



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

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March 2014

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President's Message

by Dorte Weber

Welcome to the Winter 2014 issue of the ATESL newsletter. My thoughts these past months have been on the changes to Canada's immigration system, regulations for citizenship, international student visas, temporary foreign workers, and now the investor class.... There is so much going on that has an impact on our working lives and our students and clients – it's hard to know where to begin. The media report on changes as they happen, but it can be difficult to get a global picture of the changes and the impact. CIC publishes news briefs at cicnews.ca. You can subscribe to the news brief service or just go to the site when you want to check out what is happening. For a more long-term analysis of the changes overall and their impact, I have another recommendation. In 2009, I heard Naomi Alboim speak at a conference where she laid out her predictions for changes to Canada's immigration system and outlined her concerns over the implications. Most of her predictions have turned out to be correct. If you are interested in learning more about this, you can go to <http://maytree.com/discussion-papers>. There is now a series of 6 discussion papers on these subjects. Staying informed is the first step towards helping our students and clients and helping ourselves. Most of us will welcome some of the changes and worry about the impact of some of the other changes on our students, clients and their families. Whether we are seeing lower enrolment in LINC 1-3 classes, a boom in applications for language tests for citizenship or immigration purposes, or pressure on citizenship classes, or worry about access to health care for refugee claimants, we can see that the landscape has changed, and it seems more change is coming. The Canada Job Grant, which is due to get underway this spring, will be funded in part by money currently allocated to the provinces through Labour Market Agreements. These funds are used, among other things, for skills training for under-represented groups in the labour market. The funding our students receive through Alberta Works comes from this "pot" of money. The Canada Job Grant project will reduce the amount of money the provinces receive by about 60%. We don't know yet what Alberta's response will be or what arrangements will be made between the federal and provincial governments, but there is a strong likelihood that we will see some reductions in funding available for skills training. What I have outlined here is just a rough sketch of a very complex picture. There are many factors other than the ones I have mentioned that influence the situation. Before we head out to the nearest Irish bar to drown our sorrows (well, St. Patrick's Day is coming, isn't it?), we should remember that Alberta has always been a strong supporter of immigrant language training. Immigrants are needed here and will continue to be needed. I am confident that the province will find a way to continue to support language training in one form or another, even if it is at a reduced level compared to the current level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Message

A message from Dorte Weber

Articles

Coping in Canada Project: Fostering Intercultural Awareness and Understanding in LINC Classes
by Anne Capune

Focus on Research
by Marian Rossiter & Marilyn Abbott

The LINC Research Reading Group at NorQuest College
by Rozita Amini, Celeste Bickley, Lesli Nessim, Bonnie Nicholas, & Irene Wilson

Student Writing

Help Japan by Hanae Otagaki

ATESL Local Reports

Edmonton - Evelyn Neame & Jacqueline Scott

Central Alberta - Lois Prostebby & Sharon Duplessis

Calgary - Chris Wharton & Glen Cochrane

Conference Report

Peter Myhre & Eaman Mah

Bursary Reports

Judy Sillito; Stacy Norrbom; Jun Deng



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

Coping in Canada Project: Fostering Intercultural Awareness and Understanding in LINC Classes

Anne Capune

Project Background

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes are typically filled with culturally diverse students from various educational, occupational and socio-economic backgrounds. *ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta No. 50* (ATESL, 2009) recommends that “instructional activities...encourage learners to share and celebrate aspects of their cultures, to explore their own and others’ world views, and to expand their capacity to live and work in Canada” (p.82). The Coping in Canada project aims to fulfill all of the above.

Coping in Canada has been funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) since April 2012 for LINC 4 and 5 students at NorQuest College’s Westmount Campus. The project involves a series of workshops delivered by the workshop coordinator, Anne Capune, with the objective of providing students with intercultural information to raise awareness and foster reflective practice about their integration process in Canada.

