STAGE 2

Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework

STAGE 2: DETERMINE FOCUS
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### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT GUIDE: STAGE 2

#### Stage 2: Determine Focus

**Summary:** Determining a focus for your program helps you develop a responsive and effective curriculum that guides instructors in meeting the needs of your target audience and the community. A clearly articulated program focus guides decision-making in the remaining stages of curriculum development. The framework provides guiding principles in four ESL Literacy program contexts: *Community Orientation and Participation, Family, Employment, and Educational Preparation.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development tasks</th>
<th>Process and guiding questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Review the Alberta program contexts | Consider the context of adult ESL Literacy in Alberta.  
  • Will your program address one of the existing program contexts?  
  • Will it bridge two (or more) categories? If so, which aspects of each will our program address?  
  Refer to the guiding principles for your program context as you develop your purpose, goals and approach. |
| Determine purpose                   | Seek input from stakeholders to help determine the purpose of your program. Describe the general intent and broad aims of your program.  
  • Why does the program exist?  
  Refer to the guiding principles for setting program purpose and goals. |
| Determine goals                     | Seek input from stakeholders to help determine the goals of your program. Describe the specific aims of your program, related to achieving the purpose.  
  • What will you do in the program to achieve the purpose?  
  Refer to the guiding principles for setting program purpose and goals. |
| Determine approach                  | Seek input from stakeholders to help determine the program approach. Describe the path the program will take in order to achieve the purpose and goals.  
  • What do you know and believe about language and literacy acquisition, supporting and teaching learners and the roles of stakeholders? |
| Refer to the purpose, goals and approach as you make decisions about curriculum. | Use the statements of purpose, goals and approach to guide the rest of your curriculum development process. These statements will influence decisions in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes, Stage 4: Integrate Assessment and Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability. |
STAGE 2: DETERMINE FOCUS

Determining your program’s focus is an important second stage in the curriculum development process. It is based on an understanding of ESL literacy, the environment in which your program operates, as well as the needs of your learners and the wider community (outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs). A clearly articulated program focus influences the remaining stages of curriculum development: Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes, Stage 4: Integrate Assessment and Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability.

This section of the curriculum framework aims to help you clarify and determine the overarching focus of your program, curriculum and instruction.

In establishing the focus of your program, it is important to define three components:

- Program purpose: **Why** does the program exist?
- Program goals: **What** will the program do to achieve the purpose?
- Program approach: **How** will the program achieve its goals and purpose?

In effective programs, the purpose, goals and approach are tied directly to the needs of learners and the community (as outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs). This ensures that programs remain accountable to the needs of learners and the community.

When a program has a clearly defined focus:

- learners’ needs are kept at the forefront of curriculum design
- learning outcomes are tied to the needs of learners and the community (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes)
- teaching and learning expectations for the program are clearly communicated with stakeholders (learners, instructors, funders, community)
- the program can demonstrate how it achieves its purpose (see Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability)
In this section, you will find:

- descriptions of program purpose, goals and approach
- Program Principles for defining your program’s focus
- Classroom Concept: Know your Program. Guidelines for aligning with a program’s focus and establishing a focus for your classroom
- descriptions, guiding principles and helpful resources for four program contexts in Alberta:
  - community orientation and participation ESL literacy
  - family ESL literacy
  - employment ESL literacy
  - educational preparation ESL literacy
- a summary
- helpful resources
Effective ESL literacy programs maintain a strong connection between the purpose, goals and approach of the program and the needs of the target audience (see Stage 1: Understand Needs). There are a variety of terms used to describe purpose, goals and approach in the fields of adult education, adult ESL and adult ESL literacy. The following section clarifies the way the terms purpose, goals and approach are used in this framework. The examples provided are adapted from one adult ESL literacy program at Bow Valley College, in Calgary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central question</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Example** | The purpose of this program is to address the needs of ESL literacy learners with limited education in order to:  
- improve their English language and literacy skills  
- help them develop strategies, skills and socio-cultural competence for living and working in Canada |
### Program Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Statements of the specific aims of a program, related to achieving the purpose (also referred to as <em>program objectives</em>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central question</td>
<td><em>What</em> will the program do to achieve its purpose?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Example | The program will assist learners to **improve their English language and literacy skills** by increasing learners’:
| | • reading and writing proficiency  
| | • oral communication proficiency  
| | • strategies for language acquisition and use  
| | The program will assist learners to **develop strategies, skills and socio-cultural competence for living and working in Canada** by building skills for:
| | • transferring learning to daily life  
| | • navigating systems  
| | • participating in communities  
| | • finding and keeping jobs |

### Program Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>A description of the path the program will take in order to achieve the purpose and goals; includes a description of the program’s philosophy and assumptions about teaching and learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central question</td>
<td><em>How</em> will the program achieve its goals and purpose?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>In a highly supported print-rich environment, the program will meet learners’ needs and help them achieve learning outcomes by integrating skills through theme-based instruction. Content and materials will be accurate and current, reflecting the needs and interests of learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROGRAM PRINCIPLES
How can we apply these ideas in our program?

Needs assessment (outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs) is an essential starting point in curriculum development. The information from needs assessments gives programs an overall picture of the context for the program, as well as the needs of learners and the community. The nature and range of needs will vary depending on your context. You will need to establish which needs your program can realistically address. This involves determining how your program will connect to other a) programs or contexts and b) learners’ needs and goals. This is the process of determining your program’s focus, and involves establishing your program’s purpose, goals and approach.

Set your Program’s Purpose and Goals

The same principles apply to developing both a program’s purpose and its goals. This chart outlines these guiding principles.

Guiding Principles for Setting Program Purpose and Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AN EFFECTIVE STATEMENT OF PROGRAM PURPOSE AND GOALS...</th>
<th>IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL LITERACY PROGRAMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>is achievable</em></td>
<td>A program’s purpose and goals are most effective when they are based on a realistic assessment of what can be accomplished. Having a clearly defined target audience and an understanding of constraints (e.g. funding, timelines, etc.) can help programs set a purpose and goals that are achievable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>is concrete</em></td>
<td>To be effective, a program’s purpose and goals need to be measureable and demonstrable. This allows stakeholders to determine whether the purpose and goals have been achieved, and to what degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sets parameters</em></td>
<td>Individual programs cannot effectively address all the needs of all learners. Effective programs identify their target audience and set a purpose and goals that relate to the needs of this target audience. Carefully consider and define what the program prepares learners for.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AN EFFECTIVE STATEMENT OF PROGRAM PURPOSE AND GOALS:

reflects learners’ needs
(See Stage 1: Understanding Needs for more information)

is based on input from, and is reviewed by, stakeholders

articulates to external standards

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL LITERACY PROGRAMS

In order to create a program purpose and goals that reflect learners’ needs, consider the following areas:

- the learner and community needs assessments conducted for your program
- the settlement process continuum: Which settlement needs are most pressing to the learners in the target audience?
- the wider context of ESL literacy in Alberta: Will the program address one of the four main contexts for adult ESL literacy in Alberta?
  - community orientation and participation ESL literacy
  - family ESL literacy
  - employment ESL literacy
  - educational preparation ESL literacy

Input from instructors, learners and other stakeholders (e.g. community agencies, educators, employers, funders) ensures that the program purpose and goals reflect learners’ needs, classroom realities and the community in which the program operates.

External standards influence a program’s purpose and goals. Consider standards such as:

- entrance requirements for further education/training contexts
- workplace expectations and requirements
- the Government of Alberta Adult EAL/ESL Continuum (Government of Alberta, n.d)
- the Citizenship and Immigration Canada logic model (CIC, 2008)
- Canadian Language Benchmarks

Adapted from Caffarella (2002); Holmes, et al (2001); ATESL (2009)
Support Learners’ Goal-Setting

When a program has a clearly defined purpose and goals, it is better able to support learners in the process of setting and achieving their own learning goals. In many adult education contexts, it is assumed that learners are driven by their own learning goals. In ESL literacy programs, however, it may not be possible to assume this. Many learners in ESL literacy programs are unfamiliar with the process of setting learning goals and managing their educational steps. Effective ESL literacy programs build in support and structure for this aspect of adult education.

