



The ATESL Newsletter

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.

February – March 2007

Greetings to all ATESL Members!

My year as President is rushing by as the Board remains active in many areas related to our mandate. We recently had our annual planning retreat, held in Edmonton and attended by all Board members. We were fortunate to have guests from Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry and Advanced Education join us. Our discussions focused on further establishing ATESL's role as a collaborative partner with government in policy development and service provision for ESL learners. The Board also held meaningful planning sessions related to the provision of professional development for all ESL professionals, focusing particularly on those instructors who do not receive professional development (PD) opportunities from employers or are restricted because of a rural location. Thanks to all Board members for giving up their weekend to make this retreat a success.

As part of our ongoing efforts to improve access to PD, watch the ATESL website for some updates and changes in the coming months. You may have already seen extra items being added almost weekly. These include Ilona Leki's very popular and highly informative keynote address from our 2006 conference, *"You have some good ideas, but ...": Research on effective feedback to L2 writing*, and summaries of our ongoing workshop projects. We are exploring ways to make the most out of our website so watch that space!

Our current project, Connecting ESL Professionals and Communities, is drawing to a close. The workshops we have provided as part of this project have brought together experts from across the province and provided excellent ideas for future direction and possible future projects. Results of the demographic survey many of you completed will soon be posted on the website and I encourage you to take a look at it. It provides an interesting snapshot of the profession today in the province. If you have any comments, questions or concerns I invite you to email me c/o atesl@shaw.ca.

Sincerely,
Justine Light, ATESL President



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**“You have some good ideas, but ...”:
Research on effective feedback to L2 writing**
Currents Under Currents
ATESL Conference 2006
Keynote Speaker – Ilona Leki

There’s an old story you may already have heard about an advertising executive who received written reports regularly from her staff. Because she sometimes felt the reports were not well written, she developed a feedback strategy to improve her employees’ writing. The next time she received a report, she took the written report home and the next day returned the report to the author in her private office saying, “Is this the best you can do?” The author sheepishly took the report back, worked on it, and resubmitted it. The boss once again took it home and the next day again asked, “Is this the best you can do?” This continued until the increasingly annoyed author finally said, “Yes, it’s the best I can do!” and the boss answered, “Good then I’ll read it.”

If only it were this easy!

Giving good feedback is important to teachers because we sense, I think, how important it is to a writer’s growth to have someone read and respond to what they’ve written. It is a powerful form of instruction because it trains student writers to focus on and value what gets addressed in the feedback and so as teachers I think we try hard to determine that magic constellation of things to say about a student’s text that will help the student 1) create a better one and 2) become a more sophisticated and confident writer. But it is a complex and difficult job.

One important reason for the difficulty is that most of us have never had good models of feedback to our own writing to draw on in responding to our students. Another reason is that individual students respond differently. We know from nearly unanimous research findings that L2 students crave and appreciate feedback on their written work. And yet it is sobering to realize that in Ferris’ 1997 research on students’ uptake of teacher feedback at the ideational or rhetorical level, although students used 3/4 of the teacher’s feedback comments in their revisions, only 1/2 of that led to a better draft and 1/3 of the drafts actually became worse (F. Hyland & K. Hyland, 2006). Furthermore, students aren’t always able and don’t necessarily always want to act even on feedback they ask for.

And there is the question of feedback on error or grammar or at the sentence level. Many teachers believe that this kind of feedback is very important to provide students. On the other side are those who agree with John Truscott (1996) that correcting grammar in L2 students’ writing is a waste of time, doomed to failure, and detrimental to L2 students in a variety of ways. This is not a debate that is inconsequential. Often the most salient feature of L2 writing for some readers unaccustomed to reading it, and that includes some academic audiences, is error. It is often on the basis of errors present in a text that L2 students are sent to remedial courses, remanded to ESL courses instead of mainstream programs, or failed in

entrance or exit exams or proficiency tests where the evaluator does not know the writer. Yet on the other hand, there is also evidence at the university level that professors across the curriculum are able to ignore sentence level errors and make a distinction between these errors and the quality of the ideas being expressed (Santos, 1989; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). It also appears that if a context demands grammatical accuracy, L2 writers are more likely to focus their attention on language issues, and given limits on time, attention, and cognitive energy and, if they focus on the sentence level, they are likely to neglect ideational and rhetorical levels. Thus, the literature on error correction shows conflicting and contradictory patterns.

It is important to acknowledge as well that responding behaviors do not exist in a vacuum and are influenced by considerations such as what the writing task was, what the goal of the writing course is, what has just been taught in the course, and what the student's last paper looked like, in addition to institutional, historical, and situational factors that may be beyond the control of both writer and responder. Nevertheless useful response to writing probably include the following and begin with communication between teacher and students.

