

The Early Language Learning (ELL) curriculum supports newcomers with low levels of English

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Abstract

The article provides information on the Early Language Learning Curriculum (ELL) curriculum, which is a set of documents to guide and support the delivery of real-world task-based English language instruction for adult newcomers with low levels of English (literacy to CLB 3) from Mothers Matter Centre. Designed as a service enhancement to the long-running Multicultural HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) Program for immigrant and refugee mothers of young children, ELL can also be used on its own to provide structured, informal English training in a classroom and/or with one-on-one English practice tutorials. Materials designed for the tutorials can also be used to support conversation circles. The curriculum was designed through the support of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and is free for organizations to use.

The ELL project was an innovative project funded by IRCC between 2018-2020. The project was a pilot and was implemented at two sites: in Toronto by Working Women's Community Centre and in Vancouver by Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSofBC). Mothers Matter Centre (MMC) supported coordination, quality control, capacity building, and documentation for the pilot. ELL added on English language learning support atop our core [HIPPY model](#). Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is an evidence-based program that works in the home to support vulnerable and isolated mothers in their critical role as their child's first and most important teacher. When ELL is paired with a HIPPY program, newcomer moms still learn and deliver the HIPPY core curriculum as a priority, but also attend English



language class once or twice per week to work on their English while their preschool age children are looked after by qualified childminders. The HIPPY Home Visitors also participate in the language classes as teacher assistants, helping the teacher deliver activities and occasionally using interpretation to help the newcomer moms with understanding complex concepts. The language classes are followed up by 30 minutes of home tutoring support based on the tasks the teacher is working toward in class, delivered by the Home Visitor after the HIPPY curriculum portion of their home visit.

The ELL curriculum was originally designed for use with a HIPPY program for newcomer mothers but can stand alone as a language class or be used to support conversation circles or tutoring. ELL covers 12 key settlement topics such as Knowing Your Community, Settlement and Community Services, Physical and Mental Health, Financial Literacy, and Canadian Parenting norms. Newcomers work toward informal skill-using tasks, build confidence, learn about key resources in the community, and break the cycle of isolation surrounding immigrants and refugees with low levels of English so they are more ready for structured LINC learning when their personal circumstances allow. The curriculum supports the delivery of real-world task-based English language instruction for adult newcomers with low levels of English (literacy to CLB 3). ELL can be used on its own to provide structured, informal English training in a classroom and/or with one-on-one English practice tutorials. Materials designed for the tutorials can also be used to support conversation circles.

The target clients of ELL are adult newcomers with low levels of English (as measured by the Canadian Language Benchmarks, literacy to CLB 3). Certain units or parts of units are particularly beneficial to newcomer parents, but learners do not need to be parents to participate. Units targeting parenting can be skipped if not applicable to the particular participant group.

ELL helps newcomers by increasing their language knowledge and improving their ability and confidence to communicate in social and community situations. Knowing the language they need to ask for support, helps them access existing community resources, and helps them become less isolated.

ELL is similar to LINC in several respects:

- Real-world task-based learning
- Settlement language focused for community interaction
- Alignment with Canadian language benchmarks
- Communicative and interactive classroom approach
- Client input to learning through intake and monthly needs assessments
- Builds client autonomy for learning through reflections and action-oriented feedback



ELL is different from LINC in that it is structured as informal learning as opposed to formal language training using Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) to evaluate and assign new benchmarks. Rather than doing assessment tasks, newcomers only work toward skill-using tasks and receive comments-only feedback to help them improve. Participants therefore do not receive LINC certificates from ELL to be used toward citizenship.

Every curriculum needs to measure language gains. Unlike LINC, PBLA is not used in ELL. Instead, the ELL curriculum emphasizes improvement over achievement. Learners work toward language tasks in class to complete skill-using tasks to show themselves and their teacher what they can do. Instead of marks, the teacher provides oral and written feedback to help guide the learners in how they can complete the task more successfully. The focus is on building on whatever language the newcomers already have, so they feel successful.

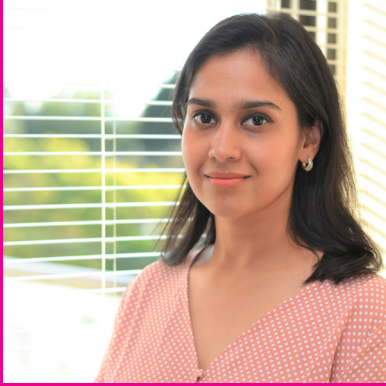
The language knowledge and skills learned with ELL, as well as understanding of the task-based approach and responsibility for learning, are transferable to LINC. The skill-using tasks completed in ELL have potential to be accepted as evidence of learning and ability in LINC though they are not formally transferable at this time.

ELL language learning materials are divided into 3 documents for each unit: Instructor Guidelines, Home Visitor Scripts, and Learner Handouts for use with the scripts. This division makes it easy for a program to use ELL to deliver classroom-only learning or tutoring-only learning if desired, instead of the classroom and follow-up tutoring model of the original design. The ELL curriculum contains enough material to support a minimum of 60 weeks of delivery over 2 years. An ELL language class requires a qualified EAL instructor to use the Instructor Guidelines and deliver ELL as intended. Volunteer language facilitators can use the ELL scripts as the basis of a conversation circle or for small-group or one-on-one tutoring.

Organizations or programs that wish to use the ELL curriculum free of charge to support newcomers learning beginner levels of English should contact Mothers Matter Centre for access.



Author Bio



Yusra works with the Mothers Matter Centre Canada as the Director for Innovations, Advocacy and Multicultural HIPPY. She has rich experience of working with refugees and displaced populations in both the global south and north. Her interests include gender-based programming, mainstreaming vulnerable groups in governance processes, and working on meaningful social inclusion programs. Yusra has 15 years of experience of designing and managing projects aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalized groups especially women and minorities at global and national levels. Before, her engagement with the Mothers Matter Centre, she worked for the United Nations and many other rights-based international organizations.

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