



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

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December 2016

www.atesl.ca

President's Report

by Lisa Rochman

Dear fellow ATESL members,

It was great to meet many of you at the conference and I look forward to getting to know more of you over the coming year. I am honored to be in this role and excited to be representing and serving ATESL this year. I have been in Edmonton since 2008 I have contributed to the ESL field in Alberta as an instructor, a curriculum developer, program Chair, and currently an Associate Dean. Over the years, I have significantly benefited from many professional development and networking opportunities provided by ATESL and view ATESL as an integral part of the profession here in Alberta. Over the next year, I am looking forward to moving forward with our strategic plan and building on ATESL's reputation for professionalism in pursuit of promoting high standards of teaching and learning for English language learners in Alberta.

A testament to the strong health of ATESL is its growing membership. Today, I am very pleased to announce that we have reached a record 749 members! On behalf of the ATESL Board, I would like to thank members who have renewed memberships year after year, and extend a very warm welcome to all our new members.

This past year, ATESL had its annual conference at the Fantasyland hotel in Edmonton. This conference had over 536 attendees and 80 sessions. The program had high interest keynotes and invited speakers as well as an array of exceptional presentations from the members and conference participants. Thank you to everyone who was able to attend the conference and a special thank you to those who also contributed a presentation. The success of the conference would also not have been possible without the tireless efforts, enthusiasm, and energy of our conference co-chairs, Jeff Hendrick and Phil Zirkwitz and conference planning committee members. Thank you so much for your exceptional work on this wonderful conference. The conference also greatly benefited significantly from the work and support of Irene Wood, ATESL Business Manager, Wendy Chambers, past president, and Maureen Stewart, past-past president. I would also like to thank the many volunteers, including ATESL Board members, who contributed significant hours of their time to ensure an excellent conference for the ATESL membership and the ESL community. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey. We will review that information for our 2017 conference.

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William Dunn

In 2017, our conference will be at the Westin Hotel in Calgary. We encourage everyone interested to join a conference committee and get involved. Please contact me at president@atesl.ca to get involved!

This year we look forward to moving forward with the first year of our strategic plan. The broad areas of our strategic direction include:

1. Broaden the variety and reach of professional development opportunities;
2. Support the professionalization of English language instructors in Alberta. Advocate for quality education and training opportunities in the field of English language learning and/or TESL;
3. Promote ATESL's presence across the province and nation as a vital professional association;
4. Expand relationships with provincial, national, and international organizations.

We are moving forward with a number of initiatives as we embark on year one of the strategic plan. Stay tuned for further updates! Recently I met with a number of my provincial board counterparts at the TESL Ontario conference. I look forward to working with them to establish great collaboration and sharing between organizations.

I am looking forward to another positive and productive year ahead for ATESL. If you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to get in touch with me.

Best wishes,
Lisa Rochman

Past President's Report

Over the past year as the ATESL president, I had the great fortune and opportunity to meet and work with a stellar group of professionals from across the province. It was a productive year for ATESL, and I am very proud of the work the board was able to accomplish. The highlights of the year include the completion of ATESL's 3-year strategic plan; participation in the IRCC Immigration Roundtable Consultations with Minister John McCallum; development of *Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Resource Based on the ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework*, a collaborative project with the professional teams at both Bow Valley College and NorQuest College and funded by the Government of Alberta's Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; reactivation of the Advocacy committee activities; development of a new ATESL website (to be released in early 2017); sponsorship of the Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching conference; and, of course, organization of the ATESL 2016 conference.

I am delighted to be continuing with the ATESL board this year in the role of past president. It is my great pleasure to provide support to the board under the leadership and direction of Lisa Rochman, the new ATESL president, and I look forward to also working with Chris Wharton in his role as President-elect. I welcome new members of the ATESL board, thank returning members for their commitment, and extend heartfelt appreciation to Irene Wood (ATESL Business Manager) for her exceptional work. We have a dedicated board and a thriving membership, so I have confidence that ATESL will continue forging new pathways and undertaking innovative opportunities.

