



TESL ONTARIO'S Second Annual Panel Discussion
Friday, November 23rd, 2007
held at
The 35th Annual TESL Ontario Conference
Making Connections

The first panel presenter for the morning's panel was **Hanna Cabaj**, Coordinator of the Continuing Education Department of Adult Education Programs with the Toronto Catholic District School Board.

With Hanna's 20 plus years of experience teaching both in Canada and overseas, as well as her broad experience in curriculum development, resource creation, and program administration, it was only natural that Hanna started her presentation with a brief overview of the changes which have taken place in adult education over the past several years. Hanna clarified "non-credit" classes and reminded us that the school board had been offering adult non-credit classes since the early 1960's and LINC classes since 1992. "In the 60's," Hanna mused, "ESL was in our backyard with our friends" and Hanna then had the audience chuckling when she told us that at that time, during the 60's, the assumption was that "anyone who could walk and talk a *little* English could teach it.." We have come a long way, said Hanna, because of connections we have made!

Today, Adult ESL and LINC programs in Ontario form a connected professional community with standards in training and accreditation, standard language proficiency descriptors, standards in curricula development, learner assessment, program delivery and support. The standards of instructor training and accreditation were brought in as a result of grassroots' recognition of the need for standards. First time TESL Ontario certification for LINC/ESL instructors now demands a degree, training from a recognized institution, a supervised practicum, and proof of proficiency in English. TESL training program standards soon followed, outlining the hours of training, content and teaching practicum requirements that accredited training providers put in place.

In 1993, the National Working Group set forth Canadian Language Benchmarks 1 – 12, creating national standardized descriptors of language proficiency in 1997, with revisions in 2000. Canadian Language Benchmarks have monumental implications for curricula development, learner assessment, design and delivery of adult language training. A series of LINC curriculum documents as well as specialized language training curricula have been developed over the last several years, all based on Canadian Language Benchmarks. Language assessment tools became the next step. In all of the LINC and ESL programs in Ontario, learners are placed in classes following a CLB-based assessment, and language classes are more and more often described using Canadian Language Benchmarks levels that provide a common reference points between different programs and program providers.

The opening of The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks in Ottawa created a national hub of professional development expertise and initiative for adult language

training across the country. High standards apply now to all aspects of the delivery of adult ESL/LINC programs, including program design, student registration, assessment and placement, professional development delivered to staff, resources, infrastructure and support services available.

Hanna was enthusiastic about the Board's latest initiatives which included support of newcomers to make speedy, smooth transfer into the trades and other skilled work. She identified the common goal of professional community of ESL and LINC practitioners - building connections across all sectors: non-credit, credit, JK-12, adult, community and work preparation to create a coherent, cohesive and comprehensive delivery of language training and settlement support services to newcomers to Ontario.

At the end of Hanna's presentation, a question period was opened.

- A participant from Ottawa asked Hanna: "Are settlement programs delivered in context of ESL?"
- Hanna responded that positive changes have been put in place. In the past, Immigrant Settlement and Assistance Program funding was not available for school boards that operated ESL programs. As of this year, with the additional funding available through Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement, that funding has been extended to additional providers and settlement counselors will now be available to help adult learners in school board delivered LINC and ESL programs.

The next panel presenter, **Cliff Fast**, has been working with CIC since 1994 and has been involved with LINC since 1992. Cliff announced that in his presentation, he would review and discuss the CIC and LINC structures, revealing their existing external and internal connections.

Cliff pointed out that Canada Employment Centres delivered locally-run ESL programs for years, and in doing so, encompassed three components: assessments (ie. deciding what was needed and referral), language training, and delivery assistance.

The goal has always been to connect the client to the most appropriate language provider, with no intention to replace but always to complement existing programs.

LINC levels 1-7 use the standard set of Benchmarks. In the current structure in Ontario, there are 134 LINC providers, 2 CIC offices (one in Toronto, one in York), 1452 classes, 23,329 contracted seats, and 45 settlement officers who have the challenge of keeping connected to a large number of communities.

After this overview, Cliff pointed out the many CIC-supported connections in Ontario: assessment centres (which assess, refer, and place), program promotions (open houses, graduation ceremonies, etc.), local professional development, regional conferences, and finally, the automated reservation system.

