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Welcome from the Senior Editor: The Challenges and the Opportunities in Our Professional Lives

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GATESOL In Action

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Welcome from the Senior Editor

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The Challenges and the Opportunities in Our Professional Lives

The work of being Editor on a State journal is no simple task and it is one that I take very seriously. It is an awesome responsibility filled with challenges and opportunities and in preparation for this first edition, I thought it was very important to gain insights from several vantage points to get current and fresh perspectives and ascertain the issues that consume our everyday professional lives. The vibrancy and currency of a journal depends on being familiar and knowledgeable about the practices, policies, and issues that concern learners, their families, communities and their teachers. As such, in this journal we must touch all bases and be open to everything that impacts the lives of language learners. This editorial commentary is an open welcome and invitation to everyone to send us your thoughts, your writings and your musings on what matters most to you in language learning and teaching.

One of the persons I spoke with to get a handle on what she was doing, seeing and envisioning for language learners in the State of Georgia was Cori Alston. Cori is the Program Manager for ESOL/Title 111 at the GA Department of Education (GADOE). The interview was conducted a year ago in an alcove at the GADOE and in the background immediately behind us

was the State's golden dome, enduring symbol of the State's governing body. I took a picture of the dome after the interview and include it as part of my commentary. In my hour-long



interview with Cori, I sensed a deep and genuine concern for those who are language learners. Ms. Alston said that while she had witnessed improvements in the performance of P-12 language learners there was still much work to be done particularly in the content areas in the general

education classrooms. She felt that there was “an untapped potential” in our learners that was not being fully harnessed or realized because “we were not reaching them.” Ms. Alston’s comments were encouraging and hopeful. She stressed the need for teachers to view her as “a supporter” and not as an “enforcer” as people tend to view “those who work for the State.” Here is an opportunity to write and tell what collaborations exist between educators and those in the GADOE. The GA golden dome in this commentary serves as a symbol of posterity and perseverance in our work with language learners.

In my own work with pre-service teachers and in preparing them for the forthcoming implementation of edTPA and the new rigors of certification, I see an opportunity for teacher educator professors to move out of their comfort zones and into spaces where opportunities reside. Is there an opportunity for new learning or the unlearning of old habits? *GATESOL in Action* provides a forum for us to articulate our constructive research engagements and ponderings about edTPA. We invite you to explore this opportunity with us.

When I visited my pre-service students' middle and high school classes last fall, I could see the size of classroom challenges and the profound need to differentiate in our instructional practices when so many of our learners in one class have varied proficiency levels and different linguistic and cultural heritages. Indeed the personal histories of our learners, those who come from war-torn and ravaged countries to those who come from highly privileged English language learning backgrounds, compel us to differentiate and we have so many of their resources to draw upon to do this. What does differentiation look like when one has a class of 15 – 20 language learners in the middle or high school and when some of them are in their late teens and early twenties? Indeed, while there are many challenges there are also many opportunities for both educators and learners. How much do we draw upon those opportunities in our rush to “cover” the curriculum? We encourage you dear teachers, our frontline educators, to tell us your approaches and let us know how you are faring in the work you do. *GATESOL in Action* is a voice for you!

In my work with in-service teachers in the homes of refugee mothers and their families I can also see the challenges for many of our college and community educators who bear the brunt of elevating the language learning potential of these learners. My in-service teachers work hard to make language learning tasks meaningful and applicable to the personal needs and goals of our refugee mothers. However, there is so much more that can be done. If anyone is conducting research with adults in our communities, please consider *GATESOL in Action* as a potential home for your writing. We need to celebrate the resources this group brings to our community through our writing. Please share this important and often unacknowledged work with us.

In my talk at the Georgia TESOL Conference this past fall, I stated that “despite living in a world of criticism, cutbacks and increased accountability,” that we needed to “maintain our

professionalism by forming communities of teachers who engage in researching and writing for the betterment of our profession.” I had wanted to challenge yet inspire attendees to take action and I reiterate those words here to close out in this my first ***GATESOL in Action*** welcome and commentary. We must harness all our energies for the collective good not ill and I encourage all educators of all levels to use our ***GATESOL in Action*** as a place for turning our challenges into opportunities by developing and enacting an agenda of hope for our profession. Embrace this opportunity! Share your research, lessons, and learning with us; be a writer for ***GATESOL in Action*** for your professional organization, ***GATESOL!***

Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Senior Editor