

English Language Learning Magazine

CONTACT

March 2026

Articles from the 2025 Conference

Open Educational Resources for inclusive language
PLUS See it, feel it, move it, read it: Reading
with all your senses for adult EAL learners AND
MORE...

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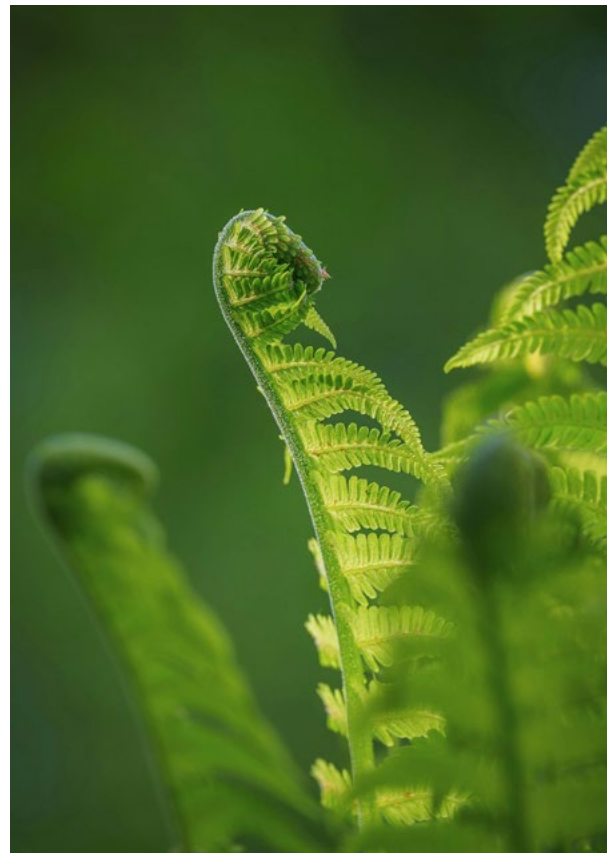
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Couleur. [Image]. Fern. Retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/fern-green-leaves-nature-growth-10014894/>

Calendar of Events

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May

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May 24 — [Release Control, Let Inquiry Roll](#)

June

June 18 — [Benchmarking Digital Prowess in Language Learning](#)

June 28 — [Volunteers Make the Difference](#)



Editor's Note

Welcome to the first issue of 2026. It's spring. Finally. We survived the winter and the mountainous snowbanks. I'm currently situated in a coffee shop in Tokyo (where I hear cherry blossoms are coming to life) writing my Editor's Note to you. Away from Toronto on business, Tokyo is a behemoth in all the positive ways.

This issue is a mixed bag of goodies for you including articles from the 2025 TESL Ontario Annual Virtual Conference and the 2025 TESL Ontario Report.

To start off, we spotlight Farnaz Karimian. Farnaz talks about transferrable skills, professional development, the precarity of language teaching in Toronto, and her latest venture, her podcast. For those lucky enough to know Farnaz personally, she is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to language teaching, entrepreneurial skills, and thinking outside the box. Thank you, Farnaz, for being part of this issue.

Three presentations from the TESL Ontario Annual Virtual Conference are featured in this issue, including Anh Le-Noronha's work on open educational resources, Heidi Brooks' experience with multisensory learning, and Javeria Rebaz and Rowan Lomas's overview of the challenges and successes HyFlex LINC literacy. Stephanie Kinzie's report summarizes the key findings of TESL Ontario's 2025 member survey. Bruno Drighetti delves into a discursive framework—specifically, a genre-based approach—which can help instructors in describing genres. Elena Kapshutar explores rapid language acquisition and how certain

techniques embedded into classroom can *help learners achieve measurable, lasting gains*. Finally, Maggie Wang, a newly OCELT, reviews lessons learned from practicum teaching.

Much appreciation to all the authors and contributors of this issue. Your articles will surely leave an impression on the readers.

Until the summer issue...

Thank you for reading. Take care.



-Nicola Carozza
editor@teslontario.org



CONTACT

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TESL Ontario

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Spotlight — Farnaz Karimian



Farnaz Karimian is an educator who's passionate about rethinking how adults learn English through inclusive, practical, and critically informed approaches. With an MA in Applied Linguistics and extensive experience across colleges, universities, private language schools, and settlement programs, she supports learners and educators in building meaningful, equitable learning environments. Outside of her professional work, she can be found doting on her pets, caring for her plants, and hosting thoughtful podcast conversations about language education in an ever-evolving ESL landscape.

Farnaz, you have a ton of experience—from all sorts of teaching to curriculum development to management—and now host of your own podcast, *Learning off the Syllabus*. Tell us everything about this exciting venture.

I'm so excited that you asked about *Learning Off the Syllabus*! Thank you, Nicola! This is a project that I started during a difficult turning point in my career. To provide

a bit of context, two days before a new term began, I lost my teaching position. As a contract professor in the college sector, I knew losing work would be absolutely inevitable, but knowing it in theory didn't make it easier when it actually did happen. I found myself grappling with really hard (and uncomfortable) questions about my own identity, values, expertise and needs as an EAL educator. "How can I be myself and move through life, if I'm no longer a teacher?" Coming to terms with that was incredibly challenging!

During this time I did everything in my power to not lose my identity entirely. On my "good" days that looked like being motivated to make a difference: applying to hundreds of jobs, looking for volunteer opportunities, signing up for PD workshops, or thinking about how I could transfer my existing skills to other fields. On my "bad" days it looked like giving up, having an existential crisis, losing hope, melting into my couch and accepting that working within the field of Teaching English as an Additional Language might no longer be what it used to be. Sitting with these unsettling thoughts is what ultimately inspired me to start this podcast.

Learning Off the Syllabus was created to highlight the voices that make English Language Education what it is: teachers, students, curriculum developers, directors, academics, coordinators and many more. I wanted to create a platform where I could talk to *real* people (our everyday heroes) and hear about *their* experiences and expertise. It is my way, although small, of advocating for equity and empowering my colleagues and students.



The concepts that are covered in each episode are what we're all thinking about every day; they are conversations that we usually have on the down low with our peers; whether it's about our pedagogical values that don't always align with operational pressures, the emotional labor of working in this field, the precarity of our jobs or other classroom stories, they are important issues that need to be spoken about out loud.

What started out as a creative outlet for me to make sense of the world I'm currently living in has led me to unbelievably perceptive, inspirational, emotional, and hilarious discussions with people I highly respect. I am hoping that these conversations bring validation, support, and generally valuable insight to our teaching and learning community.

If you're an immigrant, a language learner, a new or seasoned teacher, a leader, a thinker, or someone who's generally interested in what we do, then please listen and subscribe to *Learning Off the Syllabus* on any platform where you get your podcasts! <https://allmylinks.com/learning-off-the-syllabus>

I also always want to hear from my peers, so if you have a story of your own to share, or just want to reach out, please feel free to email me at learningoffthesyllabus@gmail.com or find me on IG: @learningoffthesyllabus

You mentioned it in one of your podcast episodes—the word *precarity*—and it's quite possibly one of the best words to sum up English language teaching currently for many. What have you learned during these times?

Honestly, the word 'precarity' comes up in almost every teaching-related conversation I have with my colleagues (and anyone else who'll lend me an ear, in which case, I'm so

sorry to bring it up again, but what can I say, I'm an advocate for fairness in education). I could talk about this for days, but I'll try to keep it concise

Precarity for EAL teachers really means working in conditions that are unstable and unpredictable, often without long-term security or strong institutional protection. Many teachers work at multiple institutions simultaneously and move from contract to contract, with hours tied to enrollment and limited access to benefits or support. Those with full time hours are likely paid unfairly, and their expertise is seemingly undervalued. Even our full time college and university professors are not entirely safe with the number of layoffs and program closures in the past year.

Precarity has been one of the most clarifying and blunt teachers in my own career. Working across colleges, universities, private language schools, and settlement programs, I've seen how instability influences everything from pedagogy, to morale, to innovation and more. I've come to see that precarity in our field is a structural reality that shapes how we live, teach, and plan for our futures. At this point I've chosen to treat it as a call to build stronger professional communities, advocate more intentionally for language educators, and help design learning environments that remain steady for learners even when institutions aren't.

Working within a precarious field has also reinforced something in which I strongly believe: Good teaching isn't always just about methodology; it's also about conditions. When teachers are expected to be endlessly flexible without stability, fair pay, or meaningful support, the strain on the profession becomes very real, especially when that flexibility looks like being okay with not knowing if you'll



have a teaching contract next term, losing classes at the last minute because of enrollment shifts, or suddenly teaching larger class sizes without compensated marking time or adjustments to the number of assessments.

When teachers have stability and support, they are more likely to provide more thoughtful feedback on assessments, design more engaging and relevant curricula and be fully present for their learners. This is not to say that teachers who work in these precarious situations aren't giving their 100%, because I know a lot of them are considering how burnt out teachers usually are, but it's also extremely difficult to mentally compartmentalize these issues and not let it seep through in our practice at times.

Ultimately, I think precarity doesn't just affect teachers and their mental, physical, financial and emotional wellbeing; it also affects our students because educational quality is inseparable from unstable working conditions.

You might have heard me say this before, because I really believe it: As EAL educators, we've been conditioned to be extremely resilient. But resilience in our field shouldn't be an individual survival skill; it should be something we build collectively into the systems we create.

Let's talk transferrable skills. For many, they're not clear. You, on the other hand, have a good sense of your abilities and what you're able to do. How do people realize their transferrable skills, but most importantly, what do they do with that to make themselves, for lack of a better word, marketable?

