English Teaching and Cultural Learning: ESL/ENL at IU Southeast

An Interview with Magdalena Herdoíza-Estévez
of the ESL/ENL License Program at Indiana University Southeast

(ESL – English as a Second Language,
ENL – English as a New Language)

Madgalena Herdoíza-Estévez is a professor of education and international studies at Indiana University Southeast, where she also directs New Neighbors Program, part of the the ESL/ENL License Program.

Magdalena Herdoíza-Estévez’s vast personal and professional experience have made her a passionate and creative professor. Her own experience with different cultures as she lived, studied, and worked in several countries made her aware of the special difficulties faced by language learners, both in terms of their language learning and the complex cultural experience of living in a new culture.

Magdalena currently heads the New Neighbors Program at Indiana University Southeast and works with the ESL/ENL License Program. These programs offer very special opportunities to licensed teachers who want to better understand the special challenges and opportunities involved in working with non-native English speakers and English Learners (ELs).

Let's hear more about these truly unique and exciting programs in Magdalena's words.
1. **First of all, how did you become interested in the field of English as a Second (or New) Language?**

   It all started with our observation of the demographic changes occurring in Southern Indiana about 15 years ago. Placing future teachers in classrooms, this change became noticeable enough to raise the need of supporting teachers and non-native students as they both struggled in the process of teaching and learning.

   It was imperative for our IU Southeast teacher education programs to embrace this challenge as quickly and effectively as the social and educational new needs called for.

   I knew firsthand that teachers who master the cultural and pedagogical aspects of best English Learning practices are effective in guiding their non-native English speakers to success. That was my children's fortune when we first moved to the US some twenty years ago, with our own six- and nine-year-old English Learners.

2. **You have studied at universities in several different countries. How has this changed you as a teacher?**

   Living abroad for substantial periods of your life changes you, per se. My pedagogical studies in Italy propelled my interest in progressive and transformational schools of thought.

   These were broadened later through what I now see as an indispensable ingredient for sound education models: a sociological perspective, which my French degrees provided. The emphasis of the common humanistic approach of my graduate education broadened and refined my perspective on the articulation of complex pedagogical, cultural, and social variables.

   All of these are, I believe, indispensable for a more accurate understanding of the education process in which human beings interact around teaching and learning. Individuals bring with them their prior knowledge, cultures, languages, and life histories, and these must be acknowledged in the education process.

3. **Tell us a little about the ESL/ENL License program at Indiana University Southeast in partnership with Indiana University Bloomington. Who is it for and who is it not for?**

   The license was conceived primarily as a response for teachers in our local communities and schools with the purpose of equipping them with research-based and application tools for ESL/ENL best practices. Our program requires an initial teaching license; therefore, it is directed to teachers.
4. As the courses for the additional license in ESL/ENL were structured, what was the guiding principle behind the program?

A balance between research-focused courses and method courses was our guiding principle. We deeply believe in the value of solid theoretical foundations to sustain and inform the teachers' practice and see praxis as a source for furthering theoretical thought. Both are (or should be) intertwined.

5. What special opportunities does your program make available to its students?

In terms of delivery, our program offers four on-line courses, three hybrid courses, and a strong clinical component, which includes the equivalent of one credit hour of observations in local model settings, and two hour credits' worth of teaching English Learners.

This last one can take place in local schools or abroad. We offer a unique opportunity to teach for three weeks in Ecuador partner schools. This experience allows our participant candidates to be fully immersed in a different culture, teach in three socio-economic contexts, practice and experiment the best practices they have studied with significant numbers of English learners, and gain in empathy with those immigrant students and families who they encounter in their schools.

From their own struggles while in Ecuador, they better understand the struggles of English learners, who do not and cannot master the US language and cultural codes.

6. What specific requirements are there for people interested in your program? Should applicants be experienced teachers?

As previously stated, having an initial teaching license is required. However, no experience is expected for admission purposes. No foreign language is required either.

This is a common misconception teachers tend to have. It is true that knowing another language helps ENL/ESL teachers better understand the process of language acquisition and assist some students who might share that specific language the teacher knows. However, an effective ENL/ESL teacher is able to teach ALL students well.

7. How does the New Neighbors Program get teachers involved in continuing their ESL/ENL education?

New Neighbors started as a project funded by the US Department of Education. Its goal was to improve the success opportunities for ELs (English Learners) through the preparation of specialized teachers (ENL/ESL license) and systemic professional development for mainstream teachers.

It focused on a partnership with a network of three school districts and eight schools. Also, every education program in our School had faculty prepared in the ENL/ESL area, which allowed for best ENL practices to be mainstreamed in our programs.
The project had the merit of giving a solid and hopeful voice to ESL/ENL education as an effective response to the needs of ELs and beyond. As the project developed in the field, teachers who underwent ESL/ENL professional development were the first ones to discover its effectiveness. They signed up for the licensing program, starting a trend that steadily reaches more teachers.

Only in its first five years of operation, 58 teachers completed the program. Now, our program reaches beyond Southern Indiana, with many teachers from Kentucky. The New Neighbors is now a University Center and continues to expand its reach and its components. New districts and schools, a strong family-school partnership program, and a newly born youth program are providing us new tools to positively impact the lives of ELs, their teachers, and their families.

8. You have two different programs: the ESL/ENL License program and the Master's in Elementary or Secondary Education with ESL/ENL Concentration. Could you tell us a bit about the different programs and the specific aims of each?

A couple of years ago, the Graduate Studies team assessed the fact that the preparation the license candidates receive was solid and rigorous enough to justify counting it as a content area (concentration) to be complemented basically by three core graduate courses for the master's and an elective. That means that, with a few more credits, teachers can now get a master's degree with concentration in ESL/ENL. This has been a well-received opportunity.

9. You also work with a study abroad program in Ecuador. What is the goal of this study abroad? How does it enrich students’ experiences and how is it structured?

As I mentioned earlier, since 2008, the option of doing part of the clinical work in Ecuador was made available for ENL/ESL licensing teachers (and now for those pursuing the master's degree as well). The study abroad program in Ecuador was born in 2002 with a focus on diversity, cross-cultural education, and a hands-on immersion in Ecuadorian partner schools and families.

In its initial 13 years, the program has evolved from including education majors exclusively, to become an umbrella for students in any major pursuing personal and professional growth in areas of diversity and global perspectives.

Students live with host families, teach in the partner schools, do a small inquiry project, engage in service-learning in an indigenous community of the Andes, take short leisure travels, and explore what Quito and Ecuador offer in culture, history, and natural beauty.

Pre-service and in-service teachers, along with students from other majors, have taught and learned along with students and colleagues for three weeks. The richness of the process allows participants to experience what it is to be a non-native language speaker in a country they don’t know, and also practice teaching English to students with variable language levels, different social, cultural, and ethnic background; all in the same country.

All participants gain from this experiential learning; teachers come back to the US with a clearer understanding of the importance of incorporating a cross-cultural perspective as an essential part of ESL/ENL best practices. Four master's candidates will be taking advantage
of this opportunity in the summer of 2015.

10. **What is the best piece of advice you could give to teachers of English?**

What I just mentioned about the need to view the teaching of English as a second or new language as more than language instruction alone, but also as a complex navigation between cultural codes and human histories, is probably something all teachers could contemplate.

A second suggestion is for teachers to immerse themselves in another culture and make the effort to learn another language. The professional and personal growth these processes offer are unequaled.