

Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals
A Project of ATESL with funding and support from AHRE
Additional support provided by CIC

Workshop Forum #2

ESL Literacy

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

Aon Room, Alumni House (11515 Saskatchewan Drive), University of Alberta
11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

SUMMARY

Participants

1. Representative from Taber and District CALC, Taber
2. Representative from Sacred Heart Adult ESL, Edmonton
3. Mary Gaia, Bow Valley College
4. Representative from CCI-LEX & EMCN
5. Representative from Language Training and Adult Literacy, NorQuest College, Edmonton
6. Representative from Pebbles in the Sand, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary
7. Representative from Parkland Adult Literacy Program, Stony Plain
8. Joanne Pettis, Coordinator, Adult ESL Curriculum Development & Implementation, Adult Language Training Branch, Winnipeg
9. Representative from Central Alberta Refugee Effort, Red Deer
10. Representative from Taber and District CALC, Taber
11. Representative from Pebbles in the Sand, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary
12. Representative from County of Lethbridge Literacy Program, Lethbridge
13. Representative from Settlement Office, CIC, Calgary
14. Representative from Settlement Office, CIC, Lethbridge
15. Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, CIC, Edmonton
16. Valerie Parr, Consultant, Innovative Language Programs, AHRE
17. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, AHRE

Definition of ESL Literacy / Main Themes

For the purposes of this workshop, the discussion was limited to ESL Literacy as it has been defined in the Canadian Language Benchmarks document *CLB 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*. This document identifies ESL literacy learners as those who have no or low literacy skills (reading, writing and

numeracy) in their first language i.e. individuals who are not functionally literate in their first language for a variety of reasons.

The schedule for the day followed the same format as that of the first workshop with the exception being that two guest speakers were invited to speak for thirty minutes each. Joanne Pettis from Manitoba provided details about doing Portfolio Assessment and Mary Gaia from Bow Valley College outlined the findings from a research project conducted in 2000 by Jennifer Acevedo and Diane Hardy entitled *Demographics, Needs, and Programming for ESL Literacy Learners*. These presentations were highly informative and generated a lot of discussion. The remainder of the workshop was again divided into three one-hour sessions with focus questions.

The focus questions during the first session asked participants to describe their ESL literacy learners (learner profile), the presenting needs of these learners, and the strategies, techniques and methodologies that they are currently using to address learners' needs. Participants were also asked to brainstorm a list of best practices related to ESL delivery service to literacy learners which leads to successful programming.

The discussion in session two followed up with questions such as what the expected learning outcomes are of ESL literacy programming, how results are tracked and quantified, how learner competencies are assessed upon entry into and exit from literacy programs and how progress is defined and reported. Other key points included discussions about traditional methods of assessment and how we can challenge ourselves to think outside the box in terms of assessing and articulating student results as well as how funding bodies can contribute to this process.

In session three, participants were asked to imagine looking into their "ESL literacy toolbox" to identify the tools or resources that they consider as essential to their practice, those resources that they use on a consistent basis, resources that are Alberta produced and any resources that they would choose to add to the toolbox that they don't already have.

Details of all discussions were recorded and compiled into a report which is available on the ATESL website. Electronic copies are available of resources referred to in the report: the research paper by Jennifer Acevedo entitled *Demographics, Needs, and Programming for ESL Literacy Learners* (2000), documents from the Adult Language Training Branch of Manitoba Labour and

Immigration entitled *Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment: Manitoba Best Practices Guide – A Resource for Integrating Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (CLPA) into the Teaching-Learning Cycle of Adult ESL Instruction (2004)*, *Writing Rubrics for Outcome Assessment* (working document) based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000, and *Suggested Resources for Teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) to Adults in Manitoba*.

Workshop participants once again expressed a high level of satisfaction with this professional development opportunity. They found the information presented by the guest speakers to be very valuable, and they were able to learn about other resources and programs which will be useful to them in their practices. Information shared during the focus sessions included identifying an extensive list of best practices for literacy programming, strategies to attract more men to literacy programs, advantages and disadvantages of portfolio and other forms of assessment, the need for more professional development in the area of ESL Literacy, as well as time to take advantage of PD activities when they are offered, the need for clarity and consistency when it comes to defining ESL Literacy, and greater ongoing communication and networking between ATESL and community groups to determine the needs of our literacy learners and how we can best work together to meet those needs.

