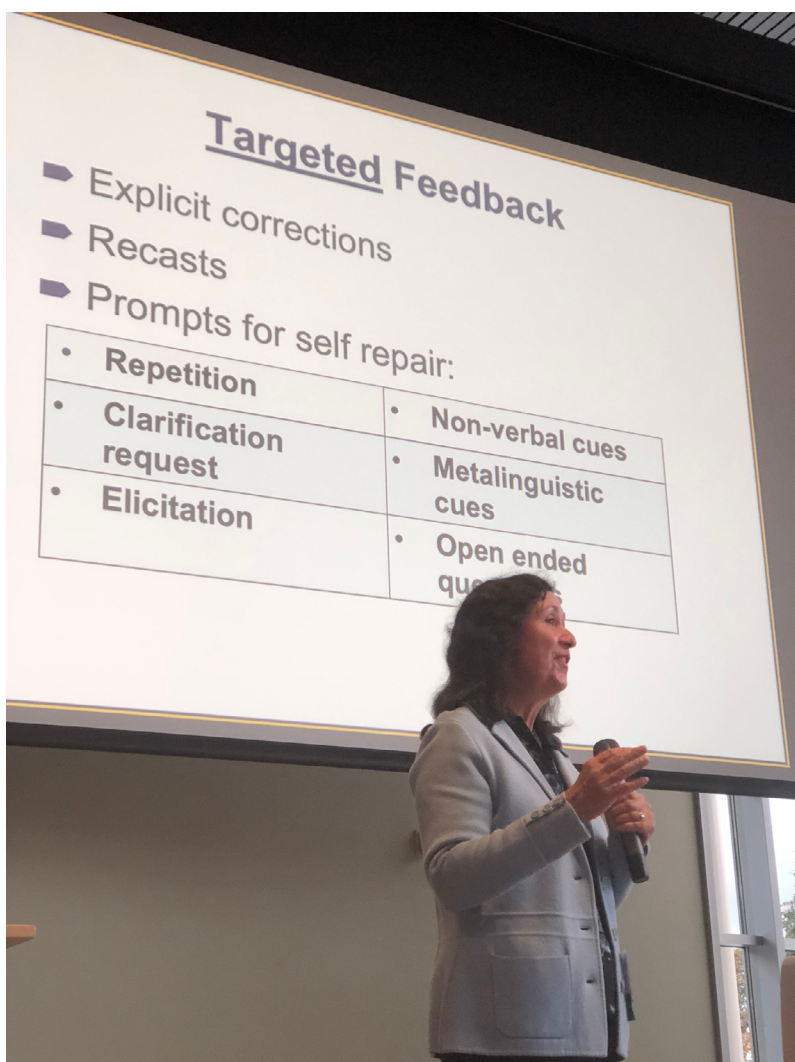


In conversation with our keynote speaker: Deborah Short

Deborah Short, PhD, was the keynote speaker at our annual WAESOL Conference in October 2022. A renowned author, presenter, materials developer, and researcher, Dr. Short was TESOL International Association president (2020–21) and served as lead writer and series editor for The 6 Principles books. She founded and directs Academic Language Research & Training, LLC and provides professional development on academic literacy, content-based English, and sheltered instruction worldwide. Dr. Short has led many research and program evaluation studies on multilingual learners and educational program designs and co-developed the SIOP Model. In addition, she has co-authored ESL textbooks (Edge, Inside, and Reach) for National Geographic Learning and has taught ESL and EFL, in New York, California, Virginia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

During her WAESOL keynote presentation, she touched on a variety of subjects, ranging from the use of translanguaging to active learning strategies. Along the way, she described how teachers can use these strategies, along with targeted assessment, to improve learning opportunities for our students. In the conversation, Deborah took some time to flesh out the ideas a bit more for the WAESOL Educator with David Martin, the new WAESOL president.



Deborah Short, PhD, presenting the Keynote Address at the annual WAESOL Conference in October 2022

WE: Could you explain the concept of translanguaging?

DS: Many teachers have done aspects of translanguaging in their classroom for years, but now we have a label, something to call it. Often credited to Garcia and her colleagues (2016, 2020) and originally coined by Cen Williams and his colleagues from Wales (see Lewis et al., 2012), the term refers to the various assets that our students bring with them to the classroom, such as their knowledge of their first language and their ability to strategically use that language either orally or in writing to accomplish tasks relevant to what is happening in the classroom. In other words, teachers encourage students, when appropriate and helpful, to use and apply the knowledge gained in their first language toward the tasks in the target language. For example, this could involve drawing a picture and explaining it in their first language to a partner. It lets them deepen their understanding because every time we talk about something, hopefully we are learning a bit more about it.

This also validates the knowledge they have. It could also involve reading or watching something and then allowing them to talk about it in whatever language they choose. It allows them to learn new information by building upon prior knowledge and skills. The basic idea is that this should feel natural and be dynamic, but whatever translanguaging practices are drawn upon have to come back to the lesson objective. In other words, what is the language goal for the lesson, because students are supposed to be using this strategy to eventually gain more proficiency in English.

WE: As a follow-up, then, what are some active learning strategies teachers can implement for their classrooms?

