



The ATESL Newsletter

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

November – December 2005



ATESL ESL – C CONFERENCE 2005

*Connecting Communities,
Honouring Voices!*

What's Inside!

- ◆ Honouring Voices! Pictures! p.2
- ◆ President's Message p.3
- ◆ Essential Skills/CLB p.4
- ◆ National Network p.7
- ◆ Manitoba Innovations p.8
- ◆ Manitoba LINC p.9
- ◆ Portfolios p.10
- ◆ New Brunswick p.10
- ◆ LINC in Ontario p.11
- ◆ Let PET be your guide p. 14
- ◆ The Athabasca University Write Site p.15
- ◆ Reverse Pedagogy? How to Write an essay p.16
- ◆ Blogs p.18
- ◆ Mission Statement p.23
- ◆ Bursary Information p.24

ATESL ESL-C CONFERENCE 2005 CONNECTING COMMUNITIES HONOURING VOICES!



President's Message

To the members of ATESL:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for welcoming me as your President at the 2005 ESL-C/ATESL Conference in Calgary, Alberta. I am very excited to have the opportunity to build on the work that has been done by ATESL in the past, as well as to launch new initiatives with our Executive Board.

During my tenure, I hope to shift the focus of ATESL towards the principles of advocacy and awareness. My long term vision for ATESL is one that promotes:

- **ATESL as a key consultant in issues facing adult and K-12 English language learners in Alberta.** I hope to achieve this by actively engaging in dialogue with various stakeholders throughout the province. By connecting with professional and private organizations that support ESL education, ATESL can become a principal player within second language education.
- **ATESL as an organization that promotes membership from individuals engaged in ESL throughout the province.** I hope to create a further awareness of our organization and what we do within urban and rural centres. The more diverse our membership, the greater our perspective!

ATESL has continually endeavoured to assist second-language learners in accomplishing their goals and integrating into Canadian society. During my tenure, I hope to carry on this great tradition, as well as achieve greater recognition for those practitioners and institutions that strive to help these individuals achieve their successes.

Respectfully,

Lesley Dudley
ATESL President



Essential Skills/Technical English Curriculum Communication Assessment Tool/Project Overview

**“A Presentation at the ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005
Connecting Communities, Honouring Voices!”**

Summary

Project: Essential Skills Technical English Curriculum (ESTEC) and Essential Skills Communication Assessment Tool (ESCAT)

A 1.5 year SAIT-led partnership initiative funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

1. Core Concepts

Essential Skills Framework: Essential Skills are the skills needed for work, learning and life. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified and validated nine Essential Skills. These skills are used in nearly every occupation and throughout daily life in different ways and at different levels of complexity. There are nine Essential Skills: Reading Text; Document Use; Numeracy; Writing; Oral Communication; Working With Others; Continuous Learning; Thinking Skills; Computer Use. http://www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/general/all_profiles.asp

Canadian Language Benchmarks: The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) are the national standard used in Canada for describing, measuring and recognizing the second language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living and working in Canada. The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) promotes and supports the recognition and use of the CLB as a practical, fair and reliable national standard of second language proficiency in educational, training, community and workplace settings.

The CLBs provide a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in English as a Second Language, expressed as a benchmarks or reference points. They cover four skill areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and use real life language tasks to measure language skills. <http://www.language.ca>

Essential Skills/Canadian Language Benchmarks – Comparative Framework:
In 2004, SAIT’s English Language Foundations Program completed a major project

funded by Canada Immigration through the CCLB – The Comparative Framework (CF). It is still early to measure the impact of the new tool but, on a national scale, it will allow mainstream employability initiatives to be extended to include newcomers to Canada, principally the wave of skilled immigrants that Canada is currently accepting. The Comparative Framework established SAIT as a lead institution in Canada’s workforce development efforts and was a main reason that SAIT was identified to lead and develop the ESTEC/ESCAT project.

2. Project Overview

SAIT has joined an educational partnership to develop curriculum and assessment tools that will help Canadians make better use of the skills brought by immigrants. SAIT’s partners in this work are the Waterloo Regional School District School Board (WRDSB) and Leading Concepts International (LCI). Both organizations are well established nationally as innovators and developers in applying the national Essential Skills Framework.

The ESTEC/ESCAT Project will develop a prototype Technical English curriculum model, using Essential Skills terms, that can be applied to language upgrading for a variety of occupational groups. The initial exemplars for the curriculum will be **Engineering** and **Health Care**. WRDSB will develop the ESTEC Engineering curriculum and SAIT will develop the ESTEC Health Care. In CLB terms, these curricula will address the higher end of language development, focusing on CLB 6-10. As a point of reference, SAIT currently uses CLB 8 for admission purposes. The intention is to provide occupational appropriate language to prepare newcomers for more direct access to education appropriate employment.

