McGill

Faculty of Arts

Training and Retention of Health Professionals Project

LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM – OVERALL PROFILE 2009-2013

http://www.mcgill.ca/hssaccess/trhpp/m1program

Discussion Guide

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This paper is meant to stimulate thought and discussion after reading the document *Language Training Program – Overall Profile 2009-2013.* It covers the first four sections of the document.

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SECTION 1: REGIONAL PLANNING OF LANGUAGE TRAINING ANALYSIS AND ISSUES

This section relates to information presented in Section 1 of the document *Language Training Program – Overall Profile 2009-2013*.

1.1   ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES COURSE ENROLMENT

OBSERVATION

The data shows that the health and social services agencies projected 8 877 enrolments in English for professional purposes courses for the period 2009 to 2013. Actual enrolments totaled 6 224, resulting in an overall implementation rate of 70%. From a regional perspective, the implementation rates ranged from 28% in some regions to 114% in others.

REFLECTION

What explains regional differences in the achievement of enrolment projections?

From a needs perspective:

- Are appropriate methods used to evaluate training needs?

- Are the needs continually changing?

From the perspective of language courses for professional purposes:

- Do the course formats and methods chosen meet the needs of adult learners?

- Is the training responsive to the learners' professional needs?

- Are the planning challenges related to working conditions specific to the health and social services sector (e.g. shift or weekend work)?

- Would the availability of online English for professional purposes courses make it easier for health and social services personnel to participate in training?

From a budgetary perspective:

- Does regional planning take its lead from the regional funding allocation instead of regional language training needs?

- Does the methodology for determining regional allocation of the funding envelope need reworking?

1.2 FRENCH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES COURSE ENROLMENT

OBSERVATION

The data shows that 7 regions planned to offer French for professional courses for which they projected a total of 146 enrolments. Five of the 7 regions actually offered courses for a total of 91 enrolments (62%). One other region that had not planned to offer any French from professional purposes courses did indeed offer some for a total of 72 enrolments.

REFLECTION

- What explains the difference between enrolment projections and few or no actual enrolments?

- Does the limited achievement of projected enrolments reflect the actual needs for French courses?

- Is there a problem providing French training for professional purposes that meets language needs of personnel in terms of numbers, linguistic competency levels and access to the courses?

- Would online training more effectively meet the needs of these professionals?

SECTION 2: TRAINING DELIVERY
ANALYSIS AND ISSUES

This section relates to information presented in Section 2 of the document *Language Training Program – Overall Profile 2009-2013.*

2.1 LEARNER PLACEMENT

OBSERVATION

The information presented in Table 2.2 concerning placement test modalities and methodologies denotes regional variations. The McGill Project obtained additional learner placement information through a process begun in 2010-2011 aimed at developing linguistic competency profiles for nursing personnel training in English as a professional language. First, the McGill Project asked 28 of its partner training organizations to share in gathering information on the linguistic competency assessment scales used to place training candidates into uniform groups. Nine organizations answered the survey four of which supplied the assessment scale they use to place candidates. This survey confirmed the lack of a standardized placement process in the regions.

REFLECTION

Developing linguistic competency profiles is essential for devising a standardized strategic approach to needs assessment and competency development. To successfully implement this targeted approach, the following steps must be taken.

Concerning linguistic competency assessment:

- develop a suitable scale for standardized evaluation of linguistic competencies in English as a professional language for each provider category when these providers have to work directly with English speakers;

  - an assessment scale for English as a professional language for nurses in the health and social services network is in the validation phase within the context of the Linguistic Competency Profile Development project of the Language Training Program;

- determine the threshold level[1] for successful communication for each provider category when those providers have to work directly with English speakers;

  - this work is also in the validation phase for nurses;

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[1] The threshold level is the level at which the learner has acquired the linguistic skills required to ensure effective, secure communication in English with his or her English-speaking clients.

- characterize the language competency levels leading to the threshold level for each provider category when those providers have to work directly with English speakers;

    o this work is being developed for nurses;

- produce and offer in all regions valid, reliable placement tests suited to each provider category so as to group learners who are at the same level or tailor training to learners at different levels;

    o this work is already planned for nurses;

- plan for online administration of placement tests.

Concerning training planning

- identify language elements to study at each level up to the threshold level for each provider category;

    o this work is already under way for nurses;

- determine the minimum number of hours required for each language training session in order to move on to the next level;

- estimate and plan the overall training time so that each learner evaluated can reach or exceed the threshold level for that provider's occupational category;

- supply for each learner category the language training materials needed for those learners to maintain acquired skills upon completion of training.

Concerning effectiveness of regional language training program

- set objective criteria for the agencies to use in assessing the effectiveness of the courses of their language training program based on provider category and in general;

- make a systematic impact assessment of the Language Training Program.

2.2 TRAINING GROUPS AND HOURS

OBSERVATION

Out of a total of 897 groups, 41% are beginner level, 38% are intermediate level, 16% are advanced level and 4% are mixed level groups.

Regarding the number of training hours given, we note that the beginner level groups receive on average 31 hours, the intermediate groups receive an average of 39 hours and the advance level receives an average of 42 hours.

The Frame of Reference for the 2010-2013 Language Training Program sets out guidelines. It was developed conjointly with the MSSS and resource people from the health and social services agencies and training organizations. It explains that, given the necessary time and resources, this Program is ideally meant for providers who have already reached an intermediate level in the target language. "Researchers estimate the minimal investment required to move from beginner to advanced level to be 2,300 hours. . . . in the case of a professional language, estimates indicate that training time can be reduced to somewhere between 900 and 2,000 hours. This suggests that learning will probably be organized around relevant elements, based on a rigorous needs analysis and the identification of competencies required to meet them."[2]

The Study Group set up in January 2012 to formulate recommendations on linguistic competency measurement scales recommended that true beginners not be among the learners targeted by the Language Training Program and that the "elementary" level be the first level of the scale.

