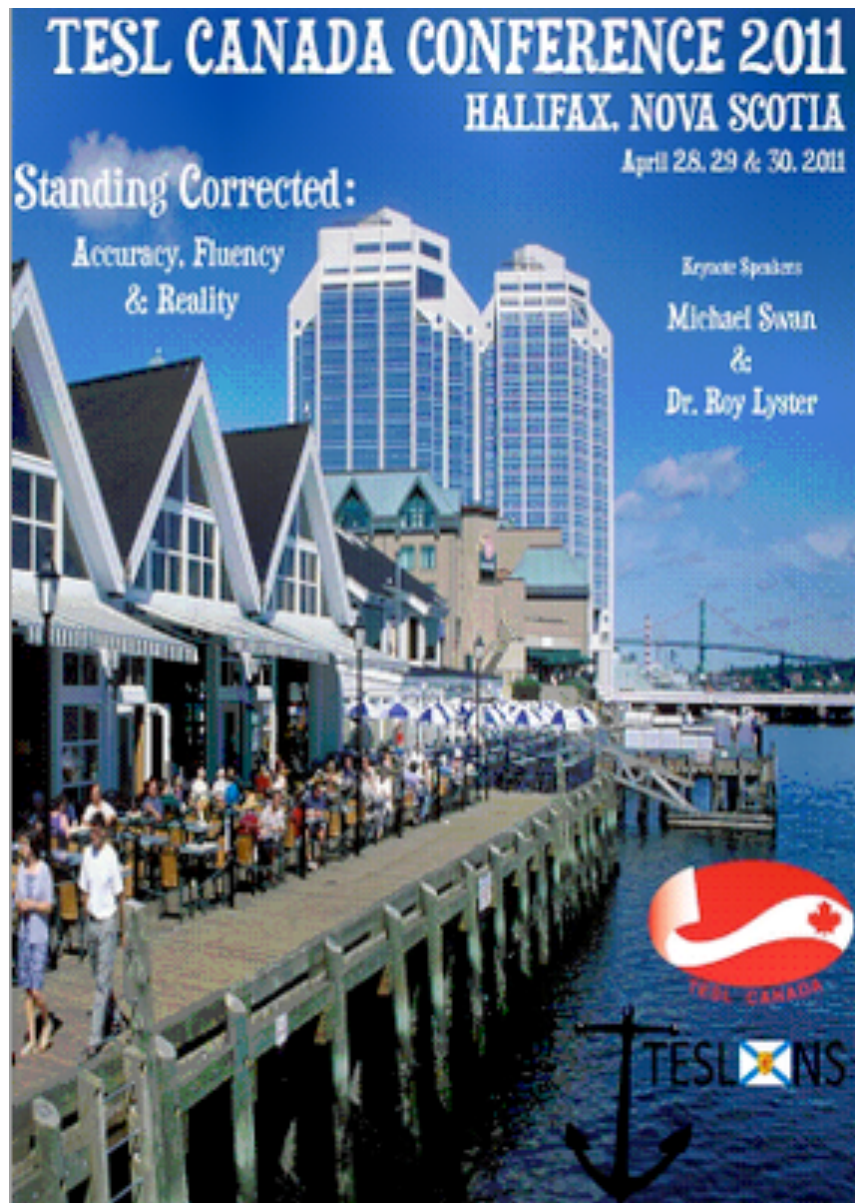


NEWSLETTER Spring 2011

The Conference Newsletter



Editorial

Greetings everyone!

The TESL Nova Scotia (teslins.ca) Association has proudly hosted another TESL Canada National Conference. It was a big success. A big thank-you is due to the very active members of the TESL Nova Scotia Board under the leadership of Ms. Ellen Pilon (TESL Canada President), Mr. Andy de Champlain (TESL NS President). Please read what some of our conference committee members have written about the conference.

