



Alberta Teachers of English  
as a Second Language

**Fall 2012**

www.atesl.ca

## **President's Message**

by Patti Lefebvre

A year goes by so quickly. Here we are again, preparing for our annual professional conference to be held in Edmonton. For me, the conference signals a time of change and turn over for the ATESL Board. As outgoing president, this is a time to pause for reflection and think about the people who have contributed to the organization throughout the year, as it does take a village to run a volunteer organization. Over the past year, so many individuals have given their time and talents to our organization. A quote that comes to mind is one from Winston Churchill, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." As TESL instructors and advocates for immigrant integration, we are fortunate that we get back from our students and clients as much as we give them, maybe even more. With such a demanding profession, I am in awe and so grateful for how much people also give back to their profession.

I would like to take this opportunity to honor and acknowledge those who have given their time and talents. Our ATESL Board, thank you for the time and energy you have dedicated over the past year, both at the local and provincial levels. To our retired business manager, Ivan Sundal, thank you for your many years of commitment, history, and sharing of your learnings; we have appreciated your stable presence with the organization. Also, a thank you to Irene Wood, who has continued to maintain both our administrative processes, and who has picked up all of the Business Manager's roles as well. Irene, your support and direction is much appreciated and very helpful to me in my own role as president and to the entire board. A thank you to the conference planning committee, who have spent countless hours working on a program and event that will benefit our entire membership. Our appreciation as well to both our Accreditation Task Force members and to our local chapters for their ongoing work. Finally, a thank you to my fellow presidential partners, our outgoing president, Diane Hardy, for her gifts of leadership, passion, integrity, and high standards; as well as my appreciation to our incoming president, Sheri Rhodes. Sheri has been instrumental in moving ATESL's projects forward. We appreciate your time, knowledge, and commitment of success to ATESL.

I look forward to supporting the board as past president and wish everyone a year that allows for time to teach, learn and give back to your colleagues the talents you each hold.

Sincerely,

Patti Lefebvre

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### **The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL)**

is a professional organization which promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.



Alberta Teachers of English  
as a Second Language

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2012 - 2013

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## **ATESL Mission Statement**

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



## **ATESL Conference 2012**

November 16th & 17th  
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Edmonton  
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Join your colleagues and guests for two days of presentations, educational workshops, stimulating conversations, entertaining activities, and publishers' displays.



Alberta Teachers of English  
as a Second Language

## Student Writing

### My Story in Canada by Gelareh Hasani

*Honourable Mention, ATESL Student Writing Contest - Spring 2011*

I came from Iran, a warm country where temperatures in the summer are mostly more than 30 degrees C and in the winter barely below 0 degrees C. It was about four years ago when I arrived in Edmonton in a -40 degree C day in the middle of February. I had heard about the harsh winters of Canada but I could not imagine how it may feel until I stepped out of the airport. Except my husband, I did not know anyone else here. I barely could speak English. I was so scared and I did not have any idea about the future. But I knew that I should be prepared for anything which might happen.

After a few weeks I found Bredin Institute, which helps immigrants and newcomers to learn about lifestyle and working opportunities in Canada. There I met several people like me in a similar situation. After a while, I became more familiar with the culture and people. I was impressed by how friendly people are here. I was starting to feel that this is a country where I want to live.

One day I was walking in the street where I saw a 'Help Wanted' sign on the door of a gift store which was looking for a sales associate. I decided to go inside and apply for the position. I went inside and a smiling blonde lady who looked like she was in her 60s walked over to me. I nervously clasped my hands and swallowed my words, I wanted to go out of the store but the lady felt my fears and came towards me with a smile asked me if I needed any help. I told her with a stammer that I wanted to apply for this position. She asked me for my resume and told me that she will contact me after reviewing it. I was sure she wouldn't call me because I didn't have any related experience or any Canadian experience or references here but surprisingly, she called after two hours and told me that she is going to hire me. I was so happy.

I worked there for a year. The lady, Margaret, was very kind and patient. She was mostly like a teacher and good friend rather than a manager to me. I learned lots of things there and gained confidence in not having fear to interact with people.

After one year I decided to apply for a job in my area. (I have a BSc in applied chemistry). After a few months looking, I found a position as a lab technician in an oil lab company where I worked for about two years. This job was a good match with my education and my goals. It was such a breakthrough for me. There I learned about the professional working environment and interacting with co-workers and managers.

