

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

MINISTRY MANUAL

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

DR. MARION CHANG

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1. The What and Why of ESL as Ministry

I have been part of countless discussions over the years about English as a Second Language (ESL) as ministry, and the same questions come up almost every time: “There are so many government and private English classes for immigrants and foreign students. They don’t need more English. Why should the church get involved?” Or, “How can teaching English be a ministry? How does this serve God and His purposes? Besides, we aren’t professionals. How can we run English classes?”

This manual is written for pastors, church leaders and possibly congregation members who see a need to connect to their newcomer neighbours. I live in Toronto, a city where over 50% of the population were not born in this country, myself included. The majority of my neighbours are newcomers, and I define that term broadly as immigrants who have chosen to come to Canada for various reasons, refugees who have been forced out of their homes, and foreign students who may stay for a short while or a lifetime. While not all cities in Canada share those statistics, there is a good chance newcomers are your neighbours and you may be the only Christian they encounter.

This is not an academic book, but rather a practical guide for going through the decision processes needed to lay the groundwork, launch and sustain an ESL ministry. I pray that each chapter will make for easier trouble-shooting in ministry development. With that in mind, I include as much about what can go wrong as well as finding the right way of doing things, hopefully without discouraging the reader overmuch. I have never found it helpful to ignore the inevitable bumps in the road when I attempt something new, and I value the experience of others when they tell me what went wrong for them so I don’t have to repeat their mistakes.

If you are reading this book, chances are you are considering whether or not God is calling you and your church into this ministry. It is worth careful consideration, since any ministry should not be entered into lightly, and it may not be appropriate for your congregation. My hope is that this first chapter will at least give you a sense of what ESL Ministry is and why teaching English to our newcomer neighbours can fulfill God’s Kingdom purposes. This chapter gives some background on ESL programs in Canada, how ESL ministry is different from a secular ESL program, and how ESL ministry serves both our neighbours and God.

Government and Private English Language Programs

The first purpose of secular ESL programs should be to instruct newcomers in English language communication. Practically, they must also consider cost effectiveness, whether they are federally funded government programs or privately

owned schools that must turn a profit. While these programs fulfill a highly useful purpose, they have a number of unavoidable constraints.

In Canada, federally funded programs known as LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers) are delivered by various non-profit organizations such as school boards, colleges, settlement agencies, etc., who operate on contracts with hired teachers paid by the hour. Moreover, LINC programs are accountable to the government to ensure funds are spent efficiently, which means teachers must write up ongoing student progress reports. Classes can vary greatly in size, and though time is provided to prepare these reports, staff frequently cannot complete the task within the given period, causing some to resent the unpaid overtime. This is not to say that there aren't dedicated teachers in these programs, but for many it is a job that ends when class is over. This means that one-on-one teaching opportunities such as those that may happen after class are unlikely. The same can be said for teacher involvement in students' lives.

Private language schools for foreign students naturally have pressure to be cost effective. Teachers are usually hired on contract, paid by the hour and in some cases lack any guarantee for minimum hours. School administration may feel constrained to spend their money where clients can see it, such as on well-appointed classrooms, rather than on teacher resources and investment in staff leadership. Those schools with smaller class sizes can be correspondingly expensive for students.

Beyond the issue of financial limitations, quality and design of programs vary between privately run schools. As an example, there are some marketed specifically for one nationality, consequently ensuring little chance to communicate in English outside of class as the student body shares the same first language.

Many of the students presently in our ESL ministry have attended private schools on work-study visas. However, some still find their English skills fall short of what they actually need to cope in the workforce. They may know grammar structures but be unable to speak or write adequately. They may also have run out of funds to pay for more classes.

One further consideration for churches stepping into ESL as ministry is the fact that there are a certain number of newcomers without access to language instruction. I have already mentioned the cost factor with private schools. LINC programs are limited in which newcomers they are allowed to accept as students, although many restrictions have lifted in recent years. Visitors cannot attend, and that includes grandparents, many of whom come for long periods to provide family childcare, though without hope of becoming landed immigrants. Those newcomers in the process of applying for landed immigrant status, or those claiming refugee status cannot enter LINC until they have a letter showing initial approval of their application. All that takes time.

Finally, any Christian who has taught in a government funded or other secular program also knows there are topics that cannot be discussed in class without repercussions. The teacher's views on religious matters would not be appropriate lest they be construed as 'proselytizing'.

Years ago I had put together a collection of Conversation Guides suitable for use in ESL ministry. Each guide centers on a different topic, and it provides vocabulary, questions and information to keep conversation going in a small group. It also includes a Bible verse related to the topic in the heading. Ann, a missionary colleague of mine, ended up using the guides in English conversation circles, each led by a Christian volunteer. After a period, classes came under a secular organization that provided the venue. Ann wanted to continue using the same materials, and she showed a sample guide containing a verse on "Family" to the Muslim coordinator of the program. She did get approval to use them, and years went by without incident, but finally there was a student complaint and the verses had to be removed. When the church delivers ESL as a ministry, there is no such constraint.

ESL Ministry: Serving our Neighbours

One characteristic that distinguishes ESL Ministry from a secular ESL Program is service to our neighbors through meeting the needs of the whole person. (Not that we can do this in our own strength as human beings but by trusting God to do so.) Newcomers take a number of risks by leaving their support network of family and friends and entering into an unfamiliar culture and language, often with reduced material resources. In the case of refugees, they may never have wanted to leave but rather were forced out by violent circumstances.

Anyone who has lived abroad can appreciate the wide variety of needs experienced by someone in a completely new environment. Simple tasks become fraught with complications due to lack of knowledge. For example, during my time in Asia when I got sick I didn't know the system for dispensing medication. All drugs seemed to be over-the-counter, and I didn't know the local name for the one I needed. Fortunately, I knew someone to call who could explain it to me. I had social and psychological needs stemming from constantly trying to cope with unfamiliarity in everything. I don't know how we would have managed if we hadn't had our spiritual needs met by our faithful God and a tight-knit group of Christian brothers and sisters. I have seen God use an ESL ministry to meet all of these needs mentioned above to serve the students He brings in.

Language Needs

Of course, the chief need an ESL ministry seeks to address is the need for communication in a second language. Functioning in English opens doors, but ineffective language use closes them.

I first began an ESL ministry back in 1994 after having taught ESL professionally for six years. Knowing the importance of learning a language by using it, I had urged my adult students to talk to people outside of class. Their responses surprised me, “But teacher, we don’t know any native speakers. I have a job, but my coworkers are immigrants also. I learn Vietnamese and Portuguese there.” I realized there were few opportunities for conversational English with those who had mastered the language, so I started a conversation class together with our church members. The chance to communicate in small groups met their language practice needs, and our numbers grew quickly.

Not speaking well, or not speaking at all, severely limits the ability to form relationships with those who do speak English, thus also limiting opportunities for practice. There may be a fear of rejection or shame at their lack of proficiency, which keep students from taking communication risks. This also applies to the other language skills of writing, reading and listening. Studying in a small, friendly group helps overcome those fears. Unlike other programs, churches can provide smaller classes staffed by people whose prime motivation is love of the stranger among us. This is ministry.

Cultural Interpretation Needs

What should you say when someone spills a drink on you, or worse, when you spill a drink on someone else? Is it appropriate to call your child’s teachers by their first names, or give a gift to them? What do you say when you want to invite someone for dinner or even refuse a dinner invitation politely? All of these questions have different answers depending on which cultural or social system in which you find yourself.

When my husband and I lived in China, we had to learn the answers to many of those questions. Fortunately, we had friends to help, and my husband is fluent in the language, but knowing words and grammar isn’t everything. He needed to learn a whole set of local vocabulary and the situations to which it was linked. We had to learn important customs, such as never going empty-handed when making visits to our new friends.

Language carries culture. Learning words and how to put them together only takes you so far in communicating effectively. We don’t speak the same way to our bosses as we do to our children. We must know the type of language that is acceptable in different social situations. We must figure out the local rules, such as when, if ever, it is allowed to show anger or other emotions in public. All of this is based on an understanding of the culture.

I had one student, a young man from East Asia, who kept calling me ‘dear’ in his texts and emails. He was always very proper in other respects, and I am probably older than his mother, but he simply didn’t know when to use that term appropriately. He may have been confused by the fact that “Dear” is used in formal letter writing, but only with a person’s full name and only in the opening greeting.

Language cannot be taught apart from context. ESL ministry is about teaching the when, why, where and how of language in different relationships and situations. The Church is a goldmine of people who have long been immersed in the local way of doing things, and they have answers to many of our students' cultural questions. Our congregations may also have some 'Oldcomers', those who were not born in Canada but who nevertheless have learned the finer points of living in this culture. In some cases they have a better knowledge of what is culturally unique or which aspects may be pitfalls of misinterpretation.

Sometimes we don't need to say a word to teach culture. The way we treat one another in class and what we say is example enough. Our behaviour can also teach another lesson when Newcomers compare Christian relationships to what they see in the outside world. This is ministry.

Support Network Needs

How does one get a driver's license or car insurance? Is it right for a landlord to withhold the security deposit upon moving out? Beyond teaching, Newcomers may need someone to step up and be their advocate when they are out of their depth or someone is taking advantage of them.

As an example, I have volunteered as parental support on three occasions during special school board conferences. These conferences are called when a child is flagged as having mental, social or learning problems, and they include a panel of teachers, administrators and experts with many letters after their names. I could see how intimidated my friends were on each occasion. Having come from an educational system in which students sink or swim, they didn't grasp the reason why their child merited all this attention, but they sensed it wasn't good. In spite of having an interpreter present, they had difficulty with new concepts, such as 'learning disability'. One mother inquired afterwards, "Are they saying my daughter is stupid?"

Another example of support comes from a brother, 'Jim', who has a gift for dealing with bureaucracy. One family, who was moving out of their high-rise apartment building, was upset to find management had withheld their security deposit, which meant they couldn't pay the deposit for their next lease. Legally, they were in the right. There was no damage to the apartment, the lease was up, and they even had friends who wanted to move into their old apartment. Jim went in to talk to the manager and stated their case. To his surprise there was no argument whatsoever! The money was turned over immediately once management realized someone who knew the system was involved.

As the Body of Christ, the Church is uniquely suited to provide a support network for our newcomer neighbours. Collectively, we are gifted by the Holy Spirit to help newcomers navigate daily life within a brand new system. This is ministry.

Social Needs

A support network implies relationships, a network of those we would call friends. Newcomers have left friends and family behind for the most part, and there may be no one to provide that vital need here. Patricia Love is the Intercultural Pastor for Foothills Alliance Church in Calgary. Before she began her ministry she spent the first three months talking to newcomers in their church family and asking what they needed. The number one desire was not English but rather connection with people. They told her, “ We want to feel like we belong. We want to make friends. We want our kids to make friends. We want to know our neighbours. ”¹

In ESL Ministry close relationships naturally form as we teach and practice language in small groups and provide social occasions to use it. Language is about communication. Good communication with loving motivation means good relationships. Good relationships are the first step in connecting newcomers to a new family - the Family of God. This is ministry.

I have talked about linguistic, cultural knowledge, support network and social needs for the newcomer, but is the Gospel a need? Various churches may answer that question differently, however. In the next section I will give evidence the gospel is as real a need as any of those previously outlined.

ESL Ministry: Serving God

Ministry means service to God. One way God has commanded us to serve Him is, “ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”² The Apostle Paul acted on this command and exhorted Christians to speak up, explaining, “...faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ.”³ Since this book is meant for Christians and churches, I’m assuming that I’m ‘preaching to the choir’, but I’ve learned not to assume too much. Just to come at it a different way, let’s ask, “What does it mean NOT to have the gospel?”

In looking at myself, when comparing the differences between living under my own management and following Christ, I see a stark contrast in quality of life. Before, I had no anchor, no clear purpose or direction in which I was headed. I had nowhere to go for insight beyond human limitations. I had no reassurance about the future, and I was oblivious to where many of my poor decisions were taking me, having a dulled conscience after years of ignoring it. (And that only covers life on this earth apart from eternity!) I am convinced that, had I not chosen to accept the Lordship of Christ, I would be divorced, full of anxieties, and counting on career to give life meaning. This is not to say that I have had an easy journey, but I’ve never been alone, and I know where I’m headed both here and forever.

¹ Interview with Patricia Love, March 22, 2018

² Matthew 28: 19

³ Romans 10: 17

I have seen the difference the gospel can make for students. Inji came into our ESL ministry at a low point in her life. She had come to Canada after an emotionally devastating incident in her home country. She was angry, depressed and isolated as she pursued studies here. She came to ESL classes to improve English with no interest in spiritual matters, but as the months went by she became curious. She connected personally with the teachers who “gave me a hand to see a little light, and guided me how to approach God...and how I can talk with God”⁴.

I started to see changes in Inji as she learned what God’s standards were. After five months in classes she prayed to receive Christ. The Holy Spirit revealed the darkness in her own heart and little by little gave her the power to forgive. The anger gradually dissipated as God worked in her heart. Over time she formed friendships with other Christians and eventually settled into a church community. The gospel is indeed a need! Telling the gospel is a command.

How would you or your church answer the question, “What does it mean not to have the Gospel?” Do you see it as the pearl of great price that can change lives and give hope that lasts? Supposing this is true, it should be evident in thought, deed and word. If, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”⁵, this assumes we have indeed seen and heard God at work in our own lives and in the life of our church. If we are not seeing God at work ourselves, then we are not ready to serve in ministry, being blind and deaf to Him. Jesus set an example of serving His Heavenly Father stating, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”⁶

Holistic Ministry

At this point you are hopefully convinced that ESL Ministry can benefit our newcomer neighbours in ways that secular public and private ESL programs cannot, even assuming they have access to such programs. I hope you are also convinced that ESL can be a ministry in the full sense of the word, serving our neighbours and serving the Kingdom of God. ESL ministry is holistic in the sense that it seeks to meet the needs of the whole person: skills in English communication, cultural knowledge, social support at a vulnerable time, and spiritual re-birth through Jesus Christ.

