

Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals
A Project of ATESL with funding and support from AHRE

Workshop Forum #4

Professional Development Opportunities

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

Grant MacEwan College, Alberta College Campus, Board Room (#627)

11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Participants

1. Representative from NorQuest College
2. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry
3. Representative from English Language Foundations, Centre for Academic Learner Services, SAIT
4. Representative from Lethbridge Community College
5. Representative from English Language Program, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta
6. Representative from Academic, English Language Program, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta
7. Representative from MacEwan English Language Institute, Grant MacEwan College
8. Representative from ASSIST Community Services Centre
9. Representative from Languages Institute, Office of International Education, Mount Royal College
10. Valerie Parr, Consultant, Innovative Language Programs, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry
11. Marian Rossiter, Associate Professor, Coordinator, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Department of Educational Psychology University of Alberta, ATESL President Elect
12. Representative from Portals: Ed. Consulting Services, Inc.
13. Representative from Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society
14. Representative from Edmonton Mennonite Centre
15. Geralyn St. Louis, Project Manager, Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals, ATESL
16. Representative from Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
17. Representative from Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Report on Focus Session Discussions

Session 1: Current practices in professional development

- Workshops are coordinated and delivered based on the needs of particular communities (especially since there is such a broad range of ESL experience across the province); training related to the CLB's is being delivered; in rural communities, there is a lot of one-on-one training with tutors who are volunteers and have no ESL background
- Need to promote ATESL, its website and the conference to newcomers to the field of ESL; the ATESL conference is a PD activity of major importance
- There is a need for better connections with Literacy Alberta and the Community Adult Literacy Councils (CALC); PD delivery is a process whereby PD activities are initiated and directed by a professional, so it starts out dictatorial, and then the participants take hold of it, make it their own, give input as to where they want to go with it and carry it forward
- There was an emphasis on the need for a long-term commitment to training, not only to formal methods (such as education and conferences) but informally as well (delivered on an ongoing basis in institutions).
- Many teachers have retired or will be retiring within the next five years which will leave a huge gap. There is a need for succession planning as well as to capture and transmit their expertise to the new cohort of teachers. For example, there is very little expertise in the area of EWP, so there is a need for capacity building with new teachers coming on board. Mentorship is a good way to address this; there needs to be more of these types of activities developed. Some methods that are being used include a buddy system and pairing up teachers to share information. However, it seems that as teachers get closer to their retirement, they seem to generally back away from professional development activities. We need to figure out a way to encourage information sharing before this disengagement process starts to occur. Perhaps allowing time for the passing on of this knowledge through a reduction in workload leading up to retirement would help.
- Providing professional development in locations outside of the major cities is also an area that needs improvement. There is currently a pilot project that makes use of video and online media. Rural communities in Northern Alberta, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories can receive in-service PD on site, can be brought to Edmonton (NorQuest) for workshops, can attend literacy conferences and have access to a telephone support system and a

resource person. Through the Rural Delivery Program, which receives federal and provincial funding, tutors can attend the ATESL conference and other rural workshops, but there is more needed.

- There is a need for intercultural education, as culture is deeply embedded in business, industry and language education delivery. More projects that integrate content into the delivery of language training are also needed. Instructors have also requested more cross-cultural training/cultural diversity training.
- Teacher education workshops (recently advertised on the ATESL listserv and offered through Portals) are nearly full in Edmonton and have waiting lists in Calgary. There is a great need for PD workshops such as these – to get the information straight to the teachers. Resources need to be expanded.
- ATESL annual conferences
 - More experienced teachers and program administrators don't always go for the sessions, as they may already be familiar with the topics or the topics are not relevant to them.
 - Often, the conference serves as a good place to network, become aware of resources and gather information. More time should be planned into the conference program for informal networking.
 - It was suggested that more meaningful, formalized opportunities for networking be added, such as colloquia or symposia on specific questions which will gather together expertise in those areas
 - Administrators also expressed an interest in professional development activities targeted specifically to their needs at the local level. At the federal level, there is the Canada Language Council.
 - It was suggested that no classes be scheduled on the Friday of the ATESL conference so that all teachers could benefit.
 - ATESL should encourage further reflection on the purpose and effectiveness of the conference to further improve it
 - Another topic to be brought forward and addressed through ATESL is that of professionalism and professional ethics; professional standards need to be incorporated and promoted
- Need to shift our focus onto the learner – who are the learners and what are their issues? Learners learn in the context of a cultural identity crisis and this

needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Lionel Laroche's book, *Managing Cultural Diversity in Technical Professions*, is an excellent resource for use with learners. In EWP and ELT programs, learning is contextualized, so it's easier to address a group with common goals. Typically, the more highly educated the learner, the more identity trauma there is.