Good question! I'm a firm believer that EAL educators have a strong set of transferable skills. I think what's often missing isn't ability, it's recognition. Our field has a long history of undervaluing its own expertise, so teachers, myself included, sometimes describe their work in narrow terms like "I teach

pronunciation" or "I teach academic writing", when in reality we're demonstrating complex competencies every day: curriculum design, facilitation, assessment strategy, intercultural communication, project management, etc.

Designing a course from scratch, for example, requires highly specialized skills such as needs analysis, learning outcome mapping, materials development, and feedback data management. Consider, too, the moments when you supported students in crisis or adapted a curriculum overnight for a new delivery mode. These aren't just teaching tasks, they're clear demonstrations of problem-solving, adaptability, and strategic decision-making.

If you had asked me this question a few years ago though, my response might have been very different. As a racialized, female, NNEST (Non-Native English-Speaking Teacher), I've personally experienced how difficult it can be to make yourself "marketable." It's always been quite awkward for me to put myself out there professionally, and that probably speaks to other issues like impostor syndrome, etc., but we won't get into that here. What has helped me though, was conversations with supportive and thoughtful colleagues in my community of practice who pushed me to see my work differently and name my skills more intentionally. I realized that identifying transferable skills starts with reframing your experience through a skills lens rather than a job-title lens and recognizing that what EAL educators do requires sophisticated professional judgment.

A crucial part of this process, in my opinion, is learning to articulate your expertise clearly and strategically. It's not about changing who you are; it's about translating your expertise so others can understand it. Educators lead initiatives, analyze learner data to inform instruction, design



accessible learning environments, manage priorities, and collaborate with diverse stakeholders. When we name these abilities with precision, we push back against the persistent misconception that teaching is narrow or limited work.

Lastly, I think what truly strengthens a language educator’s professional positioning is demonstrated impact. When educators can point to tangible outcomes (courses they’ve designed for multilingual learners, retention they’ve improved among newcomers balancing work and study, curricula they’ve adapted for diverse proficiency levels, or supports they’ve provided to help students transition into academic or workplace contexts, etc.) they make their expertise visible.

This matters because the issue has never been whether adult language teachers are skilled enough; it’s whether institutions have learned to fully recognize the scope of what they do. The more clearly we name and demonstrate that expertise, the harder it becomes for it to be overlooked.

Professional Development. From TESL Toronto to TESL Ontario, you immerse yourself in PD – whether it be for your own development or to change the landscape of English language teaching. What have been your experiences?

Professional development has really been a space of learning for me more than anything else. My involvement with the TESL Toronto Executive and TESL Ontario Board of Directors has been shaping me not only as an educator, but also as a collaborator and advocate. It’s opened up opportunities to learn alongside colleagues whose insight, generosity, and commitment to the field continually inspire me. I consider my contributions as one piece of a larger, collaborative movement led by EAL educators who continue to strengthen our profession.

PD has also expanded my own thinking. It’s pushed me to stay responsive to emerging research, evolving student needs, new technologies, and the ongoing responsibility to advocate for educators and the conditions they need to do their best work.

Equally important, it’s taught me that professional growth doesn’t happen in isolation. It happens in communities. What I’ve truly gained through PD is a deeper appreciation for how much knowledge already exists within our community. The real impact comes from creating opportunities for educators to share that knowledge with one another, amplify each other’s work, and collectively move the profession forward. I feel fortunate to be part of those spaces and to continue growing within them.

Thank you again for the contribution, Farnaz!

If you’d like to connect with or follow Farnaz, check out the links below.

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Open Educational Resources for inclusive language

By Anh Le-Noronha, Canada

Introduction: Why inclusive language education matters

Language education increasingly takes place in classrooms characterized by linguistic, cultural, and cognitive diversity. Learners bring varied educational backgrounds, lived experiences, and ways of processing information. Neurodiverse and plurilingual learners are not exceptions within contemporary language programs. They are central participants whose needs challenge instructional models that rely heavily on fixed textbooks, standardized pacing, and uniform assessment practices. When materials and learning activities lack flexibility, learners may encounter barriers to access, engagement, and meaningful participation.

Open Educational Resources (OER) offer a promising pathway toward more inclusive language education. OER are teaching and learning materials that are freely available and openly licensed, allowing educators to use, adapt, and share them. Their value extends beyond affordability. Because open resources can be revised, localized, and redesigned, they allow instructors to respond to learner needs, cultural contexts, and instructional goals when paired with inclusive design frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and OER supports learner agency and reduces reliance on retroactive accommodations.

This article explores how OER can be used intentionally to support neurodiverse and plurilingual learners in language education. Using reflective discussion and classroom-based examples, it presents practical strategies that promote accessibility, engagement, and learner choice. This discussion builds on a TESL Ontario conference session in which I shared how OER and Universal Design for Learning have informed my inclusive language teaching practice with neurodiverse and plurilingual adult learners.

Understanding learner diversity in language education

A wide range of learner identities and learning preferences shapes language classrooms. Neurodiverse learners may process information differently, experience challenges with attention or sensory input, or



require additional time and structure to engage with learning tasks. A neurodiversity informed perspective recognizes these differences as part of natural human variation rather than as deficits to be corrected (Armstrong, 2010). In language learning contexts, difficulties often arise not from learner limitations but from instructional designs that rely on lengthy texts, rapid explanations, or single modality interaction.

Plurilingual learners add another critical dimension of diversity. Plurilingualism refers to the dynamic use of multiple languages as an interconnected repertoire rather than as separate, isolated systems (Council of Europe, 2001). Learners may draw on their home languages to support comprehension, reflection, and meaning making while developing proficiency in an additional language. However, when monolingual norms dominate instruction, learners may be discouraged from using linguistic resources that could otherwise enhance learning and confidence.

In practice, neurodiverse and plurilingual learners often encounter similar barriers. These may include abstract instructions, limited visual or multimodal support, rigid assessment formats, and restricted opportunities to demonstrate learning in ways that reflect individual strengths. Access-related barriers, such as limited technology or reliance on costly materials, can further reduce participation. When these barriers are not addressed at the design stage, learners may appear disengaged or unsuccessful, even when they are motivated and capable.

Recognizing learner diversity as a starting point rather than an exception invites educators to reconsider how language learning environments are designed. By viewing neurodiversity and plurilingualism as assets, instructors can shift toward teaching approaches that emphasize flexibility, accessibility, and learner agency.

Universal Design for Learning as an inclusive framework

Universal Design for Learning is a research-based framework that supports proactive and inclusive course design. Rather than addressing learner needs through individual accommodations after challenges emerge, UDL encourages instructors to anticipate learner variability during the design stage. This approach shifts responsibility from learners adapting to rigid instructional structures toward educators designing learning environments that are accessible from the outset.

Developed by CAST, UDL is grounded in learning sciences and recognizes that learners differ in motivation, information processing, and expression of understanding (CAST, 2018). In language education, where linguistic diversity intersects with cognitive and cultural variability, UDL provides a practical framework for inclusive practice.

The UDL framework is organized around three core principles: learner motivation, relevance, and emotional connection to learning. In language classrooms, this may involve offering topic choice, incorporating short



and varied activities, and creating opportunities for collaboration and self-regulation. These strategies are particularly supportive for learners who experience anxiety, reduced attention, or disengagement in traditional instructional settings.

Multiple means of representation address how information is presented. This principle encourages instructors to provide content in different formats, such as combining written text with visuals, audio, or interactive elements. Captions, glossaries, visuals, and simplified explanations can improve comprehension for plurilingual learners and those who process information differently, without reducing academic rigor.

Multiple means of action and expression emphasize flexibility in how learners demonstrate understanding. Rather than relying on a single written task or timed assessment, instructors can offer options such as oral responses, visual projects, collaborative work, or reflective writing. These choices allow learners to draw on their strengths and promote a sense of agency.

UDL is not about making learning easier. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so that all learners can access, engage with, and demonstrate meaningful learning.

Open Educational Resources in inclusive language education

Open Educational Resources are teaching, learning, and research materials that are openly licensed and free to use, revise, and share (UNESCO, 2019). Open licensing distinguishes OER from freely available online materials by providing legal permission for adaptation. For language educators, this flexibility allows materials to be simplified, localized, or expanded to better meet learner needs.

Many OER are published under Creative Commons licenses, which clearly outline how resources may be reused and adapted (Creative Commons, n.d.). In practice, this allows instructors to add glossaries, captions, bilingual explanations, or visual supports to existing materials. These adaptations are not remedial measures. They are intentional design choices that increase accessibility and participation.

OER align closely with Universal Design for Learning because both emphasize flexibility and learner agency. Rather than relying on a single textbook or instructional sequence, educators can curate collections of adaptable resources that allow learners to access content in different ways and demonstrate understanding through varied formats. While cost reduction is often highlighted as a primary benefit of OER, its deeper value lies in its potential to promote equity and inclusive design.

For adult learners, newcomers, and students with limited access to financial or technological resources, free



and adaptable materials can significantly reduce barriers to participation. When used intentionally, OER shift the focus from affordability alone toward inclusive pedagogy.

Practical strategies for using and adapting OER

The inclusive potential of OER is most evident in everyday teaching practices. Effective strategies often involve small, intentional adaptations aligned with UDL principles rather than large-scale course redesign.

Listening and viewing materials can be enhanced by adding captions, providing transcripts, or allowing learners to control playback speed. These options support learners who process auditory information differently and reduce cognitive load. Transcripts also allow learners to review content at their own pace, supporting comprehension and confidence.

Textual and visual adaptations are equally important. OER texts can be simplified without removing core meaning, divided into shorter sections, or paired with images. Slides and readings can include key vocabulary lists or glossaries to support comprehension. For plurilingual learners, bilingual glossaries or permission to annotate materials in home languages acknowledge multilingualism as a resource rather than a barrier.