In ESL ministry, there is a temptation to stray in one of two directions. The first is to be a ‘do-gooder’ and provide students with language and cultural education within a support network while ignoring students’ spiritual needs. In our pluralistic society, it is inconvenient to be open about what we believe; even assuming we are clear on

⁴ Taken from Inji’s baptismal testimony

⁵ Acts 4:20

⁶ John 5:19

what that is. I know of a church whose laudable desire was to help Syrian refugees with their English, but they were afraid of offending their students by touching any kind of spiritual topic. Ironically, I've never met a Muslim who was uncomfortable discussing spiritual matters, and usually they have been interested to hear what I believed, respectfully expressed.

The other temptation is to have the sole focus of our ministry be on Christian conversion without concern for quality education and genuine friendship. We cannot use a 'bait and switch' tactic, promising to improve English with classes that are focused on the spiritual but lacking real language help. There are materials out there that cover both linguistic and spiritual spheres, and there are ways to get pedagogical training, if we lack expertise. The quality of our ESL teaching is a strong testimony in and of itself.

One further warning – friendship with ulterior motive is not the love God requires from us. "I will be your friend as long as I think you might become a Christian" is false friendship. You are neither capable of 'converting' anyone, nor of reading anyone's thoughts. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, and only He knows what is truly happening in a person's heart and mind. Your work is to seek insight in prayer and obey as God leads.

Having said all that, ESL ministry may not be appropriate for your church. Whether you believe God is calling your church to serve Him in this way, or whether you have made up your mind that He is not, the next chapter offers food for thought. Read it with an open heart and mind!

2. Is ESL Where God is Leading Us?

The first part of this chapter poses questions to help determine whether or not God is leading your church into ESL ministry. These questions have to do with where God has placed the church and His gifting of your congregation in order to fulfill His particular purposes. Scripture is clear about God's purpose for The Body of Christ, but it is also clear that the Body has individual members with particular functions. I believe individual congregations within the Body are given specific callings for their places and times⁷ in order to carry out Jesus' commands to The Church as a whole, namely to live godly lives, be salt and light, bear testimony of His work to the world, make disciples and worship the Living God.

The second part of the chapter deals with how to research your neighbourhood and examine your church. This will give you a clearer picture of whom you are serving and whether your congregation is equipped to carry out an ESL ministry.

Some Things to Consider

Ministry needs to come from God's calling and conviction, and ESL ministry may or may not fit your church's particular time and place. Vision and mission statements have been popular among North American churches for a number of years. Those terms have been defined in a number of ways, but I consider church vision to mean a God-given conception of where He is leading that individual church in the form of clear goals. Mission is the means used to accomplish those goals. Going through the process of putting vision and mission statements together can be a unifying exercise for church leadership and a means to focus on God's unique purposes for that congregation. (Of course, this assumes going through the process with much prayer and open hearts.)

There are various ways that God speaks to churches and makes His will known. Books have been written about discerning God's will, and I've never heard of any that did not include praying for guidance. If a church is interested in launching an ESL ministry, my first thought is, "Why do you think God is leading you to serve in this way?" Often the answer is a combination of different signs and circumstances. I'm mostly listening to hear whether God has given them a vision to cross cultural and class boundaries for the sake of the gospel by connecting to the newcomers God has put in their path. Both the vision and the mission must come from God's leading and conviction, and they have to match up. Consider these possible scenarios:

⁷ For a clear discussion of this, see "*Is there a difference between the Vision and the Mission of a local church?*", Published Jan 1, 2001

<https://bible.org/question/there-difference-between-vision-and-mission-local-church>

Right vision, wrong mission?

It may be that the leadership has been praying for opportunities to serve their community and/or a way to bring the gospel to those who have never heard it, and they have heard of success in other churches with ESL ministries. If this is a decision that has resulted from much prayer, well and good, but there are other questions that need to be settled. For example, is learning English an actual need in the community? English is a dominant language for many educated newcomers from nations who have it as an official language, though it may not be the first language of the majority of its citizens. Ghana, India, Singapore, Nigeria, and the Philippines all contain many languages within their borders and English is often used as the common tongue in official business. Citizens who finish school in those countries would therefore be familiar with the language. Not all newcomers need English instruction. More community research is needed.

Right vision, unrealistic mission?

Perhaps church leaders have witnessed a recent change in the demographics of their area, and they feel led by the Lord to be salt and light in their neighbourhood. After speaking with community members, they determine that there is a clear need for English, and an ESL ministry seems an obvious way to connect. However, is the church prepared to meet this need? What are the costs in manpower, time and commitment? More inquiry within the congregation is needed.

Vision and mission mismatch?

Occasionally people with ESL teaching expertise join or become available to the church. At times, the ESL ministry proposal comes from these members. But, does the expertise to carry out this mission match the vision of the church? Will the ministry rest on the shoulders of a few experts, or will it truly be a mission of the local church supported by the leadership following a God-given vision?

Confused vision with unrealistic mission?

In some cases churches in older, established communities may have become isolated from their neighbours as successive generations have moved out, and the congregation has become Sunday commuters. ESL ministry may seem like an effective way to serve the neighbourhood, assuming English is a need. However, if the ministry members are all commuters, how effective will the ministry be while serving neighbours at a distance? Commuting takes time away from ministry. Better to seek God's will on physical placement of the church and its members. If serving the neighbourhood is the vision, then the mission priority may be for members to re-locate or to relocate the church building to where members live.

None of the above scenarios clearly indicate churches where ESL ministry would not fit, though I have brought up some strong cautionary issues. Nevertheless, there are some wrong reasons for starting an ESL ministry. Motivations that are church-

centred, meaning they seek to fix a need within the church rather than fulfill a God-given vision, are wrong. “Our church needs more members”, “We need a higher profile in the community, (so they will know we’re here)”, or, “The church needs an outreach ministry (and any ministry will do)” are overt examples, though seldom stated so explicitly. Just as someone getting married in order to solve their own personal problems is doomed to disappointment, so a church trying to solve internal spiritual issues through ministry is headed for failure. The first step is getting one’s own house in order.

Let’s get into the details of answering questions raised by the above scenarios. In order to determine whether there is a fit between church and ministry, vision and mission, you must know your neighbours and your church.

Research Your Community

Is there a need for ESL?

The primary question is always, “Who are our neighbours?” and this must be answered in order to determine the need for ESL. This means feet on the ground, even if your area is in the middle of suburban sprawl. Don’t assume you know the area surrounding your church until you have walked the streets. Make it a prayer walk and ask to see the community through God’s eyes!

Where do people live? Stroll around the residential districts, and make sure apartment buildings are included, the taller the better. Who do you see? Don’t be shy. Ask questions about their impressions of the neighbourhood, how long they’ve lived there and where they shop. Tell them who you are and that you hope to serve the community. Ask them what they feel community needs are.

Where are the commercial areas and social hubs for your community? Go to the schools when classes let out. Talk to the parents and to the teachers, if you can. Rick Love⁸, who coaches churches in supporting newcomers, told me of a pastor who assumed there weren’t any newcomers in his fairly wealthy community. However, as they were passing by the local school, he spotted a sizable group of Filipino nannies⁹, and he was convicted! Other community hangouts are the public library and shopping centres. Don’t dismiss the smaller strip malls that may contain specialty shops catering to newcomers. Note other churches as you walk around. Do they hold worship in languages other than English? Might there be opportunities for partnerships with them?

⁸ Rick Love and his wife, Patricia, head a ministry called “Love New Canadians” that provides coaching and ESL curriculum to churches wanting to serve newcomers to Canada. See their website: www.lovenewcanadians.ca

⁹ While English is an official language of the Philippines, we’ve had a group of Filipinas in our ESL ministry for years. Though they are fluent, they crave the social interaction and admit their language could use a polish.

What other kinds of needs are there?

Different newcomer populations have different language, social and psychological needs. One church was surprised to discover a sizable population of Chinese grandparents whose family role was to care for their grandkids while their children earned a living. These elders felt isolated in their homes, and they loved coming together at the church and meeting others from different backgrounds. They had almost no exposure to English apart from the classes, and they were grateful for the practice. Furthermore, many had grown up in a religious vacuum under Marxism, and they were curious about Christianity.

Another church was surrounded by high-rises primarily populated with Muslim refugees. A number of the women were illiterate in their own language, and the older ones needed much patient repetition over a long period of time in order to master basic reading skills. Many of them had lost husbands through war or long separations, and they shouldered heavy family responsibilities as single mothers. They were grateful for English instruction and help that local Christians provided to their children, whether it was homework advice or taking them out for some fun. Though they followed a strict interpretation of Islam, I personally witnessed a very positive response to a talk on marriage (Ephesians 5: 22 – 33), which was a revelation as to what relations between husband and wife could be.

These are just two examples of how different communities have different needs. Your neighbourhood and the people who live there are unique. Ask lots of questions and expect to learn about them over time. Some needs may be obvious, but others may be deeper and harder to see until relationships develop beyond the surface.

Church location within the community

What's the method of travel for people who have no cars? If public transportation is available, try taking it, and talk to your fellow passengers. Is your church in an area without public transportation, or separated from newcomer populations? Most newcomers who have just arrived do not have cars, and they may not have driver's licenses. Some churches in that situation have rented or found space where most potential students live.

I recall one church that was located well outside the business district of a small town. At that time farmer's fields surrounded the church building, and everyone drove in on Sunday for worship. Nevertheless, they recognized their town had residents needing ESL, and they decided to rent a large room in a location most students could easily access. When I visited, the room was full of students who lived nearby and class leaders who could easily drive in.

Examine Your Church

Leadership Support

Church leadership support is a must for any ministry. If those who make decisions and have influence in the church see no place for ESL, then there is no point in going forward until they do. Each church should have a vision of God's purpose for them, and church leaders are responsible for determining the means by which God's purposes are carried out. Be very clear about your church's vision and determine whether connecting to newcomers through ESL is a practical way to see it fulfilled. Then make sure the leadership is also convinced God is leading the church in that direction.

There is one possibility church leadership should consider before starting an ESL ministry and that is a change in the social and cultural makeup of the congregation should newcomers be coming to Christ and joining the church. Are they prepared for the discipleship of new believers? Are they ready to accept mature Christians of other cultures into leadership positions? Do they expect newcomers to assimilate into their way of doing church, or do they expect the congregation to also adapt and change?

Prayer Support

Besides the support of church leaders, support from the congregation, particularly through prayer, is also necessary. How much is corporate prayer a part of congregational life? Be aware of who meets for prayer and when. Determine what prayer support is available and how to focus prayer on the ESL ministry, even during the planning stages. If there is no prayer commitment, it is unwise to proceed until it is in place.

One of the saddest conversations I have ever had as an ESL ministry consultant was with a young woman who had been slogging away in her own little ESL ministry at her church. She was discouraged because she didn't feel the ministry was bearing fruit. As we spoke it became clear to me that the church leadership was likely unaware of what this member was trying to do, let alone backing her effort. Moreover, she hadn't talked to anyone else in the congregation about joining her, even in terms of prayer support. I urged her to meet for prayer first with other church members, and to communicate with leaders about the potential for a real ministry.

Potential Ministry Team

In my experience, ministries that rely on one or two individuals last only as long as those key individuals serve. If the person moves on to other things, the ministry collapses unless a second and/or a third person in command has been trained to take over from the beginning. Sustainable ministry, particularly in ESL, requires a team. If your church has at least four people willing to serve with commitment through the long start-up process, then you have a team. One of the four must be

spiritually mature and willing to take on diaconal responsibility for the ministry. If a team member has teaching or ESL experience that is always a plus, but commitment and zeal are of first importance. Skills can be learned through training, observation and on-the-job experience.

Besides commitment, team members must be willing to love their neighbours sacrificially. This means they should be open to occasionally sharing their time outside of class and get involved in people's lives. Caring for the whole person carries a cost in time and personal priorities, and we must be prepared to pay it.

Inji's experience is a good example of this. Coming to ESL classes was only the beginning of being introduced to Christ. After many months of ESL Bible studies, she wanted to know more about following Jesus, so I invited her to my home where we could really talk. She accepted Christ as her Saviour during that visit, but she had endless questions, and the two of us began meeting regularly for discussion, Bible study and prayer. Her growth was not all on me. She met other single women at church, and they began doing things together for fun and hosting dinner parties for one another. Inji gave as well as received during those social occasions, and she also began serving in the church's Food Bank ministry. Little by little, through many relationships with mature Christians, she became part of our congregation.

Case Study of an ESL Ministry Start-up:

Clairlea Church is a church plant located in Toronto's east end with a congregation that is over 90% Filipino, though their vision is to become a church of many cultures. They rent space in a local school for Sunday worship, and the surrounding neighbourhood is populated by a number of different cultural groups, some of whom share the Muslim faith. The church leadership, including Diosa Ramos, the present ESL ministry head, recognized the need for community outreach over 16 years ago. Diosa is a trained ESL teacher as well as a mature Christian, respected by the congregation.

Clairlea talked about possible ways of reaching their neighbours for Christ, including ESL. Their mother church had already required them to look at a map and do a community needs assessment. However, though they went through that exercise, Diosa explained, "We learned about the community... but we never really entered the community... to learn where the people were living". As Clairlea solidified their own congregation, they participated in a short-term program hoping to foster community connections, but nothing developed long-term.

In the last decade SIM Canada has recognized Canada as a mission field, and they have trained some of their missionaries to research communities in order to determine where the church can most effectively serve their neighbours. Clairlea saw partnering with SIM missionaries as an answer from God, and in 2015, Peter and Cindy Newbury began mentoring the church in outreach. They formed an

outreach team, and began praying. Peter led the process of taking them out into their neighbourhood, assessing what the needs were. Diosa stated that this “was a training already. About thirty people signed up, [but] we became fewer and fewer. And then, [we got] the ‘Magic Twelve’ coming!” Peter explained that after a few prayer walks through the community, “The need was apparent, especially in that one corner, and when the team saw that, then through prayer and presenting it to the church, it became more than just a good intention.” They discussed possible formats until they settled on Alpha and ESL as the best ministries. The whole decision process took them at least a year, until in September of 2017 they launched their ESL classes.

