



June 2011

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## President's Message by Diane Hardy

In the field of ESL we are familiar with the power of expressions, some of which are so overused they become predictable clichés. One example that jumps to mind is the saying, "if life gives you lemons, make lemonade." While predictable, and at times trite, it also strikes me that expressions like this have endured because, all too often, when we are reminded of the harshness of life, we are also inspired by the perseverance and ingenuity of the people who rise up to meet adversity. Recently, we witnessed this spirit during the devastating and destructive fires in Slave Lake. Those of us who followed this life-changing event saw the amazing way the Slave Lake community, their surrounding friends and neighbors, and strangers from across our country, showed up and supported those in unthinkable times of challenge. The Slave Lake tragedy reminds me that even in the face of the most sour circumstance, we have the sweet satisfaction of experiencing the power of the indelible human spirit. Our hearts go out to all who have been impacted by the fires.

Seeing people reach out and help others in times of adversity reminds me of the importance of acknowledging and offering gratitude for the ingenuity of our ESL colleagues. I can cite many examples of how individuals in our field are constantly coming up with creative and meaningful solutions to enhance our learners' educational experiences. We have much to acknowledge in the Alberta ESL community - the commitment of stakeholders to manage recent funding cuts in ways that minimize the impact on learners, the revision of Best Practices to foster excellence in ESL and the many collaborative efforts to share resources and improve the quality of learning in our province. On behalf of the ATESL Board, I would like to specifically acknowledge the dedicated work of the members of the ATESL Accreditation Committee. Over the past two years, they have shown incredible initiative. Beyond the rigorous task of assessing applications on a volunteer basis, they have reviewed TESL accreditation standards across Canada, surveyed membership asking for input on ATESL's accreditation policies and procedures and sent out a questionnaire to government and employers seeking their feedback. At the next AGM, during the ATESL Conference, membership will learn more about the committee's activities and the feedback they have received. The ATESL Board will present recommendations for the next steps and there will be an opportunity for membership to share ideas and perspectives. In advance, if you have comments regarding accreditation that you would like to communicate to the Board,

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# Oct. 21-22, Calgary

**ATESL Conference:**  
*Igniting Language,  
Learning and Leadership*  
October 21-22, 2011  
Marriott Hotel, Calgary

*Keynote Speakers:*

Stephen Lewis and Norbert Schmitt

*Details on page 9*

Register online for the conference at  
[www.atesl.ca](http://www.atesl.ca)

Early bird registration ends July 11, 2011

### **The ATESL Newsletter**

*is published quarterly.*

**Deadlines: Feb.15, May 15, Aug.15, Nov.15**  
*Announcements, workshop dates, book reviews, teaching ideas, and articles relevant to the field.*

Contact: Irene Wood at [atesl.admin@shaw.ca](mailto:atesl.admin@shaw.ca)

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The TESL Canada Conference in Halifax in April provided another opportunity to acknowledge the work being done in our ESL community. It was exhilarating to see the breadth and depth of talent shared from within Alberta, showcasing our strength in the field of ESL. Also, the conference allowed us to pause and give thanks to one of our own, Anna DeLuca, who was presented with the TESL Canada Honorary Lifetime Member Award for her contributions to the field. Congratulations, Anna!

We now have our own conference to look forward to. The ATESL 2011 Conference Committee is actively planning the upcoming event. The theme is Igniting Language, Learning and Leadership. Some highlights include the opening of the conference by Calgary's mayor, Naheed Nenshi, and keynote presentations by Stephen Lewis and Norbert Schmitt. Further, there is a great lineup of over seventy engaging presentations in the areas of ESL literacy, English for Academic Purposes, international education, Canadian Language Benchmarks, assessment, programming for Internationally Educated Professionals and e-learning.

Early bird registration ends July 11. Visit [www.atesl.ca](http://www.atesl.ca) for more information and to register for the conference. The conference is an excellent opportunity to connect with your peers and acknowledge the exceptional work being done in the field of ESL in Alberta. I hope to see you there.

