The Joy of Watching Others Learn: An Interview with Diane Larsen-Freeman

By William P. Ancker (United States)

Diane Larsen-Freeman is a professor of applied linguistics at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA. She has written numerous articles and books on language teaching methodology, second language acquisition, English grammar, and teacher education, including *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course* (2nd ed.) with Marianne Celce-Murcia (Heinle & Heinle, 1999) and *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research with Michael Long* (Longman, 1991). She is also the series director for the four-level student text *Grammar Dimensions* (Heinle & Heinle), now in its third edition. This interview was conducted by the editor-in-chief of the Forum on March 3, 2001 at the international TESOL convention held in St. Louis, Missouri.

WPA: *How did your career in language education begin?*
DLF: Like many Americans getting started in EFL, my first opportunity was with the Peace Corps. I finished my university education, decided I wanted to be of service and to see a bit of the world, so I applied to the Peace Corps and was accepted to be an EFL teacher in Malaysia in Sabah, Borneo. I was there from 1967 until 1969. I had been a psychology major as an undergraduate primarily because I was interested, even then, in how people learn. When I found English language teaching and language in general, I became absolutely fascinated with the language learning process.

WPA: *What advice can you give to teachers just beginning their careers in English teaching?*
DLF: Because I'm so interested myself in learning, I would say the essence of good teaching is learning to watch your students, learning to read your students' interests, their attention, their engagement, knowing when to move on and when to stay. All of that comes from watching your students, monitoring what they are doing, trying as best you can to see the learning in their faces, in their behavior, and in their demeanor.

WPA: *That would include the way a teacher begins the course and introduces students to the course as well as the daily teaching, right?*
DLF: You have to take your students' learning as primary, as basic, as fundamental. It affects all times and levels of your teaching. That is, after all, why you are there.

WPA: *What do you enjoy most about teaching?*
DLF: I have to repeat: watching learning take place. I suspect a lot of teachers can relate to this. There are those moments, and they don't happen every day, when you can see the penny drop. You've been working on teaching a particular tense or a reading passage, and all of a sudden, there is that moment of awareness. When you can actually see people go, “Ahh! I see!” Those

are the moments I live for as a teacher. Those are the things that keep me going. It's the joy of watching others learn.

WPA: *You used the idiom "the penny drop." Could we say "the light bulb goes on"?*
DLF: Yes, that is also an apt idiom. What I mean is that moment when all the previous learning has come into focus and all of the sudden people understand what it is you've been working on together. We could also say "the curtain parts." That's another idiom.

WPA: *Along these lines of what goes on in the classroom and moments of awareness, what do you most often see teachers doing wrong in their language classes?*
DLF: I hesitate to say label anything "wrong" because I think it is really important to see from the teacher's perspective. Learning to teach is a lifelong process, and you can only do what you know how to do at that time. If you're in a particular stage of evolution, it's not "wrong," it just means that perhaps you yourself haven't cultivated the awareness or developed the skills that you need, but you are doing the best you can do.

As a teacher educator my job is to try to help people move from teachers as performers to teachers as managers of students' learning. So often teachers come into the profession having watched other teachers teach, their own teachers teach, and having gotten the sense that teaching is somehow a performance. You can create lesson plans, and then you follow them as a script. It's all about what you are doing as a teacher and what you need to do next and after that. Of course, you're aware that you have students there but you're caught up in your own behavior. It's understandable. Teaching is very complex and somehow you feel that you have to orchestrate the whole thing.

WPA: *In the past, I am thinking of audiolingualism, the focus really was on the teacher and almost a performance of drilling.*
DLF: That's a very good metaphor for the teacher: the teacher as a performer, the teacher as drill conductor, but a teacher self-absorbed. I don't mean that in negative way. I just mean a teacher who is caught up in his or her own performance could be missing the very point of being in the classroom, which is to be watching students' learning and taking cues from the students as opposed to from the lesson plan.

WPA: *Teacher as performer, teacher as orchestra conductor. There are other metaphors of the teacher we come across in the literature: teacher as coach, teacher as consultant. How do you respond to the skeptic who says, "What good are these metaphors of teaching? What I need is something to do in my class on Monday morning!"*
DLF: It may surprise you, but I am rather sympathetic to such skepticism because I've been there. You have to do something! Having said that teachers shouldn't be caught up in their performance, it is true that they just can't go in the classroom and let students run the show. You have to come in with some kind of activities, but activities that will remove the focus from you.

