

ESL MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES PROJECT

Public Report

June 2005

The purpose of the ESL Multimedia Resources Project was to disperse ESL online course materials and digital learning objects previously developed by the Calgary Board of Education with support from Alberta Learning and to provide workshops to ESL instructors, tutors and coordinators associated with Community Adult Learning Councils and Literacy Councils in Alberta.

The purpose of the project was to familiarize workshop participants with the contents of the ESL Multimedia Resources CDs, assist them in using the resources in a distributed learning mode, and teach participants to customize and re-purpose the resources in order to suit the needs of learners in a variety of contexts.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Ten workshops were offered to 136 participants throughout the province. In total, 160 CD programs and packages were distributed to participants. Introductory emails as well as CD packages (including a 4 CD set, CD Directory and ESL Multimedia Resources Manual) were sent to contacts in Edmonton, Banff, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lac La Biche, Cold Lake, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Brooks, Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, High Level, Taber, Westlock, and Vermilion.

Subsequent to their attendance at the workshops, all participants were contacted via email in order to answer questions and troubleshoot technical problems. In addition, the PowerPoint presentation used in the workshop was emailed to a number of program coordinators who requested it in order to share the materials and instruction with teachers in their areas who were unable to attend.

In addition to those who attended the workshops, a number of CD packages were sent out to areas that were unable to schedule workshops but were interested in sharing the resources with their instructors and tutors. For example, eighteen packages were sent out to Grande Prairie to be shared with regional coordinators at their annual meeting in May, 2005. In Lethbridge, Fort McMurray and Red Deer, the resources were deemed to be too advanced for their learners and for this reason, workshops were not held in these Centres. In Red Deer and Cold Lake, the appointment of new coordinators who were unaware of the resources made scheduling a workshop impossible within the time frame of the project. In the case of Vermilion, the original project end date (March 31, 2005) was extended in order to include instructors in this area. In many cases, particularly in the fall of 2004, there were other professional development opportunities (eg. Norquest College) being offered in many of the regions, and coordinators were hesitant to ask instructors to come in to a central location for more than one workshop in the fall term.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Workshop participants were asked to complete an online or hard copy evaluation form at the conclusion of each workshop. Sixty-five participants responded to the online survey. Asked to evaluate the workshop, 99% responded that it was excellent or very good. Asked how appropriate the resources were for their learners, 59% responded that they were extremely or very useful, while 38% selected somewhat useful.

The workshops were well received, as evidenced by the following comments made by participants on the workshop evaluation surveys:

“This is exactly the help I needed for multi-level classes.”

“There is lots to work with on every level. It will take me some time to find my way around but with some trial and error, it will be a great tool for both me and my students.”

“Thank you for your “Guru Team” impact on my world of ESL. I know so little re the great potential of this multi-media tool and/or the impact this will have on my ESL communicative style of teaching....The permission to hand out to students impacts mega on student oriented process that makes an incredible tool affordable and again student-focused. Thank you to each of you.”

“My students are working mothers who of course are very busy. We have a 2 hour lesson per week which isn’t very much. They will now be able to spend time learning English at home when they have time.”

The participants, including teachers, tutors and program coordinators, were excited to receive such excellent resources, free of charge. They were also very pleased to be able to reproduce the CDs as necessary for their learners. The workshop activities were mainly hands-on, and participants appreciated having the opportunity to look through the materials to find those that would be suitable and useful for them. In fact, several participants suggested that the CD resources should have been presented in two stages:

- 1) Stage 1: cruise, navigate, hunt, explore
- 2) Stage 2: customize and apply.

In terms of technology, the participants’ abilities were diverse and, as a result, the workshops were customized in each location. In some cases, the participants were able to not only become familiar with the resources and discuss how they could be used in a classroom setting, but also master the technical skills required for accessing the file structure and customizing individual files. In cases where the participants’ technical skills were somewhat limited, the focus of the workshop was on exploring the resources and sharing instructional strategies for incorporating them into classroom work. For all participants, sharing with other teachers was a key component of the workshops.

Workshop participants described their next steps in a number of ways but were clearly focused on further exploration and sharing, as evidenced by the following comments from the evaluation surveys:

“I will be investigating the CDs, looking for pieces that I can pass on to tutors. I will probably burn a copy of the introductory CD to pass on to a computer literate student.”

“reflective...copying several for instructors and meeting as a group to discuss use with literacy learners.”

