

Message from Dudley Reynolds, President, TESOL International

The Power of Association

Greetings to NYS TESOL! One of the real strengths of the TESOL International Association is the worldwide network of affiliate associations it relies on to keep it in touch with local issues and whom it can unite to show the impact that English language teachers are having on all levels of society today.

When I served as associate chair for the 2008 TESOL convention in New York City, I had the chance to see how NYS TESOL members from around the state worked together as a team. They helped with whatever we asked, made us aware of the issues that had an impact on their members and classrooms, and served as a second family for each other. As a family, they knew what it was like to have to piece together four adjunct jobs to make ends meet or be the only ones in a school to understand that “ESL kids” were as diverse as the rest of the student body.

Recently, I had the honor of representing the TESOL International Association at the 34th national conference of our affiliate in Venezuela, VenTESOL; the conference theme was “Reflecting and Taking Actions in ELT.” You are probably aware of the social and economic turmoil gripping Venezuela at this moment. Teachers have watched their salaries devalue to the point that they cannot even cover a week’s worth of food for a family, much less a month’s. In one of the presentations, a teacher said that she could no longer ask students to practice describing what they had for breakfast because it was too depressing. Despite these hardships, over 800 teachers from around the country found ways to make it to the conference—many for the first time and many of them young teachers in training. I heard them saying the same thing I heard in New York in 2008: VenTESOL reminds us that we are more valuable than our salaries reflect, that we are professionals with dignity and worth.

Our conferences and events, be they virtual or face to face, are times for reflecting and learning. They are opportunities to step out of the day-to-day world and all its pressures, to learn from each other, and to dive deep. This chance to be “intellectual” brings renewal for many of us. But as I realized so strongly in Venezuela, conferences are also a source for action. Again and again, I heard the new and old alike say that the chance to come together—to associate—had given them new knowledge and, even more important, a sense of power and confidence. In remarks at the closing ceremonies, one young attendee stood and said that he knew lots of young professionals were leaving the country, but the conference had helped him realize that this was not a good thing—that he needed to work with other teachers to help bring hope back to his country.

Finally, I also heard that while it was crucial for the teachers at the conference to know that they had a community of practice in Venezuela, it was equally important for them to know that they also were part of a worldwide community of people who believed in the power of language education to change lives and places. This is the power of association.

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