CALGARY IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION

**identifying the skills and addressing the gaps for struggling esl literacy learners proposal**

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour - Innovative Language Programs

November 2015



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***Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gaps for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners***

# **Executive Summary**

This proposal is for a two year project that will follow through on one of the recommendations from the Action Research Project*, Building Skills and Expertise for Working with Struggling English Language Learners* that makes a case for the need to develop a more detailed three part learning assessment tool that will determine the specific skills gaps and competency gaps of struggling ESL learners. Currently a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) literacy assessment may place a learner within the ESL literacy continuum as being in Foundation Level Phase 1, 2 or 3 or may just be assessed as pre CLB. This does not give the instructor enough information about what specific skills the learner is able to do within the literacy continuum. There is no current assessment tool that can be used to determine the learner’s literacy starting points that details which skills are missing that are creating challenges and stalling their progress. This proposal would bring the Action Research project into Phase II and would develop a three-part assessment tool that will be used as 1) a skills gap identification tool by an assessor such as the Learning Specialist at CIWA 2) an informational tool with which the instructor is able to develop an instructional plan that will employ strategies developed in the Action Research Project that will target the learner’s specific, identified skills gaps and 3) a self-assessment tool that will engage the learner in understanding what gaps have been identified in their learning, track their progress and take charge of their learning.

The assessment challenge can be compared to trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle; without all the pieces that fit into the right shaped space, the picture is not complete. In addition to finding the missing pieces, even though the learner can describe the picture in their first language, they also need to learn the language to describe it in English. The assessment tool proposes to identify what pieces of the puzzle are missing, how to fit them into the puzzle and then be able to describe the picture in English when it is complete. Another way to look at the purpose of this three-part assessment tool is to consider what skills need to be developed in what cognitive order in order to move forward into developing more complex skills. In a group of students who are practicing writing their names there may be some who understand letter sound recognition[[1]](#footnote-1) and those who are reproducing graphically without understanding the connection between what they are producing and what the letters and words they represent[[2]](#footnote-2).They are all following the same skills exercise but at different levels of understanding. Consequently for part of the class it becomes an exercise in copying symbols and not connecting letters with meaning which is the next step in reading and writing skills literacy skills. Identifying learner starting points with an assessment tool will speed up the learning and instructional process.

We acknowledge the theory of Jim Cummins’ BICS and CALP that identifies the different levels of learning a language and distinguishes between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency. It is the CALP level of language acquisition that creates the literacy skills that are lacking by ESL learners with low first language literacy and that stand in the way of being able to meet the literacy demands of mainstream society. This theory adds to the underlying research that informs the purpose for developing a tool that will assess and identify the specific skills gaps that have resulted from a lack of educational opportunity, not lack of ability.

We also acknowledge Knowles Adult Learning Principles as integral to the foundation of this project. These Adult Learning Principles are reflected in our model of involving the learner in order to motivate, acknowledge prior life experiences and be respected for what they bring to their learning journey; see relevance to their learning, see the practical application of their learning to their daily lives and to set goals for moving forward in their learning in collaboration with the instructor. The instructor’s role is to help apply these principles to their language and literacy skills development instructional planning so that the learner understands their learning starting points, gaps and what next steps they need to take in their learning plan in collaboration with the instructor.

This project will not only enhance the literacy assessment of the Learning Support Service but will also serve as a tool that both instructor and learner will be able to use in the classroom.

# **Purpose Statement**

The proposed *Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gaps for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners* comprises the development of three kinds of assessment tools designed to identify existing skills and identify and address literacy learning gaps in learners making limited progress despite best efforts by learner and the instructional team. We believe that teachers and learners using these tools will be better able articulate learning needs or gaps as well as the steps necessary for the learner to make progress. This, in turn, increases the instructor’s capacity to provide explicit, intensive and supportive literacy instruction, a belief that teacher-researchers followed in the *Building Skills and Expertise for Working with Struggling English Language Learners*. We believe this will also increase learner involvement in the assessment process and assist learners to understand and take charge of their learning.

# **Objectives**

The goal of *Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gap for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners* is to address an issue action researchers ascertained in *Phase I: Building Skills and Expertise for Working with Struggling English Language Learners*: the difficulty in identifying a baseline for instruction, learner progress and articulating skills and next steps with struggling ESL Literacy Learners for specific learning outcomes.

The proposed project endeavors to:

1. Develop and trial assessment tools for use with ESL literacy learners:
	1. Needs assessment tools
	2. Formative, classroom based assessment tools
	3. Self-assessment tools

2) Develop the User Guide for ESL professionals (available in print and electronic format) that will explain how to apply and interpret the three assessment tools and will include a summary of the project including research findings and learnings from project activities.

3) Develop the Toolkit that emerges at the end of the two-year project. The kit will be a hands-on document that will include the User Guide, sample lesson plans and checklists, evaluation tools and notes from instructor-learner conferences. .

4) Share assessment tools with ESL literacy instructors

# **LTP Project Funding Priority**

*Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gap for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners* will address Project Priority 1: Improving the Quality of ESL Classroom Instruction.

# **Rationale/Need**

In ESL and ESL Literacy classes, some learners make less progress than would be expected after some time in a program. The problem is twofold: First, while most learners do make visible progress, a few make very limited gains in months or even years. Second, when a teacher identifies a struggling learner, she has limited tools to measure and address these learners’ skills and gaps. A learner, for instance, who is unable to print her name after lengthy time in a program is unable demonstrate literacy skills that are measurable with available assessment tools. In such a case, the instructor knows only what a learner cannot do, and has no basis for already existing skills. We argue that in order to build on a learner’s present skills, we must be able to observe it.

Second language (L2) learners, including literacy learners, struggle with L2 language and literacy acquisition for any number of reasons, including learning disabilities (LD), socio-cultural and socio-affective factors, and linguistic factors (Wall, 2013). Recent numbers show that as many as 1 in 10 Canadians has a learning disability (Price & Cole, 2009). The Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta extrapolates that figure to represent 440,000 Albertans with a learning disability (2015). It is not unrealistic to consider that 1 in 10 second language learners (including ESL Literacy learners) also have a learning disability.

In addition to possible learning disabilities, adult ESL and literacy learning can be affected by health, post-traumatic stress disorder, and undetected hearing loss, visual impairment and brain injury (PANDA - Minnesota ABE Disability Specialists). Specialists in the field (Lori Leininger and Wendy Sweeney at PANDA and Robin Lovrien Schwarz) have advised that a learning disability diagnosis entails ruling out any other possible factor affecting learning: an accurate diagnosis with an adult ELL would be difficult to obtain and may not be necessary to provide appropriate supports to struggling learners. So while the TESL community is mandated to provide support to adult English learners with learning disabilities (ATESL, 2009), we must rely on other means to identify needs and address gaps than LD diagnostic tests.

In her review of the research on the connections between English as a second language and literacy in Canada, Sue Folinsbee asserts that there is very little known about the literacy needs of adult immigrants and refugees (Folinsbee, 2007). While 60% of immigrants scored below Level 3 on the previous IALS test compared to 37% of adults born in Canada, (and Level 3 is considered requisite functional literacy), this data includes those who have completed formal education in the country of origin. Folinsbee highlights a Winnipeg pan-provincial study, noting that 20-30% of learners in non-ESL adult literacy programs are immigrants.

Dr. Stephen Reder, literacy researcher, presents striking data relating to LESLLA adults (those who have no to limited L1 literacy) in another international literacy survey, PIAAC (Reder, 2014). Internationally, 12 million adults in the participating, developed countries were not assessed because their language and literacy skills were too low: many of these persons are believed to be LESLLA adults.

An Alberta study by Deidre Lake and David Watt provides the most extensive local data that we were able to locate that included and recorded data for adult learners with limited schooling in the country of origin (Lake & Watt, 2004). Their results showed that reading and writing skills for persons with 0-7 years of prior schooling typically plateau at around CLB 3 to 4. Lake and Watt found that L2 acquisition rates for L2 learners with limited formal education differed significantly from those with eight or more years of prior schooling. Note that learners included in Lake and Watt’s study are already performing at CLBs 1.8 and 1.3 in Reading and Writing respectively. Many learners we see here at the CIWA are referred with placement notes of ‘Pre-Benchmark.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association’s community-based ESL Literacy program, Pebbles in the Sand, saw 140 learners with 0 to 7 years of prior schooling from September 2014 to August 2015. During that same period, 132 learners with 0 to 9 years of formal education were enrolled in our mainstream LINC program. We have found that these learners struggle to reach CLB 4 and are likely to drop out of ESL classes after 2 years without reaching CLB 4. While we are unable to ascertain how many ESL Literacy learners have learning difficulties, our experience shows that the majority of learners referred to CIWA’s learning support services have limited formal education in the first language. In 2014-15, 64% of ESL learners referred to the Learning Specialist for learning support services had 0-3 years of formal education in first language (L1); 21% reported 4-9 years of L1 education. These learners have challenges related to low first language literacy that created obstacles to progressing in their ability to learn English. Referred learners within designated ESL Literacy programs experience challenges beyond those of their peers, but can develop L2 language and literacy skills with the appropriate supports.

Research denotes a strong connection between English literacy on integration into an adopted country. Immigrants and refugees who have not acquired literacy in their first language face greater barriers to integration than those with prior schooling. Folinsbee refers to a report by the Canadian Multilingual Literacy Centre, which highlights the limited literacy’s compounding effect on barriers based on race and language for immigrants and refugees. The study found that limited literacy affects access to housing, healthcare and employment opportunities. All of these factors together contribute to a cycle of poverty. Limited literacy only adds to the complexity of this issue. LESLLA adults included in the PIAAC the survey are making less L2 literacy gains over time, and that literacy gaps adversely affect their integration. Martha Young-Scholten notes that adult immigrants and refugees who have not developed L1 literacy are ‘the least equipped of all immigrants to able to communicate with members of their adopted communities’ (Young-Scholten, 2013).

With no policy to address ESL Literacy specifically (for adult immigrant and refugee learners with limited or no formal education in the first language) and limited training teachers with ESL Literacy learners (and many of these learners find themselves in mainstream LINC or mainstream literacy classes), learners do not receive the specialized instruction best suited to their unique needs.

To address program and instructor concerns about learners making limited progress, CIWA has offered workshops internally and to agencies providing language training on topics such as differentiating instruction, reasons why learners might struggle, hearing loss and visual impairment in ELLs, and offers an ongoing series of workshops to ESL Literacy teachers to connect evidence based research to classroom instruction.   CIWA also provides formal and informal consultations with ESL and Employment Skills instructors to discuss concerns and offer strategies to support struggling learners. On a wider scale, CIWA sits on a Learning Disabilities steering committee to represent the needs of second language learners.  Stakeholders discuss the issues surrounding learning disabilities and learning difficulties and recognize how complex supporting adult ELLs who are struggling to acquire language and literacy for any reason can be. By supporting teachers and learners to assess skills and learning needs, the proposed assessment tools will serve as a means to promoting literacy gains for struggling ESL Literacy learners, with the potential to benefit all ESL Literacy learners.

Our proposal to develop level- and skills- appropriate literacy assessments aims to address one small part of the ongoing issues faced by LESLLA adults by ensuring that ESL Literacy learners’ skills are effectively assessed and addressed. We believe that with adequate needs assessment that addresses both strengths and needs of ESL Literacy learners, instructors will be better equipped to provide relevant, effective instruction. When teachers have the tools to measure learner progress, they will be able to determine how effective their instruction is for learners as a group and individually.

In a review of assessment tools used in Canadian adult basic education programs, we have found that Dr. Pat Campbell’s (Campbell, 2006) findings sum up the issue of finding an assessment tool that would fit our particular learners’ needs. Campbell describes existing authentic, standardized, competency-based and diagnostic assessments, noting that the Canadian Adult Reading Assessment (CARA) is the most frequently used diagnostic assessment across service providers in Canada. Campbell’s respondents noted that while CARA is a well-devised tool, it is not suitable for their most foundational literacy learners. This high starting point was a common thread among assessment tools reviewed.

CIWA’s learning support service has found that The Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Placement Tool (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2005) aligns with the ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework, but does not include components that are now known as best practice with Adult ESL Literacy Learners. For example, the assessment uses line drawings for a story-sequencing task at the foundational level. This type of task requires another type of literacy that may not yet have been developed (Bruski, 2011) and may not accurately measure the target outcome, sequencing. Further, ILVARC assesses learners prior to registration in our language training programs. However, while ILVARC’s placement tool offers language training programs information on appropriate programs for learner placement, it does not offer information to these programs about a learner’s specific skills.

The high baseline for literacy assessment does not provide us information about what struggling ESL Literacy learners can do: without a clear picture of what learners current skills and abilities, we are left with a deficit-based approach to assessment and instruction, measuring what learners cannot do, as opposed recognizing strengths and providing information about next steps. [[4]](#footnote-4)

In the long term, the stall in progress will lead to the inability of learners to reach a level of literacy that UNESCO declares is necessary to reap the benefits of being literate in a literate society[[5]](#footnote-5). In the short term, without the assessment tool, the stall in progress is the challenge that faces the instructor that is charged with the responsibility of teaching and guiding learners to reach a level of literacy that will allow them to be functional in a literate society.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The challenge is in being able to identify the starting points and where the gaps in skills are so that instructors can better manage and develop a differentiated instructional plan that will address the needs of all her learners. The assessment tool will help an ESL Literacy instructor identify these missing pieces so that they can be addressed and therefore be able to move forward and not be held back in their learning journey.

Finally the case for developing an assessment tool is made by another document from the international sector that focuses on second language learners with low first language education or LESLLA (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) learners:

“We note that there are general problems concerning literacy education of immigrants, existing in every country that we have discussed. First, even though language assessment is carried out for language course applicants in Canada and Belgium, no ideal assessment tools for L2 literacy are available because standardized tests are usually not suitable for LESLLA learners. Second, even though researchers and educators agree that L1 literacy assessment is desirable, implementing L1 literacy assessment is not an easy matter. Third, in all three countries, funding resources for adult literacy education are very limited and literacy teachers are usually poorly paid. Accordingly, availability of teacher training is also an issue. To conclude, multilingual countries are particularly challenging to LESLLA learners, and thus their specific situations and needs should be better understood in order to provide them with suitable schemes of support in accordance with their particular multilingual profiles” *Literacy education for low-educated second language learning adults in multilingual contexts: the case of Luxembourg. Jinyoung Choi and Gudrun Ziegler*

**Assessment Tools**

We propose a set of assessment tools based on the CLB Literacy outcomes for use by a learning support specialist or its equivalent, for instructors and for learners. The proposed assessment tools will focus on ESL Literacy specific learning outcomes. They will be used by the learning support specialist as part of the learner needs assessment for ESL Literacy learners, by instructors to track learner progress and next steps, and by learners as they are supported to develop self-assessment skills. The corresponding classroom assessment tools will be used by classroom instructors to monitor learners’ progress for specific learning outcomes. The third material component of project will be the development of self-assessment tools on the same specific learning outcomes. All of the assessment tools will incorporate features of the *ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*. Their pilot implementation will follow the guidelines outlined in *Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta* (ATESL, 2009).

Because this set of assessment tools ties to the CLB ESL Literacy outcomes, they will better enable learning support services to recommend instructional strategies connected to a program’s instructional outcomes at the very early stages of literacy. At this point, we are not aware of any ESL literacy assessment tool that links the learning support diagnostic assessment to classroom assessment of learner progress or to learner self-assessment tools. We have also been unsuccessful in finding a comprehensive tool that enables us to see learners’ skills at the very early stages of literacy readiness.

# **Target Group**

The target population for *Identifying Skills and* *Addressing the Gaps for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners* is learners with no to limited formal education in L1 who have additionally been addressed as struggling learners within the context of their classes. Second language and literacy acquisition continues to be difficult for these learners, even with teachers’ efforts to scaffold learning and differentiate instruction.

We expect the scope of the project to directly influence learning for 5 learners in two classes for a total of 10 learners, and that the impact of the project will indirectly benefit 20-30 learners.

In addition to the learners involved directly and indirectly during this project, we anticipate the findings from this project will yield information beneficial beyond the scope of the classes involved. Instructional staff who research, develop and pilot the assessment tools will engage additional instructional staff throughout the duration of the project.

# **Project Description**

*Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gap for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners* builds on *Phase I: Building Skills and Expertise for Working with Struggling English Language Learners*. In Phase I of our project, instructor researchers identified outcomes that were more difficult to address than others. However, we are unable to ascertain the reason for the noted difference at this time. We believe that the results of Phase II will help us to understand the reason and better support learners to make gains for those specific learning outcomes. These learning outcomes will emerge once the project commences and the instructors are engaged in the development and research phase of the project. As noted earlier, we are not aware of an assessment tool available to enable us to determine the baseline that enables us to establish instruction at intake for a learner’s specific learning outcomes. We propose a set of tools that will enable our instructional team to determine what a learner’s skill level is and what her next steps in literacy acquisition would be. The set of tools consists of three parts:

1. **Needs assessment tools** – for use in a one on one setting with learners who have been identified as struggling learners. For instructors who wish to hone in on struggling learners’ skills and needs on specific learning outcomes, this assessment can be used as part of the learning support services intake process to pinpoint that learner’s skills and difficulties. This information can then be shared with the instructor to help determine starting points for effective instruction for that particular learner for a specific learning outcome.
2. **Formative assessment** **tools** – for ongoing use by the teacher in class. This tool can be used on an ongoing basis to record observations of learner behaviour throughout a term or longer if needed. This tool will be used to record a learner’s competencies multiple levels, as a learner’s skills set often expands over multiple levels. This tool will enable instructors to, at a glance, see a learner’s current skills as well as her next steps (what she needs to achieve in order to fill the gap). Models that may be considered include Bonnie Campbell Hill’s Reading and Writing Continua, as well as those used in the local community.
3. **Self-assessment tools** – sample learner work as well as instructor created materials will be collected and developed to provide learners with a rubric consisting on real materials. Samples of work can be used to provide a frame of reference for learners as they look at their own work and set goals to increase their skills on specific learning outcomes.

All three tools will be developed for specific learning outcomes as outlined in the ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework. The tools are to be used in conjunction with each other. Because these assessments begin at a level suitable for learners who have no to limited L1 formal education, they will enable us to measure both learners’ strengths and next steps, something impossible to do when assessments begin beyond reach of learners’ current skills. The use of these three tools in combination will enable CIWA’s instructional team (learning support specialist, instructors, tutors) and learners to work together on an ongoing basis to better articulate learners’ skills and next steps to enhancing those skillsets. We believe that this rounded approach involving the learner, teacher, and learning support specialist helps to promote a strengths-based approach to education (Lopez & Louis, 2009). In this way, we aim to ‘address the gaps’ in learning.

The User Guide that follows the implementation phase will be a hands-on document in print and electronic format that will explain how to apply and interpret the three assessment tools and will include a summary of the project including research findings and learnings from project activities.

The Toolkit that emerges at the end of the two-year project will include the User Guide, sample lesson plans and checklists, evaluation tools and notes from instructor-learner conferences.

An Advisory Committee comprising the ESL Literacy Network (Bow Valley College), ILVARC, Calgary Region LD & ADHD Strategy and CanLearn Society will be invited to provide expertise on the development of these tools as well as to provide input on the pilot, implementation phases and review phases.

## Project Timeline

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Timelines** | **Inputs***Resources used to deliver the activities and produce the outputs* | **Activities***Key work or tasks undertaken* | **Outputs/Deliverables***Products or services produced by the activities* |
| November 2015 | HR ManagerDepartment Manager | * Recruit and hire project staff
* Assign responsibilities to team members
 | * 2 instructors hired from the LINC and Pebbles programs
* Job description for project staff developed
 |
| December 2015 -February 2016 | InstructorsLearning Support Specialist (LSS)  | * Identify criteria for assessment tools through needs assessment, research literature scan and focus groups
* Identify struggling learners who meet the ESL low literacy learner criteria and conduct focus group
* Select targeted outcomes for assessment tools development
 | * Research and literature review conducted
* 10 learners selected to participate in the project
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| **Milestone #1**March 2016 – May 2016 | Project team | * Develop and pilot first draft of LSS needs assessment tool and instructor in-class formative assessment tool
* Collect and review sample learner work
* Strike Advisory Committee and brief them on project
 | * Assessment tools for Learning Support Specialist and instructors
* Samples of learner work to be included in the Toolkit
* Input from Advisory Committee meeting
 |
| June 2016 - August 2016 | Project team  | * Analyze results of testing of draft assessment tools and collection of sample learner work
* Compile and write mid-term report
 | * Assessment tools for Learning Support Specialist and instructors
* Mid-term report
 |
| September 2016 -November 2016 | Project team | * Develop and pilot second draft of LSS needs assessment tool and instructor in-class formative assessment tool
* Pilot assessment tools with learners
* Initiate learner conferences
* Collect and review sample learner work
 | * Assessment tools for Learning Support Specialist and instructors
* Samples of learner work to be included in the Toolkit
* Records of learner conferences
 |
| **Milestone #2**December 2016 -February 2017  | Project Team | * Conduct second set of focus group with learners
* Develop and pilot first draft of learner self-assessment tool
* Collect and review sample learner work
* Continue with instructor-learner conferences
 | * Draft learner self-assessment tool
* Samples of learner work to be included in the Toolkit
* Records of learner conferences
 |
| March 2017 – May 2017 | Project Team and Advisory Committee | * Pilot testing of instructor in-class formative assessment by CIWA instructors and tutors
* Peer review of LSS needs assessment tool and instructor in-class formative assessment tool by

Advisory committee* Develop and pilot second draft of learner self-assessment tool
* Collect and review sample learner work
* Continue with instructor-learner conferences
* Compile and write mid-term report
 | * Input from Advisory Committee meeting
* Assessment tools for Learning Support Specialist, instructors and learners
* Samples of learner work to be included in the Toolkit
* Records of learner conferences
* Mid-term report
 |
| **Milestone #3**June 2017 – July 2017 | Project Team and Advisory Committee | * Peer review of learner self-assessment tool by CIWA instructors and tutors
* Peer review of learner self-assessment tool by Advisory Committee
* Compile and analyze comparison charts of learner growth
* Assemble student portfolios
 | * Input from Advisory Committee meeting
* Comparison charts of learner growth
* Student portfolios
 |
| August 2017 – September 2017 | Instructional StaffLearning Support SpecialistDepartment Manager | * Finalize the three assessment tools
* Compile learnings from the project
* Develop User Guide on the three assessment tools
 | * Final versions of assessment tools for learning support specialist, instructors and learners
* User Guide
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| October 2017 | Instructional StaffLearning Support SpecialistDepartment Manager | * Write final report
* Produce Toolkit
* Present at ATESL Conference on project
* Disseminate information in print and electronically
 | * Final report
* Toolkit
* Conference presentation
 |

# **Outcomes and Evaluation**

We anticipate the development and pilot of assessment tools will lead to the following outcomes:

Involved instructional staff’s increased ability to recognize and measure struggling ESL Literacy Learners’ strengths and next steps:

1. Learners’ increased recognition of strengths and an increased engagement in goal setting to promote their own learning and literacy acquisition
2. Increased ability for the instructional team and learners to work from a strengths-based paradigm

To measure the outcomes and evaluate the success of the project, the instructional team will engage in:

* Data collection of involved learners’ growth on targeted specific learning outcomes
* Records of conferencing, including learners’ comments about their own learning related to specific learning outcomes
* Comparison charts of learner growth on selected specific learning outcomes for *Phase I: Building Skills and Expertise for Working with Struggling English Language Learners* and the proposed Phase II.

# **Dissemination/Distribution and Sustainability Plan**

# Project results compiled in report format for the Identifying Skills and Addressing the Gap for Struggling ESL Literacy Learners project will be made available internally to all instructional staff, followed by interested stakeholders within the local community and through consultations with peer ESL and LINC providers. Lessons learned from this project and other relevant information will be shared at an ATESL 2017 conference. The budget for this project would cover ATESL fees and related costs for at least 3 of the project team (LSS and two instructors).

We will also share our learnings online through CIWA’s website, the ESL Literacy Network community, Tutela and other repositories. The User Guide will be produced both in print and in electronic format to enable us to reach audiences across the province and country. The budget for this project allows for costs associated with the compilation and printing of this guide. As the funder of the project, Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, Immigrant Settlement and Language Programs will be recognized in all marketing and display endeavors.

# Learnings and strategies identified in this project will be used to enhance CIWA’s own assessment, instruction, and feedback practices. Further, after Phase II of this project is completed, we envision a Toolkit connecting learnings and materials from Phases I and II including the developed assessments for in-class use, samples of learner work and information on supporting learners’ self-assessment skills, and strategies and guidelines for planning to support learners’ skill development. The Toolkit will be produced in house at CIWA (100 copies) with in-kind expertise from communications staff, including graphic design.

# **Descriptions of Roles and Qualifications**

## Instructional Staff

## The two instructors selected for this project will be from current staff (not yet identified), employed in ESL programs at our agency. They will both have a level of expertise working with struggling ESL Literacy Learners. They will be contracted to work 6 hours per week during the course of this project in addition to their time teaching in the classroom. The two instructors involved in Phase I of the research project have been invaluable in supporting our instructional team better understand the needs of ESL Literacy learners within our language training programs and we anticipate similar value and capacity building to be gained through the proposed Phase II.

## The 6 hours per week instructor involvement will be broken down into the following tasks and responsibilities:

* Research and literature review
* Meetings to discuss, plan, pilot, develop and implement assessment tools
* Identify students with learning struggles who would benefit from project and obtain consent
* In class observations and collection of samples from student work that relate to outcomes identified for assessment tools
* Report writing
* Contribution to and delivery of professional development and conference presentations

## Learning Support Specialist – in kind

This position will be responsible for implementing the initial needs assessment for struggling ESL Literacy Learners and will make recommendations to instructors about addressing the needs of such learners in their classes. In consultation with the instructional staff, this person will manage the cases of referred learners and will also assign learner to work with tutors based on communication with the instructors and dependent on the learning needs identified. This staff is already employed by our agency and since her position is funded by another funder, the hours contributed to this project as a project coordinator will be in-kind.

## Language Training Manager – in kind

The manager will provide overall leadership to the project. This will include overseeing the components of the research project, ensuring that timelines are met and that data and learnings are collected throughout duration of the project. Final production and dissemination of the project report will also be overseen by the manager.

# **Budget**

Please refer to the Project Budget enclosed with the application.

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1. *Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners, ESL Literacy ALL document - Reading Learner Ability CLB 1pg 41/Writing ESL Literacy Learner Ability CLB 1L pg. 76* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners ALL document –Reading pg. 35/Foundational L Writing pg. 69* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *For any one of the 69 individuals in the Lake & Watt, 2004 study with an elementary level of education (0-7 years; mean = 4.2 years), who starts with an initial language proficiency in English of CLB 2.0 in Listening and Speaking, CLB 1.8 in Reading and CLB 1.3 in Writing, language acquisition is a difficult process. They will make smaller gains than others over any 250 hours of instruction, changing by less than 0.4 of a benchmark in each skill area. Over the long term, those who remain in programs for up to 1000 hours are predicted to change 1.4 benchmarks in Listening and Speaking, 1.6 in Reading and 2.44 in Writing, though they will seldom progress beyond Benchmark 3 and no one in this study progressed beyond Benchmark 5 in any skill area. The tendency of the group is to plateau in their language acquisition around Benchmark 3. The time to move from Benchmark 2 to 3 is 320 hours; however, the time to move from Benchmark 3 to 4 is 611 hours. In Listening and Speaking, it is estimated that 1871 hours of instruction would be required to move from Benchmark 1 to Benchmark 5.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *For a brief outline of a strengths-based approach to instruction, see Lopez and Louis, 2009. Lopez and Louis outline five principles for strengths-based teaching. We believe the project will better position instructional staff to implement Principle 1, ‘Measurement of student (and educator) characteristics includes strengths assessment, which supplements the typical focus on academic achievement and behavioral data’ and Principle 2, ‘Educators personalize the learning experience by practicing individualization whereby they think about and act upon the strengths of each student.’* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *One of UNESCO’s declarations is: ” Literacy is a human right and the basis for lifelong learning. It empowers individuals, families and communities and improves their quality of life. Because of its “multiplier effect”, literacy helps eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, curb population growth, achieve gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy.” (The Adult Literacy Research Institute, September 2015)* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The challenge is described as follows by Liette Wilson, a Pebbles in the Sand instructor: “One of the biggest challenges is the diversity of abilities. Even though everybody who qualifies for Pebbles has less than seven years of education [in their country of origin] there is a huge difference between having five years of education and having zero years of education. It shows in their awareness of learning, what they know about a basic alphabet. And when you have twelve students and they are all very high needs and hands-on, that is challenging.” *Liette Wilson Pebbles in the Sand: A Unique Literacy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Women, Stories from the Field, The Adult Literacy Research Institute, September 2015* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)