Please feel free to connect with me at my new e-mail address: wchambers@atesl.ca.

Respectfully submitted by: Wendy Chambers



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

Provincial Executive

2016 – 2017

Lisa Rochman

President

Chris Wharton

President-Elect

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Jyoti Grewal, Nadia Khan

Calgary Local Co-Chairs

Janet Kwong, Elina Stop

Edmonton Local Co-Chairs

Elise Kruithof, Anna Robertson

Central Alberta Co-Chairs

Greg Ogilvie, Shawna Vervloet

Southern Alberta Co-Chairs

Martha Urquhart

Rural Routes Representative

Tracey Derwing, Theresa Wall

Members-at-large

Irene Wood

Business Manager

President-Elect's Report

Chris Wharton first started teaching English in Japan in 2003. He taught at kindergartens, high schools, colleges, and private English schools. While in Japan, he completed his MA TESOL from the University of Birmingham, where he is now a tutor/marker. He moved back to Calgary in 2011 and starting teaching English at SAIT. In addition to being a certified CLBA assessor, Chris has recently taken on a new role as Project Manager of the provincially-funded Language Training Program for Apprentices.

Chris first joined ATESL in 2011 as the Volunteer Committee Chair for the ATESL Conference in Calgary. He has since taken on roles at the local level (Co-chair 2012-2014 and Secretary 2014-2016), the provincial conference (Volunteer Committee Chair 2013), and the national conference (Conference Co-chair 2015). He is looking forward to serving the membership in 2016/2017 as President-elect.

His priority over the next three years will be to add value to the ATESL membership card that our hard-working members across the province carry in their wallets. Membership is at an all-time high, but he has no plans of taking his foot off the recruitment gas pedal. With the increase in members, he would also like to see an increase in turnout at local events. In close collaboration with the presidential chain, the board, and our members, he wants to strengthen the wonderful sense of community we all hold dear within ATESL.

Respectfully submitted by: Chris Wharton

Central Alberta Report

Attendees at the ATESL Conference in Edmonton shared what they learned in a "Conference in Review" session. This included information on: "Inspiring through Inclusion & Communication"; "12 Terrific Teaching Tips"; and, "Vocabulary Building". There was also a review of helpful websites to engage learners and make use of technology in the classroom. It was an excellent learning opportunity for all who attended.

The Central Alberta Local Executive will be hosting its first ever Holiday Social on December 9th. It is a great opportunity for members and other ESL Enthusiasts to get together, learn about ATESL and start celebrating the holiday season.

Respectfully submitted by: Elise Kruithof and Anna Robertson

ATESL Conference 2016

The ATESL 2016 Conference took place October 14th and 15th, 2016, at The Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton and was a resounding success! The 2016 conference had more attendees than any other previous conference, with over 530 people in attendance over the two days, with 78 available presentations and panels and 13 publishers on site. CBC Edmonton's Adrienne Lamb got the conference off to an enthusiastic start with a stellar welcome address, and the presentations by keynote speakers Dr. Jonathan Newton and Dr. Stuart Webb were engaging, informative, and inspiring. World-class presentations also given by invited speakers, Dr. Stuart Webb, Dr. Bill Dunn, Dr. Jérémie Séror, and Emily Albertsen, were extremely well received. Other conference highlights included the Ed Tech Jam, the Syrian Refugees in Alberta panel, and the ATESL Member Wine and Cheese featuring musical entertainment from ATESL 2016 Conference Co-Chair Jeff Hendrick and his band. Another welcome addition to the conference was the presence of over 15 student ambassadors from NorQuest College's LINC Volunteer Class. These students proudly represented English language learners in the province, coming from a wide variety of countries including Syria, China, Kosovo, and El Salvador. They greeted attendees and provided directions to conference rooms.

Feedback from the conference was overwhelmingly positive, and special thanks goes out to the conference planning committee for all their hard work and effort to make this year's conference such a success and positive experience.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jeff Hendrick and Phil Zirkwitz



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, 2017**

<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.

