

ATESL

Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language

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TESL Canada 2009 Conference

Join us in Banff, October 1-3
Submit a conference proposal

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March 2009

President's Message

by Judy Sillito

The year 2009 is bound to be an exciting year for ATESL with a growing membership, innovative projects to enhance the field of ESL, and the hosting of the TESL Canada conference in Banff later this year. It is my pleasure to be working with this group of dedicated and gifted professionals and I hope to continue the vision of ATESL on your behalf.

We are very pleased with the great success of the ATESL Conference held in Edmonton last October. The conference saw record attendance (501 registrations) and a host of stimulating presentations and activities. Such a conference could never happen without the many volunteer hours donated by our membership. Thank you to all the volunteers who steered their various committees to success. I would also like to acknowledge and deeply thank the Conference Co-chairs, Liz Karra, and Jacqueline Dumas for their dedication, hard work, and excellence.

The Board recently held its annual planning retreat and I would like to thank the board members who gave their time and thoughtful guidance to this organization. One area of discussion centred around how ATESL can continue to collaborate with government in enhancing service provision to ESL learners and professional support to teachers. Some of the projects already on the table for this year include a review and revision of the Best Practices Guidelines, and an examination of ATESL's accreditation process. More ideas about ways to provide better support province wide are percolating, so keep watching for developments. Both levels of government are also involved in supporting professional development for our membership through their generous contributions to our conferences. We sincerely appreciate this enthusiastic support and collaborative relationship.

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Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language

President's Message continued

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2008 - 2009

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We would like to welcome a new webmaster consultant, Doug Elves, who will support Irene Wood, administrative assistant, in the maintenance and development of the ATESL website. This partnership will also assume the responsibility of distributing the ATESL newsletter. Therefore, the board has taken the decision to discontinue the position of newsletter editor, which has been in the capable hands of Tom Jiry for the many years. On behalf of all the membership I would like to thank Tom for his hard work and dedicated stewardship of this important facet of ATESL. The Board will continue to keep alert to articles of interest and we welcome submission suggestions from our membership.

Plans are now well underway for the TESL Canada 2009 Conference, October 1-3 in Banff. Alberta is co-hosting the event under the competent leadership of the conference co-chairs, Cari- Ann Roberts and Sue Taylor. I encourage you to see the website for the Call for Papers and to consider volunteering to help make this national conference a success.

ATESL steadily continues its advocacy work around issues that affect immigrants and refugees. The Board is currently taking a stand against refugee transportation loans and is committed to finding ways to alleviate the difficulties faced by temporary foreign workers. If you are interested in lending your support to these important issues or would like more information, please contact me by email at 'atesl AT shaw.ca'.

Go out and continue the fine work you are each doing to help newcomers live full and productive lives in Alberta, and as you do, remember this wise and anonymous advice: *'Be realistic; expect miracles'*.

Sincerely,

Judy Sillito, ATESL President

Bursary notification

Apply for an ATESL professional development bursary

Deadline: March 15

See:

<http://www.atesl.ca/cmsms/membership/busaries/>



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Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language

Feature Article

Review of Auralog (www.auralog.com)

by Lori Diepenbroek and Tracey Derwing, University of Alberta

Recently there has been interest in the online language learning resource called Auralog (available in Alberta libraries). As with many commercial computer materials, attention has gone into the appearance of the software, rather than the content. We cannot recommend this software for independent use. There is little explicit instruction, and the instruction that exists is often unclear, or inadequate. There is little feedback, and what does exist is often misleading or inaccurate. Most of the activities are decontextualized, which seriously limits their usefulness. Even dialogues intended to provide context-specific language, e.g., business dialogues, are unhelpful. Students listen to an utterance and choose from three responses that vary in politeness. No feedback is provided regarding the chosen response; the implication is that the sentences are equivalent. There is little cultural content, but what exists is American. The system is relatively easy to navigate for experienced computer users, but would pose problems for ESL students who have limited education and/or limited experience with computers.

