



*Merging and Emerging Pathways through Language*

# 41st Annual TESL Ontario Conference

A CONFERENCE FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

EIGHTH ANNUAL PANEL DISCUSSION  
Integrating Pathways to Language Learning  
October 25, 2013

# Eighth Annual Panel Discussion: Integrating Pathways to Language Learning

- Panel: **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 and Immigration (MCI)  
**Pauline McNaughton**, Manager, Adult Education Policy Unit, Ontario Ministry of Education (MEDU)  
**Lillian Thomas**, Senior Advisor, Language Policy and Programs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)
- Moderator: **Renate Tilson**, Executive Director, TESL Ontario

## Overview

Four government ministries are involved in delivering language learning services to Ontario's immigrants. Their services improve the lives of newcomers in multiple ways. However, there is room for improvement in the overall settlement system. Immigrant learners face a confusing array of program options and often make choices that prolong their entry into the labor force and forestall their socioeconomic assimilation.

The ministries recognize a mandate to integrate their services and make the most expeditious pathways to individual learners' goals more visible. They know that will require closer ties among them, greater policy alignment, improved information sharing, and more collaboration on joint projects and initiatives. The good news is that productive change is coming: in reshaping their programming for the future, the ministries are launching multiple initiatives to address these challenges.

## Context

The panelists, each representing a different government entity with language-related programming for newcomers to Ontario, discussed their new initiatives and joint projects, as well as the vision and objectives that guide their work.

## Federal CIC

Lillian Thomas explained the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) recent program and policy changes and its priorities going forward, with an eye toward how CIC initiatives affect language training.

- CIC policy shifts are changing the immigrant profile, and providing responsive settlement services is a high priority.**

As conference attendees know, CIC policies have shifted in recent years in ways that influence who immigrates to Canada, the skills they bring, and the services provided to them. Responding to the evolving immigrant profile with appropriate settlement services has been a preoccupation at CIC. Indeed, bringing stakeholders together to explore how best to service the evolving client profile through responsive settlement program delivery was the purpose

of CIC's National Settlement Conference, held in Ottawa on November 14–15, 2013.

Four priorities guide the Ministry's settlement services efforts:

1. Partnerships with stakeholders.
2. Building nationwide consistency in programming.
3. Strengthening placement and assessment outcomes.
4. Diversifying and broadening access to services.

Since amending citizenship regulations in November 2012, CIC has unveiled multiple changes to existing programs as well as introduced new initiatives, some launched already and some planned for 2014. The table on the following page provides an overview of new CIC initiatives in its three major service areas: immigration, settlement, and citizenship.

A common thread among the program changes is strengthened evidence of proficiency in English or French in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). CIC considers language proficiency to be an important criterion for both immigration and citizenship. There is a strong, well-documented correlation between language mastery and newcomers' socioeconomic assimilation. For example, Federal Skilled Worker Program applicants who receive maximum language points earn 38% more on average than those without high language proficiency.

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*"A common thread to modernization [is] language proficiency. Language requirements have been introduced or strengthened in the economic stream for immigration and in citizenship."*

— Lillian Thomas

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- CIC's language-related priorities for the future depend critically on partnerships.**

CIC has four language-related priorities on which it will continue to focus over coming years:

1. *Settlement and language will transition to a national program.* In part, this will be achieved via resumed federal settlement services in B.C. and Manitoba; in part, it will be achieved via program standardization

