



Merging and Emerging Pathways through Language

43rd Annual TESL Ontario Conference

A CONFERENCE FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

TENTH ANNUAL PANEL DISCUSSION
Expanding Experience and Knowledge
November 13, 2015

Tenth Annual Panel Discussion: Expanding Experience and Knowledge

- Panel: **Cliff Fast**, *Integration Manager, Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Ontario Region*
Mourad Mardikian, *Manager, Language Training Unit, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade*
Pauline McNaughton, *Manager of the Adult Education Policy Unit, Ontario Ministry of Education*
Askin Taner, *Senior Program Design and Development Analyst, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*
- Moderator: **Renate Tilson**, *Executive Director, TESL Ontario*

Overview

Ontario's immigrants have access to a wide variety of language training and other educational services to help them acquire the skills and knowledge they need to assimilate successfully into Canadian life. Four government ministries fund and run separate educational programs serving newcomers. However, finding the fastest pathways to their goals among the various offerings may be a confusing prospect for newcomers lacking knowledge of English (or French). All four ministries recognize a common responsibility to expedite immigrants' assimilation by clarifying pathways, coordinating programming, and facilitating transitions between their various program streams. They work collaboratively in a four-way partnership to achieve these shared objectives.

Continual improvement of service offerings to better meet learners' needs is a shared priority. Between the ministries, a multitude of innovative initiatives are underway and are planned. These include curriculum innovations to promote learners' progress toward goals, nationwide standardization of proficiency levels, and e-learning initiatives that expand program access and flexibility.

Context

The panelists, each representing a different government entity serving Ontario newcomers with language training and other educational programs, discussed their departments' priorities, programs, and initiatives, current and planned.

Federal CIC (Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada)

Cliff Fast provided a history and brief overview of the federal government's settlement language programming with specifics related to Ontario. He also responded to questions about the future.

Language learning programs for Canadian immigrants are integral to CIC's service offerings.

Language acquisition is crucial to successful settlement and integration of Canada's newcomers. Yet large percentages of permanent-resident newcomers have no knowledge of English, French, or both—including 54% of refugees, 43% of

family-class immigrants, and 27% of economic immigrants' dependents. Thus, providing language instruction for immigrants is an integral part of CIC's settlement services.

CIC offers Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) for learners of English as a second language (ESL) and *Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada* (CLIC) for learners of French as a second language (FSL).

LINC/CLIC has expanded much since its inception in 1992. The program was launched with just three basic levels of instruction versus today's seven. Highlights of its evolution include the introduction of home study in 1995 and literacy instruction in 2001. Today, the program features both full- and part-time classes and blended learning (i.e., part online and part in a traditional classroom). Home study and blended learning have expanded LINC/CLIC access to people in remote areas. A future opportunity is to create a totally online option, extending program access to those who can't attend in a traditional classroom.

A priority is promoting the consistent nationwide use of the CLB and NCLC proficiency-level standards.

An important priority for CIC is improving standardization and nationwide consistency of its language programming in the interest of delivering equitable, comparable programming nationally. LINC and CLIC apply the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and Niveaux de Compétence Linguistique Canadiens (NCLC) as the national standard for planning curricula and assessing learner progress. The CLBs/NCLCs are embedded in assessment tools, guidelines, and curriculum tools for federally funded language programming. Their use is critical to ensuring consistent assessment and instruction practices, quality programming, and relevant content.

Recent years' initiatives to promote standardization and national consistency include:

- *Launch of the National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines*, which establish nationwide consistency in language proficiency levels based on CLB/NCLC.
- *Development of curriculum guidelines* to help instructors design lesson plans in accordance with the CLB/NCLC framework and supportive of CIC's Settlement Program objectives.

- *Implementation of Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA)*, a standardized approach to teaching and assessment whereby teachers and students collaborate to set and achieve learning goals.

Integration and consistency between federal and provincial language programming is a priority as well. Some joint initiatives of CIC and MCIIT include:

- *The Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS)*, providing newcomers to federal or provincial language programming a common assessment and referral process.
- *Remote Language Assessments*, a pilot program utilizing a web-based platform for assessing newcomers in the remote areas of northern Ontario.
- *PBLA rollout across the province*, which will maintain consistency for newcomers accessing both federally and provincially funded programs.

Canada's change in government presents a few questions about the future.

As part of CIC's Vision 2020 initiative, stakeholders were invited in 2015 to submit proposals regarding CIC's potential settlement and language learning priorities looking ahead. Session participants wondered how Canada's new administration might affect this initiative (see the [Executive Summary of the 2014 Panel Discussion](#) for a recap of CIC's language learning objectives and potential priorities).

