

Title: Dedicated to Professional Learning: Supporting Success for Educators and English Learners

Description: In this episode, Christina Terrell defines ESL and related terminology, explains foundational elements for how people learn language, and shares guidance for how educators can support their English language learners. Christina is a program specialist on our Curriculum and Training team, who provides content expertise focused on assisting educators with professional development opportunities.

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Fara Allen: Welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training Team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State’s campus. We work where research meets reality. I’m your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. This podcast series will focus on the various approaches and supports that our center offers to educators of all learners. How do educators engage, nurture, and support their learners? Listen in on these discussions that highlight how educators can connect with and understand their learners! At CETE, we believe that everyone deserves to experience lifelong learning! To learn more about our work, you can visit our website CETE, that’s C-E-T-E, dot O-S-U dot E-D-U. Today, I’m excited to speak with Christina Terrell, a program specialist on our Curriculum and Training team at CETE. She provides content expertise focused on assisting educators with professional development opportunities. Christina designs, develops, delivers training events, and is a proponent of blended learning. As you can imagine, delivering these events in a virtual setting more than ever recently, we need to support educators in ways that are accessible and meaningful. With nearly 25 years of experience in ESL and adult education, I’m pleased to welcome Christina as our guest today, where she shares her passion for English language learners and the educators who support them.

Fara Allen: Hi Christina, welcome to CETE Works podcast. I’m happy to have you join us today to talk about an important topic centered around learners of English language and the different elements that educators should consider for their learners. Can you start us off by explaining what ESL stands for, what it means, and how it relates to our theme of the series, which we hope will help educators understand their learners and learners needs better?

Christina Terrell: Yeah, sure, thanks Fara, thanks for having me today. So, ESL stands for English as a second language, and it refers to learning the English language for someone who's first or home language is not English. There's actually several terms floating around that you may hear, for example, ESOL, which is English to Speakers of Other Languages and ELA English Language Acquisition, so those also refer to the classes and when referencing the learners themselves some common terms are ELL,

English Language Learner or just EL English Learner, which is actually now more common as it's used in some of the federal legislation and depending on where you are in the educational system, you may find one term more commonly used than another, for example, ESL is used more at the K 12 or at the university level, and ESOL is used in the Community, adult education programs, and that's more because the majority of learners know more than one language so English isn't really the second language but, quite possibly the fourth, fifth or more. And language learning, or ESL, involves engaging the four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in order to be able to actually function in the language, and in this case, English. It may be helpful to understand the process of language learning, where one begins with receptive skills, which are listening and reading and then they move into producing language with speaking and writing. Professor Jim Cummins made the distinction of BICS and CALPS, where a person begins with BICS, which is basic interpersonal communicative skills or conversational fluency using listening and speaking skills, for the first several years, so they start off with BICS and then they move into CALPS, which is cognitive academic language proficiency or using more of those academic skills of reading and writing. So, if you consider how you learned your first language as a baby there's a period of listening, we aren't born talking right?

Fara Allen: Right.

Christina Terrell: And this is referred to as like the silent period, so we listen to the sounds of the language and slowly we begin practicing sounds and eventually producing language and then later hopefully we learn to read and then write. And so, so that's a little bit about the process of language learning and, as far as then connecting it to the theme it's certainly important for educators, to understand that process of language learning so, then they can appreciate what their learners are experiencing. And even have more realistic expectations for what's going to take place in the classroom. It's also helpful to remember that ESL learners have great funds of knowledge, they have a wealth of experience, rich cultures, and diverse backgrounds. And when these funds of knowledge are viewed as an asset and educators have an awareness of cultural norms that may exist in the classroom it helps them to be culturally responsive and then they can design instruction to meet their learners needs. One example I guess I would share is with skilled immigrants arriving in the US and how their needs might be different. The American Community survey for 2019 showed that 48% of recently arriving immigrants had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Fara Allen: Wow.

Christina Terrell: Yeah, and that's compared to 33% of US born adults. These are educated individuals who can work in high skilled jobs. In Ohio Aspire, one of the projects I work on in their adult ESL classes, there's nearly 28% with a bachelor's degree or higher. And if so, if educators find them in their classes, these students may have more specific career goals in mind or need advice on career options. So, taking the time to get to know the learners and their backgrounds and then helping them set

SMART goals can really inform their instruction and can help educators target these more specific needs, or even help them find special programs and services that help skilled immigrants transfer their skills to a job in the US.

Fara Allen: That's so beneficial to our community. Christina, can you tell us a little bit about how your work at the Center directly connects to ESL and how you got involved in it.

Christina Terrell: Sure. I'd say I'm lucky enough to say that ESL is my work, and it has become my career focus, which I love. I actually started as a community volunteer in 1995 and I took this literacy course on a whim, that was offered in my hometown and I got assigned to an ESL class in the evenings, where I just fell in love with it and, at the time, I had a real job which started doing a number on my health and I decided to bag that and change paths and go to graduate school and become an ESOL teacher full time. And a number of twists and turns along that path brought me eventually here to CETE at OSU where I get to work with ESOL educators throughout the state both in K through 12 and adult education, so I feel very lucky.