One effective way of building in this support is to provide advisors as part of the program team, in addition to integrating goal-setting into classroom instruction. Advisors can meet regularly with learners throughout the term to help them set short-term and long-term goals. They collaborate with instructors and work with learners to develop individual learning plans that outline the major steps in achieving long-term goals. This helps learners have a realistic understanding of what is involved in achieving their goals. Advisors can help learners understand the academic or training requirements for the goals they want to achieve, as well as the opportunities and challenges learners may face along the way.

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for more information on setting and managing goals.

Describe your Program’s Approach

Beliefs and assumptions about the teaching and learning process inform curriculum development and instruction whether or not they are formally articulated. Taking the time to think about and describe these underlying assumptions is an important step in curriculum development. It ensures that all stakeholders (instructors, administrators, learners and funders) have a fundamental understanding of how the program aims to achieve its purpose and goals.

The following guiding questions are provided to help in describing your program’s approach.

Guiding Questions

As a program, what do we know and believe about:

- how adults acquire language and literacy?
- how to best support learners with interrupted formal education? What is the most effective ways to teach learners with interrupted formal education?
• What are the roles of learners, instructors, administrators and community members in the teaching and learning process?

When these beliefs and principles are clearly described and based on input from all stakeholders, they can be used to guide all aspects of curriculum design and implementation: selecting learning outcomes, integrating assessment, the learning experiences provided and the teaching methods used (Holmes, et al, 2001).

Curriculum development is not a once-only event. In order to remain responsive and effective, programs need to have a regular process of curriculum revision and renewal. A program’s purpose, goals and approach need to be examined as part of this review process.

See Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability for a discussion of the curriculum review process.
CLASSE ROOM CONCEPT: KNOW YOUR PROGRAM

How can I apply these ideas in my classroom?

Effective instructors understand the program of which they are a part. They learn about and contribute to the development of the program’s purpose, goals and approach. Instructors play an important role in informing program goals and ensuring that learners understand what the program offers and prepares them for.

Understand your Program’s Focus

If you teach in a program that has a clearly articulated purpose, goals and approach, it is helpful to develop your understanding of the following aspects of the program:

- the target audience
- expectations and levels in the program
- opportunities and supports available to learners

The Target Audience

Effective instruction is based on a solid understanding of the target audience. Understanding the profile of learners in the program can help you provide focused instruction. Taking the time to learn about the barriers learners face and their learning needs, both individually and collectively, will help you design more effective learning experiences.

See Stage 1: Understand Needs for more information on determining a program’s target audience.

Expectations and Levels in the Program

Familiarize yourself with your program as a whole. This involves understanding:

- your program’s purpose, goals and approach
- entry and exit requirements
- learning expectations for the level you teach
- the learning outcomes for the level before and after yours (this helps you understand where learners are coming from, and what you are preparing them for)
- transition points within the program

Opportunities and Supports Available to Learners

As an instructor, you may be the learners’ main contact person with the program, the institution and the wider community. You can support learners by connecting them with people and opportunities that address learners’ diverse needs.
Familiarize yourself with:

- support and opportunities within the program and institution, e.g. interpreters, conversation clubs, learning resources, counseling, tutoring, financial assistance, volunteering and work opportunities
- support and opportunities within the community, e.g. subsidized housing and daycare, affordable services, food, clothing, employment assistance, community events

It is important to know your own limitations and focus on connecting learners with people or agencies that can provide specialized support.

In programs where advisors and community agencies help learners create individual learning plans, it is important to address these in the classroom (see support learners’ goal-setting, in Program Principles for this stage).

Build upon what the advisors and learners have set as the learning plan by:

- referring to it regularly
- helping learners reflect on their accomplishments and challenges
- helping learners develop the language for talking about their goals and their learning processes

Establish a Classroom Focus

Establish a classroom focus. Programs differ in the emphasis they place on developing goals, purpose and approach. In some cases, you may need to develop these for your own class. Establishing a purpose, goals and approach helps you to plan and teach more intentionally.

Consider:

- **Purpose:** Why does the class exist? What am I preparing learners for?
- **Goals:** What are the goals of the class? What skills will learners need to succeed in the context I am preparing them for? Which learning outcomes relate to these goals?
- **Approach:** How am I going to achieve the goals and purpose? What do I know and believe about effective teaching and learning in ESL literacy?

Involving learners in determining purpose, goals and approach for a class can increase learners’ motivation and their chances for success. When involving learners in this process, be sure to help learners gain realistic expectations of what can be accomplished. When you involve learners in this process of setting goals and learning outcomes for the class, we recommend the following:

- Use the proficiency descriptors provided in this framework (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes) for a realistic understanding of the steps involved in achieving learning outcomes.
• See the key text types (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes) for the recommended
kinds of texts that learners will face in community orientation, family, employment and
educational preparation ESL literacy contexts.

• Use level-appropriate language and provide visual supports. Suggestions for
investigating learners’ needs are provided in the Classroom Concept of Stage 1:
Understanding Needs.

Instructors should collaborate with learners to set individual goals.

Supporting learners to set and achieve learning goals:
• helps learners experience success
• helps learners understand their learning pathways
• promotes continuous learning

This support needs to be consistent throughout a program. Integrate regular attention
to short, medium, and long-term goal setting as part of classroom instruction. Encourage
learners to set realistic goals and provide support for achieving them. Provide regular
opportunities in class to set, discuss and reflect on learning goals, helping learners revise
those that are too vague or ambitious. See Habits of Mind: Motivation, in Stage 3: Setting
Learning Outcomes for more information.

For more information and resources on supporting learners’ goal-setting, see
“Goal-Setting and Self-Assessment” in Chapter 11 of Learning for LIFE: An ESL
Literacy Handbook.
PROGRAM CONTEXTS

The purpose and goals of a program will be defined in relation to the needs that have been identified through the needs assessment process, outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs. In Alberta, there are currently four general program contexts for ESL literacy programming:

1. community orientation and participation ESL literacy
2. family ESL literacy
3. employment ESL literacy
4. educational preparation ESL literacy

Each program context addresses needs related to the settlement continuum stages: acclimatization, adaptation and integration (outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs).

Descriptions and guiding principles for each of the program contexts are provided in this section. For each program context, you will find:

- a description of the context
- guiding principles for developing programs and curricula in that context
- suggested themes (except educational preparation)
- helpful resources

Use the information provided in these program contexts to guide you in determining the focus for your program.

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for key text types. These are the recommended kinds of texts to focus on in each ESL literacy program context.
Community Orientation and Participation ESL Literacy

Programs with a focus on community orientation and participation aim to help learners develop literacy and language skills for everyday life in Alberta. These ESL literacy programs focus on providing information and developing skills related to survival and meeting basic needs. These programs also aim to help learners move beyond survival by building skills for participating in and contributing to the wider community.

Like all ESL literacy programs, community orientation and participation programs address needs related to the settlement continuum, as outlined in Stage 1: Understand Needs. In this framework, settlement is understood as a continuum, with newcomers moving through three main stages: acclimatization, adaptation, and integration. In community orientation and participation programs, the main focus is on addressing needs related to the acclimatization and adaptation stages of settlement.

Acclimatization
In this stage of settlement, learners are becoming familiar with the language, culture, people and environment of Alberta. Learners’ needs in this stage relate to accessing the basics needed for life in Alberta, such as food, shelter, clothing, health services, transportation, survival employment, funding, and financial support. Information and skills related to each of these areas are necessary for community orientation.

Adaptation
In this stage of settlement, learners are developing skills to manage their lives in Alberta more independently. Learners’ needs in this stage relate to accessing opportunities or assistance that enables them to increase their independence, such as advanced/specific language instruction, skills upgrading/training, legal assistance, and opportunities to advance their employment. Information and skills in these areas relate to community participation.

See Stage 1: Understand Needs for more information on the stages of settlement.

