

# Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA): Guide for Teachers and Programs



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# **Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA): Guide for Teachers and Programs**

**2014 Edition**

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Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA):  
Guide for Teachers and Programs

2014 Edition

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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) is referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks and is the authorized language assessment protocol for language programs funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

*Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA): Guide for Teachers and Programs* is intended to assist teachers and administrators to implement PBLA effectively. The guide provides an overview of the theoretical foundations, principles, and assessment strategies that are fundamental to PBLA. It outlines conditions for successful implementation, describes the essential features of PBLA, and provides teachers with examples of techniques and activities that can be used to integrate portfolio-based language assessment into adult ESL instruction. The guide also includes suggestions for using the Language Companion, a binder supplied to students to help them learn English and settle in Canada.

In addition, the guide provides support and direction to program administrators responsible for the implementation of PBLA. It is recommended that program administrators implementing PBLA follow the protocols and procedures outlined in this guide.

*NOTE: Throughout the PBLA guide, I differentiate between ESL and ESL Literacy students.*

ESL students are students in language-training programs characterized by the following:

- Have more than ten years of uninterrupted formal education in their first language (L<sub>1</sub>)
- Understand that written text encodes language
- Understand that written text has structure and meaning
- Seek out written texts to learn about and practise English
- Use reference material such as dictionaries and understand what they are, how they are organized, and how to use them
- Use their L<sub>1</sub> literacy skills to record, remember, and interpret information. For example, they will write out definitions, record the English sounds of words and phrases in an L<sub>1</sub> approximation, and make notes to themselves of pertinent information given by a teacher. They read text and highlight key points, and they gloss text, such as new vocabulary, in the margins of their textbooks.
- Use sophisticated cognitive knowledge and analytical skills to make sense of their environment and experiences
- Bring sophisticated metacognitive skills and classroom experiences to new learning experiences
- Have expectations and assumptions about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners, as well as appropriate classroom behaviour

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

ESL Literacy learners are immigrants who have the following characteristics:

- Have little or no literacy skills in their L<sub>1</sub>, usually because of limited or interrupted formal education, or because they come from a country with a non-Roman alphabet system
- Often have limited numeracy skills, do not read and write well in their L<sub>1</sub>, and are now attempting to learn English
- May have educational experience based solely on memorized tracts

Students who are pre-benchmark, that is they are not yet communicating at a CLB 1 level, are not necessarily ESL Literacy students. Pre-benchmark students may be educated but have had little or no exposure to English. Nor are ESL Literacy students limited to students in the CLB ESL Literacy Pre-Benchmarks A phase. ESL Literacy students may have a range of literacy skills from pre-literacy to CLB 3 or higher but continue to require specialized learning supports and materials. This group of students shares many characteristics of typical L<sub>1</sub> literacy learners, with the added challenge of learning an additional language.

# BACKGROUND

## CIC Enhanced Assessment Strategy

The development of PBLA was undertaken as a CIC priority in response to recommendations in several pivotal studies on language training in Canada. Makosky (2008) and Nagy and Stewart (2009) had noted that assessment in LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) programs was ad hoc and inconsistent. This raised concerns about the reliability of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) outcomes of language training reported to the federal government. The reports recommended that the federal government implement a teacher-based assessment protocol in federally funded language training programs. An intergovernmental study of settlement language training across Canada advised CIC to adopt a language portfolio assessment system nationally to capture language-development progress.<sup>1</sup>

## Language Assessment and Evaluation

Although the terms *assessment* and *evaluation* are often used interchangeably, they in fact have different meanings:

### Assessment

Assessment is the process of collecting information about student learning. Throughout the learning process, assessment is used to inform teaching and student learning. As a result of assessment, teachers can adjust their teaching. Regular descriptive feedback to students enables them to modify what they are doing so as to become more effective learners.

### Evaluation

Evaluation is the process of reviewing collected evidence and making a judgment about how well students have learned what they have been studying. Evaluation is used to tell students how well they have performed according to a set of standards. Typically, evaluative feedback is encoded: that is, it is reported using numbers, letters, or grades.

### Purposes

Traditionally, assessment and evaluation have several purposes:

- Diagnostic assessment – assessment of discrete strengths and weaknesses
- Formative assessment – assessment for learning (i.e., to enhance learning)
- Summative assessment – assessment of learning (i.e., to determine what has been learned)
- Evaluation – judging learning outcomes

**NOTE:** For placement purposes, the results of the CLBPT scores indicate the student's general level of proficiency. For example, a student assessed as a CLB 2 has achieved proficiency at CLB 2 and will be placed in a class to work towards CLB 3 outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal, Provincial, Territorial Forum. 2009. "Pan-Canadian Environmental Scan." Prepared by Alberta Employment and Immigration Policy and Programs Branch, Calgary.

# BACKGROUND

In language instruction based on the CLB, the following occurs:

## Initial Assessment

At the outset of any journey, it is important to know where you are starting from, and the language-learning journey is no different. This information is essential for planning, monitoring, and measuring progress on the journey. Initial assessment in government-funded language training typically focuses on the students' language proficiency, needs and goals, and preferred learning styles.

### *Language Proficiency*

Assessment of language proficiency for placement purposes is undertaken to determine the students' CLB levels in the four skill areas: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. This is done at the outset of instruction in order to refer students to appropriate programs or classes. Knowing what the student is able to do is a first step in planning for instruction. Initial assessment of the entering language level provides a baseline to set short- and long-term goals and to measure progress.

### *Needs and Goals*

A referral to a particular language-training program reflects factors related to the student's personal situation. Parents with preschoolers may be referred to programs with child care; seniors may be referred to programs that address their specific concerns. Engineers may be referred to programs to help them re-enter their profession.

Once a class has begun, teachers conduct needs assessments to identify the students' language-learning priorities and the specific social contexts for which students need English. This information informs goal setting and is the reference for ongoing discussions about progress.

### *Learning Style Preferences*

Individuals are usually able to learn in a variety of ways. However, they generally have preferred ways of learning, referred to as "learning styles." Learning styles are often influenced by culture. A student educated in a specific culture may have been influenced by a particular approach to learning, which may, over the years, have become his or her dominant learning style.

Learning styles can be clustered under the following preferences:

- **Affective:** related to personality factors (represented, for example, by the Myers-Briggs learning style taxonomy)
- **Physical:** related to visual, auditory, or tactile preferences
- **Cognitive:** related to how individuals organize and process information (represented, for example, by the Gregorc learning style model)

It can be helpful for students to explore their preferred learning styles and the implications for language learning.

## Formative and Summative Assessment

Traditionally, formative and summative assessment practices have had discrete purposes. Formative assessment has been carried out by teachers as an ongoing, frequently informal process of assessment *for* learning. Students use feedback from formative assessment during the instructional cycle to modify their learning strategies and become more effective language learners. Teachers use formative assessment to adjust their teaching strategies and plans to better meet student needs.

Summative assessment has typically been carried out to determine the *result* of the learning process (assessment *of* learning). Traditionally, it is a formal process that generally occurs at the end of a period of instruction, such as at the end of a term<sup>2</sup> or course. Teachers typically administer formal assessment tasks developed by external experts to collect performance data for evaluation.

Current conceptions of assessment consider formative and summative assessment to be interrelated and on a continuum. Research has determined that all assessment should be carried out formatively (Black and Wiliam, 1998): that is, it should promote learning. PBLA builds on the interrelatedness of assessment purposes and is premised on the belief that assessment and evaluation practices should have the following characteristics:

- Be central classroom practice
- Benefit the students
- Reflect the curriculum developed and delivered in response to the needs and goals of the students
- Yield accurate, reliable results
- Be part of effective planning
- Inform teaching
- Enhance exemplary teaching

**All assessment – whether diagnostic/placement, formative, summative, self, or peer – should inform and enhance learning.**

## Evaluation and Reporting

Evaluation and reporting to students occurs at the end of a term or course.

### *Evaluation*

During evaluation, the teacher reviews the assessment data (work samples, quiz and test results, notes and checklists, etc.) and makes a judgment based on a standard to award a grade or level of achievement. In government-funded language training, the teacher reflects on the students' performance over time to decide whether they have demonstrated the necessary proficiency on a variety of tasks.

### *Reporting*

Students have a right to know how well they have progressed; consequently, a formal progress report of outcomes is essential in a comprehensive assessment system. In CIC-funded programs, the progress reports include descriptive feedback, as well as the CLB achievement levels.

## Portfolio Assessment in Language Learning

Portfolios have been increasingly used worldwide in language learning for assessment purposes. Several particular uses of portfolio assessment in language learning have influenced the PBLA model, including the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and, in Canada, Manitoba's Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (CLPA).

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<sup>2</sup> *Term* is used to describe both a term or semester in a program year.

# BACKGROUND

## European Language Portfolio (ELP)

In ESL instruction one of the most influential uses of portfolio assessment has been by the Council of Europe. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR).

- The ELP is a self-assessment tool used to evaluate, describe, and document individuals' language learning and proficiency using the Common European Framework; to inform anyone concerned about their proficiency; to set personal language-learning goals; and to plan further learning.
- The ELP was piloted from 1998 to 2000 and was introduced on a pan-European scale by the Council of Europe in 2001.
- More than 100 models of the ELP in more than 30 countries and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs ) have been validated.
- To date, more than two million copies of ELP models have been distributed.

For more information about the ELP, including numerous downloadable resources, visit the ELP website at [www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio).

## Manitoba Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (CLPA)

In Canada, Manitoba has been successfully using portfolio assessment in government-funded language-training programs for a number of years. Portfolio assessment is used successfully for both adult ESL and ESL Literacy students at a range of CLB levels and in a variety of programs, including settlement-focused programs, workplace programs, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and academic preparation courses. This includes part-time and full-time ESL, programs with set- and continuous-intake policies, and homogeneous and multilevel programming.

- Work began on the development of CLPA in 2003, guided by a working group of experienced Adult ESL teachers from a variety of programs with students at a range of CLB levels, including ESL Literacy. Their work resulted in the production of *Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment: Manitoba Best Practices Guide*, which includes suggestions and materials for using portfolio-based language assessment with different types of learners at different levels or in different learning contexts.
- CLPA was introduced in three core Winnipeg programs in 2004 and was phased in throughout the system, including regional programs, from 2005 to 2008.
- In 2008, Manitoba's Adult Language Training (ALT) Branch project officers reviewed the consistency and effectiveness of implementation through regular program monitoring.
- As a result, the CLPA protocol and expectations were standardized in 2009. The *CLPA Binder Divider* was introduced, and the *CLPA: Manitoba Best Practices Guide* was revised.
- Feedback collected in 2010 from teachers and students on the use of CLPA indicates that the majority of students and teachers like using CLPA and find it helpful.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In February 2010, Winnipeg Technical College surveyed ESL students in language-training programs at their two campuses. They were asked two questions: Do you like having a portfolio? and Do you find it helpful? At the Erin Street Campus, 109 students from CLB 1-8 responded to the questionnaire. Eighty-seven percent said they like having a portfolio and 83% said they find it helpful. At the Pembina Campus in the same period, 201 students responded to the questionnaire. Of these students, 95.5% said they like having a portfolio and 93% said they find it helpful.

# PBLA: INTRODUCTION

Portfolio assessment in education emerged in the early 1990s as a response by teachers to accountability concerns. Regarded as a teacher- or classroom-based approach to assessment, it is considered to be a form of “authentic” assessment and an alternative to traditional testing approaches. Portfolio assessment provides teachers and students with a tool to document, review, analyze, and reflect on learning. Since its introduction, this alternative approach to assessment has been used in a variety of educational and professional contexts. Although there is no single way to use portfolios in assessment, the following elements are considered basic to a sound approach:

- A container, such as a folder, box, binder, or digital space
- Contents that demonstrate learning over time in relation to a specific curriculum or goals
- Clear, shared standards and assessment criteria
- Student involvement
- Reflection on learning

Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) is a particular application of portfolio assessment to language learning.

## What Is PBLA?

PBLA is a comprehensive, systematic, authentic, and collaborative approach to language assessment that engages teachers and students in dialogue to tell the story of the student’s journey in learning English and meeting personal goals. PBLA is a classroom- and teacher-based assessment approach that is integrated throughout the teaching/learning cycle. Together, teachers and students collaborate to set language-learning goals, compile numerous examples of

Students maintain their portfolios in their Language Companion, a binder that they receive at the outset of their language training to support their language learning and settlement and to facilitate PBLA. Please see the section on the Language Companion in this guide for more information and suggestions.

language proficiency and learning in a variety of

contexts over time, analyze the data, and reflect on progress. In this way, students are encouraged to become more autonomous, active, and self-aware language learners, engaged in and responsible for their learning. PBLA is a process that facilitates the development of metacognitive knowledge and skills that students are able to transfer to other aspects of their lives.

At the outset of the program, students, guided by teachers, collect artefacts (initial CLB placement-test results, language samples, needs assessments, goal statements, etc.) as baseline data. These baseline data indicate a student’s starting point, against which progress is shown and discussed.

As part of the instructional cycle throughout the duration of the program, students compile examples of their language learning in the four skill areas: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. These include teacher-administered assessment tasks and peer-assessed skill-using language tasks. Throughout the term, students are encouraged to self-assess and to think reflectively about their language learning process. At key intervals, each student, with the teacher’s assistance, uses the

Before portfolio assessment, I always felt there was something missing in how we were teaching our learners – but I love what we’re doing now. It’s about getting them meaningful jobs or getting them to start their own businesses. It’s so exciting.

*Mary Jean Davis, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program, ESL Literacy Phase 2*

# PBLA: INTRODUCTION

accumulated data to discuss the progress being made towards the student's goals, to highlight ongoing or emerging challenges, and to discuss strategies to overcome them. Teachers use what they learn from these reflections to modify instruction. At the end of the term or program, the teacher collects all the students' portfolios, reviews the collected data and other records, evaluates the language-learning outcomes, and prepares progress or summary reports. The teacher then meets with each student to go over the report. Explanation of the report is supported by the data in the portfolio.

## Benefits of PBLA

Any assessment process results in “washback”: that is, it affects teaching and learning. PBLA contributes to positive washback because it builds on and promotes good teaching practice and enhances the development and implementation of specific classroom curricula based on students' needs and goals. PBLA has notable benefits to students, teachers, and administrators.

### Benefits to Students

- Portfolio assessment encourages self-reflection, which is important in self-directed learning.
- Students can focus on the learning process, not just the learning outcomes. Students who are making slower progress or who are in classes that meet infrequently can see that they are developing language skills even though they may not have completed all the competencies of a certain level.
- Students can set realistic goals, develop learning plans, and monitor their progress.
- Assessment is integrated into the teaching/learning cycle and does not interrupt the learning process.
- Students can “see” their progress by comparing their present language competence with competence displayed on entry to the class or program.
- Students are given a concrete connection between their language-learning activities, their progress, and the CLB levels and competencies.
- Portfolio assessment supports the development of many important skills and concepts that can transfer to other life, work, and school contexts.

The best suggestion I can give you is to view the portfolio as if it is a picture album. When you go on a trip you take snapshots once in a while – not of everything you see. A portfolio could be viewed the same way – the contents are simply snapshots of the students' learning over a period of time.

Heather Currie, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program, CLB 2 and ESL Literacy Phase 2

### Benefits to Teachers

- When teachers are completing progress reports, they have tangible evidence of student performance.
- Teachers have concrete samples of work to refer to when meeting with students about their progress.
- Teachers are better able to explain or justify their assessment to students or to administrators.
- Teachers have access to material for a quick reference if a student requires a CLB assessment to support an application to a mainstream training program or post-secondary institution.
- Portfolio assessment facilitates ongoing reflection on the teaching/learning process so that teachers can adjust their teaching strategies and plans appropriately.

- When a student transfers in from another class, the receiving teacher has valuable information from previous portfolio assessment.
- Portfolio assessment enhances the development of professional expertise.

## Benefits to Program Administrators

- PBLA improves understanding and facilitates communication between teachers and administrators for promoting students and class reorganization.
- The consistent approach to assessment and evaluation enhances communication among program administrators and facilitates systemic planning.
- The evidence of student progress confirms the credibility of the CLB scores submitted to funders for accountability purposes.
- PBLA facilitates program planning and resource sharing because teachers employ instructional strategies and teaching resources consistent with best practices in second-language instruction and curriculum guidelines.

### **Several Winnipeg School Division Adult EAL teachers responded to the questions, “Has [portfolio assessment] impacted your teaching practice or your planning? How?”**

I am more aware of what needs to be covered and how much time I have to cover it in. I have become much more organized out of necessity. It also helps me with scaffolding exercises because I know what I have covered and what skills have been reflected in their portfolios. It certainly helps me when it comes to report card time. I am able to pinpoint the specific tasks that a student has worked on and the skills that a student does well or needs to improve on.

*Valerie Fulford, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program CLB 3-4*

I started my teaching career in Middle School and we were required to do portfolios with our students. When I made the switch from the K to 12 system to the adult EAL system I was able to hit the ground running because I had already received a lot of Professional Development related to portfolios. The impact that portfolios has had on my teaching practice or planning is simple – it keeps me accountable, organized and efficient. I have found that doing portfolios is a great way for me to keep track of which outcomes I have met when doing a thematic unit.

*Heather Currie, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program, CLB 2 and EAL Literacy CLB2L*

I find the portfolios have made me more accountable to students and myself. It forces me to re-evaluate what or how I am teaching a certain topic and whether or not I am delivering in the 4 skill areas.

*Catherine Campbell, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program, EAL Literacy Pre-Benchmarks A*

# PBLA: INTRODUCTION

## Features of the Learning Portfolio

The type of portfolio that is used in PBLA, a learning portfolio, draws on the best features of several kinds of portfolios:

- A process portfolio: The PBLA portfolio documents the learning journey over time and therefore includes more than the end products. Because it includes drafts and revisions, it can help teachers to see progress and development.
- An evaluation portfolio: The PBLA portfolio documents the learning journey based on specific needs and goals (many of which are learner identified), and in relationship to standards (in this case, those of the CLB). Portfolios include evidence of performance related to CLB standards, together with observations, records, and feedback related to specific criteria.
- A presentation portfolio: The PBLA portfolio highlights learner strengths and skills and provides opportunities for learners to comment on their work and to reflect on and take pride in their achievements. This is especially evident in the learner conferences based on the portfolios.

The PBLA portfolio also incorporates metacognitive skills such as self-assessment and reflection, strategies that have been shown to have a significant positive impact on learning.

# PBLA: FOUNDATIONS

PBLA is an assessment approach grounded in theory, principles, and practice. It has been informed by theoretical developments in classroom- and teacher-based assessment and Assessment for Learning (AfL), as well as the principles of the Canadian Language Benchmarks. In addition, the PBLA approach incorporates insights from a formal field test conducted in Ottawa ON by Carleton University, Ottawa, from 2010 to 2012, and from several extended applications of PBLA in LINC classrooms in Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John, NB, and Edmonton, AB.

## Classroom-Based Assessment

Historically, assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes have been test-driven. The use of tests to assess learning outcomes is consistent with a conception of learning as an accumulation of discrete, hierarchical, knowledge-based elements. Tests, particularly standardized tests developed by external “experts” for large-scale use, have typically been administered at the end of a learning period. The teacher’s role has primarily been relegated to test preparation and exam invigilation. However, in recent years, conceptions of curriculum planning and teaching based on student needs have become dominant. At the same time, there has been an increasing call for teachers to monitor student progress on an ongoing basis. These trends have prompted a growing interest by educators in alternative approaches to assessment, approaches that are consistent with instructional imperatives and that recognize the professional role of teachers in assessment (Davison and Leung, 2009; Leahy and Wiliam, 2011; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Daugherty, 2011).

## Advantages of Classroom-Based Assessment

According to Davison and Leung, classroom- or teacher-based assessment can be distinguished from other forms of assessment in several important ways. Classroom-based assessment has the following characteristics:

- It involves the teacher from the beginning to the end: from planning the assessment programme, through to identifying and/or developing appropriate assessment tasks right through to making the assessment judgments.
- It allows for the collection of a number of samples of student work over a period of time, using a variety of different tasks and activities.
- It can be adapted and modified by the teacher to match the teaching and learning goals of the particular class and students being assessed.
- It is carried out in ordinary classrooms, not in a specialist assessment centre or examination hall.
- It is conducted by the students’ own teacher, not a stranger.
- It involves students more actively in the assessment process, especially if self and peer assessment are used in conjunction with teacher assessment.
- It opens up the possibility for teachers to support learner-led enquiry.
- It allows the teacher to give immediate and constructive feedback to students.
- It stimulates continuous evaluation and adjustment of the teaching and learning programme.
- It complements other forms of assessment, including external examinations.

