

## Welcome from the Senior Editor

By Gertrude Tinker Sachs  
Georgia State University  
[gatesolinaction2020@gmail.com](mailto:gatesolinaction2020@gmail.com)

### Welcoming Others: Immigrants and Refugees – How do you do it?

I chose the picture that is posted on the wall of the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a church in downtown Atlanta minutes from our state capitol buildings, as the subtext of my editorial. I was mesmerized and encouraged yet distraught by the words: “*Immigrants & Refugees Welcome.*” Take a moment to ponder these words.



The Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Atlanta, Georgia (Downtown)

Many of us would say, rightfully so, given that this is a church. However, many churches have chosen not to post anything on their walls (inside or outside) or say anything from the pulpit. This “lack of visibility” may not amount to much, but to put up a sign like this on a church and near the state capitol, speaks volumes. Ways of stating our views, acting and enacting them define who we are as a people and proclaim what we stand for and represent. What do you stand for and what do you represent on the matter of immigrants and refugees?

As an immigrant to the United States since 2003 and a person who has lived in other countries (Hong Kong and Canada) historically, ethnically, culturally and linguistically different from my home country where I was born, bred and educated, (the Bahamas), I understand and am sensitive to walls and barriers of numerous types and perspectives (Tinker Sachs, 2006; 2014). The walls that we erect, ideologically, metaphorically, and physically are chilling to the heart and soul of a person. As human beings, we have so many ways to keep others out and history is riddled with too many examples. We have only to look in this country, the United States, to see the exclusionary practices directed particularly toward people of color, Native Americans, Mexicans, Asians (the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Japanese internment during WW11), and African Americans to name a few prime examples (see for example, works by Gloria Anzuldúa, Stephen Middleton and Howard Zinn). Outside of the United States we have examples from around the world of walls of all types – the Gaza Strip and Israel, North Korea and South Korea, India and Bangladesh, Spain and Morocco, Botswana and Zimbabwe just to name a few (Noack, 2014).

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1961 – 1989) noted “wall” researcher and professor of geography at the University of Quebec, Élisabeth Vallet, and her colleagues have shown in their books and presentations that the physical structures that divide us globally continue to grow (Vallet, 2014; Vallet, 2016; Vallet & David, 2012). There is no denying that these visible and invisible walls, structures, philosophical orientations as well as the language we use to describe others, such as illegal alien (Johnson, 1997, p. 277), divide us as humans and educators who share planet Earth and impact us at the classroom level.

In this edition of *GATESOL in Action*, I am very pleased to present four publications that face-off on some of the walls that separate us and how we as educators can work to minimize and to eliminate them through our research and classroom practices. If we are for sharing the resources of this planet earth in ways that promote peace and harmony, we will want to face the misconceptions about language learners that limit teacher effectiveness and student performance (Harrison’s “*Shedding Light on Misconceptions: An Act of Advocacy*”) and talk with our students about how to deal with difficult topics such as the very same walls that seek to divide us (Pendergrass, “*Cultivating Respectful Classroom Discourse in Trump’s America*”). While we embrace positive action to eliminate walls, we continue to educate ourselves to fill the voids that reduce our effectiveness such as addressing the need for teacher development programs for those who teach adult English language learners (Pettitt, Elkers, Campbell and Gure’s, “*Critical Service -Learning in Adult ESOL Teacher Preparation: Reflections from the Field*”) and the importance of providing more dual language programs (Farran and Mindrik’s, “*Drama, Language, Literacy and Cognition in*

*PreSchool Dual Language Learners*”). All these papers are important for our times and very much needed.

When I bought my house in Georgia, I opted not to build a fence around the property. I felt that there was something inherently wrong with doing so. I believe in sharing our resources and as difficult as this may sometimes be, it means that I must be willing to work with my neighbors on either side of me should disputes and misunderstandings arise. This approach is hard work, isn't it? It is much easier to build a fence and then I do not have to deal with the issues. Just insulate myself and go about my business. But, I do not wish to live in a world of alienation and denial. Can we not learn how to get along? Can we not be our neighbor's keeper (Tinker Sachs, 2013)? What we stand for and what we represent must manifest itself in our lived experiences and educational practices. How we welcome others is a definite part of this. Let's work harder at being more welcoming to each other on this earth. Let's collaborate to tear down the walls (and not build new ones) through developing mutually beneficial understandings and building common ground. It is an arduous task but it is the better path!

Happy Reading and many thanks to our reviewers. May we all continue to seek peace and learn to live, teach and work in harmony with one another for the betterment of us all!

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