



STRONGER TOGETHER:

Empowering educators to support multilingual learners



WITESOL FALL CONFERENCE

Verona Area High School

Verona, WI

NOV 8,
2025





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Schedule of Events

Time	Activity			
8:00 – 8:45 a.m.	Registration and Breakfast in the Lobby Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables and the poster presentations!			
8:45 – 9:45 a.m.	LGI - Morning Keynote - Michelle Benegas			
9:45 – 9:55 a.m.	Break - Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables and stop by the book signing!			
9:55 – 10:40 a.m.	N2044 <i>Modern Dialogue Projects with Deepsite and Animated Text Conversations</i> Matthew Manning	N2050 <i>Aprendiendo en inglés: Exploring Classroom Pedagogies for Multilingual Learners in Rural Wisconsin</i> Matt McParker	N2056 Platinum sponsor presentation <i>Brave New World - Refugee and Immigrant English Language Instruction for the Classroom, Workplace and Beyond</i> Sarah Mankowski-Lathrum - Hanan Refugees Relief Group	
10:40 – 10:50 a.m.	Break - Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables!			
10:50 – 11:35 a.m.	N2044 <i>Why Wait? Writing from Day One to Build All Language Domains</i> Allyson Techmeier	N2050 <i>Juntos: Strengthening Family-School Connections for Multilingual Student Success</i> Danielle Luer	N2052 Keynote speaker session <i>Liberatory Learning through #LILA (Language of Identity, Language of Access)</i> Natalia Benjamin	
11:35 – 11:45 a.m.	Break - Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables!			
11:45 – 12:30 p.m.	N2044 <i>Student Panel: How Teachers and Students Find Success in the Classroom</i> <i>Natalija Krsteva and students</i>	N2050 <i>Using Functional Speaking Exercises to Increase Student Accuracy and Confidence</i> <i>Paul G.J. Thomas</i>	N2052 <i>Supercharge Learning & Engagement with the RISA Oral Interaction Protocol</i> <i>Jill Watson</i>	N2056 <i>Trauma-Informed Education for EL Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences</i> <i>Kateryna Bikir</i>



STRONGER TOGETHER:

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Schedule of Events, continued

12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	LGI - Lunch and WITESOL Open Meeting			
1:30 – 1:40 p.m.	Break - Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables and the poster presentations!			
1:40 – 2:25 p.m.	<p>N2044 <i>Building Reading Skills through a Focus on Wellness and Brain Science Themes</i></p> <p>Heidi Evans and Andrea Poulos</p>	<p>N2050 <i>"I Forgot They Were ML!": How Delayed Reclassification Impacts Secondary MLs</i></p> <p>Marie-Claire Chaudoir</p>	<p>N2052 Keynote speaker session <i>From ELM to SWEL: Activating Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning</i></p> <p>Michelle Benegas</p>	
2:25 – 2:35 p.m.	Break - Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables!			
2:35 – 3:20 p.m.	<p>N2044 <i>Meet Them Where They Are: Alternative Graduation Pathways for SLIFE Students</i></p> <p>Natalija Krsteva</p>	<p>N2050 <i>Empowering Educators of Research Writing When Learners Have Access to AI Texts</i></p> <p>James Corona</p>	<p>N2052 <i>Five Eco-ELT Strategies for Multilingual Learners to Tackle Plastics</i></p> <p>Susan Huss-Lederman and Allegra Troiano</p>	<p>N2056 <i>Advocating for Multilingual Learners of English in Uncertain Times</i></p> <p>Melanie Schneider and Liz Murphy</p>
3:20 – 3:35 p.m.	Coffee & cookies in the Lobby Enjoy perusing the sponsor tables and stop by the book signing!			
3:35 – 4:35 p.m.	LGI - Afternoon Keynote - Natalia Benjamin			
4:35 – 4:45 p.m.	LGI - Closing and door prizes!			

Thank you to our presenters for volunteering to share your knowledge and expertise in order to make this conference a success.

We are privileged to learn from you.

Thank you!

All, please remember to complete the Conference and Presentation Feedback Survey. This will help us with planning next year's conference.





