

THE TESL ONTARIO MEMBER SURVEY: A BRIEF REPORT¹

By Antonella Valeo

TESL Ontario marked a milestone in 2012, celebrating 40 years of bringing together teachers of ESL in Ontario. This landmark year inspired the association to reflect on the growing diversity of its membership and the changing needs of its members; to this end, the association launched a membership survey in spring of 2012. TESL Ontario wanted to use the survey to collect data in order to better understand who its members are, what characterizes their current work, and how it can best support them as members of their professional community. A snapshot of the findings was shared in a poster session with members at the 2012 TESL Ontario Fall Conference. This report builds on that presentation by providing a brief overview of the survey, its design, development, and a summary of some of the key findings.

Method and Design

The survey was a collaborative effort that was created with input from the TESL Ontario Member Services Manager, the Executive Board, the Research Committee, and a group of TESL Ontario members. The Member Services Manager drew on her knowledge of the membership as a whole and her experience working with individual members in order to help design the survey questions. The Executive Board provided input that reflected concerns and visions for the future of TESL Ontario, especially given its increasingly diverse membership. The Research Committee members contributed their expertise in research design, survey methodology, and data analysis. Finally, a group of TESL Ontario members piloted the survey and suggested revisions to the first draft. After revisions were completed an online version of the survey was constructed using FluidSurveys and a link was distributed to all TESL Ontario members through the membership email list. As an incentive for participation, members were offered the opportunity to enter a draw for a free TESL Ontario membership. They were also asked to provide consent for their responses to be used anonymously, so that the survey results could be shared with the larger membership.

The survey included both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions organized into four sections. Section 1 contained questions about the instructors' professional

¹ This paper is based on a poster by Alison Keown entitled "TESL Ontario Member Survey Results" delivered at TESL Ontario in November, 2012.

backgrounds, including age, gender, education, work, and their history as members. Section 2 was concerned with questions about how members connected with the association. These questions were designed to assess how often members used different avenues and tools to communicate with TESL Ontario. In particular, these questions aimed to assess the potential for social media tools (such as Facebook or Twitter) to allow TESL Ontario to connect with members and support a professional community. Section 3 focussed on the conferences and workshops offered by TESL Ontario. The annual TESL Ontario conference and the multiple conferences and workshops offered by TESL Ontario affiliates comprise a large part of the service provided to the membership and represent the most important avenue for professional networking. These questions attempted to assess patterns of participation, as well as motivation and key obstacles to participation. Section 4 addressed membership benefits and was designed to help TESL Ontario understand which benefits were being used most often by members, which were considered valuable, and what gaps there might be in the range of services. A range of benefits was included, such as publications (*Contact* and the *TESL Canada Journal*), members' savings programs such as group insurance and discounts, and membership in the affiliates and TESL Canada. This section also included open-ended questions asking members what other benefits they would like to see in the future.

Key Findings

Who are the members?

The survey was sent out to all TESL Ontario members and 1,327 members participated, almost 30% of the entire association membership. The responses to questions about membership type and affiliate showed that the survey responses represented the general membership well. Each of the 12 affiliates was represented and, while the majority of participants held individual memberships, volunteers, TESL students, and retired individuals also participated. Participants were also distributed across membership history; 13% had been members for less than a year and 31% had been members for over 10 years.

A general profile of association members emerged from the first section. In terms of gender and age, 83% of the respondents were women, and the majority (62%) were between 41 and 60 years old with 36% of this group between 51 and 60 years old. The majority (82%) had completed a TESL/TESOL Certificate program in Ontario while the others had completed a range of international programs. In addition, almost 40% reported completing a graduate degree.

What work do they do?

Most of the members responding to the survey (75%) held teaching positions. Others held positions as tutors, program administrators and TESL trainers. In terms of professional involvement, almost 34% reported working or being involved in the field between 3 and 10 years while another 32% reported a career length of more than 15 years. However, at

the time of the study only 37% were employed full-time. Slightly fewer, 31%, reported part-time employment and 21% were not employed at the time of the study. School boards were the largest employers with almost 31% identifying this employer group. Members, however, identified a range of other organizations as well, including colleges, universities, and private schools. A majority of the members, 76%, reported working in LINC and Continuing Education ESL programs.

How are they served and supported by TESL Ontario?