What do we as teachers do when we go to professional conferences -- local, national, or international? We are brought together by some common objectives: to be better informed, to share experience, to support each other, to get professionally energized, to network -- in a word, to become better teachers. As much as time allows, we also try to enjoy what the host city has to offer. After all, we are in the business of teaching languages and language can't be separated from culture. Some TESL NS members {Ellen Pilon, Fe Baculi, Shawn Deleu, Hong Wang} were also in New Orleans last March to attend an Annual TESOL Convention along with exciting exhibits. The atmosphere of both conferences was "language and technologically electrifying".:)

I sincerely hope that more teachers will become members of professional organizations for teaching and attend more conferences. As the world changes, administrative policies change, teaching qualifications change, our diverse student population changes, and the needs of our students changes. To serve them better -- and to survive better -- we teachers have to change too. Our teaching techniques have to change and our grasp of the ever-changing situation has to change. We don't want to be left behind. I am therefore inviting more members to join our association and to attend our conferences.

Try us; there is nothing to lose but much to gain.

May the long-awaited summer be here soon and bring us more sunshine than our "drizmal" spring. Happy summer (and vacation) to you all!

Fe Baculi (Editor)
SMU/TESL Faculty



A Snapshot of Our Best Laid Plans

by Andy de Champlain

Over two years ago, Ellen Pilon came back from Out West, the neuron centre of TESL Canada, and told our modest little crew -- the Board of TESL Nova Scotia -- that we could host the 2011 national conference here in Halifax, if we wanted.

She looked around the room.

"Yeah, let's do it," I said.

Everyone present gave a slow nod of agreement.

Only Ellen really knew just how huge an undertaking we were agreeing to (she'd done this before), and I believe she tried to subtly warn us but without discouraging us. To say yes to something means you must follow through, and ultimately we did.

We needed keynote speakers.

Michael Swan's name came up. Ellen would contact him. Let's flash forward a bit now, to the day he actually came to Halifax. He told me over dinner, at the Five Fishermen, that if Ellen had not not had the good sense to ask him two years in advance, he would never have done it. It was a real treat to get to chat with Michael Swan about hiking, poetry, Scotch and so many other things not related to TESL.

Then there was Roy Lyster. I had read a lot of his stuff; still, the night before his keynote address, I was up until 4 trying to piece together a worthy monologue to introduce him, since I had also volunteered to introduce both keynote speakers. By the time Roy was finally talking to the delegates, I was so exhausted, I nearly passed out. It was embarrassing. Ellen was on the verge of kicking me under the table.

It really was an exhausting undertaking. Between agreeing to host the national conference and the date of the conference we lost our president; and, since I was the vice president, it all came onto me. Throughout the conference I and other TESL NS board members were putting in 12- to 16-hour days, running the registration tables.

The meetings, e-mails, number crunching, delegating, sorting through presentation proposals, dealing with publishers, choosing menu items for various meals, editing the program book and stuffing conference bags at our swag party, we all really put a lot into this conference, but in the end, I think, we can fairly say, it was all worth it. It was a very valuable experience.

Conference Successes *by Ellen Pilon*

What could be better than working with eleven other dedicated, conscientious volunteers for two years to organize and then deliver a nation-wide TESL conference for 450 people? Well, maybe a lot of things: leisurely weekends with one's family, a higher salary, an extended all-expenses paid vacation, winning the lottery, etc. But as far as volunteering goes, this was an amazing and rewarding experience because of the comfortable compatibility and commitment of our group.

So for me the most important part of this conference experience was working with such an awesome team. During the conference we were together as many as 12 or 14 hours a day, three days in a row. Before that we had many brainstorming and organizing meetings; we had a wild bag-stuffing party; we had millions of emails. Such awesome volunteers don't grow on trees.

In particular I think Andy deserves immense praise for stepping in as TESL Nova Scotia President and Conference Chair. He hadn't expected to take on these positions, but handled it all with aplomb. He was always there for us all. He was wonderful looking after our keynote speakers and being Master of Ceremonies for our events and coordinating the exhibitors. He kept us all calm and focused. He was also willing to answer countless emails from me and to spend Sundays with me planning and fixing problems.

