The ATESL Newsletter

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The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization which promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.

November – December 2007

ATESL 2007 — Enriching Our Environment

English in the Environment, the Environment in English
Thomas Ricento
Plenary Talk for the Annual ATESL Conference
Calgary, Alberta
October 19, 2007

What's Inside

A Look at Enriching Our Environment!
ATESL Conference 2007

English in the Environment, the Environment in English

Thomas Ricento

Summary of Plenary Talk for the Annual ATESL Conference
Calgary, Alberta
October 19, 2007

I would venture to say that the majority of people in the language teaching profession today subscribe (consciously or unconsciously) to the idea of language as a rule-governed system used primarily for communication. And by communication, I mean the transmission of meaning aurally or visually from one individual to another or other individuals. The goal of language teaching and learning in this view is to provide learners with the best possible chance of successfully transmitting meaning, i.e., of being 'successful communicators'. In general, curricula in ESL or EFL provide 'content' that is mostly vocabulary, grammar rules, idioms, pronunciation tips, and examples of actual language samples on tapes or CDs. These can certainly be useful and can help a learner advance in a career, and perhaps integrate into an English-speaking society, such as Canada. However, if we accept the view that "language has meaning only in and through social practices" (Gee 1999:8), what, exactly, are the social practices that students have experienced/practiced in the ESL classroom? And if language is a behavior that is enacted through both big 'D'iscourses and little 'd'iscourses (Gee 1999), where (D)iscourses takes into account non-linguistic features, such as dress, gestures, actions, interactions, symbols, tools, technologies, values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions, and (d)iscourses encompasses actual verbal texts), what sorts of behaviors are students prepared to engage in/with in the world(s) they inhabit outside the classroom?

SLA research and our own personal experiences as language learners and teachers tell us that fluency requires far more than knowing the words and ways of combining (and pronouncing) them to, for example, answer a question, make a request, provide information, etc. True fluency always involves a high degree of social understanding of situation, socio-cultural knowledge of norms and expectations in particular settings, and the appropriate language forms that both reflect and constitute appropriate behavior.

Competence in the *forms* of language only accounts for a portion of our ability to understand and perform language; we are often capable (as native speakers of a language) of understanding texts because of our understanding of and dependence on the context, the (perceived) intentions of interlocutors, past experience, cultural knowledge, and so on. Consider the following text of a recorded conversation between two women lawyers recorded in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia [from Crystal 1999: 166-167]:

CHANDRA: Lee Lian, you were saying you wanted to go shopping, nak pergi tak?
LEE LIAN: Okay, okay, at about twelve, can or not?
CHANDRA: Can lah, no problem one! My case going to be adjourned anyway.
LEE LIAN: What you looking for? Furnitures or kitchenwares?   You were saying, that day, you wanted to beli some barang-barang for your new house.

CHANDRA: Yes lah! Might as well go window-shopping a bit at least. No chance to ronda otherwise. My husband, he got no patience one!
LEE LIAN: You mean you actually think husbands got all that patience ah? No chance man! Yes or not?
CHANDRA: Betul juga. No chance at all! But if anything to do with their stuff—golf or snooker or whatever, then dia pun boleh sabar one.
LEE LIAN: Yes lah, what to do? It still is a man's world, in that sense! Anyway, we better go now—so late already—wait traffic jam, then real susah!
Glossary:

    Lah, one = emphatic particles
    Can or not? = tag question
    Nak pergi tak = tag question in Malay ('Want to go, not?')
    Ronda = loaf
    Susah = difficult
    Beli some barang-barang = Malay ('buy…things')
    Dia pun boleh sabar one = Malay ('he too can be patient')
    Betul juga = 'true also'

There are a number of words and grammatical constructions unfamiliar to many English speakers; yet, we are able to get the 'gist' of the conversation; we can relate to two women making plans to go shopping and can understand humor about spouses and the shortcomings of husbands, and so on.

Now consider the following British newspaper headline (from Crystal 2003: 162): 'Blairite MP in New Labour Sleaze Trap, say Tories'—six words with British political meanings or overtones used in quick succession, tied to local culture. We may recognize all of the words, yet the meaning is likely to be more opaque for most of us (what is a sleaze trap?). Consider another example from the South African *Sunday Times* (also an English language newspaper, from Crystal 2003: 162, 164): 'It is interesting to recall that some verkrampte Nationalists, who pose now as super Afrikaners, were once bittereinder bloedsappe' (verkrampt ('bigoted'); bittereinder ('die hard of the Anglo-Boer war'); bloedsappe ('staunch member of the United Party'). All of the local words are Afrikaans in origin. Without an understanding of local culture, we cannot easily get the gist of the language because we cannot construct a context and we have no way of understanding the intentions of the writer.

On the other hand, the simplest and most straightforward language, apparently devoid of local cultural meanings, may be doing rather complex 'social work' in everyday conversation. Someone unfamiliar with cultural 'rules' of politeness and cooperation may fail to correctly interpret very (apparently) simple language, as in the following example:

    A: Are you busy right now?
    B: No.
    A: I hate to impose, but would you mind helping me carry these boxes to my car?
    B: Sure, no problem.