(Davison and Leung, 2009, pp. 395-396)

# PBLA: FOUNDATIONS

**Table 1: Advantages of Teacher-based Assessment over Standard Assessment**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Advantage</b>
Scope	Extends the range and diversity of assessment collection opportunities, task types, and assessors
Authenticity	Assesses work being done within the classroom; less possibility of cheating as teacher knows student capabilities; assessments more likely to be realistic
Validity	Improves validity through assessing factors that cannot be included in public exam settings
Reliability	Improves reliability by having more than one assessment by a teacher who is familiar with the student; allows for multiple opportunities for assessor reflection/standardization
Fairness	Fairness is achieved by following commonly agreed processes, outcomes and standards; teacher assumptions about students and their oral language levels are made explicit through collaborative sharing and discussion with other teachers
Feedback	Students can receive constructive feedback immediately after the assessment has finished, hence improving learning
Positive Washback	Ongoing assessment encourages students to work consistently; provides important data for evaluation of teaching and assessment practices in general
Teacher and Student Empowerment	Teachers and students become part of the assessment process; collaboration and sharing of expertise takes place within and across schools
Professional Development	Builds teacher assessment skills, which can be transferred to other areas of the curriculum
Practicality and Cost	Once teachers are trained, teacher-based assessment is much cheaper as integrated into normal curriculum; undertaken by class teachers as part of everyday teaching; avoids wasting valuable teaching time on practice tests

*Source: Table 2, from Davison and Leung (2009, pp 402-403).*

## Reliability and Validity of Classroom-Based Assessment

Assessment by teachers has the potential for providing valid and reliable information about students' achievements since teachers can build up a picture of students' attainments across the full range of activities and goals. In the past, critics have raised concerns that teacher-based assessment is unreliable and subject to bias. In 2004, in response to these concerns, Wynne Harlen of the University of Cambridge undertook a systematic review of 30 papers for the EPPI Centre of the University of London, England, in order to provide research evidence for the dependability of summative assessment by teachers and the conditions that affect it. He found that classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers is both reliable and valid when the following criteria are met:

- Programs display a constructive and positive *assessment culture*.
  - Assessment is related to students' learning goals.
  - There are clear standards, required protocols, and appropriate resources to conduct assessment.
  - There are rigorous procedures for quality assurance and quality control of teachers' judgments.
  - There is access to sufficient and appropriate assessment tasks, tools, and other resources.
  - There is professional development for teachers and supportive monitoring of assessment practices.
- (Harlen, 2004).

PBLA protocols, resources, supports and monitoring procedures are intended to ensure these critical conditions are in place to support the reliability and validity of PBLA in the classroom.

## The Canadian Language Benchmarks

As outlined in the introduction of *Canadian Language Benchmark: English as a Second Language for Adults*, the CLB standard provides the following:

- A national standard for planning curricula for language instruction in a variety of contexts
- A framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming, and assessing adult English as a Second Language (ESL) in Canada
- A common yardstick for assessing learning outcomes
- A set of descriptive statements about successive levels of achievement on the continuum of ESL performance
- Descriptions of communicative competencies and performance tasks through which the learner demonstrates application of language knowledge (competence) and skill (proficiency)
- A descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in ESL expressed as 12 benchmarks or reference points

*In the Canadian Language Benchmarks, a language task is understood to be a communicative "real-world" instance of language use to accomplish a specific purpose in a particular context.*

*Canadian Language Benchmarks, p IX*

# PBLA: FOUNDATIONS

## CLB Principles

The CLB standard also reflects fundamental principles about second language learning, teaching, assessment, and evaluation:

### The CLB standard is learner-centred.

- Instruction is based on the needs and goals of learners.
- Learners are informed and involved in decision making.

### The CLB standard is task-based.

- Performance is best determined through task-based assessment.
- Instruction is task-based.
- Tasks are based on real-world issues and events and use authentic text.

### The CLB standard stresses community, study, and work-related tasks.

- The CLB outcomes are free of context; therefore, they are taught in context through various topics or themes.

### The CLB standard is competency based.

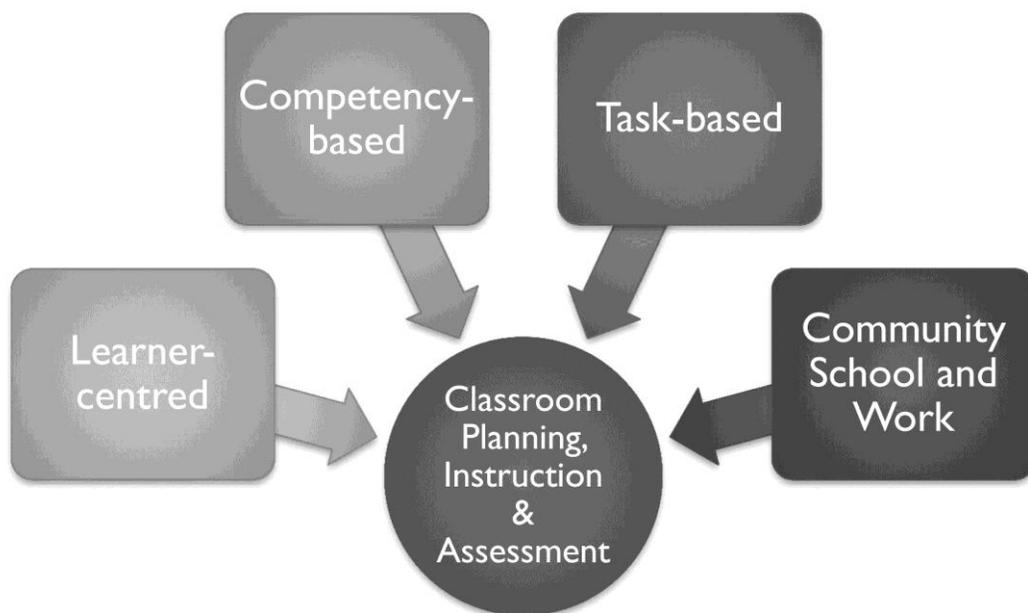
- Competency statements describe what students *can do*.
- Communicative competence requires organizational knowledge, including grammatical and textual knowledge; pragmatic knowledge, including functional and sociolinguistic knowledge; and strategic competence.

These principles are embedded in CLB-based curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices; indeed, CLB principles are fundamental to PBLA.

*These are examples of language tasks:*

- *Asking for help with a classroom assignment*
- *Following a set of 5 to 7 oral instructions to assemble a piece of furniture*
- *Reading a prescription label*
- *Filling out a job application form*

*Completing a fill-in-the-blank grammar exercise is NOT a language task. It is a skill-building learning activity focused on a discrete skill.*



## Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies

In 1998, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam of King's College, London, undertook an extensive and seminal literature review of more than 250 publications to determine if assessment improves learning. Their findings, published in the journal *Assessment in Education*, conclude not only that assessment can raise standards but that it is one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning. They also found evidence that the learning gain as a result of assessment is likely to be even more substantial for lower-achieving students, information that may be of particular interest to ESL Literacy teachers. They and other researchers – notably Hattie (2009), and Bullock, Bishop, Martin, and Reid (2002) – support Black and Wiliam, adding that the particular approach to assessment is a key determiner of its impact. For example, there is no evidence that increasing the amount of testing alone will enhance learning: teachers can administer multiple assessment tasks, but that in itself will not make a difference in student learning. Instead, it is assessment that is planned for and goal driven, and that engages teachers and students in reflection and dialogue that has the most impact.

Assessment that is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for both raising standards and empowering lifelong learners.

Assessment Reform Group,  
Assessment for Learning:  
Beyond the Black Box (1999)

**Don't do more assessment; do more with assessment.**

Since Black and Wiliam's 1998 findings, assessment reformers have emphasized the need for a closer, substantive connection between assessment and meaningful instruction. They argue that effective assessment practice is about much more than simply teaching and testing as discrete endeavours. Rather, effective assessment embeds an assessment approach in all instructional practice. Based on extensive research and work with classroom teachers, Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and Wiliam (2005) identified five key Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies, all of which are fundamental to PBLA. Ongoing and effective use of these strategies in teaching and assessment supports learner autonomy and can have a powerful impact on student learning over time. Following are some techniques to implement the five AfL strategies, many of which are from drawn from *Embedded Formative Assessment* by Wiliam (2011).

### Clarify learning intents and criteria for success.

Language learning is enhanced when the intentions or goals of learning and the criteria for success are transparent to students.

# PBLA: FOUNDATIONS

## Typical techniques

- Assess needs to identify goals.
- Have students set goals that stretch them but are achievable and reasonable within the duration of the term or course.
- Clarify how lessons or tasks relate to goals.
- Share exemplars.
- Have students use agreed-on criteria to review and rank exemplars of different quality.
- Develop criteria with students.
- Share assessment criteria prior to assessment.

## Incorporate classroom activities that elicit evidence of learning

Language learning is enhanced when teachers include activities that cause students to think or provide teachers with information that they can use to adjust instruction to meet learning needs.

### Typical techniques

- Plan and pose questions that enable teachers to check for understanding rather than just for correct answers.
- Use techniques to monitor understanding that include all students and do not interrupt the flow of the lesson, such as the following:
  - Ask random students to answer questions rather than only those who indicate they know the answer.
  - Distribute green and red “traffic light” cards, which students “flash” to indicate their level of understanding (green = understand, red = don’t understand).

## Provide feedback that moves learners forward

Language learning is enhanced when feedback, linked to criteria, is action-oriented and addresses what the student needs to do to improve.

### Typical techniques

- Provide “comments only” feedback. Research shows that marks and grades do not enhance learning.
- Provide action-oriented feedback that gives students a way forward. Ego-oriented feedback, such as “Good job!” may encourage students but does not move their learning forward.
- Use tools such as the feedback grid shown below to focus feedback on what the students should continue to do, what they should start to do or do more of, what they might think about as their next challenge, and what they should stop doing.

Offer feedback by beginning anywhere on the grid and working all the way around.

<b>Continue...</b> Comment on aspects of performance that were effective. Be specific and describe impact. Highlight things that you would like to see done in the future.	<b>Start or do more...</b> Identify behaviour that the student knows how to do and should do, or do more frequently.
<b>Consider...</b> Highlight a point of growth for the student, a “do-able” challenge for future interactions.	<b>Stop or do less...</b> Point out actions that were not helpful or could be harmful. Be specific and indicate potential impact.

- Prioritize feedback. Address the most critical needs first and limit suggestions to one or two specific ideas.
- Keep feedback succinct, specific, and related to goals and criteria. Three seems to be an optimal number of feedback comments if students are to act on them.
- Have students *do* something with the feedback: for example, “Correct the errors in your paragraph, and then rewrite it.”

## Activate students to become instructional resources for one another

Language learning is enhanced when students engage in peer-assessment focused on learning.

### Typical techniques

- Have students conduct a “pre-flight checklist.” Before a student can submit a task, require him or her to get a peer to complete a pre-flight checklist, which lists key elements that must be included or addressed in the task. The student cannot hand in the task until the peer completing the checklist signs off on it. The peer is accountable for anything that is missed.
- Set ground rules for peer-assessment.
- Have students use agreed-on assessment criteria.
- Have students use basic forms to give feedback.

# PBLA: FOUNDATIONS

## Activate students to become owners of their learning

Language learning is enhanced when students take ownership of their learning and use agreed-on criteria to carry out self-assessment and learning reflection.

### Typical techniques

- Have students use Can-Do Statements<sup>4</sup> to assess themselves regularly (focused on what the student can do and how well).
- Encourage students to conduct learning reflections regularly to monitor what they have learned, what was easy or hard, what they might do differently, and what they should do next.

Below is a sample of a learning reflection technique called “One-Minute Paper.” It can be adapted for students at different levels.

### One-Minute Paper

Help me prepare for our next class. Tell me about your learning today. Answer these questions.

1. Here’s what I learned today:

2. Here are some questions I still have:

3. Here are some things I don’t understand well enough to ask about:

Other comments or suggestions:

Source: Adapted from Walsh, A. (2006). Working with IMGs: Delivering effective feedback. A Faculty Development Program for Teachers of International Medical Graduates. Ottawa, ON: Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.mentornetwork.net/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=G96KPBKoHHE%3D&tabid=93>

<sup>4</sup> The updated Can Do Statements are downloadable from the CCLB website, [www.language.ca](http://www.language.ca).

# THE LANGUAGE COMPANION

The Language Companion is a binder given to new students to support language learning, PBLA, and the student's settlement in Canada. The three versions of the Language Companion are ESL Literacy, CLB 1-4, and CLB 5-8.

The Language Companion begins with an orientation to the sections of the binder contents. It has information about the purpose of the material, and information about the student's portfolio. The settlement and ESL information in the binder is written for the range of levels in the particular CLB stage of each Language Companion version. However, teachers may need to modify materials further for particular groups or CLB levels of students. The binder is divided into the following sections:

**Canadian Language Benchmarks** – Information about the CLB levels based on the “Can-Do Statements”

**My Canada** – Basic reference information about Canada that is important for settlement, including opportunities for students to personalize the information

**Where I Live** – Information related to provincial, regional, and municipal features and services, including opportunities for students to add resources and personalize the information

**Helpful English** – Useful English language reference information, with the option of adding additional information provided by the teacher

**My Notes** – An empty section for students to keep day-to-day worksheets, rough drafts, and handouts. This section can be culled when items are no longer needed or when a student moves to a new class.

**My Portfolio** – A section in which students organize artefacts for assessment purposes. Teachers collect this section to review it for evaluation at the end of the term, and then return it. “My Portfolio” is divided into six subsections: About Me, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Other.

## Distributing the Language Companion

Students receive a Language Companion from their program. It may be distributed when the student registers or after the student has been in class for several days. Students continue to use the same Language Companion when they move to another class or program. Those who lose their Language Companion do not receive a new one; however, the content is available on Tutela.ca and can be downloaded by teachers for students to put into a self-supplied binder.

Students only receive a new Language Companion binder when they are working primarily in the next CLB stage and it is advantageous for them to have the new content. For example, a student who has a CLB 1-4 Language Companion but is now beginning to work toward CLB 5 competencies in most skills should receive a CLB 5-8 Language Companion.

## Introducing the Language Companion: Some Activities

Prior to introducing the Language Companion, it is recommended that teachers familiarize themselves with its content, reflect on how they can exploit the resource with their students, and identify the concepts and language skills that students will need for daily in-class use of the Language Companion.

Knowing their students, teachers are likely to come up many ideas for activities to introduce the Language Companion. The following suggestions, which come from teachers across the country, are primarily for lower CLB levels but can be adapted for other levels as necessary. The activities can be done over several days, depending on the length of the class, the level of the learners, and the

# THE LANGUAGE COMPANION

scaffolding that students need to build the skills and awareness necessary for using the Language Companion regularly and effectively.

- To introduce students to the purpose and parts of a binder, bring in several examples, including the Language Companion. Elicit from them what they think a binder is. Find out who currently has a binder, what they keep in it, how it's divided, why they have it, and so on.
- Build familiarity with the organization and content of the Language Companion. Use the Table of Contents to help students develop text organization strategies, such as surveying and predicting, in order to understand content.
- Distribute the Language Companions and explain that they are provided by the Canadian government to help them settle in Canada and learn English. Have them write their names on the binder.
- Have students look at the tabs, discuss what they might find in each section, and check their guesses. Ask how they might use each section in school or at home. Ask students at Stage 2 (CLB 5-8) how they might add to the Language Companion to create a personalized reference.
- Try a search activity to find specific information in the various sections. See Tutela.ca for an example of a Language Companion search activity.

**NOTE: Tell the students that you will talk about the “My Portfolio” section another day.**

- Build key vocabulary and phrases for the binder, such as *front cover, back cover, dividers, rings, pockets, Put it in your Language Companion, Put it in front of ..., Put it behind ..., Put it in the X section ...,* and so on.
- Have students brainstorm advantages of having a Language Companion: for example, they will have a place for their papers, they have important settlement information they can use outside of class, and so on.
- Have students transfer and put any relevant papers into the “My Notes” section of their Language Companion.
- Explain the purposes of the Language Companion for you and your students:
  - To access information on settlement and language
  - To keep daily notes and handouts organized
  - To keep samples of their language learning for assessment for new CLB levels
- Have students make a list of rules for the Language Companion. Depending on the CLB level, some rules might be the following:
  - Bring the Language Companion to class everyday.
  - Keep it in a safe place at home.
  - Don't lose it or any of its contents.
  - Keep the it organized.
  - Don't let children draw in or play with it.
- Have students sign a “contract” that includes the rules they have established.

## Using the Language Companion throughout the Term

The Language Companion is intended to support settlement in Canada and be a resource for students in their learning of English both in and outside the classroom. It is intended to complement but not replace authentic, published, or teacher-made materials.

The Language Companion is not a curriculum or a textbook. It does not include language practice activities. However, it can be useful to students and teachers in a variety of ways.

## Settlement Content

The settlement content in the Language Companion is valuable to both students and teachers. While it provides some key information on a range of common settlement topics, it is not intended to be a comprehensive or in-depth exploration of each topic. Students will also find opportunities throughout

**NOTE:** The Language Companion is not a textbook or a curriculum. It is a learning resource intended to support the learning activities the teacher develops for the classroom.

Teachers will continue to develop their own activities or draw on the many excellent published resources available across Canada.

the Companion for them to personalize the information. In addition, teachers may have students add local reference material as they explore various topics:

- In a module on going to the library, students could add a brochure from a local library to the Community Service pages of the section “Where I Live” in their Language Companion.
- In a module on settlement services, students could copy the address of their local service on the relevant page of their Language Companion, and insert an information brochure.
- In a module on looking for work, a student in CLB Stage 2 could add a copy of his or her resume, while a student in Stage 1 might add a completed job application to refer to or copy from when applying for a job.

A number of ESL Literacy teachers have said over the years that it was not uncommon for their students to bring all their papers to school shoved into a plastic grocery bag in complete disorder. It was time consuming, at best, to find a worksheet even from the day before.

Now, as part of their daily lessons, students date every paper and help each other to put them in order into the “My Notes” section of their Language Companion.

## Language Tasks and Learning Activities

The content of the Language Companion can be used as the basis for developing language tasks or as reading or listening texts. Pages in “Helpful English” are also easily developed into skill-building activities: for example, listed words could be used in different vocabulary exercises. Content can also be used to develop skill-using learning activities, such as making posters or signs, role playing, filling in forms, making grocery lists, and so on.

Outside the classroom, students can use the Language Companion for self study or as a place to compile and organize additional language learning or settlement information.

...our actual experience with the Language Companion in Ottawa with ESL Literacy to CLB 4 over the past 3 1/2 years is that students are very positive about the 'binders'. They feel that the time taken to introduce and practice PBLA was well spent and they take responsibility for their Language Companions.

Larry Iveson  
LINC, Ottawa Carleton District School Board

Like any instructional resource, in the hands of a creative teacher, the Language Companion has tremendous potential.

## ESL Literacy

ESL Literacy students have reported that having the Language Companion makes them feel like “real” students. Because it is similar to the other versions of the Companion, ESL Literacy students do not feel singled out as different from students in other classes in the program.

# THE LANGUAGE COMPANION

The ESL Literacy version of the Language Companion was developed for a range of ESL Literacy levels aligned to the document, Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners. It is highly pictorial, with simplified text; however, teachers of Pre-Benchmarks A or B students may want to further simplify parts of it for specific situations or use particular strategies to support learning. Here are some additional suggestions that ESL Literacy teachers may find helpful:

- When you begin a new module, ask students if they think their Language Companion might have some pages with helpful information on the topic. Have them look for pages that are relevant.
- Have students mark the pages of the Language Companion that are related to the current module with coloured stickies. For example, in a module on shopping, students can mark the page about sales tax in “Where I Live” and the pages on prices and sales tax in “Helpful English.” It is easier, then, for students to find the pages they need for certain learning activities. (Stickies can be easily moved to different pages when a new module is begun.)
- Give students a list of key words related to a topic and have students look for and highlight them on a specific page in their Language Companion. For example, for a topic on government, students might find and highlight the words, *representative, community, local, federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and councillor* on p. 5 of “Where I Live.”
- Have students write their name and the date on every worksheet and highlight them with a coloured marker, using the same colour each time for consistency. This helps students to identify their papers and organize them sequentially.
- At the end of an activity, students can work with a partner to put the worksheet sequentially into the “My Notes” section so they will be able to find it easily the next day for review or additional learning activities.
- For Pre-Benchmarks A (Foundations) students, you might want to simplify the reference material further using pictures from the Language Companion or elsewhere. Students can then file their new reference paper in the appropriate place in the Language Companion.
- When students need to reproduce their name, address, or phone number, they can find where they wrote it in their Language Companion and use it as a model or to check their own work.
- As an introduction to using the Language Companion to organize their language assessments, have students participate in categorizing activities with “realia,” such as the following:
  - Sort realia into groups using pictures as indicators of various categories.
  - Work in small groups to decide on the categories for a number of items and then to sort them into those groups.
  - Make a simple label for each category.
  - Sort labelled pictures into categories. Make a list of items in each category and label the category.
  - Use simple inventories to keep track of the assessment tasks they put into each skill section of the Language Companion.
- Give students simple homework tasks, which can be used for assessment: for example, tell students to find certain information in the Language Companion and leave you a phone message with the information, or ask them to look on a particular page and tell you the next day what is on that page.
- Consider using the simplified dialogues on various pages as a basis for language practice. For example, in a module on cooking, the “Where is it?” activity on p. 39 can be the basis for skill-building activities for a speaking task to locate items in the fridge, such as “Where is the X?” or “Is the X on the top shelf?”

