

The MEXTESOL Journal: 1999 to 2001 and Beyond My Personal Journey with MEXTESOL

Connie R. Johnson, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla

In order to begin my trip down memory lane with MEXTESOL, I would like to thank JoAnn Miller who requested that I write this for the *MEXTESOL Journal* and for waiting on me to finally finish it. I first met JoAnn at MEXTESOL Conventions in the 1980s and she was the person who also pushed me into first presenting at MEXTESOL National Conventions, then writing and submitting articles to the MJ and finally to take over editing the *MEXTESOL Journal* from her in 1998. For all that pushing, I am indebted to her although I was frightened and not at all sure that I could succeed when I began each of these endeavors.

Even though my adventures with MEXTESOL did not actually begin until 1977, I knew that I wanted to study my MA in teaching ESL/EFL and was anxious to begin making connections in the area of Puebla, Mexico. I had begun studying my Master's in the *Universidad de las Américas* (UDLA) in Cholula, Puebla. To begin this article, I took out my copy of Volume I, Number 3 of the *MEXTESOL Journal* published in the fall of 1976. As I read names of the MEXTESOL Officers (1975-1976), I remembered that later I would become friends with many of them, such as Enrique Gutierrez, James Taylor, and Jerilou Johnson. When I reached the section that mentioned the names of the MJ officials, the first name was that of the Editor, Eugene S. Long, *Universidad de las Américas*, Cholula, Puebla. Eugene was the Chair of the Language Department of UDLA at that time where I was studying my MA. And then, I found another name of the persons who would later become my mentor on my road to MEXTESOL, Paul Davies, the Chalk Talk Editor of the 1976 edition of MJ. The first article printed in the 1976 mentioned previously was written by Ronald MacKay and Allan Mountford entitled "Pedagogic Alternatives to Explication of Text as a Procedure for Teaching Reading Comprehension". This was the first article I had ever read concerning teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and which influenced me greatly in my future profession of teaching and designing ESP courses.

As I began attending the Puebla Regional meetings of MEXTESOL, I finally met my mentor, Paul Davies who was also the President of that Chapter in 1977-1978. In fact, it was Paul that convinced me to present at one of the Regional meetings in February 1979. The presentation was entitled "The Teaching of Idiomatic Expressions in an EFL Classroom". I know this sounds simplistic now, but I was terrified. However, the experience was one that impelled me to present in other regional and national MEXTESOL conventions. Paul later "convinced" me to run as his Second Vice President of the Puebla Chapter and in the following year (1979-1980) to become the President of the Puebla Chapter. I can still recall the tremendous amount of work and responsibility that entailed being President. I had just finished my MA in October of 1978 and was hired as a full time EFL/ESL teacher at the UDLA in August of 1979. Thus, I was not only the President of the Puebla MEXTESOL Chapter but also beginning a new full-time position. Then immediately in January of 1980, I was asked to become the Coordinator of the Technical Eng-

lish Division where I found it necessary to teach concepts such as *passive voice* before *active voice* because that was what the basic English engineering students needed in order to understand their engineering text books written in English. Needless to say, 1979 and 1980 were difficult years; however, I can remember those years as being quite challenging and rewarding. What we now call "multitasking" was the theme of my everyday life.

As the 1980s advanced, so did the severe economic crisis in Mexico. These problems increased the necessity to make our own engineering English materials because there were few English textbooks that could enter Mexico and if they did, the cost was excessive. These materials entailed designing EFL learning exercises that used authentic engineering materials from the first university course at a very basic EFL level and then through all the remaining levels. The materials were often collections of texts or excerpts from engineering books or journals and labeled as "reading comprehension". In order to design the authentic material, I remembered what I had read in the 1976 *MEXTESOL Journal* article written by Ronald MacKay and Allan Mountford. This experience also provided me with a topic for submitting an abstract to the 1980 MEXTESOL National Convention: "The Core Generalization Concept and How It Is Used in an ESP Course". It was accepted and I then advanced to another milestone in my ESL/EFL profession: presenting nationally.

The more MEXTESOL Conventions I attended, the more I learned about current applied linguistics topics that were brought forth. At the 1991 National Convention, JoAnn Miller, then the Editor-in-Chief of the *MEXTESOL Journal*, approached me to request that I submit an article concerning the presentation I had just given at that Convention: "Cross-Cultural Situations for Intercultural Understanding". Again, I felt that I was not sufficiently prepared for this jump into writing and publishing. However, JoAnn is not one to be turned down, so I said I would try. I submitted it for publication and after working with members of the Editorial Board it was finally published in the 1992 volume 16 edition. This achievement gave me new goals to publish more articles which, of course, would entail more research especially into areas more than just EFL/ESL teaching.

The decade of the 1990s opened more research challenges. I began with conducting research at first in the UDLA with my own language students (action research) as well as students with other UDLA teachers and later with other institutions. By then, I had the title "researcher" added to my official university job description. When I completed a research project, I would submit the results to the *MEXTESOL Journal* for possible publication. At one of the following MEXTESOL Conventions, JoAnn Miller again approached me with more of her convincing ideas. She asked that I not only give more MEXTESOL presentations but also send abstracts to present at the TESOL International Convention. I, of course, thought: "Am I really prepared to go internationally?" At the urging of my UDLA colleagues, I had just been awarded a CONACyT (*Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología*/Mexican National Committee for Science and Technology) grant to research reasons for failures of Mexican students studying English. As unsure as I was, again I allowed JoAnn to convince me to give it a try and I was extremely surprised and delighted to be accepted at the 31st International TESOL Convention in 1997 in Orlando, Florida!

However, JoAnn had not finished convincing me to attempt newer endeavors. At the MEXTESOL Convention of 1997, she approached me again with the idea that I should be her replacement as the Editor of the *MEXTESOL Journal*. She said that she was tired of the editorship and wanted to take a position on the TESOL Board of Directors. I thought to myself: "Why me?" I had published nationally and internationally but I had no experience at editing. She insisted and said that she and all of the Board members of MJ would be there to guide me. To make this personal journey shorter, I served as the *MEXTESOL Journal* Editor-in-Chief from 1998-2001. This was an experience that gave me the opportunity to grow in more areas and to learn about the challenges of being an editor.

In addition, I accepted another MEXTESOL challenge, and became the Academic Chair and the MEXTESOL Convention Chair in 2001 and I continued through to 2014. I had previously participated as the Second Vice-President of the 1995 MEXTESOL Convention in Acapulco. This position, at that time, meant that I was in charge of the academic sessions and the entire Convention. That had been another learning experience but to be the Chair of the two committees from 2001-2014 allowed me to meet many prestigious people as well as to invite them to be plenary and key-note speakers for the conventions.

I continued my research in different areas of ESL teaching and Applied Linguistics into the following 20th century. I had long wanted to continue my studies in a PhD program, thus I applied for a program in Linguistics (*Ciencias de Lenguaje*) at the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, and I was also accepted to begin in September 2001. I now am happy to say that this attempt was another experience that I was able to complete successfully in 2006. Looking back, I believe that my experiences, in my various duties in MEXTESOL, have helped me to grow and to view my chances for success in a positive light. I have had during my career many more positions in teaching and research that I have completed and learned from, but, to end this short article, I would like to take this opportunity to thank *MEXTESOL Journal* and JoAnn Miller for having believed in me and providing me with the opportunities (and, yes, convincing me) to make the leap to attempt new things and always being there to help me to succeed. Without the years of achieving my goals in MEXTESOL, I feel that I would have been quite a different person.