The coherence of this brief conversation is not based only or primarily on knowledge of English grammar; rather, it is achieved because both A and B are doing 'social work', or as soci-

ologist Erving Goffman (1967) put it, 'face work'. If B fails to understand (interpret) A's utterance (a question) as a 'prelude to a request', or pre-sequence in the terminology of Conversation Analysis, and answers 'No', but then turns down A's request for help, B will (perhaps unknowingly, if he is an English language learner) have committed a social faux pas. The real social purpose of the 'linguistic dance' captured in this short interchange is for A to impose on B (asking a favor) and the way in which this is done in many middle class North American English speaking contexts is by indirection and the use of politeness strategies, which are realized linguistically with: (1) a pre-sequence ('Are you busy now?'), (2) a disclaimer ('I hate to impose'), (3) politeness modal ('would you mind…'). This is not the only way to achieve cooperation through politeness, and the language forms used in English are not necessarily the same ones used in other cultures and languages. Yet, all societies and cultures have 'rules' like these which are not transparent to 'outsiders'. Although we can describe the above text in terms of words and structures, what is missing is the cultural knowledge of why these forms are used to perform particular social behavior (in this case, this is how, in middle class North American society, we maintain positive 'face' when we impose on others with requests or favors). The real meaning in this brief text is not found in the words, but in their use in familiar patterns that have derived (over time) within a particular culture to do particular social work.

Let's now consider another way in which we can understand how language has meaning only in and through social practices. Here are examples of some English idioms commonly used in Pakistan, Nigeria and Ghana (from Crystal 2003: 163):

Example	Gloss
Declare a surplus	throw a party
Recite offhead	speak spontaneously
Put sand in one's gari	interfere with one's good luck
Take in	become pregnant
Give me chance/way	let me pass
I'm not financial	have no money

The only word we would not likely know from this list is 'gari'; yet few of us would recognize the meanings of these phrases in the English commonly used in these countries. But if we reflect on the fact that the meaning or connotation of words or phrases may change over time—as may their grammatical category—it is easier to understand how English may look different in a different society. Even in North America, English has undergone remarkable changes even during our lifetimes. The word 'mailman' may still exist, but 'letter carrier' is generally preferred, a direct result of the movement to promote gender equality in North America and elsewhere. While the older meaning of 'gay' (merry) may still exist, the more recent meaning generally takes precedence. The negative connotation of 'queer' has been co-opted and embraced as a positive term by the gay community. These observations demonstrate not that these English usages are wrong or odd, but rather that the meanings of words (alone or in combination with other words) are not inherent in the 'words', and that usage (like grammar) is a matter of social custom and habit, and so that knowing a word or words means knowing how they 'work' to do particular 'things' in particular societies for particular purposes. Such changes occur in 'grammar' as well, since grammar is affected by

changes in usage that are influenced by changes in technology (e.g., the internet and mass media) and other social and political movements and processes. We cannot presume to really 'know' the meanings of words or the 'grammars' (i.e., customary patterns and sub-systems) that they inhabit until/unless we are socialized to some degree in the societies (and cultures) in which they 'live' and 'work'.

Conclusion

Let me briefly summarize the main points of this talk:

(1) Language has meaning only in and through social practices
(2) The naming (or labeling) of a language is a political act, since there is no discern-able, definable entity associated with the label 'English' or 'French' or 'Spanish'
(3) There is no natural fixed structure to language. Rather, speakers borrow heavily from their previous experiences of communication in similar circumstances, on similar topics, and with similar interlocutors (from Paul Hopper 1998)
(4) Innovation, change, and adaptation occur when language varieties come into con-tact; motivation for language change is primarily social
(5) Language environments are everywhere multi-layered, multiglossic, heterogene-ous, and complex because human societies are all those things

What does all of this mean for the teaching of English? Classrooms are places where certain things can and should be done (learning vocabulary, improving reading skills through inten-sive and extensive reading, learning about culture, etc.), but the environments outside the classroom are where language actually gets *performed*. One concrete suggestion is that we should pay more attention to the social and culture aspects of language behavior and the ways in which language users perform identities and how they may 'read' the identities of others in their various environments. Language learners ideally should become amateur eth-nographers, learning how to read meaning from language used in varied social contexts. They must become active students of the complex environments they inhabit. The environ-ment of the classroom can provide guidance, general rules, relevant content, language rou-tines and patterns, but it simply cannot duplicate what happens outside the classroom walls. So, my advice is: teach your students to become ethnographers of communication, the sooner the better! It is also **your** job to investigate, to become more consciously aware of the many ways that language behavior is performed in the environments in which you live and work, as well as in the environments inhabited by your students.

References

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President's Message

On behalf of the ATESL Board and membership, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all the members of the ATESL 2007 Conference Committee for organizing such an enjoyable event. Thank you so much for your hard work and dedication - it was a memorable conference!

Thank you also to those who presented at the conference and/or were able to attend the sessions. ATESL is made up of close to 600 members working in a wide variety of contexts with learners of different backgrounds. This diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and in the coming year, it is my hope that ATESL will be able to find new ways to facilitate ongoing professional development and dialogue among ESL educators. Watch your email for notices about opportunities to participate further.

I also look forward to strengthening our relationships with government to enhance supports for both teachers and learners of ESL, and I hope that we will be able to interact regularly with other organizations in the province for the same purpose.