Is ESL Ministry for Us?

By now you may be convinced that your church does not fit this ministry, because there is no such thing as a perfect church with a perfect ministry team. I have good news! Nothing is impossible with God, and once you know where your strengths and weaknesses are, you are ready to depend upon Him entirely and get on with serving Him. If you are missing most of the pieces I have stated above, I would encourage you to start by filling in some gaps, particularly with regard to church leadership and prayer support. However, if your church is missing a few of these pieces, and God is leading you in this direction, then go for it! Pray diligently for Him to provide what is missing, and start the process.

3. Building a Strong Ministry Team

Once church leadership and prayer support are in place, the first step in launching an ESL ministry is to form a ministry team. This chapter begins with a description of what to look for when recruiting team members followed by some tried and true methods of how to go about recruiting. The third section describes how to knit individuals into a united team with a solid spiritual foundation of common vision through prayer. The chapter ends with practical descriptions of team roles, gifts needed for those roles, and stories about how churches have formed teams.

Whom to Recruit

When beginning a ministry, pray for God to bring to mind people who have the gifts, love and commitment for the team. Ask others in your church leadership for advice on whom to approach for possible team members. These individuals should be zealous followers of Christ and have a commitment to the ministry for at least one year. They also have to be willing to love sacrificially as well as traverse cultural and class boundaries. They should expect to learn as much as they teach, both from God and their students. Naturally, ministry teams are made up of flawed human beings, and there is no ideal team, but seek out a team where the majority are mature Christians. Those who are less mature should not be excluded, so that God may strengthen their faith through serving.

Try to recruit a balance of genders. In my experience, the language teaching profession is predominantly women, at least in North America. I have also found that the majority of those interested in ESL ministry have been female. It is good to have women on the team. However, it is not good to have a team made up solely of women. For one thing, male students won't have the chance for man-to-man communication. There are subtle differences between the way men communicate with each other and how women communicate, whether it is body language, vocabulary, or intonation patterns. There are things that are appropriate for women to say to another woman but not for a man. For example, women in this culture bond through compliments on each other's appearance, which can be misinterpreted if given by a man. Men studying English have a better chance to get these things right if they have the right model to follow. Another consideration is the pursuit of friendships outside of class, which should be done with students of the same gender. Finally, I've found that the more men on your ministry team, the more likely you are to keep your male students once they sign up. Men from particular cultures may be more comfortable with male teachers.

There may be some people in your congregation who seem obvious as likely team members due to their specialized experience. Anyone who has been a teacher, learned other languages, or has lived outside their own culture likely has valuable insights to contribute. Don't dismiss those who have English as their second

language, just because they ‘have an accent’. We all have accents, but that is not the same as bad pronunciation. As long as people speak clearly, are very comfortable with English and reasonably accurate, they can probably be an excellent source of expertise on grammar and other technical aspects of the language. (Native speakers educated in North America over the last 50 years tend to be weak in that area.)

Another valuable asset that established immigrants bring to the team is their empathy for students who are going through what they have already experienced. They are best equipped to give advice on the many adjustments needed to live here successfully.

Others you might consider as part of the team once classes begin are students who are brothers and sisters in Christ. At various times I have invited those students to join the core team for prayer after class. We once had a pastor from Chad who, though placed in the lowest level of English, had a marvelous gift for evangelism and love for people. He was one of our best student recruiters. He bonded with a teenager from Afghanistan better than any teacher, and he was a winsome ambassador for Christ. When he joined us in prayer, he spoke in passionate, fluent French. I didn’t understand the words, but his zeal lifted us to the Throne of Grace nonetheless.

Another story of student evangelism involved a class of two women, one of whom was a bold Christian. This student explained how she had prayed for her husband to change his bad behaviour and how God had answered her prayers through his decision to follow Christ. The other student listened intently to her story, eventually asking, “So, how long did that take?” She was amazed at what she had heard.¹⁰

How to Recruit

In my experience, it is best to approach potential participants individually rather than just make announcements from the pulpit and hope someone responds. People tend to respond more positively when you tell them why God has brought them to mind for service in ESL. You may also be able to counter some of their misgivings with information about what the classes will be like. Besides being ineffective, the pulpit call approach also risks having the wrong people respond. The last thing you want when starting a ministry is someone who is unable to commit and/or is unwilling or unable to love sacrificially.

In the beginning years of leading my first ESL ministry, we had some great team members. I also remember two people in particular who responded to a pulpit call for volunteers but were unsuitable for the work. The first had some serious spiritual issues, and both of them had difficulty relating to people in general. In the first case, the spiritual issues proved a barrier to the gospel, and they caused awkwardness in

¹⁰ Interview with Peter Newbury and Diosa Ramos, Jan. 4, 2018

class interactions. In hindsight, I should have counseled her out of the ministry, though I do think serving on the team may have done her some good. In the second case, the woman's heart was in the right place, though she wasn't gifted for the work. She ended up being a helping hand with others taking the lead, and eventually her inability to commit meant she dropped out altogether.

Another lesson I've learned from hard experience is to beware volunteers from outside the church. First of all, it is risky to include those who are unknown quantities. Ministry oversight requires accountability, and church members can be held accountable. People ask to volunteer for many reasons. They may be taking a TESOL course in a program that provides no venue for practice teaching, and they've been told to find one. They may be seeking volunteer work to bolster their resume.

Having said that, I know at least two churches who incorporate neighbourhood volunteers successfully. At Bayview Glen Church, they accept non-members, but they are carefully interviewed beforehand:

"We had a policy that only Christians could serve. Then there were some people from the neighbourhood who wanted to volunteer. We had to develop an application form to see where they were at. This is a Bible-based class, so we needed to know their level of Bible knowledge. 50% (of team members) are not members of the church but may be from sister churches."¹¹

Another successful ministry includes non-believers as a means of witnessing to them, though they do not have any spiritually significant roles nor do they constitute a majority of the team. Once the ministry is well established, see where God leads. Nevertheless, I would recommend recruiting the strongest team possible when launching a brand new ministry.

Building a Team Foundation

Once you have the team together, choose a time when you will hold the class, then begin praying together at that time until you are ready to open your doors to students. During those first meetings, it is valuable to discuss what you hope to see God do through the ministry and what you hope will result through your service to Him. Talk about how God has gifted each of you and how you might serve on the team. Talk about what you know about the neighbourhood and what you need to learn. As you talk to one another and to God, a common vision should come together. Keep praying for the means to accomplish that vision. You can pray for things that are not yet available, whether they be materials, training expertise, or certain gifts and roles that are missing from the team.

Above all, pray for harmony. Consider how God has instructed us to live as Christians. We are to be branches rooted in the vine of Christ. Jesus warns us that,

¹¹ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

“Without me you can do nothing”¹². This means that individual team members need to consistently draw close to God in prayer. One who wanders away risks becoming the weak link on the team. If friction appears between team members, deal with it immediately, not allowing rifts to fester and grow. Bear with one another, “counting others more significant than yourselves” and “looking out for each others’ interests”¹³. Staying close to God in prayer gives us a more realistic assessment of ourselves as well as helping us deal with others’ weaknesses. If we are open, the Holy Spirit can show us the log in our eye when we focus on the specks lodged in others’.

The good news is that despite our shortcomings, God has designed His children to work as a team by giving us spiritual gifts and talents. He purposely made each of us to be unique, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, so that we fit together forming a whole. When God builds a team, we become so much more than the sum of our parts.

Team Roles

Because we have gifts that “differ according to the grace given to us”¹⁴, it is good to consider the different roles core members might fill during those first meetings. (There are other roles that can be taken on by the wider congregation, which are dealt with in Chapter 10.)

In the previous chapter I talked about the necessity of having at least four team members to begin a ministry. The idea behind having a minimum of four is that one would take leadership responsibility while the other three would teach three levels - beginner, intermediate and advanced. It is usually best not to have the ministry leader also in a permanent teaching role. This frees that person up to keep an eye on the program as a whole, deal with students, or step in should a teacher suddenly have to miss a class, etc. Ministry leaders should have some administrative gifts as well as the gift of spiritual discernment in order to have a sense of where God is leading with the team. Responsibilities can be split between people, or held by one, depending on how those necessary gifts are distributed. I know of one husband and wife team in which he has the gift of spiritual discernment and she with administration. In another team, one person with administrative skills kept student records without teaching, another dealt with classroom administration, and a third took the deacon’s responsibility of spiritual leadership. (In my experience, one person should have that latter role and be accountable to church authorities.)

Teachers should have strong social skills, with a real love for people. They should be good listeners and have the gift of encouragement. A teacher who has the gift of

¹² John 15: 1 - 10

¹³ Philippians 2: 3 - 4

¹⁴ Romans 12: 6

evangelism, helps or who is able to do “acts of mercy with cheerfulness”¹⁵ is also a great blessing. Of course, there are people who are ‘gifted’ teachers, but a lot of being a good teacher comes from experience, including observing others who are good at it.

Having food in some form is essential to setting a welcoming atmosphere in the ministry. It can be as elaborate as a meal, or as simple as tea and boxed cookies. This admittedly increases the labour involved, but it is well worth the effort. One person can take on this hospitality role, or a group can share this responsibility. Another part of hospitality is having someone by the door to welcome students as they come in. At our church this is a necessity, since our downtown location makes locked doors a safety matter. Someone has to be at the door to direct new students and let in the inevitable latecomers. Fortunately, we had someone with the gift of hospitality to act as our door person for many years. Students commented on his ready smile, and they often spent a few minutes before class chatting with him. They knew he was genuinely interested in their lives, and they kept asking after him when he retired.

Another possible role is that of child care. If you have many students with young children and a team member gifted in working with them, this can open a door to students who otherwise couldn’t study. It may also become a ministry in its own right. In the late ‘90s, we had an influx of Chinese couples coming into ESL, all of whom had children about the same age. By God’s grace we also had a young woman who was both experienced and gifted in children’s ministry. She always had something interesting for them to do. At times the parents admitted to us that they felt too tired to come, but their children had begged them to go, and they couldn’t resist the pleas.

One church solved their childcare need by scheduling the ESL ministry at the same time as Sunday worship. While adults attended English class, their children went to Sunday school. They had a large team that spelled one another off in terms of attending worship, and during the post-worship coffee hour, students could mix with the congregation.

Once you have begun the ministry, other gifts among team members will likely become apparent. God has a way of drawing out talents and experiences to serve the students who come in. One ministry leader affirmed this, “People on the team went with the strengths that they had. One teacher really planned for her lessons ahead of time and she would bring things into class to do some object lessons.” Another member was a history buff and he would tell students about the history of the city and Canada. “The students just loved to listen to him”¹⁶.

¹⁵ Romans 12: 8

¹⁶ Interview with Tony and Susan Tsoi, April 9, 2018

Case Study: Forming a Team

Clairlea's approach to recruiting a team sounds similar to giving a pulpit call, but with some differences. Their general call went out to form an outreach team, but as they met over the months, people's ability to commit was tested. Their original number of 30 was winnowed down to 12, and out of those 12 an ESL team formed. They now have a team of eight with some helpers recruited after classes started.

During the months of meeting together for prayer and discussing their vision for the neighbourhood, a foundation was laid for team cohesion. There was also some fun involved. Diosa, the team leader, firmly believes that parties encourage a team and help to really know one another, which is why she and her husband throw team parties at their home.

The Clairlea team was deliberate in evaluating member functions through a spiritual gift assessment. However, once the team got to know each other, it was fairly clear who could take on different roles. In fact, people seemed to choose roles that naturally suited their gifts. For example, one person on the team was already experienced in children's ministry, therefore the team determined from the beginning to serve children as well as their parents. They had an obviously gifted administrator who now handles student records. The husband of the team leader is gifted in helps, so he took on hospitality tasks. The team leader is an experienced ESL teacher, so she gave a two-hour team training session. Yet another member is wonderfully gifted in loving and communicating with her students. There is always laughter coming from her class.

Once you have identified and recruited team members, begun meeting regularly for prayer, assessed your team gifts and made decisions based on those gifts as to who will fill which roles, it is time to think about training. By that point you should have a sense of team weaknesses and strengths and what you need in order to get the ministry up and running. The next three chapters deal with the different types of training needed to fill in those gaps and where to get that training.

4. English: Teaching and Learning

The following four chapters address key spheres of knowledge and skills helpful to those in ESL ministry. However, you do not have to have all the training before beginning your classes. Training is ongoing, especially as you get to know your students and the gaps in team knowledge become apparent. Nevertheless, it would be wise for the team to get some basic ESL teacher training before you open the doors to students.

This chapter covers what you need to know about teaching and what you should know about your students as they do the hard work of learning a second language. Knowing something about teaching will give you needed tools and confidence. Knowledge about your students' learning process will hopefully give you some empathy and some ideas about why they approach your classes the way they do. I have made suggestions in each section about how your team can gain knowledge and skills in both areas.

Teaching Basics

The Lesson Plan

People who have never taught don't usually have a sense of the work required to deliver a good lesson. (Unless, perhaps, they are married to a teacher.) If teachers have planned and thought things through, chances are the lesson will progress more smoothly than if they have not. It is worth the effort.

The following pages show a sample lesson plan used with adult newcomers in a small speaking class. The lesson is designed to be used with the student handout *'Who are You?'*. This particular plan includes these elements:

- **Objectives:** What you hope the students will understand, feel, be able to do, or become familiar with through the lesson.
- **Activities:** What student actions will achieve the objectives? How long might each activity take? (The clock is ticking, so it's good to estimate.)
- **Teacher Leadership:** What does the teacher need to be doing during the activities? (Types of instructions, class management, etc.)
- **Materials:** Keep a running list of necessary supplies as you plan. (Don't forget to check the list before you begin class.)

Whether or not a plan is written out, before a lesson the teacher should have all the above elements clearly in mind. The more you teach, the easier it becomes to throw a plan together, because things like the order of steps and giving instructions become subconscious as you repeat the same types of activities.