Guest Lectures:

1) Portfolio Assessment

Joanne Pettis, Adult Language Training, Winnipeg

- Manitoba has been receiving 10,000 immigrants annually (representing African countries, particularly Sudan and Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Central America, Eastern Europe, the Philippines, India and the Mexican/Paraguayan Mennonites) . Many move right into jobs but many also need ESL. There are a significant number of literacy students.
- The Winnipeg school system has 1,100 (40%) literacy students (often in classes with regular ESL students) and 45 teachers.
- In Winnipeg, ESL literacy is present in workplace, seniors, community-based programs and possibly LINC.
- In Manitoba, all LINC money goes directly to the province and is managed at that level.
- The Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (CLPA) has been implemented in all government funded adult programs.
- Key concerns with CLPA include:

- Time
- Storage
- Cost
- What to put in (don't want to spend time teaching about portfolio assessment as opposed to devoting time to ESL instruction)
- Working group (development team) met regularly to share and collect ideas about CLPA.
- Professional development days: the working group facilitated discussions, shared ideas, and discussed challenges.
- The preceding was collected and compiled as a resource (see Best Practices Guide, attached)
- The major challenge that teachers encountered with CLPA was that in ESL literacy, teachers must direct the activity and learners usually want to save everything, so the idea of selecting a few pieces of work was difficult.
- The major benefit of CLPA is that portfolios make it easier to show concrete results and progress.
- For more information, see Writing Rubrics (attached) and Suggested Resources (also attached).

2) Demographics, Needs, and Programming for ESL Literacy Learners

Mary Gaia, Bow Valley College, Calgary

- The report is from 2000; the information still holds true, for the most part, today (see attached report).
- In the late 1990s, it was suspected that literacy learners' needs were not being met. Jennifer Acevedo and Diane Hardy conducted research to find out about individualized instruction (ESL teachers were paid to do one-on-one tutoring)
 - Regular Bow Valley College program: 210 classroom instruction learners?
 - One-on-one instruction (limited time pilot project): 36 hours
- Many new immigrants have not been educated in the Roman alphabet.
- Phase 1 (1999-2000): looked at the kinds of programs offered in Calgary (p. 12, p. 24)
 - Most were part-time
 - Heavily populated by women
 - High success rate (see p 39)

- Those learners with clear motivation succeeded.
- Complications included eligibility for funding, workers compensation (see Table 2.6), people with little formal education may not be 'classroomized'
- Phase 2: Small groups of similar demographic groups; also had a high success rate
- Phase 3: Young adult literacy (no living allowance). These learners seemed very impatient due to financial concerns, relationships and pregnancy.
- At issue is the way in which learners from different backgrounds process information:

Traditional Society	Technological Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - oral communication - collaborative work - fatalism - concrete and practical - holistic interpretation of perceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - written communication - individualized work - focus on causality - abstract and speculative - analytical interpretation of perceptions

- Learners may come from countries where they don't fill in forms or make contracts (instead they use social networking).
- In order to be able to adapt to a different system, learning strategies must be taught:

Traditional	Technological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tasks attended to ad hoc - hands on training - process modeled to acquire skills - informal training - community training - respect for tradition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - time is scheduled - hypothetical - theory taught to apply to a process - standardized training - institutional training

- Even more than reading and writing, literacy teachers are also teaching new ways of learning and seeing the world

Session 1: Who are our ESL literacy learners (learner profile)? What are the presenting needs of these learners and how do we acknowledge and respond to their needs? What strategies, techniques and methodologies do we use to address them? What are 3 of your best practices in terms of ESL delivery service to literacy learners? What makes your programming successful?