As we move into July and August, I wish you all a great summer and a tall glass of lemonade to celebrate the work you do.

## Professional Development Bursaries

Apply for an ATESL professional development bursary. Deadline

Sept 15

<http://www.atesl.ca/cms/membership/bursaries/>





## ***The English as a Second Language Needs of Temporary Foreign Workers in Alberta***

*by Janice Lokhorst*

*Janice Lokhorst conducted research on the ESL needs of temporary foreign workers in Alberta as a graduate student in the Masters of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language program at the University of Alberta. She currently teaches LINC at NorQuest College in Edmonton.*

In recent years the province of Alberta has experienced exponential growth in the number of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). In 2002, the federal government introduced the temporary foreign worker program (TFWP) low-skilled pilot project to address the need for unskilled labour, where workers with lower levels of training who might not meet the economic immigrant selection criteria of official language proficiency, level of education, or occupation classification were readily admitted into Canada on temporary work permits (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2009). Since that time the number of TFWs entering Canada has increased exponentially, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) (2010) reported that 65,748 TFWs resided in Alberta in 2009. This is a significant increase compared with the 15,733 TFWs reported to be residing in Alberta in 2005 (CIC, 2010).

While TFWs technically have the same rights as Canadian workers, due to the complex administration of the TFWP, they can experience a lack of accessibility to protection of rights offered by the provincial and federal governments (Byl, 2009; Nakache & Kinoshita, 2010). TFWs are subject to exploitation by recruiters and employers, such as the refusal of employers to pay overtime, withholding of rights information from employees, and refusal to pay transportation costs (Byl, 2009). TFWs with low English language skills can have limited access to information about their new communities, their rights as workers, and occupational health and safety (Rastin, Derwing, & Ogilvie, 2007).

Since the permanency of temporary foreign work-

ers in Canada appears to be inevitable at this time, it seemed timely to undertake research that explores the ESL needs of TFWs. The study explored the regulation of English language skills, the English language proficiency levels of TFWs and reasons for acquiring English language training (ELT), the accessibility of ELT in terms of options and barriers, and the role of the employer in facilitating or encouraging access to ELT. The study also addressed the extent to which the ESL needs of TFWs are currently being met. Ten employees of immigrant-serving agencies and Community Adult Learning Councils (CALCs) completed questionnaires and/or participated in interviews and one provincial government representative was interviewed. Participants worked directly with TFWs or the TFWP and were chosen to represent rural areas, small and large cities in Alberta.

### **Results**

#### **Research Question 1: Are English as a Second Language Needs Being Met?**

The ESL needs of TFWs are varied, and each individual's access to ELT is affected by his/her unique situation, based on available ELT services in the area, transportation, work schedule conflicts, and employers' willingness to make concessions for ELT training. Efforts being made by agencies across the province are an attempt to meet these needs, and where classes are offered, they are said to help TFWs to improve their proficiency at basic and intermediate levels and increase confidence to integrate in the community. It was mentioned by participants in small and large cities that TFWs would like to attend more advanced college level classes to better their English language skills beyond basic and intermediate levels, but the expense of international student fees is a significant barrier. Some TFWs planning to apply for permanent residency through the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (AINP) desired to improve their English language skills in preparation for the TOEFL and IELTS exams, a score of which is a required component of the application. A specific need for ELT revealed dur-

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ing interviews was of skilled workers in trades who are required to pass a Red Seal exam in English to become ticketed journeymen. One participant explained that upon arrival to Canada, TFWs in most trades have six months to adjust to their new work environment until they take a Red Seal exam. Many TFWs do not have adequate English language proficiency to successfully challenge this multiple-choice exam, which is necessary for continuing to work in Canada and to earn a salary comparable to a journeyman. At this time, it appears that no official supportive training or language coaching is in place to assist these workers to improve their English language skills in preparation for the exam.

