



Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta

Summary Document

**Government
of Alberta** 



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada



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ATESL would like to acknowledge the contribution of *TESOL Standards for Adult Education ESL Programs* (2003) throughout this document.

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization that promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.

We do this by:

- encouraging and providing professional development opportunities that are consistent with generally accepted principles of adult learning and with currently understood principles of second language learning and teaching
- liaising with other organizations, local, provincial, national, and international, engaged in education
- creating awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants, and English language learning by communicating with government, business, and the general public
- encouraging awareness of issues of accountability and program standards by communicating with English language program providers and learners
- encouraging the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance by administering an ESL teacher accreditation process
- working collaboratively with government to develop policies and procedures which govern the provision of English language programs and related services for immigrants to Canada
- encouraging and supporting the participation of learners in the decision-making processes that determine their educational choices

In 1992, the federal government of Canada implemented a new language training policy for newcomers entitled LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), resulting in increased funding for language instruction across Canada. Growing concern on the part of ATESL about the quality of the resulting programs and instruction led eventually to the drafting of the original *Best Practice Guidelines for Adult ESL/LINC Programming and Instruction in Alberta* in 1994, one of the first of its kind to specify a list of quality practices (best practices or standards) related to adult ESL programming.

With input from ESL professionals across Alberta, ATESL, in partnership with Alberta Employment and Immigration, has now produced an updated and expanded document titled *Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta*.

This summary document includes the 67 statements of best practice found in the full document, organized into nine themes, delineating a common set of expectations regarding what constitutes best practice in adult ESL and LINC programs in Alberta.

The full best practices document is a key resource for instructors, administrators, and funders. In the full document, each of the 67 best practice statements is followed by a list of indicators that demonstrate and clarify the best practice statement. These indicators identify how the expectations set up by the best practice statement can be met. Each theme in the full document is followed by a list of references and suggested resources. Also included in the full document are suggestions for using the best practices to facilitate reflective practice and program evaluation.





The Program

The program structure is effective, professional, and ethical, ensuring the best interests of learners in terms of administration, planning, marketing, and delivery.



1. The program has a clearly articulated statement of its mission, philosophy, and goals, which is both available to and developed with input from stakeholders.
2. The program follows ethical, transparent, and financially sound procedures for the management of funds, meeting legal, funding and regulatory requirements and maintaining procedures to facilitate the financial stability of the program.
3. The program complies with legal requirements regarding confidentiality, privacy, freedom of information and copyright legislation.
4. The program structure is effective and clearly delineated, with policies and personnel to support instruction and ensure the smooth running of the program.
5. The needs of the learners, along with input from community, educational, workplace and other stakeholders, are considered in initial and ongoing program planning.
6. There are processes in place for regular program evaluation.
7. The program has effective and varied strategies in place for learner recruitment.
8. Promotional materials and recruitment activities present a clear, accurate, current and comprehensive picture of program offerings, services, and related costs, enabling prospective students to make an informed choice.
9. The program supports collaboration with other educational organizations, ESL providers, and community stakeholders, thereby raising awareness of the program, avoiding duplication of services, and identifying potential gaps to be filled.
10. Scheduling, location, length and delivery of classes take into account the needs of learners.
11. A learner-instructor ratio that takes into account the best interests of the learner is maintained.



Learner Support

As adult members of families, communities, workplaces, and educational institutions, learners come to the program with varying needs, wants, dreams, practices, and a wealth of experience. As such, they are oriented to the program, receive appropriate support throughout the program, and are assisted in their transition out of the program.

12. At entrance into a program or course, learners are oriented and provided with accurate and accessible pre-course information.
13. There are policies and procedures in place that facilitate communication with learners.
14. The program facilitates learner access to appropriate support services, either within the program or through referrals to cooperating agencies.
15. The program establishes and maintains linkages with service providers and cooperating agencies.
16. The program provides opportunity for learner participation in the broader community.
17. There is a system in place for helping learners who have completed a course to transition to other courses within the program, to other programs, to bridging programs, to other educational institutions, or to the workplace.
18. The program hires staff who are culturally aware, understand the diverse needs of the student body, and treat learners with dignity and consideration.
19. The program hires qualified staff with the background, skills and abilities to administer an ESL or LINC program.
20. The program hires qualified instructional staff with training in the theory and methodology of teaching and learning ESL.