REFLECTION

About the large number of beginner groups:

- What explains the large number of beginner groups, when the program is ideally meant for providers already at the intermediate level?

- Are competencies at the beginner level or sublevels (Beginner I, Beginner II, Beginner III) precisely defined by provider category?

- Going by occupational category, what is the threshold level for successful communication for providers enrolled at the beginner level?

About the number of training hours at the beginner level:

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1. Frame of Reference for the 2010-2013 Language Training Program 2010-2013, p. 9.

- Given their occupational category, how many hours of training do learners need to reach the threshold level?
- Given the hours of training those learners require, what explains the considerable difference between the average number of training hours provided for beginner groups and the number of hours for intermediate and advanced groups?

About the effectiveness:

- What is the promotion rate for those providers? Does this involve going to another beginner sublevel or moving directly to an intermediate level?

- How many providers reach the threshold level for their category?

2.3 LEARNER EVALUATION AT THE START OF TRAINING

OBSERVATION

The data shows that 12 regions had planned for a trainer-administered test at the start of the course to identify the learner's specific needs. Only 7 regions could describe the test modality. Sixteen regions planned in-session tests throughout the course, 12 regions could provide some detail on how this would be done.

REFLECTION

Several questions arise about learner evaluation by the trainer, both at the start of a course and during. Specifically:

- At the start of a course, what elements does the trainer test to pinpoint a learner's needs?

- Do the starting tests enable training objectives to be tied to the linguistics skills required to reach the threshold level?

- What criteria does the trainer use to set training objectives?

- Does session-long monitoring provide a means of tailoring the course to a learner's needs?

- Is there a connection between learner placement at the beginning of training and his or her perseverance until the end of the session?

- Is a provider who changes institutions able to continue equivalent training in the new workplace provided the learner is still eligible under the access program?

This section relates to information presented in Section 3 of the document *Language Training Program – Overall Profile 2009-2013.*

3.1 LEARNER RETENTION RATE

OBSERVATION

The learner retention rate, which is the proportion of learners who finish their course relative to the number who start, is 79%. The retention rate by level breaks down as follows: beginner level is 82%, intermediate level is 78% and the advanced level is 74%.

The retention rate is higher for learners at the beginner level.

REFLECTION

- Do the courses better meet the needs of learners with little knowledge of English than those of learners more proficient in the language?

- Beginner courses are usually shorter. Does this explain the higher retention rate for this level?

- In case of several beginner sublevels, what is the retention rate from one sublevel to another? In other words, how many beginning learners finish more than one training session? More than two? More than three?

- In hindsight, can we establish a typical language training path for providers starting at the beginner level? In how many sessions do they enrol on average? Are those sessions consecutive? How many hours of training do they receive on average?

3.2   SUCCESS RATE

OBSERVATION

The success rate refers to the degree to which the objective set by the agency is met in terms of the number of personnel targeted by the training. It is the number of learners who completed the course relative to the number of projected enrolments in the annual work plan.

In some regions the success rate is consistently below 60%.

REFLECTION

- Do the success rates in each region meet the expectations of the training organizations, agencies and MSSS?

3.3   LEARNER DISTRIBUTION BY ACTIVITY SECTOR

OBSERVATION

Forty-six percent of learners from the health sector and 21% of those from the social services sector are at the beginner level.

REFLECTION

- What threshold level has been set for those learners?

- How many hours of training are generally required to move from one level to another?

- What happens with learners who fail to get promoted to the next level at the end of their training session?

- How much does promotion to a higher level depend on factors other than the pass mark (e.g. too few/too many learners for a training session at the necessary competency level, scheduling conflict with a learner's availability, course location harder to reach)?

3.4 LEARNER EVALUATION AT COURSE END

OBSERVATION

We observe that all regions plan to have a course-end evaluation. Thirteen regions give an oral test, 11 of which also administer a written test. Two regions only planned to administer oral tests and five were unable to provide any information at all in this regard. Twelve regions indicated that the course-end evaluation allowed them to measure the progress of the learner to a higher level.

REFLECTION

- How can we make sure that:

    o tests for each level are valid?

    o tests are reliable from region to region?

- Would it be pertinent to make course-end evaluations available online to ensure test standardization, validity and reliability at each level?

3.5 LEARNER INCENTIVES

OBSERVATION

A variety of incentive measures are available to learners depending on the region. Thirteen regions offer courses during working hours, six of which pay staff replacement costs through project funds. Six regions offer courses outside of working hours, three of which offer other incentive measures such as an attendance bonus or time off in lieu of pay or reimbursement of parking fees. Five regions offer no inventive measures at all for some or all of their learners taking language courses.

REFLECTION

- What is the impact of these incentives on the retention and success rates?

- Should there be more substantial incentives based on the duration of the training path to provide for continuation and encouragement (e.g. when three training sessions are recommended to get a provider to the threshold level)?

- Should there be special collaboration with community organizations for public recognition of providers who reach the threshold level for their occupational category?

SECTION 4: COURSE OUTCOMES
ANALYSIS AND ISSUES

This section relates to information presented in Section 4 of the document *Language Training Program – Overall Profile 2009-2013.*

4.1 PROMOTION RATE

OBSERVATION

Given that "researchers estimate the minimal investment required to move from beginner to advanced level to be 2,300 hours. . . . in the case of a professional language, estimates indicate that training time can be reduced to somewhere between 900 and 2,000 hours,"

REFLECTION

- What explains a learner's progress from beginner level to a higher level after 31 hours of training (see Table 2.3 for average time for the beginner level)?

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