Need Addressed

The Coping in Canada workshops allow students in LINC 4 and 5 to access intercultural content that is not explicitly taught as part of the LINC curriculum. For example, in *LINC 1-4* and *LINC 5-7 Classroom Activities*, there is no stand-alone, intercultural theme or topic. According to the *ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework*, “there is a growing recognition within the field of ESL that it is important to focus not only on developing learners’ linguistic skills, but also on advancing their intercultural communicative competence or their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in English within a culturally diverse society, such as Canada” (S7-4). Furthermore, “the literature is also unanimous in the importance of making intercultural awareness and competence explicit in the classroom” (S7-7). By providing LINC learners with explicit intercultural content and self-reflection during these workshops, students have more knowledge about the cultural dynamics influencing them and are better able to direct their own adaptation to a new culture.

Workshop Content

In three spiraling workshops, LINC 4 students learn about and discuss the stages of settlement, adaptation and integration in their new country, as well as an approach to help solve intercultural challenges using a process called the “Something’s Up! Cycle” (see Figure 1). Something’s Up! was developed by NorQuest’s Centre for Intercultural Education. During the workshops, students practice using Something’s Up! with various scenarios as a tool for making sense of intercultural misunderstandings. Students also reflect on cultural differences between their home countries and Canada while discussing behaviour, values and beliefs that may be causing them confusion or problems.

For more information and examples using the Something’s Up! Cycle please see NorQuest College’s website:

[http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/online-workplace-integration-language-resources-\(o.aspx#resource3](http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/online-workplace-integration-language-resources-(o.aspx#resource3)

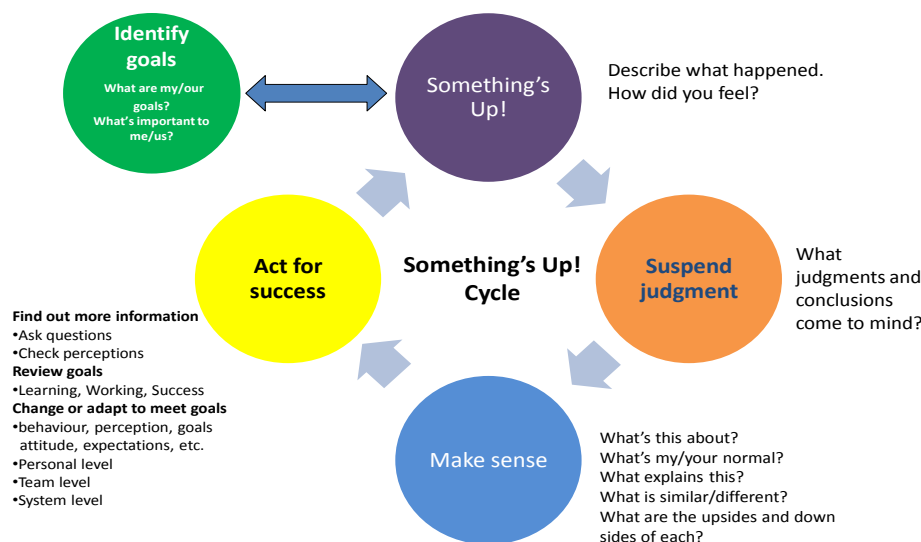


Figure 1. Something's Up! Cycle

Workshops for LINC 5 students focus on Canadian workplace culture. In one session, students hear about hard and soft skills, and the importance of soft skills in Canadian jobs, as well as some recommended skills for workplace success in Canada. The second workshop focuses on strategies to help with workplace integration; for example, speaking up and participating, watching emotions and staying on an organization's clock. To encourage student participation, iClickers2 are used so students can answer questions that allow them to reflect on the skills and strategies they have used in their home countries and to decide whether they can be transferred to a Canadian context.