Current assessment tools do not allow for measurement of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at these very high levels. For this reason, the project also includes the development of a prototype communication assessment tool (ESCAT), capable of evaluating language skills at skills similar to those of Canadian born speakers. The prototype ESCAT will be used to evaluate outcomes of learners during the pilot of the ESTEC curricula. Longer term implications are that ESCAT could be used for a variety of workplace language assessments, including assessment of Canadian born English speakers.

A further outcome of the ESTEC/ESCAT Project will be a national conference for groups that are involved in similar projects. The project sponsor, HRSDC, would like to encourage networking around the ideas of this project to encourage dissemination across Canada.

3. ESTEC/ESCAT and SAIT Strategic Planning

ESTEC/ESCAT harmonizes extremely well with SAIT strategic directions, with a potential to increase visibility of a unified programming stream called *workforce development*. Workforce development, via promotion and connection with ES, CLB and the Comparative

Framework will

- **Enhance SAIT's ability to design quality educational experiences relevant to our learners and customers** – by highlighting learning outcomes at complexity levels commensurate with identified industry requirements, SAIT will advance as a leader in workforce education for the 21st century, with enhanced ability to address issues as broad as diversity, career change and adoption of new technologies.
- **Provide industry with customized training globally** - Better tools for assessment of core employability skills – and attendant visibility associated with developing and promoting those tools – will enhance SAIT's ability to provide well-defined skills training that contributes directly to the changes and adaptations that employers are looking for in their employee teams. This new level of expertise and ability to customize training will attract employers to regard SAIT as their educational partner of choice.
- **Build strategic partnerships with industry, alumni and other educational institutions** – building curriculum that connects with nationally developed scaled relating to core employability skills – already being engaged by some national industry councils – will highlight SAIT's commitment to building skills for workplace communication, literacy and numeracy, safety and productivity. The tools we are developing through the ESTEC/ESCAT will be very usable to support this development direction.
- **Promote innovation and the development of new ideas and new processes** – the ESTEC/ESCAT project will provide a new focus for connecting with industry needs and demands, and how to serve them. SAIT will gain powerful SAIT-built tools, strong educational partners and important national exposure around the core issue of workforce development.

For further information regarding the ESTEC/ESCAT Project, please contact:

**Dr. Laura Ho, Manager
English Language Foundations
SAIT – 1301 – 16 Ave. NW.
Calgary, AB., T2M OL4**

**Laura.anderson.ho@sait.ca
(403) 284-8798**

Background to the TESL Canada National Network for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL Providers

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Angelique A. Schinas
Chair-TESL Canada National Networking Committee
Project Manager, National Network for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL Providers

The National Network is a TESL Canada national initiative funded by Citizenship & Immigration Canada. Its mandate is to promote communication and sharing of information among LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL providers nationally.

The National Network for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL Providers came out of discussions held at the National Settlement Conference I in Kingston, ON, in 2001 and a session for providers of LINC/ELSA/MIIP – ESL, TESL Canada Conference (2002) held in Regina, SK. The National Network initiative was introduced nationally in the late fall of 2002.

Since its introduction in 2002, the National Network initiative has provided opportunities for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL providers, program administrators and managers, instructors, assessors, child-minding staff and learners to share information and make recommendations relating to nationally comparable services, resources, research, and best practices. Examples of such opportunities include the TESL Canada Conference (Burnaby 2003), the National Settlement Conference (Calgary 2003), the TESL Ontario Conference (Toronto, 2004), the TESL Canada Conference (Ottawa, 2005), and the TESL Canada Learners' Conference (Ottawa, 2005) where issues unique to settlement language providers were reviewed, information and best practices were shared, and key recommendations were made by the participants.

In addition, Learner Delegates from LINC programs in the Greater Toronto Area who participated in the National Network TESL Ontario Information Sharing & Communication Sessions (Toronto, 2004) took part in the 2005 TESL Canada Symposium/ National Network workshop in Ottawa, 2005.

Participants who took part at National Network workshops presented at TESL events mentioned above and at National Network face-to-face meetings have shown an interest in the continuation of the project and some have already been involved in the process of raising awareness for the initiative in their own regions across Canada.

Information on the initiative is available through the TESL Canada website/[links:http://www.tesl.ca/links/National Network for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL providers](http://www.tesl.ca/links/National%20Network%20for%20LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL%20providers).

National Network for LINC/ELSA/MIIP-ESL Manitoba Innovations – The Entry Program

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Brenda Lohrenz

ELSA Net Provincial Coordinator

National Network Provincial Representative (BC)

Sharing with the National Network group meeting at the ATESL Conference in Alberta Nov. 3 & 4 gave insights on immigrant settlement language programming across the country. As usual, innovations out of Manitoba caught my eye.