CIC Initiative	What's New?	Why?	Language Learning Implications	Effective Dates
<b>Immigration</b>				
<b>Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) -- Changed</b>	Changes to points grid give greater emphasis to language proficiency and age.	Language proficiency and age are important to economic success and rapid integration. Research confirms that language is a key factor in employment rates and earnings.	Of the 6 selection criteria in the points system, language accounts for 28 out of 100 points. <b>New minimum language threshold:</b> CLB/NCLC 7 in all 4 skills.	May 4, 2013
<b>Education Credential Assessment (ECA) —New Part of FSWP</b>	FSWP education points are based on the ECA report, which determines the authenticity of foreign educational credentials and their equivalency to Canadian credentials.	The ECA gives immigrants clarity about how employers will regard their education credentials. It helps employers equate applicants' foreign credentials to Canadian educational standards.	In regulated professions, separate language testing may be required as part of licensing requirements.	May 4, 2013
<b>Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP) – New Program</b>	In year one, 3,000 applications accepted for specific trades (43 occupations). Program criteria include meeting the language threshold.	Program targets serious labor shortages in parts of Canada. Purposes of language requirement are two-fold: 1) ensure health and safety standards are upheld; 2) promote socioeconomic integration.	<b>Minimum language thresholds:</b> --CLB/NCLC 5 for listening and speaking. --CLB/NCLC 4 for reading and writing.	January 2013
<b>Canadian Experience Class (CEC) – Changed Program</b>	Changes in 2013 include: 1) reduced work experience requirement; 2) standardization of eligibility requirements for all; and 3) reset language thresholds.	Program allows those with Canadian work experience to stay permanently in the country. One objective: retain those with intermediate language skills in a skilled job.	<b>New minimal language thresholds:</b> --CLB/NCLC 7 for managerial and professional occupations. --CLB/NCLC 5 for technical occupations.	January 2013
<b>Expression of Interest (EOI) – Planned New Immigration Intake Model</b>	EOI will become a required pre-application stage for several CIC programs. Phase one of EOI will likely encompass FSWP, FSTP, and CEC.	EOI model will make the immigration system more responsive to labor market demand. It will create a pool of select candidates who best meet immediate and future economic needs.	Proficiency in language will play an important role in the new EOI model.	Launch expected in 2014
<b>Settlement</b>				
<b>National Settlement Program – Changes</b>	Resumed management of federally funded settlement programs in Manitoba and B.C.  New partnership models are being developed with provinces including Ontario.	Opportunities for the sharing of innovative programming in Manitoba and B.C.  Building consistency in the national settlement program across provinces.	Programs to be shared include English At Work. Areas for future collaboration include: 1) creating national consistency in LINC; 2) provincial issuance of LINC certificates; 3) Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA); and 4) New National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines.	<b>Manitoba:</b> April 2013  <b>B.C.:</b> April 2014
<b>National Settlement Conference</b>	New opportunity to bring stakeholders together to discuss the new settlement vision.	To explore the changing client profile, responsive program delivery, partnerships.	Language is a big part of the new vision for settlement.	November 13–15, 2013
<b>iCARE – New System</b>	Immigrant Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE) to replace the performance measurement system for citizenship and immigration.	Improved settlement system incorporates online training, webinars, and monthly check-ins by iCARE staff.	Components for January 2014 release include language training and language assessment.	Gradual phase-in
<b>Citizenship</b>				
<b>Amended Citizenship Regulations</b>	New approach to assessing language proficiency for citizenship purposes.	To ensure language proficiency.	<b>Benchmark:</b> CLB/NCLC 4 in speaking and listening (or its equivalent).	November 2012

across provinces. Standardization initiatives may include transitioning from broad usage of LINC levels to CLB levels, streamlining assessment approaches, and updating CLB literacy benchmarks.

2. *Placement and outcomes assessment will be strengthened.* This objective is being accomplished through:

- New national language placement and progression guidelines.
- Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA), an in-class language assessment approach in which students and teachers collaboratively set learning goals. PBLA is aligned with the CLB framework and designed to bring teachers to common standards of practice.
- A CLB-based standardized test for language proficiency, the Milestones (or “BTR”) test. Numerous uses for the test are being piloted.

3. *The reach of language services will be broadened to include diverse online options.* Greater access of

#### Directions Forward: Language Program, 2013 - 2016



services will be achieved through online initiatives including:

- Tutella, the online community of practice for language instructors.
- An e-learning strategy currently being developed. One component is the Learn IT to Teach project that provides Ontario teachers with the tools to explore blended learning approaches.

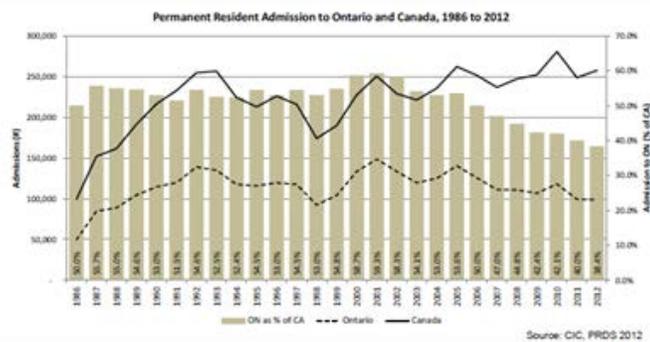
4. *CIC will continue to partner with fellow language-training stakeholders in federal and provincial governments.* Examples of effective partnerships to date include with MCI Ontario, notably on the CLARS program, as well as CIC’s consultations through the Newcomer Language Advisory Body (NLAB).

## Ontario MCI (Ministry of Citizenship)

Mourad Mardikian discussed the state of immigration to Ontario and the initiatives of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI), particularly in language training.

### Ontario MCI is focused on attracting highly skilled immigrants to the province and helping them succeed.

Ontario has long received the highest share of Canadian immigrants of any province, and still does. However, both Ontario’s share of immigrants (38% in 2012) and number (98,826 in 2012) have been declining steadily since 2001. In 2012, Ontario’s share of Canadian immigrants was the lowest in over 30 years.



