



The RI-TELLER

The Newsletter for Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners and ELL Professionals

Issue 1

Fall 2010

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Chris Bourret
Joe Lopes
Editors

RITELL Welcomed as Newest TESOL Affiliate

Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners (RITELL) is the state's professional organization for bilingual education and ESOL professionals in Rhode Island. It is also one of the newest affiliates of Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The purpose of RITELL is to determine the advocacy and professional development needs of ESOL and bilingual



Dr. J. Andrés Ramírez and Jane George are officially welcomed at TESOL's affiliate meeting at TESOL's Annual Conference in Boston in March.

education professionals in adult ESOL, higher education, workplace education as well as elementary, secondary and low-incidence programs serving English Language Learners in the state of

Rhode Island.

The governing structure of this group is a Coordinating Council of members from around the state who share the job of organizing regular mini conferences, maintaining contact information for all participants and maintaining a website and biannual newsletter to inform members of upcoming events, opportunities, and resources.

The list of current Coordinating Council members is found on page 8.

Public Education at the Crossroads Rhode Island Struggles to Make Sense of Low Latino Test Scores

The message being showered upon all educators across the state is clear: if you have a Latino student in your classroom, that student is likely to be lagging behind all of your other students.

So says Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist who said this summer, "Our Hispanic

students in grade eight had the lowest scores in the country in reading and math – a shameful statistic." In fact, on the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress achievement tests, not only did the eighth grade Hispanic students have the lowest scores in the country, the state's

Hispanic fourth graders also struggled. On average, both groups scored more than 30 points below white students in math and reading.

The current situation is very compelling to state educators as Latino students comprise the

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RI Public Education at the Crossroads cont.



fastest-growing school population, both locally and nationally. Here are the most recent population numbers in Rhode Island. Of the 145,118 public school students in grades pre-k through high school:

- 98,715 were White
- 26,921 were Hispanic

- 13,367 were Black
- 4,878 were Asian Pacific
- 1,237 were Native American

U.S., and that more than nine out of 10 children ages five to 17 in immigrant families speak English. How well they speak English is not answered by this census-driven statistic.

Despite these many challenges, Gist is unrelenting in her plan to transform Rhode Island's educational landscape. As Gist said, "We need to have the belief that students who speak another

language, students of color and students living in poverty can achieve at high levels. We also need to do a lot of other things, like improve the skills of our teachers and make sure curriculum is aligned to standards. But if we do all those things and don't have a belief that all our students can be successful, we will not get there."

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RITELL Fall Conference



**Dr. Maria Brisk,
Keynote Speaker at
the Fall RITELL
Conference**

Growing Proficient Writers is the title for this year's RITELL Fall Conference. The Keynote speaker is Dr. Maria Brisk, Professor and Chair, Lynch School of Education, Boston College. Dr. Brisk's talk is entitled "Uncovering the Secrets of English: Using a Systemic Functional Linguistics Pedagogy." There will also be a special book signing at the conference of her co-authored book, *Literacy and Bilingualism*.

Following the opening talk, conference Breakout

Sessions will include:

Adult: Learning to Write Starts with Having Something to Say, Andy Nash, Staff Development Specialist, New England Literacy Resource Center, World Education, Boston, MA.

Secondary: Creative Effective Writers in the ESL Secondary Classroom, Kim Leebrun-Stinberg, ESL Teacher, Bain MS, Cranston, RI and Hannah J. Moore, ESL Teacher & Coordinator, Colegio Marymount, Morelos, Mexico.

Elementary: *Writing Strategies for ELLs in Elementary Classes*, Margaret M. Harrington, Ed.D, Bilingual Teacher, Providence Public Schools.

Conference sponsors include Martin & Jane Brauer, National Geographic and Hampton-Brown Publishing Company. RIDE CEUs Available for conference attendees.

Conference Registration Fees:
RITELL Members \$10
Student, part time teacher and retired members \$5
Non-Members \$55
See "How to Pay" on page 8 for more information.

From Colorless Green Ideas that Sleep Furiously To Meaning-Based Learning and Teaching

"Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." The grammar of this sentence is correct, but its meaning, of course, is nonsense. Yet, this sentence is arguably the most important statement in the field of "Linguistic-Cognitive Science."

Penned in 1957 by Noam Chomsky, father of the influential transformative grammar approach, this sentence argued against the then-popular models of grammar. History shows us that Chomsky overwhelmingly won that argument, and that ultimately his linguistic legacy became so prominent that it was without any significant competing view in the United States.