Of particular interest is that with growing success in attracting immigrants, Winnipeg is now experiencing class waitlists. The solution? If you have lived in Manitoba for less than 3 months, you are invited to register for the Entry Program – a four-week language and orientation program for newcomers.

On speaking to the coordinator, Grace Eidse, they have been offering this program at the foundations, beginner, intermediate, and advance levels (to a benchmark 8) since Oct. 2004 to enthusiastic response from students. Weekly topics for the month long course were identified in collaboration with Winnipeg settlement agencies. Every Wednesday they have an expert in to speak – all the student levels join together for this talk and interpreters are provided for *every* language group. Grace mentioned they have about 20 languages represented each week! Sometimes advanced group volunteers act as interpreters and receive reference letters from the program in return.

And what of the outcomes of the Entry Program? Students have an excellent chance to meet others while in transition. Often the friendships created at these classes will extend into their home lives and provide valuable interactions they otherwise wouldn't have. Certainly initial settlement issues are covered and there is an opportunity for information sharing on key issues that may affect their adaptation process. The positive feedback for this program since its inception has helped it become an on-going part of Manitoba's settlement language services.

That is not the only initiative coming out of Manitoba we here in BC might take note of. At the National Network meeting in Alberta, a Saskatchewan presenter discussed the process of introducing portfolio assessment to their staff and students through use of a downloadable Manitoba document called 'Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment: Manitoba Best Practices Guide'. Margaret Hnidy of the Regina Open Door Society spoke enthusiastically about bringing students into the CLB evaluation process and ensuring their active participation in formulating language goals through the use of individual portfolios.

For more information, please visit <http://www.immigratemanitoba.com> and do a search on Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment.

Manitoba

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

June Shymko

Manitoba Rep

ESL teacher in the Winnipeg School Division Adult ESL Program

The Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program funds settlement and adult EAL programs. The Manitoba Government, through Manitoba Labour and Immigration, provides continued funding when the one-year federal sponsorship is finished. The department also provides funding for language training up the CLB 8 level. English language training for adults in Manitoba is coordinated through the Adult Language Training Branch of Labour and Immigration.

The ALT branch coordinates two profession development sessions each year, as well as funding EAL instructors to attend the fall TEAM conference and the February TESL Manitoba conference. In recent years, ALT, with input from EAL teachers, has implemented collaborative portfolio assessment and standardized progress reports throughout the province. The TEAM conference in October was on assessing writing, with draft copies of writing rubrics presented for CLB levels 1-8, as well as for the Literacy stream. Plans are also underway for a spring PD event focusing on Teaching Pronunciation to adult EAL learners.

Several summers ago, when there were unusually long waiting lists for language training, the ALT branch funded a 4-week Entry Program to get learners into a "class" while they were waiting for assessment and placement into a regular program. The Entry Program is theme-based and settlement-based. The summer pilot has developed into a program that now continues throughout the year.

In addition, the ALT branch is undertaking a major revision of the CLB Core Language Learning Objectives to align it with the CLB 2000. The original Core Objectives was developed as a lesson plan support document, after the introduction of the 1996 CLB.

Margaret Pidlaski, the director of the ALT branch, chairs the Manitoba Adult EAL Coordinating Group. EAL providers, professional groups, settlement agencies and government representatives meet three times a year to share information about their particular areas.

TEAM - Teaching English as an Additional Language to Adults in Manitoba

TESL - Teaching English as a Second Language

Portfolios in the Classroom

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Margaret Hnidy

Regina Open Door Society (RODS), SCENES, Provincial Rep:CCLB

The presentation shared some of the successes and challenges of introducing and maintaining learner portfolios in a continual intake classroom. Furthermore, the presenter shared information on CLB based material available to help assist teachers in the assessment of learners in addition to taking a look at some of the logistics around learner- teacher interviews.

The First Thirteen Years Plus One.....: LINC and Settlement in Saint John, New Brunswick

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Yasmin Ojah

TESL New Brunswick and National Network Representative

The **Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada** programme is into its fourteenth year in Saint John, New Brunswick at the Saint John YM-YWCA. It continues to be the only federally-funded one in the area. Two others are located in Fredericton and Moncton. In Saint John, we started with three teachers who spoke five languages among them and over time we increased LINC offerings from three to four levels, the first being a Pre-LINC one. Some of our teachers are also trained in basic literacy, a useful skill at all levels and everyone has completed TESL training.