Cliff stressed that community involvement has been a high priority since inception – many meetings were opened to encourage input and to involve other providers. CIC supports professional development at every opportunity, development that is offered in the community for LINC teachers, child-minders and LINC administrators. CIC has also given faculty the opportunities to attend regional conferences beyond the community—conferences like this, ISAP, and others.

In 1993 CIC introduced an automated program management tool, a system which provided help to manage programs (calculating seats available, child-minding spaces, and other valuable statistics) and to support communities.

After Cliff's presentation, a question period was opened.

- A participant from North Bay asked whether CIC could tell, using the automated reservation system, where and when spaces were available between communities so that if one area had no spaces but another had extra spaces, the ELL would have more options.
- Cliff responded that unfortunately, only spaces are only exposed locally at the present time, but he was hopeful that that ability would soon be in place.
- A participant from Niagara asked whether services were concentrated more in higher population areas than those with smaller populations.
- Cliff answered that CIC did send officers to smaller communities in order to become familiar with the stakeholders and funders in those areas. Cliff believes that good relations developed with the providers in these smaller areas are essential and allows CIC to rely on them... CIC does not pretend to be the expert in what is happening in every particular area.
- A London participant queried whether Canadian citizens had limited options with LINC.
- Cliff clarified that there are options after LINC; the eligibility criteria had been set quite a long time ago and it stated that no citizens or refugee claimants would be supported. These people must depend on school boards and provincially supported ESL programs. Nevertheless, they are not pushed out of the programs if they are currently in a program when they become Canadian citizens.
- At this point, Hanna interjected that the provincial ESL programs follow CLB and do indeed support these others who gain their citizenship (as well as refugees, refugee claimants, and permanent residents) while still attempting to improve their language ability.

Eleanor Good stepped forward next to present. Eleanor, with many years of experience as an ESL professional, is now the Learning Co-ordinator for ESL/ELD, NL with the Thames Valley District School Board, responsible for the support English Language Learners in 110 schools

Eleanor immediately noted the “timelessness” of the Conference’s theme, “Making Connections.” It is important that we do indeed have a common goal to foster a sense of unity among ESL professionals She then stated that there were many good things happening for, as well as many issues with, ELL in Elementary and Secondary programs, but before discussing them, she felt it necessary to “set the context first” with remarks by Eugene Garcia: “Children are rich in assets, children bring culture and experiences” and by an ESL student “...I walked a 1000 miles, dear teacher, before I met you.” Eleanor explained that these comments reinforced a vital truth: we must know our students. As teachers, we must build bridges between their old culture and their new culture. Consequently, we must create programs for their needs and not force them into set inflexible programs. We want them to achieve language and cultural competence in a timely fashion because after all, we do want them to get out of ESL and get on with their lives, to be successful in other programs or at their work.

Eleanor then outlined some key initiatives of ESL as they have developed.

Before 1999, school boards developed their own curriculum and expectations differed widely, but today there is much greater standardization. Again before '99, some boards were giving credits for ESL classes and others were not; today the policy is standardized. At the secondary level today, ESL is a credit course (Students are allowed to take 3 ESL credits and 1 regular English course in order to satisfy secondary requirements); at the elementary level, ESL is not a subject but a resource provided.

Eleanor then discussed some of the latest resources to be created to help both ELL and teacher. For example, both administrators and teachers use *Many Roots, Many Voices* (2005) for ideas and strategies for language development for students and also to help parents feel included by making the schools more inviting and welcoming. A new user friendly document, this resource has been well-received across the province.

The Ministry has recently released, for the first time policy for school boards to use for English Language Learning. The “English Language Learners, ESL and ELD Programs and Services, Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12” will help to ensure appropriate programming for ELLs in Ontario.

Two other documents are ready and will be distributed shortly: *Supporting ELL in Kindergarten* is a companion document for the regular kindergarten curriculum which helps teachers make sure children can engage within the kindergarten program. *Students with Limited Prior Schooling* was created to support students with limited schooling opportunities before coming to Canada – not only for learning English but also for learning new content.

In addition, *Steps to English Proficiency* is now being piloted at 16 Boards across the province.

Eleanor remarked that the needs of the ELL have become more evident and therefore more attention is now being placed on their needs and more action being taken.