Student Perspective

Through feedback forms and one-on-one conversations, a large number of students report that the information and awareness they have gained from the Coping in Canada workshops was helpful and useful. The response below is typical and echoes most students' feelings: "I appreciated your presentation in our classroom and thank you for it. It's important for the newcomers. Many immigrants have different culture and the first time, they confront many problems and it's not easy to resolve. Your presentations give us the key to integrate to Canadian community." Some students have also mentioned that they enjoy the workshop format over classroom instruction because the information is condensed and targeted.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to CIC for continued funding of the Coping in Canada project.

Author: Anne Capune has an MEd in TESL from the University of Alberta and an Intercultural Communication Practitioners Certificate from NorQuest College. She has worked in LINC as an instructor, coordinator, curriculum developer and project manager.

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as a Second Language

Focus on Research

Marian Rossiter & Marilyn Abbott

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2013 – 2014

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Keeping abreast of new developments in TESL to make second language teaching and learning as efficient and effective as possible is important for ESL instructors and administrators. Although many practitioners participate in various forms of ongoing professional development (PD), such as workshops, conferences, and professional reading, research (e.g., Borg, 2013; Rossiter & Abbott, 2013) shows that fewer instructors are reading research articles relevant to ESL teaching and learning.

This issue of the ATESL Newsletter introduces a new column, *Focus on Research*, which we hope will be an ongoing feature of the newsletter. Its purpose is to help bridge the gap between research and practice. In our view, if practitioners aren't reading TESL research, it is not achieving its main purpose. Reading research for professional development can enhance our knowledge and skills, and can improve instruction and student achievement by helping us to better address the needs of our learners.

It is our hope that this column will enhance practitioners' engagement with research. In each issue, you will find a summary of research that has implications for ESL classroom practice (for example, teaching and learning strategies, assessment and evaluation, computer-assisted language learning, writing, reading, grammar, feedback, pragmatics, vocabulary, listening, speaking, literacy, pronunciation, intercultural communication, task-based language teaching). In addition, links will be provided to reader-friendly, relevant, accessible, practical articles or resources that may be accessed by individuals or by professional development reading groups, along with questions for reflection and/or discussion.

How to get started

The first step is to identify a purpose for reading TESL research. This is most effective if it is a shared purpose (e.g., to address a classroom-related issue or to develop a curriculum). Incentives for reading (e.g., recognition, conference funding, time, resources) should be negotiated by both instructors and administrators in ESL programs as further encouragement for engagement with research.

How to find interesting and relevant articles

One place to begin is with websites that post summaries of research and lists of references from which to choose follow-up readings. Accessible sources include [the Center for Applied Linguistics \(CAL\) Digest Series](#); [the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition \(CAELA\) Network Briefs](#), and [the CAELA Briefs Archive \(2004-2007\)](#).

Once you've identified a topic, you can also search it in [Google Scholar](#) or in [JSTOR](#), which are online depositories of articles that have been published elsewhere. JSTOR articles can be downloaded directly from the website; some Google Scholar articles may require a downloading fee.

If you wish to consult the work of specific researchers, you can go directly to their websites to find additional references and publications. For example, if you're interested in vocabulary, you could visit [Paul Nation's website](#); if motivation is your interest, you might refer to [Zoltan Dornyei's homepage](#). Some researchers provide links to publications on their web pages.

If you don't have access to journal subscriptions or library databases, you can search the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#). These journals offer online articles free of charge to the public. Open access journals of interest include [TESL Canada Journal](#); [Language Learning and Technology](#); [TESL-EJ](#); and [Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics](#). These and other online journals can be accessed through the DOAJ database or by entering the journal title directly into a search engine such as Google.

Some journals have sections in which you will find articles with a specific classroom focus (e.g., [TESL Canada Journal's](#) "In the Classroom") and are freely available online. Others (e.g., *Canadian Modern Language Review's* "Focus on the Classroom") will need to be accessed through an academic library database.

Other electronic sources of TESL research are university archives. Summaries of several graduate research projects were published in the December 2013 issue of the ATESL Newsletter. By accessing the [University of Alberta's Education and Research Archive \(ERA\)](#) and entering the search term 'TESL', the full studies are freely available to interested readers. Many other works can be found in the archive by searching 'ESL' and/or more specific topics (e.g., 'pronunciation').