Our department, Settlement Services, now oversees **RAP, ISAP, HOST**, and a **Homework Club** as well as language training and our **School Liaison** programme is the only one in the province. Since all co-ordinators and programmes are onsite, we have a very strong team which thus facilitates service delivery to new and established immigrants. When working with Settlement Services, volunteers must subscribe to our organization's strict confidentiality policy, the programme's ethical guidelines and provide us with a police certificate. Our clients' children are given the opportunity to participate in onsite and residential **Summer Camps** and for the younger ones we offer **onsite licensed childcare** through the week. Additionally, we act as an observation/ teaching site for local university-based TESL Certificate students. Since our city is undertaking a strategy to encourage immigrants, we are now dealing with **Provincial Nominee** applicants who are in the process of setting up businesses, as well as international students who wish to stay in the province.

Recent **CLB 4/5** classes have been very successful with all clients becoming employed through opportunities provided by HRSDC counselors. While in that class, students were able to access computer training, and participate in Emergency First Aid and CPR along with health and banking workshops which resulted in a rich language learning experience for everyone. Finally, our staff attends an annual ARAISA (Atlantic Region Association for Immigrant Serving Agencies) conference sponsored by CIC, done on a rotating basis around the Atlantic, where we discuss prevailing situations and social policy matters. We invite you to join us at the 2008 TESL Canada Conference in Moncton, NB.

LINC in Ontario

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Salomi Atandi
NN Provincial Representative (ON)
LINC Co-ordinator
Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board

Background:

- There are over 200 LINC Service Providers in Ontario
- LINC levels offered in Ontario
- Literacy to LINC 5
- In some cases classes are multi-level or are blended with Provincial ESL classes
- Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee

ORLAC Mandate:

- The Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee (ORLAC) has the mandate to provide Citizenship and Immigration Canada Ontario Region with expert advice on the Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada program (LINC) including program enhancement and delivery assistance in order to support the achievement of LINC objectives and to ensure that LINC remains relevant to the evolving needs of its clients.

Why ORLAC was formed - historical perspective:

- New program initiative
- Need to have buy in
- Need to establish avenue for dialogue with all stakeholders
- Need to ensure success and quality
- Need to establish curricula

- Need to address challenges and changes in an inclusive manner

**Sample of ORLAC Supported LINC Projects
Evaluations and Studies:**

- Evaluation of the Language for Employment Related Needs (LERN) Pilot Projects
- Study of LINC Assessment Centres
- Evaluation of the Automated Reservation System and Needs Assessment to Inform Plans for Future Expansion
- Study of ESL/FSL Services in Ontario
- A Feasibility Study in the Technical Aspects of Integrating a Job Placement Component into Language Training with an Employment Focus.
- In-Home Study Feasibility Project
- Research to Establish Standards and a Protocol for the certification of Adult ESL Instructors in Canada.
- Follow-up Study of People in Ontario Completing Level 3 of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program
- CLBA and CLBPT Comparison Study

**Sample of ORLAC Supported LINC Projects
Resources for LINC Programs:**

- Best Practice Features of Quality LINC Programs
- Revised LINC Curriculum Guidelines 1997
- The Revised Literacy Component 1997 of the LINC Curriculum Guidelines
- LINC Literacy Addendum: A Support Document for the LINC Literacy Component 1998
- Annotated Inventory of LINC and ESL related Computer Software and Internet Resources 1997
- LINC Literacy Employment Resource: A Support document for the LINC literacy Component
- LINC Parenting Program: Manual and Curriculum Guidelines
- Steps to Employment Manuals
- A Toolbox for ESL Tutors: An Instructional Guide for teaching English as a Second Language to Newcomers
- Computer Assisted Language Learning: A Software Guide for the LINC Classroom
- LINC 4 and 5 Curriculum Guidelines
- Cross-Cultural Conflict Management – A Handbook of Resources
- Canadian Language Benchmarks: LINC Proficiency Checklists
- Guidelines for LINC Assessment Centres in Ontario
- Understanding the LINC Classroom: Training for LINC Project Officers in Ontario

- Alphaplus LINC mini collections
- Alphaplus Index and ESL web resources
- Nursing Benchmarks Development and Testing
- Handbook for Developing Employment Related Language Programs
- LINC 1 to 5 Curriculum Guidelines
- Understanding LINC: A Manual and Resource Guide for Service Providing Organizations

**Sample of ORLAC Supported LINC Projects
Conferences and Professional Development:**

- TESL Ontario Annual Conference
- Annual Ontario LINC Childminding Conference
- Annual Ontario Assessors Conference and Assessment Centre Coordinators Forum
- CCVT training and workshops on survivors of torture in LINC classrooms
- Understanding LINC training for LINC coordinators and administrators
- Benchmark Competency Workshops: A Guide to Assigning Student Benchmarks
- LINC Curriculum Guidelines Training
- Best Practice Features Training
- LERN Information Sharing Forum
- TESL Research Symposiums
- TESL Computer Fair
- Training Workshops for Childminders