In spite of new resources, attitudes and actions, Eleanor pointed out that issues are still present, issues which demand continuing attention, action, and advocacy:

- We must always work towards an improved understanding of the needs of English Language Learners.
- The pre-service components at Faculties of Education need to be enhanced. Programs for the teaching of ELLs should exist in Faculties of Education; as of yet, they are only optional.
- Of course, as always, there is a need for increased funding and resources. English Language Learners need to receive support for a longer time.
- Profiles of the ESL/ELD programs need to be heightened and accountability needs to be defined regarding use of dollars distributed.
- Heightened profile of ESL/ELD programs and course and ELLs. ESL Week is one way we may do this, but communities must also be reached directly in order to remove the stigma attached to ESL and ELD programs.
- For, in fact, at times, there is some stigma with taking ESL courses, a stigma which may set the learner up for future failure.
- We need more inclusive, inviting schools.

Eleanor concluded that “Much still needs to be done to meet the challenges of linguistic diversity.”

After Eleanor’s presentation, a question period was opened.

- A participant from Peterborough asked what connection was there between the research taking place and the delivery of programs.
- Eleanor responded that the research was definitely reflected in the curriculum documents.

Calum MacKechnie made the next presentation. Coming from York University English Language Institute, Calum represented the Private Sector.

Calum started his presentation by stating the goal of the Canadian Private Language Services (CAPLS) and the Canadian Language Council (CLC) “A United Strong Voice for Canada’s Language Training Industry.” Unfortunately, stated Calum, the sector has been too fragmented and suffers in comparison to language training services in places such as the UK and Australia, whose services are considerably more unified.

Nevertheless, Calum pointed out, Canada's sector is trying to become more cohesive now. In fact, in 2006, there was a Joint Task Force set up to look at the possibility of CAPLS and CLC joining forces to create a national association, one of whose functions will be to accredit language training providers. It was agreed that by March 2008, the new association would be created. The CLC accreditation model was adopted. The new Board will be elected the new association at the beginning of March 2008 and will begin promoting this new association in Canada and at various international and national events.

Calum advised that CAPLS and CLC will together offer an upcoming conference, the Languages Canada Association Conference, whose theme will be "Two Languages, One Voice." The new organization's goal will be to promote quality English and French study in Canada, and to make Canada the destination of choice for both English and French language study. The purpose of the new group will be to be the voice of the Language Training industry. It will focus on 5 key areas:

- Promoting visibility
- Providing professional development support
- Working with government partners and external stakeholders
- Promoting the goals of the group to the public and to the media
- Maintaining quality assurance (making sure that CLC accreditation agency belongs to accredited bodies), which involves not only ensuring quality but spreading the word about this quality.

Calum explained that the accreditation scheme would be transparent. An independent professional would head up a team to examine quality assurance. The working business model, of course, would be to pursue both government support and corporate sponsorship. Calum assured the audience that the new organization would be a positive blending of two cultures. CAPLS is strong on promotion and marketing; CLC is experienced at accreditation. The new organization would rely on the strengths of both.

Calum finished his presentation by giving the audience both the necessary website (www.languagescanada.ca) and describing the new logo for Languages Canada: stylized maple leaves in the colours of blue (representing the oceans), red (representing tradition) and green (representing our forests and environment).

After Calum's presentation, a question period was opened.

- One member asked Calum if membership was restricted to only private providers.
- Calum answered that both public and private ESL providers may join the organization, but before being considered, all applicants must have been in existence as a provider for a minimum of 3 years.

Dr. Dennis Mock, President of Nipissing University spoke next.

Dennis began by joking that it was the first time he had attended a conference in Toronto at which North Bay was mentioned twice! After applauding ESL teachers in general and TESL Ontario in particular for providing a forum within which stakeholders could share best practice and concerns, Dennis began his presentation by outlining how the conference's theme of "Making Connections" resonated with the learning philosophy, values and objectives of Nipissing University and epitomized the community and partner-based ESL programs the North provides.

Dennis first set the scene for those unfamiliar with the North. Nipissing University, he explained, is located in North Bay...a high-quality-of-life city of 55,000 people just 3 hours north of 407. The university shares with Canadore College a naturally beautiful 640 acre campus located on an escarpment overlooking Lake Nipissing. Dennis explained that learning at Nipissing is about close personal attention and interaction, as surveys of student satisfaction attest, the small size of the university being an asset of course, resulting in average class sizes of 34 students. Dennis mentioned student satisfaction results not only because he was proud of them, but "more importantly, because they are the attributes of the type of personalized learning relationships you yourselves create and deliver in your ESL classes."

