EnglishOnline

Blazing the trail towards collaboration and innovation in the field of EAL/ESL in Canada

Realize, a National Forum for English as an Additional Language/English as a Second Language (EAL/ESL) practitioners in Canada, was established in 2014 to answer the following needs:

1. Offer a sustainable Professional Development model for English as an Additional Language/English as a Second Language (EAL/ESL) practitioners
2. Provide a forum whereby in depth discussions of diverse topics relevant to the EAL/ESL community are conducted to build practitioners' knowledge and expertise, and provide them up-to-date teaching and learning tools
3. Provide a venue for networking and collaboration among EAL/ESL practitioners from all parts of Canada
4. Upgrade technology training for conference tools through a hands-on, experiential process
5. Establish a lasting repository of resources which practitioners can access anytime

Now on its second run, the forum has established a strong following among EAL/ESL practitioners as an ideal alternative professional development of choice. With expert educators, curriculum developers and newcomer integration experts lecturing on more than 30 topics ranging from effective use of online tools to issues on intercultural communication and ethnocentrism in English language instruction, the forum has expanded its reach across Canada

The Online Connection
One of the project's major values is its innovative design and cost-effective nature. Because the forum is held online, using Web 2.0 tools, it hurdles the usual impediments to professional development, mainly: distance, cost, and time. The seminar is for free, and does not require participants to travel. They can attend the forum in the comfort of their own homes or workplaces, wherever in Canada they may be. The forum is flexible - participants can choose from a breadth of topics they are interested in, at the time most convenient for them. Furthermore, the use of technology to participate in the forum, augmented by social media tools to chat, ask questions, and react, provides a unique, hands-on opportunity for all stakeholders (participants, presenters, and moderators) to learn and explore new media and conference tools.

Realize Organizational Structure
Another key element to the Realize forum is its lean structure that banks on English Online's straightforward organizational processes and expertise in educational technology. Despite being national in scope, Realize is handled by a small team composed of English Online staff, supported by a volunteer advisory committee. The team provides pre-seminar support in the form of pre-needs surveys, teacher newsletters, monthly webinars, presenter and moderator trainings, participant orientation, creation of stakeholder manuals, facilitation of proposals, event planning, and promotions. During the event, the team provides technical support as well as facilitation of group forums. Post-event, the team maintains online resources such as video recordings, presentation slides, and hand-outs, and sends out certificates of participation, and badges to stakeholders.

PRE-SEMINAR SUPPORTS

2013-2014
9 teacher newsletters, 7 monthly webinars, 3 manuals, 7 BBB orientation sessions for presenters and moderators, 34 one-on-one presenter training sessions, handled 889 registrants, and 27 presenters

2014-2015
7 teacher newsletters, 6 best practice webinars, 11 presenter trainings (from across Canada), handled 797 registrants, and 18 volunteer moderators

2014 *participants said that*

89% forum connected teachers in remote areas

83% great possibilities for sharing across Canada

74% great learning for novice EAL/ESL teachers

61% fostered understanding of tech & Web 2.0

SUMMARY OF IMPACT AND BENEFITS

Based on survey results, here are the forum's most notable benefits for stakeholders:

On its first run, the answers of 208 respondents (participants) to the post-conference survey reflected that the Realize Conference achieved the following goals:

- **89%** said that the forum reduced a sense of geographical and professional isolation faced by teachers in remote areas
- **83%** said that it provided great possibilities for sharing and dissemination of best practices across Canada
- **74%** expressed that it offered great learning opportunities for novice EAL/ESL teachers
- **61%** answered that the forum helped participants better understand the use of technology and Web 2.0 tools for education

Moreover, majority expressed satisfaction in the organization and handling of the forum as seen from these results: **91%** were very satisfied with the registration process, **89%** were very satisfied with the length of the workshops, **82%** with the diversity of topics, and **89.9%** would recommend the forum to others. Of the respondents, **56.7%** are first-time participants and of these, **71.5%** attended 2-5 sessions.

Measuring the experience and satisfaction of the 24 presenters, the survey showed that **95%** were very satisfied with Realize Team support and communication, **70%** learned new skills by participating, **66%** felt strongly that the online platform for presentation of their subject was effective and **75%** were very satisfied with training resources.

On the other hand, the 2015 survey almost mirrored the survey results of 2014, with:

- 87% of the participants expressing that the forum reduced a sense of geographical and professional isolation of teachers in remote areas
- 85% believing that the forum provided great possibilities for the sharing and dissemination of best practices across the country
- 88% agreeing that the forum demonstrated a sustainable professional development model
- 64% saying that it helped them better understand the use of technology and web 2.0 tools for education

Meanwhile **100%** of the 45 presenters said that it fulfilled their expectations in academic/professional terms, **85%** answered that presenting improved their skills with online conferencing tools, **90%** expressed that the team gave them confidence to present online, and **100%** answered that it fulfilled their expectations in academic/professional terms and they would recommend the forum to others.

The second Realize attracted as much as **58%** new participants to the forum. More than half (**62.6%**) of the respondents said that the forum increased their opportunity for Q&A during workshops by 12% and networking opportunities by 18%. Moreover, they expressed that the two-day format allowed for more attendees to participate on two days as opposed to one (**62.6%** of attendees indicated two days gave them more flexibility).

2015 *participants said that*

87% forum connected teachers in remote areas

85% great possibilities for sharing across Canada

88% forum demonstrated sustainable PD model

64% fostered understanding of tech & Web 2.0

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EVENT IN FIGURES

	REALIZE 14	REALIZE15
	Jan. 24, 2014	Jan. 23-24, 2015
Duration of event	1 day	2 days (Fri/Sat)
Total registrants	889	798
Presenters	39	45
Moderators	14	18
Presentations/online workshops	27	32 (plus 2 Keynotes)
Maximum number of attendees in concurrent sessions per time slot	273 345 (Keynote)	232 (Friday) 156 (Saturday) <u>Keynote views:</u> 266 (Friday) - 202 on YouTube + 64 GooglePlus 549 GPlus & YouTube playback 156 (Saturday) - 107 YouTube + 49 GPlus 293 YouTube playback
Average number of attendees per Realize session	54	54
Highest number of attendees in a session	103	106
Badges & Certificates	<u>Badges:</u> Presenters 39 Moderators 14 Participants 9 <u>Certificates of participation</u> 155	45 18 117 Volunteer 11 Contributor 7 257