nature of language learning, especially for ESL students navigating identity, belonging, and self-expression, this kind of support becomes not only impactful but essential.

Since graduating and returning to teach in Detroit Public Schools, I have realized how transformative this program has been. It did not just reshape how I approach English learners; it changed my pedagogy as a whole. In fact, I developed a strategy for addressing literacy deficiencies among African-American students in the inner city by applying principles of

TESOL pedagogy, specifically EFL. English as a Foreign Language pedagogy has specific nuances that apply to second language learning in an environment where the target language is not spoken. Because in many ways, teaching academic English in the Black community is similar to teaching English in a non-English-speaking country. Many African American students are not immersed in or exposed to the target language of formal academic discourse at all. That insight allowed me to use differentiation strategies, project-based learning, and communicative approaches from ESL/EFL TESOL pedagogy to meet students where they are and build from there, linguistically, culturally, and academically.

Additionally, I have come to see that TESOL pedagogy offers a practical and human-centered framework for navigating the challenges and opportunities of AI in education. The field has always emphasized the importance of real communication, interaction, context, and authentic human connection. These are precisely the elements that AI, for all its capabilities, cannot fully replicate. AI tools can certainly assist by providing instant feedback, translation support, language modeling, and more. However, they cannot replace the cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, adaptive differentiation, and relationship-building, as well as the progressive socio-cultural and social political consciousness that effective TESOL educators bring into the classroom. ESL/EFL/ TESOL pedagogy prepares teachers to be critical users of technology, not passive adopters. It teaches us to see AI as a tool to enhance human instruction, not a substitute for it.

TESOL pedagogy, with its emphasis on scaffolding, checking for understanding, and fostering meaningful dialogue, offers more than instructional strategies; it provides pedagogical and ethical guardrails in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence. These practices affirm that language education is not merely the transfer of information but a deeply human endeavor rooted in growth, identity, and empowerment. Indeed, the principles of ESL/EFL/ TESOL can make educators more responsive and reflective, not only for English learners but for all students. Comprehensive ESL/EFL/ TESOL pedagogical training equips educators to confront systemic inequities, navigate technological shifts, and remain grounded in the core humanistic values of teaching.



*The author at his MA TESOL graduation*

## **TESOL as a Meta-Pedagogical Praxis**

I am fundamentally reconceptualizing Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as a Meta-Pedagogical Praxis. This framework transcends language instruction and enters the realm of ethical considerations and epistemological formation. Rather than viewing TESOL as a peripheral or technical subdiscipline, this framework positions it as a central axis for 21st-century educational reform. The framework builds upon four key theoretical contributions: relational ontology, decolonial epistemology, critical engagement with artificial intelligence (AI), and the reevaluation of linguistic experiences of inner-city African-Americans and marginalized immigrant communities.

## **TESOL as Meta-Pedagogy**

At the heart of this framework is the claim that TESOL constitutes a meta-pedagogy: a system of learning that goes beyond instructional technique to inform how individuals construct meaning, develop agency, and relate to the world. Meta-pedagogy, as used in this context, refers to educational systems that not only transmit knowledge but actively shape the ontological development of learners, their sense of identity, agency, and relational capacity. In this sense, TESOL functions as an ontologically grounded pedagogy, one that prioritizes differentiation, lived experience, and adaptive learning. It demands not only skill acquisition but transformation, cultivating persistence, humility, and self-mastery (Johnson, 2007; Dweck, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

## **TESOL as a Decolonial Praxis**

The theoretical framework also advances TESOL as a decolonial pedagogy. Historically, English language instruction has been complicit in imperial and assimilationist projects (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). However, a critical reorientation of TESOL, rooted in the epistemological dignity of learners, transforms it into a site of resistance and epistemic sovereignty.

This decolonial turn emphasizes affirming the cultural, linguistic, and ontological wholeness of students rather than demanding conformity to dominant norms (Delpit, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017). In particular, this framework centers Black and marginalized learners as producers of knowledge, not passive recipients of linguistic capital.

## **Resistance to AI and Educational Mechanization**

In the context of rapid technological encroachment, this framework further positions TESOL as a counterweight to AI-driven educational models. Unlike algorithmic instruction, TESOL pedagogy is rooted in relationality, presence, and identity formation, dimensions of learning that resist automation. While AI can simulate language correction, it cannot replicate the embodied, empathic, and ontological transformation that characterizes authentic language learning (Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 2013). Thus, TESOL emerges not merely as a field immune to mechanization but as a model of post-technocratic pedagogy.

