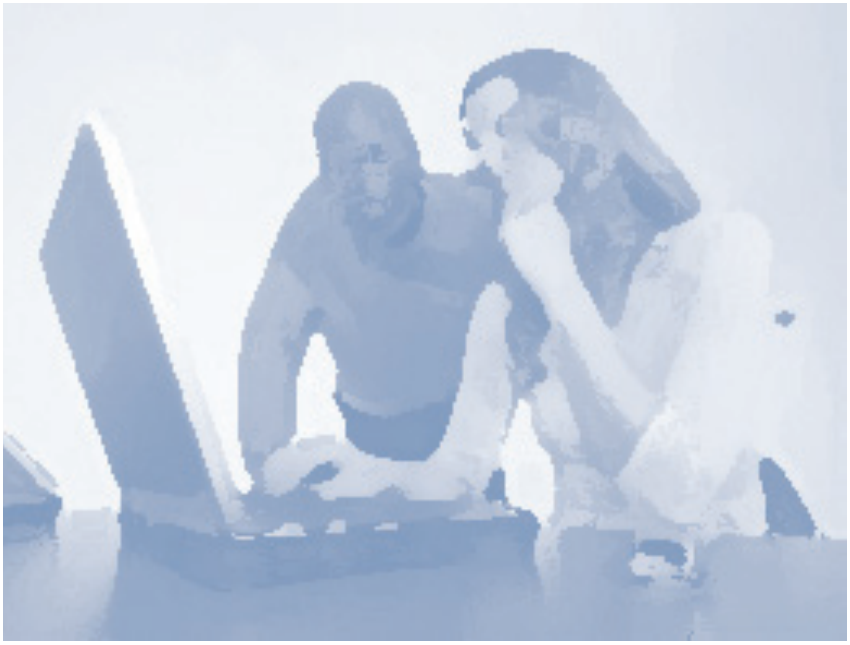
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada



FAST FORWARD

An Analysis of Online and Distance Education Language Training

Mike Kelly
Trudy Kennell
Rob McBride
Matthias Sturm

NEW MEDIA
LANGUAGE TRAINING INC.

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Credits & Acknowledgements

Project Managers: Michael Kelly and Rob McBride

Authors/Researchers: Michael Kelly, Trudy Kennell, Rob McBride, Matthias Sturm

Research and Resources Consultant: Maria Moriarty

French Consultant: Sylvain Lapointe

CIC Advisors: Fiona Corbin, Suzanne MacDonald, Sheila McMullin, Irena Nikolova, Stefany Pinkus

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About this report

Section I of this report, **Introduction**, summarizes the entire report and our recommendations. The section begins with a description of the distance education field and the role of the Internet, and the particular learning implications of emerging Web 2.0 technologies and practices. The section discusses the web implications of social-constructivist theories, and describes the methodology employed in developing this report.

Section II of the report, **Project Research & Reporting Methodology**, describes how we researched, consulted, and collaborated during the project. And the section describes how we drafted, finalized, and submitted the report and responded to comments. The questions posed for the research are listed, and the criteria we used to evaluate courseware.

Section III of the report, **Teaching and Learning Online: Theory and Practice**, covers:

- second language acquisition theories and their implications for online learning
- learning scenarios that put distance learning principles to work
- a longer, and more general discussion of constructivism
- the role of the instructor in online learning
- effective learner participation in online learning
- the role of culture in language learning and the implications for online learning content

Section IV, **Learning Program Review**, provides guidance on usability and interface design, and includes individual evaluations of many learning courseware products including web sites (BBC English, English for All), commercial ESL software products (ELLIS, Auralog, Rosetta Stone, Tense Buster and more) and other products or publications that could be versioned into ESL learning content for Canadian LINC learners (Your Money Matters, A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada and others).

Section V, **Managing Learning**. In this section, the report proceeds to a discussion of learning management online and a review of commercial and open-source learning management products. The section concludes with a discussion of learning objects and their technical compliance (SCORM) with learning management systems.

Section VI, Tools for Online Language Learning is a tool by tool description of useful distance learning technologies including e-mail, chats, podcasts, blogs, concordancers, and games.

Section VII gathers the **Key Recommendations** from the report in one place.

Section VIIII, the **Appendices**, includes four sub-sections:

- **Appendix A: Literature Search and Annotated List of Resources** includes a bibliography of the journal and other text resources we consulted.
- **Appendix B: Language Software Evaluation Template**, contains the templates we developed to compile our review of each item of courseware.
- **Appendix C: Computer-assisted Language Learning Software (CALL)** List from Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). We used this list as a starting point in determining which software to target for this evaluation.
- **Appendix D: Learner Readiness Surveys**

Section I: Introduction

The changing status of distance education

Distance education in the 21st Century has new tools at hand. Tools like blogs, wikis, and podcasts are new to the vocabulary of second language teaching. While distance education used to be thought of as courses via correspondence and the telephone, distance education is evolving into more dynamic, immediate, and communicative systems. The traffic on ESL web sites like the ones described later in the report demonstrates the growing popularity and reach of online language learning. Concurrent with the development of the Internet over the past 20 years, distance learning has become intertwined with learning online; more and more people are looking for flexibility and independence in their learning experiences.

This holds especially true for newcomers to Canada and their need for seamless integration of learning experiences with many other demands of settling into a new way of life. Even before newcomers arrive in Canada and especially in the unique case of refugees who are waiting in refugee camps overseas, online and distance learning opportunities would allow them to improve their English skills and learn about Canada while they are waiting for their application to be processed. Even in the most difficult circumstances, online learning is a possibility and offers opportunities to prepare for the next step in becoming a participating member of Canada's ethno-cultural mosaic.

As the project team began the research phase of the work, many influences were having an impact on the world of online learning and on shaping the online and distance language learning landscape in early 2007. Books like Will Richardson's *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* had been published in 2006, and the concepts in it were spreading throughout the online education community. Free easy to use software to create blogs and wikis has become widely available. And Stephen Downes[1], a senior researcher at Canada's National Research Council was regularly writing about Web 2.0 and its impact on education in his blog, The Daily.

Web 2.0 and a new way of learning

While there's still a huge amount of disagreement about just what Web 2.0 means, Tim O'Reilly[2] states that

"Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences."

[1] Stephen Downes also writes a well-known educational technology blog called the *Daily*: http://www.downes.ca/news/OLDaily.htm

[2] Tim O'Reilly writes the *O'Reilly Radar* watching for emerging technology trends: http://radar.oreilly.com/

Stephen Downes posted an introduction to Web 2.0, and shared some of these characteristics from the first Web 2.0 conference from Tim O'Reilly. Most importantly, O'Reilly described Web 2.0 as "A social phenomenon embracing an approach to generating and distributing Web content itself, characterized by open communication, decentralization of authority, freedom to share and re-use, and "the market as a conversation".

Web 2.0 as an emerging social technology phenomenon is at the heart of online and distance learning in the 21st century. Changes have been happening that have enabled online and distance language learning to evolve and become a different kind of learning. Graham Stanley[3] posted a video illustrating the impact of Web 2.0 technologies for language learning. View the video at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5307243151540361790.

Some of the problems that had been cited about online learning in its earlier stages, included lack of sufficient interactivity and timely meaningful feedback from instructors; the way much early online learning consisted of books and shallow exercises that had been repurposed to a highly controlled and tightly sequenced online format – the notion of electronic page turners or "shovel ware"; that learners couldn't take the results of their exercises and use them in meaningful conversation or writing; that online learning had sky-high drop out rates because learners weren't motivated or interested enough to continue; and that online learning wasn't living up to its potential.

Open source and its growing impact

The Open Source movement (Open source is a set of principles and practices that promote access to the production and design process for various goods, products, resources and technical conclusions or advice. The term is most commonly applied to the source code of software that is made available to the general public with relaxed or non-existent intellectual property restrictions. This allows users to create user-generated software content through incremental individual effort or through collaboration. Wikipedia[4] has been gathering steam since 1998 and for a number of reasons many universities have been moving away from their exclusive use of commercial learning management systems like WebCT[5] and Blackboard[6]. Many still retain these systems, but more and more are trying out and reporting success with Moodle's open source virtual learning environments[7] instead.

Web 2.0 and social constructivism

The emphasis on community and social networks in Web 2.0 has a strong connection to theories of social constructivism and the learners' need to create meaning whether online or face to face. As the social tools of Web 2.0 make their way into the hands of users, creating community and working with others online becomes easier. ESL Blogs like Inspiration Lane are being used to connect ideas and people around the world,

[3] Graham Stanley is an ESL teacher exploring the use of emerging technologies for language learning: http://www.grahamstanley.com/
[4] http://www.wikipedia.org
[5] http://www.webct.com
[6] http://www.blackboard.com
[7] http://www.moodle.org

educational podcasts like *English for Everyone*[8] and the communities that pop up to develop and listen to them are a vibrant and valuable phenomenon, *YouTube*[9] has found its way into everyday language. Second Life is innovating and expanding on a daily basis. The idea that there is a "decentralization of authority, freedom to share and re-use" fits perfectly with modern notions of learning as less of a transfer of knowledge from an instructor and more of learners learning from each other.

Online distance language programs around the world

The researchers were looking for examples of different kinds of online distance language programs in different countries. The templates in the appendices include some examples of what is available around the world. One of the best examples we found is the *BBC Learning English*[10] site. This site has pretty much everything a great language learning site should have. A detailed description of this and other programs, including links to the programs themselves, can be found in the *Learning Program Review* section of this report.

What does this mean for this Canadian project?

On the surface, it would seem that a site like *BBC Learning English* would be a perfect product for CIC to embrace. The content is ready, fresh, and excellent quality. But, this site is typical of many we found that reminded us that CIC's role is to create opportunities for people to come to Canada to make an economic, social, cultural and civic contribution while also realizing their full potential, with a view to becoming citizens.

A distance online language learning program that can satisfy these goals has to be more than a language learning site; it needs to be embedded in Canadian culture – in the same way *BBC Learning English* is embedded in British culture. It needs to help users settle, and become citizens as they are learning English in Canada or before they come to Canada.

Difficult choices and great opportunities

The researchers were also aware that the best features of sites like *BBC Learning English* require long-term financial and technical maintenance and commitment. CIC expressed concern that they may not have staff to develop projects like these, and that sustainability is an important issue for them. However, the researchers did not want to limit themselves to what this might mean; the easiest way to obtain content is to buy it from large software producers who have excellent production standards and add to their content repositories regularly, but this learning content does not provide the Canadian content needed in the ways that engage students meaningfully and does not provide the social networking opportunities that research tells us seem to provide the best learning experiences.

[8] http://www.eslpod.com/Web site/index.php
[9] http://www.youtube.com
[10] http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish

Recurrent themes and best practices

The researchers decided to use the best practices identified in the literature to assess each site, software, and program they looked at. CIC can then use this information as a roadmap to decide what kind of online distance program they can support. As the researchers looked at the literature relevant to online distance language education, some themes surfaced again and again.

Here is a list of some things we became aware of:

- While there are many brief studies of programs and pilot programs, there is a shortage of long-term research studies in this area
- There is a lack of professional development for instructors working in online distance language education
- Others are asking themselves similar questions about how best to use technology with distance learners in online language programs.
- Innovative tools alone will not lead to a successful online distance language program – users' needs and users' technical capacity are also important
- There is a jumble of terms related to this topic area, with different terms used in different places
- Community is important when you are learning online
- Interaction with others may be easier to achieve when you are learning a language online
- Students need to have competent writing and reading skills in order to participate well in activities like chat
- There are different benefits and advantages to synchronous (real time) and asynchronous content types
- Just as there is no one best methodology to teach a second language, there is no one best online distance education program that will work for everyone – technical reasons, cultural reasons, learning style reasons
- Better results seem to be achieved when learners have a combination of face to face and online experiences. This approach makes students feel that they are part of a program and learning is more likely to be seamless if their life situations change
- There are many examples of organizations moving away from commercial learning management systems and toward open source virtual learning environments
- Commercial software has not been successful in "teaching" culture
- Because there are hundreds of interesting and useful ESL sites freely available on the Internet, researching and identifying new material, and keeping up with old material is a continuous task for online learning users.

Section II: Project Research & Reporting Methodology

The Request for Proposals to carry out an evaluation of online language training on behalf of Citizenship and Immigration Canada described the project requirements and went out in the fall of 2006. Once this organization had won the bid, the department's requirements were refined in meetings and other consultations with the funder.

Throughout the process, the project team worked in close consultation with CIC for the purpose of feedback and to be able to respond to the needs of CIC in the best possible way. In the initial stages of the project, this consultation established reliable evaluation criteria for the researchers. In the later stages of the project, the focus of the project outcome was further refined due to continuing communications with CIC.