Fara Allen: I love to hear the journey, when, you know, you end up doing what it is you really love that's a great story.

Christina Terrell: Absolutely, thanks.

Fara Allen: You're welcome. Tying into the overall theme of the series, can you tell us how this work benefits, educators, and learners directly?

Christina Terrell: Yeah, sure. I'd say that my work specifically focuses on assisting educators and schools in adult education and K through 12. I support educators by providing professional development, and that would be in the form of training, resources, and technical assistance. So, I design and deliver a lot of training and support events for ESL teachers throughout the state. And a lot of that is well right now everything's virtual still, but a lot of that is both has both been online and in person, depending on what the event or support piece is. But I'm also involved with an elementary school where we provide support materials for parents who are immigrants with low literacy skills. And so, during this past year that's all been virtual as well, but we're still able to do it all, and yeah, so, that's been, that's been fun and I love my work, what can I say.

Fara Allen: That great, I you love it, and you're passionate about it. Following that explanation, tell us what keeps you motivated to continue to do this work.

Christina Terrell: Yeah, that's a good question, but simply, the first thing you know I can think of is the learners themselves. I just love learning their stories and trying to help them figure out the pieces of their puzzle in order, you know, for them to reach their goals. There's always, seems like there's always something to sift through and figure out to help them get in line with their, what path they need to be on, and you know whether it's figuring out education or cultural resources or cultural implications and or

Community resources that they need. But I think what's most motivating I would say is purely their drive, their, they have this relentless focus and energy and dedication to their goals to learning yet another language, and to their family, and that is just truly inspiring for me and definitely motivates me to come back and do it all again.

Fara Allen: Now that we know what motivates you, how do you turn all of that around to inspire and support others in your work? I know that you said you support educators, probably the most, but how do you turn your motivation around into inspiration for others?

Christina Terrell: Yeah, that's a good question. That's what I just keep thinking, like my role is just support them and help them help them do their job better, and I mean I feel like I've worked in customer service for a long time, quite frankly. So, I mean, I've just learned to be responsive to others needs really and I try to do that in a timely manner so they're not waiting, and it seems like the little things seem to help. I do a lot of research and share a lot of resources with educators and help them sift through, there's just so much out there now, which is great, but there's a lot to sort through and so yeah, I just try to help them do their job easier and they're always grateful for any help and making their job easier, right? But in the end, it's funny because it always turns back to, I feel like I'm the one who's inspired by their work and their dedication to their students and even the field of ESL, so it all comes back around.

Fara Allen: Since we're learning organization at CETE and we're learning culture I'm going to turn the table just a bit. Can you share with us what professional development you've participated in most recently and what your biggest takeaway was from that?

Christina Terrell: yeah sure. I participated in a national training recently, it was on the topic of ESL and that was it was three weeks long. Each week had a different focus and organization to it and turned out that the first two weeks were packed with amazing learning opportunities that were extremely engaging and interactive and the third week was just not. As a trainer, you know, who develops and delivers professional development, I found it pretty challenging to sit through that and observe how the participants who were educators were reacting to it, and so I couldn't help but consider how I'd redesign the PD differently. To be more learner centered and engaging and since then we've talked about actually doing something similar ourselves for the state. So, it may bloom into a product, but in the meantime, what it also did was it motivated me to reflect on my current PD that I design and deliver to make sure that I was providing a positive learning experience for my participants.

Fara Allen: Well, it definitely sounds like you grew from that experience and then you turned it around and you put it into place and your learner's grow from it as well. So, thank you for letting us take a deeper look into your own learning. I have one last question for you. What knowledge or skills have you sought out to gain during the pandemic?

Christina Terrell: Let's see, I started out probably like everyone else, how I can transfer my work to an all-virtual platform and keep my participants engaged right?

Fara Allen: Right.

Christina Terrell: But something I think unexpectedly that I began to focus on is how we can conduct training differently moving forward in order to embrace a new normal since the pandemic started, I think there's been this desire and hope for everything to get back to normal, whatever that was.

Fara Allen: Right.

Christina Terrell: But I'm finding that, with all of the changes that we've had to make or endure as well as all of the work that we've done to stay connected in order to survive it that I feel like we shouldn't just forget about it and go back, but let's move forward better and stronger. So recently I've been working on updating my training design formatting and delivery options to continue to include more blended learning opportunities. And to use the live or the face-to-face sessions to really allow participants to engage and interact with each other in a way that that makes sense for us wherever we are in our in our pockets of the state.

Fara Allen: I think most of us can identify with some of that. Christina, thank you so much for taking the time to share your expertise your insights and your personal story with us today.

Christina Terrell: Great Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk about ESL and the learners and my work that's been fun thanks.

Fara Allen: On behalf of the Curriculum and Training team at The Center on Education and Training for Employment, we'd like to thank our guest today. If you would like more information on this topic, please contact us at go.osu.edu/OhioState4Work. We would be happy to hear from you and share more information about our services and our work. Follow us on Twitter at OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Thank you for listening to CETE Works, we hope you enjoyed this episode. Be well and bye for now.

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