



*Support Document*

**Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework**  
DETERMINING YOUR PROGRAM'S FOCUS

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*Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework* outlines a process for curriculum development in five stages:

- *Stage 1: Understand Needs*
- *Stage 2: Determine Focus*
- *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes*
- *Stage 4: Integrate Assessment*
- *Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability*

Each stage includes information, guiding questions and suggestions for instructors.

This **tool for determining focus** is designed for instructors, based on the principles outlined in *Stage 2: Determine Focus*.

The purpose of this tool is to help instructors:

- understand the focus of the program they work in
- establish a classroom focus, if they work in a less formalized program

This tool can be used:

- by individual instructors
- in a professional development or team-building setting to generate a focus for your program
- in a course guide or curriculum package, including the information relevant to your program

This tool includes two parts:

- inquiry templates for understanding the program's focus
- a guide to developing a classroom focus

## Understanding the Program's Focus: Inquiry Templates

Information about your program's focus can guide you in planning for instruction and supporting your learners. If you teach in a program that has a formalized curriculum it is helpful to develop your understanding of the following aspects of the program:

- the target audience
- expectations and levels in the program
- opportunities and supports available to learners

If your program is less formalized, it is still be possible to gather information about some of these aspects. In this case, your inquiry may be informal, and the information gathered over a longer period of time.

This information can be gathered from program administrators or other instructors. Use these templates to guide your inquiry and record the information you gather. This information can guide you in planning for instruction and supporting your learners. Be sure to re-visit the information periodically to update it or refresh your memory.

## Understanding the Program's Focus: Target Audience

<i>What is the target audience of the program?</i>	
<i>What is unique about this group of learners?</i>	
<i>What strengths do these learners bring?</i>	
<i>What needs do these learners have?</i>	
<i>What barriers do these learners face?</i>	

Understanding the Program's Focus: Program Levels and Expectations

<p><i>Does the program have a purpose or mission statement? What is it?</i></p>	
<p><i>What is the program preparing learners for?</i></p>	
<p><i>What are the entry and exit requirements?</i></p>	
<p><i>Are there transition points within the program? What are they?</i></p>	
<p><i>What are the learning outcomes for the level I teach?</i></p>	
<p><i>What are the learning outcomes for the levels before and after mine?</i></p>	

**Understanding the Program's Focus: Opportunities and Supports**

<p><i>What supports are available to learners within our program? (e.g. tutoring, emergency funds)</i></p> <p><i>How do learners access these?</i></p> <p><i>How can I connect learners to these supports?</i></p>	
<p><i>What opportunities are available to learners in our program? (e.g. social events, relevant workshops)</i></p>	
<p><i>What supports are available to learners within our institution? (e.g. counseling, employment placement)</i></p> <p><i>How do learners access these?</i></p> <p><i>How can I connect learners to these supports?</i></p>	
<p><i>What opportunities are available to learners in our institution? (e.g. volunteering, clubs )</i></p>	
<p><i>What supports are available to learners within our community? (e.g. low-income transit pass, subsidized daycare)</i></p> <p><i>How do learners access these?</i></p> <p><i>How can I connect learners to these supports?</i></p>	
<p><i>What opportunities are available to learners in our community? (e.g. festivals, employment opportunities)</i></p>	

## Developing a Classroom Focus: Process Guide

Programs differ in the emphasis they place on developing goals, purpose and approach. In a less formalized program, you may need to develop these for your own class. Establishing a purpose, goals and approach helps you to plan and teach more intentionally.

This section includes a template to guide you in establishing a classroom purpose, goals and approach. The following resources in *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework* can assist you as you complete the template and formulate your classroom focus:

- *Stage 1: Understand Needs* provides suggestions for conducting classroom needs assessments. An understanding of learners' needs informs the **purpose** and **goals** you set.
- *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes* provides learning outcomes and proficiency descriptors from Foundation through Phase III. These will help you develop a realistic understanding of the steps involved in achieving learning outcomes and inform the outcomes you choose in the section on **goals**.
- *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes* provides key text types. These outline the kinds of texts that learners will face in community orientation, family, employment and educational preparation ESL Literacy context. Key text types can inform how you complete the sections on **purpose** and **goals**.
- *Stage 1: Understand Needs* provides guiding principles for ESL Literacy instruction. These will help you develop your understanding of effective instruction in ESL Literacy and help you complete the section on **approach**.