Central objectives and research questions for the study

Our principal objective during the research was to respond to the questions posted in the CIC Request for Proposals. The RFP listed the following tasks:

- Research and analyze online and distance education courses that are currently available within the field of second language training
- Provide information to CIC for future program planning and development, including programs and models of distance education that would allow individuals to participate in language programming before immigrating to Canada
- Examine existing models of both French and English online language training
- Make recommendations for program enhancements for CIC to consider, including a report on gaps that exist in current programs

Based on the RFP, the following research questions were developed in our proposal and in subsequent consultations with CIC:

- What are the different models, resources, delivery tools, assessment tools applied in online language training?
- What are the attributes of model online language learning systems? Web usability, promotion and outreach.
- How do student success rates in online language programs compare with success rates in traditional classroom programs?
- What is the optimal role of learner support for online learning? For example, is there a need for personal learner support or instructors in moderating discussions, evaluating student work, or responding to student inquiries and problems?
- How efficient at delivery are the models of online language learning?

- What are the characteristics of potential users for pre-arrival language training? Level of English, education, target profession, learning priorities, comfort level with online learning technologies, and access to technology.
- Is pre-arrival language assessment practical, and how it could be accomplished? What is the role of the Canadian Language benchmarks in online language training?
- Are there successful 'hybrid' models of online language study? These may combine online activities with other media: printable supplements, DVD, other video and DVD, radio & TV.
- What is the role of text, audio, and video in online learning models?
- How are students tracked from learning session to session? How is learning documented?
- What is the nature and function of effective interactive exercises?
- Do the online language training models make use of other web resources through links? For example, there is the question of "learning portals", third language sites that might guide potential immigrants to and through language and settlement training for life in Canada.
- How effective are the models of online language training in facilitation of social, cultural and economic integration into Canada?
- How effective is the language training of the online models—do they teach speaking, listening, reading, writing?
- What is the success rate of students learning in these online language training models?
- Question of different levels - at what language level can someone begin to work online at a distance?
- Extent to which a program encourages a learning community - and how?
- Recommended uses of CBT tools — chat rooms, discussion forums, e-mail, video, animation, level of interactivity.
- Best practices in interface design and navigation models for ease of use by students
- Recommendations on costs associated with specialized programs

To complete this study by June 2007, the project team had 6 months to gather information using the following methods:

- Literature research for relevant books and journal articles
- Conversations with LINC teachers and administrators about software they were using. Internet searches for ESL/FSL software and web sites
- Consultations with software publishers and vendors
- Leads were gathered from a published list of ESL learning software from an international teaching organization, TESOL

- Visited TESL professional web sites and chatrooms on relevant topics.
- Meeting consultations with CIC & LINC consultants

Literature search and resource list

The project team reviewed the literature using a wide lens and developed a list of relevant Canadian and international resources that provide a broad spectrum of examples of online and distance language learning programs. The team searched within the following parameters developed from the Request for Proposals and in consultation with CIC.

- Online and distance language training programs
- The role of culture in online language training programs
- Second language acquisition theory
- Learning theory
- Availability of professional development for instructors in online language training programs
- Trends and issues in online distance language training programs
- Researchers and writers on the subject of online, distance, and technology in language training programs
- Content and learning management systems

Search Methodology

- Identify major keyword and subject terms
- Conduct keyword and subject searches online
- Identify online and distance language courses and programs in Canada and in other jurisdictions, e.g., U.S., U.K. Germany, and Australia
- Conduct a scan of major online TESL journals to identify trends and issues

Research of language training programs

For the purpose of evaluation of language training programs, a template was developed and completed for seven online language programs and six language software programs. The template assisted the research team in evaluating the programs in a standardized manner using the following 20 categories. Refer to Appendix B for the completed Language Training Program Evaluation templates. Note that not all categories yielded information for every program evaluated.

1. Target audience and levels of language training targeted
2. Target skills – reading & writing, speaking & listening, pronunciation
3. Cultural competencies, Canadian or foreign content

4. Access, direction, movement through site, and orientation
5. Learning management tools, e.g. calendar, activity log, etc.
6. Learning modules, activities, exercises, quizzes and tests
7. Online or offline assessments, program or level placement
8. Required instructor skills, support, and professional development
9. Required student, support tools, and online/offline resources
10. Learner support and tutoring, synchronous/asynchronous
11. Communication tools, text/audio/video-based
12. Interactivity between student, instructor, and system
13. Learning community, supports for interactive sharing/collaboration tools, synchronous/asynchronous
14. Learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic/tactile)
15. Adaptive and assistive technology availability
16. Self-directed, collaborative, or blended online learning
17. Curriculum, learning path, or goal-directed learning
18. Program cost for students and/or for organizations
19. Partnerships supporting online learning systems
20. Promotion and outreach, means and methods

Development of the report

The research team undertook the writing of the report with specific roles and sections designated to each team member. Using a web-based project management application, the team members shared, commented and collaborated on pieces of the report. Teleconferences were held among the team to discuss the progress of the project on a weekly basis. A retreat was organized in the final stages of writing the first draft of the report before the team assembled the first draft of the report. The first draft was delivered in mid-June 2007 to CIC for review.

Revisions were made based on the feedback provided by CIC and a final draft was delivered in late June 2007.

Section III: Teaching and Learning Online: Theory and Practice

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theories

In this section, we will survey and describe some of the schools of thought about second language acquisition, compare methodologies and discuss the implications for distance online learning.

Few instructors are consistently attached to a specific approach. Most ESL instructors are pragmatists and may borrow or steal from other approaches to meet learner needs. The ideal way to learn language in any situation or for any student has not been found. Still some consensus exists. SLA's emergence as a field of academic research occurred when "learners were seen to play an active role in forming and testing hypotheses in an effort to induce the [target language] rules from the target language speech to which they were exposed. With the ascribing of an active role to the language learner, the SLA field was born" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

Researchers have yet to find a formula to define the ideal use of instructional technology in SLA. But one thing technology based language instruction must respect is the need for a cultural dimension to language learning. Language learning is the process of formulating, testing and adapting cognitive structures and the links between language concepts and the world. Learners adapt new knowledge into hierarchical frameworks. Any separation between language and the cultural context within which it functions is artificial. Language can't be separated from culture. Culture is language.

A general observation about the language training models we looked at for this report: most included cultural education. Generally, the comprehensive software packages did not. If they did teach culture, it was a neutral, North American or British, idea of culture, not specific to Canada, and even less to its regions.

The challenge for CIC is to make good choices to assure appropriate uses of technology. Clearly the choice of technology is central but what principles guide the use of technology? Some researchers emphasize the importance of a mandated sequence of learning mastery when employing learning technology in technology based online learning.

But even if no school of thought has universal credibility, SLA theories do help explain how we learn language, and they do guide the selection of instructional tools in online learning technology. The biggest variable remains the learner: factors such as age, aptitude, attitude and motivation, personality, cognitive style, and the complex interplay between these variables across learners and time.

An important objective of this project is to identify innovative use of technology in language teaching, and evaluate how effective it could be used with Ontario LINC learners. Identifying the best has required us to apply language learning theories and best practices. The Canadian Language Benchmarks, Canada's national standards in English and French, describe, measure, and recognize the second language proficiency

of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living and working in Canada but do not prescribe methodology. The nature of the benchmarks implies strongly that students learn in a cultural context (Canada), and they must learn to interact in English, and negotiate meaning in a realistic Canadian context.

Learning English in isolation is the only option for learners in non-English speaking countries. In Canada, learners in an English-speaking environment have opportunities to practice and solve communication problems whenever they step out the door or pick up the phone. Residence in Ontario is 'quasi-immersion'. A newcomer's home or social language may be foreign, but the language of everyday transactions is English. Taking advantage of residence in an English speaking part of the world is the challenge for LINC learners. In the classroom, taking advantage means learning must be portable to the outside Canadian world. With distance or online learners, the situation rewards autonomous self-directed learners, learners able to establish their own learning goals, negotiate meaning and assimilate information, and evaluate their progress and strategies.

Our analysis is also informed by more general theories of learning and education, and an awareness that cultural competence is a vital aspect of successful second language acquisition and Canadian integration. And we are also concerned with the special requirements of distance learning: learners who are able to learn independently while maintaining motivation.

Audio-lingual

Drill and practice of repetitive structures and dialogues are the foundations of the Audio-Lingual school. The methodology is repetition and substitution until native-like fluency is supposedly rehearsed and perfected. The mother tongue is banned from the classroom as is grammar for the most part. Reading and writing are reserved for advanced students who have mastered the basic patterns through drills and memorization.

Problems identified with the audio-lingual approach include an inability for students to make the transition from classroom drills to spontaneous speech. As well, the drills rapidly become a mind-numbing grind for learners (and instructors). Also, the lack of grammar means learners who might learn through the study and application of rules are frustrated and held back. In fact, the lack of opportunities for learners to ask questions and explore during learning while engaged in fairly mindless repetition means the approach is broadly discredited although many instructors still employ drills from time to time.

Transformational-Generative Grammar

Noam Chomsky emerged as a major figure in linguistics in the 1950s and his impact remains strong. Chomsky challenges both behaviorism and structural linguistics. If language is learned through a mechanical process involving mimicry, patterning, and reinforcements, Chomsky wondered why language speakers are able to produce totally original utterances. Shouldn't they only be able to say what had been patterned through repetition?

Chomsky posited the concept of transformational grammar instead. He argued that language is innate in all humans. And the grammar rules of one language are related to all others because they are an expression of an innate grammar we are born with:

- Grammar is surface structure—the rules are a manifestation of 'deep' grammar innate in our use of language.
- Every language contains 'universals', elements expressing a broader idea of human language, and found at the level of deep grammar.
- Language competence (the potential to say something) and performance (actually saying something) are different things.
- Language generated at the base level (deep grammar) is 'transformed' at the surface level into something else.

Cognitive Code

Next in line, and following logically on earlier developments, is the cognitive code school of language learning. Students have an active role to play. Language should be taught in a natural, realistic way that encourages students to think and absorb rules. Writing and reading are important right from the start. Students are encouraged to learn the forms of language and parallels between L2 and L1 in structure form part of the curriculum. Students are put in situations where they can generate language in a realistic context, perhaps a role-play.

Generally, materials relevant to a student's life are the core of a cognitive code curriculum. Materials should show the language in a situation, and encourage students to generate fresh language based on their study. Fresh language leads them to new conclusions about the potential forms the language can take.

Communicative

Generally speaking, this is a very broad approach that arose from Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. The theory behind the communicative approach is that communicative competence requires subtlety and an awareness of language complexity leading to communication that is socially and culturally aware and respects the need for accuracy.

The work of Dell Hymes led to the ideas of 'notions' and 'functions'. A function, as the name suggests, is the need to get some specific language problem resolved. A function could be asking for clarification, expressing dissatisfaction or making an apology. Once a function has been identified, a speaker has to find the right words to express it. The speaker has many options.

An alternative name for this school might be, English in situations. That is, the learner is encouraged to participate in 'authentic' language situations. In the classroom, this could take the form of role-plays, simulated situations, and communication games as the meat of the classroom environment. Instructors focus on helping students say what they want to say.

The communicative approach aims to be 'learner-centred'. The approach ignores a sequence of structures organized by linguistic complexity and focuses instead on the student's communicative needs. The approach doesn't reject every previous approach or methodology; grammar would be introduced strategically to support communicative objectives, and an instructor may use audio-lingual drills if they are appropriate to meet learners' needs.

Online and Distance Learning

For a long time, distance learning by way of correspondence courses was the only way to reach students who were physically separated from their instructor. With the arrival of technologies that provide a variety of media connecting students to instructors, peers and learning materials, distance learning today has come to describe a new way of reaching students. Distance learning today has to address the complexities of online learning environments and meet the demands online learning places on students and instructors.

Distance learning students have different motivations for learning this way; they may prefer learning independently or they may face barriers of transportation, scheduling, and/or accessibility to services that prevent participation in a traditional school.

New technology makes new ways of learning possible. Today, distance learning brings together life-long learning theory with the ideas of distributed, blended, and flexible learning that have emerged within the context of technology-based education over the last two decades. This section reviews the ideas that contribute to forming a genuine distance learning environment for the 21st century.

As new computer and communications technology has emerged, together with software applications such as browsers and other clients, distance learning has become synonymous with learning online. However, while distance learning carries the interpretative baggage of its principal defining characteristic, i.e. the separation between student and instructor, online learning is often too narrowly defined as "education and training delivered and supported by networks such as the Internet or intranets"[11]. While both promise learners to be able to learn anytime and anyplace to a lesser or greater degree, the implications for how students learn and instructors teach run deeper. Overall, it can be stated that online learning uses technology to breach the distance where there is a separation of student and instructor[12] in time and space.

In exploring the potential use of technologies as a medium for learning, authors and academics have looked at the challenges for instructors, and learners. Before we proceeded to evaluation of online language programs for this report, we needed to come to a common understanding about aspects of quality and the different perspectives available in the design of online and distance learning environments. The following statements best reflect our convictions about learning that online and distance learning environments should bring to life.

- Learning is *distributed* in that it "makes use of mixed or multimedia tools to bridge the distance between instructor and learner."[13] (Technology perspective)
- Learning is *blended* in that it "employs multiple strategies, methods, and delivery systems" [14] including e-based and print-based resources. (Content perspective)
- Learning is *flexible* in that it "expands the choice on what, when, where, and how people learn. "[15] (Learner perspective)

[11] Canadian and International E-Learning Specifications and Standards Activities, http://www.eduspecs.ca
[12] University of South Dakota, http://www.usd.edu
[13] Utah Education Network, http://www.uen.org/delivery/ivc_glossary.shtml
[14] Node Learning Technologies Network. The Node's Guide to Blended Learning, 2001, p. 5.

