

REFLECTION ON SETESOL

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Inspiring, innovation, empowering. These were some of the key words from the TESOL International Conference in Pittsburgh, PA I had the honor of attending. While I was excited (and a bit apprehensive) about attending a conference in person again, I felt privileged to represent LaTESOL and all of the amazing multilingual educators in our state. Above all, I was looking for ways to expand the profile of our state affiliate and to benefit the students and educators in our state, including finding future speakers for our local conference (stay tuned!).

Overall, sessions included a balance of new techniques and approaches, new classroom technologies, lessons from other fields, and re-investigations of old problems and challenges. The biggest takeaways from many of the sessions were familiar to many of us working on the ground with our multilingual students: students use their native or other languages to help them learn essential skills in English; incorporating families and students' networks into students' learning can reap tremendous benefits; and high-quality educators are more important than the latest technology. Some of my favorite talks were those that focused on the classic challenges of teaching listening and pronunciation. Many of us at some point when teaching listening have probably just tested listening (I know I have), instead of giving students the strategies, keywords, and practice they need to really develop this essential skill. Future LaTESOL conferences will no doubt include some of these topics as well.

Another goal of the conference was to rekindle our relationship with our regional organization South-East (SE) TESOL. It was great to meet educators from across the southeast to compare experiences and to learn lessons about advocacy successes and challenges from our neighbors. While some challenges are unique to each state, such as new legislation restricting educational practice in Florida, and the dramatic increase in multilingual students in North Carolina, there is significant overlap with the situation in Louisiana. It was also refreshing to hear about successes. For example, Arkansas currently has the highest graduation rate for multilingual students in the country (!), and Kentucky educators recently played a major role in removing an unpopular governor hostile to public education and electing a new one who has promised to make education a priority. SETESOL will host their annual conference the 12th – 15th of October in Richmond, VA, and you can find more information here, including their call for proposals open until May 15th: <http://vatesol.cloverpad.org/Conferences>

I cannot overstate my gratitude for the honor of representing LaTESOL. It is an organization I am proud to be a part of because I think the work we do is important: we represent a group of some of the most impressive educators I know, and, even more importantly, we educate, inspire, and advocate for multilingual scholars in the state, so that they can find their voice.