

Rural Routes – Language Tools & Resources for Local Trainers
Public Report
Advanced Education
Alberta Human Resources & Employment
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Introduction

Over the past four years NorQuest College has worked with Alberta Advanced Education and Alberta Human Resources and Employment to assist rural communities and smaller urban centres in offering quality and effective ESL training. Projects that have been completed include:

- _ the development of an ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities (ERPAC) – a curriculum and resource package for community instructors and tutors;
- _ delivery of ESL workshops targeted at enhancing the knowledge and skills of community instructors and tutors;
- _ mentoring services to coordinators and instructors and tutors from the Community Adult Learning Councils (CALC) and Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Programs (VTALP).

The latest phase of this assistance was the Rural Routes project (May 2005 to May 2006). Through this project NorQuest College built on the previous work which helped communities develop capacity in meeting the needs of ESL learners. The project included developing ESL materials that reflect the realities of life in smaller urban and rural communities and providing more support for coordinators, instructors and tutors in delivering quality ESL programming.

Project Objectives

- _ work collaboratively with smaller urban and rural communities to develop support ESL materials in the form of a ‘mini curriculum’
- _ provide 10 professional development workshops on topics such as
 - _ lesson planning
 - _ English in the Workplace
- _ resources such as Summative Assessment Manual, Integrating CLB Assessment into your ESL classroom, CLB Can- Do Checklists, Literacy Placement Tool, It’s Essential website, Relating Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills: A Comparative Framework)
- _ using Canadian Language Benchmarks
- _ teaching pronunciation
- _ ESL assessment
- _ update the ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities (e.g. websites, databases, programs) provide an Itinerant ESL Consultant service to smaller urban and rural communities throughout Alberta
- _ videostream segments of ESL professional development workshops being delivered in smaller urban and rural communities

_ research the feasibility and logistics of the development of an “ESL Help Line” and/or website concept

Project Activities

1. Development of Mini Curriculum (referred to as ESL Modules)

The idea for this project came in response to requests from instructors and tutors for lesson plans related to the ERPAC. The ESL Modules would present ready made lessons for each of 10 topics. Each of the ten topics would have a lesson A and a lesson B at two different Canadian Language Benchmark levels (CLB 2 and CLB 4) and would include extension activities to enable an instructor or tutor to teach to a broader range of levels among their learners.

Many of the topics selected for the modules address settlement issues to meet the needs of newcomers to Canada. However, as many of the learners coming into the programs have been in Canada for a period of time, other topics focus on their needs. The topics for the lessons include:

- First Day with your Class
- What Do You Want To Be & Where Do You Want To Go
- Your Community (two lessons)
- Money Matters (two lessons)
- Canadian Environment (and weather)
- Health
- Being Canadian

The ESL Modules offer a useable model for planning lessons referenced to the CLB. The topics address points that are interesting and relevant for adults. They are constructed around topics or themes and contain appropriate CLB competencies, supporting grammar for the topic, activities and teaching techniques that instructors can transfer to other lessons, suggested resources and extension activities. While the module can be used as is, off the shelf, it is designed to also build competence in instructors and tutors. Its aim is to teach users how to build lesson plans around the CLB competencies and how to use the teaching techniques in other situations.

2. Professional Development Workshops

Over the past three years NorQuest College has been providing professional development in English as a Second Language for Community Adult Learning Councils and the Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Programs across Alberta. During the first year the major focus was on introducing the ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities and the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Coordinators, instructors and tutors who attended these workshops asked for more training covering many aspects of ESL instruction. This year each community had particular needs that they wanted addressed. Therefore the workshops directly responded to specific requests for professional development and were tailored to each community’s needs. They were delivered between September 2005 and

March 2006. The host community usually opened the workshops to coordinators, instructors and tutors from adjoining communities. The majority of participants were coordinators, instructors and tutors from CALC and VTALP programs.

A total of 15 workshops were delivered in the following locations to 173 participants.

- County of Forty Mile (Bow Island)
- Literacy Alberta New Coordinator Training
- Literacy Alberta Coordinator Training
- Taber & District Adult Literacy Program
- Rockyview Adult Literacy Programs
- Write Soon Literacy Society (Whitecourt /Ste. Anne /Woodlands)
- Red Deer STAR Conference
- Fort Saskatchewan Regional Coordinators
- Lethbridge Regional Literacy Coordinators
- Red Deer, Life Long Learning Council
- Jasper Adult Literacy Program
- Medicine Hat College – ABLE, Brooks Campus
- County of Lethbridge Literacy Program
- Peace Adult Literacy (Peace River)
- Lethbridge, Star Literacy Conference

3. Update the ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities

The ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities developed in 2003 was revised. Information for instructors was updated and expanded. The grammar scope and sequence chart was revised. The Initial Placement Tool was re-correlated. The resource section was updated with current information on databases, websites and newly-developed materials. The revised issue of ERPAC will be available on the NorQuest College website.

