

# Teaching Graduate Students to Teach Conference: Results, Conclusions, and Fuelling Further Collaborations

Results of a conference that occurred 13-14 May 2013  
at Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre Campus, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

## Co-Chairs

Dr. Erin Aspenlieder

Educational Developer, Open Learning and Educational Support, University of Guelph  
easpenli@uoguelph.ca, @easpenlieder

Dr. Catherine Rawn

Instructor, Psychology Department, University of British Columbia  
cdrawn@psych.ubc.ca, @cdrawn

## Goals

1. To discuss current practices in graduate student training in teaching at Canadian institutions, and compare those practices to the existing research literature in this area;
2. To foster collaboration among Canadian practitioners in the field of graduate student training, including developing a national opensource, online tool to share lesson plans, manuals/guidebooks, program evaluation materials, and annotations to relevant academic resources; and
3. To mobilize Canadian scholarship of graduate student teaching training by prompting delegates to write papers for scholarly publications.

## Participant Information

- 46 people attended Day 1 (conference format); 28 people attended Day 2 (writing workshop format).
- Participants represented 16 institutions from across British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Hampshire (USA) and Wurzburg (Germany).
- 34 attendees completed feedback forms (25 of whom attended both days = 89% response rate). All subsequent data were gleaned from the feedback forms.
- Respondents checked the following "primary role(s)": 16 educational developers, 10 graduate students, 7 faculty members, 7 other
- 14 respondents were affiliated with a departmental graduate student teaching training program; 20 with a central program; 2 were not directly involved with teaching graduate students to teach
- 17 (51%) of respondents were *not* members of STLHE. Of the 16 people who were members of STLHE, 11 (69%) of those respondents were members of TAGSA.

## Format

- Day 1 emphasis on evaluating programs for graduate students in light of published scholarship.
- Day 2 writing workshop during which participants offered critiques and feedback on each others' manuscripts being prepared for publication.

## Budget

- \$10 000 budget funded by sponsorships we negotiated with Simon Fraser University's Teaching and Learning Centre and University of British Columbia's Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, as well as registration fees.

## A Sampler of Key Ideas

- Transformative learning comes from creating high challenges combined with high support (Dr. Gary Poole, Big Ideas in Teaching and Learning)
- Consult the literature when (re)designing programming. Some findings may surprise you (e.g., standard workshop model has very limited research support) (Dr. Erin Aspenlieder & Dr. Catherine Rawn, summarizing research on teaching grad students to teach).
- You are writing for the benefit of other people. You are writing for an interdisciplinary audience. Make few/no prior knowledge assumptions. (Dr. Michael Potter, on Writing in SoTL)

## Program Evaluation: Summary of Participant Feedback

### Quantitative Data

#### **Changes Planned as a Result of Participating in this Conference**

Everyone reported an intention to take some action because of their involvement in this conference (see Table 1). The most frequent intentions were to read an article on training graduate students to teach (91.2%), visit the website to find materials (76.5%), and attempt to publish a paper in this area (73.5%). People were less likely to intend to post materials to share (55.9%) than they were to seek others' materials on the website (although this difference was not statistically significant). Such a discrepancy poses a challenge to the viability of an online web portal that continuously facilitates collaboration.

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Attempt to publish a paper/article on training graduate students to teach.	25 (73.5%)*
Read one or more articles on training graduate students to teach.	31 (91.2%)*
Post materials online to share and/or collaborate.	19 (55.9%)
Collaborate with someone I interacted with at this conference.	21 (61.8%)
Visit the website to find materials.	26 (76.5%)*
Make one or more minor adjustments to my existing program (e.g., change the focus of a session within a larger program).	18 (52.9%)
Make one or more major adjustments to my existing program (e.g., add a completely new component).	11 (32.4%)
I have no plans to make any changes as a result of this conference.	0 (0%)†

\*proportion is significantly greater than 50/50 chance, based on Binomial test,  $p < .02$ .

†statistical test could not be performed due to 0 variance

### How useful did you find the sessions?

People rated every session as useful (see Table 2). The response scale ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very useful), and the average rating of each item was compared to the value of 1. All  $t$ -tests were significant,  $p < .001$ , and all effect sizes were very large by Cohen's  $d$  effect size standards. Below is the list of all sessions, ranked in order of effect size from most to (relatively) least helpful -- keeping in mind that all sessions were rated as helpful.

<b>Table 2</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Cohen's <math>d</math></b>
Day 1 Focus Session #1 Theory/Literature	28	3.46	0.79	2.20
Day 2 Writing workshop (PM)	24	3.38	0.77	2.08
Day 2 Facilitated discussion for preparing a manuscript	24	3.46	0.72	2.07
Day 2 Writing workshop (AM)	24	3.50	0.66	1.98
Day 1 Roundtable discussions	31	3.42	0.67	1.93
Day 1 Opening keynote Gary Poole	30	3.63	0.56	1.84
Day 1 Personal Reflection	25	2.84	0.99	1.83
Day 1 Poster session	31	2.94	0.77	1.64
Day 1 Panel Discussion	30	2.80	0.85	1.62

### Assessing the Impact of Each Day

Participants rated the impact of each day of the conference on many dimensions using a five point scale that ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (strongly agree). Analyses showed a high degree of agreement with all statements when compared with 1-not at all (all  $p$  values  $< .001$ ; see Table 3 for Cohen's  $d$  values). According to participants, Day 1 was especially effective at sparking new ideas,  $t(31) = 21.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.21$ , and increasing a sense of community among people who do this kind of work,  $t(31) = 23.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.13$ . Day 2 was especially effective at increasing peoples' awareness of the research literature,

$t(23) = 10.99, p < .001, d = 2.07$ , and inspiring greater reliance on it in their program designs,  $t(21) = 14.19, p < .001, d = 2.15$ .

