



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

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www.atesl.ca

President's Message

Maureen Stewart

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's message

A message from Maureen Stewart

TESL Canada Report

Celia Logan

Bursary Report

Cindy Messaros

TESL Canada 2015 Conference

ATESL Local Reports

Central Alberta – Sharon Duplessis
Calgary – Glen Cochrane, Silvia Rossi
Edmonton – Sabine Ricioppo

Articles

Focus on Research
Marilyn Abbott & Marian Rossiter

*Grammar and Speaking Tasks: How Can
Grammar Instruction Be Truly Enabling?*
Leila Ranta

Happy 2015, everyone!

The year is off to a busy start for the ATESL Board. We are delighted to be hosting the TESL Canada conference in October this year. Chris Wharton from SAIT and Glen Cochrane from Bow Valley College (and also ATESL Calgary Co-Chair) are the Co-Chairs for the conference. Chris and Glen have been very active in ATESL over the past few years, and we are delighted to have them lead the conference planning committee. The conference will be in Lake Louise at the beautiful Chateau with the theme 'Elevating Language Learning to New Heights'. The Call for Proposals is now open. Visit atesl.ca for more information on the conference. I would like to thank Chris, Glen, and the entire conference planning committee for their efforts in planning the conference thus far. It is sure to be a great event.

As you have seen from communication from the TESL Canada Board and from me earlier in January, TESL Canada, BC TEAL, and TESL Ontario are in consultation to potentially renegotiate their Memorandum of Agreement. ATESL continues to work closely with TESL Canada and our provincial affiliates to keep abreast of the situation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns related to ATESL.

Respectfully,

Maureen Stewart
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Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

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2014 – 2015

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TESL Canada Report to ATESL

TESL Canada is continuing its journey forward. In September TESL Ontario contacted TESL Canada to request that the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the two organizations be re-examined. It was inappropriate for the interim board to take on this task, so it had to wait until the new board was in place, which meant there was really no opportunity to address the issue until January 2015. In keeping with TESL Canada's resolve of more transparency, the TESL Canada board sent out a message on January 21, 2015, informing its membership across the country of these talks. Maureen Stewart, ATESL's president, subsequently sent ATESL members a message to reassure them that ATESL is in contact with TESL Canada and monitoring the situation. In the end, the two boards, TESL Canada and TESL Ontario, had a discussion about the MOA on January 28, 2015, and have scheduled another meeting. Communication to the membership will be made after TESL Canada's executive meets next.

TESL Canada is also beginning talks with BC TEAL about many of the same concerns as TESL Ontario. Again, in the interest of transparency, TESL Canada will communicate the results of the talks with ATESL membership as soon as possible.

Organizing for the TESL Canada 2015 Conference in Lake Louise is in full swing. The Call for Proposals is up on ATESL and TESL Canada's website, as well as on a dedicated site (<http://atesl.ca/conferenceWelcome>). The Call for Proposals for the pre-conference Graduate Symposium on October 29 is also now available.

Respectfully submitted by Celia Logan, TESL Canada Rep for Alberta

Bursary Report

ATESL provided bursaries to seven people for PD in 2014: four in March and three in September, totaling \$2,860. The committee was pleased with the breadth and quality of the professional development opportunities undertaken by the bursary applicants and wishes each applicant continued success in their professional pursuits.

The deadline for spring bursary applications is March 15.
Cindy Messaros



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

TESL Canada 2015 Conference

The 2015 TESL Canada conference hosted by ATESL will take place October 29-31 at the Chateau Lake Louise. The conference call for proposals is now open, please see [the conference submission guidelines](#).

We are also proud to announce our Keynote and Featured Speakers for the conference.

Diane Larsen-Freeman is Professor Emerita of Education, Professor Emerita of Linguistics, and Research Scientist Emerita at the English Language Institute, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is also a Distinguished Senior Faculty Fellow at the Graduate SIT Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont and a Visiting Senior Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. Her most recent books are *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* (2008, with L. Cameron), winner of the Kenneth Mildenerger Book Prize, the third edition of *Techniques and Principles* (2011, with M. Anderson), and the third edition of *The Grammar Book, an ESL/EFL Teacher's Course* (2015, with M. Celce-Murcia).