Learning Scenarios

It is essential to recognize that most online and distance learning today is and/or is recommended to be a mixture of distributed, blended, and flexible learning. From a student's point of view, online learning environments can take different forms. Here are three scenarios that often come together in the design of online and distance learning environments:

Scenario 1: distributed learning

Students study mostly using the Internet with learning materials and activities distributed using technology as a medium. Such programs may provide immediate learning activities, voice and/or text chat with instructors and students, recording and playback features, discussion boards to serve as meeting places, regular synchronous and/or asynchronous contact with an instructor, individualized learning plans, ongoing monitoring of student's progress, and telephone support.

Scenario 2: blended learning

Students go to class and meet instructors and classmates face-to-face but they also learn independently using e-based or print-based resources depending on the best possible fit between the learning material and the technology medium. Computer-based learning and Web-based learning is offered as part of the learning experience to varying degrees. Students spend time on computers and have a lot of learning software available to them. They also have Internet connections and instructors build web-based learning into the process.

Scenario 3: flexible learning

Students go to class and meet instructors and classmates face-to-face but they also complement this learning to a higher degree with web-based learning via an online component available to them outside of the classroom and scheduled hours. Students use the Internet to pick up assignments and documents, participate in discussion board rooms, take quizzes, check their grades, consult a calendar and do other things to help them with their learning.

Distance learning's growing connection with online learning

Over the past 20 years, at the same time as distance learning has become intertwined with learning online, the Internet has evolved from information and communication technology environments to a network of virtual spaces built on the dynamics of social communities. This second generation of the World Wide Web has come to be known as Web 2.0 and brings the social aspects of learning to the foreground while technology fulfills its intended purpose as a medium and nothing more. Within this context social-constructivist learning theory has reemerged as an approach to learning independently **and** embedded within a social community. Social constructivism is the approach for online and distance learning during the Web 2.0 era.

[15] Australian Flexible Learning Network, http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au

Social Constructivism

Face-to-face instruction often assumes the instructor's ownership of knowledge and transmission of it to the learner, while online and distance learning should be built with the student at the centre of the learning environment. This paradigm shift helps focus resources and supports for learners to enable them to actively use new material rather than passively absorb information presented to them. According to Jonassen & Land, this shift "signifies a fundamental change to willful, reflective, active, conscientious and constructive learning"[16].

Social constructivism presumes that learning is a process of individual interpretation and meaning making based on experience. Knowledge is constructed from these experiences[17]. Additionally, social-constructivist learning processes state that social interaction or social constructivism is not merely supportive of but an essential ingredient in cognitive development[18].

According to Jonassen and Land, the "epistemological foundations on which social-constructivist convictions are built, differ from cognitive theories of learning" by expanding on them. These fundamental changes envision learning as a social dialectic process of meaning. A learning event is characterized by internal and social negotiation between participants of an activity situated in a community. This represents a paradigm shift in the way we think of the process of learning, and the learning medium. The locus of knowledge shifts from the instructor to the learner.

This approach values authentic activities that allow learners to explore, discuss, and construct concepts and relationships relating to real-world problems and projects. Content must be relevant and meaningful to the learner[19]. This type of learning is situated in communities of learning and practice as opposed to within the minds of individuals[20]. Collaborative learning is a key concept between instructors and students. Ariza and Hancock emphasize that "two-way interaction is critical in learning a second language"[21]. The interactions between learner-instructor, learner-learner and learner-content are the main media for learning to take place.

Authentic environments are those that make learning meaningful to students. Authentic environments can be situated learning environments where learners can relate because of their previous life, education, or work experiences. As an alternative or even at the same time, authentic environments can be situated learning environments that create contexts similar to the real world in which learners will have to apply the skills that they are learning. The terms "authentic" and "situated" learning are often used interchangeably.

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[16] Jonassen, D. H., & Land, S. M. (2000). Preface. In D. H. Jonassen & S. M. Land (Eds.), *Theoretical foundations of learning environments* (pp. iii-ix). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

[17] Jonassen, D. H. (1991). Objectivism versus constructivism: Do we need a new philosophical paradigm? *Educational Technology Research and Development, 39*(3), 5-14.

[18] Duffy, T. M. & Cunningham, D. J. (1996). Constructivism: Implications for the design and delivery of instruction. In D. H. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications Technology* . (pp. 170-198). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.

[19] Donovan, S., Bransford, J., & Pellegrino, J. (Eds). (1999). *How people learn: Bridging research and practice*. National Academy of Sciences, http://bob.nap.edu/html/howpeople2/

[20] Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning - Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

[21] Ariza, E. N. & Hancock, S. (2003). Second Language Acquisition Theories as a Framework for Creating Distance Learning Courses, *in International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, October 2003, http://www.irrodl.org/content/v4.2/ariza-hancock.html

This experience of immersion into a new learning environment and the adaptation to a new way of learning is a profoundly social-constructivist experience where learning through knowledge acquisition and problem solving can take place. In order to arrive at a successful skill transfer to and application of knowledge in another concrete context, learning must occur in authentic environments and be based on the learning of general skills that are transferable to a variety of situations[22].

In authentic learning environments such as these, knowledge and skills are acquired through a process of social communication and discourse. Duffy & Cunningham state that activities that focus on social communication and discourse also focus on the connections with the community and the patterns of participation, that is connections with the community comprised of all participants who contribute to the learning experience and in the ways they contribute.

The following basic tenets may be derived for the practice of design of program delivery models:

- Learning is a process of construction based on and situated in experience.
- Authentic and situated learning is based on the instruction of transferable skills.
- The learner is at the centre of the learning process.
- The learner is a distributed and multidimensional participant.

The following table[23] illustrates the fundamental differences between face-to-face and online learning due to a reconsideration of pedagogical design based on social-constructivist convictions about teaching and learning.

Face-to-face	Online
• Instructor-focused • More "passive" learning • Instructors "deliver" knowledge • Outgoing, verbal, high-achieving, students participate the most • Technology may be used, but is not central to the role of being a learner • Various media may be used, but most delivery is by the spoken word, with some written support	• Learner-focused • More "active" learning • Instructors "guide" the learners • Instructors "model" good learning techniques • A much greater percent of students actively participate in discussions • Technology helps students explore resources and construct their own meanings • Technology may help instructors use multiple forms of media, and reach a wider variety of learning styles

[22] Winn, W. (1993). A constructivist critique of the assumptions of instructional design. In T. M. Duffy, J. Lowyck, & D. H. Jonassen (Eds.), *Designing environments for constructive learning* (pp. 189-212). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
[23] Source: http://www.elearners.com/resources/elearning-faq6.asp

Instructor Roles

Within a social-constructivist learning approach instructors are generally regarded as facilitators guiding learners through their interaction with the learning material and supporting the collaboration with other learners. The instructor has the expertise and the skills to bring the student to the appropriate learning and will work to create a learning environment where knowledge building is fostered through social exchange.

Online instructors share these characteristics with classroom instructors, and like them, must have sufficient knowledge of their subject domain and can be expected to convey enthusiasm for the subject and for their task as a learning motivator; and both types of instructors must have access to appropriate learning activities.

On the other hand, an online learning environment requires different approaches and methods. And different qualities define an online, distance learning instructor. Most importantly, online instructors must also have sufficient technical skill to navigate and contribute effectively within the online learning context, access necessary hardware, and sufficient Internet efficacy to function within the inevitable technical challenges of these new environments[24].

According to Willis[25], special challenges confront instructors teaching at a distance, which we believe also hold for online learning environments. For example, the instructor must:

- Develop an understanding of the characteristics and needs of online and distance students with little first-hand experience and limited, if any, face-to-face contact.
- Adapt teaching styles taking into consideration the needs and expectations of multiple, often diverse, audiences.
- Develop a working understanding of delivery technology, while remaining focused on their teaching role.
- Function effectively as a skilled facilitator as well as content provider.

Willis continues to state that “the instructor often finds it beneficial to rely on a site facilitator to act as a bridge between the students and the instructor. To be effective, a facilitator must understand the students being served and the instructor's expectations.”

The need for ongoing professional development

Instructors have an important place in these programs. Current research on distance learning indicates that interaction between learners and instructors through face-to-face, telephone, or electronic means is vital to the learning process in these programs. Well-trained instructors will strengthen the programs.

[24] Anderson, T. & Elloumi, F. (2004) Theory and practice of online learning. Athabasca University, http://cde.athabascau.ca/online_book/index.html

[25] Willis, B. (1993). Distance education: A practical guide. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications. http://www.uidaho.edu/eo/dist1.html#key

ESL instructors working online with students need to know:

- How to use assessment tools with learners at a distance
- How to use synchronous tools at a distance
- How to give appropriate feedback online
- How to motivate and encourage learners at a distance
- How to create a positive learning environment online
- How to manage discussions in chat rooms
- How to organize and monitor project work online
- How to retain learners online
- How to integrate technology into language learning programs,
- How to facilitate learning at a distance
- How and where to grow and update their skills as new online communications and learner support technologies evolve

Are current ESL instructors prepared to integrate technology into their programs, much less to do it at a distance? Some TESL programs, like Humber College's mention that participants will work as tutors in Humber's Writing Centre and Language Lab, where they practice CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) methodology using the latest multimedia software.

Many instructors, however, obtained certification before such courses and practices were introduced. Other TESL programs don't include specific information about integrating technology components in their course descriptions. The specific needs of instructors in distance and online language learning programs are rarely mentioned.

Integrating technology encompasses everything from administration to lesson planning. The Milken Exchange's Professional Competency Continuum: Professional Skills for the Digital Age Classroom[26], provides an interesting assessment for instructors to see where their technology skills lie on a continuum that looks at five target areas of skill: core technology skills; curriculum, learning, and assessment; professional practice; classroom and instructional management; and administrative competencies. Although it is often helpful and practical for instructors to develop their tech skills informally, many of these skill areas aren't easy to develop without guidance.

Although new graduates of TESL programs may be savvy users of technology and the Internet in their personal lives, that does not mean they are ready to be proficient facilitators in distance ESL learning programs. Experienced instructors in TESL may not be comfortable using technology. The instructors interviewed in the Power Analysis LINC Home Study Report stated that they want more orientation and training on how to facilitate learning at a distance.

[26] http://www.mff.org/publications/publications.taf?page=280

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy developed an Web-based assessment and professional development tool for online and distance instructors that is intended to "help instructors learn how to better use technology in their classrooms or to reach learners studying at a distance". AdultEd online: Using Technology to Enhance Learning opportunities can be found at http://www.adultedonline.org.

In 2000 Mark Warschauer noted in an article in TESOL Quarterly that he sees distance education as a realm in which the role of technology will be "a site of struggle" in increasing or lowering the quality of learning opportunities, which could also bring to a head issues about the professional standing of educators within the field of distance learning[27].

Recommendation

We recommend a professional development qualification for instructors and administrators who will be working in Ontario LINC online distance programs. The course matter toward this qualification should enable instructors to integrate appropriate technology into language learning. Such a qualification could be administered and created through TESL Ontario or a TESL training institution.

Learner Roles

Online learning skills are necessary in the wider world beyond language training. Lifelong learning is one of the nine skills listed under the HRSDC Essential Skills. Increasing opportunities for flexible learning increases the learner's ability to participate in a multitude of learning opportunities. For example, most community college or university courses are nearly universally based on online learning management systems. Additionally, the world of work integrates online collaboration into more and more of the structure of professional life.

An online course built on Web 2.0 principles, that is, a course that employs social-constructivist principles and includes a Web-based LINC learning community, makes special demands on learners. Learners will be working with little or no face-to-face support, and without encountering fellow learners in physical space. Learners must maintain motivation even though feedback from instructor and learners may be delayed.

Characteristics of successful online language learners

In order to be most effective in a distance program, students need to be both autonomous and self-directed but in order to participate to the fullest and be successful in a social constructivist environment they must also[28]:

[27] White, C. (2003). Language Learning in Distance Education. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
[28] The Illinois Online Learning Network, http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/StudentProfile.asp

- Be open minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process
- Be self-motivated and self-disciplined
- Be willing to “speak-up” when problems arise
- Be willing and able to meet the minimum requirements of the program
- Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process
- Have access to a computer and the Internet
- Be able to think ideas through before responding
- Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a classroom

Learner self-assessment

The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Centre provides a brief online survey called "How to Be a Good Online Learner: Is online learning for you?" which can be found at http://www.valrc.org/tutorials/onlinelearner/foryou.htm. Also, refer to Appendix D for other survey examples to assess learner readiness for online and distance learning environments.

What skills and attitudes are necessary to be a successful online language learner?

The Ontario Home Study Online Program requires that students be working at LINC Level Two. [29]

A good beginning for early LINC learners would be a sequential system that immerses students in basic vocabulary and reading, listening, and speaking activities. Ellis, Auralog’s “Tell Me More”, and Rosetta Stone, are commercial programs whose broad content and functionality would be expensive to replicate from scratch. This kind of content can provide the repetitive practice that helps students with lower language proficiency master the skills they need before they can handle tools like chat or blogs. Having said this, it is also important to keep in mind that students’ language proficiency doesn’t always parallel their familiarity and proficiency with technology.

