

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

Workshop Forum #5  
**Intercultural Competence Training**  
Thursday, February 22, 2007  
Grant MacEwan College, City Centre Campus, Room 7-218  
11:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

**Participants**

1. Intercultural Education Specialist, NorQuest College
2. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry
3. Representative from Enhanced Language Training for Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists, Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society
4. Representative from Intercultural Education Program, Immigration and Settlement Service, Catholic Social Services
5. Independent ESL Consultant
6. Valerie Parr, Consultant, Innovative Language Programs, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry
7. Representative from Edmonton Mennonite Centre
8. Geralyn St. Louis, Project Manager, Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals, ATESL
9. Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
10. Representative from Intercultural Education, NorQuest College

**Session 1:** What is your particular knowledge of, experience with and interest in intercultural competence training (round table with a brief presentation from each participant)? What do the terms “intercultural communications” and “intercultural competence training” mean to you? How do you incorporate these themes into ESL programming? What are the benefits to the learners? What intercultural training initiatives exist in the community outside of the ESL sector (e.g., employment, settlement, racism)?

- Discussion re: use of the term “intercultural”; other terms in use are multicultural, cross-cultural, anti-racism and diversity, and “competence

training”, also called awareness or sensitivity training. There seems to be a shift in terminology. While “multicultural” seems to denote a separation of individual “isolated” ethnic communities, “intercultural” seems to denote the idea of inclusion and of interaction/connections between cultures. The latter has become the term accepted by many professionals. Another term is “cross-cultural”, which is being used but seems to imply crossing over from one side to another where the responsibility for establishing communication relies on only one group. Cross-cultural is often used in reference only to immigrants while diversity tends to include other groups such as first nations and other kinds of differences such as gender, age, physical challenges, socio-economic status, etc.

- At the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, there is a sub-committee called the “Intercultural Awareness Group”, which provides “competence training”. The term “competence training” is problematic since it represents the assumption that communication is a result of training rather than education in a broader sense, and it doesn’t capture the level of intricacy in this field (presents a more limited model). However, we use it for various reasons: ease of communication across disciplines and the meaning it has for companies that have specific needs; they tend to prefer this more technical term as opposed to “awareness” which they find too fluffy and generic. Educators at NorQuest College have also remarked that the term “competence training” seems to get a better reception and more buy-in from companies, human resource departments, managers, etc. since it is a term commonly accepted in the corporate world.
- With respect to intercultural competence training in the workplace, human resource personnel often contact organizations such as NorQuest to arrange for ESL delivery. The need for language training for employees is usually the primary motivator for placing the call. Most of the time, they don’t mention culture or think about the need for intercultural training from the perspective of educating their Canadian-born employees. After a face-to-face meeting, the intercultural educator must ascertain what issues are involved in each workplace situation in order to develop a customized program for that particular company. This includes a needs assessment and an intercultural audit. More often than not, providing intercultural education for Canadian-born employees is more efficient, cost effective and results can be seen more quickly than providing English in the

Workplace programs. Language training is a long-term prospect. It is also possible (and beneficial) to educate HR and managers about the Canadian Language Benchmarks, EWP and intercultural education. For example, statistics can be given regarding the number of hours of language training needed to increase a person's competency by one benchmark level (typically 500 hundred if general training is provided, but this can be reduced significantly if the training is specific and the content relevant) as opposed to the number of hours of intercultural training needed to perhaps bring about equally desirable results. If department managers and supervisors do not buy into the program, it will not be successful (even if higher management has endorsed the program). A long-term commitment is needed in order to take an in-depth look at a company's "intercultural needs/issues". This will only occur if the long-term benefits to the company can be made clear. It would be ideal to establish ongoing, sustainable relationships with model companies in order for Alberta to develop a reputation as being well-integrated. This is a huge initiative which requires working together; efforts to provide such education should be concerted and unified among the organizations in the ESL community.