PRE-FEEDBACK COMMUNICATION: THE LANGUAGE OF WRITING

Helping student develop a metalanguage about writing gives them a vocabulary to communicate with you and their disciplinary instructors about their writing and may allow a student to understand and profit more fully from teacher/reader response to that text.

DETERMINING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Appropriate writing assignments do not set students up for failure by asking them to discuss topics they know little or nothing about. If their knowledge of a topic essentially consists of the contents of one or two articles, the texts produced on the topic can be predicted to lack developed ideas. And when the writing teacher then responds by noting that some paragraph needs more supporting evidence, the response of many students will justifiably be to just delete the paragraph because they have no more supporting evidence. In such a case, they do not and cannot benefit from the teacher/reader response.

SELF-ANALYSIS

Writing teachers can improve feedback behaviors by first analyzing them to determine exactly what their practices are. (See Ferris, 2003 for an example of a good approach to use.) A fair amount of research suggests that teachers think they do one thing but actually do something else. Find out what it is you actually do and compare that to what you think you do or, more to the point, what you would like to be doing. Also, if you can, try to continue the analysis to see which of your suggestions were taken up and which simply died there in the margins. Is there a pattern?

COMMUNICATION: YOUR GOALS

Thinking through just what your philosophy of feedback is and then communicating that to your students helps them understand what to expect and allows them to express their own desires and preferences for written feedback.

APPROPRIATION

It is important to meet the student's text where it is and to work toward helping writers say what they want to say rather than pushing them to write the one we would have written. After all these are not just students learning to write in an L2; they are intelligent humans attempting to communicate and we owe it to them to regard their texts as communication and not to appropriate their meanings to ourselves.

COMMUNICATION: STUDENTS' GOALS

A first step in this direction is communicate to students that texts are crafted to produce certain effects on the reader and certain impressions of the writer. Since it is not always easy for us as teachers to see what the writer hopes to accomplish, a potentially very useful practice is to ask students to include with their crafted text a cover sheet where they simply state what their goal is in the paper, what they are trying to do, how they are trying to sound.

Knowing answers to these kind of questions will help us respond in a way that will allow us to intervene in the crafting but not appropriate the text.

READING THE WRITER'S TEXT (NOT YOURS)

The next step is to really read the text, with no pen in hand, just reading to try to follow what is being said in light of the student's purpose. Although it seems obvious, it bears saying that we should not correct or suggest anything without being sure we understand what the writer is trying to say and if we don't understand, we need to ask the student and not guess.

So after all this preparation, what kinds of feedback seem to work? Here's what the research is saying these days:

FEEDBACK: STUDENT AND TEXT

Good feedback is text specific. The most helpful feedback gives the student not just a comment, question, or suggestion but gives the writer fairly specific advice or suggestions on how to go about responding to the feedback, points the writer specifically toward the way to proceed. Specific directive feedback answers the writer's question: I understand what you think I should do but now how do I do that? Give me some ideas.

FEEDBACK: STUDENT AND TEACHER

Good feedback is also writer specific, personalized, a communication between two people. As Ken and Fiona Hyland (2006) point out "...learners are historically and sociologically situated active agents who respond to what they see as valuable and useful and to people they regard as engaging and credible" (p. 220). [my emphasis] Each text should be responded to as the effort of an individual, the whole student, and whatever you know about the student.

CHARACTERISTIC OF GOOD FEEDBACK #1

According to the research by Conrad and Goldstein (1999), the most difficult feedback for students asks how and why questions, that is, asks for explanations or analyses, most likely because they do not know how to revise in response. This may mean that they don't quite

know what analysis or explanation means, something which can be addressed in the writing class or with individual students through scaffolding or modeling. Or students' lack of up-take of this feedback may mean they do not have enough information about the topic to provide the analysis or explanation, something that should be addressed in the writing class through selection of appropriate writing assignments.

CHARACTERISTIC OF GOOD FEEDBACK #2

Another piece of advice, one that is perhaps difficult for conscientious teachers to conform to is not to respond to everything in the paper. More efficient, however, is to select two or three changes that, if carried out, would be most likely to have the biggest positive effect on the text. Be sure to explain to students that you are doing this so that they are not under the impression that you have addressed everything in their paper.

