

A Newsletter Published by TESL North York and York Region

# TESL TIME

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## Executive Committee

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## President's Report

Dear Members,

On behalf of our executive committee, I would like to extend our thanks to two committee members who have left us this year. We will certainly miss our former Newsletter Editor Craig Gambarotto-McKay and Conference Committee member Lyubov Metrevelli as they focus on other areas of their lives.

We welcome three new committee members for 2008 - new Newsletter Editor Shirley Turchet, members Aida Aganagic and Irene Relph. Thanks for volunteering your time and talent!

The City of Toronto Council and York Region Council have declared November 9 -15, 2008 as ESL Week in recognition of both those who have contributed and those who have benefited from ESL learning. When you plan your events and activities to mark ESL week, please let us know so that we can share your plans with TESL Ontario members and York Region Council.

May you all have a safe and enjoyable summer!

Linda Cooper

## Affiliate Director's Report

The *TESL Ontario Board* has been very busy preparing for events like this year's Conference which will take place November 13-15th 2008 in a new, larger location.

At last year's conference, the membership approved the board's request to change how it is governed. As a result, a committee has been working diligently with a professional governance consultant to help make the changes. [Continued on page 3]

## TESL Time: An Interview with Jennifer Harris, U of T, by Nasreen Nasir

<http://learn.utoronto.ca/esl.htm>

### Tell us about your ESL journey.

I got a job teaching English in Chongqing, P.R. of China right after graduating from York University. It was a fabulous experience, and it confirmed my commitment to teaching ESL, but I didn't really have a great deal of skill, so when I returned, I did TESL training and got my B.Ed from the University of Toronto. Upon completing my practicum, I was hired at the English Language Program at the School of Continuing Studies and I've been here ever since!

I'm so fortunate to work with a great group of colleagues and wonderful, refreshing, bright students in a place where I've had opportunities to 'reinvent' myself every few years. I've been a teacher, an administrator, a program developer, an experiential program leader...I've been camping and horseback-riding, to weddings, and sadly, funerals...the full spectrum. Teaching offers us lots of doors if we care to enter them.

### Please share some teaching tips.

How can teachers keep things 'fresh'? That's a million dollar question! I think the key is building a solid base of quality teaching materials and ideas – which takes a great deal of time and energy, no doubt. However, once you have this solid core, you have the luxury of adding, modifying (or completely ignoring) things to make it a little different every time. It's easier to take risks on new projects when we have our old faithful materials to fall back on. Sometimes I see teachers who are prepping over and over, and I think, why keep on reinventing the wheel?

I try to keep good habits: whenever I prep a new lesson, I make a few extra questions/tasks and set them aside for a post-lesson review – that way I build up a lesson bank and a quiz bank. I also design lessons in a way that I can adapt them for a higher and lower level. I always back up material and try to make revisions and additions to my lessons right after class. I encourage students to come up with sample structures and tasks – so, for instance if I give them 5 scrambled sentences, I have them create three of their own – they're always much more interesting than mine, plus I have more for my bank!

I like to try new things – new content, new technology. Lately I've been developing listening materials for watching the TV series *Lost* and *Heroes*. We get together once a week and tune in (it's so easy now with DVDs so easily available – not like the old days when we used to have to hook up the old VCR!) I've really enjoyed this – it's a lot of work up front to design materials, but with

computer graphics and photo capture programs, it's easy to design materials that are rich in visual support...which makes the listening practice a little more relaxed and fun, but still valuable in terms of language development. It's a nice shared experience week after week – the classroom kind of feels like the 'family room.'

### Tell us about your best/worst moments.

I remember one time I was doing a jigsaw activity comparing songs about fathers and sons – one group was working on *Cat's in the Hat*, another on *The Living Years*, and so on. Suddenly, a young student jumped up and tore out the class in tears: his father had recently passed away. This memory reminds me that you never know what will be a trigger for joyous or sorrowful moments when we are with students. Each person, teachers included, comes to the class with a history - with ideas, with feelings and opinions. Each class is like a whole new ballgame – which is one of the things I love. This experience also keeps me mindful that we need to have a respectful and supportive class to effectively deal with those moments.

As for great moments...I can honestly say that every day when I go into the class and close the door, I'm in a great place.

I used to be involved with the student activities and outings, and people would say to me, "How can you stand going to Niagara Falls AGAIN?" To be honest, sometimes I did dread the thought of going, but every time we rounded the bend on the Niagara Parkway to see the Falls ahead, I'd hear the collective "Wow!" from the bus, and think to myself, "How lucky am I to experience the joy of seeing Niagara Falls for the first time over and over again?" That's one thing I love about working with international students – I feel so lucky to be a part of the great learning journeys they are on. That's what energizes me.

### Do you recommend some 'true blue' resources?

I've really been influenced by Scott Thornbury lately – I love anything of his, and Jeremy Harmer, too. My desert island list: Michael Swan's *Practical English Usage*, Scott Thornbury's *About Language*, *Teaching Pronunciation* by Marianne Celce-Murcia...my iPod. I love going to The English Centre bookstore – Nicole is great and always knows what's hot in ESL. Favourite websites: *Purdue's Online Writing lab*, *The Tongue Untied*, *Web Concordancer*.