We are delighted at the prospect of expanding our network of local chapters, and we would like to encourage more professionals in both urban and rural areas to become involved in ATESL activities. Thank you for your support of ATESL. If you would like to make us aware of issues or concerns related to ESL learning/teaching in the coming year, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Marian Rossiter

Picture this! Choosing illustrations for ESL assessment and teaching purposes

Marian Rossiter & Vivienne Jones, University of Alberta
Enriching Our Environment Presentation Summary

Picture stories have long been used for purposes of developing and assessing the speaking proficiency of second language (L2) learners. In our research with English as a second language learners, Tracey Derwing and the first presenter have used several picture stories to elicit speech samples from participants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and English language proficiency. We have also collected first language (L1) narratives from individuals whose native language is English.

The picture sequences that we chose for research purposes all seemed to be relatively clear and unambiguous at first glance. However, an examination of the transcripts of over 100 L2 and 40 L1 participants narrating five picture stories later revealed a number of factors in the stories that contributed to the relative ease or difficulty with which both native- and non-native speakers could narrate the events depicted.

Several aspects of some of the illustrations appeared to affect participants' ability to interpret and give a clear account of the picture stories. *Story* difficulties were due to narrative complexity (unclear story lines and events, illogical sequence of events), temporal complexity (flashbacks or flash-forwards, uneven flow of time), and/or disturbing content (e.g., violence). *Cultural content* problems were related to the use of text, symbols and cartoon conventions (e.g., arrows, word balloons, motion lines), gestures, body language, and representations of emotion; and/or customs or rituals. *Drawing* issues included layout (size, shape, order of panels), drawing style (inaccurate proportions, indistinct lines), and picture content (inconsistent/indistinguishable characters, objects, and locations; and extraneous detail).

None of these issues affected the studies for which we used these illustrations; however, in other circumstances they might have created problems (e.g., if knowledge of specific vocabulary was being assessed). In the workshop, participants critiqued a number of picture stories and Vivienne made further suggestions to reduce potential problems. We also discussed the importance of choosing illustrations for classroom instruction that were relevant to the learners' real-life needs and experiences.

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NorQuest College

Practical Nurse Program for Internationally Educated Nurses (PN-IEN)
PUBLIC REPORT
October 2007
Prepared by
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Submitted by
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Objectives

In 2006 NorQuest College successfully delivered The Practical Nurse for Internationally Educated Nurses (PNIEN) pilot project, which ran for 10 months, from February 6 to December 22, 2006. This project began with a development phase that included curriculum development, and establishing an interdepartmental relationship in order to develop English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum rooted with nursing content. The development of a program that credits internationally educated nurses with their previous educational experience and promotes entry into the Canadian workforce, along with efforts to facilitate articulation agreements with other post-secondary institutions were also objectives set out in the development phase.

A delivery phase was also part of this project, and the objectives centred on the pilot of the ESL Bridging course, increasing student success in the Practical Nurse component of their studies at NorQuest College, thereby decreasing attrition within the program as well as increasing the employment retention rates of graduated individuals. Follow-up phases were allocated to occur throughout the course and six months post-graduation.

Project Activities

Within the development phase, many project activities were put forward. A needs analysis was completed, and marketing, learner identification and recruitment of applicants took place. The ESL Enrichment for required Practical Nurses courses was adapted and expanded where appropriate, with new nursing-specific ESL curriculum developed as necessary. As part of the intake process, applicants received a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) PT assessment, nursing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), and, for successful applicants, an individual learning plan was established. The final activity proposed in the development phase was to arrange meetings with MacEwan College to discuss the potential for articulation agreements or other points of collaboration. Although meetings were not able to be formulated with MacEwan College, communication and collaboration has taken place with other institutions. An exchange of curricula took place

between NorQuest College and Halifax Immigration Learning Services. Discussions have taken place between NorQuest College and NAIT about offering occupational language for health care programs offered by NAIT. Some discussions have taken place with Mount Royal College primarily to learn about the Mt Royals' development of the PLAR and assessment for internationally-educated nurses.

The delivery phase activities included the delivery of the ESL Bridge to Practical Nurse integrated with a Practical Nurse challenge course, the Practical Nurse required courses with ESL support, pre-practicum workshops, and nursing practicums. The administration of CELBAN listening/speaking took place at the end of the program. Dissemination of information occurred through updates provided at advisory committee meetings (BSCOC and LARCC) and presentations given at an Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) meeting, an Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA) a Canadian Association of Practical Nurse Educators (CAPNE) conference, and the ELT 2006 conference in Ottawa.

Tracking of student employment success also took place at the end of the program, six months after graduation. The results of the employer surveys are still pending, and results will be forwarded upon return and tabulation of the surveys.

Outputs and Outcomes

Outputs

The primary output of the development phase of this project has been a nursing-specific curriculum. As a further output, this curriculum has since been shared with Halifax Immigration Learning Services. The output of the delivery phase of the program is best viewed from the perspective of the students involved. As a result of the PNIEN program, 16 qualified and capable practical nurses have graduated. Furthermore, these individuals are fully ready to enter the Canadian nursing workforce, having 100% successfully passed the national exam and thereby fully meeting the practical nurse licensing requirements.

