



Merging and Emerging Pathways through Language

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A CONFERENCE FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

NINTH ANNUAL PANEL DISCUSSION
Transcending Boundaries of Language and Learning
October 17, 2014

Ninth Annual Panel Discussion: Transcending Boundaries of Language and Learning

- Panel: **Suzanne Gordon**, *Acting Manager, Adult Education Policy Unit, Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education (MEDU)*
Krista Madani, *Manager, Employment Foundation Skills and Apprenticeship Innovation Support, Program Development Unit, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MCTU)*
Mourad Mardikian, *Manager, Language Training Unit, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCIT)*
Yves Saint-Germain, *Director, Information, Language and Community Policy, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)*
- Moderator: **Renate Tilson**, *Executive Director, TESL Ontario*

Overview

Ontario's immigrants are eligible for a wide variety of tuition free classes and other educational services to speed their integration into Canadian life. Four government ministries fund and oversee separate educational programs serving immigrants. Both the province and the federal government offer language training programs specifically targeting immigrants, with job-training and life skills components. And newcomers figure prominently in the classrooms and strategies of literacy and adult high school programs offered to Canadian residents broadly. All of the ministries involved in delivering adult education are highly committed to helping immigrants gain the skills and credentials demanded by Canadian living and by their chosen careers, and to do so as soon after arriving as possible.

However, the labyrinthine processes associated with the various programs can be confusing even to those who deliver them. For immigrants who don't speak English or French, trying to figuring out what services are available to them, how to access them, and which would provide the shortest path to their goals is daunting, and missteps can delay an immigrants' successful integration into Canadian society and transition to employment.

But productive change is coming: the four ministries recognize a mandate to remove these barriers by aligning their various offerings for more seamless and visible learning pathways. They are partnering on innovative initiatives that represent steps towards this vision. Suzanne Gordon voiced the optimism of the panelists when she said, "We'll get there."

Context

The panelists, each representing a different government entity offering educational programs for immigrants in Ontario, discussed the services they provide, how their programs work, initiatives being piloted or planned, and priorities for the future.

Federal CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

Yves Saint-Germain discussed CIC's current language training programs and improvement initiatives. He also explained how redefining CIC's language training priorities in connection with Vision 2020 will proceed in collaboration with stakeholders. And he shared expectations for an eventual pan-Canadian immigrant education strategy and delivery platform.

CIC is raising newcomers' awareness of their language training options and working on improving learning pathways.

CIC funds and operates two language training programs to help newcomers develop the language skills they need to function smoothly in Canadian society and contribute to the economy: Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is for learners of English as a second language (ESL); *Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada* (CLIC) is for learners of French as a second language (FSL). Both provide formal language training from literacy to advanced levels, labor market-focused language training, and occupation-specific language training (OSLT, or "FLAP" in French, for "*formation linguistique axée sur les professions*").

Language skills development is the most important component of CIC's settlement programming, as research shows that proficiency in the official language of an immigrant's new country correlates highly with successful settlement. That's why much of CIC's settlement program funding (40%) goes to language assessments and training services and why CIC's new (2013) selection and citizenship policy gives more weight to language skills in immigrant selection.

However, a big barrier to Canadian immigrants' language skills acquisition is simply that many newcomers don't know about the free training opportunities available to them. To raise awareness, in August 2014, CIC launched an informational video on its website and at YouTube (link: [Language Training for Canada](#)). (The video was produced in English but will be subtitled in other

languages for non-English-speaking newcomers.) One hope is that immigrants will use the pre-arrival self-assessment tools the video recommends to gain a sense of how they will fare in Canada's job markets before they even arrive.

To promote clarity of learners' pathways, Mr. Saint-Germain has been working closely with Mr. Mardikian at Ontario's MCIIT to streamline the assessments and referrals made via the province's Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS). Moreover, a working group is reviewing all of the language training programs available to newcomers and analyzing the clientele with an eye toward creating better pathways to successful settlement.

Continuous improvement initiatives include promoting LINC/CLIC standardization across Canada.

An important focus for CIC is to improve the consistency of its LINC and CLIC programming across Canada. Several initiatives have helped to do so:

- *National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines* promote consistent interpretations of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) across the country.
- *The Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA)* provides teachers with standardized ways to assess learners, a big benefit to learners switching among programs or moving among provinces; their records now go with them.
- *The 2012 launch of Tutela*, the huge online repository of resources for language instructors, helps to standardize curriculums and lesson plans.

