

English Language Learning Magazine

# CONTACT

Conference Edition | March 2012

A photograph of two women sitting at a table, likely at a conference. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing glasses and a plaid shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a black and white patterned top. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame.

**39th Annual TESL Ontario Conference**  
**Language Learning:**  
**A FOCUS ON SUCCESS**

VOLUME 38, NUMBER 1, MARCH, 2012

ISSN # 0227-2938

Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario

[www.teslontario.net/publication/contact-magazine](http://www.teslontario.net/publication/contact-magazine)

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## Calendar

March 29-31	Ontario Modern Language Teachers' association Spring Conference.
April 15-17	Ontario Association for Students at Risk Annual Conference.
April 21	TESL Durham workshop.
	TESL Hamilton-Wentworth Spring Conference.
	TESL London Spring Conference.
	Ontario Branch of the International Dyslexia Association Literacy & Learning Conference.
April 28	TESL Windsor Spring Workshop and AGM.
April 29 - May 2	International Reading Association Annual Convention in Chicago.
May 5	TESL Toronto Spring Conference.
May 7	TESL Ottawa Spring Event.
May 7-11	Education Week
May 10-12	Ontario Council for Technology Education Conference.
May 17	TESL PHE Spring Conference.
May 24-25	Great Lakes Chapter of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) Conference.



Please, contact us ([editor@teslontario.org](mailto:editor@teslontario.org)) to let us know about upcoming events.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

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This is my first issue as editor, and predictably, I'm excited and anxious to hear the reaction, and to find out who bothers to read the editor's introduction.

As you can tell, we've completely redesigned the magazine layout. We're trying to position Contact as more of a magazine with news, comment, letters from our members, and other miscellany. Just as teachers are constantly tinkering with our lessons, we'll continue to refine the look and content of Contact with your help. To that end, we're always looking for feedback, input, assistance, and content submissions.

Though most people read the magazine online, we've kept the 8 1/2" x 11" letter size to facilitate printing it. The new typeface is Georgia, which makes for easy reading on computers and other devices. We've also shifted to a single-column for most articles, to reduce scrolling up and down, but left a generous margin to avoid an overly long line length, which should also make for easier reading on tablet devices. These changes result in a slightly higher page count, but for the majority, who read electronic versions, this isn't a problem.

The 39th Annual TESL Ontario Conference "Language learning: A focus on success" was held at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel from October 27-29, 2011. Executive director, Renate Tilson, reports, "Our 2011 TESL Ontario Conference was Absolutely Fabulous! And our final registration number was 1515—an excellent result." The articles in this issue are based on presentations or posters delivered at the conference. For some more presentations, you can go view over 50 hours of webcasted sessions from the conference.

Rather than introduce our individual articles, I'd like to let each speak for itself, but I extend my sincere appreciation to the conscientious and responsive authors who contributed. We'd also like to thank once again everyone who was involved in making the conference such a success. On top of the conference articles, we have some government-related news and a review from our immediate past editor, Tania Pattison, of a soccer-themed British Council site for learning English. The magazine ends with some frivolity, which I hope you'll enjoy.

Looking to the future, our next issue will be the research issue, based on the conference's research symposia and co-edited by Hedy McGarrell and Bob Courchêne. And, finally, the date for next year's conference is November 8-10, 2012 in the same venue. Pencil it in now.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Brett Reynolds

[editor@teslontario.org](mailto:editor@teslontario.org)



## CONTACT

Contact is published four times a year (Feb, May, August, and November) by TESL Ontario. February is our conference issue and May is our research issue. It is published for the members of TESL Ontario and is available free online to anyone.



Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, calls for papers, and news items.

## Personnel

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ISSN # 0227-2938

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## TESL ONTARIO

TESL Ontario is a supportive community empowering educational professionals to help English language learners to thrive.

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# TESL CANADA CONFERENCE:

## Connections, Collaborations and Celebrations

By Joe Dobson

This coming October, the TESL Canada 2012 conference is an event that language teaching professionals should mark on their calendars. The 2012 conference will be held at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC and is co-hosted by TESL Canada and BC TEAL, October 11-13, 2011. Nestled in beautiful grasslands valleys, Kamloops is a welcoming and easily accessible city close to many renowned destinations such as Sun Peaks Resort, the Adams River salmon run, and the Thompson-Okanagan wine country. As one of North America's most important professional development conferences in our field, this is a fabulous opportunity to make connections with colleagues from around the country and beyond.

The theme for the 2012 conference, "TESL Interiors: Landscapes of Literacies and Language" is one reflective of the multiple dimensions that we, as language educators, have and of the varied ways that language is taught and learned. One of the keynote speakers will be Steven Pinker, a native of Montreal, and Professor of Psychology at Harvard. His acclaimed "language" series includes *The Language Instinct*, *Words and Rules*, and *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*.

Prior to the conference itself, there will be a number of symposia thematically focused and led by experts across a range of areas of interest and specializations. Additionally, there will be a number of pre-conference activities and excursions such as a wine-tasting tour of wineries in the Thompson-Okanagan. Like all conferences of this scale, there will also be numerous publishers and exhibitors for delegates to meet with.

This year, one of the most notable additions to the conference is that of the Graduate Students Symposium. This one day event will bring together graduate students from across the country and beyond. This is the first time that a TESL Canada has included this as part of the conference activities and offered such a venue in which to exchange and develop ideas and collaborative opportunities with colleagues at various institutions. The keynote speaker for the symposium is Penny Ur, a truly accomplished teacher educator in our field.

Last, no conference held in the BC Interior would be complete without the opportunity for some fun. On the Friday evening, the "Wine and Ale" tasting event will bring some of the best of the Thompson-Okanagan to the conference. A second ticketed event is the Gala Banquet which will feature mouth-watering food, great company, and live music with fabulous shake your boots music.

The conference planning committee invites you to participate in the event as a delegate or a presenter. The conference Call for Proposals and other information on the event is available at <http://www.tru.ca/tc2012>.



# CHANGES IN FUNDING

While cutting back on some of the well-established programs, governments announced financial support of other initiatives.

## Settlement services

“The government earmarked \$583 million for settlement services across Canada for 2011-12, down from \$622 million the year before.

For 2012-13, that total will fall to \$577 million across Canada, according to ministry figures.

For the current year, Citizenship and Immigration Canada budgeted \$346.5 million for Ontario, a decrease from \$390 million the previous year. For 2012-13, it will drop again to \$314.9 million. It is a loss of \$31.5 million.” This is certainly bad news for all Ontarians employed by settlement services.

According to the federal government, the funding is adjusted to fit changing migration patterns. Western provinces and the Maritimes see a slight increase in funding for these programs over the next couple of years.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2011/11/25/pol-immigrant-settlement-funding.html>

## Recognition of credentials of foreign-trained professionals

“Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development announced a Government of Canada investment to help foreign-trained engineers get jobs in Canada faster. Engineers Canada received over \$785,000 to improve the application process for engineers educated in other countries. With the support of the Foreign Credentials Recognition Program, Engineers Canada will compare foreign work experience with Canadian standards so applicants can demonstrate that they have the experience necessary to obtain a provincial or territorial licence. In 2010, service standards were established so that internationally trained professionals in eight priority occupations, including engineers and nurses, can have their qualifications assessed within one year, anywhere in Canada. This year, the Government has started streamlining foreign qualification recognition for six more target occupations, including physicians and dentists.”

Significant barriers to employment for internationally-trained professional have brought a lot of resentment and frustration to the lives of new immigrants. We can only hope that this initiative will effectively reduce the number of underemployed professionals in big cities like Toronto. Good news for some of our students!

<http://news.gc.ca/web/article-eng.do?nid=641439>



## Undergraduate students tuition grants

Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has some good news for families with children in college.

“As of January, Ontario students can apply to get 30 per cent off the cost of their tuition.

To help keep the cost of postsecondary education affordable the government is taking 30% off the average tuition for families - that means \$800 for undergraduate university or college degree students and \$365 for college diploma and certificate students this semester.

Because the grant is calculated to be 30% off the average Ontario tuition, the amount of the grant will keep pace with any increased future costs - meaning it will always be 30 per cent off the price of tuition.”

This is good news for all post-secondary students, but especially to those from recent immigrant families who might have less than enough savings to pay for tuition. It applies to all Ontarians who are citizens, permanent residents, or protected persons.

<http://ontario.ca/postsecondary>

<http://news.ontario.ca/tcu/en/2012/01/apply-now-for-the-new-30-off-ontario-tuition.html>



## PUBLIC SERVICE JOB CUTS

The federal government eliminates some 190 language-training jobs across the country.

“The layoffs apply to workers at the Canada School of the Public Service. The school said in a release that training would be outsourced to “external suppliers” such as universities and private language schools. Services officially end March 31. A spokesperson for Treasury Board President Tony Clement said there were capacity problems and that many public servants were already receiving training elsewhere.”

From *Toronto Star*, January 14, 2012. Allan Woods.

While this change makes life more complicated for 190 teachers, their former students might like the opportunity to be able to choose a language school that suits them best.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ILONA SANDOR

By Emily Rogolja

Ilona Sandor is an experienced ESL teacher who works in Scarborough. She believes in reaching out to students, leaving no one behind, and inclusivity in the classroom. On January 13th 2012, I had the opportunity to meet and interview Ilona at her home where she showed me some of her class portfolios and she shared with me some of her class and student successes. Her student Kathy Song recently won the 2011 ESL-week essay contest and the Grand Prize (see p. 11). The contest was part of ESL week in 2011. ESL week is celebrated annually in Ontario and took place in 2011 during the week of October 23rd - 29th. During this time, there are various contests that take place including categories such as: essay, short story, poetry, ESL blog, short film, poster design, and photo contest. Kathy Song won the essay contest for her entry titled, "My Experience of Learning English" as well as the Grand Prize of the contest.

**Emily Rogolja: Do you introduce your students to these types of contests?**

Ilona Sandor: I am always looking beyond the framework of the classroom for opportunities such as this. I wanted to engage students in something meaningful. This was how I came across it a few years ago. At that point I read through and prepared myself to ask future students to participate. I found it to be a very good opportunity because it invited students with different abilities to participate and connected the students as ESL learners. In 2010, my LINC 5/6 class entered the ESL-week contest in the poster contest. They prepared and edited the poster themselves and I encouraged the entire class to participate. The class won the first runner-up (second placement) in the poster contest.

**ER: Congratulations! What sparked the idea to enter the essay contest in 2011?**

IS: Most of my class participated in the brochure project mentioned in Kathy's essay. It



helped them to learn about their community from real people in authentic situations. They had to conduct interviews and read community pamphlets. When Kathy completed her brochure and presented it to the class, she was very proud of her work and the students watching were so engaged and encouraged by her. This gave me the idea to ask Kathy to write a short essay about this unique learning experience as a submission for the contest.

***ER: What kind of preparation must the student do?***

IS: Kathy submitted the first version as a rough copy. The basic outline had to be dressed up and include unique details that gave distinct flavour to the piece.

***ER: What is the teacher's role in this preparation?***

IS: The teacher puts in a lot of extra work. For example, I set aside lunch breaks to consult with Kathy. I corrected only grammar and stylistic errors, but provided suggestions and advice to refine her own writing. There was a lot of negotiation during the editing process to get the essay ready for submission to the contest. To get students to work hard, you must also work hard. Because of my experience I was also encouraged to apply to the contest as an instructor to describe my success story.

***ER: Do you think that these types of contests are important for ESL students?***

IS: Yes. It creates an opportunity for them to create something that stands out and shows their personality. I want my students to be proud of themselves as learners, and success is an important motivator. These contests give students a clear goal and opportunities to showcase their individual skills and talents.

***ER: What do you think ESL students gain from these types of experiences?***

IS: By acknowledging different talents and skills, students try to build on them. They often underestimate their skills or lack self confidence so they doubt their abilities. But challenging them and raising the bar to engage them helps students to see their progress and recognize their successes. The contests also provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration with other students. They work as a team for a common goal.

