

President's Report – Annual General Meeting 2019

Welcome, everyone. It is my privilege to share the president's report for the 2019 OMLTA/AOPLV Annual General Meeting. As I conclude my ninth year on the Board of Directors, I can say with clarity and sincerity that this year as president was the most enriching of my tenure. As a not-for-profit organization run entirely by a volunteer executive and Board of Directors, the amount of work that we all do can be quite overwhelming at times, yet, with great honesty, I can also say that this role has been and will always be among the greatest opportunities for professional learning, leadership, and collegiality that I anticipate having in my education career.

The last twelve months have been incredibly exciting, busy, and engaging times for all of at the OMLTA. There were roadblocks and there were challenges, but the organization persevered and was at times also able to move forward. The entire Board of Directors has worked extremely hard and with great care to further our commitment to meet the needs of our members. I would like to say that these 14 colleagues do not merely give up their time, they recognize the importance of collaborating for the collective benefit of all FSL and International Languages teachers. They provide valuable insight, talent, and initiative for all of us across Ontario. I am particularly grateful to Past President Nicole Czaja for her mentorship, collaborative spirit, and warmth, all of which has assured that I have been able to be the best President possible for all of you. I would be remiss to not recognize the indomitable spirit and hard work of our Program Assistant, Sonia Blanchard, who has been with us for over five years; we would be lost without you.

One major aspect that has marked my tenure as president has been continued fiscal responsibility. OMLTA has never overspent on insignificant items or made poor choices when it comes to finances. The organization continues to use its members' dues, earned income, and sponsorship dollars in meaningful ways. We have reduced our costs for meetings and related expenses, choosing to spend primarily on opportunities to support our members' needs, outreach, and improved professional learning. You can be proud of this board of directors for ensuring that funds spent were well spent.

I am pleased to share some highlights from these very busy 12 months:

OMLTA/AOPLV continues to be the voice for FSL and International Language teachers in meetings and exchanges with many stakeholders. As we continue to serve our members and lead our peers under our guiding principles of advocacy, best practices, and collaboration/*promotion, pratiques exemplaires/partenariats*, we are present in, support, and lead a wide variety of initiatives to inform, inspire, improve practice, and support our colleagues province-wide. Under our the tenets of reaching out and membership recruitment, we continued to spread the benefits of being an OMLTA member at successful networking breakfasts in London, Barrie, Thunder Bay, Kingston, and Kanata. We thank the educators who attended these events and the directors who led them!

It was an exceptional year for furthering value-added benefits for our members as we enhanced and expanded our collaborations and partnerships. As we enter our second year of our agreement with ACPI, l'Association canadienne des professionnels d'immersion, we also signed one-year partnerships with two new collaborators about which we are extremely excited:

- the Science Teachers' Association of Ontario (STAO), to help support our primary and junior immersion/extended teachers, in particular, and
- the Canadian office of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM-Canadá), the Autonomous National University of Mexico, to help support our Spanish teachers as well as those who are interested in learning the Spanish language and its diverse cultures.

We were also pleased to have renewed our agreements of understanding with CASLT, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, and Canadian Parents for French – Ontario, each for three more years! These valuable partnerships provide fantastic opportunities for collaboration and so much more. Finally, we remain the committed to our collaboration with the Ontario College of Teachers, Ontario Teachers' Federation, and the Ministry of Education, from whom we can share many learning opportunities and best practices for you, our members. As your president and a German teacher, I have also continued to collaborate with many organizations that support German-language education in Canada; responses remain positive from all involved and we are pleased that many more international languages teachers are aware of the OMLTA. In that same vein, you will see that there are several tables for associations that represent the learning of international languages at this year's conference, most of whom are attending for the first time. Do say hello to these groups. Ontario's rich cultural fabric is indeed enhanced by first-language speakers and second-language learners of international languages and the OMLTA is pleased to work with them.

In addition, due to changes in the provincial government over the last several months, two major collaboration opportunities in which OMLTA regularly participates – the provincial FSL Working Group, where major stakeholders across the FSL community meet with the Ministry to learn about and ultimately share new projects and initiatives for educators, and the Subject/Division meetings, where OMLTA and upwards of 40 other subject organizations learned about new initiatives and curricula across all disciplines, were all discontinued. We hope to be able to resume these professional learning opportunities again soon.

OMLTA/AOPLV also led a variety of learning opportunities this year. Two engaging summer institutes, sponsored by the Ontario Teachers' Federation and delivered by OMLTA directors and members, were held in the summer of 2018, in order to engage teachers in CEFR-focused projects and learning. Three OTF Connects online learning sessions hosted by former President Jenn Rochon and myself allowed both FSL and International Languages teachers to engage with assessment and evaluation, action-oriented programming, and more. These are linked and are free for all to see on our website at www.omlta.org. We thank the Ontario Teachers' Federation for their ongoing support of professional development opportunities for all educators in our province's publicly-funded schools. We also supported the CPF Ontario Pathways to Bilingualism conference in Sudbury where over 500 Core, Extended, and Immersion students in grades 7 and 8 had a chance to reflect on authentic, real-life French language use in their home communities and beyond. Further, the Spanish – Part 1 AQ, founded in 2013 by OMLTA and run at Nipissing University, ran yet again with many participants from across all panels, school boards, and first languages the province.