Because the format of the days differed substantially, we directly compared peoples' ratings of Day 1 versus Day 2 on each dimension, using both mean level comparisons ( $t$ -tests) and effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ). Analyses revealed that Day 2 was significantly more successful at inspiring production of scholarly contributions than was Day 1,  $t(22) = 2.60, p = .02, |d| = .49$ , which is consistent with the design of Day 2. Additionally, Day 2 inspired greater reliance on the research literature in program design,  $t(20) = 2.65, p = .02, |d| = .32$ , and promoted more new collaborations,  $t(20) = 2.09, p = .05, |d| = .30$ , relative to Day 1.

Table 3	Day 1				Day 2				Comparison Cohen's $d$ of Difference
	N	Avg $\ddagger$	SD	Cohen's $d$	N	Avg $\ddagger$	SD	Cohen's $d$	
For me, this day of the conference promoted the use of an online tool for future collaboration.	28	2.89	0.92	1.80	20	2.40	0.82	1.18	0.57
<b>For me, this day of the conference inspired me to produce scholarly contributions in this area.*</b>	30	3.17	0.87	2.02	24	3.54	0.66	2.02	-0.49
For me, this day of the conference motivated me to improve my programming.	29	3.55	0.63	1.97	22	3.27	0.77	1.97	0.40
<b>For me, this day of the conference inspired greater reliance on the research literature in my program design.*</b>	29	3.14	0.95	2.05	22	3.41	0.80	2.15	-0.32
<b>For me, this day of the conference promoted new collaborations.*</b>	30	3.17	0.87	2.02	22	3.41	0.73	2.05	-0.30
For me, this day of the conference promoted pre-existing collaborations.	21	3.05	1.02	2.07	16	2.81	1.05	1.86	0.23
For me, this day of the conference helped me to identify evidence-based strengths in my existing program.	29	3.14	0.94	2.05	22	2.95	0.84	1.77	0.21
For me, this day of the conference increased my awareness of the research literature.	31	3.29	0.78	2.01	24	3.13	0.95	2.07	0.19

Table 3	Day 1				Day 2				Comparison Cohen's <i>d</i> of Difference
	N	Avg <sup>‡</sup>	SD	Cohen's <i>d</i>	N	Avg <sup>‡</sup>	SD	Cohen's <i>d</i>	
For me, this day of the conference helped me to identify evidence-based ways to grow my existing program.	28	3.18	0.82	1.96	21	3.05	0.86	1.89	0.16
For me, this day of the conference increased a sense of community among people who do this kind of work.	32	3.69	0.64	2.14	25	3.64	0.57	1.88	0.08
For me, this day of the conference promoted reflection on my own programming.	31	3.68	0.54	1.83	25	3.64	0.57	1.88	0.07
For me, this day of the conference was useful professional development.	32	3.66	0.60	1.99	24	3.63	0.58	1.89	0.05
For me, this day of the conference reinforced old ideas.	30	3.33	0.80	2.09	23	3.30	0.76	2.00	0.04
For me, this day of the conference sparked new ideas.	32	3.63	0.71	2.21	25	3.64	0.57	1.88	-0.02

\*Items followed by an asterisk were endorsed significantly more for Day 2 than Day 1,  $p < .05$ .

‡All item averages were significantly different than 1,  $p < .05$ .

## Qualitative Data

The qualitative data provided participants open-ended opportunities to comment on their experiences during the conference and to comment on anticipated changes as a result of the conference. Rather than summarize all of the qualitative data we received, we provide here the questions we asked along with a thematic grouping of responses. As well we have included here select comments in full, as these comments are exemplary of the tone and tenor of the submitted responses.

### What was the most useful aspect of this conference for you?

*"Networking, volunteering myself to write and having a fixed (but gentle) deadline peer feedback on writing, dinner (see networking)"*

- Networking
- Feedback/discussion of papers
- Small size/atmosphere/format of conference

### **The most important thing I learned was...**

*"That conferences CAN BE really collaborative. I loved the format."*

- Training teaching assistants is not the same thing as teaching assistant development
- Differences among institutions and the range of programs/opportunities offered.
- References and the importance of scholarship in informing programs/programs informing scholarship.

### **As a result of participating in this conference, will you change how you teach graduate students to teach? If so, in what ways?**

*"I will think about how we use the workshop format and explore alternatives"*

- Scholarship and evidence-based practices: integrate, make explicit, research further.

### **What kind of follow-up support would be helpful for you as you work on your article or program?**

*"Our group is going to continue to send revised copies of our papers to one another for feedback; staying in touch will be important."*

- Listserv
- Email/online connection/collaboration

### **Is there anything else you would like us to know?**

*"This was a great conference and motivating before and should be motivating afterwards. Thank you!"*

- Appreciation to conference organizers

## **Conclusions**

- According to participants, this conference successfully inspired the use and production of scholarly literature to inform TGST programming, while building a sense of community among practitioners in this area.
- Combining a more traditional conference with a writing workshop format can be helpful to participants.
- Give more directions to people who are being asked to do non-traditional things (e.g., panel, facilitating writing workshop).