

POST HIGH SCHOOL ESL LITERACY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT PHASE I PUBLIC REPORT

**Prepared for Alberta Learning
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1. Program Overview

The Post High School ESL Literacy Research and Development Project - Phase One researched issues surrounding young immigrants exiting high school without a diploma due to low literacy skills and/or because they are too old to study in a high school setting, but demonstrate a need for further educational opportunities. The project investigated the learning and language-training needs of young ESL adults with low literacy skills. Through collaboration with the Calgary Separate School District and community organizations that work with young ESL literacy learners, research was conducted to:

- * identify the demographics of ESL literacy students who are unable to obtain a high school diploma,
- * identify barriers to further education and/or employment,
- * identify the language and course content needs of young immigrant literacy learners, and
- * draw conclusions based on data collected and make recommendations for a post high school program that meets learners' needs.

The research findings identified the high priority learning needs for this target audience. They were used to create a post high school program course guide with a focus on improving ESL literacy skills while helping students successfully bridge literacy gaps to transition into further educational programs, vocational training or the work force.

2. Program Objectives

Phase One of the Post High School ESL Literacy Research Project proposed to:

- * collaborate with educational institutions and community organizations that have a high population of young adult ESL literacy learners to identify the needs of and barriers faced by these learners,
- * conduct research into the demographics of ESL literacy learners who are no longer eligible to attend Calgary high schools, aged 18 - 25,
- * describe in a research report the program needs of young adult ESL literacy learners,
- * make program development recommendations to bridge the gaps between literacy instruction and further education to encourage a more seamless flow within the education system for adult literacy learners, and
- * custom design an ESL literacy program around research findings that meets the needs of these learners.

3 Summary of Project Activities

Phase One of the Post High School ESL Literacy Research and Development Project was comprised of two components: 1) research the learning needs of young adult immigrants that have been identified with low literacy skills, and 2) use the research findings to develop an effective ESL literacy program that focuses on improving the reading, writing, and language skills of immigrant youth to help bridge the transition into further educational or vocational programming.

Component One: ESL Literacy Research

The following outlines the fundamental activities in the literacy research component:

1. A research project timeline and outline was drawn up to form the structure and guidance for the research project.
2. Key questions and focus ideas were determined to provide guidance to the research project.
3. Questionnaires and interview guides were prepared for focus groups and one-on-one interviews with immigrant youth with literacy issues.
4. Questionnaires and interview guides were prepared for ESL instructors and community leaders.
5. Research was conducted into programs currently providing educational, employment or literacy training to youth in Calgary. Data was organized into an easy to read chart for inclusion in the research report.
6. Educational and community organizations that include immigrant youth in their population were identified as possible participants in this project.
7. The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD) were contacted in regards to possible participation in the research project.
8. Permission was received from the CSSD to conduct research in their high schools.
9. Focus group and interview times were set up with the ESL instructors in the participating schools and the necessary paperwork was forwarded to them.
10. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted in three schools with a total of 22 students.
11. Interviews with instructors were conducted at their convenience at a later date.
12. Ongoing interviews were also conducted with immigrant youth demonstrating literacy needs outside the school system.
13. Data from the focus groups, learner interviews and instructor interviews was compiled and analyzed for inclusion in the research report.
14. Fifty community leaders in programs serving youth were contacted with questionnaires regarding the youth they served.
15. Articles and written texts relating to immigrant youth and ESL training and literacy issues were identified, located and studied. Pertinent information was documented and cited to form part of the research report.
16. Data collected from the interviews, focus groups and questionnaires and the literature research was used to form the basis of the research report.
17. The report underwent one revision prior to its completion.

Component Two: ESL Literacy Program Development

The information gained through the ESL literacy research component was used to develop a course guide for a program entitled The Young Adult ESL Literacy Program. This course guide focuses on increasing ESL literacy skills in order to successfully transition learners into further educational programs. The following outlines the fundamental activities in the program development of this project:

1. Using the information gained through focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders, the project researcher created a blueprint for an ESL literacy program that identified the knowledge and skills necessary for a transitional program for young immigrants exiting high school.
2. ESL literacy benchmark competency checklists were created for reading and writing strands. The checklists combined the ESL competencies outlined in the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners* and the Alberta Education - English As A Second Language (Senior High) Program.
3. A course guide writer was hired to write the course guide for The Young Adult ESL Literacy Program. The course guide integrated the competencies outlined in the checklists to create a program with achievable outcomes.
4. Bow Valley College collaborated with the University of Calgary and used *LearningByDesign* website to support the development of the course guide.
5. The course guide went through two revisions prior to its completion.

4. Project Outcomes

Phase One of the Post High School ESL Literacy Research and Development Project recognized the importance of a bridge program to aid in the transition of young adult immigrants with low literacy skills from high school to further education. In order to develop a responsive program, research was conducted to establish the demographics, interests and most pressing learning needs of this targeted segment of learners. The findings were detailed in the report entitled *Effective Post High School Programming: Evaluating the Needs of Immigrant Youth with Literacy Issues* and were used to design a transitional program that is relevant to the age, interests and learning needs of this group.

The following outcomes demonstrate successful achievement of the project goals:

1. A report summarizing the process, results and conclusions of the research conducted was completed. This report, *Effective Post High School Programming: Evaluating the Needs of Immigrant Youth with Literacy Issues*, includes:
 - A summary of and response to literature research in the area of immigrant youth and ESL/literacy instruction including:
 - An analysis of data gleaned from the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires was documented including:
 - Recommendations for a responsive young adult literacy program.
2. A course guide was developed for a pilot program called *The Young Adult ESL Literacy Program*. This program was designed to address the needs of young immigrants with low literacy skills who are exiting high school without a diploma. The course guide to the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*.