Sample Lesson Plan for High Basic Speaking Class

- Objectives:**
1. Students will be able to ask and answer personal questions
 2. Students will get to know their classmates and feel part of the group
 3. Students will become familiar with 'Wh' question patterns

Time	Activities & Steps	Materials
10 min	Names <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce myself, and point to my nametag • Have students make their own name tags • Students practice asking and answering each other "What is your name? My name is ..." • Change the question to "What is his/her name?" 	Name tags, markers, 'Who are You' handout
15 min	Places <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I model, "I am from the United States" and point to the map. • Have students point to the map and state where they are from. • Practice asking and answering, "Where are you from? I am from ..." • Change the question to "Where is he/she from?" • Model, "I live at 123 Graves St. G-R-A-V-E-S. What is your address?" Check students' answers for spelling and pronunciation. 	World Map in Picture dictionary
10 min	Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask a student to read, "Why did you come here?" and I model the answer. • Talk about the reasons listed on the handout, and discuss their own reasons. Provide vocabulary, as they need. • Go around the group asking each other and answering the Why question. 	
10 min	Grammar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the different patterns for 'Wh' questions on the board, using examples from the handout. See if students know the changes for past, present and future or for Yes/No vs. information questions. 	White-board marker / eraser
15 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students make up their own 'Wh' questions. Then pair up, ask each other questions, and report answers to the class. 	

WHO ARE YOU?

Adapted from SOCEM Conversation Guides ©2016, Marion Chang (Ed.)
<https://eslministries.org/resources/teaching-materials/conversation-lessons/>

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me...
 You are **familiar**¹⁷ with all my ways.” Psalm 139: 1 & 3

Some questions are personal. You don't have to answer them. It is polite to answer, "I'd rather not say", which means, "I don't want to tell you".

Where?	Why?	What ?
<p>What is your address?</p> <p>Which country did you come from?</p> <p>Where would you like to live in the future?</p>	<p>Why did you come here?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better work? - better for children? - more interesting life? <p>Why do you need or want English?</p>	<p>What is your name?</p> <p>What do you look like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - height - build (thin, stocky) - face (round, long) - hair (colour, curly, straight, short, long) - age (young, middle-aged, senior)
Personal Facts	Likes and Dislikes	How are you unique¹⁸ ?
<p>Are you married or single?</p> <p>What friends or family do you have here?</p> <p>What kind of work did you do?</p>	<p>What are three things that you like?</p> <p>What are three things that you hate?</p>	<p>What is something you can do better than most people?</p> <p>What makes you different than most people?</p>

¹⁷**to be familiar with** - know well

¹⁸**unique** - not like anyone else

Many teaching materials include a teacher's manual with detailed instructions as to how to use the text. However, you may find that their plan does not fit the students or the objectives you have, and you should be ready to adapt the lesson to suit your class. Should you decide that the plan is just fine as it is, you will still need to look through it and have it in your head before you meet your students. Teacher training texts have even more student activity ideas, plus theory and research on language learning¹⁹.

If you have teachers in your congregation, no matter what subject they may teach, invite them to talk to your team and walk them through the process of planning a lesson. Then, put that knowledge to work as soon as possible. Team members likely have something that they could teach and benefit the team as a whole. Members can write up a plan, and give a short lesson to the team.

Teaching ESL

Approaches

Languages have been learned and taught for thousands of years, and methods for doing so are legion. There are also many different reasons why people learn another language, and the teaching approach and methods need to match that purpose.

Approaches such as Grammar-Translation focus on language structure, without spending much time on its actual use. Teachers analyze and take apart the language, usually doing so in the students' first language. Activities include memorizing words and grammar rules, but there is little in the way of building actual communication skills. Often learning objectives are centred solely on reading ability and/or passing tests.

Another formal teaching approach is Audio-Lingual, which uses listen-and-repeat methods. My first Spanish teacher used this approach. I remember seeing him write verb charts on the board, then we would repeat the different forms aloud many times in an effort to ingrain them in our minds. We would have our language lab times, where we entered the booths, put on our headphones and repeated whatever sentences we heard. If memory serves, 90% of the class communication was delivered in English.

My second Spanish teacher took a more modern approach. He himself was fluent, having spent years in Central America where he had married a native speaker. He used Spanish almost exclusively in the classroom, and he pushed us to do the same, supplying us with words when our vocabulary fell short. I remember enjoying this

¹⁹ H. Douglas Brown has written a number of ESL teacher training texts. *Teaching by Principles – An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* lays out concepts, methods, curriculum design and teaching ideas for the four skills. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* is more theoretical, but it gives practical insights into how your students learn.

class far more than my first. It was less formal and even had students practicing with one another rather than just with the teacher standing at the front. We still had some listen-and-repeat drills along with grammar analysis, but for the most part our tasks focused on actually communicating in Spanish.

This type of approach is called Communicative. It uses methods that put students in a situation where they need to communicate in the language they are studying. For example, a pair of students might each be given a picture that differs slightly from the other. Without showing their pictures, each student must ask questions to determine what those differences are. Teachers still cover grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, but in context. For example, a teacher would explain when to use the present perfect tense (i.e. has driven, have managed) before doing job interview role-plays. If the students have pronunciation problems and are not intelligible during the task, the teacher can deal with it after the task is complete using specific examples from the exercise.

ESL Ministry is about helping our neighbours communicate so they can function better in an English-speaking environment and build relationships. Try to focus on methods that provide opportunities to use English in practical ways. Find out what your students need to communicate in real life situations. Ask your students what they want and need to learn. What is hard for them to do in English? What roadblocks have they encountered because of language? That is what they should be practicing.

Be aware that your students may have studied English with formal approaches, and they may not be comfortable with informal communicative methods²⁰. However, once they realize that this new approach is to help them communicate rather than pass a test, they may be more open. I have found it useful with adult students to explain why they are doing a particular task, which is another reason to have an objective for your lesson plan.

One question I often get is, “How can I communicate with someone who doesn’t know English? What happens when they start at zero?” For those of you who have only experienced the formal approaches to learning a second language by way of your first, I need to address some common misconceptions. First, language isn’t the only way to communicate. One indispensable textbook for an outright beginner level is a good picture dictionary²¹, although smart phones may be rendering them

²⁰ There may also be a cultural reason for resistance to communicative methods. Students, particularly from shame-oriented cultures, may feel threatened because mistakes cause loss of face. If they can’t do the task perfectly, they are not going to risk the humiliation. Emphasize that mistakes are an important part of learning from the beginning. I always tell my students that I hope they make mistakes so that everyone can learn.

²¹ Adelson-Goldstein, J. & Shapiro, N. (2016). *Oxford picture dictionary: Third Canadian edition*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. This is the most comprehensive

obsolete. Besides pictures, you can get dramatic and demonstrate adverbs and adjectives.

The second misconception is that students need to understand everything in order to communicate the basics. It is fine to grasp the essential nouns and verbs, while leaving other words in a sentence to be discovered later with use. It is still communicative teaching to start with personal information in simple sentences and work your way into everyday topics such as food, shopping, family, school, work, etc. Repeat and review often. You will be surprised at what they pick up.

Have a discussion within your team about your own language learning experiences. What did you like or dislike? What was helpful, and what was not? If possible, invite some people to speak to your team about how they learned English and what they consider best practices for teaching.

Methods

Although your ministry may not cover all four language skills, this section suggests a few common methods²² for skills practice. Hopefully, this will give you a few ideas about what happens in different levels of a general ESL class. The *objectives* are listed first, followed by the corresponding activity. Each set is listed from easier to most challenging.

Listening

- *Recognize words* – Listen to a text and match a word to its picture or circle the words that you hear
- *Recognize the topic* – Listen to a conversation and decide what it's about, or circle the answer in a multiple choice
- *Recognize details* – Listen to announcements of airline departures and arrivals, while filling in a chart for flight information
- *Discriminate between tones of voice* – Listen to sentences and mark whether they are polite or impolite.
- *Become aware of organizational cues in lecture text* – Look at a lecture transcript and circle all the cue words used to list the main points. Then listen to the lecture and note the cues. (Advanced learners can skip to the last step.)
- *Predict focus and direction of a lecture based on its introduction* – After listening to a lecture introduction, predict which topics will be covered in the

dictionary of its kind that I've ever seen. It comes in an American version as well, plus many bilingual editions. For an ESL class, I would NOT recommend bilingual copies. It is better for the brain to link the picture directly to the English without the first language getting in the way.

²² These methods were adapted from Chapters 18 – 21 in Brown, H.D. (2007). *Teaching by Principles – An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, 3rd Ed, White Plains, N.Y.: Pearson Education Inc.

lecture, or choose topics from multiple choice. Then listen to the whole lecture and check predictions.

Speaking

- *Learn how to introduce yourself* – After reviewing and demonstrating common introductions (name, place of origin, greetings), have students introduce themselves to each other.
- *Know and use personal information questions* – Teacher helps the class determine polite, personal questions. Then students pair up and interview one another using those questions.
- *Become familiar with telephone language* – Using a teaching assistant with a cell phone, students role-play calling the assistant and placing an order for pizza using an actual menu. (Class could finish with a real order and pizza party.)
- *Get information through questions* – Students are given different sets of information A, B and C, such as a crossword puzzle with 3 sets of clues. Then they are put into groups of 3 and must use each other's information sets to solve the puzzle by asking and answering questions.
- *Solve problems and reach a consensus through discussion* – After reading about a certain problem, small groups of students discuss solutions and then rank those solutions from best to worst. The group must agree on their answers, and individuals must provide reasons for choices.
- *Practice the present perfect tense in context* – After writing up actual resumes, students go through mock job interviews, telling what they have done as part of their past job experience.

Reading

- *Use spelling rules and patterns to figure out a word* – Students look through a text and circle all the words ending in 'e'. Decide whether or not the word fits the pattern of vowel/consonant/final silent e. Practice saying the words that fit that pattern.
- *Recognize the pattern of subject/verb/object* – Choose a picture that matches each Subj/Vb/Obj sentence in the text.
- *Skim²³ the text for main ideas* – Students quickly skim through a text about earthquakes and list 2 things they've learned.
- *Scan²⁴ the text for specific information* – Read a weekly weather report and find the days with the highest and lowest chance of rain.
- *Categorize and group ideas in a text* – In a small group, students make an outline of the text by listing the main topics and placing key points under those topics.

²³ Skimming means, "Quickly running one's eyes across a whole text for its gist." Ibid (p. 368).

²⁴ Scanning means, "Quickly searching for some particular piece or pieces of information in a text". Ibid.

- *Make use of words and phrases in a text that indicate relationships between ideas* – In a small group, students answer text questions about cause and effect, similar ideas, explanations or contrasting information. They must also circle the words in the text that indicate the answers. Some examples of these are: “therefore, consequently, likewise, in the same way, in other words, that is to say, on the other hand, however”.

Writing

- *Learn patterns of written language*– Teacher speaks words, phrases or sentences first and students listen. Then the teacher speaks again and students write what they hear. Teacher repeats so students can check their work.
- *Practice the simple past* – Re-write a text, changing it from present-tense to the past tense.
- *Learn how to convey links and connections between story events* – Read a short story and highlight the linking language. Then look at a picture story or view a video. Students write up the story from memory using links.
- *Improve flow in putting thoughts to paper* – After discussion or another prompt, ask students to write for 5 minutes without stopping on a topic.
- *Anticipate the audience for specific writing* – Using a given job description, students write a cover letter to the company as part of an application for the job.
- *Become familiar with the writing process through drafting and revising* – Have students write a paragraph each day about language learning experiences. Students share their writing in small groups and ask each other questions for clarification, or the teacher can give written feedback. Students revise their work accordingly.

Student Basics: Factors in Learning a Second Language

People learn differently, although there are common factors that affect the process. Age, learning styles and strategies, experience in learning how to learn, culture, personality and emotional factors such as culture/language shock are just some things that play a part.

Age

Children, or those who haven’t been formally educated, tend to benefit from a more experiential approach with lots of language exposure and communication in different contexts. They ‘pick it up’ implicitly. Adults, especially those who are used to formal education, tend to prefer a more analytical approach with explanations about how English works. Of course, all students benefit from lots of exposure and practice, and even children need explanations at times.

It is important to realize that while older brains take longer to adapt, it is by no means an impossible task to learn a new language later in life. Adults even have certain advantages such as greater analytical ability and prior knowledge to call

upon. Children's minds seem to absorb language like sponges, but they also lose it more quickly. (Just ask a missionary family whose kids have returned to the field after a year of furlough.)

Another factor that is correlated with age is the amount of second language exposure. Children who attend school full time and go about the process of making friends probably are exposed to English for seven hours or more per day. Compare this to their parents who may only get 20 hours per week if they are attending full-time ESL classes. It is also more difficult for adults to form peer relationships with English speakers unless they are already fairly fluent and working in an English environment. Don't let your students use age as an excuse not to learn or to get out there and use what they are learning.

Learning Styles and Strategies

Besides age, individual people have different styles and strategies for learning²⁵. I am a 'visual' learner. I remember things if I see them, so my strategy is to write them down. My husband jokes about me making lists, but even if I lose the list, because I've seen it written I can usually remember it. Other people remember things by hearing, and they may use repeating things aloud as a learning strategy. Another style, called 'kinetic', involves learning through physical movement. I once knew an ESL student who was a Latin dance instructor. When he had to memorize the provinces in Canada, his strategy was to create a rough map with masking tape on his living room floor, then step from one provincial section to another while calling out, "British Columbia!, Alberta!, Manitoba!...". The point is that when we teach, one size does not fit all. Using different kinds of learning activities is one way to accommodate different styles.

Each of the four language skills presents its own set of learning challenges. Depending on the skill you teach, you will need knowledge about those challenges and which strategies can help overcome them. Of course, students develop their own, and it can be a valuable exercise to have class discussion about which strategies students have invented to learn words, better their listening skills, write letters or read newspapers.

Cultural Background and Personality

Culture influences learning. North America tends to produce more visual learners due to heavy reliance on the written word, whereas in 'oral' cultures, people can retain a great deal by listening and discussion.