Outcomes

This section will focus primarily on the individual participant outcomes. As a result of the ESL training received in the program, all of the students improved their language skills. A full table comparing the scores, from entry to completion, is provided in (see Summary of Program Outcomes). As a result of the nursing portion of the program, 16 students successfully completed the required nursing courses and practicum, resulting in graduation from the Practical Nurse program.

Further post-training results can be observed as a combined result of the ESL and nursing components, in that 100% of the students successfully passed the CPNRE. Further success stories arise in the fact that 100% of those desiring to work as LPN's have procured employment. Furthermore, two students have continued on to pursue studies in an RN transfer program.

Aside from the successes of the students, other outcomes have come forth as a result of this pilot project. Partnerships have been initiated with Halifax Immigration Learning Services. Discussions have taken place with NAIT and Mount Royal College. On the

healthcare facility end, a partnership with the Good Samaritan Society has been initiated. Feedback received as a result of this project has allowed for the continued refinement of the curriculum, to continue to improve the level and extent to which student needs can be met.

Offshoots

Some exciting offshoot opportunities have arisen out of the PNIEN project. One of the opportunities has been to continue to expand and refine the ESL curriculum as best practices have emerged through the running of this pilot, and the student feedback that resulted.

Moreover, an offshoot opportunity has arisen to provide a similar curriculum for other healthcare professionals. NorQuest College ESL programs enrol students from all over the world, who come with backgrounds from a wide variety of professions. Amongst the healthcare professionals, nurses are only one group. Individuals from other healthcare professions, such as dentists, physical therapists or radiologists, would require similar basic language needs as a nurse. While the specific content would of course vary, there are some similarities amongst all health professions, such as baseline medical terminology, the grammar involved for charting, intercultural communication needs and the language skills involved in communication tasks in the workplace.

Summary Statistical Report

Intake and Screening

The PNIEN program targeted 16 individuals. Due to the large number of presentations and information sessions that were given, it is not possible to estimate the total number of students who attended these sessions. Although there was a lot of interest in this program, 40 applicants were appropriate to be interviewed. Of these 40, nineteen students were registered in the program. Some individuals were not accepted as they did not meet the language requirements, while others removed themselves from the application process due to the financial implications of the program.

Summary of Program Outcomes

Description	Number	Percentage
Total Participants	17*	100%
Those who completed the program	16	94%
Those who did not complete the program	1	6 %
Those who were placed in work experience	16	100%
Those who met the stated language outcome	16	100%
Participants who completed the program and:	16	100%
Found employment in their field		

*Two other participants withdrew during the first 28 days for personal reasons

Language testing statistical data for the program

Name	Country of Origin	CLB 1 (CLB~PT) (entry)	CLB 2 (CLBA) (midway)	CELBAN (final)			
				L	R	W	S
Mike	China	6+	7	9	9	6	8
X-ray	China	7+		W/D			
Yankee	China	6	5+	10	8	6	8
Charlie	Congo	8-*		N/A			
Zebra	Congo	7	8	W/D			
Foxtrot	India	6+	6+	9	8	6	8
Romeo	India	6-	5+	7	8	7	7
Gulf	Japan	6+	7	9	9	7	8
Lima	Moldova	4	5+	6	7	6	8
Hotel	Phiippines	7+	7+	9	8	7	8
Bravo	Russia	7-	7-	9	8	7	7
Echo	Russia	7	6+	7	7	6	7
Kilo	Ukraine	8*		N/A			
November	Ukraine	7-	7	9	8	7	8
Oscar	Ukraine	7	7	9	10	8	7
Delta	Vietnam	7	5	7	9	6	7
Tango	Vietnam	7	7	9	9	7	7
Juliet	Yugoslavia	8*		N/A			
Sierra	Yugoslavia	7-		W/D			

*Those students who scored CLB 8 on their initial test were not required to test further as this CLB score is the entry requirement for the PN program at NorQuest College.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Projects

The main lesson learned centers on the structure of the program, and the need to separate the language and PN challenge portions. The recommendation for future programs is that students complete their ESL portion prior to initiating any of the nursing components. It is still important that the ESL portion continues to reflect the language needs of the nursing specific content, but it is recommended that they are not placed in a situation which tests their nursing knowledge until the ESL support of this knowledge has been fully completed.

Another lesson learned has been in regards to the time needed to complete the required nursing courses. It is recommended that students need more than just a simple review of skills they have already learned in their home country; time must also be granted to allow for the situations in which the skill the nurses learned in their home country is not applicable to the Canadian context, and they must in fact 're-learn' the skill.

Although it's difficult to find the balance between setting an entry-level CLB requirement which allows for a sufficient number of students to be applicable for enrolment and a CLB level which provides a feasible baseline from which students to be able to improve, it is important to, first of all, establish a definitive score, and secondly adhere to that entry requirement. While it may seem like students of a lower level CLB may have a lot of potential for improvement, they have invested largely in the program, and may indeed have been inadvertently set up for a high level of anxiety and potential failure. Although it may seem a shame to turn these students away, they are actually better served by continuing with regular ESL programs until they have achieved the necessary entry requirements.

