# Mindful Learning

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## ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework



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**Government of Alberta**

**ATESL** Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language
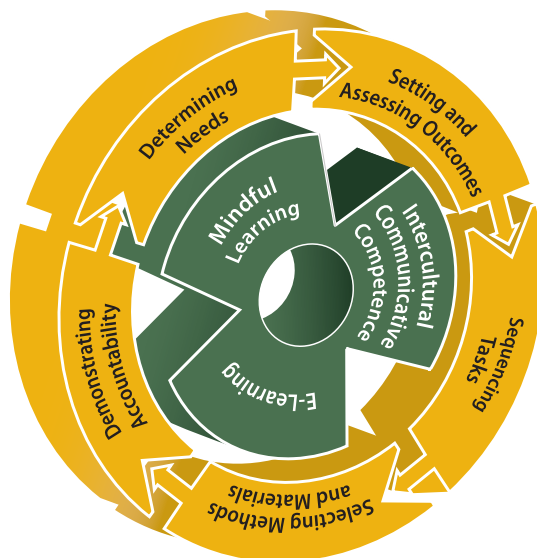
# Section 6: Mindful Learning

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## Overview

This section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* is concerned with various ways in which learners can enhance their own learning process, and by implication, ways in which curriculum developers and instructors can guide learners in this process. In this section, we highlight the importance of mindful learning, offer examples of teaching strategies to support its development, and provide some food for thought.

By adopting the term *mindful,* the intention is to build on Ellen Langer's (1989, 1997, 2000) work in *mindful vs. mindless learning,* and then integrate research in the areas of active learning, learner strategies, and learning styles and intelligences, all within the context of adult second language education. The eight aspects of mindful learning identified and discussed in this section are represented in Figure 1. As you read this section in light of second language and adult learning research,[1] you will recognize familiar concepts and practices, addressed from a "mindful" perspective.



*Figure 1. Aspects of mindful learning.*

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[1] For background reading in second language and adult learning research, see e.g., Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002.

# Mindful vs. mindless learning

## *What is mindful learning?*

Mindfulness may be understood as a keen awareness, or a "flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context."[2] The following table sets out the five essential attributes of mindfulness[3] and their implications for mindful ESL learning *(see Table 1)*.

### Table 1. Characteristics and applications of mindful learning

| Essential attributes | Being able to: | Example classroom tasks |
|---|---|---|
| *Open to novelty* | • Experience behaviour or information as novel or fresh.<br>• Notice new things.<br>• Be open to uncertainty. | • Doing something differently (e.g., re-arrange the order of a familiar sequence).<br>• Choosing from a selection of possibilities.<br>• Guessing and predicting. |
| *Aware of multiple perspectives* | • View things (e.g., ideas, actions, artifacts) from several perspectives, thereby broadening possibilities and critical thinking. | • Tasks that build intercultural communicative competence and sensitivity to diversity issues (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status). |
| *Sensitive to different contexts* | • Attend to context: What is the context of the new behaviour or information? How do things connect? | • Inquiry-oriented research projects.<br>• Concept mapping, analogies, and "odd one out."[4]<br>• Guessing and predicting. |
| *Alert to distinction* | • Draw distinctions and create new categories for understanding.<br>• Generate opinions. | • Tasks focused on intercultural and diversity issues.<br>• Synthesizing different perspectives (e.g., writing a personal response essay). |
| *Oriented in the present* | • Be present in the moment, not on "automatic pilot". | • "Hands-on" tasks.<br>• Multiple-step tasks.<br>• Active observation and listening. |

**For samples of tasks that build intercultural communicative competence and thereby foster an awareness of multiple perspectives, an alertness to distinction, and a sensitivity to different contexts, see *Section 7: Intercultural Communicative Competence.***

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2  Langer, 2000, p. 220.
3  Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 2; Siegel, 2007.
4  In an "odd one out" activity, learners identify the concept that does not fit, e.g., *bananas, berries, apples, blue; panda, orangutan, raccoon, blue whale; desert, ocean, storm, forest.*

In contrast, mindlessness may be understood as the lack of these characteristics, in other words, as habitual, automatic thought and behaviour. People act mindlessly when they rely on distinctions made in the past, rather than the present. At the extreme end of mindless on the mindful-mindless continuum, they see things from a single perspective, become rigid and certain, and fail to consider context.

There are two main ways in which mindlessness comes about: single exposure and repetition.[5] *Single exposure* means initially processing information without questioning other ways of understanding it. Within the context of adult ESL learning, this might mean learning words and expressions in one single context or from one single perspective. *Repetition* means doing things the same way all the time and is closely related to single exposure. This might mean always following a P/P/P (presentation-practice-production) lesson format or always answering lower-order questions[6] to check reading comprehension. Repetition results in a lack of freshness and curiosity.

It is important to clarify that repetitive language learning tasks do not have to be mindless. For example, using a Jazz Chant[7] to work on sentence stress or a TPR[8] routine to practice the present progressive are repetition-based strategies, but if they are two of several different ways of approaching a language learning outcome, then the learning should be more mindful than mindless. Raising learner awareness of the purpose of the task (e.g., focusing on linking or rhythm when practising a Jazz Chant) can also keep a repetitive task from being mindless. Further, recycling, a repetition-based teaching and learning strategy, is mindful when a particular skill or concept is not simply repeated, but revisited from a variety of different perspectives.