What's happening today:

- CIC – Ontario region has a couple projects currently underway:
- Looking at the needs of Literacy Learners
- Defining “High Risk”
- Possible revision and up date of curriculum
- Ontario has had a shuffle and responsibility for ESL and Foreign Trained Professionals, Access to Professions and Trades has moved to the Ministry of Citizenship (away from MTCU and EDU)

Let PET be your guide

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Veronica Baig

Practice, practice and more practice is the well known method for helping students to improve their language and writing skills. Providing the necessary amount of practice, however, is often difficult. PET—Practical English Teacher® overcomes this difficulty; it is a computer-based learning tool that allows students to practice a comprehensive array of language structures using a test-bank of approximately thirty thousand questions. This system is designed for advanced level students who may need to either improve their skills in several areas or need a course for more general language improvement.

PET achieves these goals by providing rules, examples, two levels of questions for most topics, feedback, testing of each structure taught, and tracking of individual progress through the modules. While the essentials of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure are taught, there are also modules on revision skills, editing skills, and the recognition of errors in sentence structure.

This presentation demonstrates the learning objects available in PET, and the way in which these learning objects are integrated into a total learning experience that can be individualized for each student. We show how you and your students can benefit from this easy to use, effective system that is available over the Internet.

PET allows advanced level students to practice language structures such as grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, revision skills, editing skills, and the recognition of errors. Students also receive rules, hints and feedback if they make errors. The learning objects are integrated into a total learning experience that can be individualized for each student. We show how you and your students can benefit from this easy to use, effective system that is available over the Internet.

Veronica Baig is the Academic Coordinator for English Language Studies at Athabasca University. She supervises the AU Write Site that includes the PET resource.

The Athabasca University Write Site

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

Veronica Baig

A common problem is how to improve writing skills not only for ESL students but for all students in university, college and preparatory programs. Most traditional institutions have a Writing Centre where students access resources and advice. With distance education, however, we needed to develop a different model.

The AU Write Site is designed to provide the traditional Writing Centre type of service and to include some extras. It was a grant through the E-Learning Accelerator funding from the Government of Alberta that provided the impetus for development. This grant was designed to develop online components for the highest enrollment courses. These already existed for the primary university writing course—we needed a way to extend them to lower enrollment courses, the ESL courses, and to courses requiring essays across the university.

The Write Site is designed to incorporate the following features:

- Testing of English language ability (ELA)
- Testing of writing ability (ELA-Plus)
- Writing Coach advice
- FAQs
- Discussion Boards
- Peer Editing
- Resources
- PET—Practical English Teacher—an interactive grammar resource

This paper describes the process of developing the Write Site and the resources available both to AU students and others. Some resources are available free of charge to anyone; others are available only to AU students or to other students and institutions for a fee. The bottom line is that improving writing skills benefits all students no matter which courses they take, and online resources open up a new dimension for students.

The AU Write Site is Athabasca University's answer to the need for a writing centre for on-line students. This presentation describes the background to this site, the components of the site, and the way it actually works. Particularly interesting are the different levels of access to this site—while all levels are accessible to AU registered students, there are some levels open to students and institutions anywhere, and there is also some fee-for-service options available.

Veronica Baig is the Academic Coordinator for English Language Studies at Athabasca University. Her responsibilities include supervision of the AU Write Site.

Reverse Pedagogy? How to Right an Essay

Terry McLean

Edmonton

There is nothing like reading a well-crafted essay that flows from a clear thesis statement, is joined by smooth transitions, and ends with a nifty little conclusion that ties everything up. I was hoping for this pleasing experience the other day after taking in the essays that my students wrote. We had spent weeks perfecting hooks, topic sentences, transitions, supporting details, commas, verb tenses, and word forms. I vigorously explained what it takes to write a superb essay, and, while I was sure that I taught with scholarly prowess, I was even more convinced that they were dazzled with my sagacious delivery. *Wrong*. Then again, caring instructors are supposed to constantly reflect, preferably with glass of wine in hand, on their teaching. Therefore, after a bit of vino-flecting, or re-wining, I came up with the solution to my problems. I have the impression that my younger students are doing exactly what I ask them *not* to do – just to spite me (that rebellion thing). Therefore, I am thinking of teaching how to write an 'A' essay, while showing them how to write an 'F' one. "Now there's a novel idea" (empty bottle of fermented grape beverage, quite a bit of personal communication, March 42thst, 2005). Reverse psychology? Reverse pedagogy? Sure.