Guiding Principles in ESL Literacy for Community Orientation and Participation
This section outlines guiding principles for developing effective and responsive programs and curricula in ESL literacy for community orientation and participation. The four guiding principles are:

- know your learners’ settlement experiences
- maintain a focus on immediate relevance
- build partnerships within the community
- connect learning directly to the community
Know your learners’ settlement experience

A key aspect of developing an effective curriculum is understanding learners’ needs (see Stage 1: Understand Needs). In a community orientation and participation context, learners’ settlement experiences will directly impact their community orientation needs.

Guiding questions:

What is the immigration status (e.g. family class, refugee, permanent resident, Canadian citizen) of our learners?

Immigration status affects the amount and nature of support available to newcomers. For example, some refugees receive a one-year living allowance; some learners are sponsored by family, which impacts their eligibility for assistance; Canadian citizens are not eligible for LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) funding.

What supports do learners already have in place?

For example, are the learners being assisted by other organizations or individuals (e.g. church or community sponsor)? Do they have adequate and affordable housing and/or childcare?

What survival skills have learners already developed?

For example, do the learners know how to use transportation systems, purchase affordable necessities and access health services in your community?

What responsibilities will learners face in the near future?

For example, will the learners be required to repay transportation loans? At what point will their financial assistance end?

Maintain a Focus on Immediate Relevance

Understanding learners’ settlement experiences can help programs and instructors determine which acclimatization skills and information are most pressing. For example, some learners may be refugees arriving to a Canadian winter from a country with a hot climate. These learners’ most immediate acclimatization needs may be to understand the dangers of extreme cold and to access affordable and suitable winter clothing. Other learners may have been in Alberta for some time but have been socially isolated due to family or survival employment obligations. When these learners enter your program, the skills of most immediate relevance may relate to developing social networks and accessing community programs, services and facilities (e.g. library resources, employment training programs or affordable recreation options).
Build Partnerships within the Community

As the purpose of these programs is to provide community orientation and to encourage community participation, it is critical to engage with the broader community. Consider the types of services, activities and resources that are most relevant to your learners’ immediate needs and work to build partnerships with these organizations.

**Guiding questions:**

- Which organizations, groups or individuals in the community could be resources to our learners?
- Which organizations, groups or individuals might benefit from the skills and experience learners bring?
- How can we work together with these organizations, groups or individuals?

Partnerships can take many forms and can involve formal and informal opportunities for connection. For example, there is a partnership between ESL literacy programs at Bow Valley College and Calgary Police Services. In this partnership, learners are involved in police recruitment training, which builds new recruits’ understanding of language, literacy and cultural barriers when interacting with the public. Learners have the opportunity to interact with police in a non-threatening environment, which builds their confidence and trust in the police. For learners who have had negative experiences with law enforcement in their past, this can be a significant shift in the way they view police in Alberta. Many learners report that they feel more comfortable asking police for help or protection as a result of this experience.

In your community, there will be opportunities for formal and informal partnerships. Emphasizing the benefits to both parties will encourage organizations, groups and individuals to enter into partnerships with your community orientation and participation ESL literacy program.

**Connect Learning Directly to the Community**

In all ESL literacy programs, it is important to connect learning with real-life applications. Programs with a focus on community orientation and participation will need to offer ample opportunity to learn in the community, not just about the community. Programs that provide ample opportunities to learn in the community make learning concrete and relevant for learners. Learners can then draw on these real-life experiences and the connected knowledge and skills when living in the community.

For example, when learning about grocery shopping, it is important to take learners to a
grocery store (preferably an affordable one close to where most learners live) so that they can learn about food, prices and interacting with staff in a concrete, experiential way. Most learners in adult ESL literacy programs will have had the experience of purchasing goods, receiving medical attention, taking some kind of transportation, etc. The key in community orientation and participation ESL literacy programs is to provide learners with experiences of how these are accomplished in your community, along with the skills and knowledge to do so.

These experiences provide a rich resource for language and literacy development. For example, many instructors use the Language Experience Approach (LEA) as a way of building language and literacy tied to class experiences. In this approach, the learners dictate a text to the instructor about a personal experience. This text is used as the basis for vocabulary development, sight word recognition, writing/copying tasks, choral and individual reading, etc.

For more information on LEA and other methods and techniques for ESL literacy instruction, see Chapter 8 of Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook.

Suggested Themes

In ESL literacy for community orientation and participation, the focus is on developing skills and understanding for everyday life in Alberta. Thematic units are at the core of this kind of program; they provide a rich context for providing relevant information, experiences and skills that are important in order to understand and participate in the community. For this reason, an extensive (though not exhaustive) list of suggested themes is provided.

The chart below suggests topics and corresponding themes for use in ESL literacy for community orientation and participation programs. Themes explore the topics in detail, and with a specific focus. In your program, develop these or other thematic units in response to learners’ needs and interests, tying them to the community of which you are a part.

—— Suggested Themes for Community Orientation and Participation ——

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>SUGGESTED THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Looking for a place to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different kinds of housing in your community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking care of your house/apartment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking with your landlord</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking care of your yard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Riding the bus/train</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting around our community (directions)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting a driver’s license</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding your car insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOPIC</td>
<td>SUGGESTED THEMES</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Looking for jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applying for jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working safely</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping your job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Shopping for food</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growing your own vegetables</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eating healthy food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Spending time together in our community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating with school personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding the Albertan school system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Understanding (women's/men's) health issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making appointments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accessing subsidized dental/health services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding prescriptions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making healthy choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finances</td>
<td>Using Canadian money</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using bank/debit machines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saving money</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding credit cards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paying bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spending wisely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Life</td>
<td>Activities and events in our community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being active in the community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping others in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>Understanding the seasons in Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staying warm in cold weather</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driving safely in the winter</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Use the **key text types** for community orientation and participation ESL literacy to guide your choices in the types of texts you provide for learners. The key text types outline recommended texts for use in each of the four program contexts.

*See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for the community orientation and participation key text types.*
Thematic instruction that is recycled and spiraled throughout levels in a program is an effective way to develop content knowledge, oral language and literacy skills. In each thematic unit, instructors are encouraged to integrate content from the following three content pillars:

- rights and responsibilities
- cultural expectations
- resources and opportunities

See the Classroom Concept in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on the content pillars in relation to planning for thematic units.
Helpful Resources


- *English express: A website for adult learners*. http://www.englishexpress.ca/

Family ESL Literacy

Family literacy is a rich and diverse field serving many people across the province. The Centre for Family Literacy provides the following description:

“Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their communities. It is an approach to literacy development that recognizes and supports the family as a “learning unit”; it coordinates learning activities among different generations in the same family to build expertise in language development, reading, and writing. Family literacy builds on families’ strengths and connections in the context of the culture and communities in which they live and learn.”

(Centre for Family Literacy, n.d.)

Family literacy programs in Alberta serve a variety of participant groups of parents (including grandparents, guardians and caregivers) and children. These include:

- Canadian-born, native English-speaking parents with limited literacy skills and their children. Although these learners may have limited literacy skills, they tend to be more advanced than ESL literacy learners. As native speakers, these learners have a wide range of English vocabulary and can communicate orally with ease. There are also family literacy programs that serve the general population, including parents with higher levels of literacy and education.

- Parents and children with ESL needs. These participants may be immigrants, refugees or Canadian-born speakers of other languages (such as francophone Canadians). These parents may have high levels of education in their first language and are likely to have well-developed first-language literacy skills. They need to learn oral and written English, but have skills and strategies that transfer from their previous formal learning experiences. These parents can be encouraged to help children develop literacy skills in both languages.

- Immigrant and refugee parents and children with ESL literacy needs. These parents have interrupted (or lack) formal education and may not have developed any literacy skills in their first language. When programs and materials are not specifically designed for this group, learners’ low literacy often inhibits their full participation.

What is Family ESL Literacy?