Assessment design offers further opportunities for inclusion. Openly licensed assignments and rubrics can be adapted to allow flexible timelines, multiple attempts, or alternative formats. Learners may demonstrate understanding through written work, short presentations, visual projects, or reflective tasks, supporting learner agency and alignment with UDL principles.

In one adult ESL class, I adapted an openly licensed listening activity by adding captions, a transcript, and optional visual prompts. Learners were invited to choose how they engaged with the task and how they responded. Some relied on captions, others on the transcript, and a few responded orally rather than in writing. Participation increased, particularly among learners who had previously hesitated to contribute, illustrating how small OER adaptations can reduce barriers and support engagement.

OER also support flexible participation. Discussion prompts can be offered in written and audio formats, with learners responding through text, voice recordings, or visuals. These options reduce anxiety and encourage broader participation.

Instructor mindset and inclusive practice

Inclusive language education depends not only on frameworks and resources but also on instructor mindset. Asset based perspectives recognize neurodiverse and plurilingual learners as contributors rather



than problems to be managed. This view aligns with UDL, which treats learner variability as expected and central to instructional design (CAST, 2018).

Instructor roles shift from content delivery to learning design and facilitation. This involves anticipating barriers, curating adaptable materials, and creating opportunities for learner feedback. OER support this role by enabling ethical revision and sharing of materials and by encouraging collaboration among educators.

Collaboration strengthens inclusive practice. Sharing adapted resources, remixing existing OER, and contributing back to open repositories foster collective responsibility for accessibility. Small reflective actions, such as revising a single activity or responding to learner feedback, can lead to sustained improvement over time.

Conclusion: Moving toward inclusive and open language education

As language classrooms continue to diversify, inclusive and open approaches are increasingly essential. Universal Design for Learning and Open Educational Resources together offer practical pathways for responding to learner variability with flexibility and intention. OER should be viewed not only as free alternatives to textbooks but as adaptable tools that support access, engagement, and learner agency.

When aligned with UDL, OER allow instructors to offer multiple ways for learners to access content, stay motivated, and demonstrate understanding. Small design choices, such as captions, glossaries, and flexible assessments, can significantly reduce barriers. These practices benefit all learners by creating clearer, more responsive learning environments.

Inclusive language education does not require a complete course redesign. Meaningful change often begins with manageable steps, such as adapting one resource or sharing one revised activity. By embracing openness as a pedagogical stance, language educators can contribute to more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable learning communities.



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Anh Le-Noronha is a post-secondary educator and educational developer with over fifteen years of experience teaching language, hospitality and tourism, and business courses. Her work focuses on inclusive pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) to support neurodiverse and plurilingual learners. She has taught at George Brown College and Centennial College in Toronto, Canada, and many colleges and universities in Vietnam. She supports adult learners through accessibility-focused teaching, curriculum design, and learner-centred assessment practices.

See it, feel it, move it, read it: Reading with all your senses for adult EAL learners

By Heidi Brooks, Canada

Introduction

Ahmed was a highly motivated upper literacy student with fewer than six years' education in his first language. He had good attendance and a positive attitude about school and learning. His speaking and listening skills were strong, and he communicated effectively. At the time, Ahmed was employed at a local pizza shop, and his goal was to get his Canadian citizenship and open a family business.

I first met Ahmed when his teacher referred him for reading support. She observed him struggling to read basic CVC words—single-syllable three-phoneme (sound) word that follows the pattern of consonant sound, vowel sound, consonant sound. He had trouble distinguishing words like *pat* and *pit*, for example. His spelling, reading fluency, comprehension and writing were also a challenge. We determined there was a large gap between his oral communication and his ability to read, write and spell.

Phonological awareness and reading difficulties

I spent 17 years as School Psychologist in the public school system before I became an EAL Instructor at the *Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia* (ISANS) five years ago. My experience working with children and youth in the school system and now with adult learners at ISANS told me that gaps like the one displayed by Ahmed could be a sign of dyslexia, a specific reading disability impacting reading. Research has shown that there are a few areas of processing in the brain that are most often linked to dyslexia, the most common of these is phonological awareness. If you teach reading, it is important to have a good understanding of phonological awareness as empirical evidence has shown that it is one of the most essential skills in reading acquisition for both children and adults (Fracasso et al., 2014; Moats & Tolman, 2009).



Phonological awareness is a broad term referring to an ability to consciously attend to and manipulate the sounds in words and language. This includes skills like recognizing rhyme, segmenting sentences, breaking down words into their sounds, identifying individual sounds, deleting or adding sounds, taking the words apart and putting them back together and blending the sounds. All these processes happen in the brain. It's important to note, these processes are auditory in nature and occur independent of print.

For example, when presented with the word *map*, a learner with well-developed phonological awareness should be able to identify a rhyming word (*sap*), state what remains when the initial phoneme /m/ is removed (*ap*), identify the final sound (/p/), and segment the word into its sounds (/m/-/a-/p/). Tasks such as these are commonly used for assessment and instruction.

An informal assessment using these types of activities revealed that Ahmed experienced significant difficulty with phonological awareness, suggesting that deficits in this area contributed to his reading and spelling challenges.

Once again, my experience working with children with learning disabilities showed that the most effective method for teaching phonological awareness was a multisensory approach. This means using the senses of sight, touch and movement to teach students to hear and manipulate the sounds in words. This approach is effective because more neural pathways are activated in the brain, and a deeper level of processing is achieved.

Multisensory instruction in practice

Although substantial evidence supports multisensory instruction for children with dyslexia, limited research exists examining its application with adult EAL learners. Despite this gap in literature, I felt that there was a high likelihood of success with Ahmed using a multisensory approach to improve his phonological awareness. Over the next few months, I worked with him one-on-one, twice a week for an hour for a total of 20 hours.

He made steady improvements over these weeks and by the end was able to demonstrate good phonological awareness skills and decode 3 – 5 letter words using both short and long vowels. His spelling accuracy improved, and although his reading fluency remained slow, he was able to decode words with accuracy and represent phonemes correctly in writing. Continued reading practice of authentic texts led to gradual gains in fluency.

In my current role as Accessibility Instructor, I work with adult learners in literacy and mainstream classes ranging from Foundation L to CLB 3. Many of these students are suspected of having dyslexia. Over the



last two and a half years I employed many of the same strategies I used with Ahmed with over 20 students who were referred due to weak reading, spelling or writing skills. Currently, I work with students one-on-one and in small groups (up to 5) for two one-hour sessions per week. Through structured and explicit instruction, students learn how to discriminate sounds, say and write the sounds in isolation and in the context of words, sentences and books. After building a strong foundation, we move on to higher level phonics concepts that allow them to read and understand more complex words.

What does literacy instruction look, feel, and sound like when EAL students use all their senses? Above all else, phonological awareness requires listening. For some students, this can be difficult. A multisensory approach scaffolds sight, touch and movement to teach students to hear and differentiate the sounds in words and later how to manipulate these sounds for the purpose of reading and spelling.

One multisensory approach is explicitly teaching students movement and physical action to help them learn letter sounds. Let's say a student is learning the sound /b/. I physically mime the movement of bouncing a ball with my hand while saying, /b/, *ball*. I ask the student to copy my movements and words. On top of that, a visual element can be added by showing a photograph of a ball, while continuing to say, /b/, *ball*. The combination of saying the letter sound and the complete word, the action of bouncing a ball and the visual of the picture layer to form a multisensory approach. Generally, this technique is used in small group settings with Foundation L learners who are still working on learning letter names and sounds. This approach is also used by classroom instructors so the whole class can benefit.

When I began working with Ahmed, he was a CLB 2L student, so he already possessed a good knowledge of most of the consonant sounds. However, he struggled with hearing the difference between the short vowel sounds reflected in his reading and writing. For example, reading or writing *mat* instead of *mit*. This is one of the most pervasive difficulties I see amongst students, and I spend a lot of time teaching this skill.

To address this challenge, each short vowel sound was paired with a key word and a physical action:

- /a/ hold an apple and eat it while saying, *apple*
- /i/ make the left-hand look like a round cup and use the pointer finger on the right hand to point *in* the cup, while saying *in*
- /o/ use the right hand to turn a light switch *on* and *off* while repeating these words
- /e/ crack an egg using the right hand to hold the egg and both hands to separate the shell as if putting it in a bowl while saying *egg*
- /u/ point toward the sky and say *up*

Using this method, Ahmed was able to learn to pronounce, read, and spell all the short vowel sounds. With my small group instruction, this sound action routine became a predictable component at the beginning of each session until students showed mastery with short vowel sounds.

Sound boxes and blending boards

Once Ahmed could recognize and produce several consonant sounds and at least one vowel, I introduced more complex phonological awareness skills by adapting and integrating versions of two well-known multisensory tools (Elkonin *sound* Boxes and blending boards). The *sound box* was developed by Psychologist D. Elkonin in the 1960's to help young children develop phonological awareness skills by segmenting spoken words into individual sounds. The blending board does not have a single author but is central in the Orton Gillingham approach.

Ahmed practiced identifying, ordering, adding, deleting, segmenting and blending sounds using these adapted sound boxes. You will recall that phonological awareness is an auditory process. The Sound Box shown in Figure 1 acts as a manipulative tool to practice phonological awareness by adding sight, touch and movement to an auditory process. By using this method regularly Ahmed gradually learned to practice the skills of phonological awareness by using different colors to see the difference between consonants and vowels for spelling and reading. Also, by seeing and touching the letters while listening to and reading the sounds, additional sensory pathways could be laid for deeper learning. Over time, this process helped him hear the sounds in words. This temporary support was gradually reduced as he learned the new concept and skills and independence developed.

