

# News from the North: A Technology Symposium and a Regional Conference

*Randi Freeman & Bob Woods*



*Randi Freeman and Bob Woods are a married duo who spend as much personal and professional time together as possible. Born and raised on opposite coasts, they both were exposed to a second language in elementary school, cementing a life-long love of languages and cultures.*

*Before joining forces, Randi spent several years living and working with immigrants and refugees in Sweden while Bob worked for a number of years in business and management in both the U.S. and the Middle East. They met as colleagues at Central Washington University's Intensive English Program (UESL). Randi is currently an ELL specialist in Othello's Scootney Springs Elementary School, and Bob teaches in the Ellensburg School District and at Yakima Valley College.*

*Randi has earned an MA TESOL from Monterey Institute of International Studies; a K-12 teaching certificate with an ESL endorsement from Central*

The milestone 50th Annual Conference for The Association of British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL) was held in early May 2018 at the Vantage College on the expansive campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Comparable in nature to WAESOL in Washington State, BC TEAL is an organization of educators in the Province of British Columbia who are dedicated to the growth and development of the profession of English language teaching. The theme of this year's annual conference was "Space and Pedagogy," prompting the five hundred or so participants to consider how physical, virtual, linguistic, cultural, and other forms of space interact with teaching and learning.

The conference commenced with the 2018 TESOL International Symposium on "the Global Citizen & New Technologies," co-hosted by TESOL International Association and BC TEAL. Attendees heard that with the world-wide web growing daily, TESOL professionals are faced with a desire to create not only English language users, but global citizens as well. Also, with an increasingly mobile population among the planet's seven-and-one-half-million inhabitants, cultural awareness is more important than ever. Participants attending this one-day symposium were exposed to ways technology can simultaneously teach English and build the global citizens necessary for the changing 21st century who can think beyond the classroom. Themes included creating global citizens, women in technology, teaching tech that hasn't been realized yet, and overcoming the "I don't do tech" mindset.

As a thirty-year veteran of the TESOL profession who has actively employed technology in the service of language learning for all of those years, I (Randi) thought I had at least

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*Washington University; and has nearly completed an EdD TESOL from Anaheim University. Bob's undergraduate degree is in business administration from the University of Washington; he holds a certificate in TESOL from Trinity College in London, England; and earned his MA in Applied Linguistics for TESOL from Australia's Macquarie University.*

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an average knowledge of the technology available for language learning before attending TESOL's 2018 International Symposium "The Global Citizen & New Technologies" on May 3rd. This perception was radically altered in the first few minutes of the symposium!

The day started with a brief introduction of the three symposium presenters (Nicky Hockly, Greg Kessler, and Ahmar Mahboob, who also doubled as the keynote speakers for the balance of the conference—see below), followed by separate workshops by each of the three. Attendees divided themselves into three cohorts and each cohort cycled through the three workshops for the remainder of the day.

Dr. Kessler's workshop was titled "How Can You Prepare for the Future of Language Teaching?" He showcased a variety of programs and activities which could be used with a range of students. For example, he demonstrated how we could create a "crowd source map" where students combine their own experiences and available data and connect this to a map. He recommended that we give students the responsibility of making their own materials, whether they are child or adult learners. For example, he demonstrated how we can use the OCR function on the Google Translate App. You point your phone at the world with Google Translate and it will tell you information. Another tip was that Google Maps has an education website with a plethora of ideas for educators. "Geo-guesser" is a game where we can travel around the world.

Nicky Hockly's workshop was titled "Digital Literacies for The Global Citizen." Her workshop was less high tech and invited the participants to explore the concept of what a global citizen is. She showed how students could create movies about their own countries and what others' stereotypes of their cultures are using Kaltura.

Dr. Mahboob's workshop was titled "Towards a Pedagogy of 'Global Citizenship': Practices and Principles." He explained how he develops projects with students that are credible. He admonished that research or activities must benefit local communities. He then proceeded to describe a project where he invited students to become eco-linguists. He called the project "Transgressive Linguistic Landscape." The project was designed

for first year university students in Australia as part of the course "Language, Society, and Power." Many of the students in that course were from China. He pointed out that all too often international students don't interact with other students or locals in the suburbs. Therefore, he designed the project to take place outside of the classroom and related to the 'real world' of issues around us, such as social and environmental concerns. Dr. Mahboob gave the students links to the demographics of the suburb they studied, data on the health indicators for that suburb, and linguistic landscape data in the form of the trash found. Every group collected trash from the same area. They took photos of the trash they found. The students in a group analyzed their findings before discussing their results with other groups. The project lasted six weeks during which time the professor met with the groups. This was not a causal study, but rather a correlational study. The students looked at the literature on fast food and health impacts. They studied a variety of texts about nutrition and examined the census data on the languages spoken at home in the area they studied. He mentioned that this project could lead to a campaign about health in your neighborhood.