***ER: Were students hesitant at all to participate? How was it resolved?***

IS: Part of our process included audio recording of our presentations. Although some students were reluctant and felt “watched”, they warmed up to it eventually. When we reviewed the audio clips and made constructive feedback it helped the students learn from their mistakes, to see what went well and what could have gone better.

In 2011, the 39th Annual TESL Ontario Conference took place from October 27th-29th at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel. It was subtitled “Language Learning: A Focus on Success”, and included ESL workshops, presentations, research symposia, panel discussions, and opportunities to network with ESL colleagues and explore new ESL materials displayed by publishers.

***ER: Do you make a point of attending the conference?***

IS: Yes, every year. I like it because teachers can explore and go beyond knowledge that they already have. It is a part of ongoing professional learning and gives teachers an opportunity to network with their peers and exchange ideas.

***ER: What do you think the benefits are for new and experienced teachers?***

IS: It is primarily beneficial for learning, and even experienced teachers can learn. There are always new and innovative ideas that have come from research in the field. Not only are there presentations on these new and novel ideas but also implementations on the practical side of it - how to implement it in a real classroom. The conference also has new ESL resources and material that I can choose to incorporate into my teaching.

***ER: To reference the subtitle of the 2011 Conference, all of the class work from the portfolios and the results of the contest have shown that your students have achieved a high degree of success. What is a teacher's role in students' success?***

IS: The teacher is the fuel for the car but the student is the main participant. The teacher knows the students' needs and how to engage them to make the most of their learning experience and go beyond. Going beyond the classroom helps students explore their possibilities - some seem to be impossibilities but they are not. As Kathy said, "learning has no edge", one can always go farther beyond where they are. By engaging them and encouraging them it builds their confidence. A teacher and their students should work as a team and success is what connects the two. Not only do they take pride in their learning, I also want to take pride in my teaching.

**Interviewer Bio**

Emily Rogolja is currently studying for her post-graduate certificate in TESL at Humber College.

# 2011 TESL ONTARIO ESL WEEK CONTEST

ESSAY ENTRY #7

## Title: My Experience of Learning English

By Kathy Song

Learning English is a meaningful experience for me. When I began to learn English in the LINC School, I really felt my life changed, because I can learn new knowledge to enrich my language and my way of thinking. Every day is different. Now I understand why people say learning is infinite, because learning goes on and on forever never stopping. It has no edge.

When I recall my experience of learning English, making a brochure will stay a memorable learning experience. Last week my teacher gave us a task to make a brochure about our community. The brochure needs to include everything about our community even interviewing people who are living there.

At first, I had no idea about it. When I was on my way home, I started to think about how to do it, where I should research materials, whom I will interview and so on. When I got home, I turned on my computer, and came across the brochure which my community center had given to me and I read magazines. I hoped I could catch some inspiration. After two hours of preparation, I had the main idea. I listed an outline and imagined the pictures in my mind.

Then I started to do community research on the internet according to my list, and looked for some pictures that related to my topics in my brochure. At 10 pm I finally finished the words part for my brochure. I brought it to my husband to get some advice. He proofread it for me. The second day, I worked on the interviews and decorating my brochure; it was the most interesting part. I picked four persons, my husband, my neighbour, my husband's colleague, and a stranger for the interviews. After dinner, my husband and I knocked on my neighbour's door. I felt a little bit nervous and shy, although I had practiced the questions at home. But when my neighbour, Harry, opened the door, I felt relaxed at that moment, because he gave us a big smile. I told him about my mission, and asked him questions. At that time, my husband was "my secretary", and he took notes for me. The first interview was going very well; it gave me more confidence and satisfaction.

The second person was my husband's colleague, Ramesh. I was familiar with him, so I brought soup for him. He also was willing to get involved in my interview. It was successful and I got my anticipated answers.

The third person was a stranger. On our way home, I flashed an idea in my head, why not to interview a cashier. So we went to Canadian Tire. We bought something, and then we were waiting in the line. It was my turn, it was my turn, I felt my heart beat was getting faster. Finally, I got up the courage and asked the cashier, Statty, “Can I ask you a question?” When I heard a pleasant voice, “of course, why not?”, all of my worries and nervousness disappeared. The last person was my husband, of course, there was no nervousness in our interview.

By talking to people you can get what you want to know and go beyond and expand your horizon. A friendly smile and a handshake can make it easier.

The last part of the brochure was decoration. I researched the Staple and Dollar store to get the papers and tools I had wanted. That evening, my husband helped me to complete the brochure.

We discussed it, cut and pasted pictures having so much fun in it. Although my husband was not a student in a LINC School, both of us enjoyed it! When we saw our beautiful brochure, we could not describe the happiness in words. I think it was not only homework, but also it was a meaningful experience, we learned more beyond what we could imagine. I learned from this experience how to apply my knowledge. It means how to use and organize the words, expressions and sentences we had learned in class and how to communicate with people. It is the most important purpose for learning a language. Also, this task gave me an opportunity to discover my hidden talent and creativity.

I think I should appreciate my English teacher, not only she teaches us English, but also she gives us confidence and changes our life step by step.

People often say they are not good at doing certain things. In fact, they are good at it. You can always do something better than you think. As Terry Fox said, “I just wish people would realize that anything is possible if you try; dreams are made if people try.”

## Author Bio



Kathy Song LINC 6  
Student - Polycultural  
Immigrant &  
Community Services,  
Scarborough

# CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS VALIDATION

By Daphné Blouin Carboneau

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) will soon be wrapping up the final steps of the validation of the CLB, the culmination of a four-year process during which, based on recommendations from stakeholders across the country, the standard will have been revised and validated to better fulfill the needs of its users.

In 2010, with funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), CCLB carried out revisions to the CLB and its French counterpart, the Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC), based on the recommendations which arose from the National Consultation process. The revision team looked particularly closely at recommendations from practitioners regarding the ease of use of the document and the desire for clearer terminology and clearer differences between levels. The revisions to the CLB document include clearer language for descriptors, updated sample tasks, a more user-friendly layout and a glossary which defines key terms used in the descriptors and elsewhere in the document.

The participants in the National Consultation also recommended that the CLB and NCLC undergo a thorough validation process to ensure their acceptance as frameworks of reference for a variety of uses in a variety of contexts, including high-stakes uses. With funding from the government of Alberta, CCLB consulted with validation experts from across the country who proposed a plan for a rigorous three-step validation process that would meet the needs of CLB users and also be accepted by the academic community.

In early 2011, with funding from CIC, CCLB undertook the first step of the validation by developing a common theoretical framework for the CLB and NCLC. This common theoretical framework draws upon widely accepted research in the fields of language education and applied linguistics, including key principles accepted for all languages as well as contributions from the English as a Second Language (ESL) and French as a Second Language (FSL) fields. This theoretical framework underwent extensive independent review at each stage of its development. It was later compared with three other language training frameworks: the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines and the Échelle québécoise des niveaux de compétence en français pour les personnes immigrantes adultes. This process showed that the theoretical framework was consistent not only upon the models of language ability it articulated, but also with the key principles underlying other language training frameworks.

The next step of the process was to validate the revised CLB against the theoretical framework in order to determine whether it was an accurate application of the theory upon which it was intended to be founded. In order to do this, CCLB assembled a panel of six independent experts who examined each descriptor in the document and mapped it onto the theoretical framework document. This allowed the validation team to identify gaps, that is, elements of the theoretical models that served as a foundation for the document but which were not adequately represented within the standards document. A panel of revision and validation team members then revised the document to fill the gaps identified by the validation panel. As a result, the CLB document has been confirmed to be an accurate reflection of the theoretical framework and consistent with models and research widely accepted in the ESL field.

The final step in the validation, funded by the governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Saskatchewan, with in-kind contributions from the government of Manitoba, is an extensive field validation with the document's end users. In order to accomplish this important step, CCLB has worked in close collaboration with content experts as well as service provider organizations and instructors across Canada. One of the key components of this step of the validation was the development of exemplars which would then be benchmarked by a panel of independent experts, as well as by practitioners with experience teaching learners at specific CLB levels. In order to accomplish this, CCLB first hired content experts who developed reading and listening texts and tasks for each of the 12 levels, as well as prompts which were later used to collect authentic samples of learner performance. These exemplars and texts now form the basis for a support kit for practitioners currently being developed by CCLB.

The tasks and exemplars were benchmarked by experts and, along with the revised CLB and NCLC documents, field tested with more than 100 practitioners across Canada. These practitioners fulfilled two important roles: first, to confirm the level of the exemplars based on their in-depth experience with learners at certain CLB levels, and second, to provide feedback on the clarity, completeness and accuracy of the representation of the levels in the CLB document. CCLB has also had many opportunities, at conferences and other events, to discuss the revised document with practitioners and has received very positive feedback.

A key feature of the validation has been the extent to which, like the consultation and revisions, CCLB collaborated with those using the documents in the field in order to ensure that the final product met their needs. Ever since the drafting of the first CLB Working Document, practitioners in federally funded language programs have been a key stakeholder group driving the development of the standard. Therefore, their recommendations have been a critical component of the validation from the early planning stages and informed all decisions made by the team.

Another notable aspect of this project is the extent to which it went beyond the existing pool of CCLB experts, drawing upon expertise from a variety of backgrounds. In addition

to experts from the field with in-depth experience using the CLB, this project has brought together researchers from six universities across Canada, whose research interests include validation methods, assessment, teacher training, high-stakes testing, classroom teaching and curriculum development. Furthermore, CCLB drew upon the knowledge of recognized experts of the CEFR, the ACTFL guidelines, and other language training frameworks. This collaboration and exchange not only reinforced the validation process but also resulted in new partnerships which will benefit future CLB projects.

A number of support resources are being developed in order to orient Ontario practitioners to the revised standard and fill the gaps in resources identified during the National Consultation (see McKay below). The revised CLB is currently being fine-tuned based on data returned from the field test. It will be delivered on March 31 to CIC, who will make it available online in April.

### Author Bio

Daphné Blouin Carbonneau is a Project Manager at CCLB, managing the CLB/NCLC validation and other projects. She has previously worked as an ESL instructor and as a CLB language assessor.

# SUPPORT KIT AND ORIENTATION ON THE REVISED CLB

By Jennifer McKay

With funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Ontario Region, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) is currently developing a kit of Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) resources that will be distributed to federally funded programs throughout Ontario this year. The project will also include training to CIC-funded programs through a train-the-trainer model.

CLB is the national standard for English as a Second Language for adult immigrants. Following an extensive National Consultation in 2009, it has been revised and validated to better meet the needs of users. The revised CLB will be delivered on March 31 to CIC, and will be available online in April. For more information on the validation process, please see Carbonneau (p. 13 in this issue).

As most publicly funded training programs are mandated to use the CLB framework, it is extremely important that teachers become familiar with the revisions that have occurred and be supported as they learn how to use the revised CLB in their teaching.

The National Consultation heard from over 1,300 Canadian Language Benchmarks and Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC) stakeholders across Canada. In all of the multi-stakeholder and practitioner-specific forums of the National Consultation, the need for supports for teachers involved in language training was raised. CCLB has also

provided many training sessions across Canada in the past few years on three classroom assessment resources: Using the Summative Assessment Manual (SAM), Using the CLB 5-10 Exit Tasks and Integrating CLB into your ESL Classroom. Feedback received from these sessions demonstrated the need for additional training on the CLB standard.

This project ensures that their voices were heard, as many of the recommendations from the consultations concerning training and resources have been incorporated into the CLB Support Kit Resource and training package.

The CLB Support Kit will include several guides:

- The Orientation to the CLB guide will include information on how the new standard document differs from the CLB 2000. It will also include brief explanations of the revised theoretical framework, as well as information on needs assessment, classroom planning and assessment using the revised CLB.
- Three additional guides: Incorporating Grammar into a CLB-Based Program, Incorporating Pragmatics into a CLB-Based Program, and Incorporating Pronunciation into a CLB-Based Program are being written by well-recognized researchers in their respective fields who have extensive experience in providing teacher training.