Now getting back to the question about metaphors, I think teachers need to know what to do on Monday mornings. However that, to some extent, is a short-term view. I think having a good metaphor can sustain your teaching in the longer term. Instead of metaphor, I would suggest a

theory of language learning and language teaching can sustain your teaching practice for a long, long time. Accompanying that theory is a metaphor, is a role for a teacher.

A theory with an accompanying metaphor is also generative. It actually will help you come up with what to do on Monday morning if you have a sense of the whole and what you are trying to accomplish within that whole, if you have a longer and wider view of what it's all about. I've worked with teachers who planned their lessons on a day-to-day basis and they spent hours at night trying to figure out what they're going to do the next day. What we have to do is take a step back and look at the longer-term view. What is it that you want your students to be able to do by the end of the course? How can we systematically build towards that? If we spend some time thinking that through, it's very liberating. The long-term view is very liberating, because then you know that you don't have to spend Sunday night planning for Monday morning. You have some sense of where you are going and how to get there.

WPA: *A metaphor or theory can provide guidance in terms of the activities you are likely to use and those you won't be using.*
DLF: That's right. It acts as a guide. Coherence between one's theory and one's practice is essential for a good teacher.

WPA: *Your book Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching was published by Oxford University Press in 1986. The same year, Cambridge University Press published Richards and Rodgers' Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Was that a coincidence or a plan?*
DLF: To tell you the truth, it surprised me, too. It was pure coincidence as far as I know. I was asked to write my book based on my experience teaching a methods course at the School for International Training. I don't know what initiated the other book, but it's probably not surprising that the books came out the same year because we were witnessing a proliferation of different kinds of methods, some quite the reverse of methods of long-standing like the audiolingual method. People had to come to terms with all the choices they had, in some cases a bewildering number of choices.

WPA: *I have used them a number of times, and they are perfectly complementary. It is really a great combination to have the practical approach of yours and the more theoretical approach of Richards and Rogers.*
DLF: May I just interrupt for one minute? I know why you're saying that. I did try to capture and I wanted teachers to see and experience, albeit vicariously, the methods, so I wrote a book trying to show what the method looked like in practice in a real classroom. But I think my book has quite a lot of theory, too, and that's the "Principles" part of the title. I don't think that disembodied techniques and classroom practices is what the book is all about. So I understand why you're saying that. Richards and Rogers deal with more history of the field and I don't. I go right into the classroom. But I want people to understand that there is a theoretical component. It is important in teaching to think carefully about why you are doing what you are doing.

WPA: *Certainly the section that follows the classroom demonstration ("Thinking about the Experience") is a very clear explanation, point by point, of what we see and why we see it.*
DLF: That's right, because a method is a constellation of thought-in-action links. A method serves a great purpose in getting people to think about, as I said a moment ago, why they do what

they do. It's not enough just to do something. We want to understand the reason for it, so we can choose wisely and match our particular techniques with the learning challenges of our particular students.

WPA: *Speaking of choosing why we do what we do, did you invent the term "informed eclecticism"?*
DLF: I am reluctant to say I invented anything because the older I get the more I have an appreciation of those on whose shoulders I stand. But as far as I know no one else has used that term. Doug Brown has used the term "principled" eclecticism, which I think reflects more or less the same sentiment. But I chose "informed" eclecticism because principled eclecticism still sounded to me like something outside of the teacher and I wanted a term that reflected the internal domain of a teacher. A teacher has to be informed and once informed has to choose wisely from among the available practices to create her own unique blend that would be appropriate for her own personality and teaching style, for her own students and the circumstances in which the teaching is taking place. It seemed to me "informed" eclecticism captured that notion.

WPA: *Getting back to your methods book, last year OUP published a second edition, which has two new chapters. How did you decide, of all the developments that have taken place in language teaching over the past 15 years, what to include and what to leave out?*
DLF: That's a good question, and it wasn't an easy choice. I was aided by three considerations. First, I was looking for methodological trends and innovations that have been sustained for some time and have had an enduring impact. Not everybody will agree with my choices, but that was a consideration certainly. Second, I never wrote my book, even the first edition, intending to be totally comprehensive about everything that one should know before stepping in the classroom. It was meant to be an illustration of what I said earlier: understanding that we have a lot of choices, that we have to be clear about why we make those choices, and that in all good practice there is a link between thought and action.