Another technologically-based activity he does with students is student-created academic videos. The idea is to create a set of resources that can actually be used by other people. The students create a video and a three- or four-hour workshop that goes along with it. The total project takes 13 or 14 hours to complete. Dr. Mahboob works with the students on their videos during his office hours and as a result his office hours are always packed. The videos go through 7 or 8 drafts. An example of one of the student created videos is "Refugees and Cross-Cultural Communication." Dr. Mahboob's research can be found at <https://sydney.academia.edu/AhmarMahboob>.

These exceptional transnational TESOL International Symposium presenters also served as the hard-working keynote speakers for the balance of the BC TEAL annual conference. In greater detail, they are:

- South African Nicky Hockly, now living in Barcelona, who describes herself as a "technophobe turned technophile." She has been working in the field of English language teaching and training since 1987 and is the author of

- several prize-winning methodology books about technology in EFL. Ms. Hockly shared how virtual spaces like augmented reality, virtual reality, and social networks have the potential to support formal and informal language learning and what this might mean for English language teachers in a range of contexts. For more information, visit <https://bctea2018.sched.com/> and type “Hockly” in the “search” box at the top of the page; then click on specific presentations you are interested in.
- American Greg Kessler is a Professor at Ohio University who has been technology editor of the TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching, an author of the TESOL Technology Standards, and former Ohio TESOL President. Dr. Kessler’s research addresses technology, learning, and teacher preparation. He reflected that technological developments can be equally exciting or intimidating—depending on your perspective—and how smarter tools mean that teachers need to be more informed about how, when, and why to incorporate these intelligent tools in a globalized world. For more information, visit <https://bctea2018.sched.com/> and type “Kessler” in the “search” box at the top of the page; then click on specific presentations of interest.
- Pakistan native Ahmar Mahboob, is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at Australia’s University of Sydney. Dr. Mahboob is keenly interested in the application of language sciences to developmental issues, with a particular focus on education and draws from, and contributes to, a range of linguistics and applied linguistics traditions, theories, and methodologies. He stressed the importance of feedback from teacher to student: a.) *not* as a reaction to student work, but as a planned response to student needs; b.) looking at assignments *over time* in order to assess/identify student progress in writing. For more information, visit <https://bctea2018.sched.com/> and type “Mahboob” in the “search” box at the top of the page; then click on his specific presentations.

In addition to these three speakers, the conference offered a packed schedule featuring outstanding presenters from a wide array of backgrounds and viewpoints who addressed issues of space and technology in English language teaching.

While I found all of the presentations I attended at the symposium and conference fruitful and stimulating, the highlights for me were the First Nations' welcome; a chance to have informal conversations with the three featured speakers; an introduction by Dr. Kessler to the vast array of new technologies, most of which are free or low-cost, that one can use with students; Dr. Mahboob's idea that teacher feedback on student writing is a specific genre type that can be taught to educators to make it more their feedback to language learners more effective (see [https://www.academia.edu/17498183/Understanding\\_and\\_Providing\\_Cohesive\\_and\\_Coherent\\_Feedback\\_on\\_Writing](https://www.academia.edu/17498183/Understanding_and_Providing_Cohesive_and_Coherent_Feedback_on_Writing)); and finally Bonnie Norton's introduction of "Storybooks Canada," a free, open access digital resource that promotes family literacy and multilingualism, available at <https://www.storybookscanada.ca/>.

Other notable takeaways from the conference included:

- A very informative panel discussion on "physical space," as it relates to room usage in classes, highlighted essential features such as comfort, confidentiality, trouble-free technology, and how "space always has an agenda." In other words, user input is essential since, ideally, it should be "the users who dictate the space."
- The value of developing critical thinking skills in language learners was the emphasis of a presentation entitled, "space for uncertainty." In contrast to "mindless" rote memorization and repetition, for example, critical thinking skills invite disagreement and discussion which prompt learners to engage in hypothetical discourse, examine consequences, identify bias, clarify underlying questions, and generally raise awareness from L1 to L2. In short, critical thinking skills promote more open-mindedness and intensify language learning by making room for uncertainty, ambiguity, and clarification. For more information on all aspects of this delightful conference, visit <https://bctea2018.sched.com/> and navigate the various helpful links available there.

"Technology must be used as a tool, not a pedagogy" was an important conclusion drawn from this conference. In other words, ELT, English language teaching, should not focus on technology, but rather maintain focus on teachers and learning.

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