First of all we should tell our students that proper punctuation is essential especially commas are important because without those helpful pause indicators we would never get a break

when we read things and we wouldn't know which adjective clauses are nonrestrictive and the use of colons and semi-colons can add emphasis to what we want to say for example if we want to join thoughts without starting a new sentence and whenever we use quotations in writing we should use quotation marks speaking of punctuation can you imagine what the editors of the APA and MLA manuals would say if they read an article that broke every rule in the book it would be funny to see the looks on their nitpicky faces. Also, do not forget to clarify that you need a space after commas and periods, not before them! And you can't use contractions or too many question marks?

Use sentence variety. Avoid choppy sentences. They're no good. Join interesting ideas. Be creative. Don't break it all up. Keep things going with commas. Simple sentences are boring. Throw in a complex one. Better yet, add a compound sentence. Hey, what about a compound-complex? Cool. Get the reader's attention. Use a transition. Make your writing flow. Flow like a river. Feel the syntax. Be the pen. You will love it. Sweet.

We must also apprise to our students to parry from relying on their electronic dictionaries too much. It is manifest when a student discriminates a miscalculated word that they have unearthed. Also, it is always easy too sea when a student has used a spell-check, but has not taken the time to actually read through for mistakes. There is nothing like going from bed to worse when reading an essay that has been pieced together with misspelled words and strange Capitalization. *Dog, eye hate that.*

Probably the best advice we can give our students is for them to keep away from idioms and clichés as far as they can throw them. The bottom line is to get students to reach for the top and never say never as they put their noses to the grindstone. By the way, have you noticed that young people are using so much e-mail/chat English? Cuz I have. R U as confused as I am? Let's get about +ive feedback & gettem to stop this habit asap. If we don't, I'm like gonna hafta beat the bejeezus outa some dude. Hey, soundz kinda awesome. *Word.*

So, just as teenagers, at times, rebel against their parents' every word, some students refuse to listen to what their omniscient instructors profess. I am a lifelong learner engaging in continual professional development, and, after a bit of reflection and a vat of wine, I have come to the conclusion that my novel method of teaching how to write an 'A' essay can work. As long as it leads to more enjoyable grading for me, I'll try anything. Reverse psychology? Reverse pedagogy? Like, whatever. Cheers.

Exploring the Lived Experience: Blogs as a tool for Second Language Acquisition

ATESL ESL-C Conference 2005 Presentation Summary

By Scott Roy Douglas, M.Ed.

Often in the quest for academic English both teachers and students in their anxiety to reach advanced proficiency as soon as possible immerse themselves in materials that are cognitively challenging, decontextualized, filled with complex grammatical structures and contain heavy vocabulary loads. This is done while at the same time the same students are often not able to express themselves fluently, either in speaking or in writing, about what has happened to them recently, or how they feel personally about certain topics. They are not able to express the world as they see it. What has happened is that the lived experience of the students has been ignored in the rush to gain academic English. Exploring the lived experience of English language students is a vital part of gaining academic language proficiency. The question is how can this part of the process be fully exploited when there are often such time pressures to develop academic language. The answer lies in paying attention to the lived experience of the students. One method to develop the language of the lived experience of the students is to use blogs as a learning project outside of the classroom. Because blogs are web pages that allow students to post their feelings, thoughts and ideas onto the internet, they contribute to developing language proficiency through an exploration of the students' lived experience.

For Paulo Freire (1970), lived experience plays a paramount role in education. By using blogs as a tool for English language acquisition with second language students, the students and teachers develop a freirian relationship grounded in the lived experience of the students. The dynamics of the classroom transform into an educational space where students can learn from the teacher, but the teacher can also learn from the students. In fact, there are no more teachers and students in the traditional sense, because the teacher and the students are now playing the roles of equal partners. They have become teacher – students and student – teachers. That is, they are all learning from each other as they are blogging on the internet. This is because the information that the teachers and the students are exchanging in their blogs rejects the traditional banking concept of education in which it is the teacher's task to fill the students up with knowledge by making deposits of information into the students. For Freire (1970), these deposits are detached from reality. Rather, blogs are real because the content of the blogs emerges from the lived experience and concrete reality of the students. Literacy, and by extension, ESL literacy, for Freire, must arise out of the lived experience of the learners:

I have always insisted that words used in organizing a literacy program come from the world universe of the people who are learning, expressing the actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, dreams. Words should be laden with the meaning

of the people's existential experience, and not of the teacher's experience (Freire 1983: 10)

