

TESL Ontario's 49th Annual Conference

“Forging Ahead: Building New Normals Together”

TESL Ontario 2021 Conference Report

Held on November 3, 4 and 5, the 49th TESL Ontario Conference, *“Forging Ahead: Building New Normals Together”* was our second year connecting with our members and the TESL community virtually.

The conference welcomed 1153 attendees, 11 exhibitor profiles and 2 sponsor profiles. Additionally, there were 196 attendees in our annual Program Administrators session, which brings together program administrators from across the province as well as federal and provincial funders.

Same as last year, the virtual format required pre-training for moderators, presenters, session chat volunteers, and social media and blog volunteers. Training modules using Moodle, rehearsals and or pre-recordings were prepared to train all participants as needed. We were able to build on some of the resources and experiences from the previous year's conference and refine the conference preparation and training resources.

The keynote speeches featured Dr. Julie Kerekes from OISE/University of Toronto, who shared her expertise about supporting multilingual learners through action research for practitioners. Our second keynote speaker, Award winning broadcaster Jowi Taylor, gave an enlightening and moving presentation about his project Six String Nation, which offered a unique perspective about Canadian history, geography, and multicultural identity. Both keynote sessions were very well-received by the attendees.

TechKnow sessions as well as the Career Booster Forum were also held successfully and were popular among attendees. We were also able to host our very first virtual Career Connections Career Fair, featuring employers from various sectors.

This year's conference also featured the return of TESL Ontario's Research Symposium with a focus on exploring new and innovative research in English language education. Plurilingualism, Fanfiction, and the role of AI and algorithms in language teaching and learning were among the main topics discussed.

The 16th Annual Panel Discussion with representatives from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, and Ontario Ministry of Education was also delivered virtually, under the theme *“Shifting Perspectives: Adapt, Adopt & Celebrate Progress”*. The session featured updates from the ministry representatives, mostly focused on online/remote language training delivery, possible directions for the future, and followed by a Q & A session.

The conference featured 80 presentations including the two keynote sessions, which was an increase compared to our 48th annual conference. The sessions were made possible through

the collective efforts of 142 presenters, 15 moderators, 20 volunteers, as well as the Conference Committee, our conference planner, and TESL Ontario staff. Wednesday's Welcome Reception featured the Sparks of Excellence awards and the TESL Ontario Distinguished Contribution Award, to recognize and celebrate significant and long-term contributions achieved by some of our brilliant members within the TESL Ontario community. All sessions will continue to be available online post-conference for registered attendees.

We are also grateful for the sponsors of this year's conference, the British Council and Paragon Testing Enterprises.

Overall, the TESL Ontario 49th Annual Conference was a success as we all have become more acquainted and confident in navigating virtual spaces, and thanks to the hard work and dedication of all individuals involved in organizing the conference, as well as all TESL community colleagues joining us from near and afar.

Tayebeh Shalmani
Conference Chair