



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

Meet Meg Eubank: 2022 TESOL Teacher of the Year

by [Fares J. Karam](#)



The 2022 TESOL Teacher of the Year, Meg Eubank, is currently a professor at Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania and a doctoral student at the University of Houston. Meg has worked with thousands of diverse people from all over the globe in roles as a college instructor, nonprofit director, professional tutor, high school teacher, and curriculum designer.

Fares J. Karam, assistant professor of TESOL at the University of Nevada, Reno, has asked Meg some questions to help us get to know her.

Congratulations on this award and important achievement! What does being selected as TESOL Teacher of the Year mean to you on a professional and personal level?

I am greatly honored and humbled, because there are many hard working and deserving teachers doing great work during this difficult pandemic. This recognition is exciting and validating and it inspires me to keep working to improve my teaching and help others learn the best methods to work with English language learners. I have to acknowledge, too, the excellent education I received at my alma mater, Arcadia University, which is where I learned many skills that I'm being awarded for today, and where my love of teaching was cemented.

Tell us a bit about how and why you chose to become a TESOL professional.

My journey to becoming a TESOL professional was an evolution. I began as an elementary education major and English minor from Arcadia University who graduated into a hiring freeze during a recession. I was hired part time in the Tutoring Center at Bucks County Community College as an ESL (English as a second language) specialist because I was good at explaining complex ideas simply and teaching English grammar and vocabulary. I had worked with younger English language learners during student teaching, but really fell in love with ESL by working with the diverse group of students at the community college.

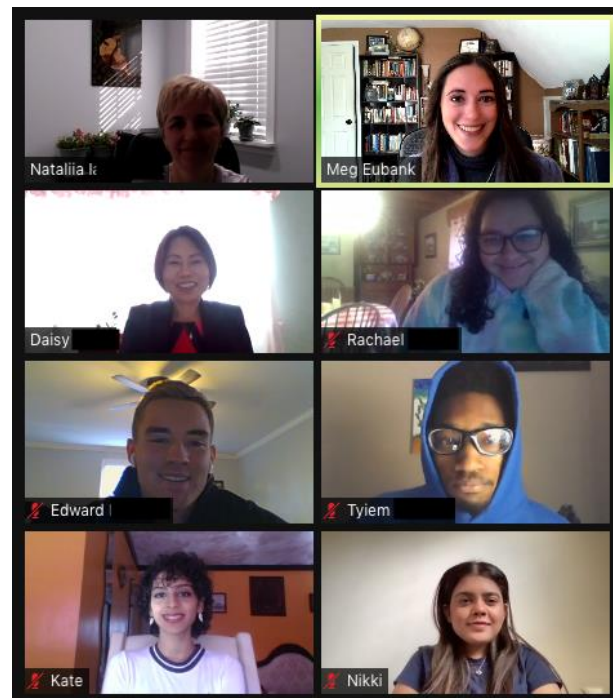
In 2011, a coworker told me that a local nonprofit was looking for people to help teach community English classes to immigrants. I started working there, and returned to Arcadia University to become certified in ESL because working with people from all over the globe was incredibly rewarding and felt like my calling. A decade later, my roles in the nonprofit had encompassed volunteer, board member, program coordinator, and eventually executive director when the retiring founder asked me to take over. By 2020, I had been able to help several thousand students from over 100 countries.

During these years, I continued at the community college teaching as an adjunct. When the pandemic started, I taught ESL to international students at a private school, and this year I was brought on as full-time faculty at Bucks County Community College, where I continue to work with students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

How did you support your multilingual students during the pandemic, and what advice do you have to TESOL professionals looking for ways to support their students via remote learning?

My teaching centers around creating a community of learners. It is important to me to choose a diverse curriculum that reflects people from all backgrounds, races, and cultures that is both representative of my students but also introduces new ideas, as well as vary activities and ways of presenting information. My biggest challenge during the pandemic was that many of my students at the private school had returned to their native countries and were in different time zones! The most difficult task was getting sleepy teens halfway across the globe to attend class. Virtual learning changed some of the usual ways we teach.