**For more about recycling, see *Section 3: Sequencing Tasks.***

Langer (1997) identifies several common myths about learning that help clarify the distinction between mindful and mindless learning. For example, one widespread myth in education is that "the basics need to be learned so well that they become second nature."[9] With this assumption, instructors may offer repetitive exercises that require learners to perform a task the same way regardless of the context or learners. Also, they may present the task as if it can be performed only one way. Langer argues, however, that when individuals are told there is only one right way to engage with material or perform a task, it limits their ability to take ownership of the material and use the information in creative, flexible ways. As Houston and Turner (2007) point out, "In reality, no individual performs a task the same way."[10] Curriculum and instruction need to help learners make their own decisions so that content becomes meaningful and learners can use it according to their various abilities and contexts.

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[5]  Langer, 2000, p. 220.

[6]  Describing, listing, matching, explaining, and paraphrasing, for example, indicate lower-order thinking skills, compared with applying, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing. See the discussion of Bloom's Taxonomy in *Section 2: Setting and Assessing Outcomes.*

[7]  Jazz Chants, a technique developed by Carolyn Graham, are rhythmic language exercises that present learners with aspects of English (e.g., vocabulary, a function, a grammatical pattern) while reinforcing the basic principles of spoken English (rhythm, intonation, stress, linking, etc).

[8]  TPR is an instructional technique developed by James Asher in which learners respond to commands that require physical movement.

[9]  Langer, 1997, 2000; Houston & Turner, 2007.

[10]  p. 88.

## *Suggestions for the classroom*

Following are a number of suggestions for integrating mindful teaching and learning into curriculum and teaching practice.

> **Present learning materials and tasks in a more conditional formatand less as a series of absolute truths. [11]**

Think about how often many of us (including learners) talk about things as absolute truths and consider the language used to convey this absoluteness and certainty (e.g., *is, are, can only be, never, forever, "Canadians are so patient," "She always does it that way"*). Presenting content, including language, as a series of absolute truths can shut down creative and critical thinking. The pressure to "cover" everything in the lesson and curriculum plans before the end of the class or the course can push instructors to provide facts and answers, instead of asking questions and encouraging discovery. The former takes relatively little time, but leaves little for the learners to uncover for themselves. Presenting content in a more conditional format encourages a more curious, present, and alert perspective in learners; in other words, it encourages more mindful learning. However, conditional language (e.g., *might, can be, many, some, usually, sometimes, may on occasion*) can convey uncertainty and not-knowing, qualities that may be perceived negatively in some situations, including business, legal, engineering, and education contexts where the teacher is viewed as "all-knowing." The fixed nature of "rules"[12] can also make it challenging to find a balance between approaching things as absolutes and leaving room for possibility and the sense of conditional. The presentation of content can be made more conditional rather than absolute by selecting or developing materials that:

- Introduce new items (information, ideas, objects, aspects of language) in a conditional, inquiring way. Tasks can encourage learners to guess, predict, improvise, and try. Grammar "rules" can be presented conditionally using words such as *generally, usually,* and *often.* Comprehension and discussion questions can make use of language such as *could be, from the perspective of, might be,* and *perhaps* (e.g., *"What could this be?", "What might it be for?"* or *"Whose perspective(s) does this article express?"*). If this language is too challenging for lower level learners, simpler structures can be used (e.g, *"What is this?", "What is it for?"*). Learners can be asked to brainstorm three possible answers, rather than just one "right" answer.

- Present different points of view.

- Encourage learners to explore different contexts in which new language and information may (or may not) be appropriate and useful (e.g., workplace/non-workplace; friends/acquaintances/strangers).

- Encourage learners to guess, predict, and question. For instance, an incomplete story outline or diagram can be given to learners prior to a reading or listening task. In pairs they can predict answers. After reading/listening, learners can work together in pairs to fill in the missing information. They can form questions requesting information they are still missing, and then perhaps interview other pairs of learners or the instructor.[13]

- Encourage learners to express themselves in a conditional way. For example, tasks might require learners to predict using modals of possibility (e.g., *might, may,* and *could*), or to write about an unexpected result, a contrast, or an opposition, using logical connectors such as *however, despite, even though, whereas,* and *still.*

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[11] Siegel, 2007.
[12] Grammatical and spelling rules, for instance, are often stated as absolutes; however, they tend to be much less "fixed" than learners would like.
[13] See also Silberman, 2006, p. 63.

- Include referential as well as display questions.[14] Display questions are used to check if learners know the answer, or if they can manipulate language. In both cases, the "right" answer is already known (e.g., *"What is the past simple form of leave?"*). In contrast, referential questions ask for information that is unknown or uncertain (e.g., *"What time did you leave work yesterday?"*), and encourage meaningful, real-world dialogue.

