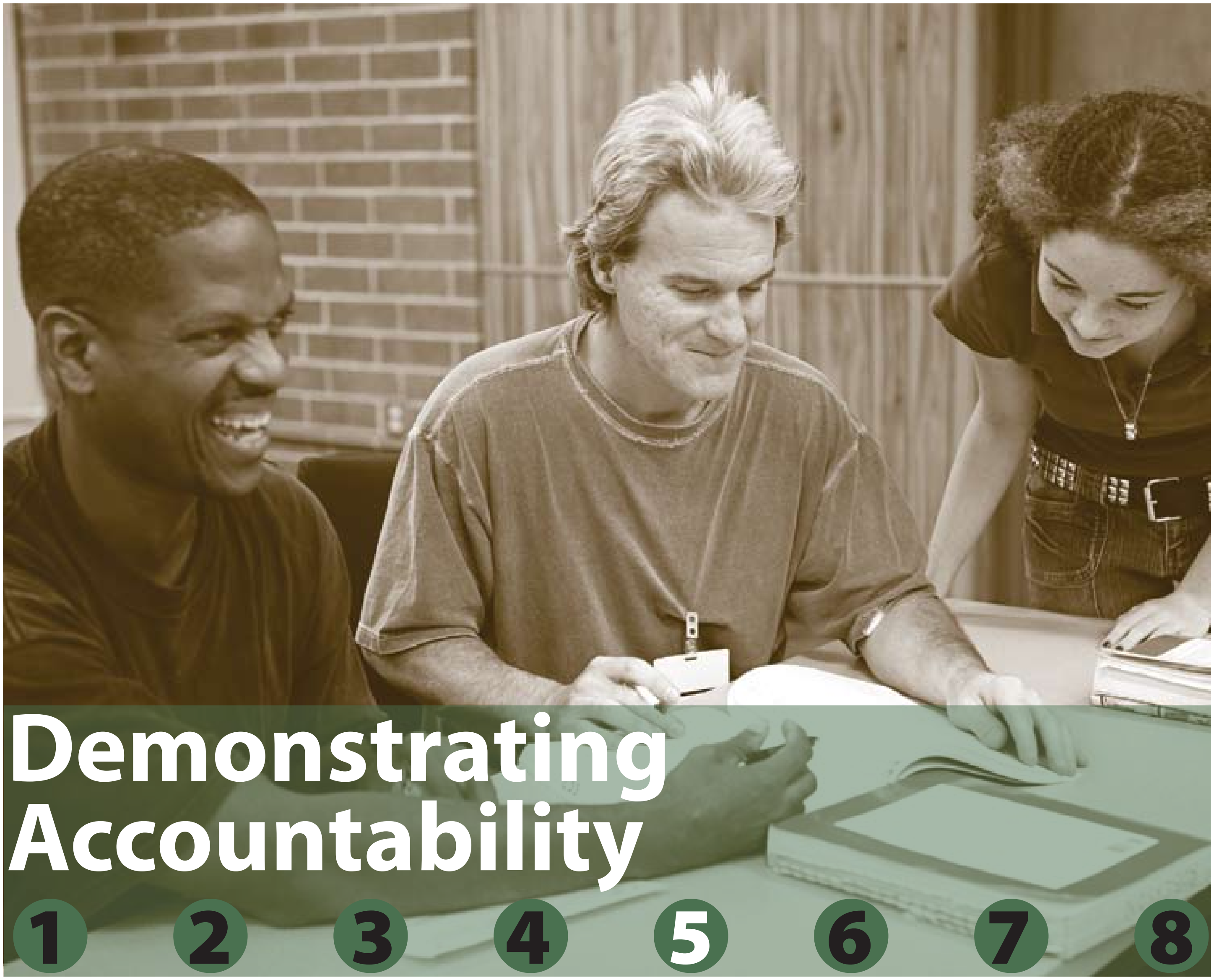

Demonstrating Accountability

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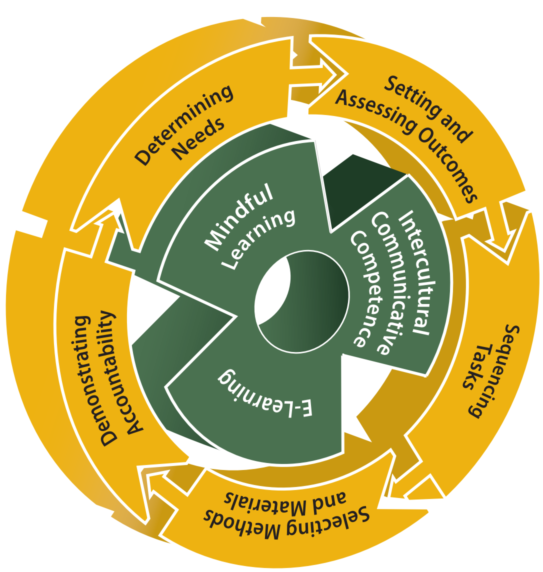
ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework



Government of Alberta

ATESL
Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language

Section 5: Demonstrating Accountability

Table of Contents

Overview

This section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* considers what accountability is, who we (i.e., curriculum developers) are accountable to, and what we are accountable for. It then provides considerations for reviewing and revising a curriculum plan after it has been implemented.[1] Reviewing a curriculum involves investigating whether it is relevant to the target audience and is providing effective and adequate support to teaching and learning. Reviewing a curriculum also considers the level of congruence between the curriculum as it was planned and the curriculum as it is being lived out in the classroom. A review can serve as a summative evaluation in order to report results and maintain accountability with stakeholders. It may also play a more formative role by informing revisions to the curriculum and changes to the course. Ultimately, this section encourages programs to pause, take stock, and investigate ways they can better serve the learning needs of their learners.