- Different institutions allot money for professional development. Some have a set number of professional development dollars for staff which are earmarked for attending the annual ATESL conference and/or for completing TESL graduate courses. For most individuals, if they want to attend both conference days, only one day is paid time. In some cases, the onus is on the instructor to find a substitute or to make up the missed class time if he/she wants to attend on the Friday. One institution has just recently made a decision to not schedule classes on the Friday of the conference so as to free up instructors to attend.
- If part of a larger institution, such as a college or university, staff may be able to access a certain number of credit or non-credit courses, to apply for reimbursement for credit courses and/or to apply for funds for a long-term study plan. Different workshops may be offered on campus, not necessarily with a language focus but presenting different approaches to teaching.
- Policies regarding professional development days vary across the language providers (from none to two days per term). Time off to attend a conference may be granted if the individual is able to arrange the time off with his/her students. Most providers require that those who have been accorded funds to go to conferences provide a summary of what they learned for the other teachers at a staff meeting.
- The frequency and topics of monthly or weekly meetings also varies greatly across providers. There is a need for more specific PD training, for example, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP – for nurses, engineers, etc.), and computer assisted learning. One program holds informal bi-weekly information sharing meetings while another has minor weekly PD sessions that address issues as they arise in the classroom. Weekly meetings are often a valuable opportunity for professional development as revision and renewal is needed on an ongoing, constant basis. A record of these informal meetings should be written up and kept on file so as to recognize them as legitimate “PD” activities.
- PD needs are partly determined by the level of training of the staff. In one volunteer-based drop-in program, volunteer training is provided four times

per year. This training is highly interactive, learner-centered and uses pair work as well as role plays. Workshop topics covered include lesson planning, pre-, during and post- lesson activities, adult learning principles, communicative language teaching, conflict resolution, classroom management techniques, task-based learning, assessment and evaluation, and cultural awareness training (e.g. cultural identity in the classroom). The program administrator has ongoing dialogue with the instructors, sets up observation sessions as well as mentoring opportunities between senior and new volunteers, and provides information about available off-site training.

- Teachers are encouraged to go to local ATESL meetings, but often personal circumstances conflict with the Friday night meeting time.
- There is always a need for in-house training in specialty areas, such as technology in the classroom.
- Technology is a growing field in TESL and training is needed in many areas, such as podcasting (for iPod), e-portfolios, FAST (survey software), language training software (such as hot potatoes - online activity builder), listservs (email distribution lists), course management systems, accessing online postings for jobs, conferences, etc. and other such e-learning and resource sharing opportunities.
- Peer evaluation, observations and mentoring are also a valuable part of team building and professional development.
- Teachers need to be encouraged to have a reflective attitude about their practice. Giving presentations and workshops to one another and the larger ESL community about their activities, peer teaching and evaluation, forces us to articulate why something is beneficial or not, what drives our teaching, etc. There is sometimes resistance on the part of the practitioner to participate in PD activities and/or to reflect on, develop or adapt one's teaching methods, but these opportunities allow us to take pride and ownership in our craft.
- At the institutional level, ongoing professional development may take the form of monthly staff meetings. For example, one institution chooses a different topic each month and brings in a specialist. PD topics vary greatly and depend on the administrator's assessment of the needs and on the teachers' choices. Some sample topics include: inviting guest speakers from different immigrant communities, learning a second language together, curriculum development and planning sessions (going through the process as a team), publisher sharing sessions, discussing and summarizing articles,

team building activities, establishing mentoring (buddy) systems and peer evaluations, hope in the classroom, first aid certification, pension information, financial planning, grammar workshops, testing and evaluation (for example, test creation – setting specifications for in-house exams), plagiarism on campus, focus groups, computer lab training, cooperative learning, CALL, WebCT training, Essential Skills training. At one institution, teachers prepare an agenda for pedagogical days which must be approved by the administration.

- One full-day workshop (part of an initiative of the institution's Cultural Respect Group which is open to all staff) that was very well received was entitled "Why am I a Teacher?" and had teachers offering feedback about what they like and dislike about teaching. This was self-facilitated by program administrators and provided an opportunity for administrators to see what the teachers believed they needed as well as to get a better idea about how to better meet student needs. It brought out the need for more such mentoring opportunities where experienced teachers can share their knowledge with new teachers, and everyone can problem solve together. This may become a regular semi-annual PD activity.
- Another PD option is to organize brown bag lunch workshops (called lunch hour refreshers). Balancing health and wellness with professional topics seems to be accepted. Professional development topics should be determined based on teachers' needs; for example, many tutors and teachers are volunteers and need different workshops than those who are considered professional ESL teachers.
- It was noted that The University of Alberta (Department of Educational Psychology) offers TESL Diploma, Masters and Doctoral programs as well as evening courses. Instructors from around the city attend. Faculty has been encouraging students and graduates to list their courses on their resume so that administrators can see where their expertise lies. One of the disadvantages is that courses cannot be offered spontaneously as they are approved nearly two years in advance on the course calendar.
- Professional development also needs to include helping teachers and administrators to understand culture and its role. We need to understand:
 - immigrants and their situations (as they are in a state of identity crisis when they are in the process of settling)

