

## Invited Article

# Building Bridges, Crossing Borders: Journey to a Better Future for TESOL

Yilin Sun

South Seattle College  
Seattle / USA  
[yilsuntesol@gmail.com](mailto:yilsuntesol@gmail.com)

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Corresponding author:

[yilsuntesol@gmail.com](mailto:yilsuntesol@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This paper stems from the presidential keynote speech I gave at the 2015 TESOL International Convention with in Toronto, Canada last year. The theme for the 2015 TESOL International Convention was “Crossing Borders, Building Bridges.”

**Keywords:** 2015 TESOL International Convention, Crossing Borders, Building Bridges

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## 1. Introduction

This paper stems from the presidential keynote speech I gave at the 2015 TESOL International Convention with in Toronto, Canada last year. The theme for the 2015 TESOL International Convention was “Crossing Boarders, Building Bridges.” This theme has a very special meaning to me on several levels. I would like to share some of this with you. Perhaps some of you may have had similar experiences.

As I stated above, the 2015 convention theme was special to me. It is special because it was exactly 30 years ago, back in 1985 when I made the decision to leave my homeland and travel to a new land. My adventure started when I left the familiar surroundings in China and crossed across the ocean to North America to pursue a young EFL teacher’s dreams. My dream was that I wanted to become the best ELT educator imaginable and to earn my graduate degree in TESOL and Applied Linguistics from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto in Canada; one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) is one of the leading institutions in the field of ELT in the world. This is where many well-known ELT scholars have studied and taught; some names that may be familiar are H.H. David Stern, Jim Cummins, Merrill Swain, Michael Canale, J.P.B. Allen, Dale Willows, Roger Simon, Ester Gava, Michael Connelly, Alister Pennycook, Alister Cummins, Bonnie Norton, Ryuko Kubota, Brian Morgan, and Angel Lin, to name a few.

Arriving in a new strange land as a young foreign Visa student, I experienced cultural shock and had to adjust my life in many ways. I lived and worked with other immigrants and experienced firsthand the challenges and struggles that many immigrant English learners face. With personal commitment and dedication I managed to work at accomplishing my goals. During this time I met, studied with other ELT scholars and professors; several who are well-known. The rigorous academic environment and stimulating conversations with my peers like Alistair Pennycook, Alister Cummins, Bonnie Norton, Ryuko Kubota and Angel Lin provided me a solid base to grow and the opportunity to work with other educators with similar interests. The guidance and support from my professors and peers inspired me during my graduate school years. It was their support and inspiration along with my dedication and good study strategies that led me to achieve my goal and the honor of being the first graduate student from mainland China to receive a Ph.D. from OISE/University of Toronto.

My life and work experience in Toronto marked the beginning of my professional journey as a TESOLer. Today, I teach future teachers and adult English language learners. I have also had the opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors of TESOL International Association as President. I have been serving TESOL with professionals whose work I read and respect. Who could have imagined that 30 years after coming to Canada, this shy, young EFL teacher from China would be standing here today delivering the presidential plenary at the TESOL 2015 International Convention.

My story is just one of many stories about the journey of non-native English speaking ELT professionals who cross borders and build bridges. Being involved in TESOL for all these years is rewarding; together, with all of you and future new teachers we are all making a difference in our professional lives, we are writing a new page in TESOL history and most important ... we are teaching the world how to communicate with each other better.

## **2. Journey for TESOL both as the Association and as the Field in the Past 50 Years**

Beyond the personal level, at the TESOL Association's level, the 2015 convention was the first one that the TESOL International Convention was held outside the United States since 2000. This year's convention "crossed" the international border between the United States and Canada. By crossing borders, we can examine differences and challenges in ELT while exploring new opportunities for development, constructive transformations and collaborations. Change is made possible not only through crossing borders, but also building bridges. The development of the TESOL International Association reflects the importance of building bridges. By building bridges over time, TESOL has grown from a solely US-based organization with 104 members 49 years ago to where we are now, the largest international association with close to 13,000 members and 117 affiliates representing 156 countries worldwide.

