

## ATESL Best Practices Checklist for EAL Literacy

*EAL literacy learners are found in a variety of educational contexts in Alberta: LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), provincially funded EAL classes, employment skills training, specific occupation training, and other literacy focused programs (family literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, workplace literacy, and more).*

*In this document, EAL literacy learners refers to learners with a range of reading and writing skills, from adult newcomers who are learning to read and write for the first time in any language, and who are doing so in a language that is new to them, to adult language learners who have completed up to 8 years of formal education in their country of origin. EAL literacy learners need to be viewed holistically to break down barriers to learning. They are identified and provided with enhanced support services. Ideally, they are placed in specialized classes designed to meet their needs and assigned instructors with specialized training and expertise.<sup>1</sup>*

### Use the ATESL Best Practices Checklists:

#### *For Individuals*

- To identify areas to consider when taking on a new, unfamiliar responsibility
- To reflect on your own practice
  - What am I doing well?
  - What am I doing that could be improved?
  - What am I not doing that I could or should be doing?

#### *For Professional development and teacher training*

- To identify goals to aspire to and specific steps to take to meet those goals
- To focus discussion after class observations
- To focus team meeting discussions
- To develop workshops/presentations

#### *For Programs*

- To identify strengths that distinguish your program (e.g., to justify the worth/value of the program to the broader institution, to funders, to learners, to community stakeholders)
- To identify gaps in a program or practice (e.g., to identify constraints to address, to identify initial and ongoing actions, to determine a focus for professional development, to justify requests for funding)

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<sup>1</sup> This theme is significantly informed by *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook* (Bow Valley College, 2009); *A Practical Guide to Teaching ESL Literacy* (Bow Valley College, 2018); *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)* (CCLB, 2016); and *ESL for ALL Support Kit* (CCLB, 2017).

**64. EAL learners with literacy challenges are identified and placed in specialized classes designed to meet their needs.**

- EAL learners with literacy challenges are identified through consideration of some of the following factors:
  - Conversations with individual learners about their experiences with formal schooling and their use of reading and writing in the L1
  - Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Placement Test (CLB-LPT) from assessment centres, such as Calgary Language Assessment and Referral (CLARC) and the Language Assessment, Referral, & Counselling Centre (LARCC) in Edmonton
  - Results of CLB literacy assessment tools
  - 0–3 years of formal education or 4–8 years of formal education
  - Difficulty in mainstream EAL classes (e.g., lack of familiarity with school-based tasks such as organizing a binder; a preference for doing assignments at home; lack of progress; and difficulty understanding and following directions)
  - Significantly higher listening/speaking proficiency than reading/writing proficiency
  - Pre- and post-test results that indicate a lack of progress over a term
- When possible, EAL literacy learners are placed in dedicated EAL literacy classes based on proficiency levels in reading and writing (along with consideration of level of education).
- Class size is limited.
- If possible, different levels of EAL literacy classes are available and are differentiated by small level increments. (Learners who are developing print literacy skills for the first time in any language will have different learning needs from learners who have developed basic reading and writing skills in the L1.)

**65. The program hires instructors with the expertise and disposition necessary for effective instruction in the EAL literacy classroom, facilitates and encourages professional development, and provides instructors with the necessary support.**

- EAL literacy instructors are supportive, flexible, and aware of the common barriers that learners face outside of class.
- Instructors value the contribution of adult EAL literacy learners while they are learning to navigate a new community and acquire a new language.
- Ongoing professional development opportunities address a selection of the following:
  - Orientation to key CLB-ESL literacy benchmarking documents and resources, including *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL) (CCLB, 2016)*
  - The educational needs and complex profiles of EAL literacy learners (including learners with learning disabilities, trauma, and other specific needs)
  - Strategies for using the learners' background, goals, and expectations to ensure that learning plans, materials, and learner assessments are relevant to their lives
  - Principles for teaching adults, including the role of motivation, experiential learning, problem solving, etc.
  - Strategies for teaching reading and writing skills, including the 5 components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, word recognition/decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension
  - Balanced literacy instruction (e.g., Whole-Part-Whole)
  - Principles for selecting and designing materials that are authentic, at an appropriate reading level, and appropriate for adult learners
  - Orientation to online tools and resources suitable for EAL literacy learners
  - Training/support in Universal Design for Learning principles and practices to ensure that learning activities and materials (online or paper) appeal to a variety of ways of learning and are suitable for EAL literacy learners
  - Opportunities for networking, mentorship, and dialogue with other EAL literacy instructors (e.g., through conferences, professional development days)
- EAL literacy instructors are provided with time and resources for developing learning materials (i.e., the extra time is compensated, or instructors have a shortened teaching day).
- EAL literacy instructors have convenient access to adult literacy teaching/learning/assessment resources, materials, and computer resources, including the following:
  - Instructional aides and volunteers to ensure a lower learner/instructor ratio and to provide enhanced technical support when needed
  - EAL literacy curriculum, reading/writing materials, workbooks, and toolkits
  - A variety of technology (computers, tablets/iPads, smartphones)
  - Realia and manipulatives
  - Posters, wall pocket charts, etc.
  - An accessible and safe password-protected online learning environment
  - Apps and interactive online materials that are suitable for EAL literacy learners
- EAL literacy teachers are supported in the many roles they perform that interact with their primary role of teacher: settlement worker, adult learner expert, language instructor, and literacy instructor.