## Stage 1 (CLB Levels 1-4)

Students in CLB 1-4 require simple, concrete language. Visual support is helpful. The CLB 1-4 Language Companion reflects these needs; however, CLB 1 and 2 teachers might find that in some instances, it is helpful to simplify the language further. Teachers may also wish to supplement the CLB Stage 1 material with some pages from the ESL Literacy Language Companion. Conversely, the Stage 2 Language Companion contains some excellent material that might be modified for students at lower CLB levels. This content is downloadable from Tutela.ca.

Teachers may also wish to try the following:

- Have students predict whether content related to a new module topic will be found in the Language Companion. Have them locate all references.
- Ask students to search for specific information: for example, “Look in Helpful English and find four ways to ask the location of grocery items in a store.”
- Have students use reference information in the CLB to carry out tasks: for example, use the “Reading Labels” page in “Helpful English” to find information on a number of authentic product labels brought into class by the teacher and students.
- Use reference information as the basis for language tasks: for example, use the activities and hobbies information on the “Being Active” pages in “Helpful English” to practise making suggestions or giving advice.

## Stage 2 (CLB Levels 5-8)

In addition to the range of settlement topics covered in the Language Companion for students in CLB 5-8, the “Helpful English” section has a significant employment focus and can be a very useful reference for students with goals related to work. Many of the skills outlined in “Helpful English” are also transferable to other life and school contexts. Teachers are encouraged to consider how they might use the content in multiple contexts. Here are some suggestions for maximizing the Language Companion with Stage 2 students:

- Build references to specific Language Companion sections into instruction as part of the background or social situation information for tasks.
- Have students brainstorm and discuss ideas for using the Language Companion for self-study.

In my three years’ experience teaching LINC, I have always wanted a collection of resource materials to give to students with visuals and clear language explanations. Then the Language Companion came along and was an answer to my dreams. When I first introduced the Language Companion to students, however, I was frustrated that they wouldn’t carry them home and study as I had hoped. I started to refer to materials in the binder as much as possible in the daily lessons. This would require students to find the page I was referring to. After a bit more reflection, I started creating lessons and tasks around the binder. I would give them a task where they had to skim and scan the binder to find information to answer questions. I also gave them readings to do from the LC and then had them present to other students what they had learned. This took a lot of effort initially, but it helped lay the ground work.... I think that the information and skills that I was teaching them were transferable to other areas of life.

Angela MacMichael  
MAGMA, Moncton, NB

Students at CLB 5-8 might use the Internet to locate information on the benefits of classroom- or teacher-based assessment or authentic assessment.

# THE LANGUAGE COMPANION

- Use the information in the various sections as jumping off points to research projects or for awareness-raising activities prior to a deeper exploration of a subject or issue.
- Have students summarize text in a paragraph or re-write the text with additional information added.
- Use information as a basis for student surveys or questionnaires in the community.
- Encourage students to take advantage of the many opportunities in “My Canada” or “Where I Live” for further research. Have them note their additional information in the appropriate section.
- Discuss transferable skills with students and have them brainstorm how the skills outlined in the Language Companion might apply to other contexts.

## Developing Autonomy and Responsibility

The Language Companion is important to student learning, and it is the students’ responsibility to take care of it. They should have it in class every day so they can keep their papers organized and accessible. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- The Language Companion belongs to the student and is the student’s responsibility.
- You are preparing them for living, working, and studying in the Canadian context. That includes familiarizing them with expectations and practices of the workplace or school.
- Students should understand that in the workplace, they will be expected to take individual responsibility for their tools or materials.
- Just as adults taking other training or post-secondary courses are responsible for their texts and papers, students in adult ESL classes are also responsible for their learning materials, including their Language Companions.
- Students cannot do homework or self-study at home if they do not have their resources.
- If, because of unusual circumstances, you allow students to leave their Language Companion at school during the week, it is increasingly important that you use or refer to the Language Companion daily. In this way, it will become an important resource to students, and they will remember to take it (and therefore their portfolio) with them to the next class.
- If you make “a big deal” of the Language Companion, take advantage of the resources, and encourage students to maximize it for their language learning and settlement, your students will be likely to treat the Language Companion with similar enthusiasm and respect.

NOTE: A student who loses his or her Language Companion binder does not receive a new one. The student will then need to keep portfolio contents in a folder or a regular binder, or teachers may download a copy of the Language Companion contents from Tutela.ca for the student to put into a binder provided by the student.

# PBLA: KEY FEATURES

PBLA is intended to enhance language learning and tell two stories: the story of progress in learning English as measured by the CLB standard, and the story of progress towards a goal of personal significance.

In a learner-centred classroom, the differences in curriculum, language tasks, needs and goals, and even attendance mean that each student's portfolio will be unique. However, PBLA includes a number of fundamental features that are key to its implementation and effectiveness. These integral features enhance and promote language learning, ensure consistency in approach, and contribute to the reliability of assessment results. The techniques used by teachers to implement these key features may vary depending on CLB level and instructional context; however, the following features are fundamental to the PBLA approach:

- Needs assessment
- Baseline personal information
- Language-assessment task samples
- Self-assessment and reflection on learning
- End-of-term portfolio review
- Standardized progress report
- Student progress conference

## Needs Assessment

Needs assessments are essential in learner-centred classrooms for curriculum planning, goal setting, teaching, and assessment. Needs assessments are used in the following ways:

**Settlement-focused programs** – Needs assessments are used to identify the social contexts or themes for instruction as well as related language tasks.

**English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs** – Needs assessments are used to identify the communication network (people and positions) in which the student needs to communicate in English, related language tasks, and other skills or information that students will need for specific social contexts, such as a workplace.

**English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs** – Needs assessments are used to identify the content of interest or importance to the students in the particular subject areas in which skill development can be contextualized.

Needs assessments should be revisited periodically to monitor progress and to capture new needs that may have emerged. There are a variety of needs assessment tools, including pictorial needs assessments for beginners or ESL Literacy students, brainstorming and consensus-building tools, surveys, and questionnaires. For more information on needs assessment, see chapter 3 in *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Guide to Implementation*. For examples of needs assessment tools, see Tutela.ca.

# PBLA: KEY FEATURES

## Baseline Personal Information

Baseline information provides the starting point for students and teachers in discussions regarding progress. The following are essential items:

- **Needs assessment results** (see above) – The summary of class needs and students’ individual needs should go into students’ portfolios as a basis for discussions throughout the term about how their needs are being met in their class.
- **CLB levels** – The CLB levels established at the outset of the class are important reference points for discussing progress.
- **Goal statement** – A language-learning goal statement is a concrete objective, that stretches the student but is achievable within the timeframe of the term or course. It provides a focus for the student’s language learning and a reference for discussions about progress.
- **Autobiography** – An autobiography is an important record of basic life facts and work experiences. It is an opportunity for students to express who they are, to give voice to the richness of their lives, and to identify goals.

NOTE: It is important to know the students’ backgrounds prior to the autobiography task. Students who have experienced serious trauma may find this task threatening unless the teacher is careful to set up the task so as to eliminate the need to share personally painful information.

In addition to these four baseline items, several optional items may be helpful:

- **Next steps** – Students need to have an action plan so they have a sense of direction and understand the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. For instance, this plan may describe future language courses or may outline employment-related steps.
- **Learning, working, living in the community: Skills self-assessment** – Students can benefit from a self-assessment of their existing life and work skills and aptitudes that will be useful in their life in Canada. Skills such as the ability to work well in a group, to display leadership, and to be organized or prompt are important in many facets of community life, work, and school. This assessment might also include knowledge and/or experiences with other languages and cultures.
- **Work and volunteer experience** – A record of the student’s work and/or volunteer experience contributes evidence of employability skills and, if documenting work or volunteer experience in Canada, can be used when the student is looking for work. For students not destined for the workforce, these data show environments in which they may have functioned in English.
- **Résumé** – For skilled workers and professionals, good résumés that meet the critical expectations of employers are essential for their job search. Students who do not require résumés for employment or other purposes do not need to include a resume in their portfolios.
- **Work and volunteer goals** – Learning is enhanced when students have clear, achievable goals. Consequently, every portfolio should include a description of the student’s long-term employment goals. For students not destined for the workforce, a description of goals related to volunteering or community participation might replace employment goals. For students with long-term employment goals, volunteering may be a short-term goal.

## Language Task Samples and Assessment Tasks

At the outset of the term, students put examples of their current use of English into their portfolio. These ‘starting point’ examples are a basis for discussing progress. Throughout the term, they continue to add language-assessment tasks and skill-using activities in the four skill areas of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing; these tasks and activities should address the CLB competencies in each of the language skill areas: interacting socially, following or comprehending instructions, reproducing information, getting things done, and sharing information. ESL Literacy students also may add numeracy or computer tasks. These additions will show the students’ progress in English in a variety of social contexts. For more information, see Adding Language-Assessment Tasks and Skill-Using Activities in the section, PBLA Throughout the Term.

The standardized progress report introduced as part of PBLA implementation allows teachers to account for progress within a CLB level. Teachers are able to indicate if a student is beginning, developing, or completing a CLB level. This recognition of progress encourages students, especially those who may be progressing slowly or are in part-time programs. Note that progress points within CLB levels are not submitted to the CIC database.

## Self-Assessment and Learning Reflection

A goal of adult ESL instruction is to assist students to become increasingly independent language learners. Assessment for Learning (AfL) research shows that regular self-assessment and learning reflection are key factors. Students who understand the language learning objectives and assessment criteria, who are involved in goal setting, and who have opportunities to think about their learning process show greater progress than those who do not (McDonald and Boud, 2003; Davies, 2000). Regular self-assessment and learning reflection are essential features of PBLA.

**Self-assessment** considers *what* the student can do and *how well* she or he can do it.

**Learning reflection** considers the *process* of learning: that is, what helps the student learn.

For more information on self-assessment and learning reflection, see “Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies” in the “PBLA: Foundations” section in this guide.

## End-of-Term Portfolio Review

Prior to student progress conferences or progress reports, teachers collect their students’ portfolios and review the contents for evaluation of CLB outcomes. It is important that portfolio entries give clear evidence of what the learner can do in English. In some cases, the teacher will be assigning a CLB level based on a portfolio that was started in a previous class. It is important that the teacher reviewing the portfolios for the purposes of assigning CLB levels and completing progress reports has sufficient evidence to support the CLB levels assigned.

NOTE: It is difficult to make decisions related to benchmark levels if there are fewer than 8 to 10 artefacts in each of the four skill areas.

## Standardized Progress Report

Teachers complete standardized progress reports using the progress report generator on Tutela.ca. Progress reports must be approved and signed by the program administrator, after which they are given to students and discussed during the student’s progress conference. For more information, see “Progress Report and Conference Schedule” in the section “PBLA: End of Term or Course” in this guide.

# PBLA: KEY FEATURES

## **Student Progress Conference**

The student progress conference is a fundamental event in the ongoing dialogue between teacher and students. At the end of the term or semester, the teacher holds a short conference (10 to 15 minutes only) with each student, using the evidence in the portfolio to discuss the student's progress with reference to his or her needs and goals. For students who have had regular, ongoing feedback on assessment tasks aligned to CLB-based criteria and have been involved in regular peer- and self-assessment, these short conferences provide an opportunity to give a brief summary of the progress that they have made and to touch on next steps.

# PBLA: GETTING STARTED

In contrast to exit tests, which are employed only at the end of a term or course, portfolio-based language assessment is integrated into the teaching/learning cycle.

PBLA helps to demonstrate the students' progress in learning English and in achieving their short- or long-term personal goals. PBLA contributes to outcome evaluation of students' language-learning progress and informs teachers' planning and students' learning decisions in an ongoing manner throughout the program. In this way, PBLA enhances teaching practices.

The teaching contexts across Canada in which PBLA is implemented are characterized by a range of differences, including the following:

- ESL and ESL Literacy students
- CLB Stage 1 students and CLB Stage 2 students
- Homogeneous classes and multilevel classes
- Full-time classes and part-time classes
- Settlement-focused , skill-focused, and ESP classes

Consequently, there is no fixed way to integrate PBLA into the teaching/learning cycle. It is advisable, however, to introduce the Language Companion and PBLA separately, especially at lower CLB levels or in ESL Literacy classes. In this way, students – and their teachers – can first become familiar with the Language Companion as a teaching and learning resource and then be introduced incrementally to PBLA. This minimizes the learning burden and confusion that can occur if too much is introduced too quickly.

## Introducing PBLA

This section contains suggestions for teachers to consider as they begin to implement PBLA. But they are only suggestions! While the key features of PBLA must be implemented appropriately and sufficiently for the students' CLB level, the specific activities that teachers employ will vary to suit the teacher's expertise, personal style, and level and context of instruction. Teachers at higher CLB levels may find it easier to introduce and discuss concepts in greater depth; at low CLB levels, in ESL Literacy, or in multilevel classes, concepts and skills may need to be introduced and scaffolded incrementally. Dividing large classes into small groups may streamline the process and provide important peer support. Calling on experienced classmates to assist new students in continuous-intake programs might also be a helpful strategy.

## Introducing PBLA Concepts and Skills

All good teaching involves planning. Because PBLA is an integrated, essential feature of the teaching/learning cycle, teachers must introduce it as they would any other topic, such as a module on safety or job search. At every CLB level, it is essential that teachers take the time to develop the concepts and language skills that students need in order to participate in PBLA. Effective modelling and skill-building practice are crucial. It is also helpful if teachers can connect the PBLA concepts and skills being learned by students to contexts outside the classroom.

# PBLA: GETTING STARTED

It is recommended that teachers begin by developing a module/unit plan to introduce PBLA. (A sample module plan intended for CLB 3 and a lesson plan to introduce PBLA are available on Tutela.ca.)

Depending on the CLB level of the students, teachers might plan activities for the following purposes:

## To raise awareness and activate prior learning

- How was the students' learning assessed in their former countries?
- How do students think learning is assessed in ESL programs in Canada?

## To introduce concepts (depending on CLB level)

- The idea that a portfolio contains a *selection* of language tasks, not every worksheet completed by a student
- The use of portfolios in education and in some professions in Canada
- Taking responsibility for one's learning in education and training situations
- Being active, reflective learners
- The expectation in Canada of self-awareness, individual responsibility for performance, and initiative in workplaces and education/training
- The importance in language training of demonstrating what one can do in English rather than what one knows (rules)

Some teacher have said that their students want to put every paper or activity they complete into their portfolios. The 'My Notes' is the place for all the ongoing worksheets. 'My Portfolio' should only contain specific artefacts needed for PBLA.

## To develop vocabulary and useful phrases needed to participate in PBLA

- *CLB, criteria, what to watch for, language task, skills, competency, assess, feedback*, and so on

## To develop language skills for specific PBLA-related language tasks

- Listening: Understand and follow directions from the teacher related to portfolios, such as *Find this learning activity, Put your name (or the date) on the paper, Fill out the inventory, Put the learning activity into your portfolio, Put the paper in the "Speaking" section, Put this paper after the divider*, and so on
- Listening and Speaking: Discuss their needs and goals
- Speaking: Talk about their progress in learning English
- Reading: Read and answer information about the CLB or about PBLA. (See information about CLB and PBLA in the preface section of the Language Companion.)
- Writing: Fill out a inventory for a skill section of their portfolio

**The PBLA information in the preface of the Language Companion may be useful for students with the requisite reading skills. For others, you may need to modify the content.**

## Collecting Baseline Information

The students' baseline information (needs assessment results, goal statement, autobiography, etc.) is collected in the "About Me" section of the student's portfolio. Remember that you do not have to do everything the first day! Begin with one of the baseline information items that is of interest or is familiar, or that seems easy. The following activities for collecting baseline information are suggestions only and can be modified for the level or context of the students:

- **Conduct a needs assessment** – After students have completed and discussed their needs assessment, have them put the results into their portfolios. At lower CLB levels, pictorial needs assessments are useful. At higher levels, consensus-building activities, questionnaires, and surveys work well. Revisit the needs assessment periodically to confirm or modify the needs as the course progresses and to check with students how progress is being made in having their needs addressed.
- **Record CLB levels** – At the outset of the class, have students record their CLB levels from their CLBPT assessment or from their previous class. Put the record in the portfolio. In order to show progress in language development, students need to know their starting place. ESL Literacy students or students in CLB 1 or 2 may find a graphic representation of their CLB levels to be more comprehensible than a written form.

4				
3				
2				
1				
<b>Level</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>

- **Add a language-learning goal statement** – Based on the CLB level of the students, discuss the students' long-term goals for work, school, and/or the community. Talk about the situations for which they need English and the language skills and levels they need to strive for. Break the goals down into short-term steps. Help them to understand the importance of having clear language-learning goals, and have each student write a language-learning goal statement that is challenging but achievable in the time frame of the term or course. Have them discuss their goal statements with the whole class or in small groups, and have them put the goal statement into the portfolio.
  - The goal statements of ESL Literacy students may be pictorial. They might choose a magazine picture that shows a situation in which they want to be able to use English, such as a picture of someone working, shopping, or taking the bus. It might be helpful for the teacher to print the goal under the picture or have students copy it from the board.

One older adult in a seniors' program in Manitoba missed her friends back home in Chile. Her goal was to learn the English skills and information she needed to be able to buy postage stamps by herself so she could mail letters to family and friends.

# PBLA: GETTING STARTED

- **Write an autobiography** – Have students write a brief autobiography for their portfolios after they have had sufficient opportunity to talk about themselves and develop and practise the language they will use for the writing task. An example of a pictorial autobiography called “My Story,” which is suitable for ESL Literacy or CLB 1-2, is available on Tutela.ca.
- **Add initial language samples** – Have students do some language tasks to demonstrate their language skills when they begin the program. Students who transfer to another class or move to a new program during the school term and present their portfolio upon admission do not need to produce a new entering sample as long as they already have one from that term in the portfolio. Teachers usually find it is easy to collect listening, reading, and writing samples; however, the collection of oral samples may be seen as a challenge.

## Collecting Samples of Oral Language: How?

In this electronic age, many teachers have access to classroom computers, language labs, or digital recorders to capture samples of their students’ oral proficiency.

Teachers may wonder how and when to collect oral samples from their students. Here are some suggestions:



### ***For CLB 1-3 and ESL Literacy students***

- Have volunteers supervise a learning activity while the teacher carries out and records a short oral activity with individual students.<sup>5</sup>
- Provide a volunteer with directions or a script for a brief oral task and have the volunteer take individual students out of class to record a conversation.

### ***For CLB 4 and above***

- Develop instructions for several oral tasks. Have students draw one from a hat and go out of the classroom to record themselves carrying it out.
- Have partners record an exchange on a specific topic. They must make a copy of their exchange so each partner has a copy for the portfolio.
- Video-record small group discussions and give each participant a copy of the recording.

The oral language sample may also show what they understand so that it can be used for both listening and speaking purposes.<sup>6</sup> However, listening tasks completed by students are also appropriate as a listening skill sample. If the task involved listening and doing, then the rating scale used to assess the skill might be included in the portfolio.

<sup>5</sup> Volunteers can be extremely helpful in an L<sub>2</sub> classroom if they have had appropriate orientation regarding their role and receive clear instructions for the activity they are to undertake. It is important to remember that the teacher is responsible for all educational decisions; volunteers work under the direction and supervision of the teacher.

<sup>6</sup> Oral samples collected for baseline data purposes do not need to be transcribed or assessed if the students were assessed formally at an assessment centre (e.g., with the CLBPT).

## Personal Learning Goals for Life, Work, and/or School

In addition to helping students achieve their language-learning goals, PBLA tracks and enhances their progress towards goals related to life, school, or work. These could include getting a driver's licence, taking post-secondary training, learning WMHIS codes, upgrading computer skills, or improving a discrete language skill such as spelling, vocabulary, or handwriting.