CHARACTERISTIC OF GOOD FEEDBACK #3

One of the most effective and yet non-appropriative techniques I have seen for responding to writing is the If, then technique that Lynn Goldstein (2005) uses. Here the teacher gives the student one or more choices for revising by suggesting what the outcome of a given revision might be expected to do. For example, in a student's paper on overpopulation in China, the purpose of the text was unclear. Goldstein's written response questioned the student using the If/then technique: If you hope to convince Chinese people to ..., then you need to If this isn't your purpose in this paper, then you need to re-think what your purpose is and revise in light of your real intentions. (See Goldstein, 2005.)

AFTER FEEDBACK

It is important to provide time in class for students to ask about the comments you have written. Research has shown repeatedly that students sometimes can't read teachers' handwriting, can't understand what the written comment is getting at, or even if they do understand, don't know how to proceed. Leaving time in-class allows students to clarify these issues. One potentially powerful follow up is to ask students to annotate the feedback you gave them, in effect, writing a response back to it, piece by piece or including a cover letter with a revision which indicates which feedback they have addressed and how, and which they have chosen not to address and why.

Finally, highly appropriate in a class devoted to writing would be a writing assignment that asks students to analyze their revisions in response to feedback, in much the way I suggested earlier that teachers analyze their feedback practices. Looking over several of their annotated texts, students might ask research questions like these:

What kinds of annotations did I address most frequently or carefully?

How often did I delete text rather than change it in response to an annotation?

What prompted deletion rather than revision? Is there a pattern in these responses?

In this way students become ethnographers of their own writing practices.

I believe that our writing assignments and the approach that many writing teachers have taken to writing courses have improved a great deal over the years. Nevertheless, it is

important as well to realize that writing is not a generalized skill that once learned in a writing class is simply there to call upon at will. Instead, in a sense, writers re-learn to write in different writing contexts for different audiences. For example, in long-term research on L1 writers, Carroll (2002) found that students who never did particularly well in first year writing courses often became entirely competent, sometimes even accomplished, writers in their majors by their senior years. And yet these same good writers still could not write well in the kinds of genres and for the kinds of purposes typical of their first year writing classes. Our L2 writing students as well will move through new discourse landscapes and will have to adapt to them on their own. But our writing courses can help set on the right track, in terms both of some writing skills and of affect or emotions and feelings about their writing in English.

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Nippon Institute of Technology and Lethbridge Community College: A Unique Partnership

Currents Under Currents
ATESL Conference 2006 - Presentation
Kathy Draper

The Nippon Institute of Technology Inter-Cultural Campus/Lethbridge Community College partnership facilitates a unique program available to students from Tokyo Technical High School. Classes in the first year take place in the scenic Crowsnest Pass in the Historic Blairmore Courthouse on a newly beautified campus.

The NITICC staff, LCC staff, and subcommittee in Japan each play a different role in the partnership. A sub-committee in Japan, made up of NIT university professors and TTHS high school instructors, makes decisions relative to program delivery and serves as a liaison between parents and NITICC/LCC staff. LCC hires instructors to deliver English for Academic Purposes and credit classes at NITICC in Blairmore in the first year, enrolls students in General Studies courses on campus in the second year at LCC, and provides academic counseling. NITICC provides administrative staff, tutors and maintenance staff on the Blairmore campus.

The program is a two-year, 60-credit General Studies Diploma program. In CNP in the first year, students study English for Academic Purposes 101 – 106 as well as credit classes. Credit classes include CPU 151 and 251 (computers), Math 149, PED 150 (health and wellness), PED 162 (introduction to outdoor life) and College Success 101, totaling 18 credits.

In the second year (15 months) students must complete the remaining 42 credits on campus in Lethbridge. Students enroll in core subjects as well as in electives. Students planning to return to NIT University in Japan will enroll in technical courses geared towards engineering degrees. Upon completion of this diploma, they may be eligible to start the 3rd year of their degree at NIT University. In some cases students remain in North America to continue their studies at other colleges or universities in Canada and the US.

EAP classes are comprehensive classes requiring 20 hours per week of classroom study. Material is often theme based so that skills can be taught simultaneously or so that there is a common link between tasks. The EAP program has enormous support from the homestay families who host the students for a one-year period in CNP and by the community. Homestay families are encouraged to take part in their students' learning, and contact activities with families are assigned as much as possible. NITICC has also established a great rapport with the community businesses. Assignments that involve community contact are done on a regular basis. In turn students help the community by taking part in community events and visiting local schools. As well, students often get involved in community sports

as participants or as assistant coaches.

Another aspect that makes this program unique is the outdoor education (PED 162) course. Students have the opportunity to participate in a great variety of activities. Some of the highlights are 3-day back packing trips in the beautiful Rocky Mountains and whitewater rafting.

