Adoption of Open Educational Resources by ELL Faculty

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Executive Summary

Overview

The goal of this project was to adopt and increase institutional awareness of open educational resources (OER) at Bow Valley College. The project investigated the advantages and challenges of incorporating OER in post-secondary English language learning (ELL) courses.

This project adopted the OER *In the Workplace: An Intermediate Integrated Skills Textbook* (referred to as *In the Workplace* throughout this report) and was funded by [Alberta Open Educational Resources (ABOER)](). The content of the resource was designed to support learners at Canadian Language Benchmark 5 and 6. The OER aims to build both language and intercultural competence. It was adopted by seven part-time language skills classes at Bow Valley College.

The key knowledge transfer objective of the project was to produce a set of recommendations for the successful adoption of OER by ELL instructors in post-secondary contexts. A secondary focus was to collect feedback on the specific resource from learners and instructors.

Key Recommendations

English language instructors in post-secondary settings often search for relevant learning materials to support their teaching and adapt those materials to meet the language levels of their learners.

The largely qualitative findings of this project suggest the following recommendations for the successful adoption of ELL OER in post-secondary settings:

- foster a community of sharing
- allow time for instructors to adapt ELL OER for their cohorts
- select relevant and targeted OER for adoption
- provide training on licensing and usage of OER

Key Findings

This project demonstrated that English language teaching and learning is enhanced by quality, tailored OER that are accessible to learners and instructors alike. The project underscores the demand for relevant thematic ELL OER, identifies a culture of sharing within the ELL post-secondary teaching and learning community, and identifies a willingness of ELL instructors to adapt resources to meet the language needs of their learners.

Ninety-one of a possible 115 (79%) learners completed a feedback survey. Of the learner respondents:

- 91% stated that the resource improved their English language skills.

- 91% stated that they will use the resource again in the future.

- 73% have already recommended the resource to at least one English language learner.

All six (100%) of participating instructors completed the end of project survey. Of the participating instructors:

- 100% stated that the OER supported their teaching practice.

- 100% plan to adopt the resource into their teaching practice.

- 100% identified an increase in their knowledge about OER over the course of the pilot.

- 83% intend to adapt content from the resource for use in their teaching practice.

- 83% shared the resource with other ELL instructors.

The findings from the project demonstrate that the OER was successfully adopted and that awareness of the resource was increased at the institution and beyond.

Post-Project Developments

Sections of the resource are currently being integrated with at least two online language learning courses in development at Bow Valley College. BVC ELL instructors in regional classrooms, with limited resource libraries, are also beginning to use the resource with their learners.

Introduction

About this Project

The goal of this project was to adopt and increase institutional awareness of open educational resources (OER) at Bow Valley College. This project investigated the advantages and challenges of incorporating OER in post-secondary English language learning (ELL) courses. The key knowledge transfer objective of the project was to produce a set of recommendations for the successful adoption of OER by ELL instructors in post-secondary contexts. A secondary focus was to collect feedback on the resource from learners and instructors.

The project aimed to understand how OER are used by ELL instructors and the benefits of OER as perceived by ELL instructors and English language learners alike. This project adopted the OER *In the Workplace: An Intermediate Integrated Skills Textbook* (referred to as *In the Workplace* throughout this report). The content of the resource was designed to support learners at Canadian Language Benchmark 5 and 6. The OER aims to build both language and intercultural competence. It was adopted by seven part-time language skills classes at Bow Valley College.

This project was funded by Alberta Open Educational Resources (ABOER) through their OER Adoption in ESL project. The objective of the ABOER Initiative Adoption Pilot is to:

- Replace paid resources resulting in cost-savings to students.

- Adopt and implement OERs in a course.

- Expose faculty and leadership to the benefits of OERs.

- Leverage and increase awareness of existing institutional knowledge of OERs.

- Collect Alberta specific data around the adoption of OERs in post-secondary education.

- Obtain feedback on the challenges and barriers to OER adoption. (ABOER, n.d.)

ABOER uses the OER Commons definition:

> *Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use and reuse at no cost. Unlike fixed, copyrighted resources, OER have been authored or created by an individual or organization that chooses to retain few, if any, ownership rights. In some cases, that means you can download a resource and share it with colleagues and students. In other cases, you may be able to download a resource, edit it in some way, and then re-post it as a remixed work. (ABOER, n.d.)*

Participant Description

Six ELL instructors at Bow Valley College, teaching a total of seven part-time classes at the downtown Calgary campus and in the region, volunteered to be a part of the project. One of the faculty members was also the primary researcher. One hundred fifteen learners, with a range of Canadian Language Benchmarks levels, participated in the project.