Once Ahmed developed proficiency with the first sound box process, he practiced CVC word dictation in a chain (or ladder) format using the multilevel sound box shown in Figure 2. This is a strategy that is commonly used to teach phonics, often using nonsense and real words. The idea is that the cognitive load is minimized since the student can use the previous word as an anchor. Words are dictated by changing only one sound at a time. Once again, short vowels are shown in a different colour, in this case yellow, to visually identify them as vowels. Writing can also be a multisensory technique in this way as it engages all senses (hearing, sight, feeling and movement) at the same time.

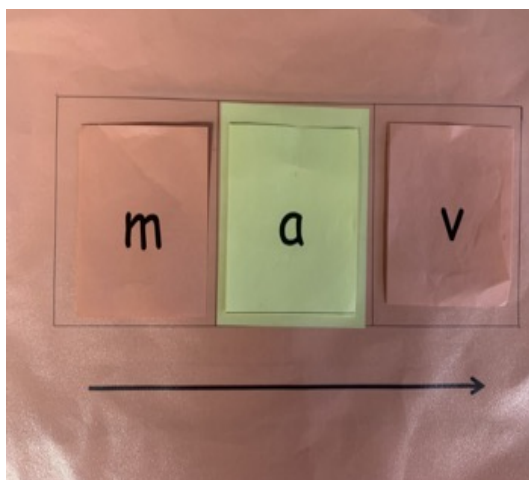


Figure 1: This first Sound Box has removable letters. This is used to teach students to identify and manipulate sounds (phonemes). Vowels are identified in yellow to differentiate them from the consonants.

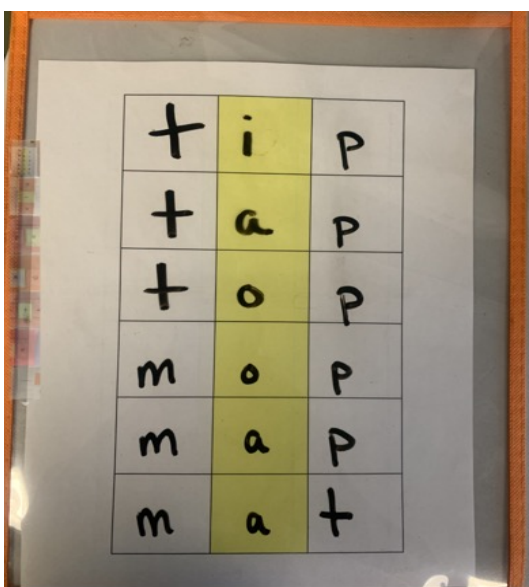


Figure 2: This chaining Sound Box is used with a plastic pocket (or sheet protector) and erasable marker. It can be used in the same way as the first sound box but can also be used to practice listening for just one sound change (called chaining) as is shown above.

Outcomes and implications

These are a few examples of multisensory approach to teaching phonological awareness that have been successful with the adult EAL learners at ISANS. I highly recommend a slow, measured approach when using these tools to avoid cognitive overload. When teaching the short vowels, for example, start with the short a, and work towards ninety percent mastery before introducing the short i. Then constantly assess to ensure previous skills have been maintained. If you teach literacy, this approach should be familiar, limiting the amount of new information that is taught, while always circling back to review previously learned material. This is good teaching practice at all levels.

Following individual intervention, I often model the same strategies with the learner's whole class. This creates the opportunity for the referring instructor to use the technique to the benefit of all students and the learner that required the intervention. In the case of Ahmed, this experience significantly increased his confidence because he was able to assist peers and participate more actively in oral reading. All the strategies I have outlined here can be implemented in a classroom setting.

I continue to build and revise my reading intervention program and the tools I use with my learners to match their needs. I recently completed the Orton Gillingham (OG) classroom educator course and in turn have implemented and adapted many new multisensory approaches with positive success for students requiring additional, individualized support. Lately, I've enjoyed sharing these ideas with colleagues across Canada in workshops for ISANS, TESL Nova Scotia, BCTEAL and TESL Ontario.

Reading may never be easy for Ahmed, as I suspect he likely does have dyslexia, but he is happy, doing well and continues to improve his reading and writing skills. I am happy to say that Ahmed graduated from his literacy program and has recently completed CLB 3 and is currently working on CLB 4. He is getting closer to his goal of Canadian citizenship.

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Author Bio



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HyFlex LINC literacy: Challenges and successes

By Javeria Rebaz and Rowan Lomas, Canada

Literacy instruction in the context of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada has traditionally been conducted exclusively in physical classrooms, with paper and pencil, worksheets, binders, notebooks, and perhaps the weekly Computer-Assisted Language Learning lesson in an on-site computer lab. The thought of teaching English to students who may have little to no schooling, reading, or writing skills in even their first language in an online setting seemed a remarkably daunting task, and still does to many in the field. “Wait, what, how?” is a common refrain when the topic of virtual Literacy instruction comes up at industry events. As noted in *Evaluation of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program* (IRCC, 2011), for the most part, LINC has been a classroom-based program since its founding in 1992, with approximately 95% of students attending the program either in a standard school classroom or a room in a commercial building. But of course, as with most things employment- and education-related, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada in early 2020 changed everything. Due to the sudden disturbance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, educators had to rethink traditional teaching methodologies, from public schools in South Korea and Mexico to LINC and English for Academic Purposes schools in Canada. This new reality encouraged the Caledon Community Services (CCS) LINC program to not only adopt new tools for remote learning but also reimagine education delivery to better serve its diverse newcomer student body as teaching transitioned back to in-person instruction. CCS implemented the beginnings of its HyFlex model in 2021, combining in-person, virtual, synchronous, and asynchronous learning. With trial and error, improvement, and expansion, the HyFlex model remains the foundation of the CCS LINC program today. With this hybrid, flexible approach, students can choose how and where they want to participate. We have students located locally in Caledon, who may want to walk to their Monday or Friday class, or benefit from CCS transportation shuttling them to school if living some distance from the location. But also, those learners as far flung as Brantford, Waterloo, North York, and even Ottawa, who are only ever able to participate virtually. Using the camera and microphone technology embedded into the physical classroom, all students in all corners of the province can see and hear each other, and participate physically and digitally together, as they communicate orally and complete worksheets on paper or PDF. The fact that students are receiving the same curriculum and instruction, with the same teacher, whether in-person or



online, also enables them to attend classes during inclement weather, when under the weather, or despite potential physical or mobility challenges, encouraging a high level of attendance and participation.

Another major component of the evolution of the HyFlex module was the introduction of the digital navigator position. This role is most crucial for online/HyFlex classes. The digital navigator is the bridge that connects teachers, students, and the Learning Management System. Learning a language is not an easy task, and if students struggle with the use of technology, their journey may end before it gets a chance to sail. In this case, the digital navigator helps students become comfortable using online platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, Ellii, and Kahoot!. The role of digital navigator does not end here, as the students are made to feel comfortable so that they may contact the digital navigator at any time the need arises. Meetings with students are scheduled regularly, and digital skills are webinars conducted monthly. WhatsApp homework groups are created for students of the same language so that learners can assist each other with asynchronous tasks. The digital navigator also assesses students' digital capabilities and device availability. If it is found that the students would benefit from more modern computers to take full advantage of Zoom and other educational technology, the digital navigator is able to provide laptop loans through third party organizations and support the students and their families in becoming familiar with attending classes and completing asynchronous tasks.

While teaching Pre-CLB language skills or foundation level reading and writing to online students was once deemed impossible, when there were no other alternatives, teachers found ways to deal with the challenges and came up with numerous strategies and successes. The main challenges encountered with this new approach included how to use paper-based materials in an online setting, review students' work and provide them with feedback, teach mixed levels, and conduct assessments. The remainder of this article will delve into how we, CCS Literacy and Pre-CLB instructors, endeavoured to address these challenges, as well as note some best practices for teaching Literacy learners.

Using paper-based materials in an online setting

As a new literacy instructor with CCS, adapting to HyFlex instruction was a definite learning curve. Previous experience with instruction, during a pre-pandemic teaching practicum, had been almost entirely in a brick-and-mortar school, with physical textbooks and printed materials. Additionally, many of the readily available and well-produced Literacy-level modules, which are aligned with Canadian Language Benchmarks and compatible with Portfolio-based Language Assessment, available on Tutela or through other organizations such as Literacy Centre of Expertise, were designed primarily for use in a physical classroom. How could these very relevant module PDFs on topics such as winter clothing or recycling be useful for synchronous



work on Zoom, or for asynchronous tasks in our Learning Management System Google Classroom? For the in-person students' synchronous time, of course they could be printed on paper and handed out in class. Regarding asynchronous writing, the instructor can print the pages as individual or multi-page PDFs, as required by the task, and import them into individual assignments in the LMS. The instructors have both teacher and student accounts for Google Classroom so that they can see every assignment how a student would see it, which helps to identify and troubleshoot potential issues. This approach also enables the teacher to demonstrate how to complete and submit each assignment synchronously so that learners have continuous exposure to the ways PDFs can be written, drawn, or typed on, and the steps that need to be taken to hand in their work. A very useful PDF editor that can open files directly in Google Classroom is LuminPDF, as when logged in with the same Google account the work syncs the student's edits automatically. As soon as the assignment is handed in, the instructor can see the work with no additional file downloads or uploads required. And what if an assignment involved cutting up paper with scissors to match sentence strips with images? One way to recreate this activity is to use Microsoft's snipping tool to digitally cut out sentence strips and associated pictures and paste them into a Google Slide. In a Google Slide assignment, learners can drag and drop matching words next to pictures like paper on a table. For those listening tasks that required students to listen to audio before answering questions, the instructor can use a free tool such as Audio Editor Online to cut out the relevant audio from large mp3 files that accompany many modules, export as mp3, and upload the audio into the LMS along with the accompanying PDF worksheet. Another option is for the teacher to read appropriate scripts while recording in Microsoft Sound Recorder and upload those files with the connected writing files.