Culture can affect language use in funny ways. For example, the first time I had to correct term papers as a university teaching assistant, I struggled with a few of

²⁵ Dr. Rebecca Oxford is a main researcher in this field. For a sense of the topic see her article, *Language Learning Styles and Strategies: An Overview* - <http://hyxy.nankai.edu.cn/jingpinke/buchongyuedu/learning%20strategies%20by%20Oxford.pdf>

them. I noticed those papers were written by Europeans. The problem wasn't their grammar or sentence structure, it was their style, which I judged as convoluted. When I spoke to one student, I was surprised to learn that in her culture it is a sign of intellectual prowess to write paragraphs by hinting at the main idea in the beginning and finally making the point in the last sentence. This is opposite to the direct approach valued in North America where the topic sentence must lead. It was a teachable moment for us both.

Personality also determines how people learn best. Those who are extroverts may be more comfortable with group activities, whereas the introverts may prefer individual tasks. Those who are sensitive to others' moods and ways of thinking tend to communicate better in general whether in their first or second language. Confidence and the willingness to take risks can lead to more opportunities for language practice. Someone who won't take the chance of making a mistake may not get as much interaction, potentially slowing progress.

Emotional Factors

You are probably familiar with the term "Culture shock". It refers to one of the stages of adjustment that a person may go through when living in a new culture, usually characterized by frustration and confusion at the odd behaviour encountered in the new environment. Part of cultural adjustment also involves adjustment of identity. Someone who is willing to identify at least in part with the new culture and language is likely more motivated in language learning.

"Language shock" may be a less familiar term, and it describes the psychological impact of starting from the beginning when learning a new language. In one sense we become babies again with all the helplessness and loss of status that implies. I clearly remember one of my students from Central America quietly weeping after a month of class. She had been a teacher in her home country, someone whose intelligence and role had been respected. She was placed at the Basic level, and she told me through her tears, "It is going to take sooo long to learn English." Our students need all the encouragement they can get, and they need to believe they will achieve competent English communication if they keep at it. The teachers' job is to cheer them on and note true progress.

Learning Experience

Literacy, the ability to read and write, usually takes a great deal of time and effort to master, even for children. However, once the brain has established pathways to take in or produce language visually, these pathways can be used when acquiring a second language. Conversely, if a student is illiterate in the first language, it can greatly multiply the time needed to acquire both literacy and second language skills. Similarly, if someone is acquiring their third or even fifth language, adding one more language can be easier than for others. In general, the more language experience a

person has had, the better they do at language learning. They have learned how to learn, and they have already established skills and strategies.

It is also possible that students have unbalanced learning experience with regard to the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. You learn what you practice: learn to read by reading, speak by speaking, etc. As previously mentioned, language education is constructed to meet the needs within that system. If the goal is reading textbooks with no expectation students will ever need to converse with others, then the system will produce people who cannot hold a conversation but who may surpass the average native speaker in sight vocabulary.

I am presently doing a language exchange with someone who came from that type of system. She has fair comprehension of written words, but she cannot recognize those words when spoken. Speaking simple sentences is a painstaking process for her. I have had the opposite learning experience. I had only two semesters of classroom Chinese when I went to live for one year in a Chinese environment. The hours that I spent working on literacy were dwarfed by the amount spent in forced practice of listening and speaking, surrounded as I was by people who spoke little or no English. I am still functionally illiterate, except regarding restaurant menus, but I can easily hold a conversation about everyday matters.

The easiest way for your team to gain knowledge about your students is to find out from the source. Ask loads of questions. (It's good practice for them and educational for you.) How do they feel about how their age affects learning? What strategies do they use to learn words, remember language, or understand reading? Which class activities seem to help and which do not?

Ask them how they are feeling on any given day and talk about the realities of culture and language shock. One revealing class exercise is brainstorming adjectives, both positive and negative, that apply to Canadians or English. Get students to tell you about how they were educated. Ask them what was expected of students and of teachers. Have they had any learning experiences outside of school? What are their best and worst memories of learning English?

How to learn more

Learn from your students about how they are learning English and their experiences as newcomers. Encourage them, extend sympathy, and try building some empathy by learning phrases from their first languages. Like any other skill, teaching becomes better with practice. Hopefully, this chapter has given you a few ideas to start with. Expect to make mistakes and to have successes as you try things out.

Now that you have considered teaching and learning, the next chapter digs into English language as a subject. Read on and find out what you probably didn't know, if you have not studied English as a foreign language.

5. English: Know Your Subject

When I crossed the Pacific to study Mandarin back in 1977, it was rare to see other foreigners like myself. Frequently total strangers would come up to me on the street and ask me to teach them English. Eventually, I gave in to one student at the university where I was studying. I soon discovered that being a native speaker only enabled me to tell what was correct or incorrect. I could not explain why it was or wasn't right. I could not help my student to pronounce words so that he was understandable or explain strategies for deciphering the complex sentences in the newspaper articles he was required to read for his courses. In fact, after a month or two my conscience was bothering me as to whether I was worth his time and expense. (He paid very well!)

In retrospect, I do think that I helped simply by giving him feedback on what aspects of his English needed to change. It also gave me curiosity about the mechanics and forms of my native language. The experience certainly exploded the myth that using English competently meant one could teach it competently, and it gave me a taste for teaching and a desire to do it well.

There is value in correcting students, so they know what works, what doesn't and where their weaknesses are. In countries where there is universal education and English is part of the curriculum, students often know grammar rules but not necessarily how to apply them. Having someone who can point them towards accuracy is genuine help. However, when you know something about the structure of English, specifically its grammar and mechanics of pronunciation, you will be even more helpful to your students, and gain their respect.

In this chapter, I dig into the grammatical and sound structures of the English language. Though it is unrealistic to expect every team member to know all about how English grammar and pronunciation function, collectively your team should be familiar with the basics. Native English speakers educated in North America tend not to know a lot about English grammatical and sound structures, which is why I have included this chapter, though it only scratches the surface. For more in-depth knowledge, see the references in the footnotes. I also provide some examples of typical student struggles in learning these structures. The chapter finishes with suggestions on how and where to get needed skills, whether from reading, experience, or from the experiences of others.

Grammar Essentials

Grammar knowledge is important for the productive skills of speaking and writing, but it's also needed to take in information while reading and listening. A tiny change in grammar can change the meaning of a whole sentence. A favourite example from one of my first grammar teachers is, "Who ate the chocolates?" versus "Who has eaten the chocolates?" The former is about an event that is over and done with,

while the latter links the past to the present with the implication that I am very unhappy about the missing candy I want to eat **now**.

One challenge that meets teachers with students from all over the world is that grammar terminology may differ from country to country and book to book. Your students may ask you grammar questions using unfamiliar terms, in which case it's best to ask them for an example of what they mean. I have found the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*²⁶ to be a valuable reference to have on hand. The following section lays out what most teachers should be familiar with.

Parts of Speech

Words may change according to the way they function in a sentence. 'Divider', 'divide', 'division', 'divisive' and 'divisively' all have the same root and core meaning, but students cannot use them correctly until they know their function in a sentence. If you look at this list you may spot a few clues as to whether these words are nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. The 'er' and 'sion' endings in divider/division often indicate a noun. Similarly, 'ive' and 'ly' endings may indicate adjective and adverb, respectively. To confuse things further, some words can function in more than one way without changing. For example, "The Ottawa River is the divide between Quebec and Ontario" and "The Ottawa River divides Quebec and Ontario."

Students who have studied English for years will usually know the parts of speech and pick this up, but others may need help. As a teacher you need to know the parts of speech, be able to explain what they are, and where they fit in a sentence.

Each part of speech has special pitfalls for students. For example, nouns can be counted or not (two bowls, but not two rices), singular or plural (desk /desks, church / churches, tooth / teeth), and pronouns can be personal (you, I), possessive (yours, mine), subject (they, we) or object (them, us). Some things we might consider simple, such as use of articles (the, a/an), actually have very complex rules, and your team will likely need to go to a reference book for explanations unless you have a grammar expert handy.

Consider how you would help a student clarify meaning for this puzzling sentence: "The man short cooker corns for we". You will likely draw a blank if you are hearing this in a conversation, but ask the person to repeat it, and try to get it written down. Depending on a student's first language, nouns and adjectives may get reversed, so determine if she means short cooker or short man. Ask which word is the verb, since it seems to be missing in the sentence. I suspect a noun form, 'cooker' should change

²⁶ Richards, J.C., Platt, J. & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (4th ed.). Pearson Education Limited. This is now available via Googledocs online with a free download:

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B401kjQ7yYFnb1RScIpbvNldhQXc/edit>

to the verb 'cook'. The object, 'corn', is a non-count noun, so it does not take 's' on the end. Finally, 'we' is a subject pronoun, and the object form, 'us', is needed. Translation: "*The short man cooked corn for us.*" Fortunately, it is rare that you would have to handle more than one error at a time.

Verb Tenses

In English verbs change to indicate time: past, present, or future, but they also change to indicate the types of time. For example, actions within time can be specific, general, repetitive, over a period, or in relation to another time. Take a look at the Chart of English Verb Tenses on the following page. From left to right, observe how verbs change signifying past, present and future. They also change from top to bottom showing the different types of time. Note how to form those different verb tenses and how the subject of the sentence can affect the form of the verb.

This is a very simplified chart, and it does not show examples of questions, negatives, or how the verb 'to be' can be an exception to the rules. More advanced students should also learn how to use 'if' to talk about hypothetical situations and the meanings of 'active' versus 'passive' voice. (The former is when the subject does the action, i.e. 'The boy broke the window' and the latter is when the action is done to the subject, i.e. 'The window was broken by the boy'.)

Keeping the verb tense chart in mind, how would you deal with these problems? "*My wife ___ an engineer in my country. She **look** for a job now. She **have** experience with city water. She **make** many improvements to the city system last year.*"

The first sentence is missing a verb. In many languages the verb 'to be' can be omitted, and students need to know English requires it. All of the other verbs are in the simple present, but because the subject is 'she' (3rd person singular) the verb needs to end in 's' for that tense. However, the first sentence should be simple past assuming it is a past fact and the engineer is no longer living in her country. The action in the second sentence likely began in the past and is continuing into the future, so it needs the present continuous tense. The third sentence could use simple past, or even better, it could use present perfect to show her past experience is related to the present job search. The last sentence must be simple past since it gives a specific past time – last year. Best corrections: "*My wife **was** an engineer in my country. She **is looking** for a job now. She **has had** experience with city water. She **made** many improvements to the city system last year.*"

When possible, use your students' own words to teach grammar. Ask questions to find out what they really mean, and then ask them if they know which verb tense fits that meaning. (If you have taught them already, then push them to give the answer.)

Chart of English Verb Tenses

Time Type	Past	Examples	Present	Examples	Future	Examples
Simple	Action at a specific time in the past	I used my computer last night. She lived in Toronto last year.	General fact, state or habit Can be used to show action frequency: i.e. usually, rarely, always, never, etc.	Winter is cold. A rose smells great. I use a computer. She often uses her computer.	Prediction about or action at a specific time in future. Planned action at a specific time in future.	Winter will be cold next year. She is going to move to Toronto next August.
Continuous: (Progressive)	Action continues over a period of time in the past Often shows past action in progress when another action occurred.	I was using my computer last night when the power went off.	Action begins in past, continues into future over a period of time Note: <i>The most commonly used present tense</i>	She is using her computer (now).	Action continues over a period of time in future. Often shows future action in progress when another action will occur.	They will be moving into the new house over this weekend. He is going to be watching the game when we get there.
Perfect: links 2 times together	Links 2 times in past. Often shows which past action happened first	I had bought my computer by last Friday. I had (already) used my computer when the power went off.	Links past & now Action that began in past and continues to now (Can use 'for' or 'since' time phrase.) Action (or repeated action) in unknown past time up to now Action in past that has a bearing on now(*)	I have studied Chinese since 1976. She has studied Chinese for 5 years. They have visited India five times. She has used the computer. *So you can have a turn now.	Links 2 times in future Links 2 actions in future and shows which will happen first	They will have moved into the new house by this weekend. She will have cooked dinner when our guests arrive.
Perfect Continuous:	Same as above, but it stresses one action continued over time.	I had been using my computer for 3 hours when the power went off.	Same as above, but it stresses the action continues or repeats over time.	I have been studying Chinese since 1976. They have been visiting India over many years. She has been using my computer! *Now I'm upset!	Same as above, but it stresses the action will continue over time.	She will have been cooking dinner all day by the time our guests arrive.

Modal Auxiliaries

We use words such as could, should, would, might, ought, must etc. with verbs to perform a number of functions such as making requests, suggestions or predictions, showing expectation, ability, certainty or necessity, giving advice or permission. Teachers need to know the many functions of these words and the finer variations of meaning. Modals indicate the speaker's feelings, desires and attitudes. Knowing how to use them can mean the difference between sounding polite or rude, supportive or arrogant.

For example, how would you explain the differences in these sentences?

1. *You must go now.*
2. *You should go now.*
3. *You could go now.*
4. *You might want to go now.*
5. *You may go now.*

Of course, context, intonation and sometimes culture also affect interpretation, but #1 clearly indicates urgency, and it sounds like an order, which means we would likely choose the softer #4, if speaking to our boss. When speaking to a peer we would probably use #2 or #3 as friendly advice, but not #5, which assumes a superior power position by giving permission to leave.

Students may have trouble using modals correctly since they do not function like other verbs. For example, they do not change according to the subject and they go with a main verb that does not change: '*She gets it.*' or '*She might get it.*' but **not** '*She mights get it.*' or '*She might gets it.*'

One way of teaching modals and their finer shades of meaning is through dramatic tasks such as role plays. Come up with different situations where such language could be used and have students write up a conversation. Lower levels can do the same as a class exercise with help from the teacher. Higher levels can experiment with roles, changing the language to fit different relationships, i.e. husband/wife or employee/employer. Once the scripts are finished, have students perform, and the more drama the better.

Sentence Structure

This can be as simple as Subject/Verb/Object at a lower level. Once they are comfortable with that, adjective and adverb placement could be a next step. In English, adjectives go before the nouns they modify, but adverbs may go before or after the verb. For example, 'He quickly moved' and 'He moved quickly' are both correct.