Introduction

> “*Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.*[2]”

In the Framework model *(see Figure 1)*, *Demonstrating Accountability* is shown as the last stage in the process of curriculum development. This is somewhat misleading, however, as demonstrating accountability occurs throughout the curriculum development process, in other words, while learner needs are being determined, outcomes based on those needs are being developed, assessment procedures are being identified, methods and materials are being chosen, and tasks are being developed. Demonstrating accountability by reviewing and revising a curriculum can also serve as a beginning step to further curriculum development. In this sense, demonstrating accountability comes not only after the other stages discussed in the *ATESL Curriculum Framework,* but also after the one stage that is not specifically addressed, that is, teaching and learning.

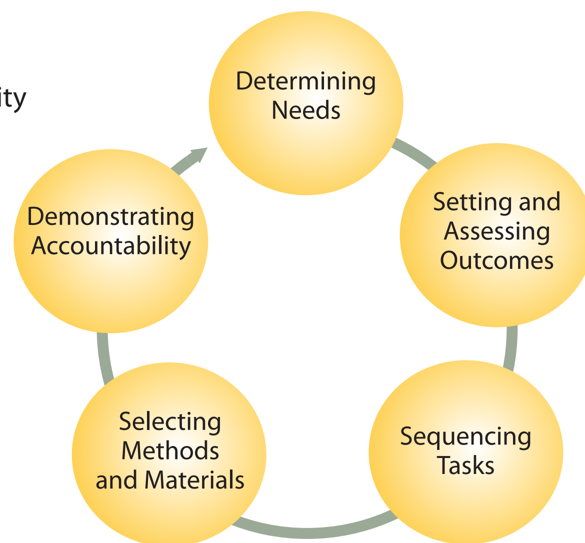


Figure 1. Framework model (simplified)

In this section, we consider the curriculum-as-plan in light of the curriculum-as-lived experience.[3] The lived experiences of the instructor and learners throughout the course are an invaluable source of information about the curriculum-as-plan, specifically its relevance and effectiveness for the learners and their learning process.

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1 Larger, whole-program reviews, including items such as accessibility to counselors, job placement procedures, and admission procedures, are beyond the scope of this document.

2 Attributed to John Cotton Dana (see http://www.etni.org.il/quotes/education.htm).

3 Aoki, 2005; Sauvé, 2009.

Principles of accountability and transparency

The following principles support accountability and transparency in curriculum development:

- The program and curriculum are accountable to stakeholders. That is, those who developed the curriculum are initially accountable to learners and instructors as they are the ones most directly impacted by the curriculum. They are also accountable to other stakeholders including, for example, administrators, funders, present and future employers, community organizations, professional associations, receiving institutions, and others who have a vested interest in the course.
- Accountability and transparency must be demonstrated throughout the process of curriculum development (as needs are being assessed, and as decisions are being made regarding outcomes, assessment procedures, materials, methods, tasks, etc.).
- The curriculum-as-lived should contribute back into the curriculum-as-planned. There must be a process in place for this to happen.
- The learners' best interests are of paramount importance; the curriculum is valid insofar as the curriculum reflects the needs of the learners, as identified not only by individual learners or instructors but also by a range of stakeholders. Insofar as it does not, it is invalid. Accountability includes the willingness to revisit different parts of the curriculum development process, and to revise the curriculum to ensure its continued relevance to the learners.
- The philosophy and goals of the program are reflected in the curriculum.

ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL/ LINC Programming in Alberta
No. 9
The program supports collaboration with other educational organizations, ESL providers, and community stakeholders, thereby raising awareness of the program, avoiding duplication of services, and identifying potential gaps to be filled.

No. 38
The curriculum reflects the mission of the program, current principles of adult language learning and teaching, and best practices in TESL methodology.

No. 39
Curriculum development and renewal is responsive to learner needs, based on input from the learner population as well as community, educational and/or workplace stakeholders.

No. 40
The program ensures regular review and renewal of the curriculum and supporting materials.

Accountability to stakeholders

Curriculum developers are accountable to learners and instructors, as well as to a host of other stakeholders, for the curriculum plan that is produced. Sauvé (2000b) defines accountability as "the ability to *account* for what we have done in a responsible manner; the ability to show concerned observers that we have done what we said we were going to do."[4] Accountability is a responsibility *to* someone or *for* some activity,[5] essentially to account (explain, give reasons) for one's behaviour. Transparency in communication with stakeholders, and transparency through the process of curriculum development are key measures of a program's accountability.[6] The following considers accountability and transparency in terms of learners, instructors, and other stakeholders.

Accountability to/of learners

Accountability is demonstrated to learners[7] when they are provided with information regarding the following:

- **The results of needs analyses and the objectives of the course.** The learning outcomes and goals of the class must be communicated clearly. Learners need to see that the learning outcomes and goals of the class are connected to their own needs.
- **Assessment.** What will be assessed and how it will be assessed needs to be communicated clearly. This assessment needs to be transparently connected to the learning outcomes of the class and to learners' own needs and goals.
- **Tasks, methods, and materials.** How learners will be taught and the purposes of the various learning activities must be communicated clearly to learners. As they are learning, they need to understand how engaging with the tasks, projects and materials is related to their achievement of the learning outcomes and the "real-life use to which language will be put."[8]

Transparency and accountability are also demonstrated towards learners when they are given the opportunity to express their perceived language learning needs, goals, and interests, as well as feedback on the course, and when they know their input is taken into account. The following kinds of activities indicate to learners that their input is valued:

- After participating in an activity, learners are asked what they learned from the activity, or are asked to rank the usefulness of the activity.
- One month into a course, learners complete an anonymous questionnaire to determine how relevant they perceive the course activities to be. They are given a list of the activities done during the course (e.g., journal writing, timed readings, role plays, paragraph writing, peer editing, pronunciation practice, information gap, jigsaw reading, group presentations, decision dramas, etc.), and are asked questions such as

4 p. 81.
5 The Free Dictionary, 2011.
6 Bow Valley College, 2011, p. 4, 7.
7 Sauvé (2000a) considers accountability to ESL learners from an instructor's perspective (p. 162-165); Bow Valley College (2011) gives suggestions for maintaining transparency in communication with ESL literacy learners (p. 7).
8 ATESL, 2009, p. 70.