- It would be great if businesses would invest in developing in-house intercultural communication programs.
- In order to promote awareness and to attract those in the corporate sector who are interested, it is advisable to bring presidents/representatives of major companies/corporations to the table with educators and government funders; they need to be directly involved in meetings and dialogues on the subject. It is recommended that this be done during the window of opportunity that we have now in Alberta brought on by the recent economic boom. We have the opportunity now to change workplace culture across the province, and we need to take advantage of it. This window will close in the future. Companies will not be as cooperative once the labor shortage passes and the pressure is off. Therefore, it is important to appeal to the business mindset, stressing the competitive nature of the labor market and the benefits of training employees in intercultural communication. Managers are often impatient and intolerant. They want things presented in clear language with definable results that make sense economically. The bottom line they're looking to meet is to have a competent workforce comprised of people who can fit in,

communicate effectively and perform their job successfully. Managers from other countries may buy in, but they will need to convince the rest of the team that intercultural training is in the best interest of the company from a profit perspective.

- If at all possible, ESL organizations should network with major businesses and professional associations to create this buy in. We need to spread the word about and sell the benefits of intercultural training. Most workshops are still only taking place with senior staff, and the results trickle down; there is a need to be educating more of the workforce at all levels. “Immersion to Integration” needs to spread out on a large scale. If there are 50 to 100 companies that need training, it will take decades to reach other businesses and sectors of society. Setting up a “mode of thought” or some kind of model that can be implemented in other a variety of business sectors is needed. It is the responsibility of various areas of ESL programming and of the Alberta government to use their resources and influence to make this happen. EWP, for the most part, is an isolated pocket which has not been able to meet the current market demand.
- The recent ATESL survey showed that ESL teachers have also expressed interest in receiving intercultural competence training. However, instead of focusing solely on ethnic profiles, learning facts about individual cultures/countries, we need to move beyond that to address more universal principles. There is a misconception that simply knowing facts about a country will lead to improved intercultural communication. While this kind of knowledge is a tool that can be used to communicate interculturality, it is only a starting point. Intercultural competence training encompasses much more than cultural profiles.
- One of the primary objectives of and key skills to develop in intercultural training is that of accurate observation. It’s not only the ability to discuss facts about a country, it is being open and observant. Immersion to Integration presents a wonderful opportunity for this kind of observation and learning to occur.
- One of the barriers to awareness is that people simply don’t know where to start with intercultural communication. They are eager and want to learn, but they don’t know what to ask, how to begin a dialogue or how to open up the lines of communication. This is where intercultural training

needs to start with HR departments, by integrating the principles of observation and open communication into their work style. Intercultural training with young supervisors who may have had very little exposure to working with people from diverse backgrounds may involve looking at attitudes and stereotypes. This type of training doesn't take a lot of time or money, and it can be very transformational.

- Transformational learning can occur through "reciprocal" learning opportunities. One successful activity has been to pair ESL students with managers. This has resulted in an open dialogue that breaks down commonly held stereotypes and assumptions. Another similar program is called the Reciprocal Learning Program (EMCN) that pairs foreign-trained nurses with Canadian health care staff. Another activity has been to pair LINC students with professionals. Getting people together to interact, to interview one another provides the mechanism which opens the dialogue and provides an opportunity for both groups to learn from each other. Students and employees often cite these kinds of learning exchanges as extremely meaningful.
- Intercultural training begins here - by formalizing these agendas and opportunities which bring people together to get first-hand experience. A major part of intercultural training is communication. Relationships are defined by communication. Leaving people to initiate or create these communication opportunities on their own is often hit and miss, or it never happens at all. We need to provide the structure wherein people can interact meaningfully, and through this structured communication, understanding and relationships will develop naturally. If there is no communication, there will be no relationship. The question is, "what structure can you put people into to get them talking"? Setting up this situation also involves pre- and post- activities in order to maximize learning.
- Structured encounters can be integrated into a school's curriculum/classes. This can happen at all levels from elementary school to university. For example, it is advised that intercultural awareness training be increased at the K-12 level, which is one of the most segregated environments of all. For example, there is very little integration amongst teenagers from different backgrounds at school. Also, at the university level, intercultural training is extremely important but

not often integrated into the curriculum, even in TESL programs. These kinds of structured intercultural communication environments need to be integrated into all faculties, and, in particular, those where graduates will be dealing with a primarily diverse clientele. There have been movements in the past to carry forward such an agenda, but they have not always met with success.