Some studies have shown that "women may be more successful in online environments than men because they frequently create a sense of community by connecting with other learners."[30] In a learning environment that relies on learners to communicate not just with an instructor but with other students as well, this could be important. As well younger adults are more likely to drop out than older classmates[31] because they may not have the same learning persistence. On the other hand many younger students are

[29] Evaluation of the LINC Home Study Program, p. i.
[30] Rovai, A.P. “In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs” in *Internet and Higher Education*. Vol.6, No. 1, pp1-16, Jan-Mar-2003.

[31] Ibid.

more adept using a computer and are more familiar with e-mail, chat rooms and the Internet in general than older students.

Some adults begin with more skills for online learning. Learners with no distance learning experience may perform lower overall than learners with distance learning experience. Learners with no distance learning experience may communicate more about difficulty with software, the course management system, or mistakes in submitting work online. In contrast, those learners with distance learning experience may perform better overall and their more frequent communications may be indicative of seeking clarification of course concepts at higher levels.

Recommendations

Online learning is currently made available as 600 seats for LINC students through the Home Study program. We recommend that access to online distance learning be made widely available, and that both its geographic restrictions and its requirement that students not be able to attend a classroom program be removed. Expansion can begin with preparation of learners in schools for greater autonomy in their language learning and settlement. As learners progress in fluency in more traditional learning environments, they should also progress in developing autonomous, self-directed learning skills.

Where possible, orientation 'events' should be held to introduce students to the requirements of the technology and the expectations for student-to-instructor and peer-to-peer communication. The orientation process was a critical factor in the success of programs in a Pennsylvania pilot study[32].

When possible, begin the course by providing traditional face-to-face instruction and then blend it with distance education. Face-to-face instruction can provide lower-level learners with support and help them develop confidence in their ability to succeed using on-line learning tools[33].

Help students develop their ability to engage in self-directed learning. For example, if the program includes traditional instruction, instructors can spend time in class working with students on time management strategies. TV411, an American television series developed to help adults improve their literacy skills, was used in a facilitated group setting and found that, for most learners, working with TV411 changed their perceptions of themselves as learners and allowed them to take ownership of their learning[34].

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[32] California Adult Education Research Digest No. 44 – Technology – May 2006 reference to Johnston, J., Petty, L. I., & Young, S. J. (n.d.). Research overviews: Technology in adult education. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. Retrieved November 27, 2005, from http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/tlt/ research.htm.

[33] Ibid.

[34] California Adult Education Research Digest No. 44 – Technology – May 2006 reference to D'Amico, D., & Capehart, M. A. (2001). Letting learners lead: Theories of adult learning and TV411. Focus on Basics, 5(B), 35-37, 39.

Ongoing support should be provided for students through frequent contact with instructors via multiple modalities (e.g., face-to-face meetings, e-mail, or telephone contact).

Any system that is contemplated should include innovative, attractive, easy to use online supports for all learners. When a student clicks on a HELP button they should be greeted by more than just text. The help should be contextualized and it should have sound and images, preferably video.

There should be immediate or quick computer technical support via phone.

Although many learners will prefer to study in face-to-face or classroom settings, we believe that ESL and FSL students can be successful online learners if given the proper support. But, so many variables determine success at online learning that we believe that most learners will need preparation to work online. Skills development could begin in language labs and could be formalized in online learner preparation modules.

An excellent first step would be development of a tool to assess learner preparation for on-line learning. This tool should assess students' familiarity with technology, their experience in online learning, their problem solving skills, their ability to motivate themselves, their level of self-directedness as well as their level of English fluency. The results should be shared with the student to help in determining their preference for learning environments.

Learners should be offered opportunities to participate in online learning at the earliest possible point in their language learning.

The Role of Culture in online language learning

Culture has been defined as: “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively, the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people, the mode of behaviours within a particular group, e.g., corporate culture, youth culture. From the Canadian Oxford Dictionary 1998.

In *Distance Education and Languages*, Börje Holmberg describes how a team of Spanish course developers successfully integrated culture in an Open University Spanish course:

- Developing materials that present the Spanish language as it is, as students are likely to encounter it in its cultural setting.
- Highlighting cultural linguistic characteristics to raise awareness of differences as well as similarities.
- Presenting the Spanish speaking cultures as dynamic entities that reflect the world they live in.
- Giving students opportunities to reflect on their own culture in relation to the culture of others.

- Ensuring the graded development of intercultural understanding".[35]

According to Elizabeth Peterson and Bronwyn Coltrane at the Center for Applied Linguistics in California, "language is not only part of how we define culture, it also reflects culture. Thus, the culture associated with a language cannot be learned in a few lessons about celebrations, folk songs, or costumes of the area in which the language is spoken. Culture is a much broader concept that is inherently tied to many of the linguistic concepts taught in second language classes. Using authentic sources from the native speech community helps to engage students in authentic cultural experiences. Sources can include films, news broadcasts, and television shows; Web sites; and photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and other printed materials."[36]

Culture and teaching

An interesting example of the way culture could be explained in an online course appears in Flea Market Sociology, described in Meei Ling Liaw's article, E-Learning and the development of intercultural competence. [37]She states that "Culture learning is not merely learning the target culture, but gaining insights into how the culture of the target language interacts with one's own cultural experience." "An overview of the development of the teaching of culture in a foreign language classroom reveals several stages. They include the factual transmission method, the cross-cultural contrastive approach, the communicative competence-based teaching, and the intercultural competence perspective." Liaw goes on to say, "Similar to the change of beliefs in how culture should be taught in the foreign language classroom, the exploration of computer technology for culture teaching has also gone through several phases. In the early stage, much computer-assisted language teaching software was developed with the functions of teaching not only language but also culture. Unfortunately, commercial CALL software design has produced software that incorporated many cultural inaccuracies and misrepresentations and thus contradicted the goal of providing learners with a culturally authentic CALL experience (Shaughnessy, 2003). Due to content and delivery isolation and the adaptation of software across languages, students were presented with an ethnocentric view of the world. Students could only learn vocabulary from one cultural reference point since the culturally generic software ignored the cultural differences associated with specific topics."

[35] Holmberg, B., Shelley, S., and White, C. (2005) Distance Education and Languages. New Perspectives on Language and Education. Clevedon Hall, UK. 2005. p. 1
[36] Peterson, E., Coltrane, B. "Culture in Second Language Teaching" Center for Applied Linguistics Digest. Dec. 2003 p1.
[37] Mee-Ling, Liaw. E-Learning and the development of intercultural competence in *Language Learning and Technology*, Vol.10, No 3, Sept. 2006, p. 2.
http://llt.msu.edu/vol10num3/pdf/liaw.pdf accessed May 15, 2007

Culture and learning

According to the Power Analysis Home Study evaluation[38], participation according to national groups in the LINC Home Study Program was quite different for some groups when compared to the same groups' participation in classroom-based programs. For example, the number of participants from Colombia is higher than is usually seen in classroom-based programs. Attendance by Chinese and Indian participants was lower than is usually seen in classroom-based programs.

Although we are including information from only one research study that was carried out in China and are unwilling to make broad generalizations based on it, the study suggests that cultural issues may have a strong impact on participation in any learning program. The study suggests that Chinese students as a group have a tendency to prefer "the conventional classroom-based learning style of interacting with, and receiving knowledge from, their instructors face-to-face. When in online learning programs they resisted alternative online support provisions available to them. This disconnect between online students' use of online learner support versus conventional offline learner support available reveal that Chinese online learners are behaving like offline learners, in that they are "stubbornly" sticking to using limited, face-to-face offline learner support services while under-utilizing more plentiful online learner support provisions. This apparent deadlock between online support provisions and conventional face-to-face tutorials needs to be addressed. The tension between institutional support efforts and low learner utilization rates of online services calls for in-depth investigation into the question[39]: of whether the low use rate was due to the lack of self-directed learner qualities, ineffective learning strategies, technical incompetence on the part of the learner, or poor service quality.

When we reviewed commercial software for this project, we sometimes saw learning activities from which cultural content had been stripped away to make the software appeal to a wide audience. In examples like BBC English and English for All, the cultural setting is powerful and totally appropriate for their intended audience, but often not really relevant for anyone learning English in Canada or hoping to come to Canada.

Broadly speaking, these commercial software packages have several drawbacks. First, they are relatively expensive in a world where lots of free software exists. Second, they aim to be culturally neutral to be sellable in many markets. Since they succeed in this, they fail to provide cultural context for language learning. Third, they consist mainly of dialogues, simulations and role plays, drills, quizzes, exercises and pronunciation development. These can be effective aids to language learning but something more is needed; authentic language anchored in the real world of Canada and Ontario.

[38] Evaluation of the LINC Home Study Program, p. 46.
[39] Wang, Tong. "Tensions in learner support and tutor support in tertiary Web-based English language education programs in China". In International review of Research in Open and Distance Learning. Vol 6, No. 3, Oct. 2005. http://www.irrodl.org/index/php/irrodl/article/view/266/425

Meei Ling Liaw's research project focused on students from one cultural group reading and writing about their own cultures through English, and so may not be a model for the kind of cultural content that an online LINC program, with its diverse cultural groups could follow. However, the concept of exploring Canadian culture in relation to other cultures is one that is interesting and is also compatible with Holmberg's approach and Peterson and Coltrane's assessment of some of the shortcomings of some cultural teachings.

Activities and materials that are developed in Ontario for a distance language learning program can reflect the best of these approaches too. Since English is spoken around the world in diverse cultural settings, often by populations much larger than Canada's, it sometimes seems impossible to find existing examples of high quality ESL materials that reflect Canadian culture. By incorporating electronic Canadian sources similar to the ones cited above, it may actually be easier to provide online culturally relevant language activities than it has been to provide print materials.[40]

[40] http://llt.msu.edu/vol10num3/pdf/liaw.pdf

Section IV: Learning Program Review

This section begins with a discussion of best practices in usability and interface design, then proceeds to a review of specific ESL online courseware available commercially under license or free.

Usability and Interface Design

Usability and user interface design are key to designing courseware that attracts, sustains, and motivates the online learner. Put simply, bad design and poor usability lead to confusion and frustration. On the other hand, good design begins and ends with a user's perspective.

"Aesthetics and quality of design play a critical role in how a user judges overall product quality and perceived value. Playful discovery and facilitated mastery of program elements can also enhance the experience. Products ... should be fun and rewarding to use." page 68 – Standards for Creating Multimedia Learning Modules for Low Literacy and Limited English Proficient Adult Learners, California State University Institute.

Good design enables easy navigation. Activities and interactions are easy to understand the first time a learner tries, and easy to remember when they come back to the same software again. And from an administrative viewpoint, good interface design will lead to reduced support costs and reduced instructor time explaining how things work.

Program descriptions – Web sites

Some of the Web sites we will review in this report are free, others are available for a subscription or license fee. This evaluation does not pretend to be comprehensive as there are hundreds of sites available to ESL or FSL learners. We tried to focus on the courseware that represents either current use of online language training, or reflects best practices in the emerging world of Web 2.0.

BBC English

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/

BBC Learning English is available ***at no charge*** from the BBC Web site and provides a variety of choices to adult students. It's not password protected and has pretty much everything a great language learning site should have. It is a medium for presentation of British culture, it uses all the great new technology that is available, and it is able to use news content for learning content through a partnership with the nation's broadcaster.

This site provides instructor mentors. A well-known linguist, David Crystal, regularly provides talks about language, and new content is added frequently to the site. Teachers can find downloadable radio programs, lesson plans and quizzes. There is encouragement to submit comments and questions in this area as well. Rotating student bloggers take responsibility to blog every weekday for two weeks. A teacher blogger responds to the student and provides questions and answers on the teachers' blog.

Students cannot only blog, but also submit questions, and participate in the forums. The site supports a bulletin board where learners can post messages and expect to receive responses in turn, and it enlists learners to help develop an online community. There is a lot of activity in these areas, demonstrating the effort made to engage learners on the site with the interactive tools that are available.

There is much evidence of excellent learner-to-learner interaction, learner-to-instructor interaction, and learner-to-content interaction. Users can watch and follow the development of a group of characters who populate the site both in "The Flatmates" series and in "Ten Days in Manchester". Tips about vocabulary, comments and research are provided.

This site seems to be ideally suited for independent learners. But they may also be using the site in conjunction with face-to-face classes that take advantage of the site's content. There are a lot of different tools on the site, including audio, video and photos. Content from other parts of the BBC site is widely used. Because its use of news feeds, it feels current and lively.

English Baby

http://www.englishbaby.com/

English Baby claims to have around 50,000 learners from around the world on its ***free site.*** It focuses on users creating an id and a profile (often with photos) and then talking with other students and teachers in a public or private chat room, of one of four discussion forums or even through blogs.

Each user has a personal area where they can build and study a personal vocabulary list, create a profile that will help them as they link with others, specify certain lessons to be listed in their private area, keep a list of friends in their private area, and create a blog. Learners connect with pen pals in English by checking out their profiles and reading their blogs.

There is an email inbox available to learners. However, English Chat and English Forums are big features of this program. The biggest strength is the level to which the site encourages a learning community.