Over the last 50 years, the TESOL professional field has also witnessed drastic changes in teaching approaches, research, and material development. *In terms of teaching approaches, the field has evolved from solely using traditional grammar translation methods to communicative language teaching approaches where the focus of language teaching is on meaningful language use in a broad context, to where we are now: the 21st century is what Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006), Brown (1994, 2007), and Richards and Rodgers (2001) referred as the "Post-Method Era" in which the ELT discussions are more focused on eclectic approaches rather than on a single method or approach. Brown (1994) called it enlightened eclecticism. Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2002) have used the term principled eclecticism to describe a coherent and pluralistic approach to language teaching and learning (Sun, 2014, p.8-9).*

*Here are the main characteristics of principled eclecticism:*

- *Maximize learning opportunities*
- *Facilitate negotiated interaction*
- *Encourage learner autonomy*
- *Increase language awareness (tolerant of learner errors)*
- *Activate self-discovery (utilize learning and communication strategies)*
- *Contextualize language input*
- *Integrate language skills*
- *Ensure social relevance (a means for self-empowerment and expression)*
- *Raise cultural consciousness (goal, purpose of teaching / learning)*

*(Kumaravadivelu, 1994)*

Even though some may argue that teachers still talk about methods, the scope and perspectives are no longer just focusing on one method or a single technique but a rich repertoire of different methods and techniques that teachers can pick and choose based on the needs of their learners. So the point here is that we should not assume that earlier methods are limited and contemporary approaches are advanced when in fact each has its own pros and cons and how and when to use them may well be based on the teaching context and the needs of learners and the program.

Today the concept of World Englishes is no longer “foreign” in the TESOL field. It is widely acknowledged that the relationship between language and power is a fundamental aspect in English Language teaching. Numerous research projects and studies have been conducted to examine the theoretical, methodological, pedagogical, ideological, and power-related issues of world Englishes: varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts. The scholars in this field have critically examined theoretical and methodological frameworks of language use based on monolingual and monocultural frameworks of linguistic science and replaced them with frameworks that are faithful to multilingualism and language variation (Bhatt, 2001). This conceptual shift provides a “pluricentric” view of English, which represents diverse sociolinguistic histories, multicultural identities, multiple norms of use and acquisition, and distinct contexts of functions (Bhatt, 2001). The implications of this shift for learning and teaching World Englishes are important as language policy makers, educators and curriculum writers from different regions of the world can take charge and determine the kind of English or Englishes to learn/teach based on the regions’ and country’s social, political and economic needs. Accordingly, trends, innovations, and challenges in language teaching confronted by the world both affect, and are affected by the local English language education reforms, such as reforms in Asia, Latin America, Europe, Middle East, South Africa and many parts of the world.

The last 50 years have marked a significant transformation in the field of TESOL. Can you imagine what our field will be like in the next 50 years? Can you imagine what the TESOL International Association will be like in 50 years?

Because it may be difficult to answer these questions, I invited 2 groups of TESOL members to share their thoughts and answers to these questions. One group consisted of TESOL leaders and the other consists of active TESOL members including global members from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The rationale for this study is that next year, we’ll celebrate TESOL’s 50th anniversary in 2016. TESOL has grown so strong in the first 50 years. In another 50 years, it will be TESOL’s

Sun (2016)

Centennial celebration. We should be prepared for opportunities and challenges that the future presents.

I'm very grateful for their valuable insights. This is only a small sample, but once you hear what they have to say, I hope you'll begin to think about the future of our profession and the TESOL Association, as well as what we should do to build a better future for ourselves and for TESOL both as a field and as an Association. Let's look at the responses to the first question.

### **Question 1: What do you predict will happen in the field of TESOL in 50 years?**

Here are two initial replies to this challenging question.

*"Great questions! I'll try to respond, knowing that I'll be 120 years old! And you will have a 50 year old grandchild in 50 years!"*

*"Not easy questions, at all. 50 years from now I worry about the earth as our home and can only hope that all teachers, regardless of their background, will be focusing on topics and themes that allow students to explore ways of better preserving whatever we have, assuming we can indeed challenge the word "irreversible".*

Based on the rich and varied responses from the study, beyond the initial replies, I detected the following three trends.