Suggestions for relevant articles may also be provided in research-based TESL courses and webinars, or in research-informed workshops at conferences or local ATESL meetings.

Instructors or administrators who join special interest groups through online listservs hosted by TUTELA or TESOL may also find recommendations of research articles that meet their interests and needs (e.g., ESL, testing, LINC, PBLA).

Quality PD opportunities allow ESL instructors to access, reflect on, experiment with, and evaluate evidence-informed techniques, assisting them in implementing more effective practices. Professional development reading groups can provide valuable opportunities for TESL professionals to discuss research articles and their application to practice. The following article provides strategies and insights for establishing and maintaining a TESL reading group. We encourage you to consider starting a professional reading group in your program, if it doesn't already exist.

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Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

The LINC Research Reading Group at NorQuest College

Rozita Amini, Celeste Bickley, Lesli Nessim,
Bonnie Nicholas & Irene Wilson

For the past couple of years, instructors in the LINC program at NorQuest College have been gathering on a regular basis to read and discuss current and relevant research articles. The inspiration for the group came when some NorQuest LINC instructors participated in a focus group for Marian Rossiter and Marilyn Abbott's research project on the links between research and practice. As recent graduates of the TESL program, we realized that we missed having a connection with research; at the same time, we recognized that, as full-time instructors, we didn't have the time or the resources to seek out recently published research in our field.

We got together to brainstorm ways that we could try to keep up with some of the current research that is being done in the field of second language acquisition (SLA); in the end, we decided to form our own LINC research reading group. Our group would be structured like a book group, but with academic research articles taking the place of novels. We have an informal steering committee that meets on an as-needed basis, usually once or twice a year, and after some trial and error, we have found an approach that works for us.

We are very fortunate to be able to collaborate with the TESL faculty at the University of Alberta in finding suitable articles. At our first meeting of the year, we brainstorm general ideas for the kinds of research articles that we'd like to read. As practitioners, we are always most interested in research that has practical implications for our classrooms; we want to be making evidence-based decisions for what we do in our teaching. We send our list of topics to the TESL faculty and they have been very generous in sending us suggestions for sound research articles. This is very important to us; otherwise, we would be "lost in a sea of articles" as one participant describes the daunting task of finding research articles on our own.



The LINC Reading Group meets regularly on a Friday after school at a nearby restaurant. We've chosen the first Friday of the month as the best time for our reading group, as meeting on a regular day each month makes it easier for people to plan. Having a meeting place close to work is important because we don't want to make travelling time a barrier to participation. We gather about 30-45 minutes after the end of our teaching day. Our goal is to meet for about 1½ hours so everyone can get home in time for dinner. This way, the reading group doesn't seem like just another meeting or another evening away from home. Our reading group offers an informal learning opportunity; participation is strictly voluntary and we don't keep any tabs on attendance. We have found that this is also a great way for our staff from both areas of the college (LINC and ESL Intensive) to stay in touch and share our classroom experiences in a relaxed environment. As we all have very busy workdays, it is often difficult to connect with our colleagues for more than a few fleeting minutes.

Our numbers have ranged from 6-15 people. Usually there are 8-10 of us at each reading group. We are still trying to figure out how we can have a round-table discussion when the restaurant only has square tables; inevitably, two synchronous conversations develop as it is simply too difficult to try and hear someone who is speaking from the far end of a long table in a restaurant on a Friday afternoon. It was important for us to meet away from our workplace so that we can make the meetings relaxing as well as informative. However, our classrooms have tables that are designed for group work, so we may well end up back at our workplace and order food in. Our group is flexible; we want to meet the needs of our group and if the meetings aren't worthwhile and enjoyable, no one will come.