Now, I look forward to the future and I am attending some English classes in Central Connection Institute (CCI-LEX) in Edmonton to improve my English language.

## In Memory



**Beverly (Bev) Walker passed away October 26, 2012 in Edmonton.**

Those of you who had the pleasure to know Bev knew her as a woman of great compassion, integrity and grace. Her attention to the individual was a genuine presence felt by that person when they were talking with her. I know of no one who knew her who was not touched by her kindness and dedication to her students, her “adopted” son, and many friends.

For those who didn't know her, Bev spent many years teaching ESL in a variety of contexts. She started out as an aide at what was then AVC and from there became the coordinator and one instructor in the longstanding Levi Strauss EWP Program in Edmonton. She worked in various capacities at Catholic Social Services and was well-known by the immigrant and immigrant-serving communities in Edmonton. In a recent meeting with one of her former Cambodian associates, I learned that in that community, they refer to her as a legend. She was the individual who taught the initial groups of Cambodian refugees when they arrived here. She brought laughter and understanding to a group that needed and appreciated it very much.

Those who didn't know her but wanted to refer to her often chose the monicker Earth Mother, in part for her long flowing blonde hair and style of dress, and in part because she truly was a protector of all of Creation. We will miss her but continue to treasure the light and love she brought into our world.

Virginia Sauv , colleague and friend

## Professional Development Bursaries

Apply for an ATESL professional development bursary.

Deadline: March 15, 2012

<http://www.atesl.ca/cmsms/membership/bursaries/>

## Newsletter Information

*The ATESL Newsletter is published quarterly.*

*Deadlines: **Feb.15, May 15, Aug.15, Nov.15***

*Announcements, workshop dates, book reviews, teaching ideas, and articles relevant to the field.*

*Contact: Irene Wood at [atesl.admin@shaw.ca](mailto:atesl.admin@shaw.ca)*

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# Stretch your Vocabulary: Instruction & Course Design

Geoffrey Pinchbeck & Katie Crossman, University of Calgary

## Introduction

As an EAL teacher, perhaps you've found yourself preparing for a lesson and questioned some of the textbook-specified target words (we've personally seen "zester" with absolute beginners and "dream" with advanced learners). Whether you have reservations about textbook's choices or wonder what words to teach from authentic readings, this article suggests a wide range of often underused, yet effective, techniques that can be easily applied the EAL classroom.

Most teachers agree that vocabulary is key to language learning, although not all teachers agree on how to approach it. At one end of the spectrum are those who laud repeated exposure and communicative activities, while at the other end are practitioners who adhere to discrete and direct instruction. We argue that both views are ideal when used together. Vocabulary is indeed learned contextually, but given L2 learner characteristics and time constraints, direct instruction is effective, especially when strategically selected with corpus-based approaches.

Recognizing this as a promising area of research with many practical pedagogical implications, ATESL has recently welcomed keynote speakers such as Tom Cobb and Norbert Schmitt, who both specialize in corpus-based classroom vocabulary instruction techniques. Nevertheless, in Alberta, corpus-based teaching approaches are not used by the majority of practitioners. For example, while 93% of ATESL teachers report drawing learners' attention to grammar in a written text, concordance or corpus analysis activities were only used by 33% of respondents (Ranta & Waugh, 2011). This article discusses some of the most accessible techniques to make vocabulary instruction more effective and interesting.

## Vocabulary Assessment

One of the first key steps in any language course is to determine the vocabulary level of the learners. There are certainly a number of commercially available (read: expensive!) tests that measure vocabulary, but fortunately, there are several free and user-friendly tests. The Vocabulary Size Test (Nation & Beglar, 2007) and the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test, which were designed and validated to measure receptive, and productive vocabulary competence, respectively, are both accessible on Tom Cobb's lextutor.ca website. These tests are corpus-based; roughly meaning that test items progress from more common to more obscure English words. The Vocabulary Size Test has 14 sections, each with ten questions similar to the following:

1. SEE: They saw it.
  - a. cut
  - b. waited for
  - c. looked at
  - d. started

Test items of increasingly difficult vocabulary are presented, and when test takers are unable to answer 8/10 questions in one level correctly, they stop and their level is recorded. This test only measures receptive vocabulary, which is useful when choosing appropriate reading and/or listening materials (see Choosing Materials below) and appropriate target vocabulary.

