

Stress: Helping Refugees Cope

English as a second language (ESL) teachers are often among the first people available to help refugees and other immigrants cope with a new cultural and linguistic environment. Although the identified role of the teacher is to teach English language skills, the teacher's role as a cultural broker can be just as important. This article discusses stresses that occur with resettlement and what ESL teachers can do to help their students adjust to a new life in an unfamiliar culture.

Stress Experienced in Resettlement

Stress occurs when the burdens imposed on people by events or pressures in their lives exceed their resources to cope. For refugees, resettlement involves three types of stress:

Migration stress. When migration occurs suddenly as a result of political violence, war, or other catastrophes, refugees are attempting to function under conditions out of their control. Moreover, many of the losses associated with migration represent the loss of the usual resources—such as family, friends, and community—that people ordinarily rely on.

Acculturation stress. Immigrants and refugees often do not expect that the very fabric of life around them will be profoundly different in the new culture. Ways in which people relate to each other and form and sustain friendships will be different, and how children go to

schools and are socialized change. Even the most simple of daily tasks, such as shopping for food or asking for directions, can become challenges involving not only language barriers, but also the potential for deep cultural misunderstandings.

Traumatic stress results from extreme events that cause harm, injury, or death of loved ones, such as natural disasters, accidents, assault, war-related experiences, and torture. It is inevitable that individuals suffering such events will be changed by that experience, and research suggests that these changes will be psychological, social, and physical.

Heed Cultural Differences

Concepts of mental health are laden with cultural bias. The societies where many of the refugees and immigrants to the United States come from tend to be more collectivistic than U.S. society. In the United States, parents rear their children to be independent and self-reliant, to leave home early, and to be responsible for their own happiness and well being. In collectivist societies, parents raise their children to be interdependent and responsible for others, within a system of relationships where others in turn care for them. Behaving in individualistic ways could be seen as dysfunctional in these other societies. Because of these cultural differences, U.S. teachers of refugee adults must be cautious in passing judgment on behaviors they may not understand.

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Her NCLE's Worth

In this issue of NCLEnotes we are inaugurating a new column. In "Her (or "His") NCLE's Worth" we will talk with a practitioner in the field of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Our first interview is with Janet Isserlis, Director of the Literacy Resources Center at Brown University and NCLE board member.

Miriam Burt: How did you get started in ESOL?

Janet Isserlis: It was in the summer of 1980 here in Providence, Rhode Island. I was completing my MAT in art and working as a cashier in a convenience store. I started talking to a guy who came to the store carrying a baby on his back. He was Bill Shuey, the Executive Director of Project Persona, an ESOL center in Providence. I volunteered at Persona's ESOL program for Southeast Asian refugees that summer, became a paid teacher, and stayed there for 12 years before I moved to Vancouver, BC.

MB: And a lot happened in those 12 years...

JJ: Yes. Project Persona merged with the International Institute of Providence in the mid 1980s. I got my second Masters





What's her job?

BEST Gets Better

A prototype computer-assisted oral assessment instrument successfully completed its pilot testing recently at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). Based on the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and similar to the BEST oral interview, this one-on-one oral assessment uses the computer to prompt the examiner with test tasks within specified content domains and at appropriate difficulty levels for the examinees. The adaptability of the test allows the examiner to probe what the examinee knows and decreases the time needed to accurately determine language proficiency. CAL hopes to develop a fully operational instrument as well as a print-based version suitable for use in programs with little or no access to technology.



What's wrong with this woman?

Integrating English Literacy and Civics

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education has awarded 12 grants, totaling \$6.9 million, to test ways of better combining instruction in English and civics. Programs in California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia will participate in the 2-year study. "Language and civic life are often joined in the real world, and it certainly makes sense that they be joined in the instruction made available to our immigrant neighbors," stated U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. For more information on the grants and the programs, see the press release on the Department of Education's website at <http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/05-2000/0510b.html>.

Summit Stirs Many Into Action

In February, over 150 adult learners, practitioners, administrators, and researchers from the field of adult education and literacy assembled in Washington, DC, to initiate the process of building a national consensus on how to move adult and family literacy forward in the 21st century. They call it the National Literacy Summit 2000.