- Another key part of intercultural training, besides observation, is listening. A person can learn to develop his/her listening skills, for example, training one's ear to listen to accented speech. This shifts the emphasis and responsibility from the speaker onto the listener for creating successful communication.

**Session 2:** What are the current needs of ESL programs with regard to intercultural competence training? Who are the providers? What are some “best practices” that you have found or developed in this topic area? What are some useful models for understanding intercultural communication? How do we assess the need for and evaluate the effectiveness of intercultural competence training? How can we increase people's awareness of and access to such training?

- One of the themes of the upcoming LINC retreat (Revisit, Refresh, Renew) is intercultural communication. The theme is interwoven into all activities, rather than being the topic of a session. This retreat not only provides an opportunity for professional development but also a chance for people to share experiences with one another. Thus, it is a retreat and not a conference (4 days/3 nights). There will be workshops throughout and professional speakers such as Lionel Laroche who did a presentation at NorQuest which was workplace focused, and he has done training at other colleges regarding classroom issues as well as feedback and assessment in the workplace and in the classroom. Sophie Parkins is another speaker who will present on intercultural communication with a focus on how people experience and react to the “terrible reality” of trauma from different perspectives and how that interferes with communication. All LINC program staff, including administrative support, will participate (northern Alberta focus). The organizers have planned the retreat so that participants cannot simply take the path of least resistance and fall back on previous acquaintances. There is an effort to create fresh opportunities for new dialogue. For example, each institution has a

specific color and at one workshop, there cannot be more than one color represented at each table – thus ensuring that people from different organizations will meet and mingle. Even within particular groups, individuals will be assigned a particular spot. This is an example of the aforementioned structured learning environment which creates dialogical learning opportunities.

- Formal evaluation of intercultural communication is difficult since it is focused on a process rather than on a product or statistic. Measuring its results or outcomes is not so clear-cut as the learning that occurs may be subtle, and the effects of that learning may not be “noticed” or incorporated until later. The notion of organizational development states that you need a certain number of people to create momentum and to keep that momentum going. We need to ask ourselves what we need to do to support the momentum being created around the need for intercultural training until the point at which it becomes accepted by the larger community, until it becomes a part of the “lens” that we see the world through. ESL is only one part of larger immigration issues which are affecting the larger community. This has already been noted as more people are calling about intercultural education and more people are choosing workshops on this subject at conferences. There is change occurring. People are now taking the first step towards learning about other cultures. Intercultural education is now taking place not only within the non-profit and social services sectors, there is interest originating from mainstream agencies. There is more demand for intercultural educators to go out to companies, organizations and conferences as guest speakers. Mainstream organizations, such as those who work with youth or persons with disabilities, want intercultural training for their staff in order to better meet the needs of a diverse clientele and of a diverse work force.
- A gap in terms of intercultural communication that exists is between First Nations people and immigrants. Since these two groups rarely interconnect, this is definitely an intercultural issue. Structured encounters which allow for communication are needed and highly beneficial. For example, the Preparation for Policing and Security Program now has an intercultural component for working with immigrants and First Nations people and to connect these two groups so as to collaborate and work together. At NorQuest College, such structured interactions can easily be arranged as there is a natural representation of diversity represented in

the student population: 60% are immigrants and 25% are First Nations. An interactive model of communication can be applied throughout the college which brings together individuals and starts the communication. Mentoring activities and guest speakers lend voices of authenticity through the story-telling that takes place to the intercultural training. This is the fundamental pillar of such training which we need to keep developing. The nature of acquiring intercultural skills is not so much about gaining knowledge or facts as it is about creating a dialogical interaction, two-way communication, a conversation between two people within a structure that includes providing participants with a framework beforehand upon which they can hang their learnings and a post-activity debriefing session.

