Here to Help
Language Skills for Food Service Workers

Public Report

Prepared by: Bow Valley College

Project Goal

The goal of Here to Help: Language Skills for Food Service Workers was to support immigrants and refugees, with intermediate language proficiency levels (CLB levels 4 to 6), develop effective job readiness skills and workplace communication skills for the food service industry.

To meet this goal, the project involved:

1) The development of an instructional resource called, *Here to Help: Workplace communication skills for food services.* This resource package was developed for instructors who teach English language learners across Alberta. This resource package consists of a learner workbook, an instructor manual, and multi-media files.

2) The delivery of a part-time, face-to-face English language course to eight cohorts of learners in Calgary and the Bow Corridor region. *Here to Help: Workplace communication skills for food services* was the core resource used by the instructors who taught the pilots of the course.

Project Activities

This project was comprised of two stages.

Stage One: Development of the instructional resource package

Stage one of the project focused on the development of the instructional resource package, *Here to Help: Workplace communication skills for food services.* This resource introduces English language learners to people working in different roles and who hold different responsibilities within food service workplaces. These learning materials were developed to be support language learning at Canadian Language Benchmark proficiency levels 4 to 6.

This resource package consists of:
- a learner workbook,
- an instructor guide, and
- multi-media resources.

The learner workbook targets learning materials at Canadian Language Benchmarks 4 to 6. It shares learning activities that introduce English language learners to common workplace speech acts and job-specific language. It also provides learners with language examples that they can refer to, in order to bridge classroom learning with their daily life. The learner workbook also includes evaluations and reflections that promote goal-setting aimed at language acquisition and language practice.

The instructor guide outlines teaching strategies that foster language development and support workplace skill development. The instructor guide also outlines teaching strategies that will help instructors to increase learners' awareness of pragmatic competence. The instructor guide includes discussion talking points that will help instructors manage class discussions. These class discussions set-up and support many of the exercises and activities in the learner workbook.

The multi–media assets were created to provide learners with multiple opportunities for observation, reflection, and practice, and to provide examples of communication exchanges that focus on common workplace speech acts. The audio materials were designed around a reoccurring character as she interviews for, trains, and communicates in several authentic entry level food service work situations. The video materials were designed to introduce module themes, and to introduce concepts and language skills that support these themes.

The resource, *Here to Help: Workplace communication skills for food services*, can be accessed via the School of Global Access website: https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/products-services/here-help-workplace-communication-skills-food-services

Stage Two: Deliver Job Readiness Course

Stage Two of the project delivered a workplace communication and job readiness course to eight cohorts of learners at CLB levels of 4 to 6. The pilot classes were offered in Calgary and the Bow Corridor region (Banff, Canmore, and High River).

The ELL instructors who taught the pilot course attended an orientation workshop that introduced them to the newly developed resource package which was used as the core instruction plan for this course. Instructors were given some background about the project, an overview of the learner workbook and instructor guide, and details about the process of collecting feedback from both learners and instructors. Regular meetings between the project lead and the instructors were held to discuss class progress and how the resource was used.

During stage two, the resource was modified in response to feedback from learners and instructors. In the final months of the project, revisions were made to the learner workbook and supplemental activities and suggestions were added to the instructor guide to make it easier for instructors to use and adapt the material between the target ranges of CLB 4-6.

Project Outcomes

The following outcomes were realized in this project:

- 97% of learners demonstrated gains in workplace communication skills.
- 90% of learners identified as having increased job readiness skills.
- 85% of learners indicated they feel more confident using English in workplace contexts.
- 95% of learners demonstrated English language gains as observed and tracked by instructors.
- 100% of instructors who taught the pilot course indicated an increased comfort level in teaching workplace language and job readiness skills to CLB learners at CLB 4-6.

Anecdotal feedback indicated that the pilot course helped learners to either maintain their jobs and/or ladder to other opportunities. Examples of such feedback include:

- *"This program helped me to be confident in applying for the job I really love doing"*
- *"I can use language examples question to communicating with co-workers in the workplace. For example: when we make a birthday cake, my co-worker tell me how to making that order."*
- *"Now, in every meeting I can express myself better in both writing & verbal."*
- *"I think it able to use in my daily life, if I have something need to do in my workplace I can use more language examples, it help me work in my job."*
- *"I want to improve my skills, someday I will apply supervisor or I will use my skills to apply better job."*
- *"I think this course help me in my future to get a good job…"*

Project Recommendations

This project increased our awareness of the complexity of the workplace communication tasks required of entry level positions. Collaborating with industry partners highlighted the areas where communication can break down in fast-paced food services settings. This knowledge informed the development of content to help learners practice the skills required to bridge these identified gaps.

The pilot of the course encouraged instructors to employ different strategies in their classroom instruction, including explicit instruction in workplace communication skills, targeted vocabulary development and goal setting.

Recommendations:

Create similar resources for other industries
Throughout the project, learners showed a lot of interested for the food service specificity side of the resource. Equally, there was much positive feedback about the workplace language and communication skills of this resource, apart from their context in food services (for example: communicating with managers, interviewing, shifting language formality). A recommendation is that resource could be adapted for additional industries.

Include authentic workplace interactions
The balance between video and audio resources worked very well in this project. Using video as an overview or an anchor for modules, and then using audio to fill in the listening activities throughout the units, both served each medium well. Throughout the feedback, however, there was some concern about the language level in the audio resources, a concern that was continually revisited. Ultimately, a decision was made that the trade-off for reducing the language level would be to also reduce the authenticity of the conversations that workers encounter in the food service industry. Reducing the authenticity was not a suitable trade-off for a workplace specific resource. A recommendation is to plan for and record, along with the authentic conversations, a series or related vignettes (shorter dialogue exchanges) that could be used in addition to or in place of the full conversations.

Provide multiple opportunities for in-class discussion
Even though we anticipated the desire for high amounts of in-class speaking and pair/group language practice, learners and instructors still identified class time to use language and talk with each other as one of the ways to improve the instruction. A recommendation would be to use more "flipped classroom" strategies, requiring learners to do work on their own (for example: listen to the audio conversations at home) and then use class time for discussion.

Leverage smartphone technology (e.g. audio recording)
This type of resource lends itself well to student use of technology. A recommendation would be to build technology use into the instruction/activities so that learners can record themselves with video and audio for self-assessments and evaluations. This would also decrease the amount of class time devoted to assessing learner performance.

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