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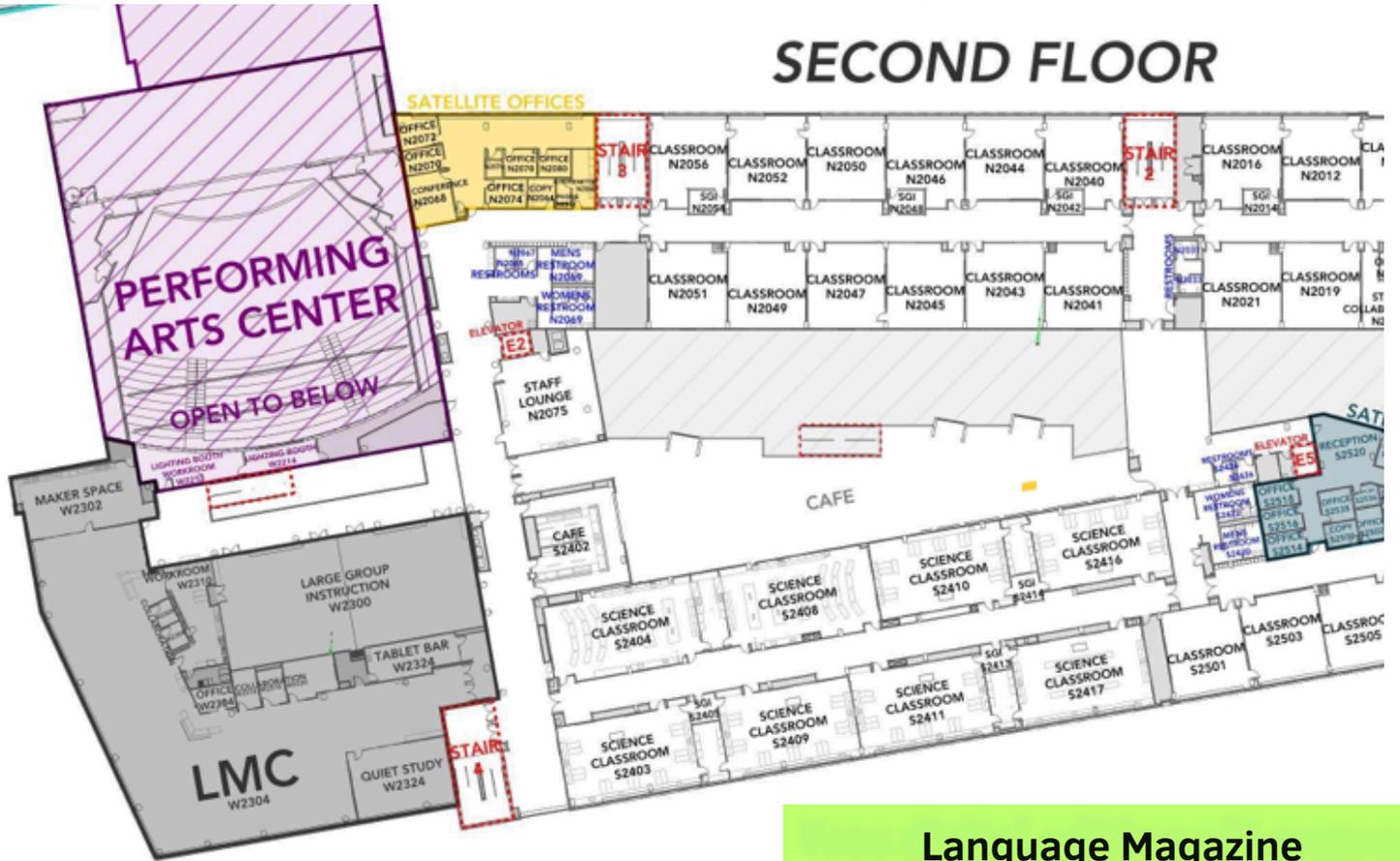
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WITESOL is the professional organization for Wisconsin Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. As an affiliate of TESOL International and an associate of IATEFL, we provide professional development opportunities and a network for educators of English Learners and multilingual students of all levels and ages around the state of Wisconsin.

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Keep calm and communicate!

