



TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

ARTICLE #2

ESL TEACHERS – INSTRUCTORS OR MENTORS?

“Teaching English as a second language to newcomers to Canada is not like teaching science or math!”

This is how one teacher of a LINC (Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada) program sums it up when asked what her goal is when working with a new learner.

Suma Balagopal, ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor since 2007 at the Caledon Community Services, Brampton, and one of [TESL Ontario’s Sparks of Excellence Recognition Award](#) winners this year, is so passionate and enthusiastic about her new career (she was a former marketing executive abroad) that her success in helping students has translated into consistently producing winners in the Learner Division of the TESL Ontario’s [ESL Week Creativity Contest](#) every year since the competition started. To what does she attribute this astounding record? She explains: “My goal is to understand the learners’ goals and help each person achieve them. I also try to help them get over their fear of English and ultimately make a difference in people’s lives.”

Suma’s success is evident as she seamlessly instructs up to six levels at once in a multi-level CLB (Canadian Language Benchmarks) classroom. Her intuitive teaching and life coaching skills seem to bring out the true strengths of even the most introverted of learners. Through her determination to help make a difference, Suma is able to empower and build self-confidence in all of her adult students. “There are so many rewarding moments in my new career, I cannot highlight just one!” she says.

Take a recently graduated student, now in dental college, who visited Suma with her new baby not long ago. With a big hug, the student said: “Thanks for showing me the way.” Suma has been very instrumental in her students’ successes at attaining their individual achievements, and volunteering personal time for goals such as becoming a music teacher, passing a G1 driving test, acquiring Canadian citizenship and joining the police force.

Susan Richarz of the York Region District School Board and Affiliate Chapter president of TESL North York/York Region is another TESL Ontario [Sparks of Excellence Recognition Award](#) winner this year. Susan began her love of ESL teaching as a volunteer 20 years ago. She is continually impressed by her students’ determination to learn English and strives to match their efforts by working to improve her teaching. To help her students integrate into Canadian society she arranges theatre and museum

excursions and helps reinforce classroom learning by inviting visiting speakers. “I love to share my passion for Canada and at the same time enrich my life by learning about my students’ different cultures and countries. It’s a win-win for all of us,” she says.

Collaboration with colleagues and supporting new teachers are also important to Susan’s commitment. And being part of the North York/York Affiliate Chapter board for several years now, enables her to help support the members by providing opportunities for professional development and networking.

Both Suma’s and Susan’s accomplishments were acknowledged at this year’s [TESL Ontario annual conference](#) in Toronto October 16 – 18 (#TESL2014), when they received the Sparks of Excellence Award that recognizes excellence and commitment of TESL Ontario members. The Conference is the highlight of [ESL Week October 12-18](#) celebrating ESL education and learning throughout Ontario.

Three more TESL Ontario members were also honoured with the [Distinguished Contribution Award](#) that recognizes significant long-term achievements and contributions to the advancement of English Language educators, the English Language training sector and/or TESL Ontario.

Sheila Carson of Thames Valley District School Board, **Joanne Hincks** of Toronto Catholic District School Board and **Velma Lang** of YMCA of Niagara were presented at the evening dinner and entertainment event at the Conference.

[TESL Ontario](#), established in 1972, is a non-profit organization serving the needs of teachers of English as a Second Language. It represents more than 4,600 language training professionals working in immigrant serving agencies, school boards, publicly funded sites across Ontario, colleges/universities, elementary/secondary and private language training schools. TESL Ontario’s expertise is in teaching, advocacy, accreditation and professional development. The organization is instrumental in influencing the success of many thousands of English language learners throughout the province.

For more information visit www.teslontario.org and follow us on