“lots of browsing; pass set on to our employment services for business English; burn class sets.”

“To burn copies for teachers at my school, to take a more in-depth look at the program and possibly to set up a little workshop at my school to share the information as you have done here.”

Participants praised the facilitators for their knowledgeable and practical approach while facilitating workshops; they liked the fact that the presenters were approachable and ensured that everyone understood what they needed to understand; they appreciated facilitators’ enthusiasm; thought that the workshops were well presented and very productive. It allowed for a variety of learning styles, questions and discussions .

OUTCOMES

As a result of the distribution of the ESL online course materials and the delivery of the accompanying workshops, coordinators, instructors and tutors from Community Adult Literacy Councils and Literacy Councils across Alberta were provided free access to these excellent digital course materials. As a result of attending the workshops, the participants are now:

- familiar with navigating the ESL Multimedia Resources CDs
- able to access resources appropriate to their learners’ needs
- able to access Teacher CD resources including quizzes, tests, answer keys, rubrics, suggested syllabi and print reading packages
- able to design a lesson or unit of study incorporating the CD resources with their own resources
- able to apply the concept of distributed learning in an ESL environment
- familiar with a variety of ways in which the resources can be used, as shared by other workshop participants and the workshop facilitators

As a result of the ESL Multimedia Resources Workshop, participants with more advanced technical skills are now able to:

- access individual files on the CDs in order to customize the resources to fit their classroom needs
- retrieve, manipulate, revise and re-purpose learning materials located in the CD file structure

EXTENDED OUTCOMES

For many of the workshop participants and program coordinators, this was the first time that they had access to digital ESL instructional materials. They were intrigued by the multimedia components and felt these would be motivational for their students. Many were surprised that they were able to customize the files for their own use and that the technical skills required were minimal. Exposure to the use of these materials may lead to increased interest in digital ESL resources in the future, including digital learning repositories where teachers can search for multimedia and text-based materials for their own learners. For example, some coordinators asked about the availability of digital math resources to help their learners prepare for math tests they must pass in order to continue working in specific trades. In terms of distributed learning, the fact that these resources are available in CD format means that even in rural areas where Internet connectivity is limited or slow, teachers can plan individualized remediation or enrichment programs for their learners, beyond the boundaries of the classroom. This is an area in which many workshop participants expressed interest. While suggestions were also made to expand the resources to include pronunciation as well as reading/writing/grammar materials at Canadian Language Benchmarks 2 – 5, many participants were appreciative of the fact that these resources were designed for students at CLB 5 – 10 because, in most cases, they had few resources for such high level learners.

In summary, the broader outcomes of the project are:

- increased awareness of and interest in digital ESL resources
- interest in expanding knowledge of how to access and use distributed learning resources, particularly in CD format, where Internet access is limited or slow
- increased technical capabilities, in terms of file management and customization
- increased interest in and capability for providing customized learning experiences for ESL and literacy learners with a wide range of abilities, needs and challenges

CONCLUSIONS

Project design

Project resources were well designed to meet the broad spectrum of learner needs. Workshop delivery received very good feedback from participants who thought that the initiative was something they needed that provided support for them in preparing for the use of ESL Multimedia Resources CDs.

Facilitator Role

Facilitators delivered workshops in an efficient and practical manner while also demonstrating expertise in the subject matter and readiness to support participants at their level of comfort technology and content wise. Survey participant responses clearly demonstrated that the role of the facilitators was critical in understanding ESL Multimedia Resources CDs and assisting the participants in using the resources in a distributed learning mode while also teaching them to customize and re-purpose the resources in order to suit the needs of learners in a variety of contexts

Major learnings

After attending the workshops the participants:

- became familiar with navigating the ESL Multimedia Resources CDs
- are able to access resources appropriate to their learners' needs
- are able to access Teacher CD resources including quizzes, tests, answer keys, rubrics, suggested syllabi and print reading packages
- are able to design a lesson or unit of study incorporating the CD resources with their own resources
- are able to apply the concept of distributed learning in an ESL environment
- are familiar with a variety of ways in which the resources can be used, as shared by other workshop participants and the workshop facilitators

RECOMMENDATIONS

Similar projects could be improved by

- offering separate instruction for participants with limited computer skills
- providing more time for workshops or possibly a two-stage workshop
- including more digital resources in Math and at lower CLB levels
- avoiding overlap with other professional development opportunities funded by Alberta Learning's Language Training Programs