http://www.soe.umich.edu/people/profile/diane_larsen-freeman/

Jane Willis worked extensively overseas as a language teacher and trainer. She later joined Aston University, tutoring on their Masters in TESOL programmes. Now semi-retired, she lives in the English Lake District and works as an ELT consultant, runs workshops for FL teachers and teaches Tai Chi. Her prize-winning books include *English for Primary Teachers* (with Mary Slattery) and *Teachers Exploring Tasks in English Language Teaching* (with Coronyn Edwards). Her latest books (with OUP) are *English Through Music*, co-authored with music specialist Anice Paterson and *Doing Task-based Teaching*, co-authored with her late husband Dave. For more information, visit

<http://www.willis-elt.co.uk/>

Randi Reppen is Professor of Applied Linguistics and TESL at Northern Arizona University where she teaches in the MA TESL and Applied Linguistics Ph.D. programs. She has extensive ESL and teacher training experience, including 11 years directing NAU's Intensive English program. Randi's main interests are the use of corpus research to inform language teaching and for developing better language teaching materials. Recent publications include *Using corpora in the Language Classroom, Grammar and Beyond*, and the *Cambridge Handbook of English Corpus Linguistics* (co-edited with Doug Biber). In her spare time, Randi enjoys outdoor activities, especially, biking, Nordic skiing and tennis.

<http://nau.edu/CAL/English/Directory/Randi-Reppen/>

Please consider submitting your own presentation proposal and being a part of this incredible line-up. Keep up to date with conference information by bookmarking [the conference website](#). Coming soon: venue reservation information and registration in April.

If you would like to get involved in conference planning activities, or have any other inquiries, please email:

lakelouise2015@atesl.ca.

Central Alberta Local Report

On January 21, CA-ATESL had a panel of teachers talk about their experiences teaching in China and North Korea. Paul and Ruth Furseth taught in China for 12 years. Eight of those years, Paul taught at a private University in Yanjing. Hannah Disen was one of the first foreign teachers to teach in Pyongyang, North Korea. Their challenges and adventures were of interest to all attendees.



Alberta Teachers of English
as a Second Language

On February 18, the speaker scheduled for our monthly PD was Mounir Rahwan. Mounir works for Catholic Social Services as an Immigrant Settlement Counselor. He agreed to speak to us about Middle Eastern Culture and how the political situation in the Middle East may affect classroom dynamics. This topic is of great interest to us.

Submitted by Sharon Duplessis (CA-ATESL Co-Chair)

Calgary Local Report

Calgary ATESL started 2015 with a great workshop by Nancy Sheppard entitled “Do I HAVE to read this book? Literature circles unveiled”. The meeting at SAIT was well attended with about 25 Calgary Local members learning with - and from -Nancy. Thanks very much to Nancy for taking time out of her vacation in Canada (all the way from Argentina) to present her strategies for running successful Literature Circles. We also learned about opportunities for language teachers in Nancy's corner of Argentina.

We are actively recruiting presenters and workshop facilitators for our upcoming March, April, and May meetings. First-time and return presenters are welcome! If you've never presented before, this is a great opportunity to develop professionally. We are a really friendly crowd. :) 60-90 minute sessions are standard, but if what you have to share is more appropriate for a shorter time frame, let us know. We are very open to putting several mini-presentations together to create variety.

If you have a request for a particular type of workshop or presentation, just email us at calgary@atesl.ca. We are here to serve our members, so the more we understand what you are looking for, the better we can meet your needs. At the moment, we have some leads on presentations in the areas of teaching active listening, task-based language teaching in EAP, and a discussion forum for program administrators/coordinators/managers. Send us your feedback and encourage colleagues to expand their network by attending a meeting!

Submitted by Silvia Rossi and Glen Cochrane (Calgary local Co-Chairs)

Edmonton Local Report

At our most recent meeting on January 30th at NorQuest College, Dr. Leila Ranta, Justine Light, Monica MacFadzean, and Justine's former EAP students Camila Estefani Orsso and Mayara Nascimento de Oli from Brazil gave a presentation on *Exploring Edmonton's Linguistic Landscape*. Attendees walked away with ideas on how to create a task-based assignment that allows students to take photographs of written texts and signs displayed in a variety of different languages and reflect on the process and what they learned about the linguistic landscape in Edmonton.

We had an amazing turnout - 50 members attended the presentation. At this ATESL meeting, it was informally decided that we would reduce the number of formal meetings we have, allowing for more time for professional development. The co-chairs learned at the first ATESL Board Meeting at the ATESL conference that none of the other locals are having formal meetings prior to their PD sessions. We will continue to have formal meetings when new business arises. Please watch for emails Irene Wood sends out on our behalf to update you on any ATESL Edmonton Local Chapter news.