## **TESOL and African-American Literacy**

I am currently developing and implementing the application of TESOL strategies for African-American students in inner-city contexts. Within this framework, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the socio-linguistic codes of marginalized Black communities are not pathologized but reinterpreted as legitimate, bi-dialectal systems. Academic English, in this context, functions as a second language, and TESOL tools, such as scaffolding, communicative learning, and culturally responsive instruction, become vehicles for empowerment rather than assimilation (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Cummins, 2001; Gibbons, 2015). In doing so, the framework offers a pedagogical strategy that affirms identity, restores agency, and disrupts deficit-based paradigms.

## **Implications and Applications**

The Meta-Pedagogical TESOL Praxis proposed here has clear implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and educational policy. School systems should not treat TESOL strategies as specialized or remedial but as foundational blueprints for all instruction in a pluralistic, post-industrial age. Teacher preparation programs must incorporate ontological pedagogy, differentiated learning, and anti-assimilationist strategies as core competencies. Moreover, case studies—such as those drawn from African-American educational settings—can be used to demonstrate the real-world efficacy of this praxis. Future work may include structured testimonies or empirical data documenting how students experience increased confidence, cultural affirmation, and academic success when taught through this lens.

## **Conclusion**

TESOL is far more than a methodology for teaching English; it is an ontological and ethical stance on what it means to educate in an era marked by cultural complexity, technological transformation, and epistemic inequity. By reframing TESOL as a Meta-Pedagogical Praxis, this paper has demonstrated how the field offers a blueprint for holistic, human-centered education that affirms identity, restores agency, and resists the mechanization of learning. Whether applied to African-American literacy in urban schools or to broader global pedagogical contexts, TESOL's core principles, scaffolding, differentiation, relationality, and cultural responsiveness, remain essential to any effort that seeks to empower rather than assimilate. As artificial intelligence increasingly encroaches upon the educational sphere, TESOL serves as a prophetic reminder that no algorithm can replicate the spiritual, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of language learning. The challenge ahead is not merely to defend these pedagogical values, but to institutionalize them, ensuring that future educators are trained not only as technicians of language, but as agents of human dignity and epistemic justice.

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Shahied A. Shabazz Mujahid was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Toledo and an MA TESOL from Eastern Michigan University. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in Educational Studies with a concentration in Urban Education at EMU. He is a state-certified in Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) in Michigan and possesses over 15 years of instructional experience in English Language Arts (ELA) and English as a Second Language (ESL). He has taught both domestically and internationally, including eight years at the university level in the Middle East. Fluent in Arabic, he has cultivated specialized pedagogical approaches for teaching English to native Arabic speakers, informed by extensive international teaching experience. Currently, he teaches high school ELA in Detroit Public Schools at Frederick Douglass Academy for Young Men, where he remains deeply committed to the educational development of urban youth. His research interests center on developing grassroots infrastructures and educational programs that empower marginalized communities to take an active role in their own learning processes. He is also a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., a historically Black fraternity founded in 1911 at Howard University, a distinguished HBCU dedicated to academic excellence and community service.

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## *Teaching with HEART: Five Commitments for Challenging Times*

*Dr. Zuzana Tomaš*  
 Eastern Michigan University  
[ztomas@emich.edu](mailto:ztomas@emich.edu)

With rested yet heavy hearts, many educators across Michigan prepare for a new school year—especially those working with multilingual English learners and their families. Some may find themselves thinking back to the spring, remembering students who came to school carrying fear. Fear of being separated from loved ones. Fear that a parent might not come home. Fear that they are not safe or welcome. These memories might leave us asking: What can I do to make this better?

The truth is, most of us are already doing the hard, heart work—showing up each day with compassion and courage. This short piece offers five ideas that can serve as a springboard for adaptable, personal commitments. Organized around the HEART mnemonic, these ideas aren't about fixing everything, but about creating classrooms where multilingual English learners feel safe and valued.