**For more discussion on encouraging different points of view, see *Section 7: Intercultural Communicative Competence.* For more discussion on selecting materials, see *Section 4: Selecting Methods and Materials.***

## Present learning materials and tasks in context.

For some, paying attention means focusing closely and not being distracted from the object of focus.[15] However, Langer (1997) suggests that this is another common myth about learning that can prevent learners from noticing different aspects of the topic (i.e., the context). Novelty sustains interest. This does not mean that learners do not need to pay attention or focus closely, but instead, that a "hyper" vigilance should be complemented with a "soft" vigilance.[16] This more diffuse quality of attention encourages learners to explore context around the language and concept(s) in focus, making connections with background knowledge and developing different perspectives. Attention is centred, but not static, in the following types of activities:

- **Themes and cases** are two good ways of building context. For example, an ELT program for health care specialists might structure itself around a case per week.[17] Learners might engage in cooperative reading jigsaws, use information-gap tasks to build vocabulary, script dialogues, and role-play patient interviews. The intent is to approach the target language learning outcomes in different ways, both directly and indirectly. LINC programs work with broad topics – such as family relationships, education, and Canada – that also offer opportunities to explore concepts from a number of different perspectives.

- **Inquiry-based projects** built around a question or problem, for example, encourage openness to new items (information, ideas, language) and can help build critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

- **Debriefing discussions** at the end of a task, lesson, and/or unit are helpful for reinforcing the importance of context. They provide a chance to make the various connections explicit and encourage multiple perspectives.

**For more about themes and projects, see *Section 3: Sequencing Tasks.***

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[14] Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2010, p. 25.

[15] Langer, 2000, p. 222; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 3.

[16] Ellis, 2001; Houston & Turner, 2007, p. 88.

[17] See Medical Communication Assessment Project (M-CAP) at http://www.m-cap.ca/.

## Begin with meaning.

Meaningful information is remembered more easily. Memorization is sometimes the first technique that learners use to help them remember information; however, in Langer's (1997) words, "memorization is a strategy for taking in material that has no personal meaning." [18] The following are strategies for making information meaningful so that it is more easily remembered:

- Spiralling, scaffolding, and recycling (for reinforcement) are strategies that build on learners' prior knowledge and understanding (i.e., they begin with meaning). They can be helpful for consistently expanding the learners' repertoire of skills.

**For more about scaffolding, spiralling, and recycling tasks, see *Section 3: Sequencing Tasks.***

- Tasks can be structured inductively instead of deductively. For instance, instead of being structured according to a P/P/P[19] lesson format, tasks can be designed so that learners first try to process and respond, and then work on target language forms in a more structured manner. This is a mindful learning approach because it helps make outcomes meaningful to the learners, avoids rote memorization, and recognizes the possibility of multiple correct answers.[20]

- Tasks and learning activities can encourage learners to consider how their own attitudes and approaches shape their learning experiences.[21] Metacognitive language learning outcomes (such as "Learners will outline the steps they plan to take to complete the writing assignment" or "Learners will respond to a self-assessment checklist upon completion of the task") can be incorporated into curricula. Materials and tasks can be designed to build intrapersonal (reflective) intelligence, for example, by making use of excerpts from autobiographical texts and journal writing. (For more about metacognitive and intrapersonal skills, see *Second Language Learner Strategies* and *Learning Styles* below.)

In these various ways, mindfulness encourages active participation in the second language learning process.[22] Staying engaged or active in the learning process is a critical aspect of mindful second language learning. The section now examines active learning theory for ways in which it supports mindful learning.

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[18] p. 67.
[19] presentation-practice-production.
[20] Houston & Turner, 2007, p. 90.
[21] Siegel, 2007, p. 7.
[22] Thornbury's (2005a, 2005b) notion of awareness-raising activities is also helpful for thinking about mindful learning. See Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2010, p. 24.

# Active learning

## *What is active learning?*

Active learning can be considered as simply the opposite of passive learning, but the term also implies a certain quality of learning-focused activity. In other words, "active" means something more than being busy or talking with a partner. Active learning principles draw from brain-based educational research and build on one's natural abilities to learn.[23] For example, research has shown that the brain is a complex adaptive system, functioning on many different levels and in many ways simultaneously. This means that variety and challenge in learning tasks and materials are key aspects of active learning. Research has also found that the brain makes sense through patterning, or linking to prior knowledge.[24] Active learning therefore involves frontloading, or scaffolding, learning tasks to prepare the brain for the new information to come.[25] Scaffolding tasks include, for example, starting with warm-up activites, introducing vocabulary before reading a text, presenting video clips, integrating graphic organizers, using prediction strategies, and conducting "think-pair-shares" *(see Table 2)*. Further, the brain seeks to make meaning and is social. Active learning acknowledges that we learn with and through others, affirming the importance of communicative learning tasks in the adult ESL context. The point of active learning and teaching is always to work with the brain, not against it.

> **ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL/ LINC Programming in Alberta No. 43**
>
> *Class content…is meaningful, appealing and engaging.*

## *Suggestions for the classroom*

Active learning tasks that are often found in the ESL classroom include cooperative activities (e.g., roundtables, jigsaws) and experiential learning tasks (e.g., self-assessment inventories, questionnaires, critical incidents, case studies, role plays, simulations, and excursions). They support the kind of mindful learning described above by striving to keep learners oriented to the present moment, thereby more able to notice distinctions, context, novelty, and multiple perspectives. A few basic active learning techniques are described below *(see Table 2)*.

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[23] Caine & Caine, 1994; Caine, *et al.*, 2009.
[24] Caine, *et al.*, 2009.
[25] Lombardi, 2004.