I think Andrea deserves special mention for her wonderful organization and negotiation skills in arranging all the social events. She was awesome in getting ideas and commitment from Ambassadors for the bus, Pier 21 for the morning tour, entertainment for Friday evening, the Keith's tour, and the location for the lobster dinner. Both Thursday tours were very popular: thanks to Parisa for guiding the Pier 21 tour, and Andrea for the Peggy's Cove tour. Michael Swan thoroughly enjoyed both tours; he also really appreciated Sharon's help with the Macintosh computer for his presentations. He was relieved to have such expertise available the whole time. Thanks to Jason D. and Haiyan for being there all the time to key in the internet password and to coordinate with the AV guys. Thanks to Olga, Christine, Hong and Jason M for being spending long hours at the registration table and getting there at the crack of dawn, and also for participating so actively in all the planning committees. Thanks to Fe for collecting all our ideas together into this newsletter.



Another highlight for me was the email communication with many of the presenters and delegates, some of whom had presented and attended the 2008 conference in Moncton. Finally meeting these wonderful enthusiastic people face-to-face was a joy. I love the networking with other ESL people from across the country.

What was extra special? After all our planning and discussions and visions of the conference, it was wonderful to see it take place, to greet everyone as they came to check in, to see delegates enjoy the food we had selected, to realize the space at the WTCC was absolutely perfect. Best of all, I think, was the Friday night banquet which we wanted to make different. We wanted it to be a fun social event, and from the noise and laughter I would say we succeeded. We decided to have the buffet, which is unusual for a TESL Canada conference banquet. We spent hours choosing the food and deciding to splurge a bit and provide more choices on the buffet. The gourmet food far surpassed our dreams. We spent more time deliberating over what entertainment could best be appreciated while delegates enjoyed their social time with old and new friends, and Roger Stone was the perfect touch of Nova Scotia music.

Personally, I found the whole experience before and during the conference rewarding: all the emails, the back-and-forths, the payment reminders, balancing the budget and working out the financial statements, coordinating with the hotels and the convention centre, and so on. It's all fun. Another such hard-working, dedicated, enthusiastic bunch of volunteers would be hard to find. Just like in teaching, it's the people who make all the preliminary planning come alive.



Conference Experiences: “Ask Me”

by Jason Doucette

Well...I don't have any inside info to spill. But, as a member of the “inner circle” that worked the conference, I can say working a TESL Canada conference is not nearly as hazardous to one's health as you might expect. So if you have a chance to join your local or national TESL boards, do so. And so, with our “Ask me” buttons set to please, our small but industrious crew helped to make what was, in my not so humble opinion, a great TESL Canada conference.

While most of us working the conference were busy assisting registers and making sure all those little details no one ever sees were perfect, my interactions with those attending, albeit brief, told me that this conference was widely enjoyed. The highlight for me, and assumedly for many, was keynote speaker Michael Swan. With poise, eloquence and an assuredness that only years of experience can offer, Mr. Swan gave delightful and informative speeches that I am positive will offer those in attendance years of self-reflection about our field and what it truly means to be a bona fide ESL instructor. And, on this note, I would like to express to all those attendees and especially to those I had the opportunity to assist in helping to deliver this conference my sincere thanks and gratitude! Cheers!

Conference Highlights

by Andrea Purchase

After many meetings and much planning, the TESL Canada Conference went off without a hitch! What a success! Conference goers gave wonderful feedback about the overall organization of the conference, the lovely venue of the World Trade & Convention Centre, and the variety of workshop -- much to the delight of the behind-the-scenes folks, the TESL Nova Scotia team, who spent many hours

planning and prepping for the big conference.

During the conference, it was wonderful to work with such dedicated people who were always there to lend a hand in answering questions, directing conference goers and helping everyone find exactly what they were looking for, whether it was a cup of coffee or an Internet connection.

Part of my role in the 2011 conference was to organize activities. The Peggy's Cove/Mahone Bay trip was a success and people enjoyed the beautiful scenery despite the rather dreary weather.