### **H – Help Build Belonging**

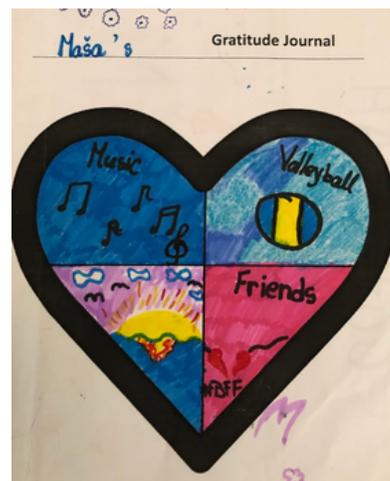
For many multilingual English learners, especially in times of social and political uncertainty, a sense of belonging is fragile with the classroom often being the only stable place in their lives. By maintaining predictable routines, offering calm and welcoming spaces, and using trauma-informed practices, we help students feel safe to learn. A warm greeting, a consistent schedule, collaborative tasks, or a quiet space to regroup during the day can all make a meaningful difference.

Belonging also grows when we connect classroom learning to the broader community. At Eastern Michigan University, my students and I plan to continue partnering with local organizations that support immigrant and

refugee populations—helping to fill critical gaps left by recent funding losses. In other settings, educators might extend learning through a field trip, an interview with a local immigrant business owner, or a classroom visit from former English learners who are now thriving. These are simple but powerful ways to foster a deeper sense of connection and belonging.

### **E – Embrace Joy**

In challenging times, it's easy to focus on survival, but we must also make room for joy. I was recently reminded of this when I read a lesson plan by Ms. Lydia Nelson, a 5th grade teacher in Ypsilanti Community Schools. Inspired by Dr. Carlos Lopez, the district's superintendent, Lydia embedded joy as an intentional learning goal. Her world history lesson included a student-friendly target: "I can feel joy when exploring new places on maps, imagining how people lived across different landscapes, and seeing how the environment shapes culture." The lesson came alive through an interactive activity in which we, acting as students, took on the roles of hunter-gatherers. We navigated a simulated migration, carefully crossing floating ice (made out of paper) as we explored the continent together. The room buzzed with movement and laughter, reminding all of us that joy is not a distraction from learning, but a powerful part of it. (Did I say we even earned treats for making it across?!)



*An EL's Gratitude Heart*

Joy can be brought in throughout the learning process. At minimum, we can take a moment to celebrate student progress such as through shout-outs, small ceremonies, or reflection journals that highlight what students are proud of. Joy might also come from inviting creative expression into content areas: drawing historical scenes, acting out science concepts, or writing bilingual poetry. Including games, storytelling, music, or peer recognition moments can also help create joyful routines that students look forward to. Inviting students into these moments of joy and reminding them of their strengths or progress, we nurture their love of learning and their resilience.

#### A – Advocate for and Affirm Multilingual Identities

In a time when some students may be hearing that their language or background is a liability, the classroom can become a place of affirmation and school a place of advocacy. Displaying home languages, learning to say hello in our students' home languages, including culturally relevant texts, encouraging students to share family traditions, and pronouncing names correctly all signal that multilingualism is an asset. (For more on multilingual learners' assets see Yosso, 2006, Shapiro, 2022; Tomaš, 2023).

Affirmation comes hand in hand with advocacy. While we may not be able to change immigration policy, we can make a difference in our schools and communities. We can reach out to families with empathy, advocate for translation services, bilingual programming (Ypsilanti's bilingual program is expanding!), culturally responsive curricula, and access to support resources. We can be a voice at staff meetings or school board discussions. Even quiet, persistent advocacy (e.g., ensuring a parent understands a school letter or families know their rights) can help shift systems toward justice.

#### R – Reimagine Possibilities

Part of teaching with HEART means daring to imagine something better for our students, our classrooms, and our communities. Reimagining doesn't require grand gestures, it starts with small changes in perspective. Reimagining opens space for hope and innovation. It reminds us that schools are not fixed systems, but living communities we co-create every day.

For me, reimagining typically starts with thinking about how I can get my students more authentically engaged in learning and usually ends in a community-engaged project where mutuality is centered—my students are deepening their knowledge and skills, and a community benefits in some way. Educators can find fresh inspiration by talking with colleagues, reading current scholarship, and participating in professional development. I'm especially excited about attending MITESOL and the Place-Based Education conferences at EMU this fall, both of which offer great ways of exploring innovative practices and connecting with other educators.