─────────────── **Table 2. Sample active learning tasks.**[26] ───────────────

**Think-pair-share**

(1) Individuals reflect (or write notes, i.e., "write-pair-share") for one minute in response to a question. Learners might summarize what they are learning, answer a question posed during the discussion, or consider how, why, and when they might apply language or an idea to their own situations. (2) Learners pair up with someone sitting near them and share responses verbally for two minutes, or they may work together to create a synthesis of ideas or come to a consensus. (3) The instructor or discussion leader randomly chooses a few pairs to give 30-second summaries of ideas.

**Roundtable**

A question is posed. Each learner writes one answer (or another type of response) on paper (flipchart, transparency) that is passed around the group. Each group shares/presents their answer to the entire class. A roundtable can be done in an e-learning context and with lower proficiency learners.

**Two-column method**

Provide a prompt (e.g., "A positive workplace looks and sounds like/ doesn't look or sound like this") and use the two-column method to generate and record responses, Head two columns on the board or flip chart with *Looks/sounds like* and *Doesn't look/sound like*. Ask learners for ideas, observations, or thoughts from a preceding discussion or presentation that support one side of the board or other.

**Jigsaw**

One variation: (1) A general topic is divided into smaller, interrelated pieces (e.g., an article or website is divided into parts). (2) Give each member of the group a different part to read (e.g., one learner reads "Team Building Strategies," another reads "Team Composition and Roles"). (3) Each member of the group teaches the rest of the group about their particular section so that, in the end, everyone in the group develops an understanding of the whole.

**Case studies or scenarios**

Provide learners with a "local" example of a concept or idea being discussed in a theme or a course. In small groups, learners talk about/analyze the case and try to generalize their insight to other situations they may encounter outside the classroom. Learners can briefly present their findings to other small groups or to the whole group, or they can simply record ideas on the board/flip chart/overhead so the instructor can lead a debriefing discussion. Learners might also develop (individually, in pairs, groups) their own work-based case studies and exchange them with others for discussion and analysis.

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The think-pair-share and roundtable strategies help learners be alert to distinctions and multiple perspectives between themselves and their partners or group members. The two-column method and case studies help learners notice distinctions and increase their awareness of context. Jigsaws introduce some ambiguity or uncertainty (the whole is hidden) and anticipation, helping learners stay open to new information and complexity. Active learning techniques, therefore, are helpful in building a mindful learning environment.

Research in the area of second language learner strategies also suggests that building strategic competence[27] may be an integral aspect of mindful second language learning and use. In the next section, various ways in which learner strategies can support mindful ESL learning are explored.

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[26] Adapted from University of Minnesota, 2008.
[27] Strategic competence refers to the speaker's ability to integrate and apply all elements of communicative competence effectively in communicative situations. These strategies include, but are not limited to the following: learning and using language, self-monitoring, negotiating meaning, and coping with communication difficulties. (Adapted from Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis, and Pidlaski, 2001.)

## Second language learner strategies

Second language learner strategies give learners proven techniques for learning and using language. When learners make use of a range of strategies, their learning is flexible and more mindful than mindless. Building strategic competence can also help ESL learners become more self-directed and responsible in their learning. Intentionally targeting these learner strategies in language learning outcomes and practice may help curriculum developers, instructors, and learners realize their value.

> **ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL/ LINC Programming in Alberta No. 51**
>
> *Instruction fosters independence and autonomous learning as learners take responsibility for and manage their own learning.*

> **ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL/ LINC Programming in Alberta No. 44**
>
> *As learners interact with listening and reading texts, they identify and practice skills and strategies to access the content and to accomplish meaningful, real-life tasks.*

### *What are second language learner strategies?*

Second language learner strategies may be understood as "the often-conscious steps or behaviours used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information."[28] They are often referred to as second language *learning* strategies, or "learning how to learn." Cohen (1996, 1998, 2007) uses the term "*learner* strategies" to cover both aspects of learning and using. Strategies are tools for the active, self-directed involvement needed for developing second language communicative ability.[29]

### *Suggestions for the classroom*

Table 3 synthesizes two well-known classifications of second language learner strategies and suggests various ways for learners to practice different strategies.[30] There are several taxonomies and approaches to choose from; these two have been selected for their familiarity and popularity.[31]

The first category of learner strategies presented is **socioaffective.** Social strategies are used in interactions with others, and affective strategies are useful for handling emotions or attitudes. Socioaffective strategies are indirect. They may be the least emphasized type of strategy, perhaps because they are often connected with attitudes and their use and development can be relatively difficult to observe and measure. In terms of building intercultural communicative competence, however, socioaffective learner strategies and their underlying attitudes of openness, patience, reflection, and perseverance may be particularly significant.[32] Socioaffective strategies highlight how learning is both interdependent and autonomous.[33]

**Metacognitive** is the second category of learner strategies considered in Table 3. Also indirect, these are strategies for organizing, focusing (centering), and evaluating one's own language learning and use. They often serve an "executive" function. That is, they encourage reflection about one's own thinking and learning, and in this sense, seem particularly

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[28] Oxford,1989.

[29] O'Malley & Chamot, 1990.

[30] The charts synthesize the work of Chamot & O'Malley, 1994, O'Malley *et al.*,1985, and Oxford, 1990. Also see Cohen, 1996 and Chamot *et al.* (n.d.).