With advanced students you may need to become familiar with such features as:

Gerunds	(I adore listening to waves on the shore.)
Infinitives	(I want to listen to waves on the shore.)

Clauses	(I listened to waves that lulled me to sleep.)
Ways to relate ideas	(Due to a late night, I feel fatigued, and consequently I have neither the ability nor the energy to work.)

Hopefully, you are not feeling overwhelmed at this point. If it makes you feel any better, it took me years of teaching to learn all this, BUT with experience and a good reference text, it can be learned. You don't always have to have all the answers on the spot. Many a teacher has told students, "I'm not certain of that, but I will check and tell you next class." Betty S. Azar has written a series of grammar books that I've found helpful both to students and prospective teachers²⁷. For teacher references that cover the 'how to' of grammar and the 'why' of linking grammar to meaning, Marianne Celce-Murcia and Dianne Larson-Freeman's texts are a well-respected source of information²⁸.

Pronunciation Essentials

Newcomers tell me they get tired of hearing, "Pardon me?" or "Could you say that again please?" They want to be understood easily in order to get the work they want, make friends and otherwise function well in a new country. Your ministry can provide patient listeners who will help them discover their problems with pronunciation and hopefully give them needed practice.

Accent vs. Pronunciation

I define 'accent' as the way a person sounds. We all have an accent that carries personal information about us, such as where we've lived or our social identity. Accents are not good or bad, they simply are. I define good pronunciation as the ability to sound intelligible to the listener. Admittedly, this depends in part on the listener's ability and willingness to communicate. Someone can be easily understandable and still have a foreign accent.

Another consideration is that someone can be perfectly intelligible in one context, but hard to understand in another. There are many varieties of English in

²⁷ The Azar grammar series published by Pearson/Longman includes beginner, "*Basic English Grammar*", intermediate "*Fundamentals of English Grammar*" and advanced "*Understanding and Using English Grammar*". Though Azar has been criticized for not including practice using real communication, I haven't found better texts for clear, concise explanation. The books contain precise charts that help make sense of a complex subject. I recommend the advanced for English speakers who have no grammar background and want to learn themselves. It is also a great reference book to have on the shelf.

²⁸ Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (2016) *The Grammar Book: form, meaning and use for English Language Teachers*. 3rd Ed. Boston: Heinle-Cengage Learning. In my experience, this is the most in-depth teacher reference. These authors stress teaching grammar in order to communicate, and they provide teaching methods that make use of real communication. Larsen-Freeman has also edited a series for students called *Grammar Dimensions*.

the world, and even native speakers may need to adjust their pronunciation in order to be understood in a new area. Many years ago, I had a wonderful visit to Trinidad, staying with a friend's family. I had to adapt my ear to the local English, though I noticed I had no trouble understanding the news broadcasters. When I discussed this with my new friends, they commented that the average person spoke the real Trini-Trini English but that professional speakers tended to be more generic. They also said that they sometimes had trouble understanding me. If I ever retire there, I would have to adjust the way I speak to have 'good pronunciation'.

Stress and Rhythm

I'd say this is the most important part of pronunciation. For example, if the speaker lacks stress and rhythm, the listener cannot distinguish which information is important. (It can also induce sleep with continued exposure.) If syllable stress is wrong, the speaker is often unintelligible.

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines stress as "the pronunciation of a word or syllable with more force than the surrounding words or syllables"²⁹. In laymen's terms, this refers to the beat of speech. Some languages such as Spanish and Japanese are syllable-timed languages, meaning each syllable takes about the same amount of time. English is a stress-timed language, meaning the timing of a word or sentence does not depend on the number of syllables, but on the number of stresses. '**Scots like oats**' takes about the same amount of time to say as 'The **Scots** would've **liked** the **oats**' since each sentence has three stresses. (Try it yourself, speaking at a natural, conversational speed.)

At the word level, one syllable may be stressed, as in pho**TO**graphy. In an extra long word, there may be multiple stresses, for example, **CIN**ema**TO**graphy. There are various rules as to which syllable in a given word receives stress, but suffice it to say English tends to move syllable stress around more than in other languages. Consider how confusing it may be for a student to determine the pronunciation of 'pho**TO**graphy', 'photo**GRAPH**ic', and '**PHO**tograph'.

Make sure your students know that learning a new word includes learning the stress pattern. When teaching syllable stress it helps to use visual cues such as enlarging the script, as seen above, or using different sized dots:

● ● ● ●
Pho/ to/ gra/ phic

Most native speakers are not conscious of how we use stress. When we teach stress we need to know that stressed syllables sound **louder**, last **longer** and have a **pitch change**, meaning the voice usually goes higher or sometimes lower in tone. Test it out by quickly saying a multisyllabic word three times. What makes the stressed syllable distinct from the others? Try going onto Youtube and listening to speech

²⁹ Richards, J.C., Platt, J. & Schmidt, R. (1992). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2nd ed.). Longman Group U.K., Limited.

samples from professional speakers and check how they use stress. (You can challenge your students to do the same for homework.)

The flip side of stressing syllables is reducing those that are unstressed. Reduced syllables are shorter and softer, with no pitch change. An unstressed syllable often affects the vowel, changing it to a schwa sound (ə)³⁰. Try quickly saying ‘photography’ three times and pay attention to the sounds in the unstressed syllables. You should hear /ə/ in the first and third syllables: ‘phətəgrəphi’. For students coming from a first language that has the same time for every syllable, this can be a challenge, especially if they don’t use the schwa properly.

One method for practicing vowel reduction is to use nonsense syllables to replace the word sounds. Stressed vowels become ‘ah’, and unstressed vowels change to schwa. For example, ‘photography’ becomes ‘tətətətə’.

Physical techniques also help teach stress. Try clapping or stomping out the rhythm of words. To demonstrate how syllables lengthen or shorten, use a rubber band stretched between the thumbs when stressing or reducing the syllables. Start slowly, then see how fast your students can do it with practice³¹.

I define rhythm as the pattern of stress over extended speech such as sentences and paragraphs. The word ‘photo**GRAPH**ic’ has the same stress pattern as ‘This is **BRO**ken’. Just as syllables in words have stress, so certain words in a sentence get stress, depending on their function. Using the example of “Scots like oats” (noun, verb, noun), each word in the sentence carries essential meaning. The longer example, “The Scots would have liked the oats”, contains added words serving a grammatical function, but in essence both sentences carry the same meaning.

Words that carry meaning are called **content words**. Words serving grammatical purposes are called **function words**. Content words are usually stressed, and function words tend to be reduced. (See the chart on the following page for some examples of each.)

Of course, context is everything! Any word can be stressed depending on the meaning a given speaker is trying to convey. For example, a purpose of stress is to

³⁰ Schwa, symbolized by /ə/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet, is the most common vowel sound in English. It is also the easiest sound to produce made with a relaxed mouth and requiring little breath or effort. A schwa is the vowel in ‘of’, as in ‘cup of coffee’, or in ‘a’ as in ‘take a seat’. **See the next section on English Sounds for further explanation.**

³¹ Warning! Know your students. I would be cautious about handing out rubber bands to a bunch of energetic kids, unless you’re prepared to duck. I’ve also found that I’m a bit clumsy in doing this exercise myself, so see what works for you.

highlight key information. Consider these responses, noting the stress, and try matching them to the questions³²:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. The red car is mine. | A. Is the blue car yours? |
| 2. The red car is mine. | B. Does the red car belong to Peter? |
| 3. The red car is mine. | C. Is that your red motorcycle? |
| 4. The red car is mine . | D. That red car can't be yours! |

Acting out different scenarios in class is a wonderful way to teach pronunciation in general, and stress, rhythm and intonation in particular. Students can write their own scripts, or use prepared texts. Get dramatic and encourage students to speak the lines in different ways depending on how the character might be feeling.

Content Words and Function Words

Usually Stressed		Usually Reduced	
Content Words	Examples	Function Words	Examples
Nouns	car, Pat, Toronto	Articles	the, a, some
Verbs (except 'to be')	drive, chase, seem	Pronouns	he, her, his, theirs
Adjectives	red, dark, fast	Verb 'To be'	is, are, were, am
Adverbs	very, aptly, rarely	Auxiliary verbs	has (gone)
Negatives	not, never, can't	Prepositions	to, in, on, of
Contrasting words	His car, not your car!	Conjunctions	and, but, or

Both students and teachers claim that learning a song helps pronunciation, and it certainly livens up a class. Choral speaking is also good practice for stress and rhythm. Limericks, with their standardized patterns, are a fun way to practice both stressing and reducing syllables³³. Having the class recite as a group can give you clues about which students have trouble in reducing syllables. (They will be the ones

³² Answer key: 1A, 2C, 3D, 4B

³³ See this website for examples -

<https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/happy-mothers-day-limerick>

who finish a few beats behind the others.) However, rather than singling individual students out, try breaking the class into smaller groups, working on problem phrases for 20 – 30 seconds with each group.

The same method of using nonsense syllables to teach word stress works equally well for teaching the rhythm of extended speech. For example, the first line of a limerick would be: tətətətə tatətə tatə. Another source of choral speaking material is the Jazz Chants series by Carolyn Graham, published by Oxford University Press³⁴.

Pronunciation is obviously important for speaking skills, but knowing how stress and rhythm function in English can aid listening skills as well. I've had students report that it was so much easier to understand fast-paced native speech once they realized it was not necessary to focus on every single word but rather on the stressed words that carried essential meaning.

English Sounds

When most people think of pronunciation they think of isolated sounds. Native speakers produce consonants and vowels without being consciously aware of how it's done, but if we are to teach these sounds, we need to know consciously how to physically produce the sound and what distinguishes one sound from another.

Be aware that sounds and letters are two distinct systems. English spelling is only partially phonetic, with the letters also giving clues to the word's origin and meaning. For example, the first sound in '**ph**oto' is the same as that in '**ph**oot'. The former comes from the Greek word meaning light, and represents the sound by 'ph', whereas the latter comes from Germanic Old English using 'f'. To further complicate matters, 'th' represents two different sounds. Say both initial sounds of the words '**th**em' and '**th**ink', and you should notice the difference. In order to know the sounds of English, apart from the spelling system, I would suggest checking out the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which many of your students have also studied³⁵.

³⁴ Carolyn Graham has some online training videos about how to use these chants in class: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_nPUuPryCs

³⁵ This website gives a chart of all the sounds in the General American variety of English. If you put your cursor over the example words, you can choose either to hear or see the sound spoken in context:

<https://easypronunciation.com/en/american-english-pronunciation-ipa-chart>

Don't get put off by the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The IPA is a very useful tool to distinguish actual sounds from the way our spelling system deals with them. For more information on the IPA, see these 3 teaching videos for vowels, diphthongs and consonants: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c97xwLdSsXU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XajvB178Hhs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cU9fqpCqBA>

Below you will see a chart of sounds for the General American variety of English. This chart uses IPA symbols, but where the symbol differs a lot from the English alphabet, I have included a key word with the sound **underlined**. The top two rows are vowels, the third row represents diphthong vowels, and the bottom three rows are consonants. The sounds are in categories according to how they are produced. The following paragraphs give you some basic information about how to make the sounds, and how to help your students make them.

IPA Sound Chart for North American English
aj pi ej sawnd tʃaʊt fɔː nɔːθ əmeɪəkən ɪŋɡlɪʃ

ski i	pick ɪ	step ɛ	fat æ					Row 1 Vowels
tune u	book ʊ	summit ʌ	of ə	core ɔ	got ɑ			Row 2 Vowels
hey ej	aisle aj	boil ɔj	row ow	cow aw				Row 3 Diphthong Vowels
p	b	t	d	chop tʃ	Judge dʒ	k	g	Row 4 Consonants
f	v	think θ	that ð	s	z	hush ʃ	vision ʒ	Row 5 Consonants
m	n	sing ŋ	h	l	r ɹ	w	Johann j	Row 6 Consonants

Vowels

A vowel sound is “A speech sound in which the airstream from the lungs is not blocked in any way in the mouth or throat, and which is usually pronounced with vibration of the vocal chords”³⁶. This means that vowel sound differences depend on the shape of the mouth. Tongue position, lip rounding and jaw position shape vowels.

Take a look at Row 1 of the IPA Sound Chart. Looking in the mirror, make the sounds from left to right, and observe what your tongue is doing. You should notice a change in tongue position and your jaw should drop a bit as you move from /i/ to /æ/. Whether your tongue is to the front or back of the mouth, or whether it is high

³⁶ Richards, J.C., Platt, J. & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (4th ed.)*. Pearson Education Limited, p. 403.

or low shapes a vowel. Now try making the sounds in Row 2, still observing yourself in the mirror³⁷. Notice how your lips change shape moving from left to right. Your mouth should form a tight 'o' shape for /u/ but open into a less rounded form for /ɑ/. Finally, try the diphthong vowels in Row 3. Notice that your jaw moves up and down for each sound. This is because diphthongs are a combination of two sounds sliding into one. Students may have trouble with these if they do not move their jaws enough.

Vowels can be difficult to teach, because of the very fine differences in tongue position, lip rounding, or jaw position. The good news is vowels usually are not at the root of bad pronunciation, though they are an important component in accents. In teaching pronunciation, it is wise to choose your battles. If there is no breakdown in communication, leave it alone, but if there is a struggle to understand a student's speech, it is worth addressing the problem. Pronunciation is a physical action, and even when a student finally gets a sound right, it takes a lot of practice at home to develop the right muscles and coordination. Don't waste their time if they are easily understandable, but don't be afraid to assign practice of problem words and phrases for homework, checking for progress in the next class.