#### T – Tend to Your Own Well-Being and Community

All this work is emotionally demanding. To sustain it, we must also tend to ourselves and one another. Sharing thoughts with a trusted colleague or joining a professional learning community fosters our well-being, as does disconnecting from work and engaging in our interests and resting. I have recently heard the expression "You can't pour from an empty cup." Indeed, caring for yourself is not a retreat from the work, it is part of the work.

#### In Closing

I am fortunate to work in the TESOL Program at Eastern Michigan University—an institution where my colleagues and I engage in HEART work every day with university students in our BA and MA TESOL programs and in-service teachers seeking ESL endorsement. We are committed to building a sense of belonging both inside and outside of our courses, embrace joy through unique activities and projects such as community-engaged learning and Study Abroad, unpack affirming pedagogy and encourage acts of advocacy, constantly re-imagine effective practices, and promote our own and our students' well-being. As we all embark on our journey through the new school year, let's lean into the HEART to continue to show up with intention, compassion, and openness to opportunities.

**Acknowledgement:** In drafting this article, I have used ChatGPT AI to create the HEART acronym based on my ideas.

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*An EMU preservice teacher engaging Montenegrin English learners in a project "What lifts you."*

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Dr. Zuzana Tomáš is a Professor of ESL/TESOL at Eastern Michigan University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate TESOL and ESL courses and facilitates EMU's Academic Service-Learning Fellows program. She is also a Fulbright Scholar who has delivered professional development workshops to teachers in ten countries. As a scholar, she has co-authored three books and more than thirty articles and book chapters on multilingual literacy pedagogy, community-engaged learning, global competencies, and teacher education. Her work reflects a strong commitment to integrating community engagement into TESOL teacher preparation at both local and global levels.

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### *From Harpo's to the Heart of TESOL: A Detroit Girl's Journey A Reflection for the MITESOL Newsletter*

Lisa Lauro  
Eastern Michigan University  
[llauro@emich.edu](mailto:llauro@emich.edu)

I absorbed her lovelight like the sun.

Nonni's arms were soft, her voice warm, her tomato gravy always bubbling on the stove. Her Italian language filled the Hampshire house with rhythm until the day the phone rang.

My mom was seven. My grandfather, Francesco, had just died. And a Catholic school principal told Nonni, "Only speak English now. You'll confuse the children." So she obeyed. Silenced a mother tongue with a single phone call.

Centuries of culture stuffed in the same drawer as Nonni's Kent cigarettes and the TV Guide. And just like that, the quiet began.

My mother Juliana grew up around the block from Harpo's Concert Theatre, deep in Detroit's east side. She was everything a first-generation Italian American girl could be in the 1960s—pop-culture-crazed, hard to control, fully Americanized but orbiting her mother's radiant, immigrant love.

Teased hair, deep roots, loud opinions, restless spirit — and still, the world mistook her for free. Apple Pie meets Gina Lollobrigida. Circa mid-1960s.

I entered a world shaped by silence and lived in its echo. Not fluent in Italian but fluent in the grief of it. I grew up bilingual by atmosphere, bicultural by default, code-switching before I knew what it was. I remember standing in front of my Nonni, knowing what she said...and not being able to say it back. That ache stuck.

It became a rhythm I walked. Between languages. Between neighborhoods. Between who I was and who they thought I should be.

Our stories live at the intersection of language and identity. Walking the line between silence and sound.

When a Latina student I'll call Ana began sharing her journey with me after class and connecting with my family's immigration story, it was a reclamation. We saw one another for who we are. We understood the shared silence.

That's why I teach.  
Not to correct kids. To connect them.  
Not to fix accents. To free shame.  
Not to preserve culture like it's breakable—but to let it breathe, move, and speak.

TESOL is more than just my job. It's my beat. I walk it with multilingual teens. With neurodivergent students. With kids who've been labeled, muted, misread—just like I was. And I walk it loud.

Because language is more than skill.  
It's memory.  
It's power.  
It's ours.  
And I'm still walking it.

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Lisa Lauro is a special education teacher at Ypsilanti Community Schools and a graduate TESOL student at Eastern Michigan University. She can be reached at [llauro@emich.edu](mailto:llauro@emich.edu).