Because the content in the blogs emerges from the world experience of the students, the content is neither a gift nor an imposition from the teacher. It is not made up of the bits of information of the banking concept of education that are to be deposited in the students. Instead, by using their own content, the students can feel less alienated from their reality, and they can become more committed to their education (Freire 1970). Learners become subjects of their own education. The content of an ESL course using blogs centres on issues from their own lives, so learning English becomes immediately relevant and engaging (Auerbach 1992). The blogs arise out of the lived experiences and concrete realities of the students, and because of that, learning becomes grounded in the day to day experience of these students. Blogs become an environment in which the creation and exchange of a large amount of information provides students with more opportunities for learning and using language through peer interaction than a traditional teacher centred ESL classroom. The teacher and the students are engaged in dialogue and they confront each other as knowledgeable equals in a situation of genuine two-way communication. Both teachers and students have something to offer to each other. Teachers possess knowledge of the English language, while students possess knowledge of the concrete reality of their culture. Teachers can help the students set up blogs, and the students can teach the teachers about the daily reality of their lives. The students' blogs give the teacher and the students the opportunity to engage in the mutual process of reflecting upon and developing insights into the students' ever changing situations (Spener 1992). Blogs are a forum that in which a certain level of fluency can develop freely as the students write about the world as they see and experience it.

One reason why using blogs in this manner fits in so well with developing the students' English is that by exploring their lived experience, the students are developing a vital stage of their language proficiency. Free blogging, where the students choose what topics they will write about, plays an important role in the development of English language proficiency. This developmental process is based on Cummins' (1982) concept of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Cummins provides educators with a framework for understanding academic language proficiency. The Cummins framework was designed to identify the extent to which ESL students are able to cope successfully with the cognitive and linguistic demands made on them by the social and educational environment in which they function (Cummins 1994). Cummins developed his framework for describing BICS and CALP along two continua. The vertical continuum describes the degree of cognitive involvement in communicative activities, and the horizontal continuum described the range of contextual support. Roessingh (2004) has adapted the framework (figure 1) to describe the stages of language acquisition that are necessary to achieve academic language proficiency. (See page 21)

Roessingh's interpretation of the Cummins Model finds that the intersection of the two continua opens up four windows that are useful for thinking about instructional supports that will allow for growth from BICS to CALP. As students advance through their academic

years, they are increasingly required to manipulate language in a series of developmental stages that correspond to the BICS / CALP quadrants. As a result, the model is a useful guide for thinking about the development of academic proficiency in ESL learners. In order to succeed academically, students need an educational program that commits to support across all four quadrants of the Cummins Model (Roessingh 2003). That is, none of the quadrants can be skipped on the road to academic proficiency. Roessingh (2003) sees certain instructional strategies as being suited for the characteristics found in each of the quadrants. For Roessingh, quadrant 2 is important for developing literacy and cultural information. Blogs are one of the instructional strategies that fit into the second quadrant, which can be thought of as the quadrant that contains the language of the students' lived experience. This language is accessible from the familiar experiences of the students. Blogs seem to be an ideal instructional tool for exploring the lived experiences of the students when the students can freely choose the topics they wish to write about. By having the freedom to choose topics that come from their own lived experiences and interpretation of the world, blogs provide the writing practice necessary for the students to gain the English ability needed to move into the next quadrant on their way to cognitive academic language proficiency.

Setting up a blogging program as part of an ESL curriculum is relatively easy. There are several blogging web sites available for free on the internet, and most of them are simple to use. In this case, blogger.com was chosen because of its ease of use and popularity. After an initial investment of time in the computer lab (60 – 90 minutes), students were able to set up their blogs and begin blogging. The only requirements made were that the students blog at least once a week with a total of 100 – 150 words. After the students established their blogs, a central list of all the students blogs was put onto the teachers blog so that students could easily read each other's blogs. To date, five blogging projects have been successfully carried out with students both at Kansai Gaidai University in Japan and the University of Calgary in Canada. These blogs are found at <http://www.kansai.gaidai.ac.jp/~blogspot.com>, <http://www.kansai.gaidai.ac.jp/~englishtwo.blogspot.com>, <http://www.iesglobalissues.blogspot.com>, <http://www.gaidai.globalissues.blogspot.com>, and <http://www.leapintoenglish.blogspot.com>, with the most current blog being the last. It is evident in these five blogging projects that students were able to free write large amounts of text, the topics of which were of their choosing. The blogs evolved into an authentic forum for autonomous learning in which the students wrote for a real audience consisting of their classmates, teacher and other bloggers from around the world. Free rein was given to the lived experience of the students in the blogs, while in the classroom attention was paid to developing the rhetorical structures of written and spoken academic language in a more formal manner. Because of this, no developmental steps were ignored in the quest for academic language proficiency, and the lived experience of the students was able to inform the teaching occurring in the classroom.

Blogs help students become fluent in the language of their lived experience. Because of this, students are set up for further academic success. Friere, Cummins and Roessingh have all identified lived experience as one of the keys to learning. If this key to learning English is not used, the door to academic language proficiency will never become unlocked. Teachers should not, in their rush to achieve academic proficiency, leave behind the students

who are not able to express themselves on a basic interpersonal level. One kind of fluency compliments the other, and the achievement of one cannot be separated from the achievement of the other. Time spent blogging is time well used.