## Spring Conference

Our Spring Conference, April 12, was such a big success that we were too crowded in our present venue. Hopefully we'll find a more spacious school to accommodate the 150 members who come out in the future.

We got into gear with the morning coffee, juice and giant muffins, sorted ourselves out for lively and engaging workshops, enjoyed networking over a splendid sandwich and wraps luncheon, and perused several publisher's displays, then held our breath for the highlight "lucky draw" for free book prizes from the publishers.

Hearty thanks go to Conference Chair *Susan Richarz*, the Executive organizers and the volunteer Members-at-Large who helped it all run smoothly, trouble-shooting and doing those myriad nitty-gritty jobs, including clean-up, which ensure a successful conference.

One concern resulted from a number of registrants who reserved a spot, but did not attend. We understand that emergencies do happen, however you are reminded that PD hours are forwarded to TESL Ontario towards renewal of certification, but only if you actually ATTEND the conference.

Unfortunately you will be charged as we held a spot for you, resulting in turning away someone who wished to attend but could not because our maximum number had been reached.

We would like to report that the extra food donated to Eva's Place (a shelter for homeless and at-risk youth) was greeted with great enthusiasm and gratitude by the young people. We encourage you to support this worthwhile initiative if you can.

We look forward to seeing you again at our fall conference which will be held on a weekday late afternoon. Please check our website in early September for the date:

<http://www.teslontario.org/teslnyy/index.htm>



### **Affiliate Director's Report (continued) by Susan Richarz**

The decision to change the structure of the board and its conduct was the result of TESL Ontario's rapid membership growth and a desire for more effective governance. Some of the major changes are to the size of the board, the process by which individuals are elected, and the number of terms that members may serve. Other changes are designed to improve the flow of information between board members, committee members and the Executive Director. The members of the existing board look forward to the new board organization which will be implemented in time for the November AGM, when the new board will be elected. Members will receive information in June explaining the new procedures for nominations and elections. Some members of the current board will remain to allow for continuity in next year's transition.

A firm has been hired to manage the web site to be up and running soon, and a forum has been added to provide an opportunity to communicate with other ESL professionals. Please take the time to check it out and add some comments or your own.

## Assessment 101: A Presenter's Perspective by Lesline Smikle, TDSB/Seneca

If you are like me, you got your TESL certification eons ago, before terms like “assessment”, “rubrics”, “portfolios” and “evaluation” were essential to our craft. Today, these words are important to many ESL teachers, and assessment is its own course in many TESL certificate programs. As a teacher of such a course, I was asked to present at the TESL/North York Spring Conference. My workshop was called “Assessment 101”. When I was preparing to do this workshop on assessment, I realized that I didn't know many things about the practitioners. Would teachers be coming to the workshop with the basic knowledge of assessment principles? Are the workshop participants required to create or evaluate assessments in their own classes? This article briefly summarizes and reflects on the workshop.

There were about 30 participants in the 2 hour workshop. We discussed the difference between the terms “assessment” and “evaluation” and learned the 5 types of assessments and 5 main principles to think about when creating, evaluating and discussing tests, based on *H. Douglas Brown's Language Assessment* text, which examines and describes these in detail and gives a lot of examples of how to assess students in the 4 skill areas.

The second half of the workshop allowed the participants to critique a listening test, experience a speaking test and share their own testing successes. I tried to give examples of some of my more radical tests. Although I don't know whether I convinced anyone to be a radical tester, it proved a

good discussion of how to think (and test) outside of the box.

Testing students is easiest when there are specific beginning and end dates to the teaching period, whether it be terms, semesters or, in my case, quadrimesters! The one experience that this workshop did not really address was teaching in multi-level classrooms with continuous intake. A few of the participants had questions on how to adapt my activities for those classes, and my response was to modify the requirements and expectations for different levels of students. For example, requiring one- or two-sentence responses to a speaking task instead of ten. It would have been helpful to give the participants time to brainstorm ways of adapting the tasks for their particular situations during our session.

All in all, the workshop was enjoyable for me, as I hope it was for everyone else. With the increasing pressure of being accountable to the funding agencies, assessment is bound to play a large part in the future of our profession. The challenges of assessing students in community programs are ever-present, but the reality is that practitioners are going to have to become even more creative and more flexible than ever to meet those challenges. It can be done if we apply the passion that we usually apply to our challenges, for it is this unique passion for our profession that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

*Notes:*

5 types of language tests: aptitude, proficiency, placement, diagnostic, achievement

5 principles: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, washback

*Reference:*

Brown, H.D. *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. NY: Longman, 2004.

## The Joys of Supply Teaching by Shirley Turchet

The phone rings at 7:30 in the morning and jolts me up. “Can you make it today for a level 3?” I jump into action – a quick wash-up, a hastily gulped breakfast, a grab for the “emergency school kit” and a leap into the car to fight rush-hour traffic. It’s Shirley to the rescue and the adrenalin is pumping!

