

# Forum at Fifty

Instructional magazine is idea-sharing venue  
By Tom Glass, assistant editor, English Teaching Forum

Few government publications have brought together ideas from as diverse and widespread an audience as has *English Teaching Forum*, a quarterly publication of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The magazine, which marks its 50th anniversary this year, is a conduit for the exchange of teaching ideas and experiences, and fosters a shared understanding of American culture.

More than 3,060 articles by some 2,750 authors from 139 countries have appeared in *Forum's* pages since it made its debut in 1963. Articles remain relevant long after their publication date.

The magazine brings together the worldwide community of English teachers. Retired Regional English Language Officer (RELO) Richard Boyum described *Forum* as a journal “of the English teacher, by the English teacher and for the English teacher.”

Editor-in-Chief Max Koller vividly recalls the first time she came across *Forum*, more than 20 years ago. “I was teaching English as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mauritania,” she said. “I had no books, a broken blackboard and no chalk.” But she did have copies of *Forum*, and she used the ideas in it to create lessons for her classes at the University of Nouakchott.

Whether or not teachers have other resources available, they find that *Forum* provides a welcome feeling of connection and support. Office of English Language Programs Materials Branch Chief Rick Rosenberg believes that nurturing the sense of belonging is one reason for *Forum's* sustained popularity over five decades.

“*Forum* serves as a community of practice,” said Rosenberg. “It’s a place for teachers to share ideas and get inspired.”

RELO David Fay agrees. “I’ve often heard comments about how *Forum* helps teachers stay connected,” he said. “They all like the fact that other teachers have written the articles. I suppose they see themselves in the articles.”

Because of this connection, the name *Forum* resonates with a wide and sometimes hard-to-reach audience as a public diplomacy outreach tool.

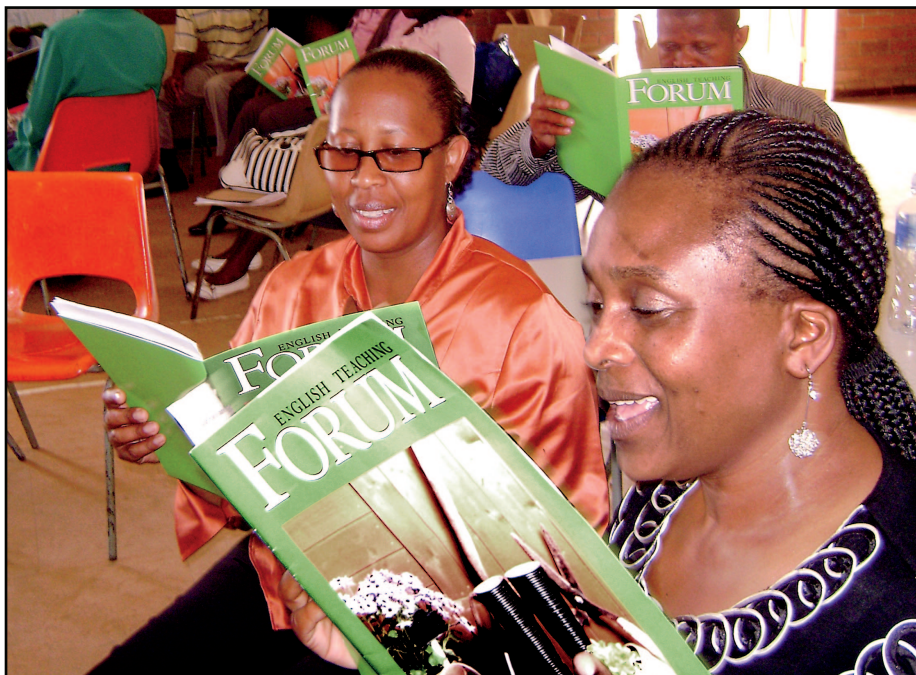
“Teachers around the world, in some of the most obscure places, recognize the *Forum* brand,” said Craig Dicker, Programs Branch chief in the Office of English Language Programs.

Teachers also look forward to reconnecting with *Forum*. Rosenberg said he recently met an English teacher in Amman, Jordan, who had been receiving *Forum* since 1986 and had not gotten the latest issue. “He was upset!” Rosenberg recalls.

Nearly 90,000 copies of each issue of *Forum* are distributed by U.S. embassies in more than 125 countries, often as a gift to teachers at workshops, conferences or American Corners. The magazine has been available online since 1994 (past issues are at [Forum.state.gov](http://Forum.state.gov)), and its Facebook page has a steady stream of new fans.

Worldwide, *Forum* has a range of uses.

“In Chile, there is a large network of English teachers who form their own networks and meet on a monthly basis,” said RELO Lisa Morgan.



English-language educators use *English Teaching Forum* at a training session in Ga-Kgapane, South Africa.  
Photo by Colleen Shipalana

“These networks look forward to receiving the newest *Forum* because they structure their meetings around it.”

According to Christina Chandler, former English Language Officer at the U.S. Mission in Iraq, teachers at a teacher-training program in Ramadi read *Forum* and eagerly used the articles for discussions of new vocabulary, usage, linguistics and practical teaching ideas. At the end of the program, teachers asked for more editions of the magazine.

Through its feature articles on American culture, *Forum* provides a window on the American lifestyle. According to Damon Anderson, a RELO and former *Forum* editor, the magazine presented cultural information about the U.S. that the teachers might not otherwise have access to, in a very engaging and useful manner.

Fay and Boyum also believe *Forum* builds respect for English teachers.

“I have heard people say ‘I’m just an English teacher,’” said Boyum. “Once I heard that, and I had a copy of *Forum* handy. I opened it up and showed a couple of great articles, written by ‘just’ English teachers, and pointed out that those authors were having an impact on tens of thousands of English teachers around the world who were helping students master a skill that would better their lives. Is that the work of ‘just’ an English teacher?”

It is too late to order the first 2012 issue of *Forum*, but posts can order the rest of this year’s anniversary issues by emailing Global Publishing Solutions’ Orders Desk at [orders@gps.state.gov](mailto:orders@gps.state.gov). They can be sure that each issue will find a much appreciated home in a library or English department, and that readers will find something useful and interesting, no matter where they teach. ■