English for All

http://www.myefa.org

English for All was created as part of the American Cyberstep Project to meet the challenge of creating and distributing multimedia learning materials for the hardest-to-serve Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ESL adult learners in the United States. Learner support is provided via pages of FAQs for students and for teachers, answering a good range of questions. Site ***access is free***.

It provides high-quality and engaging videos with characters from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds. The videos are available on VHS, CD and online. The stories deal

with real-life situations as experienced by immigrants acclimatizing to life in the United States. Topics include job and career advancement, job health and safety, managing family life, dealing with taxes, civic participation, and more. Students view the videos with or without viewing the script, practice oral vocabulary words, and complete a variety of activities related to vocabulary, grammar, life skills, and critical thinking, as well as complete a posttest for each episode.

This site is an excellent example of innovative use of video. In contrast, the exercises that followed each video are more like exercise book work. The online course itself lacks opportunities to develop oral communicative competence. There are some limited communicative opportunities via writing added through the discussion board and e-mail with the teacher.

The Linguist

http://thelinguist.com/

This Canadian site has several attractions but is expensive (***US$79 per month*** after the 14-day free trial). It provides an easy-to-read interface and access to a writing tutor. All of the content is North American English and much is Canadian. Many topics would be of value to Ontario newcomers studying English. There aren't many learning activities however. But there is a dictionary/translator function where text can be selected leading to a pop-up with a definition and a translation into the first language.

Assessment is a self-test where the learner selects the best description of their English ability from a list of 6 in his or her first language. The program mandates a sequence through the material but there is flexibility. To motivate learners, the program tracks time on tasks and words or phrases saved to a personal bank of terms. The Linguist has modules that instruct in English while attempting to improve the language learning skills of users.

Many learning modules are based on question and answer sessions between the producer and someone of interest, for example, a community service worker in North Vancouver. These audio interviews are also available as transcripts. Speech tools are basic but the site does model discrete sounds and clusters. Communication with other students is available through many online forums on many topics.

This site provides lots of guidance on becoming a more effective language learner. The writing tutor and the online support tools in the first language are the available support resources. Chat forums offer guidance on how to learn English and how to use the Linguist. The forums also put you in touch with learners and guides.

Learning French online

http://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/french-language/learning-online/index.html

This ***free*** site targets newcomers to Canada, pre and post-arrival, who have no command of the French language.

Assessments measure the learner's ability and help to select the appropriate exercises. Vocabulary assessments and lessons reflect "areas of everyday life". Speaking is practiced using words drawn from areas relevant to practical daily living. There are some texts and lessons about Canadian and Quebec history, geography and politics; education and the daycare system in Quebec; the rights and obligations of a tenant; and how to start a business.

The Online French exercises database, a self-training tool for learning French as a second language at the beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, offers a variety of exercises to improve the learner's language skills. Three language placement tests direct students to the appropriate section of the database.

Another self-training tool for learning written French, Written French and workplace situations, is intended to improve skills in text comprehension and writing at the intermediate level in training modules about searching and finding a job that include a pre-test, text comprehension exercises, grammar exercises, and a final exam.

The large number of exercises is the real strength of this site. There are activities on every aspect of the French language. However, the lessons and explanations are not ample enough to ensure success. The learners must have access to other online and or offline resources. Without any learning management tools, this site would be a great tool if alongside other language training programs.

Portal Zweite Chance (Portal Second Chance)

http://www.ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de/

This ***free*** German site targets mainly adult literacy learners but is also used by newcomers as a second language learning tool. It is intended as a stand-alone program or as an extension to face-to-face classes, providing vocabulary and grammar exercises.

An initial online self-evaluation and diagnostic test places students in a level and a calendar is populated with activities based on the level and availability. Learning progress is automatically recorded and assessed, and the learning calendar is individually adjusted in response. The learning calendar that is automatically populated based on learning level, curriculum, and student's availability. It can be adjusted by student and adjusted automatically when needed. The learning calendar is a great feature, providing lots of flexibility to learn self-paced and independently.

The vocabulary lessons reflect "areas of everyday life" and speaking is practiced with language topics using examples of words drawn from topic areas relevant to practical living. Learners at all levels receive individual learning packets with daily practice units. Weekly progress is automatically recorded and linguistically assessed, and the next week's learning is adjusted accordingly: if language topics have been mastered successfully, the learner moves on in the curriculum.

Language Program descriptions - licensed commercial products

There are many licensed commercial second language learning products available today. Until recently most of these products were available as off-the-shelf CD-Rom or DVD products. Most have attractive user interfaces with solid navigation systems and multiple help tools. They offer sequential language training starting at a very beginning level. Learners watch videos or see photos and listen to audio recordings and do quizzes and games to build reading, listening, writing and sometimes pronunciation skills. Grammar help is available and vocabulary building is always focused on.

Licensed commercial products are directed at large American or British customer bases and therefore most of them do not have any Canadian content or offer Canadian content only in so far as it relates to the metric system and Canadian currency. While they promise dramatic results in short periods of time, they do not meet the key and explicitly articulated goal that an online learning system for newcomers to Canada provide basic language training in one of Canada's official languages in ways that facilitate their social, cultural and economic integration into Canada. As tools for practicing specific language skills in addition to a face-to-face or online and distance learning program, these products may have some value for students at the beginner level.

Many licensed commercial products allow learners to interact with the content but do not offer learner-to-learner or learner-to-teacher interactions. The only feedback available to learners is pre-programmed feedback based upon the design of the programs. As such these products work best with self-directed learners and not so well with learners whose motivation isn't so strong and who are not part of a learning community. In online and distance learning environments for pre-arrival language training of newcomers to Canada, when an instructor is not available to support students face-to-face or via technology tools, these products may be a viable alternative to the kind of learning environments recommended for post-arrival language training for newcomers to Canada in this report.

Tense Buster

http://www.clarityenglish.com/

Tense Buster is popular software that provides engaging, short, and manageable chunks of practice. There are different ways of providing feedback to the student, from the pie chart showing the percentage of right answers to the oral reading of the correct answers. There is a variety of accents that provides lots of practice hearing a range of people speaking English. Marks are either given right away or delayed marking can be chosen; progress reports and results can be provided instantly or delayed and students can redo exercises until they get them right, aided by support to explain what they need to understand.

There is also the *Results Manager*, a database for the online version of Tense Buster which tracks student work. In addition, *AuthorPlus* has been much improved and it allows teachers to author Tense Buster type activities and package them in SCORM 1.2 format or in the format for the *Results Manager*. All Clarity products are SCORM 1.2 compliant, which means they can be used in Moodle, Blackboard, and other learning environments. NAS Software in Toronto distributes Tense Buster and other Clarity products.

COST	
Per 500 users	US**$7.80** per student per year.[41]

My Canada

http://www.nas.ca/mycanada/demo/index.htm

This software covers Canadian history, geography, culture, and government at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Within each of the topics there are 4-6 subdivisions, followed by introductory readings and exercises presented according to the level chosen.

The presentation of the material is very dry and in order to score well in some of the exercises, memorization of the information is required. The software characterizes the beginner level as CLB 2+, but much of the vocabulary in this area is not common or everyday language. Also, because the software covers the whole country, the information is extremely general and not very well explained.

This software is completely Canadian in content. Also, beyond the exercises there are videos or animation when progressing further along. The content would need to be updated and more creative activities would have to be developed. More information about language levels would have to be provided.

COST	
Per 500 users	US**$7.80** per student per year.[42]

Study Skills Online

http://www.clarityenglish.com

This software gives specific and quite detailed insight into what's needed to succeed in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams in each of the skill sections. Subscription to Clarity provides teachers with administrative and authoring options. All Clarity products are SCORM 1.2 compliant.

This program provides a scratch pad for note writing, print icon on every page, progress reports, Web links, and IELTS tie-in. The Web links tie-in provides more suggestions for using web resources for more practice in the specific skill area being worked on, such as *BBC* for listening and the *Scientific American* for reading. The IELTS tie-in provides tips about how the item will help during the IELTS exam.

Each skill area contains a list of learning topics. A student could either go through each list completely, or could pick and choose which ones to complete. As the student goes

[41] E-mail from Sam Sheinberg, NAS Software, June 12, 2007.
[42] E-mail from Sam Sheinberg, NAS Software, June 12, 2007.

along, s/he can get progress reports. There is a free recording download so the student can record some statements, and then listen to some models to compare to theirs.

COST	
Per 500 users	US**$7.80** per student per year

Rosetta Stone

http://citizenshipandimmigrationcanada.onlinelanguagelearning.com/en

This program provides lots of practice, drilling, and exposure to oral language. There is no particular context to the practice. It needs to be complemented with other work, including communicative practice, the language of problem solving, and more casual language.

Student can move around at will and try out whichever lessons s/he is interested in but they have to be able to move through the content without needing too much guidance. The system is quite easy to master, but occasionally there's a new technique required. Students need to be able to intuit their way through the units and assignments. There is online documentation and a series of FAQs to support the students and there is an on-screen notification about completed, in-progress and new lessons. A usage log can be viewed on screen to see how much time and which activities are completed.

As in many stand-alone programs, feedback to the learner is immediate, simple, and terminal. The computer can only give the learner pre-programmed feedback based upon the design of the program. Rosetta Stone can be very valuable as a content base when used in conjunction with an array of other tools and methods in a learning environment for Second Language Acquisition.

COST	
Per 101 - 500 users	US**$75** per student per year
Per 501 - 1000 users	US**$65** per student per year
Per 1001 - 5000 users	US**$55** per student per year[43]

Ellis

http://www.pearsondigital.com/ellis/

Ellis is a web based product but like many licensed commercial products Ellis is now being ported over to the Web instead of being provided as stand-alone CD-ROM based software product. Ellis can be used as a core curriculum or as a supplement. It features American content that has been partially adapted to Canada, like using the metric system and Canadian currency. The program is offered in a culturally and linguistically 'neutral' North American context.

Each lesson begins with a situation that is a video based presentation that sets a realistic model and a cultural context. Students study the video script and proceed to the

[43] E-mail from Brian Sellstedt, Rosetta Stone, June 12, 2007.

presentation of 5 integrated skills: listening, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and communication. If multiple learners are online, they can also take roles in a dialogue simulation.

The program offers support in many of the students' native languages. Currently there is user help available to guide users in five languages and there are ten more to be added. Immediate feedback is a big lure for learners according to the distributor and research indicates this is a positive for learning. Text accompanies the video and in the text window, learners can replay a section of video by selecting a line of text. Students can record themselves saying the dialogue and compare themselves to native speakers. ELLIS produces administrator manuals and teacher manuals in PDF.

As part of an online learning environment, ELLIS would need augmentation with Canadian information and content and an instructor trained to work with online learners. The online version of ELLIS allows other content to be uploaded and offered to learners but it is not clear whether it would work in an open source environment like Moodle.

COST
Online pricing not finalized yet but estimated by the vendor to be **$20 – $30** per student per year.[44]

Tell Me More

http://www.auralog.com/

Tell Me More is a very good interactive online language product. It is easy to use and has lots of help features to guide learners. This program has a robust learner management system, including performance evaluation, pre and post- placement and progress tests. Students can take the *Language Achievement Test* at any time and be tested on different skills, including oral and written comprehension.

Tell Me More is a sequential second language learning product and boasts having 27 different kinds of interactive activities including many grammar-based activities with explicit grammar instruction but also a variety of games and quizzes. The different kinds of exercises add variety to the program and limit student boredom and fatigue. While the program is sequential there is a *Free-To-Roam* mode. The program has skill-building activities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking and has vocabulary-building exercises.

Tell Me More uses advanced speech recognition technology, interactive dialogues, and videos to help immerse learners in the language of study. When a student speaks into a microphone the speech analysis tool evaluates the spoken words, and phoneme pronunciation. While their speech recognition software doesn't work on Apple computers, Auralog is currently developing a new version that will roll out after September 2007, and this version will be Mac compatible, in all formats.

[44] E-mail from Sam Sheinberg, NAS Software, June 12, 2007.

COST	
Per 0 - 500 users	US**$170** per student per year
Per 501 - 1000 users	US**$130** per student per year
Per 1001 - 5000 users	US**$70** per student per year[45]

Existing content with applicability for newcomers to Canada

An online distance language learning program should facilitate language learning and integration into Canadian society. We have tried to locate language training Web sites that reflected Canada and its regions, culture, communication, the world of work, government, education or health care. We felt it was important to investigate existing free or low cost alternatives to commercial software. We have included suggestions to develop Canadian online language training modules or learning objects that addressed these topics by using existing material.

In addition to being concerned about whether foreign materials are appropriate to Ontario students, we should also be concerned about regional and local variations in Canada. Something produced in Ontario may well be useful in B.C. or New Brunswick, and wider use likely increases cost effectiveness, but care should be taken to version the material for localities and regions.

Canadian resources

Your first days in Ontario

As the document "YOUR FIRST DAYS IN ONTARIO – A GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS" at Settlement.Org points out, information on themes like voltage, public holidays, agencies that help immigrants and Community Information Centres, public libraries, Canadian money, using the telephone and using the telephone book (white pages - blue pages - yellow pages), sending and receiving mail, getting a mailing address, transportation, driving, finding childcare, registering children for school, applying for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), applying for a Social Insurance Number (SIN), learning English or French, measurements (imperial - metric), prices (taxes - GST, PST) all are important information to living in this society. Any would be worthy topics in an interactive on-line course.