However, as the formal and context-free grammar advocated by Chomsky gained almost canonical status in the 1970s, a functional meaning-based grammar called Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was being developed across the Atlantic by linguist Michael Halliday. SFL looks at language as a meaning-making system, with priority given to studying the choices in language. SFL allows us to ask why, out of so many choices, does a speaker make that particular choice and not another.

Like Chomsky, Halliday was interested in how grammars can function. Unlike Chomsky, however, Halliday was not interested in what any given speaker would be able to do as the result of innate characteristics of human beings.

Rather, he was more interested in describing, explaining, and interpreting what specific

speakers actually do with language; how they use language in different contexts; why they make the choices they make, and what may be the social consequences of such choices.

Halliday's concern was first and foremost with the analysis of everyday speech, as it naturally occurs in actual contexts of use. Chomsky, meanwhile, focused more on the formal properties of English, the innate nature of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and the prototypical speaker.

Today, for practitioners and teachers of language, it is perhaps irrelevant and not useful to choose between either Chomsky or Halliday, especially since both of their theories make important contributions to the field of linguistics.

Rather, it becomes a decision as to what approach will most likely help them as teachers to meet the needs, rights, and backgrounds of their ELL students. What approach will help them as teachers move their ELL students forward?

This is why, in my opinion, if we are to meet the needs of our ELL students, we must fight for their rights, teach to their backgrounds and meet them where they are. To do so, we should move from correctness to appropriateness and from form to meaning; we should move from "Colorless green ideas that sleep furiously" to meaning-based learning and teaching.

In her RITELL Plenary, Dr. Maria Brisk will illustrate and expand on Systemic Functional Linguistics and its role in growing proficient writers. Don't miss it!

**By Andres Ramirez, Associate Professor,
Rhode Island College**

RI Public Education at the Crossroads Cont.

While educators and state officials alike are not disputing the acute need to address the latest low performance scores, solutions must account for the total picture. And finding solutions is more complex than just having high expectations for students.

One of the most visible districts in this firestorm is Central Falls, whose low performance of its high school students has often been criticized. Yet, according to data from the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), 22 percent of Central Falls High School students were identified as being Limited English Proficient, with English as their second language. The number for the rest of the state, meanwhile, is three percent. Also, 23 percent of Central Falls High School students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), plans designed for students with special needs. The state average was 17 percent.

Even more alarming is a *Washington Post* article

in which it was reported that 85 percent of Central Falls student were classified as economically disadvantaged, compared to the state average of 35 percent. Experts also point to attendance patterns and other social factors such as violence, drugs and teenage pregnancy as having an adverse effect on performance scores.

The data is clear: Latino students are struggling in Rhode Island. This same data, though, is difficult to interpret because when children who are in the process of learning English and are tested through the English language, it is well known that those scores are neither valid nor reliable. It is always a measure of their English proficiency, not necessarily their academic achievement in reading and math.

It is also well known that there are many factors which affect student performance, as Gist herself acknowledged in a *Providence Journal* article in July, and to single out teacher quality, as some have suggested, is

simply being unfair. Experts in the Education of English Language Learners, therefore, stress that comprehensive solutions are needed with everyone working together to address the under-achievement of the state's Latino population, and these same experts point to the four recommendations made by TESOL in 2007:

1. *Develop Sound Assessment and Accountability Systems for English Language Learners*
2. *Advance Expertise and Expand Capacity*
3. *Build Community*
4. *Promote Multilingualism*

Hopefully, the solutions generated to address the low performance of the state's Hispanic students will match the complexity of the issues that are yielding these low performance scores and parallel the guidance given to educators by TESOL and other specialists serving ELLs. Also, ELL educators have a large role in providing

appropriate guidance to their schools and to those charged with transforming our schools so they meet the needs of all ELL children, particularly Latino students.

HELP ON THE WAY

Support in the form of massive federal funding will soon reach Rhode Island.

This summer, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that Rhode Island will receive \$12.5 million through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program to turn around its persistently lowest-achieving schools. The SIG program is designed to transform low-achieving schools and is expected to accelerate student achievement and close achievement gaps.

With the expectation of an additional \$75 million over four years from Race to the Top funding, the state's educators may have the resources to tackle the immense task at hand - to transform Rhode Island's schools, especially for Latino students.