The Staff

The program employs appropriately qualified and experienced staff, providing them with appropriate compensation, professional treatment, and professional development.

21. The program hires instructional staff with the skills, abilities, and dispositions necessary for effective instruction.
22. The program hires instructional and/or other professional staff with varied levels of experience and areas of expertise.
23. The program hires support staff with the training, qualifications, abilities and dispositions to ensure the smooth running of the program.





24. New staff (administrative, instructional and support) are oriented to the program, the learners, and the broader institution.
25. The program takes a principled approach to providing ongoing professional development.
26. The program facilitates, encourages, acknowledges and rewards participation in professional development.
27. The program provides resources and opportunities for staff to expand their understanding of the learner population, adult second language acquisition, and best practices in the TESL field.
28. Instructional and administrative staff demonstrate commitment and professionalism through reflective practice, collaboration, and ongoing professional development.
29. The compensation of program staff is equivalent to the compensation of staff with comparable qualifications in similar positions in the broader institution or in similar programs across institutions.
30. There are policies and procedures in place that ensure ethical treatment of staff.
31. There is a process in place for the regular evaluation of administrative, teaching, and support staff.

Canadian Language Benchmarks

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) provide a common frame of reference for all stakeholders (learners, instructors, administrators, funders, etc.) and inform all aspects of ESL programming. Curriculum development, materials development, instruction, and assessment are referenced to and informed by the Canadian Language Benchmarks.¹



32. Instructors and other staff (administrators, curriculum developers, material developers, and assessors) access and receive formal, ongoing professional development regarding the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and their applications.
33. Learners are familiar with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and are able to use them to clarify their present proficiency levels, to identify learning goals and objectives, and to chart a course for learning.
34. Language outcomes are referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), providing a standard frame of reference for all users and facilitating movement within the program, from program to program, and from program to workplace, within Alberta and Canada.
35. Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) inform curriculum development, materials development and course/lesson planning.
36. Instructors have convenient access to an organized and regularly updated collection of Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) referenced teaching/learning/assessment resources, sufficient to support the curriculum.

¹Note: This theme does not stand alone. Each of the best practices in this theme must be paired with relevant best practices in the Staff (i.e., professional development), Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Resources themes.



Curriculum The program supports the ongoing development and renewal of curriculum that is relevant to learners' present and future needs, is based on principles of second language acquisition and adult learning, and provides a flexible framework to guide the teaching/learning process.

- 37. The curriculum is clearly articulated and provides a flexible and accessible guide to the teaching/learning process.
- 38. The curriculum reflects the mission of the program, current principles of adult language learning and teaching, and best practices in TESL methodology.
- 39. Curriculum development and renewal is responsive to learner needs, based on input from the learner population as well as community, educational and/or workplace stakeholders.
- 40. The program ensures regular review and renewal of the curriculum and supporting materials.





Instruction

Instruction is learner-oriented, designed to meet the communication and content needs of the particular group of learners, and informed by TESL theory and practice.



