

Maria Antonini de Pino

My name is Maria Antonini de Pino, some people call me Dr. Antonini because I have a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics. I am an ESL teacher from Venezuela. I grew up in a modest, middle class family, and was blessed with parents who thought the best inheritance they could leave their children was an education.

Public university education in Venezuela is free, so I obtained my undergrad ESL degree without economic problems. However, I wanted to go on to grad school in the USA, and the only way for me to afford that was through scholarships. I was aware that I needed good grades to get a scholarship, so I studied hard. When graduation time came, I had the grades required for a scholarship, but there was a condition that involved economic sacrifice: I had to work as probationary faculty in my university for two years, at half the salary my colleagues were getting in public and private institutions. With the priority of becoming a better ESL professional, I accepted the position of probationary faculty. The sacrifice was well worth it and I was awarded the scholarships that led to my doctoral degree.

Becoming an ESL teacher is quite a challenge for people whose first language is not English. We have to study not only pedagogy and linguistics, but we also have to learn English and reach a proficiency level that allows us to stand in front of a classroom full of ESL learners of all nationalities, and be a fit model of the second language.

Today, I am proud to be congratulated for my English. Learning and maintaining my English skills has implied a personal and academic effort, but it has mostly been FUN. This fun started with my first teachers: John, Paul, George and Ringo, yes, The Beatles, back in my teen years. The wish to read about them and understand and sing their songs (no internet back then) was the beginning of my success story as an English learner. So, on the basis of my experience, I would recommend ESL learners to turn to the English-speaking artists they like, use their music to complement their ESL classes, and most importantly, to become autonomous, life-long learners.

Besides having the time of my life, I have reaped many benefits from my having become a fluent bilingual. I am not only an ESL teacher, I am a citizen of this global village which is our planet, and which uses English for communication in all areas. Today, we all need to be part of the workforce in our areas of interest. Having a profession makes us useful to society and rewards us emotionally and materially. Being a fluent bilingual is more than a plus, it is an essential condition for success in our society, and that is why I am here at Evergreen, to give ESL students one of the crucial tools they need to live and work.