Dennis went on to say that he had recently been meeting individually with some of Nipissing's ESL students to try to better understand both the university's programs and partnerships with other stakeholders. In doing so, he came to more fully appreciate the range of educational, social and day-to-day challenges ELL face, and at the same time, developed a greater insight into the role of ESL practitioners and their impact on even a small community like North Bay.

Dennis then focused on the different composition of ELL in the north. He said that the university and college had a large Aboriginal and Francophone population and a smaller, yet growing, international and new Canadian cohort. Nipissing University itself currently has 236 self-identified (actual estimate 400) Aboriginal students from the north and 67 international students, with 160 Nipissing students studying abroad on exchanges and practice teaching assignments. Dennis said that the university also serves an unknown number of ELL who have come to Canada from other countries as young teenagers, who have adapted to the culture, but who still need help dealing with native language interference.

Northern connections, Dennis pointed out, are constant, as the university shares ESL resources with Canadore College, our local Near North District School Board, which offers ESL in one of our high schools, our Literacy Coalition, and city groups such as the North Bay Newcomer Network, all interested in the adjustment of new immigrants. Dennis also explained that a Community Service Learning project based at the university, as part of its connection to and support of the community, had created the Biidaaban Learning Circle which offered homework help to children of local Cree families who had relocated from the James Bay area to study at the college or university. Tutors from

Nipissing's Education Program work with the ELL children in partnership with community associations such as the Amelia Rising Sexual Assault Centre of Nipissing, the Claude Ranger Mental Health Clinic, the Cree School Board, Nipissing Secondary School, Nipissing and Parry Sound Children's Aid society, Nipissing Family Program, North Bay Literacy Council, and the North Bay Public Library. As well, Nipissing has made connections with WUSC (the World University Service of Canada) to sponsor refugee students from Rwanda and the Congo.

Added to all these connections with various community and world organizations, the university's Diversity Committee strives to fight prejudice both on the campus and in the city by setting up information booths and by offering presentations and debates open to the community.

Dennis revealed that the university also supported and assisted the city in their vision of creating a centralized Newcomer Centre where new Canadians choosing North Bay could receive information on local support systems including English language assistance in all its forms, both public and private. The university also highlights the presentations of visiting international students as they share information about their countries, their cultures and their arts. Much of this sharing culminates in the yearly International Food Festival held at the university every February.

The net result, Dennis concluded, of all this plethora of ESL-related activities and community connections were the wonderful success stories that, as Dennis coined, "energized us all." At this point, Dennis told a story about the experiences of one Chinese immigrant, Tian Ying (Emily Tian) who came from China four years ago, following, in trust and love, her husband and his dream. She left behind a promising career as a physics teacher and all her family and friends to enter a strange new culture and entirely new language. After four years of struggle, leaning on the resources of the city, the school board, the college, and finally, the university, Emily is now employed as a science and math support co-ordinator at the university itself. Her husband has found a job as a computer programmer; they have a new house, two babies, and many friends. Emily's life changed through connections.

Dennis stated that he was telling this story of one individual because he wanted to illustrate that Nipissing University was living the conference's theme. "For us," he said, "connections are not just a theme or an expression, but a living reality in a university where faculty can chat with their students after class and even remember their names."

After continuing with more details and statistics about ELL groups, and most particularly the Aboriginal population Nipissing serves in the North, Dennis thanked TESL Ontario for allowing him the opportunity to outline some of the connections, programs and successes of ESL in one particular region that Nipissing University serves.

Joan Reynolds, Chair of the Language Studies Department, at George Brown College, was the final speaker of the panel.

Joan first addressed the role of colleges in the integration of internationally trained immigrants into the workplace. She introduced the audience to some interesting statistics. First of all, few might realize, but out of every 100,000 immigrants, 60,000 bring either degrees or diplomas into Canada. Yet, most will still require some form of upgrading in order to enter the workforce. Colleges play an integral part of this upgrading.

