



The ATESL
Newsletter
<http://www.atesl.ca>

August 2008

ATESL 29th Annual Conference



October 17th and 18th, 2008

**Keynote
Speakers**

Jian Ghomeshi
from CBC Radio

Murray Munro
from Simon Fraser
University



**Conference
Sponsor**



**Early Bird Registration deadline
September 20th**

**Crowne Plaza
Chateau Lacombe Hotel
10111 Bellamy Hill
Edmonton**

**Further
Information
www.atesl.ca**

ATESL President

President's Message

I hope you've all had an enjoyable summer and are looking forward to new and interesting opportunities in the coming year.

I'm delighted to announce that Tara Holmes was nominated by ATESL and selected by the national association for the TESL Canada Honourary Life Member Award for her significant contributions to TESL at the provincial and national levels. Tara was the focus of the *In Conversation* section in our last ATESL newsletter, and the award was presented at the TESL Canada Conference in Moncton, NB in May. Congratulations, Tara!

Preparations are well under way for the ATESL 2008 conference to be held in Edmonton on October 17 and 18. Jian Ghomeshi, CBC broadcaster, writer, and musician, will be our plenary speaker on Friday, and Dr. Murray Munro from the Department of Linguistics, Simon Fraser University, will be providing insights into the teaching of pronunciation at the Saturday plenary. In addition, there will be over 50 presentations, publishers' exhibits, and lots of opportunities for networking over the two days.

At the ATESL conference lunch on October 18, organizers have created an opportunity for participants with special interests (pronunciation, CALL, etc.) to sit together to discuss issues of importance to you. Those of you who responded to the Special Interest Group survey in April will have been invited to participate in discussions with each other via listserv. We're hoping that these sorts of opportunities will be only the beginning of ongoing sharing of ideas and professional development. We anticipate that groups will start to generate their own ideas for future activities throughout the province, such as discussions of issues, books/articles, topics for mini-conferences, and so on.

You may have noticed that our newsletter format changed in March. We hope that you'll find the new format appealing. We've also created a special page on our website for posting Funded Innovative Projects. Please have a look at the public reports there to find out about new projects that have been developed to meet the changing needs of ESL in Alberta.

Thanks to all the Board members and local committees for their hard work over the past year, and to all our members for their support. I look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Sincerely,
Marian Rossiter
ATESL President

CCLB – Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks



Centre for
Canadian Language
Benchmarks

Centre des niveaux de
compétence linguistique
canadiens

Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks Update from ATESL's CCLB Representative

In October 2007 I was appointed to represent ATESL on the board of the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. I attended the CCLB AGM and my first CCLB board meeting in June in Ottawa.

With the coming in of a new executive director the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks has experienced a busy year of transitions. The Alberta Government continues to be a strong supporter of the centre and to financially support multiple projects. One such project that we will see unfold over this coming year is the review of the CLB 2000. A national consultation will take place which will gather input from the ESL teaching field as well as other stakeholders that use the CLB 2000. A second project of great interest in Alberta and across the country is the long awaited release of the Workplace Language Assessment – an assessment tool intended for internationally-educated professionals with post-secondary education and work experience in fields such as engineering, accounting, information technology, finance and business. The tool has been developed, but the date of the release of the WLA has not yet been determined.

As a new board member I have signed up on a number of committees; one of them is the WLA committee, another is the CCLB teacher education and PD committee. There is a lot of exciting work going on at the CCLB - <http://www.language.ca> and across the country and I hope to be able to bring some vital information to the ATESL membership through my involvement on the board. I am delighted to be able to represent ATESL on the CCLB board and look forward to some challenging work in this area. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my predecessor in this role, Tara Holmes, who made valuable contributions in her tenure in this position.

Anna De Luca

In Conversation With ...Fariborz Birjandian

In 1988, Fariborz Birjandian came to Canada as a refugee. Within two weeks, he was working as a volunteer for The Red Cross, offering support to survivors of torture. Two months later, he was hired as a settlement counsellor with Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS); for two years after that, he assumed the role of Manager of Business Employment and Technical Services with CCIS.

The pace at which Fariborz started his life in Canada has not abated in the past 20 years. Over the past two decades, he has continued to be an agent for positive change, working tirelessly to promote the healthy, fruitful, and respectful integration of newcomers to Canada. Currently, Fariborz is the Executive Director of CCIS, a position he has held since 1994. During his tenure, Fariborz has brought CCIS from an agency of 65 staff of 10 offering programs at two Calgary locations to its present capacity of 180 staff and 1300 volunteers offering 72 programs and services at eight locations in Calgary and one in High River. Among his many accomplishments in this role, he has:

- led the development of Reception House in Calgary
- provided leadership throughout the province in building capacity in the settlement sector
- developed strong relationships with the business community that resulted in the ability to help immigrants find jobs - even during the 80's when the unemployment rate was as high as 11%
- led the country in conceptualizing and developing the first bridging programs for professionals in 1993 with the launch of the Engineering Upgrading program – a 6-month bridging program to integrate internationally educated engineers into the labour market. Starting with a partnership of four engineering firms, CCIS now delivers this program with the help of 100 partnerships in the sector.
- continued to develop professional programs to address the needs of professionals and today offers programs for millwrights, electricians, bank tellers, drillers, chefs, and seismologists.