In this framework, the focus is on learners with ESL literacy needs. Family ESL literacy can be understood as the intersection of the fields of family literacy and adult ESL literacy (which incorporates language and literacy development). Family ESL literacy programs are those that target adult ESL literacy learners and their children. These programs build language and literacy skills in a setting that fosters family literacy and provides opportunities to develop literacy awareness and abilities for children and adults. Family ESL literacy programs (as in
other family literacy programs) offer activities that celebrate the joy of learning and connect participants (both parents and children) to other learning opportunities.

The diagram below illustrates the intersection of the three purposes addressed in family ESL literacy.

![Diagram illustrating the intersection of Family Literacy, Literacy Development, and Language Development]

**Family Literacy**
Supporting children and parents’ literacy, emphasizing parents as children’s first, and most important teachers.

**Literacy Development**
Developing literacy skills for the first time, but in a second or other language.

**Language Development**
Developing language skills and cultural understanding necessary for parenting in Canada.

There are several existing family literacy models currently in place around Alberta. The Centre for Family Literacy website (http://www.famlit.ca/) provides descriptions of these programs. The Centre for Family Literacy supports the development of family literacy across Alberta by developing resources, providing training, promoting family literacy awareness and conducting research. Adapting these program models for ESL literacy learners involves including an explicit emphasis on the parents’ language development.

### Guiding Principles for Family ESL Literacy Programs

This section outlines guiding principles for developing effective and responsive programs and curricula in **Family ESL literacy**. The five guiding principles are:

- ensure that the program is designed according to the needs of families
- balance program time between parent-only and parent/child learning
- support first language use and development
- connect to community
- build skills for parenting in Alberta

**Ensure that the Program is Designed According to the Needs of Families**

Effective programs are scheduled for times that are appropriate for learners with children. Program spaces need to be suitable for children and parents (e.g. providing a place to park strollers). If the program focuses solely on parents learning English for family purposes,
childcare should be provided. If there is a cost associated with the program, it needs to be affordable for the target group of learners.

Many family ESL literacy programs involve fathers, grandparents and other caregivers, as well as mothers and children. In order to encourage participation of all types of family members, programs need to be offered in locations and at times that are also feasible for everyone.

Within a program, it is important that instructors use content that is appropriate to learners’ needs and reflects the age/stage developmental needs of the children involved. For example, if all the learners in a class have infants rather than school age children, it may be appropriate to focus more on child development/nutrition, community access and intercultural parenting rather than on reading report cards.

**Balance Program Time Between Parent-only and Parent/child Learning**

ESL literacy learners need to develop oral language skills, literacy skills and sociocultural competence in addition to learning how to support their children’s literacy development. Effective programs may include both time for parent-only and parent/child learning. This ensures that parents’ literacy development receives equal emphasis. When parents increase their own literacy and language skills, they are better able to support their children’s literacy development.

Specialized early childhood literacy development can be provided at the same time as the parent-only portion of the program. It is also important to provide time for parents and children to learn and interact together as they explore literacy activities. This ensures that parents have the experience of being their children’s teachers and builds a repertoire of literacy-based activities for parents and children to engage in at home. Parents need encouragement to apply what they learn in family ESL literacy programs to interactions with their children; for example, in everyday language-rich conversations and literacy-building activities.

**Support First Language Use and Development**

Learners may believe that it is best for their children if English is the only language spoken at home. This can be effective if the parents speak an advanced level of English themselves, but it will still have the effect of diminishing the children’s ability to communicate in their first language. This also reduces the children’s exposure to a rich and varied vocabulary, which is the foundation for early literacy skills development. Research (Cummins, 2001; Roesssingh, 2009) has focused on the benefits of parents maintaining the first language in the home. When parents and children share a common language, they are able to discuss issues as they arise and as children grow older. If parents’ English does not develop as quickly as their children’s and if the children do not maintain their first language, parents may find themselves unable to communicate with their teenagers. In your family ESL literacy program, stress the importance of maintaining the family’s first language, in addition to developing English skills.
It is helpful when instructors have a general understanding of the cultural representations of learners, as well as their traditions, practices and beliefs. This allows instructors to respect and reflect the cultural traditions and values of the families attending, such as by using pictures, songs, rhymes and stories connected to learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Connect to Community

Family ESL literacy programs that provide community connections are highly effective in providing instruction that is meaningful and relevant. Learners benefit from building relationships with, having exposure to and gaining information from various community agencies and groups. The types of community connections provided will differ based on several factors (e.g. urban/rural, learners’ length of time in the community, learners’ needs & interests). In order to best connect learners to the community, form meaningful partnerships with refugee/immigrant services, cultural associations and community leaders. This allows programs to recognize and build on the strengths found within the community.

In a family ESL literacy setting, one of the most important connections that can be made is with schools in the community. In some cases, family ESL literacy programs are housed in local elementary schools. This allows parents to have an immediate connection to their children’s school and begin to feel comfortable in that environment.

In addition to providing exposure to community agencies, learners will need to develop the skills to access community supports. For example, learners may need to fill out forms for housing applications, daycare subsidies or child health care benefits. The learning outcomes in this framework outline the development of such skills, including filling out forms (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes). It is important to make a tangible connection between the literacy task (e.g. reading labels) and its application in the learner’s life within the community (e.g. reading prices in a grocery store).

Build Skills for Parenting in Alberta

Parents, family members and caregivers in ESL literacy classes have many valuable parenting skills. At the same time, however, many people want to learn about how to support their children so that they can succeed in school and life in Alberta. Areas of particular concern for many participants in family ESL literacy programs include:

- supporting their children’s education
- nutrition and child development
- managing family finances
- intercultural parenting skills
Supporting children’s education

For parents with limited or interrupted formal education, the educational system can be very intimidating. When parents have limited oral English combined with limited literacy, they are faced with many challenges in supporting their children’s education.

Family ESL literacy programs can address many different aspects, including understanding the roles and responsibilities of teachers, children and parents in the education system. Building relationships between parents and the school environment is an important aspect of helping parents support their children’s education. In addition, ESL literacy learners need to develop their skills for reading and writing the types of texts used in school systems, such as report cards, school newsletters, notes to teachers, etc. (See Key Text Types in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for more information).

Communicating orally with their children’s teachers, school personnel and other parents is a priority for many learners in family ESL literacy classes. Learners will need to practice their oral communication skills so that they will be able to do this. This will enable parents and teachers to work together in supporting the children in their learning and helps create opportunities for parents to volunteer and be a regular presence in their children’s school and education.

One way that parents can support their children’s literacy development is to provide a print-rich environment in the home. Parents in family ESL literacy programs may not be aware of the importance of modeling literate behaviour, due to their own interrupted educational experiences. Providing parents with the skills and inclination to read with their children, and to thereby develop their own literacy skills, is an important part of effective family ESL literacy programming.

Children’s nutrition, development and well-being

Adult ESL literacy learners may be unaware of how to provide nutritious meals for their children with the foods and products available in Canada. Parents may find it useful to learn about normal child development, providing nutritious meals and age/stage-appropriate learning activities that they can engage in with their children. Many parents will also need to learn about ensuring their children’s well-being (e.g. providing appropriate winter clothing) and laws in Alberta that relate to parents’ responsibilities (e.g. not leaving young children unattended). Attention to these topics in family ESL literacy programs helps parents support healthy childhood development and lifelong learning success.
Budgeting and supporting a family on a low income

This is an area where many adult ESL literacy learners struggle. Many people with interrupted formal education have gaps in their numeracy skills as well as in their literacy skills. Teaching budgeting and financial literacy to adult ESL literacy learners is complex. Learners in ESL literacy programs may need to learn the basic math concepts and operations before they can engage in budgeting. This is a worthwhile effort and can make a substantial difference in the lives of learners.

See Appendix A: Recommendations for Integrating Numeracy for information on numeracy instruction in ESL literacy programs.

Intercultural parenting skills and strategies

Many parents find it challenging to raise their children in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. The issues and strategies explored in cross-cultural parenting workshops for mainstream ESL learners can also be explored in ESL literacy programs. In family ESL literacy programs, however, written materials used to promote discussion will need to be adapted to be appropriate for the learners’ literacy levels. Oral discussion and review is an integral part of ensuring that participants understand the material presented to them.