Finally, I was able to justify grouping the innovations around two themes that seemed to me to be overarching in the development in the field in the last 15 years. The first theme is the idea that one learns a language in somewhat of an incidental way by studying content, that language need not be the sole focus of attention in order for language to be acquired. One studies content via language, or one does tasks through which language is learned, or one participates in problem solving through which learning language is served. The second theme is language learners and their learning process. This theme justified my inclusion of learning strategy training, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligences in one new chapter.

WPA: *In that particular chapter of the new edition, you state that in those three methodological innovations you just mentioned the main concern is with the language learner. With an increased focus on the learner, can there come a point when the teacher doesn't have the time and can't attend to the individual needs of every learner?*
DLF: I would say the time has come already! Many of our colleagues around the world have classes of considerable size: 40, 50, 60 or more students. Even in smaller classes it's impossible to totally monitor everybody for every second of class. I think there are things a teacher can do though and this is related to my comments earlier about trying to shift a metaphor for a teacher

from a performer to a manager of learning. There is a way to take the focus from myself and put it on the students so that they are receiving the practice and the language. I am not doing all the talking. That frees me to pay more attention to them. Caleb Cattegno used to say, "We need to subordinate teaching to learning." I think that is a wonderful way of thinking about the teaching and learning processes. If I can get my students to be involved and me disengaged from leading and conducting the lesson, I am free to pay more attention to them and what they are doing. So I can't be monitoring every student every single time, but over the course of our many meetings, I can get a sense of my students.

I also think that there are two levels of focus. To the best of your ability you want to be meeting individual needs, but that is a daunting task. There is also a class personality and rhythm that you can and need to monitor. At any one time there will be some students who are not paying attention, some who are bored, some students who haven't understood what the lesson is about, and there will be some in the middle, so you are never going to have a uniformity of student responses. But there is an energy level of the group that one needs to read and that's still, as far as I'm concerned, focusing on the learners. Actually, I prefer the term "'focus on learning" rather than "focus on learners."

WPA: *What you just said about rhythm reminds me of something that a principal told the teachers at a school where I worked in Nicaragua. During a faculty meeting he said, "The essence of good teaching is timing." Timing and pacing are essential for good teaching.*
DLF: There is a maxim about when the student is ready, the teacher will come. What I am looking for is a teachable moment. What I mean by that is the students are ready to learn, they have shown me they are ready to learn, and I am there trying to read that and making an informed choice of about what to do next. If I can do that well and the students are willing to be with me, that's when I have a teachable moment, that's when I get to see those wonderful occasions where the light of awareness goes on.

WPA: *Is the search over for a better language teaching method?*
DLF: That is a reasonable question. However, I think people who say we are beyond methods are making more of a political statement than anything else. I think they misconstrue what a method can be. They're saying there is no room in language teaching for formulas, for prescriptive practices to be imposed on teachers worldwide. Certainly I have no quarrel with that. But I think it's a big mistake to mix up method and its implementation or how a method is used. I wouldn't want to impose a method on anybody, but it seems to me the more methods we have, the more we see the variety of human experience, the more we have a bigger palette from which to paint our picture. We have more choices.

Of course, I don't think any method should come along that teachers are forced to adhere to, but a new method can become another choice in one's practice, in one's constellation of thought-in-action links, I think is very valuable. I have no problem with that, but I have a problem with people who say, "We shouldn't export a method from one part of the world to another, because the poor teacher will find that it is inappropriate to her context." I think that is very patronizing towards teachers. I understand that it's being said with the idea that we shouldn't colonize others with out methods, but it seems to me that teachers can make up their own minds, in the best of all worlds.

Somehow saying that you shouldn't impose these methods comes across as we shouldn't let people know about them. Why not? Are people afraid of information? I understand in some instances, teachers have been victimized and told they have to follow a particular way. But we know that even in those cases, teachers will depart from the script, so to speak, to an extent because every group of students is unique. I hope methods are here to stay but not methods as formulaic, prescriptive practices. I don't think many teachers do adopt a whole method. I don't think that it really is a question of striving for the ideal, best method. It is a question of expanding, revising one's thought-in-action repertoire.