LINC and CLIC Program Requirements

While these requirements haven't changed lately, consistent implementation of the rules is important. All official LINC and CLIC programs—whether delivered in person, online, or a blend of both—must:

- Be preceded by a placement assessment based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) or Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC).
- Follow the *National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines*.
- Be based on the CLB or NCLC framework.
- Be guided by LINC, CLIC, or provincial CLB- or NCLC-based curriculum guidelines for newcomers.
- Be led by a qualified teacher.
- Be aligned with the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) approach.
- Be concluded with a CLB- or NCLC-based summative assessment.

CIC sees opportunities for further program improvements in the areas of curriculum guidelines, e-learning approaches, literacy tools and resources, programs' labor market and essential skills focus, and instructor standards. Partnership/collaboration and stakeholder engagement remain a continual focus.

Vision for the future: a pan-Canadian language training strategy and a single, integrated service delivery model.

Canada stands at a crossroads in terms of its immigrant settlement policy. The next few years will be a time of great exploration as the CIC and stakeholders decide how best to achieve improved outcomes for newcomers by 2020 via CIC's "Vision 2020" initiative.

As part of the initiative, new priorities for language training will be defined. To gather the perspectives of stakeholders on what priorities should be, CIC will host various settlement summits across the country. With stakeholder feedback in hand, the current list of potential priorities will be refined and included in the national call for proposals in 2015. In 2016/2017, the first ever national settlement evaluation will be conducted.

Potential New Priorities for CIC's Language Programs

To provide language training and skills development services that help newcomers attain the English and French proficiency they need to function and participate in all aspects of Canadian society, a potential list of priorities is:

- Basing language placement assessments and referrals to training on the national language framework (i.e., CLB/NCLC).
- Targeting lower levels of language training and resources (literacy to CLB/NCLC-4) to help newcomers engage in basic social interactions and acquire Canadian citizenship.
- Targeting higher levels (up to CLB/NCLC-10) at labour market entry and the pursuit of education.
- Providing newcomers with special needs (e.g., hearing or visual impairments) with learning opportunities and resources that accommodate their needs.
- Providing minority newcomers with services and supports to promote their full societal integration.

While language training priorities aren't yet crystallized, it is clear that their implementation will require a pan-Canadian language strategy. CIC plans to develop a strategy in collaboration with provinces and territories that realizes the following objectives:

- All adult newcomers are aware of their language abilities relative to the proficiency level required for their intended settlement goals.
- All adult newcomers have access to the full continuum of learning opportunities they need to improve their language ability, commensurate with their skill level, labor market goals, and social integration needs.

- Federal, provincial, and territorial government work in partnership to provide programming guided by the principles of accessibility, flexibility, consistency, and a seamless immigrant settlement experience.

CIC also envisions a model for service delivery at some point in the future that is nationally consistent, unites all language service providers with a single online platform, and is responsive to newcomers' diverse learning needs by providing access to online and blended learning options.

"We need a universal, nationally supported learning management system that serves as a platform for all service providers. . . . It would provide access to online and blended learning options . . . and facilitate uptake and retention."

— Yves Saint-Germain

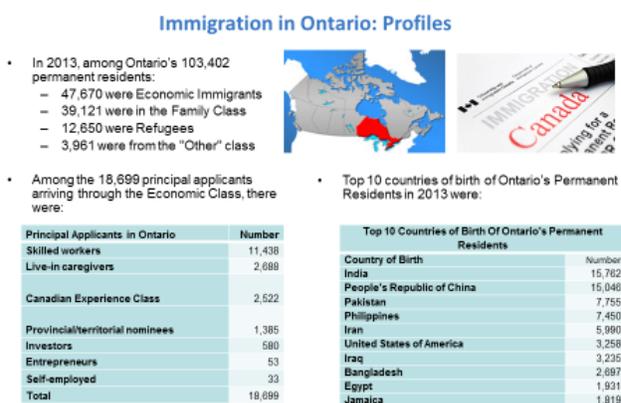
Ontario MCIIT (Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade)

Mourad Mardikian shared statistics about immigrants in Ontario and explained how MCIIT serves their learning needs by funding ESL and FSL language training programs, and partnering with other ministries and the federal government to integrate programs and create clearer learning pathways.

Ontario attracts more immigrants than any other province, many of them highly educated.

