

ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework



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Acknowledgements

A large number of ESL experts graciously shared their perspectives in the development of this project.

We were fortunate to benefit from the leadership and vision of the following individuals:

Diane Hardy, ATESL President

Carolyn Dieleman & Christine Land, Alberta Employment & Immigration

We are very grateful to Virginia Sauvé for her background research on ESL curriculum frameworks, which greatly contributed to our project.

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Audrey Olson

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Tracey Derwing

Other ESL expert contributors who generously shared their expertise

Anna Lisa Gutnick

Brenda MacDonald

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Michele Foley
 Murray F. Smith
 Pamela Heath
 Patricia Love
 Penny Hui
 Phyllis Regier
 Rosemary McMahon
 Sheri Rhodes
 Suzanne Oswald
 Vince Kelly

Also thanks to...ATESL members who attended and contributed to our session at the ATESL Conference 2010, as well as those who completed the e-survey in September 2010.

Graphic design: Katheryn Charchuk



This project was funded by Alberta Employment and Immigration.



Printing of this document was generously supported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Prairie Metropolis Centre.



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Introduction

“ [A] curriculum is... not a set of documents or a textbook, although classroom activities may be guided, governed, or hindered by such documents. Rather, it is a dynamic system. This system can be conceptualized as three interrelated processes: planning, acting and evaluating.¹ ”

The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* is intended to be a supportive reference guide for effective curriculum development in a variety of adult ESL programs, both existing and new, throughout Alberta. A curriculum framework offers a process and key considerations for designing and developing curriculum in diverse contexts; it does not prescribe a particular curriculum. The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* is written for teaching professionals, particularly curriculum developers, and while the document is grounded in current second language research and theory, it aims to be both accessible and practical. The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* seeks to promote a common language and approach in order to build and share expertise: “It is very important that curriculum design makes the connection between the research and theory of language learning and the practice of designing lessons and courses.”² The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* also aims to increase transparency and improve accountability in the curriculum development process. Ultimately, a set of curriculum development guidelines will enhance adult ESL teaching, learning, and assessment, and facilitate transitions for adult ESL learners across the Government of Alberta’s (2008) *Adult EAL/ESL Continuum* and into further study or the workplace.

Figure 1 represents the *ATESL Curriculum Framework*. The outer wheel of the model illustrates the five steps in the curriculum development process, and the inner circle, or core, shows three essential aspects of contemporary, relevant curriculum.

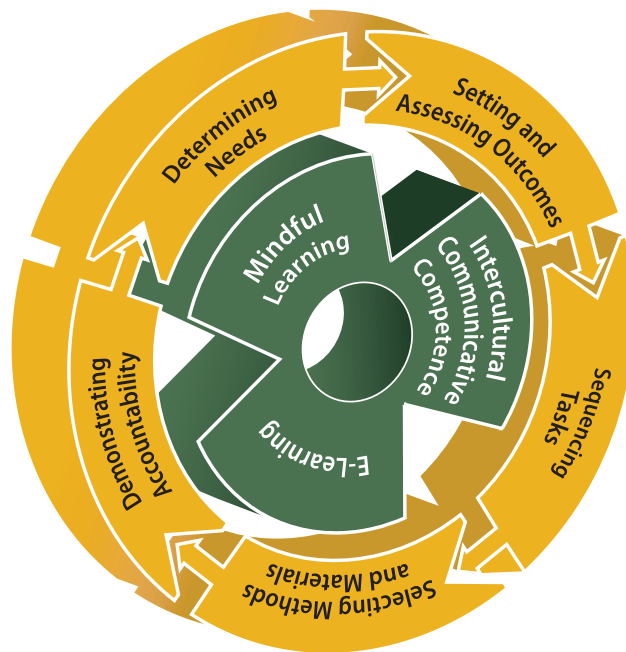


Figure 1. *ATESL Curriculum Framework* model

¹ Carroll, 2007, p. 5 (cited in Sauvé, 2009, p. 5).

² Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 5-6.

Organization and structure of the document

The first part of this document, “**Curriculum Development,**” discusses the necessary steps in the curriculum development process (see the outer circle in Figure 1):

- **Determining needs**
- **Setting and assessing outcomes**
- **Sequencing tasks**
- **Selecting methods and materials**
- **Demonstrating accountability**

The five integrated steps of curriculum development are represented in Figure 1 as a circular process. A needs analysis precedes decisions about learning outcomes, tasks, methods, and materials; learning outcomes and assessment tasks influence the selection and sequencing of learning tasks, methods, and materials; demonstrating accountability completes the process. However, demonstrating accountability occurs throughout the curriculum development process, not just as the final step. Demonstrating accountability can also act as a beginning step to further curriculum development. In other words, at a practical, localized level, the curriculum development process can be more integrated and organic than a circle may suggest. All five steps in curriculum development, however, are present.