#### **Trend 1: English will change continuously, and expand exponentially as a global lingua franca, especially in EFL contexts. More new varieties will emerge.**

Many participants indicated that there will be an unprecedented increase in global demand for English as the TESOL field will continue to be strong and in demand in the next 50 years. As a result, ELT will be part of all children's and adults' curricula. TESOL will be even more critically important, since there is no way that countries are going to be able to meet the need for appropriately-trained teachers and many Ministries and schools will turn to TESOL organizations (including local affiliates) to assist them in this regard. TESOL will need to take a leading role in helping Ministries and districts and schools to plan for this and to provide interim solutions on a regular basis. We have often been viewed as marginalized, especially in the United States, but that is not the case in the international sphere. As English becomes increasingly a global language, TESOL will also need to find ways to represent a much wider range of ELT contexts.

On the other hand, *"English will meet challenges because other languages will emerge as eminent in the field with the economic development in those countries, e.g., Russian and Chinese will probably compete for the position that English currently occupies in the world."*

#### **Trend 2: Increase and change will result in an expanded global landscape of diversified English language uses, diversified contexts and diversified language users.**

Everyone will be challenged to respond to changes. Approaches, content, and mindset will need to adapt to the diversified landscape in the ELT world. TESOL professionals will also be experts in content areas. One respondent stated *"All teachers in all schools will have some TESOL training in order to provide the best educational experience possible to English language learners."*

In the future, the conventional way of learning may also change as *“Students can drop out any time and re-sequence their learning process.”* And *“There will be much less geographic difference from country to country, region to region in term of learning resources.”*

In summary, approaches, content, mindset and models will all need to adapt to the diversified landscape in the ELT world. Such frameworks as Kumaravadivelu’s post-method pedagogy of particularity, practicality and possibility or Tudor’s ecological approach, where teachers and other stakeholders negotiate with glocal needs and challenges at multiple levels, are beginning to emerge with promising effect. And research will better pinpoint ingredients for success, including more accurate specification of contextual variables leading to successful learning, making learning faster and more efficient.

### **Trend 3: Highly advanced technology in ELT.**

Who, 50 years ago, would have predicted the impact of digital technology on language learning? In the next 50 years, digital technologies may lead to more individualized language instruction, through online models, either stand alone or hybrid. A lot of instruction will be delivered on small mobile devices or on wearable computers. Online instruction & connected learning will be the dominant features of language instruction. As several participants stated, *“Technology will dominate our lives and will be well interwoven into our classroom practices.”*

*“Students will be pretty much on their own in deciding what to learn and how to learn it. Much the same as we order take-out food online today, they will be able to ‘order’ online what they want to learn (most likely in the form of modules), and sequence them any way as they prefer.”* Their choices will be much less limited by where they live or what kinds of family they come from. They will also be able to add to the selected modules or chip away content from the selected modules. *“Instructors will teach less, but consult and facilitate more. Students can drop out any time and re-sequence their learning process. They can also fire their instructor if they are not satisfied with what they are taught or the way they are taught. They can also learn from each other since everyone in the learning community is both a learner and a teacher. The same will be true with assessment. Students can assess each other against the standards created either by the leaders in the field or peers in the learning community.”*

Participants also indicated that ELT educators around world will have easier access to professional development activities as *“The phone will perform translation and serve as a learning platform,”* and *“The plenary speaker will come into your school or living room via hologram.”*

On the other hand, there will also be challenges with the impact of highly advanced technology in the ELT field. One respondent indicated that *“Automated translation will eliminate some of the motivation for people to learn new languages.”* With this comes an added responsibility for all ELT educators. That is to better understand what is pedagogically sound and what is not viable in the learning spectrum in the highly digitized world.

An important point to keep in mind is that we should never ever diminish the essential importance of human, real-live, face-to-face social interaction among students and among professionals.

The first question focused on the major trends in the ELT field in the next 50 years. The second question centered on the directions for the TESOL Association and its affiliates in the next 50 years.

Sun (2016)

## **Question 2. What will the TESOL International Association look like in 50 years?**

Based on the responses from the participants, three themes stood out from the survey.

### **Theme 1: TESOL will play an even stronger leadership role in the global ELT field**

The participants indicated that 50 years from now, the Association will leave its mark on every aspect of the future of the profession. It will closely follow, lead and spearhead megatrends in the profession.