COST: **Free**

A newcomer's introduction to Canada

In a like manner the document, A NEWCOMER'S INTRODUCTION TO CANADA, points out society-specific information like buying or renting a house, types of housing, finding a place to live, signing a lease, international educational assessment services in Canada, Provincial credential assessment services, employment in regulated professions and trades, employment laws, discrimination, and important Canadian cultural content like

[45] E-mail from Brian Sellstedt, Rosetta Stone, June 12, 2007.

geography, distances, population, history, economy, government, bilingualism and multiculturalism. Other themes like family life and family law, marriage, divorce and the law, birth control and family planning, youth and their parents, youth and the law and important social standards, are likewise mainly society-specific and would lend themselves to great interactive learning modules. Finally themes like personal rights and freedoms, children's rights, women's rights, senior citizens' rights, becoming a Canadian citizen, and responsible and active citizenship, would be of great interest to second language students engaged in interactive online learning.

Financial literacy

Financial information like banking, consumer credit agencies, filling out a TD1 form and other things you might do when you get a job like arranging to be paid by direct deposit, the costs and details of opening a bank account, paying taxes, using a debit card, distance banking, reading a bank statement, using cheques, arranging for pre-authorized payments, using an ATM machine, credit basics, using credit cards, payday loans, debt management, understanding percentage and interest rates, developing a budget, managing your pay, budget tips, reducing expenses, distinguishing between essential and non-essential expenses, learning to save, and other elements of financial literacy that are mostly society specific would also make relevant and interesting interactive language learning curriculum.

Your money matters

In 2006 in British Columbia, ASPECT, an association of community-based employment trainers developed interactive online learning materials on financial literacy. A Canadian Language Benchmarks assessor has benchmarked this program. This interactive resource will help students learn all the basics of managing money and has been graded as appropriate for CLB levels three through six with greater or lesser degrees of facilitation. The program contains text, animation and audio and allows unlimited repetition and review.

Your Money Matters program content

This program includes five training modules featuring true-to-life animated sequences that bring financial processes to life. Exercises and quizzes cover common money issues such as opening a bank account, dealing with debt, developing a budget and reading a paycheque.

- The Value of the Vault: Includes banking basics, opening accounts, completing transactions, and more.
- The Paycheque Checklist: Describes the forms, deductions, payment methods, health benefits, etc. that are involved with employment.
- The Dirt on Debt: Describes various forms of borrowing, interest and time calculations.
- The Balancing Act: How to keep track of the ins and outs, income and expenses, and how to create a personal budget plan.
- The Big Save: Ways to save, benefits of saving, the importance of paying yourself first.

Other resources

English for All

English for All is an example of an American resource that helps students develop their language skills while building workplace skills like "how to find a job or get a better job", "how to work as part of a team", and important general life skills like "how to be a better parent", "women's work issues and sexual harassment issues", “men's changing roles", and "learning how to get involved with your children's education." It seems that American and Canadian societies have enough shared customs, values and language that these materials would be relevant to Ontario second language students. Even some more specific issues that are covered in the English for All series like "what to do if the police stop you” might have relevance for Canadian students. Having said that, we must also say that other issues that are covered in the English for All series like "workers' compensation", "rehabilitation for injured workers", "paying taxes", as well as "transportation information" are particular to life in California or the United States in general, and as such are not that useful for Canadian second language students. Ontario students need to have learning that helps them survive and thrive in this society.

COST: Free

BBC English

At the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) English learning site you can take a business English course called Ten Days in Manchester which follows the progress of Tony and May who are attending a conference. In an opening exercise, for example we can learn:

1. the difference between ... a) a motel b) a hotel c) an inn and
2. Find out how much you should tip in a hotel in Britain.
3. Is it appropriate for an Ontario student to ponder what an inn is? It's not a distinction that we make in Ontario and tipping protocol in Britain isn't really a priority for integration into Canadian society.

This is an excellent site and should have some relevance for Canadian language students but the audio and video files are replete with British idiomatic language and are delivered in British English accents. In a dialogue at the conference that Tony and May are attending, we hear "Well, we've been queuing for half an hour already, actually." "What a pain! Can't you tell us the number of our stand? Where is it?" exactly?"

What is most impressive about the BBC ENGLISH site is the way the learning assets are structured and the amount and variety of interactive learning materials. This could be a model for future development. It would be interesting to see the development and funding model for this site especially if CIC considers the possibility of a partnership with a media organization (see the Video section for more information about this).

COST: Free

Section V: Managing learning

Learning management systems/virtual learning environments

There are a number of ways that online students can access English as a Second Language learning materials; they can do a Web search to come up with thousands of separate Web sites that provide practice in all of the skills; they can find authentic listening materials to increase their understanding of the language and its culture in English-speaking countries. They can find sites that include links to other sites. The Splendid ESOL Web link is an example of one such site.

Instructors can use the same approach to assemble a collection of sites they use with their students, and materials that can help them with their teaching. The results of these kinds of searches may include some password-protected materials, but there will not be an overall system that tracks learners' progress or activity or provides any kind of central location for students who are attached to a specific program to get together online.

The Virtual Learning Environment or VLE (Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT) is a tool for colleges, training providers and others who want to **deliver** (or at least support the delivery of) learning interventions online. VLEs are particularly good at supporting tutor-facilitated, collaborative online learning and allowing tutors and students to share content. Moodle even includes blogging and wiki tools.[46]

Pressures for accountability have resulted in 90% of American universities using learning management systems to satisfy the information requirements of a variety of stakeholders. According to a 2006 study by Boston-based Eduventures, although the community-source Sakai project and its open-source counterpart Moodle do not match the market penetration of the proprietary software providers like Blackboard and WebCT, they are playing the role of the industry disruptor.

Open-source and community-source applications are providing a nonproprietary code alternative option to commercial products. Many institutions that have previously used commercial products have switched over to open source products. Open source products like Moodle have large communities committed to ongoing development of the product. Unlike commercial products which charge license fees, open source products are low cost. UCLA is one institution that is experimenting with an open source system.

Moodle is a learning management system (LMS) provided, maintained, and continually improved through the Open Source software development model. Originally arising from a PhD research project by Martin Dougiamas, version 1.0 of Moodle was released on August 20, 2002. The current release is version 1.8. As of July 15, 2006 there were some 13,526 Moodle sites involving nearly 45,000 courses, five million users, over seven million enrollments, and over 150 countries. In November, 2005 Moodle was selected as the LMS for the UK's Open University students.

[46] From Clive on Learning: http://clive-shepherd.blogspot.com/2007/04/apples-and-pears.html

Designed to be extremely flexible for instructors and learners, Moodle can be downloaded and used on any nearly any mainstream computer, and it readily scales from single-instructor or departmental Web sites to 50,000-student universities.[47] You can read a highly readable account of Idaho State University's voyage from being satisfied Blackboard users to their new use of Moodle at this site[48] . They report on the kinds of learning activities that professors wanted to have available and contrasted availability between Blackboard/WebCT and Moodle, and Sakai. They also contrast costs. In almost every case, Moodle was the clear winner at this university.

Students surveyed in the Idaho State study at the link below specifically requested that any new LMS include quick access to grades, improved assessment instruments, and an interface or visual approach and display that will help differentiate file types. Their overall rating of all three products concluded with Moodle unanimously ranked first by all student participants.

Examples of approaches to building a learning management system Functions[49]

Functions	Consisting of
Program information	Background info on program, timetable of major events and deadlines, what the learner can expect, what the program requires of the learner, aims, and a syllabus
Program orientation	Orientation to working within the learning spaces that are provided, and how to access help services
Program content	Text, audio, video, graphics, simulations should be integrated with assignment work and the interactive elements of the course
Interactivity	Synchronous or asynchronous. Usually in the form of: Email: for learner to institution interaction Chat: for one-to-one real-time meetings, and also for student interactions in private chat rooms Discussion groups: for learners and tutors to interact asynchronously, to collaborate on tasks and activities Bulletin board: useful for posting notices from the institution to the learners

[47] http://www.isu.edu/itrc/resources/moodle-info.shtml#pilotfall
[48] http://www.isu.edu/itrc/resources/moodle-info.shtml#whymove
[49] White, C., op.cit., p. 223.

Testing	This includes self-assessment questions and computer-marked quizzes and tests
Assignments	These can be submitted electronically. There is notification of receipt of the assignment. Group feedback and individual feedback can all be provided electronically.
Program management	This would include maintenance of student records, course evaluation processes, management of student progress details.
Support services	This includes access to library resources and to technical, academic, personal and administrative support.

Tasks[50]

The tasks a learning management system should carry out are:

- Enrolling
- Presentation of the syllabus [this could be the LINC curriculum]
- Assignments
- Grading [not so crucial in a non-credit environment]
- Online resources
- Announcements
- Scheduling/calendar
- Discussion groups/forums – feedback - mini-teaching sessions,
- Journaling
- Peer discussion of work
- Quiz
- Revision
- Collaborative space

Content

The five content ingredients in an e-learning course: content, layout, presentation, structure, and navigation. Depending on which type of learning management system is selected, these ingredients can be bundled as a visually integrated package, or stored separately from one another.[51]

[50] Earlham College."What is CMS?" http://www.earlham.edu/~markp/cms/lit_resources/what_CMS_Moodle.php.
[51] Outstart Inc. "Learning Management Content Systems" Outstart Inc., 2007, p. 5. http://www.outstart.com

Commercial learning management system

WebCT CE6.0

WebCT began as a project by a University of British Columbia professor Murray Goldberg as part of a grant project to study the effects of online teaching on learning. Murray founded WebCT in 1997 at UBC, and delivered it as a commercial product at that time. In 1999 the company was acquired by Universal Learning Technology (ULT) and the combined company was renamed WebCT, and headquarters moved to Lynnfield, Massachusetts. WebCT is a privately held company backed by a group of investors, which include CMGI@Ventures, JPMorgan Partners, SCT, and Thomson Corporation.

For comparisons of other commercial learning management systems, see the Edutools site.[52]

Open source learning management systems

Sakai 2.0

The Sakai Project is a coordinated higher education open source community project launched in 2003. It builds on previous work done by Stanford, Michigan, Indiana and other partners, and is built within the uPortal framework. The project has been funded through 2005 by the Mellon foundation as well as contributions from the Hewlett foundation and the core partners themselves. The project has also created the Sakai Educational Partner's Program (SEPP), a for-fee community that is open to educational institutions and for which they receive early access to code releases, documentation, project staff and exchange of partner tools.

Moodle 1.8

Moodle.org is an open source community launched in 2001 that has grown out of a PhD research project by Martin Dougiamas. Version 1.0 was released on August 20, 2002. Moodle.com is a company launched in 2003 that sponsors Moodle development and provides commercial support, hosting, custom development, and consulting. The Moodle Partners are a network of companies that work with Moodle.com to provide services around the world.

Learning Objects

Industry Canada's EduSpecs[53] web site describes learning objects as "a conceptual approach as to how objects can be created, distributed, discovered and reused. A learning object can be included to complement existing curricula or entire courses can be developed using multiple learning objects assembled into cohesive modules. Learning objects are designed for use in many different contexts, with the ultimate goal of increasing the flexibility of learning and training design and facilitating updates and modifications to courseware. Learning objects can include such things as an image, an interactive game, an assessment, a digital video, a multi-media file, instructional text, a

[52] *Edutools homepage* http://www.edutools.info.
[53] Canadian and International E-Learning Specifications and Standards Activities, http://www.eduspecs.ca/epic/site/eduspecs.nsf/en/h_00007e.html

Web site, a sound file, and a simulation." The Wisconsin Online Resource Center (WORC) further describes learning objects as small units of learning, that are self-contained, reusable, can be aggregated and are tagged[54].

Learning objects have been popular in recent years as they provide a way to create e-based reusable content for online and distance learning. There has been some disagreement however insofar the creation and reusability of information used within a learning activity supports a social-constructivist learning approach that places more importance on the process of knowledge construction from a learner perspective than on the creation of learning material from the perspective of an instructor. It is not learning objects that foster knowledge but rather learning objects that foster understanding that we believe can contribute to a valuable approach to SLA. "Learning objects should be enthralling, interactive, and centered more on the students' activities than on instructor's knowledge. [They also] should be socially interactive [and] should have a dialogical, collaborative component."[55]

Additionally, learning objects are generally understood to be digital entities deliverable over the Internet, meaning that any number of people can access and use them simultaneously (as opposed to traditional instructional media, such as an overhead or video tape, which can only exist in one place at a time). Moreover, those who incorporate learning objects can collaborate on and benefit immediately from new versions. These are significant differences between learning objects and other instructional media that have existed previously.