There isn't a set format for our group; our meetings are quite informal. We try to start with a few minutes to visit and order some food and drinks; usually after about 15 minutes, the leader reminds us why we are there. A planned addition to our meetings is to start by looking at the previous month's article, discussing ways we implemented results and recommendations into our teaching practice, and sharing our successes and failures. We review the current month's article and explore ways in which we might incorporate the ideas into our teaching.

We appreciate the practicality of the articles, as our in-service practice allows us to reflect on ways in which we may have incorporated the research under study, whether we are aware of it as research or simply as practice we have brought into our teaching. Alternately there are articles which we feel are not suited to our level (LINC being a foundational program), but we accept that as professionals we can also read beyond our specific work context. Furthermore, as our colleagues from ESL Intensive attend some of our meetings, it is interesting to see individual perspectives on how instructors at varying levels may incorporate research into their teaching practice.

Participants take turns volunteering to be the discussion leader; this person's role is to lead the discussion and keep the group focused on the article so the meeting doesn't turn into just a social occasion (although relaxing and socializing is part of the draw for the group; there is always lots of laughter at our meetings). The leader has read the article carefully and can draw the group's attention to salient points. This is a key factor in the success of the group, as we know that not everyone who participates will have had time to give every article a close reading; we all benefit from the leader's insights. We had a couple of meetings without a designated leader, but we found that the discussion wasn't as focused, so we decided to go back to having a leader. Sharing the leadership role is doable for everyone, especially as the leader makes the final decision on which article will be discussed. That way the leader can choose an article that he/she is comfortable with.

We have explored numerous topics including pronunciation, giving feedback, TBLT, motivation, and integrating technology into language teaching. At this point there is considerable interest in assessment as we are all learning to design PBLA tasks for our students. We may continue to return to topics already looked at as our needs, interests, and the composition of the group change. Often the article is used as a springboard for us to share teaching ideas on what we are already doing in the area or how to improve on current practices. It is great to have fellow instructors to bounce ideas off and to build on each other's experiences while keeping current research in mind.

Since we have a bank of articles from the TESL Faculty from which to choose, someone volunteers to be the discussion leader the next month and that person usually picks the specific article for that meeting. One volunteer emails all the LINC and ESL instructors with pertinent details for our group meetings: where, when, and which article we'll be reading at least three weeks in advance, and we start reading for our next meeting. Sometimes the leader chooses to email a reminder a few days before the group meets, often highlighting two or three key points from the article to get people thinking.

Although this group has some structure (a set day and time), it is informal enough that if we know the next couple of

months are going to be really busy, we just don't plan any meetings. We want to keep this an enjoyable way of staying current with SLA research and practice, without it becoming a burden. As a group of teachers with varied experience, some more familiar with recent research and others with more in-service experience, this group proves to be a great meeting ground for members to be enriched by each other as we share our interest in learning more about both the theory and practice of our profession.

STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

In the spring of 2011, the ATESL Board sponsored a writing contest in order to support adult English language learners in the sharing of their ideas and creativity in the written form. In this issue, we share the work of Hanae Otagaki, who received an honourable mention.

HELP JAPAN by Hanae Otagaki

In the cold early morning of the 11th of March 2011, I was listening to the Japanese radio news. As soon as I had gotten the news about a M9.0 earthquake disaster in the northeast of Japan, my heart started beating fast, and I just could not believe what I had heard. I immediately remembered when my hometown Kobe was hit by a M7.3 earthquake in January 1995. That also happened in the early morning; the vibrations caused by the earthquake were so strong that I woke up. Then I felt a powerful vertical shake which seemed never ending. My room was next to the kitchen, so I could see the refrigerator jumping, and dishes falling on the floor from the cabinets: the scene looked like a science-fiction, apocalyptic movie. Large parts of Kobe collapsed in the earthquake.

The recent earthquake was also followed by a devastating tsunami and the heavy damage to the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. This unprecedented triple disaster caused enormous suffering to the victims.