TESOL International Association will function comprehensively and globally, not only in teaching, but also in research, teacher education, advocacy, professionalism, assessment and material development. It may still be based in the US for historical reasons but will be present and influential all around the world.

*“TESOL will have two or three times as many members, more from K-12 system and business sectors. An increased number of English learners in the world will lead to a greater demand for professional development. That professional development will come from TESOL.”* As a way to respond to such increasing needs, TESOL will offer diverse forms/novel ways of PD - in person, online, or via hologram.

TESOL will host its conferences in multiple locations around the world in conjunction with affiliates outside America. TESOL will offer its products and services not only to support professionals, but also governments, by providing accreditation, standards, expert teams, assessment tools, and learning materials.

### **Theme 2: Affiliates will be critical in supporting “the mother ship” to address needs ‘glocally’.**

Given the likelihood that the majority of ELT professionals will live outside North America, and given the global increase and diversification of the profession, the TESOL International Association will become much more global.

*“TESOL will have at least 70% of the affiliates outside the US.”* Right now there are 50% of the affiliates outside US. *“The affiliates will mature and play more central roles in supporting and directing the mother ship.”*

*“TESOL International Association will truly become international, US issues and concerns will be one – among many – sub-layers of TESOL as opposed to “half” of its focus.”*

*“The premier TESOL International Association annual convention will not be a single event, but rather a series of conventions that are held on multiple continents with many more opportunities for members living outside of North America to participate.”*

### **Theme 3: TESOL will expand its strong partnerships with multiple organizations worldwide.**

TESOL will build bridges with other organizations that have so much to say to us. TESOL will make connections with other disciplinary areas and enhance language competency for teachers and students in other disciplinary areas. TESOL will offer services to MOEs and other professional sectors in different countries. *“TESOL will no longer be a TESOL-only association. It will become the TESOL Plus Association, doing business outside the box.”*

I was very inspired by the insightful predictions these leaders and fellow TESOL colleagues outlined about the future of TESOL as a field and as an Association. The three trends

and three themes generated from the survey will give us a lot of food for thought. To build a better future for TESOL and to get ready for the changes in the next 50 years, TESOL professionals need to stay strong and competitive. We need to have commitment and more importantly we need to have effective strategies.

Over time, I have come up with eight strategies from several studies I conducted. I'd like to share them with you in this article, so you can begin building bridges to the TESOL future, whether 50 years from now or 5 years from now.

***Strategy 1: Value the Changing Perspectives on ELT.*** About 50 years ago the ELT field started to see changes in our views of English language learning; this has become more evident over the last 20 years. The old term of ESL has been changed to ELL or EAL (English as an Additional Language) as ELT educators recognize that many learners know more than two languages and English is not their second language anymore. Code-switching was seen as language errors; but now has been recognized as a valuable bilingual and translanguage resource. An accent instead of being viewed as deficiency now reflects identity. Today standardized assessments utilize different accents in their listening comprehension tests. The purpose of English learning has moved away from mimicking "inner circle" speakers as closely as possible to successful use of skills and strategies to be effective and competent communicators for a globalized workforce.

***Strategy 2: Embrace Changes in Goals of English Teaching and Learning.*** One key strategy, in building bridges for a better future for the profession is a rethinking of the educational goals: the "why" of English education. In the 21st Century, the goals of ELT have changes from focusing solely on developing lang. skills and mimicking NESs to fostering a sense of social responsibilities in students.

Today, more educators are realizing that ELT cannot be considered successful when students do not know about global issues or care about societal problems, or worse yet, in the future use the language skills they have learned for destructive activities such as participating in global crime networks or damaging the environment (Brown, 1994, 2007; Cates, 1997; Sun 2014).

With the awareness of the importance of producing responsible citizens for society, teachers now have well recognized that teaching English is not simply to prepare students to imitate native English speakers as language learners but to produce fully competent language users, critical thinkers, and constructive social change agents as Crystal (1997, 2004), Cook (2002), Brown (2007) and Cummins (2000) noted.

