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# TESL NL NEWSLETTER

[WWW.TESLNL.CA](http://WWW.TESLNL.CA)

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



### DR. XUEMEI LI

Dear members,

I hope our inaugural newsletter finds you well in this beautiful summer.

Last fall after our inaugural conference, we received lots of positive feedback from the presenters and audience. A former member who moved to Ontario said what we achieved made her proud of being a Newfoundlander. Yes, we have made a difference in the field of TESL and made TESL NL visible to the public over the last few years, through collective efforts of our members, and in particular, our Board of Directors, who have dedicated many hours of their spare time to the rejuvenation of our association. As I am writing, I realize that it will take me a while to list the things we have done, so I decide to save my time. Other members may want to mention a few highlights based on their memories.

As a future-oriented person, I just want to tell our members that this newsletter is simply one of the many “firsts” in the history of TESL NL. There will be more. Be hopeful. Be confident. If you are following the news concerning newcomer education and support in this province, you should know more positive changes are on the way, and we will have an even stronger voice in the future.

All the best,

Xuemei Li, PhD

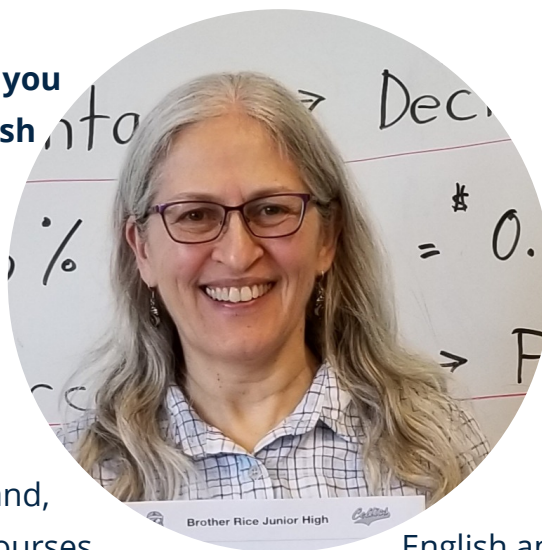
TESL NL President

# INTERVIEW WITH SUZANNE FITZPATRICK

INTERVIEWED BY TINA ROWE AND SUSANNE DROVER

- **When and how did you get into teaching English as an additional language?**

In 1982 when I returned home to St. John's for the summer from university on the mainland, I was planning to take courses at MUN and work part-time. I registered at the then so-called "Manpower" centre to assist in the job search. Next thing, Jack Jardine, the guidance counsellor at the Newfoundland School for the Deaf (NSD), started calling requesting that I come for an interview as they were looking for someone with a theatre background to work with a group of senior students over the summer. Initially, I told him no, I'm enrolled in summer courses and do not know sign language. However, he persisted and continued to call as they needed to hire a post-secondary theatre student to fulfill grant obligations and there weren't many people fitting that description in the province at that time. Finally, I relented and went in for an interview thinking I'd never get the job and he'd stop calling. Next thing, I am dropping courses at MUN and heading to work at the NSD, first observing classes,



and then trying to function as a teaching assistant during the school day, and teaching tap dancing and drama extra-curricularly after school, while simultaneously trying to learn signed

English and American Sign

Language as fast as I could. So essentially, I was learning ASL from the students, while helping them learn ESL.

- **Can you give us some insight into motivating students?**

As a teacher I always try to develop my students' curiosity and desire to learn. A lot of what I have done, especially in the Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) position at Brother Rice Junior High (BRJH) is to follow the students' lead. Often, questions posed by students lead into big units focusing on providing answers to those questions. It's an inquiry-based approach which facilitates deep learning. One year the students were asking questions about bears which led us to spend months learning about bears. Another group was

fascinated with space. Another year we focused on Earth's biomes. Once we spent a term studying the differences between Formula 1, Indy and stock cars, and another learning about bridges. This past year we had two basic themes: Canada's indigenous peoples and Black Lives Matter which reflected what is going on in Canada and the world. So basically, students ask questions and I teach them how to do research, find answers, and I learn along with them. If students are studying what they're interested in, they are intrinsically motivated, and I help them find and learn the English words they need to communicate their learning.