Morning Keynote Speaker: Michelle Benegas, Ph.D

“Rethinking Academic Language: Flattening the Hierarchy and Centering Access”

8:45-9:45 a.m. in LGI



Abstract: At best, *academic language* is an apolitical term that has taken on an exclusionary tone over time. At worst, it is a gatekeeping mechanism. The Language of Access responds to those who have been injured by linguistic hierarchy and redefines the teacher’s role in expanding learners’ linguistic repertoires.

Michelle Benegas, Ph.D., is an associate professor at Hamline University and co-founder of TESOL International Association’s School Wide English Learning (SWEL) Professional Development Series. A former secondary English Language Development (ELD) teacher, her career began in a newcomer high school. Her books include *Language of Identity, Language of Access (LILA): Liberatory Learning in Multilingual Classrooms (Corwin)* and *Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning (TESOL Press)*. She was the 2015 president of MinneTESOL and senior editor of the *MinneTESOL Journal* from 2020-2023. Her scholarly interests include ELD teacher leadership, systemic approaches to improving ELD services, raciolinguistics, and etymology.

Afternoon Keynote Speaker: Natalia Benjamin

“Language Development through Identity and Criticality”

3:35-4:35 p.m. in LGI

Abstract: Student success is intrinsically linked to classroom engagement and a positive classroom identity. When students feel valued and seen, they will develop a strong sense of self that motivates them to do well in school. We will explore personal experiences that exemplify how identity and criticality support students in schools to be successful as they develop their language skills.

Natalia Benjamin taught high school *Ethnic Studies* and *Multilingual Learners* in Rochester, MN and now works as the Director of *Multilingual Learning*. She was named the 2021 Minnesota Teacher of the Year and holds a National Board Teacher Certification. Her work focuses on advocacy for multilingual/multicultural education, identity work, *Heritage Speakers*, *ethnic studies*, *language justice*, and student-centered humanizing pedagogies. She shares many practical examples for teachers to enact these practices in the book she co-authored: *Language of Identity, Language of Access: Liberatory Learning for Multilingual Classrooms (Corwin, 2024)*.



Concurrent Session 1: 9:55 – 10:40 a.m.

Room N2044

Modern Dialogue Projects with DeepSite and Animated Text Conversations

Presentation: Workshop/Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Matthew Manning

Abstract: Learn how to use DeepSite to help students create animated text message conversations that modernize dialogue between characters. This engaging, standards-aligned tool supports creative literary analysis, voice, and digital storytelling—no coding required. Perfect for ELA, social studies, or world language classrooms in grades 6–12.

Room N2050

Aprendiendo en inglés: Exploring Classroom Pedagogies for Multilingual Learners in Rural Wisconsin

Presentation: Research-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Higher Education, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Dr. Matt McParker

Abstract: Rural schools often face challenges in meeting the needs of multilingual learners (MLs) and little research exists examining effective practices for MLs in rural settings. I examine how two teachers in a school district with a high percentage of MLs structured their classrooms to meet their students' needs.

Room N2056

Brave New World - Refugee and Immigrant English Language Instruction for the Classroom, Workplace and Beyond - *Platinum Sponsor Session*

(Hanan Refugees Relief Group)

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: Adult Education, Migrants / Refugees, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Sarah Mankowski-Lathrum

Abstract: We will explore strategies for working with a mixed classroom of refugees who have come from traumatic environments with specialized skill sets – as well as needs – that often differ from the other ELL students in our classes, who have been living in the US for a longer period of time.



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Concurrent Session 2: 10:50-11:35 a.m.

Room N2044

Why Wait? Writing from Day One to Build All Language Domains

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education

Presenter: Allyson Techmeier

Abstract: Learn why writing should begin on day one with multilingual learners and how early writing drives growth in reading, speaking, listening, grammar, and pronunciation. This session offers practical strategies, examples, and ready-to-use tools so you can confidently integrate writing at any language level and support students' overall language development.

Room N2050

Juntos: Strengthening Family-School Connections for Multilingual Student Success

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Migrants / Refugees, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Danielle Luer

Abstract: Discover strategies to strengthen family-school partnerships that support multilingual learners. This session highlights how culturally responsive engagement builds trust, fosters collaboration, and promotes student success. Participants will explore a successful family outreach model and gain practical tools to enhance communication, connection, and community with multilingual families in their own schools.