The Productive Vocabulary Levels Test measures controlled productive vocabulary by using a completion item type. For example:

1. He was riding a bi\_\_\_\_\_
2. The package was de \_\_\_\_\_ two days after it had been sent.
3. The dress you are wearing is lov\_\_\_\_\_.

Test-takers here need to pay attention to not only the initial letters, but also the sentence context to find the appropriate words and word forms. Instructors can use the results from this test to choose target vocabulary items that learners may already be familiar with passively, but require additional instructional support to produce these words effectively and flexibly (see Choosing Target Vocabulary below).

Both of these tests can be taken directly online, or administered on paper. There are also bilingual versions of the receptive test for low-level learners who are literate in L1 (Nation, 2010). Most learners demonstrate less competence on the productive test than on the receptive test. The results of each of these tests determine what lexical items require attention and directly inform the choice of course materials and target vocabulary.

### **Choosing Materials**

There is a strong and well-established relationship between the lexical competence of readers' ability to understand text. Therefore, when choosing reading materials for a course, the results of the Vocabulary Levels Test (receptive) provide a way to gauge the lexical difficulty of text. When choosing materials for a 6-week language program (Crossman & Pinchbeck, 2012), we used the following steps:

- 1.** Create or obtain digitized-text files of candidate materials. Sometimes this means typing the transcript for audio/video, but often CD/DVD materials come with printed transcripts. Printed text can also be scanned and digitized with optical character recognition functions of software such as Adobe Acrobat.
- 2.** Copy and paste the text of a candidate reading into the Vocabulary Profiler (<http://www.lexutor.ca/vp/bnc/>). Check the box "ALL Off-List Propers => 1k", and then click "Submit." The Cum% column will indicate how much of the text is covered by increasingly rare groups of word families: e.g. K1 Words = 1-1000 most common word families, K2 Words = 1001-2001 most common words, etc.
- 3.** Compare the vocabulary profile of a text with the results of a learner's Vocabulary Size Test. Following the findings of Hu & Nation (2000), we generally use texts that contain <5% words that are likely unknown to learners for instructional purposes and <2% of unknown words for independent reading with minimal dictionary support. For a learner whose passive vocabulary knowledge ends within the K2 word families, choose texts where >95% of the text vocabulary is within the K2 band. For example, 95% of the first Harry

Potter book is covered by the first 4000 word families of English. Although the story might be engaging, the vocabulary would be unreasonably challenging for learners with knowledge of 2000 word families and a graded reader would likely be more appropriate.

### **Compile a Corpus of Course Materials and/or Target Discourse**

Once materials have been chosen, it is helpful to then create a corpus of all the reading and listening texts from which language targets (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, functions) can be chosen. In this way, the course materials themselves provide the learning context.

For ESP (English for special purposes) or EAP (English for academic purposes) programs, a compilation of texts from subject-specific corpus textbooks allows language to be chosen and taught from the target contexts. In this way, the most germane domain-specific meanings, forms, and collocations of these words can be isolated and taught.

### **Choosing Target Vocabulary from Course Materials**

Vocabulary Size Test results allow course designers and instructors to more precisely identify the range of high frequency words that can be excluded from targeted instruction. The next step is then to choose among the words that are 1) within the next most frequent band of words and 2) are already frequent within the chosen materials. The most frequent words in general English currently unknown to the learners are the most useful, and the words that are also frequent in the course materials will be more quickly acquired. If applying these two criteria doesn't shorten the list of candidacy target words sufficiently, designers and teachers can then use their judgment to select words. Verbs and nouns that represent abstract concepts or are otherwise difficult to learn would be better targets than concrete nouns, which might be easier to master with other methods such as glosses, visuals, realia, or dictionaries.

### **Plan for Key Words, Rare Words, and Technical Words**

It is almost impossible to find materials that perfectly match instructional and learner needs. As a result, there will always be words in the materials that are not part of the target vocabulary but frustrate a learner's understanding of the text. When learners get stumped by such words, it can detract from more useful language. It is better to deal with such words by pre-teaching those that are key to the topic. A teacher might help learners make connections between the technical and non-technical uses of the same words or explaining jargon through quick explanations, pictures or a gloss to keep the class focused on the text, rather than the non-target language. Alternatively, designers can also replace problem words with easier synonyms.

To summarize, the best target words for any language course are those that are both slightly beyond the limit of a learner's current vocabulary and also most common in general English and in the course materials. Identifying target words takes some time and planning, but the learners will reap the benefits. Once a manageable list of words is in hand, there are many learning tasks that lay the ground for acquisition.