Two of the instructors were aware of the OER prior to the orientation session. All participant

instructors were able to contact the primary researcher with questions about the resource or its use throughout the project.

Data Collection

Anonymous instructor and learner data was collected via electronic surveys at various stages of the project. Learner participation in the surveys was voluntary, but participating instructors were remunerated for completion of electronic surveys to share feedback on the resource and detail how they used the resource in their practice.

All six (100%) participant instructors completed electronic surveys prior to the start of the project. Five instructors completed surveys at midpoint (one instructor's session had not started at this time) and all instructors completed surveys at the end of the project.

Learners in the six classes that were in session at midpoint were also invited to complete surveys at this time.

Some findings from both the instructor and learner midpoint surveys were shared at the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) conference in October 2016.

At the end of the project learners in all seven classes and the participating instructors were invited to complete surveys. One hundred percent (6/6) of participating instructors and 79% (91/115) of participating learners completed surveys. The findings from the end of project surveys that are shared in this report reflect this number of participants.

Report Structure

This report presents the project findings in two sections: Feedback and Recommendations.

In the end of project surveys, learners and instructors were asked to comment about the experience of using the book. Impacts of the resource and ways in which teaching and learning were enhanced by use of the resource in the classroom have been included in this report.

Collecting feedback on the resource from learners and instructors was a secondary focus of the project; however, some of this feedback has been included first in this report to provide context for the project and for the recommendations that follow.

I Feedback on *In the Workplace: An Intermediate Integrated Skills Textbook*

The workplace-themed OER adopted in this project was specifically designed for English language learners and instructors working at CLB 5 and 6. The OER can be used online with interactive activities or be downloaded and printed to use as a regular textbook.

Developing Canadian workplace knowledge is an important element of settlement and so it was assumed that this relevant and targeted resource, which integrates language learning with Essential Skills and intercultural communicative competence, would be well-received by participating learners and instructors. The project findings proved this to be the case.

Learner Feedback
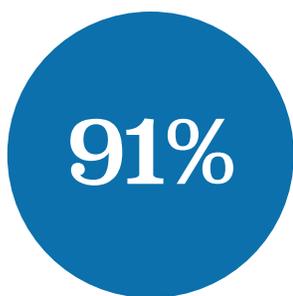
91% *of learner respondents reported that the resource helped improve their English language skills*

The learner response rate to the final electronic survey was high (79%), with 91 of a possible 115 learners completing a survey at the end of the project.

When asked how useful the resource was in their everyday lives, 98% of respondents rated the resource as useful to varying degrees. Twenty-one percent of respondents stated the resource was a little useful; 40% stated it was useful; 30% of respondents stated it was very useful, and 8% stated the resource was extremely useful.

Impacts

- 91% of learner respondents stated that the resource helped improve their English language skills.

- 91% of learner respondents stated that they will use the resource again in the future.

- 73% of respondents have already recommended the resource to at least one other English language learner. Of the 51% of respondents who provided an exact or estimated number of recommendations, a minimum of 109 personal recommendations of the resource were made by learners.

Enhancements to Learning

In addition to stating if and how the resource improved their English language skills, learners were also asked questions about specific features of the resource and asked to select the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. In each instance, a minimum of 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed:

- that the audio and video resources were helpful

- that the resource helped them to develop their understanding of Canadian culture and Canadian workplace culture

- that the information provided by the Strategy Coach and Workplace Mentor was useful

Instructor Feedback
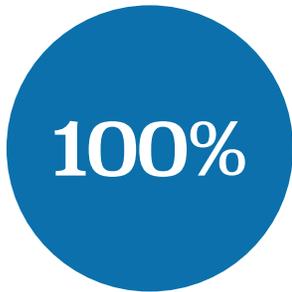
100% *of instructors plan to adopt the resource into their teaching practice*

Six instructors teaching seven part-time classes in Calgary and the region participated in the project. All six instructors (100%) completed an end of project electronic survey to provide feedback on the resource.

Impacts

- Instructors reported that they used the resource either frequently (83%) or constantly (17%).