While it's easy to focus on lessons learned through challenges, it is equally important to give attention to the lessons learned through the successes. The greatest highlight from this area comes from the fact that we have learned that a program tailored to the ESL, intercultural and nursing needs of internationally educated nurses can indeed produce qualified, competent individuals who are truly ready to enter the Canadian workforce. With extra focus on areas such as the language required for the workforce, as well as for their nursing and national exams, internationally educated individuals can succeed in a field where they often have previously struggled.

IELTS EXPLAINED

Jackie Gomes
Enriching Our Environment Presentation Summary

IELTS is the International English Language Testing System and it superseded the ELTS (English Language Testing Service) **in 1990** when it came under international management. It pioneered the 4 skill areas (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) and solved the practical difficulties that ELTS was having.

The IELTS test **assesses the language ability of people who need to study or work where English is the language used in communication** - it is taken by well over 500 000 people every year, and is recognized by over 4000 organisations worldwide. It is **used by universities and other educational institutions** which offer courses taught in English. It is also **used by professional bodies and immigration authorities** in many countries. It is also international in terms of test delivery – **available worldwide** – in around 150 countries. It is available up to 4 times a month in over 300 locations in 150 countries, making it one of the most widely available English language tests in the world.

The test provides an accurate, relevant assessment of language skills, based on well- established standards and covers the full range of ability from non-user to a very high level of proficiency. All results are reported on a clear **nine-band scale**:

$\Rightarrow$ **0-9 band scale**
   - $\Rightarrow$ 9 - expert user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 8 - very good user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 7 - good user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 6 - competent user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 5 - modest user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 4 - limited user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 3 - extremely limited user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 2 - intermittent user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 1 - non-user
   - $\Rightarrow$ 0 - did not attempt the test

IELTS is the product of a **unique international partnership**:
- **British Council & IDP: IELTS Australia** jointly manage
- **Cambridge ESOL** – manages all
  The 3 partners also jointly sponsor IELTS research projects

IELTS is:
- a test of a candidate's **ability to communicate in English**
- for people who have to **work or study** in countries or situations where English is the

medium of communication
- a pioneer in the testing of **all four language skills**
- a **test of international English** because it tests 'international English', and **sources of materials are also international**. Publications are used from all over the English-speaking world, as well as on the internet
- a test that:
    - has **no cultural or linguistic bias** in terms of content, vocabulary, or grammar
    - focuses on the language areas common to all the varieties of English
    - is created by test writers and editors worldwide (UK, Australia and New Zealand – may be using some in the US soon)
    - uses a variety of commonly understood accents
- **based on a model of communicative competence:**
    - purposeful
    - goal-oriented
    - interactive
    - tasks test **language skills in whole texts, not discrete-points**
    candidates have to react to a whole text, not just complete a brief exercise

    it is a test of **performance:**
    - it tests the ability to use language in an act of communication
    - It doesn't just test knowledge about the language.

*(** it is **NOT** a test of grammar or study skills)*

THE TEST:

- **All candidates must do all four test modules** because it provides a profile of all four skills at one point in time. The Listening, Reading and Writing modules normally take 3 hours to complete. The Speaking module consists of an 11-14 minute interview

- Depending on candidates' needs, they are **able to choose between** two variants of the test – **Academic and General Training**

- **Academic IELTS is suitable for people planning to study in higher education or seeking professional registration.** This option assesses whether a test taker is ready to study or train in the medium of English and is a test of general academic English. Making effective use of written texts in academic work is a skill to be learned at college or university, not one that students at all levels should be expected to possess on entry. For this reason, the IELTS test reflects some features of academic language but does not aim to stimulate academic study tasks in their entirety. This approach is widely supported by the institutions that recognize IELTS.

- **General Training IELTS is suitable for test takers planning to go to English-speaking countries to undertake non-academic training or work experience, or for immigration purposes.** This option emphasises survival skills in a broad social and educational context.

  (note that all candidates do the same Listening and Speaking and the Speaking module can be taken up to one week earlier or later than the List, Read, and Writ. This module is performed as an interview with a certified IELTS Speaking Examiner.)

International teams of writers contribute to IELTS test materials, and IELTS invests heavily in on-going research to ensure that IELTS remains **fair and unbiased** – wherever and whenever the test is taken. IELTS encourages, reflects and respects international diversity and is fair to anyone who sits the test, regardless of nationality, background, gender or lifestyle. The rigorous processes used to produce the test materials ensure that every version of the test is of a comparable level of difficulty, so that candidates' results are consistent wherever and whenever they take the test.
IELTS test takers, and the organisations which rely on IELTS test results, benefit from IELTS' continuing investment in quality assurance, research, and development to ensure that the test remains **robust and relevant.**

Candidates are mailed their results 13 days following a test. They cannot receive their results by phone or email for security reasons.