- Pebbles in the Sand (CIWA): takes people from the beginning of their literacy experience and prepares them to transition successfully into other language programming
 - The key is to show respect and to encourage women to be strong and able to face the new country
 - Takes place in the community, primarily in churches (locations that are easily accessible to students); attendance is extremely high.
 - Exclusively for women, part-time, child care built in (curriculum for children); the program is an international award winner
 - Supportive atmosphere (families welcome)
 - Programs with funding for childcare seem to have the most success
 - Reflect methodology: what people are interested in directs the curriculum; a hands-on approach is used (going to a clinic to look at equipment); the goals are determined by the group; the groups' interests are fairly common and resources have been built around these themes
 - Challenge: assessing outcomes
 - Facilitate rather than teach
 - The challenge is to address the needs of men, who see themselves as bread winners and not students (difficult to acknowledge literacy needs). In a trial program with men, none of the instructors stayed and attendance was never high. There is an apparent reluctance for men to ask for help, especially in the workplace. Perhaps changing the terminology would help (to communication, rather than ESL)
- Possible strategies to attract men:
 - Appeal and saving face ??
 - Integrated training programs (do not mention language training?)
 - Motivation: preparation for a trade
 - Need a "champion" in the workplace to support and participate in the program so others do not see it as threatening
 - Need employer buy-in (this is sometimes difficult although not now so much because of the labor crunch, with All Weather Windows as a great example)
 - Manitoba: employers hire the teachers, and the teachers do a needs assessment and develop the curriculum; many institutions are losing instructors to businesses for workplace English
- In Taber: 5-month workplace preparation. The clientele are Low German Mexican Mennonites. (more info to come)

- Sacred Heart Adult ESL: combine ESL with job skills and work placements (especially for a new African group who does not understand our work ethic); the advantage is that students have work placements with the benefit of program/professional support; need a liaison worker to mediate between employers and students; employers don't understand the learners' culture
- NorQuest: intercultural communications initiative – mix Canadian disadvantaged students with newcomers, do group collaborative projects and there is learning on both sides
- CARE: works to raise community awareness by doing presentations in schools (300 so far); liaises with Catholic Social Services; matches community volunteers with newcomers
- EMCN: parenting and literacy (mothers bring their children)
- **Best Practices** for literacy programs as identified by group participants:
 - Goal-oriented
 - Task specific
 - Learner driven
 - Coping strategies incorporated into the curriculum
 - Face saving strategies used by instructors
 - Electronic dictionaries
 - Vocabulary resources
 - Motivational factors
 - Functionally based
 - Purposeful
 - ESL integrated with job readiness and workplace culture
 - Cultural models of work needed
 - Use classroom “situations” as opportunities for learning
 - Guest speakers
 - Write lists
 - HRDC's 9 Essential Skills (e.g., numeracy) – increase rate at which learners acquire what they need to know
 - Give reasons for all activities which are clear/evident to the students; demonstrate why the skills are necessary
 - Use students as resources to give presentations on intercultural training to various groups, schools, in the workplace, etc.

- Matching programs in the community, such as matching volunteer friends with new immigrant families, or in schools such as graduating students interview ESL students followed by social time and free conversation
- Workplace visits – partnerships between students and professionals
- Teachers need to be flexible with literacy learners
- Acknowledge and value student experience by using it as a basis for learning (they are generally grateful for such consideration) and by allowing time to deal with it and to develop relationships
- Offer combined parenting and literacy classes
- Use music, songs and dance to increase confidence and the learning will increase
- Use family photos and personal information IF appropriate and acceptable
- Increase accessibility by offering community based classes and having outreach workers
- Systems-based versus relationship-based learning: we don't spend enough time trying to understand the role of culture in language learning
- Cultural exchanges or employee matching systems: pair a new employee with an experienced employee to establish workplace relationships; pair native with non-native speakers; the result will be renewed interest in coming to work and increased learning for the newcomer
- Cultural training for employers (often send middle management to meetings)
- Teach language in context (e.g. in the context of the learners' workplace) with relevant content; more success by interweaving the two
- Focus on intercultural communication through mentorship (one-on-one) as well as group/collaborative projects

Session 2: What are the expected learning outcomes of ESL literacy programming? How are results tracked and quantified? How are learner competencies assessed upon entry into and exit from literacy programs? How is progress defined and reported? What are the traditional methods of assessment and how can we challenge ourselves to think outside the box in terms of assessing and articulating student results? How can funding bodies contribute to this process?