[31] See Oxford, 1994, for a discussion of the major classifications of learning strategies. For a good introduction to different tasks that support strategy learning and instruction, see Brown, 2002.

[32] These are the four "habits of mind" set out in the Massachusetts Framework (Massachusetts Department of Education and Adult and Community Learning Services, 2005). Like learning strategies, they are said to support life-long learning. See Bow Valley College (2011) for another perspective on habits of mind within the context of ESL literacy.

[33] Nah, 1999.

"mindful." The idea is that once we begin to think about our own learning, we begin to notice how we learn, how others learn, and how we can adjust our patterns to learn more efficiently and effectively. In one researcher's words, "Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can help second language learners develop." [34] In the context of adult ESL, this means encouraging learners to use the strategies they are already familiar with, to transfer strategies from one context to another, and to apply new strategies to expand their repertoire. Metacognitive strategies, however, can also be difficult to observe and measure, so like socioaffective strategies, they too may not always receive the attention they deserve.

The third category is **cognitive** strategies. These learner strategies are concerned primarily with linking, analyzing, and classifying new information; memorizing; and compensating for a lack of understanding or ability (e.g., guessing, using gestures or synonyms).[35] Cognitive strategies are considered more direct than socioaffective and metacognitive strategies and are the easiest to assess. They are the most heavily emphasized type of learning strategy in the context of adult ESL and in Western education in general.

#### —— Table 3. Second language learner strategies. ——

### *Socioaffective strategies*

*Handling emotions or attitudes; cooperating with others.*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Questioning for clarification* | • Ask questions in a variety of ways and contexts for additional explanation, rephrasing, examples, or verification. |
| *Working together with others* | • Cooperate to solve a problem; combine information in an information-gap activity; check a learning task; model a language activity; give/receive feedback on oral or written performance.<br>• Empathize with others (e.g., practice paraphrasing skills).<br>• Build confidence in others (e.g., build peer feedback and coaching skills). |
| *Self-talk* | • Use mental techniques that make one feel competent to do the task (e.g., visualize to reduce anxiety and monitor emotions; encourage oneself by noticing progress, available resources, and one's emotional state). |

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[34] Anderson, 2002.
[35] See Bow Valley College (2009) for further details re: reading strategies (p. 109-116) and learning strategy instruction (p.124-132).

### Metacognitive strategies

*Organizing, focusing (centering), and evaluating one's own learning; the "executive" function.*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Advance organization/ Managing* | • Preview main ideas and concepts (e.g., follow a K-W-L format[36]); skim text for its organizing principles; explore background knowledge, experience, and attitudes.<br>• Complete surveys and other tools regarding learning style and strategy preferences.<br>• Participate in out-of-class learning tasks, such as contact assignments.<br>• Take (quiet) time for thinking and reflection. |
| *Organizational planning* | • Plan a task or content sequence; plan how to accomplish a task; set goals.<br>• Discuss relevant learner strategies for specific tasks.<br>• Describe one's thinking and reasoning while working on a task (think-aloud process).<br>• Work on assignments and projects that encourage exploration, inquiry, and negotiation (e.g., cooperative writing such as a newsletter or research project). |
| *Selective attention* | • Decide in advance to attend to a specific aspect by, for example, scanning for key words, concepts and/or linguistic markers, or writing with a specific audience in mind. |
| *Self-monitoring* | • Use time checks while completing a task.<br>• Participate in cooperative learning tasks where success depends on effective communication (e.g., group presentations, information-gap activities).<br>• Answer comprehension questions or quizzes.<br>• Give instructions or explanations. |
| *Self-evaluation* | • Complete self-evaluation surveys, preferably co-created with instructor.<br>• Use rubrics and checklists to evaluate own and others' work.<br>• Make observations in a learning log or journal.<br>• Engage in debriefing. |

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[36] K-W-L format means first establishing what the learners already know (K), then what they want (W) to know, and finally, what they have learned (L).

### Cognitive strategies

*Linking new information; analyzing and classifying it; memorizing; compensating.*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Resourcing* | • Use a dictionary, the Internet, and other reference materials (e.g., work-related resources to prepare a policy summary).<br>• Follow a model or instructions to construct something.<br>• Ask questions to obtain specific information. |
| *Grouping* | • Classify words, terminology, or concepts according to their various attributes, such as parts of speech.<br>• Engage in other kinds of patterning tasks (e.g., "odd one out"). |
| *Note taking* | • Record key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form while listening or reading. |
| *Summarizing* | • Prepare a mental, oral, or written summary of information after listening or reading. |
| *Deduction/Induction* | • Apply rules to understand or produce English (deduction).<br>• Create rules based on language analysis (induction). |
| *Imagery* | • Use visual images to understand and remember new information (e.g., graphic organizers, such as Venn diagrams, time lines, charts, concept maps, SmartArt).<br>• Use real objects/role play: Manipulate real objects as English is used, and act out or imagine oneself in different roles. |
| *Auditory representation* | • Re-play in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or sentence. |
| *Elaboration/Association* | • Relate new information to prior knowledge, including making meaningful personal associations with the new information. |
| *Transfer* | • Draw on background knowledge and skills to facilitate comprehension or prediction (e.g., recognize suffixes, substitute or paraphrase, make associations). |
| *Inferencing* | • Use context and existing knowledge to determine meaning, make logical guesses, predict outcomes, or complete missing parts (e.g., complete information-gap activities, read and "listen" between the lines). |