The settlement program evaluation that had been planned for 2016/17 will be moved ahead in time, said Fast, but further details aren't yet available. While it is too early to say for sure, Fast's opinion is that not much about CIC's focus will change given the new administration's commitment to newcomers' successful settlement.

Also on many minds: How will the current LINC/CLIC infrastructure absorb the influx of 25,000 Syrian refugees coming over the next few months? Will there be federal funding for the expansion of the language learning programs? Fast doesn't know the logistical details yet, but is sure access to language instruction will be provided.

"It's a very fluid point in time, but we do know that if we're going to be bringing people into the country, we're going to ensure that there's access to language instruction."

— Cliff Fast

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

Mourad Mardikian presented an overview of MCIIT's language learning services for Ontario's immigrants, explaining the Ministry's initiatives and areas of future focus.

Ontario's vision for adult immigrant language training is distinguished by its CLARS referral system.

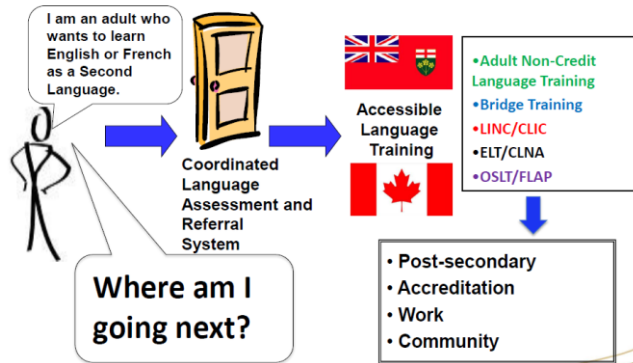
In Ontario, the MCIIT funds ESL and FSL courses for adult immigrants. These courses are organized by the province's school boards. A few distinctive features about these newcomer language instruction programs are:

- *Different eligibility for MCIIT-funded programs than for the federal government's LINC and CLIC programs.* All adult immigrants whose first language isn't English are eligible for MCIIT-funded programs with the exception of visitors and temporary residents on work visas (except in certain narrow circumstances). Those deemed ineligible still may take the courses at the discretion of the school board, but not for free.
- *CLARS.* Ontario is the only province with CLARS, a system that clarifies for learners visiting assessment centres their language program options based on assessment results and eligibility status. With CLARS, learners can see the most efficient pathways to their educational and occupational goals. CLARS expedites immigrants' integration and is integral to the Ontario MCIIT's vision for adult language training.

"CLARS has transformed how people access programming in Ontario . . . allowing [clients] to make the decisions that best meet their needs."

— Mourad Mardikian

Ontario's Vision for Adult Language Training



In the interest of continually improving its programming, the Ministry has begun to study why up to 30% of CLARS clients are leaving assessment centres without making a decision on course(s) to be referred to when presented with a range of options. While there might be many valid reasons for not making the decision while at the CLARS centre (such as wanting to check in with their family or taking some time to make their decisions), some might also be leaving CLARS without a decision due to the range of course options not meeting their needs. Some of this could be as simple as what time of day courses are currently offered (for example). The Ministry wants to learn what the most frequent impediments are (e.g., scheduling, location, duration, or course content) and figure out how to remove obstacles.

MCIIIT has been working on several initiatives, with many more planned for the future.

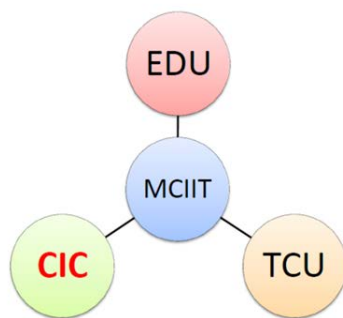
Besides CLARS, the MCIIIT's recent language learning initiatives include:

- *The Ontario Curriculum Guidelines and Online Portal* articulate a framework for adult ESL/FSL language training delivery. Tools and resources for curriculum development are available on the portal, which also provides a platform for sharing lesson plans. Rollout is happening this school year and next.
- *The National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines* (NLPPG) help to ensure that CLARS assessors and language instructors apply a consistent approach to assessing learners' skill levels. CLB/NCLC levels are now recorded in a consistent way across Canada, thanks to these guidelines. Their development was a collaborative effort of MCIIIT and CIC, which jointly funded NLPPG training services.
- *PBLA* was developed to improve language program delivery and standardize assessment across Ontario's ESL, FSL, LINC, and CLIC programs. A portfolio of learners' work samples is used to demonstrate proficiency strides for the purposes of assessment and final evaluation, supporting the transition to higher training levels. Lead Instructors from more than 25 school boards have become certified in the method and are implementing PBLA with learners as well as training their colleagues.
- *Coordination and collaboration.* Continual work goes on behind the scenes at MCIIIT coordinating the language training programs offered by the federal government, MCIIIT, and the province's MEDU and MTCU. This inter-departmental collaboration is "a four-way partnership" to clarify and expedite learners' pathways from program to program.