In addition the transition that students are able to make from NIT Jr. High School to NIT High School to the NITICC program in Canada to the NIT University is unusual in Japan, and makes things easy for parents and students.

Other programs facilitated by NITICC and LCC include the NIT Junior High Program, which takes place in the summer. Students study English at LCC and then come back to CNP and take part in various outdoor activities while paired with a Canadian peer. Also, NIT University architecture students visit the NITICC campus for a weeklong period to build the structure they have planned at the university. A new addition is the month long Cosmopolytech program which occurred this past summer at LCC. Grade 10 and 11 students from Tokyo Technical High School studied ESP (Technology based English) at LCC.

For further information you can log on to the website: www.niticc.ab.ca or http://www.lethbridgecollege.ab.ca/departments/academic/access/elc_program8.html



Workshop Forums

Justine Light – ATESL President

Geralyn St. Louis – Project Manager, ATESL

The first part of the *Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals* project involves a series of workshop forums, five in total, aimed at creating an opportunity for ESL professionals from various communities throughout Alberta to come together to share their knowledge and expertise with one another as well as with ATESL and government representatives.

The workshops are designed to create a forum for discussion on a variety of topics in order to provide insight into the key issues and challenges facing the ESL industry in these topic areas. A Project Manager, Geralyn St. Louis, and Workshop Coordinator, Linda Manimtim, were hired by ATESL to oversee this part of the project. The Project Manager acts as the main point of liaison with both ATESL and AHRE and takes an active role in organizing, facilitating and reporting on the workshops while the workshop coordinator is in charge of disseminating information, communicating with potential participants, arranging logistics for the workshops and documenting workshop proceedings in conjunction with the Project Manager. It is the Project Manager's responsibility to report on all aspects of the *Connecting ESL Communities and Professionals* project in consultation with ATESL.

Topics and dates for the workshop forums as well as focus questions for discussion have been decided upon during consultation meetings between the ATESL Project Manager, ATESL President, Justine Light and the Manager, Language Training Programs, Carolyn Dielemen, of AHRE. The topics chosen and timeline for the workshop forums are as follows:

1. ESL Programming for Settlement and Integration – June 2006
2. ESL Literacy – September 2006
3. ESL Assessment – November 2006
4. Professional Development Opportunities – January 2007
5. Intercultural Competence Training – February 2007

Summary of Workshop Forum #1: ESL Programming for Settlement and Integration

The topic selected for the first workshop was *ESL Programming for Settlement and Integration*. This workshop took place on June 27, 2006 at Grant MacEwan College, Alberta College Campus from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The main themes of the workshop were building welcoming communities and increasing capacity for newcomers. Workshop

participants were as follows:

1. Independent Consultant, ESL & Essential Skills, Calgary
2. Representative from NorQuest College & Alberta Essential Skills Society, Edmonton,
3. Representative from ESL & Volunteer Programs, Calgary Immigrant Educational Society, Calgary
4. Representative from Rocky View Adult Education Literacy Program, Rocky View Adult Education
5. Representative from Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Program (VTALP), Adult Basic Literacy and all lifelong learning courses, Community Adult Learning Council (CALC), Lloydminster
6. Representative from English Language Centre, Lethbridge Community College, Lethbridge
7. Representative from Catholic Social Services (CSS), Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), Cultural Connections Institute – The Learning Exchange (CCI-LEX) & NAIT, Edmonton
8. Representative from VTALP, Peace Adult Literacy, Peace River
9. Christine Land, Adult Learning Coordinator (LINC Program), ASSIST Community Services, Edmonton; Secretary, ATESL
10. Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC), Edmonton
11. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, Intergovernmental Relations & Immigration, AHRE
12. Valerie Parr, Innovative Language Services Consultant, Intergovernmental Relations & Immigration, AHRE

The schedule for the day included an optional half-hour meet and greet coffee time prior to the workshop, a one-hour lunch break and networking time, and an afternoon coffee break.

The workshop was divided into three one-hour sessions with focus questions for each session. In session one, the discussion focused on the connection between the two sectors of language and settlement, exploring opportunities that exist, outside of traditional LINC programming, to incorporate the delivery of settlement information into language training programs and how the language training and settlement information needs of ESL learners in communities throughout Alberta, as represented by the participants present, are currently being met.

The discussion in session two was guided by asking participants to reflect on the overall lay of the landscape in their home communities in terms of the arrival of newcomers and the groups of individuals that are, and increasingly will be, in need of language and settlement training. Participants were asked to describe this training as well as the issues and challenges they are facing, or anticipate facing, in providing such training in their communities. Finally, participants were asked to share their opinions on whether or not there is a need for a stream of language training that includes settlement as a key component and, if so, how this type of ESL fits in with LINC programming.