The Summit is an effort to develop a vision and action agenda of adult language and literacy programming and instruction in the United States. It was organized by a steering committee of members from the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), National Coalition for Literacy (NCL), National Council of State Directors for Adult Education, National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE).

Members of the Adult Education Interest Section (AEIS) of TESOL have made recommendations regarding the action agenda for adult English language learners. They include the following:

- Language development as well as literacy need to be national priorities;
- English language learners as a group need to be served by adult programs, and their differences from adult basic education (ABE) learners need to be taken into account; and
- The program standards developed by TESOL should be used as the basis for evaluating program quality.

The Summit organizers plan to release a foundation paper on the state of the adult education and literacy field and a detailed action agenda. The target date is September 8, 2000, International Literacy Day.

For more information on the Summit, see its website at <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/summit.html>. NCLE staff are working with TESOL and other adult ESL professionals to write a paper articulating the vision and action agenda for adult English language learners. The paper will be completed in November 2000. To read drafts and contribute your voice to the effort to improve services for this population, visit NCLE's website at <http://www.cal.org/nclc/summit.htm>.

TESOL-AEIS on the Internet

The Adult Education Interest Section (AEIS) of TESOL wants to help members stay better connected via the Internet. A new listserv centering around concerns of TESOL members whose work focuses on ESOL/EFL for adults has been humming along since the TESOL 2000 conference in March. If you are a member of TESOL and the AEIS, you can join the discussions by going to the subscription box on the current AEIS web page (<http://www.tesol.org/isaffil/intsec/f-ae.html>).

NCLE on the Move Spring 2000

What do NCLE staff members do besides writing digests and books and providing valuable Web services? Well, when they're not creating at their computers, they're usually on the move....

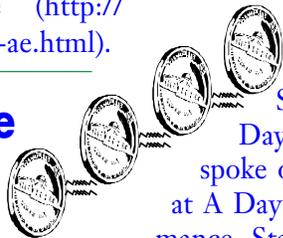
Joy Peyton participated in a Department of Education briefing in Washington, DC, on the *New Presidential Directive on International Education Policy* and joined one of its working groups, whose focus is "expanding high-quality foreign language, English, and culture learning" (May).

Miriam Burt gave a presentation on *Effective Practices in Adult ESL Instruction* at the Working for America Institute (AFL-CIO) Convention in New York (May) and one on *Problem-Solving Activities for Adult English Language Learners* at the Laubach Literacy Biennial Convention in Orlando, Florida (June).

Carol Van Duzer facilitated a session for adult education ESOL teachers on *Reconciling Best Practices With Legislative Reporting Requirements* at the Sunshine

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are available in full text on
NCLE's Website.
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State TESOL conference in Daytona Beach, Florida. She also spoke on *Assessment in Adult ESOL* at A Day of Dialog on Adult Performance Standards, sponsored by the Michigan Department of Career Development.

Lynda Terrill gave a workshop on *Communicative Activities for Beginning Level Adult ESL Classes* at the 7th Annual DC Literacy Center's Mini-Conference, Washington, DC (May).

Three NCLE staff members attended ALT 2000: Bridging the Digital Divide, Washington, DC (June). **Carol Van Duzer** and CAL colleagues Dorry Kenyon and Jill Wooddell gave a presentation on the development and pilot testing of a computer-assisted Basic English Skills Test (BEST) oral interview prototype (see article on page 4). **MaryAnn Florez** and **Lynda Terrill** facilitated a workshop on *Integrating Technology Into ESL Instruction Through Project-Based Learning*.

Miriam Burt, **Lynda Terrill**, and **Carol Van Duzer** traveled respectively to Minnesota, Colorado, and Texas to pilot the computer-assisted BEST prototype.

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Resource Updates

NCLE has inaugurated a new feature on its website. **NCLE Resource Collections** brings together information and resources on topics of interest to those working in the field of adult ESL. The purpose of the collections is to provide a starting point for exploration—an overview of the reports, articles, organizations, and other resources that are currently available on specific topics, drawn from the Internet and conventional published sources.