The data also highlights specific linguistic and language needs of TFWs; these include specific foci to assist TFWs with better comprehension on the job and improved interactions in public.

Sometimes TFWs do not recognize that they have a need for ESL training, or they do not make inquiries into ELT at settlement agencies. There are many reasons why TFWs do not inquire into further ESL training; it is important to acknowledge that a low number of inquiries is not necessarily representative of ESL needs. It is very difficult to draw conclusions about the ESL needs of TFWs.

### **Research Question 2: Opportunities for English Language Training**

Although certain settlement agencies in the province have funding to provide services to TFWs, ESL training is not included in the package. One participant explained that this is the ultimate barrier to ELT access: while settlement agencies and ESL providers may utilize federal or provincial funding to offer ESL classes to permanent residents or Canadian citizens, funding is not available for TFWs.

Despite this, organizations have been creative in developing ELT opportunities for TFWs. Research findings showed that in one small town, the Community Adult Learning Council (CALC) makes ELT opportunities accessible to TFWs by offering an evening course for a fee. In one small city and one large city, ESL classes are accessible through evening courses offered by the settlement agency. In another large city, a settlement agency refers TFWs to public libraries

and local churches for ELT. In two small cities represented in the study the only opportunity for ELT is at the local college where international fees are charged. In another small city represented, the local CALC and an employer of a significant number of TFWs provided ELT opportunities. A few settlement agencies in the province have also instigated weekly or monthly conversation cafés specifically for TFWs to practice. In sum, the ELT opportunities for TFWs appear incredibly varied and inconsistent across the province.

Other barriers for access to ELT include irregular work schedules and overtime shifts that conflict with the hours that ELT is offered, a lack of awareness of ELT opportunities available, and access to transportation required for getting to and from ESL classes.

### **Research Question 3: Regulation and Employers**

Although employers are not mandated to provide ESL training to TFWs, some employers recognize that needs for ELT exist, and provide transportation to ESL classes, accommodate work schedules, and even grant funding for TFWs to take classes. Participants who worked directly with TFWs in these classes explained that the students benefited by increasing their confidence and language for integrating into the community, increasing fluency, and increasing ability to communicate in the workplace. However, employers who provide these opportunities appear to be few, and there are many other TFWs who could benefit from additional ELT for integration and work-related purposes.

While participants unanimously agreed that ELT was necessary for TFW work needs, little elaboration was offered. One participant suggested that occupational health and safety is at risk if TFWs do not have sufficient English language proficiency. Although she acknowledged that the expectation exists that TFWs arrive in Canada with sufficient English skills, other participants revealed that some TFWs were entering ELT courses at CLB 1 – 4, which implies that their English language proficiency is relatively low. That individuals are on the job with very limited English skills and thus hazardous to themselves and their co-workers is cause for serious concern. The data indicated that often TFWs are unaware that they are allowed to take ESL training, or are unaware of the opportunities available in the community.





## ***A Snapshot of Grammar Teaching Practices in Alberta***

*by Leila Ranta and Erin Waugh*

Many ATESL members may remember having received an invitation in March of this year to complete a survey about their grammar teaching practices. In this article, we present a brief report of our preliminary results from our online questionnaire. We were interested in looking at the teaching of grammar for a number of reasons. A wide body of research has demonstrated that second language learners may not acquire advanced proficiency without some kind of grammar instruction referred to as focus on form or form-focussed instruction (see review articles by Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997). In addition, surveys carried out in different parts of the world have shown that adult learners may be dissatisfied if explicit grammar instruction is not provided since this is the kind of instruction they are most familiar with and believe in (Schulz, 2001; Burgess & Etherington, 2002). In the Canadian context, Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) support documents explicitly state that grammar needs to be taught but leaves it up to the ESL instructor to decide how, when and where to teach it. We wondered how teachers are teaching grammar and to what degree innovative practices that have been documented in the research literature are making their way into teachers' actual practices.