**66. EAL literacy programs address barriers to learning, settlement, and integration with access to enhanced support services.**

- It is recognized that many EAL literacy learners have experienced, and continue to experience, crises and circumstances that affect their ability to learn (e.g., trauma associated with fleeing their home country; income support being cut off; concern for family members in refugee camps; and difficulty adjusting to life in Canada, for themselves or family members).
- Enhanced support services are available to EAL literacy learners, for instance:
  - Transportation assistance
  - Childcare
  - Support and/or settlement workers who are available to support learners to address the barriers they face and to connect learners to community supports such as:
    - Medical care
    - Subsidized dental/eye care
    - Food banks
    - Legal aid, immigration/family sponsorship
    - Places to access used/free necessities
    - Access to free laptops, desktops, phones
    - Counselling
- Additional academic supports are available to EAL literacy learners, for instance:
  - Academic counselling to support learners in setting both short- and long-term educational goals
  - Homework help/clubs
  - Tutoring
  - A place and materials to study outside of class hours
  - Flexibility for learners with interrupted class attendance due to multiple challenges/barriers commonly faced by EAL literacy learners
- First language support is provided through some of the following:
  - The use of language-specific tutors who speak the language(s) of the learners
  - Regularly scheduled interpreters
  - Student mentorship programs
  - First language instruction
- EAL literacy learners receive enhanced technical support in courses with online components, such as:
  - Supported face-to-face orientations to online learning platforms
  - Flexibility to use online platforms with support in a face-to-face or virtual classroom
  - Teaching assistants, first language support, peer support, tutorials, etc.
  - Flexibility to use apps and tools that are familiar to the learners (e.g., using WhatsApp or messenger to communicate, rather than email)

- The program seeks out funding to provide EAL literacy learners at the earliest stages with the same learning materials, binders, textbooks, highlighters, scissors, pencil grips, etc. (e.g., explicit instructions become easier and more systematic if everyone gets a blue Duo-Tang for their personalized picture dictionary, a green Duo-Tang for stories, and an orange notebook for writing practice)
- Learners receive specialized assistance in determining pathways and options when transitioning out of an EAL literacy program. For example, depending on their needs and proficiency, EAL literacy learners are assisted in their transition into the following:
  - Mainstream EAL
  - Adult basic education
  - Work-readiness programs
  - Adult upgrading and further education
  - Volunteering before employment
  - Occupation-specific training
  - Employment

**67. The EAL literacy class provides a learning environment that is encouraging, predictable, collaborative, connected to the real world, and supportive of life-long learning.**

- The EAL literacy classroom is a welcoming, dedicated space with moveable seating and sufficient space for realia, manipulatives, posters, technology, movement games, and small group and one-on-one instruction.
- Classroom routines provide a sense of stability and help learners build organizational abilities and learning habits. Routines in an EAL literacy class may include, for example:
  - A morning meeting where learners greet each other and participate in setting plans for the day
  - A daily calendar/weather report
  - A daily vocabulary/flashcard drill
  - Regular time set aside during class for extensive reading (e.g., setting out the expectation that learners pick a book to read whenever they finish a task early; learners can read alone or with a peer)
  - A regular time set aside at the end of the lesson for organizing binders
- Outcomes for EAL literacy classes are informed by the learners' real-life needs. Instructors gather information on learner needs through some of the following:
  - CLB Can Do checklists, and/or Essential Skills/Skills for Success Can Do checklists
  - Observation of learners when doing learning tasks
  - Interviews with learners to understand their learning goals
- Classroom activities relate directly to learning outcomes and learner needs, as follows:
  - In beginning levels of EAL literacy, language and materials are personalized to the learners and related to their immediate needs.
  - As literacy skills progress, materials may be less personalized, but continue to be meaningful, familiar, and relevant to the learners.
- Learning is connected to the real world through some of the following:
  - Field trips
  - Realia and manipulatives
  - Stories
  - Reading/writing tasks that reflect learners' real-life needs and interests
  - Listening/speaking along with reading/writing tasks
- Learners share the wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that they bring with them; they teach each other and collaborate, fostering a sense of belonging.
- Small and large successes are celebrated; learners receive continuous and encouraging feedback on their learning.