The first Resource Collection focuses on teaching English to adults with learning disabilities. It provides background materials about learning disabilities from K-12 and adult education and gathers the limited resources that directly address adult ESL concerns. Articles, research reports, books, organizational websites, and newsletters are annotated. Links are provided where available. You can find this collection at <http://www.cal.org/ncl/ResLD.htm>.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is now making the **Program Standards for Adult Education ESOL Programs** available to the public. Developed by a national task force of adult ESL program coordinators and instructors, the document defines the components of a quality adult education ESOL program and describes program quality indicators in eight areas: program structure, administration, and planning; curriculum; instruction; recruitment, intake, and orientation; retention and transition; assessment and learner gains; staffing, professional development, and staff evaluation; and support services.

Copies are \$14.95 (\$9.95 for TESOL members) plus shipping and handling. To order, contact TESOL Publications, PO Box 753, Waldorf, MD 20604-0753 (Tel: 301/638-4427 or 888/891-0041; Fax: 301/843-0159; Email: tesolpubs@tasco1.com)



The Center for Immigration Studies operates two informational listservs that focus on immigration policy issues. **CISNEWS** is a daily list of full-text news items, announcements, reviews, and questions about immigration issues. To join, go to <http://mail.cis.org/guest/RemoteListSummary/CISNEWS> and follow the directions for subscribing.

This Week in Immigration is a weekly summary of immigration news. In addition to lead paragraphs of the week's top 15 or 20 news stories, there are occasional announcements about new publications and upcoming events. To subscribe, go to <http://mail.cis.org/guest/RemoteListSummary/THISWEEK>.



Welcome to the USA: Trainer's Notebook

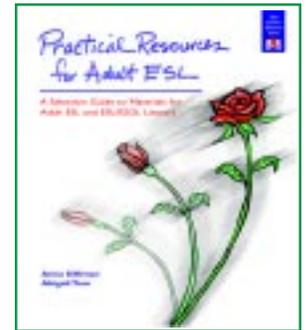
is available from the Refugee Service Center at CAL. The notebook is designed to provide additional support to overseas Cultural Orientation (CO) programs that use the **Welcome to the USA video and guidebook**. Lesson notes and handouts (in English) corresponding to the five parts of the video constitute the main part of the notebook. For those using the video for continued cultural orientation once refugees reach the United States, some additional activities, suggestions, and expansions have been included.

For more information on how to obtain a copy of the notebook or video and guidebook, contact La Dittavong at the Refugee Service Center (Tel: 202/362-0700; Fax: 202/362-3740; Email: la@cal.org). The notebook is scheduled to be online this fall at the **Cultural Orientation Website** (<http://www.culturalorientation.net>).

How many times have you found yourself scrambling for new resources or ideas to use in teaching adult ESL? Do you feel like you spend as much time trying to locate information as you do putting it to use? Anna Silliman, NCLE advisory board member, and Abigail Tom, both experienced adult ESL teachers, have created a resource that helps teachers reduce both the anxiety and time spent in this process.

In **Practical Resources for Adult ESL: A Selection Guide to Materials for Adult ESL and ESL/ESOL Literacy**, the authors review over 260 titles that teachers, tutors, teacher trainers, and program administrators can use in adult English language instruction. Sections include teaching reading, speaking, listening, and grammar; classroom activities; instructional series; general methods and techniques; culture and community life; and literacy. There are also reviews of dictionaries, vocabulary texts, and multi-media resources, with information on publishers

and distributors. The authors indicate the proficiency level of each resource where appropriate. Finally, a glossary of instructional approaches is added for those unfamiliar with ESL "jargon." Altogether, this book speaks to both novice and experienced adult ESL practitioners.



The Guide (2000; ISBN 1-882483-80-4) is available from Alta Book Center Publishers, 14 Adrian Court, Burlingame, CA 94010 (Tel: 800/258-2375 or 650/692-4654; Fax: 800/238-2329; Email: info@altaesl.com; WWW: <http://www.altaesl.com>).



The Book Shelf

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures

By Anne Fadiman
(1997, The Noonday Press, ISBN 0-374-52564-1)

Reviewed by Miriam Burt

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down is a nonfiction account of the Lees, a Hmong refugee family living in Merced, California, in the 1980s, and the U.S. doctors who try to treat Lia—the Lee's young daughter who has a seizure disorder—with disastrous results.

I read the book last fall and was transported back to St. Paul, Minnesota, where in 1980 and 1981, I taught Hmong students. I had never encountered adult learners like these.