Reviewing student work

Another challenge identified was how to review student work and provide feedback. For students attending in-person, the instructor is easily able to view a pupil's writing at their desk. For virtual review, another option is to screenshare the PDF or show a Zoom Whiteboard and have the learners copy the writing in their notebooks. They can then show their work via their device camera and receive immediate, constructive feedback from the instructor. Formative assessment may be conducted and areas for improvement identified in the moment. If it is noticed that the tail of a lowercase *g* or *q* does not go down below the line as it should, for example, the student is given the opportunity to re-write the letters on the spot until correct, increasing the likelihood that this skill will solidify, with repetition. Clients and teachers also participate in WhatsApp groups for each individual class. They can send pictures of their work in WhatsApp and receive timely guidance, which is especially effective when it comes to reading comprehension.



Mixed-level learners

LINC classes typically include students with diverse levels of literacy and digital proficiency. With some students struggling with technology and others with literacy skills, LINC instructors need to be ready to resolve the continually arising issues while keeping the class engaging and interactive. “In HyFlex learning environments, engagement can be particularly challenging due to the diverse modes of participation, such as in-person, online synchronous, and online asynchronous” (Beatty, 2019). Students with low literacy often struggle with comprehension, making them overly dependent on translation applications. Those with limited technological skills, on the other hand, find it difficult to navigate Zoom and the LMS. If these two core challenges are addressed, the remaining issues become more manageable.

Technological skills can be developed with the support of a digital navigator. An initial step is helping new students practice joining Zoom meetings multiple times, so they feel confident and less overwhelmed when attending their actual LINC classes. Students with limited technological skills are also given a transition period of 15 to 30 days to complete asynchronous work, rather than being rushed.

Students with limited literacy or comprehension challenges benefit greatly from peer support. To reduce anxiety, instructors adopt a flexible approach, allowing occasional use of students’ first language, especially when introducing new vocabulary. More advanced students are encouraged to assist their peers by explaining concepts in their own words. The use of visuals, gestures, and peer collaboration helps students feel safe, welcomed, and less reliant on translation apps.

To further support asynchronous learning, instructors should join platforms such as ELLI or Google Classroom as students. Completing homework tasks together as a class using student accounts helps learners gain confidence and complete assignments independently, without relying on family members.

Conducting assessments

It is also important to make students feel comfortable in the class setting, so they are not scared of making mistakes. It needs to be manifested that mistakes are the way to learning. Errors enable instructors to adapt, modify, and plan lessons to support learners. Students should also be encouraged to complete their homework independently so teachers can accurately assess their progress, especially in HyFlex settings where family members or AI tools may otherwise be used for support. One effective way to address the challenge of work completed with family support is to conduct regular formative assessments.

It is also essential to keep students informed about their progress, as this helps celebrate their achievements, motivate them, and support ongoing improvement. To ensure that students understand the assessment



results and are working on the right track, one-on-one meetings are held every month. Both their progress and assignments are shared with them verbally as well as translated into their first language to ensure they understand. If they have any questions or suggestions, the student is encouraged to share in their first language so the instructor can understand using a translation app. This, as well as keeping a record of students' work on Excel sheets, helps instructors evaluate progress as well as write progress reports.

Additionally, when conducting summative assessments, instructors can recreate paper-based rubrics as Google Classroom rubrics by inputting the same criteria as listed on PDFs, with the same criterion descriptions, values, and target scores. In this way, marks are easily inputted and communicated to students via email. Private comments can also be added for further feedback on which criteria were well met, as well as things to be worked on for further improvement.

Best practices

To conclude, though each instructor may find different ways to navigate and ensure students' success, here we would like to share some of the best practices that worked well for us. The first and foremost is having a consistent class format, so the students know exactly what to expect in the class, and they are not overwhelmed. For example, the class may begin with each student greeting each other, or the instructor playing jeopardy, or guess-the-word games reviewing the vocabulary learnt in previous classes. Another important, highly recommended practice is teaching them clarification strategies, such as *can you repeat* and *I don't know*, otherwise they find it hard to express any issues they may be having in the class. Teaching them real-world, meaningful skills that they can immediately apply in their immediate settings keep them motivated and provides a way to practice the skills. These tasks should be reviewed, repeated, and recycled so the students feel confident. Teaching Literacy students in a HyFlex setting can be successfully carried out by having a positive mind-set, supportive digital navigator and management, and equipping students with basic technological and literacy skills needed. This is the most rewarding and meaningful experience to equip the students with literacy and technological skills which enable them to not just survive but thrive in Canada in the years to come.



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Author Bios



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Rowan is a former newspaper writer and experienced English language professional with almost two decades of work in the TESL field, including two years as a LINC Literacy Instructor with Caledon Community Services. With extensive experience in virtual learning and teaching, and a keen interest in employing technology in a HyFlex setting, Rowan strives to make every class accessible and engaging while assisting students in developing digital and literacy skills. Rowan is an Ontario Certified English Language Teacher with an MEd and Bachelor of Journalism degree.

TESL Ontario 2025 Report

By Stephanie Kinzie, Canada

Abstract

This report summarizes key findings of TESL Ontario's 2025 member survey. As in past surveys, a representative sample of TESL Ontario members shared data about their personal and professional situations as well as perspectives on services for members. Respondents reported employment in a broad spectrum of roles both in Canada and abroad, and they used TESL Ontario's PD offerings and affiliate Chapters to connect and engage in professionalization. Finding and maintaining stable employment was a key concern due to recent changes in immigration policy and ongoing concerns with funding. Opportunities for TESL Ontario to support members include increasing advocacy efforts; providing access to research, employment, and professional resources; and pursuing a wider range of member benefits.

TESL Ontario 2025 Report Article

Since 1972, TESL Ontario has represented ESL instructors in Ontario, collaborating with them to ensure that English language teaching and learning in the province is engaging and evolving in positive ways for both students and teachers. Continuing the work from 2012 and 2021, TESL Ontario has again surveyed its members to gain insight regarding the current conditions of ESL instruction in Ontario and identify key issues and concerns members are facing. As in previous years, this information will be used to fine-tune existing services and resources and to create new ones that respond to emerging professional needs. An ongoing hope is that the findings will also permit TESL Ontario to engage with municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies and inform policies and initiatives that affect ESL instruction in the province, particularly given the challenges facing the Canadian ESL industry in 2025 and beyond.



Method and design

The development and content of the survey drew inspiration from previous years (Kinzie, 2022; Valeo, 2013). A 32-question survey was distributed through the TESL Ontario membership email list to build a portrait of current membership, working environment, professional development needs, engagement with TESL Ontario's online resources, and ways in which TESL Ontario can continue to advocate for its members. Respondents answered multiple-choice and open-ended questions about demographics and employment, professional development experiences and online communities, experiences with TESL Ontario's member services and certification processes, and suggestions regarding steps TESL Ontario can take to address key challenges faced by TESL instructors and students. 344 members, or about 8% of the organization's 4500+ members, responded to the survey.

For reporting purposes, numbers were rounded up or down to the nearest whole percentage (e.g. 34.49% to 34%, 35.50% to 36%).

Key Findings

I. Demographics and employment

Questions 1–15 requested information about member demographics, employment, and professional designations. Between 285–344 responses (83–100% of total respondents) were received for this first group of questions.

Age, TESL Ontario membership, employment status, and remuneration

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) were aged between 45–64 years. 21% were 44 years old or under, and 17% were over 65 years of age. 55% have been TESL Ontario members for 10+ years, and almost equal numbers have been members for 4–9 years (23%) and 1–3 years (22%). 56% have been employed in English language education for 15 years or longer, 14% for 11–15 years, 19% for 4–10 years, and 12% for fewer than 3 years. Of those currently employed, 36% held one full-time role, a notable decrease from the 43% reported in the 2021 member survey (Kinzie, 2022). 16% held one part-time role, and 14% held two or more part-time roles. Equal proportions (12%) held contract/temporary positions or were not employed at the time of the survey. Respondents who chose “Other” reported positions including supply teacher, self-employed tutor, a mix of part- and full-time or contract roles, or retired. Although 77% of respondents held positions, 45% were actively seeking employment in the field. Most respondents reported low-to mid-range income levels, with 21% of respondents earning between \$30,000–\$49,999 annually and 27% of respondents



earning between \$50,000–\$74,999 annually. 18% earned less than \$30,000 annually, and 19% earned over \$75,000 annually. Additional comments revealed various respondents with annual income levels below \$15,000; some of these included students or unemployed members earning no income at all.

Current careers and training

English language education was the current career for 75% of respondents, and a second or subsequent career for 13%. 3% of respondents were not currently working in language training, and 10% reported other career paths such as language assessor, instructional designer, or private instructor. Several respondents in this “Other” category reported that teaching language was only one aspect of their professional roles or that they taught English in addition to other subjects. 286 respondents had completed a TESL/TESOL certificate or diploma program, with an additional 183 respondents reporting the completion of other relevant training (e.g. OCT-recognized AQ ESL courses, or Canadian or international language teaching degrees or diplomas).