Supporting the notion of small, reusable chunks of instructional media, Reigeluth and Nelson[56] suggest that when instructors first gain access to instructional materials, they often break the materials down into their constituent parts. They then reassemble these parts in ways that support their individual instructional goals. This suggests one reason why reusable instructional components, or learning objects, may provide instructional benefits: if instructors received instructional resources as individual components, this initial step of decomposition could be bypassed, potentially increasing the speed and efficiency of instructional development." [57]

The Learning Objects Quick Guide from flexiblelearning.net.au, describes a Learning Object as having five essential characteristics; namely that it is:

- Discoverable (able to be found)
- Interoperable (able to be shared across systems)
- Context-able (either has an existing level of context or be adaptable to a variety of contexts)
- Editable and
- Re-useable.

[54] Wisconsin Online Resource Center , http://www.wisc-online.com/
[55] Washabaugh, W. (2003) Learning objects in a constructivist curriculum, in *Teaching with Technology Today*, 9, 6, http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/washabaugh.htm
[56] Reigeluth, C.M. & Nelson, L.M. in *Educational Media and Technology Yearbook*, Vol. 22, 1997, pp 24-35.
[57] Wiley, David. "Learning Objects: Difficulties and Opportunities," Utah State University. n.d. http://opencontent.org/docs/lo_do.pdf.

SCORM

An important international standard for web-based online learning is called SCORM. SCORM stands for Shareable Content Object Reference Model. SCORM is a series of standards and specifications to enable interoperability, accessibility and reuse of Learning Objects. It really is a series of online learning standards that specify ways to catalogue, launch, and track course objects.

SCORM is a lot like the VHS standard for video tape. VHS specifies the standard size for a video tape and how fast the VCR should spin the reels. Similarly, SCORM dictates the technical specifications for creating online learning objects. Any type of video can be put on a VHS tape, comedy, horror, drama, home movies, etc. In the same way that VHS puts any type of video on tape, SCORM allows for creation of any type of learning content; it doesn't specify instructional design, pedagogical methods, visual appearance or anything else that affects the educational experience.[58]

SCORM 2004 introduced a complex idea called sequencing, which is a set of rules that specify the order in which a learner may experience learning objects. Two systems are required for online learning. The first is the actual instructional material, or "content". The other is a Learning Management System (LMS) which is responsible for directing the learner to relevant training, tracking the learner's progress and maintaining the learner's transcript. The essence of SCORM is that any content that conforms to the SCORM specifications will work with any SCORM conformant LMS.

Recommendation

We recommend that any investment in creating online learning objects should specify SCORM compliancy as a requisite. CIC Ontario should initiate a project that defines the parameters and begins to develop strategies, specifications and a roadmap with other regions to produce an expanding set of interactive on-line language learning objects which could be shared across Canada.

[58] http://www.scorm.com//resources/scorm4dummies/Scorm%20for%20Dummies.htm

Section VI: Tools for online language learning

Email

R	Reading
W	Writing
L	Listening
S	Speaking
L2L	Learner to Learner
L2T	Learner to Teacher
L2C	Content to Content
Asynch	Asynchronous
Synch	Synchronous
C	Collaborative
SD	Self-Directed

Sending and receiving e-mail is still the dominant online activity for Internet users. Statistics Canada's 2005 Canadian Internet Use Survey found that 91% of Internet users went online to use email.[59] People today can usually access their emails from any computer or mobile device, making it the easiest way for learners and instructors to interact asynchronously. E-mail in second language learning allows teachers to regularly communicate with students in a private way. Teachers can use email to offer private tutoring.

In a face-to-face classroom situation, teachers have all sorts of strategies such as using facial gestures and making eye contact with students to draw them out and encourage them to participate in classroom activities and conversations. In an online classroom, e-mail allows teachers to privately encourage students to participate in the course, provide feedback on assignments and direction for future studies.

Email is a reading, writing tool. It allows for learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher and learner-to-content interaction. Email is an asynchronous tool that allows the learner to participate when they are able to and it allows for collaborative work. We believe email is a kinesthetic and visual learning tool.

Email = R, W, L2L, L2T, L2C, Asynchronous, C, K, V. (see above)

Blogs

The term blog is an acronym for "web log" and is used to refer to Internet journaling. Journals have been a key activity of language learning for quite some time. Blogs provide students with an online opportunity for reflective writing. Instructors can edit the text and give feedback. The blog (like the journal) is learner-centered and uses social-constructivist ideas of learning, including the possibility to collaborate on a blog.

Blogs can be public or private spaces; they are often used as a kind of publishing tool for learners. Other bloggers can initiate discussion on a topic or comment on postings. A nice feature of the *English Baby* Web site is that it allows any user to set up their own blog and to search for blogs of other learners.

A blog is a reading, writing tool. It allows for learner-to-learner, learner to teacher and learner to content interaction. A blog is an asynchronous tool that allows the learner to participate when they are able to participate. Blogs are also collaborative tools. A blog is a kinesthetic and visual learning tool.

Blogs = R, W, L2L, L2T, L2C, Asynchronous, C, A, K, V. (see above)

[59] http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060815/d060815b.htm

Forums

Known as Internet forums, web forums, message boards, discussion boards, electronic discussion groups, discussion forums, and bulletin boards, they are tools for holding discussions with two or more participants. Most of the time participation is asynchronous which offers students the opportunity to take time to compose their messages. Many forum tools allow for users not only to communicate with text but also to post images or multimedia files as well as attachments.

One of the biggest strengths of forums is they track information effectively. Students can go back and look over past messages and review important course discussions and topics. Forums also encourage a sense of community online. Participation is essential to effective forums and a critical mass of voices is needed for forums to work. This is not a once-a-week medium. Frequent and regular short messages are best. Teachers can play a central role in this, facilitating the discussion.

Forums, like in-class group discussions, are communicative and social-constructivist. A forum is a reading, writing tool. It allows for learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher and learner-to-content interaction. A forum is an asynchronous and a collaborative tool. It involves learners' kinesthetic and visual learning styles.

Forums = R, W, L2L, L2T, L2C, Asynchronous, C, K, V. (see page 47)

Chat (Text and Voice)

Providing a chat room for learners to practice communicating synchronously enables learner-to-learner and learner to-teacher interaction. Most often chats have been text-based media where students type their messages but with the emergence of Internet telephony services voice-to-voice interaction is now widely used.

Skype is a free VOIP (voice over internet protocol) communication solution, enabling free computer-to-computer calls and also allows calls to standard phone lines for a small fee. Skype has over 171 million registered users, is available in over 28 languages and is used in almost every country around the world. Features include conference calls, video calls, instant messaging, chat and file transfer.

A text chat room is a reading, writing tool and an audio chat is a listening and speaking tool. Chats allow learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher and learner-to-content interaction. Chats are synchronous and collaborative tools, which foster kinesthetic, audio, and visual learning.

Chat = R,W, L, S, L2L, L2T, L2C, Synchronous, C, S, K, A, V. (see page 47)

Podcast

The podcast is a new and powerful addition to the online language learning toolbox. When talking about online language learning, learning that can take place anytime, anywhere, and at any pace is the strength of any program. Podcasts have increased the flexibility of content delivery as students can listen to podcasts independent of time and

space. Our research suggests that podcasts also serve both older and younger learners because they can be used on a standard computer with an internet connection or by other mobile device such as cell phones, Ipods or mp3 players.

Podcasts are examples of what is called 'push' technology and 'syndication feed' technology, which simply means that they are subscriber-based. Content is regularly pushed or delivered to the user in much the same way that a subscriber has a newspaper delivered to their home. Podcasts are audio or video files that are delivered for use on mobile devices but they can be used on a computer. Another strength of podcasts is that they can be used to continually add fresh and timely content.

Our research found about a dozen podcasts in the field of ESL/FSL language learning but has turned up only one ESL podcast site that has an online learning system with a student management system and a vocabulary tool. English For Everyone[60] is an excellent example with hundreds of episodes to download for students to improve their English by listening to conversations and discussions at a slower speed with everyday phrases and expressions. At the end of each dialogue there is commentary explaining the content. At the end of each podcast, after the commentary, the dialogue is repeated at regular speed. Each podcast has a learning guide available to members.

As a form of blended learning in that it is often accompanied by a web site with supporting information. Podcasts are often used to supplement course material and are usually made up of an audio file often with a link to a Web site where you can access an accompanying PDF file. The file can contain a transcript of the podcast, and some printed language-building activities. The dominant model for ESL/FSL podcasts at the moment is that users subscribe and listen for free but must pay for the printed support materials.

A podcast is a listening tool. It allows for learner-to-content interaction. A podcast is an asynchronous tool. Podcasts are self-directed tools. A podcast is an audio and a visual tool.

Podcast = L, L2C, Asynchronous, SD, A, V. (see page 47)

Video

Ten years ago the Web was a text-based medium. As modems were able to transfer information more quickly photographs and drawings were added to break up the monotony of text. When *streaming* was invented, software like *Flash* emerged that allowed for more dynamic content using sound and animation, for example. The emergence of YouTube indicates the increasing viability of video distribution on the Web where users can post and view videos that others have created. Video is able to convey many cultural norms such as body language and gestures and adds a whole new

[60] Center for Educational Development. op.cit.

*Streaming means sending digital video directly to the user's screen rather than requiring it first be downloaded. Streaming allows the beginning of a piece to play while the end is still loading so a user doesn't have to wait for the entire file to be downloaded before seeing it.

dimension to second language teaching because it has the potential for realistic language content.

Our research has turned up many examples of sites using video of language training purposes. CBC Ottawa and CBC Archives in partnership with the Applied Linguistics Department at Carleton University developed CBC-ESL[61] to help newcomers learn about Canada. Ten lessons with quizzes and links to other Web sites were developed as part of this pilot project underlining how television can play a role in English Language Learning. CBC Know Canada[62], an earlier effort by the CBC was developed as "a free service to new Canadians, providing opportunities to increase their English language proficiency through news stories, lessons and content" by way of new lessons each week based on news programming from CBC News – Canada Now. The hope was that "these engaging lessons develop listening comprehension abilities, increase vocabulary, and deepen understanding of Canadian culture to new Canadians", indicating that CBC would like to facilitate second language learning and settlement. The English for All[63] video series is the best example of the use of video in language learning on the Web today and could act as a model for future development. Refer to the program description in the Learning Program Review section of this report or Appendix B for more detail.

Video has the potential for authentic learning because learners can observe and listen to native speaker input with genuine accents, posture, and gestures, talking about situations, emotions, and activities that interest them. It provides for individualization due to tagging of audio and video objects as a means for locating multimedia content. Video fosters autonomy as learners can access videos online at any time and any place. According to Elizabeth Hanson-Smith and Michael Marzio, “video can also be a collaborative communication tool with the addition of student productions, formally in script-writing and project presentation as well as informally in teamwork within project groups.”[64]

Video is a listening and reading tool. It allows for learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher and learner-to-content interaction. Video is an asynchronous tool. Video is a self-directed tool and potentially collaborative. We believe video is an audio and visual tool.

Video = L, R, W, Asynch, L2L, , SD, A, V. (see page 47)

Concordancers

A concordancer is a type of software that exists on many Web sites and provides real life examples of how language is used by searching through a body of texts. The student types a word into a Web site interface and the computer searches through a pre-selected body of texts and returns a list of sentences that use that word in context. So, for example, an electrical engineer learning English and hoping to work in Ontario might

[61] CBC-ESL http://www.cbc.ca/ottawa/esl/index.html
[62] CBC Know Canada http://www.KnowCanada.com/
[63] Los Angeles Unified School District. Division of Adult Education. English for All homepage http://www.myefa.org/
[64] Hanson-Smith, E. and Marzio, M. “Video Online” in *Teaching English with Technology*. Vol. 6, No. 2 Maay 2006.
http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/j_tech24.htm

search an online engineering textbook for examples of a technical term's use in an authentic context.

This type of tool is clearly useful to language learners, especially more advanced learners who are able to work comfortably with authentic documents and also, people learning career-specific vocabulary. Students enter new vocabulary into the concordancer to see if they can find and record other words that are commonly used with them. If students commonly make collocation errors, students can put the root word into the concordancer to see if they can discover what the error is. When students are learning words that have multiple meanings, they can group the sentences according to their meaning. Using a concordancer and a simple word processing program, teachers can gather authentic text to use in creating fill in the gap activities.

Concordancer = R, Asynch, L2C, A, V. (see page 47)

Games

As ubiquitous as computer gaming is today, it can be an important online language training technique. Online gaming could be an engaging and motivating learning tool for language learners, especially if the content reflects authentic language and culture, and realistic communication situations. Scenario-based environments, autonomous play, instant feedback, and building upon knowledge to advance in a game are important gaming applications that are also important qualities in social-constructivism and communicative language learning. When entertaining games are combined with good learning methodology, the result will be rewarding and entertaining learning for the student. The English for All learner decision-making function is a type of learner role play that works well and would be a good model for a language learning game.

Games can also serve two important functions. They can teach discrete language skills or they involve complex virtual reality environments. An example of a simple Web-based game that teaches the alphabet is Type the Alphabet Online[65]. This game teaches the letters of the alphabet and offers typing practice. Other games involve complex virtual reality environments like the game English Taxi[66], where learners drive a taxi, listening and responding to passengers' conversations. This is a listening comprehension game that requires the student to answer questions by clicking on multiple choices. Photo Periodista[67] is a virtual travel game for learning and practicing Spanish language with the aim to facilitate learning though a goal-oriented, immersive experience. The game simulates a virtual journey as a photojournalist, gathering information about realistic events, listening to native speakers, taking pictures and writing reports for the editor. The game provides a context for developing one's skills in grammar, vocabulary and cultural awareness.