In doing so, however, the state will want to look at successful programs recognized for their success with ELLs, such as the International Charter School in Pawtucket. The International Charter School promotes multilingualism, with dual language instruction being offered in English and either Spanish or Portuguese.

Useful Online Resources for Writing

Compiled by Nancy Cloud, Professor, Rhode Island College

<http://www2.lab.brown.edu/tdl/elemlit/writing.shtml>

From the Website: Teaching Diverse Learners: Equity and Excellence for All sponsored by the Education Alliance at Brown University. A series of teaching considerations designed for K-12 teachers, but useful to all ESL teachers.

http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource_topic/english_language_learners

From the National Writing Project, this page lists featured resources on their site of interest to teachers of ELLs. Join the NWP's ELL Network.

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/672>

From the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Education, strategies designed to help ELLs throughout the writing process prepared by Frances Hoch, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Section Chief for K-12 Program Areas.

http://www.cal.org/caela/scb/III_E_TeachingWriting.pdf

A part of a CAELA workshop for Adult Educators on Teaching Writing to Adult ELLs and taken from a publication called The CAELA Guide for Adult ESL Trainers. Covers Pre-Writing, Revising, Editing and Publishing in Chapters Called: Preparing to Write, Making it Clear, Checking Mechanics, Making it Public.

http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/tips_teaching_ells_write_10803.php

Teaching tips taken from EverythingESL.net; a K-12 site.

When you go to this site, you may also want to check out: Giant Steps with Nonfiction Writing:

http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/giants_steps_nonficti_writing_96247.php

http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/dsl_digital_second_language_11955.php

DSL: Digital as a Second Language

http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/wordless_books.php

Wonderful World of Wordless Books

http://www.everythingsl.net/lessons/memoirs_personal_essays_03701.php

Memoirs and Personal Essays

http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/teaching/writing_ells

Taken from the Colorin Colorado Website, this page is the organizing page that links you to many other pages on the site that give extremely useful ideas for teaching writing to ELLs, including tips for parents, elementary and middle school strategies and ideas for writing projects. See also

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/teaching/writing>

This site gives writing instruction with ELLs and gives useful information about how to organize compose and edit writing.

http://academics.smcvt.edu/cbauer-ramazani/Links/esl_writing.htm

Christine Bauer-Ramazani at Saint Michael's College gave us all a wonderful gift--A rich site for Adult ESL educators providing many resources, activities and articles on teaching writing/composition to adults, including student e-mail and web projects, use of online discussions for writing and ways to publish student's work. There is a huge section with downloadable templates on Graphic Organizers. It even includes information on handwriting.

Definitely check this site out and maybe write and thank Christine at <http://academics.smcvt.edu/cbauer-ramazani/>



Attend the RITELL Conferences that are held every Fall and Spring at Rhode Island College!

Why Join RITELL?

Six Essential Reasons

RITELL is the only association in Rhode Island that maintains an affiliation with TESOL. Joining RITELL can help you present yourself as a serious professional who is a member of his or her professional association.

Highlight your membership on your resume:

There are few better ways to show your serious commitment to the field and distinguish yourself from others who don't join or participate in their professional associations.

Pay special member fees and use RITELL resources:

At RITELL Conferences in the fall and spring, pay

discounted fees. Designed with our members' needs in mind, visit the RITELL website regularly to stay up to date in your field. www.ritell.org.

Receive the association's newsletter -- The RI-Teller:

Receive the *RI-Teller* twice a year and stay up to date on issues and developments in the field. Learn of changes in state policies, gain valuable information that can help you teach your students more effectively and learn of professional conferences of interest to be held in our region.

Job Postings:

Receive job postings through *RIWorks*, our e-bulletin that

will notify RITELL members of ESL and bilingual/dual language positions as they are announced.

Networking:

Network with colleagues who can offer you ideas, strategies, resources and encouragement.

Advocacy:

Benefit from the advocacy efforts of RITELL on behalf of Rhode Island ESL and Bilingual professionals, as well as ELL students and their families.

Get involved!

RITELL members are the backbone of our professional association. If you are looking for a way to contribute, RITELL is a wonderful option for you. Join others and make a difference!



Don't miss out on the opportunities and benefits RITELL can bring!

Contribute to RI-TELLER!

We welcome book reviews, articles, lesson ideas, notices or relevant meetings and any other news of interest to ELL educators in RI.