### Showing Progress towards Personal Life, Work, and School Goals

The "Other" section in the student's portfolio can be used in a variety of ways that reflect the needs of the student. Students can use this section for artefacts that track their progress towards a personal goal such as getting a driver's licence or learning basic computer skills. They could use it to show progress in addressing a troublesome, discrete language skill, such as spelling or handwriting.

### Specialized Courses

Students in specialized classes such as ESL Literacy, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), or Occupation-Specific Language Training (OSLT) may have goals related to those contexts. Teachers may wish to use the "Other" section for artefacts related to the focus of their program or course. For example, ESL Literacy teachers might have students use this section for numeracy tasks.

Students in a Phase 2-3 ESL Literacy class in Winnipeg were asked what they had learned by keeping a portfolio. One young man said that because he had to keep an inventory, he knows how to find information in the job binders at his place of work. A young mother said that she is not afraid to look in the binder at the daycare facility because she knows how to find things.

## Monitoring Portfolio Contents and Inventories

Periodically, it is important for teachers to take a look at the students' portfolios to ensure that they are being maintained and kept organized. At this time, teachers can offer feedback to their students on the progress that is reflected in the portfolio. Monitoring the portfolios also gives teachers an opportunity to assess whether they are adequately addressing the four language skills and the range of competencies for the CLB level. Teachers may need to continue to remind students of the importance of PBLA to their language learning. Students may also need to be reminded of their PBLA responsibilities. Generally, however, teachers using PBLA have found that effective use of Assessment for Learning strategies motivates and encourages students.

One student in a Winnipeg School Division ESL Literacy class said he can use a Table of Contents now to find papers in the work binder at his job because it is like the inventory in his Language Companion.

Mary Jean Davis

Inventories help with the process of monitoring the students' progress. Students need to maintain a dated inventory for each skill section of their portfolio. A quick scan of an inventory reveals the artefacts that the student has added to that section of the portfolio. The inventories should record the tasks and competencies addressed. An overview of all of the inventories helps both the teacher and the student to see the scope of completed tasks and to identify gaps.

Maintaining an inventory is a useful transferable skill. It not only contributes to the overall organization of the portfolio, but it also has relevance in other home, school, community, and work contexts. For students with little education, maintaining and using an inventory is a very helpful metacognitive skill to acquire.

# PBLA: GETTING STARTED

There are samples of inventory forms on Tutela.ca for a range of ESL and ESL Literacy students, such as the one below, which can be adapted for other portfolio sections:

Reading	
Date	Item
<b>Interacting with others</b>	
<i>Sept. 5th</i>	<i>Class Potluck Notice</i>
<b>Instructions</b>	
<b>Getting Things Done</b>	
<b>Information</b>	

## Finding Time

"No time to give and use feedback" actually means "no time to cause learning."

Grant Wiggins  
(leading authority on AfL)

As has been stated several times in this guide, PBLA is an integral aspect of the teaching/learning cycle and therefore cannot be treated as an add-on. The teaching day will not be lengthened to accommodate PBLA, and accelerating one's instruction will have negative consequences for everyone. Teachers need to adjust their lesson plans to accommodate PBLA activities appropriately and

effectively. Some other practices may need to be modified so that PBLA can be implemented effectively to the benefit of students and teachers.

Integrating AfL strategies and including an assessment and feedback phase into lesson plans may require more instructional time than teachers devoted to a module before they began using PBLA. A module that once took three days to teach without an assessment component and portfolio activities may now take a week.

This means that teachers may not be able to cover as many themes or modules as they might have prior to using PBLA. That is okay. The benefits of incorporating PBLA and the valuable Assessment for Learning strategies it employs outweigh any reduction in thematic content.

## Scheduling PBLA

It is recommended that teachers schedule a regular time each week to do portfolio management activities, such as putting artefacts into the portfolio, filling out the inventory, etc. so students (and their teacher!) become accustomed to the practice. These portfolio times could be used for some of the following activities:

- Give back an assessment task that you had collected for marking.
- Have students reflect on the feedback.
- Have students work in groups to share strategies for practising or improving their English or to make an action plan.
- Have students correct errors, writing the correct answers *beside* the original rather than erasing the original.

ESL Literacy or CLB 1-3 students will likely need some direction from the teacher when they put artefacts in their portfolios. You might have students work in groups to identify the skill

section for the task or to record artefacts on the inventories. Students might be asked to reflect on their language learning that week for their portfolio and/or to complete a self-assessment activity. For PBLA to be effective in enhancing language learning, it must be a regular part of the teaching/learning cycle. Regular PBLA activities help both the teacher and students become comfortable with the routines and expectations. Planning becomes easier. Many teachers in classes that meet five days a week start out scheduling a PBLA time once a week. Most, however, find that

Some teachers in five-days-per-week programs begin the week with a review and reflection on the topic and skills of the previous week. Any assessment tasks that were marked over the weekend are returned and feedback is discussed. A new module is begun. Later in the week, on Thursday or Friday, one or more assessment tasks related to the new module are administered.

Other teachers at higher levels spread a module over two or three weeks. As students develop their skills throughout the module, they do assessment tasks or skill-using activities as peer-assessments. Occasionally, a task is complex and is only assessed at the end of the module, or is assessed in parts over time. For example, a presentation task may have several parts, such as researching the topic, preparing a presentation, delivering the presentation, and responding to questions.

# PBLA: GETTING STARTED

because PBLA is good teaching practice, it becomes a part of their everyday activity. Students, too, begin to use their Language Companion binders every day to store worksheets or to find settlement information and helpful vocabulary.

The schedule that teachers decide to follow depends on the frequency with which classes meet.

## **Full-Time Classes**

For full-time classes that meet five days a week, some teachers schedule a 30- to 45-minute period on Friday afternoons for students to do PBLA management activities. Others like to schedule a PBLA time at the beginning of the week to review the previous week's work. They can hand back assessment tasks, discuss feedback, have students put the artefacts into their portfolios, complete the inventories, and do a learning reflection. Try out different schedules to find out what works for you.

## **Part-Time Classes**

For part-time classes that meet only two or three times a week, teachers might schedule 30 to 45 minutes during the last class of the month for students to put artefacts into their portfolios, or may incorporate a PBLA-related activity, such as a short learning reflection, daily. Again, try out different schedules to find out what works for you and best engages students in PBLA and their language learning.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

With PBLA, the instructional cycle is one of plan, teach, assess, and reflect. Ongoing assessment as an integrated aspect of instruction is fundamental to PBLA and key to enhancing student learning.

## Planning with the End in Mind

You can facilitate regular assessment throughout the instructional cycle by planning at the module level as well as the lesson level. This means that when you are planning a particular a module, such as “Going Shopping,” you begin by establishing the following:

- The CLB level or levels you will focus on
- The language tasks you will teach
- The CLB competencies that will be addressed in those tasks
- The skills that will be required for students to carry out the tasks: that is, the functions, genre and discourse features, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation/orthography, pragmatic conventions, and strategies
- The information students need about the social context
- The tasks you will assess at the end of the module
- How you will assess those tasks

I teach 10 hours/week so modules can run for two weeks to a month. I usually teach a module for several weeks and assess interspersed throughout the module – though if it is a very new topic and a significant amount of skill-building has been necessary, then I will assess at the end.

I try very hard to assess all four skill levels for a module. Before I begin teaching I map out what the final assessment pieces will be and then how to get there. Occasionally a skill that I was hoping to assess is still too raw, and I will transfer the skill to the new module theme and work on/assess it there.

I assess tasks formally. Throughout the process, informal assessment happens between peers and self-assessment. I try to 1) teach the skill; 2) practise the skill and have students self-assess/peer-assess with some teacher feedback; 3) formally assess and give feedback.

Jennifer Loewen. Winnipeg Technical College EAL Program

For more information about planning for assessment, see Holmes (2005), available from the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

## Adding Language-Assessment Tasks and Skill-Using Learning Activities

Throughout the term, teachers have students add language items to their portfolios. Unlike some other portfolio approaches in which students self-select artefacts, with PBLA, the teacher tells the students what to put in their portfolios. This ensures that students have evidence in their portfolios that helps the teacher determine CLB outcomes. In field tests of PBLA, teachers noted that when students self-selected artefacts, they often chose samples that were unhelpful for CLB purposes, such as the following:



- Skill-building worksheets, such as grammar or spelling exercises
- Worksheets that they had copied from another student because they were absent when the activity was completed
- Items that had been corrected or revised in a way that hid what the student was able to do independently

Consequently, PBLA protocols now require teachers to tell students which artefacts to add to the “Listening,” “Speaking,” “Reading,” and “Writing” and, in ESL Literacy, “Numeracy” sections of their portfolios. The artefacts should primarily be assessment tasks administered by the teacher.

In programs aligned to the CLB, language-assessment tasks, like skill-using learning activities, simulate or parallel real-world language tasks. Completion requires students to assemble an array of communicative knowledge and skills to negotiate a purposeful and meaningful message for a specific context and audience. Both language assessment tasks and skill-using activities also relate to specific CLB competencies and are carried out under conditions appropriate for the particular CLB level (see Features of Communication and Profile of Ability in the CLB).

They differ, however, in several ways. Skill-using activities are carried out as rehearsals for the real world task. Teachers may intervene to clarify instructions or suggest strategies, or may provide scaffolded support to some students. Tasks may be carried out as partner activities. Language assessment tasks, on the other hand, have a greater degree of formality and are carried out to determine what students are able to communicate independently.

Consistent with Williams and Leahy’s assessment for learning strategies, instructors using PBLA:

- develop clear assessment criteria for assessment tasks
- share the criteria with learners before they begin the task
- provide feedback to learners in relation to the criteria with action-focused comments that learners can use to improve their performance.

The assessment tasks together with instructions for completion of the tasks, learner samples, assessment criteria and feedback to learners (including any assessment tools such as checklists, rating scales or rubrics) are included as entries in the portfolio.

Teachers can also have students add some samples of skill-using learning activities that were self-corrected or peer-assessed.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

NOTE: The material should aim to reflect the student’s progress in acquiring language proficiency related to the competencies specified for each skill in the CLB, as shown below:

Table 2: CLB Skill and Competencies

CLB Competencies			
Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Interacting with Others	Interacting with Others	Interacting with Others	Interacting with Others
Comprehending Instructions	Giving Instructions	Comprehending Instructions	Reproducing Information
Getting Things Done	Getting Things Done	Getting Things Done	Getting Things Done
Comprehending Information	Sharing Information	Comprehending Information	Sharing Information

This does not mean that a task must address only one competency. In fact, in real communication, it is common for more than one competency to be addressed in a task. For example, a teacher might administer a task that addresses an aspect of interacting socially and of understanding or sharing information.

## The Number of Language-Assessment Tasks per Skill Area

To make an informed decision about a student’s outcome CLB level at the end of term, there must be sufficient evidence in the student’s portfolio. Students in part-time and full-time classes will have a different number of language tasks in their portfolios. However, to establish that a student has achieved a CLB level, there must be evidence of the student’s proficiency in variety of tasks and competencies in a range of social situations.

Eight to 10 artefacts per skill area seem to be a minimum on which to make a decision. Most teachers prefer more artefacts in their students’ portfolios. The artefacts should consist primarily of assessment tasks, although some may be skill-using learning activities or peer-assessments.<sup>7</sup>

The number of artefacts added per week will vary depending on the CLB level, the skills assessed, and the type of program in which the students are enrolled (i.e., five days a week or part-time).

- In a class that meets five days a week, teachers might aim to have two or three entries per week, recognizing that in some weeks – for example, when there is a major writing or speaking task – there may only be one artefact.
- In a part-time class, a teacher might aim for two to four artefacts every two weeks.

What does this mean for part-time classes? Research by David Watt (2004) indicates it takes over 250 hours of instruction to achieve a benchmark level in each skill, so in a part-time program teachers might be unable to collect enough language samples in a term to show that the student has achieved a particular CLB level.

It is important to remember that even though some students may not complete a CLB level, their portfolios will still document their progress – an important advantage of PBLA.

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<sup>7</sup> In a compilation of 10 artefacts, six or seven of them should be teacher-administered assessment tasks. The balance can be skill-using activities or peer-assessments.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

## Tasks and Competencies

Although assessment tasks sometimes assess only one competency area, especially at lower CLB levels, many will assess more than one competency. For example, a task such as making a doctor's appointment may address social interaction, getting things done, and sharing/comprehending information. Research indicates that sharing and understanding information is the competency most frequently employed in communication, so it is to be expected that this competency may be most frequently addressed in assessment tasks. However, since the CLB competencies are only a representation of the range of possible competencies, it is important that teachers administer assessment tasks that cover all of them: interacting socially, giving/comprehending instructions, reproducing information, getting things done, and sharing/comprehending information.

## Examples of Artefacts

Throughout the term, teachers should have students complete and file in their portfolios assessment tasks and skill-using learning activities (possibly undertaken as peer-assessed tasks) that embody the various competencies.<sup>8</sup> Also, although teachers may choose to include tasks and activities in the students' portfolios that are related to all four skills taught in a module, it is not essential to assess each task or each competency after every module. For example, over time, a student at CLB 3 might accumulate the following in the "Listening" section of a portfolio:

An **assessment task** in a module at the beginning of the year on getting to know your classmates, in which students listen to descriptions of their fellow classmates and match their classmates' names to their photos. (*comprehending information*)

A **learning activity** from a module on going to a fast food restaurant in which students listen to short exchanges where someone is placing an order for food. Students identify the correct order from several options and mark their own task. (*getting things done*)

An **assessment task** in a module on outdoor recreation in which students listen to warnings about various dangerous situations, such as beware of thin ice, swim at your own risk, etc. and correctly match each warning to the corresponding picture. (*getting things done*)

A **peer-assessment** from a module on "My Neighbourhood" in which students listen to short exchanges and indicate if the exchange is a greeting, a leave-taking, or an introduction. Classmates exchange their answers for correction. (*interacting socially*)

An **assessment task** in a module on health in which students listen to brief recordings of people describing illnesses or symptoms and answer correctly a minimum of 7 out of 10 true/false questions on a worksheet with picture supports. (*comprehending information*)

An **assessment task** in a module on getting along at work in which students listen to short request exchanges and decide the nature of the request and reason for it. (*getting things done*)

A **learning activity** from a module on community in which students listen to negative and positive imperative sentences and locate places on a map. Students mark their own worksheets. (*comprehending instructions*)

An **assessment task** from a module on emergencies in which students listen to 911 calls and identify the problem, details, and the address. (*getting things done*)

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<sup>8</sup> A skill-using activity is a simulation of a real-world task. The emphasis is on negotiation of meaning.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

An **assessment task** from a module on nutrition in which students listen to short passages and circle the correct information that they hear. They must answer correctly a minimum of 7 out of 10 true/false questions on a worksheet with picture cues. (*comprehending information*)

An **assessment task** from a module on block parties in which students listen to descriptions of various neighbours and try to identify the individual in a picture of neighbours at a block party. They must correctly identify a minimum of 7 out of 10 individuals in the picture. (*comprehending information*)

## Group Work

Examples of group or project work can also be included in a portfolio. Be sure to make a notation that the work was not produced independently but is the work of collaboration. (This is especially important in ESL Literacy classes where students frequently work together or do activities with a significant level of support from the teacher or teaching assistant.)

## Collecting Speaking Tasks

Speaking assessment tasks need not be done one on one between the classroom teacher and each student. A variety of strategies can be used to manage speaking assessment:

- Put students in groups and have them carry out role plays for each other using scenario cards. While one pair carries out a task, the others in the group do a peer-assessment. Meanwhile, move from group to group and assess various partners. (You may not be able to assess all of the students at one time; however, if students use the same criteria as you do, all students will get feedback on their performance.) Keep track of who you assess so you can assess a different group of students on another day.
- Have students leave the room individually or in pairs to perform and record a speaking task using a digital recorder.
- Not all speaking samples need to be audio-recorded. In fact, recording all speaking samples would be onerous in many classrooms without easy access to digital equipment. Instead, you might include a written description of the speaking task with the completed rating scale or rubric.
- Carry a small pad of feedback forms, such as the one on the right, as you circulate in the class when students are engaged in speaking activities. Make quick notations on a form and tear it off to give to the student, who then staples it to the task prompts and puts it in his or her portfolio. An example of this form, which can be modified for various CLB levels and skills, is available on Tutela.ca.

Name: _____
Task: <b>Good Morning</b>
<b>Speaking CLB 2</b>
<i>I can greet my classmates:</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Hello! Good morning!
<input type="checkbox"/> How are you today?
<input type="checkbox"/> Fine thanks. Not bad. So-so.
<input type="checkbox"/> How about you?
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm fine too.
<i>I remember to:</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Look at my classmate
<input type="checkbox"/> Smile

For more ideas, see Holmes (2005).

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

## Teacher’s Master Checklist

Keeping a master checklist of the artefacts that students add to their portfolios is essential (see example below). This list should include not only the items for the baseline information in the “About Me” portfolio section but also, in particular, the peer-assessments and assessment tasks completed for each skill. For each task, take note of the CLB level(s) and specific competencies. Keeping a master checklist helps you to track the task levels, which is important because early in the term, the assessment tasks might most closely reflect the students’ CLB levels at the time of entry. The checklist also helps you to monitor PBLA and to ensure that you have administered a sufficient number of assessment tasks in each skill area and that the full range of competencies has been adequately addressed.

The master checklist helps keep you on track so that at the end of the term, there is no sudden discovery that too few listening tasks were included or that assessment tasks only assessed information competencies. A master checklist also facilitates the portfolio review process.

MASTER CHECKLIST						
CLASS		TERM:				
LISTENING ASSESSMENT TASKS		CLB LEVEL/S	SOC INT	INSTRUCT	GET THINGS DONE	INFO
DATE	TASK					
SPEAKING ASSESSMENT TASKS		CLB LEVEL/S	SOC INT	INSTRUCT	GET THINGS DONE	INFO
DATE	TASK					

If you like to monitor your students’ portfolios at various intervals, you might prefer to make a class checklist for yourself, such as the following example.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

(A blank version of this checklist can be found on Tutela.ca.)

<b>Monitoring Interval</b>				October 15th				
<b>Students</b>				Fatima Assef	Roberto Morales	Nam Van	Vladimir Nabokov	Helga Bunn
<b>Dated Inventory Up-to-Date</b>				✓	✓		✓	✓
<b>Personal Data Complete</b>				Autobio. missing	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b><u>Listening</u></b>								
<b>Task <u>Grocery Shopping - directions</u></b>				✓	✓	✓	<b>Missing – was absent</b>	✓
Social Interact	Instruct. x	Suasion	Inform					
<b>Task <u>Medical – Following instructions to take medicine</u></b>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social Interact	Instruct. x	Suasion	Inform					
<b>Task _____</b>								
Social Interact	Instruct.	Suasion	Inform					

## Sample Timeline for PBLA Activity throughout the Term

Below is a sample schedule of PBLA activity in a class that meets five days a week. It illustrates key activities and intervals. It is an example only. Schedules will vary depending on a variety of factors, including the length of the program.

Table 3: Sample Timeline throughout the Term

Month	✓	PBLA Activity
September		<p><b><u>Week 1:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intro Language Companion               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Familiarize students with binder sections, uses of binder and expectations</li> <li>○ Develop language skills students will need, such as instructions like <i>Put the paper behind the divider...</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Intro PBLA               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduce the CLB and PBLA</li> <li>○ Begin to collect baseline data for “About Me” (e.g., entering language levels, needs assessment, goal statement, autobiography) and baseline language samples</li> <li>○ Introduce the inventory template</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

	<p><b><u>Week 2:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to collect personal data and baseline language samples             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduce student self-assessment and reflection</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Week 3 and 4:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to collect personal data pieces</li> <li>• Conduct several assessment tasks at the end of modules</li> <li>• Have students do learning reflections and a self-assessment</li> <li>• Have students add artefacts to their portfolios and record the artefacts on their portfolio inventory</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<p><b><u>Weeks 5 – 8:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to collect personal data pieces as necessary</li> <li>• Continue to conduct assessment tasks following instruction as appropriate</li> <li>• Have students engage in periodic peer-assessment tasks</li> <li>• Continue regular portfolio activity</li> <li>• Periodic review of portfolio by teacher and dialogue with students about progress</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<p><b><u>Weeks 9 – 14:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to collect personal data pieces if still outstanding</li> <li>• Continue to conduct several assessment tasks as appropriate</li> <li>• Have students engage in periodic peer-assessment tasks</li> <li>• Continue regular portfolio activity</li> <li>• Periodic review of portfolio by teacher and dialogue with students about progress</li> <li>• Review of portfolios to prepare progress reports<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• Begin to prepare progress reports</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<p><b><u>Weeks 15 – 16:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue assessment tasks, if appropriate, and regular portfolio activity</li> <li>• Meet with colleagues to discuss student assessment and possible transfer of students to new classes</li> <li>• Complete progress reports (located on Tutela.ca)</li> <li>• Discuss progress report in context of portfolio during teacher/student interviews</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> In the first term of PBLA implementation, only three reports are completed. The purpose is to ensure teachers have an opportunity to become familiar with process on Tutela.ca and to ensure the report reflects the evidence in the students' portfolios. The reports are not distributed. For all subsequent terms, progress reports are completed according to the schedule in "Progress Reports and Conference Schedule" in the next section of this guide, PBLA: End of Term or Course.