For many instructors, determining classroom goals is an organic and ongoing process, which involves responding to learners' needs as they emerge. Keep in mind that it will be necessary to limit the number of goals you will focus on with the whole group (e.g. accessing medical services or supporting children at school). It is important to be realistic in what you hope to achieve. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to address all the needs of every learner. It is more effective to narrow the focus and build fewer skills to a higher level, with an emphasis on how learners can transfer and use the skills.

Use this template to guide you in formulating a focus for your classroom.

	Guiding questions	My classroom focus
<b>Purpose</b>	<p><b>Why</b> does the class exist?</p> <p>What am I helping to prepare learners for?</p>	
<b>Goals</b>	<p><b>What</b> are the goals of the class?</p> <p>What skills will learners need to succeed in the context I am preparing them for?</p> <p>Which learning outcomes relate to these goals?</p>	
<b>Approach</b>	<p><b>How</b> am I going to achieve the goals and purpose?</p> <p>What do I know and believe about effective teaching and learning in ESL Literacy?</p>	

## Involving Learners in Establishing the Class Purpose and Goals

Involving learners in determining purpose, goals and approach for a class can increase learners' motivation and their chances for success. When involving learners in this process, be sure to help learners gain realistic expectations of what can be accomplished. Use level-appropriate language and provide visual supports.

This process is informed by your classroom needs assessment (see *Stage 1: Understand Needs*). When determining a purpose and goals with your class, tie these to the needs you have identified in a classroom needs assessment.

Depending on the level of your learners and your program parameters, you may be able to establish a purpose and goals collectively by brainstorming and prioritizing. It is possible to use a process approach to involving learners in setting a purpose and goals for your class.

### *A process approach*

Use the information gathered in your classroom needs assessment (see *Stage 1: Understand Needs in Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*) and identify several general areas of need that learners share, such as accessing employment or housing.

- Discuss the general topics with the learners, using level-appropriate language and visual supports as necessary. Write each of the topics (with pictures, if needed) at the top of a piece of paper and post these around the room.
- Ask the learners which things they want to learn about or get better at. Give each learner a limited number of stickers (e.g. three) and invite them to place their stickers on the topics they want to focus on. Ensure that learners understand they can only place one sticker on a page.
- Review the results. If you do this as a class, place the posters with the most numbers of stickers on the board at the front of the room. Review with learners which topics/skills are the priority for your class. Consider keeping these posters up in the room as a reminder to learners about what you're focusing on. If you choose to review the results after the class and determine priorities by yourself, ensure that you communicate with the learners about which topics and skills will be emphasized in the class.

## *Guidelines for incorporating the purpose and goals*

Follow these guidelines to help ensure that the purpose and goals are integrated effectively in your class:

- refer to the purpose and goals to guide your unit and lesson planning
- communicate with learners (appropriately for their level) about the purpose and goals to ensure that you demonstrate accountability
- make a point of emphasizing and making connections between what you're working on in class and how they can use it/how it addresses their goals
- help individual learners who have barriers as much as possible by connecting them with services, supports and opportunities

## **Involving Learners in Establishing the Class Approach**

As the instructor, you have expertise in effective methodology for ESL literacy instruction. You can determine the approach you'd like to take with your learners, given your program parameters. However, it can be beneficial to involve learners in this process as well.

This section provides information on two aspects of involving learners in determining approach:

- setting classroom standards
- eliciting feedback

### *Setting classroom standards*

You can involve learners in determining the classroom approach by setting classroom standards as a group. One approach to doing this is to create posters about the characteristics of good learners, teachers and classrooms. This activity can be a springboard for clarifying roles and expectations. This section outlines three modifications of the poster activity, at Phases I, II and III.

#### *Phase I poster activity*

Have the learners work in small groups. Provide 3 large pieces of poster paper for each group. Label each paper with the word and provide two columns with indicators for positive and negative (e.g. happy/sad face or "✓" and "x" marks).

Classroom		Learner		Teacher	
😊	😐	😊	😐	😊	😐

Provide the small groups with pictures or photographs illustrating positive and negative characteristics/behaviours for each.

Classroom pictures might include: clean/dirty, light/dark, spacious/ crowded, tidy/messy, etc.

Learner pictures might include: working with others, raising hand to ask questions, bringing pencil/book to class, talking on cell phone, sleeping, etc.

Teacher pictures might include: helping a student, pleasant/unpleasant expressions, organized/disorganized, etc.