***Strategy 3: Integrate 21st Century Teaching/Learning Approaches.*** In recent years more schools have placed the 7C skills, outlined by Fidel and Trilling in their book 21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times (2009), at the center of learning. The seven Cs being: Critical thinking & problem solving; Creativity & innovation; Collaboration, teamwork, & leadership; Cross-cultural understanding; Communication and media literacy; Computing and ICT literacy; and Career and learning self-reliance. In addition to the seven 21st century skills, the ELT field nowadays is also referred as the Post methods Era where the focus of teaching is on eclecticism (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006, Brown, 2007, Larsen-Freeman, 2000 and Mellow, 2000). Eclecticism involves the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying

assumptions. Some “hot topics” nowadays are Common Core, ‘Glocalization’, standards, pathways, ESP/EAP, flipped classes, project-based learning, IDEA (Integrated Digital English Acceleration), and content and technology integration to address “glocal” needs in language teaching and learning.

***Strategy 4: Understand Changes in Research Approaches.*** The research field has witnessed significant transformation over the last 20 years. ELT research studies have moved from a sole focus on the designs and methods of quantitative empirical research to the inclusion of qualitative and other alternative approaches; with designs that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative elements. Today we see more mixed method studies and the field as a whole has also become more open to hermeneutic (non-empirical interpretive) inquiry, for example, historical studies. New alternative theories and perspectives have emerged from research; these can be seen in SLA, SLW and ESP studies.

Take the ESP research development for example, from early 60s to 80s, most research studies were under the influence of four major theoretical roots. Studies on Grammar & Technical English (e.g., Lackstrom, Selinker, Trimble, 1972) and Rhetorical Functions (e.g., Selinker, Tarone, & Hanzeli, 1981) could be traced back to Linguistics roots. Studies like Local knowledge by Geertz, 1973, could be under the Interpretive Anthropology roots. Studies on Skills & Schemata Development (e.g., Widdowson, 1983) belonged to Cognitive/Psychological roots, and Teaching Communicative Use of English, Learner-centered approach (e.g., Allan, Widdowson, 74; Ewer & Huges-Davies, 71-72, Hutchinson & Waters, 87) were influenced by the Eclectic linguistic, Psychological, & Social psychological roots.

More recent ESP research studies have brought in new approaches and perspectives, such as Identity Studies (e.g. Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011) and Critical Ethnographic studies (e.g., Starfield, 2011, Lillis, 2008) were influenced by Critical pedagogy and Post-structuralist approaches. Studies on broad scope of Needs Analysis/Assessment (e.g., Belcher, 2006; Johns & Makalela, 2011, and Global Language Use (e.g., Mauranen, 2011) brought in Social-cultural roots. Corpus Studies (e.g., L Flowerdew, 2011, Kandil & Belcher, 2011) were under the Linguistics roots. Studies on Genre Analysis/ Discourse Analysis (e.g., Swales, Flowerdew, J. 2011; Hyland, 2011, Paltridge & Wang, 2011, to name a few, added new insights into Disciplinary Specificity and Cognitive/linguistic Discourse approaches. Today, ESP studies have developed an infrastructure involving professional journals, book publications, conferences, groups within professional organizations, and academic programs in higher education. It has expanded its reach from North America and Europe to throughout the world in the last few decades.

ESP research is a reflection of what has been going on in the ELT research field. The hot topic these days in the field of research is on research to praxis and using research to inform instruction and bridge the gap between research and practice. Researchers need to understand what has been going on in the classroom while practitioners need to engage in action research and use research findings to inform instruction. This is especially the case in the ELT field.

***Strategy 5: Expand the dimension of Communicative Competence.*** Recent research publications illustrate the expanding framework of communicative competence. *Some scholars have introduced their new way of looking at SLA as 'multi-competence' (Cook, 2009). Others (Byram, 1997, Corbett, 2003, Kohn, 2013), focused on the importance of Intercultural communicative competence (ICC).*

According to Cook (2012, para 1-2),

*Multi-competence...presents a view of second language acquisition (SLA) based on the second language (L2) user as a whole person rather than on the monolingual native speaker... It changes the angle from which second language acquisition is viewed. It constitutes a bilingual 'wholistic' interpretation of bilingualism as opposed to a monolingual 'fractional' interpretation of bilingualism, in Grosjean's (2009)'s terms).*