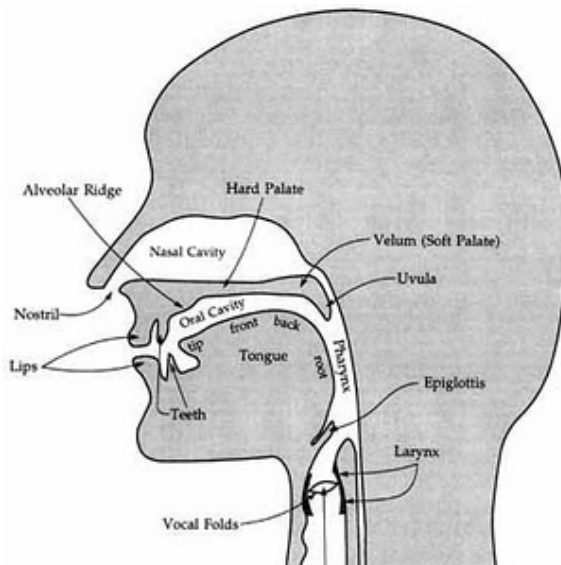
Having your students use mirrors to see the finer differences in vowels can give them necessary visual feedback. They may feel silly looking in the mirror, but just like learning dance steps, your brain may not be aware of what your body is doing. (It's no accident that ballet classes use mirrors to provide visual feedback.) This holds true for students as well, and I keep small hand mirrors as basic equipment in English class. One technique I've used is to have students position the hand mirror so they can see both their mouths and the teacher's. As the teacher makes the sound, they can compare it with their own efforts and modify accordingly.

Consonants

These sounds are made by completely or partially blocking exhaled air in some way. Teachers need to know the parts of the mouth and throat we use to articulate these sounds. Lips, teeth, hard and soft palate, and tongue position distinguish one consonant from another. The head cross-section below shows the key places for consonant production. Consonants can be classified by where and how they are made. Moving from front to back in the cross-section, we have the categories of 'bilabial' (2 lips), labiodental (teeth + lip), dental (teeth + tongue tip), alveolar (tongue tip on ridge behind teeth), palatal (tongue blade + hard palate), velar (tongue body + soft palate) and glottal (air through vocal cords).

³⁷ Note that the vowel in 'summit' is almost the same as the schwa in 'of (cup of coffee). The only difference is the first is stressed and the second is not, making it shorter.

Head Cross-section



The rows in the sound chart are arranged according to **where** a sound is produced. As you move from left to right in a row, you also move from front to back in the head cross-section. Each row is also grouped according to **how** a sound is produced. Is the air completely blocked or flowing? Is the air flowing from mouth or nose? Is it just air, or are the vocal cords used as well?

Try saying the sounds in Row 4 and notice how each sound blocks air and then releases it. These are called 'Stop' consonants because they stop

airflow and then release a puff of air. You will notice that 'stops' like 'p' and 'b', 't' and 'd', cannot be made continuously, but only repeated. The sounds in Row 5 partially constrict the air causing friction, but still allow airflow. These 'Fricative' sounds such as 'f' and 'v', 's' and 'z' can be made continuously, or at least until you run out of air.

Other sound characteristics help us classify consonants. If you place your fingers over your voice box and speak these sounds³⁸ aloud, you will notice half use your voice and the other half do not³⁹. Rows 4 and 5 list sounds in voiceless/voiced pairs, because **where** they are made is the same, but **how** they are made is different. For example, /p/ and /b/ only differ because the second uses voice, but they are both stops using the lips. Not every language recognizes this distinction. If misunderstanding arises because students use those sounds interchangeably, try having them put their hands on their throats and testing the difference.

Row 6 contains miscellaneous sounds that do not fit into the other rows. Nasal consonants such as /m/, /n/ or /ŋ/ as in **sing** redirect the airflow through the nose. (That is why we cannot produce them if we have a cold.) There is very little restriction of airflow in /h/, /l/ and /ɹ/. The last 2 consonants in the chart are semi-vowels, which is why some textbooks use those symbols in diphthongs.

³⁸ Make sure you are saying a sound, and not a letter. For example, the /t/ sound is not the same as saying 'tee'. If you say that sound, you should not feel any vibration in your voice box.

³⁹ If you put your fingers on your voice-box, you should feel throat vibration with 'b', 'd', 'v' and 'z' whereas 'p', 't', 'f' and 's' are voiceless with no vibration.

Teachers need to be consciously aware of how to produce consonants. Stand in front of a mirror and pronounce the sounds in Rows 4 – 6, watching what your mouth is doing. During this exercise, note if the tongue is involved and which part of it is used (tip, blade or body). Are you using your voice or not?⁴⁰ When you are trying to help your students speak clearly, you will be doing the same analysis with them.

Consonants may cause problems because students don't have the sound in their language, and they don't know how to make them. For example Korean does not have /f/ or /v/, and Japanese 'r' resembles a cross between /l/ and /ɹ/ to the English ear.

There are two visual means you can use to help students make new sounds. Mirrors work for checking on what the mouth is doing. I've used this to help students practice the difference between /l/ and /ɹ/. The tongue touches the palate in /l/ but not in /ɹ/, an easy distinction to see. Koreans can see whether their teeth are touching lower lip for /f/ and /v/.

Another visual aid is the head cross-section, also called a 'Sammy diagram'. Using the diagram you can point to the places where the tongue should or should not touch. If you are good at drawing free hand, you can sketch a rough picture on the board, drawing the tongue in the correct position for whatever sound you're teaching. Otherwise you can grab the image from the internet and make it into a poster for reference. (Leave out the tongue, so you can use an erasable marker to draw in the tongue position each time.) I have used an extra large image and put my hand into the diagram to demonstrate how the tongue is supposed to move for /l/ and /ɹ/.

Another problem students have is when the sound occurs in a position that violates the rules of their first language. They are able to make the sound, but not in certain contexts. For example, the /ŋ/ sound never occurs at the beginning of an English word, whereas it does in Vietnamese, such as in the common surnames of 'Nguyen' and 'Ngo'. English speakers can make the sound, but it takes some concentration and practice to produce that sound at the beginning rather than at the end of a word. Before assuming your students can't make a sound, see if they can make the sound in other word positions. For example, for /v/, have them try "vine, hover, save". If they are able to make the sound, then work with them to produce the sound in a different position⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Check your consonant analysis at this website, which lists the consonants and their points of articulation: <https://www.mimicmethod.com/ft101/manner-of-articulation/>

⁴¹ If you want to learn how to pronounce 'Nguyen' properly, try slowly repeating 'sing-when', then speed up, dropping sounds off the beginning: 'ing-when, ngwhen'. The same technique works to move a sound to the end: 'go-tan, go-ta, goat'.

Another common pronunciation problem is with consonant clusters. English is a dreadful language for lumping many consonants together with no vowel relief in between. Students from first languages that don't cluster consonants deal with this in various ways. They might insert a vowel into the word so that 'backs' becomes 'backəs', or they might just drop one or more of the consonants saying 'bak' or 'bas'. Slowing down speech sometimes helps with this problem. Draw out the word into its separate sounds: b-æ-k-s. Slowly speed up the word until they can manage it, and then assign practice for homework. Note that native-speakers also take shortcuts with consonant clusters. For example, in "Hang the clothes up outside", 'clothes' probably sounds more like /klowz/ than /klowðz/. You might experiment with dropping some consonants from the cluster, and see if the word remains understandable.

Carol Blake notes that, "A great teaching tool now is the mobile phone – there are apps to spell out speech. Have students try difficult words and see what the phone 'hears'."⁴²

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman have written an in-depth teaching reference for pronunciation⁴³. The amount of information in this text might be overwhelming, but start with the basics, and go back to it when your students have problems you can't solve. Another useful teacher text is *Teaching American English Pronunciation* by Avery and Ehrlich⁴⁴. Student texts can also provide a basic understanding for new teachers. I would recommend Judy Gilbert's *Clear Speech* series⁴⁵ and Rebecca Dauer's *Accurate English*⁴⁶ for more advanced understanding.

⁴² See her article: <http://blog.teslontario.org/smart-phones-in-the-pronunciation-class-yes/>

⁴³ Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (2010). *Teaching Pronunciation: A course book and reference guide. 2nd Ed.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This teacher training text covers just about everything you would ever wish to know about English pronunciation varieties and how to teach them.

⁴⁴ Avery, P. & Ehrlich, S. (2003). *Teaching American English pronunciation. 6th Ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. This book is very readable, and it makes a good handbook for problem solving. It includes teaching techniques that address common pronunciation problems, but it also highlights problems for specific first language groups.

⁴⁵ Gilbert, J.B. (2012) *Clear speech from the start: Pronunciation and listening comprehension in North American English. 2nd Ed.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This student text explains the basics and gives practice exercises. The more comprehensive text is Gilbert, J.B. (2012.) *Clear speech: Pronunciation and listening comprehension in North American English. 4th Ed.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Dauer, R.M. (1993). *Accurate English: A complete course in pronunciation.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents. This text has helpful pictures showing mouth positions that illustrate fine differences between sounds. It tends to be technical and rule-based. This could make it overwhelming to new teachers and

How to Learn More

Not every student needs all four language skills, and your ministry may choose to focus only on the skills most necessary for your students. However, as teachers your team does need to begin getting a sense of how to explain basic English grammar and help students with pronunciation problems.

I know that not everyone is gifted for language, and I've seen eyes glaze over when I'm training on the technicalities of English structure, but it is worth the effort to know something about the language you are teaching. Also, as described in the previous chapter, people learn differently. I know not everyone learns best from explanation and lecture, so I include demonstrations and participatory practice in addition to written handouts when I train, hoping each person will get something by the time we're finished. I have categorized three types of training: Learning from reading, learning through experience, and learning from others' experience.

Read

For some people, reading about grammar or pronunciation teaching is the means to gain expertise, and I have already included some texts and websites aimed at both teachers and students in the chapter footnotes. Student texts are useful for learning things yourself, like grammar, pronunciation and tips for mastering the four skills. They also present activities designed to help learning, which will give you ideas about tasks you can use with your students.

When people first get into teaching, they tend to want activities they can use immediately in their next class. This is not a bad place to start. Depending on interest and learning style, this may appeal to some of your team members, and they can share what they are learning with the group. Be aware that not all activities will work with all students, but try them out and learn from mistakes. Knowing about how people learn a second language and what affects the process is equally worthwhile. The old saying, "There's nothing as practical as a good theory"⁴⁷ holds true as you try to figure out why a lesson didn't work.

One warning would be appropriate here. I have found that reading information does not stick unless you do something with it and the sooner the better. Most of what I know about grammar I learned through tutoring a friend using her grammar text. I stayed one lesson ahead of her then taught it a day later. Talk about what you are

students, but I like it as a reference. In my experience unless students get a chance to mindfully apply the rules in real life, it's unlikely to change their intelligibility.

⁴⁷ An oft-cited quote by Kurt Zadek Lewin, father of social psychology. I also like, "There is nothing so theoretical as a good method", the title of an article about the synergy between theory and method by Anthony G. Greenwald:

<https://faculty.washington.edu/agg/pdf/NothingSoTheoretical.PPS.2012.pdf>

reading with your team members. Try demonstrating an activity to the group. Ask someone who has learned a second language about his/her experience in order to test out a learning theory you have just read.

Experiences

Another way of learning is observation of skilled teachers. Once your ministry team is formed an excellent training opportunity is going out to observe successful ESL ministries. You can look online to see which ones are in your area, by searching for 'church ESL'. Then contact them to see if they can accommodate you. It is usually best to have only one or two people observing at a time so as not to be too disruptive to the class. If there is no ESL ministry already operating close by, consider volunteering at a government (LINC) or community program. (This may or may not be allowed, depending on the policy of the organization.)

Learning by doing is the next step. Find a student text that makes sense to you, and try using it to teach an actual student. There are many ways to connect with a potential student. Perhaps there is someone in church who might want English practice, or people who can introduce you to their newcomer neighbours. Maybe a member of your team knows a lot of potential students and he/she can share contacts.

If you are approaching people yourself, don't make the mistake of assuming they want or need help with English. Explain that you need help in learning how to teach, and that your church will be opening an ESL program soon. Then ask them if they know anyone who would be willing to work with you. (This also gets the word out about your church's future plans.) If you are tutoring one-on-one, recruit someone of the same gender.

Once you do start tutoring, make a note of what you still need to know. Questions will come up that you cannot answer, or your student may have problems you aren't sure how to tackle. Pool your questions as a team, and use them in future training. The experience will likely give you some confidence as well. When I train churches, I urge them to complete a short-term tutoring assignment. One person who did this was pleasantly surprised with the results. He reported, "My student said it really helps him, and he doesn't want to stop meeting. I guess if I can do it, anyone can!"

Experienced People

Interactive team training by a professional is worthwhile, particularly if team members have some teaching experience under their belts and a list of questions to cover. If you have an ESL teacher in your congregation or your denomination, use that person to train the team. Ask about any ministerials or other Christian ministry cooperatives⁴⁸ to find the widest possible range of like-minded training resources. If

⁴⁸ In Ontario we have the Southern Ontario Cooperative of ESL Ministries (SOCEM): <https://sites.google.com/site/eslministries/>

all else fails, you may also find someone who trains ESL teachers at a local college or university. Invite some potential students to come in, and have the trainer do a demonstration lesson with a debriefing afterwards.

Finally, if your team still lacks language teaching knowledge, it would be beneficial to send someone for professional training. Consider supporting that person financially with tuition. This would mean that a team member sacrifices time and effort, but it is well worth the investment. The knowledge and skills can be passed on to the team, and you will have a reference person for students' hard questions.

There are intensive programs taking 8 – 10 weeks, such as the CELTA certificate course, whose standards are set by Cambridge University⁴⁹. This program provides a knowledge foundation of the English language and, most importantly, skills for teaching it to adults. Some other schools also offer their own quality programs that meet the standards of independent organizations such as TESL Canada⁵⁰. Neither of these programs comes cheap, but you get what you pay for.

Beware of training programs that promise a certificate in just a few hours without including any teaching experience involving actual ESL students. These types of schools make up their own standards, and other schools do not recognize their training. Such certificates aren't worth the paper they are printed on.

I am hoping that this chapter has not discouraged you with a long list of information you cannot yet fully understand, let alone put to use. You don't have to drink a river all at once; just start sipping. Invest some time in **working through** the technical parts of English step by step. You do not have to be an expert to begin.