- Following the project, 100% of participating instructors:

  - stated that the OER supported their teaching practice

  - plan to adopt the resource into their teaching practice

  - identified an increase in their knowledge about OER over the course of the project

- 83% of participating instructors have recommended the resource to other English language practitioners.

- 83% plan to adapt content from the resource for use in their teaching practice.

Enhancements to Teaching Practice

In the end of project survey, instructors were asked to explain the benefits of using *In the Workplace* to support their teaching practice. In their responses to the question, 50% of instructors stated that using the OER saved them time.

The participating instructors were also asked to detail the ways in which they used the resource in their teaching and their responses revealed that 50% percent of the instructors used *In the Workplace* as a core resource. One instructor wrote:

> *Initially the resource supplemented what I was doing in the classroom … As time went on we spent more time using In the Workplace and my original lessons became supplementary.*

II   Recommendations for Successful Adoption of OER by ELL Instructors in Post-Secondary Contexts

The OER *In the Workplace* was successfully adopted by the six participating instructors in this project. The recommendations that follow are based on instructor responses to a variety of closed and open-ended questions in the pre-project survey and the end of project survey.

This section of the report aims to recommend ways in which post-secondary ELL providers can create environments that are conducive to ELL OER adoption by instructors.

1. Foster a Community of Sharing

> *"I presented the resource to the entire group of co-workers (approx. 25)."*
>
> - Instructor

The findings from the pre-project and end of project surveys revealed that the majority of participating instructors were part of a community where colleagues willingly share materials and resources. As such, the instructors raised awareness of the OER *In the Workplace*. The collaborative nature of the instructors as individuals and the collaborative nature of their instructional communities saw the resource shared with colleagues at Bow Valley College and elsewhere.

The project revealed that in collaborative teaching and learning communities, ELL instructors willingly share resources with one another either informally or through more formal professional development. This sharing culture should be fostered by post-secondary institutions for successful ELL OER adoption by faculty. Instructors could mentor each other informally in order to support adaption and not just adoption of OER.

Pre-Project Findings

In the pre-project survey, 83% of the instructors reported that they share resources that they have adapted for their classrooms with their colleagues and other instructors. The majority of respondents stated that they share resources with instructors teaching in the same level or program. Sharing happens both informally and formally within the teaching community.

Post-Project Findings
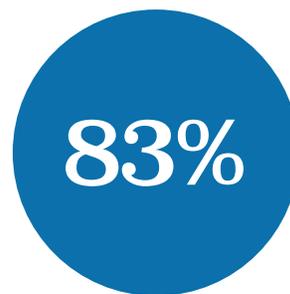
83% of instructors shared *In the Workplace* with other ELL instructors.

The collaborative nature of the community was again reflected in the results from the end of project survey, when 83% of participating instructors reported that they had shared the resource with other ELL instructors.

A minimum of two recommendations of the resource were made by five of the instructors. One participant instructor shared the OER with five ELL instructors and another with six. In addition to the instructor who presented to a group of approximately 25 co-workers, two instructors also shared the resource with former colleagues at other institutions.

Fifty percent of the instructors shared both the online and paper-based versions of the OER with colleagues.

2. Select Relevant and Targeted OER for Adoption

> *"It's never easy to find authentic and topic relevant audio and video materials. This resource helped me to not only save my time, but also demonstrate high quality learning content to the learners."*
>
> *- Instructor*

The project revealed that there is a demand for relevant thematic ELL OER, as ELL instructors in post-secondary institutions are either frequently or constantly searching for materials to support the skills that they are trying to teach in their classrooms. ELL OER that are level appropriate and targeted for specific audiences, e.g. LINC learners, can be successfully adopted by post-secondary ELL instructors.

Pre-Project Findings

In the pre-project survey, the participating instructors reported that they search for materials for use in their classrooms either frequently (50%) or constantly (50%). Instructors were also asked about the expected benefits in using an ELL OER to support their teaching practice. In their responses, 50% of instructors expected an ELL OER to foster independent work by learners.

One hundred percent of the instructors expected that an ELL OER would support their teaching practice.