Edmonton Local Report

We would like you to meet this year's executive for the ATESL Edmonton Local Chapter and September presenter.



From left to right: Mariam Sakka (Secretary), Elina Stop (Co-Chair), Nick Williams (Treasurer), Janet Kwong (Co-Chair), Jennifer Foote (September presenter), Irene Wilson (Hospitality), and Sabine Ricioppo (Past Co-Chair)

Missing: Rosemary McMahon (Communications Officer)

New Co-Chair: Elina Stop

Elina Stop is currently teaching in the LINC program at NorQuest College. Elina completed the TESL Master's at the University of Alberta. She has been teaching English for seven years at different organizations, to students of different ages. Elina finds her teaching experience very rewarding and she is looking forward to many more years in this field.

Continuing Co-Chair: Janet Kwong

Janet Kwong is currently teaching at NorQuest College in the Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) Blended Program. She completed her TESL Master's at the University of Alberta. Janet has been teaching for approximately 13 years, mostly in an adult ESL context. She has a special interest in teaching pragmatics and incorporating technology into language learning. Janet recently presented at the 2016 ATESL Conference on tips and tricks for incorporating Moodle activities into the ESL classroom.

Secretary: Mariam Sakka

Mariam has a Master's Degree in Social Sciences from the Lebanese University of Beirut. She is also a TESL graduate from Algonquin College, Ottawa, ON. Mariam is a certified community interpreter (English /Arabic) and an associate member with ATIA. She is currently teaching literacy Learners at Changing Together, an organization for immigrant women.

Continuing Treasurer: Nick Williams

Nick has been working in adult education for almost thirty years, most of that time in Slave Lake, Alberta. He recently "retired" and enrolled in the TESL Diploma program at the U of A, which he completed in December 2015. He loves to travel and he has two children in their 20s. Nick has a lot of experience in distance learning and is looking forward to becoming more involved in the field of TESL.

Hospitality: Irene Wilson

Irene Wilson is returning to the hospitality post after an absence of a few years. She has a TESL diploma and is currently taking the online literacy course from CCLB. She is an instructor in the LINC program at NorQuest.

Continuing Communications Officer: Rosemary McMahon

Rosemary is the Program Manager of four LINC schools (Sacred Heart, Cardinal Collins, One World...One Centre, and St. Francis) with the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD). She has worked with ECSD for 27 years, starting as an ESL/LINC instructor and then as a Coordinator for various LINC schools. Her work has led her to write a workplace curriculum for the Royal Glenora and a women's only LINC Curriculum for St. Francis. She completed the ACE Certificate in Language Program Management. Apart from the regular duties of a Program Manager, her main focus and passion over the last year has been the creation of a LINC Literacy School at Sacred Heart. The intent was to ensure that literacy learners would no longer be registered in regular CLB classes and could access a learning environment suitable to their needs.

Professional Development

The ATESL Edmonton Local met on Friday, September 30, 2016, from 4:30-6:00 p.m. We elected our new Co-Chair, Secretary, and Hospitality Convenor, and had a presentation by Jennifer Foote from the University of Alberta. Jennifer Foote, an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, gave a quick and simple overview of some of the most important aspects of pronunciation pedagogy. This included how to choose pronunciation priorities in the classroom when faced with limited time, as well as how to help learners in a multilingual classroom with different pronunciation challenges. Jennifer also shared activities that could be used for a wide range of learners.

We had the pleasure of hosting the first ICC Workshop in Edmonton on November 19, 2016 from 9:00-11:00 a.m. at NorQuest College. Twenty-seven people attended the workshop and they received a participation certificate. This was the first of three workshops offered in Edmonton to introduce the new ATESL ICC resource developed in collaboration with Bow Valley College and NorQuest College. In this 3-hour workshop, participants learned about and explored the resource, and developed intercultural communicative competence pertinent to teaching ESL. We received positive feedback from attendees.

