

TESL NS Newsletter



December 2010

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Editorial
Fe Baculi (Editor)
TESL/SMU Faculty

"O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being.

Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead

Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing."

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Though most of the dead leaves have either been raked off our lawns and put into plastic bags to be carted off to compost dumps, where they will be turned into food for new leaves in the new year, or have been blown into dead-end corners, some few are still driven across the land by the wild West Wind. I have lately felt like one of them myself -- literally, when the angry winds of autumn storms have all but blown me off my feet, and figuratively at the mercy of the storm of stresses like that of a cold that refuses to leave, that of preparing for more conferences and that of preparing lectures and tests, and marking critical analyses and research papers -- marking self-renewing piles of them often late into the night.

Our TESL Conference turned out its own

reward when it got off the ground. All the participants hugely benefited from what it had to offer and they had fun too. I'll not go into the details of what the Conference presented. Others have done this for me -- the people whose contributions you will find in the Newsletter itself. I'll limit myself to thanking the contributors, acknowledging their names along with a hint of what their contributions are about: Ellen Pilon (ISIS), our own newly elected President of TESL Canada, for her tripartite contribution -- her Greetings to the members of TESL Nova Scotia, her "Why attend a TESL Canada Conference?" and her Summary of Dr. Joan Rubin's Presentation; Andy de Champlain (SMU), our newly elected President of TESL Nova Scotia, for his President's message "It's been a big year with lots of challenges"; Jason Doucet (SMU), for his report on Carol Lesbirel's "Caught in the Middle... sometimes in Hot Water"; Sharon Churchill Roe (AU), for her report on a roundtable, where a variety of topics were discussed; Sophie Paish (MSVU), for her report on a roundtable discussion, which Hong Wang (MSVU) led, "The phonological and syntactic challenges facing Chinese and Arabic learners of English"; Jason MacDonald, for his "Learners in Need"; and Chris Grimshire (SMU), for her "How Can Language Schools Use NSSE?".

Soon another term will end and we'll be off to our well-deserved Christmas break. I wish us all a restful vacation and one that will be free from the health problems associated with winter. In this context, permit me to remind you of something I touched on in a previous editorial -- the importance of Vitamin D for spending the winter months, our vacation included, in good health and in the best of spirits. In summer, most of us get some Vitamin D from sun exposure; in winter, most of the denizens of our part of the globe are deficient in the sunshine vitamin, with possibly serious health consequences. Vitamin D protects against infections, the common cold and the flu included. Why do we get flu epidemics in

winter but not in summer? It is vital for cardiovascular health. Evidence is mounting that it protects us from depression, from diabetes, from osteoporosis and from various forms of cancer. Go and google "The World's Single Deadliest Vitamin Deficiency" or "The benefits of Vitamin D" to find out for yourselves.

Apart from protecting you against the ills associated with winter and all the other ills I listed above, Vitamin D can be trusted to bring some sunshine into your winter months and to wipe away what may linger of the low spirits associated with preparing, administering and marking final exams. It may even make your Christmas lights shine brighter.:

May we all return, our batteries fully charged, ready not only for a new term/semester at work but also for the planning of a project even more challenging than the TESL Nova Scotia Conference -- that of the TESL Conference for all of Canada and beyond.

Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year to us all.

**President's Report
TESL NS AGM, Nov 6th, 2010
By Andy de Champlain**

It's been a big year with lots of challenges. First up, we've lost Julian and Kent. I want to thank Julian for his efforts as President this year. Since he has stepped down from that role and I took it up, I can really appreciate the responsibility his work entailed. I also thank Kent for being TESL Canada Rep and wish him well in his future.

This year is also challenging because of our volunteering to host next year's TESL Canada Conference. Planning for that in addition to today's conference has been a heavy workload for all the board members.

I want to congratulate Ellen on her new role as TESL Canada President, which is a boon for TESL NS, and thank her for all her work,

guidance and communications with me and other board members and tangential players, including keynote speakers, hotel managers, publishing companies, applicants for the TESL Canada Conference, TESL NS non-board members, and many more people. I think we all agree that she has gone light years beyond the call of duty as "TESL NS Membership Secretary". Indeed, having been on the board for so long—including as our President—she's brought to me (and to all of us) invaluable knowledge and good judgment, in addition to the time she's spent maintaining our website.

Andrea has proved to be an absolutely stellar secretary, and I thank her for all her work. Sandy, likewise, has been a diligent treasurer, and for that I thank him immensely. Fe continues to do a wonderful job with the newsletter.

The discussions led today by Hong, Jason MacDonald, Chris and Sharon were all wonderful, and I look forward to reading about the ones I missed as well as the write-ups on the keynote speakers in the newsletter. The contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated.