Most of the members (77%) responded that they joined TESL Ontario primarily for accreditation. However, a number of other reasons were also cited as motivators. The two most commonly cited reasons were professional credibility (identified by 58% as a motivating factor), and professional development (identified by 52%). In terms of their engagement with TESL Ontario, the website appeared to be the most common way in which members connected with the association. Almost 75% reported occasionally checking the website, while over 85% had never accessed social media connections with the association (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). However, when asked if they would be interested in exploring other professional community tools such as live chats and blogs, 70% responded that they were open to participating.

Although the TESL Ontario annual conference is one of the association's primary activities, 26% of the members responding to the survey had never attended a conference. Just over half of those who had attended did so with financial support. The remaining members attended the conference at their own cost. Most of those who received financial support (63%) identified the support as a LINC or ELT subsidy and just under half of these recipients felt that they would not attend the conference without financial support of some kind.

Of the various TESL Ontario services and benefits, the most popular were the job board maintained by TESL Ontario and the publications, specifically *Contact*, the affiliate newsletters, and the TESL Ontario Conference Reports. When asked what additional services members felt they wanted to see TESL Ontario offer, one of the most common responses was a call for more support with finding work in the field, through job counselling, links with employers and advocacy in the field.

Conclusion

What have we learned?

What have we learned from this survey? Some of the results reflect what is already widely known, for example, that the majority of TESL professionals are women. Other data, however, is more surprising. TESL professionals are characterized by maturity with a significant percentage of individuals, 36%, approaching retirement in the next 10 years. In addition, a sizeable group, 40%, have completed education beyond the minimum required for professional accreditation of an undergraduate degree. Despite these qualifications,

only 37% reported holding full-time employment at the time of the survey. Many of the members value their professional credibility and want to pursue regular professional development. However, fewer than half are able to access financial support to attend the annual conference and many in that group report that they would not attend without support. As a community of professionals, overall members do not typically use a range of social media to connect professionally but are open to participating in new ways to connect with their colleagues and the field.

It is also important to recognize the limitations of this survey, inherent in survey methodology and reflective of the diversity of the field. The nature of any survey, where a menu of options is provided, limits the kind of input and feedback that participants can provide. In addition, a multiple-choice question is only 'as good' as the options given in the question. While the questions were created with the input of a range of individuals that represented a spectrum across the membership, they can never encompass all the possibilities. Not surprisingly, for many of the questions, the 'Other' category drew responses that were in themselves widely divergent. While the analysis of the survey explored these divergent responses, and all open-ended question responses were considered, recognizing this diversity amongst the members may be a significant contribution of the survey.

Where do we go from here?

Overall, the survey has provided TESL Ontario with an effective snapshot of its membership, along with insights into future potential benefits and means of connecting members with TESL Ontario itself, and with each other. However, with the limitations of any survey in mind, TESL Ontario recognizes the value of ongoing contact with all its members, and invites them to get in touch to share their thoughts on issues, concerns, and potential future directions on an ongoing basis.

Acknowledgements:

TESL Ontario Member Services Manager: Allison Keown

TESL Ontario Research Committee Members 2012: Antonella Valeo (Chair), Johanne Mednick Myles, Bob Courchene, Hedy McGarrell, Theresa Hyland, Farahnaz Faez, Liying Cheng, Subhadra Ramahandran

Author Bio



Antonella Valeo is Chair of the TESL Ontario Research Committee and Associate Professor of ESL and Applied Linguistics at York University.

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Presents...

THE MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

Main Questions

- Who are the TESL Ontario members?
- What do they do in their institutions?
- What do their students look like?

Context & Rationale

Context

The survey was:

- Compiled by the TESL Ontario Research Committee
- Conducted in the winter of 2012
- Sent to all members of TESL Ontario
- Completed by 1,190 members

Rationale

TESL Ontario created a member survey to:

- Identify areas of improvement
- Determine which member services are useful & valuable
- Help the organization to meet the needs of its members now and in the future.