DS: I think that while teachers are eager to try using translanguaging and active learning strategies, sometimes they are hesitant because maybe they don't speak the student's language (for example). Possibly they are worried about accountability or whether what the students are saying is inaccurate information that the teacher can't check on. That's why I advocate for teachers taking small steps but also making sure there is some accountability for students. Let's say the goal is learning new vocabulary; they can write down what they know about it in whatever language. However, ultimately, the student needs to use the word in the target language. Also, if students are going to write something, they could use their first language to develop the outline before writing the actual essay in English. That allows them to build flexibility in language, but it's all in the service of the objective or goal for language use. Another important factor in determining how translanguaging use fits is to always work backward from the ultimate goal.

Now, when it comes to active learning, it's a little bit more than just whether students are translating. The collaboration with another member of the class makes the process more active. When students are more engaged in the process, it will be more active, which is more motivating. When students are more motivated, they learn more. Therefore, it has more to do with the topics involved and whether the topics are interesting. If you asked me to talk about chaos theory, I don't think I would have much to say because I'm not a physicist. I haven't studied it. Quite frankly, it doesn't interest me, except maybe to talk about traffic and why it can never seem to go in the same pattern. Therefore, some of the burden falls on the teacher to create/find engaging topics to build upon. However, I think all teachers find that cooperative learning groups, techniques like Kagan techniques (Clowes, 2011) are very useful. When we have multilingual learners, it gets them up and moving around, which can help with active engagement and gives them some ownership over what they're going to say or what they're going to ask someone that they're working with. So, these along with a lot of the technology tools work well.

WE: What are your favorite language teaching tools you have used with students?

DS: I think it comes back to some of the tech tools that are available. Since the pandemic, we have a wealth of technology tools that teachers like to use that students enjoy. Flipgrid and Kahoot, for example, are popular for concept and vocabulary review as well as for practice and setting up a game-based learning environment. All of that typically engages students, but I think anything that lets the students participate in the learning and knowledge-making process is useful. I don't think that the burden of generation has to fall completely on the teacher. For example, suppose students want to play a Jeopardy game—students could write the answers and the

questions, right? Another option is drawing from the Kagan Technique where students write a question and answer on a card. They pair up and quiz each other and then switch cards and find a new partner, continuing to switch cards as they go. In this way, they are continuously practicing language to ask and answer questions and even learn new vocabulary or ways to negotiate meaning. In this scenario, maybe they are reviewing a range of different content topics that they may have been studying or vocabulary words and definitions.

Just one more note on the use of technology tools such as Flipgrid or Padlet: these tools allow them to make mistakes and then fix those mistakes without penalty. In a sense, it is like changing to a new sticky note. They are given free rein to take risks with language. We want them to know it is okay to make mistakes, to think through the mistakes.

WE: In your keynote presentation, you discussed the issue of feedback. What do you feel is the most crucial consideration when giving feedback for language learners?

DS: I would say there are two major considerations. One has to do with the feedback being language-level appropriate. If a student is at a certain stage in language development, then feedback should focus on what they are able to do plus just a bit more. It shouldn't be something that is way on the other end of the spectrum. It's just going to sail over their heads. So it has to be targeted to where they are in terms of their acquisition of the language. Another consideration is to know your learner in the sense of what he or she is comfortable with when it comes to getting that feedback. There are some that will shut down if you do it in a public way in the classroom, but the same feedback might be taken just fine if given in a one-on-one situation. An additional point to consider is the importance of reflection and providing time for the reflection to take place.

WE: You mentioned the importance of reflection at the keynote presentation, could you expand on the idea of reflection and why it is important?

DS: There has been quite a body of research on feedback and best ways to give feedback to students, and one of the key things that comes out is if you want the feedback to make a difference down the line, then there has to be some time for students to reflect on the feedback that they got. That reflection doesn't just mean to hand back a piece of text you've written notes all over and have students read the notes in the quiet of their home. Instead, the teacher should build in some sort of practice activity in relation to the feedback. For example, maybe there is a paragraph in an essay that the teacher asks the students to rewrite using the feedback. So instead of rewriting the whole three-page essay, they focus on just revising that paragraph where the teacher has made targeted comments on specific aspects of the paragraph. The student then returns the paragraph for subsequent responses, but they have had a chance to deal with a more manageable chunk of the essay.

Also, what we see is that in-the-moment kind of feedback where a teacher corrects pronunciation or grammar and has everyone repeat it, that's just helpful for full-class comprehension but it's less likely that an individual student will go "Oh yeah, that's the way I have to pronounce it from now on in the future" and then be able to do it, particularly if that student has never had a chance to rephrase or restate it him or herself.

WE: On a more global scale, then, what are the most crucial issues you see coming up in the world of TESOL that we should be considering?

DS: I think one thing that all teachers at all levels are working on and thinking about is the globalization of English. There are a lot of facets to this, one of which is that English

is the most popular new language to learn in the world. That means that more and more people are teaching English as well as learning English. However, we have teachers who perhaps don't have all the professional development they need to teach it well and to teach it to the advanced level of language and literacy skills that I think our society and our economies are going to need with this globalization, not only of English, but of communication and industry. So providing that teacher training and ongoing professional development for all these teachers of English is going to be important.

WAESOL thanks Deborah Short for sharing her knowledge and expertise with us.

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