



TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF LEARNING WITH NEW PBLA INITIATIVE

“Maria”, a newcomer to Canada and one of many learners in adult ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in Ontario, is being taught how to fill out a form in English. If this scenario was 1999, she would have been given instructions and some assistance in this task by her teacher and then perhaps tested on her ability to complete a form. She may not know if she could transpose the skills learned in this exercise to other “form-filling” activities in her daily routine that seem to be imposed on all Canadians as a way of life.

Today, Maria’s assignment has taken on an entirely new focus, thanks to [Portfolio-Based Language Assessment \(PBLA\)](#), an approach to measuring and tracking learner progress, introduced in partnership between federal and provincial governments. Now, Maria will not only learn how to complete the form, but will also be assessed on how well she can perform this task using an actual form she might have to complete for her doctor or for employment. She will also reap the benefit of taking ownership and becoming engaged in her own learning path by being able to transport this and other newly learned language skills with her in her ‘Language Companion Guide’ (Binder), should she move to a different ESL program, city or province.

From its early beginnings in Manitoba, this initiative was formally introduced by the federal government as a standard feature of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) in 2013, to be rolled out in three phases. Although CIC (Citizen and Immigration Canada) had begun funding language classes more than 20 years ago, it did not provide guidelines on how to evaluate learner progress. Today, the program’s quality has been raised through using PBLA to provide a consistent, more standardized method of learner assessment, as required by both the federal government and the Ontario government’s adult non-credit ESL classes funded by MCIIT (Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and

International Trade). PBLA measures successes and holds instructors and learners accountable for classroom learning. It is now available to more than 100,000 English language learners in Ontario.

Evidence of the enthusiastic roll-out of this mandated program was apparent by the many sessions about PBLA that took place at TESL Ontario's [annual conference](#) in Toronto November 12-13, 2015. Presentations by PBLA regional coaches, teacher-trainers and instructors offered PBLA-focused workshops on classroom activities and strategies; challenges, gaps and solutions; and methods for incorporating technology and blended learning into program delivery.



The 43rd annual conference of TESL Ontario took place at the Sheraton Centre Toronto, November 12 - 13, 2015 as part of the annual [ESL Week](#) (November 8 – 14), a celebration of ESL education and learning opportunities in Ontario. The conference is amongst the largest conference of its kind in Canada, hosting more than 700 delegates. Interactive workshops, [presentations](#), technology labs, [panel discussions](#) and more are offered to language training professionals from public and private sectors, academics, researchers and government representatives.

[TESL Ontario](#), established in 1972, is a non-profit organization serving the needs of teachers of English as a Second Language. It represents more than 4,600 language training professionals and is instrumental in influencing the success of many thousands of English language learners throughout the province. TESL Ontario's expertise is in teaching, advocacy, accreditation, and professional development.

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