TESL Ontario membership and professional certification

86% of respondents were certified TESL Ontario members, most commonly holding the OCELT/ICTEAL certification (270 respondents). 12 respondents held CTESOL certification, 32 held TESL Trainer certification, and 4 held PTCT Instructor certification. 50% of respondents regularly used their certification as a professional designation in emails, online profiles, or on business cards. 63% of respondents required OCELT certification for their employment role, and 74% reported that the certification had helped them secure employment. Only 17% reported that the OCELT certification helped them secure promotions or salary increases; 60% reported that it was not helpful, and 23% were not certain of the certification’s impact in this aspect. Additional comments included a mix of positive and constructive feedback about current certification options. Positive feedback indicated that the OCELT designation adds credibility to holders’ professional status and provides a necessary set of checks, balances, and standards for the language teaching profession. A small number of constructive comments noted that the annual cost of certification is high and keeps rising, that it does not enhance earning potential, and that many K-12 educational employers still require language teachers to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers regardless of OCELT certification. Suggestions included providing more options to indicate specializations (e.g. language assessment) and a lower-cost option for retirees or those not currently working in the field but who do not want their certification to lapse. For this member subset, TESL Ontario’s Standard Membership is available; information is shared publicly on TESL Ontario’s website and with current members through renewal communications.



II. Member resources, engagement, and research

Questions 16–28 requested information about members’ use of TESL Ontario’s professional resources and benefits, and engagement with and impact of research on members’ work. Between 72–323 responses (21–94% of total respondents) were received for this second group of questions.

Resources and engagement

The most popular, frequently accessed resources are the TESL Ontario Webinar Series (18% monthly, 25% once or twice per year), the TESL Ontario Annual Conference (1% monthly, 38% once or twice per year), CONTACT Magazine (15% monthly, 18% once or twice per year), and the TESL Blog (14% monthly, 18% once or twice per year). These resources provided members with opportunities for professional development and networking as well as practical information to enhance professional practices. The least-accessed resources were also the least-visible: Insurance Provider Partner Discounts, Retail Partner Discounts, Event & Attraction Discounts, and Health & Wellness Discounts (never accessed or unknown by 78%–89% of respondents). Additional comments indicated that members would value more favourable insurance discounts; grocery, gas, and travel benefits; discounts for classroom resources (e.g. books, conferencing and education apps), and expanded networking opportunities focused on mentorship and sharing everyday classroom experiences.

The TESL Ontario website continues to be a key resource for members, who visit the TESL Ontario website to renew memberships (88%), learn about upcoming webinars and PD opportunities (68%), access membership certificates (52%), and review the job board (37%). The most popular events of the past year were TESL Ontario Webinars, attended by 79% of respondents, the TESL Ontario Annual Conference, attended by 35% of respondents, and Virtual Chapter Events, attended by 18% of respondents. Participation was also seen in In-Person Chapter Events, In-Person PD Sessions, and Mentorship Sessions (21% of respondents). 32% of respondents regularly or occasionally attended Chapter Events whereas 54% did not; scheduling conflicts and lack of time were cited as common reasons for not attending or for attending less frequently than in the past. For future Chapter Events, members are interested in practical sessions with teaching tips for a variety of teaching contexts, panel-type discussions with other stakeholders in the ESL profession, networking and job search opportunities, and sessions that address technology, teacher wellbeing, and social issues that impact learning environments. Respondents suggested that half-day or weekend sessions might make these opportunities more widely accessible. The popularity of virtual events speaks to their convenience for members, yet in-person opportunities are still valued.



Research

Respondents reported that research has an impact on them principally through publications in relevant journals (37%) and through research carried out on their own to help their work (36%). However, only 5% of respondents reported that they were paid to carry out research as part of their professional duties, and 47% reported that research was not part of their work. TESL Ontario could promote research engagement by providing access to research through the organization's website (67%) and/or a venue to share informal and formal research (79%). There was also a notable interest in receiving instruction and mentoring in research methods (42%) and in connecting with other members as research partners (38%). Members' comments suggested that, similarly to Chapter Events, time constraints prevented many from engaging in, or with, research. Research that could be applied in the classroom to encourage new or improved practices, or presented to the general public and to funding organizations to inform and support language programs, was considered most relevant.

Suggestions for improvement

Many respondents' comments indicated satisfaction with TESL Ontario's current member services. Suggestions for improved member and certification services centered around lower membership and event fees, increased support for job searching and networking, more focus on EAP/post-secondary and private teaching contexts, and additional PLAR pathways for prospective members. Online information about different certifications and courses could be updated and reorganized for clarity, and the certification requirements themselves, particularly regarding language proficiency and extra-provincial and international educational experience, could be reassessed and streamlined to facilitate certification.

III. Advocacy and key concerns

Questions 29–32 solicited feedback regarding TESL Ontario's member advocacy work and the key concerns facing our membership. Between 220–288 responses (64–84% of total respondents) were received for this final group of questions. Comments in response to other sections of the survey also revealed significant interest in TESL Ontario providing greater advocacy for members.

Representation and grassroots campaigns

67% of respondents felt that TESL Ontario represents the interests and concerns of their sector very well or somewhat well. 23% were neutral, and 14% considered representation to be somewhat or very poor. 61% were very likely or somewhat likely to participate in grassroots campaigns if organized by TESL Ontario;



collaboration with other language education organizations (64%) and public awareness initiatives (61%) were the most popular options, followed closely by letter-writing campaigns (51%) and social media awareness campaigns (51%). 39% were neutral about or unlikely to consider participating in such campaigns.

Most pressing concerns

Job stability, adequate pay, and professional recognition continue to be ongoing concerns for TESL Ontario's members. In the 2021 survey, these concerns were principally related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily limited in-person teaching and contributed to the reduction or closure of many ESL programs and providers. In 2025, respondents identified government cutbacks to immigration, student visas, and funding as the most significant contributors to precarity. With CLB5+ classes no longer funded, lengthy waiting lists and limited classrooms are making LINC a less feasible option for students and decreasing the available positions for teachers. Contracts in post-secondary/EAP programs are limited in both number and hours. Remuneration is often based on classroom contact time only, requiring teachers to put in hours of unpaid labour to prepare lessons and grade assessments. OCELT certification alone is not recognized by provincial K–12 school boards, which cuts off another potential employment pathway. Respondents commented that the available positions, pay, and level of job security are not commensurate with the amount of education and certification required to teach adult language learners in Ontario. The increasing presence of AI and growth of remote learning environments were also viewed by many as largely detrimental to the development of language and social skills essential both in and out of the classroom.

Conclusion

What have we learned?

As in previous years, stability in membership can be seen through the 55% of respondents who have been TESL Ontario members for 10+ years and the 70% who have been involved in English language education for 10+ years. Despite this longevity, the decrease in the number of respondents with full-time roles points to the disconnect between experience and job stability. For the majority of respondents, language teaching was their primary and only profession, but changes to funding and immigration were identified as factors that are significantly decreasing the viability of language teaching as a career. TESL Ontario certification was identified as essential to securing employment, yet it was considered to be of limited value in securing promotions or salary increases. Respondents largely appreciated the resources and services currently provided by TESL Ontario and were open to more opportunities to connect with other members, engage in and with research, and to participate in grassroots campaigns to promote the language teaching profession in Ontario.



Opportunities were identified for TESL Ontario to consider how to increase members' access to, and engagement with, their local Chapters, relevant research, and membership options. The visibility of current benefits and services outside of the organization could be increased, and new partnerships could be pursued. Advocacy with funders and government stakeholders is an area in which TESL Ontario can continue its work; additional consultation with members may help refine current efforts and encourage those who are uncertain about or unengaged in grassroots campaigns to become involved.

As always, the inherent limitations of survey methodology must be considered. Predetermined values for responses restricted the range and variety of responses for some questions which, although beneficial for consistency and coherence, limited the nuances and details that respondents could provide. The opportunity to provide additional comments was made available as much as possible, yet the need to summarize these responses means that members may not see all of the details included in their comments. Responses were collected from a small proportion of the overall membership base, and thus members may not see reflected in this report concerns and needs that are relevant to them.

Next steps

Despite these limitations, the survey has provided an updated overview of TESL Ontario's membership as well as insights into members' working conditions, perceptions of TESL Ontario's services, and key concerns and needs. TESL Ontario is grateful to those members who were able to respond to the survey and share their experiences and suggestions and welcomes additional feedback at any time so that it can continue to understand and represent its members as fully as possible.



Author Bio



Stephanie Kinzie is an English language teacher and a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at York University. Her research interests include language teacher education, critical pedagogy, and EAP writing. She has experience teaching English language, literature, and communication in a range of contexts in Canada and internationally and has been a member of TESL Ontario since 2018.



A genre-Based approach to implementing PBLA in LINC classrooms

By Bruno Drighetti, Canada

Introduction

The Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) approach was introduced into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in Canada in 2010. It serves as a teaching and assessment framework that standardizes the quality and methodology of language instruction and assessment for adult newcomers to Canada. While some instructors perceive PBLA as a positive approach, associating it with an improved understanding of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and more accurate evidence of students' strengths and weaknesses, others regard it as a cause for increased workload and a need for continuous training (Ripley, 2012).

To organize their LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) lessons in accordance with PBLA expectations, instructors often integrate PBLA with complementary methods, such as the Four Strands Framework (Lee, 2025), the Genre-Based Approach (Burgos, 2025), or the Self-Regulated Learning Framework (Gilbert, 2023). In this article, I will present a Discursive Framework—specifically, a genre-based approach—developed by the French linguist Dominique Maingueneau (2014), which can assist instructors in describing genres. The value of this approach lies in its ease of implementation to meet PBLA classroom objectives and in the fact that it can provide a direction for teachers when preparing their lessons.

To achieve this objective, this article begins with a contextualization of some key concepts in the field of Discourse Analysis, followed by applications to education, and lastly, with an example of how ESL teachers can implement the approach in LINC classrooms.

Discourse analysis and language education

Discourse Analysis is a field of study within Linguistics that examines language in a complex manner, going beyond grammar and syntax. Rather than viewing language as a mere collection of sentences, a discursive approach understands it as an interactive activity organized by social norms and that goes beyond words and sentences; it involves considering the role of context and ideology in the construction of meaning.