Future ICC workshops are scheduled for January 21st and February 25th, and both will take place at NorQuest College.

First Annual Winter Social

Winter Social: The ATESL Edmonton Local met on December 2, 2016 from 4:30-6:00p.m. at NorQuest College. All members were asked to fill out the RSVP form with their suggestions for professional development for the upcoming year. The plan was to get to know each other and share our experiences with colleagues over fun games and festive activities. We received positive feedback from attendees and numerous suggestions for future professional development.

Next ATESL Edmonton Local Meeting

January 27th, 2017 Edmonton Local ATESL Meeting

Presentation: TBA

Rooms A808/A809, NorQuest's Downtown Campus
10215 108 Street

Respectfully submitted by: Janet Kwong and Elina Stop



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Calgary Report

The Calgary local chapter hosted the first ICC workshop on November 05, 2016 at Bow Valley College. The workshop was facilitated by Yuji Abe (Norquest College) and Veena (Bow Valley College). The workshop was well received by the participants, and many members thanked ATESL for providing them with such an opportunity. Both Yuji and Veena did a fantastic job of making participants familiar with the ICC resource. Maureen Stewart introduced the resource and shared the idea behind the workshop.

The Calgary local chapter hosted the holiday social on November 28, 2016 at Milestones Cafe. Twenty-one local members attended the holiday social. This gathering gave members a chance to network and make connections. The Calgary Local executive team met just before the start of the social and talked about ways to offer quality PD at the local level.

The Calgary local chapter has also been busy planning meetings and sessions for the upcoming year. The schedule of local events for the first three months of 2017 is as follows:

- ICC workshop, January 14, 2017 at SAIT
- Panel discussion on 'Teaching Literacy Learners', February, 2017
- ICC Workshop, March 18, 2017



The ATESL Calgary Local Executive Team

New Co-chair: Jyoti Grewal

Jyoti works as a full-time English Language Foundations Instructor and team lead at SAIT. She is also a certified CLBA Assessor. She started her career teaching children in Australia and BC. After delving into the areas of marketing, software training, career counseling, and post-secondary teaching, she found her niche teaching adults at SAIT where she's been for the past nine years.

Continuing Co-chair: Nadia Khan

Nadia is an ELL instructor at Bow Valley College. Nadia has over thirteen years of hands-on experience in the field of English as a second language as a teacher, practicum supervisor, and ESL course developer. Nadia was the ATESL representative on the Rural Routes stakeholders' committee last year. She has also been a part of past ATESL and TESL Canada conferences held in Calgary and Lake Louise.

Treasurer: Peggy Jubien

Peggy teaches computer courses at Mount Royal University and in an ESL program for seniors at Bow Valley College. She has been the Calgary ATESL treasurer since February 2016. Before that, she was part of the ATESL planning committee for the 2015 ATESL/TESL Canada conference in Lake Louise.

New Secretary: Edi Casimirri

Edi has been an English Language Learning instructor in Calgary for the past ten years, most recently working at Bow Valley College and GEOS Calgary. She holds degrees and certificates from Carleton University (Bachelor of Journalism) and the University of Saskatchewan (CERTESL). Prior to her teaching career, Edi worked in the field of communications, media relations, and journalism. Edi is passionate about helping newcomers enhance their English language and communications skills in order to achieve their goals in Canada.

Thanks to all members who actively participated over the past year. We look forward to continuing to represent you in 2017.

Respectfully submitted by: Jyoti Grewal and Nadia Khan

Southern Alberta Report

New Co-Chair: Greg Ogilvie

Greg Ogilvie is currently an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge, specializing in second language teacher education. Greg has worked as a language educator in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Canada, most recently teaching EAP courses in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. Greg recently completed a PhD at the University of Alberta focusing on the hermeneutics of criticality and interculturality in the second language classroom. In addition to actively engaging in research related to second language teacher education, Greg has also done work related to task-based language teaching and has recently published an article about the use of restorative justice pedagogy to create a caring classroom for refugee students.