All of the guides will focus on using the communicative approach in a CLB based classroom, and will include examples taken from the revised CLB document. They will bring current theory to the audience in a practical and accessible way.

The kit will also include:

- Exemplars or samples of performance, sample tasks, texts and passages
- DVDs containing benchmarked speaking and listening exemplars with closed captioning and/or subtitles, as well as transcripts, for hearing impaired instructors
- Benchmarking writing samples and reading texts
- Best practices and tips on the following topics: teaching in an academic context, teaching in a workplace context, teaching multi-level classes, and working with special needs learners in a CLB based classroom

All of the exemplars and texts are being developed with the intention of exemplifying authentic communication that would be encountered in the real world. Exemplars and texts for all four skills will be included from settlement, employment and academic contexts.

Much of the kit content will be available online in an interactive, digital bookshelf, which will also contain other CCLB resources. The intent of the project is to support a dynamic, interactive community of practice.

Webinars will also be developed on several of the topics from the kit. The webinars will be live facilitated presentations that will be recorded and loaded onto CCLB's website at [language.ca](http://language.ca) and available through Tutela.ca (the national repository funded by CIC) so that anyone can access them at any time.

A training package on the orientation kit is currently being developed. This package will be used for hands-on training that will be rolled out throughout Ontario beginning this spring. A train-the-trainer model will be used so that all programs can receive the training as soon as possible.

We will be offering approximately 20 sessions throughout the Ontario region for up to 400 lead teachers. Coordinators in CIC-funded programs will be invited to send one or more instructors who will go back to their own organizations to deliver the training to colleagues and peers. The participants of the train-the-trainer sessions, or "lead teachers," should be leaders in their community of practice. They will be given all of the tools needed to easily and effectively roll out the CLB Orientation.

We hope to offer the training to instructors from other publicly funded organizations within Ontario, as well as throughout Canada, following our CIC Ontario funded rollout.

For more information on the project or training rollout, please contact Jennifer McKay at [jmckay@language.ca](mailto:jmckay@language.ca).

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Jennifer McKay is currently the Senior Program Manager for CLB related projects at the CCLB. A TESL Ontario certified instructor, Jennifer has been with the Centre since 2005, and has worked on various projects including assessor and instructor training and professional development as well as project management of the CLB Milestones Test. She is currently overseeing the CLB Support Kit project.

# ENGLISH ACCENT COACH:

## Not quite a fairy godmother for pronunciation instruction, but a step in the right direction.

By Ron Thomson

The website [www.englishaccentcoach.com](http://www.englishaccentcoach.com) has been developed with support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and is free for Canadian immigrant language learners. It is an online, interactive pronunciation training tool, designed to address one aspect of pronunciation that many English language instructors find difficult to teach: the accurate perception of vowels and consonants. Teachers themselves can benefit from the tool, by using it to learn the International Phonetic Alphabet, an invaluable classroom aid to teaching pronunciation. Notably, the approach used by English Accent Coach has been shown to significantly impact the pronunciation ability of adult learners, and those traditionally believed to have plateaued in their learning. It also leads to a significant increase in students' confidence in their ability to perceive English sounds (Thomson, 2011, 2012). These significant improvements begin after just a few short training sessions.

### Background

Pronunciation has often been referred to as the “Cinderella” of language learning, neglected while we focus on its older sisters: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar (Kelly, 1969; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin & Griner, 2010). Unlike the proverbial Cinderella, however, pronunciation is not neglected because it is disliked. Rather, it seems to be avoided because teachers feel underprepared, or because they do not have access to what they believe are effective teaching materials (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Breitzkreutz, Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; MacDonald, 2002; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2012). Another commonly expressed teacher belief concerning pronunciation is that when it is incorporated into the curriculum, benefits to learners are incommensurate with the time and effort invested, leaving teachers to question whether valuable instructional time is being wasted.

Given these reasons for pronunciation's neglect in many language classrooms, the search continues for its elusive fairy godmother: pronunciation teaching techniques that are teacher-friendly and effective. Teachers' own eagerness to gain knowledge regarding pronunciation instruction is undisputed, being self-evident from the popularity of conference presentations on the topic, which are nearly always standing room only. Unfortunately, despite teachers' eagerness for knowledge, little seems to change in the techniques and strategies available. As a profession, we have yet to find that magic solution. This is most

probably because such a solution does not exist, despite frequent claims to the contrary by those advertising “accent reduction” programs. In fact, researchers largely agree that there is no quick fix (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Flege, Munro, & MacKay 1995; Thomson, 2011). At the same time, understanding what research tells us about pronunciation learning can lead to the development of tools that will go a long ways toward making pronunciation instruction easier, more effective, and more accessible. English Accent Coach is an example of a tool that attempts to bridge the gap between current research and practice. It is not an all-in-one solution, by any means, but it does make a proven technique accessible to learners, and can therefore be a useful addition to the pronunciation teacher’s toolbox.

## Segmentals vs. Suprasegmentals

Many teachers continue to debate whether it is more important to teach segmentals (i.e., vowels and consonants) or suprasegmentals (e.g., stress, rhythm and intonation, etc.). In fact, both segmentals and suprasegmentals are important for communication. However, teacher beliefs and experiences often lead to a focus on one over the other (Foote, Derwing & Holtby, 2012). For example, many teachers focus on segmentals, because they feel they are easier to teach (Burgess and Spencer, 2000). Indeed, at least on the surface, there is something more intuitive about explaining how to produce a sound that can be both heard and felt (e.g., how to make a ‘b’), than suprasegmentals (e.g., how to produce word stress and pitch), which can only be heard. Ironically, despite being viewed as easier to teach, segmentals seem to be very difficult for students to learn using conventional methods. One explanation for this is that materials for teaching vowels and consonants typically take a one-size-fits all approach, which does not work well when students come from a mix of first language backgrounds and proficiency levels (Thomson, 2011).

When it comes to the teaching of segmentals, what is really needed is instruction aimed at the needs of individual learners. English Accent Coach is designed with this concern in mind. As a result, it promotes easier and more rapid learning of English vowels and consonants than traditional approaches (Thomson, 2011, 2012). The vowel and consonant games can be set to address individual learners’ needs by allowing selection from a range of difficulty levels. In the case of consonants, the option to focus on particular sound contrasts is also available.

## Key research behind English Accent Coach

A common misperception in pronunciation instruction is that it should primarily focus on articulation practice. While practice in producing sounds is obviously important, the underlying foundation of pronunciation must be the accurate perception of English sounds (see Flege et al., 1995). If learners cannot accurately perceive English sounds, they cannot easily learn how to produce them, let alone monitor their own pronunciation. Without the ability to perceive sounds, learners would have to be taught how every single word

in the language is articulated, and then remember how to pronounce them correctly in spontaneous speech. In contrast, if learners are able to accurately perceive sounds, they can monitor their own pronunciation, a much more realistic expectation.

Laboratory experiments have provided some insight into how to promote faster improvement in perception. For example, we know that the use of multiple speakers in training recordings is far more effective than using only a single speaker's voice (Logan, Lively & Pisoni, 1991). Thus, English Accent Coach currently comprises eight native speaker voices, and will ultimately incorporate at least 25 voices. Research also indicates that frequent corrective feedback is important to learning (Saito & Lyster, 2011), something English Accent Coach also provides.

What English Accent Coach does not do is provide feedback on learners' articulation of sounds. Thus, it is clearly a tool that can only complement rather than replace the teacher. Despite claims to the contrary, computers cannot yet provide sufficiently accurate feedback on oral production (see Thomson, 2011 for an overview); fortunately, teachers can. There is also something ecologically more appealing about having a real human listener assess production, since the aim of learners is to produce speech that is intelligible to human listeners, not machines. English Accent Coach should, therefore, be used in conjunction with opportunities for students to practice what they are learning in both controlled and spontaneous speech activities. For controlled contexts, learners can begin by mimicking the sounds they hear during the game. In my research, I have observed learners doing just that – without being instructed to do so. A human teacher is still needed, however, to provide learners with accurate feedback on their oral imitation. As learners' ability to perceive English sounds improves, they will be able to autonomously monitor their own speech. Although improvements in the perception of English sounds through this type of training has been found to transfer to pronunciation, even in the absence of explicit production practice (Thomson, 2011), teachers can help promote more rapid transfer to pronunciation, in more complex and diverse contexts. Suggestions for doing so are provided at the end of this article.

## How English Accent Coach works

### Step 1: The tour.

For learners or teachers who are unfamiliar with the International Phonetic Alphabet, the first place to start in English Accent Coach is with the "Tour" link. Here there is an opportunity to click on the phonetic symbols and see and hear example words that contain the target sounds, including both vowels and consonants (see Figure 1).

### Step 2: The vowel and consonant games

After the learners feel they have a basic understanding of the phonetic symbols used, they should proceed to the game by clicking on the "Play" link. Do not worry if a learner's

understanding of the phonetic symbols is not quite perfect. That will quickly come through playing the actual game.

Upon clicking on the “Play” link, the user must first choose whether to focus on vowels or consonants. The learner will then be able to choose how long the session should be (from 20 to 200 items), the level of difficulty, and the number of incorrect guesses he or she can make before the game will show the correct answer (see Figure 2). For the consonant game, the same parameters are available to the learner, in addition to a choice of how many consonants to focus on, and which ones.

The basic game procedure is always the same: the learner will hear a syllable or word, and must click on a phonetic symbol representing the target sound they are practicing. This could be as simple as indicating the vowel in a single syllable (i.e., Vowels, Levels 1 and 2), or as difficult as indicating the vowel in the stressed syllable of a two-syllable word (i.e., Vowels, Level 8). If the learner makes a correct choice, the game will proceed to the next item (See Figure 3). If users make an incorrect choice, the game will indicate the correct answer, which they must then click on in order to proceed to the next item (See Figure 4). The game also includes a timer. Although a learner may be quite accurate, improving the speed of his or her responses should also promote learning and retention.

### Step 3: Tracking progress

After completing a game session, users will receive a report card indicating their overall score, their scores on individual sounds, and the time elapsed (See Figure 5). It is generally recommended to obtain at least 75% or higher on particular sounds before attempting the same sounds at a more difficult level. If after

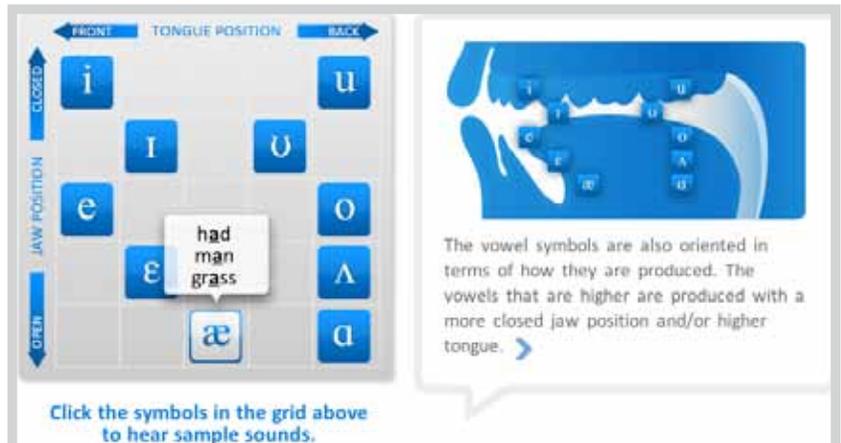


Figure 1. An example of a Tour page from EnglishAccentCoach.com. Clicking on symbols randomly plays words with target vowels in them.

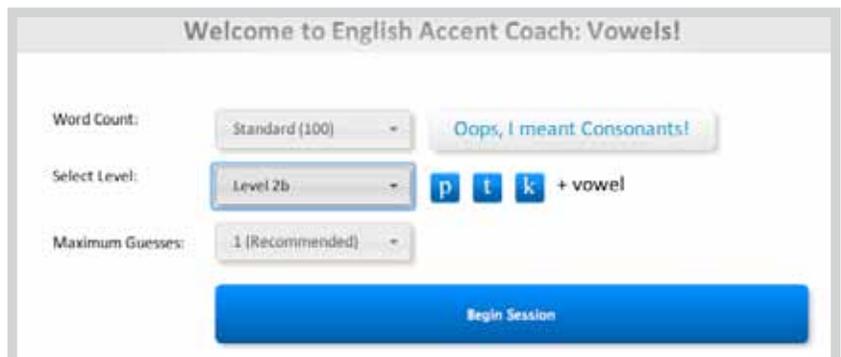


Figure 2. Vowel game parameter selection page. After selecting parameters, click on “Begin session to start game”.