For more information, contact Joe Lopes or Chris Bourret at either

westerlyjoe@hotmail.com

or

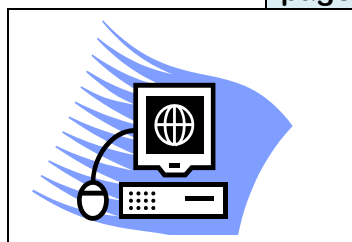
cbourret@verizon.net



See "Helpful Tips" for more information about submissions on the last page.

Check Out the RI-TELL Webpage!

www.ritell.org is up and running. In the coming months, the free site will contain event information, job openings, advocacy positions, educational resources where teachers can post ideas for lessons and other material, as well as other information for members. Visit it today!



African Voices

African students make up 10 percent of the overall population of English Language Learners in Rhode Island, as compared to Asians (16 percent), Europeans (37 percent), and Latinos (37 percent) according Rhode Island *Kids Count*.

Although African students comprise the smallest group of foreign-born Language Learners in our state, their numbers have been substantially growing over the last decade.

West Africans constitute the largest group of African immigrants nationwide. The predominant group of West Africans in Rhode Island are from Cape Verde, but other countries like Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Mali, Liberia and the Ivory Coast are also significantly represented. According to sources from the Migration Policy Institute, there are 12,380 African-born residents in the Providence-Fall-River-Warwick Metropolitan area with a majority concentrated in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket.

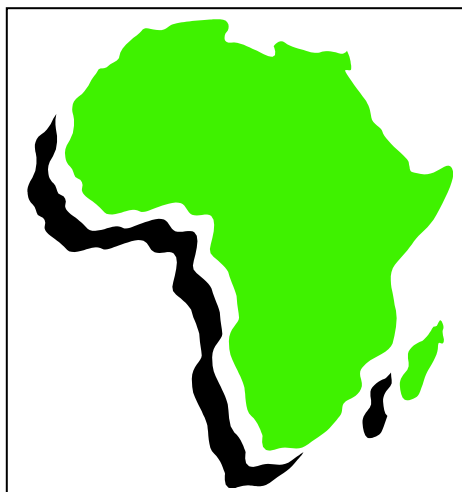
According to RIDE, the percentage of African languages represented in Providence Public schools are Wolof (39), Twi (11), Yoruba (10), Swahili (5), Rundi (5), Akan (3), Afro-Asiatic (2), Bambara (2), Basa (2), Ewe (2), Fulah (1) and Grebo (1). The predominant language according to the RIDE Office of Student, Community, and Academic Supports are Wolof which is spoken by students from Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, and a portion of Senegalese-born Cape Verdeans.

Most of these students were educated in systems that inherited colonial languages such as French, English, Portuguese and Spanish. For example, most students from Senegal speak Wolof as a native language but were schooled in French which is the official language of the country. Similarly, many students from Gambia speak Wolof as a native language, but were taught in English as a result of being a former British colony.

The multilinguistic reality of African educational systems often causes confusion for American teachers who are not quite sure what to make of records, or lack of them, brought by students when they arrive in their new schools. In the upcoming issues of the RI-Teller, we will be looking into individual African school systems, languages, and cultures in an effort to provide a wider perspective on the educational backgrounds of Rhode Island students of African origin.

By Anta Lo, M.Ed. TESL

For information on US policies pertaining to the Refugee Admissions Program for Africa, see: <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/February/20090213121916xjsnommis0.4800793.html> This will give you basic information about resettlement efforts.



Dusting Off What We Already Know: Helping Our ELLs to Write in a Second Language

Writing is, for many people, a highly personal and often intimidating task. Over the past several decades, good—or even outstanding—writing has increasingly become requisite across the professional spectrum and is being emphasized as early as the second and third grade. For ELLs, the purposes associated with writing may represent a vast and seemingly insurmountable range of tasks, from filling out a simple application to preparing a college essay. Below is collective guidance that can aid ELL teachers when supporting their learners to grow towards becoming proficient writers.

1. *Talk about your own experiences as a writer....and model, model, model!* With more advanced students, instructors can reason through their thinking about a particular writing task or topic and explicitly detail how each step was approached. Devote time to modeling the writing process and to familiarizing students with tools and strategies (such as using graphic organizers or other information management resources) that are at their disposal. Break the tasks into manageable chunks, each with finite, achievable goals.