1. Which of the above activities have you learned the most from?
2. Which of the above activities have been slightly or not at all useful?
3. Which of the above activities would you like to spend more time on?
4. Which of the above activities would you like to spend less time on?
5. Is there anything that we are not doing that you wish we would do?

The instructor gathers and analyzes the responses, and then uses the responses to inform course direction.[9] The instructor shares the results of the questionnaire with the learners, and updates them on changes that are (or are not) being made based on those results.

- At the end of a course, learners complete an end-of-course evaluation of the teaching and learning that occurred. For instance, they are given a list of the learning outcomes of the course and asked whether those outcomes were met. They are asked to rank outcomes or tasks according to how relevant, important, or useful they are to their present or future goals.

Feedback from learners can be used to determine course direction; it can also be used to inform the curriculum revision process.

Learners are also called upon to be accountable, and as Sauvé (2000a) explains, this accountability on their part is empowering: "Accountability is the opposite of blame; it means searching for and using the power one *does* have in a situation to make things better for oneself."[10] As such, learners need to understand their own responsibilities in the course, including issues regarding attendance, homework, record keeping, as well as an understanding of their responsibilities in the language learning process (related, for instance, to learning strategies and self-assessment).

For a discussion of second language learner strategies, see *Section 6: Mindful Learning*.

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[9] In lower level courses, the instructor might want to gather this information during individual progress interviews with learners, using a poster listing the activities that have been done in class to guide the discussion. Or, the instructor might want to approach some of these questions through collaborative group work. For example, groups of learners can be given a selection of cards with the activities written on them. They then negotiate in groups to place the cards in different categories (e.g., "spend less time"; "spend the same amount of time"; "spend more time"), and report their results to the class.

[10] p. 31.

Accountability to/of instructors

Accountability is demonstrated towards instructors[11] when they are provided with orientation and training in the following areas:

- The needs and goals of the targeted learners
- The learning outcomes of the course
- How those learning outcomes could/will be assessed
- The methods, materials, and tasks that they are expected to incorporate into the class

Instructors themselves are accountable to the learners and to the program/curriculum. That is, they need to design and facilitate learning experiences that meet both the outcomes of the curriculum and the learning goals and needs of the learners. The hope, of course, is that in taking care of the one, they will also be taking care of the other. However, when there is a mismatch between the curriculum and the needs or abilities of the learners, the instructors are most likely to identify the mismatch first. Mismatches may occur for a variety of reasons, for example, because the curriculum plan was incorrectly conceived in the first place, the demographics of the target learners have changed, or the requirements that learners need to meet have changed.

Accountability is also demonstrated towards instructors when their input during the curriculum development and revision process is valued. This is done by soliciting (and acknowledging) instructor input on the following questions:

- Did the learning outcomes reflect the needs of the learners in your class?
- Were any of the outcomes not covered in the class? Why?
- Were learners able to meet the outcomes of the course? If not, why not?
- Were the methods, materials, and tasks appropriate in terms of level?
- Did the methods, materials, and tasks support the learning outcomes?
- Did the methods, materials, and tasks engage the learners? If not, why not?
- Was enough support provided in the curriculum to effectively assess learners?[12] Did assessments measure learner gains accurately and fairly?

Accountability to other stakeholders

A host of other stakeholders – funders, administrators, employers, community organizations, the larger institution, other institutions, professional associations, accreditation bodies, government agencies – form a web of accountability around the curriculum. They may have some responsibility to the program/curriculum (e.g., to provide accurate information regarding learner needs, support, or funding), and the program and curriculum developers are also responsible to them.

[11] Bow Valley College (2011) gives suggestions for maintaining transparency in communication with instructors by seeking input and providing support/training (p. 8).
[12] I.e., Were the outcomes measurable and clearly defined? Were sample assessments helpful?

In some cases, accountability is demonstrated to stakeholders when clarity is provided regarding a program's offerings and the learners that it serves.[13] For instance, programs and curriculum developers demonstrate accountability to those stakeholders who provided input on learner needs by reporting back to them what was learned. A program or curriculum developer may be more specifically accountable to those who funded the project (i.e., government funders, employers, companies)[14] to provide, for example,

- Deliverables by set deadlines
- Project updates
- A needs analysis report
- The curriculum plan (or a summary), including the learning outcomes that will be addressed
- A report on learner progress and attendance
- Tracking of budget expenditures

In many ESL settings in Alberta, curriculum developers are accountable to stakeholders for linking the curriculum to the Essential Skills and/or Canadian Language Benchmarks. They demonstrate accountability in their use of **Essential Skills** when they

- Include information from relevant Essential Skills Profiles (ESP) or Occupational Language Analyses (OLA) in the curriculum plan. Including ES/OLA descriptors allows stakeholders to check whether the curriculum does indeed reflect the ESP.
- Ensure that outcomes, tasks, and assessments reflect the targeted ESPs or OLAs.
- Double check with stakeholders to ensure that the skills and tasks in the curriculum accurately reflect those that learners will use in the workplace.