Indeed, I thank all the board members for their continuing efforts to keep this organization not just going, but thriving. We have 99 members, and after days like today we can really see how our work pays off. In the spirit of lifelong learning, professional development is a great lifestyle choice for educators, and we are the agents encouraging our province's ESL teachers to pursue this lifestyle. For our efforts we should probably be proud of ourselves. As good as we feel about how things went today, I know we will be especially satisfied with the national conference in the Spring.

Our new TESL NS Board:

President: Andy de Champlain
Vice President: Jason MacDonald
Recording Secretary: Olga Sarycheva
Membership: Ellen Pilon
Newsletter Editor: Fe Baculi
Treasurer: Parisa Rad
TESL Rep: Andrea Purchase
Members at large: Christine Grimshire,
Sharon Churchill, Hong Wang, Haiyan Sun,
Jason Doucette.

**“Greetings to everyone from the President of TESL Canada”
By Ellen Pilon**

It's not often I get to say something like that! But since April 2010 I've been the President of TESL Canada. It was an honour to be voted into this office and it has been a challenge to fill it. I think that, even after serving six years on the TESL Canada Board, five of those on the Executive, I still don't know enough. It has required a lot of listening instead of speaking, pondering instead of responding, conceding instead of asserting. As you can well imagine, I can't say I've succeeded as often as I would have liked. I think leaders have to develop thick skins and not care about what others think: it's not easy. Of course each success leaves its mark; yet human nature seems to make us remember the bad more than the good. I'm teaching an online customer service course now, and we often discuss this idiosyncrasy.

Canada is so huge and the differences among provinces are immense. I always thought of Canada as a united country, as a country without regional accents or different philosophies. I was as comfortable living in Ontario as in Nova Scotia. But I've learned that the provinces are quite different from one another: we are not the same. Some of the viewpoints, expectations and idioms of some provinces are less familiar to me than those of the UK. It's fascinating and makes one wonder how TESL Canada can successfully serve the interests of all provinces.

Can it? I believe so. Certainly the teacher certification that TESL Canada offers is a tremendous advantage for our TESL NS members. TESL NS is too small to provide that service. Member fees for some other provincial conferences might be convenient for a few.

Volunteering on the TESL Canada board is very rewarding if you have the time and the energy. The first step is volunteering on your provincial board and gaining several years of experience there. After you learn

how the local association works, perhaps there will be an opportunity to be nominated by TESL NS to be the TESL NS representative to the TESL Canada Board. That's the first step, and it takes commitment and time. TESL NS is an association accountable to only itself, but its members are also members of TESL Canada. Our representative to the Board of TESL Canada serves just that function -- to represent the interests of TESL NS to the national organization. From the position of representative, if you're lucky and experienced, you may be invited to run for an elected position on the TESL Canada Board. And there you are.

It was an honour to be voted into this office and it's been a challenge to fill it. It's been challenging to balance the interests of each of the other nine elected board directors and the ten appointed provincial representatives. However, all told, it remains an honor and a pleasure to be in this position. I've made new friends and cemented relationships with old friends. I thank them all.

**TESL Nova Scotia Fall Conference
Citadel Halifax Hotel
November 6, 2010
Summary Reports**

*Dr. Joan Rubin's Presentation:
6 Ways to Promote More Effective
Language Learning.*

Summary by Ellen Pilon

Dr. Rubin joined us in rainy Halifax after flying here from Washington DC. Fortunately she had been to Nova Scotia before and so was aware of the beauty of our province. She certainly didn't get to see it this time. Rain, rain, and more rain.

Joan kicked off the conference after a brief introduction by President Andy de Champlain. She talked about six ways teachers can promote more effective

language learning, six ways which develop our students'

- ability to set goals, criteria and a timeline;
- understanding of the nature of the task;
- strategy repertoire;
- ability to monitor;
- ability to evaluate their own work; and
- ability to problem solve.

Joan observed that teachers should have, and do have, control over the subject matter. Some delegates questioned this because sometimes we are restricted to specific materials. However, Joan added that we could make choices within those materials, choices that are relevant to the students' needs. She mentioned that allowing students to choose materials, although requiring considerable effort on the part of the teacher, is worthwhile because it involves them and it gives them control of their language learning right from the beginning.

Joan noted that much learning has to take place outside the classroom. Our classroom lessons are first steps, but the real learning occurs in the practice outside the classroom. I would completely agree with this comment though I think it makes the assessment of learning in a language program very difficult, if not impossible. I've seen end-of-course tests where learners performed "well" but wasn't sure these tests were valid tests of learning? Would the learners use the new language skills the week after? Six months later? And, if they did, how well would they perform in the real-life situation?