- The powerful result of this is a reduction in fear. Once people have spoken to one another, it's easy to talk again. Most people do not have the time, on their own, to find ways to do this. Rather than having certain people who are on the "outside", these opportunities allow everyone to be included in the discussion; less dominant groups are brought into interactions with more dominant groups, and the result is the leveling of the playing field. The open exchange of information has an "equalizing" effect. This is a win-win situation which, for example, allows an ESL learner to learn more about Canadian culture, and a Canadian learner to find out more about a foreign culture. Stereotypes which separate us may be broken down. Such reciprocal learning events are definitely needed at the college and university level.
- The CLB's were created for non-Canadian, not for Canadian-born, second language learners. It embeds learning the language in the context of culture.
- Multicultural Health Brokers keep developing relationships with the community and they help to communicate authenticity. It has a greater impact to hear the information from the source, rather than from a third party.
- The Eye to Eye Project develops mentoring relationships between two immigrant groups. For example, those who are working for a company and those in a transition program. Interaction can take place over a longer-term period. The question that arises is if there is a minimal level of language competence necessary for this kind of interaction to be

successful? Can it occur from day one or does it take time to develop the necessary communication skills? Are there cognitive realities or structures that need to develop before certain levels of more advanced communication can take place in an effective way? Content vs. context. Even if certain content/concepts cannot be grasped or discussed, it is widely believed that learning can still occur through participation in the process.

- The LINC classroom is a controlled, safe environment for intercultural contact, but it is much more difficult to make the transition to the workplace. The ESL classroom is a staged/artificial environment which may be quite different from the authentic/real work world. For example, meetings and social gatherings in the work place where supervisors mingle with staff members may present challenges not encountered in the ESL classroom. Learners need to be able to gain experience interacting in these natural environments before joining the work force. It would be helpful to incorporate such authentic learning opportunities into language training.
- Perhaps developing the idea of a cultural broker or liaison would help businesses to communicate with their employees (such as how the multicultural health brokers provide liaison between immigrant and Canadian populations). Cultivating “natural leaders/mentors” who, through his/her on the job training, is given support in order to perform a cultural liaison role in the work place. Separation between ethnic groups naturally exists in certain work places, so a person who has already demonstrated the ability to lead and act as an intermediary could be designated as such. This natural leader could be given training to bridge communication gaps and recognized for the intercultural skills he/she brings to the work place. He/she could also be acknowledged through salary incentives or certification of some sort. However, this may also cause feelings of favoritism. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), developed by Mitchell R. Hammer and Milton J. Bennett, is a tool that measures intercultural competence which may be helpful in identifying such individuals within a work setting. Being “bi-cultural” does not necessarily mean that the person has well developed intercultural skills. Therefore, it may be helpful to identify the characteristics of someone who would be suitable as a cultural broker. How do we identify such competencies? Once identified, training could be developed to foster and

support these skills. How do we promote the need to employers of having such a person with these identified skills on staff? If we get two or three big-name companies to buy in to the concept, others will follow due to the “competitive factor”. Educate HR departments, work with them to let them know that they need an “intercultural specialist” on staff; it’s now not an option.

- Since immigrant workers belong to many groups, it may also be beneficial to train a broker to liaise with more than one group. Intercultural skills need to be seen for the valuable assets they are. A person will be better able to translate these skills to an employer in a meaningful way if the skill has been previously identified by someone as valuable (e.g. by PLAR or other documentation).
- Money for intercultural training is an issue within private industry. They are willing to contribute some dollars, but if it’s too expensive, they won’t go for it. About half of the companies who inquire about intercultural competency training drop the idea after they receive a quote (too expensive - whether on the side of EWP or on the side of intercultural training). A preliminary needs assessment and cost analysis, if offered for free, is often not followed up on by a company either because of a lack of staff buy in or because it’s not considered cost effective. These “intercultural audits” need to be customized and should be a paid service. If a company is unwilling to pay for this service, it is unlikely that they will be willing to pay for training or to make the long-term commitment needed. The cost value needs to be evident to companies at the upper management levels. Companies should not be given training for free, but if the government would subsidize half of the cost, they would most likely agree. If they can see the cost value at higher levels. The Manitoba model is a 50/50 cost sharing model which provides a company with the total cost of training including the portion that is government funded and the bottom line for the portion of funds that the company will need to commit. The Alberta government also has provisions for a similar cost sharing model for delivering EWP. Contact Carolyn Dieleman for details.
- The question of how to address the ROI (Return on Investment), how to measure success, concern often comes up. We need to be able to explain and identify how the process works. Workplace Essential Skills training is an effective tool for this. Also, having a champion to practice and preach it