Test centres in Alberta:

1) **Global Village Calgary**
   #200, 515 1st Street SE
   Calgary, AB   T2G 2G6
   1-403-441-4375

2) **Off-site centre for GV Calgary:**
   Grant MacEwan College, Alberta College Campus
   Edmonton, AB
   (all test registration is done through GV Calgary)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- **IELTS website: www.ielts.org**
- **IELTS Calgary: www.ieltscalgary.ca**

Project-based ESL Education: Promoting Language and Content Learning
Yan Guo, Ph.D., University of Calgary

The ATESL Conference
Mount Royal College, Calgary
Oct 19th, 2007

A review of the literature on project-based instruction indicates that in subject areas, the goals of project-based instruction are subject matter learning and the acquisition of skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and cooperative learning (Cuthbert, 1995; Peterson & Myer, 1995). In ESL education, however, project work has focused more narrowly on language or on the practice of listening to and speaking English (Fried-Booth, 1986; Gardner, 1995). Few scholars explicitly connect the development of skills and content knowledge with the importance of language/discourse (Beckett & Slater, 2005).
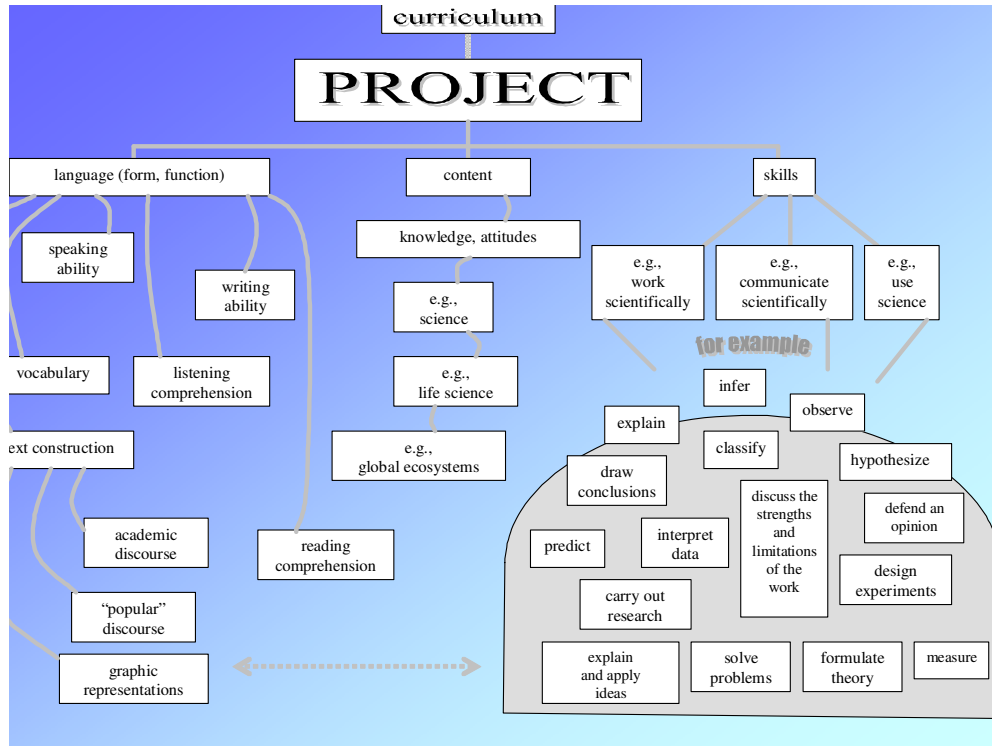
Project-based learning aims to engage students in the investigation of real life problems and develop students' creativity, problem-solving, and lifelong learning (Barron, 1998; Breault & Breault, 2005; Blumenfeld et al., 1991). It addresses the learning of language, skills, and content simultaneously – an important goal identified by Dewey for project-based instruction (Dewey, 1926; Dewey & Dewy, 1915). A project, "is defined as a long-term (several weeks) activity that involves a variety of individual or cooperative tasks such as developing a research plan and questions, and implementing the plan through empirical or document research that includes collecting, analyzing, and reporting data orally and/or in writing" (Beckett, 2002, p. 54).

Alan and Stoller (2005) discuss a real-world project which followed the ten steps suggested by Stoller (1997) and Sheppard and Stoller (1995), including

1) The students and instructor agree on a theme for the project,
2) The students and instructor determine the final outcome of the project,
3) The students and instructor structure the project,
4) The instructor prepares students for the demands of information gathering,
5) The students gather information,
6) The instructor prepares students for the demands of compiling and analyzing data,
7) The students compile and analyze information,
8) The instructor prepares students for the language demands of conducting the activity,
9) The students present the final product, and
10) The students evaluate the project.

By the end of the project, students had improved their language and content knowledge and enhanced their critical thinking and decision-making abilities. Project-based learning enhanced learners' motivation, improved their performance in writing and communication, and initiated their active roles in learning (Gu, 2002). It offered an opportunity for learners to communicate meaningfully and increased authentic interaction and purposeful language learning (Gu, 2001). Students interacted far more often in project-based learning than they would have in other ESL courses; they had more autonomy in their learning, and they perceived that the learning process was more relevant to their lives (Fang & Warschuer, 2004).

The Project-Framework is a tool that helps students to learn language, content, and skills simultaneously. It consists of two components: the planning graphic and the project diary. The former provides the categorization of the target language, content, and skills and the latter provides students with a weekly summarization task (see Beckett & Slater, 2005).

curriculum

PROJECT

language (form, function) | content | skills

speaking ability

writing ability

knowledge, attitudes

e.g., work scientifically | e.g., communicate scientifically | e.g., use science

vocabulary

listening comprehension

e.g., science

for example

text construction

e.g., life science

infer

observe

explain

classify

hypothesize

e.g., global ecosystems

draw conclusions

discuss the strengths and limitations of the work

defend an opinion

academic discourse

reading comprehension

predict

interpret data

design experiments

carry out research

"popular" discourse

graphic representations

explain and apply ideas | solve problems | formulate theory | measure

Week	Project Diary	Name
Activity	**Knowledge and skills**	
Things I did this week.	Things I learned this week.	