We examined lessons at the beginner and intermediate levels from the standpoint of a language learner, using Dutch and French. The first author is a beginner in Dutch and an intermediate speaker of French. (According to a review in a scholarly journal, the versions in different languages are straight translations – there are no cultural adjustments, so her experience would parallel those of beginner and intermediate learners of English.) Finally, we conducted a comprehensive examination of the English version of Auralog, at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels, as experienced ESL instructors who are cognizant of the second language acquisition and teaching literature.

The Dutch program offers students a choice of selecting a proficiency level or completing a lengthy test, which will then assign a level. Lori took the test and was designated a beginner. There is nothing for pre-beginners or literacy students. The first unit was about family, but it also covered introductions, greetings, and small talk. It was very content-heavy for a single unit. All units begin with a dialogue and an accompanying picture. There are then questions to which students respond. In this case, the narrator/voice asks the woman pictured ‘Are you a beautiful woman?’ and one of her responses was “I think so.” There was also a question “Are you a man?” These are obviously pragmatically inappropriate questions. Following the dialogue, there was a vocabulary list. The Dutch version allows for translation into English, but the English version has no translation option; however, there is a sample sentence in which the word is used. A student would have to look up unknown words in a dictionary. A major limitation is the lack of explanations prior to the language points introduced. Students often need explicit instruction; not only are some language learners reliant on a teacher because of learning styles, but research has shown that some aspects of language will never be ‘picked up’ without direct teaching because students fail to notice these features. Another issue with the beginner level, both in Dutch and in English, was the use of extremely difficult language in the directions. Consider the following excerpts from the earliest part of the beginner English as a second language program: “The exercises will enable you to understand and assimilate concepts that will enable you to communicate appropriately.” “Consult and assimilate the key terms for the topics addressed in the study session.” This level of language is beyond the capabilities of a beginner and would pose problems for intermediate students. On the other hand, some activities have no instructions at all.

At the intermediate level, Lori started with the French dialogue - she was required to respond verbally by reading one of three possible answers on the screen. If a student’s pronunciation is not what the program expects, it will respond, “I don’t understand you.” If the student hesitates, the program will say, “speak faster.”

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Review of Auralog continued

The Most Stressful Thing for Me in Canada

by Johanna Wild

The most stressful thing for me since I came to Canada has been thinking about the future.

Not knowing exactly how much time I have to spend to learn English, and apply for a job related to my career, make me feel anxious.

I've met people with a University degree who came to Canada and haven't been able to work as lawyers, dentists, doctors and teachers, among others. In most cases, they've not only invested a lot of time to learn the language, but they've returned to study at the University; that's really disappointing.

There are many obstacles to be overcome in order to achieve the necessary economic stability and, thus, the emotional stability. Most immigrants who have come to Canada want to get something better than what they had in their home countries, but they face the sad reality that they must start from scratch as if they'd never made any effort before.

The mere thought that years of effort and study will be useless in this country, is really stressful; but we need to keep trying because our security and peaceful life are here without war or evil problems. As immigrants, we are between a rock and a hard place, wanting to be in our homeland with our family and needing to be safe.

However, there is no indication of the source of the problem in the first case, and in the second, some learners are simply not fluent -- this response will discourage them from continuing. The next step involved a waveform display accompanying words to be imitated, but it was difficult to distinguish differences in pitch at the word level – sentences or phrases would have been better. Lori could not distinguish some sounds and neither could she determine what her problems were. Again, there was no useful feedback. She was told she was wrong, but she was not told what she needed to do differently.

The problems we have outlined for Dutch and French are also problems with the English version. There is too much information in every unit. In the third beginner session, for instance, there were 5 language functions, 6 lexical groups, and 8 grammar functions. Feedback was either missing or unhelpful. In the pronunciation section Lori deliberately mis-assigned stress to words and yet achieved a perfect score. She also read some sentences in monotone and again received a perfect score, yet L2 research has shown that stress (or lack of it) is an important determinant of intelligibility, in many instances more important than the production of individual sounds.