### **Classroom Applications**

There are a number of tools that are indispensable to increase word knowledge. We are all likely familiar with completely decontextualized lists of English words and their L1 equivalents found in many students' study

notes. Clearly this rote understanding of a word is superficial as deep word knowledge includes all meanings, register, connotation, collocations, grammar, pronunciation, and suitable usage. This deeper knowledge of a word can be aided by many tools accessible to both students and instructors.

### **Concordancers**

Concordancing a word provides information about how and where words work together and highlights collocation, connotation, grammar, and usage. A good concordancer can be freely accessed online (<http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/>) where a word is chosen, and a range of examples of how the word is used within a selected corpus are provided. For example, the word “afraid” is followed by “of” in 36/140 given examples, indicating that these words frequently occur together. A student can benefit from seeing how and where target words are used most frequently to more naturally produce these words in their own speech and writing.

Similarly, students also respond well to hearing target words in natural contexts. Target words can be highlighted from video or audio materials. In order to create such compilations, it is necessary to obtain or create transcripts. Using the find feature on any computer, target words can be isolated and then found in their natural context within the recording. A compilation can be made of all target word utterances. An example of a video compilation we created for the word “community” can be found online (see Links, below). In the video, a target word was selected from a documentary film script, and all video segments in which the word appears were concatenated. Although creating these videos can be time consuming, they become much easier with a bit of practice and students can also create these types of videos with basic software such as iMovie.

### **Student Vocabulary Assessment**

A valuable tool already mentioned is the vocabulary profiler. Vocabulary profiling can also be used to evaluate the lexical breadth of student writing. Instructors can use it as an impartial tool to better determine what kinds and levels of words students are producing and track student progress over time. Learners quickly learn to use these tools to evaluate their own word choices.

Finally, one of the simplest yet most effective ways of ensuring target word output is through the use of productive vocabulary writing assignments, which can be used with students at an intermediate level and beyond. At the end of a unit and after target words have been studied and practiced, students are then challenged to use them in context. In class they are given a list of the target words and a writing prompt. They must answer the prompt in a few paragraphs using target words, which they should underline. To assess these assignments the instructor awards a full mark for a correctly used word (in terms of grammar, collocations, usage, meaning, etc.). Besides requiring little preparation or complicated rubrics, these assignments push students to generate sentences using the words they’ve studied, taking vocabulary learning and instruction to its zenith (zenith, by the way, is a band 13,000 word).

### **Conclusion**

We’ve addressed a number of current approaches to vocabulary instruction in the EAL classroom and as technology develops, so will new understandings, tools, and methods. Teachers can choose to what extent



they will use these approaches, all of which complement more traditional vocabulary instruction and practice.

Recognizing that not everyone is keen to use computers or technology, it's important to collaborate with colleagues and share ideas and projects. Working together and sharing knowledge, especially in terms of fresh technology is invaluable and fosters a community of engaged learners and teachers.

### Links

[http://www.lex tutor.ca/tests/levels/recognition/1\\_14k/](http://www.lex tutor.ca/tests/levels/recognition/1_14k/)

<http://www.lex tutor.ca/tests/levels/productive/>

<http://www.lex tutor.ca/vp/bnc/>

<http://www.lex tutor.ca/concordancers/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-z46jov1jc&feature=youtu.be> (community compilation)

[www.testyourvocab.com](http://www.testyourvocab.com)

[www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)

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# Teaching Vocabulary: ESL Instructors' Beliefs and Practices

Andrea Kushnir, Marian J. Rossiter, & Marilyn L. Abbott, University of Alberta

This study investigated the beliefs and classroom practices of adult instructors with regard to ESL vocabulary instruction. Thirty ATESL instructors (85% female, 15% male) completed a 15-20-minute online Survey Monkey questionnaire. They ranged from below 30 to over 60 (half were 50-59) years of age and had an average of 15 years' ESL teaching experience (range: 3-41 years). Some of the key findings are presented below.

## Vocabulary Teaching Techniques

At least three quarters of respondents sometimes/often used the following teaching techniques in class: say the word aloud, use the word in an example sentence, give a simple definition, write the word, give examples of synonyms or related words, ask students for definitions, identify the stress pattern of the word, act out the word using gestures, use supplemental materials, discuss underlying meanings of words, identify prefixes or suffixes, refer to information in the course textbook, draw/display a picture of the word. They sometimes/often had students look up the word in a dictionary (66%) and displayed or created important vocabulary and phrases in the classroom (50%).