*Another dimension of the expansion of the communicative competence framework is the discussions on intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, 2009; Corbett, 2003; Kohn, 2013). Those with intercultural communicative competence are able to effectively communicate with interlocutors from other cultures in appropriate ways. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) requires:*

*Openness and respect: the ability and readiness to regard other people's values, customs and practices as worthwhile in their own right and not merely as different from the norm and willing to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own,*

*Empathy and suspension of judgment: the ability and willingness to understand, acknowledge and accept different behaviors and ways of thinking, the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with,*

*Sensitivity and flexibility: the ability and willingness to adapt and to deal appropriately with the feelings and ways of thinking of other persons, and the awareness and responsiveness to other people's behaviors and ways of thinking, and*

*Knowledge and application of critical cultural awareness: knowledge and critical awareness of social groups, values and cultural practices in one's own and in one's target culture, and the ability to apply and act effectively using that knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. (Byram, 1997, 2009; Corbett, 2003; Kohn, 2013)*

*These traits and abilities are more important for successful intercultural communication than the native English speakers' (NES) norms of communication (Sun, 2014, p. 9-10). The implication here is that when teaching intercultural communicative competence, teachers need to teach both local and international cultures. The goal is to produce effective language users who use English as a global lingua Franca, not simply learners who mimic the language and culture of the 'inner-circle' countries.*

**Strategy 6: Teach and Learn in a 21st Century Context.** There are rapid changes in the skill set needed to compete in today's workforce; technology, globalization, workplace, demographics, and personal competence, risk and responsibility headline these changes. Individual performance is evaluated on leadership ability, work collaboratively with others, and problem solving skills. In a globalized world, it is just as common to form a team of four people from four different continents as it is from four departments of an institution. The implication is that ELT educators need to be aware of the changing forces, so we can prepare students with 21st century skills along with language and cultural competency for them to succeed in the competitive globalized workforce.

**Strategy 7: Apply Macro-strategies to Enhance Assessment.** Many schools have implemented standards-based assessment programs, which measure the success based on student learning (achievement of standards) rather than on compliance with rules. Assessment can't be one size fits all. Effective assessment needs to implement theory-based, researched-informed macrostrategies.

Here are some of the macrostrategies to be kept in mind: Assessment needs to be used as a multipurpose instructional tool. It should provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their skills in communicative and authentic tasks. The purpose of assessment is to engage students in monitoring their learning progress and process as well as cultivating a positive washback. The assessment information and date need to be utilized systematically to identify existing and emerging needs of the students and provide a clear indication of progress and achievement that students have made over the course of their learning. Linda Darling-Hammond, et al (2002) advocated that the reform of assessment of students learning needs "top-down support for bottom-up reform." Once this happens, educators will be empowered to apply macro-strategies to enhance assessment. The assessment tools should be designed to engage students in active learning and demonstrate their skills in real-world performance-based projects.

**Strategy 8: Be ready for rapid development and integration of Information technology in ELT.** Rapid developments in technology, use of cell phones and multimedia devices have opened endless possibilities for English teachers to access information. The Internet, YouTube, Web.2.0, e-books have helped teachers prepare lessons and classroom activities. With ready-made materials with the stroke of a key it is possible to bring real-life into the classroom. Appropriate integration of technology in the classroom encourages students to use language in different ways and brings real world issues into the classroom. Learners from different parts of the world can get connected and exchange ideas. Many students may know more than their teachers about how to use technology, and yet they need proper guidance from the teachers on how to select, analyze, and utilize the right information to achieve their learning goals.

### **3. Our Responsibilities in Building a Better Future for TESOL**

In the 21st Century classroom, teachers have multiple roles and responsibilities as facilitators of student learning and creators of a productive classroom environment in which students can develop the skills they will need for the 21st century workforce. Many teachers integrate content-based, project-based approaches; and changes in classrooms such as co-teaching; team-teaching and collaboration with other teachers have shown advantages. These innovative approaches are providing educators with excellent resources and opportunities. Teachers need to embrace new ideas to effectively teach in our ever-changing societies. This also prepares teachers to be reflective practitioners and constructive social agents in the world of globalizing the English language (Sun, 2014). It's more important than ever that teacher receive real institutional support with funding and time to attend professional development activities.

