EXPLORING LEARNER PATHWAYS
Meeting at the LBS / ESL Intersections

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LEARNER PORTRAITS
Cover image:
Literacy and Basic Skills class students from Labour Education Centre working on their writing skills - http://www.laboureducation.org

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Jennifer Huang

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For more information about this and other materials related to the Exploring Learner Pathways project, visit http://learnerpathways.wordpress.com
LEARNER PORTRAITS

This booklet is an excerpt from the Exploring Learner Pathways: Meeting at the LBS/ESL Intersections project’s final report. The project researched the learning pathways and needs of Anglophone-stream Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners in Toronto and York Region who speak English as a second or additional language. Part of the project involved documenting learner profiles and pathways.

The 12 ‘Learner Portraits’ highlighted in this booklet are drawn directly from learner focus groups sessions conducted across the two regions – with a total of 74 LBS learners who speak English as a second/additional language participating.

The term ‘Learner Portraits’ was chosen to signal a more detailed exploration of learner pathways – one in which the learners’ life circumstances, motivations, and experiences are made visible in the course of their learning trajectories. Learner profiles without the voices of the learners themselves tell only half the story, therefore the researchers present these learner portraits with the intention of bringing readers ‘face to face’ with the variety of learning pathways they encountered throughout the course of the project.

Service providers – whether from LBS or ESL (non-credit and credit) adult education programming or from referring agencies – are encouraged to use the 12 learner portraits as a catalyst for further dialogue, which can enhance understanding across the programs serving adult learners with both ESL and literacy needs.

The full Exploring Learner Pathways: Meeting at the LBS/ESL Intersections report can be accessed on the project’s website at http://learnerpathways.wordpress.com
GEN 1.5 works toward a brighter future...

‘Jenny’ is a Tagalog speaker from the Philippines. She has lived in Canada for 14 years (since she was 9 years old). She completed high school in Canada and had been placed in ELD/ESL classes in elementary school in Canada. She is currently attending the LBS program in York Region at Level 2/3.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
- Improve writing to go to Academic Upgrading college – post-secondary goal

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
- Become a nurse

WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL

“Reading newspapers and it helps me to tell the difference between using one kind of article in three different newspapers and writing it. Also, taking what are the verb tenses and what I need to improve. Or what’s missing in the verb tense in the paragraph that I am describing. Also, there is a program online…. The learningHUB. I’m doing the reading comprehension. I’m doing the science to make my memory come back again.”

HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING

“Well I’m improving because, my writing is slowly, slowly—when she marks it there is so much red—after a few practice of writing fewer red marks.”

“Because I was out of school for five year. I finished my high school here in Canada and I was working in a factory for five years. Working there was not my lifestyle and I wanted to improve my English. My English is, like, poor language for me. I need more practice and writing in order for me to go to college. So, I went online and checked the adult learning school—YDAL school and it wasn’t really good—so I went here and I met up with X. She assessed me and she told me to come to the LBS.”
Deka

‘Deka’ has lived in Canada for 20 years. Her mother tongue is Somali. Deka completed high school in Somalia but had been out of school for a while because she was raising her children. She waited until her youngest was at school full time. She is currently enrolled in a school board LBS program in Toronto.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
To get her high school in Ontario.

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
To work in childcare – Early Childhood Education

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**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**
“Still I like to take this class, because when I was in ESL class it was more basic, I was learning more listening, but not for write. When I came here, I feel comfort to learn more, to go ahead, to wish my goal.”

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**
“I know I improve because I read the story, I know the topic.”

“I was busy with my children. My last child go full-time and came to the school and started ESL Level 2, then 3, 4, until 5. I went down to the assessment office... There is a different program they told me that LBS...asked the testing and after I waited maybe six months on the list. Still in ESL, and one day they told me I come to LBS and I’m so happy.”

