Introduction

During the program year 2000-2001, eight Tennessee ESOL Peer Trainers and an ESOL coordinator, along with nine EL/Civics Grantees, began work on an action research project to develop an ESOL curriculum resource guide for Tennessee adult ESOL teachers. This book is the result of their year’s work and is dedicated to their ESOL students and to the wonderful Tennessee ESOL teachers who have dedicated their work and time to Tennessee’s students.

In addition to the information contained in this book, the authors wish to add their beliefs and ideas about what helps to create a successful ESOL class. They are as follows:

• Good ESOL teachers must be able to reach across cultures and connect with the individual ESOL students and be sensitive to their lives.
• Good ESOL teachers perceive English as a “skill” that students must have to function in our society.
• ESOL classes should be adapted to the students’ needs and curriculum should be used as a resource for the ESOL teacher and not rigidly followed.
• Diversity permeates the ESOL classroom in every aspect of the ESOL environment. Imagine a classroom which has a refugee with no education in the same class with a clinical psychologist who speaks five languages but no English. Imagine a class that includes a 19-year-old migrant worker in search of independence and a 77-year-old woman whose culture requires that she not speak when her husband is present.

The best ESOL classroom includes respect, laughter, warmth, is a safe haven for our ESOL students, and above all, gives them hope.

“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul”
—Emily Dickinson

The vision of the University of Tennessee’s Center for Literacy Studies is shared by the authors of this resource book. It is as follows: “We envision a future in which all adults have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to flourish in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. We will work with others to create an adequately funded

“Learning English when you live in the US seems easy because you hear English all the time, but I’m not sure it is, especially for adults. If you don’t have the support of a class, with a teacher, it’s very hard to start to be confident and to speak to the American people.”
—Student Learner
“Learning English looks easy, but it’s hard.”

—Student Learner

and staffed adult literacy and lifelong learning system that fosters democratic values and processes, participation, personal agency, increased voice, and critical reflection.”

We are ESOL practitioners who are passionate about our mission and vision and wish to continually work to improve the lives of our students. Ken Burns, when speaking of America said, “Improvisation is our genius as a people.” It is also, we believe, our genius as ESOL teachers. Please use this resource book as a guide and use your own creative ability and improvisational skills when working with your students.

Pat Sawyer
The University of Tennessee
Center for Literacy Studies