

14th Annual Research Symposium

TESL Ontario, October 24-26, 2013

Report submitted by
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The 14th Annual Research Symposium was held as part of the 41st annual TESL Ontario Conference in Toronto from October 24-26, 2013. The Research Symposium addressed three topics and included a total of eight presentations

- Canadian Language Benchmarks and Assessment
- Blending Technology with Traditional Classroom Techniques for Learning and Teaching
- Task-based Language Learning

The three topics were each presented in a three-hour session 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 (up to 200 participants) was reached for two of the three topics.

A brief synopsis of each of the three symposium topics follows:

Blending Technology with Traditional Classroom Techniques for Learning and Teaching

Thursday, 24 October, 2013, 14:10 – 17:10 hrs.

Presenters: Iryna Kozlova, PhD, Carleton University
Geoff Lawrence, PhD, York University

Many researchers have dealt with the perceived potential and expected benefits of the use of technology in language learning and teaching. Similarly, the development of materials for blended teaching and learning has been addressed in numerous publications. However, there is a dearth of studies that show how specific recent technologies actually impact on learning. To begin to address this gap in the literature, two presenters were invited to present their work and perspectives. Iryna Kozlova explored how collaborative tasks for beginner level language learners work out in a blended learning environment. Geoff Lawrence summarized studies from Canada and abroad with a focus on the importance of the crucial role teachers' presence plays in online environments.

Task-based Language Learning

Friday, 25 October, 2013, 09:15-12:15 hrs.

Presenters: Scott Douglas, PhD, University of British Columbia
Eva Kartchava, PhD, Carleton University (with Elizabeth Gatbonton,
Concordia University)
Kim McDonough, PhD, Concordia University

Task-based language learning was explored from three distinct perspectives. Scott Douglas reported findings from a survey of 217 TESL Canada members who articulated their perceptions of task-based language teaching and learning approaches in differing English as an additional language teaching and learning contexts.

Kartchava and Gatbonton's study explored the role of corrective feedback and learner beliefs in tasks in an ACCESS-based class. ACCESS is a variation of TBLT in which language practice is communicative, inherently repetitive, and formulaic. Kim McDonough focused on the effectiveness of collaborative structural priming tasks at eliciting relative clauses. Findings from the study indicate that the students produced more relative clauses during the interview tasks than the summary tasks.

Canadian Language Benchmarks, Evaluation and Assessment

Friday, 25 October, 2013, 14:10-17:10 hrs

Presenters: Janna Fox, PhD, Carleton University
Gail Stewart, PhD, Consultant
Amilia Hope, PhD, University of Ottawa
Carla Hall, MA, University of Ottawa

Evaluation and assessment of learner abilities within the Canadian Language Benchmarks continues to raise questions for teachers, learners and researchers. Within the Research Symposium, the topic was addressed in three separate presentations. Janna Fox, Wendy Fraser and Aparna Chandrasekaran reported on the impact of the Portfolio-based Language Assessment (PLBA) initiative within Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs in Ottawa. The researchers focused on the LINC students' reported perceptions and engagement in their own learning in response to PLBA, and their teachers' reported knowledge and comfort with four specific dimensions, to derive recommendations for future implementations of PLBA. Carla Hall and Amelia K. Hope explored whether the concept of Interactional Competence can be accessed through CLB-based test formats.

Gail Stewart investigated whether CLB-based language testing instruments can be shown to have reliability and validity. While highlighting specific challenges, Stewart suggested specific solutions that have been shown to improve outcomes.

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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