For more information on the Essential Skills Profiles, see the *Essential Skills Profiles* on the HRSDC website.
For more information on OLAs (Occupational Language Analyses), see *ITSESSENTIAL.ca.*

Curriculum developers demonstrate accountability in their use of the **Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)** when they

- Include CLB descriptors and performance conditions in the curriculum plan. This allows stakeholders to check that the curriculum actually reflects the targeted benchmark levels.
- Ensure that outcomes, tasks, and assessments reflect the targeted CLB levels.
- Use the results of external CLB assessment (or externally developed CLB assessment tools) to demonstrate that learners are progressing.

[13] Bow Valley College, 2011, p. 8.
[14] See Sauvé (2000a) for a discussion of accountability to funders and employers (p. 165-166).

For more information on the Canadian Language Benchmarks, see *Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2011.*

Accountability in the curriculum development process

Accountability is how curriculum developers gain and maintain the confidence of stakeholders (learners, instructors, funders, etc.) that the curriculum follows best practices and principles, and is able to meet the learning needs of the learners. Previous sections of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* have addressed how best to work through each stage of the curriculum development process. In this section, we look at the accountability of curriculum developers in each of those stages *(see Figure 2)*.[15]

Accountability in determining needs

In this stage of curriculum development, a needs analysis is conducted in order to examine the learning needs of the learners from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders. Accountability is demonstrated when needs analysis results are documented and shared with stakeholders (learners, instructors, funders, others). Instructors and learners are assured that the curriculum will address learning needs of the learners when they are aware of the needs that have been identified and when they see a transparent connection between those needs and the outcomes, materials, tasks, and assessments that form the curriculum plan.

A curriculum developer's accountability also includes a willingness to revisit the needs analysis stage. That is, it is important to recognize that learner needs may change. For instance,

- The target learner demographic may change. For example, learners may be entering the course with a lower language level than first planned for, or learners may have different goals than first identified.
- The target contexts may change. For example, a professional body may change its accreditation requirements, or a program of studies that learners transfer into may change their assignments.[16]

Figure 2. Framework model: Accountability throughout the process

For more information on assessing learner needs, see *Section 1: Determining Needs.*

[15] Bow Valley College (2011) also advocates for demonstrating accountability throughout the stages of curriculum development (p. 5-7), although their stages, set within the context of ESL literacy, differ from the stages set out in this *ATESL Curriculum Framework*.

[16] For example, in the past learners may have taken multiple choice tests to demonstrate success in a general studies psychology class. Now, however, they may be expected to give group presentations and write research papers. As the requirements change in the general studies courses that graduates of an EAP course enter, EAP curricula may need to change.

Accountability in setting and assessing outcomes

During this stage of the curriculum development process, learning outcomes and assessment measures are developed. The curriculum developer demonstrates accountability and transparency during this stage by

- Setting measurable outcomes.
- Ensuring that all outcomes are based on learner needs as identified by a variety of stakeholders.
- If relevant, clearly linking outcomes to the CLB and/or Essential Skills Profiles.
- Communicating outcomes to learners, instructors, and other stakeholders.
- Communicating how outcomes will be assessed (i.e., how learners, instructors, and others will know when outcomes have been met).
- Ensuring that rubrics, portfolios, or other methods of assessment are transparently connected to learning outcomes.
- Ensuring that learners understand how they will be assessed.
- Ensuring that instructors know what and how to assess, and are supported in the process (e.g., time is provided for preparing assessments; sample rubrics are provided).

Accountability also includes a willingness to revisit this step; that is, if learner needs have changed, new outcomes and assessment tasks and procedures may need to be identified.

For more information on outcomes and assessment, see *Section 2: Setting and Assessing Outcomes.*

Accountability in sequencing tasks

During this stage of the curriculum development process, tasks, themes, and projects are suggested as ways to sequence language forms, functions, and skills within a curriculum. Accountability and transparency are demonstrated in this stage of curriculum development when

- Sufficient sample tasks are suggested for all learning outcomes.
- The proposed tasks/projects/themes clearly support the learning outcomes.
- There is a clear connection between the proposed tasks/projects/themes and the learning needs of the learners. If the connection is not intuitively clear, a rationale is provided.
- If relevant, there is a clear connection between the proposed tasks/projects/themes and the targeted Canadian Language Benchmarks. For instance, the CLB performance conditions for the targeted level are reflected in the proposed tasks. Tasks are neither harder nor easier than the limitations described by the performance conditions.
- Sufficient support is provided in the curriculum to ensure a shared understanding of what the successful completion of a task/project would look like through, for example, exemplars and performance indicators.

- The proposed tasks/projects reflect real-life authentic language use. If relevant, there is a clear connection between the proposed tasks/projects/themes and targeted Essential Skills Profiles or Occupational Language Analyses.
- The curriculum provides guidance regarding what might need to be taught to enable learners to successfully perform a task or complete a project.

A curriculum developer's accountability also includes a willingness to revisit this step. That is, the tasks/projects/themes from the curriculum may be deemed to be less relevant or not engaging and new tasks/projects/themes may need to be proposed or developed to meet existing or new learning outcomes.

For more information on tasks, projects, and themes, see *Section 3: Sequencing Tasks.*

For more information on the Essential Skills Profiles, see the *Essential Skills Profiles* on the HRSDC website.
For more information on the Canadian Language Benchmarks, see *Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2011*.

Accountability in selecting methods and materials

This stage of the curriculum development process involves selecting (or recommending) a range of methods for instruction, and selecting or developing materials to support the curriculum. Accountability and transparency are demonstrated in this stage of curriculum development when

- Materials that are developed and course books that are chosen clearly support the outcomes presented in the curriculum.
- Justification is provided (to both instructors and learners) as to why those particular materials and textbooks were chosen.
- Materials developed or selected for the course are clearly aligned with current second language acquisition (SLA) and TESL principles. If they are not (i.e., they are chosen for other valid reasons), then reasons for their selection are provided, and the curriculum provides support for using them in ways that conform to principles of SLA and TESL pedagogy.
- Sufficient materials are provided (developed or selected) to support the curriculum.
- A variety of language teaching methods, some of which focus on meaning and some of which focus on form, can be used to teach the course. That is, the curriculum allows for flexibility on the part of instructors, so that the selection of methods is responsive to the content of a lesson and the preferred learning and teaching styles.