- how cultures interact and work together (there is a renewed interest in intercultural connections with one another; one organization has a sub-committee that does diversity training with staff members and out in the community)
- different types of diversity: age, gender, social class, etc.
- the process of delivering settlement information; how/where settlement and language overlap and intersect
- ATESL is an invaluable resource, especially for smaller institutions with few resources.
- Feedback from the ATESL conference workshops is a valuable source of information regarding the PD needs of the membership.
- PD dollars are greatly appreciated and PD activities, in general, are well attended.
- CIC strongly supports PD activities; funding provided for LINC instructors to attend the ATESL conference; classes are cancelled on the conference day; for in-service PD days, classes are shut down and salaries continue; LINC assessors attend a conference in Toronto; LINC child minders have in-service training and attend a conference; unforeseen PD needs are dealt with through the LINC Projects Office (can respond to identified needs); a LINC treat has been planned for March 6 – 9 (personal and professional retreat)
- Some suggested resources for program administrators:
 - Managing Cultural Diversity in Technical Professions
 - by Lionel Laroche
 - ISBN: 0750675810
 - The ELT Manager's Handbook
 - by Graham Impey and Nick Underhill
 - ISBN-10: 0435240900
 - Sustaining Professional Development
 - by Patricia Byrd and Gayle Nelson
 - ISBN: 1931185115
 - Handbook for Language Program Administrators

- by Mary Ann Christison and Fredricka L. Stoller
- ISBN-10: 1882483626

Session 2: Needs and barriers

- One of the problems is that administrators and teachers may not know where to look for people with expertise in a particular area. Mechanisms need to be put into place to share information, knowledge and expertise on, for example, teaching techniques and technologies. It was suggested that ATESL create a resource list/catalogue of experts comprised of workshop speakers, presenters, etc. who have expert knowledge in particular areas of interest (or, at least, create the forum for the creation of the list). A list of topics can be listed on the website and administrators/organizers can contact the administrative assistant to obtain the expert's contact information. One concern, however, is how to conduct quality control. One suggested topic for this list was the writing of research papers and dealing with plagiarism as this constitutes hours upon hours of work for an instructor. Sharing ideas as to how others manage this writing process would be a helpful time saver. A pool of experts would feed and inform the system.
- We need a network, either real or virtual, in order to open up PD opportunities to the wider ESL community (for example, large public institutions could make workshops available to smaller non-profit providers).
- There also needs to be development in the area of using technology (e.g., teaching speaking and listening online) as well as research on its effectiveness. Need funding for such technologies and research. We also need to understand the capacities of the communities we're trying to reach (e.g. number of learners, access to technology). All of the CALC's have WebCT; they use it and are familiar with it.
- ATESL could formalize a process for the creation of working groups (which could be attached to the annual conference as symposia) which meet to discuss specific topics. These working groups could also meet on a more regular basis outside of the conference (e.g. a program administrator's group that meets the day before the conference and throughout the year). Chat rooms on the ATESL website could also be established as forums for ongoing discussion on various topics of interest.
- Because TESL experts often have limited time, as do those who would be receiving the training, it may be of use to develop video-conferencing or

online accessibility to information. An example of a free web conferencing program is Skype (www.skype.com). It might also be a good idea to video tape lesson vignettes to show as examples. Learning could be a combination of video conferencing and in person meetings.

- Another possible project for ATESL is to do research to determine the exact needs and capacities of language providers in the province (in order to find out what the least “know how” is that teachers/administrators need).
- Perhaps ATESL should develop its own PLAR system to account for professional development activities outside of formal education and experience. Also, individuals want recognition such as certificates of participation and achievement for their PD activities. There is room for a system of recognition beyond accreditation. In order to give accreditation credibility, the system should be transparent.
- Some barriers to accessing PD opportunities are cost, accommodation, travel and time. We need to ask ourselves what the road blocks are for those for those who want to become qualified, what we can provide to those who want to further their training and how we can reach those who don't have access or don't know where to get the training/knowledge. There are restrictions, especially for part-time instructors, lower paid instructors, volunteer tutors, students, those who have foreign training and/or experience and those outside major centres. Quite often the necessary resources exist, but instructors/staff are unable to gain access to them.
- ATESL mini-conference brought in a lot of new instructors and created renewed interest and enthusiasm.
- There is a need for the sharing of knowledge about how to develop in-house tools. For example, those who are new to the field struggle with how to develop tests and other methods of both formative and evaluative assessment.
- There is a need to fill the positions of those who are or will be retiring and of those who leave the field to pursue other careers. How can we address the needs of ESL learners in communities where there is a lack of “qualified” professionals? How/where does the voluntary sector fit in? How can we interconnect non-accredited paid or volunteer staff, who are often highly educated professionals in other fields or teachers in training, with accredited ESL teachers? What about employers – is there a system for monitoring who employers hire and the level of qualifications they require?

