

13th Annual Research Symposium
TESL Ontario, November 8-10, 2012

Report submitted by
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The 13th Annual Research Symposium was held as part of the 40th annual TESL Ontario Conference in Toronto from November 8-10, 2012. The Research Symposium included ten presentations that addressed one of three topics

- Challenges and Approaches for Low Level Literacy Learners
- LINC – Challenges as TESL Ontario Turns Forty
- Corpora for Language Learning and Language Teaching

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 to engage in discussion with the presenters. All three topics were well attended and room capacity (136 participants) was reached for each of the three topics.

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

Challenges and Approaches for Low Level Literacy Learners

Thursday, 8 November, 2012, 13:00-16:00 hrs.

Presenters: Alister Cumming, PhD, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
Esther Geva, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
Alexandra Gottardo, Wilfrid Laurier University
Robert Kohls, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

The presentations on the literacy topic revolved around recent initiatives and insights into the development of adolescents' and adults' low level literacy skills. Alister Cumming focused on the role of dynamic assessment of language and literacy abilities compared to more conventional assessment techniques. Esther Geva reported on an intervention project on recently immigrated adolescents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The project was designed to accelerate the academic vocabulary learning and reading comprehension strategies through explicit teaching of vocabulary and transfer skills of members of the target group. Alexandra Gottardo's study focused on whether reading success in a group of Chinese ESL learners appeared more likely due to language or reading issues. Robert Kohls' presentation focused on the beliefs tutors in an after school literacy program have about writing and approaches to the teaching of writing.

LINC Challenges as TESL Ontario Turns Forty

Friday, 9 November, 2012, 09:30-12:30 hrs.

Presenters: Douglas Fleming, University of Ottawa
Diane Larsen-Freeman, University of Michigan

Antonella Valeo, York University
Farahnaz Faez, University of Western Ontario

The LINC topic was approached from pedagogical, theoretical as well as professional perspectives. Douglas Fleming discussed two of his recent studies in which he examined the relationship between a sample of adult ESL learners in a LINC program conceived citizenship compared to how these concepts are treated in assessment and curriculum documents related to the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Diane Larsen-Freeman drew on her and others' research on developmental yardsticks of language proficiency as reflected in the Canadian Language Benchmarks to highlight the challenges presented by three key characteristics of second language learners: the non-linearity of the learning process, the distinct individual paths learners take and the non-telic nature of language learning. To conclude, Antonella Valeo and Farahnaz Faez reported on their study of teachers in the LINC/ESL teaching contexts. Their analysis of qualitative and quantitative data suggest challenges for language teachers in terms of their employment options and choices, which in turn impact on the career development of accredited LINC and ESL instructors and their ability to establish themselves as part of a stable professional community.

Corpora for Language Learning and Teaching

Friday, 9 November, 2012, 14:30-17:30 hrs.

Presenters: Randy Appel, Concordia University
David Wood, Carleton University
Hedy McGarrell, Brock University
Randi Reppen, University of Northern Arizona

The three presentations on the topic of corpora offered insights into how corpus linguistics extends and add to insights into language learning and teaching. Randy Appel and David Wood discussed their research into multiword functional language units identified in Engineering and Business textbooks to determine the nature of such units in academic discourse. Hedy McGarrell summarized recent research to illustrate how principles and techniques of corpus linguistics have implications for textbooks and their contents that are relevant to language teaching and learning. Randi Reppen presented research to clarify, based on diverse vocabulary measures, effects of first language and writing tasks on learners' productive vocabulary.

Part of the research symposium is the publication of the proceedings in a special refereed issue of *Contact*. The co-editors of the proceedings, Dr. Hedy McGarrell and Dr. David Wood 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 in January 2013, the projected publication date of the proceedings is 31 May 2013. The issue will be published through the TESL Ontario website and be available to teachers, researchers and language professionals throughout the world, wherever access to the Internet is available.

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