While immigration to Ontario continued to decline in 2013, Ontario did receive the most newcomers of all provinces (103,402 people, representing 40% of all landings). Most people came for economic reasons, and 45% arrived with some post-secondary education. More newcomers with advanced degrees (master's and doctorate) arrived than in any other year. India now has overtaken China as the top source country (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Profile of Ontario Immigrants Landing in 2013



MCIIT funds ESL and FSL language training delivered by school boards.

MCIIT funds 37 school boards to deliver ESL and FSL programs, which now issue provincial Language Training Certificates. These programs' reach is wide, with roughly 75,000 learners participating at over 350 locations in the province. While enrollment has been dropping, in part reflecting declining Ontario immigration, MCIIT has been providing resources to help school boards promote their programs and raise local awareness. Interestingly, FSL program enrollment has been on the rise (seven school boards now offer the FSL program, up from three).

"We've got quite a wide reach. We have school boards present in most communities where there may be some immigrants to Ontario."

— Mourad Mardikian

A recent survey of 7,500 learners highlighted similarities and differences between the programs' ESL and FSL learners. In both cases, the typical learner is a woman, aged 30-44, with prior white-collar employment; China is the top source country. But more of the FSL learners have completed university, are working, and are Canadian citizens. They have been in Canada for longer than ESL students as well. FSL learners' top motivation for taking the classes is job related, whereas the top motivation of ESL students is to improve their English for daily life.

MCIIT works closely with government partners to coordinate learning programs for Ontario newcomers.

MCIIT works with CIC, MEDU and MTCU to improve the coordination of programs and services for adult learners across Ontario. The importance of inter-ministry partnership and collaboration to clarify pathways for learners moving among programs is driven home by the findings and recommendations in a 2005 study, [Ontario Learns](#).

MCIIT has worked collaboratively with CIC to develop the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA), National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines (NLPPG), Tutela, and the joint working group on language programming, mentioned in the prior section, as well as:

- *The Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS)*, which is operating in expanded pilot mode across Ontario. CLARS provides eligible learners with a single point of access and consistent approach to language assessment and referral, whether immigrants access federal or provincial ESL or FSL language training programs.
- *History of Assessment Referral and Training System (HARTs)*, the shared MCIIT and CIC learner data management system, effectively manages all of the learners currently participating in government funded language training programs, and accurately tracks their enrolment / attendance.

MCIIT is constantly working with school boards and other stakeholders to improve its programs to create better, more integrated learner experiences.

MCIIT initiatives currently underway include introducing curriculum guidelines for the Ontario Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program, which comprise of an online portal for ESL/FSL instructors for course development; e-learning initiatives, and instructor training on CLB/NCLC language benchmarks. MCIIT is also undertaking a third-party evaluation of its adult language training programs to identify opportunities for future improvement and further integration in the interests of creating better learner experiences and promoting immigrants' success.

Ontario MEDU (Ministry of Education)

Suzanne Gordon discussed MEDU's adult secondary school offerings and why they attract large numbers of newcomers as well as the importance of collaboration among the four governmental agencies serving Ontario newcomers.

Ontarian immigrants have found a "different doorway" to their goals in MEDU's adult secondary school offering.

MEDU offers various secondary school programs for adult learners in Ontario, who can choose to go back to high school during the daytime, night time, or summer. They can opt for correspondence/self-study/e-learning instead of the traditional classroom. Mature learners are awarded credit via Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), so they needn't start at ninth grade. These programs grant 8,000 high school diplomas annually.

The top reason that adult Ontarians return to high school is to get a diploma so that they can pursue post-secondary education, followed by the need to take prerequisite courses for a job training program. But significantly, 46% of adult students in MEDU's adult secondary school programs are immigrants (60% of them in Canada less than five years). Their motivations differ: improving their English skills is the top reason, followed by the opportunity to gain work experience via co-op assignments (which provide secondary school credit while students complete a work placement). It is easier to get a job in Canada once they've had a job in Canada. So by returning to high school, many newcomers are accessing an unintended "doorway" to their employment goals.

"Immigrants are very interested in the co-op feature of high school offering. . . . It wasn't designed with immigrants in mind, but they're accessing it. They're finding a different doorway, with all due respect, not having found one elsewhere."

— Suzanne Gordon

MEDU is committed to aligning programs and sharing best practices in the interest of helping newcomers find their way.