The most commonly used vocabulary learning strategies were also those that instructors thought most highly effective: guessing from context; working in pairs/groups; choosing words to learn; and guessing meaning for word parts. Instructors favoured guessing word meanings from context; however, research shows that students need to know at least 98% of the surrounding words to have a good chance of guessing meaning correctly (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). Nation (2008) has shown the benefits and efficiency of focused, decontextualized study using word cards to learn the meanings of new words.

Instructors expected their students to learn 19 words per week, on average (range: 2-50). Seventy percent of respondents believed that students must encounter a new word 5-12 times to learn its meaning; research suggests that 8-10 exposures are necessary (Schmitt, 2008). Three quarters of instructors believed that students had only a 25% chance of remembering a new word's meaning after one hour, and 83% believed that they had only a 10% chance of remembering it after one day. According to Ebbinghaus (1913), the average retention rate after one hour is 45% and after one day is 30%. ESL instructors should provide spaced repetition to facilitate long-term retention. Presenting previously studied words in new contexts was done sometimes/often by 97%; requiring students to use studied words in their writing by 93%, and reading extensively by 67%. More instructors could be encouraged to implement extensive reading in their classes (e.g., Cobb, 2008) to reinforce and enrich learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Of 29 respondents, 62% assessed their students' vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the course, 72% at the end, and 21% at neither. Without assessment, it is difficult to choose level-appropriate vocabulary, as native speaker intuitions about word frequency are not always accurate (Nation, 2001), and instructors may waste valuable class time teaching known vocabulary. On average, instructors gave a vocabulary test every 7 classes (mode = 5; range: 0-20). Regular vocabulary testing promotes vocabulary learning and retention (Folse,

2004). Of those who gave regular vocabulary tests, only 37% tested students on words learned not only that week but in all previous weeks as well. To effectively recycle students' vocabulary, minimize forgetting, and discourage students from cramming (and likely soon forgetting), cumulative tests are considered more effective (e.g., Nation, 2008).

### **Vocabulary Learning Resources**

Of 30 respondents, 57% had a class set of dictionaries, but only 43% provided dictionary training (average = 3.25 hours; mode = 2; range: 1-10). Research shows that instructors often mistakenly believe that students already know how to use an English language dictionary efficiently (e.g., Pasfield-Neofitou, 2009). The most popular dictionary allowed in class was English-English dictionaries. Current research, however, suggests that bilingualized dictionaries are the best type of dictionary for all levels of ESL learners (e.g., Yuzhen, 2010, 2011), as they combine the speed and ease of understanding of a translation with the deeper understanding provided by extended English usage information and example sentences.

Sixty-three percent of respondents were aware of free corpora available on the Internet; however, only half sometimes/often used them. Eighty percent knew of free frequency lists on the Internet, and two thirds sometimes/often used these to guide their teaching. Just over half sometimes/often used lists of formulaic sequences to guide their instruction. Almost 60% of instructors were aware of free concordancers on the Internet, but only 28% used them. Only 28% used a computer program to verify the reading levels of supplementary materials used in class. Of these, most used Cobb's free online program (<http://www.lexutor.ca>) to ensure that students were provided with comprehensible input.

### **Vocabulary beliefs**

The number of words known by the average educated native speaker is 70,000 (Folse, 2011), equal to about 20,000 word families (Nation, 2001). One respondent correctly selected 70,000 words from the choices provided. When asked what percentage of everyday spoken English was covered by the 2,000 most frequent English words, 19% of respondents chose the correct answer of 90% (Nation, 2006).

Only 9% of respondents knew that 98% of words in a text need to be known before learners are able to guess words from context (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). One quarter of respondents believed that 30% of everyday spoken English consists of formulaic sequences; 29% chose 50%; 43% chose 70%; and 4% chose 90%. Research estimates that 32% (Foster, 2001) to 58% (Erman & Warren, 2000) of spoken/written English and perhaps 90% of spoken English (Nation, 2006) is made up of formulaic sequences.

Instructors expressed greatest interest in the following professional development topics: strategies and techniques for teaching vocabulary; assessment of vocabulary knowledge; the linking of classroom practice to research findings; and repetition and vocabulary learning.

