Spotlight — Nancy Van Dorp

Nancy Van Dorp (BA, B.Ed., M.Ed., CTDP) started her TESL career teaching Business English, LINC Home Study, and English in the Workplace. She joined New Language Solutions in 2011 as a trainer and mentor for what is now Avenue.ca, and is currently the Manager of Distributed Learning. She is fascinated with the affordances of edtech solutions, and has presented at conferences across the country and in Australia.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Nancy! For those that don't have the pleasure of knowing you, tell them a little about yourself.

Thanks, Nicola.

I've been involved in the LINC and ESL sectors since 2010, and started working as a consultant with New Language Solutions in 2011. New Language Solutions is a non-profit that is funded federally by IRCC and in Ontario by MLITSD. We develop, teach, and support the English language learning sector through Avenue.ca and the LearnIT2teach platforms. NLS also develops and hosts the open-access CanAvenue.ca platform.

I have just moved into the role of Manager of Distributed Learning for NLS. I have also worked for Sheridan College for more than 15 years—teaching a partial load in the Applied Computing and Business departments.

Lastly, I'm also a mom of two, so I can truly appreciate working moms everywhere.

You are known as a Microsoft Specialist [Re: Sheridan College], tell us more about how technology, and more so AI, have influenced your teaching, work, and students?

I love exploring technologies, and I especially love seeing how they fit in with education. Of course, some technologies make our jobs more productive, but some offer more set-up work than benefit.

With recent AI portals available to everyone, there are many new angles from which to look at this technology. While I am usually a quick adopter of technologies, I am somewhat of a slower adopter of AI. That's not to say I don't use it, because I do, but more that I am reluctant to make it do my work. I guess you can say I'm "old school" in that way.

Artificial intelligence has, though, really impacted my college students, and I have concerns about that part. I do feel that learning doesn't really happen when students can easily use AI to write assignments, and not use their authentic voice when, for example, they are preparing a reflective assignment.

Is there an area in development or teaching you want to explore more?

I have become interested in teaching to violence-impacted students. This interest has arisen in the past few years partly

due to violent trauma experienced by my immediate family in Canada in 2023.

There are webinars and courses out there, and I'm just waiting for the right time for me to be able to explore those topics more. I feel that I would be a good student to learn about those topics academically, and would hope I can share with others what I have learned down the road.

You are a well-seasoned presenter at many conferences – for those that have always wanted to present but don't know where to start, what's your advice?

As teachers, we are presenting every day, and it is not a huge leap to present to your peers. If we all view ourselves as students, which we must, it is not substantially different than teaching in a classroom.

When you have an idea/topic and you want to share it—just do it!

To begin, start presenting locally if you have the opportunity. TESL Ontario regional conferences are great for this, but it's ok to jump right into provincial conferences as well.

Pay attention when calls for proposals are issued, and heed the theme of the conference. Look and learn from other conference sessions descriptions. Like teaching in the classroom, think of your three learning outcomes.

Writing a presentation proposal is often like selling, so don't be shy to talk about what benefits participants will receive from attending your session.

And don't despair if your proposal isn't accepted. Try it at another conference, or try a different topic at the same conference. I can also share that not all my sessions proposed get accepted, but that's ok too.

What is something from the classroom that one day you'll look back on and think is your greatest achievement?

I developed and taught a college credit course based on the impact of culture in the workplace. In it's hey-day, there were 50 sections of the course being taught throughout the college per term, and I have never taught a course that received more consistently positive thoughts, reviews and thanks from students than that course.

If you could rub a magic lamp in your career, what would your three wishes be?

I would love a magic lamp!

My first wish would be for worldwide literacy. Literacy is such an important portal for knowledge and power. Access to resources is key to a growth and development for individuals and communities to thrive.

And once we have literacy, my second wish would be digital literacy for all. In my opinion, this is an essential skill to again thrive in our communities in 2025, and promote equality.

Lastly, I'd wish for more time to do the things we love. Whether it's hanging with family, participating in the community, or pursuing career options. More time would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you once again for your contribution, Nancy!

If you would like to know more or connect, please visit Nancy's LinkedIn.