- The issue of “professionalism” arises when opening up PD opportunities to a variety of individuals who possess different levels of qualifications. There may be a reluctance or unwillingness on the part of someone who has completed a post-graduate program of study to share PD time with someone who has lesser qualifications or someone who has qualifications from a different field and is working in ESL on a voluntary basis.
- Potential for ATESL to create a two or three tier accreditation system to acknowledge the different levels of professional ESL qualifications and training that instructors, tutors and volunteers have. Different standards would apply to these different groups as the roles they can fill are different. There are groups of individuals who are working in the field but who are under represented or not represented in ATESL such as part-time staff, volunteers, those who work in private ESL schools, those with foreign credentials, etc. How can we create a system which will allow individuals who want to become qualified, according to the standards set out by ATESL, to get those qualifications? How can ATESL, and TESL Canada, create systems that are inclusive of diversity? Do we have a professional responsibility to do so? How can we develop ways of disseminating information and sharing expertise that will benefit individuals from a variety of backgrounds displaying a wide range of qualifications? Do we not all benefit, as a profession, from raising the level of the least of the educated?
- The issue arose of sharing resources when there is the role of competition to consider. There is the issue of in-house funded vs. publicly funded training/resources. If the in-house training or production of resources has been publicly funded, it is of benefit to a greater number of learners to share this product or service with other professionals in the community. The ultimate goal should be to share resources as much as possible. What is the best way to encourage open sharing of resources and materials? Perhaps bring together a representation of all the individuals involved in producing the work, practitioners and administrators alike. For example, curriculum outlines could be made available universally so others could benefit. Currently, there is more sharing being done on a national level than there is from north to south within the province or even locally. How can we encourage collaboration between LINC/ESL providers in Edmonton?
- Program exchanges are a way of sharing information and knowledge such as a work exchange between two individuals from different organizations. Another option is creating a system for a “teacher exchange” where teachers (paid by their own school) can teach and research at another institution.

- Contract workers often have a wide range of experience and knowledge to share as most have worked in a variety of positions with a wide range of learners and at different types of learning facilities.

Session 3

- Some topics/issues that should be addressed in professional development include:
 - Assessment
 - pre-requisites and requirements for entry into language programs (it would be helpful if there was a common standard among language providers so that it is easier to communicate)
 - developing tests
 - using the CLB's
 - Developing experts in various fields in Alberta
 - Visibility: the latest mini-conference in Calgary had terrific turn out from private school teachers because they flooded them with advertising. ATESL needs a more visible presence in Alberta to encourage professionalism.
 - Part-time and contract teachers need to be supported as they often do not receive benefits or professional development funding from their institutions.
 - We should encourage "plain English" in some workshops so as not to scare away teachers/volunteers with overly technical jargon
 - Summer institutes are one alternative way of providing PD
 - Identifying language competencies, teaching to them and evaluating them; need a greater form of regulation.
 - Establish informal linkages between ATESL and other professional associations and organizations could lead to more formal collaborations and increased PD opportunities e.g. with AAISA and Literacy Alberta
 - Develop an associate or intern level of accreditation for those who have not yet met all the qualifications to become fully accredited. Completing course work, seeing that it counts towards something

and being included in a group of professionals are good motivators to continue working towards a higher level of qualification.

- To address the barrier of accessibility, have an itinerant/outreach professional developer who travels to different communities to deliver workshops on different topics. This would be much cheaper than bringing all the participants to a remote locale. An initial workshop or weekend class could be followed up through Skype on a weekly basis. EMCN has a model/mechanism for this that can be used if high speed Internet is available. CALC's use supernet.
- Establish partnerships. Northern Lakes College has satellite campuses around the north. A relationship with them, and others, could be established.
- Provide compensation for time spent participating in PD activities. Usually, the only paid time is instructional time in the class.
- Share resources – Bow Valley College received funding to provide four PD workshops, and they invited Mount Royal College instructors as well volunteer tutors from a non-profit to attend