### **Method**

According to an international survey by Borg and Burns (2008), teachers of adult ESL/EFL integrate grammar with skills work by presenting grammar in context, deriving grammar from texts, and presenting grammar through texts. The teachers surveyed reported that they taught grammar in preparation for skills work as well as after skills work and through feedback on errors. To add to this picture, we wanted to get a more detailed view from as large a number of teachers as possible in Alberta. That's why we decided to use an online questionnaire that asked teachers about lesson planning in general, materials and specific grammar teaching techniques.

A total of 60 teachers who were teaching an adult ESL class at the time of the survey responded to the invitation to complete our SurveyMonkey questionnaire. Of those, 29% had taught for five or fewer years, 22% for five-ten years, and 49% had ten or more years. Most teachers (41%) taught CLB 5-8 or intermediate level classes; 31% taught CLB 1-4 or beginner level classes, and 15% taught CLB 9-12 or advanced level classes. The remaining 13% were teach-

ing either literacy/pre-CLB or had more than one level in their class. The most common type of program represented by this sample was LINC (41%), General ESL (34%), and English for academic purposes (24%). Almost two-thirds of the teachers reported that they used the CLB. Just over a third taught in programs with a prescribed grammar syllabus.

### **Results**

Although we asked a wide range of question, we will present in this brief report only the responses to questions about grammar materials and teaching techniques. We were very curious about what grammar textbooks adult ESL teachers are using. The big winners were the Focus on Grammar (61%) and the Azar series (60%) of grammar textbooks. Other textbooks were used by a much smaller number of respondents. We also asked about teachers' opinions of the textbooks they used: 41% agreed that they were useful whereas 32% reported that they were not. Teachers agreed that commercial grammar textbooks lack Canadian content, are difficult to connect to the CLBs, are irrelevant to students' needs, and are too decontextualized. Perhaps not surprisingly, 61% reported that they always or often created their own grammar teaching materials. A large majority of teachers (85%) use the Internet as a source of material for teaching materials or as a source of answers to grammar questions (73%).

In the section on grammar explanations, teachers were presented with a list of grammar teaching techniques and were asked to choose one of the following responses: "I did this last week", "I didn't do this last week", or "I didn't do this last week but it is something that I do". To interpret responses to these items, we assumed that all responses to the first and the last of these options reflect a teachers' repertoire of grammar teaching techniques. The lists of techniques can be grouped as being traditional or innovative. Traditional techniques are those that have been around since before the advent of communicative language teaching in the late 1970's such as using grammar charts and fill-in-the-blank exercises. Innovative techniques are those that have emerged from the second language teaching and research literature. Techniques in this category are noticing activities, consciousness-raising tasks, concordancing and corpus analysis, structured input, and structured production activities (see Table 1 for descriptions of these terms as used on the questionnaire). We

niques in this category are noticing activities, consciousness-raising tasks, concordancing and corpus analysis, structured input, and structured production activities (see Table 1 for descriptions of these terms as used on the questionnaire). We wondered whether teachers in our survey used predominantly traditional techniques or whether they also used innovative ones.

The results for giving grammar explanations are presented in the first seven rows of Table 1. We see that overall there is a high percentage of teachers using traditional techniques. Interestingly, the teachers' reported use of consciousness-raising tasks, an innovative technique, is as high as the rate of use of traditional ones but much lower for concordancing or corpus analysis (33%). However, since this is a new addition to the grammar teaching toolbox, the very fact that teachers are using concordancing is very encouraging. The last four rows of Table 1 display the results for the use of traditional and innovative techniques for practicing grammar. Only about half reported using fill-in-the-blank exercises and dialogue memorization whereas 60% used form-focused listening, and 90% structured production tasks, what we consider innovative.