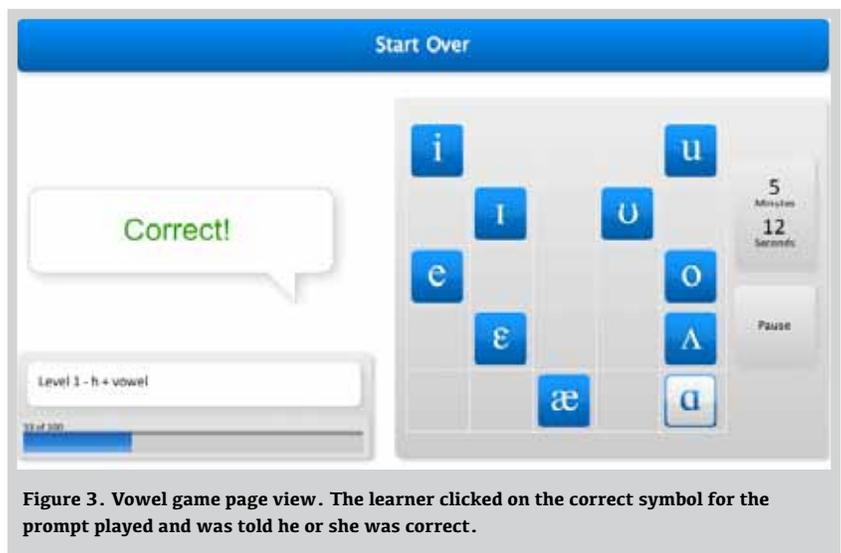


Figure 3. Vowel game page view. The learner clicked on the correct symbol for the prompt played and was told he or she was correct.

approximately ten sessions 75% accuracy is not reached, and there does not appear to be further improvement, then proceeding to the next level is recommended. Ultimately, it is a users' choice when they want to proceed to a more difficult level. The game only provides recommendations, based on general principles, and what is believed to be best for learning. In order to track progress over time, users can print each report card, or save it as a PDF file to refer to later. Keep in mind that even native speakers often cannot achieve a perfect score, particularly for some of the vowel levels.

## Questions about levels and the use of non-word training prompts

There may be some confusion as to why, at lower levels, the game uses syllables rather than words. In fact, some users, particularly native speakers, experience greater difficulty identifying sounds in syllables than in words. The design is deliberate. My research (Thomson & Isaacs, 2009; Thomson & Campagna, 2010) indicates that word knowledge actually distorts perception. Thus, sounds in words may seem clearer, and be easier to identify, when in reality, the sounds in those words may not be very prototypical at all. Initially training with syllables prevents even unconscious reliance on word knowledge, and forces the user to instead use real phonetic processes, which I believe more closely replicates the mechanisms by which we learned our first language. In Thomson (2012), I demonstrate that adult immigrant language learners are able to significantly change both their perception and pronunciation of English vowels as a result of just eight training sessions. The learners in that study comprised a group that previous research indicated had largely stopped experiencing any improvement in their pronunciation. Not only did this type of training result in measurable gains, there was also evidence that the changes were permanent, as a test one month after the completion of training indicated that no learning had been lost.



Figure 4. Vowel game page. The learner clicked on the incorrect symbol for the prompt played and was told he or she was incorrect. The learner must now click on the red button to proceed to the next item.



Figure 5. Vowel report card page. This learner needs to continue practicing, although he or she is nearly ready to progress to the next level.

## Suggestions of extra activities to accompany English Accent Coach

There are many activities teachers can use to bridge students from improved perception of English sounds to improved pronunciation in broader contexts. Some I suggest are:

1. Create a chart of phonetic symbols and have students identify vowels or consonants from the chart in response to new vocabulary items presented in the ESL classroom.
2. Create a chart of phonetic symbols and have students identify vowels or consonants from the chart in response to lists of words that contain sounds known to be particularly problematic.
3. Have more advanced users of English Accent Coach transcribe vocabulary lists using the phonetic alphabet, then check their answers against a dictionary. This will raise their awareness about items that they may have been previously mispronouncing.
4. Give students a short listening activity in the form of a single sentence, or even multiple sentences, and ask them to identify all words that contain a particular sound.
5. Have students imitate the teacher as the teacher produces the same nonsense syllables used at particular levels of English Accent Coach. Provide feedback to students. I would recommend using this activity after students have demonstrated substantial improvement at a certain level. Otherwise, they will not be able to mimic the teacher, and may therefore be reinforcing bad habits.
6. Present students with a list of phonetically transcribed words and ask them to practice producing them. After they have shown improvement in reading, show them pictures illustrating the same words and have them practice saying them without the written prompt.

Undoubtedly, teachers will be creative and design many more classroom activities and homework assignments to go along with English Accent Coach training. Assuming students have access to a computer and the internet, they might also be assigned more English Accent Coach use as homework.

As noted above, learners will make steady gains in just a few short sessions. Practicing for 5-10 minutes per day will pay major dividends in just a short while.

Note: This article is based on a TESL Ontario 2011 workshop entitled “Using English Accent Coach: A web-based tutor”.

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## Author Bio

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# ADULT ESL LITERACY LEARNERS:

## Surveying what is known

By Melanie Pothier

### Background

Given the large number of newcomers arriving in Canada each year, it is natural that a great deal of funding, resources and energy are directed towards various ESL programs. Instruction in this context often takes for granted that adult learners are literate and have some formal schooling. Increasingly though, newcomers are arriving with limited formal literacy skills. Originally, these learners were largely from South-East Asian (especially Hmong) and Central American backgrounds. More recently, refugees from Horn of Africa countries (Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia) have been coming in increasing numbers to Canada. Their lack of familiarity with English and formal literacy presents an added obstacle to their settlement experiences. Not only must these newcomers learn English, but they also must learn to read and write for the first time in their lives in a largely unfamiliar language. These learners are distinct from previously-non-literate English learners in that they are not as familiar with basic concepts of print and conventions of formal schooling. Furthermore, they are distinct from adult literacy learners because they are learning to read and write in an unfamiliar language; they must travel “a journey twice as far” (Gunn, 1994).

My own work with ESL literacy learners began several years ago in the LINC program in classes with Somali and Congolese students. On my first day with this group, I was thrown into the classroom with no warning about the unique situation of the learners and was given no direction to meeting their specific needs. In a class with very limited oral English skills and only an emergent understanding of the alphabet, communication was of course my primary barrier. Nevertheless, as I worked and developed relationships with these learners, I came to understand some of the exceptional challenges that they faced. I began to look for resources to support my classroom practice; however, I found it difficult to locate relevant information on this population of learners. I discovered that even experienced instructors in the field felt ill-prepared to deal with the challenges present in these classes and were equally lost when searching for supportive resources. This is in part because ESL literacy learners are relatively new to Canada and so represent a largely uncharted area of study. Moreover, while many literacy learners are indeed in the LINC program, many others are being served by family literacy programs, faith-based organizations, libraries, community colleges or adult literacy centres (Florez & Terrill, 2003). As a result, information about

these learners is scattered. Despite these challenges, based on my research, I have summarized highlights from the literature in this field with the hope of addressing the following questions:

1. Who are ESL literacy learners?
2. What are the special considerations and challenges for this population?
3. What are the best established classroom practices?

## Who are ESL literacy learners?

Adult ESL literacy learners are generally defined as those who have had few years of education in their home countries and therefore require special support with literacy not provided by traditional beginner ESL classes. Within this definition, however, learners can vary widely in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, age, length of residence and learning goals (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2000; Shank & Terrill, 1997). Moreover, their oral English skills can range from limited to quite proficient. Reasons for limited experience with literacy also vary and may include: difficulty accessing education, interrupted schooling due to displacement, and speaking languages with recently developed writing systems and strong oral cultures.

Under the broad umbrella of ESL literacy learners, there are a wide range of proficiencies and experience with literacy and formal education. Bell and Burnaby (1984) identified several sub-categories including preliterate (from a language with no writing system or one that was only recently developed), nonliterate (from a language with a writing system but without access to formal education) and semiliterate (with some access to formal education and literacy training). We might then find a class with learners from rural Congo whose native language has no written form, learners from Cambodia who never attended school due to displacement, and learners from El Salvador who grew up surrounded by print but did not attend school long enough to become proficient readers.

Complicating matters further, many who are not true ESL literacy learners often turn up in classes aimed at this population. These include learners who are literate in languages that use different writing systems than English. Others still may appear in an ESL literacy class, such as seniors, those with mental or physical health issues, or those who are unable to attend class regularly due to family or other commitments (Holt, 1995). Although such learners may prefer the slower pace and frequent repetition of these classes, they are not considered to be true ESL literacy learners and may benefit more from different kinds of programming.

## What are the special considerations and challenges for this population?

Now that we have established who ESL literacy learners are, we can address some of the special considerations for this population of learners. First and foremost, we cannot assume that all students will be familiar with basic concepts of print. When working with learners with first language literacy skills, it is easy to take for granted the many skills around reading and writing that they transfer to learning a new language. These include matching symbols to sounds, written words to spoken words, and images to concrete objects (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2000; Wrigley and Guth, 1992). Literacy learners may also need to be familiarized with reading from left-to-right and from top-to-bottom.

Those new to writing with a pen or pencil might first practice writing in sand or in the air with fingers. Writing on lines, the use of page numbers, cursive and printed scripts as well as typefaces will likely also be novel to learners who will need to be slowly exposed to these differences. Additionally, those who have never been to school before will need time to adjust to sitting in desks for long periods of time, using classroom items and organizing materials. It is also worth noting that since many ESL literacy learners are refugees who may have experienced extreme events, the incidence of traumatic stress is high in this population (Horsman, 1998). When working with distressed individuals, instructors may wish to engage in dialogue around this issue and connect with family and community members as necessary.

## What are the best established classroom practices?

While each class of ESL literacy learners presents its own challenges and opportunities, all of these learners need to develop an understanding of literacy skills both at the micro-level, such as grasping sound-symbol correspondence, and at the macro-level, such as developing higher-level comprehension skills. A number of suggestions specific to ESL literacy learners follows.

### Building on oral language skills

Instruction must build on prior knowledge. One way to accomplish this is to focus on developing oral English skills first before tackling print (Huntley, 1992). Learners from oral backgrounds tend to excel in speaking long before writing. Learners must therefore be allowed time to hear and distinguish the sounds of spoken English in order to establish an “oral language pool” (Kalantzis, 1987). Without this, reading and writing in English is yet further removed from the learners’ realm of knowledge and experience. And having oral language to draw on will give learners some skills to meet their immediate needs. At a time when one of my former students was only beginning to understand the alphabet, she was still able to go to a coffee shop by herself and successfully place an order. This has an

obvious functional benefit, but it is also motivating and validating for learners who may otherwise feel dependent on others to complete daily tasks.

### **Authentic practice**

Once literacy instruction is started, it must be meaning-based, contextualized and tied to larger community activities. Similar to the way that second language teaching has moved away from a pure grammar focus, literacy instruction too has moved away from a purely phonics-based approach towards a more meaning-based approach. In practice, this means that instruction should not wait until learners have mastered the alphabet and spelling conventions before exposing them to “real” language. Instead, it is “real life” reading and writing that should be the starting point in instruction and the development of decoding skills should be a tool to help them understand the print that exists all around the learners.

Literacy items must be contextualized and have immediate relevance in the learners’ lives. Use such writing tasks such as addresses and phone numbers belonging to the learners and their family members or those they will need. Outside materials should also be used in the classroom: flyers, utility bills, bus tickets, food packaging, maps and any other concrete literacy items that are present in the students’ daily lives (The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, 2008; Crandall & Peyton, 1993).