Room N2052

Liberatory Learning through #LILA (Language of Identity, Language of Access) - Keynote Speaker Session

Presenter: Natalia Benjamin

Abstract: Participants will examine how language stances and pedagogies support, sustain, and develop the language of identity and criticality for students while developing the language of access in different social spaces. This session will provide an overview of theoretical frameworks that support this process. We will explore how people's perspectives affect the experiences of multilingual individuals and their communities and what educators can do to implement different theoretical frameworks to foster liberatory learning spaces where students can thrive in schools.



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Concurrent Session 3: 11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Room N2044

Student Panel: How Teachers and Students Find Success in the Classroom

Presentation: Panel

Audience: K-12 Education

Presenters: Natalija Krsteva with Valerie Gomez Rojas, Sofia Zapata Forero, Sofia Torres Gallegos, and Mariia Kiselyova

Abstract: This student panel features four high schoolers sharing their journeys learning English and exiting EL status. They will highlight effective classroom strategies, supportive teacher practices, and personal experiences that accelerated their language development, offering insights into what helps English learners thrive academically and linguistically.

Room N2050

Using Functional Speaking Exercises to Increase Student Accuracy and Confidence

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: Adult Education

Presenter: Paul G.J. Thomas

Abstract: By consistently providing students with a high volume of opportunities to practice high-frequency constructions that elicit meaningful output, instructors can guide English language learners to build accuracy at a faster rate, which increases student confidence. In this interactive presentation, participants will engage with exercises that can transform their classroom approach.

Room N2052

Supercharge Learning & Engagement with the RISA Oral Interaction Protocol

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education

Presenter: Dr. Jill Watson

Abstract: The Routine, Integrated, Structured, Academic Oral Interaction Protocol is a popular strategy that leverages the oral mode to strengthen literacy, learning, & engagement for ELs & SLIFE at all ELP levels. Participants will learn how to do RISA by reviewing differentiated examples from many schools, content areas, & ELP levels.

Room N2056

Trauma-Informed Education for EL Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences

Presentation: Research-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Migrants / Refugees

Presenter: Kateryna Bikir

Abstract: This session focuses on trauma-informed education for English Learners with adverse childhood experiences. Attendees will explore effective strategies to create supportive learning environments, engage in practical activities, and develop culturally responsive lesson plans. Participants will leave equipped with tools to enhance student engagement and emotional well-being in the classroom.

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Concurrent Session 4: 1:40 – 2:25 p.m.

Room N2044

Building Reading Skills through a Focus on Wellness and Brain Science Themes

Presentation: Research-Oriented

Audience: Higher Education

Presenters: Heidi Evans and Andrea Poulos

Abstract: Equipping students for learning is essential for student success, especially when tied to meaningful, real-world topics. This presentation explores a university reading skills course focused on health, wellness, and the brain and learning. The presenters demonstrate how these topics empowered students and share learner training activities adaptable for various levels.

Room N2050

"I Forgot They Were ML!": How Delayed Reclassification Impacts Secondary MLs

Presentation: Research-Oriented Presentation

Audience: K-12 Education, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Marie-Claire Chaudoir

Abstract: This presentation reviews existing research on how delayed reclassification impacts secondary multilingual learners (MLs). Strong oracy often masks academic literacy gaps, limiting rigorous coursework and reducing self-efficacy. This presentation will share actionable strategies for educators and leaders to foster timely reclassification, proficiency, and academic success for all MLs.

Room N2052

From ELM to SWEL: Activating Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning - Keynote Speaker Session

Presenter: Dr. Michelle Benegas

Abstract: In 2016, Hamline University was awarded a \$1.4 million grant from the US Department of Education – Office of English Language Acquisition to fund the English Learners in the Mainstream (ELM) Project. This Minnesota-based model, now known as School-Wide English Learning (SWEL), is under the wing of TESOL International Association.

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651-494-8524

Concurrent Session 5: 2:35 – 3:20 p.m.