### The Decline in Immigration to Ontario Continues

In the past, 60%–70% of Ontarian immigrants were skilled workers. This has dropped to percentages in the high 40s to low 50s. To address this trend, MCI launched a new immigration strategy in November 2012 focused on attracting highly skilled workers and their families. The goals are to:

- Build a stronger, globally connected Ontario economy.
- Help newcomers achieve success.
- Foster welcoming and diverse communities.

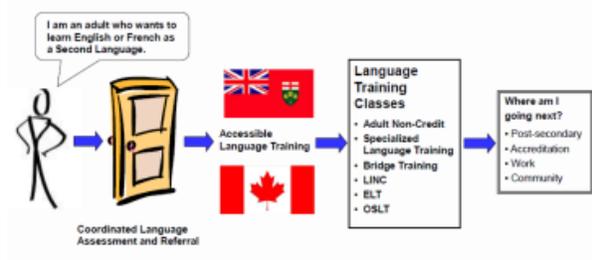
To those ends, MCI has implemented activities targeting:

- Enhanced labor market forecasting.
- Improved understanding of employers’ labor needs and challenges.
- Enhanced employer engagement in integration of immigrants.
- Evaluation by an external party of gaps and opportunities in MCI’s interventions and investments.
- Improved information and referral tools for attracting and recruiting qualified immigrants.
- Exploring/developing initiatives to increase Francophone immigration.

### Many of MCI’s language-related initiatives are collaborative ventures with other provincial Ministries and the federal CIC.

MCI’s vision for immigrants seeking adult language training is a process of simplicity and ease accessing the appropriate services. Partnerships are important to implementing that vision.

## Ontario's vision for adult language training



MCI collaborates with the Ministry of Education (MEDU) and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to coordinate various language training programs and is working with the CIC on systems to clarify what can be a confusing landscape of language training options for newcomers:

- *The Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS)*. Currently being piloted and eventually to be rolled out province-wide, CLARS will provide immigrants a single point of access to language training, both federal and provincial programs, as well as a consistent assessment approach. Newcomers will visit a CLARS center, take a language assessment, and be presented with course options for which they are eligible.
- *History of Assessment Referral and Training System (HARTS)*. "The heart of CLARS," said Mr. Mardikian, "is HARTS." This is a common, shared learner and course database tracking system. A big component is a course template that eventually all language training providers in Ontario will use. It will allow CLARS center staff, sitting one-on-one with clients, to access to all of the relevant information on courses for which they are eligible, to help clients choose among available options.
- *Other CIC pilots and programs*. MCI is participating in the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA), implementation of national language placement and progression guidelines, among other CIC initiatives.

MCI will be working on several other language-related initiatives in 2014, including:

- Introducing Ontario curriculum guidelines.
- Piloting a program for specialized employment-focused language training.
- Working on bridge training projects to help internationally trained immigrants become licensed and accredited in Canada.

*"We're working behind the scenes to better coordinate our programs, improve pathways for participants, and make sure everybody has clarity as to whether they are in the right place."*

— Mourad Mardikian

## Ontario's Immigrants & Language Learners

- Of the 98,826 Ontarian immigrants in 2012, 30% self-reported that they spoke no English or French, while 60% said they spoke some English or French.
- The most common learner profile in Ontario's ESL or FSL programs is a woman from China, aged 30–44, with a university education. (China is the top source country.)
- Refugee claimants have dropped from 22% of the province's immigrants in 2011 to 14% in 2012 and further declines are expected.
- Some 50% of participants in the provincial programs are eligible for federal programs as well.
- Learners' top three reasons for taking ESL: 1) to improve their daily life; 2) to prepare for the labor market; and 3) to prepare for further education.

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

Krista Madani described MTCU's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program.

- **Literacy and basic skills training is integral to achieving MTCU's vision of building Ontario's workforce capabilities.**

MTCU's vision is that Ontario will have the most highly educated and skilled people in the world, improving the province's economic advantages and its citizens' quality of life. The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program contributes to this vision by delivering literacy and basic skills training to adults who test below Level 3 on the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALSS) scale (comparable to Essential Skills Level 3). Learners may have various barriers to learning.

The LBS program helps learners gain the literacy and basic skills needed for employment, further education, and independence. The focus is on *using* skills in practical ways. Students are taught how to find and use information, communicate ideas, work with numbers, use digital technology, manage their learning, and engage with others. Thus, the program is learner centered, competency based, goal directed, and transitions oriented.

Additionally, learners are provided with appropriate referrals to additional supports; these services are coordinated, in alignment with Ontario's goal of providing a seamless adult education and training system.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, LBS launched two change initiatives in recent years:

1. *The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF)*. OALCF, implemented in 2012, strengthens the LBS program by providing standards for service provision. It includes a competency-based curriculum framework. The organizing principle of the OALCF is

the learner's goal path. Learners transition through competency levels to achieve their goals. The framework clarifies for learners and practitioners the connections between literacy development and tasks that learners perform in work, learning, and community settings.