We hope that this research will stimulate further reflection by ESL practitioners on their vocabulary beliefs and practices. A number of books/articles (\*) in the reference list below provide practical guidelines for ESL instruction based on recent research in vocabulary teaching and learning.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language for allowing the use of the listserv to conduct this research, and the ATESL members who participated in this survey.

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# “What’s the point of doing language research if it’s not going to have an impact on learning?”

Marian Rossiter & Marilyn Abbott, University of Alberta

The title of this report was a question posed by a participant in our recent study on the engagement of adult ESL instructors with TESL research. We explored to what extent instructors were reading research in TESL, what and why they were reading, and the degree to which particular aspects of research publications influenced their engagement with research.

A total of 61 adult ESL instructors in Alberta responded to the instructors’ survey that was emailed to potential participants via the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) listserv. Respondents reported a range of educational backgrounds: Master’s degrees (46%), Bachelor’s degrees (38%), Diplomas (5%), Doctoral degrees (5%), Certificates (1%), and others (including studies in progress) (5%). Eighty percent of the respondents had specialized in TESL, Applied Linguistics, or Education. The instructors were from a wide range of institutions, the majority in Calgary and Edmonton. On average, full- and part-time instructors taught a combined average of 13 hours per week and had from 1.5 to 30 years of teaching experience.

In addition to questions about their teaching experience and qualifications, we asked instructors about the number of research articles they had read in the past year, as well as topics, reasons for reading, and the source and impact of the articles. We also asked respondents about the most influential research article they read in the past year; factors that would encourage them to read more; characteristics of teacher-friendly research articles; and initiatives undertaken by their ESL programs to encourage engagement with research.

Eight former University of Alberta TESL Master’s students were also invited via email to read three research articles, complete a short questionnaire, and participate in a follow-up instructors’ focus group interview. The focus group interview was based on a discussion of the articles and two open-ended questions: What is currently being done to enhance instructors’ engagement with research in your ESL program? What further steps could be taken to enhance engagement with research in your ESL program?

Seventy percent of respondents who completed the survey had read at least one research article within the past year (average=3). The articles that instructors had read were focused primarily on classroom instruction, vocabulary, pragmatics, literacy, second language acquisition, pronunciation, assessment, technology, and reading.

Why were they reading? Of those instructors who reported reading research, over 85% were reading voluntarily for general professional development; two thirds were reading to address a classroom-related problem; almost half were reading because it was required by their employer, and almost half reported reading for academic coursework (multiple responses allowed). When asked to what extent the articles had impacted their instruction, 64% of readers reported ‘somewhat’; the others were equally divided between ‘extensively’ and ‘not at all’. Of the 15 TESL-related journals that respondents had accessed, over 40% chose

the TESL Canada Journal, which is open access; other popular journals were TESOL Quarterly, The Canadian Modern Language Review, and Applied Linguistics (almost 10% each). Participants reported that teacher-friendly research articles were practical, relevant to their classroom/ teaching context, written in clear language with minimal jargon, short, and readily available, with limited or no statistics.

We asked instructors how their engagement with teacher-friendly research publications could be enhanced. They suggested the following: recommendations of relevant, interesting research articles; funding for academic courses; workshops on how to access articles and research summaries; incentives provided by employers for reading and conducting research; special interest groups; professional reading groups; opportunities to dialogue with researchers; reading of articles for discussion in staff meetings; a course on research methods; easy access to journals; time to read; and annual professional development requirements for accreditation/ certification.

What did we conclude? Study participants were generally not engaging extensively with research, for a number of very important reasons, consistent with previous research findings (Borg, 2007). We recommend that ESL instructors and program coordinators begin discussions to identify their professional development needs, and we look forward to exploring with you useful ways for instructors, administrators, and researchers to engage with current research and to make instruction as efficient and effective as possible for ESL learners.

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# Instructors' Views of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the ESL Classroom

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For instructors with a culturally diverse ESL student population, developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in learners is not only a critical pedagogic goal but also a necessary reality. In the ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework, ICC is defined as the learners' "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in English within a culturally diverse society, such as Canada" (S7-4). Although there is growing recognition of the importance and relevance of ICC, and the proven benefit in developing ICC for greater success in second language acquisition (SLA) (Byram, 1997; Houghton & Tsai, 2010), the implementation and application of an ICC approach in language learning classrooms has been the subject of very little investigation (Young & Sachdev, 2011). The present study investigates the beliefs and self-reported practices of adult ESL instructors in Alberta with regard to ICC.