Like other stages of curriculum development, accountability in selecting materials and methods also includes a willingness to revisit this step based on input and feedback from instructors and learners. It may be that supplemental materials need to be developed, alternate course books need to be selected, or different instructional methods need to be incorporated into the curriculum.

For more information on principles that could inform the selection of materials and materials, see *Section 4: Selecting Methods and Materials.*

Accountability through reviewing the curriculum

We have addressed the questions of who curriculum developers are accountable to, what they are accountable for, and how they maintain accountability *throughout* each part of the curriculum development process. Accountability also includes a willingness to review the curriculum plan *after* it has been implemented. The lived experiences of the instructor and learners throughout the course are an invaluable source of information about the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum-as-plan, for the learners and the teaching-learning process. In a curriculum review, the curriculum as it was lived informs the curriculum plan.

Curriculum is generally understood as a document (or collection of documents) outlining, for example, learning outcomes, assessment tasks, topics or themes to be covered, course books, and other materials to be used. This is "curriculum-as-plan."[17] However, curriculum documents are interpreted as they are enacted in the classroom or, in other words, as they are transformed from "planned" to "lived" experience.[18] From this perspective, curriculum is a shared event: it unfolds as instructor and learners interact with the course of studies (curriculum plan) and with each other within the context of (in our case) an adult ESL classroom in Alberta. Teaching and learning are localized, interpretive acts, and good curriculum development takes this "curriculum-as-lived" aspect into account.[19] Curriculum developers, then, are accountable both to support instructors as they interpret the plan as intended, and to revise the curriculum-as-plan to more closely reflect the curriculum-as-lived experience.

When a curriculum is first developed, initial piloting[20] generally results in a review and revision of the document. Once a curriculum has been developed and piloted, and is functioning successfully, it is tempting to view it as a fixed and rather static component of a program, able to provide guidance and focus for a succession of student cohorts. However, while a curriculum may initially serve the needs of the learner population for which it was designed, changes in the learner population or the demands of follow-up programs and employment may render a course ineffective. Similarly, changes in technology and new findings from research in language teaching and learning may render a curriculum outdated or obsolete. Viewing the curriculum as "a living document [that] is not fixed and unchangeable, but is continually evolving to meet the changing needs of learners"[21] ensures that a curriculum remains effective and relevant. Table 1 below provides a sampling of the kinds of input from learners, instructors, and other stakeholders that might indicate a need for curriculum review and/or revision.

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[17] Aoki, 2005; Sauvé, 2009.
[18] Sauvé, 2009.
[19] Aoki, 2005; Sauvé, 2009.
[20] Much of the following information related to reviewing and revising a curriculum is also relevant for the review and revision that occur when a curriculum is piloted.
[21] Bow Valley College, 2011, p. 14.

Table 1. Sample stakeholder input that could prompt a curriculum review

Input from learners	• Do learners express frustration that their learning needs are not being addressed in the course? Are there consistent requests that the course address different or additional learning needs? • Are learners finding certain tasks/themes/projects/materials/methods (which were designed to meet particular learning needs) to be irrelevant? I.e., are some of the originally identified needs no longer relevant? • Are a significant number of learners unable to complete the requirements of the course? If so, the program needs to consider whether the entrance requirements are appropriate (that is, do learners have the prerequisite skills?), or whether the course content is more difficult than it needs to be. • Are a significant number of learners unable to pass required external tests?[22] If so, the program needs to consider whether the entrance requirements are appropriate,[23] whether the course is addressing the skills learners need in order to pass the test, or whether passing the identified test is a reasonable expectation for learners in the class.
Input from instructors	• Are instructors identifying new categories of learners with new sets of needs? Is there a lack of congruence between the original perception of learner needs and the needs of the learners that now populate their classes? For example, has there been a change in immigration patterns resulting in learners with much more or much less education than the original cohort? • Do instructors (or learners or others) flag certain aspects of the curriculum as obsolete or out of date? Has available technology been upgraded to allow new ways of teaching? Have there been new lines of thought in language teaching that instructors feel could improve the curriculum? • Do instructors indicate that changes to the program (e.g., new components, changes in course structure and/or number of hours of instruction) have resulted in a lack of congruence between the course that is taught and the curriculum plan? That is, are they finding that the curriculum is providing only minimal support to the course as it is now being taught?
Input from other stakeholders	• Do receiving employers identify new requirements for hiring? • Do professional associations identify new requirements for accreditation or licensing? • Have receiving programs made significant changes to entry requirements or the requirements of specific courses?[24] • Are receiving programs reporting unacceptable failure rates of graduates (i.e., your graduates are unprepared for the language requirements of the new program)?

[22] E.g., TOEFL, IELTS, CELBAN, CAEL, standardized CLB tests.
[23] That is, are the expectations reasonable in light of the learners' language levels upon entry and the length of the course?
[24] For example, the assessment measures in an entry level university course change from multiple choice tests to research papers or group presentations.

Initiating a review

To ensure that the curriculum is generating the best learning experience for all learners, programs need to monitor and review their curriculum at regular intervals[25] from the perspective of key stakeholders. Curriculum review can occur informally through learner and instructor feedback during a term or course.[26] However, without careful groundwork and a plan for allocating time and resources, teachers are often left to respond to changes in the margins of their teaching load. This leaves the curriculum-as-plan unattended or the revisions haphazard as multiple individuals do what they can, or what they believe to be necessary, without the unifying logic of a shared vision or a shared understanding of learner needs.