The grammar exercises are decontextualized – conjugating verbs, filling in blanks, and so on. If one makes a mistake unrelated to the grammatical function, the sentence will still be marked wrong, but it is unclear what the problem is. For example, students are told to rewrite an original sentence such as “Jeff asked for Mary’s opinion” as shown in an example (but no explanation for why). Instead of writing the expected response “Jeff asked for her opinion.” Lori wrote “Jeff asked her opinion” which is also correct in English. When she asked for a correction she received the following: “Jeff asked her opinion” – a response which didn’t explain why the program would not accept her answer.

We could give many more examples of problems with Auralog, but suffice it to say that unless there is a teacher who can provide both pre-instruction and selection of activities, many students will be frustrated. Even if students were able to navigate all the modules, they would not be exposed to meaningful interaction, thus they may develop declarative but not procedural knowledge. In other words, they will not improve in the very areas that they need the most: fluency, pragmatics and pronunciation.



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In Conversation With Mary Gaia-Maretta

by Emily Albertsen

Mary Gaia-Maretta retired in the fall of 2008, after a long and dedicated career in ESL. Mary worked for many years at Bow Valley College, Calgary, where she focused on ESL literacy. She is a brilliant teacher, always striving to better meet the needs of and to advocate for our learners; she was also always willing to share with other instructors her ideas, her rich understanding of the field, and her experience. I was lucky to be able to work with Mary for two years, most recently on the development of a comprehensive introduction to ESL literacy: *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook*.

Before leaving Calgary for further adventure afield, Mary gave one last presentation on ESL literacy, organized by ATESL. Instructors from across the city came out to hear her views on “Literacy – Beyond ‘Foundations.’” She spoke warmly, with humour and experience, on the differences between high-literacy cultures, such as Canada, and high-oracy cultures, such as the cultures of many ESL literacy learners. Mary summed up the challenge of these learners as they adapt to Canadian culture and shape their lives here: they struggle to develop strategies to deal with a high-literacy, analytical, and bureaucratic society.

Mary began the presentation by discussing traditional, high-oracy societies and technological, high-literacy societies. She highlighted the features of both: in a high-oracy society, there is a focus on oral communication, highly personal interactions, and collaborative work, as opposed to a high-literacy society, which focuses on written communication, impersonal or bureaucratic interactions, and individualized work. Oral cultures tend to be figurative and allegorical, self-referenced and intuitive, and fatalistic, while more literate cultures are abstract and theoretical, factual and logical, and with a focus on causality. It is clear that learners, moving from one culture to the other, face a tremendous challenge, for the expectations of Canadian society are different, and the skills and strategies they developed in their home countries will not serve them as well here.

Mary stressed that ESL literacy learners are not without skills and are not without strategies for learning; however, these strategies are very different. It is the task of the teacher to help these learners become aware of the expectations of the Canadian education system, Canadian culture, and the workplace, by meeting them where they are and building from their strengths. She suggests teaching through oral, collaborative activities; field trips; chants, singing, and clapping games; hands-on activities; and manipulatives. These activities can provide a bridge to developing reading and writing.

She also discussed the impact of moving from a high-oracy society to a high-literacy society, outlining the cause of culture shock and how this might affect learners in the classroom. She pointed out that when learners are in Canada, they are cut off from familiar cultural patterns, operate in ambiguous situations for long periods of time, and have their values questioned – in other words, they have very different cultural expectations which are frequently challenged or undermined. These expectations can cause behaviour that can be misinterpreted in the classroom; for example, learners from a highly collaborative society, where group work is valued far beyond the work of the individual, cannot be expected to know when it is acceptable to work together in a classroom, and when the teacher will call this “cheating.”

