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ESL MiniConference

What's Next?

Interview with Robb Scott, Editor, ESL MiniConference Online

1. You have moved, from Hays, KS, to Manhattan, KS. Why?

I taught on the ESOL/Special Education faculty at Fort Hays State University from 2002 to 2005, and thoroughly enjoyed that activity. However, my agreement and relationship with Hays required that I complete a doctorate by the end of year five, and I was not making the necessary progress on that project. At the same time, my experience at Hays, including building an online masters program in ESL teaching and participating on a successful NCATE review of our teacher education programs, convinced me that I wish to work in that kind of higher education setting in the long term. I have aspired to the goal of completing a doctorate since I was 29 years old, and was unsuccessful in two earlier attempts. The desire to make certain that I succeed this time, and the realization that my ability to do the kind of work I enjoy depends on that success, led me to make the decision to resign at Fort Hays and move to Manhattan, Kansas, to be near the campus of Kansas State University, and give more of my attention to my doctoral studies in special education here.

2. How are things progressing with your doctoral program?

Much better. My background and my master's degree are in TESL, so my Ed.D. program at K-State had to include a significant number of fundamental courses in special education, making the program a little larger than most--73 credits. I have now completed my special education core, 30 credits, and am working on electives and internship coursework. In the fall semester of 2007, I hope to take my preliminary exams, and submit a proposal for my dissertation. With hard work and continued good fortune, I expect to be defending my dissertation and completing requirements for the Ed.D. in special education by the summer of 2008.

3. I understand you are also teaching international students in an intensive English program again. How is that going?

I am very happy to report that international student numbers are trending up across the country and, especially, at Kansas State University. This has opened up a wonderful opportunity for me to get back into one of my favorite activities,



meeting students from other countries and preparing lessons to help them with the English skills they need in order to be successful in academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This semester, I taught students from Puerto Rico, Honduras, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, Mongolia, and Kazakstan. This teaching activity reminds me of the earliest teaching I did, as a graduate teaching assistant, during my master's degree at the University of Kansas. I am inspired by the interaction with these young people from all over the world. I am having a great time.

4. Are you still able to find time to devote to organizations like Kansas TESOL? I know you were president a few years ago. Are you still active in that group?

I have had to scale those activities back a bit, but remain active "behind the scenes." I am the Webmaster for KATESOL and I coordinated another big KATESOL conference early in 2006 here at K-State, with 500 attendees. But I have cycled through my leadership duties--first vice-president, president, and past president--and now am not officially a member of the board, although I am still in touch with colleagues there. It is exciting to think that 2007 is the 25th anniversary of the founding of KATESOL, and I have wonderful memories of being part of those first several annual meetings, working with Betty Soppelsa, who started the organization. We will probably do something special online to celebrate this milestone, perhaps with interventions from past presidents. Edith Palmberg, the KATESOL historian, has generated a nearly complete accounting of main events and individuals from over the past quarter of a century, and I'd like to use the Web site to put this information in front of people.

I am beginning to get involved in the Kansas CEC (Council for Exceptional Children) group, too. I have served as co-Webmaster for Kansas CEC during the past three years, and I was recently elected vice-president, which office I will serve starting next summer. I am excited about the opportunity to share ideas with special education colleagues across the state and the country about multicultural perspectives on teaching exceptional children. My area of research is transition planning for culturally and linguistically diverse students, and I am beginning to understand some ways that I can contribute using my knowledge and experience in ESL.

5. Tell me about your family. Don't you have four children? What are they doing?

I am the proud father of four amazing children: Robert Bryan just turned 25; Stephanie Faith is 23; Heather Giselle is 17; and William John is three and a half. The two older children have completed college degrees, and are in that stage

of life when a person works, builds, dreams, and figures out whether more schooling would help in the achievement of their goals. Giselle is a senior in high school, and is a talented writer, artist, and musician. She is looking at colleges for next year. Bill, my youngest, attends two mornings of preschool each week, and is developing his English and Spanish skills, which is kind of the basic starting place for all four of the children. When I think of my own childhood and early education, in a somewhat sheltered English-only environment, I am happy to imagine that the multicultural experiences my children have enjoyed place them all at a higher level of awareness with a greater potential for learning and growth than earlier generations of our family. That is something that their Grandfather John Scott and Grandmother Virginia Huffman Scott would have appreciated if they had lived to know Robbie, Stephanie, Giselle, and Bill, I am certain.

6. The new year, 2007, marks the five-year anniversary of the ESL MiniConference Online. What do you believe have been the contributions or accomplishments of your newsletter and Web site up to now? What is your vision for the ESL MiniConference over the next five years?

I know that the articles, the interviews, and the effort have touched a number of teachers, because I have heard from them, via e-mail. Sometimes, it is a major accomplishment just to continue to exist, in the rough and tumble, here today, gone tomorrow, world of the Internet. Certainly, collecting the first several years of achievement profile interviews into a book is something that I am glad was possible to do. More than 10,000 people have downloaded the e-book version as a free download, at www.eslminiconf.net/eslbook, and that means we are making a difference.

Just as we tracked the effects of downward trends in international student numbers after 9-11, and ways in which our profession can never be the same again, it is exciting to realize that the current upswing in those numbers will also influence the ESL/EFL field. I look forward to learning about the new trends, and continuing to share ideas with colleagues and friends from around the world as the ESL MiniConference tries to "keep that conference spirit going."

7. You recently traveled to New York City to visit family. Five years ago, you moved to Kansas from New York. Do you miss the big city? How is your life different now? How would you compare living in the Midwest to living on the east coast?

I grew up in central Kansas and most of my formative years were spent in Kansas schools. The 10 years that I spent in New York City were important for

the learning experiences that I had there. I think that a lot of people in New York feel that they are competing against everyone else; in Kansas, perhaps people are a little more interested in working together towards a common goal. Because I have so many key memories in my life which are associated with this place, there is a nostalgia and a sense of continuity of experience which perhaps would not be possible elsewhere. However, I appreciate having had the opportunity to spend a decade of my life living in New York City. There are some things there which are hard to find where I live now. For example, I remember the Monet show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and feeling the cool breeze off the water while riding the Staten Island ferry on a hot summer's day. At the same time, my eyes find the Kansas colors, in all seasons, very familiar and beautiful, and I walk as if through a garden of trees on my way to and from classes on the K-State campus here in the "Little Apple," Manhattan, Kansas.

8. Do you have any New Year's resolutions for 2007?

It's a great time to be making resolutions. It is a hopeful time, after the recent election season. I hope, for example, that the American soldiers can come home from the Iraq conflict where nearly 3,000 of their fellow patriots have fallen. I hope that the will of the American people is respected this time, and that our governing leaders can find constructive rather than wasteful ways to spend the national treasury. My personal resolution would be to be a good example for my children and my students, in the way I approach challenges, difficulties, and obstacles in my life. A year from now, I want to be on the verge of finishing my toughest project to date--the Ed.D. in special education. En route to that landmark, I will face physical, emotional, and intellectual hardships. I have resolved to be strong and graceful in meeting these as yet unforeseen barriers. I need to become more efficient in my completion of the tasks that comprise my work and my studies. I also need to get enough regular exercise to have the stamina required to persevere.

Thank you for your interesting questions.

Report by Meribel Osorio

2007 ESL MiniConference Online



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