Room N2044

Meet Them Where They Are: Alternative Graduation Pathways for SLIFE Students

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Migrants / Refugees, Program Design / Administration

Presenter: Natalija Krsteva

Abstract: This session explores alternative graduation pathways for SLIFE students with few or no credits upon arrival. Highlighting the CORE 15 initiative and other flexible options, the presentation will detail how these pathways support English acquisition, literacy, and timely graduation. A Q&A segment will follow the 35-minute presentation.

Room N2050

Empowering Educators of Research Writing When Learners Have Access to AI Texts

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Adult Education, Higher Education

Presenter: James Corona

Abstract: Examining student assignments generated with the help of machine generated texts, I have looked for regularities and limitations in language expression, research topics, and organizational structures to more fully understand how to exploit these limitations in order to incentivize students to more closely engage with their research assignments.

Room N2052

Five Eco-ELT Strategies for Multilingual Learners to Tackle Plastics

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, International Educators

Presenters: Dr. Susan Huss-Lederman and Allegra Troiano

Abstract: In this practice-oriented session, participants will explore five hands-on eco-ELT strategies that help students understand the problem with plastics. Strategies include: 1) auditing single-use plastics, 2) creating plastic sculptures, 3) pledging to reduce plastic use and writing slogans, 4) preparing an infographic, and 5) creating a song through generative AI.

Room N2056

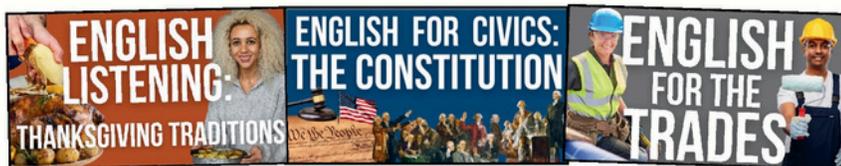
Advocating for Multilingual Learners of English in Uncertain Times

Presentation: Workshop / Practice-Oriented

Audience: K-12 Education, Adult Education, Higher Education, Migrants / Refugees

Presenters: Dr. Melanie Schneider and Liz Murphy

Abstract: Do you wish you could do more to support and uplift MLEs and their teachers outside of the classroom? Advocating for MLEs may offer a partial answer. In this presentation we share how you can learn advocacy skills at both the state and national levels in WITESOL and TESOL.



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Poster Presentations

We are Stronger Together: Voices from TESOL Practicum Students

Presentation: Poster Session

Audience: K-12 Education, Higher Education, Program Design / Administration

Presenters: Dr. Yuanyuan Hu, Scarleth Canales, Greta Volkening, Leah Hammill, Linnea Meneses, Broderick Vaclavek

Abstract: A TESOL instructor and five undergraduate TESOL practicum students share their empowering experiences in a set of three poster presentations. The three posters, featuring the TESOL students' voices, illustrate how we can be stronger together in our efforts to be empowered and empower multilingual learners.

Guided by Theory, Grounded in Practice: Critical Literacy Curriculum for Multilingual Learners

Presentation: Poster Session

Audience: K-12 Education, Adult Education, Higher Education

Presenter: Dr. Jiahong (Annie) Wang

Abstract: This poster session demonstrates how multilingual educators can apply theory and research to design curriculum that supports critical literacy for newcomer students. Drawing on practical examples, it showcases how theoretical frameworks can be transformed into accessible, empowering classroom strategies.

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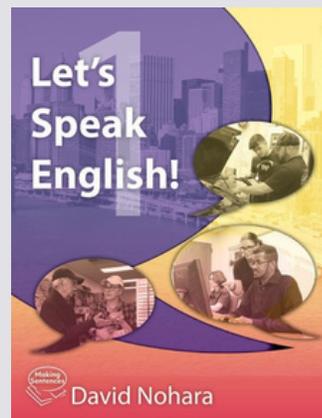
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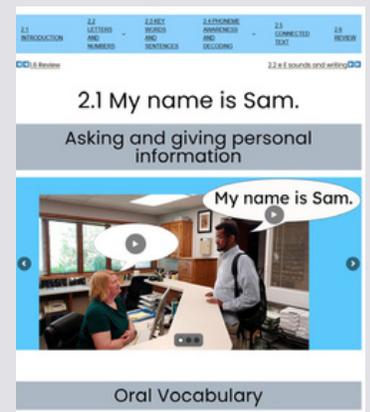
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Concurrent Session Speaker Bios