Adequate time and resources need to be allocated to ensure that a curriculum review yields fruitful information. The following questions may help to determine whether or not a curriculum review is feasible at a particular point in time:

- Is the review possible with the resources at hand (e.g., qualified staff, learners who have fully experienced the course)?
- How much time and money are available to do the evaluation?
- Have there been changes since the last review?
- Are other courses in greater need of review?
- What are the requirements of the course's stakeholders? For example, do external accrediting bodies or funders require reviews at certain intervals?
- If the review uncovers changes that need to be made, is there support for allocating resources to course revision?

Deciding who should conduct the review will largely depend on the purpose of the review. If the review is part of an accountability process, programs may consider an external reviewer. If, however, the review is meant to inspire revisions to a curriculum, the individuals who will be tasked with the revisions should be involved from the beginning of the review process so that they have an understanding of where the curriculum has been and what motivates the changes. Allocating time and personnel to the review process demonstrates the institution's commitment to quality and relevancy.

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Curriculum development and renewal is responsive to learner needs, based on input from the learner population as well as community, educational, and/or workplace stakeholders.

Identifying questions to address during a review

Before beginning a review, programs need to identify who the review is for (i.e., who will be using the information, and what information they need or value) and its purpose.[27]

Generally, a curriculum review is conducted to determine whether or not the curriculum is achieving its intended purposes. Different programs are created for diverse purposes; they have different stakeholders and different definitions of success. For example, a language program for pharmacists would develop the communication skills necessary in that professional setting. Interviews with employers, fellow employees,

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[25] A five-year schedule is suggested by Languages Canada (2010) guidelines, and the practices of Canadian colleges such as Algonquin College (2011) and Camosun College (2007).

[26] See "Accountability to/of learners" above and "Gathering your own student feedback" (University of Sydney, 2011).

[27] Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 124.

and program graduates could determine whether the language program was successfully meeting those aims. On the other hand, an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program would prepare learners for success in further education. Interviews with instructors of classes that receive EAP learners, as well as with EAP program graduates, could provide feedback on whether learners were being adequately prepared to be successful in their programs.

When selecting the questions to focus on during a review, programs need to consider who will use the results of the review and what information they will need. Will the review be formative, with the goal of improving the course? Or will the review be summative, with the goal of determining the viability of a course or reporting to stakeholders.[28, 29] A curriculum review should answer the critical questions of your intended audience of stakeholders,[30] which could include, for instance, questions regarding learning needs, learning outcomes and assessment, course content, the place of the course in the overall program, and instructor support. The questions you choose to address will depend on your particular context and needs. Table 2 provides sample questions that a curriculum review might seek to address.

Table 2. Sample questions to address in a curriculum review

Needs	• Have learner needs changed? Is the cohort different from the originally conceptualized cohort? • Is the curriculum presently addressing learner needs? • Are learners completing the curriculum in a timely manner? If not, specifically why not? • Do dropout or failure rates indicate a problem? • Do graduates find appropriate employment or acceptance in their desired program after graduation? Are they functioning well in those settings? If not, specifically why not?
Outcomes and assessments	• Do the outcomes reflect current learning needs? • Are any of the existing outcomes superfluous? • Are the outcomes realistic and relevant to the current level of the learners? • Have the outcomes been written in a way that allows the program to evaluate whether the learners have met the outcomes of the course? • Are the methods of assessment consistent with the type of learning and the outcomes promoted in the course? • Does assessment align with what learners are expected to do during the course and upon graduation? • If relevant, does external CLB assessment indicate that learners are progressing?

[28] E.g., for a proposal to funders, or for promotion of the course to potential applicants.

[29] See Nation & Macalister (2010) for a discussion of the distinction between formative and summative course evaluations (p. 125).

[30] Key stakeholders could include any of the following: learners, teachers, program administrators, funders, future/present employers, graduates of the program, staff in receiving institutions, counsellors, job placement coordinators, certification/licensing bodies, professional associations, government agencies.

Course content[31]	• Is the timeline of the curriculum pedagogically sound? For instance, is the course long enough for learners to reach the targeted benchmark level?[32] • Is the course organized in a way to maximize learning? • Does the curriculum support the design of meaningful tasks? • Are all of the materials used in the course relevant and effective? • Are new materials available that would improve the course? • Do current materials support the learning outcomes? • Does the curriculum allow opportunities to integrate technology? • Does the curriculum provide opportunities to explore culture and develop intercultural communicative competence? • Are learners actively involved in their learning? Are there any other opportunities to structure active learner engagement (e.g. volunteer internships, hands-on training, etc.)? • Does the curriculum foster independent and lifelong learning?
Placement of course in wider program	• What classes do learners generally take prior to the course? Do learners face any problems transitioning from pre-requisite courses into this course? • What programs/courses do learners typically transition into after completing the course? Do learners face any difficulties transitioning from the course into those programs?
Instructor support	• Is the curriculum clear and easy for instructors to use? • Do instructors have convenient access to the curriculum document? • Is there a mechanism for instructors to give ongoing feedback and augment the course? • Is the curriculum being implemented as planned? • Are teachers aware of the underlying philosophy and goals of the curriculum?

[31] These questions address tasks, materials, methods, mindful learning, e-learning, and ICC.
[32] Consider the discussion in Watt & Lake (2004) on benchmarking the rates of second language acquisition in adults.

Collecting existing documentation

It is good practice to maintain a collection of documents relating to a course throughout the time the course is being offered. For instance, keeping documents from when the curriculum was originally developed[33] can help a reviewer identify the degree of change that has taken place since the original conception of the course. Documents related to learner involvement in a course[34] and learner success[35] can provide evidence of learner engagement and insight into whether a course is effectively meeting learning needs. Maintaining a record of any input from instructors[36] regarding the curriculum and how it was lived over a course or term, along with a collection of instructor-prepared materials,[37] can shed light on the congruence of the curriculum plan and the course that is being taught/learned, and can be extremely valuable when a curriculum is being revised. Having a collection of existing documents readily available when it comes time to review the course will make the review process simpler and more accurate.

