

The following report outlines a groundbreaking new language learning materials development project on topics related to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

The Language of Inclusion: Diversity & Inclusion Materials for the EAL Classroom

NorQuest College's Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership

This project was made possible by:



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Executive Summary

The Language of Inclusion: Diversity & Inclusion Materials for the EAL Classroom project aimed at producing four modules of curriculum for instructors to use in their classes for the development of newcomer inclusive language skills. The targeted proficiency of the materials ranged from Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 3 (mid-level beginner) to CLB 6 (mid-level intermediate). In our current educational context, materials developed at this level can serve the largest number of newcomer language learners in Alberta. In addition, the project team set out to deliver training workshops for instructors, a webinar and a conference presentation for two purposes; to raise awareness of the new open access materials, and to assist instructors in building skills teaching topics related to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI).

Project Background

A growing number of employers see inclusive cultures as priorities in their talent development strategies and critical to productivity, engagement and innovation. A recent survey by Bersin of Deloitte on the topic of diversity and inclusion states that this topic, “now impacts brand, corporate purpose, and performance,” and that a large demographic of employees see inclusion as compulsory in an effort to build a company’s culture¹ (p.1). In addition, nearly one-half of the companies surveyed by Deloitte in Canada invest in diversity and inclusion initiatives (Deloitte, 2014)². However, as EDI work continues to be in demand by employers and employees alike, how can we ensure that newcomers to Alberta, of which there were 207,790 between 2011 and 2016, understand what EDI means for them as they engage meaningfully with Alberta’s workplaces? As a post-secondary institution we felt that one way would be to develop language learning materials that explore EDI as a topic area complete with its own complex set of linguistic rules and norms. Commercial EAL textbooks have a lack of topics on dimensions of diversity and inclusion (e.g., LGBTQ2S+, disability, mental health, anti-racism, age) in workplaces and often only highlight ethno-cultural differences. The project team felt this gap could be addressed by engaging a diverse team of materials developers to ensure that inclusive language, and the cultural values associated with that language were well outlined for newcomers in their EAL learning experiences.

Summary of Project Deliverables and Activities

This project began in January 2019 and was completed in January 2020. The following is a summary of project deliverables and activities:

- [One webpage](#) dedicated to the materials housed on the NorQuest College Continuing Education and Custom Training website. Links to the materials are also available on the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language [ATESL](#) website as well as the national repository for EAL materials known as [Tutela](#).

¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-dttl-2014-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

² <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ca/Documents/human-capital/ca-en-human-capital-diversity-and-inclusion-in-canada.pdf>

- Over twelve fully editable lesson plans totalling more than 100 hours of teaching content across Canadian Language Benchmarks 3-6 proficiency levels and skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing) on topics ranging from Anti-Racism, Diversity and Parenting in the Canadian School System to LGBTQ2S+.
- An [Emerging Traits in Inclusive Education](#) document for ESL providers to refer to, discuss and repurpose related to classroom practice, policy and the use of space.
- **145 instructors** participated in 6 workshops, 3 conference presentations, and 2 webinars.
- **99% of the surveyed instructors** reported an increased awareness of the new teaching materials.
- Materials were **piloted in 6 classrooms across 4 CLB levels and 68 students** participated in the pilots. **82% of learners** reported they had **acquired new knowledge**.

Below are some quotes from learners after participating in the pilots.

- I learned how I have to respect other identity based on gender. I didn't know a lot of thing but I learned a lot. It is going to help me through my life how we are equal all. Thank you!
- Intersectionality is the key to accepting others with respect. Anyone has their own choices, values, abilities, thoughts, skills, etc.
- The people who are bisexual and from another race are welcomed in Canada and also they are protected by law. Nobody can decide my identity because it is my personal freedom.
- The occupations, we have some quick judgement or bias and now I know about mine and how to understand the racism

The settlement stage in any newcomer's journey, wrought with challenges related to basic needs (securing housing, financial support, transportation, employment, etc.), can make discussions of EDI and more "Canadian" approaches to, for example, same sex marriage, conversion therapy, racism, and deeper, value-laden social issues quite challenging. It is, therefore an important consideration when materials are being developed to have representation from a broad range of individuals. As such, we employed an innovative approach to engaging curriculum developers for this project.

Inclusive Project Engagement: An Innovative Approach to Materials Development

There is a significant amount of literature that calls on employers to use more inclusive hiring practices to increase the representation of under-represented and marginalized individuals on work teams and in leadership (see Cross & Braswell, 2019³, Deloitte's Diversahack report, 2016⁴, Webb, nd.⁵). The project team at NorQuest used an inclusive recruitment model to engage individuals with the lived experience of marginalization who in some cases face barriers to employment because of identity factors. Twelve different materials developers with all different levels of experience worked on the project. Some project diversity demographics include:

³ <https://hbr.org/2019/12/why-isnt-your-organization-isnt-hiring-diverse-talent>

⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/ca/en/pages/human-capital/articles/inclusion-diversity.html>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maynardwebb/2017/10/29/how-to-alter-your-hiring-practices-to-increase-diversity/#6b6264402029>

- 4 racialized instructors, 3 Education students at the undergraduate level
- 1 ESL instructor who is blind and their instructional aide
- 2 under-employed newcomer EAL instructors with no Canadian teaching experience
- 2 queer instructors

As a result, the materials have diverse representation of identity characteristics, a clear focus on intersectionality, as well as indigenous voices from Southern Alberta.