Kateryna Bikir

“Trauma-Informed Education for EL Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences”

Kateryna Bikir, M.S. in Psychology, works as a School Counselor in ECASD. She served as an EL teacher for two years. Kateryna is a member of APA, ASCA, and NPA(Ukraine). She worked as a psychologist in Ukraine and the Czech Republic. She is an expert on trauma-informed education and culturally responsible practices in teaching and counseling. Kateryna moved from Ukraine with her family because of the war. She advocates for refugees and creates a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

Marie-Claire Chaudoir

“I Forgot They Were ML!”: How Delayed Reclassification Impacts Secondary MLs”

With over two decades dedicated to empowering multilingual learners, Marie-Claire Chaudoir brings extensive practical experience as the District Multilingual Instructional Coach for Menasha Joint School District. In this role, she works alongside educators to develop culturally and linguistically responsive practices so that all students thrive. Ms. Chaudoir is currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research focuses on the impact of language ideologies held by school leaders and how these ideologies influence the academic and social outcomes for long-term multilingual learners. This vital work aims to illuminate pathways for school systems to deconstruct monolingual biases and cultivate truly inclusive, affirming spaces for every student, championing linguistic justice.

James Corona

“Empowering Educators of Research Writing When Learners Have Access to AI Texts”

Having earned a Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction from UW-Madison, James Corona is a Lecturer in the English Department at UW-Madison. As a member of the ESL program in the English Department at UW-Madison, he specializes in teaching academic writing. Therefore, he generally teaches three academic classes per semester. These classes constitute the Comm A research writing requirement for international students at UW-Madison. He is currently exploring ways to improve the quality of research writing education for his students.

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Concurrent Session Speaker Bios

Heidi Evans and Andrea Poulos

“Building Reading Skills through a Focus on Wellness and Brain Science Themes”

Heidi Evans is a Distinguished Teaching Professor and Associate Director of the Program in ESL at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she teaches academic skills and TESOL courses. She has taught in the U.S. and Japan and led professional development workshops on assessment, curriculum design, and teacher training on four continents. She is especially interested in how digital tools and AI can support multilingual learners in academic contexts.

Andrea Poulos is a Teaching Faculty in the English Department/ESL Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In honor of her grandparents, all four of whom were immigrants, she has served as an English teacher and teacher trainer throughout her career, working with a broad range of populations from varied educational backgrounds.

Yuanyuan Hu, Scarleth Canales, Greta Volkening, Leah Hammill, Linnea Meneses, and Broderick Vaclavek
“We are Stronger Together: Voices from TESOL Practicum Students”

Dr. Yuanyuan Hu is professor of English/TESOL in the Department of Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-P), where she directs the TESOL program, the Linguistics certificate program, and the Master of Science in English Education China program. She enjoys serving as university supervisor for TESOL practicum students as it connects her to school districts, cooperating teachers, and multilingual learners, beyond the college classroom.

Scarleth Canales is a Spanish Education major, with a TESOL minor and a Linguistics certificate. Originally from Honduras and a first-generation college student, she is passionate about empowering multilingual learners. Her experience as an ELL inspired her to be a teacher who supports students through language and cultural transitions.

Greta Volkening is a 4th-year student, pursuing a BA in Elementary Education with TESOL licensure. Greta is also on the softball team. She will be completing student teaching next fall. Her real-life experiences from several practicums have had a profound impact on her and set her up for success in her future classroom. **Leah Hammill** is a senior Spanish Education major, with minors in English Education and TESOL, and a certificate in Linguistics. A McNair Scholar and 1st-generation college student, she is deeply committed to equity in education, language access, and ML advocacy. Leah is currently studying abroad in Mendoza, Argentina. **Linnea Meneses** and **Broderick Vaclavek** are also TESOL students.



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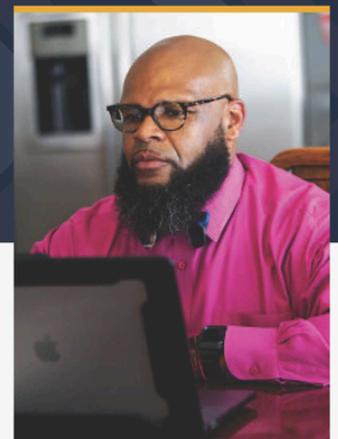
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For more information contact erin.ferruzzi@ace.edu.