Suggested Themes

Every learner is unique and every class is different. However, there are some themes that are generally appropriate for portions of the program that focus on parents’ literacy development. The following themes are suggested for family ESL literacy programs:

- understanding my child’s school
- talking with teachers, principals and other parents
- learning about child development
- eating healthy food
- saving and spending in our family
- communicating with my child
- keeping our culture and language alive
- reading with my child at home

Use the key text types for family ESL literacy to guide your choices in the types of texts you provide for learners. The key text types outline recommended texts for use in each of the four program contexts.

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for the family ESL literacy key text types.
Thematic instruction that is recycled and spiraled throughout levels in a program is an effective way to develop content knowledge, oral language and literacy skills. In each thematic unit, instructors are encouraged to integrate content from the following three content pillars:

- rights and responsibilities
- cultural expectations
- resources and opportunities

See the Classroom Concept in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on the content pillars in relation to planning for thematic units.
Helpful Resources

The following resources are suggested for use in Family ESL literacy programs:


- Centre for Family Literacy http://famlit.ca/


Employment ESL literacy programs support learners in developing the language, literacy and cultural skills necessary for success in Albertan workplaces. There are two distinct areas within this field: employment preparation ESL literacy and workplace ESL literacy.

**Employment preparation ESL literacy: English FOR the workplace**

In employment preparation ESL literacy programs, learners develop general skills that are applicable to job searches, interviews and employment in Canada. For example, in an employment preparation ESL literacy class, learners develop skills for filling out a variety of employment applications, reading a variety of workplace schedules, and developing a general understanding of Canadian workplace culture expectations. These programs may provide work experience, job shadowing or other connections to workplaces, but focus on developing these skills prior to employment. Transferability of skills is essential in these programs.

**Workplace ESL literacy: English IN the workplace**

In workplace ESL literacy programs, learners develop skills for a specific workplace. Workplace ESL literacy programs take place within the context of a particular company or organization. In a Workplace ESL literacy program, learners develop skills related to performing specific job duties (e.g. reading labels on products used in the job) or being an employee of a specific company (e.g. using the workplace computer sign-in system). ESL literacy training in these programs happens while learners are employed, although it may occur outside of work hours. Employers themselves are key stakeholders in these programs and need to see results that prove the value of their investment.

Both types of employment programs are of value to ESL literacy learners, but have different purposes and require different considerations. As a result, they are outlined separately in this section.
Guiding Principles for Employment Preparation ESL Literacy Programs

This section outlines guiding principles for developing effective and responsive programs and curricula in employment preparation ESL literacy. The three guiding principles are:

- focus on language acquisition and transferable employment skills
- focus on Alberta workplace culture and systems
- connect learners to workplaces

Focus on Language Acquisition and Transferable Employment Skills

The outcomes provided in this framework are all transferrable skills. The key text types provided in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes outline employment-specific applications of these outcomes.

In addition to the skills outlined in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes, learners will also need to develop skills specifically related to employment. The skills integrated into an employment preparation ESL literacy program need to be generally applicable to employment in Alberta. Learners need to understand that documents and procedures will vary by organization.

As employment preparation ESL literacy focuses on employment in general, rather than for specific workplaces, it is important to provide learners with opportunities to practice using a wide variety of employment-related documents. For example, not all employment applications, employee handbooks, time cards and schedules are the same, and learners will need strategies for understanding a variety of layouts.

Learners will need to develop skills for finding and getting jobs. These include:

- job search skills
- job application skills
- job interview skills

Job search skills
Reading job advertisements (print and online), using employment service agencies, understanding qualification requirements, and networking are all necessary skills in identifying employment opportunities.

Job application skills
Completing employment applications (paper/online), writing resumés and cover letters and establishing positive references should be included.
**Job interview skills**
Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework

Learners will need to understand the cultural expectations in Canadian job interviews. Job interview behaviours such as highlighting one’s strengths, asking for clarification, making eye contact may be unfamiliar to ESL literacy learners. Providing learners with ample opportunities for practice and feedback on their interview skills will be extremely valuable.

Learners need to develop skills for **keeping their job**, once hired. These include:

- reading employee handbooks
- understanding workplace signs and symbols
- managing job tasks
- understanding and applying employment standards
- obtaining information
- learning health and safety practices for the workplace

**Reading employee handbooks**
Learners need to develop skimming and scanning skills in order to find information that is pertinent to their situation. Strategies such as using a table of contents or scanning for headings will be helpful.

**Understanding workplace signs and symbols**
Learners need to understand the importance of workplace signs and symbols, as they can affect job safety and performance. Although every workplace will have its own unique signs or symbols, learners will benefit from being familiar with some common ones, such as “no entry”, “hard hats required” or “out of order”. Learners need to understand that it is better to ask for clarification than to ignore a sign/symbol that they can’t interpret.

**Managing job tasks**
Learners will need to manage their tasks on the job. They will need to learn how to prioritize and track tasks accomplished. They may also need to leave information (e.g. tasks accomplished, to-do lists) at shift changes. In addition, learners will need to know that workplaces generally have established expectations regarding workplace tidiness; developing skills for organizing paperwork and maintaining an orderly workplace will assist learners when they find employment.

**Understanding and applying Employment Standards**
Learners may be unfamiliar with their current rights and responsibilities in the workplace. The information learners receive in employment preparation ESL literacy programs must be current, and learners will need the skills to be able to ask for clarification about their rights and responsibilities.
**Obtaining information**

Learners will need to develop the literacy and language skills for obtaining and communicating information in the workplace. In order to access the information they need to function effectively in their jobs, learners will need oral, literacy (see *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes*), cultural (see below) and computer skills (see *Appendix B: Recommendations for Integrating Technology*).

**Learning health and safety practices for the workplace**

Learners need to understand that safety regulations are not optional. They are required by law and are in place to protect workers and patrons. Using PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) such as hard hats, steel-toed boots and safety goggles is a job requirement in many workplaces and learners need to know that they are expected to comply with these requirements. General WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training, using level-appropriate materials, will prepare learners for some of the safety expectations of the workplace. In some cases, learners may have taken WHMIS training, but not be aware of the need to follow these safety practices in the workplace. It is important for learners to understand the safety consequences of not following WHMIS procedures. Learners may also have different understandings of what constitutes “safety” due to their experience in working in other contexts with different (or non-existent) workplace health and safety codes.

**Focus on Alberta Workplace Culture and Systems**

Unspoken cultural expectations are part of workplaces in Alberta and many newcomers are unaware of these. As a result, they may be unaware of how their behaviour is perceived. ESL literacy learners may also be unfamiliar with common workplace roles and hierarchies. When learners have a general awareness of workplace expectations and systems, they have a greater chance of being successful.

Learners will need to know about:

- workplace roles and hierarchies
- workplace systems
- employment orientations
- taking initiative
- fitting in to the new workplace environment

**Workplace roles and hierarchies**

Most organizations have managers (or several levels of management), supervisors, workers, a payroll and/or a human resources department. Learners will benefit from learning cultural expectations regarding the appropriate person and time to ask questions. If learners understand the general chain-of-command common to workplaces, they will be able to apply this understanding to a specific workplace when hired.
**Workplace systems**
Most workplaces have certain systems in place, such as time cards, vacation request protocols, dress codes, probationary periods and timing of breaks (e.g. a fifteen minute break means you need to be back at your work station in fifteen minutes, not spending fifteen minutes in the break room). Learners who are familiar with these concepts are more likely to successfully meet expectations in their new jobs.

**Employment orientations**
For many ESL literacy learners, intensive employment orientations can be very overwhelming. Understanding the nature and purpose of orientations as well as developing strategies for accessing or clarifying information at a later date will help learners process the information presented at orientations. When learners are exposed to a variety of workplace systems (see above) in their employment preparation program, they are be better able to understand orientation information.

**Taking initiative**
It is a cultural expectation in most Alberta workplaces that workers take initiative on the job. Workers are expected to ask questions when they need clarification, take responsibility for learning what they need to know in order to complete their job requirements and contribute effectively as team members.