**68. The EAL literacy class develops literacy skills through a print-rich environment, instruction in phonics, strategy training, and plenty of modelling, repetition, recycling, and practice.**

- EAL literacy instruction draws from both second language acquisition principles and principles for teaching EAL literacy learners.
- Outcomes for EAL literacy classes are informed by *Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*.
- Learners develop oral control over material, with an emphasis on vocabulary development, before reading and writing.
  - Oral skills build on strengths, and may include singing, chanting, drama, and storytelling.
  - Learner-generated texts (e.g., language experience stories) ensure that the language in a text is known to the learner.
- The classroom and instruction provide a print-rich environment that appeals to kinesthetic, sensory, and visual modes of learning (posters, pictures, pocket charts, picture dictionaries, flashcards, etc.).
- Instructors are aware of the importance of plain language, while still providing opportunities for exposure to a rich language environment.
- Learning materials are formatted appropriately for EAL literacy learners (see “Conditions for Learning” in *ESL for ALL* for specific guidance for each EAL literacy level).
  - Fonts are large, sans serif, and black, with limited use of style changes such as bolding and italics.
  - Text is sparse and uncluttered with lots of white space.
  - Continuous text is broken into smaller chunks with double or 1.5 spacing.
  - Texts are supported by realistic images.
  - Texts use simple sentences and concrete plain language.
- A balanced approach is taken to instruction, such as Whole-Part-Whole. For example a text may be approached as follows:
  - **Whole:** Learners first examine the whole text, for instance by doing the following:
    - Making predictions based on the title and images and eliciting relevant vocabulary
    - Brainstorming for what they know about the topic and text type
    - Examining the text and discussing the intended audience and purpose
    - Listening as a text is read aloud (and perhaps putting images in order)
    - Reading for general meaning
    - Recalling key ideas
  - **Part:** Learners do a few activities, contextualized in the text, to develop some of the following bottom-up literacy skills for decoding (reading) and encoding (writing):
    - Developing visual and motor skills needed to read and write (e.g., holding a writing implement; tracking left to right; turning pages right to left)
    - Recognizing and forming letters
    - Drawing connections between sounds and letters
    - Recognizing that words are made up of separate sounds

- Recognizing and using inflections, prefixes, and suffixes
- Recognizing and following basic conventions such as spaces between words, sentences beginning with capitals and ending with periods, sentences scrolling, paragraphs starting on a new line
- Using basic spelling rules to decode and encode words
- Drawing meaning from images, symbols, and text enhancements
- Developing an increasing repertoire of high-frequency and familiar sight words and phrases
- Developing an increasing repertoire of high-frequency words that they can spell by rote (with a focus on high-frequency irregular words that cannot be sounded out)
- **Whole:** Learners then re-read for meaning, comprehension, and fluency development, for instance, by doing the following:
  - Reading for pleasure
  - Re-reading, then recalling and telling the story
  - Re-reading to find answers to comprehension questions, fill in a table, put images in order, etc.
  - Re-reading a number of times, with the goal of improving reading speed each time
  - Reconstructing a text using sentence strips (or H5P drag-and-drop if online)
  - Completing a guided text based on the text they have read
  - Writing relevant captions for images
  - Making suggestions/predictions, agreeing/disagreeing, etc. based on the reading

- Unfamiliar academic tasks are contextualized in familiar and known language and content such that:<sup>2</sup>
  - Learners see immediate relevance to their daily needs, interests and lives.
  - Learners move from shared/collaborative tasks towards individual responsibility for tasks.
  - Oral and written learning is connected to help learners develop the ability to gather meaning from print.
  - Learners develop critical thinking skills.
- Learners read and analyze models of written tasks that meet expectations.
- Repetition and recycling of strategies, materials, and concepts are built into the curriculum. For example, materials and activities are related thematically to ensure recycling of outcomes, vocabulary, and skills.
- Instruction provides sufficient in-class time for writing practice (whether face-to-face or synchronous online).
- Strategies for reading, writing, and language learning are modelled, explicitly taught, and spiralled throughout the curriculum.
- Instructors ensure that assessment tasks for EAL literacy learners are very similar in content and format to the learning tasks that they did in class.