Seventy instructors from ATESL responded to the invitation to complete an online Survey Monkey questionnaire. They represented LINC (44%), English for Academic Purposes (27%), and general ESL (23%) programs. Their experience ranged from 1 year part-time to 30 years full-time (average = 12 years full-time, 4 years part-time). Of the 70 participants, 47% had obtained a Bachelor's degree, 13% a certificate, 10% a diploma, 40% a Master's degree, and 3% a Doctoral degree. Half of the participants reported having taken specialized intercultural communication training.

## **Instructors' views of their own ICC**

When asked to self-report their degree of ICC, 57% reported high, 36% moderate, and 7% low. Instructors felt that they had the experience to address cultural issues in the multicultural classroom, but were less confident in their skills to do this. When asked how much of an impact culture had in successful communication (low, moderate, or high), 30% indicated moderate and 70% high. Instructors also reported that language training cannot be separated from teaching ICC (81%), and almost all instructors (99%) felt that without ICC skills, individuals may misunderstand one another, even when speaking each other's languages fluently.

## **Instructors' Views on Learners' ICC**

Two thirds agreed that most of their students were motivated to develop ICC and that fostering multicultural understanding was one of their program curriculum goals (80%); however, only 68% felt that the development of ICC was a realistic goal for their students. The vast majority (96%) reported that students showed an interest in Canadian culture, although significantly fewer (71%) believed students showed an interest in their fellow classmates' cultures. Research (e.g., Bennett, 1998) indicates that ICC has a positive effect on learners' attitudes towards the target culture and is useful in challenging stereotypes, fostering understanding and empathy, and rewarding encounters with difference. When asked if ESL instructors could positively influence learners' attitudes towards people from other cultures over the course of an ESL class, 96% agreed. Instructors perceived a variety of benefits to developing learners' ICC: 81% indicated that individuals with higher levels of ICC would be more likely to seek out opportunities to interact with native speakers, and 96% felt that their

interactions would be more successful. Over three quarters of instructors (80%) believed that ICC could help students cope with culture shock. The most important factor for the successful integration of ICC into their teaching was time, followed by resources; opportunities for development were rated as least important.

### **ICC Resources**

Instructors generally considered course textbooks to be insufficient for addressing students' needs in regard to ICC. The majority (73%) indicated that their textbooks did not explicitly deal with aspects of ICC. These findings are consistent with Young and Sachdev (2011) and Pulverness (2003), who claim that available cultural teaching materials are insufficient for adequately addressing the complexity of culture or developing ICC in learners. When asked if they knew where to find additional information or resources to use in class, 41% reported that they did, but 59% did not. Instructors rated knowledgeable colleagues as their favoured ICC resource, followed by books, intercultural websites, and lastly research articles. Instructors valued knowledge gained from their own experience or that of their colleagues over the knowledge that could potentially be gained from current literature on ICC.

### **Teaching Methods and Practices**

With respect to the teaching of ICC, 74% of instructors believed that ICC skills need to be taught explicitly, as suggested by Bennett (1998) and Byram (1997). Over a quarter (27%) reported that they did this often, 58% sometimes, 9% seldom, and 6% never. When asked if they set teaching objectives for ICC, 21% reported doing so often, 30% sometimes, 27% seldom, and 22% never. Considering that 80% of instructors stated that fostering multicultural understanding was a goal of their program curriculum, ICC does not appear to be systematically transferred into the classroom. In all, 41% of instructors reported assessing ICC never, 27% seldom, 23% sometimes, and only 9% often. Nearly all (93%) were motivated to teach ICC. The two greatest motives for teaching ICC were to help learners integrate into Canadian society (18%) and to raise their awareness of appropriate language (18%). Results indicated that a much higher percentage of instructors addressed cultural difference through discussion or problem-solving, rather than explicitly planned instruction.

The current study suggests that ESL instructors in Alberta are interested in and motivated to teach ICC and see it as a valuable aim for their learners. The development of ICC in language learners is now recognized as an essential part of language learning and integrating into a multicultural society. Both pre-service and in-service instructors would benefit from training in strategies for setting clear ICC learning objectives, locating useful resources, developing ICC materials relevant to learners' needs, integrating ICC in classroom practices, and assessing ICC.

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