A four-way partnership:

1. Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade (MCIIIT)
2. Ministry of Education (EDU)
3. Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (TCU)

And



Initiatives being developed for the future include:

- *E-learning.* MCIIIT is developing e-learning pilot programs covering the full range of delivery options: blended online/classroom, self-directed, and virtual classroom learning. A 2013 e-learning feasibility study indicated widespread support for e-learning among learners, instructors, and administrators. The benefits of e-learning include expanded program accessibility and the ability of learners to progress at their own pace.
- *Specialized Language Training (SLT) stream.* MCIIIT has introduced a new SLT stream to support its more than

40 occupation-specific language training courses. SLT guidelines are being developed to support future SLT courses.

- *Reducing duplication in language course offerings.* The Ministry has an internal working group analyzing local programming gaps and working with school boards to eliminate duplication. It would be unfortunate for two coterminous school boards to consider closing similar courses due to low enrolment in the same area, impacting all learners. It would be more effective, and address duplication through collaboration, for the two school boards to work together in identifying courses that might differ from each other enough to attract appropriate learners to their respective courses. This could involve arranging to offer courses at different CLB levels, different times or on different days. There is opportunity to fill gaps in local offerings, helping transitioning learners access the next steps on their pathways.
- *Program evaluation.* A third-party evaluation of MCIIIT's adult non-credit language training program is nearly completed. The evaluation will identify opportunities for further improvements and inform developments for integrating learner boundaries.

On the question of how MCIIIT's language training program will accommodate the influx of Syrian refugees next year (about 50% of whom are expected to settle in Ontario), Mardikian said that since the program's funding model is enrolment-based, most school boards are likely to accommodate the surge in demand by setting up the requisite courses. "We're ready from the language side," he said.

Ontario Ministry of Education (MEDU)

Pauline McNaughton discussed MEDU's vision for Ontario's adult secondary school offerings and its action plan for executing that vision.

MEDU serves Ontario's immigrant population, via its adult secondary school programs.

MEDU funds secondary school programs for adult learners in Ontario delivered by 64 school boards across the province. Learners have plenty of delivery options, particularly in urban areas. They can go back to high school during the day or evenings as either full- or part-time students, year round. With self-study and e-learning, they can progress at their own pace or choose a traditional classroom program. Mature learners are awarded credit via Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), so they needn't start at 9th grade.

Immigrants represent about half (46%) of the diverse adult learner population enrolled in these programs, and 60% of the immigrants in the programs have been in Canada for fewer than five years. So MEDU is serving the same populations that IC and MCIIIT focus on and that MTCU likewise serves in its Literacy and Basic Skills program. Pauline McNaughton echoed the commitment that all four ministries share to work collaboratively to coordinate their (sometimes overlapping) programming in the interest of serving their mutual client.

"Most of you represent adult ESL or adult LINC; there's commonality in whom we're serving. We have common goals related to helping folks get what they need [and] get on with their lives."
— Pauline McNaughton

MEDU's adult education strategy involves multiple initiatives and an action plan.

MEDU's renewed vision for Ontario education, "[Achieving Excellence](#)," reflects the following commitment to improving adult education in the province: "Ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace."

In the interest of improving supports for adult learners, MEDU has been exploring ways to better engage them as well as to build program capacity. To build capacity, it has embarked on numerous school improvement initiatives as well as undertaken innovative research pilot programs focused on: 1) encouraging single parents to finish secondary school; 2) delivering adult education to inmates in correctional facilities; and 3) designing a sustainable hybrid delivery model combining direct instruction, independent study via e-learning, and tutoring.

Additionally, as part of a strategic action plan, a regional approach to program planning and delivery is being implemented. The idea is to organize the 64 school boards delivering MEDU's adult and continuing education programs into seven or eight regional groupings. The groups will self-coordinate to minimize course redundancy and maximize the breadth of offerings within their areas. This approach also promotes more efficient collaboration with outside entities such as Employment Ontario, CIC and MCIIT immigrant language training communities, and others. As Ms. McNaughton explained, "Instead of 64 boards having conversations, you've got seven or eight regional groupings of boards having conversations."