“I want to improve my language to help my children to do work with them. Also, I am planning to work for childcare – ECE. When I asked to take that program, they want high school. I want to finish.”
‘Senait’ has lived in Canada for 7 years. Her country of origin is Eritrea and her mother tongue is Tigrinya. She also speaks Amharic and Arabic. The highest level of education that she completed in Eritrea is high school. She reports having taken ESL courses at the school board and having finished Level 6 ESL. After her ESL (non-credit) courses, she went to high school and completed a hairstyling pre-apprenticeship certificate program at Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre. Her teachers told her that her spelling was poor and recommended an LBS program. Senait says that her spelling in her mother tongue is ‘perfect’. After completing her certificate program she had trouble finding employment due to childcare issues. She is currently in a Level 2 class in school board LBS program.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
Spelling improvement

- Completed high school in country of origin
- ESL (non-credit) Level 6
- Hairstyling pre-apprenticeship certificate
- Unable to find job
- LBS

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
University

- Post-secondary

**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**
The writing and spelling focus.

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**
“My spelling…it’s getting better. I’m starting to know the vowels – to spell right.”

“So I am gifted with my hand. I am very creative, that’s why I take the hairdresser. That was my short-term goal. So, I learned to do hair and get a job. But I couldn’t do it with my daughter because they told me to work weekends, evening. So I can’t do these things. So, I have to go back to school and do a better career. So I will have to go to college or university. Maybe university this time.”
What the field demands...

‘Azeeza’ arrived in Canada 19 years ago with elementary school being the highest level of schooling completed. Tigrinya is her mother tongue, but she also speaks Amharic. She explains that she has completed a personal support worker course and has her Personal Support Worker diploma. Azeeza had worked as a homecare PSW for 5 years. [Level 1 LBS learner]

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
Improve spelling, writing

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
Go back to work with better spelling and writing skills

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**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**
Teacher provides help with next steps and gives hope.

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**
“Teacher, he care when we are angry about the spelling. He says, ‘It’s going to be okay.’ One sentence, six wrong spelling is now three or four.”

“I took the course PSW and I have the diploma. The only thing is when you work in a nursing home you have to write in charts. What happened and what people say. As soon as I know, I’m going to find a job and go back to work. Spelling with the dictionary... I worked for PSW for five years, home to home. It’s just a chart, you don’t have to write. It’s just a little thing to write. But when we had training, it’s a lot to write. I don’t want to get it wrong with the medicine so I don’t want to get in trouble. I’m going to go back to work.”

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EXPLORING LEARNER PATHWAYS: Meeting at the LBS/ESL Intersections
LEARNER PORTRAITS
A chance to build foundation skills...

‘Rafael’ has lived in Canada for 23 years. He is originally from El Salvador and Spanish is his mother tongue. He never attended school in El Salvador. He said he learned his English through everyday life. He explains that he worked for many years in Toronto and now he is receiving OW supports. He was sent to an ESL class but was only there a couple of days when the teacher told him the LBS program may be a better program for him. He says this program is a good fit because he is finally learning how to read and write. Rafael finds he speaks English only in his daily life. He is a Level 1 learner at a Toronto school board LBS program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHORT-TERM GOAL</th>
<th>LONG-TERM GOAL</th>
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<td>Build foundation skills for reading and writing.</td>
<td>Become his own boss in landscaping.</td>
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WHAT HE FINDS HELPFUL

“I try to find out what is consonant, what is vowels. If I know the phonetic sounds, then I can reach my goal.”

HOW HE KNOWS HE’S IMPROVING

“I know that I’m improving because it was like I was sleeping and then I read, I understand. What I’m reading is much clearer than before. And if I go somewhere, I watch the signs there and I catch what I’ve learned in school.”

“I have to learn how to read and write... And if I don’t do that I will always be like a cripple. I know I can do it. I just didn’t have the time. I speak English every day and I don’t speak Spanish, only English.”

“My wish is that if I can get this straightened out – because I like to work in landscaping industry which I work before for a long, long time – I could become my own boss.”

EXPLORING LEARNER PATHWAYS: Meeting at the LBS/ESL Intersections
LEARNER PORTRAITS
A slower pace...

‘Adara’ is an Arabic speaker from Morocco who has lived in Canada for 20 years. The highest level of education she completed was Grade 5. She raised her children and when they started high school she decided to go to school again. Adara attended Grade 11 adult credit courses at the Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre and found the courses too challenging. Adara attends an LBS program in her local community centre. The program is delivered by school board staff.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
Improve math and spelling.

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
Work in an office using a computer.