Continuing Co-Chair: Shawna Vervloet

Shawna is a post-secondary educator in Business English, Business Communications, English as a Second Language, Western History, Economics, and Political Science. While working toward completing Master's studies overseas, Shawna instructed English as a foreign language in a task-based learning environment before returning to Canada to instruct English as a second language.

The Southern Alberta Chapter is planning to host several events in the New Year. Surveys are being distributed to second language educators in the region in order to ascertain their professional development goals and to guide activities within the chapter. We hope to plan a combination of professional development and social events to foster a community of professional practitioners. Stay tuned to hear about the exciting events that will be hosted in southern Alberta!

Respectfully submitted by:
Greg Ogilvie and Shawna Vervloet

TESL Canada Report

The TESL Canada Board of Directors met on November 24. I had the opportunity to put faces to many of the names I have come across through emails, including the Chair of the Provincial Representatives Committee. All vacant positions on the Executive Committee are now filled, as the position of Secretary has been taken on by Sheri Rhodes.

TESL Canada Conference 2017: June 8-10

Planning for TESL Canada 2017 in Niagara Falls is in full

swing. Claude Lloyd is working closely with Dianne Tyers, who has been contracted to organize the event.

Keeping TESL Canada "In the Loop"

In order to keep TESL Canada in the loop, the TESL Canada Executive Director and Office Manager have asked to be added to ATESL's subscriber email list. They wish to receive newsletters and other correspondence sent to ATESL subscribers.

Non-Voting Designates for Provincial Representatives to TESL Canada

It has been decided that non-voting designates from associated provincial organizations are allowed to attend TESL Canada board meetings in cases where the provincial representative cannot.

Memorandum of Agreement between Provincial Organizations and TESL Canada

I have sent out the current MOA held between ATESL and TESL Canada to the ATESL Board as a Google doc. Directors are invited to submit their comments/proposed changes by December 13. I know there was also discussion surrounding the MOA in June 2016. We now have an opportunity to ensure any recommendations put forward by the ATESL board are addressed.

Special AGM – Early 2017

The TESL Canada Executive presented a motion to the board at the November 24 meeting proposing annual conferences for TESL Canada. Currently, the bylaws state that conferences are to be held once every 18 months. The Executive wishes to hold a special AGM in Edmonton in the first quarter of 2017. At this special AGM, a motion will be brought forth to change the bylaws so that, starting in 2017, there will be an annual TESL Canada conference and AGM. It is proposed that this annual conference and AGM will happen in June each year.

Respectfully submitted by: Kim Dudas



Kim Dudas, MEd TESL, is a self-proclaimed language geek with extensive experience in the world of literacy and language learning in Alberta. Kim has built an impressive resume as an ESL teacher and program developer in the Edmonton area. Prior to her appointment as ATESL Representative to TESL Canada, Kim had the privilege of serving on boards at the municipal level: St. Albert Further Education (2012-2016) and at the provincial level: ATESL (2006-2008). Kim is looking forward to her new role with ATESL in collaboration with the TESL Canada Board of Directors.

Rural Routes Report

I decided to ease into Board work by being involved with a program I'm quite familiar with: Rural Routes. I worked as a Rural Routes consultant from 2008 to 2011. I am also familiar with the needs and special requirements of rural communities in providing ESL services. I hope that this experience will give me insights that will contribute to my being an effective representative for Rural Routes on the ATESL Board. I'm looking forward to learning and developing my skills under the skillful direction of the president, Lisa Rochman, and in collaboration with the other Board members.



Rural Routes has a new resource available for ESL practitioners to help determine professional development needs. SATIE is a free self-assessment tool that generates a plan for training priorities. ESL practitioners can access SATIE at: <https://eslruralroutes.norquest.ca/discussions.aspx?forumid=5&threadid=186>

At this time, SATIE lists suggested workshops developed by Rural Routes. If any ATESL chapter has workshops or topics that they offer regularly in their areas, they can request to have those added to the list available.