- Issue of needing to quantify results
- Assessment of progress requires descriptions of pre- and post language competencies related to the CLB's
- Learners need to be aware of their progress
- Use a variety of assessment tools and show students the results
- Learner self-assessment is useful; self-assess and set immediate goals; revisit these goals later
- Is there a process that can be identified for developing assessment tools?
- Documenting the process can give guidance to others rather than reinventing the wheel – highly beneficial
- Pay for curriculum and assessment tools to be developed – ensures quality and consistency
- Portfolio assessment:
 - o Challenging because it is a big change
 - o Gives a sense of satisfaction that marks don't
 - o There is a lot of preparation and post time for teacher
 - o Lots of work but provides excellent results
 - o Revision of tasks required
 - o Results are not immediate
 - o At this point, it seems like trial and error and a lot of collaboration between teachers are necessary
 - o Teachers may need assistance from aides or volunteers
- Need different ways of placement testing other than the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) which is a post-ESL assessment tool
- CIWA – uses tests from On Target or ones similar to those in On Target
- Pebbles in the Sand – tests reading and writing only; portfolio assessment would work well for them
- ESL Young Adult Literacy Program at Bow Valley College has in-house developed assessment tools
- Assessment should be relevant to content
- Formal and informal, for example, anecdotal, assessment are both useful
- Volunteers and assistants can be used in the classroom to work with learners while the instructor is doing more individualized assessment (such as oral interviews)

- Lack of mechanisms to test learning disabilities and lack of resources to address disabilities if identified
- Assessment tests are culturally biased
- Need norms that have been tested by members of various ethnic groups
- Issue of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) being identified as a learning disability
- Issues specific to refugees; no one wants to address their needs, so they come up in the ESL classroom; how can we get L2 learners access to mainstream L1 resources

Session 3: Looking in your “ESL literacy tool box”, what tools would you identify as essential to your practice? What tools do you consistently use? Which tools are produced in Alberta? Which tools would you choose to add to your tool box that you are currently missing?

- Lack of lower level resources (0 to CLB 1, 2); lack of both teaching and assessment tools
- Flexibility Learning Systems – has developed checklists and a DVD with real-life situations
- ABC’s of ESL Literacy – Bow Valley College
- Rural ESL Enhancement Program
- SAM: Summative Assessment Manual – need to encourage greater use of this tool
- 44 CALC’s (Community Adult Learning Councils) in rural areas
- Videotaped training on, for example, ERPAC, or other resources would be useful
- The challenge to students and practitioners is lack of time; there is not enough time for teacher training as it takes away from the already limited time for student training
- Another challenge is lack of funding to compensate instructors for their PD time: the burden should not always be on the teachers’ shoulders; neither should they have no responsibility – need a cost sharing system to ensure staff are able to participate
- Practitioners are starved for training and are also overwhelmed
- A resource network of people who can train others could be developed, perhaps on a regional basis; could offer “key streams” for training; one-day, regionally based train the trainer workshops in various communities
- In order to provide time for teachers to access PD, in-house training could be provided on a quarterly basis, for example; while instructors receive

- training, classes could be cancelled, two classes could be combined or project work could be assigned
- Centre for Family Literacy has one week per year of mandatory family literacy training; this model could work for others or online learning modules could be developed instead of taking this week off of work
 - Offer online PD opportunities – could offer training courses with assignments submitted electronically
 - Need to connect ESL and literacy
 - o Programming issues
 - o Benchmark criteria
 - o Need a standardized way to talk about literacy
 - A key issue is confusion around the definition of an “ESL literacy learner”
 - The 40 characteristics of an ESL learner – where did this come from?
 - o Difficult to pin down the difference between an ESL learner and an ESL literacy learner
 - o What do they have in common and what do they NOT have in common?
 - o If the definition is too broad, it feeds stereotypical notions of immigrants (immigrant ≠ ESL learner ≠ ESL literacy learner)
 - What about English dialects
 - Need more communication between ATESL and Literacy Alberta about who their literacy learners are and what their needs are
 - Need greater interconnectivity between ESL and other programs so that we’re using common language; there is also a need for language assessment in other areas
 - Representatives from various community groups could be invited to attend ATESL meetings so as to provide input on language training needs; promote the use of ATESL as a vehicle to express language training needs in the community, workplace, etc.