I’m in the enviable position of being a retired (read sleep-in) high school English teacher on a liveable pension who can choose what work I want to do to “keep my hand in”. I love being an occasional “supply” or “fill-in” teacher for the York Region District School Board’s Adult ESL. I never know when the call will come, and I usually have only 20 minutes to get out the door, ready to teach just about any thing, anywhere – in the old, cramped but friendly Adult Education Centre way west of me, or in a local church or shopping mall. I could be facing a class of a dozen adults from the same culture, or thirty-four of mixed levels and diverse backgrounds, as do ESL teachers every day.

If I’m in luck, the regular teacher has had a scheduled appointment and has left the attendance sheet, texts, handouts and lesson plan in the classroom; someone has a key and there are chalk, paper and markers available. But quite often it’s a last-minute problem and I’m on my own “winging” it. That’s where the “emergency school kit” comes in.

I have a pre-packed school bag waiting for the call. It contains the ‘anywhere’ basics, that, believe it or not, are often not there: chalk, pencils, markers, some lined paper to sign-in on, chart paper rolled up, my verb time-line charts, a good (I use Longman’s ESL) dictionary, a bottle of water and a granola bar. Then there are the “adjustable” lesson

prompts in case the teacher has been unable to leave anything: a couple of overheads with pictures of ‘at the restaurant’, ‘at the grocery store’, ‘at the park’ ( great for all kinds of talk, but not so useful when there’s no overhead projector, unless I have time and means to photocopy a set); some envelopes with class sets for groups of 3 of pictures to manipulate and negotiate meaning --cut-up story cartoon strips to put in sequence, vocabulary build and tell the story; cut-up pictures to match to get people moving, talking and into small groups; picture activities to deal with prepositions, a specific verb tense or comparisons. [These are usually from Penny Ur’s Grammar Practice Activities book, Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers. Activities are given by function and the teacher photocopies, enlarges and prepares a set, and then has them for re-use].

Of course the best thing about “supplying” is the wonderful students I meet. They’re always happy to have a change of face and pace, and I can give them my full energy because I don’t have to do the day- in, day-out lesson planning or evaluating. I’ll ask what they would like to learn that day, they get a break from routine and often ask things they’d be hesitant to ask the regular teacher as I walk about checking homework, writing. If there’s a lesson plan, I teach to it, with my own ‘extras’. It’s always different and delightful and keeps me ‘in touch’.

[Shirley Turchet has co-written the text Basic Grammar and Usage for Canadians by Choy/Clark/Turchet, 2007, published by Thomson Nelson. Not specifically for ESL, but great for advanced, teacher ref, with exercises and answers, free teacher’s guide available.

## Resources and Reviews

### **English for Business Life** **Reviewed by Nicole Graham,** **The English Centre**

4 levels: Elementary to Upper Intermediate  
by Ian Badger and Pete Menzies  
Marshall Cavendish Education

*English for Business Life* seems to be the perfect text for workplace English classes geared to adults living and working in an English-speaking context. Most business English books are geared towards young international students who have little to no work experience but are hoping to become the next Bill Gates. This text is different in that it assumes work experience and the content is geared more to the everyday office worker than it is to the aspiring CEO. For this reason, I often say this text could be renamed "English for Working Life".

One of the unique features of the book is the Preparation boxes. Students are asked to think about the subject of the next lesson and come prepared with real examples from the workplace or from their own experience. Unit 13, "The services you provide and use" (Intermediate level), for example, asks students to prepare for the lesson by bringing to class brochures or notes about services that they provide or use.

This unique feature ensures that the students are relating what they are learning to real life and that they learn the language they need to communicate in these real-life situations.

The series is very heavy on functional language and grammatical accuracy, which seems to be just what the doctor ordered. At the end of each unit there is a page called "language reference" which highlights problematic grammar points and provides a nice long list of useful phrases. In fact, the preparation boxes direct students to the language reference page to learn the language they will need to discuss the topic at hand.

All of the skills are integrated into each four-page unit, meaning that all of the skills can be practiced in one class and that each unit is short enough to complete in one class. The Self-study Guide (workbook) is very useful as well, with even more functional language, grammar practice and skills development (a CD is included for the listening activities). We have gotten some very positive feedback on this series and wholeheartedly recommend it for classes training learners who are living and working in Canada.

### **TEACHING ABOUT THE SUMMER OLYMPICS?**

<http://www.esltower.com/VOCABSHEETS/olympics/olympics.html>

**This page has printable vocabulary exercises related to Olympic Games, sports and countries. Look at the worksheets and descriptions and decide which one to print. Click on the thumbnail to print. There are ESL flashcards, puzzles, quizzes and more exercises to teach and practice words related to Olympic Games and sports. Give your students good word practice on what they will watch on TV at the Beijing 2008 Olympics. This is simply the best time to teach Olympics Games vocabulary.**

Submitted by Linda Cooper

**Pronunciation Teachers Reference** recommended by Workshop Leader **Jinjiang Du:**

Teaching Pronunciation: A Reference for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.  
M.Celce-Murcia/D.M.Brown/J.M.Goodwin, Cambridge 1996.

Interactive, self-teaching website for intermediate to advanced on pronunciation:  
<http://www.sunburstmedia.com/Pronweb.html>