Literacy learners in particular also tend to benefit from “experiential” or hands-on learning that is connected to their home and community lives. This may include the involvement of guest speakers as well as class fieldtrips when possible to locations such as the grocery store, bus station, post office, clinic or other service centres (Condelli and Wrigley, 2003). Doing so not only contextualizes literacy for the learners, but also allows learners to explore the literacy demands of a new location and creates an opportunity for instructors to identify genuine uses of literacy that can be brought back to the classroom. Even a lunchtime walk to the market can be an opportunity for instructors to see things through the learners’ eyes and for the learners to encounter literacy tasks with the support of their instructor and classmates.

### **Using home languages in the classroom**

Another strategy for confronting the double challenge of learning literacy and English language skills is to scaffold instruction with use of the home language. Teachers can do this through in-class language comparisons, community interaction, guest speakers, and the use of bilingual materials, teachers, and assistants. The use of bilingual assistants has received special attention given that they can serve to clarify instructional materials and concepts, to translate organizational matters and to facilitate learner participation in curriculum development (Gunn, 2003). Although having full-time assistants may not be feasible for many programs, even occasional or volunteer assistants may yield comparable benefits and would be worth seeking out. Personally, I have had success using bilingual children’s books available in the public library. This allows the learner to practice decoding skills in a familiar language while promoting connections to English.

## The use of technology

In light of the important role that technology plays in day-to-day life in Canada, literacy learners should be introduced to technology as soon as possible in order to address the steep learning curve they will face. Lessons designed around using cell phones, bank machines, public transit kiosks and appliances can facilitate this. In my experience, the possibility of communicating with friends and family overseas via email has been so motivating that many learners are highly engaged and dedicated to improving their computer skills. The ESL Literacy Network presents a list of relevant online resources and provides detailed and pedagogically sound recommendations for introducing ESL literacy learners to computers.

## Conclusion and Implications

As the number of ESL literacy learners in Canada continues to grow, so too must our understanding of appropriate and effective instructional practices to use with this population. Although much remains unknown concerning the learning trajectories and language development of these learners, we can nevertheless point to some special considerations and best practices. It is clear that while the fields of adult literacy and traditional ESL education can offer insights to guide our practice, we must consider the unique needs of adult ESL literacy learners when working with this population. Instructors must take into account the steep learning curve that these learners face when in terms of tackling basic concepts of print as well as adapting to school routines and becoming familiar with technology. The suggestions outlined above highlight the need to develop authentic, meaning-based instruction while building on oral language skills, using home languages and developing computer skills in the classroom. In my own experience and research, I have seen how literacy learners benefit from these practices and can develop significant connections to reading and writing even in the face of exceptional challenges. Nevertheless, I hope that this article will promote even further dialogue between educators, service providers and learners as we continue to discover new ways to create meaningful literacy experiences and foster genuine engagement with reading and writing among learners who have limited experience with literacy.

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# FRAMEWORK FOR POST TESL CERTIFICATE TRAINING

By Carolyn Cohen with contribution of Framework Project Team

## Background

In the Fall of 2009, TESL Ontario responded to a public call for proposals and received funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Ontario Region) to launch a new initiative; development of a Framework for design and delivery of Post TESL Certificate Training (PTCT). The primary goal of this framework is to ensure that future post TESL Certificate training initiatives for language instructors in Ontario are of a consistently high quality and are relevant to instructors' classrooms and the evolving needs of newcomers to Ontario.

Continually evolving English as a second language learner demographics as well as social and workplace communication requirements have precipitated the need for enhanced skills for instructors delivering language training in Ontario. Since the 1970s, the changing profile of newcomers to Canada has had a significant impact on the field of English language instruction. In response, programs of language instruction have continued to diversify. Today, programs include LINC and ESL as well as a range of language programs that address specific skills and contexts such as Enhanced Language Training (ELT), Occupation-specific Language Training (OSLT), Specialized Language Training (SLT), and Bridge training programs.

The policy statements of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Ontario now emphasize a priority on programs that are outcomes based ([CIC, 2010](#)). The stronger emphasis on accountability, program evaluation, and assessment is reflected in government policy initiatives such as CIC's new Modernized Approach to Settlement, which emphasizes "greater flexibility, results-oriented programming with improved accountability, and better planning and coordination" ([CIC, 2009](#)). Similarly the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration has initiated a redesign of the Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program calling for a greater focus on results-based programs that address "the full spectrum of training needs" ([MCI, 2009](#)). For instructors, all of these shifting policies and demographics have created a parallel need for the appropriate professional knowledge and teaching strategies to adapt to changes.

## Research

The Framework project began with a stage of research and consultation that provided a foundation of knowledge and understanding to inform the development of the PTCT Framework. Drawing on extensive research and consultation, the Framework was developed to provide language instructors and training providers with protocols, standards, and implementation guidelines that will govern the design and implementation of sustainable models of effective, relevant post TESL Certificate training.

Beginning early in 2010, the project team began a series of interview consultations with key stakeholders in the field, while at the same time launching in-depth literature reviews on several themes relevant to the Framework, such as the current context of immigration in Ontario and the professional development of language instructors.

The review of literature was wide-ranging and included past evaluations of relevant programs, such as LINC and ELT, along with government policy documents and academic research on teacher training, language learning, and immigration. Key informant research in the field was undertaken to consult as broad a base of stakeholders as possible. Framework consultations included seventeen interviews with key stakeholders who were selected for their knowledge, experience, and relationship with the project's context of government-funded language training in Ontario.

Eleven focus groups for language-training-program instructors and administrators were held across Ontario from Windsor to Ottawa, with a total of 180 participants attending from school boards, community agencies, and colleges.

Three online surveys were developed to collect detailed, quantitative input from stakeholders, resulting in significant participation from more than 900 instructors, 120 administrators, and 100 learners. TESL training providers were also invited to respond to a provider survey, with eleven in total participating.

CIC has funded two related projects that currently support professional development in similar fields. These projects were consulted to review their delivery models and operation designs: the Training Opportunities Project (TOP) for LINC childminders, and the Professional Education and Training (PET) model for settlement workers.

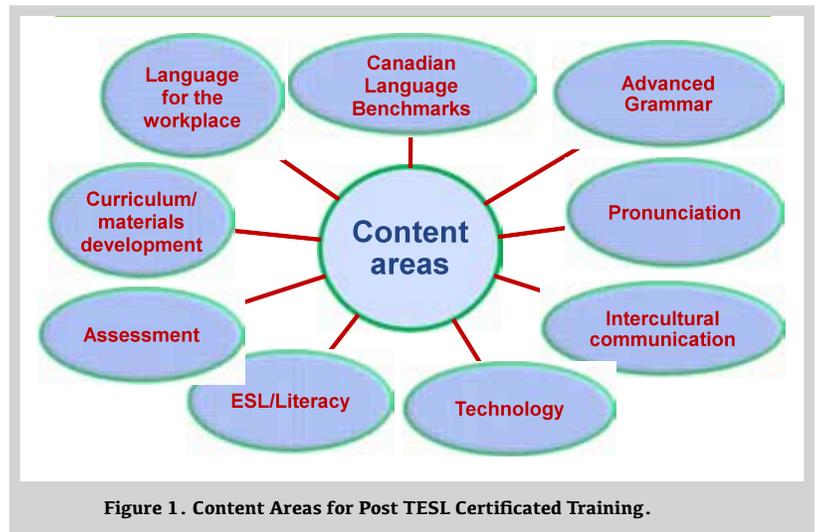
TESL Ontario provided key input to the project, in particular with regard to delivery and operations. The project team reviewed existing infrastructure and established practices to support the development of an effective operations design for Post TESL Certificate Training that will build on the current professional status of language instructors in Ontario.

This iterative research approach continued throughout 2010, with many aspects of the consultations and ongoing research reinforcing each other.

## Research Findings

Extensive consultation across Ontario for Post TESL Certificate Training with instructors, administrators, learners and other key informants ensured that the eight standards presented in the Framework were designed to address the needs of the field. Following are a few examples of how the input received supported the development of the Post TESL Certificate Framework and its standards:

- Instructors advised that they value access to current research and theory, but also want knowledge that can be used immediately in their classrooms. This input led to standards which deal with theoretical knowledge and its application in the classroom.
- During consultations, instructors and administrators alike acknowledged the importance of having PTCT delivered by trainers who represent excellence in the field and whose advanced training, content knowledge, and experience in professional development delivery will enhance the quality of PTCT. This input from stakeholders led to standards relating to the qualifications of trainers.
- The standard which is related to the development of a community of practice was inspired by instructors' repeated emphasis on the value they place on sharing and strategizing with colleagues, a theme also present in the professional and academic literature.



These examples provide a glimpse of the foundation from which the Framework standards were developed.

Research identified and continually confirmed a number of key content areas for which Post TESL Certificate Training for instructors would be beneficial. The need for these content areas was defined as required based on the continuing growth of specialized language training for learners and the movement toward outcomes-based teaching and learning, which requires specialized knowledge and skills for instructors. Key content areas identified during consultation are included in figure 1.

## Standards for Quality Post TESL Certificate Training

A set of standards has been developed to reflect the input of multiple stakeholders engaged in funding, developing, delivering, or otherwise participating in language training in

Ontario. Guidelines for application of these standards are included in the Framework document and available on TESL Ontario's website.

1. PTCT builds on a foundation of professional knowledge and skills established in TESL Certificate training and developed through classroom practice.
2. PTCT is outcomes based and includes assessment of change in the professional knowledge and skills of participants.
3. PTCT connects theoretical knowledge and/or current research related to specific content with practical application of that knowledge in language training programs.
4. PTCT includes the direct application of learning to the classroom.
5. PTCT promotes professional reflection and development.
6. PTCT supports the development of a community of practice.
7. PTCT reflects the current needs of instructors teaching adults in English as a second language training programs in Ontario.
8. PTCT trainers have an understanding and knowledge of the theory and research relevant to the teaching context of English as a second language training for adults in Ontario, and expertise in the specific content and the medium of instruction.

## Field/pilot testing

Following development of the PTCT Standards, piloting of the Framework for Post TESL Certificate Training was undertaken to expand its application and increase the project team's understanding of PTCT delivery requirements in training-provider settings. The pilot process built on the existing fieldtest process that had been applied between December 2010 and March 2011 and was designed to meet four key objectives:

1. obtain training-provider feedback about the strengths and challenges of Framework design and its application
2. inform any required revisions to the Framework
3. develop PTCT outline exemplars that reflect Framework standards
4. receive input from training providers regarding potential requirements related to the delivery of Post TESL Certificate training in their respective contexts

Between June and August, 2011, the multi-phase pilot process was implemented with three training providers. The process facilitated productive feedback on both the Framework and training delivery, and resulted in three draft training outlines in varied content areas.

Training providers were selected based on their experience in design and delivery of instructor training content identified during PTCT research. Pilot participants included: Algonquin College for Higher Level Language Training (HLLT), the CCLB for CLB-based Teaching and Assessment, Humber Institute for Language Training for Employment

(LTE), the Toronto District School Board for ESL Literacy, and New Media Language for Learn IT to Teach (LIT2T) Stage 4. The pilot process was designed to include four phases, which facilitated the introduction of the Framework to the participants and supported their development of a PTCT training outline as well as information regarding delivery requirements. In the initial phase, members of the project team provided a half-day orientation to the standards and application guidelines of the Framework to each of the three selected training providers. Following the orientation, in Phase II, training providers developed a training outline based on the standards and guidelines provided. Following completion of training outlines, Phase III was comprised of a review of the training outline with training providers. Any mutually agreed upon revisions to the outline followed in Phase IV. A number of tools were developed to facilitate the four-phase pilot process.

## Findings

The pilot process was successful in meeting the Framework-project objectives and resulted in the creation of PTCT training outline exemplars that met the Framework standards. In addition, useful information was collected from training providers regarding the Framework itself and what issues they anticipated as being relevant to Framework implementation in their particular contexts.