**Fitting in to the new workplace environment**
Learners may feel uncomfortable or vulnerable when they enter a new workplace. In an employment preparation ESL literacy program, learners will need to develop skills for interacting with other employees (e.g. making small talk), making positive first impressions (e.g. non-verbal messages), and developing positive working relationships. Engaging learners in role-plays and working through real-life scenarios are very effective ways of helping them in this area.

**Connect Learners to Workplaces**
Learners will benefit from connections with workplaces prior to their employment. There are many ways that an employment preparation ESL literacy program can connect learners with workplace opportunities. These include:

- job-shadowing opportunities
- work experience placements
- networking opportunities
- scenarios and case studies
- simulating a workplace environment in the classroom
Job-shadowing opportunities
When learners have the opportunity to shadow someone in a particular occupation, they gain a real-life perspective on the tasks involved and see how culture influences interactions in the workplace. This experience also provides learners with an opportunity to ask questions about a particular job prior to being employed.

Work experience placements
Whether paid or unpaid, temporary work experience placements can be very useful to learners. Work experience placements allow learners to gain practical on-the-job skills and also help learners identify areas where they need skill development. These placements provide learners with Canadian work experience, which is an advantage when applying for work. Another benefit is the potential for establishing a positive Canadian reference, which is very valuable to building a résumé for work in Canada.

When providing learners with work experience placements, it is important to provide “call-back” opportunities during the work placement period. One effective method is to have learners return to the classroom one day a week to debrief and learn from their experiences in the workplace. Bringing learners together to discuss their real-life workplace experiences provides all of the learners with an additional learning opportunity. Learners’ experiences can be used for the basis of discussions and role-plays, which develop language and cultural skills for facing similar situations in the future. When scenarios and role-plays are derived from learners’ actual experiences, they become more meaningful and learners become even more engaged in the learning process.

Networking opportunities
Employment opportunities are not always advertised through traditional channels. Learners will benefit from making contacts with people in a variety of organizations and workplaces. Many learners will already have established networks within their own ethnic or cultural group. However, they will also benefit from exposure to other networking opportunities. Employment preparation ESL literacy programs need to help learners develop strong oral skills and an awareness of cultural expectations for networking. Programs can host job fairs or take learners to existing job fairs. Providing opportunities to be mentored (or to mentor others) can also provide learners with valuable contacts.

Scenarios and case studies
It may not be feasible in your program to provide extensive job shadowing or work experience opportunities. In any situation, it is worthwhile to provide workplace-related scenarios and case studies as learning tasks. Learners can role-play, engage in problem solving and learn about socio-cultural expectations in the workplace from the experiences presented in scenarios and case studies.
Simulating a workplace environment in the classroom

By providing an environment similar to the workplace, learners develop skills and understanding that will help them retain employment. Ways of accomplishing this include: establishing sign in/sign out procedures, assigning roles and responsibilities to individual learners.

Suggested Themes

Every learner is unique and every class is different. However, there are some themes that are generally appropriate in employment preparation ESL literacy programs. The following themes are suggested for employment preparation ESL literacy programs:

- looking for a job
- getting a job
- starting a new job
- keeping a job / becoming a valued employee
- learning about health and safety on the job

Use the **key text types** for employment ESL literacy to guide your choices in the types of texts you provide for learners. The key text types outline recommended texts for use in each of the four program contexts.

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for the employment ESL literacy key text types.

Thematic instruction that is recycled and spiraled throughout levels in a program is an effective way to develop content knowledge, oral language and literacy skills. In each thematic unit, instructors are encouraged to integrate content from the following three **content pillars**:

- rights and responsibilities
- cultural expectations
- resources and opportunities

See the Classroom Concept in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on the content pillars in relation to planning for thematic units.
Guiding Principles for Workplace ESL Literacy Programs

Effective workplace ESL literacy programs help learners develop the literacy, language and cultural skills they need to succeed in meeting job requirements in a specific workplace. The focus in these programs is on supporting learners to succeed in their current employment context. Workplace ESL literacy programs are funded by the employer and are specific to that organization.

Teaching within a workplace involves a different set of considerations on the part of instructors and program administrators, as they are serving two populations at once.

This section outlines guiding principles for developing effective and responsive programs and curricula in workplace ESL literacy. The four guiding principles are:

- build positive relationships with employers and learners
- understand employers’ expectations
- understand the workplace task requirements
- understand the workplace culture

Build Positive Relationships with Employers and Learners

In workplace ESL literacy programs, program designers and instructors are accountable to both management and the learners in the program.

It is key to the success of the program that the purpose, goals and approach are based on needs of both the employer and the learners. Ensure that the employers and learners understand the value of the program and are committed to its success. Build trust with both stakeholder groups.

Understand Employers’ Expectations

Workplace ESL literacy program administrators and instructors need to clearly understand the expectations of the employer and of the competitive labour market. It is important for instructors to be clear on employers’ requirements regarding communication, progress reports, etc. This helps instructors communicate accurately with the learners about how the information from the classes will be used.

Employers and managers need to understand what can reasonably be accomplished in a given time frame. They may not fully understand the nature of ESL literacy acquisition and may be surprised to learn how incremental the learning steps are. It is important that employers and learners have realistic expectations for learner achievement. When expectations are realistic, learner success is more attainable.
Learners need to understand what their employers expect. These expectations may include adopting culturally appropriate workplace behaviour (e.g. greeting people when arriving at work) or increased ability to participate in other workplace training opportunities.

Employers and management need to understand what challenges their employees are facing in their jobs, as these challenges will impact their job performance. Using these challenges as the basis for building a workplace-specific curriculum will increase the buy-in of the employees.

**Understand the Workplace Task Requirements**

Program administrators and instructors need to understand the job requirements of a particular workplace. The following questions provide a starting point for identifying the kinds of skills and information the learners need for that particular workplace.

- What is the organizational structure of the company?
- What are the established procedures for routine job tasks? (e.g. sign in/out, requesting days off, communicating with management & co-workers, safety, etc.)
- What are the duties of the job?
- What are the safety requirements of the job?
- What challenges are the learners experiencing on the job?
- What changes do the employers want to see?

**Understand the Workplace Culture**

In addition to understanding the specific job requirements, it is essential to develop an understanding of the particular workplace culture that the program will be operating in. Although there are general Alberta workplace cultural norms, each workplace has its own cultural flavour. When learners break the cultural norms of their workplace, this can create tension, even though their actual work skills may be excellent. The following questions provide a starting point for identifying the cultural expectations of the workplace.

- What cultural norms do the learners need to be aware of?
- What behaviours are required for learners’ knowledge and skills to be valued by employers?
- What behaviours are required for learners to be valued and accepted by co-workers?
- What behaviours are required for learners’ voices to be heard and understood?

When these questions have been explored, instructors and program administrators can identify the particular language, literacy and cultural skills that will form the basis of the curriculum.
**Suggested Themes**

Every learner is unique and every class is different. Themes in workplace ESL literacy classes will depend on the workplace itself. These may include:

- learning about health and safety at work
- communicating at work
- learning on the job
- managing your job duties
- solving problems at work
- resolving conflicts at work

Use the **key text types** for employment preparation ESL literacy to guide your choices in the types of texts you provide for learners. The key text types outline recommended texts for use in each of the four program contexts.

See **Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for the employment preparation ESL literacy key text types**.

Thematic instruction that is recycled and spiraled throughout levels in a program is an effective way to develop content knowledge, oral language and literacy skills. In each thematic unit, instructors are encouraged to integrate content from the following three **content pillars**:

- rights and responsibilities
- cultural expectations
- resources and opportunities

See the Classroom Concept in **Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on the content pillars in relation to planning for thematic units**.
Helpful Resources

The following resources are suggested for use in employment ESL literacy programs:


In Alberta, the government has set the goal of increasing the literacy level of adults with the equivalent of high school completion to seventy percent of the population (Alberta Advanced Education & Technology, 2009.). One strategy for achieving this goal is to increase the number of adults participating in foundational adult learning and skills training programs. Educational preparation ESL literacy programs help adult learners with interrupted formal education develop the skills necessary for further education and literacy development.