## The Learning Curve

For some reason, patient, supportive, and excellent adult ESL teachers who always scaffold learning activities so students are not overwhelmed by the learning burden often do not do that for themselves. They set demanding professional standards for themselves and often have unrealistic expectations of immediately being able to integrate all the aspects of PBLA into their instruction. These conscientious teachers can all too quickly become anxious and stressed out because of the changes to which they are trying to adapt and their expectation that these changes will occur immediately.

## Taking It Slowly

Real change takes time! Teachers are encouraged to take it slowly and to expect a period of uncertainty.

Rather than trying to do everything at once, you can phase in PBLA one key feature at a time. You might begin by introducing the Language Companion and using it regularly in class for a week or so, just for information about settlement topics or language learning and for storing worksheets and handouts. Then, as students become accustomed to using their Language Companion in some way every day, begin to introduce other aspects of PBLA and “About Me” activities one by one over a period of time. Encourage students to put each artefact as it is completed into the portfolio and record it on their inventory.

When students are comfortable with that routine, try an assessment task. For the first instructional module using PBLA, you might plan to assess one skill only. After doing the task and discussing feedback, have the students date the task, file it in the appropriate portfolio section, and enter it on the portfolio inventory. At the end of the week (or on Monday, as a review), students could do a learning reflection and add it to the portfolio. Following this pattern, add more aspects of PBLA incrementally as you gain confidence.

Some items for the “About Me” section, such as a needs assessment or goal statement, need to be done early in the term. Others might be addressed in various modules throughout the term. For example, in a module on the community, students might discuss similarities and differences between their new community in Canada and their previous community. This could be followed by an activity focused on prioritizing skills that they think they will need in their new community or job in Canada and a self-assessment of those skills. The results can be dated and included in the “About Me” section of the portfolio. Throughout the course, other language samples related to the CLB outcomes are added to the portfolio.

## End of a Module/Theme

While many teachers include PBLA activities weekly, even daily; others find it effective to schedule portfolio activities at the end of a module or theme so as to provide students with an opportunity to review the language and context information that was addressed in the module, reflect on their language-learning progress, and set goals for the next learning period.

## Developing Familiarity with Processes

When you first begin doing portfolio activities with your students, you will probably need to go through the process step by step. You might have to be quite directive, depending on the CLB level. For example, after a module on health, you might say:

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

“We did a lot of work on health this week. Think about what you learned about health and about the activities you did. Write a short message about what you now know about health that you didn’t know before, what language skills you learned, when you used or will use your new skills outside the class, and what your favourite activity was.”

It is important to keep in mind that most students entering language training will be unfamiliar with PBLA and may not initially perceive the benefits to them and their language learning. There are likely to be growing pains – awkward times when problems develop or something does not work out as planned.

## Adjusting to Change

Typically, teachers report feeling more comfortable with practice:

- In Term 1 – They feel hesitant, confused, and frustrated at times. Everything is new, and every practice takes adjustment and trial and error. Some teachers say they feel less competent.
- In Term 2 – They begin to feel more in control as they find effective practices and strategies. More activities become routine, although there are still new responsibilities to implement, which can cause initial uncertainty.
- In Term 3 – They find a rhythm and way of working that seems effective. They are beginning to repeat the PBLA cycle and are able to do so more effectively and with increasing confidence. They still have many questions but are beginning to refine their practice to enhance learning for students.

## Challenges

Some situations in federal and provincial language-training programs may present particular challenges for teachers when implementing PBLA.

### Level

It can be a challenge at CLB Stage 1 and in ESL Literacy classes to communicate the intention and process of PBLA because of language barriers. This is similar to the experience of many teachers when introducing any new learning activity to beginning speakers of English. Usually, the first few times the students do a new learning activity, they require considerable support and direction from their teacher. However, in time, they become increasingly comfortable and independent even if they do not entirely understand or appreciate the purpose of the activity. The introduction of PBLA may be similar. At first, students may not understand what they are being asked to do or why, but familiarity will increase as the PBLA processes are modelled, especially if PBLA activities occur regularly and instructions and protocols are consistent. Nevertheless, students from educational backgrounds that are teacher directed may require ongoing encouragement to take more responsibility for managing, reflecting on, and assessing their own learning. Students with limited or interrupted formal schooling may need extended levels of support and reminders.

I introduce [students] to the CLB and the Essential Skills using the posters in my room. We look at their student cards and their current scores. I use a number line to indicate where they are in each skill area. I stress to them that their portfolio will be a collection of tasks they are learning and that by keeping their portfolio they will be able to see how much they are learning.

Mary Jean Davis, Winnipeg School Division  
Adult EAL Program, EAL Literacy Phase 2

## Continuous Intake

Continuous intake presents a range of challenges to ESL teachers every day. Students arrive at different times throughout the term, and in some programs, throughout the week or even throughout the day. These students need to be brought into the “community” of the classroom. Teachers constantly need to find time to determine what the students can do and what skills they need to address. PBLA both assists with these challenges and presents others.

One benefit is that a student arriving from another class or program implementing PBLA should arrive with a Language Companion and portfolio of work done previously. A scan of the content can tell a teacher a lot about the new student’s proficiency, strengths, and difficulties.

A student newly referred by an assessment centre will need to be oriented to both the Language Companion and PBLA. A needs assessment and other baseline info will need to be collected. Several strategies can make this process easier:

- Have packages of forms and tools ready to use with new students.
- Wait until later in the week to give all the new students that week their Language Companion and to provide orientation.
- Recruit volunteers to your program to support Language Companion orientation. Provide the volunteers with guidelines on how you want the Language Companion introduced.
- Work with a colleague so that once a week one of you provides orientation to the Language Companion and PBLA while the other leads a joint activity with both classes.
- Partner the new student with an experienced student for support while doing initial PBLA-related activity.

## The Multilevel Class

Many adult ESL classes are multilevel, combining several CLB levels or types of learners (e.g., ESL and ESL Literacy). Implementing PBLA in multilevel classes is facilitated by the following strategies:

- Recruit volunteers to support instruction and PBLA in the classroom.<sup>10</sup>
- Group students together for learning activities and assessment tasks.
- For a particular task, use the same text but differentiate the activity according to level, or use different texts and have students do the same activity. For example, for a CLB 2-3 task that involves writing about a class event, group 1 completes sentence stems and group 2 writes complete sentences. Use similar prompts for reflection activities.
- Develop assessment tasks that span several levels: that is, tasks that address criteria from several CLB levels.
- Assess different groups of students on different days.

Students in continuous-intake classes will not have the same contents in their portfolios. A student arriving partway through the term will only have contents from their arrival onward. Teachers will review the new student’s portfolio at the end of term along with the other students’ portfolios. While evidence may show that the student has made progress, there may not be sufficient evidence to indicate that the student has attained a new CLB level.

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<sup>10</sup> Volunteers are not responsible for instructional decision-making. They should work under the direction of the teacher to support instruction. Volunteers should not assess students.

# PBLA: THROUGHOUT THE TERM

## Attendance

The 2010 *Evaluation of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program* reports that “teachers who placed work-like expectations on their students tended to have students more committed to attending and being on time....Teachers who had lax standards ... had students who were more likely to show up late and take long breaks” (p. 14).

Another challenge for teachers and students is regularity of attendance. Students who are frequently absent may not have the particular artefacts that the teacher wants included in the portfolio or may not collect enough material in their portfolios to assess for CLB outcomes. Students who frequently arrive late or leave early may also have insufficient material for assessment. Programs without policies for attendance and arrival and departure times may need to introduce and enforce clear guidelines. Teachers may need to remind students frequently that their portfolio will be used to determine their CLB level at the end of the course. If students have insufficient data as a result of irregular attendance, the teacher won't be able to make a CLB decision.

## Resistant Students

Some students may be focused on attaining specific CLB levels that are required for admission into a post-secondary program or for occupational training. They may initially think that maintaining a language portfolio and participating in the discussions and reflections on learning that are integral aspects of PBLA takes away from their language learning. It is helpful to tell them that these activities have a proven track record for promoting learning. It is also useful to emphasize that being able to set appropriate language-learning goals, monitor their own progress, and adjust their learning plans based on assessment feedback are very important skills in academic and workplace settings. Students may need to be reminded that the contents of their portfolios will be the basis for determining their CLB outcome level. Therefore, they cannot opt out of PBLA. However, experience has shown that once engaged in PBLA, students find that the ongoing feedback enhances their learning and is motivating.

**Students take their lead from their teachers. The 2010 *Evaluation of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program* notes that teachers “who were enthusiastic had students who were enthusiastic” (p. 14).**

# PBLA: END OF TERM OR COURSE

At the end of the term, you will need to collect the language portfolios from students so that you can evaluate the assessment data (contents of the language portfolios, complemented by anecdotal notes and checklists that you have compiled), determine exit levels, and complete progress reports.

## Remember!

To achieve a benchmark level in a skill, the student must have demonstrated satisfactory performance in the four competencies for the skill at that level. According to the 2013 National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines, a CLB level of completion can be associated with most or all (traditionally, 70% to 100%) of the descriptors for the benchmarks assigned in each of the four skills. Achievement in only one or two of the competencies means that the student has not achieved the CLB level.

At this time, it is imperative that you keep in mind the levels the students entered with. A student might have been assessed at the outset as a CLB 3 in Listening and a CLB 4 in Speaking, Reading, and Writing and may have been referred to a class working on CLB 5 competencies. However, for a variety of reasons, the student may have ended up in a CLB 4 class, perhaps because the pacing of the class was more suitable or because the student needed other supports. Sometimes, all that is available is a multilevel class of CLB 4 and 5. You will need to evaluate progress keeping in mind the students' starting levels. A change of class does not mean that the initial CLBPT assessment was wrong. Nor does it mean that the student cannot do tasks at the levels at which the student was assessed. According to guidelines, the CLBPT is reliable within a benchmark level, which means the student has demonstrated proficiency at the level assessed but may be higher. It could mean any of the following:

- In a classroom environment with many students, the student is shy or uncomfortable and not able to perform as competently as when she or he is in a one-to-one situation.
- The class is working primarily at a “completing” CLB 5 level and the student is functioning primarily at a “beginning” CLB 5 level.
- The student needs some time at a lower class level until his or her listening skills improve.
- A student needs more time to complete tasks because of such factors as physical limitations, age, confidence, culture shock and adjustment, or worry about personal problems.

## The Rate of Progress

Students with 8 to 12 years of education register moderate rates of progress over any 250 hours of instruction, changing approximately .6 of a benchmark level in Listening and Speaking, .9 of a benchmark level in Reading, and .5 of a benchmark in Writing.

Watt (2004), Executive Summary

If, however, at the end of term, you believe that a student is functioning below the level at which she or he was originally assessed, you must be able to defend that opinion with evidence from the student's portfolio showing that the student attempted tasks for the level assessed but was unable to do them. The program administrator must concur with this opinion. It is often very upsetting to a student to receive a progress report indicating that he or she not only has made no progress but has actually lost ground. The decision to record lower CLB levels must not be taken lightly. If the teacher and administrator agree, based on a significant body of portfolio evidence, that the student is functioning below the original CLB levels, the following wording for the progress report might be helpful: *“On the tasks carried out in this class, the student is functioning at CLB level X.”*

# PBLA: END OF TERM OR COURSE

It is also important to note that although the majority of students will make progress by the end of a course or program, they may not move from one benchmark level to another. This is especially true of ESL Literacy students or students in short-term or part-time programs. In order for a teacher to say that a student has completed a CLB level in a skill, there must be evidence in the portfolio and other data collected by the teacher that the student has satisfactorily demonstrated proficiency in each competency area outlined in the CLB.

It is common for literate ESL students to make the greatest progress at lower CLB levels. For example, educated, working-age students commonly jump very quickly from CLB 1 to CLB 2; however, progress frequently slows in Stage 2. Anecdotally, teachers and assessors have observed that many students seem to stall at CLB 6 for a while before they are able to push past this plateau.

This is not to say that there are not highly motivated, skilful language learners who make significant leaps in learning; however, it is unlikely that a student in Stage 2 would progress from, say, CLB 5 to CLB 8 in a part-time program in one year.

## **“But, teacher, I need a CLB 8 ...”**

It is unethical to give students a CLB level just because they want it for citizenship purposes, for admission to a course or program of study, or for licensure if there is no evidence to support it. Students are not served well when teachers give them higher CLB levels to “help them out.” Giving in to a student’s impassioned request for higher CLB levels sets the student up for failure.

Teachers are accountable for the levels they record on student reports and must be able to show satisfactory evidence in the student’s portfolio that the student can appropriately perform a range of language tasks under the performance conditions described for the CLB level. If a student is persistently demanding, the student should be referred to the program administrator.

**Teachers and administrators are accountable for the accuracy of the CLB information on the progress report. Therefore, both the teacher and the administrator must sign the progress report.**

## **Standardized Progress Report**

Programs are required to issue progress reports to students who have been in the program for 200 hours or more according to the schedule provided below. The progress report documents the language-learning outcomes determined through PBLA. The progress report is a standardized report that has been developed for use in LINC and other language-training programs. It can be completed on Tutela.ca (see the progress report generator) and saved on the LINC program’s computer system. The progress report generator enables teachers to complete the reports online and save them to their own system. The advantage of using the progress report generator is that it has many features to expedite report writing. Instructions are available as part of the process.

## Progress Report Versions

There are different versions for ESL and ESL Literacy students.<sup>11</sup>

The **ESL Progress Report** is for ALL educated immigrant students (more than ten years of formal, uninterrupted education) who are learning English.

The **ESL Literacy Progress Report** is for those students in any class who have little or no literacy skill in their first language, usually because of limited or interrupted formal education. They may have any of these characteristics:

- Be speakers of languages with no written code
- Have little or no education in their home countries (one to two years)
- Have up to eight years of schooling, with many interruptions

Be sure to use the progress report version that reflects a student's language learning characteristics – not the type of class the student is in. For example, suppose that a CLB 2 class contains two students who have characteristics of ESL Literacy learners (e.g., limited education in their home countries). Teachers should use the *Canadian Language Benchmarks for ESL Literacy* to help them assess student progress in Reading and Writing, and assess Listening and Speaking using the CLB. The ESL Literacy version of the progress report should be used for these two students. For all other students, teachers would complete the ESL version of the progress report.

## Protocol

Progress reports are designed to ensure conformity of features and adherence to government guidelines. The LINC progress reports are authorized and bear the federal logo.<sup>12</sup> They cannot be altered without written approval from CIC National Headquarters.

- Reports must include the identifying information and logo, if any, of the issuing program.
- Assigned CLB levels must be supported by examples of work in the students' portfolio.
- No white-out should be used on reports.
- Completed reports must be reviewed and initialled or signed by administrators.
- Each progress report must be signed by the teacher, which indicates that to the best of the teacher's professional knowledge and skill, the information on the report is accurate. **THIS IS AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT.**
- The signed original is given to the student. A copy is kept on file by the program.
- Students in language-training programs funded by the Canadian government **MUST** receive written reports on the progress of their language development.

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<sup>11</sup> ESL does not refer to only those students in provincially funded programs. LINC and provincial programs across Canada serve ESL and ESL Literacy students.

<sup>12</sup> Some other provincial jurisdictions use a similar progress report.

# PBLA: END OF TERM OR COURSE

## Progress Points within CLB levels

Progress reports are intended to be a record for students of the progress they are making in learning English. For a variety of reasons, students may make progress in a term without completing a CLB level, that is 70% - 100% of the descriptors for the benchmarks assigned in each of the four skills. Consequently, on the progress report, teachers record each student's progress on a continuum within a CLB level.

- **Beginning** is used if the student has demonstrated initial evidence of characteristics (qualities and attributes) associated with performance at this level.
- **Developing** is used if the student has demonstrated increasing evidence of characteristics (qualities and attributes) associated with performance on tasks at this level but may not be able to do so consistently or may not have performed a sufficient range of tasks and competencies.
- **Completing** is used if the student has consistently demonstrated characteristics (qualities and attributes) associated with performance at this level over a range of tasks and competencies.<sup>13</sup>

## Disputes about Assessed CLB Levels

Disputes about the CLB level determined by the teacher tend to be fewer with PBLA. Students are engaged in monitoring their progress throughout the course or term, so there are no surprises. If a student disputes the CLB levels or comments, the teacher should review the portfolio data and, if confident of the appropriateness of the report, should show the student on what bases the decision was made. If a review of the data supports a change to the report, the change must be approved by the administrator.

A teacher must not assign a CLB level to accommodate a student's wishes if the student's work does not substantiate the level.

## Teacher-Student Progress Conferences

The brief (10 to 15 minutes) progress conference is an opportunity for the student and teacher to review the student's progress in learning English in relationship to the student's specified needs and goals. It should be a culmination of the ongoing dialogues in which the teacher and student have engaged throughout the term as well as an opportunity to consolidate information about the student's language proficiency and to set new directions.

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<sup>13</sup> The term "completing" is used on the progress report for pedagogical reasons. Teachers recognize that there is no hard line that a student steps over from one CLB level into another. For data-collection purposes, "completing" is understood to mean that the student "achieved, and demonstrated, the level of communicative ability associated with **most or all** (traditionally, 70% to 100%) of the descriptors" of the skill.

## Progress Report and Conference Schedule

Teachers are required to issue progress reports to their students according to specified schedules. In addition, short one-on-one teacher-student progress meetings should be scheduled as part of the feedback process. In programs based on a two-term September-June program year, and in continuous-intake programs that are not divided into terms or semesters, progress reports and conferences must be scheduled twice a year as follows:

**Table 4: Schedule of Progress Reports and Conferences**

Hours of Delivery	Number and frequency of progress conferences	Number and frequency of progress reports
12+ hours per week	<b>2 conferences*</b> Conference 1 - Jan/Feb Conference 2 - End of May/June depending on program	<b>2 progress reports</b> Report 1 - Jan/Feb – Report 2 - End of May/June depending on program
8 – 11 hours per week	<b>2 conferences</b> Conference 1 - Jan/Feb Conference 2 - End of May/June depending on program	<b>1 progress report</b> End of May/June depending on program
Fewer than 8 hours per week	<b>1 conference</b> End of May/June depending on program	<b>1 progress report</b> End of May/June depending on program

\* Additional mid-term meetings may be scheduled for programs with longer courses.

## Preparing for the Progress Conference

Progress conferences might be a new experience for the class and may cause the students some anxiety. You can mitigate anxiety by providing an overview of what will occur during the conference, including some of the topics of discussion. A day or so prior to progress conferences, you might find it helpful to facilitate learning activities to prepare students to participate in their interview. Working in groups, students might be asked to do the following:

- Review their portfolios and discuss the goals they set at the beginning of the course and the progress they have made towards them
- Discuss what they have learned, what they are proud of, and what is still difficult
- Talk about what they think the teacher will say about their progress; practise some phrases that they or the teacher might use
- Talk about their experience – what they liked, what they wish had been different – or have them write a brief reflection.

# PBLA: END OF TERM OR COURSE

## Conducting the Progress Conference

Students should not receive unexpected news about their CLB outcomes in their one-on-one teacher-student conference. If you have ensured that students understand the CLB outcomes towards which they have been working and if you have been providing students with realistic ongoing feedback throughout the course, students should have a good idea of what they have achieved, as well as their strengths and challenges.

- **Talking about goals** – During the teacher-student conference, begin by talking briefly about the expectations of the course or program and refer to the personal goals the student expressed at the beginning of the term or course. If students can't remember their goals, their goal statements in their portfolios can provide a useful reminder.
- **Reflecting on progress** – Ask students to talk about their progress – about what they can do now in English that they could not do before. If students have been encouraged to reflect on their language learning throughout the program, this activity should not be unduly challenging. Students who are familiar with the CLB outcomes towards which they have been striving can say whether they think they have met those outcomes. If students are less familiar with the CLB outcomes, they can talk about something that they could not do before, something they have improved on, and something they think they still need to improve. Ask students to pick out some samples from their portfolios that support their opinions. If the students are at a low CLB level, ask them to show you a couple of samples of language use of which they are particularly proud.