The banquet was also a beautiful success with wonderful food, staff and the awesome musical entertainment of Roger Stone. We have now received a few requests for Roger's CD's!

The final evening brought the tasty lobster dinner at the Waterfront Warehouse in downtown Halifax. With many in attendance, the staff paraded sumptuous lobsters around the venue and some conference goers had their very first taste of a Nova Scotia lobster. It was a wonderful farewell to a busy week of conferencing and for many it was the last evening before heading home.

I'd like to thank all those who helped with the conference and made it a fun experience for the organizers and conference goers alike! Congratulations on a job well done, everyone!

Conference Volunteering

by Parisa Tootazehi

From directing non-TESL guests to the Prostate Cancer Support Breakfast to taking the TESL guests (including Michael Swan) on a tour to Pier 21 and Peggy's Cove, it seems like the volunteers on the board could and did juggle almost anything

planned and unplanned. Seeing smiles and hearing positive feedback from TESL delegates made the entire event such a treat. This conference had it all: world-renowned keynote speakers, a wide selection of workshops and presentations, tours to unforgettable sites, live music with a talented local artist, and of course...Nova Scotian lobster!



Conference Workshops

by Christine Grimshire

For those of us interested in distance learning program development and computer assisted language learning, the TESL Canada 2011 Conference provided several offerings, beginning with a symposium on the opening day. There was this group of educators from the province of Alberta who shared their expertise acquired during the building of a distance ESL program for rural Alberta. They began by grounding their program in guiding principles and transferred these to the needs of online learners and instructors. A lot was spoken on the needs of instructors.

A second member of the group spoke on what they had learned about the physical environment and equipment required in successful videoconferencing. No amount of programming is effective when the delivery is lacking in one or more areas. I was especially impressed to learn that, when examining the best practices in Canada, the team studied the distance ESL program offered through the Nova Scotia Community College. In their search for creating a learning environment that would equal as much as possible a face-to-face learning community, they spoke of microphone and camera placement, the optimal color for walls of the video-

conferencing room, and the clothing of the instructor.

Another important consideration is the videoconferencing team. This consists of the instructor, the remote site facilitator, and the technical support person. While the instructor often needs to be able to troubleshoot glitches in the classroom, there also needs to be a professional who makes sure the lines of communication between the host and remote sites are open. The videoconferencing team might also include the learner; so much was said about the importance of communicating clearly with the learners about the course and delivery even before the course begins. This not only means using a language the learner understands, but also presenting the information in a way that will be understood culturally.

Software choice, they said, was a matter of taste, so test-drive it. Make sure it meets your practical considerations. Is it easy to learn? How often does it crash? How expensive are the upgrades? Is it consistent with modern language pedagogical practices? The program with the most bells and whistles might not fit the bill.

The symposium ended with a section on e-learning tools and online resources to promote active learning. In addition to the many websites that offer cloze-drill exercises that practice grammar, instructors can take advantage of the many social media to expand the four productive language skills. In the symposium, listening and reading were considered as productive as speaking and writing. The social media provide opportunities to use real language to communicate real ideas.

The message I left with (besides the 100-page manual) was: distance learning is not less expensive; lesson preparation takes a lot of time; but if you want to offer ESL services to an audience that was previously inaccessible, it is eminently doable.

Conference Reflection

by Jason MacDonald

The conference went by like a large, four-day photograph, taken from a distance, with too long an aperture. Too, too long an aperture. My eyes were blurry, my head was tired. There were far too many things to see, too many presentations I wanted to attend stacked on top of one another, and, most of all, far, far, far and away too many people I wished I had had more time to stop and talk with. Volunteering at the event was great fun, but I was between a rock and a hard place; when there was something happening I wanted to take part in, it was time to help out, and when there was nothing much to be done as a volunteer (which was a lot of the time thanks to the phenomenal organization of the event and preparation done by my fellow board members) it seemed there wasn't much to see, or that it was too late to join an event, or my phone was ringing again.