Rural Routes presented a workshop on SATIE at the ATESL conference in October, 2016. If you missed that workshop, or if you just want more information about SATIE, contact Barb Hudkins, Manager of Rural Routes, to discuss the possibility of Rural Routes presenting at your next staff or organizational meeting.

Both Barb and I look forward to implementing the decisions outlined in the MOU between ATESL and Rural Routes just recently developed and approved. Watch this space for an update in the next newsletter on how the activities are unfolding.

Respectfully submitted by: Martha Urquhart

Perspectives on the Profession

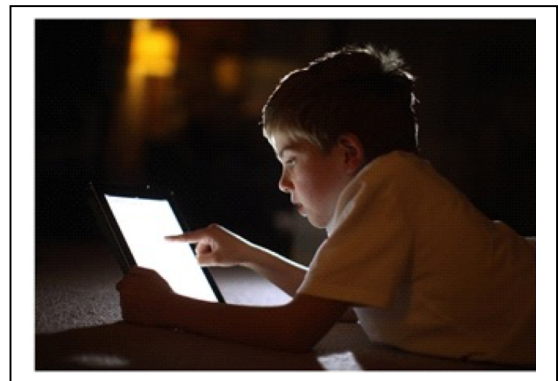
Perspectives on the Profession is a column featuring articles by ATESL Past Presidents and leading professionals in the English language teaching and learning field. In this issue, Dr. Hetty Roessingh (Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary) shares her insights and expertise concerning the use of electronic devices by young immigrant children.

5 Pointers for Parents: Promises and Perils of Electronic Devices for Kids

by Dr. Hetty Roessingh

There was a newly published book reviewed recently in the Calgary Herald, *i-Minds: How cell phones, computers, gaming and social media are changing our brains, our behavior and the evolution of our species* (Swingle, 2016). As the title suggests, the book largely talks about the perils of allowing children unfettered access and time to digital devices and the array of apps that so intrigue and captivate them. These include diminished time for physical play and social interaction with their peers but also with their parents, their key source of language input and vocabulary development. As Swingle would have it, an outright ban on electronic devices for children under 6 should be imposed.

For children of immigrants who speak another language at home, however, the digital world can hold an enormous source of rich language input that would otherwise not be available to them outside of school hours. I was reminded of this point recently when I assessed two young grade 2 ELLs for my research. Both scored over the 95th percentile, despite neither set of parents or caregivers having anything more than rudimentary levels of English language proficiency. Derek began by telling me he was a very



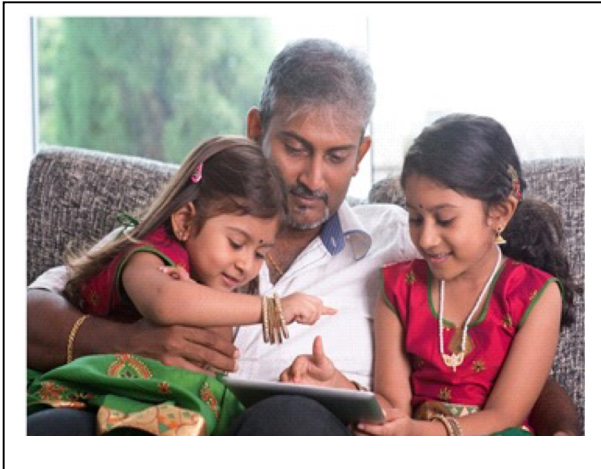
curious little boy and that he loves to read, often on websites with good information on topics he wants to explore. His only sibling, a much older brother at Waterloo University, SKYPEs daily with Derek in English on a wide range of science related topics, setting Derek off on another round of explorations on his iPad. Ikra, on the other hand, loves to find Netflix movies for the whole family to watch on Saturday nights.