Some key changes that arose out of the pilot process:

Based on feedback from all training-provider participants, the project team made some modifications to the Framework introduction that clarified sections identified in Pilot Orientation discussions.

Standard 2.2 was amended to reflect discussion around the need to ensure all assignments were passed: Course completion includes a minimum 70% on assignments overall and no less than 50% on any one graded assignment.

Feedback on Standard 2.6 in relation to online modality has resulted in ongoing research by the project team into how other online TESL programs and training providers deal with equivalency of online hours to classroom hours.

The editing of the training exemplars highlighted key areas where further instructions to future training-provider applicants could streamline the process. These were compiled for further discussion and review.

## Orientation

In the fall of 2011, the Framework for Post TESL Certificate Training project conducted five orientation sessions for language training providers across Ontario with the aim of providing information and support for the development of PTCT. Sessions for both TESL and non-TESL training providers were held in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and London.

Fifty-five participants representing universities, colleges, school boards and language training agencies attended the sessions.

At each PTCT orientation session, attendees were given the Orientation Package for Training Providers which consisted of a background to the project, PTCT standards and the Guide to Implementation as well as the Introduction to the Guide to Implementation. Participants were also asked for their feedback as summarized below concerning the following questions:

***Q: Based on the information you received today, what would be the most important considerations in deciding to provide PTCT?***

A: the costs of training development, market assessment in terms of potential students and sustainability, instructors' access to training due to fees and the 600 hours of teaching experience requirement, and locating qualified trainers who fulfill the PTCT standards.

***Q: What are some ways that government could support delivery of PTCT (fees reimbursement, instructor recognition, administrator funding)?***

A: promotion and recognition of PTCT training, release time for instructors to participate in training, an increase in salary for PTCT accreditation, and funding of course development.

***Q: What kind of support would be most useful to you from the FPCT project and TESL Ontario (e.g., consultation access, Q&A sessions)?***

A: support with regard to the marketing and promotion of PTCT, communication regarding the PTCT process, quality assurance, and bursaries to support access to PTCT training.

PTCT orientation evaluations were distributed at the end of each session. Participants highly rated the presentation of information needed to understand the development and implementation of the Framework, as well as the clarity of the Framework standards, Guide to Implementation, and the accreditation process.

## Role of TESL Ontario

Research and consultation highlighted the need for an effective governance and administration structure to facilitate the sustainability of the PTCT Framework. In addition to input from multiple stakeholders engaged in funding, developing, delivering, or otherwise participating in language training in Ontario, the development of guidelines for governance and administration was informed by a review of existing frameworks for training and professional development both in Canada and internationally.

Three relevant training models operating in Ontario were most prominent in this review, specifically, the Training Opportunities Project (TOP) for LINC childminders, the

Professional Education and Training (PET) for settlement workers, and the Additional Qualifications available to certified teachers in Ontario. The review of these models highlighted the need for a lead organization responsible for governance and administration for Framework implementation. Each of these training models is administered by a broader organization responsible for professional standards: TOP operates within Childminding Monitoring and Advisory Support (CMAS), the CIC-funded organization supporting LINC childminders; PET is operated by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI); and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) regulates Additional Qualifications for certified teachers in elementary and secondary schools. In the field of language training



Figure 2. Government and Administration of PTCT.

for adults, TESL Ontario holds a position parallel to CMAS, OCASI, and OCT in that it is the representative and accrediting body for ESL instructors in Ontario. The Framework has identified TESL Ontario, in its capacity as a professional regulatory body, as the body responsible for administering the implementation and delivery of PTCT. The specific roles and responsibilities for Framework administration by TESL Ontario are defined in the figure 2.

## PTCT Training Development

Following pilot testing and successful completion of PTCT outlines, one training course has been approved as PTCT and two training providers are currently adapting existing curricula for approval as PTCT. Learn IT to Teach Stage 4 has received approval as recognized Post TESL Certificate Training. In addition, Humber Institute and Algonquin College are currently adapting existing curricula for accreditation as PTCT - Humber Institute for Language Training for Employment (LTE) and Algonquin College for Higher Level Language Training (HLLT). Continue to visit our website (<http://www.teslontario.net/framework2010/index.html>) for future developments.

Note: This article is based on a TESL Ontario 2011 workshop entitled “Enhancing Professionalism: Framework for Post TESL Certificate Training”

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# INTERPERSONAL SKILLS:

## A Teaching Journey

By Gwen Zeldenrust

What is it that we say or do that makes people respond positively to us? This isn't something I really thought about until I started teaching workplace communication to highly skilled newcomers to Canada. I remember teaching in a program that was aimed at helping the participants to ultimately gain employment in their field or a related field. I know English and I'm a fairly good English teacher but something didn't quite sit right with me about what exactly I was teaching. I found myself grasping at straws trying to figure out what it was specifically these learners needed. They had good English skills but there was something that was missing and I wasn't quite sure what it was.

Time passed and I learned a lot from my experience working with my students. They were wonderful people and I really wanted to help them succeed. I had a hunch that what they needed was increased vocabulary but I also felt it was deeper than that. I read and researched everything I could about teaching communication. However, it wasn't until I started teaching from a culture-based curriculum that it dawned on me: yes, these learners needed to improve their language skills, but the reality was that they needed to understand language more from a cultural perspective than from a structural perspective. They needed to know what it is we do in Canada that makes people want to cooperate with us. My problem was that even though I seem to be able to interact quite well with other Canadians I wasn't really aware of what I actually did. It made trying to explain good interpersonal skills quite challenging for me.

After research and observation, I came to observe that there is a tendency for English-speaking Canadians to prefer a certain type of interaction. It is my theory that the interactions should be:

- Indirect
- Soft and Undemanding
- Flexible
- Embedded with indicators/warnings
- Positive

These types of interactions are particularly important when you are in a situation that tends to be more formal and goal oriented where the outcome of the exchange you have with that person could dictate what your future holds. For example, you might want to format your speech according to the above characteristics when you are having a job interview,

or asking someone to give you a reference. When you talk to your friends you tend to be less formal and if the conversation is more casual then your speech won't be as filled with the five characteristics. However, I have found that when I'm talking to my husband and I want him to do something, the more characteristics I use; as outlined above; the more responsive he is to what I'm asking him to do.

In order to get our speech to contain these five characteristics, we have to perform some communication accommodation (Hornberg, 2010 p. 463) at times. When I want things to go smoothly in certain situations, for example when I want someone to listen to me, hire me, implement my plan, give me a reference, do me a favour or respect me, I change my communication style somewhat from my regular everyday style. Have you ever been in a situation where you've had to ask a colleague to help you? Have you ever had to disappoint someone because you have had to break plans with them? Have you ever had to ask your boss for time off? Think about the words you would use to get the person to respond favourably, and also think about how you modify your behaviour. So the next question was that if Canadians like indirectness, soft and undemanding language, flexibility, indicators and positivity, what do I do to make my speech more like that? What I discovered was that there are a number of "speech act strategies" that we use (Goodale, 1987), often without even realizing we do this, in order to fit the five criteria of preferred speech. Eight useful speech act strategies are:

- Using conditional language
- Using warning phrases
- Transforming statements into questions
- Using down graders
- Negating verbs when using imperatives
- Using continuous forms of verbs
- Using comparative rather than superlative adjectives
- Offering criticism by negating positive adjectives

For example, everyone knows that to get a positive response from someone you would say, "Could you open the window?" rather than "Can you open the window?"

Additionally, did you know that a Canadian would rather hear, "To be honest, I can't help you." rather than "I can't help you."

The above listed speech acts usually have a positive effect on a person familiar with the Canadian cultural norms of speech. The problem that I encountered was that I learned this knowledge implicitly. Trying to learn or teach the techniques implicitly required much more time than I was allotted in my courses and usually more time than the learners wanted to take in order to get on the path of gaining employment in Canada.

In trying to simplify this, I began looking at the speech acts which were helpful and I came

up with eight of them that I was able to contextualize and explain. I am sure there are many more, but I have been focusing on these eight which are helpful in goal-oriented language exchanges. The following is a chart that illustrates the eight speech acts. I've paired them with grammatically correct, but less effective phrases that might be used to communicate interpersonally within what is typically Canadian language sensibility:

	<b>Preferred</b>	<b>Less Effective</b>
Conditional	<i>Could I talk to you? You might want to try emailing rather than calling.</i>	<i>Can I talk to you? Try emailing rather than calling.</i>
Warning Phrase	<i>To be honest, our company doesn't offer that product. Unfortunately, the answer is no.</i>	<i>Our company doesn't offer that product The answer is no.</i>
Statements as questions	<i>Could I talk to you? Why don't you send me an email?</i>	<i>I'd like to talk to you if I could. Send me an email.</i>
Down graders	<i>I have a <u>little</u> problem. My idea might cause <u>a bit</u> of difficulty</i>	<i>I have a problem. My idea might cause difficulty.</i>
Negative Imperatives	<i>Don't forget to respond to the email! Don't stop!</i>	<i>Remember to respond to the email! Keep going!</i>
Continuous	<i>I <u>was wondering</u> if you got my message. or I <u>am wondering</u> if you got my message. I <u>am hoping</u> you will call me soon.</i>	<i>I <u>wondered</u> if you got my message. I <u>wonder</u> if you got my message. I <u>hope</u> you will call me soon.</i>
Comparative	<i>I have a <u>better</u> idea. My child is <u>smarter</u> than the other kids in the class.</i>	<i>I have the <u>best</u> idea. My child is the <u>smartest</u> kid in the class.</i>
Negated positive adjective	<i>That's <u>not good</u>. The result is <u>not positive</u>.</i>	<i>That's <u>bad</u>. The result is <u>negative</u>.</i>

The messages have a similar meaning but when you are trying to get interactions to go smoothly, it's better to choose from the preferred column rather than the less effective column.

I found it useful to base lessons on this information. The problem that I then encountered was simply trying to teach the information. I tried to achieve a nice balance of implicit and explicit instruction so the learners could achieve the objectives in a reasonable amount of time, but at the end of the lessons I didn't feel confident that I was reaching everybody. The concepts weren't too difficult to explain or understand, but a piece was missing, and I could never be sure that the students were really "getting" it in a meaningful way.

One day when I was doing a unit on job interviews, I saw a better way to teach these interpersonal skills. I had shown a video that demonstrated bad and good responses (Human Resources Canada, 2009) and actions related to job interviews. Watching the video, the participants in the class immediately understood what was expected of them during a job interview. It was as if just by watching that video that they had lived the experience themselves. They had a context that was explained with more than just words. It was almost real and definitely not abstract. More importantly, the problems were immediately recognizable. In that moment, I realized a video is what I needed to bring the interpersonal interactions skills to life. It was the next best thing to actually living through the situation.

My search to find a video that fit in with my ideas began. I couldn't really find the type of thing I was looking for. I needed something aimed at advanced learners of English who needed to learn more about culture than language, but the search simply wasn't fruitful.

Over time I had really become attached to my ideas and I thought that they were valuable. I knew I had to continue trying to find a way to teach this content. I recalled that many of my former students had commented on how what they had learned in class had helped them, and I had witnessed how the penny dropped for them, so to speak, when I showed them the job interview video. I knew I was on the right track so I decided to produce a video myself that demonstrated the eight speech act strategy ideas that I found so important.

The process has been very complicated. There were details to handle that I never could have imagined. Luckily, I talked to the right people and was able to find and work with many people who brought their talents to the project. I can't even begin to explain what I have learned about producing videos and teaching language/culture. That would be an article all on its own. What I can say about the experience is that I am now dedicated more than ever to what I do as a teacher. Those of us who teach LINC/ELT/OSLT/ESL to adult newcomers to Canada know that language knowledge is part of the job, but there is more to it. We need to know many things that are often outside the scope of language. Sometimes we are the representatives of Canadian society. It's a big responsibility!