2. *Offer explicit, simplified writing instruction with multiple supports to target and engage multiple intelligences.* Offering students varying types of visual, print, interactive, and instructional options can help ensure that all students' strengths and resources are being harnessed. Be on the alert for the need to adapt or to modify formats as necessary. For example, an activity like peer editing may be useful only if peer editors are provided with

explicit guidance and checklists. Equip students to be successful in their respective roles through modeling and familiarizing students with appropriate procedures.

3. *Remember the affective filter!* Writing in English can be overwhelming and frustrating for ELLs. Teachers can acknowledge and discuss the likelihood of some frustration before students actually experience it, perhaps through humorous role plays or some other equalizing activity. It's helpful, too, to check in with students throughout the process, encouraging them to identify their levels of frustration with graphics or Likert scale surveys. Supporting students through their feelings of ambiguity can help to keep them moving forward.

4. *Don't craft, draft!* Students sometimes get stuck on the notion that they must labor over each word before putting a first idea on paper. Unhinge your students from this misperception by encouraging free writing and brainstorming sessions. Provide guidelines to help students open their thinking channels to the possibilities of theme and content. It's also helpful to vary writing assignments, alternating between strictly defined or delineated topics, loosely defined topics, or total author discretion (choices will be guided by proficiency levels, linguistic targets, etc.).

5. *Create informal vehicles for writing to encourage fluency.* Teachers can help students to relax and experience the benefits of writing through activities that are less structured and have lowered expectations with regard to form, mechanics or content. One example is the well-known interactive dialogue journal between the teacher and student. *Continued on page 9*



Dusting Off What We Already Know: Helping Our ELLs to Write in a Second Language Cont.

Not only does the student reap the benefit of having the freedom to “make mistakes,” but she/he also is afforded the opportunity to feel more personally connected to the instructor (which can also support persistence). Another benefit of the dialogue journal is that the instructor is given more insight to the student’s ongoing language development process and needs.

6. *Explore the range of options for writing at various proficiency levels.* At the entry or beginner level, appropriate writing tasks that can be enjoyable while concurrently helping to build enthusiasm for writing may include analyzing and synthesizing information on simple charts, graphs or grids or dictating short stories (group activities are a great topic) that the teacher writes in whole-class format. For more advanced students, it may be appropriate and desirable to use the *process model* of writing specifically for ELLs, which builds upon the strengths of the model with additional scaffolds appropriate for language learners. Publishing, where possible, can also be a highly motivating element of writing instruction. A simple “class newsletter” containing students’ polished final pieces can both create enthusiasm and build confidence.

7. *Delve into available expert resources:* A discussion of genre theory and text types is beyond the scope of this article. But certainly, if you’re teaching at the college or high school level, your students will be

expected to read and write using the codes and conventions that are specific to a particular discipline or academic register. Fortunately, help is available for the taking to teachers at virtually every level of ESL. The CAELA or TESOL sites alone will put instructors in touch with much of what they will need to support their learners at every point on the spectrum. (See *Useful Online Resources for Writing* on page 5 and *Academic Writing Resources* on page 10 for suggestions).

8. *Use rubrics, writing exemplars, student portfolios, and other assessment tools that offer a range of rating criteria...and consider holistic writing assessment.* As teachers of ELLs, some rubrics may be inappropriate to our students’ instructional needs or may not fully capture their budding language skills and development. Here, holistic rubrics and writing exemplars specific to ELLs may be useful. Additionally, portfolio assessment can offer students and teachers a long-term, tangible compilation of work that can be an indisputable record of progress. Finally, seeking the opinion of trusted colleagues when assessing student writing will ensure inter-rater reliability.

These are only a few of the many ways that we can help our ELLs to develop the important skill of writing in their second language. By removing some of the obstacles that students face and taking a proactive approach to anticipating and meeting their unique needs, we can make the writing task both achievable *and* enjoyable.

By Lisa Davis, M.Ed. TESL

Useful Academic Writing Resources

Compiled from teachers' recommendations. Books listed can be used in High School, Adult, and Higher Education classes.