Although they sat in the desks, the desks didn't own them, didn't define them, and didn't make them students. They didn't sit face forward, staring fixed at

the teacher, copying down everything from the blackboard. Rather, they sat sideways, facing one another as they spoke. They only copied words or phrases when expressly directed to do so. It seemed as if their presence in the classroom was almost accidental. In short, they turned the classroom conventions upside down, because that was, in fact, just what they were—conventions, and they were conventions that had little or no meaning for these students. Yet they were at home with themselves, and at home with their not being at home in the classroom.

The chasm between *who* my Hmong students were, and *where* they were, couldn't have been wider.

This experience came back to me when I read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. Anne Fadiman wrote the story without making Western civilization the easy villain. Both sides are portrayed as being well meaning, and indeed, both sides are. Unfortunately, the culture of Western science and medicine is so different from that of Hmong spirit life, there was no meeting place between the Lee family and the American doctors.

ESL practitioners should read this book and realize that even when all the characters have the best intentions, there is not necessarily a happy ending. We must strive, however, to communicate with one another, to find "where the edges meet," as Anne Fadiman says in the preface to this excellent book. 🌹

Stress from page 1

What Can Teachers Do?

Teachers can learn to recognize symptoms of mental illness or abrupt behavioral changes that disrupt the class.

Signals teachers identify from observation may include absences, withdrawal from participation, lack of attention, sleeping in class, frequent crying, behavioral problems, and change in progress. Symptoms often reported by students include headaches, backaches, stomachaches, insomnia, and excessive drinking of alcohol.

Teachers can discuss health and cultural content relevant to learners.

When refugees seek help from a medical doctor or a mental health professional, they often become uneasy when asked about details of their personal lives and backgrounds. In the ESL classroom, activities related to making appointments to see a doctor and then

talking about health issues with the doctor, finding and keeping a job, negotiating transportation, and so forth are all natural components of the curriculum. These activities give learners opportunities to discuss issues of personal interest and concern with others and to solve problems related to survival, family, and employment.

Teachers can network.

They can collect information about community resources for dealing with refugee mental health. They can develop relationships with interested local mental health providers, find out how the local mental health system works, and identify community resources related to accessing help for cultural adjustment and mental health. Finally, they can make a decision about whether it is appropriate to contact resources, speak with other family members, or bring the

situation to the attention of a resettlement agency or sponsor group, or to simply give the student the opportunity through classroom activities to discuss personal concerns.

The myriad needs that refugees bring to the classroom provide rich opportunities for learning. ESL teachers can be a critical link in a well-functioning team of providers helping refugees establish a new life that is both productive and satisfying. 🌐

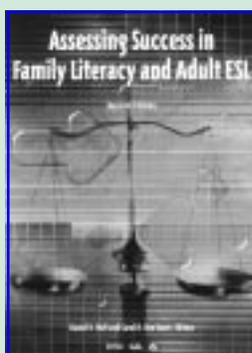
This article is excerpted from Mental Health and the Adult Refugee: The Role of the ESL Teacher, by Myrna Ann Adkins and Barbara Sample, Spring Institute for International Studies; and Dina Birman, Georgetown University Medical Center. This ERIC Digest is available from NCLE's website (www.cal.org/nclc/digests/mental.htm) or by phone (202/362-0700 x200).

About NCLE

<http://www.cal.org/nclc/about.htm>

When was NCLE established? Does NCLE produce materials on developing workplace ESL programs? Can NCLE help us evaluate our ESL program? If you don't know the answers to these questions, perhaps you should take a minute to visit *About NCLE* on the NCLE website. *About NCLE* provides an overview of who we are, what we do, and why we do it. You will learn about our history and funding, staff, advisors, collaborators, products, and services. It is a great way to find out how NCLE can become your number one source for information on adult ESL instruction.

The Latest From Delta Systems



Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL is a revised edition of Daniel Holt's 1994 *Assessing Success in Family Literacy Projects*. This new 2000 edition, edited by Holt and NCLE staff member Carol Van Duzer, moves beyond family literacy to include all adult English language learner programs: lifeskills, workplace, citizenship, vocational, pre-academic, and others. The book shows program staff how to develop an effective evaluation plan through the integration of both standardized and alternative assessment approaches. Surveys, interviews, observation measures, and performance samples are discussed.

Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL can be ordered from Delta Systems Co., Inc. (800-323-8270 or www.delta-systems.com).