	Language (e.g., vocabulary expressions, grammar)	Content (new information about your topic)	Skills
☹ I spoke English to	☹	☹	☹ _____
☹ I talked English about	_____	_____	☹ _____
☹ I read	☹	☹	☹ _____
☹ I looked for and found	_____	_____	☹ _____
☹ I looked for and didn't find	☹	☹	☹ _____
☹ I wrote	_____	_____	☹ _____
☹ I observed		☹	☹ _____
☹ I created a key visual about			

Things I hoped to learn this week, but didn't. (State reasons for not learning.)

☹_____ | ☹_____ | ☹_____

The Project Framework was presented to nineteen professors in China. The professors, 2 of whom were teaching English majors and 17 of whom were teaching non-English majors, came from 15 universities in China. They were all Chinese native speakers and had been teaching English for more than 10 years. The professors agreed that project-based learning can be an effective tool for the integration of language, content, and skills (see Beckett, 2006; Beckett & Slater, 2005; Mohan, 1986; Stoller, 2006). For example, one of the three professors who used project-based learning in their teaching reported she asked her students to interview 10 Chinese university students and 10 international students on campus to elicit their opinions about online dating. Her students presented their results orally to the class. At the end of the project, her students reported that they learned interview skills, new vocabulary about online dating, using English for a real purpose when they communicated with the international students, and developed their critical understanding about the issue of online dating. Most of the professors noted that project-based learning is urgently needed because it might address the weakness of Chinese students. They noticed that many of their students had successfully passed various tests in English, but not many had developed necessary communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Professors believed that project-based learning may "enhance students' motivation" and "develop students' ability to learn more independently and autonomously."

The professors also reported that their students might resist such a mode of learning for a number of reasons. Project-based learning challenged the traditional view of learning and their students might not value it; students might consider it as not a serious teaching. Many students study English for examinations and they believe it is more efficient to get a right answer from the teacher or the textbook than doing a project. Professors also mentioned other reasons such as their need for further professional development, the limited resources, and the big class size.

The Project-Framework can be used to raise students' awareness of simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills (Beckett & Slater, 2005). Future research needs to investigate the process about how instructors implement project-based ESL learning and how their students react to such an approach

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Volunteering for ESL students:
A model from the classroom for establishing effective links
into the community

Summary ~ ATESL Conference presentation, October 20th, 2007
Justine Light – NorQuest College, Edmonton

This presentation, given at the ATESL conference in October, focused on three main aspects of volunteering for ESL students: the benefits of volunteering for ESL students; experiences gained and lessons learned from a NorQuest College project; and, recommendations for anyone planning to set up a volunteer program in their own ESL setting.

Most ESL instructors would intuitively expect that a volunteer experience might be beneficial to an ESL student in a number of ways. Firstly, we could anticipate that volunteering might present opportunities for language acquisition. Furthermore, volunteering appears

to offer potential for addressing settlement concerns of new immigrants and building community and job related links in the community. To a large extent these intuitions are supported by the research. The classroom may not always provide the best venue for language acquisition due to the lack of varied comprehensible input it offers (Wong Filmore, 1992). The ability to communicate effectively in the target culture however will be one of the key factors in the successful integration of immigrants into a host society. (Dudley, 2007) Dudley further posits that volunteering opportunities could provide the avenue by which language acquisition opportunities could emerge. Research conducted in the benefits of volunteering for NS has shown further benefits of volunteering including social, economic and educational benefits. Despite the conclusion that volunteering may be beneficial to ESL students, Dudley's research conducted in a Northern Alberta College indicated that only a fraction of students were participating in volunteering outside class. The reasons cited for the low participation rates were: Lack of time, low confidence about communicative skills, and lack of knowledge about volunteering.

Building on this body of research and further in-house needs assessment, an academic preparation course for ESL students, Academic Enrichment (AE) strives to include a course component of volunteering for its students. AE is a 20 week course that runs as part of the ESL Intensive program at NorQuest College. These students have clear goals for further academic study, and many have professions in which they are attempting to achieve recognition for their credentials. Volunteering is just one element of this unique course.

The volunteer project takes place for eight weeks of the twenty weeks of the course, but takes more than twenty weeks to organize and execute! The first phase of the project is the pre-volunteer preparation. It starts right away at the beginning of term and, for me, always started with a series of guest speakers. These range from those with a personal story to tell about why they volunteered, to Volunteer agencies looking for volunteers, to employment services explaining how to find meaningful volunteer placements. Students are encouraged to set their own goals for the volunteer placement, whether those be language focused, networking opportunities or simply a first chance to observe the Canadian context for professional employment. Employment counselors help further, with the consolidating of such skills as resume building and interview skills. At this early stage, it can be vital to secure police checks. Each AE student completes the security clearance process so that they are ready for any requirements that their chosen placement may have. There is an approximate wait time of six weeks for these clearance forms in Edmonton. Finally, students are provided with a letter of introduction from the College and AE course to assist prospective placement sites understand the goals and limitations of the project.

