

**Sri Lanka English Language Teachers Association (SLELTA) Young Learners Special Interest Group (YLSIG) Conference at Peradeniya Teachers' College, The Center for Excellence in English Language Teaching (CEELT)**

**Report by Janet Orr, USAID Education Specialist and SLELTA YLSIG Member**  
June 13 to 16, 2007



On Wednesday, English Language Specialist Dr. Mary Lou McCloskey, whose visit was funded by the Regional English Language Officer Richard Boyum, New Delhi, arrived at the airport at 1:30pm. After meeting her at the airport, Kane Gilmour, English Language Fellow, Richard Reidy, volunteer, and I preceded Kandy. On Thursday, we went to Peradeniya Teachers' College to prepare for the conference and set up the audiovisual equipment. As this is the first major conference held at the newly recognized Center for Excellence in English Language Teaching (CEELT) and since the Principal and 4 lead teachers were at the University of Pennsylvania on an exchange program, I felt we needed to be sure the campus was ready for the conference, which it was. The YLSIG committee members, made up of SLELTA members, primary educators and teacher trainers, arrived later that afternoon and continued with the setup.

The purpose of the conference was to provide primary English teachers with a professional development opportunity, which is rare here since there are no university professors who specialize in teaching English for young learners and few professional teachers at the masters degree level. Regular professional development is important for English teachers as it assures that they continue to improve their spoken language as well as gain access to current methods and techniques for instructional use in the classroom. The conference was attended by 55 primary teachers and 20 student teachers at Peradeniya Teachers' College who were given a reduced registration rate for their assistance with setup and management of the conference. This activity also gave the students an opportunity to learn how to set up for a conference or workshop. It seemed that the conference did not have as many attendees as anticipated (150) because there were no sponsored registrations available and the Ministry of Education was not paying teachers to attend. Many teachers do not take it upon themselves to improve professionally rather they believe it is the responsibility of their employer/the government.

**Sri Lanka English Language Teachers Association (SLELTA) Young Learners Special Interest Group (YLSIG) Conference at Peradeniya Teachers' College, The Center for Excellence in English Language Teaching (CEELT)**

The theme of the conference was "Stories around Us" so many of the sessions were focused on telling and reading stories. Two noted Sri Lankan children's authors presented sessions, Sybil Wettasinghe and Maureen Wickremasinghe, both drew large audiences, as it is rare for teachers to have an opportunity to learn from them. The internet enabled computer center was well utilize, ELF Kane Gilmour introduced participants to many educational sites, Sri Lanka DynEd representative (and former USAID E-CBL recipient) Naaren introduced the New Dynamic English program and YLSIG Committee member Neelika Edirisinghe introduced participants to easily available software for making online books. Kane also introduced participants and gave them research tips using the comprehensive ELT library collection recently donated by USAID.

Mary Lou McCloskey's sessions were highly sought after as she truly engaged the audience in learning new techniques for the classroom. The primary teachers sought out sessions that involved active learning techniques, they really want to learn how to increase active learning in their own classrooms. British Council presenters were also well received by the audience and the Cambridge University Press sponsored speaker, Dr. Geeta Nagaraj who traveled from Bangalore. My session was also well attended as it demonstrated cooperative learning structures that can be effectively used in any classroom. During the closing session, Mary Lou McCloskey and I shared insights from TESOL's publication "Trends in Primary EFL," which was popular because both Sri Lanka and India are featured chapters.

**Sri Lanka English Language Teachers Association (SLELTA) Young Learners Special Interest Group (YLSIG) Conference at Peradeniya Teachers' College, The Center for Excellence in English Language Teaching (CEELT)**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Room</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Speaker</b>
<b>Friday</b> 9:00 – 9:30	<b>Fraser Hall</b>	<b>Opening and Lighting Ceremony</b>	Sybil Wettasinghe, Author of Children's Books, Chief Guest
9:30-10:30	<b>Fraser Hall</b>	<b>Plenary Session:</b> Multicultural Literature for Literacy, Empowerment and Peace	<b>Dr. Mary Lou McCloskey, Georgia State University</b>
10:35-10:50		TEA	
10:55-12:30	Computer Room	The Computer and the English Teacher (Limit 40)	Kane Gilmour, English Language Fellow, BCIS
	E	Conversations with a Children's Author	Sybil Wettasinghe, Author of Children's Books
	F	Songs and Noises	Anna Obaidat, British Council
	G	Activities for Young Learners	H. Wanigasekara, RESC; L. de Silva, Teachers' Centre, Bandarawela
	Fraser Hall	Young Learner Exams	Gerald Yorwerth, British Council
12:35-1:25		Lunch	
1:30 – 3:00	Fraser Hall	<b>Plenary Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INTRODUCING SLELTA</li> <li>• Using TV for Educational Purposes</li> <li>• Making English Reading an Enjoyable Activity for Young Children</li> </ul>	<b>SLELTA Committee</b> <b>Mr. Azaff Azeez, ART TV Sri Lanka</b>  <b>Maureen Wickremasinghe, Author of Children's Books</b>
3:05-3:20		TEA	
3:25-4:30	Computer Room	Internet Resources for English Teachers (Limit 40)	Kane Gilmour, English Language Fellow, BCIS
	F	How my Little Bird Lost its Feather	Molina de S Jayaratna, Skills International, YLSIG Coordinator
	G	Making Stories with your Students	Rachel Bowden, British Council
	Hall	Poetry or Pronunciation? Grammar or Giggles?	Susan Sunflower, Lideke Wery Education Institute
<b>Saturday</b> 9:00 –10:30	<b>Hall</b>	<b>Plenary Session</b> <b>Teaching Young Learners</b>	<b>Dr. Geeta Nagaraj, Cambridge University Press</b>
10:35-10:50		TEA	
10:55-12:30	Computer Room	Blended English Teaching: Computers and Teachers	Moharanjithan Narendran, Headway College of English, Batticaloa
	E	Storytelling and Chorus Drills	Emilda S. Douglas
	F	Cooperative Learning	Janet Orr, USAID Education Specialist
	Hall	Touching Hearts and Developing Oral English through Hands-on Storytelling	Dr. Mary Lou McCloskey, Georgia State University
12:35-1:25		Lunch	
1:30 – 3:00	Computer Room	Telling Stories on a Computer	Neelika Edirisinghe, Head Teacher ABC Pre-School
	F	First Words, Words First: Vocabulary Development Essentials	Dr. Mary Lou McCloskey, Georgia State University
	Library	Using the Library for ELT Research	Kane Gilmour
	Hall	Movement & Meaning in the Primary Classroom	Nirmali Hetterachchi, Principal, The Academy of English and Drama
3:05-3:20		TEA	
3:25-4:30	Hall	Closing Plenary: Trends in EFL Primary Education: Case Studies Certificates Awarded	Janet Orr and Mary Lou McCloskey