Having been myself a victim of a natural disaster, I strongly believe that the only thing we can do from Canada is to help by making donations for the victims. Restoring the cities hit by the catastrophe will obviously require a very large amount of money, and so many victims lost family, house, job... I am extremely glad to see that many generous people in Canada think likewise, and that, immediately after the disaster, a lot of fundraising events were organized throughout the country. I could participate in several of them, which warmed my heart all the time.

The reconstruction will take time, but I hope that the beautiful cities devastated by the earthquake will recover and flourish again, as it was for my hometown, Kobe.



Alberta Teachers of English
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Newsletter Information

The ATESL Newsletter is published quarterly.

Deadlines: February 15, May 15, August 15, November 15

Announcements, workshop dates, book reviews, teaching ideas, and articles relevant to the field.

Contact: Irene Wood
at services@atesl.ca

More information and archives at
www.atesl.ca/newslettersArchive

Professional Development Bursaries

Apply for an ATESL Professional Development Bursary

Deadline: **March 15, 2014**

<http://www.atesl.ca/bursary>

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL)

is a professional organization which promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.



Alberta Teachers of English
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ATESL LOCAL REPORTS

Edmonton Local Report

Did you know that learning student names the first day and having students learn each other's names by the end of the first week is a teaching technique that really works? Did you know that the Picture Word Inductive Method (PWIM) integrates vocabulary, reading, writing, and grammar and that at least one Edmonton ESL teacher uses it for every level whenever she is stuck? Another teacher recently discovered the effectiveness of having students record themselves while shadowing a native speaker reading a text. The students could hear how much they differed from the native speaker and this realization prompted the development of more comprehensible speech.

When teachers, administrators, and TESL students attend Edmonton's ATESL meetings, they learn a great deal while talking with each other. In addition, they are informed of exciting new administrative developments, such as the opportunity to win a free registration to the ATESL Conference held at West Edmonton Mall on October 24th and 25th merely by attending meetings. Every stamp on an ATESL member's Professional Development Participation Passport becomes a ticket that will be entered into a draw for a free registration. But wait – there's more! If you need to meet professional development requirements at your workplace, certificates verifying attendance at sessions will now be issued upon request.

For many members, however, the professional development presentations are the highlight of ATESL meetings. In November, Sabine Ricioppo taught us how to design reading assessments for Canadian Language Benchmark Levels 1 to 8 and in February, Sarvenaz Hatami explained the importance of teaching vocabulary in chunks and provided resources to use in the ESL classroom. Barbara Penner will talk about Reading Circles: An Intensive, In-Depth Quest of the Curious, on March 28th, and we have scheduled 4 short presentations of Master's capping projects for April and three for May. In April we will learn how to teach English articles to ESL learners, use National Film Board shorts in the ESL classroom, harness film as an authentic source to teach ESL writing, and explore ESL learner attitudes toward minority sexual identities. In May we will understand how videos and captioning improve listening comprehension, examine the influence of oral corrective feedback, and discover the links between theory and practice in ESL textbooks and grammar tasks.

Attending ATESL meetings on a monthly basis can be very rewarding. Arrive at 4:30 p.m. to partake of the tasty treats while networking with others in your profession, gain useful knowledge by attending the professional development presentation, and join us for dinner after the meeting if you can. Check the calendar on the ATESL website for information on location, presentation topics, and the restaurant choice. Come and be fed physically, socially and intellectually.

Evelyn Neame and Jacqueline Scott
Edmonton Co-Chairs



Alberta Teachers of English
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Central Alberta Local Report: CA-ATESL Winter 2014 Highlights

The Central Alberta Chapter of ATESL meets the third Wednesday of every month at Central Alberta Refugee Effort from 3:30 – 5:50 pm for professional development and networking. A number of members attended the conference in Calgary and felt it was very worthwhile. Our November meeting was a conference share, so members who could not attend could benefit from what others had learned.