Facililty with learner strategies, particularly second language learner strategies, varies widely. Some learners will come to class with a well-developed and thought-out slate of strategies that work well for them; others will come with less experience and few thought-out strategies for learning. It is important that curriculum developers and instructors "recognize, honour and build upon the strengths that learners bring as a result of their life experiences."[37] However, they also need to recognize that not all learners are able and willing to make use of a wide range of learner strategies. Also, a learner's prior experience with strategies may not automatically transfer to his or her current learning context. A needs analysis can help gauge a learner's knowledge and use of learner strategies.

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

In reality, many learning tasks are accomplished using a number of different language learner strategies. A curriculum document can provide a selection of strategies for the instructor to choose from, depending on the language learning outcomes and learners' attitudes, beliefs, needs, and skills. Learning tasks that focus on one or two strategies at a time can then be designed. It is not just the number of strategies that enhances learning, but also the choice of the most effective strategies for a particular task. Over time, a variety of strategies can be integrated, recycled, and spiraled, challenging learners to work with a range of appropriate strategies, rather than always with their preferred few.

Second language learner strategies need to be presented explicitly, both in the curriculum document and in the classroom. This can be done by naming the strategies and then referring to them consistently by name. This can also be done as strategies are recycled (and modeled) in different contexts, and as learners are encouraged to identify strategies that can be used in specific contexts. Classroom activities can focus on learning to learn, as learners and instructors discuss how a particular strategy can help learning and performance, and when, how, and for what kinds of tasks the strategy can be used.

Explicit instruction in language learner strategies creates a way of talking with learners about thinking and learning, and gives learners a way to talk about themselves and their learning process *(see Metacognitive Strategies in Table 3)*. Second language learner strategies can encourage mindful learning by helping learners to stay open to new ways of doing things, notice distinctions, create multiple perspectives on how to learn, and understand the importance of context. Similarly, developing learning tasks to appeal to different learning styles, including multiple intelligences, can enhance flexibility and support mindful learning.

For a detailed discussion of "habits of mind" within an ESL literacy context, see the section titled "Habits of Mind" in *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes(Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework)*. Learning outcomes are proposed for each habit of mind (resourcefulness, motivation, responsibility, and engagement), and suggestions are provided for fostering these habits of mind in the ESL literacy classroom.

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[37] Bow Valley College, 2011 (see PDF of "Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes," p. 95).

## Learning styles and intelligences

Research has shown that learning styles have a significant influence on learners' choice of strategies, and that both styles and strategies are among the most important variables influencing performance in a second language.[38] The need to appeal to different learning styles and intelligences in the adult ESL classroom is widely acknowledged.[39] New language can be presented in different ways (e.g., reinforcing verbal presentations with demonstrations, writing on the board, providing handouts, and organizing games) in order to appeal to the range of learning styles and intelligences found in a particular classroom. The following seeks an understanding of learning styles within the context of mindful learning and, importantly, within the context of adult ESL curriculum development.

> **ATESL Best Practices for Adult ESL/ LINC Programming in Alberta No. 41 (indicator 4a)**
>
> *Learning activities appeal to different learning modalities (visual, auditory, interactive, kinesthetic) as learners interact verbally, write, read, role-play, debate, sort, move, sing, etc.*

### *What are learning styles?*

The term *learning style* is commonly used to refer to four aspects of a learner:

- Preferred and habitual patterns of thinking.
- Patterns of attitudes and interests that help determine what a learner notices in a given learning situation.
- The inclination to look for situations that are compatible with one's own learning patterns.
- The tendency to use certain learner strategies and avoid others.[40]

It is not difficult to see from these characteristics how an individual's learning style might act more mindlessly than mindfully. Instructors can help learners understand how they learn by asking them to recognize their own learning style, to work out strategies for strengthening their learning style, and to apply different strategies to learn different, necessary skills. Language learning tasks and outcomes should reflect the importance of learning styles and strategies.

At least twenty different dimensions of learning style have been identified, and several different ways of organizing the different dimensions have been proposed. Researchers have also given different names to similar learner characteristics or personality traits. Table 4 synthesizes four main types of learning styles from four well-known approaches to understanding learning styles. You might recognize these four types as reading/writing, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic (see last row in Table 4) or as thinking, reflecting, experiencing, and doing (see second row in Table 4). These four types do not represent all dimensions of learning style, but they provide a place to start thinking about integrating styles and intelligences into curriculum development and teaching practice. Further, it is important to note that individuals may have more than one learning style.

