

Project Overview

Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals is a project of Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) with funding and support from Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), and with additional support provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The proposal for this project indicated that with the ever-increasing population of newcomers to Alberta, brought on by flourishing labour market prospects, it is crucial that programs and services be available to ensure that immigrants are adequately prepared for integration into Canadian society. Given that a key component of integration is English language training, ATESL acknowledges that it is necessary to have appropriate programs and services in place in order that newcomers may develop their language skills. Therefore, this project came about with two main purposes in mind:

- to assess emerging immigrant language needs and recommend best practices in the province of Alberta
- to provide a mechanism for bringing together expertise in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) to immigrants that exist in the province of Alberta

By connecting ESL communities and experienced language professionals, ATESL's aim is to provide a mechanism whereby current trends and strategies may be identified as well as issues and challenges addressed with regards to language training in Alberta.

The objectives of the project, as identified in the proposal, are as follows:

1. To provide opportunities for ESL teachers and program administrators to collaborate with government on key issues and challenges in language training in Alberta in order to further advance programs and practices in their fields.
2. To develop instruments to gather information about the current trends in ESL within Alberta in order to identify strategies to support the development of the ESL profession in responding to government language training priorities.
3. To increase awareness and understanding of the expertise that exists in the province in the area of TESL and the role that language plays in the integration of immigrants through the dissemination of information through multiple communication mechanisms such as provincial newsletters and websites.

The rationale behind the project stems from the fact that there is a wide array of language programs and projects being administered throughout the province; however, accessibility to and awareness of such programs is limited to the areas in which these programs are delivered. Therefore, there is a need to provide a means by which all stakeholders in the ESL community can share their expertise and program information with one another and with the larger ATESL membership. Through this information sharing, the ESL community will be more aware of what is available to the immigrant population. As a result, stakeholders will be better prepared to meet the needs and contribute to the success of the ever-growing and changing ESL population in Alberta. As the immigrant population continues to increase, another critical issue that emerges is ensuring that there are enough qualified teaching personnel to sustain current and future ESL programming. As a result, this project also addresses the need to examine the state of the ESL teaching population throughout the province by use of survey techniques.

The target group for this project includes the province's ESL teaching population, program administrators and researchers. Provincial and federal government representatives will also benefit by learning about areas of emerging needs, trends, issues and challenges in the ESL community as well as by having the opportunity to communicate with representatives from the field about immigration policy, initiatives, funding opportunities, resources and results of programming.

Description of Project Activities

- 1. Organization of discussion groups and workshops for the exploration of key issues relating to language training in the province.**
 - a) Organization of workshops, involving researchers, administrators and teachers that focus on the emerging program needs and practices within the ESL teaching community. These discussion groups will involve stakeholders from all over the province and consist of 8 to 10 ESL individuals per session, a workshop coordinator/moderator, and at least one to two government representatives five times through the year on key issues relating to language training, as well as findings of research in the province.

- b) Organization of a two-day forum in March 2006 involving coordinators and teachers from on-going Enhanced Language Training Programs to discuss the success and challenges of such programs that are designed to assist internationally educated immigrants who are attempting to access the Alberta labour market, as well as future directions. This two-day forum hosted by ATESL was intended to address the design and delivery of integrated language training programs in Alberta.
- c) Organization of a guest speaker for the annual ATESL conference. Given that ESL teachers play a key role in the successful integration of new Albertans, providing opportunities for these teachers to engage in furthering their knowledge about current trends and best practices in the field is essential. The annual ATESL conference is one such major professional development opportunity and a key component of the conference is bringing prevalent speakers within the ESL field to Alberta in order to share research findings and instructional methods to ensure the successful delivery of language services. The ATESL conference was held in October 2006 of this year in Edmonton and funding provided through this project was used to cover the costs of bringing one of the guest speakers, Ilona Leki, to the conference.

2. Examination of the current state of the ESL teaching population

According to the project proposal, a suspected number of ESL professionals in Alberta are nearing retirement age. Examination of the demographics of the current teaching population in order to develop strategies to support the current and future ESL environment is necessary. The aim of this part of the project is to use survey techniques to measure, analyze, and report on the demographics of the current ESL teaching population in Alberta. Along with demographic information, ATESL would also like to collect information regarding professional qualifications and how teachers would prefer to access professional development as it relates to the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

3. Dissemination of Information related to AHRE funded pilot projects

The results from workshops and forums that will be conducted throughout communities within the province, funded by this initiative, and the findings of research or pilot projects that have been sponsored by AHRE, through Enhanced Language Training Programs and Language Training Programs, will be publicized on-line via the ATESL newsletter.

4. **Discussion with AAISA and government funders of immigration related activities regarding the feasibility of developing a stand-alone website that lists all ESL, Settlement and Employment related programming for immigrants in Alberta.** A report will be prepared that examines what is already available on local websites, provides information on what exists in other jurisdictions and makes recommendations on possible options.

Further questions related to this project should be directed to Geralyn St. Louis
c/o atesl@shaw.ca