WPA: *Let me rephrase the question. Could we say that the search is over for the one method that will suit us all?*
DLF: I don't know if it is over, but I think we are not likely to find one method that will suit all learners, all teachers, and all occasions.

WPA: *It is probably a naive assumption that we could find one such method that would serve everyone's purpose.*
DLF: Probably the striving for it still goes on, and I think that's okay. That gives us a reason to continue to create new ways of thinking about what we do.

WPA: *Have you got a favorite piece of teaching technology?*
DLF: I'm pretty old-fashioned. I like chalk and white board markers. I like cuisinaire rods to make particular points of language salient. I am very fond of the overhead projector. I am kind of a low-tech person. I am not afraid of technology. I use it in other parts of my professional life, but I think the reason I like these low-tech things is that I can be more spontaneous and interactive with the students who are in front of me. For example, with an overhead projector, I can write down a thought I had or select a relevant article I saw that morning, make a transparency, and use it that day in my class. Or I can take some of my students' errors or questions and create a transparency, and we can look at them together as a class in order to have people learn from each other's learning challenges. An OHP is nice too because, at least in theory, it allows you to direct the learners' attention, to focus learners' attention. I find that very helpful.

WPA: *A moment ago I asked about what teachers do wrong. Can you tell us one thing that all language teachers, regardless of the age or proficiency level of their students or where they teach, can and should do in their classes?*
DLF: I recall at the 1996 international TESOL convention there was a closing plenary session, which I participated in. It was billed as "The Great Debate: Is Teaching an Art or a Science?". I was assigned the role of arguing that teaching was a science. The way I chose to carry out that role was to argue that, like good science, good teaching is best served when practitioners cultivate attitudes of inquiry. By "attitudes of inquiry" I mean to have a natural curiosity about one's subject matter, the teaching process, the learning process, one's students; to not be afraid to experiment; and to try new things. Cultivating an attitude of inquiry is a way to keep one's teaching practice from becoming stale. Prabhu wrote that our teaching can become "over-routinized" if we just continue to do it over and over and over again. The way to work against that is to constantly be inquiring into our practice. It's a way to avoid teacher burnout and to keep vital for years.

WPA: *Speaking of inquiry, if you were given time and resources to conduct research in the fields of FL/SL instruction and applied linguistics, what would you investigate?*
DLF: I don't believe that one method is necessarily inherently superior in all cases to another. However, I'm interested these days in the debate that I'll try to encapsulate as the PPP vs. PPP [laughter]. That should be transparent! That is, the traditional approach to teaching has often been called the PPP approach: the teacher presents something, the students practice it and then they produce it in a more open-ended fashion.

But it seems to me these days in communicative language teaching, task-based approaches, and content-based approaches, students start out producing the language. They have a task where they are engaged in making meaningful communication to the best of their abilities. Obviously it won't be totally comprehensible, accurate or fluent, but they do some kind of productive task. And then there may be a practice phase and then the teaching concludes not with a teacher presentation per se but perhaps with a teacher-led opportunity to consolidate the learning, say, in the case of grammar, to articulate or induce a grammar rule from the experience they have just had in using the language.

It seems to me, and Peter Skehan said this too, it's turning the PPP upside down: production, practice, presentation, where the presentation is really the result of an inductive process. Practice is still in the middle.

I don't know if I could even control the experimentation; there are too many possible confounding variables. But I would be curious to see if any different learning outcomes arise from the two different sequences of Ps.

WPA: *Any other topics that you would like to investigate if you had the time and resources?*
DLF: I think a fascinating development now is all the linguistic corpora that are being produced around the world, the data bases we are now getting through the use of computer technology. It's affecting our view of language. People are much more aware now that language, albeit partially rule governed, is made up of a number of lexicalized phrases, things like “by the way,” and lexicalized sentence stems “I am very sorry to hear that…” or “I am terribly sorry to learn that….” Those kinds of beginning sentence fragments that you then complete with whatever you are sorry to hear or learn about. There is an enormous number of these phrases and lexicalized sentence stems that users of a language avail themselves of in order to communicate in a fluent manner.

It would be really interesting to do some kind of a study looking at teaching rules versus teaching these patterns. Or even before that, say that language is made up of an enormous number of these patterns in their permutations and combinations. Does that mean we should teach them? Are they systematic enough to teach or are we just going to get a phrase book kind of syllabus? And if there is some systematicity, if it isn't just a matter of mapping these phrases over a whole semester or several years of courses, then what's the best way to teach them? It seems to me they are memorized holistic phrases. Do we just send our students home to memorize these phrases? Do we just get them to repeat after us? What is the best way to help students learn to use these in a fluent, accurate, and appropriate manner?