From BICS to CALP: Roessingh's (2004) adaptation of the Cummins' (1982) Framework for the development of language proficiency

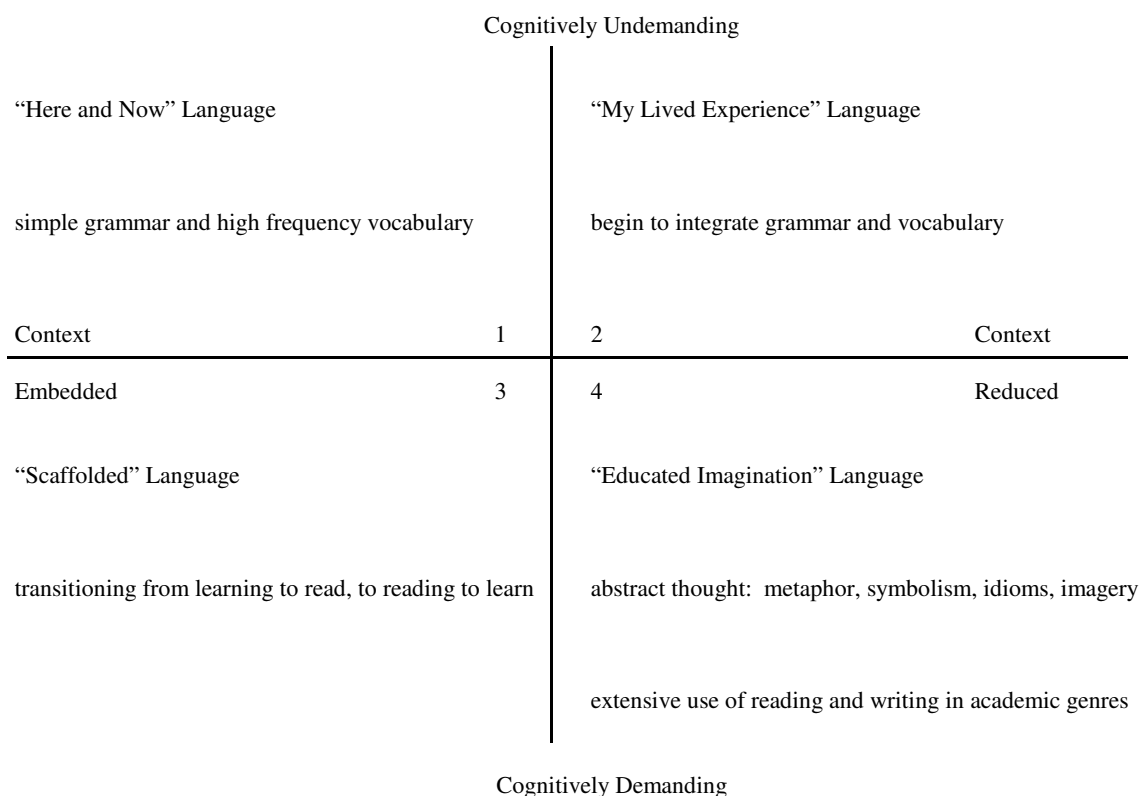


Figure 1

References:

Auerbach, E.R. (1992). *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL literacy*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

Cummins, J. (1982). *Bilingualism and minority language children*. Toronto, ON: OISE Press.

Cummins, J. (1994). The acquisition of English as a second language. In (Eds. Karen Spangenberg-Urbschat and Robert Pritchard) *Kids come in all languages: Reading instruction for ESL students*. Newark, DE: IRA.

- Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Freire, Paulo. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. *Journal of Education* 165 (1): 5 – 11.
- Roessingh, H. (2003). BICS-CALP Development: Cummins Model. Unpublished Paper.
- Roessingh, H. (2004, May). *BICS-CALP: An introduction for some, a review for others . . .* presented at the Saskatchewan Council for Educators of Non-English Speakers Annual Conference, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- Spener, David. (1992). The Freirean approach to adult literacy education. *ERIC Digest*. Washington, DC. National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Retrieved March 1, 2003: <http://www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS/FreireQA.htm>.
-

THE ATESL NEWSLETTER
Published Quarterly
Deadlines: Feb. 15, May 15, Aug. 15, Nov. 15
Announcements, workshop dates, book reviews, teaching ideas,
and articles relevant to the field welcome
Editor: Thomas Jiry, 1-780-463-5576
tom.jiry@norquest.ca

Disclaimer: ATESL remains neutral to all content in the ATESL Newsletter.

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

ATESL Professional Development Bursaries

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

Deadlines for application in 2005 are: March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.

Apply now by completing the official application form:

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.