

Stepping Stones to English
Calgary Chinese Community Service Association Project
Funded by Alberta Learning
Public Report
Summary of Project Objectives, Activities and Outcomes
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Project Goal/Objective:

The main goal of this project was to provide an alternative learning option for learners that would not or have not been successful in a traditional ESL program. Our objective was to introduce a bilingual ESL model into this alternative ESL option. In phase one of this project we worked with the Chinese community to provide this alternative bilingual ESL model to learners in the following category:

Profile of learners the program expected to reach in the first phase:

1. Workers currently in low-skill, low-paying jobs in contexts where languages other than English are used almost exclusively. They have little opportunity to learn English in the workplace and their hours of work do not enable them to participate in classes that are offered in educational institutions.
2. Seniors who speak little or no English, who may be unfamiliar with the larger Calgary community, and who are unable to access services in English or to interact with English speakers in the community. Many are uncomfortable in formal ESL classes.
3. Homebound parents and caregivers - usually mother of small children. Their child-care and housekeeping duties limit their ability to access ESL classes. These women may have varied educational backgrounds, but the target group will be those who have limited educational backgrounds and have not had professional or specific vocational training

How did the project achieve this objective?

- * Offer an alternative learning model - use of a bilingual facilitator in addition to an ESL teacher
- * Offer short-term classes that focus on learner identified language needs as the basis of the curriculum for the short 6 week class
- * Use the contacts and resources of Calgary Chinese Community Services Association (CCCSA) to support the outreach to these target groups.

Project Activities

Outreach:

In order to conduct effective outreach into the Chinese community we hired an outreach worker that could speak Mandarin and Cantonese as well as being fluent in English.

We were also looking for an outreach worker who could work in the capacity of bilingual facilitator. We were fortunate to have found someone who met all of these criteria. A number of strategies were suggested and carried out with varying degrees of success. We reviewed the target groups and attempted to make contact with them through the following means:

- Community facilities
- Restaurant owners
- The Chinese newspapers
- Schools
- Referrals from CCCSA

Students were directed to call CCCSA and leave their name and phone number. They were informed that an outreach worker would call them back and talk to them about the program in their first language. The potential students were screened over the phone by the outreach worker in the students first language using the intake form. As a result of our outreach efforts we held thirteen 6- week part-time classes between November 12/02 and July 03/3 at the Chinese Cultural Centre and at the Thorn Hill Library.

Assessment of students and placement:

Students tested to assess their starting benchmark levels using the CLBPT test. Not all students could be tested with a CLBPT test, so an independent test was developed after the second 6-week session for subsequent testing. Students who had been previously tested by ILVARC were not assessed again with the CLBPT test or independent test. In addition to the initial intake form that asked students to identify what they wanted to learn English for, we developed an in-class needs assessment strategy (a mapping exercise) that used the bilingual facilitator and a series of visuals to solicit information in the first language and determine what tasks and skill areas that the class wanted to focus on in the 6 week session. The curriculum focus was then based on this in-class needs assessment. End of session assessments based on the tasks and skill areas focused on during each 6-week session were developed for each class.

ESL Facilitator and Bilingual Facilitator Model:

Two ESL facilitator positions were filled. A part-time ESL teacher who has had extensive experience with ESL literacy students filled one position. The coordinator filled the other position. We reviewed literature related to the use of bilingual facilitators and had discussions about the proposed model that might be used. However, until we actually started our first set of classes we were not able to define what that bilingual model would look like. Dialogue, journaling and objective evaluation involving the advisory committee, coordinator and facilitators as well as survey feedback from students are invaluable to the process of building a model that worked to achieve the needs of the students.

We were fortunate to have found someone who could handle both positions (outreach worker and bilingual facilitator). One of the other criteria that we were looking for is the ability to speak both Mandarin and Cantonese. The bilingual facilitator was used in the first week primarily in the mapping exercises to explore what students needed to learn English for. The mapping exercise was conducted in English and then in Chinese. The

Chinese component helped to establish the topics that were of real concern to the students.

Use of the bilingual facilitator enabled us to do a class needs assessment in a thorough and efficient manner. It also allowed students the freedom to express their concerns in a non-threatening manner. Students are traditionally skeptical of taking the lead in determining what they were going to learn in class. However, with a bilingual facilitator we were able to overcome their skepticism with explanations and discussion in Chinese. Once students understood the rationale behind the approach, it was much easier to get through the mapping exercise with the full support of the class. The ESL teacher took the lead with the activities. The Bilingual facilitator intervened when they couldn't understand a word or explanation that is abstract or needs conceptual understanding. Under normal circumstances, the level of modeling and explanation in English required to overcome this impasse in comprehension would take a very long time and potentially interfere with the flow of the lesson. Using the first language explanation cut down on the instructional time and provided an easy bridge to the flow of learning.

Program Evaluation:

In addition to an overall program evaluation tool, the program also developed a student evaluation tool (translated as well into Chinese) that assisted in the collection of qualitative and quantitative data for the program end evaluation. An intake form was developed that included data that would be useful for a program evaluation.