In groups, learners can sort the pictures into positive (good) and negative (bad) pictures and glue them into the correct column. To simplify this activity, have each group do one poster at a time. As a variation, arrange the class into three groups, have each group work on one poster and then share with the class.

Use this activity to generate discussion about the behaviours that contribute to a positive learning environment. If possible, keep the posters up around the room, revisiting them throughout the term.

### *Phase II poster activity*

At this level, the Phase I activity can be modified to be more level-appropriate. Have the learners work in small groups and use poster paper with words in the headings rather than symbols or pictures. Provide or generate as a class a bank of words describing positive and negative characteristics. Provide pictures (as described in the Phase I suggestion) and have learners categorize them and glue them in the correct column. The learners can then write the appropriate words beside the pictures.

Review the posters as a class and discuss the behaviours that contribute to effective learning. If possible, keep the posters up and revisit them throughout the term as a reminder of classroom expectations.

### *Phase III poster activity*

In Phase III, learners will need less support to create their posters. Provide the headings on the board to begin and begin with an initial brainstorm of content. After this, learners can work together in groups to fill in the categories. Encourage learners to help one another with word choice and spelling.

Have each group present at least one of their posters to the whole class. Encourage them to notice whether there are differing opinions. As a class, use the posters to establish which behaviours you can all agree on. Then, create a class contract based on this and have learners sign it and keep it in their learning portfolio. Alternatively, you could post a copy of the signed contract in your classroom. Make a point of revisiting the contract during the term as a reminder or to determine whether anything needs to be added or revised. Keep in mind that the purpose of this activity is to involve learners in determining and understanding the approach for the class time together.

### *Eliciting feedback*

(This information has been adapted from Stage 5: Demonstrate Accountability in *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*)

Effective instructors reflect on their teaching practices and seek to improve on an ongoing basis. Gathering information from learners about their learning preferences and experiences can provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of your instruction.

If learners have some previous experience in your program or another institution you can gather information about what has helped them learn in the past. In this case, you can collect input on approach at the beginning of the semester. Another option is to gather information from learners later (e.g. at mid-term) about which types of activities and approaches helped them learn best in your class.

The concept of providing feedback to one's instructor may cause confusion and discomfort for some learners, depending on factors such as cultural background, prior educational experiences and beliefs about learner and teacher roles. Make every effort to increase learners' comfort levels with this process by building it in as a regular part of instruction. The process of reflecting on instruction also benefits learners by increasing their awareness of their own learning processes.

Build learners' familiarity with the process of providing feedback by integrating it as a regular part of class time.

- Gather feedback **daily or weekly**. When concluding a lesson, ask learners to provide feedback on aspects of the lesson that were helpful. This also helps learners reflect on their learning and review what they have learned, which is an important learning strategy. This feedback can inform the tasks, materials and pacing of subsequent lessons.
- Gather feedback **at the end of thematic units**. Based on feedback from learners, you can adjust the design of your next thematic unit (e.g. length of unit, tasks, materials, number of outcomes, etc.).
- Gather feedback **at midterm and end-of-term**. This feedback can focus on the semester as a whole, in order to identify areas to focus on for the remainder of the semester, and guide your instruction with future groups of learners. It is often helpful to convey mid and end-of-term feedback to program administrators, as it can influence future programming decisions.

Learners usually require pre-teaching and scaffolding in order to provide feedback to instructors. You will need to adapt methods and provide supports (e.g. photographs, word banks) as necessary to suit learners' language/literacy levels. The following methods are suggested for gathering feedback from learners in ESL literacy programs.

- Use realia, photographs and illustrations to help learners identify the skill areas they want to continue developing.
- Use open ended statements. For example: *I learn best when we practice \_\_\_\_\_. I need to do more \_\_\_\_\_, etc.* Learners can finish these orally or complete written sentences with support provided in the form of word banks or scribes.
- Use opinion continuums and rating scales. Have learners move around the room to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with statements about the lesson, theme or semester. For example: *Working with my table group helps me learn. I like practicing spelling every day. Writing in my journal helps me learn. I learn when we take class trips.* This can also be accomplished in written form, by expressing an opinion on a rating scale. Support learners in this task by reviewing each statement orally first and then having learners mark their opinion on the rating scales. Another approach is to provide learners with a slip of paper with a rating scale and read a statement orally, which they then respond to on the slip of paper. This can be done daily as a way of gathering feedback on the effectiveness of the lesson.