To complement the picture provided by these responses, comments from open-ended items provide further insight into teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward teaching grammar. Many comments reveal the affective dimension of grammar instruction: "Grammar should be made as interesting as possible for learners" and "I enjoy teaching grammar

and find that many students enjoy learning it". Others complained about the poor quality of the textbooks, and the lack of preparation that they had had. Finally, one teacher's reflection identifies what is surely the essential role of the teacher:

"I don't know if there is a cure for these ills [i.e., poor textbooks]. I find that it is my job to mediate between these imperfect resources and my students by making them relevant"

From previous studies carried out in different countries (e.g., Burgess & Etherington, 2002), we have seen that ESL and EFL teachers believe in the importance of teaching grammar and that they connect grammar to communicative activities in different ways. This study from Alberta provides more precision about the ways that teachers address grammar issues; they are continuing to use traditional techniques like grammar charts and fill-in-the-blank exercises but have added techniques that have support in the research literature. Given the fact that none of these newer ideas are illustrated in CLB documents, we think this as a sign that at least those teachers who chose to participate in our survey have expanded their teaching repertoire in order to provide the best possible instruction to their students. Although further exploration of these issues needs to be done in a more contextualized way, these results provide useful input for pre-service teacher education, in-service professional development, and teaching materials development.

*Please see page 8 for References*

**Table 1. Teachers' Reported Use of Specific Grammar Teaching Techniques**

Technique	Type	% of teachers using this technique
presented grammar chart or textbook explanation	traditional explanation	78
presented a grammar point using a visual aid	traditional explanation	85
guided class to discover rule in examples	traditional explanation	81
communicative task where students discuss a grammar rule	innovative explanation	71
draw learners' attention to grammar in a listening text	innovative explanation	76
draw learners' attention to grammar in a written text	innovative explanation	93
used a concordance or corpus analysis activity	innovative explanation	33
assigned fill-in-the-blank exercise	traditional practice	66
students memorize/practice a dialogue	traditional practice	45
practice grammar through listening	innovative practice	67
speaking activity with opportunities to use a specific structure	innovative practice	93



### **ATESL Mission Statement**

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization that promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English. We do this by:

- encouraging and providing professional development opportunities that are consistent with generally accepted principles of adult learning and with currently understood principles of second language learning and teaching;
- liaising with other organizations, local, provincial, national, and international, engaged in education;
- creating awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants, and English language learning by communicating with government, business, and the general public;
- encouraging awareness of issues of accountability and program standards by communicating with English language program providers and learners;
- encouraging the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance by administering an ESL teacher accreditation process;
- working collaboratively with government to develop policies and procedures which govern the provision of English language programs and related services for immigrants to Canada;
- encouraging and supporting the participation of learners in the decision-making processes that determine their educational choices.

### **Conclusion**

Canada's answer to an employment shortage in skilled and semi-skilled labour areas is the temporary foreign worker program. As Canada continues to recruit individuals who are denied the rights available to citizens and permanent residents, including access to federal English language training, or put individuals with low English skills in vulnerable situations with employers, we are fostering the development of an underclass. This scenario can be avoided by providing TFWs with similar rights to ESL access realized by permanent residents. If more opportunities for formal ELT were available to TFWs, they could improve their skills, work more safely, improve their opportunities for integration in the community, and possibly overcome exploitative situations. Regulation and monitoring of English language proficiency levels of TFWs and the mandate of employers to provide ELT is also necessary to help circumvent exploitation. The TFWP may be permanent, but the perpetuation of an underclass does not need to be; if funding is provided for ELT opportunities for TFWs, the distance of marginalization will become smaller as TFWs begin to enjoy the same access to language classes as their permanent resident neighbours.

*A complete report is accessible online at the Prairie Metropolis Centre website, as part of the Working Paper Series (2011), <<http://pcerii.metropolis.net>>.*

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# Student Writing Contest

In the spring of 2011, the ATESL Board sponsored a student writing contest in order to support adult English language learners in the sharing of their ideas and creativity in the written form. We were very pleased to receive a total of 23 submissions and the following were awarded cash prizes. In this issue, we share our first prize winner's work and others will be published in forthcoming issues.

