



TESL Ontario Conference 2010

By all accounts the 38th Annual TESL Ontario Conference was among the best ever with the theme "Research and Teaching: A Collaborative Process" attracting over 1600 registrants, 193 of whom presented a total of 295 sessions! In addition, fifty-three exhibitors promoted the latest resources on 79 Exhibitors' tables in two exhibit areas. Returning to the beautiful Sheraton Centre Toronto for the third year generated a comfort level for many of the delegates.

Our plenary sessions brought speakers from as far away as British Columbia. Dr. Bonny Norton, speaking on "Identity and Digital Literacy Across Time and Space", made the case that digital literacy offers unique opportunities for language teachers and students in poorly resourced communities to claim identities as global citizens. Dr. Ken Beatty, sponsored by Pearson Longman, addressed the delegates on "Breaking Barriers to CALL in the Classroom" and identified and examined some of the barriers that exist and suggested some approaches to address them. Dr. Jim Cummins from OISE spoke on literacy engagement being key for developing academic English and use of effective strategies for deep understanding of text.

The 11th Annual Research Symposia further reflected our conference theme with the following sessions: "Sociocultural Theory and Its Relevance to Classroom Teaching", "How Research Informs Language Learning and Classroom Management", and "The Influence of Research and Second Language Acquisition Theory on Teaching and Teaching Materials". Many thanks to our Research Symposium team of Bob Courchene and Hedy McGarrell for organizing the symposia, and to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for their sponsorship of this popular feature.

A reflection of our modern world, the annual Technology Fair continues to grow in popularity. Co-chairs Sharon Rajabi and Kevin O'Brien and their team provide numerous opportunities for our conference delegates to gain hands on experience in this ever evolving field.

Once again the panel discussion drew a large audience. Under the theme "The Future is Now: The New Era of Language Training", we heard from Richard Franz, Ministry of Education; Catherine Finlay from Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration; Darlyn Mentor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada; and Harry Bezruchko from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Following their updates, the audience had the opportunity to pose questions to the panelists. Administrators in particular value this opportunity to hear the latest ministry developments first hand.

Delegates always appreciate the opportunity to peruse the latest in ESL resources in the exhibitor areas and this year was no exception. Publishers and other vendors provided a wide range of merchandise that participants found appealing.

Our first annual Poster Session drew much praise from both presenters and viewers. Under the guidance of Antonella Valero and TESL's Research team, thirteen individuals displayed evidence of their research on large poster boards. While the posters were available for attendees to view at their leisure throughout the conference, the researchers were available at designated times for one on one or small group discussion on their topic. We look forward to building on our successful first year!

Of course networking is always a highlight of any conference. The Welcome Reception on Thursday evening provided an excellent opportunity for those in attendance to relax and connect with colleagues while enjoying a variety of appetizers. As well, they were able to view the entries of the ESL week poster contest and congratulate the winner.

Friday evening's event was another opportunity for relaxation and networking. The audience of 900 enjoyed a delicious dinner, interspersed with TESL Ontario silver pin presentations to Cheryl Richmond, Joanne Millard and Clayton Graves (posthumously), and greetings from the Honourable Eric Hoskins, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and Heidi Jurisic, Acting Regional Director Ontario Settlement, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Multiculturalism from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. An announcement by our guests from TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) confirmed that their annual conference will be held in Toronto in March of 2015! The evening concluded with entertainment by Disco Inferno, a musical group that brought everyone to their feet to dance the night away.

As conference chair, I wish to express my thanks to the multitude of volunteers who worked tirelessly in so many ways to make this conference such a success. The theme for 2011 is "Language Learning: A focus on success" and the conference team is already planning ways to ensure another great professional development experience.

Submitted by
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Conference Chair