



11th Annual Research Symposium
TESL Ontario, October 28-30, 2010

Report submitted by
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The 11th Annual Research Symposium was held as part of the 38th annual TESL Ontario Conference in Toronto from October 28-30, 2010. The Research Symposium included eight presenters (a ninth presenter had to withdraw from the conference for health reasons) who addressed one of three topics: *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*. The three topics were each presented in three-hour sessions that included time for presenters to respond to questions arising from their presentation and for symposium participants engage in discussion with the presenters. All three topics were well attended and room capacity (100 participants) was reached for each of the three topics.

A brief synopsis of each of the three symposium topics is offered in the following.

Sociocultural Theory and its Relevance to Classroom Teaching

Thursday, 28 October 2010, 13:00-16:00 hrs.

Presenters: *Julie Byrd Clark*, PhD, University of Western Ontario
Barbara Graves, PhD, University of Ottawa
Bonny Norton, PhD, University of British Columbia

The three researchers in this symposium examined the role of sociocultural theory using three different lenses: multiculturalism, identity theory and listening. In each case the presenters drew on their research to demonstrate how the findings of their work might benefit what teachers do in the classroom to facilitate the learning process and to promote the integration of students into classroom community. The first presenter highlighted the importance of social approaches to language learning and the development of linguistic repertoires. Drawing on insights from an ethnographic study, she highlighted the investments and experiences of Canadian youth as they navigate what it means to be and become *officially* bi- or multilingual while trying to integrate into the social and professional world. She emphasized that the ideas educators and policymakers have about languages and language learning as well as the ways in which they invest in certain representations of languages and identities have definite outcomes for both students and citizens.

The second researcher began by offering her definition of sociocultural theory: a theory of mind mediated by language and cultural artefacts that disrupts the binary oppositions such as mind-body, theory-practice, and cognition-emotion that have traditionally structured educational practices. Since knowledge and learning arise out of the interaction of people and activity contexts, rational processes are understood as social activities. She proposed that teaching and learning from a sociocultural

perspective are ethical practices whereby teachers and learners are transformed as they interact together. In such a framework, a listening attitude is at the heart of these interactions. To examine what teachers and researchers can learn by listening attentively, the researcher presented data from multilingual children and international graduate students.

The third presenter drew on a broad range of second language research to make three arguments: first, that sociocultural relationships must be understood with respect to larger institutional practices in schools, homes, and workplaces (the social) as well as more grounded practices associated with particular groups (the cultural); second, that much contemporary research on identity and language learning shares an interest in the complex and dynamic nature of identity, co-constructed in a wide variety of sociocultural relationships, and framed within particular relations of power; and third, that this broad range of theory can enhance researchers' and teachers' understanding of the relationship between identity and language learning. To the extent that the theory addresses both institutional and group practices, it can be considered "sociocultural" theory.

How Research Informs Language Learning and Classroom Management

Friday, 29 October 2010, 09:30-12:30 hrs.

Presenters: *Ken Beatty*, PhD, Anaheim University
Jim Cummins, PhD, University of Toronto
Jeremie Seror, PhD, University of Ottawa

The presentations on this topic ranged from macro- to micro- considerations to show the relationship between language learning and research. At the macro level, the presenter proposed a framework for considering the impact of research and theory on educational policy and classroom practice focusing on the achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Canadian context. Through an examination of the logical relationship between research findings and knowledge generation, the presenter set the stage for an argument in favour of the legitimacy of diverse forms of research. Such diversity, he argued, has the potential to contribute to knowledge generation as well as to educational policy and classroom practice.

A second presentation focused on computers and research around the use of computers in the classroom, pointing out that the rapidly changing available technologies for language learning and teaching provide a rich source for research. However, he cautioned that there are also many potential pitfalls with studies around computer hardware and software, including the fact that some studies have been conducted by program developers while others report findings from few participants who may not have had sufficient time to adjust to the technology being studied.

The third presenter focused on the ability of second language socialization research to situate language learning within its social context and highlight the power of seemingly ordinary interactions as carriers of explicit and implicit norms. These norms have the potential to strengthen or weaken language learners' sense of belonging within a target community. While the interactions in question typically occur in "micro moments" of teaching, they tend to entail noticeable cumulative

effect over time. The presenter concluded with examples of the impact of such insights on his teaching and work with second language writers.

The Influence of Research and Second Language Acquisition Theory on Teaching and Teaching Materials

Friday, October 29 2010, 14:30-17:30 hrs.

Presenters: *Philippa Bell*, PhD Candidate, Concordia University
Leila Ranta, PhD, University of Alberta

The first of two presentations on this topic addressed the issue in terms of ESL learners while the second presentation focused on how the topic relates to ESL teachers. The first presenter investigated whether research-based views on grammar activities are reflected in current English as a second language (ESL) course books. An examination of six widely used intermediate level course texts revealed that a number of research findings are not incorporated into these course books while others are not fully addressed. The presenter discussed why certain research findings may not be integrated into course texts and focussed comments on the pedagogical context. The second presentation focused on the context of ESL grammar instruction within the framework of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB). She noted that although the framework provides descriptions of outcomes for learners' communicative abilities, the framework does not define how and when grammar should be taught, leaving the decision up to instructors. However, based on a small-scale survey, the presenter found that many teachers used one of two grammar texts – neither of which appears related to the anticipated CLB outcomes. The presenter outlined how SLA research suggests innovative ideas to improve the effectiveness of ESL grammar materials.

Part of the research symposium is the publication of a special refereed issue of *Contact* based on the proceedings. The co-editors of the proceedings, Dr. Robert Courchêne and Dr. Hedy McGarrell have set up a Reading Committee consisting of experts on the topics addressed to assist with reviewing the manuscripts. The due date for manuscript submission for the refereed proceedings is December 15, 2010 and the publication date is expected to be 31 May 2011. The issue will be published through the TESL Ontario website and be available to teachers and language professionals throughout the world, wherever access to the Internet is available.

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