WPA: *Looking ahead to the next ten years, where do you see the field going? What do you think will be the issues that we are discussing and debating then?*
DLF: I think the dominant metaphor in our field for language is changing. I think the field is struggling with the way it conceptualizes its subject matter. For many teachers, researchers, and students, language is seen as atomized, comprised of pieces, which are governed by some fairly rigid rules. Acquiring a language then is a matter of "getting" the pieces. I have become interested in Chaos/Complexity science because it has helped me to realize that this description is not the only way of looking at language. We need a new metaphor. I understand now that language can be seen as a process, as much as a set of products. I also believe that language is more organic than it is rigid and that acquiring a language is more of a matter of participating than it is of "getting." I think the field is moving in seeing language and its acquisition in these ways too.

WPA: *What is Chaos/Complexity science?*
DLF: Chaos/Complexity science is the study of complex, nonlinear, dynamic processes as they occur in the physical world. I do not think that teaching and learning are physical sciences, but I do think that a Chaos/Complexity Theory lens helps us look at what we do in new ways. After all, I can't think of anything more complex, nonlinear, and dynamic than language and its acquisition. I'll give you an example of how we can learn to look with fresh eyes.

I think that language learning is often viewed as an additive, linear process. We teach this piece and then that piece and we expect that our students will acquire them one by one. However, that is not what happens. Language learning is a nonlinear process. For example, you are learning the tenses, and you're doing fine; you learn the simple present, the present progressive, the simple past, and the teacher introduces the present perfect, and then, rather than making progress, your performance actually becomes less proficient. You have added another tense and the system you have constructed implodes.

WPA: *But it's rebuilt again, right?*
DLF: That's right! We know that there are orderly periods, followed often by periods of chaos when the system convulses. This happens when something new is introduced and students have to figure out how it fits into the system, or they have to revise their understanding of the system in order to accommodate their new awareness. Fortunately, through interaction with others, eventually, order is restored. That does not mean that what the student now produces is target-like, but a new interlanguage stage may have been reached. So I think the conceptualization of language as a fixed, static, atomistic entity is being challenged by one that is much more nonlinear, organic, and holistic.

WPA: *If I understand you correctly, in this description of Chaos/Complexity and its application to language learning, interlanguage would be a very importance concept for teachers to understand. There is a process of learning and interlanguage is what it is called, and if it is nonlinear, then a loss might not be a permanent loss.*
DLF: You could even say a loss is a sign of progress! The point is that it is not a linear process. You are not going to see a direct line; it is full of peaks and alleys. Learners are not speaking something that's deficient, but rather a language of their own that's somewhere in the middle between the two. It's a creative process. I think it is much better to think of it as having hills and

valleys and in some case there is some backsliding. There is actually some regression in behavior. But assuming that student interest doesn't wane and that students continue to have fruitful exposure to the target language, things do move along and sort themselves out usually.

WPA: *You've mentioned that the dominant metaphor for our profession is changing. Is there anything else you can add to that, about where we are going and what we will be discussing in the future.*
DLF: We have to deal with this technology issue. We've got to educate ourselves; we've got to learn how to use the technology we have access to in a complementary fashion. We have to acknowledge that we don't all have equal access to it. And we've got to learn to use the technology so that the technologists are not driving the educational process but we are working with them. Otherwise, it seems to me, we defer to technology. I think technology, and I am talking about computer-assisted learning and Web-based courses, that sort of thing, can be extremely helpful as a complement to, but not as a substitute for, good language teaching.

Also, I think we still have a lot to do in teacher education. Particularly, we need to review how best to prepare young people who are about to enter the field to step into the classroom. You'd think we would have figured that out by now! Should there be, for example, a prolonged teacher preparation time? Or is it better to integrate a teacher's preparation with actual classroom time? I don't mean just an abbreviated practice teaching phase. I mean a genuine integration, with the thought that teachers always tell us that where they've learned to teach is in the classroom, by teaching. We have to revisit and rethink some of our teacher preparation plans. That's another issue that will have consequences down the road.