Post-Project Findings
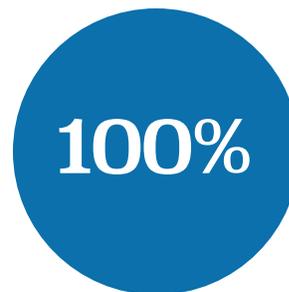
100% *of instructors stated that In the Workplace supported their teaching practice.*

At the end of the project, the instructors were asked how *In the Workplace* supported their teaching practice. In their anecdotal feedback, instructors indicated that the resource covered CLB requirements; gave structure and continuity; created connections and unity between other elements of curriculum; provided concept practice in a relevant context; and respected diverse ways of learning. They also wrote:

> *It saved me stress, knowing that these were activities designed for learners just like mine. It helped me evaluate other resources that I looked at and was considering using.*

Learners were very enthusiastic about the realism of the examples, and how they connected to their own experience. This helped me to find tasks that helped their lives as well as meeting course objectives.

The end of project survey also included this question, "If we were to actively promote this resource with other practitioners and institutions, what important information should they know?" In their responses, 33% of instructors stated that knowing who created the resource was important and the same number referenced the permissions of the license. Thirty-three percent of instructors also stated that identifying the content level was important.

In the responses to this question, and other open ended questions in the survey, respondents commented about the usability of the different formats of this particular OER.

When asked to share what they liked about the resource, 65% of learner respondents provided unique answers. In addition to comments that mentioned the relevance of workplace content or referred to the resource as useful, additional themes in the responses included, but were not limited to the vocabulary and the organization of the resource.

3. Provide Training on Licensing and Usage of OER

Through participation in the project, all of the instructors developed their OER knowledge. Takeaways from the anecdotal feedback suggest that ELL instructors have a learning curve in terms of knowledge of OER licensing and usage, but this doesn't impede adoption of resources. Therefore, knowledge sharing and training could positively impact perceptions or misconceptions that post-secondary ELL instructors may hold about OER.

Pre-Project Findings

"By the end of this project I can understand better the most important features and advantages of using OERs. Some of them are: expanded access to learning...scalability...quick circulation...less expense for learners...continually improved resources."

- Instructor

In the pre-project survey, the participating instructors rated their own knowledge of what OER are as either, 'no knowledge' (33%) or 'a little knowledge' (67%). Instructors also rated their knowledge of how OER can be used and adapted as, 'no knowledge' (50%) or 'a little knowledge' (50%). Fifty percent of the participant instructors also reported that they had not previously used an ELL-specific OER in their teaching practice.

In the same survey, instructors were asked what they perceived the disadvantages to adapting OER could be. Their responses were varied and included:

> *The value of adapting and sharing has not been understood by everyone. Some stakeholders may inadvertently stifle innovation by resisting sharing and adaptation in the name of developing 'intellectual property'.*

> *Too much adaption could change the focus.*

Post-Project Findings
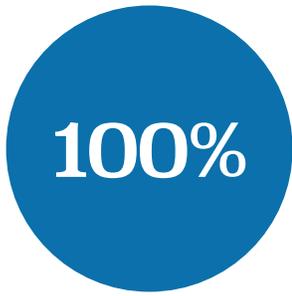
100% of instructors identified an increase in their knowledge about OER.

When they answered questions at the end of the project, the instructors rated their knowledge of what OER are as, 'some knowledge' (50%) or, 'working knowledge' (50%) – a notable shift from their responses in the pre-project survey. Instructors were also asked how they rated their knowledge of how OER can be used. Instructors rated their knowledge of how OER can be used as, 'some knowledge' (50%) or 'working knowledge' (50%).

One hundred percent of instructors reported that they were more aware of OER now than at the beginning of the project. When asked to expand, comments included:

> *One of my goals now is to explore more open educational resources.*

> *I've found myself thinking more about what 'open' actually means.*

4. Allow Time for Instructors to Adapt ELL OER for their Cohorts

"The more people sharing ideas about how to adapt OER material for learners, the more quality material there will be to adapt."

- Instructor

The findings from the pre-project survey revealed that one of the primary concerns of post-secondary ELL instructors with regards to adapting OER is the time it will take to do so, even though all of the instructors reported that they adapt resources for use in their ELL classrooms. Of additional concern with the OER *In the Workplace* were technical and digital literacy requirements. However, the findings from the end of project survey revealed that in spite of these concerns prior to the start of the project, 83% of instructors adapted content for their learners.