Joan stressed the importance of students setting goals and measuring them. Attendance isn't a measure of performance. Students need to realize when they failed to meet a goal and they need to analyze why they failed. Was the goal too optimistic? Was it unattainable? Did the student spend too little time trying to attain the goal? If the students themselves set the goals, they tend to work to achieve them.

Perhaps most useful were her points about learners building their own strategy repertoire. They need to understand how

they got a correct answer so that they can do it again. Learners need to understand the task; they need to understand the approach of the speaker or presenter or teacher.

Taking time to prepare them to succeed is time well spent. For example, they need to learn how to listen and develop good strategies. Problem-solving can be enhanced through learner diaries. When several delegates questioned the effectiveness of diaries, Joan stressed that they are effective as long as they are about the learners' learning and progress. She recommended daily diary-writing. Learners should ask and answer these questions: Did your strategies work? If not, why not? Can you think of other strategies to use? Can you modify your goals to make them attainable? Was your timeframe realistic?

One practical tip she gave us was asking learners to share how they performed a task, what strategy they used to arrive at a correct answer. Learners can share their strategies with others who then see what the strategies can do for them.

Though, to a large extent, a review of what we learned in our teacher training programs, this presentation was an interesting reaffirmation of the importance of our learners acquiring strategies of their own to facilitate learning.

*Carol Lesbirel's Presentation
Caught in the Middle... Sometimes
in Hot Water*

Summary by Jason Doucette

Carol Lesbirel, trainer, facilitator, and multi-talented speaker, captivated her TESL Nova Scotia audience at the recent Fall Conference with her presentation "Caught in the Middle... sometimes in Hot Water," which provided a practical and common sense approach to energy-saving strategies for the workplace. Her no-nonsense, take-no-prisoners approach, including her Dr. Philisms, for instance, "your lack of preparation is not my crisis", provide a backdrop for her engaging presentation of how to navigate workplace "flying saucers" –

basically energetic vampires which drain our productivity and can be serious sources of stress both in the workplace and in life.

According to Carol, “saucer overload” can manifest in several ways, including eventual burnout, if not effectively ameliorated, and much of her presentation focused directly on how to do this. For Carol, flying saucers can be partially avoided by making specific communication choices such as providing assertive deflective response statements, for these statements not only provide a positive response to a “saucer pusher” but they also allow one to maintain a professional role in the workplace. More specifically, for the ever-flying-saucer world of the ESL teacher, Carol poignantly points out that as teachers we have to recognize the intermediary role we play between our boss and our students. Ignoring this interplay will not only sap our vital energy but make for uncomfortable workplace relations as well. Moreover, she asserts that we need to develop trust through effective communication with both our students and our employers; the gain here being that, once trust is established, we can [then] experience more workplace freedom, for a boss’s trust equates with leniency, less micro-management, and the freedom to do what we all love to do – teach! Perhaps, more importantly, effective and professional communication yields respect, which in turn makes for a smooth flowing work environment.

In summation, highlights of Carol’s seminar include the importance of developing rapport not only with our students – and, let’s face it, our customers in the ESL workplace – but also more importantly with our employers who, themselves a part of the management chain, need to act professionally and, as Carol frames it, avoid amateurish behavior. And we need to make deposits in the trust bank, always watching that we do not withdraw more than we bank; for, after all, earning trust is, much like building your credit score, a slow process while losing it is fast and easy. All in all, by simplifying the complex workplace world in which we all have to negotiate, Carol offers us deep insight into and a great framework for our ESL workplace, in fact for any workplace. For more information on Carol, check out her website at www.trainwithcarol.com.

*Roundtable by Christine Grimshire:
How Can Language Schools Use
NSSE?*

Summary by Christine Grimshire

Seven gathered to explore ways to adapt the techniques of the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) to the needs of language schools. We were instructors, administrators, and school owners. We represented English in the Workplace, English for Academic Purposes, and general English language learning.

NSSE has been around since 2000 and is used by more than 1,300 universities and colleges internationally. It measures students’ levels of engagement with learning in the classroom, institutional programs and activities meant for personal development, and the community they are in. We all know that most language learning happens outside the classroom. Institutions that use NSSE believe the data gained helps them make changes that lead to improved learning, fewer drop-outs, more loyal alumni, and increased word-of-mouth promotion of the school.

Each year, a random selection of first-year and senior-year students answer survey questions that measure behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes. It contains five benchmarks: Active and Collaborative Learning; Level of Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; Enriching Educational Experiences; and Supportive Campus Environment.

While discussing Active and Collaborative Learning, talk quickly focused on what different schools do to get their learners out into the community using their language and bringing back to the classroom questions on how to improve their language skills. There was also considerable discussion on the importance of not imposing Western values in a culturally imperialistic way.