However, whether hybrid, synchronous, or asynchronous instruction, technology can be an advantage. Some techniques include breakout rooms on Zoom with small groups, one-on-one conferences, whole group activities, plus unique experiences like making and sharing videos, creating a virtual community using social media and digital portfolio tools, sharing audio clips to converse across time zones, using the chat box in Zoom to do “waterfalls” of shared ideas, private chatting for students who are not comfortable asking a question aloud, and ultimately making an inclusive community with a wide variety of ways to engage. Make sure to present information verbally, visually, written, recorded, and in as many ways as possible for students, and implement UDL (universal design for learning) strategies.



Meg teaching a Zoom class.

It is also imperative to make sure every student has equitable access to the tools they need. This year, it was even more important to use technology and sites students could access, that there was great flexibility in how students could complete and hand in work, and to offer alternative ways to do assignments with lots of differentiation. Keep lines of communication open. I checked in daily with each individual as we learned authentic and relevant lessons and engaged in a lot of culture sharing to build a strong community of learners.



Can you please share some of your experiences working and leading nonprofit organizations that support multilingual learners?

My work with local nonprofits has centered on a vision of global family members working together to advocate for themselves and connect with one another, building community and support. One big challenge is how to communicate with non-English speakers to inform them of services. Word-of-mouth does not reach enough people, so it is important to build partnerships and community. The nonprofit I ran expanded across three counties, from 150 registrations to 400 a term, serving over 1,000 students every year and resulting in a 146% increase in enrollment since I began because we built a strong network in the communities where immigrants were living and working. As a result, there was incredible support among the immigrants, and we created

a family of people from different countries who offered each other rides to class and helped one another. If a mother needed to bring her child to class, we welcomed them. I connected with over 75 community organizations and nonprofits to hold classes, partner in workshops and services, and connect students to resources. Beyond academic classes, I initiated working closely with advocacy groups to make changes at the local, state, and national level, and to empower people to advocate for themselves.

The best rewards were the goals that my students reached—a Liberian grandmother who learned to read and write for the first time; a Mexican victim of human trafficking and sexual abuse that earned her GED, found a job, and passed her driver's test; an Eritrean widow with a toddler son who learned to communicate and navigate her new community; and even the Chinese seventh grader who suffered from isolation on top of her natural shyness during the pandemic, but grew into a chatty, creative, productive student by the end of the school year.

What advice do you have to novice TESOL colleagues? More specifically, how can they continue to support and advocate for multilingual learners both inside and outside the classroom?

The biggest key that opens the door to compassionate teaching is: Remember that your students are people with complex feelings and individual goals. I remember a grandmother from China came to class feeling lonely and isolated, not being able to speak to others in her community. She studied diligently, and one day walked into class with a big smile on her face, glowing with happiness. She revealed that she made a new friend, her neighbor, and had a full conversation in English about their gardens. She had been craving social interaction with someone her age but needed to have working proficiency in the same language in order to find that connection in America. Humans need relationships, and we can help students gain the tools to connect with others.

Teaching English language learners, we encounter students from all over the world. As they learn from us, we also learn from them. Our world becomes larger being exposed to so many different individuals from all over the globe, but also becomes smaller as we realize that we all have so much in common. Everyone is concerned with the same worries, like caring for their families and trying to plan for the future. Our humanity links us in many ways, and this is essential to remember. The driving forces that everyone encounters as humans are the same, and ultimately we are all concerned about our loved ones and trying to do the best we can.

Fares J. Karam is an assistant professor of TESOL at the University of Nevada, Reno. His scholarship focuses on the language and literacy development of multilingual learners from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. His research has been published in *Applied Linguistics*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, and *TESOL Quarterly*—among others.