Highest Level of Education - Grade 5; 20 years in Canada

Adult Credit Courses - (Grade 11 challenging)

LBS

Office Skills Training

Employment

**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**
The math, computer practice and the pace of learning.

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**
“My reading now is getting better than before. Before, when I read anything, my kids laughed at me and told me that I’m singing. And computers, too. Now I know what to do. Now I know how to go to websites and check e-mail. Better than before.”

“When I was in Yorkdale school, the teachers rush, rush to teaching you. You know, I need somebody close to me and teach me slowly....I was like grade 11 and, I couldn’t do it there. They rushed, rushed. Here I find the teachers are heartful. They take time to teach you.”
A program that pushes her...

‘Min’ attends an Academic Upgrading program and her goal is to enter a college Early Childhood Education program. She is a Mandarin speaker who arrived in Toronto from China 5 years ago. The highest level of education that Min attained was high school completion in China. Two years ago she attended a LINC class for two months but a friend told her about the AU program.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**

“To improve the English.”

**LONG-TERM GOAL**

Do the college ECE.

| Highest education attained outside Canada - high school; 5 years in Canada | LINC classes (2 months) | Academic Upgrading | ECE program |

**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**

“Computer and English, because before I don’t know how to write an essay or business letter or a cover letter. But the teacher taught me a lot about how to write and prepare my resume and cover letter.”

She also enjoyed tutoring supports at the college this past summer – support from tutors who spoke her mother tongue.

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**

“I understand 80% now when I read.”

“I was in LINC only two months. After I find this program, so I moved to here because LINC is for English, for the people who come to Canada new, right? So, I was here almost three years. I know some basic of Canada. The culture or something. So, I don’t need to stay there. I moved here. So I need to focus on the English and the computer and math.”

“There [in LINC] more relaxed. Here give you credit, but there nothing. You just you know, very relaxed. For the people who come, they don’t know Canada very much. In there I feel very enjoy, very relax, but here they push you. They mark the attendance very serious.”
Volunteering and teamwork broaden skills/vocabulary...

‘Ayman’ is an Arabic speaker who hails from Somalia. He arrived in Canada over 2 ½ years ago. Ayman had taken some English classes in Somalia. He also attended an ESL program at the school board. The highest level of education that Ayman attained was Grade 8. His goal is to obtain his GED so he can go to college for math and computers. He is currently enrolled in a community-based agency LBS program that offers a ‘teamworks’ component. As part of his LBS training he has been volunteering at the Daily Bread Food Bank where he reports he is learning a number of things.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
GED

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
Attend college for computer/math course.

**WHAT HE FINDS HELPFUL**

Hands-on learning.

“Here we cook food – learn how to cook different foods.”

**HOW HE KNOWS HE’S IMPROVING**

“I learned new words. Better work vocabulary.”

“My friends wanted me to go to other schools. I decide to stay because the program help me go to college.”

“At Daily Bread I learn to organize, help driver with schedule of delivery, use money, working with forms and meeting people.”
Appreciating learning...

‘Giuseppe’ has lived in Canada for 43 years. His mother tongue is Italian and the highest level of education he completed outside Canada was Grade 5. When he arrived in Canada he started working immediately as a carpenter. Giuseppe worked in his trade for more than 40 years until he was injured on the job. He is currently attending a school board LBS program in York Region.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**
Work on his English and computers

**LONG-TERM GOAL**
Employment

Highest level of education attained in country of origin:
Grade 5; 43 years in Canada

Employed for over 40 years  ▶  Injury  ▶  LBS  ▶  Re-enter workforce

**WHAT HE FINDS HELPFUL**

“The teacher is number one! She’s very well maybe because her way of teaching adults is perfect the ways she does. Learning that’s the first priority. Before we didn’t have time to come to school, before it was not enough time to study. ... We slow learners. We learn and then we forget again, and this learning-forget goes back and forth. We picking up each time a little bit.”

**HOW HE KNOWS HE’S IMPROVING**

“Now I can email my family back home and friends. And even some company, and now like insurance companies or gas company, now they have my email. We start to pass information even though it’s still my low level but we starting, and when I go there practicing word I learned that I didn’t know before even my kids said, ‘Dad, you’re getting know what we know now.’ (laughs with joy). So that’s how we notice, the way we speaking, we look at a piece of paper – we don’t know 100% yet, but it’s better than before. It’s clear, that’s how we know that we are improving.”