During the last session of the day, participants were asked to recommend possible action plans, solutions, pilot projects and/or best practices to address the language training and settlement needs of ESL learners in their communities and to assess the impact on these individuals, as well as on the communities in which they are living and working, should these needs go unaddressed. Participants shared information on how the presence or absence of quality, appropriate language and settlement programming affects the community integration process of newcomers to Canada and their potential to participate in Canadian society.

Feedback received from participants about the workshop indicated that they found the day extremely useful and informative. The greatest benefit was the opportunity to come together to find out about what other ESL professionals are doing in their communities to address the needs of newcomers in terms of programming, services and resources. Sharing information among individuals who all have expertise in the chosen topic area was of benefit to everyone. For example, details about how communities are responding to the influx of large cohorts of newcomers were a key part of the discussion. Doing research on, having insight into and providing a forum for discussion on these types of migration patterns can help communities better prepare for and respond to the needs of its newcomers. Another important point that emerged from the sessions was that it is necessary to challenge and broaden our traditional definition of settlement in order to respond appropriately to learners' and communities' needs for ESL programming for settlement and integration.

The proceedings from these sessions were recorded by the Project Manager and Workshop Coordinator and then compiled into a report by the Project Manager. This report in its entirety, along with all other workshop reports, will be made available on the ATESL website.

Summary of Workshop Forum #2: ESL Literacy

The topic selected for the second workshop was *ESL Literacy*. This workshop took place on September 20, 2006 at Alumni House, University of Alberta from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The list of workshop participants that attended is as follows:

1. Representative from Taber and District CALC, Taber
2. Representative from Sacred Heart Adult ESL, Edmonton
3. Mary Gaia, Instructor, Bow Valley College
4. Representative from CCI-LEX & EMCN
5. Representative from Language Training and Adult Literacy, NorQuest College, Edmonton
6. Representative from Pebbles in the Sand, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary
7. Representative from Parkland Adult Literacy Program, Stony Plain
8. Joanne Pettis, Coordinator, Adult ESL Curriculum Development & Implementation, Adult Language Training Branch, Winnipeg
9. Representative from Central Alberta Refugee Effort, Red Deer
10. Representative from Taber and District CALC, Taber
11. Representative from Pebbles in the Sand, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary
12. Representative from the Lethbridge Literacy Program, Lethbridge
13. Representative from Settlement Office, CIC, Calgary
14. Representative from Settlement Office, CIC, Lethbridge
15. Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, CIC, Edmonton
16. Valerie Parr, Consultant, Innovative Language Programs, AHRE
17. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, AHRE

For the purposes of this workshop, the discussion was limited to ESL Literacy as it has been defined in the Canadian Language Benchmarks document *CLB 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*. This document identifies ESL literacy learners as those who have no or low literacy skills (reading, writing and numeracy) in their first language i.e. individuals who are not functionally literate in their first language for a variety of reasons.

The schedule for the day followed the same format as that of the first workshop with the exception being that two guest speakers were invited to speak for thirty minutes each. Joanne Pettis from Manitoba provided details about doing Portfolio Assessment and Mary Gaia from Bow Valley College outlined the findings from a research project conducted in 2000 by Jennifer Acevedo and Diane Hardy entitled *Demographics, Needs, and*

Programming for ESL Literacy Learners. These presentations were highly informative and generated a lot of discussion. The remainder of the workshop was again divided into three one-hour sessions with focus questions.

The focus questions during the first session asked participants to describe their ESL literacy learners (learner profile), the presenting needs of these learners, and the strategies, techniques and methodologies that they are currently using to address learners' needs. Participants were also asked to brainstorm a list of best practices related to ESL delivery service to literacy learners which leads to successful programming.

The discussion in session two followed up with questions such as what the expected learning outcomes are of ESL literacy programming, how results are tracked and quantified, how learner competencies are assessed upon entry into and exit from literacy programs and how progress is defined and reported. Other key points included discussions about traditional methods of assessment and how we can challenge ourselves to think outside the box in terms of assessing and articulating student results as well as how funding bodies can contribute to this process.

In session three, participants were asked to imagine looking into their "ESL literacy toolbox" to identify the tools or resources that they consider as essential to their practice, those resources that they use on a consistent basis, resources that are Alberta produced and any resources that they would choose to add to the toolbox that they don't already have.