Concurrent Session Speaker Bios

Susan Huss-Lederman and Allegra Troiano

“Five Eco-ELT Strategies for Multilingual Learners to Tackle Plastics”

Susan Huss-Lederman has been an English language educator for over 30 years. She has provided professional development workshops in several Latin American countries as a Fulbright Scholar and an English Language Specialist, focusing on project-based language learning for sustainability.

Allegra Troiano started her teaching career as a Peace Corps TEFL Volunteer in Senegal, West Africa. Since that time, her career has expanded to teach ESL to refugees, immigrants, and international students; administer ESL programs around the world; and design curriculum.

Natalija Krsteva and Students

“Meet Them Where They Are: Alternative Graduation Pathways for SLIFE Students” and “Student Panel: How Teachers and Students Find Success in the Classroom”

Natalija Krsteva is a Bilingual Resource Teacher at Verona Area High School, where she has worked for the past six years, primarily supporting newcomer students. She teaches an introductory newcomer course and an English class designed specifically for English learners, while also providing in-class support across subject areas. Natalija works closely with SLIFE students to develop individualized graduation plans that reflect their unique needs and goals. As an immigrant and English learner herself, she brings a personal understanding to her work, building strong, lasting connections with students and serving as a passionate advocate for their success. Her lived experience fuels her commitment to improving instructional programs and creating equitable pathways that support newcomer achievement and graduation.

Valerie Gomez Rojas is in 11th grade and she came to Verona from Colombia four years ago.

Mariia Kiselyova (Masha) is in 11th grade and she came to Verona from Ukraine three years ago.

Sofia Torres Gallegos is in 11th grade and she came to Verona from Mexico four years ago.

Sofia Zapata Forero is in 11th grade and she came to Verona from Colombia five years ago.

Danielle Luer

“Juntos: Strengthening Family-School Connections for Multilingual Student Success”

Danielle M. Luer is the English Learner (EL) Coordinator for the Eau Claire Area School District, where she supports multilingual learners and their families through advocacy, programming, and educator development. With over a decade of experience in both domestic and international education, Danielle has taught and led in diverse learning environments, including time spent abroad in Latin America. Her work focuses on fostering inclusive school communities that honor linguistic and cultural diversity. She is passionate about building strong family-school partnerships and creating systems that empower multilingual students to thrive academically and socially. Danielle leads districtwide initiatives that support language access, family engagement, and professional learning for staff. She is especially committed to elevating the voices of underrepresented communities and ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities. Outside of work, Danielle enjoys traveling, scuba diving, and exploring new cultures and languages.

Sarah Mankowski-Lathrum – Hanan Refugee Relief Group

“Brave New World - Refugee and Immigrant English Language Instruction for the Classroom, Workplace and Beyond”

Sarah is an ESL instructor with over 20 years teaching experience, spanning university writing and literature courses to elementary and high school Spanish classes with Milwaukee Public Schools. She has traveled around the world, from volunteering at a teacher training college in Poland with the Peace Corps to teaching English at a women's junior college in Tokyo, Japan. Her passion for community-based educational programs brought her to Hanan Relief Group over a year ago, and she enjoys helping their clients begin - or continue - their English language learning journeys.

Concurrent Session Speaker Bios

Matthew Manning

“Modern Dialogue Projects with Deepsite and Animated Text Conversations”

Matthew David Manning is a newcomer to Wisconsin but has been a high school ELL teacher in Kansas City for nearly a decade. He has always had a keen interest in developing tools and resources that help aid in making instruction more streamlined, efficient, and entertaining. Currently, he and his family are adjusting to their new lives in Green Bay as he starts his new career at North High School part of GBAPS.