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─── **Table 4. Four types of learning styles.**[41] ───

| Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Converger:** Independently without groups; analyzing ideas; planning; rationalizing and understanding before communicating. | **Conformist:** Being directed and organized by the instructor; learning rules and understanding meaning; observing. | **Concrete Learner:** Practicing in groups and with games; learning from direct experience but under instructor guidance; connecting and speaking with people. | **Communicative Learner:** Using language outside class with other English speakers; experimenting and taking risks; not relying on instructor. |
| **Abstract conceptualization:** Learns by thinking. | **Reflective Observation:** Learns by reflecting. | **Concrete Experience:** Learns by experiencing. | **Active Experimentation:** Learns by doing. |
| **Analytic Learner:** Formulates ideas; asks "What?" | **Common Sense Learner:** Applies ideas; asks "How?" | **Imaginative Learner:** Makes connections; asks "Why?" | **Dynamic Learner:** Creates original adaptations; asks "If …?" |
| Learns by **reading and writing.** | Learns by **listening.** | Learns **visually.** | Learns **kinesthetically.** |

In addition to these four popular approaches to categorizing learning styles, Howard Gardner's (1983, 1993, 1999) concept of multiple intelligences may be helpful when thinking about, selecting, and organizing a range of tasks that both appeals to and challenges a variety of learners.

## *What are multiple intelligences?*

> *The question Gardner asked was not "How smart are you?" but "How are you smart?"* [42]

Multiple intelligences describe different ways of being smart and imply different preferred learning styles. Gardner's (1983, 1993, 1999) research has identified seven different intelligences.[43] Table 5 sets out these different intelligences and the primary capabilities and perceptions associated with each.

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[41] First row is adapted from Skehan, 1998, p. 247-250; second from Kolb, 1984; third from McCarthy, 1980; fourth from Fleming & Mills,1992 (Dawson & Dodge, 2007).

[42] Armstrong, 1994.

[43] Currently, Gardner and others are exploring at least three further intelligences/ways of being smart: naturalistic, spiritual/existential, and moral. See http://www.howardgardner.com.

## Table 5. Multiple intelligences: Capability and perception.

| Intelligence | Good with... |
| --- | --- |
| Verbal-linguistic | Words and language |
| Logical-mathematical | Logic and numbers |
| Visual-spatial | Images and space |
| Bodily-kinesthetic | Body movement control |
| Musical-rhythmic | Music, sound, rhythm |
| Interpersonal | Other people's feelings |
| Intrapersonal | Self-awareness |

Gardner's (1983, 1993, 1999) research shows that we each have these intelligences in varying degrees of strength. The average person is said to have a few that are highly developed, some that are more modestly developed (secondary intelligences), and one or two that are underdeveloped. Like learning styles and strategies, we privilege certain intelligences over others. Significantly, Gardner's research shows that intelligences can and should be developed to enhance learning, and that learners can work with different intelligences to facilitate second language learning. Visuals, such as photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons, illustrate and reinforce the meaning of written words. Films, videotapes, and live dramatizations (when possible) illustrate lessons in text. Integrating whole class, small group, pair, and individual learning formats provides variety and appeals to different ways of learning. The goal is to provide variety in order to appeal in some way to all learners, as well as to challenge learners to open to the possibility of learning in new ways.

## *Suggestions for the classroom*

Attention to different learning styles and intelligences in ESL curriculum and instruction, as with language learner strategies, needs to take place over a period of time. Working explicitly on a few learning styles at a time is helpful. Learners can complete a multiple intelligence or learner strategy questionnaire. Materials and tasks can be designed and presented in a way that encourages learners to actively monitor their expanding use of different styles and strategies throughout the course. A list of the various learning styles or intelligences can be posted on the classroom wall. Planning for instruction is important for making sure that each learning style is addressed at some point in sufficient detail.

Table 6 offers suggestions for working with different strategies, styles, and intelligences in adult ESL curriculum development and teaching practice. The suggestions are organized by intelligences, but there is overlap with learning styles to clarify ways to support verbal, auditory and kinesthetic learners. As well, connections are drawn between socioaffective learning strategies and interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, for example, or metacognitive strategies and intrapersonal and logical-mathematical intelligences.

────────── **Table 6. Multiple intelligences: Characteristics and applications**[44] ──────────

### *Verbal-Linguistic*

**Is strong in:** Reading, writing, telling stories, memorizing data, thinking in words.

**Learns best through:** Reading, hearing and seeing words, speaking, writing, discussing, debating.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Create a language-rich and print-rich environment by asking learners to:

- Create audiotapes, CDs, podcasts, or videos.
- Write letters, essays, poems, stories, parodies, a set of instructions.
- Give oral presentations.
- Conduct an interview.
- Create a slogan.
- Produce a radio show.
- Write or present a news report.
- Write a dialogue.

### *Logical-Mathematical*

**Is strong in:** Reasoning, logic, problem-solving, patterns, math.

**Learns best through:** Working with patterns, relationships, and the abstract; classifying; categorizing.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Include numbers, computation, logic, classification, and critical thinking by asking learners to:

- Classify a selection of nouns or a group of 12 randomly gathered objects and create a rationale for the classification.
- Complete a project that requires learners to follow step-by-step directions.
- Create an outline, computer program or graphic.
- Talk about probabilities, make lists, set priorities, plan for the future, predict.
- Make analogies.
- Write a cause-and-effect paragraph.
- Create a time line or other sequence.
- Use deductive thinking skills.

### *Visual-Spatial*

**Is strong in:** Reading, maps, charts, drawing, mazes, puzzles, imaging things, visualization.

**Learns best through:** Working with pictures and colours; visualizing; drawing from memory and imagination.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Use videos, visualization, visual/graphic organizers, colour, and art by asking learners to:

- Create and/or use maps and blueprints (even models). For example, participate in a scavenger hunt with interesting maps leading to the "treasure."
- Create a collage on a theme or idea to convey a message.
- Watch a short film and create a story board.
- Talk about a chart.
- Create and maintain a bulletin board (possibly electronic) or blog.