Provide students with the written progress report and discuss the contents. The contents of the portfolios provide examples of language use for discussing the progress reports. During the conference, encourage students to identify future goals and language-learning objectives and discuss with them strategies that might be helpful in furthering their language development.

- **Signing the report** – Students must sign the progress report to indicate that they have received and have looked it over with their teacher. Although ESL Literacy and beginning students may have a more limited understanding of the report, if teachers and students have regularly been engaging in conversations about progress, the report will have more meaning. Explaining levels or comments by showing examples from students' portfolios will help the students to understand. Interpreters assisting during the progress interview can also be helpful if they understand their role and ethical responsibilities.
- **Putting the report into the portfolio** – An electronic copy of the student's progress report should already be on file before meeting with the student. The signed original goes into the student's portfolio.

# TEACHERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q. I have so little time already. How can I add PBLA to an already full agenda?**

**A.** It means doing things differently. PBLA cannot be an add-on. It is better to do fewer modules or units, spreading each module over more time so you can effectively incorporate ongoing assessment and other PBLA activities. Remember, the time you invest in assessment throughout the term is time you don't need for assessment at the end of the term. More importantly, the integration of assessment throughout the term enhances student learning.

**Q. I tried to get my students to do PBLA but they didn't get it, and I ended up doing everything for them. What can I do differently?**

**A.** Developing the students' capacity to participate in PBLA is as important as developing their knowledge and skill to communicate at the doctor's office or deal with appliance breakdowns at home, and it needs planning and scaffolded practice. The introduction to PBLA must be taught in the same way as any other thematic module, with the requisite language skills and concepts being developed incrementally. Taking time regularly to do portfolio-related activities with students is imperative, even if this means eliminating another learning activity periodically. As well as providing opportunities for developing self-assessment skills, PBLA activities reinforce important transferable language and learning skills.

**Q. My students are beginners, and many are ESL Literacy students. How do I explain PBLA to them?**

**A.** If possible, bring in an interpreter or a more advanced student who has been doing PBLA for a while. If this is not possible, tell the students that after they practise something in English, you will check to see how well they can do it. Explain that we call this "assessment." Tell them they will put assessments into a portfolio and they will be able to see how much they are learning. It can also be helpful to show students a sample of a portfolio.

**Q. My CLB Stage 2 students are all trying to improve their CLB levels so they can get into post-secondary programs. They don't want to do PBLA; they just want to learn English. What do I do?**

**A.** This can be a challenge with students who are used to traditional approaches to testing. You might point out that with PBLA, students will be doing frequent assessment tasks so they will get ongoing and timely feedback each week on how they are progressing in English. It will help them to see what their strengths are and what is difficult for them so that they can adjust their learning to make better progress. You might also explain that PBLA incorporates Assessment for Learning strategies that have been proven, through extensive research over many years, to enhance learning. Depending on your students' level, you might do a module to introduce PBLA and have them do language tasks such as the following:

- Watch a video on Assessment for Learning and summarize the main points (Google Dylan William for some excellent video clips)
- Locate three articles on Assessment for Learning on the Internet and summarize the main points
- Read an article on Assessment for Learning strategies and explain how Assessment for Learning strategies are embedded in PBLA
- Interview other students who have experienced the value of engaging in PBLA

# TEACHERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If they are still resistant, you might point out that since their portfolio will provide evidence of what they can do in English, it may help them when they apply to another program. Assure them that once students have tried PBLA for a while, they usually find that it helps their learning considerably. If all else fails, you may have to explain that PBLA is the government-authorized assessment protocol in the program and that their portfolio will be the basis for your decisions on their CLB level at the end of term. In other words, if they don't participate in PBLA, you will not be able to report on their progress at the end of the term.

**Q. How directive should I be as the teacher? Should the artefacts for a portfolio be selected by me or by the students?**

**A.** You will need to ensure that students file specific assessment tasks and skill-using activities in the skills sections of the portfolio, so you will need to indicate the items for their portfolios. You may choose to use the "Other" section of the portfolio for student-selected work. Initially, you may need to manage the process step by step. However, as students learn the process, they may be able to file tasks in the correct section of their portfolios, record them on their inventories, and so on more independently.

**Q. What happens when someone is absent and doesn't have a sufficient number of assessment tasks in their portfolios?**

**A.** Usually, if a student misses an assessment task, then it is simply not available for the portfolio. It is a consequence of being absent. If at the end of the term, a student's portfolio contains insufficient data to assess progress, then the student needs to understand why his or her progress report might not show progress. Of course, depending on the situation, teachers may choose to administer the assessments tasks to students at an alternate time.

**Q. How many artefacts do students need in their portfolios?**

**A.** It is impossible to provide a set quantity; however, 8 to 10 artefacts per skill is a minimum for making an informed CLB decision. Most teachers find it helpful to include more. Sometimes, if teachers haven't kept track of what tasks they have had students file in their portfolios, they may end up with an imbalance of material in the different skills, which can be problematic, especially at the end of term when they are trying to decide CLB levels. Much depends on the needs and levels of the students, the length and frequency of individual classes, the length of the term, and so on. Portfolios must hold a sufficient number of artefacts in each skill section to allow teachers and students to see the progress over time related to the four competencies within each skill. The teacher must have enough data to explain the benchmark outcome levels in each skill.

Miranda Fidler, an ESL Literacy teacher working with Phase 1 and 2 students in the Winnipeg School Division Adult ESL Program in Manitoba, says, "One challenge is that students who were absent won't have the work sample. Those students don't record the information on the [inventory] chart. Also, it is hard for them to understand that they just can't copy the answers from another student and include the paper. Sometimes when we do a longer, more involved activity I will ask the students, 'how long did it take us to complete this activity?' (45 minutes). Then I try to help them understand that if they are absent when an activity like this is done in class, I can't just give them the paper."

# TEACHERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Q. Do I have to develop all my own assessment tasks, or can I use ones that have been developed by others?**
- A.** Instruction should be based on student needs, and assessment should be based on instruction; therefore, it can be expected you will want to develop a lot of your own assessment tasks to address what you taught. That being said, there are some very good compilations of assessment tasks available, and should you find a task that is consistent with your module plan, it is fine to use it. You would need to make sure it is appropriate for your level and the competencies you want to assess (check it out against descriptors in your CLB). Remember that the important thing is to teach to your students' needs and assess appropriately. Do not teach to an assessment task that you found pre-made in a published resource because it might be expedient.
- Q. Is there a place for exit tests in PBLA?**
- Exit tests may be used as a complement to the portfolio contents. An exit test may give you a snapshot of what the student is able to do on a particular day; the portfolio contents give you a picture of what the student has been able to do over time in a variety of contexts and tasks. If an exit test is conducted, the results should be viewed holistically as part of the assessment evidence. It should not be given any greater weight than other data collected.
- Q. PBLA requires that students maintain an inventory or table of contents in their portfolios. How can beginner students do this by themselves?**
- A.** You will need to take the time to develop the language and skills to maintain an inventory, which is an important, transferable skill. ESL Literacy students in Winnipeg who were interviewed about their portfolios said that because they have a binder and do inventories, they can now find papers in binders at work or at their children's daycare. Students in ESL Literacy use very simple tables for creating inventories. With guidance from their teacher, students help each other record the date and title for the piece of work on the chart. Then they may check off which major skills they used for the task and whether they worked independently or in a group or with a partner. The teacher keeps a master checklist of what has been recorded on the chart.
- Q. When I am helping one student with portfolio work, the others sit idle. How can I keep others busy while I am helping that one student?**
- A.** Do portfolios on the same day of the week or month so that it becomes routine. Have students work in small groups or pairs of similar abilities. If they encounter problems, they can help each other. Or have the class work on other learning activities while you work with one group at a time. In an ESL Literacy class, while you help a small group do their portfolio activities, the rest of the students could do numeracy activities, record information from a memo, practise writing on the board, participate in a game directed by a volunteer, or study sight words. Volunteers are invaluable. While you do speaking assessments with individuals or small groups, a volunteer can circulate and help students do portfolio tasks, like record an item on an inventory, or can supervise skill-building activities or games. Be sure the volunteer knows the kind of help you want given to students – for example, the volunteer should not do the work for the students. The volunteer can take the time to speak slowly, explain, repeat. NOTE: Classroom volunteers are there to support instruction and work under your direction. It is inappropriate for volunteers to carry out professional responsibilities for which they are not trained, such as planning instruction, teaching, or assessing.

# TEACHERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Q. My students attend my class in the morning and another class in the afternoon. Do students keep two portfolios? Who does the progress report?**
- A.** If you share students with another teacher, the two of you will need to collaborate. It is best for the student to maintain a single portfolio of work done in both classes. Artefacts should be identified in some way as being from one class or the other (e.g., with a coloured marker). Artefacts should be listed jointly on the inventories, but again, could be colour coded with a highlighter. When it is time to prepare progress reports, you may want to divide up the shared students, with each of you writing reports and doing the progress conferences for half of the shared group. If you share only one student, one of you should give all the info to the other to use in writing the report. It will be important that both of you are in agreement about the students' progress.
- Q. Do you ever remove artefacts from a portfolio? Don't they get quite large over time?**
- A.** Usually, at the beginning of a term, when students have a portfolio started in another class, teachers often review the contents, then advise the students to remove all but the most recent items, i.e. the artefacts they added just before the end of the previous term. These items become the 'starting' point artefacts to use when reflecting on progress going forward.
- Q. Isn't this all pretty paper-based for a digital age?**
- Yes, it is. Teachers are encouraged to think about how they can do things digitally. As PBLA is rolled out, e-portfolios will be developed. However, at this time, many programs across the country do not yet have the needed technology or bandwidth to support an online version of PBLA. One step at a time.
- Q. I don't want to implement PBLA. Can I opt out?**
- A.** CIC has specified PBLA as the authorized assessment protocol for their programs, and it is an "activity" or deliverable in the contribution agreements CIC has with its programs. Teachers cannot opt out.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

The use of Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) in ESL classrooms has been demonstrated to benefit teachers and promote student learning. Its implementation, however, impacts not only teachers and students but also program administrators.<sup>14</sup> It is up to a program's administrator to provide leadership, supervision, motivation, and support, and to create optimum conditions for successful PBLA implementation. (See "Conditions for Success" below.)

The implementation of PBLA may necessitate a shift over time in how programs do things. The program may experience growing pains and ups and downs in enthusiasm and commitment as teachers experience success or encounter frustration. This is normal in a long-term change initiative. It is helpful if administrators can anticipate and plan for the implementation of PBLA and develop strategies to manage the change process effectively.

## Change Management

Systemic change is complex and long term. The literature on change management, especially in the context of education, provides considerable insight and ways forward for the implementation of PBLA. The following key themes emerge:

- The specification of *what* needs to change in actual classroom practice and service provider organization (SPO) culture, and what it will take to achieve the specified changes must be clearly articulated and shared with all staff.
- Continuous learning among staff must be embraced and not isolated within individual SPOs. Instead, it should be collaborative across SPOs and jurisdictions.
- Change activities must focus simultaneously on changing teacher practice and changing the culture and system within which teachers work.
- Motivation to engage long term in the individual and collective effort needed to change is critical, as is effective leadership.
- Capacity building that focuses on results and embeds "positive pressure" is essential.
- Learning must occur in, or be applied to, local and larger contexts.
- Reflective action must be built in: that is, teachers and other stakeholders need to engage in purposeful thinking about what they are doing.
- "Permeable connectivity" (Fullan 2006) must be fostered: that is, strategies that promote engagement, mutual interaction, and influences across all levels of responsibility must be pursued.

Communication between instructor and student is greatly enhanced through this [PBLA] process. The students absolutely love it. They have a much better understanding of their abilities. But the biggest impact is the standardization of information between programs and service providers. Students move around with portfolios that have demonstrations of what they are able to do. Their next instructor spends much less time assessing where they are at when they enter the class.

Shirley Graham,  
LINC and ESL Coordinator,  
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board,  
2013 TESL Canada Conference presentation

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<sup>14</sup> The term *program administrator* is used in this guide to refer to the person responsible for the LINC program, including supervising and managing classroom teachers.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Conditions for Successful PBLA Implementation

PBLA is premised on the understanding that ongoing assessment is fundamental to good teaching. It also reflects a belief that teachers are best situated to observe and assess their students' language proficiency in a variety of language tasks over time and that they have or can develop the necessary expertise. It is an approach that integrates assessment into reflective teaching practice and engages students in actively planning and thinking about their language learning.

Many aspects of PBLA will already be familiar to teachers and administrators; however, the introduction of PBLA may necessitate that they undertake familiar activities and strategies in different ways. PBLA is most successful in programs that meet certain conditions, as outlined below:

### Administrators

- Administrators have a student-centred approach to program planning.
- Administrators encourage an “assessment culture” within their program in which assessment is discussed openly and positively and is not seen as a “necessary chore.”
- As much as possible, administrators implement workplace-like expectations of students regarding attendance and arrival and departure times.
- Administrators manage intake of new students and inter-classroom transfers to minimize disruption to teachers and students.
- Administrators cluster students to address needs most appropriately and minimize multilevel classes.
- Administrators understand and appreciate the benefits of PBLA and assume a leadership role as champion of PBLA implementation.
- Administrators recognize their accountability for appropriate PBLA implementation and provide clear and supportive direction.
- Administrators commit to staying informed of developments in PBLA
- Administrators understand that change is a long-term, complex process.
- Administrators commit to engage long term and to provide leadership in the individual and collective effort needed to change.
- Administrators are engaged and informed members of PBLA professional communities, such as the PBLA Administrators group on Tutela.ca.

### Teachers

- Teachers have a student-centred approach to teaching, including assessment.
- Teachers demonstrate a willingness to approach assessment from a new perspective.
- Teachers implement workplace-like expectations in their classes regarding attendance and arrival and departure times.
- Teachers believe their students are capable adults and strive to foster independence.
- Teachers make PBLA part of their instructional planning and reflective practice, and regularly ask themselves, “Why am I doing this and how?”
- Teachers employ effective instructional and classroom-management strategies in multilevel classrooms.
- Teachers have the requisite knowledge of the CLB and skill in task-based instruction and assessment.
- Teachers view assessment as a fundamental professional responsibility and not as a “necessary chore.”
- Teachers understand the role of ongoing assessment in planning for teaching.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- Teachers have a commitment to their ongoing professional development.
- Teachers embrace initiatives that will benefit their students.
- Teachers are motivated and motivating.
- Teachers understand and appreciate the benefits of PBLA to themselves and their students.
- Teachers commit to engage in the individual and collective effort needed to incorporate PBLA into their teaching practice.
- Teachers regularly engage in positive problem solving.
- Teachers engage in ongoing activities that focus simultaneously on developing their expertise related to PBLA and adapting, as necessary, to the culture and system within which they work.
- Teachers are willing to collaborate with colleagues within and across programs and jurisdictions.

## Students

- Students have a clear purpose for learning English.
- Students have identified language-learning needs.
- Students have an articulated language-learning goal.
- Students assume greater responsibility for their language learning.<sup>15</sup>
- Students attend regularly.
- Students arrive on time for the beginning of class and do not leave early.
- Students actively engage in language-learning activities.
- Students are aware of their level of language proficiency and the goals towards which they are striving.
- Students engage sufficiently and appropriately in PBLA activities.

In planning for the implementation of PBLA, it is helpful if administrators and teachers assess their program, identify and build on those conditions for success currently in place, and develop a plan to address any gaps.

## The Role of Leadership

The effective implementation of PBLA relies on more than good program management; good leadership is also essential. Teachers look to their administrator for direction, guidance, and support during the implementation of PBLA. Effective implementation occurs when administrators see themselves more as leaders than managers and display efficacy in their:

- **Use of resources** – Good leaders seek out resources that will benefit their students and staff. They recognize that their greatest resources are their staff and that teachers thrive on being appreciated and acknowledged for good performance.
- **Communication skills** – Good leaders have good people skills. They listen well and have persuasive interpersonal communication skills. They use these skills effectively to inspire trust, spark motivation, and empower teachers and students.
- **Knowledge** – Good leaders are knowledgeable about the field and connected to the “community” of language-training programs in their region. They are tuned in to all of the pertinent issues and current events.

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<sup>15</sup> Many students with limited formal education in L<sub>1</sub> face many language-learning challenges. Although they require ongoing support and direction from their teachers, it is important to help them identify goals and assume more of the responsibility for their language learning.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- **Visibility and accessibility** – Good leaders are a positive, vibrant, and visible presence in the school. They lead by example.
- **Planning** – Good leaders have excellent planning skills and are reflective observers of performance in their program.

(Adapted from Concordia University, Portland, OR, Blog, “Four Instructional Leadership Skills Principals Need,” <http://education.cu-portland.edu>)

## The Lead Teacher

PBLA Lead Teachers are resource teachers who are drawn from the programs to support but not supervise or manage their colleagues in the implementation of PBLA. Experienced teachers should be chosen by the program administrator for this role based on a demonstrated excellence in teaching, a range of experience at different CLB levels and contexts, and perceived leadership by their colleagues. The careful selection of Lead Teachers is considered key to the successful implementation of the PBLA project.

### Essential qualifications

- Knowledge and expertise in using the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) for tasked-based curriculum planning, instruction, and assessment
- Experience in teaching in a variety of CLB levels and/or contexts.
- Enthusiasm for teaching and learning
- Intent to remain in the program for the duration of the PBLA implementation project (two years)
- Demonstrated skills in the following areas:
  - Teaching
  - Leadership
  - Collegiality
  - Communication
  - Problem solving
  - Providing professional support to colleagues: mentoring, PD workshops, and so on.
  - Using various modes of digital technologies for communicating: Skype, web conferencing, email, and so on
  - Participation in online courses

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Lead Teacher Activities

Following successful completion of the PBLA Lead Teacher Foundation Course and two terms of classroom application, Lead Teachers draw on their classroom experience and professional knowledge to provide PBLA training, guidance, mentoring, and support to their colleagues, program, and students. Their time commitment as Lead Teachers is the equivalent of five hours per week.

Some activities that Lead Teachers carry out in their role (depending on factors such as expressed needs, available time, etc.) include the following:

- Deliver workshops related to PBLA implementation
- Provide new students with an orientation to PBLA and begin collecting some of the personal information, such as the needs assessment or goal statement, for the portfolio section of the Language Companion binder after the initial start up of classes
- Meet one on one with teachers to discuss PBLA-related topics (including the CLB, task-based instruction, and task-based assessment)
- Facilitate informal small-group discussions
- Observe teachers and provide feedback and/or suggestions as a peer and colleague (not as a supervisor)
- Team-teach on occasion
- Take over a teacher's class to free the teacher to undertake language assessments. (NOTE: Lead Teachers should NOT carry out assessments in place of the classroom teacher. It is the classroom teacher's responsibility to carry out language assessments of their own students.)
- Give demonstration lessons
- Communicate with the administrator to keep him or her informed about the progress of implementation and any needs or concerns
- Participate in meetings with other Lead Teachers as necessary (generally once a month)

## Allocation of Lead Teachers

The number of Lead Teachers allocated to a program is based on a calculation of one Lead Teacher for every 10 classroom teachers, with a minimum of one Lead Teacher per program.<sup>16</sup> The number of Lead Teachers allocated to a program will be rounded up or down as needed.

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<sup>16</sup> Lead Teachers are allocated on the basis of individual classroom teachers, not on the basis of the number of classes (one teacher may teach several classes). This allocation may be changed to accommodate multiple program sites.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Roles and Responsibilities

Administrators are responsible for PBLA implementation in their programs: that is, coordinating implementation, staying informed on developments, ensuring resources, scheduling, supervising, directing teachers (including the Lead Teacher), and monitoring implementation. The Lead Teacher is a support person, responsible for training and supporting teachers in PBLA implementation and advising the administrator regarding successes, emerging issues, and needs according to the job description set out by CIC. The administrator and Lead Teacher work as a team to implement PBLA (see the following table).

