



An Instructor's Perspective: Lori Dodson

Working in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system, Lori Dodson realized that she could have a great impact on children and families by teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Inspired by Montgomery County's cultural diversity, Lori began teaching English to adult learners through the Spanish Catholic Center, at the Gilchrist Center (now known as the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center) in Germantown, in addition to her work at MCPS. As an active participant in the MCAEL network, Lori is an experienced instructor who enjoys teaching and advocacy.

I love working with a diverse community. I think the diversity of Montgomery County is its strength.

With the dual perspective of teaching ESOL to children in schools and her experience teaching adults, Lori sees the value and impact that adult ESOL has on children. As parents learn English, children no longer bear the burden of translating for the family. This helps balance the parent-child dynamic and relationship.

Lori has also seen how parent enrollment in ESOL class is positive for their children's academic experience and how this increases a child's chances of success. The kids are proud of their parents and inspired by them to do well in their own studies. An additional outcome is parents' increased confidence and empowerment to participate in school activities and be more engaged in their children's lives.

Seeing their parents go to school too and be able to learn to improve their lives also, I think, is very inspirational for children. I think they have a lot of pride that their mom is going to class and learning, making education a priority for their family. I think being able to learn English makes families more comfortable participating in the school, so they can come and be more active. We know that parent engagement in school really helps the child's success in school and the more families we get to feel confident in participating, the better it is for the child.

Building that relationship for kids helps them see their place in American society, it helps them feel confident and grow high self-esteem. It helps them feel part of the school community so they want to learn.

As an adult ESOL instructor, Lori has participated in training workshops and networking opportunities offered by MCAEL. Through these she has learned many useful techniques and best practices to bring to her teaching.

I loved their “More Learning, Less Talking” training, which focuses on getting the students to work harder than the teacher and giving them that opportunity to authentically use language. I know that with every age group I’ve taught, that’s become one of my big philosophies. The trainings really cemented that point to me, the importance of getting our learners to talk.

As a MCAEL Instructor Advisory Group member, Lori has contributed her invaluable perspective on K-12 education. She regularly shares MCAEL resources with parents and families she encounters at school. In her advocacy with state representatives and other officials, Lori often utilizes MCAEL’s reports on the benefits of ESOL for the county.

[MCAEL does] a great job of educating the wider community on why this is important, providing resources, and being that voice to counter other people with strong rhetoric that’s not accurate, you have a place that has data collected that can provide facts that educate.

In addition to her work with MCPS and as an adult ESOL instructor, Lori is also very involved in advocating for the rights of immigrants, refugees and Dreamers, including how those rights relate to ESOL. Lori uses her voice to give others a voice and to teach them how to advocate for themselves; one way to do that is through learning English.

I have a voice and a lot of times people who are learning English or who have a language barrier aren’t always able to share their voice yet. Or because of cultural reasons, [they] don’t know how to share their voice within the American culture, because different cultures work differently. [...] As someone of privilege, I can advocate. I also greatly believe in scaffold advocacy, where you help teach people to advocate for themselves, and then your voice can fade away as people become more confident on advocating for their own needs. I know learning English is one way to help people to feel more confident to advocate for themselves and their families, to share their voice.