Mary completed her presentation by highlighting the importance of teaching specific strategies for learning,



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Mary Gaia-Maretta continued

reading, and writing. She focused on how to develop organized learners, independent learners, learners with strategies, and learners who set goals. Mary is a dynamic and inspiring speaker; she made us laugh and she shared some of the great experience and knowledge she has. We wish her the best of luck in her next adventure, as she moves from Canada to China.

**TESL
CANADA**
CONFERENCE
2009

The Banff Centre
Banff, Alberta
October 1-3, 2009

keynote speaker
Lionel Laroche
Bonny Norton

Weaving pathways: Interculturalism and Language

Hope to see you there!
- the ATESL executive

Presented by ATESL. For more information log on to: www.teslcanada.ca.
Interested in presenting? Fill out the form on the next pages and send in!



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.

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

More information and archives at atesl.ca

TESL Canada & ATESL present the TESL Canada 2009 Conference
Weaving Pathways: Interculturalism & Language

The Banff Centre, Banff, AB

October 1 – 3, 2009

Call for Presentations & Symposia Sessions

Presenter to whom correspondence will be sent:

(Ms / Mr / Dr) Surname _____ Given name _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____ <i>(please print clearly)</i>

Position / Title _____ Affiliation / Employer _____

Additional presenters, in the order to be listed in the program:

Surname	Given name	Title	Affiliation / Employer

Symposia Title: _____

Symposia Sessions are on **Thursday, October 1st, 2009**

Times you are available: 9:00 – 12:00 1:00 – 4:00

Presentation Title: _____

Presentations are on **Friday, October 2nd & Saturday, October 3rd, 2009**

Please choose the appropriate session length: 60 minutes 75 minutes

Times you are available to present: Fri. a.m. p.m. Sat. a.m. p.m.

Target Audience: (Circle ONE)

Adult ESL	EAP / ESP	Curriculum	Methodology
ESL for Children & Youth	ESL Literacy	Research	Technology
Multiculturalism	English in the Workplace	Administration	Assessment/Evaluation

Other:	Settlement
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Type of Presentation: (CHECK ONE)

- Paper:** discusses current research and its application in language teaching
- Workshop:** features a leader or leaders working with a group to help them solve a problem or develop a specific teaching or research technique
- Panel:** allows several presenters to contribute to a variety of views on a topic
- Poster:** gives a presenter the opportunity to explain an exhibit representing a program, a teaching approach, an idea, an innovation, a trend, etc.
- Exhibitor:** demonstrates the use of products to enhance the teaching/learning process

Presenters are required to provide their own laptop computers

Other A/V requirements: (please circle 1 or 2 boxes)

Overhead Projector & Screen	TV/VCR	TV/DVD	Internet Access
Media/Digital Projector & Screen <input type="checkbox"/> with sound <input type="checkbox"/> without sound	CD/Cassette Player		Flipchart

Changes: requests for changes to your A/V requirements must be received **before July 31st, 2008**. No changes can be made after that date.

Room Set-up

Please choose which room set-up would be most appropriate for your presentation:

- Classroom style
- Theatre style
- Group seating with tables

Audience Limits

All sessions are open on a "first come, first serve" basis. The number of participants will be determined by room capacity. Is there a limit to the number of participants you can accommodate? Yes No If yes, how many? _____

PLEASE ATTACH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO THIS FORM AND
SEND BY EMAIL OR MAIL **BEFORE June 1st, 2009**

1. **Presentation Title** max. 7 content words
2. **Presentation Synopsis** as it will appear in the program booklet max.100 words
3. **Biographical Statement(s)** written in the 3rd person max. 30 words per presenter

Email this form and attachments to conference2009@atesl.ca or mail to:

TESL CANADA 2009 Conference
6-102 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
T6G 2G5

PDF and MS Word versions available at: <http://www.teslcanada.ca>

For more information, email conference2009@atesl.ca

Deadline for submissions: June 1st, 2009

Please note that full conference registration fees apply to all presenters. Presenters must register before September 1st, 2009 for the workshop to be included.