



Summary report

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The TESOL Summit on the Future of the Profession was an exhilarating experience! Delegates, speakers and representatives from TESOL International Association and others across the profession gathered in Athens, Greece February 7th and 8th where we discussed a number of current megatrends and their potential impact on our profession.

My theme of futurology with a focus on professionalism led me to focus on the potential for using social media professionally. Social media offers all of us the opportunity to engage with others around any topic that is important to us. The global reach of social media is dramatically increasing and many have projected that within just a few years there will be only a few small pockets of human beings without access to these vital means of communication. Considering this potential we are not only presented the ability to reach a broad diversity of people, as professionals we have a responsibility to do so. Professionals in any field share a responsibility to communicate with individuals both inside and outside the profession about the issues that are important to their profession.

Such engagement should guide us toward the pursuit of moving the profession forward, galvanizing stakeholders, and publically advocating for the profession, our institutions, ourselves and, most of all, our students. The English students and future teachers we work with deserve for us to represent them, particularly when so many economic and political forces bear down on them as a backlash to globalization, multiculturalism, and technological developments (among other megatrends). It was obvious throughout the two days that all of the other themes could benefit from the use of technology as a means of disseminating information, gathering stakeholder's contributions, and advocating on behalf of the profession.

However, it is obvious that some are reluctant to embrace social media. This reluctance is in spite of the vast potential it has to influence people and open channels of communication with others across the globe. In my talk, I attempted to assuage concerns that are based on the perception of numerous threats, including identity and security threats as well as a general sense of being overwhelmed when considering the vast quantity of information already present

across the social media landscape. This apathy has resulted in some opting out of social media altogether. I presented the scenario that choosing to not engage in social media is not really an option, particularly for professionals with an obvious public presence. Such a void is not only fertile ground for mischief, it also represents a missed opportunity to communicate. After all, if you are not advocating on behalf of an issue, you are sending a message that it is not important to you. TESOL International Association has a long history of taking a stand on important issues that influence the profession. In fact, I began my talk by mentioning my appreciation for Dudley Reynolds and Rosa Aronson and the public message they released on February 2nd, 2017. As I said, “It begins with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr, ‘In the end it will not be the voices of our enemies that we remember, it will be the silence of our friends,’ and ends with a call for us all to “speak up whenever possible about these issues” and “It is important that we as professionals not be “silent friends” to those we serve and work with.” This timely call should serve as inspiration for all of us to strive to be better caretakers of our profession and professional community. Of course, one of the most obvious places to begin developing community today is across social media.

As we promote and support increased social media presence across the profession, it would also be worthwhile to explore ways to create more engaged communities online around various extant groups and issues across our profession as well as across new topics. During and since the summit I have heard from many delegates and community members that they simply did not know where to start regarding social media. Some were concerned that getting a message through all the noise of social media is difficult. Others were more optimistic and acknowledged they had not considered the implications of not engaging in social media on behalf of the profession. A handful of these representatives told me they would try it out in the near future. Some of the concerns that people expressed about the use of social media included concerns that their engagement may exist within a bubble, may largely go unnoticed, or may ultimately be misunderstood or misrepresented. I believe that much of this apprehension is the byproduct of our nascent experience with social media as well as the increasing awareness of misinformation and deception present across the social media landscape.

There are a variety of issues that we need to address in order to help TESOLers across the profession become active social media contributors. First, it is important to establish a sense of the difference between personal, private, and professional social media presence and participation. Similarly, it is important that participants recognize how these different domains (personal, professional, pedagogical, etc.) support these different contexts. Second, members would benefit from learning how to engage with individuals who may disagree with us. I think these situations may present a number of opportunities for us to articulate our values with others who may not understand. Of course, it is important to be able to distinguish between those who are willing to engage in meaningful discussion and those who simply want to argue

(e.g Internet Trolls). Similarly, there is concern about sorting through all of the varied forms of misinformation in social media. Whether it is intentional deception, accidental mistakes or parody, it is obvious that many social media users are not able to successfully navigate these domains. This is largely due to the newness and our lack of familiarity within these contexts. As we develop more experience, we will certainly develop better abilities. In the meantime, professional organizations such as the TESOL Association could provide some tips or best practices for representatives.

I think it would be fruitful to have workshops at the annual TESOL Convention as well as other professional development contexts to guide professionals, particularly those in leadership positions, to learn how to optimize their social media use and presence. While the Electronic Village within each TESOL Convention already supports a variety of social media practices for instructional purposes, there has not been support for its use across non-pedagogical domains within the profession. As with any profession, ours has a unique community with unique interests, identities, and purposes. Such workshops could help all members of the TESOL community to better engage with others within the community in order to collectively better understand and appreciate our shared experiences. Increased and improved social media practices can also help members of the TESOL community to share their perspectives and concerns with others who are outside the community with overlapping interests of who may be potential advocates. Communities such as ours are better served when members and other stakeholders share their perspectives with one another. Promoting a culture that welcomes a variety of viewpoints is critical for a community such as the TESOL profession. Increased and enhanced dialogue can only strengthen this community. As we participate more thoughtfully and more deeply, we will collectively improve our abilities to navigate and use these social media platforms and improve our abilities to engage with other members of our own community as well as others.

While it is necessary for all of us to establish and maintain public profiles for our professional personae, the potential for using social media in language education is equally important. There are so many opportunities to create compelling and engaging experiences for learners to practice language in authentic contexts while using authentic language for authentic purposes. In fact, within the domain of social media, these contexts are evolving in ways that can often only be understood by those who participate in the culture that exists across these unique social contexts. Therefore, it is even more important to introduce learners to responsible use of these contexts. Such preparation should help our learners to be more engaged and informed democratic participants.

Of course this online engagement supports meaningful face to face engagement as well. As we connect with others who also value multicultural and educational goals, we learn more about

opportunities to get involved in our local contexts. We can see how powerful this has been in the past few months. We have had record numbers of citizens turn out around the world for the women's march, the march for science, and various other marches that have brought people together around shared concerns about important social issues threatening our diverse, multicultural, and multilingual society. Together we can keep each other informed and continue moving in a positive direction.