On February 27th, Dr. Wendy Chambers presented on *Building Community With Online Discussion Boards*, which had to be postponed in November due to poor weather conditions. Wendy's workshop focused on understanding communicative presence for the purpose of building a community of learners within asynchronous discussion boards. She presented a model of communicative presence and a set of principles for organizing and facilitating discussion board tasks and activities. There was a very large turnout for this session, which was extremely well received.

We have invited Directors of all ESL programs in Edmonton to talk about their programs in March. Due to the TESOL and AAAL conferences toward the end of March, the meeting has been moved to March 18. Traditionally, the TESL Program at the University of Alberta has offered a Director's Forum for Master's and Diploma students. The co-chairs have agreed to help keep this tradition alive by hosting the forum at the ATESL meeting in March. While graduate and diploma students in the TESL Program may be curious to find out about potential job openings, the forum is mainly aimed at giving the membership an opportunity to hear about the types of programs offered at the different ESL/LINC institutions and/or any innovative projects the institutions may be working on or have recently completed.

As you all know, the TESL Canada conference preparations are in full swing. With this conference being in Lake Louise this year, we thought we would hold a CLB mini-conference in Edmonton on May 2, 2015. We are happy to announce that we have received approval from the board to invite Lisa Herrera, Lead Instructional Coordinator, LINC Program at Immigrant Services Society of BC, PBLA Regional Coach and CLB Trainer, and her colleague to present a 3-hour workshop entitled *Demystifying CLB Lesson Planning*. After lunch, we are going to offer an additional 90-minute CLB workshop (presenter TBA). Registration to attend will be required and there will be a fee for attending the mini-conference to help cover any costs for the presenters, registration and lunch for the participants. Details will be forthcoming.

Submitted by Sabine Ricioppo (Edmonton local Co-Chair)

Focus on Research

Marian Rossiter & Marilyn Abbott, University of Alberta

In this fifth *Focus on Research* column, we're delighted to feature Leila Ranta's synopsis of her ATESL 2014 conference presentation entitled "Making grammar activities truly enabling for task-based learning". Grammar instruction is a critical component of the ESL classroom, and Leila's article provides relevant and practical insights into how to make it as effective as possible.

We hope that you'll access references at the end of the article (write to us if you need assistance), discuss the ideas in the article with your colleagues, apply them in your ESL classrooms, and engage in further reflection on your grammar teaching practices. And be sure to attend future conference presentations on grammar by Leila!



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Grammar and Speaking Tasks: How Can Grammar Instruction Be Truly Enabling?

Leila Ranta

Teaching grammar is one of the most challenging and important roles of an ESL teacher. The challenge is to design grammar instruction that builds learners' second language (L2) grammatical knowledge so that they can eventually produce fluent and grammatically accurate utterances in English when they are engaged in real-world interactions. In this piece, I will discuss the issue of the integration of grammar in task-based teaching with a focus on grammar enabling activities¹.

A good starting point for our discussion is a statement about grammar instruction from the *ATESL Best Practices Guidelines*, published in 2009:

"Grammar instruction includes focused practice activities that range from very controlled to more open-ended so that learners can use their grammatical knowledge during meaning-focused communication."
(pp. 77-78)

This guideline highlights the need for different kinds of grammar practice and the function of practice as preparing learners to be able to use their grammatical knowledge during communicative tasks. But the Best Practices document does not outline the different ways grammar can be taught, nor how it can be integrated within task-based lessons. Other pedagogical sources must be consulted for these topics. For information about the various ways in which grammar can be taught, teachers can consult teaching methods textbooks such as Thornbury's *How to Teach Grammar* (1999) and a more recent book by Nassaji & Fotos (2011). Although useful resources, these books do not offer much input on the topic of grammar in task-based teaching relevant to adult ESL teachers in Canada. To support teachers working with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), some useful but basic advice about grammar instruction is offered in LINC documents and resources (e.g., Holmes et al., 2001; Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2004). In these resources, grammar activities are viewed as having an *enabling* function when they precede a task and an *extension* (or reinforcement) function when following a task.

Grammar instruction in CLB documents

As the term suggests, 'enabling grammar activities' are intended to develop learners' skills and knowledge in order to perform classroom and real-world tasks. Let's take a look at the advice about grammar instruction provided in the Toronto Catholic District School Board's curriculum resource book (2004). According to this guide, pre-task grammar instruction should begin with a contextualized introduction to the selected grammar point, which has been chosen because it is required for the ensuing task. The next phase is the explanation of the grammatical feature's form, meaning, and use. This then leads to focussed practice activities, where learners gain control of the new structure that they will use when performing the communicative task. Basically, these guidelines advocate a very traditional approach to designing grammar instruction referred in the language teaching literature as Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP). The assumption appears to be that learners will be able to use grammatical forms that have been presented to them and practiced, even for the first time, prior to the main task. What I want to draw attention to here is that this advice does not adequately take into account

what we know about language processing during task performance and what we know about L2 grammar acquisition.

