

TESOL Academy 2008 in Chicago
with Karyn Niles June 20-21, 2008
by Vicki Barber

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Vicki Barber teaches in a FWISD high school for overage students whose education has been interrupted. She is interested in how academic skills can improve her students' economic opportunities.

The TESOL Academy was held at Roosevelt University in Chicago in June. There were several workshops that covered teaching in multilevel classes, working with students with special needs, and organizing professional development. I attended a workshop on "Teaching Reading Across Content Areas" presented by Karyn Niles.

Niles shared research, activities, and materials that she uses in her Virginia middle school classroom. She provided a resource list of literature to support content and a bibliography of research. Her lesson designs focused on suggested instructional strategies by Janet Allen, Kylene Beers, Kate Kinsella, and Ellin Oliver Keene.

Niles stressed that students need to have access to up to date books that are relevant and will motivate students to read on their own. Niles explained that too often decoding is the focus of instruction when comprehension needs to be specifically taught. She stressed

to remember that reading is thinking and recommended that students have the opportunity to read with the teacher and in groups so they can share their thoughts about what they read.

Niles said that although education is held in high regard in immigrant communities, the actual realities of daily life often make speaking and translation more valued than reading and writing. She also stated that many parents believe their children can function at a higher level of language than the student is actually able to use. Sometimes the students themselves emphasize the importance of speaking over reading and writing because of their non-traditional roles as the communicators for the family.

Niles suggested using real life experiences and current events to build reading comprehension skills. A police report is usually done first by speaking and then in writing where details must be included the first time and cannot be added later. She suggested this type of model could be used to help students

realize that finding supporting details is a skill to be valued.

Participants were given several opportunities to experience the activities that Niles suggested for classroom. Quick Writes and Anticipation Guides were used to introduce the topics. Think Alouds were demonstrated. Sentence starters were distributed on rings to encourage discussions. Gallery Walks and Museum boards were used to share findings. All the activities worked towards propelling the students forward in their reading skills in their content classes.

The complete Power Point for the two day workshop can be seen at www.academicesl.com. You can also hear more about the activities presented at the workshop at the **TexTESOL Conference in Richardson** this November, where the presentation will be titled: **Teach Reading to Support the Content Areas**. Ideas presented at TESOL Academy will be shared. Feedback will be given on how the activities worked in a high school classroom.