makes all the difference. For example, working with professional associations to sell them on the benefits of intercultural training is a good idea. If we get them working with us, they'll spread the word.

- Assessment and quantification of results can be done in a way other than with a dollar figure. Encourage companies to think outside the box. Have work place conflicts been reduced? Has a better work environment been created? Has productivity increased because of a more satisfied, unified staff? Eventually, this will greatly affect the bottom line; there is a profit incentive in the long-term.
- Motivators include: supply and demand, the current labor shortage, and marketing. If we show that it works now, while there is a great need for it, people will still see its worth and will continue to access it when demand decreases.

**Session 3:** What information about intercultural competence training would be useful for ATESL members? What would be the best way to disseminate this information (e.g., ATESL has begun drafting a list of web resources on world cultures for the website)? What resources could be accessed by ATESL members to enhance intercultural competence? How can ATESL play a supportive role in intercultural competence training? What do we need to further the understanding and use of this theme?

- ATESL should continue to identify the notion of intercultural competence and how it can be exemplified in the classroom. Also, ATESL should prepare the membership to address this subject.
- The notion of a “halfway house” may be useful in designing “transitional levels” within ESL programming. This would help transition students from the safe environment of LINC to “real life”. Examples include internships, practicums, work experience placements, volunteer positions and mentoring relationships.
- We should encourage SIETAR to be more active in the community
- ESL instructors should be encouraged to take on the role of cultural liaisons; this would require in-house capacity training:
  - o they are interpreting the world for their students

- we must be aware that our learners' stories are just part of a larger story
  - interpreting needs to be done in an informed manner
  - we can't assume that having experience with immigrants qualifies a person to be a cultural liaison worker (just as being a native speaker of English does not make someone an ESL teacher)
  - we need to examine our own culture and biases
- ATESL should promote this as a pivotal issue
    - through this project report
    - an EWP guide to curriculum development
    - an editorial endorsement from the board that includes information about intercultural resources, models of training delivery, authors, researchers, and experts; encourage reading literature about "cultural theory" and further research into this area
    - recognize the value and need for intercultural training and the importance of bringing intercultural awareness into program design and delivery (not just isolated to the classroom environment)
- It has been projected that in 2011, Alberta will be short 109,000 workers (even if all First Nations and immigrant groups are working). Currently, supply and demand is as far as we can see, and the pressure points are only going to intensify.
- We need to examine our attitudes about Canadian culture and other cultures. We also cannot assume that immigrants are culturally aware. Traditionally, anyone who was an immigrant was seen as someone who could be a settlement or cultural liaison worker (based on language group not any specific ability to negotiate or communicate). Leads back to the need to develop identifiable skills and training for "intercultural brokers".
- Based on current demand, companies are forced to hire translators.
- Recommended material: the Critical Incident Resource Package and Handbook (in development; will be on the NorQuest website and available at cost recovery).
  - Sarah is involved in a pilot project which is an intercultural ESL program for non-labour market destined and non-LINC ESL learners; the project summary can be posted on the ATESL website.

- There is a need for an EWP guide to curriculum development.
- There is a need to look at incorporating intercultural training into professional training and associate level training throughout the labour market.
- Intercultural training starts with oneself, with self-awareness and examination of values. Everyone can benefit from this type of education.