The video has been piloted with my recent group of students and it received a great response. I also previewed parts of the video at the 2011 TESL Ontario conference, which led to me writing this article. My goal is to be able to share with you some of the important information that I have learned. I am hoping that sharing the information with those of you who were in the position that I found myself in a few years ago will help to provide some new and interesting materials to your students, and will help enhance not only their learning experience, but their success as well.

My desire for my own future is to continue to do this type of work. The thought of continuing to produce materials such as these is exciting and appealing. I know how much value these resources can add for teachers, and I feel that by doing this work I am able to really make a difference to the students that I am so committed to helping. I already have many ideas for the next video in the series. Now I am just focusing on getting the current video out there so it can do the job that I had intended it to do to help newcomers succeed in their pursuit of prosperity in Canada. Knowing that I played a part in contributing to their success is so very rewarding. My wish is that our students are given all of the tools and skills that they need to navigate the Canadian cultural landscape so that they receive positive responses in their interpersonal interactions. For teachers and students alike the development of cultural awareness and skills in the Canadian context is essential for successful outcomes, and I have found video to be a great tool to achieve it.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the video to use in your own teaching practice, it is available at a very reasonable cost. Additionally, I have a website where a number of resources, discussion boards, and other information is available to you free of charge. Please visit [www.languagefoundations.ca](http://www.languagefoundations.ca). I'd love to hear from you!

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# HOW CAN I IMPROVE CHINESE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING ENGLISH?

## An Action Research

By Yi Mei

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show the process of my efforts to improve Chinese students' interest in learning English. I conducted an action research project in an 11-week English double-major class at a university in China. During the 11 weeks, I observed the class and the changes in students' behavior and their attitude toward me. The main data source is the reflective observation log I kept during the research and two questionnaires before and after the research conducted. The results indicated that 83% of the students claimed an improved interest in learning English. By doing this research, I have explored some solutions for raising my students' interest in learning English. This research also has implications for improving Chinese students' learning interest in Canada.

### Introduction

This article aims to show the process of my efforts to improve students' interest in learning English at a university in China. English is one of the major subjects for Chinese students at all levels of education. Students have to write all kinds of standardized English tests from primary school through to university. Getting high marks are indicative of the probability of a successful career and a promising future. It is not exaggerating to say that passing English tests is a key to success in China (Cheng, 2008). Therefore, passing English tests is a major driving force behind learning English in China.

In recent years learner-centeredness has been advocated (Ministry of Education, 2001) and received growing attention in China (Cheng, 2009; Dai & Liu, 2004; Li & Hu, 2006), but the teacher-centered approach is still a dominant pedagogy used by teachers (Ren, 2006). Two main reasons for this situation can be identified. First, a learner-centered pedagogy is difficult to implement in large classes. In China, the size of English classes is usually very large; sometimes approximately 200 students share one classroom. Second, Chinese students, especially university students, are usually reluctant to air their opinions in class. They get accustomed to listening to teachers' lectures (Ma & Huang, 2007). Sometimes the English class becomes the teacher's one-person show.

## Theoretical Framework

In the fall of 2010 when I was studying at Beijing Normal University as a visiting scholar, I met Qiang Wang, an internationally acknowledged expert in curriculum and action research. In her class, I encountered the concepts of action research (e.g., McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Wang, 2002), which inspired me to think about becoming a teacher-researcher. Action research can be defined with the following characteristics:

1. Action research is a form of systematic, self-reflective enquiry; 2. It is undertaken by teachers to directly participate in research and explore a particular issue in their teaching practices; 3. It needs to be conducted through a set of procedures; 4. Its purpose is to improve and optimize teaching practices, and at the same time to increase knowledge and understanding about the teaching process. [1. 行动研究是一种系统的反思性的探究活动。2.它由教师针对自己教学中的问题直接参与和开展调查与研究。3.行动研究需要一系列步骤来完成。4.其目的是不断改进自己的教学，使教学达到最佳的效果，同时提高对教学过程的理解和认识。] (Wang, 2002, p. 8)

For many Chinese English learners, in spite of the tons of time they have spent in learning English, they cannot write or speak correct and fluent English, and they hate learning English. For the past eight years, I have been working as an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher and teaching an English course for English double majors at a university in mainland China. As a teacher, I always take it as my goal to help my students enjoy learning English as well as improve English proficiency. In the spring of 2011, I decided to conduct research in my double-major class to explore ways to improve students' learning interest. I adopted the process of conducting action research as developed by Wang (2002): pinpointing the problem, analyzing the problem, confirming the problem, developing an action plan, implementing the action plan, and reflecting on the implementation.

## Pinpointing and Analyzing the Problem

English is an obligatory subject for all undergraduate students in China for the first two years of their Bachelor's study. In my university, the students taking English as a second major are non-English majors from different departments. Usually the students begin their studies for the second major from their sophomore year and complete the studies in two years. By the time they graduate, they have obtained Bachelor's degrees in both majors, which makes them more competitive in job markets.

However, a high absentee rate, sometimes as high as 60%, is very common in our English double-major classes. The teachers feel frustrated when very few students show up, and the teachers' performance suffers accordingly, which often leads to more students skipping the class. The students I have taught complained that some of their English teachers were so irresponsible that they did not take the attendance, and it seemed that the teachers did not care whether the students were absent or not. They also indicated that the class was boring.

Conversely, my colleagues complained that some of the students only showed up for final exams; what they were interested in was getting the degree.

As a teacher, I want to stop this vicious circle and see what I can do to help my students enjoy their English classes. Based on my experiences mentioned above, I made the assumption that the high absenteeism in English double-major classes was due to students' lack of interest in learning English.

## Confirming the Problem

In the spring term of 2011, I began to teach a new English double-major class. The class was made up of 36 students from four departments. To test my hypothesis of absenteeism due to lack of student interest, at the end of our first class in the first week, I issued a questionnaire to examine the students' motivation for taking English as a second major, their self-evaluation of English proficiency, and their greatest difficulty in learning English, as well as to get to know the students' needs and expectations for this English course.

Twenty-nine students participated in the survey. The results showed that 28% of the students took English as a second major only because of their interest in learning English, and 41% claimed extrinsic motivations for taking this second major, such as passing English exams or getting a good job in the future. The remaining students (31%) expressed a combined motivation of the above two. Altogether, 59% of the students expressed their interest in learning English. The results supported the hypothesis that lack of interest was responsible for the high absenteeism.

The results also indicated that 90% of the students graded themselves as modest or limited English users, suggesting an overall lack of self-confidence. English speaking and vocabulary were reported as their greatest difficulties in learning English.

The students requested that the teacher allot more time to background information, words and expressions, and text analysis than to grammar and exercises. Although most of the students wanted the teacher to teach in a traditional teacher-centered fashion, some students expressed their hope of involving some classroom activities and more interaction with the teacher.

## Developing an Action Plan

According to Dewey's (1913) classic analysis, interest-based learning is far more beneficial than effort-based learning driven by extrinsic motivation. Though the questionnaire results revealed that teacher-centered pedagogy was welcomed by the students, I was going to try a more learner-centered approach in my class. I would focus on helping the students improve their weak points and boost their self-confidence, and as a result begin to enjoy learning English. I would try to create a positive and encouraging atmosphere, and get every student involved in the class. The action plan I developed included five strategies:

showing my interest in and respect for individuals, having more communication with students, using peer-assessment, organizing more student-involved classroom activities, and introducing histories and cultures in English speaking countries.

To show my interest in and respect for individuals, I planned to adopt a “No One Left Behind” plan. I would try to remember the name of each student by taking attendance, invite every student to participate in classroom activities, and encourage every attempt. I also planned to set up an online learning community using emails and a Tencent QQ group (a popular online community in China) as an information platform to communicate and share with the students experiences of learning English.

I was going to use peer assessment when grading students’ written passages of the text from memory and gave feedback on their performance. It is a traditional teaching approach in China to ask students to write down some well-written texts from memory. I had tried this approach in my previous classes and it was effective in improving overall English proficiency. In this study, I would add peer assessment to this approach. Peer assessment is an effective way of improving the quality of learning (Topping, 2009). When students read their peer’s assignments, they usually tend to be more critical than reading their own assignments, and become more aware of their own strong and weak points.

I also planned to organize various classroom activities, such as discussions, role-play reading, and group self-teaching, to get students more involved in the teaching and learning process, and encourage them to practice English speaking. As was suggested by some students in the questionnaire, I would introduce some related histories and cultures in English speaking countries.

## Implementing the Action Plan

During the 11 weeks, I observed changes in students’ behavior in class and their attitude toward me. I kept a reflective observation log and made fine adjustments in my teaching according to my observations.

In the first week, I was actually doing a one-person show. I had a very quiet class. The students barely gave any verbal response to my questions. They were reluctant to express themselves in class.

From the second week, I began to implement my action plan. I began the class with feedback on the questionnaire, explaining how I was going to teach and why I would do it that way. After the students proofread and graded their peer’s assignments, I collected the assignments and wrote some simple and encouraging comments. During breaks, some students began to nod and smile at me when we met in the corridor. After class I wrote a blog on my experiences of learning English and shared it with my students.

From the third week, Dejie, a girl in our class, began to erase the white board for me after every session of the class. In China, university students usually erase the white board for

their teachers only when they like them. This week when I asked questions in class, I got some responses.

In the fourth week, some students began to greet me when they met me. I found that some students did not take a look at their peer-assessed assignments, so I changed the plan a little bit. After they graded others' assignments, they got their own and were encouraged to write down a few self-reflective remarks. After that, I collected their assignments and gave them suggestions on improvement.

In the fifth week, when we held discussions, more students took an active part. Zhengzheng and Yanqing, another two girls in our class also began to erase the white board for me. Zhaosheng, a boy in our class, set up a website for the class to share resources of English learning.

Double majors usually only meet when they have class. After completing two years of second-major study, they barely know each other. However, in this class the online learning community enhanced communication not only between me and my students, but among the students as well. They chatted, exchanged messages, and shared learning experiences in the community. I also encouraged pair or group work in class. Through these activities, I observed that the students got to know each other better and began to support each other. The classroom atmosphere was getting lively and relaxing.

In the seventh week, I could remember the names of most students. When I asked questions, I got many voluntary speakers. A student who did not attend class regularly came to me after class, explained that he did not attend every class because he was going to study abroad and was busy preparing for English tests, and asked for my advice on how to prepare for the tests.

In the ninth week, more students felt free to air their opinions in class. The 11th week was the last week of the term when we had class. At the end of the class, I issued another questionnaire to examine the students' perceptions of this class, and whether their learning interest had improved.

Thirty students completed this questionnaire. According to the questionnaire results, effectiveness of the five strategies for improving learning interest is ranked as follows (from high to low): teacher's interest and respect (97%), introduction to cultural backgrounds (93%), communication with the teacher (90%), student-involved classroom activities (83%), and peer assessment (83%). Altogether 83% of the students claimed that their interest in learning English had improved through this English course.

Some students explained why their learning interest improved and commented on this course:

- The teacher's introduction to some cultural background knowledge has kindled my interest in English study.

- The teacher organized many activities in class where I can use and practice English. It has aroused my learning interest.
- We have more communication with the teacher in this class. The teacher is so friendly. I like the classroom atmosphere, and I love the way the teacher teaches us. I do hope Miss Mei will continue to teach us.
- I have gained a great deal from writing texts from memory. By doing this, I gradually begin to enjoy English. And I'm so impressed and surprised that the teacher has remembered the name of each of us!
- I have to take CET-6 this term, so I force myself to take an interest in learning English. And the teacher is gentle and amiable. I like that.
- The teacher's encouragement has stirred up my learning interest.

Some students also made comments and explained why their learning interest did not improve:

- No surprise, no disappointment. I Hope the teacher can teach us some more advanced knowledge in English.
- Communication with the teacher has increased my learning interest, but I cannot see the improvement of my English proficiency, which makes my interest wane somewhat.
- My learning interest hasn't improved much, because I'm too lazy and distracted by other businesses in our department. But I do like the teacher sharing with us some real-life experiences and showing us how to apply English expressions in different occasions. I hope I can get a questionnaire from you next term in this class.
- I've learned English for so many years, but my English proficiency hasn't improved much, especially English speaking and listening. I've lost my interest in it.