WPA: *Diane, let me ask a question about you as an individual. If you weren't a professor and author, what would you be doing?*
DLF: I would probably be an organic gardener. I'd have a small plot of land. I love to garden and get my hands in the dirt, play around and get out of my head sometimes. I love nature. But to tell you the truth, I've always wanted to be a teacher. I remember when I was a little girl. I was the oldest in the family, and I would get my brother and my sisters and make them be the students. My parents even put a small blackboard in my bedroom behind my bedroom door. I would call my brother and sisters, I would have them sit on the bed, and I would close the door and there was the blackboard. So I think I've always wanted to be a teacher. If I weren't a teacher I would like to do something in the natural world.

WPA: *Are teachers made or born? In your case, I guess born. What do you grow?*
DLF: I grow a little bit of everything, I live in Vermont, so we have a rather short growing season. I grow vegetables and flowers. I usually teach in the summer and nothing pleases me more than coming home from teaching, going down to the garden, and picking that evening's salad.

WPA: *Earlier you mentioned class rhythm. A garden is a way to learn rhythms of nature.*
DLF: David Nunan and I gave a talk a few years back called "Grammaring and Gardening." I coined the term "grammaring" a decade ago to get at the idea that if you knew all the rules in all the grammar books around the world but couldn't use them, you wouldn't have learned what you needed to in order to become a fluent speaker. I called it "grammaring" to get at the process

nature of it all, the organic nature. It also is an illustration of my idea that grammar is an incredibly flexible system that allows us to make new meaning. By using the -ing on the end of grammar, I've turned it into a process, and I've used grammar to do that. It challenges what I think is the misconception of grammar, which is that grammar is a unified body of static rules having only to do with form.

WPA: *I know you travel a lot internationally. In your work with teachers in the United States and other countries, that is, in second language and foreign language settings, do you perceive a gap between TESL and TEFL?*
DLF: Most definitely. I think at the psychological level, at the learning process level, we humans around the world have something very much in common with our learning. People may take me to task for this, but I don't see the language learning process, which seems to me to be uniquely human, is going to differ very much. We have a lot to learn from each other in this regard. But the social, contextual, political, and resource issues loom very large when we compare the amount of exposure to the language and the resources we invest. So at the social level, I think there is a great deal of variation. At the political level, clearly there is. At the economic level, clearly there is. And they all impact on language learning and its accessibility. At the psychological level, the learning process to my way of thinking is, I hesitate to use the word, but I'm going to: universal. There is something about us as humans and our relationship to language that I think is going to transcend individual situations and context, but you should know that's a highly volatile issue right now.

WPA: *Would that be controversy about the social, political, and economic influences?*
DLF: The controversy revolves around whether each situation is so unique, due to its contextual variables, that we cannot make generalizations about the learning process across contexts. However, I do not think that it is one or the other—I don't think in absolutes. It seems to me there has to be a blending of the two; there will be something that transcends context and there will be contextual influences.

WPA: *Tell us something that most people don't know about you.*
DLF: I have a wonderful family. We have two sons, one of whom is about to become a Peace Corps Volunteer, which was his choice. It looks like he will be going to Central Asia. We've traveled a lot as a family. I like to think that my sons have been educated with some knowledge of the world, that they still consider world travel to be a privilege, and that they have some sense of a need to give back because we are very privileged in this country.

WPA: *Is there an inspirational anecdote from your career that you would like to share with Forum readers?*
DLF: Every time I come in contact with the learning process I find it inspirational, and I draw a good deal of energy from it myself. Some years ago, I was observing one of my students who was a teacher-in-training during her internship. She was working with some adult immigrants from Laos who were living in Vermont where I teach, and they were not literate in their native language. She was working with them on literacy skills and one day very fortuitously I happened to be present. One of the women had that light bulb go on, the penny drop, when you could see that she made a connection, a conceptual connection, between her name in print and her name in speech. I saw that happen and it was an incredible thing to watch. Up to that point, my student

had been very patiently nurturing the concept of literacy and people were not getting it. You could see the woman got it then. She made the conceptual leap. And when she did, after that she just sped along in developing literacy. But she had to make that connection between the printed word and the spoken word and until she did that she couldn't get anywhere. I was very privileged to be present that day when that happened.

WPA: *I feel privileged to have met you and done this interview.* On behalf of the readers of the English Teaching Forum, thank you very much, Diane!