Publications Order Form

New ERIC Digests from NCLE

Mental Health and the Adult Refugee: The Role of the ESL Teacher

by Myrna Ann Adkins,
Barbara Sample, and Dina Birman

Addresses both ESL and mental health issues of refugees and other adult immigrants, and explores three things ESL teachers can do to facilitate language and cultural learning while helping learners with mental health issues.

Multiple Intelligences: Theory and Practice in Adult ESL

by Mary Ann Christison and
Deborah Kennedy

Looks at Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and discusses its applicability to teaching adult English language learners.

Critical Literacy for Adult English Language Learners

by Carol Van Duzer and
MaryAnn Florez

Describes the concept of critical literacy for both what is heard and what is read, and provides classroom activities and strategies for developing critical literacy skills in adults learning English.

ESL Instruction and Adults With Learning Disabilities

by Robin Schwarz and Lynda Terrill

Reviews research on adult ESL learners and learning disabilities (LD), suggests ways to identify and assess LD in learners, and looks at practical methods for instruction and teacher training.

Trauma and the Adult English Language Learner

by Janet Isserlis

Reviews key findings on the impact of trauma on behavior and how it effects learning, and discusses ways in which practitioners can respond appropriately and assist victims of trauma in the adult ESL classroom.

ERIC Digests (Free)*

- Trauma and the Adult English Language Learner** (July 2000)
- ESL Instruction and Adults With Learning Disabilities** (June 2000)
- Mental Health and the Adult Refugee: The Role of the ESL Teacher** (December 1999)
- Multiple Intelligences: Theory and Practice in Adult ESL** (December 1999)
- Critical Literacy for Adult English Language Learners** (December 1999)
- Poetry in the Adult ESL Classroom** (December 1999)
- Native Language Literacy and Adult ESL Instruction** (December 1999)
- Refugees as English Language Learners: Issues and Concerns** (September 1999)
- Using Videos with Adult English Language Learners** (August 1999)
- Reading and the Adult English Language Learner** (August 1999)

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Her NCLE's Worth from page 1

degree (in ESOL) at Brown. I became the coordinator of the refugee program at the International Institute and worked there until 1992, when funding for refugee programs started to dwindle.

MB: So you moved to Vancouver?

JJ: Actually I hadn't planned to stay in Vancouver. I was invited there in 1992 to work on a student action research project for five months. That project ended, but I stayed on for four years working on other projects, one particularly interesting one, the Rainmaker project. A team of adult educators at an elementary school worked with kids and their parents, teaching computer applications. We wanted the kids and their parents to see each other in school, and we wanted to help the mothers improve their English and computer skills. The project was important because it helped parents become a part of the larger school community and because it identified literacy as an integral piece of community development.

MB: Four years in Vancouver means you came back to the U.S. in 1996...

JJ: Yes. And in 1997 I took the job as Project Director at the Literacy

Resource Center at Brown University.

MB: And that's where you are now?

JJ: That's where I am now. It was kind of hard to be not teaching after 17 years.

“Language and culture are integrally connected to everything that happens in the world.”

Now I'm tutoring in a prison, keeping connected that way.

MB: And you're a NIFL fellow, too.

JJ: Yes, I have a Literacy Leader fellowship through the National Institute for Literacy to look into the impacts of violence on learning. And along with staff at a women's shelter in Providence, I've recently been awarded a United Way Critical Issue grant to develop literacy work with shelter staff and residents. I've been volunteering

there with literacy tutoring, and now I'll be training counselors on how literacy and violence are related, helping them have a better sense how to support the women in their educational endeavors.

MB: You've been in the field of ESOL literacy education for 20 years now. What has kept you here so long?

JJ: I want to keep learning and growing, and I can't imagine doing anything else. Language and culture are so integrally connected to everything else that happens in the world. They are so much a part of race and power and other social issues.

MB: Is there anything else you'd like to say to *NCLEnotes*?

JJ: In the field of literacy, especially ESOL literacy, as we do our work we have to be always mindful of power relationships. We need to remember the ways in which we as teachers have power over students and the ways in which we don't have power (such as with funders). This morning as I walked to work I asked myself what would be better for adult learners because I'd come to work today. I think that's a question we need to ask ourselves regularly. 🌍