41. Instruction fosters a supportive community of learners in which learners feel comfortable, take risks with language, and engage in purposeful learning.
42. Instruction is both guided by the objectives and goals of the curriculum and responsive to the needs and goals of the learners.
43. Class content (e.g., themes, listening/reading texts, speaking/writing topics, communicative tasks) is meaningful, appealing and engaging, with a transparent connection to the learners' real-world needs and future goals.
44. As learners interact with listening and reading texts, they identify and practice skills and strategies to access the content and to accomplish meaningful, real-life tasks.
45. Instruction in speaking and writing provides a balance between fluency and accuracy, along with the opportunity to practice and incorporate feedback, as learners use their productive language skills to accomplish tasks.
46. (a) Explicit instruction of how the grammatical system works to express meanings is integrated into meaning-focused language teaching. (b) It encourages learners to notice and analyze the forms, meanings, and uses of target structures; provides ample exposure to target structures; provides opportunity for pushed output, in which learners are encouraged to use new structures in spoken and written communication; and provides corrective feedback.
47. (a) Explicit pronunciation instruction focuses on those factors that affect intelligibility. (b) Pronunciation instruction raises awareness of the characteristics of spoken English and provides opportunity for both focused and communicative practice.
48. (a) Vocabulary instruction encourages learners to notice and focus on new vocabulary items (single words as well as formulaic sequences) and links the forms of new vocabulary to meanings, collocations, and uses. (b) It provides multiple opportunities to retrieve new vocabulary items; provides opportunities for pushed output, in which learners are encouraged to use new vocabulary items in spoken and written communication; and includes the explicit formal teaching of vocabulary learning strategies.

- 49. Technology is used to encourage learners to explore and create language, as well as to use language to explore ideas, solve problems, develop new skills, and negotiate and communicate with an expanded audience.
- 50. Instructional activities are culturally sensitive, and they encourage learners to share and celebrate aspects of their cultures, to explore their own and others' worldviews, and to expand their capacity to live and work in Canada.
- 51. Instruction fosters independence and autonomous learning as learners take responsibility for and manage their own learning.



Learner Assessment

The program employs a full spectrum assessment continuum (including placement, ongoing formative feedback/evaluation, summative assessment, and high stakes assessment) that is fair, valid, and useful to all participants.

- 52. There are processes in place to ensure the learner's appropriate placement in the program.
- 53. Ongoing formative evaluation and feedback, of value to learners, are integrated into the teaching/learning process and inform class direction.
- 54. Appropriate summative assessment is meaningful, based on multiple measures, and clearly linked to the outcomes specified in the curriculum and to class content/activities. Learners know how they will be assessed.
- 55. The program ensures that assessment is fair and valid.
- 56. Learner progress within the program is documented, and this information is presented in such a way as to be useful and recognized for transfer into training programs, the work-place, and post-secondary education.



Resources

The program facilities, equipment, and resources provide a learning environment that is accessible, safe, appropriate, and equipped to support learning.



- 57. The program location and facilities are appropriate and accessible, and they enhance student life.
- 58. The facilities, including classrooms, are safe, clean, and well maintained.
- 59. Classrooms are equipped for learning.
- 60. Learners have access to adequate and appropriate learning resources that are relevant to the curriculum and the needs of the adult ESL learners, and include Canadian/local content.
- 61. Outside of class time, learners have access to resources and facilities that promote learning, either within the program or in proximity to the program.
- 62. Instructors have access to a work area that is equipped to support the planning of instruction.
- 63. Instructors have convenient access to an organized and regularly updated collection of teaching/learning/assessment resources that are relevant to the curriculum and the needs of adult ESL learners and include Canadian/local content.

ESL Literacy

The program facilities, equipment, and resources provide a learning environment that is accessible, safe, appropriate, and equipped to support learning.²



- 64. ESL learners with literacy challenges are identified and placed in specialized classes designed to meet their needs.
- 65. The program hires instructors with the expertise and dispositions necessary for effective instruction in the ESL literacy classroom, facilitates and encourages professional development, and provides instructors with the necessary support.
- 66. The ESL literacy class provides a learning environment that is validating, encouraging, connected to the real world, and supportive of lifetime learning. It provides a print-rich environment, predictable routines, strategy training, and plenty of repetition, recycling and practice.
- 67. ESL literacy learners have access to enhanced support services.

²Note: This theme does not stand alone. Each of the best practices in this theme must be paired with relevant best practices in the Program, Learner support, Staff, CLB, Curriculum development, Instruction, Assessment, and Resources themes.

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