**Table 5: Administrators and Lead Teachers: Roles and Responsibilities**

<b>Administrator</b>	<b>Lead Teacher</b>
Functions as the authority in the program responsible to CIC for PBLA implementation	Functions as the resource person responsible to the administrator for assisting teachers in PBLA implementation
Sets or changes program policies and practices to facilitate PBLA implementation	Advises the administrator on program policy or practice changes that may be required to facilitate PBLA
Manages, directs, and supervises teachers; monitors PBLA implementation; holds teachers accountable	Provides PBLA training, supports teachers, advises on emerging issues, and strategizes solutions with the administrator
Schedules PBLA implementation and communicates with staff on program policy or direction in consultation with Lead Teacher	Advises on scheduling of PBLA implementation and policy communications; communicates with classroom teachers re: PBLA PD, support activities, or resources in consultation with administrator
Informs prospective teachers that PBLA is an expectation of employment in the program	Provide PBLA orientation, training and support to new teachers
Coordinates with CIC to ensure that resources are in place	Advises on needed supports such as PD or resources
Supports the Lead Teacher	Supports the administrator

NOTE: The Lead Teacher job description, including responsibilities and hours of work, are set by CIC and cannot be changed without CIC approval.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Implementation Timeline

The implementation of PBLA is staged incrementally over several terms:

Table 6: Implementation Timeline

Phase	Activity
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PBLA implementation is scheduled by CIC.</li><li>• Lead Teachers are recruited by the program.</li><li>• Programs consult with CIC re: budget considerations to support Lead Teachers.</li><li>• Programs begin an inventory of program strengths and gaps.</li><li>• Lead Teachers participate in the PBLA Lead Teacher Foundation Course.</li></ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lead Teachers implement PBLA in their own classroom for two terms and debrief their experience with their Regional Coach.</li><li>• During the second term of classroom implementation, Lead Teachers and program administrator begin to consider the introduction of PBLA to classroom teachers by discussing program needs.</li><li>• Lead Teachers work with their Regional Coach to review provided PD materials and plan for professional development sessions with classroom teachers.</li><li>• Lead Teachers begin to do some PBLA sessions with classroom teachers.</li><li>• Classroom teachers incrementally begin to use some features of PBLA with their students.</li></ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Classroom teachers begin to use full implementation of PBLA in their classroom.</li><li>• Lead Teachers continue to support their colleagues and the program throughout implementation.</li></ul>

Following is a detailed outline of activities that occur during the phases listed above:

### Phase 1

#### PBLA Implementation Scheduled

Program administrators are informed by CIC that their program will be implementing PBLA. At this time, administrators need to consult with their settlement officer regarding the implications of PBLA implementation for the activities and budget of their contribution agreement. It may be necessary to do an amendment to account for the following:

- Lead Teacher wages during their training and beyond
- Professional development and planning meetings
- Classroom teacher salaries
- Resources and supplies

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## **Lead Teacher Recruitment**

As soon as program administrators are informed that they will be implementing PBLA, they need to select a Lead Teacher according to specified criteria. Excellent Lead Teachers are crucial for successful PBLA implementation.

Lead Teachers support the program’s teachers in the implementation of PBLA; they are not managers or supervisors. Administrators are accountable for PBLA implementation.

## **Consultation with CIC re: Budget**

It is important that as soon as program administrators know they will be implementing PBLA, they begin to work with their CIC settlement officer regarding budget and activity implications for their Contribution Agreements.

## **Program Inventory of Strengths and Gaps**

Using the “Conditions for Success” information in this guide as a basis, an inventory of the program is taken: What are the program’s existing strengths to build on? Where are there gaps? How can the administrator prepare the program for PBLA, create the conditions for success in the program, and provide supportive leadership in the implementation of PBLA?

## **PBLA Lead Teacher Foundation Course**

In term 1, Lead Teachers must successfully complete the course and assignments for PBLA Foundations for Lead Teachers. The Foundations course focuses on the theory, principles, and practices of PBLA. It is delivered online over several months. Where possible, some face-to-face interaction may be included. During this time, Lead Teachers submit several assignments to their regional coach.

NOTE: It may be helpful for the program administrator and the Lead Teachers to begin to meet regularly while the Lead Teachers are taking the Foundations course.

Lead Teachers are considered “on the job” during both the course and classroom application phases of their professional preparation and should be compensated according to the guidelines developed in consultation with CIC (equivalent to five hours per week).

## **Phase 2**

### **Classroom Application of PBLA by Lead Teachers**

Following the PBLA Foundation Course, Lead Teachers use PBLA in their own classrooms for two terms. This period of application helps them to develop practical experience and strategies to draw on later when they are helping their colleagues introduce PBLA in their classrooms. Lead Teachers receive ongoing support from their regional coach (course instructor) and submit a final course assignment at the end of term 1 of their classroom application of PBLA.

### **Planning for PBLA Implementation**

As Lead Teachers continue to use PBLA in their own classrooms during term 2, they begin to discuss the implications of PBLA for current program practices with their administrator. Some areas to explore might include the following:

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- **Facilities**

PBLA may require additional facility space. Once PBLA is implemented in classrooms, storage space is required for a supply of Language Companions for new students, as well as various documents needed for student orientation to PBLA. The Lead Teacher will need a space to meet with colleagues at different times of the day, depending on teaching schedules. What are the implications for the facility and how can they be addressed?

- **Materials and Resources**

Teachers may need CLB documents, resources and tools as well as materials for student portfolios such as needs assessments, inventories, assessment tasks, and peer- and self-assessment forms. What are the implications for the resource, paper and photocopying budgets?

- **Administrator Responsibilities**

Administrators will probably have additional responsibilities such as scheduling time for progress report completion, reviewing and signing progress reports, coordinating with the Lead Teacher to schedule and participate in PBLA meetings. What are the implications? Are there teachers in the program who are unfamiliar with the CLB and its use in the teaching/learning cycle or with task-based instruction, or who are computer challenged or resistant to change? What strategies will be effective in supporting those teachers through the change process?

- **Attendance/Late Arrival Policies**

Research shows that students make better progress when there are work-like expectations. Irregular attendance slows a student's progress and has implications for PBLA. There are significant benefits from instituting and enforcing an attendance policy: for example, PBLA field tests have shown that students think it makes the program "more like a real school." What are the implications of instituting an attendance policy for your program?

- **Continuous Intake/Registration**

Are there implications for the program's intake/registration process as a result of introducing PBLA? How can they be addressed?

PBLA implementation may mean additional administrative tasks, such as receiving new students and ensuring that those from programs using PBLA have their Language Companions, managing Language Companion supplies, responding to questions, allocating space, and data input. What are the implications for support staff?

What are the implications of introducing PBLA in a continuous-intake program, and how might they be mitigated? Introducing PBLA and the Language Companion binder to new students and collecting essential baseline information such as needs assessment, goal statement, CLB levels, and autobiography take time and can be disruptive in continuous-intake programs when students arrive at different times throughout the week. Some possible strategies to address these challenges include the following:

- In five-day-a-week programs, institute a "managed continuous intake" process. New students arrive first thing Monday morning if attending morning classes or first thing Monday afternoon for afternoon classes. New students are not able to join classes mid-week or mid-day. Provide one orientation for new students per week to PBLA and the Language Companion. What are the implications for your program and your child-minding program if you move to this model?

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- Have the teachers take turns providing a PBLA and Language Companion orientation to all new students in the program. A colleague covers the class of the teacher giving the orientation.
  - Have a volunteer or program assistant undertake PBLA and Language Companion orientation under the direction of the Lead Teacher or a classroom teacher.
  - In a program with several Lead Teachers, have one of them do one or two PBLA and Language Companion orientation sessions per week. (Sometimes, one session is carried out for CLB Stage 1 and ESL Literacy students and another for CLB Stage 2 students.) However, in a program with only one Lead Teacher, this is not advisable as it diminishes the Lead Teacher’s pedagogical support to classroom teachers.
  - Have teachers do one session per week of PBLA and Language Companion orientation with all their new students while the rest of the class works on another activity.
- **Progress Reports**

Progress reports are issued twice a year in programs that meet 12 or more hours weekly: at the end of January or February and at the end of May or June depending on the program. What are the program implications? How can they be addressed?

- In many continuous-intake programs, reporting dates are specified even though they may not have terms.
- In many continuous-intake programs that operate throughout the summer, the official PBLA ends with the June report and resumes again in September with a “new” start to the portfolio.

Progress reports are completed online by teachers. As well, most PBLA resources will only be accessible through Tutela.ca, and many language tasks that students need to learn are computer based (basic emails, online forms, searchable databases such as phone directories, etc.). Are there teachers on staff who lack basic computer skills or access to a computer? How can those teachers be supported in developing basic computer literacy to fulfill their professional obligations?

## **Beginning Introduction of PBLA to Classroom Teachers**

As Lead Teachers work through their semesters of classroom application, they may begin to talk about PBLA with their colleagues. At first, sessions should be information sessions only, in which the Lead Teachers describe what PBLA is and what they are doing in their classes. During their second term of application in their own classroom, the Lead Teacher begins to work with the administrator and their Regional Coach to develop a training plan and schedule to introduce PBLA to classroom teachers and support them as they begin to implement aspects of PBLA in their classrooms. Training may include a series of workshops, small-group or one-on-one sessions, and tasks that classroom teachers need to complete either individually or in pairs or small groups. It is important that classroom teachers have an opportunity to work with new concepts and skills incrementally. Teachers will also benefit from having some time to prepare for PBLA implementation before it begins in their classrooms.

At this time, administrators need to ensure an adequate supply of Language Companions for students, both existing and prospective, and other resources necessary for PBLA, such as copies of the CLB, CLB posters, or Can-Do Checklists.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Phase 3

### Team Work

Following the introduction of PBLA to classroom teachers, the Lead Teacher and administrator decide on an official start for full PBLA implementation. It is critical that the administrator and Lead Teacher be seen as a team and as champions of PBLA. In this team, the administrator is responsible for ensuring that teachers

- see the administrator as the manager and a principal champion in the program for PBLA implementation,
- understand the importance of PBLA implementation for student learning and accountability to funders,
- comply with all aspects of PBLA training and implementation,
- understand that they will be supported in learning how to integrate PBLA into their teaching and that they do not have the choice of opting out,
- understand the role and range of responsibilities of the Lead Teacher,
- feel encouraged by celebration of their progress and by opportunities to provide feedback and input, and
- see the administrator visiting classes and monitoring PBLA implementation by talking with students and asking to see their portfolios

### Beginning of the First Term of Full PBLA Implementation

As classroom teachers begin their first term of full PBLA implementation, they will have many questions. Unanticipated issues may emerge. At this time, the administrator's leadership is key. It is important to build on program strengths from the beginning. Administrators do not need to have all the answers themselves; however, they must acknowledge questions and commit to finding an answer. When challenges arise, it is critical that administrators engage staff and explore options for solutions with them.

Administrators should establish clear lines of communication to keep staff updated on the plan for implementation and key events. Staff could be given a clear calendar of events at the beginning of the term so they know what is expected and when. For example, teachers need to know at the beginning of the first PBLA term that they will be completing three sample progress reports at the end of the first term and progress reports for all students at the end of second term for the first year of PBLA implementation. After that, progress reports for all students will be provided according to the schedule in this guide. Teachers need to know that there will be scheduled progress interviews for all students at the end of both the first and second terms that will incorporate reference to the evidence of progress in the students' portfolio. Prior to the completion of progress reports and interviews each term, there will be a scheduled levels meeting so teachers can discuss the evidence of student progress in portfolios and the student's progress it displays.

It is also helpful to schedule regular meetings between administrators and Lead Teachers, and other support instructors to share information, coordinate activities and monitor PBLA implementation.

It is important to start planning at the beginning of the term for progress reports. Teachers will need to know when they must be submitted to the administrator for approval.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## End of the First Term of Full PBLA Implementation

At the end of the first semester that classroom teachers are using PBLA, the administrator and Lead Teacher should plan a meeting of the classroom teachers, possibly by levels if numbers warrant. The meeting, facilitated by the Lead Teacher, is for teachers to discuss student progress using their students' portfolios and the CLB. This critical planning session provides an opportunity to discuss whether assessment decisions are appropriate for the level of the students and whether sufficient appropriate data has been accumulated for CLB decision making. At this time, teachers will also complete "practice" progress reports for three students to familiarize themselves with the process. The reports can be completed using the online progress report generator on Tutela.ca. One of the practice reports should be for a student working at the lower CLB levels in the class, another for a student working mid-range, and the third for a student working at the higher levels. These practice reports are not for distribution to students but are intended as an opportunity to become familiar with the process, to minimize any confusion or difficulties, and to receive feedback from the Lead Teacher. It is also an opportunity to clear up any confusion and identify problems or glitches with the online progress report generator.

Although teachers do not issue reports at this time, classroom teachers do meet with all of their students for short interviews at the end of semester one, using the portfolio to discuss progress.

## End of the Second Term of full PBLA Implementation

At the end of the second semester, another planning meeting is scheduled for teachers to discuss their students' progress using their portfolios and the CLB. Teachers complete progress reports for ALL students at the end of this semester, and the reports must be reviewed and signed by the administrator or authorized designate. Teachers then have a short end-of-term interview with each student to discuss the student's progress report and portfolio. If teachers have been providing ongoing feedback to their students throughout the term or semester, there should be no surprises for the student. The interview should just confirm what students know about what they have achieved. For more information, please see the "Progress Report" section in this guide.

## Throughout Each Term

Throughout each term, the administrator should continue to do the following:

- Ensure that teachers and the program have the tools and resources required for PBLA
- Ask to see the portfolio of newly registering students if they have previously attended another government-funded program or have transferred from another class in the school
- Ensure that students are adequately introduced to PBLA, including its benefits, expectations, and process of implementation
- Ensure that students have the necessary orientation and baseline (personal) data for their portfolios<sup>17</sup>
- Ensure that students understand that they must have their portfolio available during class time
- Ensure that students understand that their portfolios are their property and responsibility
- Be familiar with the process and expectations of PBLA

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<sup>17</sup> This is particularly important in continuous-intake programs. Strategies to introduce new students to PBLA and collect the essential baseline (personal) data will need to be developed so that class disruptions are minimized.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- Ensure that new teachers are provided with the *PBLA Guide for Teachers and Programs* and with appropriate orientation, professional development, guidance, and support to undertake PBLA
- Visit classrooms and monitor PBLA implementation

## Supporting Teachers

For PBLA to be implemented successfully, it is essential that staff see you as leading and championing implementation. Field tests in Ottawa, Edmonton, Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton demonstrated PBLA's potential to enhance student language learning and autonomy, to focus instruction, and to enhance accountability. Teachers tend to follow an administrator's lead and behaviour. If you are enthusiastic about PBLA's potential to enhance learning, your teachers will be as well. If you are ambivalent or resistant, staff will be too. Staff need to be reassured that although there may be growing pains as PBLA is introduced, all staff members will work together to resolve any challenges. It may be helpful to emphasize that teachers and administrators in the field tests reported that students and teachers benefitted from consistency in teaching and assessment. Collaboration and sharing increased, and teaching became more focused. In some cases, attendance increased. Students like PBLA.

Teachers need to know that PBLA implementation is a requirement of the funding agreement and is therefore an expectation of employment; everyone will participate. You, as administrator, are accountable to CIC for PBLA implementation; teachers are accountable to you and their students.

The following implementation strategies have been suggested by administrators across Canada:

- Before PBLA implementation begins in earnest, bring teachers together to discuss the initiative. Make it clear that all teachers in the program will be implementing PBLA. Field their questions, answer those you can, and resolve to find the answers to outstanding questions. Have teachers express their concerns. List them and strategize solutions.
- At the outset of PBLA implementation, conduct a needs assessment among staff to explore their readiness for PBLA. Some things to determine are the following:
  - Familiarity with the CLB standard and need for CLB documents and tools
  - Current approach to teaching (skill-based, grammar-based, task-based)
  - Current approach to CLB assessment and resources used
  - Familiarity and experience with task-based instruction and assessment
  - Comfort and ability with computers for basic teaching and communication
  - Experience in planning for instruction
  - Hidden skills and talents
  - Support or training needed
- Work with the Lead Teacher to develop a plan to address identified gaps, possibly through brown-bag lunch sessions, CCLB online boot camps, collaboration, and mentoring.
- Work with teachers to brainstorm implications of PBLA implementation on the program and strategize solutions.
- Get all teachers signed up and active on Tutela.ca. Ask each one to find a teaching or PD resource on Tutela.ca and tell colleagues about it.
- Initially, the learning curve will be steep. Encourage teachers to start with some basics of PBLA and to add elements as they become comfortable. Remind teachers they don't need to do everything or know everything all at once.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- Be sympathetic and supportive. If teachers show anxiety about change and see it as a criticism of their current practice, remind them to treat themselves with the same patience and understanding as they would their students who are learning something new. If teachers are struggling, listen to their concerns and anxieties, and with the Lead Teacher, help them to create a plan to overcome their difficulties. It is important that teachers have an opportunity to express their concerns; however, at some point, change must occur. When teachers complain about a difficulty, ask what you can do to help them. If, however, they suggest an idea that is inconsistent with PBLA, such as that the Lead Teacher assess their students, make it clear that using PBLA and assessing their students is their professional responsibility. Resistant teachers need to be told explicitly that although they will be supported in learning how to implement PBLA effectively, using PBLA is a condition of employment<sup>18</sup>.
- Celebrate successes. As PBLA implementation reaches various milestones, acknowledge staff efforts and accomplishments – and don't forget support staff and child minders who have also had to adjust to new practices. When a teacher learns something new, tries a new strategy, or develops a resource, make sure they get positive feedback. Encourage them to share their ideas or resources with colleagues, either at the program level or on Tutela.ca.
- Look for hidden talents and skills among your staff and showcase their skills. In one program, for example, a colleague was particularly good at developing assessment rubrics. If you have staff who are experts in a certain area, encourage them to provide PD for colleagues.

## Supporting Students

In data collected during the PBLA field tests, students consistently reported that they like PBLA. They say it “feels more like a school.” They find it helpful to have a better understanding of the CLB levels and what they need to do to reach new CLB targets. They report benefitting from regular assessment and feedback on their strengths and challenges. They appreciate having concrete evidence of their learning.

Initially, however, students may be unclear about PBLA – what it is and how it works. If students are from countries that rely heavily on traditional assessment methods, they may be hesitant, even resistant to PBLA. They may not immediately see its benefit and may be concerned that time spent doing PBLA-related activities is taking away from learning English. They may not initially appreciate that the language and metacognitive skills they develop and the information collected through regular assessment and feedback will enhance their language learning and raise standards. Students need to be encouraged about PBLA's potential to help them progress in English. They also need to understand that PBLA is the authorized assessment protocol in government-funded ESL programs. Participation in the program entails participation in PBLA. A student's progress in learning English cannot be evaluated if they do not participate in PBLA. The following suggestions may help you to support students in their participation in PBLA:

- Express support and enthusiasm for PBLA to students whenever possible.
- Visit classes regularly (even two or three classes a week for 15-minute visits is supportive) and ask how things are going. Ask to see the portfolios of some students. Talk to them about their goals, the language skills they are learning, and the progress that is shown in their portfolios.

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<sup>18</sup> All new teachers hired after PBLA has been implemented need to be informed that PBLA is a expectation of employment. The Lead Teacher is responsible to orient and support new teachers in PBLA implementation.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

- If students are resistant to PBLA, talk to them about the benefits. (See Benefits to Students in this guide.) Tell them that portfolio assessment is common in education and in many professions in Canada. Research shows that students who participate in regular assessment make better progress. Through PBLA, they will get regular feedback on their progress so they can focus their learning. Their teachers will be able to see immediately how they are doing and will be able to adjust their teaching to meet student needs better. Students will develop skills to increase their language-learning autonomy and monitor their own progress. They will also develop useful language skills that are transferable to other learning and work contexts.
- Most students report that they like being able to take their Language Companion home so they can review their lessons on the bus or in their free time. Sometimes, however, students don't want to carry their Language Companion back and forth between school and home. They may be carrying their children's daycare gear, for example, or they may be going straight from school to work. There are several points to make to students in this case:
  - Students in Canada – whether in K-12, college, university, or skills-training programs – carry their school resources back and forth with them.
  - They are adults. In the workplace or other educational settings, they are expected to take care of their own materials and tools. Supervisors or instructors will not take care of these things for them. The Language Companion fits into backpacks to facilitate transport.
  - The classroom is only one small opportunity to learn English. To make progress, it is important that students use English outside class, do homework, and review lessons. Their Language Companion helps them to do that.

NOTE: In some special circumstances, accommodation might be temporarily extended to students: for example, one program has a number of students who are in a temporary shelter for abused women. Things go missing, so the students are allowed to keep their Language Companions at school only until they are in permanent housing.

## Progress Reports

Administrators are referred to the “Standardized Progress Report” section in this guide. It is also advisable that administrators become familiar with the progress report generator on Tutela.ca so they can encourage teachers to use it. Although PDF versions of progress reports are available for download at Tutela.ca, using the progress report generator expedites the process for teachers. Doing the progress reports electronically also makes it easier for programs to save administrative copies of student reports.