4. Itinerant ESL Consultant Service

Two consultants: one for the north and one for the south of the province provided mentoring services to CALCs and VTALPs as an immediate, individualized response to ESL questions. The requests for assistance and advice came from coordinators, instructors and tutors covering a wide range of needs. Most commonly the consultants were asked to deliver in-service training to tutors and instructors. Sometimes, there were 5-6 tutors present but more typically 2-3 people came for training. Many wanted advice on dealing with multi-level classes, help with grammar and assessment, or simply someone to bounce ideas off of. Many asked for advice on suitable resources. The consultants carried a range of CLB referenced resources to display on their community visits. They also guided practitioners in using the resources effectively. As the consultants worked more closely with communities they discovered community prepared resources that they then recommended to other communities.

Other examples of the mentoring services provided are:

- _ Classroom observation and feedback
- _ Research and information about resources

- _ Attending staff meetings
- _ Suggestions regarding teaching strategies and techniques
- _ Discussion around new ESL programs
- _ Discussion of professional development needs of new ESL instructors and tutors
- _ Research and information about funding issues
- _ Assistance with writing proposals
- _ Advice on writing ads for new ESL classes

The ESL Itinerant Coach Service involved 34 community visits and provided mentoring to 24 Volunteer Literacy Programs and 16 Community Adult Learning Councils as well as individual service to tutors and instructors. The following locations indicate the communities that received mentoring services.

Airdrie – Athabasca – Barrhead – Bonneyville – Brooks – Bow Island – Camrose – Claresholm – Coaldale – Cold Lake – Drumheller – Edson – Evansburg – Ft. Saskatchewan – Grande Cache – Hanna – High Level – Hinton – Lac La Biche – Literacy Alberta – Lloydminster – Peace River – Provost – Red Deer – St. Albert – St. Paul – Strathmore – Taber – Two Hills – Vegreville – Vermilion – Vulcan – Wainwright – Whitecourt

5. Video Streaming of Workshops

Many smaller communities in Alberta do not have the resources to send their instructors and volunteer tutors to professional development opportunities. Factors that influence this issue include distance from location of the PD, time available for instructors to attend, volunteer turn-over resulting in ongoing training and the lack of funds to cover travel and accommodation expenses. However, the need for professional development in the area of ESL continues to grow. Therefore, it is important to look at different solutions to meet the need for training around ESL delivery. As on-line training continues to become more accessible in rural areas of the province, it is time to look at this as a piece of the solution to professional development. NorQuest College undertook to develop 3 ESL professional development workshops to be offered as on line training to Alberta communities. They selected three topics for workshops based on those most frequently requested in smaller urban and rural communities.

- _ One-on-one instruction
- _ Teaching Pronunciation
- _ Teaching Strategies

The three workshops will be piloted in the near future via Web CT for coordinators, instructors and tutors to access from their communities.

6. ESL Help Desk/Website Concept

An environmental scan was undertaken to determine interest and/or need of an ESL HELP DESK. Bradley Wells Management Consulting was hired to conduct the study. Twelve interviews were conducted with various stakeholders. The following Help Desk models were examined:

- _ Literacy Alberta Help Line
- _ AlphaPlus Centre (Ontario based)
- _ CAELA (US based)
- _ Literacy B.C.

The findings of this preliminary report suggest that an ESL Help Desk that supports practitioners in rural Alberta would be a useful addition to the existing suite of tools available. However, it was made clear that the undertaking of setting up an ESL Help Desk be done with careful and thorough planning and to ensure that sustainable long-term funding would be available for the endeavour. It was also recommended that duplication be avoided and where possible this service be incorporated into existing infrastructure.

Recommendations

1. Provide additional 12-14 professional development ESL workshops on a range of topics such as lesson planning, occupational language, resources, intercultural communication, Canadian Language Benchmarks, pronunciation, and grammar.
2. Expand the ESL mentoring service of the Itinerant Consultant to additional (new) rural and small urban communities throughout Alberta and to continue to provide in-time support to communities with whom we already have a relationship established.
3. Produce a publishable format of two existing workshops.
4. Pilot the three on-line professional development workshops – teaching Pronunciation, One-on-One Instruction, and Teaching Strategies and develop guidelines for creating future on-line workshops based on the feedback from the pilots.
5. Pilot ERPAC mini-modules
6. Create an ESL newsletter providing tips and information around ESL instruction for instructors and tutors in CALC and VTALP programs.
7. Develop marketing material that highlights the services available through the Rural ESL Initiative.
8. Complete a more in-depth feasibility study on the need of a service such as an ESL Help-Desk to support practitioners in rural Alberta.