

Supporting English as a Second Language Students: Promising ESL Strategies in Alberta



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INTRODUCTION

Who Are English as a Second Language Students?

English as a Second Language (ESL) students are students who first learned to speak, read and/or write a language(s) other than English and whose level of English language proficiency precludes them from full participation in learning experiences provided in Alberta schools. ESL students may have recently (im)migrated to Canada or may have been born in Canada and live in homes in which the primary language is not English.

Alberta schools have always included students who are learning English as an additional language. Children and their families (im)migrate to Alberta from every corner of the world. Many students who come to Canada from other countries speak languages other than English and have varying levels of English language proficiency. Canadian students of Aboriginal, Francophone and other descents, whose families have lived in Alberta for many generations, may begin learning English when they enroll in Alberta schools. Linguistic and cultural diversity is characteristic of schools and communities throughout the province.

In the past, some students, particularly younger ones, learned English informally and went on to participate fully in workplaces and communities throughout Alberta. When the seniors of today were in school, a Grade 6 or Grade 8 formal education was often considered an adequate level of literacy for employment. Today, the situation is quite different. Students learning ESL need targeted instruction and structured opportunities to develop language proficiency and literacy.

Young people entering post-secondary institutions or seeking employment generally require senior high school diplomas. There are few jobs available that do not require advanced levels of literacy and most employers will consider only those applicants who have completed senior high school, even for entry level positions.

When ESL students are integrated with their English-speaking peers, they are able to work on language and concept development in all subject areas. English language proficiency is, however, not simply a by-product of other classroom learning. Specific formal instruction in speaking, reading and writing in English is essential.

In recent years the number and diversity of ESL students in Alberta has increased significantly. Many families have (im)migrated to Alberta to find employment and the parents hope that their children will acquire English language proficiency and achieve a senior high school diploma. These families have found jobs in many Alberta urban and rural communities. Teachers in these communities are looking for promising teaching and learning strategies that best meet these students' needs.

This publication is intended to provide assistance to teachers by identifying promising practices funded by the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Project that might enhance the teaching and learning of ESL students in Alberta.

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement ESL Projects

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) Project supports the improvement of student learning and performance by encouraging teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives based on local needs and circumstances. It was developed through a partnership of the education community in 1999 and was first implemented in all Alberta school authorities in 2000.

This document contains a sampling of ESL projects from AISI Cycle I, Cycle II and Cycle III that illustrate the work being done in schools across Alberta related to the development of effective ESL teaching and learning strategies. The document informs teachers, curriculum coordinators, school administrators, central office staff and others involved in education about successful ESL strategies currently used in Alberta schools. Additional information about each of the projects highlighted in this document can be obtained by visiting the AISI section of the Alberta Education Web site at <http://www.education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi.aspx>.

The variety of promising ESL strategies outlined in this document can be easily adopted and adapted by all teachers to provide students with meaningful ESL experiences that will strengthen their English language proficiency and their ability to succeed in all subject areas. It is not intended that a teacher or school staff implement one of the projects from this document in its entirety, but rather that educators pick one or two strategies from a project that could work for them. By sharing successful strategies, educators can offer ESL programs that will support ESL students.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The following insights and general findings from the AISI projects have the potential to inform the implementation of promising ESL strategies in Alberta schools. Many of them apply equally well to language learning throughout the entire school program and, when implemented, have the potential to enhance all student learning.

Organization

Small class sizes alone do not guarantee improved student achievement. In order to take full advantage of the benefits of smaller classes, teachers also need to:

- work collaboratively
- participate in research-supported professional development
- use culturally diverse resources
- develop appropriate assessment tools and use them properly
- interpret data to plan for improved learning
- include the parents/guardians of ESL students in the education of their children, whenever possible.

Pullout classes, in which teachers have the opportunity to help students one-on-one, have a large impact on student learning. Pullout classes are not, however, a promising strategy on their own or when continued indefinitely.

Special populations require alternative learning opportunities or strategies, which may include separate locations and culturally sensitive resources and staff. Alternative learning opportunities or strategies include workplace literacy, technology literacy and language arts and numeracy skills.

Provision of a structured curriculum for English language learning prior to Kindergarten benefits student learning well into the primary years. Effective early English language learning strategies result in fewer students falling behind their peers, entering the special education strand or being in danger of failing to complete school.

Leadership

It is essential that one person, e.g., lead teacher, project coordinator, consultant or principal, be responsible for project development and for coordinating the implementation of promising ESL strategies.

Community partnerships and innovative delivery of resources, programs and services, e.g., travelling libraries, to targeted students in sparsely populated and geographically isolated areas provide literacy opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

Knowledge

Teacher professional development must be intentional, ongoing and systematic. It is essential that teachers and administrators have knowledge of and use the literature on English language learning to inform their teaching practices. Coaching and collaboration ensure changes in teaching practice and result in the implementation of best practices. Research shows that teachers require more than a year to master the implementation of new approaches to the curriculum.

Comprehensive Approach

A primary strategy for English language development is the effective implementation of the program of studies throughout the school. Promising ESL projects include four essential components fundamental to improving student learning and success:

1. alignment of resources
2. enhanced staff capacity
3. research-based teaching strategies
4. the involvement of communities and families.

Writing and reading projects and strategies are essential. Cross-curricular language learning strategies support school-wide English language learning and develop the metacognitive skills of all students; e.g., a focus on nonfiction text is important to student success.

SELECTION OF PROJECTS

In 2008, Alberta Education provided a consultant with approximately 60 English language learning projects from the three AISI cycles for review. The consultant felt that it was important to build on the knowledge gathered by the previous research reviews of the Cycle I and Cycle II AISI projects, in particular those focused on ESL. After a rigorous and close reading of the 60 projects, the consultant chose 25.

Steps in the Selection of ESL Projects

Alberta Education, in collaboration with the consultant, determined the criteria for selecting the projects. The consultant then followed the steps below to select 25 projects with promising ESL strategies.

1. A close reading was done of the literature on this topic; e.g.,
 - the University of Lethbridge's reports on AISI Cycle I and Cycle II
 - Alberta Education's (2008) *Draft of a Summary of Input on a Literacy Framework for Alberta*
 - the Language Research Centre of the University of Calgary's (2007) *Review of the Literature on English as a Second Language (ESL) Issues*
 - Howard Research & Management Consulting's (2006) *Review of ESL K-12 Program Implementation in Alberta: Final Report*.

These reports provided strategies and information about literacy and ESL.

2. The promising practices in the above-cited reports, specifically the University of Lethbridge AISI report and the Howard Research & Management Consulting (2006) review provided the framework for selecting the promising ESL strategies from the AISI projects. A significant feature of the projects in this report is the specificity of the promising strategies. In short, the promising strategies in this report are more explicit than implicit and provide concrete strategies to consider and implement in school districts, schools and classrooms.
3. Consideration was also given to the following factors when selecting the projects for this report:
 - geographical location of the school
 - whether a project was undertaken in a public, separate or private school
 - whether the projects were urban or rural

- the grade level
- the type of program
- the nature of the student population
- the number of students involved in the projects.

All ESL-focused projects provided by Alberta Education from Cycle I, Cycle II and Cycle III AISI projects were reviewed in light of the preceding factors and those that contained promising strategies were selected for further review.

4. After a second reading, the projects were clustered according to similar strategies.
5. After a third reading, the projects were clustered according to grade level, from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12.
6. After a fourth reading, the projects were clustered according to the programs in which the strategies were implemented.
7. After a fifth reading, the projects were clustered according to the school population involved.
8. After a sixth reading, the projects were clustered according to the number of students involved.
9. The project reports were then read for quality and clarity of written communication. Twenty-five projects that best fit the preceding criteria and most clearly communicated promising English learning strategies were selected for this report.
10. A synopsis of each project was written that included identification of the project, the scope of the project, a brief description of the project in paragraph form, a synopsis of key strategies and a synopsis of changes in practices. Key implementation strategies and assessment strategies were also included when they were deemed to be essential aspects of the promising strategy.
11. A bibliography of resources with promising ESL strategies and other material used in the selected projects was compiled.

From the consultant's report, Alberta Education staff reduced the number to 18 projects with promising ESL strategies. These 18 projects represent a wide variety of grade levels, strategies and populations and are organized into four categories: Projects Involving ESL Students, ESL Strategies, Projects Involving ESL Students and Other English Language Students, and Projects That Involve ESL Students but Apply to All Students.

SUPPORTING ESL STUDENTS: PROMISING ESL STRATEGIES IN ALBERTA

Projects Involving ESL Students

Enhancing Learning for ESL Preschoolers ABC Head Start Society (AISI Project ID: 667)

This project increased parent involvement.

Scope: 288 students, pre-Kindergarten, one school

Brief Description

This project increased the involvement of ESL parents in their children's education and provided assessment in the student's home language, which allowed for quicker and more accurate identification of ESL educational needs. This, in turn, led to more accurate and timely addressing of these needs.

Key Features

- Managed by the education manager and staff involved in the project.
- Used interpreter services.
- Developed and implemented procedures for accessing and monitoring interpreters.
- Trained staff on working with interpreters.
- Encouraged staff to access services that best meet the needs of the children and families attending ABC Head Start.
- Held workshops for staff and parents.
- Increased the involvement of parents of ESL students in case conferences, parent groups and other school activities related to increasing their children's educational success.
- Identified and addressed educational needs quickly and accurately.
- Collected anecdotal information about the number of parents attending parent group and case conferences.
- Collected anecdotal information about the ability of staff to effectively and efficiently assess and address the educational needs of ESL children.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

Staff had access to interpreters and translated documents, e.g., consent forms, and to newly purchased multicultural resources.

Professional Development

Workshops for staff and parents increased the confidence and comfort level of all participants.

Parental Involvement

Parents received information on a regular basis through the parent group and classroom volunteer times. Parents reported feeling involved and empowered and were more confident in participating in their children's education and overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers. Parental participation rates increased throughout the project.

Preschool Literacy Northern Gateway Regional Division No. 10 (AISI Project ID: 332)

Twilight Colony School targeted Kindergarten ESL students to equip them with the English skills they needed to successfully complete the Grade 1 program of studies during their first year of school.

Scope: 20 students, Kindergarten, two schools

Brief Description

Twilight Colony School targeted Kindergarten ESL students to equip them with the English skills they needed to successfully complete the Grade 1 program of studies during their first year of school. These students were provided with a basic knowledge of English before they entered the regular school program to ensure that they could start with Grade 1 materials when classes started in September. Prior to the implementation of the Kindergarten literacy program, students were not working at the appropriate level until approximately December of the Grade 1 year.

The school hired a teacher assistant for April, May and June of each year for the three-year project to work with the Kindergarten ESL students in small groups. The supervising teacher assessed the students and devised a curriculum based on each student's needs, before he or she began Grade 1.

The students' English skills improved and parents, students and teachers were all buoyed by the students' success. In fact, some of the participating students achieved better results than older students who did not participate.

Key Strategies

- A teacher assistant, supervised by a designated teacher, was hired to work with the preschool children.
- The supervising teacher kept a daily journal of each student's progress.
- Students were assessed using standardized tests, ESL assessments and teacher observations.
- Individualized program plans were in place for each student entering Grade 1.
- Parents became involved with a home English program.
- Staff and parents were surveyed annually.
- All stakeholders participated in a final program evaluation.

Changes in Practice

- Program continuity was maintained by using the same texts throughout the entire project.
- A teacher assistant was employed from the first of April until the end of June to work with students in small groups to prepare them for Grade 1.
- Parents were encouraged to listen to their children speak English and to assist them, whenever possible.
- Parents were increasingly visible in the classroom.
- There were more parent–teacher meetings, both formal and informal.
- Parents received two written reports about their children’s progress in their Kindergarten literacy project.

Animated Literacy for ESL Students Edmonton Khalsa School Educational Association (AISI Project ID: 10133)

This program makes it possible to teach a student whose first language is not English in such a way that the child's first language is not excluded.

Scope: 80 students, Kindergarten to Grade 4, one school

Brief Description

The Animated Literacy for ESL Students project incorporates a variety of instructional strategies, phonetic-analysis strategies and music in its approach to teaching. Although research does not consider this approach to ESL instruction as effective as other strategies, it produced positive results when combined with the other strategies implemented in this project. This program makes it possible to teach a student whose first language is not English (all Edmonton Khalsa School students had ESL needs) in such a way that the child's first language is not excluded; indeed, the program helps to ensure that the curriculum is covered in both languages and, as a result, both languages are enhanced.

This project fundamentally changed the school's approach to teaching ESL and language development. Integrating languages, particularly Punjabi, into the program was very effective and advanced the school's mission.

Key Strategies

- The principal was responsible for managing the program.
- Weekly staff meetings were held and time was scheduled for discussions and project updates.
- The Animated Literacy program budget was reviewed with all staff throughout the school year to ensure that spending corresponded to funding.
- The school used numerous resources, materials and speech therapists trained in animated literacy.
- All teachers in the school participated, as required, in in-service training in the Animated Literacy program.
- The school worked with students and parents to plan their ESL training schedule and to familiarize them with the Animated Literacy program.
- The success of each student and the project was evaluated at the end of each year.
- Parent and student satisfaction with the program was monitored throughout the three-year project cycle.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

- Students demonstrated increased skills in both oral and written communication. The puppets that are part of the program supported this skill development and helped teachers engage the students visually and give them hands-on experiences.
- The Animated Literacy program targeted specific literacy objectives for ESL students, thereby helping students achieve their outcomes. This program, along with other ESL learning resources, increased teachers' confidence in their ability to deliver a literacy program.
- A variety of instructional strategies were used, including individual, small-group and whole-group strategies. Parents were also involved in the program.
- The program's phonetic-analysis strategies helped students with word analysis skills, vocabulary development, listening skills, language development and reading and writing skills.
- The program's music element included a music manual and CD-ROMs. Both were effective and became favourite parts of the program.
- The program's drawing manual improved student learning outcomes in both fine motor skills and listening skills.
- Both teacher tests and standardized tests were used each year to assess students' reading and writing levels.
- Teachers received professional development in animated literacy.
- Student learning outcomes were enhanced through teacher mentors available for the staff's professional development in animated literacy.
- The associated literacy resources and materials will be available in the school's classrooms in future years.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was evident at school and at home. Some parents helped prepare materials and resources for use and some ensured that homework was consistently completed and met the school's requirements.

Additional Benefits

The Animated Literacy program had a significant effect on the behaviour of the Khalsa students involved in the program. The students enjoyed learning and did not want to be away from school. As a result, attendance improved overall and student progress toward literacy objectives was continuous and consistent.

ESL Strategies

Almadina School Society (AISI Project ID: 10506)

An ESL school implements a very rich project that focuses on implementing and evaluating key ESL strategies and cooperative teaching.

Scope: 540 students, Kindergarten to Grade 9, one school

Brief Description

The purpose of this project was to redefine, refine and improve the quality of education provided to Almadina students, specifically ESL students. This project integrated ESL curriculum and assessment strategies into classroom practice and assessment procedures to improve students' language proficiency and academic achievement.

Key Strategies

- An effective sheltered language instruction model that incorporated a content-based approach to ESL instruction was developed and implemented.
- The ESL coordinator in charge of the project led a focus group of teachers who developed ESL unit plans and integrated effective ESL teaching strategies into those plans.
- Teachers received coaching and feedback in their classrooms on the use of the identified ESL teaching strategies from a language-sensitive perspective.
- In conjunction with the ESL coordinator, project teachers from each division identified elements of their classroom activities and assessments that corresponded with the ESL academic standards tool (Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey).
- Students involved in the project developed portfolios that showed the curriculum work they had completed and the academic language proficiency level associated with this curriculum content.
- In cooperation with the ESL coordinator, project teachers developed a collaborative planning and team teaching model that was supplemented with workshops.
- Teacher planning and instructional delivery were standardized at each grade level through the implementation of the Learning by Design (LBD) planning tool that allowed teachers to plan units on a University of Calgary online site. This facilitated the integration of language objectives into curriculum units.

- Teachers received feedback on the developed curriculum and lesson plans from the ESL coordinator and peers who were members of the ESL focus team.
- Students were placed in classrooms based on their English proficiency and received instruction at that level. Curriculum content was modified to meet their needs. This was a school-wide model implemented at each grade level.
- Information about academic achievement was gathered using multiyear data. The Woodcock-Muñoz assessment tool was used in conjunction with individual student assessment portfolios to determine student achievement levels at the beginning of the year. Interim assessments kept in the individual student portfolios measured student achievement against curriculum objectives for each reporting period. The Woodcock-Muñoz test was administered in the fall of each school year to compare and measure individual student progress against the expected outcomes statement of the project. The goal in using the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) assessment tool was to track progress that affected the achievement results in the Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT) for each division. The PAT results and goals outlined in Almadina's three-year (2003–2006) plan reflected the progress gauged by the Woodcock-Muñoz assessment tool.
- Other expected outcomes were tracked by developing and administering evaluation questionnaires or rubrics that evaluated perceptions, participation, satisfaction levels, activities and circumstances at the beginning of the project in 2003. The results of these surveys and rubrics were measured midpoint in the school year (December or January) and then again at the end of the school year.

Changes in Practice

- Effective instructional strategies were implemented that allowed students to practise their language skills; the cooperative learning strategies worked particularly well.
- Teachers identified and taught key vocabulary at the beginning of each unit. They also provided explicit language instruction in function and structures and used regular comprehension checks.
- These strategies worked well because teachers and students began to focus on the language of the curriculum that tends to be the biggest challenge for ESL students. By deliberately integrating language and content into their strategies, teachers enhanced student success in both areas.
- The PATs were an excellent measure of how well students were meeting curriculum outcomes. Teachers analyzed PAT results and used them to develop action plans for improvement for each grade.

- Based on the Woodcock-Muñoz language survey results, students were placed in classes with others with similar language proficiency.
- Teachers used a detailed printout of each student's strengths and weaknesses in each area of language proficiency to meet student needs more effectively.
- Provincial and school-wide rubrics provided students with models and standards to strive for.
- Planning periods allowed teachers to plan collaboratively with colleagues.
- A mentoring system was established in which new teachers worked as part of a team and with a more experienced teacher.
- The knowledge gained from this project was integrated into the school's annual Professional Development (PD) plan.
- Teachers received a certain number of PD days each year to work with their planning/professional learning community teams. This type of PD proved effective because teachers could learn from colleagues in a nonthreatening setting.

Parental Involvement

- A benchmark report card gave parents information about their children's language proficiency and academic progress. Informed parents are better able to support their children's learning in direct and indirect ways.

Award-winning Program

- In 2007, Almadina School received a Garfield Weston Award from the Fraser Institute for improvement in elementary education. The school was a Fraser Institute finalist in 2004–2005 and again in 2005–2006 as the Most Improved in Elementary Academics in the province.
- In 2005–2006, a University of Lethbridge study identified this project as one of the AISI projects that had contributed to an improvement in elementary literacy.

ESL: Access to Academic English Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7 (AISI Project ID: 30057)

This project used social, linguistic and cultural strategies to help ESL students achieve. It also prepared teachers to meet the complex and diverse needs of English language students.

Scope: 1000 students, Grade 5 to Grade 12, 17 schools

Brief Description

The goal of this project was to help secondary ESL students who were at risk of not completing school to improve their competence and achieve their academic potential. ESL teachers, content area teachers, parents and students had all expressed concern that intermediate (levels 3–5) ESL students were not achieving academically because of inadequate academic language support. This concern was heightened by the declining PAT results of these students in such content areas as mathematics, science and social studies, in which low proficiency in academic language prevented students from achieving acceptable standards. This was countered in three ways.

1. Informed and directed instructional planning gave teachers better access to content curriculum, enabling them to address student language proficiency.
2. Effective supports ensured optimal program placement and success in transitional years.
3. Cultural competency was increased, resulting in many implications for successful learning.

The Edmonton Regional Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) gave this project the Alberta ASCD Innovative Teaching Practices Award 2007.

Key Strategies

- Dedicated 2.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) consultants to the project.
- Identified and focused PD for priority schools.
- Developed a district ESL student portfolio.
- Enhanced teachers' ability to revise instructional programs.
- Developed workshops for parents on Alberta's educational programs and their children's educational needs.
- Developed tools and strategies for teachers to meet ESL students' linguistic needs.

- Developed cultural competency strategies for teachers to meet their ESL students' cultural needs.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies: Cultural Competency

- Research was one effective practice that used many of the excellent resources on cultural competency; e.g., Davies 2006.
- An important process was helping teachers understand and recognize their own culture first to see how it shaped the lens through which they viewed the world and the impact it had on their teaching. This gave teachers the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue about what constituted a culturally responsive learning environment and encouraged them to find ways to change their practice in their own unique classrooms and schools.

A Better Culture: Cultural Competency PD Workshops

- Schools must be able to raise sensitive issues, e.g., cultural competency, in gentle but straightforward, caring and honest ways. The culture of the teachers is as important as the culture of the students. At this school, the entire school staff were helped to articulate a specific goal related to cultural competence and then to delineate a way of measuring progress toward that goal.
- The project PD workshops provided enriching learning environments in which it was safe to be politically incorrect and to ask the questions that participants had always wanted to ask but had never had a safe and open forum in which to do so.

Parental Involvement

- Another effective aspect of this project was workshops for parents on Alberta's educational system and the role of parents in their children's education. These well-attended workshops were held at central locations to ensure maximum access and participation and were promoted through communities at the grassroots level in six different languages.

Topics identified by parents for future sessions included:

- school security
- ignorance of rules and expectations that leads to many ESL students getting into trouble
- ESL programs for parents
- more information about secondary schooling
- assessment of ESL students
- activities to teach parents how to help their children improve their English

- clarification of academic expectations in every subject area
- ways in which parents can better inform schools about their home culture, language and traditions
- information on how to handle problems when a student’s classmates are dismissive, disrespectful or racist
- celebrating diversity.

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Davis, Bonnie M. *How to Teach Students Who Don’t Look Like You: Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006.

Improving Teaching and Learning Strategies for English as a Second Language

Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7

(AISI Project ID: 10351)

A large urban school district established a district-wide approach to improve teaching and learning strategies in ESL program delivery.

Scope: District-wide

Brief Description

A large urban school district established a district-wide approach to improve teaching and learning strategies in ESL program delivery. The district also developed diagnostic and assessment instruments for K–12 ESL to improve assessment, interpretation and reporting of test results and to better fit the Alberta program of studies. The district’s approach included the development of common visions and goals, consistent ESL assessment, intake protocol development and implementation and leadership and research combined with capacity building.

KEY FEATURES

Common Vision and Goals

A steering committee made up of parents of ESL students, teachers, administrators, immigrant community agencies, ESL liaison workers and the district AISI project coordinator was crucial to the success of this project. Collaboration and coordination promoted and sustained this project throughout Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7.

The school district and school communities were required to build a common vision, with goals that showed a responsive and coordinated approach to programming for the success of ESL students and their families. This was accomplished by:

- aligning project goals with the goals and priorities of the province, district and superintendent
- building cultural competency among staff in schools with ethnically diverse populations to help them encourage fuller participation from parents who traditionally do not see themselves as partners in their children’s education
- having liaison workers communicate and build relationships with immigrant parents through services, e.g., translation, interpretation and orientation sessions, so parents understand their roles and responsibilities as partners in their children’s education.

Consistent ESL Assessment and Intake Protocol

A consistent, manageable and essential ESL assessment intake and protocol was established across the district to enhance second language learning and student achievement by:

- establishing intake procedures, including first and English language assessment, to ensure settlement, engagement and participation of second language students from the beginning
- implementing a practised, maintained and monitored protocol, at the district and school levels, of formative assessment tools to identify student proficiency in reading, writing and oral English development to provide a standard benchmark and consistent assessment practices
- providing parental support through liaison workers who assist school communities and families with orientation, settlement, translation and interpretation
- integrating English proficiency benchmarks and explicit reading and writing outcomes into English language arts to improve student achievement.

Leadership and Research

Leadership and current research findings helped assure the success of this project by:

- providing supportive PD for classroom teachers and ESL-designated teachers to help them learn and refine strategies and put them into practice
- providing release time during the school day for teachers to develop a deeper understanding of second language acquisition and proficiency benchmarks with relation to curriculum outcomes in all subject areas
- developing congruency between pullout and classroom practices for ESL students by having classroom teachers attend workshops to collaborate and develop essential common understandings
- implementing the lead teacher role, as identified in Thomas Guskey's (2000) model, that stresses the significance of a teacher expert modelling, mentoring and coaching. Instructional strategies presented during PD sessions were modelled onsite for teachers and the ESL and AISI teachers provided coaching and mentoring support.

Changes in Practice

Schools that focused on purposefully addressing their culturally diverse learning communities with goals and action plans that aligned with district and provincial goals and priorities, including ESL and AISI goals, recorded increases in:

- parental participation
- student engagement
- professional knowledge
- ESL student achievement.

Other positive outcomes were as follows.

- Revisions to the reception, initial and yearly assessment protocol were implemented in all district schools.
- The revised ESL District Accountability Form, which all district schools complete every year, included the data required for district and Alberta Education monitoring of ESL programming. This included student name and grade, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) entry score, oral/written English language proficiency scores, overall level of proficiency, foreign-born funded/Canadian-born funded coding and arrival date.
- Identifying specific assessment tools, including English language proficiency benchmarks, allowed for consistency in assessing ESL student proficiency in oral language, writing and reading across the district.
- Once student needs were clearly identified, teaching practice involved more student-centred teaching and assessment with a toolbox of effective strategies. Evidence showed that these strategies improved student achievement.
- When teachers and students were able to define what was expected of them on English proficiency benchmarks and other literacy measures, the rate of improvement increased and the gaps in learning decreased.
- Through PD activities, teachers in content areas increased their capacity and repertoire of strategies that implemented scaffolding, resulting in improved achievement of English language students.
- A team-teaching approach was used more often than pullout sessions isolated from classroom content.
- ESL student achievement on PATs in grades 3, 6 and 9 English language arts was used as a benchmark to track the rate of improvement of English language students.

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Improving Teaching and Learning Strategies for ESL Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7 (AISI Project ID: 10351)

The focus of the project was on the use of an integrated district- and site-based PD model designed by Thomas Guskey. This project is a continuation of the previous project.

Scope: 1650 students, Grade 1 to Grade 12, 40 schools

Brief Description

The overarching goal of this large, urban, district-wide project was to improve student achievement in English language arts for ESL students. The focus was on the use of an integrated district- and site-based PD model designed by Thomas Guskey. Over the three years of the project, 36 independent schools increased their ability to deliver responsive and effective programs for ESL students.

The PD model drew upon current research, study groups, mentoring, modelling and coaching to help teachers make informed decisions about practice and programming to meet the needs of ESL students in each of the 40 schools. Lead teachers provided onsite support and used mentoring and coaching when assisting teachers in implementing skills and strategies.

A district ESL protocol was developed with new standards and procedures for reception/assessment/benchmarks and it provided the district with a consistent reception/programming process. Programs for immigrant parents explained how Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7 works, how an additional language is acquired, what expectations the school had of their children and what they, in turn, could expect from the school system.

Criteria for participation in the project were included in the invitations sent out to schools inviting them to take part in the project. The AISI coordinator carried out formative assessment and monitoring during the course of the projects. Although each project had its own indicators of success, all the projects were designed on an evaluation rubric that was used by the AISI selection committee when vetting each project. This rubric was also applied at the end of the cycle to determine if the stated outcomes of the original proposals were met.

This project was chosen as an exemplary project and its findings were presented to educational researchers at the University of Lethbridge who were studying commonalities for success in a number of AISI projects.

Key Strategies

- Developed a PD model suited to the goals of the project.
- Developed an Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7 protocol for ESL students.
- Improved PAT results for ESL students.
- Encouraged immigrant parents to actively participate in their children's education.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

- Essential learning outcomes that all students could be expected to achieve were identified.
- The ESL AISI teacher modelled and coached ESL best practices in schools.
- As best practices were identified, teachers reflected on their own practice and refined and honed it with the assistance of onsite coaching, if requested.
- Evidence from a checklist on ESL teaching strategies showed that a significant change in teaching practice occurred.
- Content-area teachers gained knowledge and understanding of second language acquisition and its effect on academic learning. Teachers implemented best teaching practices that improved the concept attainment of ESL students in mathematics and science. The district's model of ESL support expanded to include content-area teachers in core curriculum areas. Results improved in core areas when this model was implemented.
- Evidence indicated that ESL teachers involved in this project shared these effective teaching practices with their colleagues.
- There was continuous talk between ESL support teachers and classroom teachers about how to implement strategies to improve ESL student learning.

Student Assessment

- ESL intake procedures, including first and English language assessment, were established at the beginning to ensure the settlement, engagement and participation of second language students.

- A variety of formative assessment tools were used to identify student proficiency in reading, writing and oral English; these tools provided a standard benchmark and consistent assessment practice that became an ESL protocol that is practised, maintained and monitored both at the school and district levels annually. The rate of improvement increased and the gaps in learning decreased.
- Parental support from liaison workers helped school communities and families address orientation, settlement, information, translation and interpretation needs.
- Success was achieved when English language proficiency benchmarks and explicit reading and writing outcomes were integrated into English language arts. This purposeful integration improved student achievement.
- Once student needs were clearly identified, teaching practices involved more student-centred teaching and assessment from a toolbox of effective strategies.
- The rate of English language acquisition was monitored yearly to identify if and when ESL students were peaking. If they were peaking, instructional strategies focused on the required level of instruction to advance their learning.
- A prereferral process ensured consistent access to support services for ESL students with complex learning profiles. More information about the recognition of severe adjustment disorder and post-traumatic stress needs was included in PD sessions.
- An ESL transition examination was used as a district assessment tool to effectively place students transitioning from Level 4 ESL into English Language Arts 10-1 or 10-2.

Leadership

- Leadership strategies and current research were used to initiate and sustain successful capacity building and change that ensured the academic success of ESL students.
- The services of ESL liaison workers (Immigrant Settlement Services) were used.
- Interpretation, translation services and guidance were offered to families whose language at home was not English.
- The project coordinator acted as a liaison between Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7 and outside agencies; e.g., Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Alberta Education, the ESL Advisory Committee, University of Alberta, Catholic Social Services, Mennonite Welcoming Centre, Multicultural Mental Health Brokers, ASSIST and Elders from the Sudanese Community Association.

- The project coordinator collaborated with the ESL assessor in the referral and delivery of ESL assessments and acquired, maintained and distributed up-to-date ESL resources.

Professional Development

- Sustained and supportive PD for both classroom teachers and ESL-designated teachers gave teachers the opportunity to work as a team to learn, refine and implement strategies.
- Daytime release time gave project participants the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of second language acquisition and proficiency benchmarks related to curriculum outcomes in all subject areas. This was crucial to the success of PD.
- The success of ESL students receiving pullout support was amplified when there was congruency between pullout practices and classroom practices. Having classroom teachers and ESL-designated teachers attend PD in-services together established common understandings and essential collaboration.
- The instructional strategies that were presented during PD sessions were modelled onsite, and coaching and mentoring support was provided by the AISI ESL teacher. This onsite role was critical and acted as the change agent for increased best practices in ESL education.
- The following workshops were held:
 - Building Culturally Responsive Schools
 - Teaching Content to English Language Learners series
 - Literature Circles with a New Twist (Brownlie, 2005)
 - Developing Math Literacy and Numeracy Skills with English Language Learners in Mind
 - Making Sense: Small Group Comprehension Lessons for ESL Students
 - A Celebration of Promising Practices That Enhance Achievement of English Language Learners

Parental Involvement

- Presentations were made to community agencies that provided services to immigrant parents to increase parental awareness of Alberta's education system and the expectations that schools have of both students and parents.
- ESL liaison workers spent time at six schools to increase the parental participation of immigrant families in the school community.
- A multicultural fair was held at a district school to celebrate diversity.
- Multicultural tip sheets were distributed at many meetings, presentations and school open houses. Parent education program curriculum guides were also distributed.

- *A Handbook for Parents of ELL Learners* provided information and suggestions for parents with children in elementary school.
- A series of parent information sessions were held due to the collaborative efforts of an ESL AISI school, ESL liaison workers, the Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership and Children's Mental Health Enhancements from the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Translation services were provided at these meetings and parents were encouraged to participate in their first language.

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Projects Involving ESL Students and Other English Language Students

English as a Second Language, K–6 Providence Christian School Society (AISI Project ID: 30363)

Schools with many ESL students will find this project useful in assisting these students to rapidly improve their English.

Scope: 55 students, Kindergarten to Grade 3, one school

Brief Description

The goal of this project was to improve the English skills of a large influx of German Mennonite students, mainly to Division 1, over a four-year period. Many of these children did not speak English and were not doing well in school. The school realized that it needed to address this problem. The school purchased resources, hired an aide to work in the school's resource room and enabled staff collaboration and the sharing of promising practices for developing fluency in English. The older children played a lead role in developing English language skills for their whole family by sharing their learning with siblings and parents. Teachers used a variety of resource-specific formative and summative measures to monitor students' English language learning and track teachers' confidence in their ability to teach English language students. Feedback from teachers, parents and students provided information about the efficacy of this project and informed project adaptations.

Schools with many ESL students will find this project useful in assisting these students to rapidly improve their English.

Key Features

- The school purchased a variety of print and multimedia resources and provided staff with in-services on using the new resources and strategies with ESL students.
- A teacher aide was hired to work in the resource room, collaborate with staff and share promising practices to help students develop English fluency.
- Teachers used a variety of resource-specific formative and summative measures to monitor student learning and enhance teacher confidence in their ESL teaching skills.

Changes in Practice

- New resources purchased included Essential Skills, Spelling Fusion, NAS software, ESL Learning Kits and a variety of print resources.
- Students received daily one-on-one instruction to develop their reading, comprehension and oral skills.
- Time was taken to identify individual student needs and address them in an immediate and personalized way.
- Because the students generalized their reading skills across the curriculum, the reading program was extended into mathematics.
- This project was expanded to include students not identified as being at-risk. All students in the school now use the program.

The success of the project was advertised through school announcements, newsletters, presentations to the school society and at a year-end awards ceremony.

Early Literacy K–3 Edmonton School District No. 7 (AISI Project ID: 364)

This particular early literacy project involved full-day Kindergarten, small classes in Grade 1 and implementation of the early literacy strategies of reading recovery and balanced literacy.

Scope: 1150 students, Kindergarten to Grade 3, 15 schools

Project Description

The goal of this project was to implement early literacy programs in 15 schools in Edmonton School District No. 7. This project began after the district had gathered input from principals, parents and central staff that identified early literacy as key to improving student achievement. This particular early literacy project involved full-day Kindergarten, small classes in Grade 1 and implementation of the early literacy strategies of reading recovery and balanced literacy.

The balanced literacy program had a positive impact on the academic growth of students and gave teachers confidence in their abilities to monitor growth in English language arts and meet the needs of a wide range of children, including ESL students.

Although this project was undertaken in a large urban school district, it could be replicated in smaller districts with fewer students.

Key Features

- Full-day Kindergarten programs were implemented, requiring extra teacher FTEs.
- Grade 1 classes had 15 or fewer students, requiring extra teacher FTEs.
- Emphasis was on reading recovery and balanced literacy programs.
- Teachers received PD in reading recovery that involved abundant front-line staff time and PD for one year.
- Balanced literacy provides continuous English language arts programming across all elementary levels and is consistent with Alberta's English language arts curriculum. Teachers received PD in balanced literacy implementation. The main costs were for release time for in-servicing and coaching.
- The district's Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) was the main tool for measuring project success. Each year of the project, quantitative information was collected from the HLAT at target grades and from the Grade 3 PAT in English language arts.

- Qualitative information was collected from the Developmental Reading Assessment and from surveys of teachers, principals and parents.
- Case studies of a sample of students were done as a result of the project.
- Teachers kept journals on the students' progress.

Changes in Practice

- With AISI funding, Edmonton School District No. 7 expanded full-day Kindergarten to 15 schools in low socio-economic neighbourhoods and compared the progress of the full-day Kindergarten students to that of half-day Kindergarten students in middle-class neighbourhoods. The consistent result over three years of the AISI project was the elimination of initial differences between low socio-economic full-day Kindergarten students and middle-class half-day students. At the end of each year, the performance of the low socio-economic students who had received full-day Kindergarten resembled the performance of their middle-class peers in the half-day control group.
- Reading recovery instruction was important for the lowest performing students in Grade 1. Reading recovery involved intensive, individualized instruction in both reading and writing. The district reported that 84 percent of the students who had enough time to complete their reading recovery instruction successfully reached grade level.
- Teachers training in balanced literacy committed to participating in a two-year PD program of 70 hours that focused on the theoretical underpinnings of literacy and also provided practical demonstrations, coaching, observations, feedback, consultations and meetings between teachers within a support-to-independence model; e.g., reading specialists model each strategy or technique prior to coaching teachers. The movement from supported to independent literacy was basic to all teaching in the program's three components of reading, writing and working with words.

Instructional Strategies

- Teachers who enrolled in balanced literacy training learned specific strategies in word block, reading block and writing block. They also learned how to provide multilevel programming for all students in their classroom and adjust programming to meet student needs. The use of multilevel methods and materials ensured that all children demonstrated growth in literacy.
- To facilitate communication and sharing among teachers, core sets of professional and classroom materials were housed in a central location in each school.

- Staff and administrators purchased recommended materials for student use and for teacher PD. Balanced literacy in-services were scheduled in the school calendar to allow teachers to attend and timetabling for English language arts was done in continuous blocks of time in the morning.
- School staff participated in monthly in-services combined with demonstration lessons and coaching in each of the daily key components of word block, reading block and writing block.

Parental Involvement

- Parents were involved in a home component of balanced literacy—every day, they practised five word-wall words with their children and listened to their children read home reading books. Every two weeks, they reviewed a making words lesson with their children. Parents also volunteered in schools with balanced literacy material preparation and organization of the room where the balanced literacy resources were stored.
- Parents received a newsletter from the balanced literacy manual about the program. Schools held parent nights at which parents learned interesting ways to get involved. Communication with parents occurred throughout the school year through work sent home, phone calls, parent–teacher conferences and informal meetings when parents were in the school.

Building Connections to the World

Foothills School Division No. 38 (AISI Project ID: 375)

This project was useful for school districts that serve closed communities or that have ESL students with limited background knowledge of elementary social studies and science topics taught in Alberta.

Scope: 31 students, Grade 3 to Grade 6, three schools

Brief Description

This project attempted to make learning more experiential, relevant, personally meaningful and enjoyable and was based on the knowledge that students who are engaged in learning are more likely to do better academically. This project was useful for school districts that serve closed communities, e.g., Hutterite colonies that have varying but usually limited degrees of contact with the outside world, or that have ESL students with limited background knowledge of elementary social studies and science topics taught in Alberta.

The colony teachers made use of materials, e.g., manipulatives, nonfiction books, teacher-made visuals and other media, to support and supplement grades 3 to 6 social studies and science. At times, especially in social studies, an experiential approach was critical because the concepts taught were so foreign to the students who tended to simply memorize content without really understanding it. The materials were organized into circulating kits that rotated each year among the three colony schools. Textbooks had already been successfully shared in this manner.

Key Strategies

- Language and content were taught simultaneously.
- Key visuals helped students acquire content vocabulary without compromising course content.
- Hands-on experiences made content more relevant.
- Teachers continued regular classroom assessments; e.g., unit tests in social studies and science. The first-year results served as a baseline for the subsequent two years.
- One person working out of the largest colony coordinated the project.
- Students were surveyed annually to determine their attitudes toward social studies and science.
- Teachers conducted random observations of the students and documented the number of times that “side trips” were required during lessons to explain unfamiliar vocabulary and build the necessary background knowledge so they could effectively teach the course content.

- The project relied on younger students learning from older siblings participating in the project.

Changes in Practice

- Direct instruction in content-area vocabulary, coupled with the use of visuals, e.g., posters, books and hands-on learning, had a positive effect on the learning of these students whose experiences are limited by culture and traditions.
- Time was spent during the summer break ordering and processing materials for the upcoming school year.
- PD activities for colony educators focused on strategies for multigrade classrooms that are the norm in colony schools.

Parental Involvement

Parents were notified about their children's progress at parent meetings. Colony parents were neither actively involved nor interested in being actively involved in colony schools.

Issues Related to Education in Closed Communities

This project demonstrated that improving student learning and achievement in colony schools takes longer than in a mainstream English school. Other factors to consider include:

- most research indicates that fluency in English takes seven years
- the colony goal is often for children to learn only basic English; the Hutterite German dialect is the language of daily use
- Hutterite culture and traditions are often at odds with the educational goals of the school; e.g., there are fears that schools teach colony children worldly values that conflict with traditional ones
- school is the sole source of information about the outside world
- consistency of colony school teaching staff is necessary but difficult to maintain.

Improving Reading Skills Peace River School Division No. 10 (AISI Project ID: 417)

This project was appropriate for a geographically isolated school division in a sparsely populated region of the province.

Scope: 1700 students, Grade 1 to Grade 9, 15 schools

Brief Description

This project had two main goals:

1. use technology to teach literacy
2. give teachers strategies to improve their reading instruction.

This project was appropriate for a geographically isolated school division in a sparsely populated region of the province.

The project set out to improve the teaching of reading to students in grades 1 to 9 and to secondary students in four junior high schools. During the first year, the schools concentrated on improving the reading skills of at-risk and ESL students. Two factors helped achieve this goal:

1. the hiring of an itinerant part-time reading specialist
2. the widespread use of computer programs, e.g., AutoSkill, designed to improve student attitudes to and skills in reading.

In the second year of the project, the First Steps Reading Resource program was implemented in grades 1 to 6. First Steps is a professional development resource that helps teachers improve student literacy. During this year of the project, at-risk and ESL students continued to be the focus, although some early literacy and regular stream students were also included. All elementary reading teachers received 10 hours of in-servicing in the First Steps Reading Resource program.

Because reading success is strongly affected by writing skills, the First Steps Writing program was implemented in grades 1 to 6 in the third year of the project. All elementary reading teachers received 10 hours of in-servicing in the First Steps Writing program.

Key Strategies

- Acquiring the AutoSkill program and required hardware.
- In-servicing teachers in the use of the AutoSkill program (10 hours).
- Engaging identified students in a minimum of 25 hours with the AutoSkill computer program.

- In-servicing the effective literacy programming by the reading consultant (10 hours).
- Implementing the First Steps Reading Resource in grades 1 to 6.
- In-servicing all elementary reading teachers in the second and third year, using the First Steps Reading Resource.
- Assessing individual student reading levels, both pre- and post-, using the diagnostic component of the AutoSkill program. The pretest served as the baseline for future testing.
- Keeping anecdotal records on student involvement in nonprescribed reading by teachers.
- Surveying teachers and parents on their perceptions of the reading program.
- Holding regular meetings between the reading consultant, curriculum supervisor and project participants.

Changes in Practice

- Teachers received targeted in-servicing that helped them implement new programs and resources effectively and confidently.
- The reading consultant was trained in becoming a First Steps literacy resource tutor.
- The reading consultant supported the implementation of new reading resources in the elementary schools, arranged staff training, conducted in-services as needed or requested, helped teachers with common concerns, networked with colleagues, initiated the search for information pertaining to reading practices, provided support through school visits and helped set up workshops.
- The reading consultant helped facilitate a reading program to familiarize 15 teachers with the Four Blocks approach to teaching reading.
- The reading consultant collected data for reporting purposes and worked with the AISI coordinator to present the data, manage the budget and complete other administrative tasks.
- Trained teachers supported reading-delayed students by working with them in the Academy of Reading.
- Trained teachers used strategies from the First Steps Literacy Resource to enhance classroom reading instruction.
- Teachers discussed a common resource and their shared understanding of literacy to create a positive environment for literacy instruction.
- Networking between teachers and schools established a broad base of support.

- The First Steps program provided a common assessment continuum that enabled teachers to assess students, using common criteria for each grade level.
- The reading consultant was trained in the reading resources implemented during the three-year project and, in turn, provided in-services to the elementary reading teachers.

Parental Involvement

- Parents were invited to observe their children working in the Academy of Reading.
- Some parents received enough training to enable them to be parent helpers to students working in the Academy of Reading.
- Aspects of the First Steps program were used to inform parents about the program and how their children were progressing.
- School newsletters published articles about reading.
- School council meetings gave parents an opportunity to discuss information about the reading process.

Other Information

Over the three years of the project, the number of students enrolled in the Academy of Reading declined as teachers became more cognizant of the program and more selective regarding which students would benefit the most. Difficulty in obtaining computer time can also limit the number of students using the program, as can the availability of teachers to work with the students and the program.

Middle School Literacy Enhancement Northland School Division No. 61 (AISI Project ID: 10299)

The school effectively used this project to increase awareness and use of reading strategies to improve student learning and academic success.

Scope: 200 students, Grade 6 to Grade 9, one school

Brief Description

This project provides information about how geographically dispersed schools with diverse student populations, including ESL students and other struggling readers, can use technology to enhance middle school literacy. The school effectively used this project to increase awareness and the use of reading strategies to improve student learning and academic success.

The major resource used in this project was the Accelerated Reader program. Students had 40 minutes per day to devote to intensive reading. The program and the extra reading time allowed teachers to use novels, comprehension tests and reading in pairs to increase student reading levels; teachers used the STAR Reading program to track progress. These strategies had many positive effects, including:

- students received ongoing assistance
- a positive and supportive environment for reading arose in the school
- students became more aware of their own reading abilities
- the class time devoted to these skills increased student interest in reading and improved their reading skills
- teachers incorporated the divisional Reading Initiative strategies into their classroom instruction in recognition of the importance of reading comprehension in student academic success.

Key Strategies

- Forty minutes per day were devoted to reading.
- Class size did not exceed 20 students.
- Student competency during reading time was enhanced by having students work in pairs.
- The availability of high-interest, variable-level reading sources was increased.
- Monthly activities promoted reading and included the school, home and community.

- Reading comprehension was tested regularly and remediation was applied, as required.
- All instructional staff reviewed overall progress monthly and revised strategies as needed and on an ongoing basis.
- Award ceremonies recognized student success.
- The STAR Reading program measured grade-equivalent tracking and project success.
- Data to gauge project success was also gathered from achievement test data and from classroom teacher evaluations of their students.

Changes in Practice

- The extra time allowed teaching staff to use a variety of strategies to grade these middle school students' reading levels. These strategies were as follows.
 - Student–teacher conferences took place in which reading comprehension problems and strategies for improvement were discussed.
 - Follow-up was provided with individual students to see if the strategy helped or if a new strategy was required.
 - The use of Accelerated Reading diagnostic information guided students to the appropriate book levels and indicated if further intervention was required.
 - Vocabulary instruction, games and word-of-the-week were instituted.
 - Students tracked their own progress in journals to help them know when to ask for assistance.
 - Reading assignments were given on a weekly basis.
- The assessments helped teachers assess student reading, improve reading instruction and support and build on successes. Student assessment strategies were as follows.
 - Accelerated Reading program quizzes provided the teacher and student with immediate feedback and intervention, leading to a discussion of problems.
 - The STAR reading test was used for grade-equivalent tracking to gauge project success.
 - At the teacher's direction, following a novel study, students, either individually or as a class, took detailed and comprehensive tests and literacy quizzes that were part of the Accelerated Reading program on selected books.
 - Students studied selected vocabulary for a book they were planning to read and did a vocabulary quiz prior to starting their reading.
 - The students took teacher-made comprehension and vocabulary tests.
 - Jerry Johns Diagnostic Reading Assessments were administered.

- All staff participated in the following professional development activities.
 - Several reading teachers continued to study and learn on their own.
 - Eleven teachers attended a book club once a month where they discussed articles and practices related to improving student vocabulary, using the International Reading Association book-study pack on vocabulary.
 - Grade 6 teachers and administrators participated in a 2005 reading initiative on reaching reluctant readers, a 2006 workshop on avoiding the grades 3 to 6 reading slump and a Precision Reading workshop.
 - All teachers received in-servicing on how to use the Jerry Johns Informal Reading Inventory.

Literacy Enhancement Canadian University College (AISI Project ID: 10786)

This project involved both ESL and regular students who needed extra help with literacy skills and was based on the belief that many of the pedagogical strategies that are effective with ESL students are also useful with at-risk English-speaking students.

Scope: 25 students, Grade 10 to Grade 12, one school

Brief Description

This was a two-part project that involved both ESL and regular students who needed extra help with literacy skills and was based on the belief that many of the pedagogical strategies that are effective with ESL students are also useful with at-risk English-speaking students. Resources were put toward enhancing teachers' confidence in their ability to meet the literacy needs of their ESL and at-risk students.

A project teacher (.5 FTE) was hired to develop the program and work with the students. In the first year of the program, this project teacher engaged in PD, assessed similar programs in other schools, gathered resources and experimented with them to determine which were most suitable.

The more structured second and third years of the project delivered the program that had been developed in year one. A weekly cultural aspect was incorporated into the program to help ESL students understand and apply literacy skills in the context of Canadian culture. The English-speaking students also had a role in integrating language skills into the cultural activities.

Criteria were developed for assessing the students' literacy growth. Anecdotal observations, from the ESL teacher and regular classroom teachers, about the growth of literacy skills and students' ability to apply them to their assignments, supplemented the quantitative assessment of the project.

Key Strategies

- The principal coordinated the project in consultation with teachers and staff.
- PD was the emphasis in the first year of the project.
- The project teacher evaluated potential resource materials and implemented them on an experimental basis with the ESL and at-risk students to determine which were suitable.
- In the second year of the project, the teachers implemented the new program and resources in a formal class for identified students.

- Student learning was monitored to determine the impact of the project and adjustments were made, as needed.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Practices

- One-on-one work was undertaken in small groups with the aid of volunteer staff.

Professional Development

- The project teacher participated in workshops and peer discussions with teachers in other ESL programs, initiated discussions with community ESL resource programs and read professional literature related to the project.

Student Assessment

- Teacher-developed pretesting and post-testing were conducted to determine if the project had accomplished its goals.
- Teachers took anecdotal notes on each student and conducted tests to determine students' reading level when they entered the program. These tests included the Schonell Reading Test, Slosson Oral Reading Test and General Assessment Grammar Recognition. After each six-week grading period, the students were reassessed using these same tests to see how much they had improved. Findings indicated that teachers should emphasize reading, writing, handwriting, phonics, listening skills, conversation skills, spelling, grammar and knowledge of Canadian culture.

Parental Involvement

- Parents were informed about their children's status at the beginning of the program and received an update on their children's progress every two to three weeks.
- Parents were encouraged to visit the project classroom when they were in the school.

Literacy for ESL and Special Needs Students Calgary School District No. 19 (AISI Project ID: 768)

This project focused on improving the literacy skills and academic success of English language students and language-delayed students with special needs who were integrated into the regular classroom.

Scope: 80 students, Grade 10 to Grade 12, one school

Brief Description

This project focused on improving the literacy skills and academic success of English language students and language-delayed students with special needs who were integrated into the regular classroom.

An English Language Arts 10-1 class was created to address the literacy and language needs of ESL students and students with special needs. The class covered the English Language Arts 10-1 curriculum, addressed language proficiencies required in all subjects and attended to student behaviour and attitudes. The rationale for the project was as follows.

- Proficiency in English affects all subject areas.
- Large classes and curriculum demands often prohibit individualized instruction in literacy development.
- The English language arts curriculum is flexible enough to provide instruction in literacy development.
- Both ESL students and students with special needs tend to have a high drop-out rate.
- Both ESL students and students with special needs tend to represent themselves aggressively by demanding more time from the teacher or passively by becoming invisible and slipping through the cracks.
- Barriers to ESL student success are most significant in highly abstract and culturally specific subjects.

This project has the potential to enhance instruction in districts seeking to adapt to the steady rise of ESL students in mainstream classrooms.

Key Strategies

- A sheltered English language arts class for ESL students and students with special and literacy needs was created and implemented.
- Students received additional help throughout their senior high school years.

- Teacher resource time was allocated to English language arts and social studies classes and to students who required literacy time.
- Collaboration and workshops provided teachers with strategies to meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

- Although the implementation of the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1/adjunct ESL 5 classes was not an original idea in Calgary School District No. 19, the formal extension of the semisheltered classes and continued support in Grade 12 made this program unique.
- For the noncoded student, support was provided on a drop-in or pullout basis and was available to students during the lunch hour and after school.
- The sheltered English Language Arts 10–1/ESL 5 class program was made available on a Web site for the use of other schools dealing with the same program needs.

Professional Development

- PD was provided for special strategies to deal with mainstreamed ESL and struggling students. These strategies included scaffolding, prior knowledge and differentiation.

Program Management

- At the end of each semester, the teachers who had been working in collaboration with or taken workshops from the AISI literacy coordinator were surveyed to determine if their needs and their students' needs had been met. This information was recorded and used by the project coordinator to re-evaluate and determine the type of assistance the teachers found most useful.
- One of the most important insights gained was related to the way in which student timetables were planned over three years. While some students advanced and integrated rather effortlessly, others seemed to need continual support. The original idea was to start the identified students in the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 class and follow this with full integration. When it became apparent that many students benefited from the unique learning opportunities to work on specific strategies introduced in the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 class, the semisheltered English Language Arts 20-1 class was implemented and continued support was provided in English Language Arts 30-1.
- It was important that student timetabling consider students' future academic plans, possible post-secondary educational goals and the organization of subject options and social studies classes.

Assessment

- The ESL student drop-out rate before project implementation was the baseline. Students enrolled in the first sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 class were tracked over the next three years. It was believed that, by the third year of the project, the drop-out rate of those students receiving additional help would fall to the provincial average. Any student who did not complete senior high school and was not enrolled in senior high school or any other educational facility, e.g., SAIT, Viscount Bennett Centre, was considered a drop-out. These alternative educational paths were required as viable options because many ESL students run out of time to complete all their senior high school courses in three years.
- The pass rate on the English Language Arts 30-1 and 30-2 and Social Studies 30 and 33 examinations for the two years prior to the project were averaged to form the baseline data for achievement in these courses. The study group was the first set of students enrolled in the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 program. These students were expected to meet the acceptable standard for achievement for the English language arts and social studies diploma examinations.

Parental Involvement

- Parental involvement was limited. A notice was sent to parents at the beginning of the school year to inform them of the extra support their children would receive.
- Plans were in place to have the parents monitor their children's literacy goals but, in reality, very few immigrant parents have the time or the confidence in their own language ability to get involved in their children's education.

Continuation of AISI Project 768: Literacy for ESL and Special Needs Students Calgary School District No. 19 (AISI Project ID: 10318)

One of the goals in this project was to identify coded ESL, noncoded ESL and struggling students as early as possible to set up an immediate support system.

Scope: 300 students, Grade 10 to Grade 12, one school

Brief Description

The implementation of the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 class and adjunct ESL 5 class, as described in the previous project, remained the same. One of the goals in this project was to identify coded ESL, noncoded ESL and struggling students as early as possible to set up an immediate support system. The AISI project implementer oversaw the sheltered class and a qualified ESL teacher facilitated the adjunct portion of the program. As a result, the participating students received two complementary English classes in one semester. The teachers collaborated to build a solid program that emphasized vocabulary development and strategies for reading and writing. Because the academic ESL students still lacked English vocabulary and mechanical skills, the class was differentiated to accommodate their specific needs. A modified and individualized program was created for students who might not continue in the academic stream. Because the project provided ESL students with the one-on-one attention, which is essential to creating independent thinking ability and metacognitive awareness, this project would not have been doable in a large class.

Ongoing support is crucial to the success of ESL students. By creating a semisheltered English language arts class, student transitions to higher-level courses occurred in a more comfortable and supportive setting. The class consisted of approximately one half Canadian-born students and one half ESL students pursuing the academic route. An English language arts teacher, who was fully aware of the special dynamics of such a class, taught the English Language Arts 20-1 class in which the emphasis was on increasing the ESL students' awareness of Western culture and its literary legacy and on building vocabulary.

After completion of the sheltered English Language Arts 10-1 class and adjunct ESL classes, students had three options based on their academic results; i.e., to:

1. repeat the English Language Arts 10-1 blended class, in the case of failure
2. advance to English Language Arts 20-1
3. advance to English Language Arts 20-2.

Teachers strove to identify individual literacy issues early in the program to determine subsequent student placement in either academic or applied streams.

At this level, because teachers often felt overwhelmed by large classes and the pressure to prepare students for the diploma examinations, a weekly formal English Language Arts 30-1 tutorial was set up to give both teachers and students extra support. This one-hour tutorial was scheduled at a set time, either before or after school. The AISI implementer collaborated with English Language Arts 30-1 teachers to fine-tune errors in students' reading and writing. In the English Language Arts 30-1 class, more emphasis was placed on meaning, interpretation and communication of text, so the tutorial gave students time to work on their individual literacy skills.

Social studies teachers were able to access the AISI implementer's resource time on a pullout or drop-in basis, depending on individual student needs. Advice on student placement, in either the academic or applied streams, also applied in social studies classes. Social Studies 30-1 is not necessary for many post-secondary placements and students had to be aware of this fact and plan accordingly.

Key Strategies

- Formal ongoing support for students was provided through sheltered classes in English Language Arts 10-1, semisheltered classes in English Language Arts 20-1 and a scheduled tutorial in English Language Arts 30-1.
- Students received help in planning their three-year senior high school program, including help with timetabling, summer school or alternative program options.
- A project management committee was formed at the Grade 10 level to make collaborative recommendations to help students and teachers at the applied level.
- Teachers received resource time for social studies and English language arts students. Teachers also received ongoing PD on strategies and resources to help them meet the needs of identified students, assisted by a Web site created for this purpose.
- The AISI implementer acted as an advocate for ESL students in their communication with administrators, teachers, counsellors and parents—ESL students were aware of the extra advocacy provided by the AISI implementer. This was especially useful because students are often intimidated when dealing with school officials.
- The AISI implementer also provided information about cultural and community support groups to students.
- Assessment data from the annual reports was collected and examined to provide information about the impact of the project and its strategies at the end of the three years. Assessment data from reading portfolios, writing portfolios and interviews were also collected.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

- Incorporating general ESL research into the project helped teachers understand the importance of using certain theories and strategies to teach ESL and other at-risk students.
- Front loading, building vocabulary and tapping into students' prior knowledge were all fundamental approaches to a successful program.
- A wide variety of well-founded strategies were employed to address students' individual learning styles. Learning styles and Gardner's multiple intelligences were discussed with the students at the outset of each semester to make them aware of their own learning style.
- During project meetings, teachers discussed what strategies had worked best with particular students. Teacher collaboration led to a broad-based, eclectic program that could be individualized, as necessary.

Student Assessment

- New and innovative ways to assess student writing focused on students becoming aware of their errors and how to avoid them.
- Students reviewed returned assignments and checked teacher comments and correction symbols to determine the most frequent writing errors. Students then wrote specific goals for improvement.
- Each student developed personal goals for improvement in consultation with the teacher; e.g., a long-term goal of improving verb usage could commence with a short-term objective (committing to using the correct verb tense throughout a literary essay with an accuracy rate of 70 percent during a one-month period).

Professional Development

- Workshops, both inside and outside the school, enriched project members' teaching and knowledge of ESL instruction.
- PD sessions focused on reading and an intensive study of ESL.

Parental Involvement

- One initiative to build a stronger liaison between parents and the school community included an awards ceremony to celebrate student successes. Students received certificates on a bimonthly basis, e.g., most improved or best citizen, and, at the end of the semester, awards for top academic achievement.
- Parents received a notice of their children's upcoming award so they could attend the ceremony.

Projects That Involve ESL Students but Apply to All Students

Literacy Enhancement Project Horizon School Division No. 67 (AISI Project ID: 209)

The purpose of this project was to facilitate literacy development of ESL students by delivering services, programs and resources, e.g., travelling libraries, to targeted students.

Scope: 750 students, pre-Kindergarten to Grade 3, 21 schools

Brief Description

The purpose of this project was to facilitate literacy development of ESL students by delivering services, programs and resources, e.g., travelling libraries, to targeted students in sparsely populated and geographically isolated school divisions.

The three components of this program were:

1. providing quality fiction and reference books to ESL students in Hutterite schools
2. establishing a reference library with quality fiction in the Kanadier Mennonite programs
3. purchasing early literacy materials for targeted preschool children of ESL families.

This project had a profound impact on ESL students in the Horizon School Division. Colony schools and Kanadier classrooms now have hundreds of books to enjoy whereas, prior to the project, their libraries were inadequate. Student achievement in reading and writing continued to improve over the course of the project, as indicated by the students' results on the PATs. The benefits of this project will last as long as the books do and will truly make a difference in the lives of all ESL students in the Horizon School Division.

Key Features

- A travelling library of quality trade and reference books was made available on a rotating basis for periods of six months to students of Hutterian Brethren Colony schools and Kanadier programs for ESL students in two regular schools. Permanent collections of books were also provided to schools with a Mexican Mennonite population. These books were targeted at early childhood services and preschool children to help them learn English.
- Colony and Kanadier teachers and assistants had access to a wide range of resources for teaching reading and improving the literacy of their students. The AISI library resources were used for thematic planning and research activities in all subject areas.
- Teachers attended a number of PD conferences and workshops and investigated alternative methods of teaching ESL students.

Changes in Practice

- Schools received a large collection of appropriate reading materials.
- Reading was promoted through literature appreciation activities.
- Some schools had a travelling library on a rotational basis.
- A permanent library collection was established in some schools.
- Students learned library and reference skills.
- Teacher confidence and competence in the use of literature to enhance literacy were enhanced.

Enhancing Student Counselling Services Almadina School Society (AISI Project ID: 429)

This counselling project addressed the problem of ESL students dropping out of senior high school.

Scope: 424 students, Kindergarten to Grade 9, one school

Brief Description

This counselling project addressed the problem of ESL students dropping out of senior high school. Through the implementation of a student-directed, peer-mediation program, the project improved student behaviour and helped students plan for their futures. This made the school community more aware of student learning and behavioural needs and abilities. In turn, students were inspired to become more tolerant and understanding of their peers.

Early identification of potential behaviour disorders helped avoid emotional and physical violence in the school. Almadina's existing programs were examined to determine if they were in fact increasing student achievement and decreasing the drop-out rate. Efforts were made to implement challenging learning activities for academically talented ESL and regular students. Counselling increased student awareness of the rigours of senior high school. School staff also encouraged students to continue their education and graduate from senior high school so they could become lifelong learners and more productive citizens.

After analyzing the results of the project, Almadina School realized that its school had made a difference; longer-term students improved their achievement results. It also became apparent that it was important for school staff to know more about, and feel a greater degree of responsibility for, their students' learning outcomes.

Key Features

- A designated person who worked with a school committee managed the project.
- The school hired a half-time, culturally sensitive, academically trained personal and career counsellor who had expertise in gifted and talented education and was familiar with research and survey procedures.
- Second Step and Peer Mediation programs were started.
- Surveys were developed and research data were collected on student decision making, goal achievement, behaviour modification and academic success.

- Research partnerships were formed with the University of Calgary, service groups and organizations that work with new Canadians, e.g., Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association, and service clubs; e.g., Lions Quest program. A partnership was already in place with the University of Alberta.

Changes in Practice

- School staff helped in the development and teaching of consistent classroom procedures and routines. All students, especially ESL students, need classroom procedures to be taught and retaught for them to become routine.
- The Social Skills program became an important part of every classroom program.
- A staff committee planned PD with input from all staff.
- Staff had the chance to practise and receive feedback and teachers learned many counselling skills.

Parental Involvement

- Parents were actively involved in their children’s learning and participated in team planning meetings related to their children.
- Communication with parents was maintained through newsletter articles, school council meetings and regular reports to school boards.

I Know That—Help Me Articulate It!

Equilibrium International Education Foundation

(AISI Project ID: 10474)

The school's ESL students faced a unique barrier to success—difficulty demonstrating their acquired knowledge on tests and examinations.

Scope: 30 students, Grade 10 to Grade 12, one school

Brief Description

The school's ESL students faced a unique barrier to success—difficulty demonstrating their acquired knowledge on tests and examinations, especially in the structured and paragraph formats required on Alberta Education diploma examinations. To address this problem, a program of extra classes was set up on Fridays to help ESL students improve the reading comprehension and writing skills required for written examinations. These sessions helped students improve their study skills and understand how to respond to diploma examination questions. Teachers were encouraged to participate in PD activities that focused on helping students succeed in test situations.

In the first year of the project, the study sessions were added to the regular school schedule and in the last two years, the sessions were incorporated into regular class times. All the school's students were thus exposed to the kinds of questions found on diploma examinations, improving all students' study skills and helping the school meet its student outcomes.

Key Strategies

- The president of Equilibrium International Education Foundation coordinated the project in consultation with the school's teachers.
- The administration provided resource and release time, as required.
- The teaching staff was encouraged to participate in workshops on strategies to help students write tests.
- During the first year of the project, extra classes for ESL students were held every Friday to provide small-group and individual instruction on effective test writing.
- During the second and third year of the project, the extra sessions were incorporated into regular classes.
- Diploma examination results provided a quantitative assessment of the project's success.
- Student and staff feedback was included in assessing the success of the project.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Instructional Strategies

- The most effective instructional practice was the introduction of in-class tests that were based on previous provincial examinations. The tests were followed by an in-depth review of the test questions. Students were given the correct answers and were helped to understand them. They were also given a number of additional worksheets that were based on previous provincial examination questions. This approach helped prepare students for the kinds of questions they would likely be asked on provincial examinations and made them more comfortable with answering such questions and with testing in general.

Student Assessment

- Prior to the introduction of this AISI project, the school's students received very high scores on the multiple-choice portion of the provincial examinations but failed the written portion. After the students participated in this project, their academic skills were assessed using tests and classroom evaluations. Teacher observations and informal assessments of student achievement indicated that the project had indeed improved the ESL students' writing skills, especially those skills required for the written portions of the provincial diploma examinations and particularly the written sections of the sciences and mathematics examinations.
- One highly effective assessment strategy introduced in this project was marking students' written answers on the in-class tests using the marking rubrics provided by Alberta Education for each diploma examination subject. Using this approach familiarized students with the rubrics' vocabulary and how marks are awarded. Students used this information to understand what they should include in their written answers, how to format written answers and why these approaches would improve their achievement on diploma examinations.

Project Management/Coordination

- The foundation's president coordinated the project, in consultation with the school's teachers, and chaired meetings attended by all of the school's Grade 12 teachers.
- The teachers monitored student progress in the project throughout the semester. Issues related to the project were reported and discussed during semimonthly meetings.

Professional Development

- PD consisted primarily of peer collaboration and cooperation between teachers, who consulted with one another about the introduction of test questions.
- Teachers also assisted one another and shared information and research about Alberta Education resources.

Parental Involvement

Most of the parents of the school's foreign students live overseas, making it impossible for them to participate in the day-to-day education of their children. Many of the parents of ESL students who do live in the community do not speak English and do not actively participate in their children's education.

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