Ontario has 24 English colleges and 2 French colleges, serving a total of 200 communities. Currently, there are approximately 150,000 full-time students and 380,000 part-time students registered in colleges. Out of these student bodies, 15% (and even larger in specific areas & programs) do not have either English or French as their first language. Interestingly, less than 1/2 of high school graduates continue into any post-secondary education. At George Brown, 60% of its students are not directly entered from high school and 25% of students are born outside of Canada.

Joan then gave a brief analysis of these students coming from outside of Canada. To begin with, these students are already well educated, but, unfortunately, they are now drastically under-employed in their newly adopted country. Two-thirds are female and they have returned to school in order to improve their work opportunities. They are confident of their ability to succeed. The barriers they face are time, money, and a lack of recognition for the training and skills they have already acquired.

According to Joan, colleges have created several initiatives to support immigrant integration through:

- Enhanced language training
- LINC
- Mentoring
- Resource Centres funded by Services Canada
- Bridging

Example of a specific language training, the college teachers bridging project:

-Rationale: grew from an emerging need

-Eligibility: credentials and teaching experience in home country

-Interview

-CLB 7+ for entry

-Preferred areas of teaching: hospitality, technology and community services

Components:

8 weeks of higher level language training

Introduction to Workplace and Teaching techniques

Online component

Career coaching in partnership with Job Start

Work place experience – classroom observations – 14 weeks, 3 hours a week teaching internship

- Group was varied, representing many countries – 21 students who were very highly qualified (8 had Phds)
- Developed networks and contacts they needed

Joan cited another important college initiative for integration into the workplace:

- Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) Phase 2
- Projects include the design, development and testing of systems, processing of tools for the continuance of services needed by internationally trained immigrants:
- Assessment
- Administrative process
- Language assessment
- Credential assessment and advanced standing
- Employment preparation
- Competency assessment
- Continuing education and part-time studies

Finishing her presentation, Joan then summed up some of the ways in which Ontario colleges collaborate and make connections across the province:

- Regular meetings are held for the members of the Ontario Colleges Heads of Language Committee and for the ESL sub-committee
- Actively participate in the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC)
- Partnering with other colleges in ELT-funded program delivery

After Joan's presentation, a question period was opened and developed as follows:

Question: Is funding for a Bridging exit required?

Answer: For entry, the CLB test is used. Meeting CLB-defined outcomes successfully through performance based tasks defines exit requirements.

Question: What is the situation of students transitioning into post-secondary?

Answer: We did a study to assess the communication needs of high school graduates. We found 37% of high school graduates need some form of remedial English. The range of needs is complex and there is not one easy remediation. Remedial courses are designed to support a particular program, but some students are too low and even remedial courses are not enough to help them.

Question: We have students in LINC programs who are having serious transportation and work problems. Also, adults don't understand what is happening to these elementary and high school students.

Answer: We do need inservice to connect what is happening to children who have ESL.

At this point, Eleanor Good offered the information that a learning conference took place in her area annually. At this conference adult education teachers were brought together

with elementary and secondary educators. Eleanor felt that this was a good model but we needed to keep working to improve these connections.

Question: What are successful countries doing? What results are they having with amalgamating the two groups?

Answer: They work very closely with their governments.

Question: Is that because education is a federal responsibility in many other countries (such as Australia) but here it provincial?

Answer: Yes, it is an element but not an obstacle that can not be got around.

Question: How are children integrated into the regular school system here? I have a friend from Russia whose child was put 2 years behind. What is the policy?

Answer: Today, children learning English are put in a class with their age-appropriate peers.

Question: They are no longer held back?

Answer: No, we realize how important it is for them to be with their peers, and we realize that they may actually need 6 to 7 years to actually catch up to the new language. Also, it is difficult to know if other factors are at play while the language remains a barrier.

Question: There seems to be a problem with funding. Do we have a problem understanding that second language training is a responsibility of the government? Is it not the need that should be designated so that we get long-term funding?

Answer: We are moving forward.

- The province will be a part of the new ELT Conference in the new year.
- LINC sharing
- CONTINUING EDUCATION sharing

The second annual panel discussion ended at that point as audience and speakers then mingled for informal discussion. It seems that this last question and answer hit the tone of the conference most accurately: As long as we make every effort to support each other, share and connect, we are moving forward!