Educational preparation ESL literacy programs help learners build the literacy, language, and academic skills and strategies for success in adult education contexts. These contexts include, but are not limited to:

- adult basic education (ABE) programs and high school upgrading
- workplace training programs
- training/certification programs
- continuing education programs
- community-based (e.g. library) adult learning programs

Adult education programs such as these are usually based on principles of adult learning, which frame adult learners as self-directed, internally-motivated, autonomous learners who can identify their own knowledge and skill gaps. Adult education principles advocate for problem-based, experiential learning that allows learners to draw on past knowledge and experience and apply it in concrete ways to their immediate roles (Smith, 1999).

Learners in ESL literacy programs have not had the opportunity to develop the skills and characteristics that are assumed in many adult education contexts. The purpose of educational preparation ESL literacy is to help learners develop skills and strategies for success in these contexts.
Guiding Principles for Educational Preparation ESL Literacy

This section outlines guiding principles for developing effective and responsive programs and curricula in the context of educational preparation ESL literacy. The five guiding principles are:

- identify the context you are preparing learners for
- understand the academic requirements of the contexts learners will transition into
- understand the expectations of adult learning environments
- create bridging outcomes and assessment standards
- maintain a focus on educational transitioning

Identify the Context for which you are Preparing Learners

Educational preparation ESL literacy programs cannot fill in all of learners’ knowledge and skill gaps. You will need to make informed decisions about which skills and content to prioritize. This is only possible when it is clear which program you are preparing learners for.

Determine the context for which you will prepare learners for based on information gathered from an environmental scan and community/learner needs assessments. For example, will your program prepare learners for an adult basic education program, a daycare worker certification course or an apprenticeship exam and apprenticeship? Identify the programs learners will transition into and a clear target audience. This enables a program to provide focused, intentional programming and supports learners’ success. For more information on setting your program’s purpose, goals and approach, see the Program Principles section earlier in this stage.

See Stage 1: Understanding Needs for more information on environmental scanning, needs assessment and defining a target audience.

Understand the Academic Requirements

In order for learners to be successful in their next learning steps, it is crucial that the educational preparation ESL literacy program builds the skills necessary for that context. For example, if learners will be transitioning into an adult basic education program, it is necessary to understand the academic requirements of that specific program.

Although each context may have specific requirements, learners will generally need to develop skills in the following areas:

- reading
- vocabulary
- writing
- grammar, mechanics and spelling
• academic content
• academic strategies
• numeracy
• technology

Asking the following questions will provide a starting point for understanding the academic requirements of learners’ next educational steps.

• What program will learners transition into? What courses will they need to take?
• At which level of the program should learners enter, in order to make the most of their ESL literacy support and funding?
• What skills are learners expected to have upon entry? Consider listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary development, grammar, numeracy and non-academic skills.
• What knowledge is expected of learners when they enter? Consider content knowledge from Alberta Learning K-9 Programs of Study.
• What strategies will help learners meet expectations when they transition?
• What numeracy requirements do learners face?

Reading
The learning outcomes for reading and reading strategies provided in this framework (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes) provide a solid foundation for developing the reading skills needed in adult education programs. In order to be successful in adult education programs, ESL literacy learners need to transition from **learning to read** to **reading to learn**. In this process, learners develop enough basic reading skills (decoding, sight word recognition and reading strategies) to begin to gain new knowledge through text. This shift generally begins towards the end of Phase II.

In educational preparation ESL literacy programs, it is critical for learners to develop strong skills for **reading to learn**. It is generally assumed in adult education contexts that learners understand it is possible to learn new information through text. This assumption is the basis of using textbooks (or other print materials such as newspapers, websites, etc.) as a way of transmitting and acquiring new information.

When they participate in adult education programs, LIFE are faced with reading materials that are challenging not only because of the reading level, but because of the cultural content, background knowledge assumed, and the range of vocabulary presented. Teaching learners strategies that will help them cope with the nature and quantity of reading materials presented in adult education contexts is critical in an educational preparation ESL literacy program.
The following reading strategies are particularly important in transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn:

- using context cues
- using word, syntax & punctuation cues
- identifying literary elements
- using supports
- making inferences and drawing conclusions

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for learning outcomes in reading and reading strategies.

**Vocabulary**

Supporting learners to build their ability for reading to learn involves incorporating explicit instruction in vocabulary development. It can be very challenging for ESL learners to keep up with the vocabulary acquisition of their native English speaking classmates. This lag in vocabulary acquisition can result in a lag in the development of literacy skills (Roessingh, 2009).

Vocabulary development and strategies for understanding unfamiliar vocabulary are crucial to learners in academic contexts. Academic word lists are one way of helping learners develop vocabulary, but this vocabulary must be taught in context for it to be meaningful to learners. Explicit instruction in reading strategies helps learners understand, name, practice and apply strategies that increase vocabulary recognition and comprehension as they read.

In educational preparation ESL literacy programs, it is important to provide learners with ample opportunities for reading a variety of texts. Learners need exposure to both fiction (including novels, short stories and poetry) and non-fiction (including textbooks, websites and newspapers) in order to build an understanding of differing structures and appropriate strategies for reading and comprehending each.

**Writing**

The writing, spelling and literacy strategy outcomes provided in this framework are the basis for developing the writing skills needed for success in adult education programs. In educational preparation ESL literacy programs, learners need to develop writing skills that prepare them for the context they will transition into. The requirements of the transition context influence the level of writing learners need to demonstrate. In many adult education contexts, learners need to develop skills in the following areas:

- organizing and planning writing independently
- revising and editing writing independently
- writing in a formal academic tone
- writing about abstract concepts
Instruction in writing strategies is an important part of an educational preparation ESL literacy program. In their next steps in adult education contexts, they will need to be able to move through the writing process independently. Explicit development of writing strategies gives learners a strong writing foundation for their future educational steps.

See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for learning outcomes in writing and writing strategies.

**Grammar, mechanics and spelling**
Grammar, mechanics and spelling are integral parts of writing instruction. In order to write the type of complex sentences required in academic contexts, learners will need to understand the building blocks of accurate sentence structures. Grammar instruction needs to be explicit, but not isolated. Learners need contextualized opportunities to practice and use the structures as they are presented.

**Academic content**
Learners with limited formal education may lack what is considered to be “common knowledge” in the areas of science, geography, history or literature. It is unrealistic to expect to be able to fill in all of these gaps. However, programs can integrate and spiral key concepts and information from the Alberta Learning K-9 Programs of Study. Using this content can provide the context for literacy development. If a program is designed to scaffold and spiral the development of “common” background knowledge throughout, learners will have more success in adult basic education classes (e.g. science, social studies) when they transfer.

**Academic strategies**
When learners transition into non-ESL, or content-based programs, they often find that the pace of classroom learning is increased substantially. Learners need to be prepared for this faster-paced learning environment. Build in instruction and time to develop the following skills:

- note-taking (when listening or reading)
- timed reading
- test-preparation and test-taking strategies
- summarizing
- quick and accurate copying

**Numeracy**
Numeracy is particularly important for learners in educational preparation ESL literacy programs. Depending on learners’ educational and career goals, they may need to take math courses. Numeracy instruction can be challenging because learners’ numeracy levels do not always correlate with their literacy and oral communication skills. When learners do have higher numeracy levels, they still often have difficulty with word problems and the
language used to talk about mathematical functions. The focus of a numeracy component in educational preparation ESL literacy programs is on providing learners with the numeracy and the language needed for English math classes.

See Appendix A: Recommendations for Integrating Numeracy for more information.

Technology

Technology is a part of everyday life and computers are used extensively in adult education contexts. The context you are preparing learners for will dictate the kinds of technology/computer skills to include in your program. The following skills are assumed in many adult education contexts:

- word processing (e.g. Microsoft word) skills
- email skills (including managing an email account and sending attachments)
- skills for using an online search engine (e.g. Google) to find information
- presentation software (e.g. Powerpoint) skills
- skills for using online learning platforms (e.g. blackboard, discussion boards, etc.)
- skills for using online and phone registration systems

See Appendix B: Recommendations for Integrating Technology for more information.

Understand the Expectations of Adult Learning Environments

ESL learners with interrupted formal education will be faced with more than just academic challenges when they transition into adult education programs. In addition to academic skills, learners need to understand the expectations of adult learners in formal education contexts. In educational preparation ESL literacy programs, it is essential to provide learners with the skills to meet these expectations. This section highlights the assumptions of adult learners that are often assumed in adult learning contexts.

Asking the following questions will provide a starting point for understanding the expectations of the adult learning environment you are preparing learners for:

- What underlying assumptions about adult learner behavior are infused throughout the program they will transition into?
- What behavioural expectations might learners be unaware of?
- What skills will enhance learners’ chances of success when they transition?
- How can the program support learners to develop the non-academic skills necessary for success?

This framework provides information on the non-literacy attributes and skills that contribute to learners’ success in a section called Habits of Mind (see Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes). The Habits of Mind section provides a model for developing skills and strategies to demonstrate
resourcefulness, motivation, responsibility and engagement in Albertan contexts, such as education, workplace and community.

In addition to the skills and strategies related to *Habits of Mind*, learners often need to develop skills for **independent** and **interdependent** learning. These will help learners to understand and meet expectations in adult education contexts.

**Independent learning expectations**
Adult learners are generally assumed to be independent learners. Developing skills for independent learning allows learners to meet these expectations and fosters continuous learning. Learners transitioning into adult education will need to develop:

- autonomous study skills: managing time, setting priorities, organizing and managing tasks, and completing assignments
- problem solving skills
- critical thinking
- goal setting

*See the section on Habits of Mind in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on independent learning*

**Interdependent learning expectations**
Although adults are expected to be independent learners, they are also expected to interact with and learn from classmates. Learners will need to develop the following interdependent learning skills:

- participation in group / class discussions
- functioning effectively as a team member in group projects
- reflecting on and talking about their learning goals, strengths and challenges
- seeking support and clarification from others
- respecting other learners’ time, opinions and property

Learners need to understand their degree of readiness for adult education contexts. Include outcomes related to classroom behavior, managing learning, group work, etc. Precisely describing expected behaviours (such as arriving on time, or asking for permission to hand in an assignment late) and supporting learners to achieve these increases their chances of success upon transition.

For example, in the Bridge Program, an educational preparation ESL literacy program, at Bow Valley College, a project-based component of the course addresses learners’ non-academic needs. Learners’ participate in a class called Building Essential Life and Literacy Skills (BELLS). This multi-level class provides learners with an opportunity to complete group projects on topics that are applicable to their lives. The projects involve...
group work, problem solving, making presentations and developing computer skills. Learners gain real-life experience and feedback on their skills in these areas, which helps to prepare them for the expectations they will meet when transitioning into their next academic steps.

Create Bridging Outcomes and Assessment Standards

When preparing learners to transition into an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, it is important that the learning outcomes effectively bridge the gap between learners’ current literacy and language skills and those expected in these programs.

In many cases, the academic language and literacy requirements of ABE programs exceed the threshold of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners. The learning outcomes in this framework align with these benchmarks, from Foundation to Phase III. In educational preparation ESL literacy programs, it is often necessary to extend the learning outcomes beyond Phase III of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners.

In order to do this, curriculum developers can follow this process:

- determine transition points.
- determine the skills and knowledge required.
- create bridging outcomes and assessment tools

Determine Transition Points

In some cases, learners will transition to an adult education context that has just one entry point (e.g. a certification course). In other cases, learners will enter into a program that has a series of courses (e.g. adult basic education). The transition point is the point at which the learners enter the new program.

When preparing learners to enter a program with a series of courses, find out whether there are flexible transition points. In adult basic education programs, for example, these are the points where learners should enter to experience the highest chances of success in achieving their goals. In general, the more focused language and literacy support learners receive in ESL literacy classes, the better their ability to cope with the demands of programs such as adult basic education. Consider learners’ funding and time limitations when determining transition points.
Determine the Skills and Knowledge Required
Investigate the skills required for the learners to transition into the adult education program at transition point you have identified. It is important to consider all of the following areas:

- language skills
- literacy skills
- Habits of Mind
- academic and learning strategies: independent and interdependent
- academic content
- numeracy
- technology

Prioritize these skills and identify those that are critical for success.

Create bridging outcomes and assessment tools
The learning outcomes provided in this framework extend to Phase III Adequate in the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners. Use the skills you have identified and create outcomes that bridge the gap between the requirements of the transition point and the learning outcomes provided in this framework. Ensure that you articulate to the standards of the context for which you are preparing learners (e.g. grade equivalencies, Essential Skills levels, Canadian Language Benchmarks, etc.).

A general principle of developing outcomes is to begin with the end point and build backwards from that point. With the outcomes provided in this framework, the designer’s task will be to build a bridge between the two skill levels. Although there are no clear parallels, it may be helpful to use other external standards such as grade equivalencies or the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language for Adults.

Effective assessment is directly linked to the learning outcomes in a program. Ensure that your program measures the outcomes it has set, and that the learning outcomes reflect the expectations of the context to which learners will be transitioning.

See Stage 4: Integrate Assessment for information on developing assessment tools.

Maintain a Focus on Educational Transitioning

Educational preparation ESL literacy programs need to have rigorous learning expectations (Leong & Collins, 2007). It is appropriate for programs to have built-in support, but learners also need to be ready to meet these rigorous expectations. In order for learners to transition into and succeed in adult education programs, they will need to focus on their academic and non-academic skill development.
In order to maintain the focus on educational transitioning, it is important to ensure that the purpose, goals and learning expectations of your program are transparent to learners. These need to be provided in a format that is accessible to learners. For example, provide learner versions of the learning outcomes and assessment rubrics.

Depending on their length of residence and the support they already have in place, learners may have needs related to the *acclimatization* stage of the settlement continuum (see *Stage 1: Understand Needs*). For example, learners may need information and skills for accessing community and health services, finding housing, budgeting, etc. These can be integrated into an educational preparation ESL literacy program, but should not become the purpose. In exploring *acclimatization* topics, use these as a vehicle for developing the skills necessary in academic contexts. Provide opportunities for learners to listen, speak, read and write about these topics, keeping the focus on developing the skills needed for academic success throughout. However, learners whose lives are dominated by *acclimatization* needs may not be ready for the rigorous expectations of academic preparation programs.

Topics related to acclimatization can be used as the basis for thematic instruction in educational preparation contexts. Thematic instruction that is recycled and spiraled throughout levels in a program is an effective way to develop content knowledge, oral language and literacy skills.

Use the **key text types** for educational preparation ESL literacy to guide your choices in the types of texts you provide for learners. The key text types outline recommended texts for use in each of the four program contexts.

*See Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for the educational preparation ESL literacy key text types.*

In each thematic unit, instructors are encouraged to integrate content from the following three **content pillars**:

- rights and responsibilities
- cultural expectations
- resources and opportunities

*See the Classroom Concept in Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes for information on the content pillars in relation to planning for thematic units.*
Helpful Resources

The following resources are suggested for use in educational preparation ESL literacy programs:


SUMMARY

Effective ESL literacy programs identify learner and community needs (Stage 1: Understand Needs) and use this information to determine the focus of their program. A program’s focus is composed of three main elements: purpose, goals and approach. This section has outlined considerations for each of these three elements from both programming and instructional points of view. This section has also provided descriptions and guiding principles for each of the four main ESL literacy programming contexts in Alberta:

- community orientation and preparation ESL literacy
- family ESL literacy
- employment ESL literacy
- educational preparation ESL literacy

A clear understanding of purpose, goals and approach informs the remaining stages in curriculum development: Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes, Stage 4: Integrate Assessment and Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability.
HELPFUL RESOURCES


• ATESL. (2009). Best practices for adult ESL and LINC programming in Alberta. Edmonton: Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language


WORKS CITED

For a complete list of the works cited in this document and in Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework Please refer to www.esl-literacy.co/workscited2