Among the strategic plan's objectives are: 1) promoting programs' flexibility and responsiveness to learners' needs; 2) promoting program innovation and accessibility via partnerships among school boards; and 3) improving learners' transitions between MEDU's adult credit programs and programs funded by the MTCU and MCIIT.

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

Askin Taner discussed MTCU's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program as well as MTCU's use of data from OECD's PIAAC initiative to assess Canadians' skill and competency levels.

The LBS program helps adults acquire the literacy and basic skills needed to participate more fully in Canadian life.

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program plays a significant role in the government's multi-year priority to increase skills among Ontarians. Through the program, adult learners who lack literacy and basic skills get an opportunity

to build the competencies they need to participate more fully in the economy and society. They work on achievement of goals related to employment, post-secondary education, apprenticeship, secondary school credits, and increased independence. LBS has four streams: Anglophone, Francophone, Aboriginal, and Deaf.

LBS is delivered through Employment Ontario's service delivery network (over 200 transfer payment agencies at over 300 sites). Last year, the Ministry's budget of \$85 million allowed 43,000 learners to be served. A majority (62%) of learners next moved on to employment or further education—a percentage that has been on the rise. The cornerstone of LBS is the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF), which relates the curriculum to learners' goal paths.

"The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework provides very important structure for the LBS program. It close relates the curriculum to the goal paths of learners."
— Askin Taner

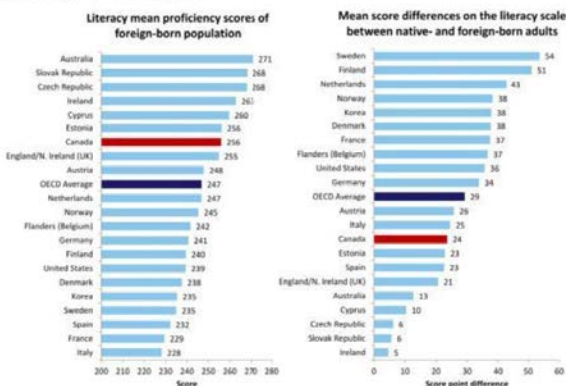
OECD's PIAAC skills assessment study sheds a favorable light on Canadian immigrant assimilation.

Separately, MTCU has been involved in analyzing data from the OECD's Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which assessed and compared the skills and competencies of adults in OECD countries. The government of Ontario invested extra funds to obtain an oversized sampling of the province's population to gain rich data on skill gaps among various population segments. An analysis can be found at [Essential Skills Ontario, Analyzing PIAAC](#).

Notably, the scores of immigrants whose native tongue is not the official language of the participating country can be misleading owing to the language barrier (tests are conducted in countries' official language). Nonetheless, Canada's gap in scores between its native and foreign-born populations is lower than for the OECD average, which speaks to the good job that Canada does in the language training of its newcomers.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Pan-Canadian Report

Literacy — Average scores and score point differences of population aged 16 to 65 by immigrant status, OECD average and countries, 2012



Biographies

Cliff Fast, *Integration Manager, Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Ontario Region*

[Biography not available]

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

Mourad Mardikian has been with the Ministry of Citizenship, 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 MCI. 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.

Pauline McNaughton, *Manager of the Adult Education Policy Unit, Ontario Ministry of Education*

Pauline McNaughton has worked in the field of adult education for over 25 years in college, school board, government and not-for-profit sectors. Currently she is Manager of the Adult Education Policy Unit, with a dual report to both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and works closely with the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. Prior to this she was Executive Director at the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks and Field Team Manager with the AlphaPlus Centre. She taught adult literacy and adult ESL for many years with both Arctic College on Baffin Island and with the Ottawa Carleton District School Board.

Askin Taner, *Senior Program Design and Development Analyst, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*

Askin Taner is a senior analyst at the Strategic Policy and Programs Division, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU). At MTCU, he is currently working on adult education policy development and essential skills programming design. Prior to joining MTCU, Askin worked at the Global Experience Ontario, Labour Market Integration, and Language Training units of the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade. Askin served as Vice-Chair on the Board of Directors of the Davenport Perth Community Health Centre from 2006 to 2012. Askin's educational background is in political science and public administration. He carried out graduate studies at the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto.



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