Gathering further information[38, 39]

Existing documentation offers useful input when determining whether a curriculum remains relevant and effective, but in most cases it will be important to also connect with a variety of stakeholders to gather additional information on the effectiveness of the curriculum as it is being lived and taught. Table 3 summarizes a variety of ways to gather information from stakeholders to support a curriculum review.

Table 3. Ways of gathering information from stakeholders

Learners	• Focus groups or interviews with learners • Online surveys/questionnaires completed by learners regarding course satisfaction • Online forums in which learners respond to specific questions related to the course • Learner questionnaires reflecting on the quality of materials and course books • Interviews, focus groups, or online surveys/questionnaires completed by graduates of the course
Instructors	• Focus groups, interviews, or questionnaires completed by instructors, reflecting, for example, on the class that was taught, materials, curriculum, learner needs, etc. • Teaching diaries • Online forums for instructors to chat about the progress of the course • Instructor course book evaluations • Meeting minutes

33 E.g., descriptions of the learners, needs assessment surveys, descriptions of the employment market, statements of aims, reports of planning meetings.
34 E.g., attendance reports, course withdrawal reports, middle and end of term learner feedback surveys, learner self-reports about what they have learned, learner progress reports, samples of learner work.
35 E.g., learner performance on external tests (e.g. standardized CLB tests, TOEFL, IELTS, CELBAN, CAEL, etc.); learner employment rates (e.g., upon exit from the course, one year after graduation); comparisons of grades that learners received during the course with their success in receiving programs.
36 E.g., self-reflection surveys, questionnaires, recommendations.
37 E.g., tasks, projects, reading activities, writing assignments, library assignments, computer lab assignments, handouts, tests, rubrics.
38 See *Section 1: Determining Needs* for a discussion of steps to go through when conducting a needs analysis to develop or revise a curriculum.
39 See Bow Valley College (2011) for strategies for gathering information from learners, instructors, and community transition contexts during a program evaluation (p. 11-13).

Other stakeholders and sources of input	• Consultations, interviews or questionnaires completed by graduates' employers (Are learners experiencing success in the workplace? If not, why not? What knowledge and skills remain challenging for graduates? Have there been any changes in the industry necessitating new knowledge, attitudes, or skills?) • Consultations, interviews or questionnaires completed by the educators in programs that graduates frequently enter (Are learners experiencing success in those programs? If not, why not? Are there areas that the course could focus on in order to improve graduates' performance? Have there been, or will there be, any changes in their curriculum, expectations, or prerequisites?) • Consultations with professional associations regarding any changes in accrediting/licensing requirements • Consultations with programs that *could* serve as future pathways for learners (Would reasonable adjustments to the curriculum mean more options for learners upon graduation?) • Review of materials by external stakeholders (e.g. employers) to ensure that the information is up to date • Feedback from marketing/recruiting staff • Investigations of similar courses run by other programs • Consultations with funders (or funding agreements) • Standards/expectations of external organizations[40]

[40] E.g., see Campus Alberta Quality Council (2011) and Languages Canada (2010).

Reporting results

When reporting the results of a review, it is important that the information is communicated clearly and in a timely enough manner to allow action for the benefit of all stakeholders. When reporting the findings of a review, reviewers must maintain a careful balance between several different concerns *(see Figures 3 and 4)*.

The reporting process must be transparent in order to facilitate trust. However, stakeholders (especially learners and instructors) need to be assured that the feedback they provide will not affect them negatively. This means that programs must maintain the confidentiality of the contributors, which may result in some information being released only to those who need to use the data.

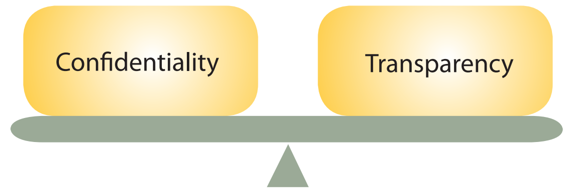

Figure 3

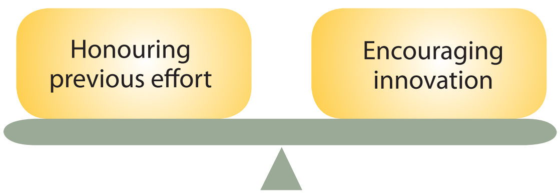

Figure 4

The reporting process must also maintain a balance between honouring the work that has been done in the past, and still identifying areas of dissonance and promoting change. If possible, those who contributed their time and talents to develop the original curriculum should be included in the review process so that the rationale for previous decisions is considered. At the same time, curricula need to be dynamic. Areas for change must be identified and the reasons for change must be clearly communicated.

A report of the results of a curriculum review could include the following:

- Rationale for conducting the review
- Brief description of the current status of the course (e.g., a general description of the instructors and learners, current course documents, and the place of the course within the institution and in the context of the learners' career path)
- Overview of the revision process (whose feedback was sought, what techniques were used, etc.) and reasons for the various choices
- Summary of responses
- Conclusions that can be drawn from the results
- Recommendations/suggestions about the future direction of the course

Accountability through revising the curriculum

A curriculum review may find that the curriculum continues to be a relevant and useful guide to the teaching and learning of a course; it might also find that a curriculum is no longer effective, requiring anything from a bit of tweaking to a major overhaul. The following flowchart *(Figure 5)* identifies questions and decisions to be made when considering whether and what to revise:

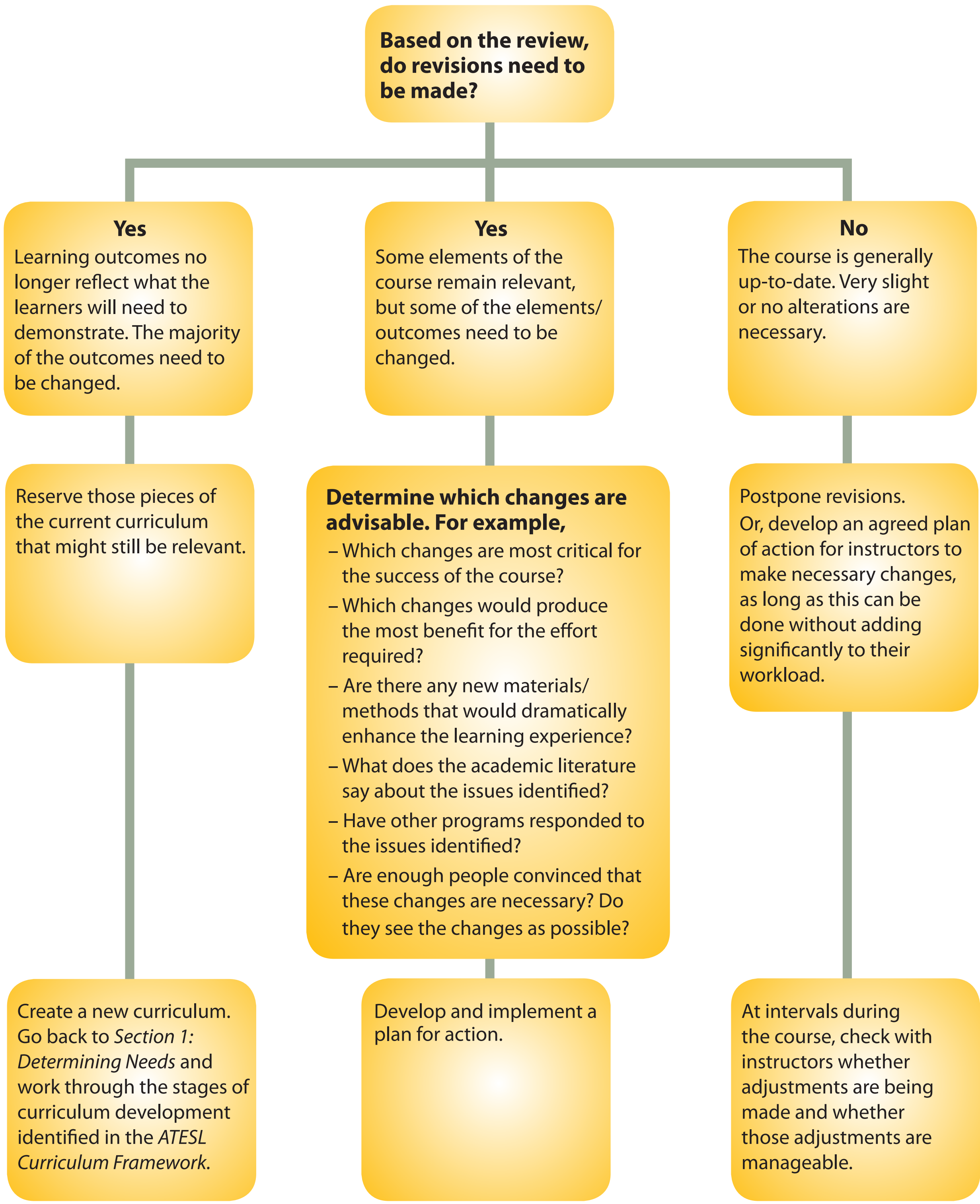

Figure 5. Revision flowchart

If a curriculum review indicates that the curriculum documents are largely irrelevant to the learners and the course that is being taught, then the curriculum planning process may need to start again from the beginning (i.e., with *Section 1: Determining Needs*), or the viability of running the course may need to be questioned.

If it is found that the course is, for the most part, relevant and successful, it may be that small changes to the curriculum documents can be postponed to a later date or can be dealt with by instructors while they are teaching.

In many cases, however, it is likely that, while most parts of a curriculum may remain relevant, necessary changes to other parts of the curriculum will be identified. In this case, the following questions will need to be addressed:

- Who will facilitate the desired changes? Does the team tasked with reviewing the curriculum have the expertise to create these changes? If not, are the changes important enough to justify further training or outside help?
- What resources will be necessary in order to make effective change (staff time, materials, etc)?
- How should reasons for the change be best communicated?
- What will be the timeline for implementing the changes?

Once revisions have been made, it is important to have a plan in place for reviewing the effectiveness of the revisions. That is, at a specified later date, you will need to investigate whether the changes to the curriculum plan have been implemented in the course as it is being lived in the classroom. Have the changes had the intended effect of making the curriculum more relevant to the learners, more effective in guiding teaching and learning, and/or more congruent with the curriculum as it is being lived in the classroom?

The review and revision process is a time when professionals pause and reflect on their practice. It provides opportunity for professional growth, for improvement in learning, and for attuning programs to current realities. In times of scarce resources, programs may be inclined to put off review and revision indefinitely. Saving review and revision for later prosperity, however, is false savings. Understanding the impact of a course on stakeholders allows programs to discern whether the course is meeting its intended purpose, thereby making the program more efficient and effective.

Conclusion

In this section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework*, we have examined the ways that curriculum developers are accountable to learners, instructors, and other stakeholders. We have considered how to maintain accountability and transparency throughout each stage of the initial curriculum development process. Curriculum review and subsequent revision were then offered as additional methods of demonstrating accountability in curriculum development. In review and revision, the curriculum as it is lived contributes back into the curriculum as it was planned, resulting in greater congruence between the two.

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