“I work all my life, and never home before. And I injured myself .... I don’t want sit home. And I’m learning here, thanks to this program. And now I can send an email. Was a dream before.”

“My English, I talk, but I can’t read and write. So I took an opportunity in order to sit home and do nothing, I go to school I learn maybe after if I feel better after I would do anything to enter in the workforce in a better understanding.”
Moving towards skills training...

‘Ugoulo’ arrived in Toronto 3 years ago from Nigeria. His speaks Edo and he has indicated that he had some English in classes he took in school many years ago. The highest level of education he completed outside Canada was Grade 6. Ugoulo is currently attending a school-board LBS program that is delivered within a learning hub setting where LINC, LBS and skills training programs are co-located.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**  
Improve writing

**LONG-TERM GOAL**  
Forklift skills training

Highest level of education attained in country of origin:  
Grade 6;  
3 years in Canada

WHAT HE FINDS HELPFUL

The teacher is helpful – “The way we speak is very different from the way we write. She teaches very well.”

HOW HE KNOWS HE’S IMPROVING

“When you see your skills to move to the next step.”

“For me it’s not easy. I’ve been a long time out of school. It’s easier for baby to learn than adult....When I was young, in my country we have a lot of different tribe. Some tribe, we call them Ebu. They were staying at my father’s house...speaking different language. I was speaking with them.”
Confidence on the path to employment...

‘Shamim’ is an Urdu-speaker who arrived in Canada 5 years ago from Pakistan. The highest level of education she completed outside Canada was Grade 12. Shamim took ESL classes and finished Level 5. Her ESL instructor told her about the LBS program. She is currently attending a school-board LBS program in York Region.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**

Computers and writing

**LONG-TERM GOAL**

Employment in a daycare centre.

**Highest level of education attained in country of origin:** high school

**5 years in Canada**

► ESL program

► Daycare training

► LBS

► Employment

**WHAT SHE FINDS HELPFUL**

“My goal is employment. I had some courses in daycare from York Region programs. So, that’s why I want employment for different daycare centres. And here, our teacher helps us for filling applications for any place... She helped me and I got a [seasonal] job.”

**HOW SHE KNOWS SHE’S IMPROVING**

“I can go anyplace... I am going and talking. For health card, for doctor, for a job... interview in English. I was very confident.”

“If you are going somewhere that you same language people... we are talking in own language. When I came to Canada, my husband and me go to English classes and my teacher say you don’t sit together. So, this is very good for us. And here in the program, a different culture, so we must speak English. If people are coming and speaking just mother language this is not a good thing.”
‘Jose’ arrived in Toronto from Mexico 4 ½ years ago. The highest level of education he completed outside Canada was Grade 12. In Mexico he had worked in sales in a large company. He attended some ESL classes upon arrival, but friends recommended the community-based LBS program he is currently attending, which is part of a learning hub setting where LINC, LBS and skills training programs are co-located.

**SHORT-TERM GOAL**

Improve writing, reading and understanding

**LONG-TERM GOAL**

Attend a college business course

Highest level of education attained in country of origin: high school 4.5 years in Canada

► ESL program

► LBS

► College - business courses

**WHAT HE FINDS HELPFUL**

“When I started ESL class you understand what they teach to you. You understand the meaning of the sentence. But, you think in your own language. Here it’s more deep. For example, they teach you the proper use of the verbs. When you choose a verb. And then you start to think in English. This gives us more confidence to express experience. We are able to make conversation with English people.”

**HOW HE KNOWS HE’S IMPROVING**

Explains that he can do presentations now and use the computer: “[The teacher] say choose one topic and we have to develop the topic, and search the Internet, and we have to present in front of the people. PowerPoint. We have the minimum time and the maximum time. I am more confident to do this.”

“I know that I need to complete my English skill in this school. I need to work hard to improve my writing, reading, my understanding. After that, I wish to get a job in sales person, because, in the past I work at ‘x’ as a sales manager. I know to reach my goals I need to work very hard in my English skill. After that, I go to college, maybe, to complete that program?”
The Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy’s (MTML’s) *Exploring Learning Pathways: Meeting at the LBS/ESL Intersections* project researched the learning pathways and needs of Anglophone-stream low-level Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners whose mother tongue or primary language is other than English.

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