Within the walls of CCIS, he continues his charmed work while simultaneously reaching out into the broader community as a strong leader and passionate advocate for social justice and equity for newcomers and all Canadians.

Brilliant, energetic, and passionate, Fariborz was not content with success in just one forum. For many of us it would seem that the scope of his work as Executive Director at a thriving settlement agency would allow little time for other services to the community; not so for Fariborz. For six of the past 10 years, he has held the post of chairperson of Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA). AAISA is an organization which represents and serves immigrants and refugees as well as the agencies that serve them.

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AAISA facilitates the growth of immigrant serving agencies and their professionals as well as advocates on behalf of immigrants and refugees in Canada.

Under his guidance, AAISA has moved from being a small grassroots organization of committed volunteers with zero funding to its present capacity of two full-time staff. AAISA provides a strong and united voice for immigrants and has raised the profile of immigrant and settlement issues across the province. AAISA works very closely with all levels of government, mainstream agencies, ethno-cultural communities, and business communities across Alberta. Fariborz believes these important ties have been strengthened through the development of better relationships between and among sectors, community, especially smaller centres, as well as through the establishment of guidelines for the settlement sector.

One of his crowning glories in that capacity has been his involvement in developing the training modules for the Settlement Practitioner Accreditation Program. Launched in 2005, this training and accreditation is the only such program for settlement practitioners in Canada and is an important step in fulfilling AAISA's goal of promoting the recognition of settlement and integration work as a profession.

In his 20 years of active service, Fariborz has witnessed many trends and has a lived experience of the changing tides of immigration in Canada. While he recognizes that immigration has always been an important cornerstone in the building of Canada, he points to the changing face of immigration, especially in the past 10 years. While in the past, immigrants stemmed largely from European countries, today's newcomers come from a new variety of host countries, with the distribution being approximately 15% from European countries and the rest from more non-traditional regions. As a result, the face of Canada's immigrant population is becoming more visibly diverse. This, Fariborz claims, is changing the name of the game in the settlement sector, which in turn has resulted in a cultural shift in the sector, the community, and the nation.

In speaking with Fariborz, one senses a hardworking humility that is full of hope for our collective future. He speaks with effervescence about the accomplishments over time of the settlement sector, but is equally energized with the work still to be done. For example, he notes that there is still no national immigrant voice in Canada, something he will do his best to change before he hangs up his hat. As he reflects on his work over the past 20 years, Fariborz says, "Newcomers to Canada are really no different now than they were 200 years ago. They all come here with their hopes and their fears - as people, and as communities. "If we want to ensure that the immigration experience is a positive one, we have to identify those fears and eliminate them; identify those hopes and build on them."

Fariborz Birjandian
Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
www.aaisa.ca/files/about_aaisa.html

Judy Sillito

TESL Canada Learner's Conference 2008... Essay Contest

How I got here: My immigration experience

Simona Popovici

I opened my eyes. The light was dim in the room. I looked around, trying to remember where I was. Suddenly, the raindrops tapping on the window were like echoes of unknown voices, trying to tell a story. It was a story about their long way to Earth, from high clouds to the ground, to bring spring and happiness, and a green feeling of a new life. I understood then the similarity between the rain's way and my life's. I was like a little drop of rain looking for its way. I chose a new country to live in like rain chose to be Nature's tears of joy. I came to Canada for a better life. I wanted to blossom like Nature in spring. I wanted to be a small part of a big world. I wanted my dreams to come true in a country where possibilities are endless. I dared to ask for more, even though I knew there is a price for it. I accepted the challenge and the sacrifice was worth it. I left everything behind, determined to start a new life. I wanted to feel the joy of a new beginning, the excitement of living in a growing city with friendly people, ready to help or support. I grew green wings and I flew. My soul was full of hope. My story is one of those starting with "Once upon a time", but ending with "They lived happily ever after". I am grateful for the opportunity to live here, in an environment full of chances. My life has started to find its way. I could say that coming to Canada was my rebirth.