Phase two of the project is to secure a meaningful volunteer placement. The volunteering is done in class time for an eight week period for half a day per week. Students are further permitted to attend volunteer interviews and training sessions in class time. The volunteer placement takes place over the last eight weeks of the class. During this period of time a number of language learning opportunities are linked to the project. Students write papers which included feedback on volunteering. Students last semester were shocked to learn one day that their spontaneous presentation would be on the topic of volunteering and would be given to another class!! They did a great job with this because they really knew their content!! Table one indicates some of the many great community partners we have had in the

Edmonton area for our volunteer project. Feedback from students has been on the whole very positive. Despite some initial hardships in finding the right placements, most students are able to enjoy their time in the community and extend their network of "known Canadians." I have collated their feedback in specific areas off volunteering in Table 2.

Volunteer location	Volunteer position
▪ Edmonton General	Volunteer visitor/recreation assistant
▪ Changing Together	Office assistant
▪ Salvation Army Food Bank	Sorting food
▪ Edmonton Food Bank	
▪ University Labs	Lab technician
▪ Pharmacies	Retail assistant
▪ Vibrant Communities	Workshop participant and planner
▪ CNIB	Retail assistant and visitor
▪ Catholic Social Services	Office assistant
▪ YMCA daycare	Childcare assistant

Table One: Typical volunteer locations & positions

Student feedback on language acquisition	Student feedback on job search skills	Student feedback on their views of Canada	Student feedback on the Canadian workplace
"I used to want to take a medical terminology course but I realize this setting is much better than that."	"I now know where and how to apply my skills and knowledge."	"I think Canadian senior people are happier than those in developing countries."	Even though this volunteering is not related to my career, it is a good chance to know the real Canadian workplace."
"Volunteering enriched my medical terminology by hearing the words and taking notes."	"It gave me a chance to apply for a job, to pass an interview and have such an experience."	"Canada has a good healthcare system."	"There are no short-cuts to be successful."
"I want to improve my pharmacy vocabulary; so it's a good idea to stay in this environment."	"It enhanced my confidence to get back my career."	"Canadians are charitable and helpful."	"Being a pharmacist is better than being a pharmacy technician."
"In the IT department, we discussed software and hardware and that improved my conversation in the context of work."		"Canadians in business are friendly, helpful & communicative."	"I had many chances to talk with patients, to understand how they describe their suffering and feelings."

Table Two: Student feedback on the volunteer experience

I would highly recommend this type of project to ESL instructors everywhere. My students are challenged to set their own goals, find their own placements and make the most of their time there. Students have had positive experiences in previously unknown settings, secured jobs, learned a little about Canadian workplace culture and made friends. The most gratifying part of this for me as an instructor has been to see students realize that despite obstacles that might be still in place they are closer than they realized to achieving their goals in Canada. This project has provided the time, knowledge and confidence boost that students had previously identified as gaps in their ability to take part in volunteering (Dudley, 2007). So now that I have inspired you to have a go at this kind of project, I am including my ten steps to a happy, healthy volunteer experience.

Ten steps to a happy healthy volunteer experience
1. **What are your language & settlement objectives?**
These objectives will determine the length and scope of your project.
2. **Plan ahead**
Everything takes longer than you think!!
3. **Utilize the expertise around you**
Nobody can teach resume writing and interview skills in our College as well as the counselors from Career Services, so they teach this part!
4. **Student buy-in**
Students, who don't buy in, don't show up!
5. **Always think how you can integrate your language/settlement objectives into the process.**
6. **Use your network in the community**
Given a concrete and contained opportunity lots of Canadians are keen to help immigrants integrate into the community.
7. **Don't burn bridges**
Burnt bridges in the community are burnt for a very long time.
8. **Gather feedback from students and where possible "employers"**
9. **Revise & revisit**
Both 8 & 9 have enabled me to offer students a far more streamlined and meaningful volunteer experience.
10. **Assess whether or not you have achieved your goals**

Any further questions, experiences to share or comments please email me
Justine.light@norquest.ca

References:
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ATESL Professional Development Bursaries

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

Deadlines for application in 2008 are: March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.

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

You are eligible to apply if:

- You have been a member of ATESL for at least two years

- You have not received a bursary from ATESL in the past two years

- Your membership fees are paid in full

- You plan to return to Alberta after your conference or course of study, if it is outside the province.

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

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

ATESL Mission Statement

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization which promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English.

We do this by:

- encouraging and providing professional development opportunities which are consistent with generally accepted principles of adult learning and with currently understood principles of second language learning and teaching

- liaising with other organizations, local, provincial, national and international, which are engaged in education

- communicating with government, business, and the general public to create awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants and English language learning

- communicating with English language program providers and learners to encourage awareness of issues of accountability and program standards

- administering an ESL teacher accreditation process which encourages the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance

- working collaboratively with governments to develop policies and procedures which govern the provision of English language programs and related services for immigrants to Canada

- encouraging and supporting the participation of learners in the decision-making process which determine their educational choices

THE ATESL NEWSLETTER

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

Editor: Thomas Jiry

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