From a discursive perspective, language is more than a structured system: It is a complex device that is used to reflect (or repel) other discourses and ideologies in society (Maingueneau, 2008). In other words, “the wording and the structure of a text are not enough to determine what a text intends to mean; each text or message is produced in a certain place, an exact moment and by a specific person” (Sepúlveda, 2017, p. 2). Structure still plays an important role in meaning-making, but it is not the most important linguistic feature—in contrast to Structural Approaches, which prioritize formal grammar elements, such as sentence patterns and the arrangement of words, as the main determinants of meaning (Mareva & Nyota, 2011).

Among the benefits of a discursive approach in the ESL classroom, Sepúlveda (2017) identifies: the creation of a real-life atmosphere in the classroom; the development of communicative skills beyond grammar; and the promotion of critical thinking. An approach that views language (and the meanings it produces) as contextual and interactive, while acknowledging its ideological dimension, may help students develop a more complex, and realistic, understanding of language, one in which having an impeccable knowledge of grammar does not necessarily equate to effective communication.

Having provided this broad contextualization of a discursive approach, the next section will focus on a specific framework developed by Dominique Maingueneau (2014) for describing genres, along with an example of how this can be implemented in the ESL classroom.

A genre-based approach in the ESL classroom

A language teacher’s primary goal is to help students develop their communicative competence. As Dominique Maingueneau (2005) explains, communication necessarily occurs through genres; every time a person speaks, they draw on their repertoire of genres depending on the context and the intended communicative function. Because genres are an integral part of communication, Maingueneau (2005) uses the terminology *genre competence* instead of *communicative competence*; after all, it is not possible to communicate except through genres.

When instructors use the PBLA approach in the ESL classroom, they collect samples of student work as evidence that students were able to complete a real-world task according to expectations. Often, the linguistic ability developed is associated with a genre. Some examples of genres that are frequently taught in LINC classes are small talk, forms, emails, job applications, among others. Genres are an essential part of LINC classes—whether instructors are aware of it or not. However, to teach genres effectively, it is important to understand how they are organized and how they function in a social context.



In Discourse Analysis, more specifically within the French framework, genres are described as communication devices that are activated under certain social and historical conditions (Maingueneau, 2014). Although some variation is expected, genres set expectations for structure, tone, and purpose in different contexts. For instance, a professional email has relative stability in terms of an expected structure and tone, and while the writer has some freedom in how they compose it, significant variation may compromise the communicative function.

To develop the communicative/genre competence, understanding the expectations evoked by genres is essential; hence the importance of organizing LINC lessons in a way that fosters this comprehension among students. According to Maingueneau (2014), there are seven essential elements that characterize a genre:

1. One or more purposes: Every text is produced to fulfill one or more functions, which must be clear to the speaker to employ the appropriate strategies. An argumentative essay, for example, has the purpose of persuading a reader of a specific point of view; to do so, the writer might adopt specific strategies such as presenting facts, data, and logical reasoning. While these strategies can help the speaker achieve the social function of the argumentative essay genre, they are not the same as those that would be employed in a different genre, such as a *recipe*.
2. The statute of legitimate partners: During a discursive exchange, there is a set of unspoken rules related to the roles of the speaker and the audience. These *rules* include who can play these parts and how they must behave. To illustrate, in a lecture, there are at least two different roles: the lecturer, whose role is to deliver information, and the students, who listen and take notes.
3. A legitimate place and time: Some genres can only play their role in specific time and place to be considered legitimate. For example, a class only happens in a specific setting and at certain times; small talk is a type of genre that does not require a specific setting.
4. A mode of inscription in temporality: Some genres happen periodically (i.e. a class), and others have no repeatability expected (i.e. a job application).
5. A medium: Some texts are oral while others are written; some might require a specific medium, such as the use of the Internet, and others might exist in more than one medium. The medium is an important element in the functioning of genres; just as it is not possible to send an *email* on paper, a *text message* cannot be sent without an electronic device.
6. A textual composition/organization: Most genres have a relatively stable textual organization. *It* is relatively stable because some variation is expected in real-world texts, which is an important



feature of a successful text. This element, particularly, is what many teachers think of when they consider genres, whether it is a five-paragraph essay or an email with a greeting, introduction, body, closing, and signature. Language teachers should keep in mind that although organization is very important for a text, it is not the only feature at play during an enunciation.

7. A specific use of linguistic resources: The last element of a genre in Maingueneau's proposal is related to the language style employed by the speaker when they produce the genre to have a successful interaction. Is it formal or informal? Is the vocabulary general or technical? Is the tone friendly or serious? Unlike what more traditional educators might assume, grammar correctness is not the norm in every genre. Adhering to a high level of formality might not guarantee a successful interaction in genres such as text messages or personal emails.

These seven elements co-occur whenever a genre is put into action, and it is essential for instructors to consider them to promote a deep understanding of genres and, therefore, enable students to develop language proficiency for real-world situations, as expected under the PBLA approach. Students do not necessarily need to know all the technical terminology from the field of Linguistics and Discourse Analysis; these can be adapted to help them grasp how the genres are organized.

As an example of how this approach can be implemented, consider the functioning of a genre commonly taught in LINC classrooms, medical prescriptions, which will be examined through the seven elements previously addressed. The purpose of a prescription is to guide a patient's treatment and authorize the purchase of specific medications at a pharmacy. The legitimate partners involved in this process are usually a doctor, a pharmacist and a patient, all of whom play different roles. The legitimate place and time for this genre are both at a doctor's office (at the end of an appointment) and at a pharmacy (after the appointment). Regarding its temporality, a prescription is given only once at the doctor's office and might be used more than once (if given refills) at the pharmacy. Its medium is often paper (printed or handwritten) and sometimes electronic. Its textual composition typically includes information such as the patient's name, the name of the medication, information about the doctor, directions on how to take the medication, and other details. Finally, the specific linguistic resources in this genre include the use of medical terminology, direct language, verbs in imperative, and words to indicate frequency and duration.

This brief description of a prescription illustrates how the framework proposed by Maingueneau (2014) can be easily implemented into classrooms. This proposal is valuable for giving clear guidance to instructors who might fear omitting important information, and, if considered, it should support the achievement of PBLA expectations in LINC classrooms.



Conclusion

This article sought to shed light on a didactic proposal that is not widely promoted in Canada, despite its benefits and its potential to support the implementation of PBLA in the classroom. I encourage educators to consider adopting this framework when planning lessons; doing so will not only guide lesson development but also ensure that lesson delivery reflects the complexity of how language functions in real-world contexts.

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Bruno Drighetti, PhD, is a linguist and instructor with experience across multiple sectors of the ESL industry, both in Canada and internationally. His research and practice are primarily focused on fostering critical literacy in the classroom and a view of language through a discursive perspective – encompassing identity, ideology, and power relations. Currently, he teaches at Conestoga College and at the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB).



Best practices for supporting rapid language acquisition

By Elena Kapshutar, Canada

Introduction

Rapid progress in additional or foreign language learning, especially among adult learners, is often portrayed as rare or even accidental (Birdsong, 1999; Lengyel & Singleton, 1995). Some individuals appear to acquire a new language with surprising ease, while others struggle despite equal or greater effort. From a teaching perspective, however, this phenomenon is neither mysterious nor dependent on innate talent. Rapid acquisition occurs when learners engage with language in consistent, structured, and cognitively challenging ways, in other words, in conditions that educators can design and sustain.

Over fifteen years of working with adult learners, international students, professional language users, and teacher trainees, I have observed recurring patterns that accelerate progress. Six interconnected practices appear consistently effective: balancing extensive and intensive input; encouraging output with structured, delayed feedback; integrating technology for deliberate practice; creating short-term intensive study cycles; applying the input +1 principle; and recycling errors systematically.

Each of these can be embedded into classroom and program contexts to help learners achieve measurable, lasting gains.

Practice 1: Balancing extensive and intensive input

One of the fundamental conditions for accelerated learning is sustained exposure to meaningful input or language that is heard or read in authentic contexts (Krashen, 1985, 1994). Not all input serves the same function, however. Extensive input refers to broad exposure: reading books or online media, listening to podcasts, or watching films without detailed analysis. Intensive input, by contrast, involves close reading or listening with focused examination of language features, such as vocabulary, collocations, or grammar.

Both types of input are essential. Extensive input builds tolerance for ambiguity and develops a natural sense of discourse, while intensive input consolidates accuracy and deepens lexical and grammatical awareness.



In practice, teachers can combine these modes effectively, for instance, by asking learners to listen once to a news clip for gist, then again with a transcript to underline key expressions, and finally once more without text to gauge improvement. This layered approach demonstrates that partial understanding is a valid stage toward mastery.

In adult ESL programs such as LINC, extensive listening may involve following CBC Radio or podcasts, while intensive work can focus on parsing transcripts of interviews. At the college level, extensive reading may include scanning authentic articles, while intensive analysis might target cohesive devices within one paragraph. Teachers who balance these two forms of input foster both fluency and precision—creating the ideal conditions for rapid, sustainable growth.

Practice 2: Encouraging output with structured feedback

Another consistent accelerator of progress is early and sustained output, or productive language use. Speaking and writing are not merely the outcomes of learning but its catalysts (Pannell et al., 2017). When learners attempt to produce language, they test hypotheses, strengthen memory, and expose gaps in knowledge that guide future learning.

Feedback delivery, however, is crucial. Constant interruption during speaking activities can inhibit fluency and confidence. Structured, delayed feedback, where the teacher notes common errors and addresses them after the task, preserves communication flow while still targeting accuracy.

A possible framework includes the following stages:

- Allow uninterrupted production during fluency tasks
- Note common errors while learners speak or write
- Provide collective and individual feedback after completion

To put it differently, as the feedback *golden rule* reminds us, the tighter the practice, the tighter the control (Cambridge Assessment English, 2021; Harmer, 2015; Scrivener, 2011;).