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<sup>2</sup> See the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, 2015).



**69. In addition to second language and print literacy skills, EAL literacy learners develop the digital literacy and numeracy skills they need for life, work, and school tasks.**

- Learners are exposed to and learn to use the technology they encounter in life, work, and school, such as the following:
  - Computers, laptops, tablets, iPads, and smartphones
  - Other technologies such as microwave ovens, ATMs, ticket dispensers, self-checkout counters, etc.
- Learners develop the digital literacy they need for life, work, and school tasks. For instance, learners develop the language, literacy, and digital skills to do the following:
  - Manage their finances, for instance, using ATMs, online banking, online financial transactions, self-checkout counters, etc.
  - Protect their devices, personal data, and privacy (e.g., as they create, use, and protect passwords)
  - Use tools and features on their digital devices (e.g., setting up voicemail, downloading the Quizlet app)
  - Use online learning platforms and environments
  - Type and use a mouse
  - Create Word documents
  - Search for jobs online
  - Write emails
  - Navigate a website
  - Use Google maps/location
  - Connect online with their children’s school (e.g., through SchoolZone)
- Numeracy and financial literacy skills are integrated into classroom routines and language/literacy tasks as learners do the following:
  - Count and write numbers
  - Tell and write times
  - Locate days/dates on calendars
  - Talk about the weather
  - Measure, record, and compare measurements (weight, temperature, length/width/height, distance, etc.)
  - Identify and use coins and bills
  - Read, compare, and talk about budgets
  - Read and compare prices, bills, timesheets, pay stubs, bank/credit card statements, etc.
  - Learn and use vocabulary and symbols for expressing numerical concepts
- If possible, numeracy and digital literacy is supported in the form of supplementary workshops or classes based on assessed skills.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> That is, learners are placed in numeracy classes/workshops based on their numeracy skills. However, reading comprehension also needs to be taken into consideration to ensure that learners can read the word problems and fully understand questions.

**70. Recognizing that EAL literacy students are often integrated into regular EAL classes, EAL instructors with both EAL learners and EAL literacy learners apply strategies for teaching multilevel classes.**

- Instructors differentiate instruction to provide optimal level-appropriate education to both EAL literacy and mainstream EAL learners. For example:
  - EAL literacy learners are sometimes grouped together to provide opportunities for specialized instruction, tutoring, first language support, additional scaffolding, and taking on leadership roles.
  - EAL literacy learners read level-appropriate texts (with added visuals, shortened sentences and paragraphs, simpler vocabulary, increased font size, increased white space), while EAL learners read unadapted texts.
  - EAL literacy learners receive extra scaffolding and support (e.g., vocabulary banks, permission to use a picture dictionary during a task, tutor support, first language support).
  - EAL literacy learners are allowed alternate ways to demonstrate comprehension (e.g., while EAL learners complete short written questions, EAL literacy learners answer orally, point, circle, or check off right answers).
  - EAL literacy learners are given additional time to work on tasks.
  - Beginning writers complete shorter and simpler tasks than more advanced writers (e.g., completing the personal information pieces of a medical form vs. completing the full form; making a list of items for a party vs. composing an email asking individuals to contribute items).
  - Beginning writers complete tasks with more familiar content (e.g., an email telling a friend what they do every day in class), while more advanced writers complete tasks that are cognitively more complex (e.g., an email comparing 2 different EAL programs and recommending one).
- Instructors plan activities that allow learners at all levels to collaborate together and contribute in meaningful ways, for example:
  - Jigsaw activities, where EAL literacy learners are given the simpler/shorter portion of a text to read and then share, while EAL learners read the longer more complex portions of the text
  - Problem-solving activities, where EAL literacy learners take on tasks that have fewer literacy requirements (e.g., they watch a video or make a phone call to gather information, while EAL learners research or request information by email)
  - Group presentations, where EAL literacy learners contribute their oral skills and EAL learners contribute their research and writing skills
  - Pair work, where EAL literacy learners contribute according to their strengths (e.g., content knowledge, oral fluency), and EAL learners contribute according to their strengths (e.g., reading, writing, spelling, digital literacy)