The January meeting was an idea share on the use of technology, and February we had a very interesting presentation by two members on 'Anchoring vocabulary through Movement.' In March we have a temporary foreign worker coming to share her experience, with April being devoted to a local author Susan Glasier who penned 'Bend like the Willow.' The program for our last meeting in May has not been finalized at this point.

Lois Prostebby and Sharon Duplessis , Central Alberta Co-chairs

Calgary Local Report

Calgary ATESL wants to extend a huge thank you to everyone who came out for Matt Adolphe's presentation on Canadian workplace culture. We had a record turnout of 43 attendees for our first event of 2014! Let's keep that level of commitment and enthusiasm going all year!

We had another great presenter for February. Brock Wojtalewicz presented on "A Principled Approach to Vocabulary Assessment and Teaching". In this presentation, Brock demonstrated how lexical profiling software can provide ESL instructors with quantitative insights into their learners' present word knowledge, vocabulary development over time, and future learning needs. This corpus-based technology allows for enhanced language assessment, as well as for more strategic, targeted, and efficient vocabulary instruction. Originally from Wisconsin, Brock Wojtalewicz has taught ESL courses in China, Germany, France, the United States, and Canada. He is currently pursuing an MA in Education at the University of Calgary.

Finally, we want to remind our membership that at every local event you attend, you receive a Participation Certificate and a stamp on your Professional Development Participation Passport (PDPP). At the end of the year, every stamp counts for one entry in a draw for a free ATESL Conference registration! We want to say THANKS again to our treasurer, Kim MacDonald, for making these wonderful documents and coming up with the catchy acronym.

We're looking forward to seeing you all on March 19 for our next workshop ("Let's Benchmark Speaking!") with Daniel Love. Please RSVP to calgary@atesl.ca by March 12.

Chris Wharton and Glen Cochrane, Calgary Co-chairs



ATESL 2013 Conference Report

Peter Myhre & Eaman Mah
Conference Co-chairs

Hello All,

Once again it is time to mark your calendars and start thinking about ATESL's 2014 Provincial Conference in Edmonton, Alberta.

This year's conference will be held on October 24 and 25 (Friday and Saturday) at *The Fantasyland Hotel in West Edmonton Mall*.

Our organization turns 35 this year. To mark this significant milestone, we have chosen *Reflecting and Revitalizing* as the theme of the 2014 Provincial Conference. We hope that this year's conference will remind us of past achievements and energize us for future endeavours.

It is you, the members, that have made our organization great, and we need your help to make this conference a success. Towards the end of March or the beginning of April, we will be sending out our first call for presenters. If you have never presented before, and especially if you have, please consider sharing your wealth of knowledge with our membership at this year's provincial conference. You all have great ideas and we need to hear them.

We look forward to hearing from all of you.

ATESL Professional Development Bursaries

ATESL members are eligible for bursaries for conferences or courses of study (maximum \$500).

You are eligible if...

- you have been a member of ATESL for at least two years;
- you have not received a bursary from ATESL in the past two years;
- your membership fees are paid in full;
- you plan to return to Alberta after your conference or course of study, if it is outside the province.

Priority will be given to candidates who demonstrate need for financial support.

Successful candidates will agree to provide a written evaluation of the event or course, which may be published in the ATESL newsletter (see the following reports) or on the ATESL website.

Deadlines: **March 15** and **September 15**.

Application online at <http://www.atesl.ca/bursary>



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

ATESL Bursary Reports – 2013

LESLLA 2013 Conference: Expanding Emergent Literacy Practices August 7-9, 2013 San Francisco, CA

LESLLA for Adults is an international forum of researchers who share an interest in research on the development of second language skills by adult immigrants with little or no schooling prior to their arrival in the country of entry. The goal of the LESLLA is to share empirical research and information to help inform and guide further research on second language acquisition for the low-educated adult population. This research in turn will provide guidance to education policy development in all those countries in which immigrants settle and most need educational support.

