



TESL Ontario's 48th Annual Conference

“Resilience: Re-envisioning Language Education Together”

TESL Ontario 2020 Conference Report

The 48th Annual TESL Ontario Conference, “Resilience: Re-envisioning Language Education Together” was our first virtual conference, necessitated by the COVID 19 pandemic. The learning curve was steep for the conference committee and the conference delegates, but the conference was deemed an overall success.

Held on November 5, 6 and 7, the conference had over 1300 delegates. Additionally, there were 16 exhibitor profiles and 3 sponsor profiles. TESL Ontario is appreciative of the conference assistance from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for enabling 235 delegates to attend the conference. Many of these were among the 100 individuals who attended the Friday afternoon Administrators session.

The new format required pre-training for moderators, session chat volunteers, social media and blog volunteers, and all presenters. Rehearsals and or pre-recordings were also necessary for panel participants, and those involved in the Wednesday evening Welcome Reception. Certainly, the attention to detail leading up to the event was significant, but resulted in positive feedback.

Our keynote speakers were popular. Hugh Dellar’s keynote “Technology and Principles of Language Learning” was sponsored by National Geographic Learning and was delivered from his home office in England. Dr. Eve Haque from York University shared important insights on anti-discrimination education, and Zaheen Nanji, from the Shanti Wellness Centre spoke on “Building Your Resilience Reflex – How to Shift from Chaos to Control”.

TechKnow sessions were well-received in the new conference format and were found to be less distracting than in an in-person setting. The Career Booster Forum took on a slightly different format as well with a panel discussion focused on career growth with online teaching skills and was generally well-received.

The 15th Annual Panel Discussion with representatives from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, and Ministry of Education was also delivered virtually, under the theme “Forging Ahead in an Era of Change”. The attendees found the session informative and appreciated being able to ask questions of the panelists even in the virtual format.

While the number of sessions was lower (70), the 130 volunteer presenters were able to present to an unlimited number of participants in the virtual format. We know that our participants appreciated being able to attend any session without facing lineups at the door!

We welcomed 16 exhibitors and were supported by 3 sponsors. We know the virtual format was new for most of them and we will strive to enhance their experience and visibility in the future.

Wednesday's Welcome Reception featured the Sparks of Excellence awards for contributions to the field of ESL. We continue to be grateful for, and inspired by, the dedication and hard work of our members.

This year's sponsors included the Learning Disabilities Association Toronto District, National Geographic Learning who sponsored Hugh Dellar's keynote address and New Language Solutions for sponsoring the "EduLINC & Avenue: The Response to the Pandemic" session.

The success of our first virtual conference was a team effort by staff, committee members, mentors, trainers and presenters and would not have happened without their dedication to our profession.

Barb Krukowski
Tayebeh Shalmani
Conference Chairs