I operate two student residences in Halifax, which means that trouble strikes without warning. Like most weekends, I remember the TESL Canada conference as 3 days of telephone calls from students with problems. But not the mornings! No, no. My students sleep later than I do. For those three mornings I got to leave the house at 7am, have coffee with great people, meet other teachers from across the map, and I even made it to a few of the talks. Some that stood out to me were about things like quantum learning, personal teaching philosophies, and practical advice for teaching Chinese and Arabic ESL learners. It was a wonderful weekend and an event I won't forget in years to come -- Nova Scotian food, friends, and fun.



News from TESL Canada 2011 Conference

by Paulette Cake

An article published by an enthusiastic delegate from Quebec, Paulette Cake. <http://www.ccdmd.qc.ca/nouvelles/?id=245> 06.05.2011 (reprinted with permission)

Paulette Cake, Project Manager at the Learning Centre, recently attended the TESL Canada 2011 Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The conference offered workshops on pedagogy, assessment and e-learning. Participants came from all over Canada the U.S., and even as far away as Australia, to hear the well-known keynote speakers and exchange on language teaching.

Paulette made some interesting discoveries: she learned that Alberta and Manitoba are very active in the creation of ESL resources (geared mostly toward immigrants). She was pleased with the workshops, but the ones listed below really stood out. She was able to make connections with the presenters and she hopes to collaborate and share ideas in the future.

The first day of the conference was a symposium entitled E-learning and ESL in Alberta: A strategic approach to technology. The presenters discussed the Alberta government's new strategic framework that supports the transition of adult ESL programs into the e-learning world. They presented examples of online lessons to support language learning, a successful rural urban partnership using videoconferencing and criteria for evaluating software. Paulette will receive a Guiding Principles document shortly and will be able to share it with the community.

Representatives from the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA) were also present. One of their instructors was part of the panel discussion on Fluency and Accuracy: What language tests can contribute to classroom practice. Participants could ask questions about the

commonly used certification tests such as CLBA, IELTS, CAEL, TOEFL and CELBAN. Each test has its strengths and weaknesses, and it was enlightening to discuss evaluation practices.

Her biggest discovery came from the presenters of the practical workshop called Reality Bytes: Perspective of online learning Manitoba. Presenters gave an overview of the online tools available for adult ESL learners in Manitoba:

www.myenglishonline.ca (a fabulous resource worth checking out) and www.manitobanurses.ca/education-and-training/canadian-culture-and-communication-for-nurses.html (a complete resource for internationally trained nurses who would like Canadian licensing this means language resources). Paulette was personally invited to attend and talk about what's going on in Québec. Online tools were presented with much enthusiasm and she got positive comments on the CCDMD's resources.

TESL NS hosted the event and offered many opportunities for ESL teachers from elsewhere to meet and discuss their realities. Paulette also connected with people from TESL Ontario, who were interested in CCDMD's eTCALS placement test and the Learning Centre's online tools.

The keynote speakers were Michael Swan and Roy Lyster, a researcher at McGill University. Both spoke about Accuracy, Fluency and Reality in language learning.

Paulette is really glad she had the opportunity to attend this conference everyone agreed that sharing experiences and tools is inspiring and motivating!

TESL Canada letter of thanks to the conference committee:

We received a card of thanks from TESL Canada for all our work on the TESL Canada 2011 Conference. The photograph on the card was one of Kent Avery's balancing rocks.

May 2011

TESL Canada 2011 Conference Committee:

This is just a short note to say thank you for all you have done to make the 2011 Conference a success. TESL Canada knows that a conference is only as successful as its volunteers and therefore is very grateful.

Thanks a million

*Louise Aerts
Executive Director
TESL Canada*

The Conference Committee

Andy de Champlain, Conference Chair

Ellen Pilon, Conference Coordinator

Andrea Purchase, Entertainment & Tours

Christine Grimshire

Fe Baculi

Haiyan Sun

Hong Wang

Jason Doucette

Jason MacDonald

Olga Sarycheva

Parisa Tootazehi

Sharon Churchill

Special thanks to Jeff Totten of the World Trade Centre and to Barbara Broome of the Prince George Hotel.