In practice, an adult ESL instructor might let learners role-play workplace scenarios, record common issues (tense consistency, politeness markers, pronunciation, etc.), and review them collectively. Learners leave confident in having communicated meaningfully, with clear next steps for improvement.

This approach empowers learners to produce more, not less. Freed from constant correction, they build fluency, while structured reflection ensures accuracy develops steadily alongside it.



Practice 3: Integrating technology for deliberate practice

Technology extends deliberate practice beyond the classroom. It provides repetition, feedback, and opportunities for self-correction, which are essential for rapid acquisition. While human interaction remains central, digital tools can reinforce form-focused work efficiently.

Conjugation apps, online exam simulators, and AI-based writing checkers allow learners to practise intensively between lessons. The teacher's role is to curate and model effective use rather than merely suggest tools. For example:

- Spend five minutes daily on this conjugation app, focusing on past tense
- Record a 60-second response, check it with a transcription tool, and reflect on accuracy
- Run your short writing draft through AI feedback and bring both versions for class discussion

In Ontario contexts, learners might use free apps during commutes or submit AI-reviewed drafts before peer editing sessions—coupled, of course, with study of the mistakes and language successes as well. Technology amplifies deliberate practice, providing feedback loops that reinforce awareness and progress.

Practice 4: Creating intensive cycles of study

Language learning rarely progresses in a straight line; acceleration often happens in short bursts of focused effort. Short-term immersion, whether through intensive courses or teacher-designed study sprints, builds momentum and strengthens retention.

For instance, a two-week study sprint might include daily writing tasks, brief listening practice, and micro-presentations. Framing such cycles as time-limited challenges motivates learners to push through effort and experience rapid, observable gains.

In community ESL programs, these cycles can align with thematic units: employment, housing, or healthcare, combining authentic materials with frequent, small-scale tasks. In college programs, writing boot camps can serve the same function, emphasizing repetition and recycling over a compact timeframe.

By embedding concentrated effort into structured cycles, teachers help learners overcome plateaus and see progress as both visible and cumulative.

Practice 5: Applying the input +1 principle

Rapid acquisition flourishes when learners consistently engage with language just beyond their comfort



zone. The input +1 principle (Krashen, 1985), as vague as it remains in terms of what exactly +1 is, holds that progress depends on exposure to material slightly above the learner's current level.

This might involve introducing authentic news articles to intermediate students or unscripted podcasts to upper-intermediate classes. Scaffolding through glossaries, guiding questions, and comprehension checks makes such input accessible without diluting its challenge.

Encouraging learners to revisit the same material later reinforces the perception of growth: what was once difficult now feels manageable. This tangible sense of progress fuels motivation and persistence.

ESL teachers might use local radio broadcasts or community newsletters, while academic instructors can scaffold debates or lectures through note-taking templates and prediction tasks.

Practice 6: Recycling and consolidating through error work

Errors are inevitable in learning, but without systematic revisiting they risk becoming fossilized. Teachers who recycle errors, intentionally returning to them until corrected forms are automatized, help learners achieve lasting accuracy (Li, 2016).

A practical approach is maintaining individual error logs for recurring grammar, pronunciation, or word choice issues. Lessons can begin with short review activities targeting these patterns. For example, repeated omission of the third-person -s might lead to a brief oral drill at the start of each class, while confusing pairs such as borrow/lend or say/tell can be recycled through multiple contexts.

In adult newcomer programs, where study time often competes with work and family commitments, systematic recycling ensures that learning remains efficient and cumulative. It also reinforces learners' sense of tangible improvement over time.

Conclusion

Rapid language acquisition is indeed neither mysterious nor unattainable. It emerges from consistent, research-informed classroom principles: balancing extensive and intensive input, promoting structured feedback, integrating technology for deliberate practice, organizing intensive study cycles, applying the input +1 principle, and systematically recycling errors.

The implications for the classrooms are quite clear: teachers are not mere content deliverers but designers of environments where accelerated growth can occur.



For Ontario's ESL, LINC, and college programs, these practices offer concrete strategies to help learners achieve more in less time. In a world where integration, employment, and academic advancement often hinge on linguistic competence, supporting rapid acquisition is not only desirable but essential.

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Fail better: Lessons from practicum

By Maggie Wang, Canada

“Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

This phrase has been my personal motto for years. By the time I began my TESL practicum, I already believed that mistakes were not a sign of failure but a sign of learning in motion. I wanted my students to see that each stumble was a step forward.

During my placements, one in person at Malton Neighbourhood Services, and one online at the Welland Heritage Council, I carried this belief into my lessons. These were my very first times standing at the front of the classroom as the teacher. I thought I knew what it meant to welcome mistakes. What I did not realize was how hard it would be to extend that same grace to myself.

I have always believed mistakes matter for learners. They are not weakness but evidence of growth. I knew this because it took me nearly twenty years to shift my own thinking. For a long time, I treated mistakes as proof that I was not capable. Eventually, I came to see them as necessary steps in the process of learning.

I also knew that many adult newcomers might carry similar experiences. I do not want to generalize, but I cannot ignore that some students come from schooling where accuracy is valued above all else, and errors are penalized. For my learners in their 40s and 50s, these beliefs had been reinforced for decades. It made sense that they might see mistakes as shameful or avoid speaking up in case they got something wrong.

I felt it was important to create a classroom where errors were not something to hide but something to share.

During my practicum, I worked hard to model that message. When a student made a mistake, I never voiced disapproval. I did not want the moment to feel heavy or embarrassing. Instead, I would smile and say, “Nice try. Do you want to try again?” If they did not want to, I would turn to the class: “Does anyone else want to give it a shot?”

The impact was noticeable. No one laughed at their peers, and no one looked ashamed. Instead, students leaned forward, eager to participate. They raised their hands quickly, sometimes even blurting out answers before I finished asking. Over time, the atmosphere shifted. I only saw this group once a week, but across



three months, I watched their comfort grow. Adults who had started cautiously began volunteering freely. Mistakes no longer froze the room, they sparked curiosity.

For me, that was proof of what I had always believed: Mistakes, when handled safely, could unlock participation and confidence.

The irony was that I did not treat myself the same way.

As a student teacher, I over-prepared everything because I believed I needed to be perfect. I was told by my TESL instructors that what looks smooth in the classroom is usually the result of hours of planning and preparation. I scripted lessons, made backup worksheets, and prepared fillers just in case. Later on, I realized this could be a strength. But at the time, it was a reflection of my nervousness and anxiety.

Inside, I was unforgiving. When pacing slipped, I told myself I had failed. When technology caused confusion online, I replayed it in my head for hours. I judged myself far more harshly than I judged my students.

My first ever lesson at Malton Neighbourhood Services showed me this clearly. The class enjoyed the materials and participated actively. But a couple of feedback cards said the pace was too fast. Instead of focusing on what went well, I went home discouraged. Later, I realized that what felt like failure was really feedback: I needed to build in buffer time and to accept that I might not finish every task. Letting go of *covering everything* was the real success.

At the Welland Heritage Council, I designed housing lessons around authentic rental ads and tenant-rights websites. The content was strong, and students engaged with it, but online delivery was messy. Some could not open the shared documents, and others stayed quiet in breakout rooms. At one point, I skipped an activity entirely because my instructions had not landed clearly. Again, I thought I had failed. But when I reflected, I saw that students still learned: They practiced scanning ads, discussed red flags, and asked questions about leases. The class was not smooth, but it was meaningful.

What's funny is that during my first semester observations, I first thought everything looked perfect. Looking back, I noticed that even experienced teachers had their own slip-ups. I saw teachers make lessons fun and memorable with charades, gestures, and humour. I saw pronunciation taught through physical techniques and listening made accessible by slowing down recordings. And none of it was flawless. Timings slipped, explanations stumbled, and technology did not always cooperate. But the students did not mind. They laughed, participated, and learned.

That was the moment I realized: My *failures* were not evidence I was not cut out to teach. They were simply part of teaching.



The most important lesson I took from practicum was that my philosophy had to apply to me as well as my students. I wanted them to know mistakes were safe, and I saw their confidence grow when I modeled that. But I needed to learn that teaching is also a process of trying, stumbling, and trying again. When they say teaching is a collaborative process, I think it is important to remember to collaborate with students as well. Of course, as the teacher you have responsibility for the students, but you also need to build rapport with them. Let them trust you, and you should trust them too.

Both practicums, my first time stepping into the role of teacher, showed me that *fail better* was not just for learners. It was for teachers, too.

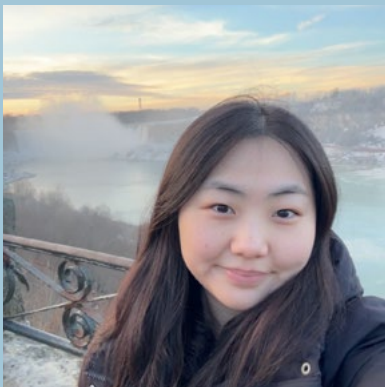
Practicum did not make me flawless. It made me reflective. I still prepare more than I need to, but now I see that as strength: Preparation gives me options. I still sometimes rush, but I give myself permission to slow down or skip. I still worry about the quiet student, but now I rotate groups and draw them in gently.

Most of all, I no longer see these moments as failure. They are part of growth.

“Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

It is no longer only what I want for my students. It is what I expect of myself, and what I want every new TESL student teacher to carry into their own practicum.

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Maggie Wang is a newly certified OCELT with TESL Ontario and a recent graduate of Niagara College’s TESL program. Based in Toronto, she has taught in both in-person and online LINC settings and enjoys exploring different ways to engage adult learners. Maggie values curiosity in the classroom and is excited to continue growing as an ESL instructor.