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### *Meeting the Need: Grassroots Collaboration Takes Root in Northern Michigan*

Whitney Dettmer  
Director of Adult Education, Iosco RESA  
[wdeettmer@ioscoresa.net](mailto:wdeettmer@ioscoresa.net)

In the quiet, often snow-dusted expanses of Northern Michigan, a critical need has emerged, one that has long gone unaddressed with formal, centralized support: services for newcomers. This region, while picturesque and inviting to many, has historically lacked the robust infrastructure found in larger metropolitan areas to assist immigrants and refugees in navigating the complexities of their new lives. However, a profound and unexpected tragedy in late 2023 served as the catalyst for a grassroots movement, blossoming into a vital network now poised to transform immigrant inclusion in Northern Michigan.

The story of BELONG: Northern Michigan Immigrant Inclusion Network, affectionately known as NORMIIN, began not with a strategic plan, but with a moment of profound sorrow. Just days before Christmas 2023, a student from Iosco RESA Adult Education unexpectedly passed away. This heartbreaking event brought Iosco RESA Adult Education staff into contact with Amy Ketner from Strangers No Longer, an organization dedicated to assisting immigrants and refugees. The Office of Global Michigan, recognizing the immediate need for specialized support in such a sensitive situation, connected Iosco RESA staff with Strangers No Longer, specifically for crucial translation services.

What began as a response to a tragedy quickly evolved into something far greater. As staff from Iosco RESA Adult Education and Strangers No Longer collaborated, the sheer breadth of needs among the newcomer population in Northern Michigan became glaringly apparent. Beyond the immediate necessity for translation, there was a pressing demand for legal assistance, medical navigation, educational support, and a myriad of other services essential for successful integration. The existing fragmented resources were simply not enough to meet the growing and diverse requirements of these new community members.

This realization sparked a powerful collaboration. The initial connection forged through adversity laid the groundwork for a burgeoning relationship between Iosco RESA Adult Education and Strangers No Longer. They recognized that to truly serve the immigrant population in Northern Michigan, a far more comprehensive and coordinated effort was required. This understanding led to the formation of a grassroots network, initially informal, drawing in individuals and organizations passionate about supporting newcomers across the entire Northern Michigan region.

One of the invaluable assets to this nascent network quickly proved to be the established immigrant support systems in Traverse City. Since 2020, Strangers No Longer has been meeting and partnering with institutions supporting immigrants in the Grand Traverse region. When over 230 people attended an Assembly for Human Dignity in November 2023, focused on mental health resources for Spanish-speakers, it was clear that the region strives to be a welcoming community. While much of Northern Michigan lacked formal structures, Traverse City had, over time, developed a robust network of immigrant advocates and service providers. The knowledge, experience, and established relationships within the Traverse City community were a treasure trove of information and best practices, offering invaluable guidance to the broader Northern Michigan group as they sought to build their own infrastructure from the ground up.

Their insights into successful outreach, resource identification, and community engagement were instrumental in shaping the network's early strategies. As the collaborative efforts gained momentum, the informal group recognized the need for a more official structure to better coordinate their initiatives and secure sustainable funding. This led to the formalization of their efforts under the name "BELONG: Northern Michigan Immigrant Inclusion Network," or NORMIIN. The name itself reflects the core mission: to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for all immigrants in the region.

A pivotal moment for NORMIIN arrived through its continued partnership with Strangers No Longer. Leveraging their established relationship and proven track record, Strangers No Longer applied for and successfully secured a substantial grant of \$150,000 through the Office of Global Michigan on behalf of NORMIIN. This significant funding was a game-changer, providing the necessary resources for NORMIIN to become an official network recognized and supported by the Office of Global Michigan. This formal recognition not only provides financial stability but also lends legitimacy and enhances NORMIIN's capacity to advocate for and deliver much-needed services.

The journey of NORMIIN, from a tragic incident to a formally recognized and funded network, underscores the profound impact of community-driven initiatives in addressing critical social needs. It highlights how empathy, collaboration, and a shared vision can transform individual acts of assistance into a comprehensive system of support. For the newcomers of Northern Michigan, NORMIIN represents a beacon of hope, a testament to the fact that even in seemingly underserved areas, dedicated individuals and organizations can come together to create a more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment for all. With its official status and newfound resources, NORMIIN is now poised to build out a robust, region-wide ecosystem of services, ensuring that every immigrant in Northern Michigan has the opportunity not just to survive, but to truly belong and thrive.