Like the CIC and MCIIT, MEDU is very interested in aligning the various educational programs immigrants use in their efforts to gain language and job-related skills. Ms. Gordon echoed the sentiment of the speakers before her, saying they are all "on the hook" to forge better alignment among their programs. Better alignment will smooth learner transitions among programs, facilitating immigrants' access of the right services for their needs. "We'll get there," she said.

In the spirit of collaboration, Ms. Gordon shared two MEDU resources with ESL and FSL teachers: the report [Creating Pathways to Success](#) provides plentiful tools to help adult learners move their lives forward in meaningful, well-planned ways. So does the [Ontario Skills Passport](#).

Ontario MTCU (Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities)

Krista Madani outlined how MTCU's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program helps adults with learning barriers transition onto productive goal paths.

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program helps adults to develop and apply literacy, numeracy and digital skills to achieve their goals.

LBS training is geared to the specific needs and levels of students with barriers to learning. It helps them develop the communication, numeracy, and digital skills they need to transition onto one of five goal paths: 1) employment; 2) post-secondary education; 3) apprenticeship; 4) secondary school credits; or 5) increased independence. Students' most common goal paths are post-secondary education (39%) and employment (16%).

Four LBS program streams are offered: for Anglophone, Francophone, Aboriginal, and deaf learners. The cornerstone of LBS is the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF).

LBS service providers are the face of the program, providing instruction and coordination directly to learners. But 28 LBS support organizations exist to aid the service providers in various ways, supporting seamless client pathways, providing resource development, supporting continuous improvement, and contributing research.

For more information and program referrals, contact Employment Ontario.

Biographies

Suzanne Gordon, *Acting Manager, Adult Education Policy Unit, Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education (MEDU)*

Suzanne Gordon is currently Acting Manager of the Adult Education Policy Unit, Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch at the Ministry of Education. Previously, she was the Senior Manager of the Labour Market Integration Unit at the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Since she started with the Labour Market Integration unit in 2005, she has led the expansion of Ontario's Bridge Training Programs for Internationally Trained Individuals from 35 pilot projects to more than 300 projects, as well as the ground work for other strategic initiatives to improve the economic integration of skilled newcomers, including the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and the initiation of new services and programs such as Global Experience Ontario and the Ontario Internship Program for Internationally Trained Individuals. Previously, Suzanne worked at the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and at the Secretariat to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, where she worked on program standards for degree level postsecondary education.

Prior to her government career, Suzanne taught at both the Schulich School of Business and Osgoode Hall Law School. She holds a PhD in Law from Osgoode Hall Law School, and is a graduate of the Université de Montpellier, France, Diplôme des Etudes Approfondies, Droit international public et européen.

Krista Madani
Manager, Employment Foundation Skills and Apprenticeship Innovation Support, Program Development Unit, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MCTU)

Krista Madani has been providing strong leadership in the Employment and Training field for over 10 years, in which she has worked on the full range of programs and services. She is currently the Manager, Program Development in the Strategic Policy and Programs Division for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. In this role, she oversees the development of Employment Ontario programs. She started her time with the Ministry in 2007 after being transferred from the Government of Canada. Krista has held a number of progressive positions in local field offices and head office branches.

Mourad Mardikian
Manager, Language Training Unit, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCIIT)

Mourad Mardikian has been with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and International Trade's Language Training Unit almost since its inception in May 2006 as the unit's first Team Lead and more recently as its Manager. He is responsible for the management of the Ministry's largest program—the Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program—which happens to also be Ontario's and Canada's largest language training program geared to adult immigrants. With input from the Ministry of Education, he helped develop and implement the internal processes to ensure the smooth transition of the Adult Non-Credit Language Training program to MCIIT. He works closely with colleagues at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on adult education initiatives related to language training. More recently, he has been working very closely with the federal government (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) on the development and implementation of the Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (called CLARS) as the co-chair of the CLARS Advisory Committee and was previously the Co-Chair of the Language Training Working Group set up through the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. Prior to joining the Ontario Public Service, he worked in the private sector in management consulting and business consulting focusing on developing self-employment training programs geared to both adult and youth entrepreneurs.

Yves Saint-Germain, *Director, Information, Language and Community Policy, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)*

Yves Saint-Germain is the Director of Information, Language and Community Policy, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration. Yves joined CIC in 2006, occupying various functions including the development of an accountability approach for settlement programs and the management of performance measurement aspects. He was appointed to his present position in August 2007.





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