The Great Writing Series, Heinle Publishing. *A five level series of books by Keith S Folse, et al., that contains a variety of writing models in selected rhetorical styles that provide practice in working with the writing process to develop a final piece of writing.*

Book 1: *Great Sentences for Great Paragraphs*

Book 2: *Great Paragraphs*

Book 3: *From Great Paragraphs to Great Essays*

Book 4: *Great Essays*

Book 5: *Greater Essays*

Ready to Write, Longman Publishing. *The three-level series by authors Karen Blanchard and Christine Root provides basic writing instruction, strategies, and many opportunities for students to use composition skills needed to be successful writers in and out of the classroom.*

Book 1: *A First Composition Text*

Book 2: *Perfecting Paragraphs*

Book 3: *From Paragraphs to Essays*

Writers at Work Series, Cambridge Publishing.

This three-book series by various authors prepares students to tackle academic essay writing by introducing a process approach. In each chapter, students go through a five-step writing process helping students through with strategies for prewriting, organizing, revising, editing and proofreading.

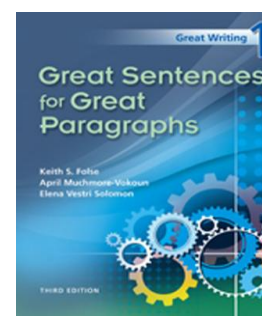
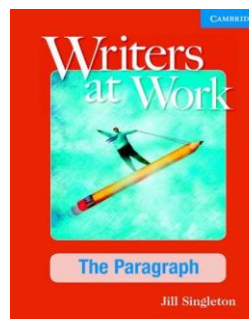
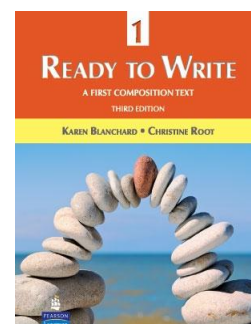
Book 1: *The Paragraph*

Book 2: *The Short Composition*

Book 3: *The Essay*

Check out the publisher websites for more details of each series.

If you have a teaching resource you find useful with your ELL or bilingual students, share the title with us through RI-TELLER!



RITELL Coordinating Council

President: Nancy Cloud

Vice President: Andres Ramirez

Recording Secretary: Susan Rotblat-Walker

Membership Secretary: Jane George

Treasurer: Lauren Bentley

Advocacy Representative: Sarah

Courtemanche

Editors: Chris Bourret and Joe Lopes

Representatives at Large: Pat Morris and

Dina Silvaggio

How to Pay for RITELL Membership and Fall Conference

RITELL membership fees are \$40. Fees are \$25 for part-time teachers and retired teachers.

If you have already become a RITELL member, Conference Registration Fees will be \$10 for members, \$5 for student, part-time teacher and retired members. Those attending who do not wish to become RITELL members will pay a conference fee of \$55.

You may pay your membership fee and your registration fee in one check made out to RITELL. Contact Jane George at Jane_George@NKSD.net to register for the conference and let her know you will bring your check that day.



Past RITELL Conference Pictures



Upcoming Conferences

Contact information:

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.ritell.org

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RI-TELLER submissions

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2011 MATSOL Conference

*One Size Doesn't Fit
All: Meeting the Needs
of Diverse Learners*

May 5-7, 2011
Four Points Sheraton,
Leominster, MA. K-12,
Adult, Workplace and
Higher Education
Focus.

Share the effective
strategies, tools and
practices you use in
your classroom with
your MATSOL
colleagues -- submit a
proposal for a
conference workshop
session. Submission

deadline: October 3,
2010. See www.matsol.org
for more information and
to submit your proposal
online. Conference
registration opens Oct. 1.



TESOL Annual Convention

New Orleans, LA,
March 17-19, 2011.
Registration Opens
Nov. 17, 2010. Visit
www.tesolconvention.org
to download a copy.

Full pre-registration is
\$320 for members and
\$535 for non-members
until February 1, 2011.
Prices will increase on
February 2.



Upcoming Webinars

A series of webinars, *Improving Education for English Learners: Research-Based Approaches*, will begin on Oct. 27 and conclude on Feb. 16. Visit <http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/print/htdocs/smu/webinars/upcoming.htm> for more details.

Helpful Tips for Submission to RI-TELLER

Articles can be up to 900 words in length. Contributing writers are asked to keep in mind the following tips when submitting articles to the editors of the RI-TELLER:

- **Get to the point...**
The more succinct your submission, the more likelihood it will be read.
- **Third person ...**
Unless you are writing an editorial, always write in the third person.
- **Be objective ...**
Your task is to inform, not to be opinionated.
- **Avoid jargon...**
Don't bore your readers to sleep. Simple, clear language is usually more effective.

