

Reflections on Practice

Retirement address: Outgoing bits of wisdom

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This article is a summary of an address given by Dr Mary T Jeannot, founder of the MA/TESOL program at Gonzaga University, to a gathering of her students, colleagues, and friends, on the occasion of her retirement. Sprinkled with inside jokes and deep exhortations, Jeannot reminds us that humor, depth, leadership, and a sense of adventure build community, deepen connections, and belong in the classroom.

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Image 1: Mary Jeannot (sitting, smiling, center left) with current and former students and colleagues after her farewell address *Outgoing bits of wisdom*, excerpted here

Hear I forget, see I remember, do I understand. (There's a little audiolingual irony for you.)

Do as I say, not as I do!

Don't be a hypocrite.

Don't drink Diet Coke. [opens a can of Diet Coke to laughter]

Just because you've been to a country once doesn't mean you're an expert. (But I went to Tianjin, China, and I'm now an expert!)

Floss! At least, floss every tooth you want to keep. (Lucia Huntington gave the same advice to ESL students 25 years ago—invention)

With the times being as they are, don't play with kids too enthusiastically. You never know when you will be called to the principal's or dean's office.

Be grateful always. Find something to be grateful about even on your worst days. Forgive easily and don't hold grudges.

Take life one day at a time.

The conversation doesn't end here. It didn't originate here, and it doesn't end here.

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Cultivate a spiritual life! Pray to something bigger than yourself.

Remember, perception is not reality. Thinking is not reality. Don't think. Breathe.

Triangulate to find truth.

Exercise. Always. Even when you don't want to. Preferably some kind of yoga or forest bathing.

Respect your elders.

Use APA 7th edition. Put your commas next to the word, periods after the parentheses, and page numbers for direct quotes, etc.

And never use etc!

Avoid excessive use of passive voice and there is, there are. There are things that have happened to me! Change to: I have made them happen! The former evokes self-pity; the latter, agency and self-awareness.

Remember that chatgpt is NOT a person. Technology isn't God; we can behold it and stand in awe, but nothing is more sublime or sacred than human mystery.

Lola. find your Lolas. When you find your Lola, listen. [Lola refers to the essential cultural informant in Basso, 1988, pp. 99–130.]

Which leads to: Embrace mystery. In fact I'd go so far as to say Embrace ambiguity! [laughter as this is a famous refrain for Mary]

There is always something to learn no matter what. Let errors be your friends. Notice them, make adjustments.

Acknowledge the many memberships, subcultures, and tribes to which you belong. Listen to how the language changes—in your L1, your L2, in other's L1s and 2s...

Be a linguist. Be a sociolinguist. Strive to be multilingual!

When your classes start to get boring, sing!

Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate! You did not give birth to yourself. Be generous in giving others credit.

Sit in the front row and smile. Laugh at jokes no matter how dumb. It doesn't matter if you understand. Just make laughing and listening noises and nod your head.

[...silence]

Don't talk too much, you insult the imaginative capacity of your listener.

[...silence]

[...silence]

One of the last things my Mom said to me before she died is, "I wouldn't have sweated the small stuff." So take heart in your youth: Don't sweat the small stuff. None of it matters in the end.

In our house growing up we had a burlap banner (reminiscent of groovy things in the 70s) that read: The most lost day of all is the day in which we do not laugh. (So central to our family *Weltanschauung* that mom and dad used it as their epitaph.)

Avoid profanity, swear words. Don't use nice in your writing (unless you are invoking Joey from Friends). Proper, versus, master, delivery—these are all swear words. We don't deliver, we teach. Especially avoid the word piece, as in the ESL piece; diversity isn't a piece. Social justice, language—not pieces.

If you're a man avoid mansplaining, manspreading, manhandling, and man-iplating in any culture, in any language.

Always use a pencil when you read student papers. The eraser comes in handy if you are grading while hangry!

And speaking of grades: Relax. Chill. Letters are a social construction.

The most important word in the English language is c-c-c-context! The words "no" and "help" are equally important.

In 1999, the MA/TESOL program was my baby and when she became a teenager, the apron-strings were turned over to the formidable and indefatigable Dr. James Hunter. In the last few years, he has run the program nearly single-handedly and of course always with grace, dignity, humor, and humility! Always putting us first, right? And now four of us are leaving the island and James stands alone! [Sings The cheese stands alone, hi ho the dairy-o, the cheese stands alone.]

But before I am completely forgotten, the legacy that must be left is this: At the heart of our program is linguistic and cultural theory/practice built on the foundation of critical ethnographic exploration. If we abandon emic/etic pursuit, insight, reflection, and research, then we abandon the original goals/invention of the MA/TESOL program. And the core of our research should be ethnographic in scope. Please don't forsake it for bigger samples and an elusive "objectivity" that doesn't exist anyway.

Your cumulative work in TESOL should be your legacy, a bit of your soul. Spend time thinking about the multiple needs out there that you can help fill with creativity, ingenuity, passion, and your own GU MA/TESOL invention! It is our TESOL birthright to rebel, invent, and adapt--maybe more than we would like.

And finally,

Go to the desert. Be a Bedouin! Bedouins adapt themselves to the environment, develop strong tribal bonds; the Bedouin is never alone.

"This act of reconnecting with the past, I was starting to realize, is largely what I was undergoing on my trip through the desert as well. I was wriggling free from the firm grip of modern life and inching toward something else, something more instinctive and untaught. I was breaking away from modes of thought I had used

since I was a teenager—reason, skepticism, logic, learning—and moving toward modes of relating to the world—emotion, intuition, trust—that I probably hadn't relied on so much since I was a child. In doing so, I felt myself slide farther away from the rigid, controlled person I was at the beginning of this process. I was less of an upright wooden chair, to use the local vernacular, and more of a roll-out carpet. I was conforming to the land" (Feller, p. 297).



Image 2: The author in the desert

References

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