English Language Learning Program Newsletter

July/August 2023

Upcoming Tutor Roundtable

I'm happy to share that next month there will be another tutor roundtable. This is an opportunity for tutors to share experiences and exchange ideas about teaching English learners. It's a great way to learn about all the wonderful things that other volunteers are doing; if you attend, I think you will come away feeling inspired and invigorated!

Some of you may have attended some of my roundtables for newly trained tutors. However, this one is open to all tutors, regardless of how long they've been part of the program. Also, this event will be led by a volunteer, Aviva, who will bring some new ideas and a fresh perspective. I'm sure that she will be a great facilitator!

This event is scheduled for Thursday, August 10, at 10:30 AM, and it will take place on Zoom. You can sign up here. Space is limited, so please sign up only if you are sure that you can attend.

British English

Sometimes tutors ask me about the value of ELL resources that use British English. Generally speaking, I think beginner and intermediate students living in the United States should focus on American English, since that's what they are going to hear in their daily lives, and trying to use other varieties of English could cause confusion. However, advanced learners or learners who need to communicate with English speakers in other countries might benefit from practicing British English, or at least having some exposure to it. (The differences between American and British English are noteworthy but not huge. Besides the distinct accents, there are differences in spelling [for instance, "color" vs. "colour"], vocabulary ["eggplant" vs. "aubergine"], and grammar ["in the hospital" vs. "in hospital."])

One resource that I would recommend to learners and tutors is BBC Learning English. It has English courses at three levels (easy, medium, and hard), in addition to sections on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Some audio features that I like are 6 Minute English, which covers topics in the news, such as chatbots and climate change denialism, and The English We Speak, which discusses idioms and expressions like "jump through hoops" and "famous last words." Much of the site's content is available on the BBC Learning English app. Of course, you can also access news from the BBC that's not intended for English learners.

Another resource that I like is the British Council. The site offers paid courses, but it also has plenty of resources available for free; I would suggest anything to the right of "Online Courses" at the top of the page. There are sections on the four main language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), business English, short stories, and more. You might see references to things like "A2 reading" or "C1 grammar." These are known as CEFR levels, and they're commonly used in other countries to refer to one's level when learning a language. They range from A1 (beginner) to C2 (advanced).

Finally, there are several excellent YouTube channels that use British English. Besides the channels from the organizations mentioned above, BBC Learning English and the British Council, I would recommend English with Lucy. Another popular channel is mmmEnglish; however, Emma, the person who runs it, is actually Australian!

Learner Profile

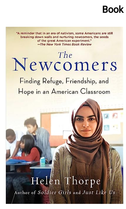
This is the fourth in a series of profiles of ELL tutors and learners.

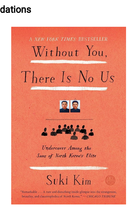
Marianella came to the United States from Venezuela two years ago. She is one of the millions of Venezuelans who have emigrated in recent years due to the deteriorating political and economic situation in their country. Marianella decided to live with her daughter here in Newton, and she is happy about that decision. "I really love to be here. I think the people is great. I love Boston and Newton, and I love to be with my daughter and my son-in-law and my little grandson, so I'm very happy in this moment," she explains.

She has taken some English classes with other programs, but she decided to apply to the Newton ELL program because tutoring is more individualized. She feels that she and her tutor, Marylin, have many things in common and are a great match, which she thinks is important. (Marianella, left, is pictured with Marylin above.) She likes that Marylin asks her what she wants to work on. Marylin sends her exercises on topics like phrasal verbs, which they review together. They also read articles from the *Boston Globe*, allowing Marylin to correct Marianella's pronunciation, and discuss TED Talks, which she enjoys very much. They just started reading *I Am Malala* together. Of course, they also chat about things happening in their lives.

Marianella works in the development office at a local hospital, and she is happy to be doing something similar to what she did in Venezuela. However, she feels that her English makes it difficult for her to advance in her career here. "I'm aware that I can't go further because of my language. I don't feel comfortable speaking with donor or asking many questions. I don't feel comfortable to express as I do in my own language," she explains. She is self-conscious about her pronunciation and grammar; she often knows what she wants to say, but when it comes out, it's a "disaster." However, her lessons with Marylin have helped her communicate better at work and in other places, and she is enthusiastic about continuing their lessons together. "Marylin has been so wonderful to me that I consider her like a friend," she says.

Book Recommendations





I would like to recommend two of my favorite books from the past several years, both of which relate to English language education. One is *The Newcomers* by Helen Thorpe. It's a beautiful, moving portrait of about 20 immigrant and refugee students at a high school in Denver. While the students are younger than the ones in our program, their stories reflect the shared need to integrate into an English-speaking world and the common desire for a better life; reading it will give you insight into the backgrounds of many English learners around the country. I think you'll come away from the book with some teaching ideas as well!

The other book is *Without You, There Is No Us* by Suki Kim. It's a fascinating memoir by a Korean-American woman who taught English in North Korea. Tutors with Korean students might be especially interested in her account, but I think her story would be compelling to anyone who's curious about what it's like to live, let alone try to teach, in a place as isolated, surreal, and dangerous as North Korea. Here is a TED Talk in which the author reflects on her experience.

Some advanced learners might be interested in reading these books. However, these are mainly recommendations for tutors. If you decide to read one, please let me know what you think!

Program News

- After a pause of about seven months, in May we resumed accepting applications from learners interested in having a tutor. Clearly, there was a lot of pent-up demand, as over 70 learners applied within 24 hours! The waiting list is currently at about 130 people.
- There will be an information session for prospective volunteers on Thursday, July 20, at 10:00 AM at the library. It will be followed by a series of training workshops for new tutors. There will be more training starting in September. If you know someone who would be interested, please have them contact me!
- The ELL website now has a photo slideshow featuring various tutors and learners. Also, check out our new brochures at the library's circulation desk and reference desks!

Until next time,
Andrew

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