Administrators should start planning for progress reports at the beginning of the term so they can share the schedule with teachers. Teachers' scheduling is facilitated if they can begin with the end date – the date students are to receive their reports and work backward.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

Table 7: Backward Planning: Steps in Scheduling Progress Reports and Interviews

Step	Consideration	Example
Final Step – Teachers distribute progress reports to students during progress interviews.	When will progress interviews be held? Who decides?	Progress interviews are scheduled for June 5 and 6.
Step 6 – Teachers must prepare materials for progress interviews.	What do they need for the interview with the student? How long will it take to assemble it?	Teachers must receive resubmitted progress reports back by June 4.
Step 5 – CLB levels – and in some programs, progress reports themselves – must be entered into program/funder databases.	Who will do this? How long will it take per student?	Admin support assigned to enter data must have all reports by May 26.
Step 4 – Administrators need to approve and sign resubmitted reports	How long will that it take for the administrator to review and sign the resubmitted reports?	Administrators must receive resubmitted reports by May 23.
Step 3 – Teachers must make any changes to reports required by the administrator and resubmit the reports.	How long will this take?	Teachers need to get back any reports needing changes by May 20.
Step 2 – Administrator must review and sign each progress report.	How many students are there in the program? How long will it take for the administrator to review and sign all of the reports?	Teachers must submit students' progress reports to the administrator by May 11.
Step 1 – Teachers must gather and review portfolio contents and other assessment data, and complete progress reports.	How long do they need for this? <sup>19</sup>	Teachers begin reviewing portfolios and writing progress reports by May 4.

<sup>19</sup> The first few times reviewing each student's portfolio may be slow, especially if the teacher has not monitored progress regularly throughout the term. Using the progress report generator may also be slow at first. Teachers need to set a date to begin completing progress reports that reflects the time they may need and the date by which they need to submit their reports.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

All students must receive a progress report at the end of the term or course, except in the following situations:

- Students who transferred from another class in the program and who have been in the current class for 200 hours or less receive a progress report jointly prepared by the previous teacher and the new teacher.
- New students who have been in the program for 200 hours or less receive a report but their CLB levels will not be changed and comments will be limited.

Administrators sign each report, indicating that they concur with the information provided. Before signing a report, the administrator should ensure the following:

- The report has been completed according to guidelines.
- Attendance figures are accurate.
- CLB levels are appropriate: that is, the levels are not lower than entering levels unless explained and documented through the portfolio, and the levels are consistent with demonstrated performance.

## Monitoring PBLA Implementation:

PBLA is a required component of LINC and is included in the activities outlined in the program's contribution agreement. Administrators are therefore responsible to monitor PBLA implementation in the classroom to ensure that *all* teachers include PBLA sufficiently and appropriately in their instructional cycle.

## Feedback from Your Lead Teacher

Get regular updates on PBLA in the various classrooms from your Lead Teacher on PBLA implementation. Identify any teacher who may be having difficulty. Schedule a meeting with the teacher to explore the reasons for the difficulty. Work with the Lead Teacher and classroom teacher to develop a plan and schedule of action.

## Feedback from Classroom Teachers

Get feedback on a regular basis from staff, including support staff, on PBLA implementation comfort and level of confidence. Also get feedback from staff on your leadership.

## Walk Throughs

Conduct 'walk-throughs.' Typically, walk-throughs are used to engage an administrator and teachers in reflective practice. The classroom walk-through model consists of a series of frequent, unannounced classroom visits during which the observer looks for specific practices that have been discussed with the teacher beforehand. Walk-throughs are usually short: three to five minutes is typical. A walk-through is intended to be a non-threatening, purposeful observation that gives a quick snapshot of activity in the classroom. Feedback may or may not be given after each visit. However, periodically, the observer may follow up with a face-to-face question to prompt reflection. Questions may begin with "I noticed.... Why ...? How...? What could you do differently?"

Walk-throughs can easily be adapted for PBLA implementation. Before undertaking walk-throughs, tell teachers that you will be conducting informal walk-throughs to monitor and support PBLA implementation. Ask teachers what you can expect to see in the classroom as evidence of PBLA implementation and task-based teaching aligned to the CLB.

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Look Fors

Together, you and the teacher should develop a brief list of indicators that would be consistent with the practices being focused on. These indicators are often called “look fors.” The following is a list that an administrator might have created. Typically, the administrator will select just a couple of look fors so as to focus a particular classroom walk-through.

- Students seem engaged in their language-learning activities. Everybody seems to know what to do.
- The teacher is not doing all the talking.
- Teacher-talk is relevant, comprehensible, purposeful, and focused on learning.
- Students have their Language Companions with them.
- The teacher or students are using the Language Companions to support learning.
- There is evidence of a lesson plan and the agenda or learning intents for the day has been shared with students.
- There is evidence that students have information about the CLB and their language level.
- There is evidence of a focus on real-world language tasks and themes relevant to students’ needs and goals.
- Students can explain how and when they use their Language Companion.
- A sampling of several randomly selected portfolios contain the following:
  - A needs assessment and goal statement
  - An inventory for each skill section
  - Evidence of recently added artefacts to one or more skill area
  - Evidence of self-assessment and learning reflections
- The walls have interesting, relevant, and motivating information that reflects the CLB standard and shows evidence of current themes, language support, and skills.

## Follow-up

It is unnecessary to follow up after every visit unless you observe something that is of concern. If things seem on track, you may wait until 8 to 10 visits have occurred before offering feedback or engaging in dialogue about how things are going. Do NOT leave notes. A conversation about the teacher’s PBLA practices is preferable and more informative than the one-way communication of a note. Helpful questions to ask the teacher include the following:

- Continuous intake is a factor in this program. How are you introducing PBLA or the Language Companion to new students?
- You have a multilevel class. How are you managing assessment?
- What are you doing differently as a result of PBLA implementation?
- I noticed this student has not added anything to his portfolio since X. Is this typical of all the students? What could you do differently to ensure that students are engaged in PBLA and ongoing assessment for learning?
- What questions do you still have about PBLA?
- How could I support you in PBLA implementation?

# PBLA IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

## Support for Administrators

For an initiative such as the implementation of PBLA, administrators, too, need support. Being part of a community of practice reduces isolation, facilitates communication and resource sharing and provides a forum to address problems and strategize ways forward. Administrators are encouraged to find ways to stay connected and informed, such as:

- Join the PBLA Administrators group on Tutela.ca for updates, resource sharing, and problem-solving.
- Form an administrators group within your community to discuss emerging issues, and share information.
- Talk to TESL conference organizers about scheduling workshop sessions for administrators at conferences.
- Once you have some PBLA implementation experience under your belt, be available to mentor fellow administrators new to PBLA implementation.



# ADMINISTRATORS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q. I'm not an educator. Can I ask my Lead Teacher to monitor the teachers' implementation of PBLA?**

**A.** Although Lead Teachers make classroom visits to observe or help colleagues, they do not have supervisory authority. Their responsibility is to support teachers in implementing PBLA. The administrator's responsibility is to supervise and ensure PBLA implementation. Lead Teachers can support your role. For example, you can visit classes together and observe some PBLA activities or look at portfolios. Lead Teachers can give you regular updates on how things are going and report challenges that need your support, such as a need for certain resources or PD or resistant or struggling teachers. Together, you can strategize solutions.

**Q. What support is available for administrators? I feel isolated and would appreciate talking with colleagues who are also implementing PBLA.**

**A.** Isolation when implementing a new initiative can be a challenge. Talk with other administrators in your community or region whenever possible. In addition, Tutela.ca provides a forum for administrators to support each other, ask questions, discuss issues, and share strategies. See PBLA Administrators Group on Tutela.ca

**Q. Some of my teachers do not want their students to keep their portfolios with them. They are afraid students will lose them, and they want to keep student portfolios in the classroom. Is this okay?**

**A.** Explain to the teachers that the student portfolios are the property and responsibility of the students. They belong in the Language Companion and should be maintained there. The portfolio is not just a collection of assessment tasks for the teachers' review and evaluation; it is the basis for student self-assessment and ongoing monitoring of their learning. If they do not have their portfolios, they cannot take ownership for their learning. If the portfolio is lost late in the term, the teacher may not be able to evaluate progress and provide outcome benchmarks. Students need to know the consequences of losing a portfolio and take responsibility for its care.

**Q. In our program, each class is taught by three instructors: a core teacher (15 hrs), a conversation teacher (5 hrs), and a CALL teacher (5 hrs). It's a challenge to prepare progress reports with all three teachers having their input. Any suggestions?**

**A.** Sit down with the teachers and brainstorm some solutions that would get the job done but would not be taxing. Would it be helpful for the core teacher to prepare the report, except for the Listening and Speaking sections and the General Comments section (which might be used for CALL purposes)? Or would it be better for the conversation and CALL teachers to provide their input to the core teacher?

**Q. Some of my teachers are complaining that PBLA takes away from teaching. They say they spend all their time focusing on getting tasks into the portfolios. Any suggestions?**

**A.** There are several aspects to this problem. To begin, teachers have always been expected to assess their students' progress. Traditionally, this has occurred at the end of the term/semester. The teachers' complaint reflects the traditional viewpoint that teaching and assessment are separate endeavours. However, over the last several decades, there has been a shift in assessment practices worldwide as a result of extensive research showing that authentic assessment integrated throughout the instructional cycle raises standards and promotes learning. PBLA shifts assessment from the traditional end of term, where it has little benefit to students, and intersperses it

# ADMINISTRATORS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

throughout the instructional cycle so that students can receive immediate and ongoing feedback to enhance their language learning. PBLA benefits students and is good teaching practice.

As teachers adjust to PBLA, there is likely to be an initial learning curve and increased workload. This is typical of doing anything new – teaching a new CLB level, taking on an ESL Literacy class when your only experience is regular ESL, using a new resource, and so on. For some teachers – those who have not been using task-based instruction and assessment aligned to the CLB, for example – the shift to PBLA may be steeper as they catch up with current practice. (The CLB standard has been in place since 1996 and the LINC curriculum guidelines, which are task-based, since 2002.) However, teachers report that as they develop PBLA-related practices and materials that work for them, their planning time adjusts to its former level.

- Q. I have several teachers who are becoming stressed out over PBLA. They are excellent teachers, and I don't want them to burn out. How can I help them?**
- A.** Listen to their concerns, and ask them what you can do to help. Remind them that they do not need to be masters of PBLA from the outset. Encourage them to give themselves time to learn and adjust their practice. Their first year of PBLA implementation is substantially experimental: they are developing new skills as they try out different ideas and strategies. Suggest that they focus on one or two key aspects of PBLA initially and work with those until they develop some comfort and can add another piece. Also, if possible, suggest they collaborate with a partner working at the same or a similar level. Sharing ideas and problem-solving together often lessens the load and provides important support.

# GLOSSARY

This is a glossary of terms frequently used in discussions about PBLA, including discussions about ESL curriculum planning, teaching and learning English, and assessment.

Action-Oriented Feedback	Feedback that provides students with a way forward to close the gap between current and desired performance. Action-oriented feedback focuses on what students are doing that they should continue to do, what they need to do more of, what they might consider doing, and what they should stop doing.
Aesthetic Text	A spoken or written use of language that uses figurative, descriptive, or poetic language for playful or imaginative purposes
Analytic Criteria	Criteria related to appropriateness, sufficiency, and accuracy of specific factors related to communication, such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary
Assessment	The process of collecting information about student learning. Throughout the learning process, assessment is used to inform teaching and student learning. As a result of assessment, teachers can adjust their teaching. Students also benefit from assessment. They need to receive a considerable amount of descriptive feedback to enable them to continue or adjust what they are doing to be effective learners.
Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies	Five key strategies that are particularly effective in promoting learning in the classroom
Assessment Task	A task that is designed to assess learning, is aligned to specific CLB performance conditions and competencies, has predetermined criteria for success, and is administered under consistent, test-like conditions
Awareness-Raising activities	Learning activities intended to engage students in a topic, determine what they already know, and focus their attention on specific features of a task or text
CALL	(Computer Assisted Language Learning) Any process in which a learner uses a computer, i.e. computer, network, peripheral devices, PDAs, MP3 players, mobile phones, SMART Boards, etc. and, as a result, improves his or her language
Classroom-Based Assessment	Assessment in which teachers plan for and implement their own assessment instruments and procedures to monitor and evaluate student progress in their classrooms. Also referred to as “teacher-based assessment” or “authentic assessment.”

# GLOSSARY

Communication Event	A series of language tasks carried out to accomplish a particular social purpose: for example, getting a medical check-up comprises many tasks – locating a doctor’s phone number, calling to book the appointment, announcing one’s arrival, filling in a health history, and so on. Also called a “language event.”
Communicative Competence	The ability to communicate or understand messages effectively and appropriately in specific social situations.
Context	The social situation in which a message occurs, such as workplace, library, school medical clinic, or store. Each context has different expectations and conventions, which inform communication choices.
Criteria	Indicators of successful performance by which an assessment task will be judged. Also called “performance criteria.”
Criteria Checklist	A list of CLB-aligned criteria by which a task will be assessed
Criteria-Referenced Assessment	Assessment based on specified criteria
Curriculum	An outline of instructional goals, principles, standards, approach to instructional practice, needs assessment, learning objectives (intended outcomes), assessment tasks, learning activities, resources, and materials
Discourse	A piece of spoken language. Discourse may consist of one word (e.g., “Careful!”) or may be of considerable length. Also referred to as “text.”
ESL Literacy Learners	Adult immigrants who need to learn English, and are not functionally literate in their L <sub>1</sub> .
Expository Text	Spoken or written language whose intention is to set forth or explain
Evaluation	The process of reviewing collected evidence and making a judgment about whether students have learned what they need to learn and how well they have learned it. Evaluation is used to tell students how well they have performed as compared to a set of standards. Typically, evaluative feedback is encoded: that is, it is reported using numbers, letters, checkmarks, and so on.
Feedback	Information that results from formal or informal assessment and that is used by teachers and students to enhance teaching and learning
Formative Assessment	The ongoing collection of information and feedback about the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities in order to inform or modify instruction
Functional Knowledge	Knowledge of language functions or speech acts
Genre	A socially recognized, staged, goal-oriented way of using language: for example, a report, lecture, or letter. A genre typically has common features, text-structure, or moves.

Global Performance Descriptors	In <i>Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000</i> , a brief account of a student’s general language ability in ESL: that is, the typical characteristics of a student’s language at a particular level. In the revised CLB, these characteristics are described under the Profile of Ability, in the section ‘demonstrating these strengths and limitations’.
Goal Statement	A personal learning intent achievable within a specific time frame
Holistic Criteria	Criteria related to overall effectiveness of communication
Inter-rater reliability	The level of agreement attained between independent raters of student performance, often expressed as a percentage of agreement or as a correlation between the scores of two raters on the same group of students
Interlocutor	A person actively engaged in a conversation. Also called an “interactant.”
L <sub>1</sub>	A person’s first language or mother tongue
L <sub>2</sub>	A person’s second or additional language
Language Task	The communicative real-world use of language to accomplish a specific purpose (language function) in a specific social situation
Learning Activity	An activity designed by the teacher to raise awareness, build or practise skills, use skills to negotiate meaning in a simulation of a real-world task, or transfer skills and knowledge to a new situation. Also referred to as a “learning task.”
Learning Reflection	A metacognitive strategy employed by a student to monitor and reflect on the <i>process</i> of learning. It may include reflection on what was learned, what was easy or difficult, what helped learning, what hindered learning, or next steps.
Lesson Plan	A description or outline of the series of learning activities and procedures a teacher uses to achieve learning objectives. It often also identifies the materials and resources that will be used.
Linguistic Knowledge	Knowledge at the sentence level of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (including rhythm, stress, and intonation) or, in written text, graphology and orthography. Also known as “grammatical knowledge.”
Moderate (v.)	The process of ensuring consistency of assessment among teachers, aligned to a specific standard. Also referred to as “calibrate.”
Module Plan	A description or outline of the content, skills and strategies that will be the focus of instruction in a unit or series of lessons. Focuses on <i>what</i> will be taught.
Needs Assessment	An investigation to determine the needs, interests, learning styles, circumstances, and goals of the learner

# GLOSSARY

Norm-Referenced Assessment	An assessment designed to measure and compare individual students' performances or test results to those of an appropriate peer group (that is, a norm group) at the classroom, local, or national level. Students with the best performance on a given assessment receive the highest grades.
Outcome	The result of an intervention, program, or instruction
Outcome Assessment	Assessment of the results of instruction
Peer Assessment	Feedback on a task from a peer or classmate that is aligned to specific criteria
Performance Conditions	The specific conditions that establish the purpose of communication: setting/place, audience, topic, time constraints, length of task, supports allowed, and so on.
Performance Criteria	Indicators of successful performance by which an assessment task will be judged
Persuasive Text	Spoken or written language intended to persuade or convince
Placement Assessment	A low-stakes assessment to get a snapshot of a person's general language proficiency in order to place him or her in the appropriate language class
Portfolio	A collection of samples of tasks or products
Pragmatics	The ability to use appropriate language in a given communicative situation. It comprises functional, paralinguistic (gestures, eye contact, interpersonal space, etc.), and sociolinguistic knowledge.
Rating scale	A set of categories (e.g., Not at all, Somewhat, Often, Always) designed to elicit information about a quantitative or a qualitative attribute. In the social sciences, common examples are the Likert scale and the 1 to 10 scale, in which a person selects the number that is considered to reflect the perceived quality of something.
Realia	Refers to real materials: that is, materials not made specifically for ESL students, such as library card forms, prescription labels, school notices, hydro bills, flyers, catalogues, recipes, and traffic signs
Reliability	The degree to which an assessment yields consistent results
Register	A specific application of a genre: for example, a report is a genre; a weather report is a register
Rubric	A fixed scale with specific performance characteristics arranged in levels (0-3 correct, 4-7 correct, 8-11 correct, etc.) that describe each score in a range for a particular outcome
Scale	An assessment tool that involves marking on a continuum. Each of two end points is assigned a meaning, and performance is rated in relation to the extremes.

Self-Assessment	Checking one’s own performance: that is, what one can do and how well one’s abilities align with a specific standard or set of criteria
Skill-Building Activities	Learning activities focused on developing accuracy of form and use of a specific, discrete aspect of language use
Skill-Using Activities	Learning activities focused on developing fluency and negotiating meaning in simulated or actual real-world tasks
SMART Goals	Goals that are <b>s</b> pecific, <b>m</b> easurable, <b>a</b> chievable, <b>r</b> elevant and <b>t</b> ime-bound
Social Situation	The context in which communication occurs, such as workplace, library, medical clinic, or school. The expectations and conventions of a particular social situation inform communication choices.
Sociolinguistic Knowledge	Knowledge of the relationship between language use and society. It encompasses knowledge of how situational variables such as the relationship or status of speakers impacts communication. It includes pragmatic knowledge.
Speech Act	An utterance that serves a function in communication, such as an apology, a greeting, or a request. A speech act may be one word or may require a series of “moves,” or smaller units of discourse.
Standardized Test	A test that has been developed from tryouts and experiments to ensure that it is reliable and valid and that is administered under uniform procedures
Strategic Competence	The ability to use effective strategies to manage the selection, integration, and application of various aspects of language to understand or communicate a message in a specific context. It includes compensatory, repair, and enhancement strategies.
Summative Assessment	Information and feedback collected at the end of a learning unit or program to document progress and achievement of communicative proficiency
Task Analysis	The breakdown of a task into discrete steps and texts. Also referred to as a “communication event analysis.”
Task-Based Instruction	Instruction focused on the language tasks that students need to carry out in specific social situations or settings
Teacher-Based Assessment	Assessment in which teachers plan for and implement their own assessment instruments and procedures to monitor and evaluate student progress in their classrooms. Often called “classroom-based assessment” or “authentic assessment.”
Text	A piece of spoken or written language. A text may consist of one word (e.g., “DANGER!”) or may be of considerable length.
Text Analysis	A systematic breakdown of the various aspects of communicative competence in a written or oral text

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Text Type	The category to which a text belongs depending on its purpose: to inform, persuade, describe, and so on. Whole or parts of texts with specific features – such as patterns of language, structure, or vocabulary – that help to achieve the purpose may belong to the same text type.
Text Structure	The method used by the author or speaker to organize text, such as sequencing, compare and contrast, cause and effect, or problem and solution
Textual Knowledge	Knowledge of genre and text-type features, including coherence and cohesive devices for building longer or extended discourse or texts. Also known as “discourse knowledge.”
Traditional Assessment	The administration of exit or standardized tests developed by outside “experts” at the end of a term or course for evaluation purposes
Transfer	The carrying over of learned behaviour from one situation to another
Utterance	What is said by one person before or after another has spoken. An utterance may be one word, one sentence, or many sentences.
Validity	The adequacy of an assessment in measuring the curriculum and the objectives it represents
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	The probability that one will choose to initiate communication, given the opportunity to do so

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