Second language processing during task performance

When an L2 learner is focused on communicating meaning orally, attention is directed towards conceptualizing the message that is to be expressedⁱⁱ. This is especially true when there is a high cognitive load, for example, when a speaker gives an opinion about something s/he has never talked about before, or explains something complicated. This means that there is less attention available to think about correct grammar. In formulating utterances, speakers must rely on grammatical knowledge that is available automatically. Under conditions of high cognitive load, the learner does not have enough attention to make use of knowledge that has not yet become automatized. Automatization comes about through extensive practice, but it is important that this practice be transfer-appropriate. To be transfer-appropriate, the practice must involve the same processing mechanisms as those that will be activated later when the form will be used for real-world use (Segalowitz & Lightbown, 1999). Unfortunately, practice activities in most commercially produced grammar textbooks tend to be written fill-in-the-blank or other narrow response exercises. Although written exercises have their place when learners are first working with a new rule or reviewing what they have learned before, this kind of grammar practice does not allow the learner to experience the same kind of processing pressure that takes place when they have to speak about a personal idea, opinion, or anecdote in order to fulfill a communicative goal.

Effective enabling activities

So, now we can be more specific about the nature of the challenge faced by the teacher who wants to develop her/his students' grammatical accuracy during speaking. Teachers need to plan for learning opportunities that promote the development of automatic control over English grammatical forms. How can we improve grammar activities so that they actually *enable* learners to use specific grammatical forms during communicative tasks? What is needed is to increase the number of opportunities that learners get to produce or comprehend a targeted grammar form and embed this increased practice in meaningful language use. Thus the characteristics of optimal enabling activities are that they focus on a particular form, they are purposeful and meaningful, and there is inherent repetitiveness. An example of this can be found in the toolbox of all ESL teachers – the '*Find someone who...*' activity. For this type of activity, learners are given a list of attributes or personal experiences to use to survey their fellow classmates. When the list of attributes is focused on a particular structure (e.g., *Find someone who has lived in Europe, climbed a mountain, slept in a castle, etc.*), learners get a chance to repeatedly produce meaningful sentences using the same grammatical form with different verbs.

Communicative tasks that have a grammatical focus

Learners will get even more opportunities to produce a target grammatical form if the communicative task that follows the enabling activities is biased towards the same target form. This is what Ellis (2003) refers to as a *focused task*. A focused task (Ellis, 2003, p. 342) is defined as one "that has all the qualities of a task but has been designed to induce learners' incidental attention to some specific linguistic form". Take, for example, *The Alibi Game*, a commonly used activity that has a clear focus on the past tense. Students are presented with the scenario that a crime was committed during the previous weekend and that, as potential suspects, they have to prepare an alibi. To prepare their alibi, the students work in pairs to create an air-tight story about what they did during the weekend. The task goal is not just to tell a story but to tell it convincingly to others who will decide whether they believe it or not. Elizabeth Gathbontonⁱⁱⁱ collected data from two classes of intermediate level Chinese L2 learners who did two pre-tasks (*Find Someone Who* and a picture description activity) and then the Alibi Game as the main task. She found that collectively, the learners produced over 5,000 utterances relating to the past tense during a three-hour period; on average each learner produced orally about 200 utterances

referring to the past. Furthermore, analysis of oral interviews at the beginning and the end of the mini-course revealed significant improvement in accuracy of past tense use, although 100% accuracy was not attained.

This kind of research is currently a work-in-progress; further refinement in the theory of language practice and further empirical research are certainly needed. Nonetheless, I hope that ESL teachers won't wait for this to happen before they start to experiment with ways to increase the quantity and quality of the grammar practice activities they design for their students.

Leila Ranta is an associate professor in the TESL program in the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. She has a long-standing interest in the teaching of English grammar.

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Notes

ⁱ This is a summary of the main ideas from a presentation on the topic of enabling grammar activities that I gave at the ATESL conference in Edmonton in October 2014.

ⁱⁱ This explanation is based on the speech production model by Levelt (1989).

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Gatbonton very kindly shared her slides from a presentation that she gave at Carleton University.