Details of all discussions were recorded and compiled into a report which is available on the ATESL website. Electronic copies are available of resources referred to in the report: the research paper by Jennifer Acevedo entitled *Demographics, Needs, and Programming for ESL Literacy Learners* (2000), documents from the Adult Language Training Branch of Manitoba Labour and Immigration entitled *Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment: Manitoba Best Practices Guide – A Resource for Integrating Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (CLPA) into the Teaching-Learning Cycle of Adult ESL Instruction* (2004), *Writing Rubrics for Outcome Assessment* (working document) based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000, *CLB 1 Writing Assessment Rubric*, and *Suggested Resources for Teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) to Adults in Manitoba*.

Workshop participants once again expressed a high level of satisfaction with this profes-

sional development opportunity. They found the information presented by the guest speakers to be very valuable, and they were able to learn about other resources and programs which will be useful to them in their practices. Information shared during the focus sessions included identifying an extensive list of best practices for literacy programming, strategies to attract more men to literacy programs, advantages and disadvantages of portfolio and other forms of assessment, the need for more professional development in the area of ESL Literacy, as well as time to take advantage of PD activities when they are offered, the need for clarity and consistency when it comes to defining ESL Literacy, and greater ongoing communication and networking between ATESL and community groups to determine the needs of our literacy learners and how we can best work together to meet those needs.

Summary of Workshop Forum #3: ESL Assessment

The topic selected for the third workshop was *ESL Assessment*. This workshop took place on November 23, 2006 at Grant MacEwan College, Alberta College Campus from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The list of workshop participants that attended is as follows:

1. Representative from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta and the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration
2. Independent Consultant, Calgary
3. Representative from NorQuest College, Edmonton
4. Representative from the Immigrant Language and Vocational Assessment-Referral Centre, Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, Calgary
5. Representative from the Language and Vocational Assessment, Language Assessment, Referral and Counselling Centre, Catholic Social Services, Edmonton
6. Representative from the Centre for Foreign Trained Professionals, Bredin Institute, Edmonton
7. Representative from Lethbridge College, Lethbridge
8. Justine Light, ESL Instructor, NorQuest College, Edmonton and President, ATESL
9. Gayle Taylor, Settlement Officer, CIC, Edmonton
10. Carolyn Dieleman, Manager, Language Training, AHRE, Edmonton
11. Valerie Parr, Consultant, Innovative Language Programs, AHRE, Edmonton

This third workshop in the series was designed to create a forum for discussion on the topic of second language assessment. The day followed the usual format with three one-

hour sessions and time allowed before and after sessions for networking and information exchange. The focus questions that were used to guide the discussion during each of the sessions were sent out to participants prior to the workshop for their review. The questions and discussions were intended to be both philosophical and practical in nature.

During the first session, each participant was asked to give a brief presentation about his/her particular knowledge of, experience with and interest in assessment. The discussion then turned to the role that assessment plays in the learning process, the importance and goals of assessment, the expertise required to achieve these goals, and whether these goals are the same or different in the area of second language acquisition from other areas of learning.

The focus questions for the second session were aimed at examining how learner progress is measured. Participants shared information about the kinds of assessment tools they're currently using, the processes involved in developing and administering these tools and how their effectiveness is evaluated in terms of consistency, validity, and reliability. Details about who gets assessed, when, how often and by whom were exchanged. The last part of this session asked about the roles that various individuals and organizations play in the assessment process and about who is responsible for assessment.

The focus of the third session was on the follow up aspect of assessment. For example, how, when, by whom and to whom do assessment results get communicated? What are the various lines of communication? Participants were asked to reflect on how important, efficient, consistent and effective these reporting processes are and how they could be improved. The discussion also looked at what opportunities exist, if any, for ESL learners to contribute to and play an active role in the assessment process. The last part of the day led participants to provide input on opportunities that exist for ESL professionals to share their knowledge, experience and resources in the area of assessment and/or to further develop expertise in this area. Recommendations for future training opportunities were then solicited.

This workshop forum provided an excellent opportunity for individuals involved in different areas of assessment to come together and share information. It became apparent as session one got underway that it was an ambitious task to unravel the various strands of assessment and to follow an organized pattern of discussion. The types of assessment discussed were both formative and summative, including placement, ongoing, proficiency and exit testing. Key points brought forward during the focus sessions were the

usefulness of the CLB's, the need for greater consistency and transparency in interpreting and describing levels of language learning, using assessment to inform the teaching process and to create learning plans or "learner pathways", and the need for more and better communication/collaboration between the many stakeholders such as assessors, researchers, instructors, program administrators, employers, professional associations, learners, and funders. A large part of the discussion also focused on the role of assessment in content-based instruction, processes and strategies in second language learning, assessment issues as they relate to English in the workplace language training and foreign trained professionals and, finally, the need for ongoing professional development, including developing and implementing resources, in the area of assessment. It was evident that given the complexity of this topic and the weight of the impact that it has on so many that this is a topic which requires further discussion and initiatives which allow individuals and organizations involved in assessment to work collaboratively.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the workshop forums are as follows:

- Creation of collaborative partnerships between ATESL, providers that offer language training programs or services and government funder(s)
- Increased opportunity for professional development for ESL professionals in the province of Alberta and promotion of ATESL policies and best practices
- Sharing of expertise with ATESL members, government funders and other appropriate service providers via summarized reports of workshop proceedings which include promising practices and programs within Alberta, key current issues and follow up exploration/direction
- Preparation and distribution of highlights of forums to the ATESL membership via the on-line newsletter and circulated to the wider community via posting on the website



ATESL Professional Development Bursaries

ATESL members are eligible for bursaries for conferences or courses of study (maximum \$500).

Deadlines for application in 2007 are: March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.

To apply, complete the application form at:
http://www.atesl.ca/participate_bursary.html

You are eligible to apply if:

- ◆ You have been a member of ATESL for at least two years
- ◆ You have not received a bursary from ATESL in the past two years
- ◆ Your membership fees are paid in full
- ◆ You plan to return to Alberta after your conference or course of study, if it is outside the province.

Priority will be given to candidates who demonstrate need for financial support.

Successful candidates will agree to provide a written evaluation of the event or course, which may be published in the ATESL Newsletter or web site.



ATESL Mission Statement

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.

We do this by:

- ◆ encouraging and providing professional development opportunities which 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, which are engaged in education
- ◆ communicating with government, business, and the general public to create awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants and English language learning
- ◆ communicating with English language program providers and learners to encourage awareness of issues of accountability and program standards
- ◆ administering an ESL teacher accreditation process which encourages the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance
- ◆ working collaboratively with governments 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 decision-making process which determine their educational choices

CHATMATES

Currents Under Currents
ATESL Conference 2006 Presentation

Sheila Edwards
Cara Gratton

What is Chatmates?

Chatmates is a conversation partner program co-ordinated by the ESL department. A volunteer and an ESL student will be paired for ten weeks during the school sessions throughout the year. It is an opportunity for students to meet with ESL students and help them improve their conversational skills.

How much time is involved?

The partners will meet once a week for one or two hours for ten weeks. Volunteers have access to a training manual which lists discussion topics when partners have nothing to talk about.

Who should volunteer?

Volunteers should be fluent English speakers. They should enjoy meeting people from other countries to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

Who should apply for a Chatmate?

Students enrolled in the ESL program at MacEwan College may apply for a Chatmate. ESL students who would like to improve their conversational skills should apply soon!

What's in it for you?

Chatmates' volunteers will gain valuable volunteer experience working with people from other cultures. If volunteers would like to receive a letter of recognition for a minimum of ten hours of volunteer service, they will be asked to fill out a log of the meeting dates. ESL students will have the opportunity to practice their English speaking skills outside of the classroom. In addition, they may make a new Canadian friend and learn more about Canadian culture.



Questions? Feel free to contact Sheila Edwards, email: edwardssh@macewan.ca or Cara Gratton, email: grattonc@macewan.ca

STAYING CURRENT PROFESSIONALLY

Marian Rossiter & Leila Ranta

University of Alberta

Was one of your New Year's resolutions to spend more time on your professional development? Want some ideas about how to go about it? Participants at the ATESL 2006 conference were asked to think about this question and came up with many great ideas that we would like to share with you.

Professional development is a priority in the ATESL mission statement. But what kinds of professional development are teachers doing, and what kinds of activities should ATESL be promoting at the provincial and local levels? These are questions that were foremost in our minds when we decided to organize a workshop on professional development at the ATESL conference in Edmonton. We learned that ESL teachers in Alberta are already doing many different things to enhance their classroom practice. These include personal initiatives, such as foreign language training, as well as employer-initiated opportunities, such as workshops on technology, leadership, assessment, settlement issues, and attendance at conferences. From these experiences, participants reported substantial personal and professional benefits in confidence and motivation, use of time, coping skills, teaching practices, and peer relationships. Ultimately, ESL students benefit as much as their teachers.

There was, however, a general consensus that barriers exist that serve to discourage teachers' engagement in professional development activities. Some of the barriers noted were lack of information about opportunities, lack of access to opportunities, scheduling difficulties, lack of funding, and lack of institutional support. And of course, in our busy lives, finding the psychological energy to do something extra is also a challenge. So, given all of this, what is it that we can do?