ELL-specific OER like *In the Workplace* lend themselves to meaningful and successful adaptation as evidenced in Enhancements to Learning and Teaching Practice outlined earlier in this report and the findings from the end of project survey. By creating the time for instructors to adapt ELL OER, one of the major potential stumbling blocks to adaption is removed.

Pre-Project Findings

In the pre-project survey, all of the instructors reported that they adapt resources for use in their ELL classrooms to varying degrees: occasionally (17%); frequently (50%) and constantly (33%).

Additionally, instructors were asked what they expected some of the challenges would be in using an ELL OER to support their teaching practice. There were two principal concerns: 50% of instructors identified time as being a potential challenge and 67% of instructors listed technical or technological issues as potentially presenting challenges. Their responses included:

> *I believe it will be a learning curve for both my learners and myself.*

One of the biggest challenges to using online resources is navigating the particularities of local IT configurations.

familiar with the different formats of the resource, as well as the digital literacy levels of learners. One instructor struggled to get a feeling of continuity with the resource with a part-time teaching schedule.

Post-Project Findings
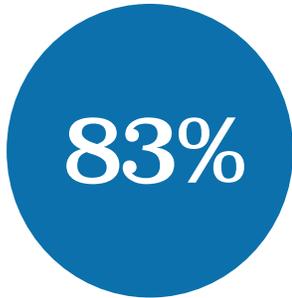
83% *of instructors adapted the resource for their learners.*

Even though the focus of the project was adoption, 83% of the instructors adapted the resource for their learners, regardless of having 'no' or 'little' knowledge about what OER are or how they could be used and adapted at the beginning of the project.

At the end of the project, instructors were asked to share the advantages of adapting content from the resource. They wrote:

> *It more directly reflected the learners' needs.*

> *I could keep the higher level learners challenged and engaged as well as change up activities so that they could be completed by partners or in small groups to foster brainstorming and collaboration.*

Instructors were also asked to detail the disadvantages of adapting content. No disadvantages were stated, though one instructor commented that, "it's just a matter of time." The comment was not further explained.

In the same survey, instructors were also asked what the challenges were of using *In the Workplace* to support their teaching practice. The comments included the time to become

Conclusion

This project successfully increased institutional awareness of the OER *In the Workplace* at Bow Valley College and all participant instructors plan to adopt the resource into their teaching practice going forward. The project enhanced the teaching and learning of pilot participants and the reach of the project was extended as the OER was shared by instructors and learners with others beyond the scope of the project.

This project demonstrated a demand for the development of ELL-specific OER for use in post-secondary contexts, as 100% of the participating instructors said that the development of similar OER would be beneficial and 91% of learners stated they would like to use more resources like this in the future. There was an assumption that the participating instructors and learners would be receptive to the resource as it was specifically developed for their cohorts and this was validated by the high survey participation rate of learners, adaption of *In the Workplace* by instructors, and use of the OER as a core resource.

A further benefit of the project was the effect of increasing instructor knowledge about what OER are and how they can be used and adapted. The project demonstrated that there is an openness towards ELL OER and adaption of ELL OER within the ELL teaching and learning community, even though ELL instructors may not have used ELL OER previously, or have working or comprehensive knowledge about associated licenses and adaptation and use.

References

Alberta OER. (n.d.) *About.* Retrieved from http://albertaoer.com/about-us

Alberta OER. (n.d.) *ABOER Champions' Toolkit v1.2.* Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FytdhaXwvGVHKv2ZB4HtphTNYCPsfl8m68Q_xw3CdQ/edit

Appendix A: About *In the Workplace: An Intermediate Integrated Skills Textbook*

With funding from Alberta Open Educational Resources, Bow Valley College and NorQuest College collaborated to create Open Educational Resources (OER) in the form of e-textbooks. This partnership project produced two e-textbooks intended for immigrant adult learners who require English language programming.

These e-textbooks support language development within thematic topics relevant to economic and social integration needs of immigrants in Alberta. The e-textbooks target learners at Canadian Language Benchmark 5 and 6, incorporating four language skills, reading/writing and listening/speaking. These e-textbooks integrate language learning with Essential Skills and intercultural communicative competence. An instructor's guide is included as an e-textbook companion resource.

In the Workplace: An Intermediate Integrated Skills Textbook and the accompanying Instructor Guide, can be accessed at centre.bowvalleycollege.ca/ITW