

CRONES & CODGERS & MINNETESOL

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I have recently retired from Hamline University which may qualify me as a crone, wise old woman, and yet I continue to be involved in the field and attend the MinneTESOL conference. While I love the keynote and small sessions, one of the highlights of the conference is seeing colleagues I have worked with over my career. And what does seeing them entail? Talking about what we are doing, what we did do, what we think about things now, what we know from experience, what we marvel at, what we brings us to despair, and how concerned we are for our English language learners.

I was a co-founder of MinneTESOL 35 years ago. The organization was established because there was a need for ESL professionals to come together. Today there is still the need to meet, discuss and share ideas about our work. Many young ESL teachers know the value of MinneTESOL. I believe there is a need for a new interest section to be created, one for Retirees. We have wide interests, but we share years of working and responding to new waves of refugees, new research, changing demographics, organizational changes, chasms in Minnesota education policy that leave some students without help, and on and on. At the core of our experience and years of service is a commitment to our field and to our learners.

What retiree does not have a perspective on their life's work? What of the history of MinneTESOL that resides in this group? What do we think of the lack of educational opportunities for limited formal schooling, LFS, students who are 21 and have to leave our schools? What might we say about the continuing lack of preparation of mainstream teachers in Minnesota schools to deal with English language learners? How can we help our own ESL teachers feel more grounded in the grammar of our language? What about the program changes that institutions make that impact our profession?

We will be the old farts to some, but those of us at this point in our career know we still have 'tred' left, and the perspective gained from experience we believe brings wisdom and sometimes helpful advice. The power that comes to a group when it is active can be awesome, and the benefit is frequently unanticipated. In other words, we will be a surprise to ourselves and to the members of MinneTESOL, but we will be present and have our own voice.

So, this is a call for retirees within the organization to speak out in support of this proposal. Come to the Fall 2012 conference and join the gathering of retirees during the interest section meeting time which I am requesting right now. I will be in the space allocated for us. I look forward to greeting and talking with you, and I already know our first contribution to MinneTESOL. We are modeling good professional behavior by giving our time to meet, contribute, talk, share and work together, and from years of experience we already know that we will benefit. We can teach that lesson to our younger colleagues.