- **What has been the biggest change you've noticed in the field of English language teaching throughout the course of your career?**

I've taught a long time, so there's been a sea-change in pedagogy and methodology over the course of my career. English language teaching used to be much more of a knowledge transfer from teacher to students. This is what you need to know; go home and study these words or memorize how to conjugate these verbs. Education today is much more student-centred.

Teaching a second or other language is now more about providing rich language learning experiences. I've spent the last

twelve and a half years at BRJH focusing on teaching content via language learning.

- **Can you share with us some of your favourite resources?**

If you were to ask my students, they would say, "Google!" I absolutely love finding answers to questions using Google. I use it a lot and encourage students to use it too to find the answers they need, to translate and define new words, or to find images of nouns, for example.

I take a very etymological and philological approach when teaching English. I like to help students see the links between languages and words, so my next go-to resource would be the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). I kept a reference version at school, and I have the Shorter OED at home. Sometimes nothing beats a good old hard copy of the OED.

I also love using Reading Bear ([readingbear.org](http://readingbear.org)) which was created by WatchKnowLearn.org managed by non-profit St. Charles Place Foundation in Memphis, Tennessee, to teach English phonics and vocabulary. It is an excellent free resource. I've seen recent arrivals work through the fifty lessons and improve their English reading by two or three grade levels.

Binogi is also in my top five. My friend Jim Cummins who taught at OISE told me about it in the summer of 2019 when it was only binogi.com. This past school year I participated in an OISE research project using the newly minted binogi.ca. It's a phenomenal resource providing animated science and math videos with the options of selecting the voiceover and subtitle languages. It was originally developed by Swedish educators to teach refugee and immigrant students with academic gaps (i.e., LEARN students). We used it extensively this spring to learn about water, carbon footprints and climate change. Binogi allows students who have minimal English skills to learn in their first language and to accelerate English acquisition.

Another favourite resource would be folktales and fables from all over the world. Students love reading stories from their culture, or stories they already know. Often, they can connect to these stories because they have already been exposed to a similar version in their language. For example, Aesop's fables, are known all around the world. Students get very excited when they recognize a known story. Folktales and fables help create connections between students, as well.

- **What advice would you give new teachers coming into the field about how they can make a real difference in students' language development?**

My first advice would be to listen to students and follow their lead. What are they interested in? What do they want to know? If you walk in with a wonderful unit on animals, for example, pre-planned and ready to go, but the students want to know why the highway collapsed in Genoa or the condo building in Surfside, it's going to be a long, painful animal unit for everyone.

**Suzanne Fitzpatrick** was the first intermediate Literary Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) teacher in NL. Recently retired, she spent her career in Toronto and St. John's, teaching refugee and immigrant youth from all over the world.

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- Professional Learning
- Connection and Community
- Resource Sharing
- Advocacy and Support

# TESL NL MEMBER PROFILE

## KRISTEN BUTLER



- **Position:** Level 3/4 ESL Teacher with Association for New Canadians Adult ESL Training Centre in St. John's, NL.

- **My favourite thing about teaching:**

My favourite thing about teaching with the ANC is getting to know our students. I love being a part of their language-learning process and in their newcomer experience. We have such a diverse student community at our school, with adult students of all ages, from various countries, and with unique backgrounds and varying educational and work experiences. As a relatively new ESL teacher (and new to teaching adults, too!), it has been so interesting to observe and to take note of how my students like to learn and what particular learning tasks and activities seem to “click” for them. I've met such interesting and truly wonderful people through my teaching role- it has been a genuine learning experience for me, as well.

- **My recommended resource**

I have been introduced to so many great interactive resources (especially during our period of online teaching and learning) that I think have eased my planning/assessment tracking, and that have encouraged my students to study independently, practice at their homes, and to build on their computer literacy skills. Most recently, I have been using the teaching resource “ESL Library” to support my teaching- this website offers lots of visuals, listening activities, CLB-connected real world tasks, and has an excellent variety of themes and topics. Use of technology in our teaching and learning has been made a priority at our ANC school, and I really enjoy using a variety of tech tools to support our students' language learning.

- **Final note**

Teacher collaboration is also an incredibly helpful resource- sharing ideas and experiences, offering and receiving suggestions, and working together to problem-solve and discuss best practices. The challenges of teaching and learning throughout the COVID pandemic have shown me the importance of community, of working together, and of how important it is to communicate effectively during difficult times.