An hour is not much time to explore such a big topic. Noticing that we were quickly running out of time, we cherry-picked topics

from the other benchmarks. The first was the importance of students seeing the relevance/importance of the classroom activities to real language use. We finished with a rousing discussion on ways to enrich the educational experience in the classroom and in the campus environment. It is hoped that this workshop will have generated enough interest that the participants will think more deeply about ways to increase student engagement.

*Roundtable by Jason MacDonald:
Learners in Need*

Summary by Jason MacDonald

After a shaky start where I set up my position and materials at the far end of the table where it was nearly impossible for the participants at the opposite end to hear me, and having to move my notes and handouts to my newly assigned seat in the middle of the group, mixing everything up as I went, we got off to a great start.

The aim of this roundtable discussion was to allow everyone to focus on a particularly difficult situation experienced in their teaching, especially one in which a learner may have had exceptional needs or may have been disadvantaged in some way. (dyslexic student, student with attention deficit problem, etc.) And then to open a discussion on the various ways tricky classroom situation could be successfully resolved.

The Roundtable was presented in THREE parts. The first and third parts focused on these challenging situations, how to keep things interesting while breaking them up; the second part was allotted for participants to discuss relevant vocabulary for ESL teachers, to circulate and share ideas and to meet participants from other groups by doing a JIGSAW.

***Part 1 (pair work)**—Participants were asked to turn to the person on their left and tell about a difficult situation they'd encountered in an ESL classroom. They were instructed not to explain how the situation was handled, but to ask the advice of their partner.

****Part 2 (vocabulary jigsaw)**—Participants formed groups of THREE and each group was given a (different) list of THREE vocabulary words. Each group was asked to build a definition for and to create an example using each of the terms in a fitting context. After discussing the terms, participants were labelled A, B, or C. Next, an A group, a B group, and a C group were formed to share their respective terms so that each participant would end up having discussed all NINE vocabulary terms. At the end of the exercise, all participant were given the British Council definitions of the terms with examples to compare.

*****Part 3 (group discussion)**—Case study sheets were handed out, each sheet outlining FOUR different "challenging classroom situations". Groups discussed the case study while the facilitator made rounds, randomly circling SECTION 2 vocab terms and challenging participants to discuss cases within the context of the chosen vocabulary.

The roundtable seemed to be well received and, I hope, of benefit to everyone who participated. The discussions and comments I had the opportunity to hear as I monitored the session were very insightful and it was hard not to stop and join a group myself. Everyone was highly engaged and seemed to be enjoying mixing with the various groups, exchanging ideas, meeting new faces and running into old friends. All with an educational goal!

In future, I'll plan to include a comments card so that group members can offer comments on and criticism of the roundtable discussion, a small oversight but one that made me miss a good chance at gathering some valuable, free advice.

Roundtable by Hong Wang: The phonological and syntactic challenges facing Chinese and Arabic Learners of English

Summary by Sophie Paish

The differences between the native language (L1) and the target language (L2) can create enormous difficulties for L2 learners. In our roundtable we discussed the phonological and syntactic challenges facing Chinese and Arabic learners of English. Our roundtable discussion began with a brief look at the evolution of Chinese symbols, the Arabic alphabet, and the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). Subsequently, each group member at the table was given two charts. The first was for recording the phonological and syntactic differences (or similarities) between Chinese and English while the second was for Arabic and English.

Features of the languages discussed included, but were not limited to, phonology, stress, word order, tenses, use of "to be," pronouns, modals, articles and spelling. Generally, group members had similar findings regarding difficulties for Chinese and Arabic speaking learners of English. Members were also able to share suggestions and give advice regarding how to solve in-class issues connected to their students' language development.



Roundtable by Sharon Churchill Roe: Technology in the Face-to-Face Classroom.

Summary by Sharon Churchill Roe

Our roundtable focused on technology in teaching. Since the interests and experiences of the group were varied, we discussed a wide variety of topics. We began with sharing some of our favourite web resources. Everyone had interesting suggestions of different sites they like to use with their students. Next we discussed the Learning Management System Moodle and how we use it in our teaching. Most of us were familiar with Moodle, and found it to be a useful resource to enhance learning in and out of the classroom. We talked briefly about online teaching using Moodle and other web-based platforms like WizIQ. All in all, it was a very useful discussion with lots of idea sharing. It seemed that we all walked away with lots of new ideas to try.

Why attend the 2011 TESL Canada Conference?

- It's in Halifax! April 28-29-30
- Workshops by ESL professionals from across the country
- Keynote presentations by Michael Swan and Roy Lyster
- 70 workshops to choose from
- The next conference isn't until fall 2012 and will be in Kamloops BC!
- Early bird registration for members: March 28

For details go to:

<http://www.teslins.ca/conference.html>

email: conference2011@gmail.com