My Immigration Experience

Victor Girleanu

Canada is one of the most peaceful countries in the world, and it was a great chance for my family to immigrate here from Moldova. Nevertheless, immigration is a very stressful and difficult experience. My pregnant wife, our son and I can still remember that day, June 14th, 2004, when we arrived. Our English was poor, so we had a hard time understanding immigration officers. Eventually, we finished the paper work, but our luggage didn't come. The next day, I found a mistake in our documents; on the resident permanent card, my name was switched, and my nationality was changed. Moreover, we couldn't find an apartment to rent for a couple of weeks.

I knew that Canadians have a different life style, so I tried to prepare myself for the problems that would appear, but I have still faced several difficulties since immigrating. The lack of ability to communicate was one of the major issues. The next complication was my inability to write and read in English. Being at an insufficient academic level of language created difficulties in preparing a resume and applying for a job. In addition, not having a Canadian education stressed me negatively in struggling with this situation. Because of this, the integration period seemed to be very complicated.

Thanks to my ESL program, I could overcome all these challenges, and now I feel that coming to Canada was the right decision. My heart left my homeland, but my eyes have viewed a new kind of homeland, a land of opportunity, which is Canada.

ATESL Feature Article

**The Influence of *Willingness to Communicate*
on the Development of Oral Fluency**

Kyesuk Song

Many second language learners believe that spending time in an English-speaking country is all that is needed to develop oral fluency. Once immersed in a second language (L2) environment, however, there are many other factors that affect the successful development of fluency. One of these is learners' *willingness to communicate* (WTC), "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using an L2" (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998, p. 547).

Researchers believe that WTC in the first language is personality-based, but that in a second language it is more context-dependent. In other words, willingness to communicate will vary, depending on the situation in which the L2 is used. ESL learners, for example, may be more willing to communicate with a specific person because of his/her attractiveness, similarity to and familiarity with them. For example, a Korean speaker of English may be interested in interacting with a Japanese student in the same program because her speaking is very fluent and both are interested in each other's culture (Song, 2008). On the other hand, learners' uncertainty about their ability to communicate in a novel or unfamiliar situation (e.g., being interviewed for a job; giving directions) increases feelings of tension (*state or situational anxiety*) and decreases their belief in their capacity to communicate effectively at a particular time (*state perceived competence*), thus reducing their WTC.

A greater degree of willingness to communicate creates more opportunities to interact in English. Learners will therefore have more opportunity to practise their speaking skills, which in turn will enhance their oral fluency. Practice helps to reduce dysfluencies (e.g., filled pauses [*um, er*], excessive silent pauses, and false starts) and to improve speaking rate, thus increasing learner confidence to engage in further interaction. The more opportunity for meaningful practice, the more opportunity learners have to transfer important language rules into their conversations (Schmidt, 1992).

The results of my study of five Korean international university students (Song, 2008) support research findings that WTC is improved by the following: L2 self-confidence; state (situational) communicative self-confidence; learners' communicative competence; the desire to communicate with a specific person due to his/her attractiveness, similarity and familiarity; familiarity with the speaking partner; the speaker's familiarity with the topic; and positive attitudes towards the target language group (in this case, native speakers of English).

This research has several implications for ESL classrooms.

1. Since L2 self-confidence is associated with learners' perceived communicative competence and L2 anxiety, **comfortable and supportive classrooms with positive feedback** will establish a place where learners can take risks in their L2.
2. Teaching basic **communication strategies/skills** (e.g., paraphrasing, negotiating meaning, body language, requesting clarification, asking questions) will increase learners' WTC.
3. Many learners may not be aware of **cultural norms of conversation** and are therefore too shy to speak out (*state anxiety*). Teaching them cultural norms (e.g., the difference between direct/indirect communication styles; levels of self-disclosure; using appropriate register in a variety of situations) will be helpful.
4. Strategies for **small talk and background information on topics** that learners might encounter outside the classroom (e.g., Canadian politics, hockey, current events, how to start/end a conversation) can go a long way towards increasing WTC (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2008).
5. **Familiarity with native speakers** can be enhanced by language exchanges, club activities, part-time jobs, as well as volunteer activities in the community (Kodama, 2007). However, as Derwing et al. (2008) indicated, because many learners do not take it upon themselves to seek out volunteer activities, teachers or program coordinators may need to provide learners with (a) strategies for finding suitable opportunities and (b) follow-up activities in the classroom to ensure engaged participation.
6. **Sharing their positive and negative experiences** with each other in class and reflecting on their interactions will help learners better understand Canadian culture and how to deal with similar situations in future.

Improving learners' willingness to communicate will increase their communication with other English speakers so they can share opinions and develop intercultural understanding. The development of willingness to communicate and oral fluency will not only help ESL learners interact successfully in academic, social, and workplace contexts, but also bring them one step closer to successful integration into Canadian society.

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2007-2008

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THE ATESL NEWSLETTER

Published Quarterly

Deadlines: Feb. 15, May 15, Aug. 15, Nov. 15

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

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**The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second
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