Teaching Strategies and Resources:

We used a variety of teaching strategies and a minimal number of original texts. Most of the initial teaching strategies were developed around student generated language experience stories and original teacher developed material. Visuals were the key instructional tools for teaching. We sought out materials with accompanying visuals related to topic areas such as time, using the telephone, health, safety, reading the newspaper.

Outcomes and Recommendations:

1. CLB levels of Students:

What is interesting about the CLB test results is that from **76% - 86%** of the assessment results fall into the Pre Benchmarks to CLB 2 range for all skill areas.

2. Projected Progress of Students:

Our proposed outcome related to language acquisition and progress was based on building competency through short, task and skill-based instruction coupled by bilingual facilitation. Our initial expectations for progress were ambitious based on the recent research study conducted by David Watt and Deidre Lake- Benchmarking Adult Rates of Second Language Acquisition and Interpretation: How Long and How Fast? Final Report Phase 1, 2001/2002.

The study identifies the following rates of English language acquisition based on first language educational background and **250 hours** of instruction. It is important to note that students in this study did not have the benefit of a bilingual facilitator in addition to an ESL facilitator:

Approximate Rate of English Language Acquisition based on 250 hours of Instruction - Canadian Language Benchmarks is the measurement tool

Years of Education	Listening/Speaking	Reading	Writing
0-7	1/3 of a benchmark	1/3 of a benchmark	1/2 of a benchmark
8-12	1/2 a benchmark	1 benchmark	1/2 of a benchmark
13 - 16	1/2 a benchmark	1 benchmark	1/2 a benchmark
17+	2/3 of a benchmark	1 1/4 benchmark	2/3 of a benchmark

Based on our initial expectations that students would progress one benchmark level in 2 six-week sessions (70 hours) or 1/2 a benchmark in one six-week session (35 hours) in one of the skills areas, the following chart estimates the rate of progress of our students in each skill area. The measurement tool used in this chart is based on the number of six-week (35 hours of instruction) sessions it would take to progress one benchmark level and doesn't take into account the use of a bilingual facilitator:

Approximate number of six week sessions (35 hours of instruction without a bilingual facilitator) that it would take a Stepping Stones to English student to progress one Canadian Language Benchmark level

# of students	% of total # (85)	Yrs. of Education	Listening/Speaking	Reading	Writing
25	30	0-7	42	42	28
45	53	8-12	28	14	28
7	8	3 - 16	28	14	28
8	9	17+	9	14	9

Although the research study did not take into account the addition of a bilingual facilitator in the learning process, it is evident from the study's findings that we need to revisit our expectations relative to the rate of language acquisition of the students in our Stepping Stones to English project. The rate of progress would be very difficult to monitor based on the statistics on rate of language acquisition (Benchmarking Adult Rates of Second Language Acquisition and Interpretation: How Long and How Fast? Final Report Phase 1, 2001/2002.) Therefore we documented progress not in terms of progress to another benchmark level, but progress in terms of

1. task based assessments within a benchmark level that the teacher determined students in class were capable of working within
2. program evaluation that determined confidence level

3. The role of the CLBs:

The role of the CLBs in this project is something that we reviewed and assessed on an ongoing basis. We determined the following about the CLBs relative to this project:

- a. It was necessary to become very familiar with the CLBs in order to assess and establish the starting points of our students as well as the range within which our students could work
- b. The CLBs assisted us in determining which tasks and strands were realistic to teach within a six week session. We consequently determined that a 12 week time frame would give students more measurable progress.

4. Outreach:

* In the advertising that went out in the community, we offered a choice of locations. However, the majority chose the Chinese Cultural Centre as their choice location. Even for students who were new to Calgary or who were seniors and came to school by transit, the Cultural Centre was a landmark that was easily recognizable and familiar.

5. Target Group:

The profiles of our students suggest that through our outreach we were able to reach the three target groups as identified in the introduction to this report:

- * Workers currently in low-skill, low-paying jobs in contexts where languages other than English are used almost exclusively.
- * Seniors who speak little or no English.
- * Homebound parents and caregivers.

However, we found that there was another group in addition to our 3 targeted groups that we were reaching. This fourth group of students was comprised of students who were very new to Calgary, were not confident enough to enter a part-time English only class and were waiting for acceptance into a fulltime or part-time LINC class. Although the percentage of students in this category is small, (**22 %** or **19 out of 85** students as per chart # 17) anecdotal comments from program evaluation results indicated that they felt more capable of entering English - only classes as a result of taking a bilingual ESL class.

6. General summary observations about using a bilingual facilitator:

It became quite evident from this experience that teaching a class involves much more than the fundamental teaching and learning of English language skills. We are also dealing with the dynamics of building a community of learners. This means that we are dealing with students building relationships with each other and the teachers. The politics of socializing in a group and building a group from a collection of strangers is as important as the process of teaching and learning. Having someone who can translate not just language but social and cultural understandings have been extremely helpful in building communication beyond language.

The consequence of having a bilingual facilitator in an ESL class has been that students have been able to learn more material than would be normally be covered in the same amount of time without a bilingual facilitator. 75 out of 85 students filled out a program evaluation form. In the self evaluation portion of the program evaluation **90%** indicated that their confidence levels had increased **2 to 5 levels** after participating in bilingual ESL classes. Comments from program evaluations attributed the increase in their confidence to learn and use English to having a bilingual facilitator in the class.