The absenteeism in this class was relatively low (17%) in comparison to other English double-major classes, and remained almost the same throughout the term. The action plan appears to have achieved its purposes.

## Reflecting on the Implementation

This action research was conducted in 11 weeks. Although it proved to be generally effective, the action plan was not flawless. In spite of the overall considerably improved interest in learning English, only 38% of the students reported a positive attitude toward attendance taking, and one student expressed strong dislike for it. I did not explain to the students that the purpose of taking attendance was to remember their names, which reflected my ill consideration and lack of communication with students about this issue.

Despite the limitations, both students and I benefited from this action research. The students' interest in learning English increased, and I really enjoyed being a teacher-researcher. This action research has helped me find some solutions for raising students' interest in learning

English and attracting students to English double-major classes. However, students' interest cannot be maintained unless they can see increase of their English proficiency, which may take time. Therefore teachers should keep exploring effective teaching methods to help students achieve noticeable progress while enjoying learning English.

## Concluding Remarks

In this study, I have seen the power of action research. Through implementation of the action plan, while I was learning to stimulate my students' interest, students were teaching me how to be a better teacher. Experienced as I am, I have never been so attentive to my students' voices and have never generated so many reflective thoughts on my teaching practice.

Although this action research was conducted in the Chinese context, considering the large population of Chinese immigrant students and the increasing number of Chinese students surging in Canada, this research also has implications for Canadian educators to further their understanding of Chinese students' cultural backgrounds and therefore throws light on effective ways to help Chinese students adapt to and settle in the Canadian educational environment.

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# PREMIER SKILLS ENGLISH:

## A collaborative project between the British Council and the Barclays Premier League

Reviewed by Tania Pattison

One day in class, I noticed two of my students working together, one wearing a Manchester United jacket, the other an Arsenal t-shirt. Another of my students came to class proudly bearing a Liverpool FC flag. When a Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League semi-final was broadcast live during class time, we abandoned any thought of language skills and watched the last part of the match.

I teach EAP students from around the world and many of them are, to put it mildly, slightly crazy about football (or—as we say here in Canada—soccer). As an immigrant from England, I share their enthusiasm. Last year, when thinking about course offerings for the summer term, I could think of no better topic for a fun, motivating, and still educational elective course than the ‘beautiful game’ ... and I could think of no better material to work with than that found on the Premier Skills English website.

Since attending a presentation on Premier Skills English at an IATEFL conference, I had been dying to use this material in class. Premier Skills English is the result of an ambitious collaboration between the British Council and the Barclays Premier League (the top league in English football, which includes Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Chelsea, and other well-known teams). It’s a collection of downloadable reading passages, videos, interactive games,

vocabulary exercises, match reports, and other activities that, as the website says, help learners to “communicate in two of the world’s global languages—English and football.” Best of all, it’s free.

The Premier Skills English material (also available in print format) is used extensively around the world. It

is actually part of a larger initiative, Premier Skills, which aims “to change the lives of thousands of people” through involvement with football. Courses in football skills have taken place in countries as diverse as China, Egypt, Uganda, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Teachers have been trained in the use of the English-language materials, and over 1,000,000 copies have been distributed

worldwide. The first promotional material I ever saw for Premier Skills featured a young woman wearing a track suit and hijab, bouncing a football on her knee; this speaks volumes about the inclusivity and worldwide popularity of both the game and the project.

When planning and teaching my summer elective course, I made particularly good use of the reading passages from Premier Skills English. Each reading is based around one of the 20 teams in the Premier League and focuses on a specific topic related to that team, either on or off the pitch. There is a lot of trivia here: How old was the youngest Premier League player? After how many seconds was the fastest



goal scored? What is Prince William’s favourite team? Answers are in the readings! Nothing is too technical—students don’t need any expertise in football to benefit from these readings—and social themes are prominent. There is, for example, a reading on the Chelsea Breakfast Club, a team-sponsored initiative to provide a nutritious breakfast for children in disadvantaged parts of London. There is another on the Fulham Badgers, the UK’s first team for young people with Down Syndrome, established with the support of Fulham FC; and there are others on the attempts being made by various Premier League teams to counter racism and youth crime. All these readings are easily downloaded, along with question sheets and answer keys.

Also on the website are video interviews with fans and players. Premier Skills English has enlisted some ‘big name’ players to appear in its videos. These are international players playing in the Premier League; they talk about moving to a new country, learning the language, making friends, dealing with homesickness, and so on. The video on tips for learning English, for example, includes words of wisdom from popular Côte d’Ivoire striker Didier Drogba, and from the Czech Republic’s goalkeeper Petr Cech, both currently playing for Chelsea. The effect of this is clear; if Drogba suggests writing down new words, or if Cech recommends English movies and television, then it must be a good idea. It’s the ELT equivalent of buying Adidas shoes because David Beckham advertises them.

Other sections of the website include player profiles, team information, reports of recent matches, online games, competitions, and more. Interactive activities feature prominently throughout, which means the materials lend themselves equally well to classroom use and self-study. The material is updated regularly. The Premier League changes as teams are promoted and relegated at the end of each season, and as players are transferred. The creators of Premier Skills English stay on top of these changes, and new materials are always appearing. This season, three new teams have joined the Premier League, and the writers wasted no time in posting materials related to these teams.

Premier Skills is pitched at a low-to-mid-intermediate level; some of my stronger students did not find the materials particularly challenging, but the themes in the readings lend themselves beautifully to extension and supplementation. I brought in additional material on football hooliganism and on the high salaries earned by top-flight players, and some lively discussion took place. I also branched out beyond the English league; the final assignment in my course was a poster presentation on a player of their choice—any nationality, past or present. Students put a lot of work into these, and I learned far more about Zinedine Zidane and Lionel Messi than any ESL teacher really needs to know.

For me, working with Premier Skills English was enormously satisfying; I had a class who really enjoyed this topic and who thought it was a great way to learn English. There has also been an unexpected result: these days, as a result of teaching my summer elective course, I seem to have acquired an odd reputation as the teacher who knows a lot about football. I had a student I barely know stop me in the hallway one day to say, “Teacher, I am so sorry!” What for? Apparently Manchester United had lost an important match. He was relieved—and perhaps surprised—to learn that although I have a degree from the University of Manchester, I am not a fan of the Red Devils.

The UEFA European Cup is coming up this summer. Qualifying matches for the 2014 World Cup are underway in many parts of the world. Your students will be watching. Why not take a break from your textbook and capitalize on their interest by downloading some free readings, video lessons, or language games from the Premier Skills English website? This highly recommended material is available at <http://premierSkills.britishcouncil.org/>.

## Author Bio

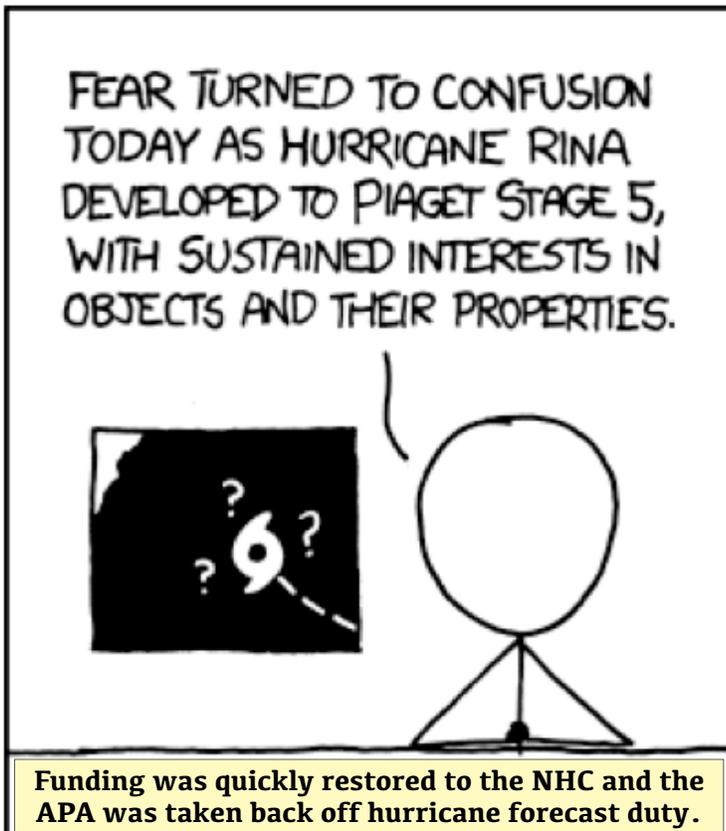
Tania Pattison is Curriculum Coordinator of the EAP program at Trent University. She frequently spends her Saturday mornings watching English Premier League matches on TV.

Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal, by Zach Weiner



source: <http://www.smbc-comics.com/index.php?db=comics&id=2443#comic>

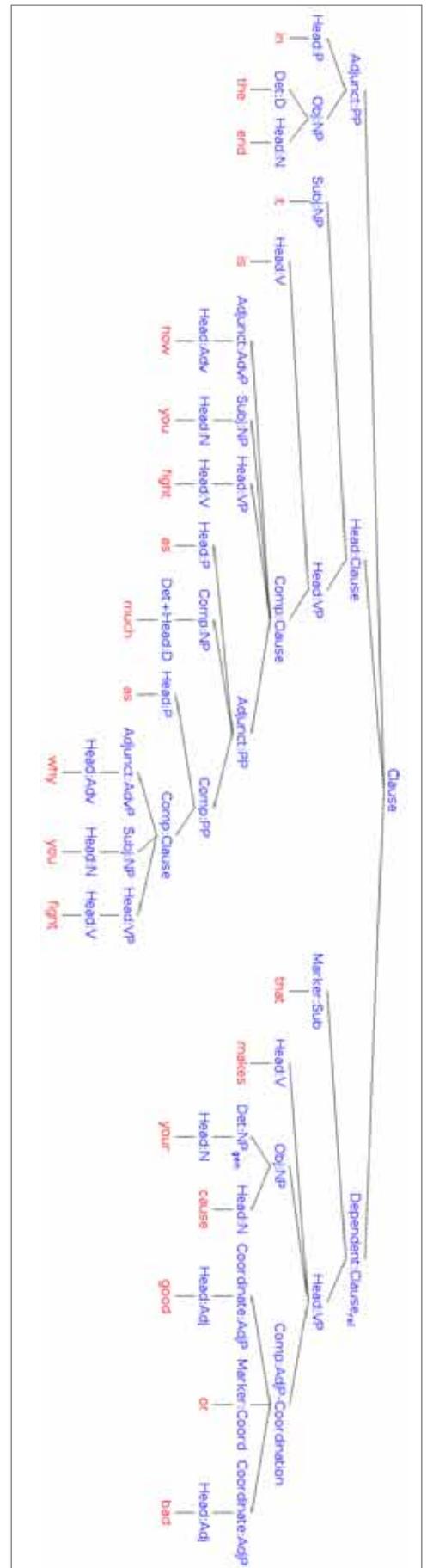
XKCD, by Randall Munroe



Funding was quickly restored to the NHC and the APA was taken back off hurricane forecast duty.

source: <http://xkcd.com/957/>

Syntax Tree



**Puzzle**

Türkü Delt

The following is a list of Turkish words and the corresponding English translations:

güreçi	wrestler	takatsız	lacking strength
ikbalsız	unsuccessful	barutçu	gunpowder maker
gözcü	sentry, eye doctor	sütsüz	without milk
isimsiz	nameless	bahkçı	fisherman
ormancı	forester	parasız	cashless
sonsuz	endless	mumcu	candlemaker
içkici	drunkard		

Two of the Turkish words are formed from stems that are loans from another language. As a result, these two words are formed slightly differently from the others. What are those two words?

Using only the information given, how do you write milkman and blind in Turkish? Remember that i and ı are different letters.

Source: <http://www.naclo.cs.cmu.edu/problems2010/F.pdf>

**Dinosaur Comics**



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Source: <http://www.qwantz.com/index.php?comic=1841>

Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario