

Language Training Program for Apprentices (LTPA)

Report Summary

(March 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017)



The Project

SAIT, NAIT, and Keyano College were given a conditional grant to collaborate on the development and delivery of a trades-specific language program to support immigrants seeking to successfully integrate into the trades.

The purpose of this program was to build English language competency skills in immigrants who speak English as an additional language in order to meet the language and workplace communication demands associated with the trades of plumber (NAIT), electrician (Keyano College) and automotive service technician (SAIT).

Together, the three institutions developed a curriculum framework that includes both face-to-face (F2F) training and online learning. It also includes a mentorship component in order to allow learners to further develop their skills in a professional setting under the guidance of a qualified industry mentor.

The project had five distinct phases running from March 2016 to November 2017.

- **Phase I:** Project Start-up (March 1, 2016)
- **Phase II:** Curriculum Development (April to December 2016)
- **Phase III:** Program Promotion/Participant Selection (May to December 2016)
- **Phase IV:** Pilot the Curriculum (January to July 2017)
- **Phase V:** Evaluation, Analysis, and Final Report (ongoing to November 2017)

This summary report will focus on the lessons learned and will provide a list of recommendations for future innovative language training programs.

Results

There were 43 learners registered in the LTPA across all three institutions (SAIT – 21; NAIT – 15; Keyano College – 7).

- 92% of learners improved by at least one CLB in at least one competency area (Listening/Speaking, Reading, and Writing)
- 59% of learners improved by at least one CLB in Listening/Speaking
- 58% of learners improved by at least one CLB in Writing
- 38% of learners improved by at least one CLB in Reading
- Results from the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) post-tests show that the average score gains for those who completed both a pre and post assessment:
 - Reading: average gains – 75
 - Document Use: average gains – 57
 - Numeracy: average gains – 73

- Almost all LTPA learners were satisfied with the program (62% very satisfied, and 35% somewhat satisfied). In addition, 92% would recommend the LTPA program to their friends or colleagues.
- Generally, learners rated the course content and materials very positively. Almost all of them agreed that the course content was relevant (63% strongly + 29% somewhat agreed), and that the course materials were useful (62% strongly agreed + 35% somewhat agreed).

Recommendations

The recommendations will focus on three key areas: course delivery, innovation, and course design.

Course Delivery

The Language Training Program for Apprentices (LTPA) ran for 16 weeks/160 hours. It was a combination of four hours (Tuesdays/Thursdays) of online and six hours (Saturdays) of F2F training every week.

1. For the online learning, an orientation is needed for both the learner and the instructor.
 - Instructors should have in-depth training on the technology and on effective online teaching strategies
 - Regular communication between instructors is useful
 - Include establishing an online community to enhance learner engagement
2. Be clear about the relationship of online work to the F2F component, and schedule within realistic timelines for work to be completed (e.g., asynchronous work, homework, etc.).
 - Communicate expectations clearly
3. Label clearly and consistently, including agreeing on naming conventions for files and proofread carefully.
4. Define roles of instructors – both language instructors and content/skills instructors
 - Include both in orientation
 - Meet and plan beforehand
 - Use realia where possible
5. Orient both the learner and the instructor to new teaching methodologies (e.g., Task-based Language Teaching).
 - Ensure variety in topics and task type
6. Arrange classroom observations for both online and F2F classes.
7. Anticipate and plan for major religious holidays (e.g., Ramadan) when scheduling.
8. All language SMEs should observe trades classes at all three institutions.
9. Develop more accurate workload estimates through more detailed discussions with all stakeholders
10. Do not award completion certificates to learners until the post-test has been completed.

Innovation

Since the innovation was in the collaboration, the lessons learned stem from collaborating among institutions and the organizations providing support.

1. Expect staff changes and have contingency plans.
 - Inform and orient wide groups of individuals within the same working group/department about the project
 - Keep comprehensive meeting minutes and distribute status updates/interim reports
 - Ensure sufficient coverage during holidays
2. Create a clear timeline and communication plan.
 - Maintain a central repository for communication, reports, marketing collateral, etc.
3. Include equal representation from the partner institutions on the various committees.
4. Accurately scope the project from the beginning with all stakeholders agreeing on the deliverables and timelines.
5. Avoid assumptions; frequently ask confirmation questions.
6. Document/summarize email and phone communications.
7. The three institutions needed to scope the curriculum development work and compare that to their internal capacities. It eventually ended up being easier and more straightforward to have one institution do the work while the other two provided valuable input and checks and balances throughout the process.
8. Ensure there is a “champion” at each institution who will serve as the primary contact for instructors, marketing, recruitment, etc.
9. Create organizational charts early on in the process.
10. Access to web conferencing tools and teleconference lines for online meetings is essential and institutional access to such tools should not be assumed.
11. For the sake of efficiency and cost, coordinate the schedule of onsite meetings and presentations with information sessions (e.g., meeting with NAIT curriculum team on Monday afternoon; info session at NAIT on Monday evening).
12. Response rates when contacting Immigrant serving agencies (ISAs) were better in Calgary; this might have been due to the fact that the project manager was local and had previous contact with the ISAs.
13. Beware of curriculum development around the winter holidays.
14. One-on-one communication with advisory committee members throughout the project is often more valuable than large meetings; face to face meetings are not always necessary; emails and conference calls are often enough.
15. If possible, have all the partners together at one start up meeting.
16. Partner with organizations targeting same clients (e.g., Momentum, CCIS, and Motive Action).
17. Have three local mentorship coordinators report to the project manager rather than one central mentorship coordinator.

Course Design

The program was developed through close collaboration between the partner institutions. Language and trades Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) worked with the curriculum coordinator to develop both F2F and online lessons and formative and summative assessments.

SAIT's Learning Management System (LMS) is Brightspace (D2L), and NAIT and Keyano College use Moodle as their LMS. SAIT loaded the curriculum into Brightspace and then ported it over to Moodle with the assistance of NAIT and Keyano College. NAIT and Keyano College were then able to assist each other with the final implementation.

1. Consult IT from the beginning, keep them in the loop throughout, and make sure they are available at key launch times.
2. Assign one or two key individuals on the curriculum team to stay with the development from concept to completion.
 - Frequent change results in miscommunication and redundancies
3. Ensure personnel that are familiar with the intricacies of the project are assigned to do final reviews and authorize changes.
4. Engage in upfront work around setting expectations, avoiding assumptions, and committing enough resources to properly scope the online component of the program.
5. Expect and schedule for slippage around milestones; revisions to timelines will be necessary.
6. Clarify the volume of documents that need to be created (e.g., organizational pages, PPTs, etc.).

Lessons Learned

The key lessons learned were around flexibility to adapt, better organization and preparation, and the messaging needed to make the program a success.

Flexibility

In this type of project, there are certain aspects that require flexibility:

- A narrow target group was used to test the concept; however, it proved to be too narrow; be flexible in expanding targets but have a clear rationale for why and how
- Ensure a strong connection between the Language Learning and the mentorship; consider starting the mentorship component earlier

Some examples of demonstrated flexibility:

- We had to expand our initial target to include other trades (e.g., instrumentation at Keyano; heavy equipment technicians at SAIT; etc.), all periods of technical training (1st through 4th), and a greater range of CLBs (e.g., CLB 4 and up)
- We added another pre/post assessment measure with the AWES test because we wanted to assess the learners' developing grasp of essential skills alongside their developing language competency
- The decision was made early on to split the mentorship position into three separate but equal positions (one for each city) because having a central coordinator based in one city would have incurred considerable travel expenses and would have had to rely heavily on local resources for planning and execution of the mentorship events

Messaging / Marketing

- Trade shows/conferences should be attended to promote the program
- A joint press release should be done early on
- More collaboration was needed between the marketing departments at each institution
- Early web presence is essential
- Have promotional handbills include info session dates; then, simply revise the dates for subsequent information sessions and reprint
- Use different colours (SAIT – red; NAIT/Keyano – blue) for handbills
- Have presentations in front of frontline staff at ISAs
- Present to Apprenticeship and Industry Training (AIT) and get their help in spreading the word to their clients
- Add program information to Alberta Works email blasts
- Do not get disheartened by low turnout for information sessions
- Target and get buy-in from trades instructors at each institution

Future structure

- As the classrooms were not filled to capacity, there were different options entertained for the future structure of the LTPA.
 - The simplest is to maintain status quo and offer AST, Plumber, and Electrician.
 - Alternatively, there is the option of going more generic and offering a program for all apprentices (use common content for first-year apprentices [e.g., safety, fasteners, tools, etc.]). However, going fully generic might turn off some of the learners who enjoy the trade-specific content (e.g., at SAIT no automotive learners quit).
 - As a compromise, the difference could be split between generic and specific.
 - There was also an idea to offer a residential course and industrial course (e.g., task situations, level of customer contact, etc.).

- Finally, similar trades (with similar tools/materials) could be grouped (e.g., Group 1: Automotive, HET, Autobody, Millwright, welders; Group 2: Electrician, Instrumentation, Appliance repair, elevator repair). The advantages to the latter options would be to increase registrations while maintaining cohort cohesion by grouping learners with similar backgrounds.
- For smaller trades schools, which offer fewer trades and less frequent intakes with fewer English Language Learners (ELLs), the future of the LTPA may not be in creating trade-specific courses (e.g., an AST course, a plumber course, etc.), but it may have more success (at least in terms of recruitment) as a general trades English course for all tradespeople that still addresses both the language and content needs of the learners.
- The larger institutions, on the other hand, may have the capacity to offer trades-specific courses. This would allow learners to be exposed to more relevant content directly related to their chosen trade.
- Throughout the promotion and recruitment phase of the project, the idea of expanding the target group to include Quebecois, English-speaking youth, indigenous learners, international students, pre-apprenticeship students, and pre-employment students was brought up multiple times. With such an expanded target, the curriculum would need to be closely reviewed to determine which aspects of the training would and would not be appropriate for these other target groups.