The second part of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework*, “**Curriculum Foundations,**” looks at three core aspects, or foundations, of contemporary, relevant curriculum development (see the inner circle in Figure 1):

- **Mindful learning**
- **Intercultural communicative competence**
- **E-learning**

Given the current global times, it is likely that Alberta will continue to attract people from around the world; working, living, and studying effectively in English within increasing diversity (intercultural communicative competence) will become increasingly important. It is also likely that the need for life-long mindful learning skills and e-learning capabilities will continue to grow. The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* presents these three elements as essential aspects to be integrated into adult ESL curricula in Alberta.

Each of the sections in this document is numbered, with the five steps of curriculum development as sections 1 – 5, and the three curriculum foundations as sections 6 – 8. The section and section page number are indicated at the top of each page, along with a visual marker of your place within the eight sections. Attention to Canadian Language Benchmarks, Essential Skills, and ATESL’s (2009) *Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta* is integrated where appropriate. To further reinforce the ways in which the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* is linked to and builds on existing resources, two icons are used throughout the document to denote external and internal connections and sources of additional information (see below). The references at the end of each section also provide valuable additional online and print resources.



This icon points you to other relevant sections within the *ATESL Curriculum Framework*.



This icon indicates a helpful external resource, such as:

Resource

Website

*Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta*³

www.atesl.ca

*Canadian Language Benchmarks*⁴

www.language.ca

Essential Skills (ES)

www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/⁵

Essential Skills Profiles (ESP)

Essential Skills and Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)
CLB/ES Comparative Framework
Occupational Language Analyses (OLA)

www.itsessential.ca⁶

*Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*⁷

www.esl-literacy.com/curriculum-framework

³ ATESL, 2009.

⁴ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2011.

⁵ Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, 2011.

⁶ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.

⁷ Bow Valley College, 2011.

Curriculum as both planned and lived

The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* makes the distinction between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived.⁸ Traditionally, curriculum is thought of as a document (or collection of documents) that outlines, for example, the learning outcomes of a course, the topics to be covered, the designated textbooks, and other reference materials to be used. This is curriculum-as-planned, otherwise often called a syllabus or course of studies, which represents one face of curriculum.

Every curriculum plan comes alive in particular classrooms and communities, amidst particular instructors and particular learners. Teaching takes place in these conditioned, local worlds, and for the instructor context is everything; this is curriculum-as-lived.⁹ While a curriculum plan represents teaching as a rationally planned action, this second perspective acknowledges that curriculum documents are interpreted as they are transformed in the classroom from “planned” to “lived” experience.¹⁰ Curriculum-makers, then, include both planners *and* instructors.¹¹ In this very important sense, there are two faces of curriculum, and well-balanced, effective curriculum development considers both.

The importance of curriculum-as-lived is evident in the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* in two primary ways. First, wherever possible, attention is given not only to curriculum planning, but also to teaching, learning, and assessing. For example, *Section 2: Setting and Assessing Outcomes* focuses on formative assessment strategies. *Section 6: Mindful Learning* looks at how learners can enhance their own learning process, and by implication, how curriculum developers and instructors can guide them. Second, curriculum development is represented in Figure 1 as a continuous circular process. *Section 5: Demonstrating Accountability* points to the importance of reviewing and revising the curriculum-as-plan (as necessary). Ideally, there is a dialogue between the two faces of curriculum:

“ if the curriculum is to be successful, [the plan and the lived experience] need constantly to be interacting with and informing each other. In other words, a good curriculum is alive and subject to change... ”¹²

The *ATESL Curriculum Framework* aspires to offer you a dynamic curriculum development framework that engages both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived in a systematic process of planning, acting and evaluating to ensure a consistent match between the two.

⁸ This distinction is made by curriculum reconceptualists, such as Ted Aoki (2005), Terrance Carson (2009), Virginia Sauvé (2009), and numerous others. The reconceptualist model is a response to the traditional, but still influential, Tyler (1949) model, which presents the relationship between curriculum, instruction, and evaluation as a simple four-step process. Curriculum reconceptualists consider the important role of context and see curriculum development more as an art than a science.

⁹ Aoki, 2005; Carson, 2009, p. 216.

¹⁰ Aoki, 2005, p. 160; Sauvé, 2009.

¹¹ Clandinin & Connelly, 1992. Also see Craig & Ross, 2007.

¹² Sauvé, 2009, p. 22.

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