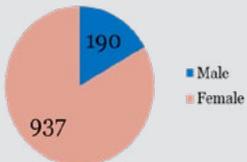
Overview of Results

Overview of Membership*

*Based on completed questionnaires

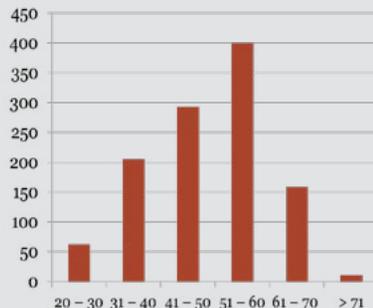
GENDER SPLIT

Total Responses: 1125



AGE RANGE

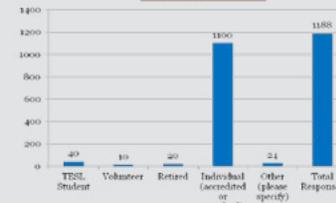
Total Responses: 1124



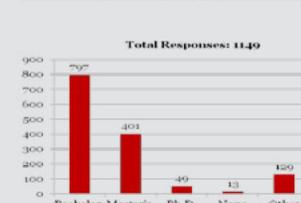
Length of Membership



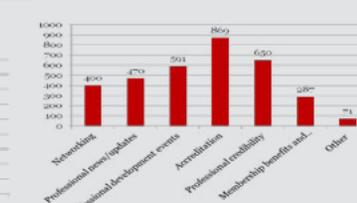
Membership Type



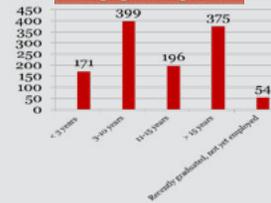
Type of Educational Attainment



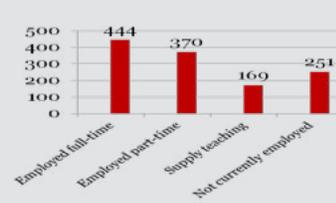
Reason for joining TESL-O



Length of Time in the Language Training Field

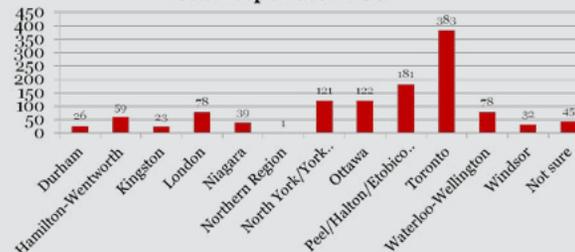


Employment Status



TESL AFFILIATION

Total responses: 1188

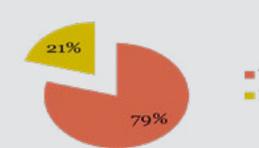


Overview of Membership Activities*

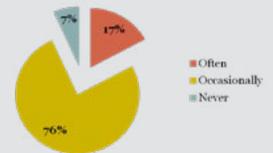
*Based on completed questionnaires

Access to TESL-O's Website

Accessed at least once

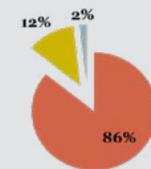


Frequency of Access

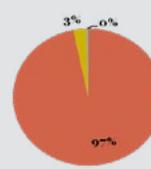


Access to TESL-O's Social Media Channels

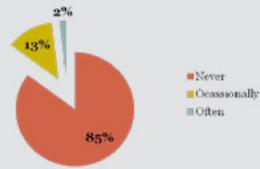
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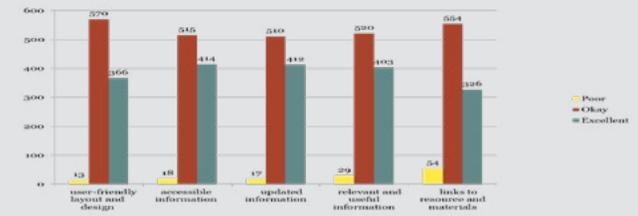
TWITTER



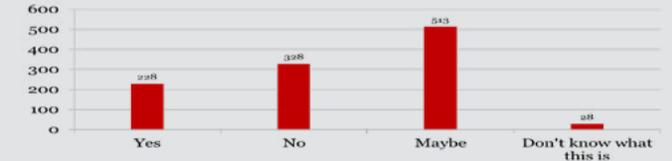
LINKEDIN



TESL-O Website Ratings

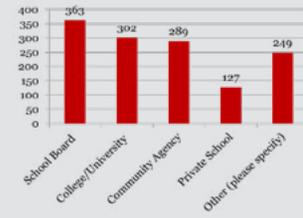


Interest in Online Professional Interaction



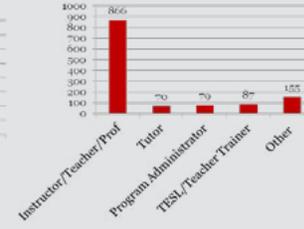
Type of Language Training Workplace

Total Responses: 1183

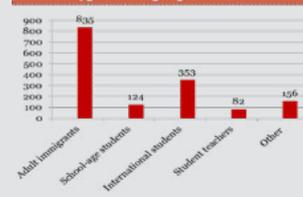


Primary Position

Total Responses: 1131



Type of Language Learners



Type of Teacher Education Completed