Matt McParker

“Aprendiendo en inglés: Exploring Classroom Pedagogies for Multilingual Learners in Rural Wisconsin”

Matt McParker is an associate professor in the Educational Studies Department at University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. In addition to researching social studies inquiry, he is interested in how effective teachers structure their classrooms for students of all linguistic backgrounds to experience success. Prior to coming to Wisconsin, he taught for 13 years at a middle school in Portland, OR with students who spoke over 30 different languages. He earned an EdD in 2016, writing his dissertation about the experiences of female refugee students from Burma. At UWL, Dr. McParker supervises elementary field experiences, teaches courses in social studies and TESOL, and serves as the elementary-middle education program director. He also serves on the WITESOL board as a member at large.

Melanie Schneider and Liz Murphy

“Advocating for Multilingual Learners of English in Uncertain Times”

Melanie Schneider is Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, where she coordinated the ESL and Bilingual Education Licensure Program and advised the Student Teaching Program in Mexico. She is interested in promoting advocacy skills that lead to professional growth among teachers, university students, and university faculty. Additionally, she is committed to advocating for multilingual students and their teachers. She enjoys working with practicing teachers as well as teaching students of all ages. A long-time member and supporter of WITESOL, Dr. Schneider is serving as the Advocacy Chair of WITESOL.

Allyson Techmeier

“Why Wait? Writing from Day One to Build All Language Domains”

Allyson Techmeier is a secondary ELL teacher in Altoona, Wisconsin. She holds a Master’s in Education (Early Childhood Education) from Grand Canyon University and a BS in Child, Youth, and Family Studies with an emphasis in Family Communication and a minor in Religious Studies from UW-Stevens Point. She is currently completing a Master’s in TESOL at UW-River Falls, where her capstone research focuses on writing. With teaching experience spanning early childhood through high school, Allyson specializes in building writing-focused classrooms that drive growth across all language domains. She also partners with general education teachers to develop writing prompts and guide effective practices that support multilingual learners. In her diverse classroom, she uses writing to meaningfully connect vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and reading from day one. Allyson is passionate about creating practical tools that make writing accessible, relevant, and empowering for students at all language levels.

Paul G.J. Thomas

“Using Functional Speaking Exercises to Increase Student Accuracy and Confidence”

Paul G.J. Thomas has been working in language training since 2002, when he started teaching developmental composition to non-native speakers at St. Augustine College in Chicago. He was an adult education ESL instructor at several City Colleges of Chicago for twelve years in addition to teaching ESL, TOEFL & IELTS prep, and business communications at a private language school for more than ten years. As an administrator he has been an adult education / ESL manager for Malcolm X College, Oakton Community College, and Daley College - Arturo Velasquez Institute. Currently he is the Adult Education and Literacy Manager at Trellus (formerly Asian Human Services) in Chicago. Over the past few years he has presented on his language training approach at conferences nationwide, which include the Illinois TESOL-Bilingual Education Conference, New York TESOL Conference, Alabama-Mississippi TESOL Conference, and IACEA Conference. Paul holds an M.A. in Linguistics from Northeastern Illinois University.

Concurrent Session Speaker Bios

Jiahong (Annie) Wang

“Guided by Theory, Grounded in Practice: Critical Literacy Curriculum for Multilingual Learners”

Jiahong Wang 王佳虹 is an Assistant Professor of TESOL at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. She is a dedicated language educator with over 12 years of teaching experience—four years teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China and eight years teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the United States. She is a licensed high school English teacher in both China and the U.S., as well as a National Board Certified Teacher. Jiahong holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Teaching with a focus on TESOL from the University of Kansas. Her research interests include English literacy, critical literacy, language learner and teacher identity and agency, critical autoethnography, and teacher education.

Jill Watson

“Supercharge Learning & Engagement with the RISA Oral Interaction Protocol”

Jill A. Watson, Ph.D., is a noted advocate, researcher, and professional development provider with a strong focus on effective instruction for Multilingual Learners of English (MLEs) and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). Recently retired from her position as director of ESL Licensure at St. Olaf College, Dr. Watson is adjunct professor in the graduate education program at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, and is active as a PD provider in schools throughout Minnesota and beyond. She is the co-founder and leader of the MinneSLIFE Standing Committee, creator of the RISA Oral Interaction protocol, and is a certified trainer in the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP). Dr. Watson is a past president of MinneTESOL, and recipient of the Mary Diaz Award for ESL Advocacy.

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