May Reminders
May 5    Last day of instruction
May 6-7  Study period
May 9    Mother's Day
May 10-14 Final Exams
May 15   Spring Commencement
May 24   Summer Session I begins
May 31   Memorial Day

Time Waits for No One
To realize the value of one year:
Ask a student who has failed a final exam.

To realize the value of one month:
Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of one hour:
Ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of one minute:
Ask a person who has missed a train, bus, or plane.

To realize the value of one second:
Ask a person who has survived an accident.

To realize the value of one millisecond:
Ask the person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Time waits for one. Treasure every moment you have.

TESOL 2004
Learning to Read L2 Before L1
By Tim Donahue

At TESOL Ms. Katrina Watkins, Director of the American Academy of Casablanca, presented her research on beginning reading instruction in students' second language before they start reading in their first language. She wanted to determine whether starting to read in a student's less-known language had a negative impact either on reading skills or on learning the second language.

Watkins runs a school for Arabic speaking students in Morocco. Parents send their children to the school so they can learn English and French. The school follows a bilingual format where children are taught content in English and Arabic in the early grades, then introduced to French in the upper grades. The children's first reading experience is English. I was interested in attending the session because I remembered Ms. Watkins from a previous TESOL conference five or six years ago. At that time, she was criticized strongly for having her students begin to read in a language they didn't know. Her argument at that time was that her experience told her that the practice was not detrimental to students learning to read. Her presentation at this year's conference backed her anecdotal, experience-based conclusions with hard data.

Watkins followed a cohort of students for five years, examining their grades and teachers' comments on their performance. She found that students had no problem decoding the unfamiliar language. In other words, students learned the connection of sounds to letters and were able to group the letter sounds into words. The children that had difficulties with the task were the ones who had learning difficulties in other areas as well; leading her to conclude that decoding depends on aptitude, not knowledge of the language.

Further, she found that learning to decode did not interfere with acquiring the second language but in fact contributed to students' gaining familiarity with the sound system. Also, students were able to transfer their understanding of the connection of sound to letters, even when they were introduced to another writing system. So even though English uses the Roman alphabet and Arabic uses a different script, students were able to decode Arabic easily after they had learned the skill through English.

The caveat to the research is, of course, that it focused on decoding, not fluency and comprehension. Watkins was quick to point out that fluent reading occurs more fully and quickly in the students' first language. This is a very important distinction and one that teachers here should keep in mind. It can be deceptive when young English Language Learners do well with decoding activities. It does not indicate that they have learned English. They will still need strong support in learning the language if they are to become fluent readers.
TESOL 2004

Soaring Far, Catching Dreams

By Lee-Ann Farias

TESOL is the acronym for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. The TESOL Convention is known to be the leading worldwide professional development opportunity in English language teaching for children and adults. I have always wanted to attend a TESOL Convention but have never imagined it to be so huge! Participants can expect four days of more than 800 workshops, exhibits, academic sessions, demonstrations, meetings and more. First-timers, like me, can attend an orientation to help manage their time. There are activities and special events running continuously throughout the day and into the early evening. I examined a wide variety of appropriate research-based materials that accommodated my professional and students’ academic and social needs. I found resources to support our mainstream teachers in helping ESL students in the classroom. More importantly, I learned more about No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for English Language Learners.

In regards to examining appropriate research-based materials to accommodate my students’ academic and social needs, there are several companies that offer an ESL language arts program like Harcourt, McGraw, and Hampton-Brown. Their ESL language arts programs proceed into the mainstream’s program. Purchasing the appropriate reading and writing materials for ESL students would help mainstream teachers tremendously. Some schools may not be aware of this information and should check with the school’s Title I or Reading Coordinator. Collaboration among the mainstream teachers and the ESL teachers is very important. ESL teachers can help their students by sharing information, materials, and strategies with the mainstream teachers.

One of the most interesting materials I came across was by Dr. Spencer Kagan on “Multiple Intelligence to Promote Language Acquisition”. Dr. Kagan is a former clinical psychologist and professor of Psychology and Education at the University of California. He developed activities and games to energize the brain by combining the facets of intelligences and language acquisition (input, output, and content variables). Using his techniques teachers can provide and support students with contextual clues that make learning vocabulary and concepts more comprehensible. I believe in using the facets of multiple intelligences to help students learn and feel. Including both the student’s multiple intelligences and language acquisition would be most beneficial in helping to motivate and build new experiences for ESL students.

In regards to learning more about NCLB for English Language Learners, Hawaii’s English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards met “full approval”. The States that met “full approval” were given appropriate Title III funds to provide research-based materials for ESL students and provide professional development for ESL teachers. According to Harpreet Sandhu from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), forty states including Hawaii were given Title III funds. These funds have been distributed to their local districts and disbursed into the schools as of September 2003. Many of the participants at this meeting were teachers in ESL programs who did not receive funding support to purchase the appropriate materials for their students and wanted to know where the funding went. Mrs. Sandhu stated that the OELA is presently investigating schools that may have misused Title III funds. This was the first year that the U.S. Department of Education OELA participated at a TESOL convention and they are looking forward to participating at next year’s convention in San Antonio, Texas to update NCLB/Title III.

The wealth of information made available to the participants at this year’s TESOL Convention for English language learners was unbelievable. I had an incredible time and enjoyed all four days of the convention. The city of Long Beach was an excellent host venue with accommodating facilities and a friendly atmosphere. It was a privilege to meet with participants from different countries and various parts of the United States who were anxious to share both their experiences and knowledge. I am thankful to Project BELL for giving me this wonderful opportunity to further my career and life experience in educating our ESL students in Hawaii.