First prize (\$200) Yemen (Maggie) Xu

Second prize (\$100 each):

Marianna Hudak, Irene Jung (tie)

Honourable mention (\$50 each):

Seunga (Jasmine) Han, Gelareh Hasani,

Birenda Prasad Kayasth, Hanae Otagaki

## The Adventure at the Airport by Yemen (Maggie) Xu

It was a hot summer in Shanghai. My friend Lily was going to the US, so I went to the airport to see her off. I arrived at our pre-planned meeting spot, and there she was squatting beside her backpack, digging and searching in it for something. She was sweating profusely.

"Hey, what are you doing?" I greeted her with a smile.

She turned to me frantically, "I can't find my passport! I know I brought it with me when I left home. I put it in my backpack, but it is not there now!"

"How many minutes left before you check in?"

"Half an hour," she replied anxiously.

"Don't worry, settle down. Let's just think about it." Even though my fears were growing, I calmly said, "Let's do this step by step. First, are you sure that you have put your passport in your backpack?" I know Lily well; she is the kind of person who cannot organize herself, especially in critical situations.

Lily resigned herself to my interrogation. "Yes, I'm sure. I was in a hurry this morning, but I'm sure that I put my passport into my backpack."

"Which pocket of the backpack you put it in," I queried.

"The very front one."

"What else did you put in the pocket?" I continued questions. Her eyes were fired on nothing. "You still have time, don't worry," I stated matter-of-factly.

She took a breath and sighed, "The last thing I did was put my passport, my wallet and my cell phone into my backpack. Then I left home."

"Where are your wallet and cell phone now?"

"My wallet and my cell phone are here." Her shaking finger pointed to the items tucked neatly in the adjoining pocket. I realized that she must have taken her things out of the front pocket. My detective instincts were suddenly kicking into high gear.

"What did you do when you arrived at the airport?" I hurriedly asked. "Did you go to the food corner or the washroom?"

"Oh yes, I went to the washroom just a few minutes ago!"

"Let's go see." We rushed to the washroom and saw the passport lying beside the toilet. She quickly picked it up, turned to me and gave me a big hug, "Thank you, thank you!"

"Time to check in, my dear," I laughed.

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*continued from Ranta & Waugh, page 6*

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# Igniting language learning leadership

ATESL 2011

## ATESL Conference

October 21 - 22, 2011  
Calgary, Alberta

### Marriott Hotel

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*Early bird registration  
ends July 11, 2011.*

ATESL is committed to the highest standards of English language teaching and program provisions. This year's conference theme is **Igniting Language, Learning and Leadership**.

With over seventy presentations, this event promises to provide opportunities for:

- ▶ connecting with your colleagues
- ▶ perusing new resources
- ▶ learning from leaders in the field
- ▶ exploring innovations in Alberta
- ▶ being inspired by dynamic keynote speakers

Join us and ignite your interest in language, learning and leadership.

## Keynote Speakers



### Stephen Lewis

Stephen Lewis is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto. He is the board chair of the Stephen Lewis Foundation ([stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://stephenlewisfoundation.org)), which is dedicated to turning the tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and he is co-founder and co-director of AIDS-Free World in the United States. Stephen Lewis' work with the United Nations spanned more than two decades. He was awarded the Pearson Peace Medal in 2004 by the United Nations Association in Canada; the award celebrates outstanding achievement in the field of international service and understanding.

### Norbert Schmitt

Norbert Schmitt is a Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Nottingham. He is interested in all aspects of second language vocabulary, written eight books and textbooks on the subject, as well as over seventy journal articles and book chapters. He is currently focusing his research on the distinction between implicit and explicit vocabulary knowledge, the relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, and formulaic language.