1. What ESL program administrators can do:

- Put team-building exercises on the agenda for meetings and retreats
- Promote common goals that can be communally accomplished
- Set up brown bag presentations for faculty, staff, and students where ideas, experiences, or readings are discussed
- Schedule a staff social/retreat to connect colleagues within or between institutions (to discuss issues, exchange activities or ideas, or review textbooks and resources)
- Solicit suggestions and requests from staff
- Post resources on a website (in the form of a listserv, discussion board, or blog)
- Organize a panel of community representatives on culture, religion etc.
- Initiate action research to address staff-wide concerns
- Fund and reward the achievement of program development goals with incremental pay increases

- Organize an internal committee for in-house training
 - Develop a monthly professional development newsletter for the staff
2. **What ESL teachers typically do on their own initiative:**
- Share experiences with other colleagues
 - Observe other classes (inside or outside the field of ESL)
 - Increase familiarity with modern technology through workshops, self-study tutorials, or peer tutoring
 - Watch videos of exemplary classroom teaching
 - Seek or be a mentor
 - Give a workshop at ATESL or in your ESL program
 - Participate in local or international teacher exchanges
 - Become a student again and reflect on your experiences
 - Search for web-based resources
 - Read about current trends in second language teaching or issues relating to your students
 - Keep up-to-date with published materials
 - Pursue formal TESL education (traditional or online)
3. **Other things teachers can do:**
- Invite guests into the classroom
 - Observe other teachers for insight into new techniques and strategies
 - Get more involved in ATESL
 - Teach new types of ESL courses
 - Get involved in training teachers from overseas
 - Teach overseas for a short contract
 - Explore other related training opportunities, such as public speaking, assertiveness training, intercultural training, counseling skills
 - Take on curriculum development projects or administrative roles
 - Participate in research studies
 - Review articles or textbooks for your program or a periodical
 - Write articles for teacher journals
 - Become a trained expert in Canadian Language Benchmarks
 - Actively network/collaborate with other ESL professionals, both locally and regionally
 - Work with organizations that have similar goals
 - Maintain a blog
 - Try team-teaching
 - Create a teaching portfolio
 - Travel

One of ATESL's roles in the ESL community is to encourage and provide professional development opportunities for its members. We would like to thank the participants for their

creative thinking, which has expanded our thinking about professional development in ESL.

Looking for more ideas? Check out these references:

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Mobilizing Knowledge Gained Through Early Childhood Development Initiative Research

Two research studies undertaken with funding provided by the Early Childhood Development Initiative provide valuable insight into the circumstances of refugee and immigrant families with preschool children living in Edmonton. The Multicultural Family Connections Program, a partnership between ASSIST Community Service Centre, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative provided the research populations for both studies.

Mapping the Life Experiences of Refugee and Immigrant Families with Preschool Children provides ethnographic information about the lived experiences of Afghan, African French speaking, Cambodian, Eritrean, Kurdish, Somali, Sudanese, and Chinese families. ***Examining Culturally Appropriate Assessment Practices in Early Childhood Development Programs*** highlights the issues associated with early childhood assessment practices when utilized with newcomer families.

Recently, members of the research teams for both projects met with staff members from the three settlement agencies involved in the research to disseminate the research results and consider together the impact this research has upon the work of frontline staff as well as discuss what future avenues of research would be beneficial to both staff and newcomers.

Regarding the usefulness of the completed research, participants in the dissemination project shared these comments:

- Majority culture institutions and individuals lack knowledge about the complex issues faced by newcomer families. The research documents can bring this information to them.
- The research already completed shows common issues being expressed across agencies and across ethno-cultural groups.
- The research has been a catalyst for work with other agencies.
- Present research results are reinforcing of what is known and what the frontline settlement workers experience.
- Present research is informative, especially regarding refugee families.
- Knowledge gained from the research will increase mutual understanding between Canadians and newcomers.

Suggestions for future research include:

- Clear links need to be made between the lived experiences of families and existing government policies that impact resettlement.
- There is a need to document the effective practices of the Multicultural Family Connections Program as a basis for policy development.
- Research is needed as a resource for use in advocacy with funding agencies.
- Ethno-cultural demographic information is needed about all refugee and immigrant communities.
- Research is needed that examines how the values and practices of newcomers are maintained and integrated into the fabric of our communities.

Meetings with researchers, front line staff, and representatives of funding agencies are scheduled to discuss further research possibilities. For more information, please contact Dr. Catherine Caufield at, c.caufield@ualberta.ca, 492-7283.

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

Editor: Thomas Jiry

1-780-463-5576

tomjiry@hotmail.com

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