While teachers can make a difference in students' lives in the classroom, teachers can also make a difference in our own professional lives and make professional organizations better in serving us, our colleagues, and communities. With the rapid changes in the ELT field, to build a better future for TESOL, TESOL educators are expected to engage in continuous professional development activities in order to keep current on trends, research, development, and practices as well as to remain effective and competitive. We need to go the extra mile and improve professionally. Act now!

## Building bridges, crossing borders: Journey to a better future for TESOL

Some of the things that we can start as ELT educators is to leave our personal/professional comfort zones and start embracing some of the new ideas and perspectives. I encourage teachers make more border crossing acts and venture into areas that we are not familiar. Try reaching out to colleagues; most have not talked to other teachers and don't know much about other places. You could be pleasantly surprised to find out how much you have in common with another teacher from half way around the world. The more border-crossing acts we engage in, the better the teaching and learning environment we will be able to create.

As ELT professionals, some of the things we need to embrace include:

- Maximize opportunities for ourselves as professionals- (gain institutional support; mentor newer/younger professionals and learn from each other).
- Engage in and critically reflect new ways of teaching /research (implement 7Cs and multicultural/multilingual perspectives).
- Advocate for social justice, equality, and professionalism in the field and in the Association. Today poverty among school children is still a serious issue that we must address..
- Utilize professional development and leadership opportunities as well as get involved with volunteer opportunities.
- Help TESOL International Association build more bridges and collaborations with other like-minded professional organizations and NGOs. Reach out to non-TESOL members and let them know about TESOL and your local ELT organizations.

There have been positive changes in the past 50 years. The awareness of “World Englishes” and “English as an International Lingua franca” is here. The roles of non-native English-speaking teachers in the TESOL field, the mission of English language learning, and the global English teaching /learning community, and recognition of intercultural communication competence has evolved. All the positive changes did not occur by happenstance. *This progress has been achieved through the concerted effort of all involved individuals who care about the profession, the Association, the students, and the equality of all TESOL professionals in the education system. The stronger the professional association, the louder the voices can be heard at different policy-making levels. Also, the more publications there are from ELT professionals on research and teaching practice in the ELT field, the better the awareness and opportunities that can be created for teachers and for learners (Sun, 2014,p.15).*

I began this article by telling you about a shy, young EFL teacher who crossed the ocean from China to Toronto, Canada 30 years ago. She never envisioned far into her future much less that of TESOL. But in retrospect, this teacher encourages you to start today to envision your future as a TESOL leader and innovator.

May I conclude by reminding you to embrace changes in the next 50 years, the mission to improve ELT for all learners must continue and the mission to help TESOL International Association build a better future is a must? We need all TESOL teachers to become more engaged in the Association; a good starting place is within your Interest Sections and with your affiliates.

The future of TESOL both as the Association and as the field is in the hands of all of us: diverse, complicated, and multifaceted and of course ... “glocal.” Let's work together, cross

Sun (2016)

more borders and build more bridges so we can co-construct a stronger global TESOL Community in the next 50 years! Thank you very much!

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## Sun (2016)

**Bio:** Yilin Sun, Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics/Curriculum and Instruction from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, Canada. She has served as president of TESOL International Association (2013-2016). This is the first time in TESOL's 50 years history that an Asian female NNEST professional who has been elected as president of TESOL International Association, the largest professional association of its kind in the world. She has also served as Chair of the TESOL Affiliate Leadership Council (2007), president of Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL, 2003, 2007), a Fulbright Senior Scholar (2011–12), and an English language specialist for the U.S. Department of State since 2009. Yilin currently teaches at South Seattle College in Seattle, USA, who has more than 28 years of experience in the field of TESOL as an MA-TESL teacher trainer, researcher, classroom teacher, and program leader with a variety of higher educational institutions in China, Canada and the United States. Yilin is the author and coauthor of books, book chapters, and research papers in refereed professional journals. She also serves on several Editorial Boards of ELT journals including Journal of Language Education in Asia. Over the years, Yilin has presented frequently at national and international conferences as a keynote or a featured speaker.

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