This symposium is the leading forum for knowledge, practice, and issues related to the education needs of the immigrants with the lowest levels of language proficiency. The numbers of learners in this particular sector of our work is rapidly increasing and yet comparatively few ESL teachers and administrators are well equipped to respond to the unique needs of this learner group.

My presentation, entitled *Learning the Language; Learning the Land - Literacies in a camping context*, shared information about a literacy program that offers a unique blend of classroom instruction and outdoor camping experience to newcomers to Canada. The research study and full-length documentary that emerged from the project both attest to the significant gains made by newcomers with the lowest literacy skills in terms of their language improvement and positive integration experience.

The conference featured four excellent keynote speakers who shared literacy education experiences in diverse contexts: a women's group in El Salvador; volunteer 'brigidasts' in rural Cuba; case studies from Portland, Oregon; and most impressive was Nigerian-born visual artist, Victor Ekpuk. He uses an ancient 'pseudo-writing' technique to explore the interplay between art and literacy. In addition, there were several excellent sessions that affirmed some of our own local best practices in literacy, and that highlighted for me the urgency of responding to this area of growing need in our global communities.

Thank you for this valuable support to professional development.

Sincerely,
Judy Sillito

Task-Based Learning and Teaching Conference October 3-5, 2013 Banff, AB

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for an ATESL bursary to attend the Task-Based Learning and Teaching (TBLT) Conference in October 2013. Without this financial assistance, I would not have been able to participate in this learning opportunity. Additionally, I am including a few brief highlights of my participation at the conference.

The TBLT plenary sessions as well as the individual presentations provided excellent opportunities to connect research to classroom practice and were of great benefit to me both as a TESL graduate student and an ESL instructor. Furthermore, I found the conference to be a wonderful opportunity to network with other ESL instructors and exchange ideas for both teaching and learning.

I would like to highlight two sessions that I found particularly helpful in my experience at TBLT. The first is "Using collaborative prewriting tasks to promote discussion and organization", presented by Kim McDonough, Hieke Neumann, and Paula Kielstra. Their research suggest that students who participated in prewriting tasks produced much richer language and engaged in more thoughtful discussion than those who did not. A challenge was to direct the prewriting tasks toward either organization or ideas for discussion, as students were unable to successfully focus on both aspects. I anticipate this strategy providing a useful prompt for more lively discussion in the classroom.

As I currently work with higher-level intermediate learners, Scott Roy Douglas and Marcia Kim's presentation on task-based language teaching and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) also provided some useful information about how to incorporate a more task-based approach into the EAP classroom.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to attend the TBLT conference.
Sincerely,
Stacy Norrbom

ATESL 2013 Conference: Expanding Emergent Literacy Practices November 1-2, 2013 Calgary, AB

I would like to express my gratitude to ATESL 2013 for offering me a wonderful professional development experience. My research interest is pragmatics, which is about language use in different social contexts. The conference I enjoyed the most, unsurprisingly, were the workshops concerning pragmatics. Erin Waugh and Yuji Abe demonstrated how to teach ESL students to apologize. They provided a sample teaching plan and generously shared their online teaching resources. Dr. Marian Rossiter introduced the concept of pragmatic competence and its importance in employment and social interactions. She also explained various linguistic devices to soften requests, discussed the limitations of current ESL textbooks, and provided suggestions for pragmatics instruction. Dr. Leila Ranta and I reported on the misuse of expressions by non-native English speakers when making a request. We explained how ESL/EFL teachers could help students to solve the problem by exploring cultural implications of the language people use. The resources, insights and positive feedback that I received there have inspired me to reflect and to improve my dissertation project.

Thanks to the conference, I have also acquired up-to-date knowledge and skills in ESL teaching from those enthusiastic presenters, who engaged the attendees in different teaching activities, and shared teaching ideas and online resources they have created and found useful.

Additionally, I would like to thank the conference for the opportunity it provided for me to network with colleagues and to make new acquaintances there.

My thanks to ATESL.
Jun Deng