[65] http://free-online-games.nu/alphabet.html
[66] http://www.desq.co.uk/sections/portfolio/index.asp?a=portfolio&opt=010
[67] Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Photo Periodista. Design Document." http://web.mit.edu/nadya/www/DOCUMENTS_JUNE_2003/Periodista_web_site/game_documents/Periodista.pdf

Second Life

Earlier in this report, a video by Graham Stanley[68] provided an introduction to the look and feel of Second Life. For more information about Second Life and language learning, the blog from an IATEFL ((International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) [69] discussion at http://blog-efl.blogspot.com/2007/04/second-life-and-language-learning.html is an excellent resource.

Computer-based virtual reality environments are becoming increasingly popular for learning online. Second Life (SL) is an example of a virtual reality environment: a 3-D virtual world on the Web. Today there are over eight million people globally participating in SL.

Wikipedia explains that in Second Life, "users download a client program and choose from a variety of motional avatars to move around the environment. Residents can explore, meet other people, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade items (virtual property) and services from one another."

During the six-month period that the research team spent on this project there were many innovations in the way that Second Life is being used as a learning environment for second language acquisition and we expect many more will follow. There is now a group on SL called Second Life English for people interested in learning or teaching English in the 3-D world. (http://esl-secondlife.blogspot.com/) The group's classroom and *3-D Learning Circuit* are located in the English Village, an island in Second Life where teachers are equipped with holodecks (simulated reality facilities), quizzing tools, and more. Lessons are scheduled at certain times and students can log in to learn about topics like phrasal verbs.

Schools and universities are taking up residence in Second Life, joining business people, politicians, entertainers, and others in this virtual world. Using Second Life's virtual environment for second language learning is still very new but it looks to be a promising innovation for many students.

We recommend that CIC monitor Second Life to determine its potential role in the online distance program.

Games can be listening, speaking, or writing tools. Games allow for learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher and learner-to-content interactions. Games can be both synchronous and asynchronous tools. Games can be collaborative and self-directed tools. We believe games can be kinesthetic, audio and visual tools.

Games = R, S,W, L2L, L2T, L2C, synch and asynch, C and SD, K, A, V. (see page 47)

[68] http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5307243151540361790
[69] International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Aberdeen, Scotland, in April 2007

Section VII: Recommendations

- We recommend that **access to online distance learning** be made widely available, and that both its geographic restrictions and its requirement that students not be able to attend a classroom program be removed. Expansion can begin with preparation of learners in schools for greater autonomy in their language learning and settlement. As learners progress in fluency in more traditional learning environments, they should also progress in developing autonomous, self-directed learning skills.

- Follow Borje Holmberg's recommendations regarding **integrating culture** in an online distance program. Activities and materials that are developed in Ontario for a distance language learning program should reflect the best approaches towards incorporating Canadian culture.

- Most online and **distance learning today** is and/or is recommended to be a mixture of distributed, blended, and flexible learning. From a student's point of view, online learning environments can take different forms.

- Where possible, **orientation** 'events' should be held to introduce students to the requirements of the technology and the expectations for student-to-teacher and peer-to-peer communication. An excellent first step would be development of a tool to assess learner preparation for on-line learning. This tool should assess students' familiarity with technology, their experience in online learning, their problem solving skills, their ability to motivate themselves, their level of self-directedness as well as their level of English fluency. The results should be shared with the student to help in determining their preference for learning environments.

- When possible, begin language instruction by providing **traditional face-to-face** instruction and then blend it with distance education. Face-to-face instruction can provide lower-level learners with support and help them develop confidence in their ability to succeed using on-line learning tools.
- Help students develop their ability to engage in **self-directed learning**. For example, if the program includes traditional instruction, instructors can spend time in class working with students on time management strategies. TV411, an American TV series an online learning site for adults who want to improve their literacy skills was used in a facilitated group setting and found that, for most learners, working with TV411 changed their perceptions of themselves as learners and allowed them to take ownership of their learning.
- Ongoing support should be provided for students through frequent **contact with instructors** via multiple modalities (e.g., face-to-face meetings, e-mail, or telephone or videophone contact).
- Any system that is contemplated should include innovative, attractive, easy to use **online supports** for all learners. When a student clicks on a HELP button they should be greeted by more than just text. The help should be contextualized and it should have sound and images, preferably video.

- There should be immediate or quick computer **technical support** for online distance learners via phone.

- CIC Ontario with other regions should initiate a project which defines the parameters and begins to develop strategies, specifications and a roadmap to produce an expanding set of interactive **on-line language learning objects** which could be shared across Canada.

- We recommend that any investment in creating online learning should specify **SCORM** compliancy as a requisite for learning objects.

- Courseware developed for LINC should be **browser-based** and platform independent for use on PC, Mac, or Unix based personal computers.

- Students learning online have basic **equipment needs**: an up-to-date computer with microphone, and speakers or earphones. Optimally, the system should include a camera for stills or videoconferencing

- We recommend a **professional development** qualification for instructors and administrators who will be working in Ontario LINC online programs. The course matter toward this qualification should enable teachers to integrate appropriate technology into language learning. Such a qualification could be administered and created through TESL Ontario or a TESL training institution.

- Adding regular **podcasts** to a language learning site would be an excellent use of resources. Producing podcast videos would add detail and authenticity and tap into the paralinguistic features of language such as gestures and body language.

- **Video on the web** is here now and has enormous potential for online language learning. Video is effective in building listening skills and offers the use of images as contextual clues to help with language comprehension. Also, videos could be produced to cover countless important themes, such as Canadian immigration, housing, healthcare, consumerism, and education.

- A **video** series of skits or vignettes on different aspects of workplace literacy focusing on both finding employment and on thriving in a current job would be a real benefit to students. A library of podcast and/or video episodes could be produced that could be accessed by students on a regular basis. Teachers from the LINC and/or The Home Study Online program could be invited to suggest and/or to assist in developing content for podcasts and videos.

- CIC LINC online courses should incorporate **concordancers** as learning tools for intermediate to advanced learners.

- **Games** can be very motivating and engaging edutainment anchored in authentic communicative situations, or simple mini-applications that effectively teach language skills. CIC should consider sponsoring the licensing or development of games for LINC online language learning. CIC should monitor the emergence of Second Life type virtual online worlds, especially as audio communication becomes available.

Recommended Next Steps

In this report we have surveyed the field to identify trends and best practices in online language education, and we have made recommendations to CIC on content and technology, teacher preparation and learner readiness. A logical next step in our belief would be a consultation with stakeholders. The LINC community, including learners, assessors, teachers, administrators, and the settlement community need a voice in many of the next steps facing CIC, and the success of online language training depends on a buy-in from newcomers and educators. A consultation with LINC teachers, administrators, assessors, educators and learners would be a giant step toward a strategy that expands access to online learning, develops distance and flexible opportunities for learning, and takes advantage of new learning and communications technologies. A consultation should take the technology temperature of the field, and hear what the field's priorities are. The consultation might take the form of a symposium or traveling workshop, or even a Web distributed conference. The outcome of the consultation should be a strategy to develop and expand online language training for LINC learners.
In addition to our strategy recommendation, a number of smaller first steps are available toward a developed online LINC option based on the principles we have recommended.

Learner Readiness

We recommend a pilot project to test best practices in learner preparation for online independent learning. It could include:

- Developing one on-line course, 4 – 8 weeks long
- Identifying a LINC delivery agency
- Identifying a pilot group of LINC learners wanting to make the transition to online independent learning and needing technical and other preparation.
- Assessing the learners' readiness and creating and delivering a preparation module
- Delivering the course through the LINC agency
- Researching a summative evaluation through interviews, surveys, and focus groups

Teacher Readiness:

- A pilot course covering online teaching could be developed by a TESL training institution. CIC could solicit bids from all the credentialing institutions to develop and test a new course of PD for ESL teachers. (And it should be an online course.)
- Another pilot project teaching teachers to work online could be developed for professionals already in the field.
- Support the development of "Web 2.0 and online learning" symposium/workshop/training events at local and provincial TESL events.

Online Learning Content:

An ongoing effort should be made to constantly update and refresh a list of key free web resources. The list should be distributed as annotated links on a web page for the use of Ontario settlement professionals and LINC learners.

Twenty-five years ago hardly any Canadian ESL publications existed (Today titles number in the hundreds or more, mainly because LINC and other government programs enabled institutions to buy Canadian materials in numbers that justified investments by publishers. A similar issue faces the ESL community today: producers of online content need a financial argument to invest in Canadian content. CIC should encourage the production and use of culturally relevant material through direct funding, licensing or purchase of subscriptions. In many cases, new Canadian content will need to take into account unique characteristics of other provinces and territories.

CIC can encourage strategic partnerships among LINC materials developers, second language educators, and news and cultural organizations that can provide media assets for versioning into LINC learning objects. “Versioning” content that has already been validated is an economical shortcut to launching language learning objects.

We are including below some examples of authentic, reliable content that could readily be versioned or re-purposed into online LINC learning objects. Please note this is not a researched list as there are countless items that could sourced for conversion to online learning objects.

Your Money Matters

http://www.aspect.bc.ca/products/yourmoneymatters.php

ASPECT, British Columbia’s Association of Community-based Trainers, has already developed online learning materials on financial literacy. There is sound on the site but only in a few spots. Sound would need to be added to other areas. The interactive quizzes and activities would need to be augmented.

The Learning Edge

http://www.thewclc.ca/edge/

an interactive online newspaper for low literacy adults. This interactive content has audio support throughout but the interactive exercises would need to be augmented. Seven issues of the newspaper have already been created. The task would be to select certain "best of" stories and augment them with learning activities designed for LINC learners.

Steps to Employment

http://www.settlement.org/steps/manuals.html

CIC funded the Steps to Employment project in 2000 to develop workshops for internationally trained professionals and trades people in 17 occupations. The workshops were presented as a set of manuals each of which consisted of learner and practitioner material. Each manual orients the internationally trained person to the way their occupation works in Ontario (regulations, membership organizations, educational requirements, union status), explores labour market issues such as whether the occupation is a growing one, as well as introducing the terminology of the occupation with pronunciation support. The manuals need to be updated to reflect current trends and issues. The original manuals were produced in Pdf format and are available from

the Settlement.org Web site. They would be even more useful if they took advantage of some of the interactive tools described in this report. Steps to Employment manuals were developed for students working on LINC 5 outcomes. Each manual consists of 25 hours of orientation to the occupation and 25 hours of language training.

Many professions have Enhanced Language Training (ELT) programs up and running and more are in the works. For those learners, the community of professionals in Ontario that works in their field is extremely important for mentoring, sponsoring, and generally showing them the ropes. This kind of relationship is key as they work to re-enter their professions and trades. The idea of communities of practice that can be developed in online distance language programs is extremely relevant to their needs. Many of the occupations in Steps link to the Career maps that Access to Professions and Trades (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities) makes available. A series of interactive online workshops reworked to target internationally trained professionals and trades people who enroll in ELT programs would be a great addition to what is available.

Your First Days in Ontario

As the document YOUR FIRST DAYS IN ONTARIO – A GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS at Settlement.org points out, information on themes like voltage, public holidays, agencies that help immigrants and Community Information Centres, public libraries, Canadian money, using the telephone and using the telephone book (white pages - blue pages - yellow pages), sending and receiving mail, getting a mailing address, transportation, driving, finding childcare, registering children for school, applying for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), applying for a Social Insurance Number (SIN), learning English or French, measurements (imperial - metric), prices (taxes - GST, PST) all are important information to living in this society. Any would be worthy topics in an interactive on-line course.

A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada

In a like manner, the document, A NEWCOMER'S INTRODUCTION TO CANADA, points out society-specific information like buying or renting a house, types of housing, finding a place to live, signing a lease, international educational assessment services in Canada, provincial credential assessment services, employment in regulated professions and trades, employment laws, discrimination, and important Canadian cultural content like geography, distances, population, history, economy, government, bilingualism and multiculturalism. Other themes like family life and family law, marriage, divorce and the law, birth control and family planning, youth and their parents, youth and the law and important social standards, are likewise mainly society-specific and would lend themselves to great interactive learning modules.

Finally, themes like personal rights and freedoms, children's rights, women's rights, senior citizens' rights, becoming a Canadian citizen, and responsible and active citizenship, would be of great interest to second language students engaged in interactive online learning.

These last three are only examples of material that exists in print and that cover relevant themes for ESL students - these might be good candidates to be transformed into interactive multimedia content. Perhaps an initial piece would be to offer a contract to investigate what print materials are available that are particularly relevant to newcomers building a new life in Canada and would lend themselves to being transformed into dynamic online learning materials.

Learning Management Systems:

Our key recommendation, the Home Study program and any other online delivery agency should seriously consider the alternatives existing in open source learning management systems.

SectionVIII: **Appendices** *(SEE OTHER DOCUMENT FOR APPENDICES)*

Appendix A: Literature search and annotated list of resources

Appendix B: Language Software Evaluation Template

Appendix C: Learner Readiness Surveys