I tutor a group of four young Punjabi speakers on Monday nights, and while I initially resisted any kind of use of electronic devices, I have come to see them as highly useful adjuncts to complement our working sessions. Newsclips on Quanto, a police service dog killed in the line of duty, for example, led to further exploration of Youtube clips on obedience training for puppies and 'hero' dogs posted on the RCMP website. A high interest story about Kate and Pippin, an unlikely duo of a Great Dane dog and an orphaned fawn, is another example of authentic input that is motivating. Both of these stories provided a good visual and oral source of the important high utility general academic vocabulary that these students would not be hearing in their first language (L1), and that teachers tend not to address either, with the consequence that these youngsters fall increasingly behind in their grasp of academic vocabulary in both languages.

Besides interesting stories and endless informational sites that young learners can access and benefit from independently, there are many free access sites where young ELLs can practice pronunciation and work on literacy concepts and skills, such as listening to and identifying words that rhyme.

For immigrant parents, here are a few pointers that come to mind:

- 1) Be aware of and take an interest in what your children are accessing. Ask your child to summarize or explain new information they've located on the Internet in L1 and/or L2. This type of code-switching can strengthen both languages, especially if parents are available to provide the comprehensible +1 input involved. Informational texts are the key to this type of language learning on both sides of the bilingual equation.
- 2) Make it a shared activity. This would be a good opportunity for elaborative and collaborative talk. Children co-construct and reconstruct the world for themselves if the key information is mediated by parents or caregivers who take the time.
- 3) Set limits and boundaries on how much time is permitted for children to be 'connected' and more importantly, enforce them! Where, when, and with whom will the use of devices be allowed? Current research estimates that young children may be behind a screen for as much as 4-8 hours daily. Spare your child dependency on digital devices and the behavioral consequences that make life miserable for everyone!



- 4) Remember that these devices can enhance learning and have great potential to support language and cognitive development when used judiciously. They are not intended as toys or to replace engaged parenting by providing an easy babysitter.
- 5) Be a good role model! Home literacy habits are absorbed by young learners, including those that involve the use of digital devices. Kids are watching. Swingle notes that, too often, parents are on their own personal devices and everyone is missing out on the active engagement in language use and social interaction that is so important with young children.





Digital devices are not going away, and neither is kids' fascination and involvement with them. The key is to see them for their potential, if properly harnessed, to enhance the bilingual language and cognitive development of young learners. Parents play a key role in making this successful.

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Interested in contributing an article to the column, *Perspectives on the Profession*? If you have an idea that reflects on emerging trends, issues, and challenges in the ESL field, please contact Wendy Chambers (ATESL Past President) at wchambers@atesl.ca.



Alberta Teachers of English
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Focus on Research

by Marian Rossiter & Marilyn Abbott

We are pleased to introduce this issue's Focus on Research column, which presents insights by Dr. William Dunn on task-based language teaching.

Task-Based Language Teaching: When the Part Becomes the Whole

William Dunn, University of Alberta

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a broad current in second language research and pedagogy; and yet, in many instances, it seems that specific examples or types of TBLT have come to be viewed as the entirety of this approach to language teaching. When part of something is understood to be the whole, misconceptions can develop. For example, Willis' (1996) well-known and influential model of TBLT is sometimes understood to be synonymous with TBLT, rather than a specific conceptualization of how it can be enacted pedagogically. Consequently, TBLT is sometimes seen as a fixed instructional sequence in which attention to language form occurs only at the end. Van den Branden's (2009) research, on the other hand, has pointed out how teacher interventions can draw attention to form even while students are engaged in carrying out a task.

When the part becomes the whole, the result can be constraints on thinking, research, and pedagogy, thus limiting ideas and possibilities. Ellis (2009) noted that TBLT has been criticized for lacking features that are, in fact, aspects of TBLT; and yet, it is evident that certain characteristics appear much more frequently than others across the many instantiations of TBLT. For example, interactive speaking tasks have tended to receive more attention than input tasks (Ellis, 2001) and writing tasks (Byrnes & Manchón, 2014) to the point that spoken production is sometimes assumed to be an essential feature of TBLT. Similarly, “authentic” functional tasks associated with day-to-day uses of language have tended to receive more attention than ones that are cognitively challenging (Manchón, 2014) or creative and imaginative (Dunn, 2011). Consequently, it is important to consider arguments in favour of broader notions of TBLT that avoid conflation with specific characteristics such as spoken interaction and functional authenticity, which are frequently, but not necessarily, present in TBLT.