Even in face of potential financial pitfalls, as all of our publicly-funded school boards had not yet received their dedicated FSL funding prior to that point in the school year, we elected to move forward with our annual Fall Conference, held in October in Timmins. It was extremely well attended, featuring three incredible keynote speakers by Denis Cousineau, Léo-James Lévesque, and Dr. Enrica Piccardo, nearly 20 vendors, and 15 great workshops. It was, for me, one of the warmest and most exciting Fall Conferences in recent years, and allowed us to further our promise to better engage with members in all parts of the province. Thank you to Haley Brooks, Lynda Mitchell, and Maria Sheculski for their onsite support, as well as to Sonia and Nicole, for the hard work on our collective behalf.

In addition, we recently launched a series of games and activities for our primary and junior FSL teachers, which can easily be adapted for all levels, on our website in the members' section. These, along with our many resources, lesson plans, fact sheets, and podcasts, will serve Ontario's FSL and International Languages educators extremely well for years to come.

I could not give my AGM report without talking about our summer immersion programs: *Projet à Québec*, which celebrated its 11th edition in 2018, and the very first offering of *Projet à Moncton*. As our Past President and program lead, Nicole Czaja, says, these opportunities align with the Ministry of Education's vision of providing high quality, innovative, and immersive learning opportunities for our province's FSL teachers. These learning opportunities improve participants' proficiency in French, strengthen intercultural understanding, and help remove that affective filter when communicating in français, all of which are skills that are directly transferable to the classroom – and to our students. I would like to thank and congratulate program staff Julie Théberge, Lianne Perreault-Raymond, and Rhéal Alain for their incredible work and expertise. We congratulate the 98 educators who took part in these amazing learning opportunities in 2018! We hope to have news any day from the Ministry of Education to allow Ontario teachers with at least one year of teaching experience in FSL can apply for *Projet à Québec* and *Projet à Moncton 2019*. Fingers and toes crossed. Do stay in touch with us via our website and social media for updates.

Other benefits include that we continue our monthly e-blasts with important and relevant information and opportunities for our members. Our online magazine, *Communication*, edited by Lisa Picerno, remains a useful resource for all of our members, and we look forward to further evolving with this format. We also are pleased to have been able to offer a study bursary in Italy through the generous support of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Toronto – applications for which are now open – and to support four different language contests across the province for students of German, French, and Italian. We are frequently contacted to engage with local events across Ontario and we always do our utmost to be involved: this year, we supported and accepted invitations from the Grand Erie DSB, le Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, the Golden Horseshoe regional consortium, three different Faculties of Education, and multiple Additional Qualification courses. OMLTA remains involved with the present and the future of our profession. Our many, many, many social media and website updates have been executed with aplomb by our talented webmaster, Alessandro La Gamba, to whom I also extend my sincere thanks.

As I conclude this year as president and continue to celebrate this wonderful Spring Conference, please allow me to thank my colleagues Sonia Blanchard, Nicole Czaja, Jayne Evans, Susanna Beatrice-Gojsic, Melissa Schwartz, Carla Caraffi, Vanessa Heydrich-Swan, and Karen Strong, with many thanks to Ida Continenza, for their incredible work on this year's event. We remain the largest annual event in the country for FSL and International Languages educators – and the hard work of this year's committee is a testament to our commitment to our members. We want the OMLTA to remain among the most engaged subject associations in the province – and the country.

I would also like to thank our former Operations Manager, Kim Murray, who worked with us until November 1, 2018. The eighteen months that she shared with us were outstanding and she is a talented colleague whose collaboration we all appreciated. In a time of provincial savings which directly impact OMLTA and other subject associations, her role was largely to assist us in other revenue-generating opportunities. Kim's roles have been distributed amongst the board and staff, allowing now for further learning by all involved.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, I am pleased to share some exciting news. Since this past autumn, OMLTA has been engaged with the Ministry of Education and a variety of other stakeholders to collaborate with projects elaborated from federal government funds provided under the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023. These projects aim to benefit our profession under the identified tenets of supporting FSL educator recruitment, retention, and proficiency. All of this is in a nascent stage, but we are excited to be involved and at the table. The fact that OMLTA is involved in this process is more than just a compliment: it is a recognition that we remain a vital force in our province to support bilingualism and plurilingualism of Ontario's young people.

Please allow me to thank our Board of Directors: the previously-mentioned executives, plus Pamela Marshall Gray, Laura Dursley, Josette Bosc, Josée Boutin, Pauline Galea, Angeline Humber, Beverly Kukhta-Jackson, Alessandro La Gamba, Lisa Picerno, Lianne Perreault-Raymond, Mara Reich, and Jordan Sloan.

This has been an incredible year for OMLTA, and, if I may say, for me as your president. It's been busy, it's been hectic, and it's been rewarding to see our organization remain pertinent and meaningful in the eyes of so many, particularly in the current climate for education workers. My last official words to you

as your OMLTA President are the same with which I started my term: do everything in your power to listen to your students, to recognize their lived experiences and those of the communities around you. Be that caring adult who works hard to make sure that both the physical space and the programming are better representative of marginalized and absent voices.

As we move forward in these troubling times, let us remember that teachers and education workers are more than merely on the front lines of formal education: we are conduits for spreading messages of support, critical thinking, awareness, love, and humanity. Let us not lose that humanity, so much of which is linked back to being able to communicate meaningfully with others – oftentimes, in our shared languages. Chi miigwech, muchísimas gracias, muito obrigado, mille grazie, herzlichen Dank, merci beaucoup.

I respectfully submit my report.

Jimmy Steele

March 29, 2019