[44] The following seven profiles of the different intelligences draw from Armstrong, 1994; Christison, 1998; Fogarty, 1997; Lazear, 1992; and Reid, 1998.

### Bodily-Kinesthetic

**Is strong in:** Athletics, dancing, acting, crafts, using tools.

**Learns best through:** Touching, moving, processing knowledge through bodily sensations.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Include movement, hands-on experience, and eye-hand coordination by asking learners to:

- Perform different physical activities while learning language. This might range from a class excursion or demonstration/experiment, to using TPR to learn the imperative mood (commands) and present progressive verb form.
- Use mime or charades to convey ideas, opinions or feelings. For example, express reactions to a video clip, piece of music or other presentation through physical gesture, movement or body posture.
- Role play; act in a skit.
- Create a board game.
- Build "human sentences" to practice punctuation, word order, and logical connectors.[45]

### Musical-Rhythmic

**Is strong in:** Singing, mimicking sounds, remembering melodies, rhythms.

**Learns best through:** Rhythm, melody, singing, listening to music and melodies.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Include musical sounds, environmental sounds, and/or rhythm by using TPR and Jazz Chants or asking learners to:

- Listen to several minutes of different types of music and write/speak about the different effects of each (feelings, images evoked, memories).
- Demonstrate their understanding by writing their own song, or adding sound effects to a story or poem with music, rhythmic beats, etc.
- Choose a well-known tune and write/sing simple lyrics.
- Write/sing a rap with rhyming words or target vocabulary.
- Use clapping to practice word stress.

### Interpersonal

**Is strong in:** Understanding people, leading, organizing, communicating, resolving conflicts, persuading.

**Learns best by:** Sharing, comparing, relating, interviewing, cooperating.

**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Build rich interactions amongst learners, with the instructor, and with others outside the classroom by asking learners to:

- Work cooperatively on group projects and in teams.
- Organize and hold a debate or panel discussion.
- Work with materials and topics/themes that promote a sense of caring and interconnection.
- Engage in reciprocal teaching (learners teach other punctuation rules) and peer coaching (learners give each other feedback on oral presentations).
- Conduct an interview or survey (e.g., an observation chart of non-verbal behaviours).
- Practice dialogues to respond effectively in a given situation, i.e., listen, ask relevant questions, make appropriate comments, and paraphrase to check comprehension.

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[45] Benjamin & Berger, 2010.

- Work on socioaffective learner strategies.
- Achieve consensus in a diverse group on a (more or less) complex issue.

### Intrapersonal

**Is strong in:** Understanding self, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, setting goals.
**Learns best by:** Working alone; doing self-paced projects; reflecting.
**Suggestions for the adult ESL classroom:** Promote reflective time, memories, personal feelings, and current options by asking learners to:

- Keep a self-reflective journal or (guided) reflective learning log.
- Create a learning portfolio.
- Work on metacognitive skills; come to understand oneself as a language learner.
- Record and compare pronunciation patterns with those of a native English speaker.
- Complete learning style surveys/questionnaires and other kinds of self-assessments.
- Make a "mood graph" showing the day's high, low and in-between points, and note the external events that contributed to the different moods.
- Write responses to guided reflection questions at the end of class or series of classes.
- Read about personality types, how to handle emotions, and other inward and relational topics.

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It is important to acknowledge that verbal, logical, and visual abilities and skills generally dominate in most Western educational systems.[46] This can be compounded in the language classroom where verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences often receive the most attention. Further, instructors and curriculum developers bring their own preferences to the classroom. Given the opportunity, though, learners can tap into their secondary styles and intelligences to improve their L2 learning process. The point is to encourage, on the one hand, flexible learning that is open to possibility and incidental learning, while on the other hand encouraging strategic or intentional learning.

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[46] Lazear, 1992.

## Conclusion

This section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* has made a number of suggestions for supporting mindful learning and teaching within the context of adult ESL curriculum and instruction. Essential aspects of a mindful approach include openness to novelty, awareness of multiple perspectives, sensitivity to different contexts, alertness to distinction, and a present-moment orientation. Mindful learning can be supported in the curriculum by selecting and designing outcomes, tasks, materials, and assessments to address each of these aspects. In some senses, though, mindful learning-teaching, like intercultural communicative competence, is more of a stance than a particular body of content or a method. Integrating mindful learning in the classroom may entail highlighting different perspectives during a discussion, for instance, or cultivating different qualities of attention.

This section has also explored ways of integrating active learning techniques to support mindful learning. Active learning research focuses on the brain's natural abilities to learn, and active learning and teaching techniques strive to keep learners attentive (active) and present, noticing connections and context. Working with different second language learner strategies and learning styles also encourages the development of openness, multiple perspectives, and alertness to distinction. This kind of attention builds strategic competence and flexibility in the ESL classroom, thereby supporting mindful learning.

These different aspects of mindful learning need to be considered in ESL curriculum design and development, as well as in instructional practices. The goal is to help learners enhance their own learning processes.

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