Beyond Spoken Interaction

Byrnes and Manchón (2014) noted that conceptualizations of TBLT “explicitly or implicitly take speaking, and certain types of speaking tasks, as the default” (p. 29). There is much to be gained, however, by a more balanced approach that fully encompasses other task modalities, such as writing or listening comprehension. For example, increased attention to input-based listening tasks can address doubts that some teachers may have regarding students’ ability to complete tasks (e.g., Willis, 1996). One reason for scepticism among teachers toward TBLT is the idea that students will not be able to carry out tasks because they are not yet fully equipped with the necessary linguistic resources. Tasks that involve input or comprehension, rather than language production, offer a response to these doubts.

Ellis (2001), for example, described an input task in which learners were presented with a diagram of a kitchen, along with images of various objects that might be found in a kitchen. Following instructions from the teacher, students were asked to place the objects in specified locations in the kitchen diagram. Although a pre-test indicated that the English names of the kitchen objects (e.g., ladle, scouring pad, dustpan, blender) were unknown to the students, they were able to complete the task by following directives, such as:

Can you find the scouring pad? A scouring pad – scour means to clean a dish. A scouring pad is a small thing you hold in your hand and you clean a dish with it. Take the scouring pad and put it on top of the counter by the sink – on the right side of the sink. (Ellis, 2001, p. 51)

Such tasks do not require language production and, more importantly, they provide an opportunity for students to learn new lexical items in English within the context of carrying out a task. This is significant, because we most often think of students using previously acquired language to carry out production-based tasks.

Beyond Functional Authenticity

The emphasis on functional and authentic uses of language can be considered a strength of TBLT, since it directly addresses language needs that learners are likely to face in the real world. This focus is clearly reflected in frameworks such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks, which describe a range of language functions that learners should be able to carry out. Although emphasizing the ability to use a language to carry out communicative tasks is unquestionably an important goal in second language learning, limiting TBLT to this focus has significant drawbacks. For example, Roberts and Cooke (2009) described “the potential for authentic materials to produce a narrow and overly functional learning experience” (p. 622), adding that the result can be “a sometimes dreary diet of pseudo real-life scenarios such as shopping or filling in forms” (p. 623). As noted above, equating TBLT with functionally authentic language can result in a diminished emphasis on creativity and imagination. It can also lead to less cognitive challenge when tasks are limited to day-to-day functional uses of language, such as shopping, ordering meals, giving directions, and introducing oneself.

Functional authenticity has been so heavily emphasized in TBLT that it is sometimes considered to be a defining and necessary feature of tasks. Ellis (2003) included authenticity among the essential characteristics of tasks but noted that authenticity need not be defined strictly as simulating the real world. Other researchers (e.g., Byrnes & Manchón, 2014; Manchón, 2014) have suggested that an unintended consequence of limiting TBLT to authentic speaking tasks can be a lack of opportunities for intellectual stimulation, critical thinking, and problem solving. This argument is not easily dismissed in the current educational climate that emphasizes the need for complex skills in an information-based society. Although researchers and educators in the field of TBLT have pointed out the potential of TBLT for addressing broader education aims such as social justice (Van den Branden, 2006) and intercultural learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), fulfilling these aspirations will remain elusive if TBLT is considered to be synonymous, or coterminous, with functionally authentic uses of language.

Concluding Thoughts

In order for TBLT to live up to its full potential, it cannot be defined narrowly in relation to a subset of typical characteristics, such as spoken interaction or functional authenticity. The point is not that TBLT should *not* include these features, but rather that it should not be limited to them. Ensuring that TBLT is conceptualized broadly enough to encompass the full richness of language expands our possibilities as language educators and results in a more vibrant field of research and pedagogy.



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