2. *The LBS Performance Management Framework (PMF)*. The PMF will help service providers be more effective, efficient, and customer focused, achieving a high standard of service quality. Learner data will be entered into Employment Ontario IT system (Information System-Case Management System, or EOIS-CaMS), and statistical reports will reflect effectiveness, efficiency, and customer service measures. Phase 1 was rolled out in 2012–13; the framework will be fully implemented in 2016–17.

LBS service providers are the face of the program, providing instruction and coordination directly to learners. But a second set of organizations, the LBS support organizations, exists as well. They support the service providers with research, advocacy, and other services. More information about these and the LBS program can be found in *Literacy in Ontario* on the Essential Skills Ontario [website](#).

## Ontario MEDU (Ministry of Education)

MEDU's Pauline McNaughton discussed the need for more partnerships and efforts focused on expediting immigrant learners' paths to their goals.

- **The settlement system requires greater inter-ministry partnership and collaboration to improve the efficiency of learner pathways.**

Half of the learners in Ontario's adult credit programs are immigrant learners, so MEDU is a settlement services provider by default. Even highly educated immigrants with foreign-earned university degrees take adult for-credit courses to earn Canadian high school diplomas, as that is the credential many believe will open doors to employment opportunities. The Canadian high school diploma serves as evidence of language proficiency as well as a particular level of education attainment.

However, repeating high school is far from ideal for many of these individuals. An October 2013 report, [Non-Traditional Post-Secondary Education Pathways of Adult Learners in the Toronto District School Board](#), found that adult learners face multiple barriers, including time and financial constraints and childcare responsibilities. Immigrants face these as well as secondary challenges related to grappling with a new culture and often a new language.

The fact that so many immigrants enter Ontario's adult education system suggests flaws in the settlement system that is supposedly aimed at helping these immigrants attain appropriate employment in the least possible time.

*"There are real problems in a system where highly educated immigrants are going to high school, and there's a real need for us all to talk about that."*

— Pauline McNaughton

Back in 2005, a conclusion of the study *Ontario Learns: Strengthening Our Adult Education System* was that "more work is required to create the kind of seamless learner pathways that take learners on the shortest and most effective route to their goal." That is still the case. A 2012 report, *Exploring Learner Pathways*, by the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy found that "misinformation or gaps in information with respect to other programs and their eligibility criteria were found to be a reality... in LBS, language training, settlement, and OW programs." It also found that managers of ESL, LBS, LINC, and EDU courses "rarely if ever sit down together to discuss learner transitions across programs."

MEDU feels it is critical that the three Ontario ministries involved in immigrant learning (MCI, MTCU, MEDU) continue to communicate with each other and with CIC via MCI to align programs and policies. In particular, they need to:

- *Enhance the "front doors"*; e.g., better coordination of the intake, needs assessment, and referral services among the three ministries.
- Improve the pathways for those clients who require services from more than one ministry; e.g., those whose goals include further education and employment.

Mr. Mardikian pointed out that the CLARS and HARTS joint projects of the CIC and MCI, currently being piloted, will advance the province.

However, providers of ESL and FSL programs at the local school board level needn't wait for government to implement solutions, Ms. McNaughton said. They can partner with local organizations on innovative ways to provide learners with visible, efficient, effective pathways to their goals.

The Lakehead school board took such initiative, and MEDU helped to fund it: [www.netan.ca](http://www.netan.ca), is an online resource to aid practitioners in making appropriate learner referrals. A Metro Toronto website, [www.oklearn.ca](http://www.oklearn.ca), offers another good model. It points learners to appropriate pathways as they identify their situation and goals.



## Biographies

### 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 and Immigration (MCI)*

Mourad Mardikian has been with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration'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 and Immigration. 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.

### Lillian Thomas

*Senior Advisor, Language Policy and Programs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)*

Lillian Thomas joined the department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2001. While working for the newcomer Integration Branch as a senior policy and program advisor, Ms. Thomas has been responsible for files such as the branch wide Report on Plans and Priorities, Client Centered Policies for Women and Refugees, Enhanced Language Training, Sector Capacity Development Review, and Support Services for settlement including for the introduction of the new Care for Newcomer Children service. She has worked as a CIC Region interim manager in Ottawa where she managed services in immigration, citizenship and settlement. As part of the Language unit within the Integration Branch, Ms. Thomas has taken on responsibility for the development of the new Milestones Test, is HQ advisor for the Co-ordinated Language Assessment and Referral System pilot in Ontario, and is providing support to several emerging files in the language area.



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