Over the course of the project, there were a number of success stories relating to pilots of materials in classrooms, students who had learned new language and were able to communicate more effectively on EDI topics with their teammates at work, and developers who had experienced innovative new discoveries related to curriculum on EDI topics. We asked two of our developers to share their stories.

Project Stories of Impact

The first impact story was written by a instructor, mother, woman, and a member of the blind community who designed materials on the project. The second story's author is a woman, an EAL instructor, mother of an LGBTQ+ individual, sister, and friend.

Developer 1

Participating on the Language of inclusion project through NorQuest College has helped me to understand the issues of identity and bias both for older people who are new to Canada and for myself as a member of the EAL teaching community who is blind. During the course of my interactions with immigrant seniors to collect their personal stories, I realized how much of their identity is expressed in their younger selves – who they were when they were, for example, working professionals, heads of households and movers and shakers in their communities and not so much in identifying with their age now. When discussing their age now, these older adults seemed to be bound into an identity of prisoners who were bound by their own aging bodies, the biased views of older people in society and feelings of isolation, boredom and loneliness. Nonetheless, they were eager to share stories, welcome me into their homes and into their lives. It is their stories that shaped the lessons I have created for the project. In addition, it was interesting that these older adults do not like the labels of old, senior or elderly and when they were asked for a photo to share with the project, they wanted to share photos of their younger selves. As well, working on this project has given me a much-needed personal sense of self worth and success as a professional in the ESL field. Up to this point I had experienced a lot of the biases that people have towards a true acceptance of a person with a disability being accepted as a colleague. In being asked to work on designing lessons, creating activities and resources for the ESL community as a part of this project, it gave me the feeling of acceptance and worth in the community of my peers; something that remains an ongoing struggle because just like the seniors and their stories, I have stories of my own and they are not all wrapped up in one identity- that of a person who is blind. My stories and my pictures too, that I wish to share, are those of my other self- a qualified, professional Edmontonian who has a desire to help others. To conclude, I have learned so much about identity and inclusion through the project and I hope the impact will last.

Developer 2

Prior to working on this project, I was convinced that developing curriculum to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion would be a valuable tool, specifically for ESL instructors to help non-LGBTQ+ newcomers as they learn to live in a Canadian culture that is generally more tolerant of the LGBTQ+ community than many of our learners' cultures of origin. As the parent of an LGBTQ+ individual in Canada, I was completely invested in this. However, in the process of creating and developing these materials, I went through a paradigm shift, from promoting tolerance to advocating for inclusion.

I interviewed a young immigrant who had gone through horrifying experiences in his home country as a result of being gay -- but the thing that struck me and shocked me as he spoke was how isolated and frightened he still was in Canada, and specifically in his ESL courses. In 3 years of ESL classes, LGBTQ+ topics had never been broached. He had never seen himself represented in any language learning materials. He had never been able to write an authentic paragraph where he wasn't pretending to be someone he wasn't. His voice was never truly welcomed. He had never told anyone who he really was. He was pretending, constantly. And when one teacher, one time, told the class about her own gay child in response to homophobic comments, and he was able to come out to her, that was life-altering for him.

As he said during the interview, there are likely LGBTQ+ individuals in every ESL class we teach. I hadn't really thought about that. It's only in the last couple of years that I've deliberately included at least one activity on that topic in my classes, as a way to help my learners move towards tolerance and acceptance. When talking to that young man, though, I realized that for most of my 30+ year teaching career, learners like him have been silenced in my classes -- not through anything I've said, but from my silence. I find that horrifying. And I realized that, while I hope my language learning activities on LGBTQ+ topics do indeed move homophobic learners towards tolerance, the value of those activities lies more in the fact that LGBTQ+ individuals in the class see themselves represented in the content. That is, through this project, my purpose and priorities shifted from promoting tolerance and awareness, to giving instructors the tools to ensure that LGBTQ+ learners in our classes know that they are included, and their voices welcomed, in their language classrooms in Canada.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

At the time of reporting (March, 2020), as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic globally, the project team recognizes that our province is in uncharted territory when it comes to how we live and work. This new normal has and will continue to have wide-reaching effects on EDI initiatives in organizations both public and private. At the Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership at NorQuest College, we are working with our industry partners, immigrant serving organizations and the government to increase the knowledge, skills and awareness of EDI towards a more inclusive Alberta. We have already begun work on new innovative projects so please stay tuned. In closing, we acknowledge and thank the Government of Alberta for making this project possible, the incredible work of our development team and all of the instructors and learners who took part in the project. Thank you!