Once you have some basic teaching and English knowledge under your belt, recruit your students and get started. As you get to know them, pay attention to the way they do things without making assumptions. Then, consider the information in the following chapter on culture.

In Calgary, Alberta there is Cooperative ESL Ministries: <http://eslcooperative.ca>

⁴⁹ See their website for information: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/celta/>

⁵⁰ One example of training offered at a private college recognized by TESL Canada is: <http://cclcs.ca/tesl-training/>

6. Crossing Cultures

One of the main reasons I chose ESL teaching as my profession was to encounter people from all over the world and get a taste of the cultures they came from. The more I got to know them and the way they saw and experienced the world, the better I was able to understand and explain my own culture in contrast. It also made me a better teacher as I discovered what methods worked best within different cultural groups.

Serving in ESL ministry means we need to be ready and willing to cross into other cultures. The first part of this chapter begins with some basic knowledge about what culture is, some important areas of cultural difference, and the process people go through when adjusting to a new culture. It concludes with suggestions on how to learn more about your students and understand the way they see the world.

Why this is Important

Knowing something about the cultures of your students can definitely help to find the right teaching approach. One example of this is error correction. If you know that your students come from a shame-oriented culture, then you would not be singling out students and correcting them in front of others, thus causing them to 'lose face'⁵¹. You would give the correction to the whole group so they can all benefit, or make sure to correct every student, not just one, or even wait and give feedback to a student privately.

Cross-cultural knowledge also aids in forming stronger relationships with your students. For example, Japan has a very collective culture in contrast to North American culture that is at the extreme end of individualism. In the first year of our church's ESL ministry we had a few Japanese students. They delighted in the group experience of class, and they eagerly accepted social invitations where we got to know them as people as well as students.

What is Culture?

Defining culture is difficult simply because the topic is so huge. Culture circumscribes every aspect of human behaviour as well as psychology. It forms a "template for personal and social existence"⁵². We have grown up with certain expectations about the proper way to relate to people and survive socially. There are material aspects of culture that can be easily grasped with our senses, such as art, language, food, music, some customs, etc. However, cultural features such as

⁵¹ 'Lose Face' is a direct translation from Chinese, and it paints a picture of shame such that a person cannot lift his/her head to face another. Most world cultures, including China, are shame-based.

⁵² Brown, H. Douglas. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 4th Ed. Addison, Wesley, Longman Inc., White Plains, N.Y., p.177

values, beliefs, and concepts of how the world does and should function cannot be so easily deduced or learned.

The metaphor of the iceberg⁵³ with its small, visible top and large, hidden bottom has been around for over 30 years. The visible portion of the iceberg corresponds to material parts of culture, i.e. things we can see, hear, taste and touch. These are cultural aspects that most frequently come to mind. If we want to experience the culture of a different country, we try the food, watch performances of traditional dance and music, shop for souvenirs of local clothing, admire the unique architecture and even try to learn phrases in the language. However, unless we investigate thoroughly and stay a while, we may never know the culture's deeper aspects. How people make decisions or structure relationships, attitudes towards authority or time, concepts of right and wrong, shame, guilt, cleanliness, and personal space are all part of the invisible aspects of culture. These aspects explain a lot about why people do what they do. In ministry we need to know the invisible parts of culture so as not to offend or jump to conclusions. In order to be effective ambassadors for Christ, we need to know where people are coming from regarding the human condition, concepts of deity, love, and the afterlife, just to name a few.

Areas of Cultural Difference

This section explains some of the main cultural aspects affecting social interaction, all of which will have a bearing on teacher-student relations and expectations. I have used graphics created by Yang Liu, a Chinese artist who came to live in Germany as a teenager⁵⁴. She pictorially represents cultural differences, with western culture in blue and eastern in red. The majority of world cultures, not just those in Asia, tend to have more in common with the Chinese, at least in broad terms.

Finally, different doesn't necessarily mean wrong. Each side of these cultural variances has its own advantages and weaknesses. It is easy to make assumptions when interpreting behaviour that differs from what is expected in our own culture. Your job as cross-cultural learners is to gather information first before assuming the meaning of any given action. Encourage your students to do the same, and talk about

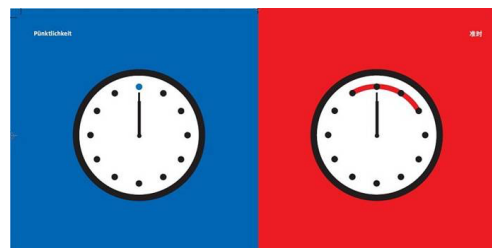
⁵³ The iceberg is a common metaphor for culture, first laid out by Gary Weaver. See: Weaver, Gary R. (1986). Understanding and coping with cross-cultural adjustment stress. In R.M. Paige (Ed). *Cross-cultural orientation: New conceptualizations and applications*. Lanham MD: University Press of America. For a detailed description of culture's visible and invisible aspects see: "Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg: Five stages Toward Cultural Competence." by Jerome Hanley
<http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/hips/Beyondthetipoftheiceberg.pdf>

⁵⁴ Yang, Liu. (2015) *East meets west*. Berlin: Taschen. Her graphics can also be found online, and I've used them with students:
https://museumfatigue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/liuyang_eastwest.pdf

their interpretations of what they are seeing in this culture. You may even decide to use some of Yang Liu's graphics.

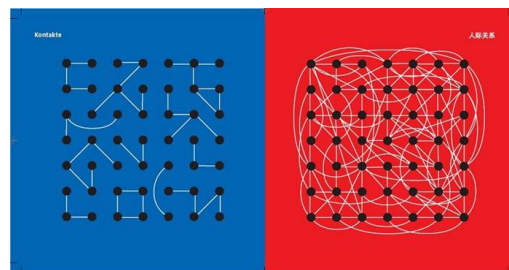
Time

Concepts of time and lateness are culturally determined. In Canada, "time is money", and arriving 15 minutes past class starting time is late. (Note how English uses the same verbs for both time and money – make, spend, waste, save, etc.) In Zambia, I've been told that 15 minutes or more past starting time is still within the realm of punctuality. A fellow missionary explained that in Zambia relationships are so important you would never use the excuse, "Can't talk or I'll be late" to friends met on the way. Stopping to chat for five or ten minutes to inquire about their well-being is obligatory, and everyone understands time must stretch to fit.



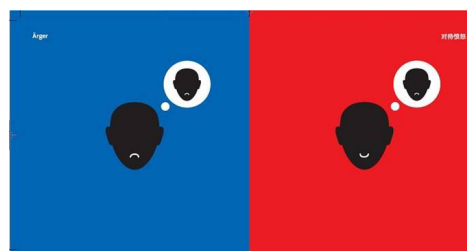
Focus on Relationship versus Task

The last example of Zambian time also serves to illustrate the cultural value of relationship over the task at hand. In such cultures this often means the job will take longer, but since the relationship outlasts the task, it doesn't matter. Project goals are subordinated to the needs of those working on that undertaking. Canada tends to be more task-focused. In a teaching context, I have learned to expect students from relationship-focused cultures to be more interested in making friends than achieving my lesson goals. That calls for flexibility on my part. I must also recognize that from an eternal standpoint, relationships are important, and my own culture doesn't always do well in that regard.



Directness versus Indirectness

In some cultures it is rude to refuse or disagree directly, so the society has worked out other ways to say no. They might qualify their 'Yes' with certain conditions, or procrastinate endlessly when you try to nail down details on when things might be done. Don't take it personally if you invite a student to dinner, and somehow it never seems to happen. The student doesn't want you to lose face by a direct refusal, though there may be a very reasonable explanation for saying "No".



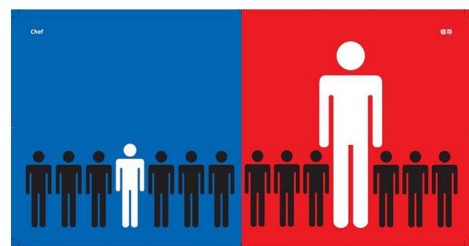
It also might be that students will say "No" when they mean "Yes". When I was in Central Asia I learned that the guest was expected to refuse food, at least at first. It

was the host's duty to press food on the guest, who should not appear too eager or greedy. Students who come to Canada from that same area of the world have felt unwelcome when they politely refuse more food and are not asked again.

English North Americans don't like to "beat around the bush". We state how we feel, and we tend to deal with a person face to face if there is a conflict, rather than use a mediator, as indirect cultures often do. Students who come from indirect cultures love it when I teach the nuanced language of suggestion or request, with polite, cushioned phrases such as, "If you wouldn't mind, do you think it might be possible to maybe turn down the TV for a little while."

Power Distance

Anglo North Americans consider themselves an egalitarian society, and compared to many other cultures this is true. We consider that we have a 'right' to disagree with those in authority. In the classroom we are encouraged to state our own opinions and even debate the teacher at times. One change that has taken place during my lifetime is the increased use of first names for teachers, doctors and others in authority, though we might put their title in front, i.e. Miss Tina, or Dr. Mike. This level of informality reflects the relative closeness between those with authority and those under that authority.

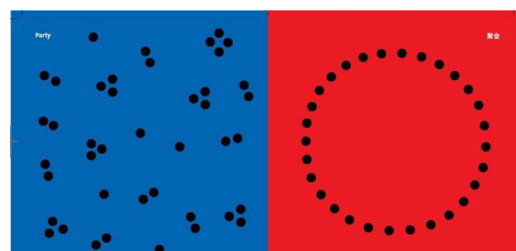


Cultures that have greater power distances would not question authority, which could be interpreted as lack of respect. The teacher/supervisor/leader makes the decisions and those under follow exactly. I remember a story from Liu Zhi Xiung, a Chinese pastor, describing his first experience working in North America. He was astounded when his boss asked him, "What do you think?" He replied, "Sir, I am not paid to think. But, if you tell me what to do, I will work very, very hard to do it."

Transitioning to a relatively informal classroom and speaking up without being asked would not feel comfortable to someone trained to only speak when spoken to by the teacher, which is worth remembering when certain students 'refuse' to participate in class.

Individualism versus Community

Anglo North American culture values independence, and it stresses the rights of the individual. There is less emphasis on the group, whether that is family, fellow workers or country. In community-oriented cultures, one's identity is wrapped up in the group. The good of the group is primary, and individuals must seek harmony with the community. This means 'privacy' or personal space apart from the group may be a foreign concept within community-oriented cultures.



When someone from a community culture enters into a culture as individualistic as ours, it can cause a lot of stress. A person who has no social connections here can feel lonely and isolated. New identities must be forged when former group identities have been left behind. Whole group activities with everyone in the ESL ministry, such as Christmas parties or special field trips, are very important. We usually end each semester with some kind of party or group event, which promotes community atmosphere.

Shame-oriented versus Guilt-Oriented

Western culture tends to be guilt-oriented. This means people are judged on what they do. If actions meet the social criteria for what is right, then there is no reason to feel guilt. However, if those actions go against those criteria, we feel guilt, because we have done wrong, as judged by others or ourselves.

Most other cultures in the world are shame-oriented. This means people are judged on who they are. It is about status, either inherited through family or attributed through a particular position of authority. In a shame-oriented culture honour is foremost. Therefore, losing and saving face are a primary concern in social interactions.

Shame-oriented cultures tend to be indirect, since directness risks losing face. They also tend to be more community and relationship focused, since honour comes from the group. There is a corresponding need to bring honour to the group or at least avoid bringing shame by one's own actions, and the group rather than the individual judges those actions. In *"Grace for Shame"*⁵⁵, John A. Forrester explains these contrasting worldviews:

On a low-context, guilt-oriented culture if I am guilty I am expected to feel guilty even if no one else believes I am guilty since guilt is a breach of principle, not relationship. But if I belong to a high-context, shame-oriented culture my "wiring" is very different. If I am innocent but the group believes I am guilty, I am shamed and dishonored already. On the other hand if I am guilty but the group believes I am innocent I am not ashamed since shame, by definition, is about how I am seen. (pp. 58-59)

One point to get across to students is the acceptability of making mistakes. Tell them from the beginning that one must make mistakes in order to learn, that all of them will have errors when they practice, and that the practice you give is supposed to show them what they need to work on. There is no shame in mistakes, there is only shame in keeping silent, since silence means no improvement. Cheer them on when they make mistakes and then self-correct. It is the first step in mastery.

⁵⁵ Forrester, J.A. (2010) *Grace for shame*. Toronto: Pastor's Attic Press.

Understanding shame-oriented cultures is particularly relevant to Christians trying to cross cultures with the gospel. It is helpful to know that Jesus lived in a shame-oriented culture and that He took on both our guilt and shame at the cross.

Stages of Acculturation

Acculturation means adjusting successfully to living in a new culture. (This is not the same as assimilation, or *replacing* one's first culture with the new.) There are four stages to this process⁵⁶, and as we come to know our students, it helps to recognize the emotions associated with each stage.

Stage 1 Euphoria: Everything is so new and fascinating! I want to take it all in and enjoy all the interesting differences!

Stage 2 Culture Shock: I am starting to feel confused with all the new things coming at me every hour of every day. I can't get used to the food, the smells and the constant noise. People here don't act normally. I'm never sure what they are thinking, and they seem so cold. Sometimes I just need to get away from it all!

Stage 3 Culture Stress: I really miss my friends and family at home. I realize how important they are to me, and I'm feeling lonely and a little depressed. I have met some nice people here whom I consider friends, and I like the relaxed way people here interact, but I'm tired most of the time.

Stage 4 Adaptation & Acceptance: Living here is starting to feel normal. I understand people better and how they act. I like my new friends, and I try to have fun with them while keeping busy. I can do this!

Of course, not everyone reaches the point of being comfortable in the new culture, and the stages are never cut and dried, since it's possible to experience the emotions of all four within a single day. In stages 2 and 3, people tend to be open to new worldviews and relationships as they try to rebuild their social networks and figure out the new culture.

As teachers we should also appreciate students' natural urge to withdraw during culture shock. It's a good idea to talk about feelings stemming from too much cultural change since they may be unaware of why they feel the way they do. Encourage students not to withdraw, but to talk honestly about what they like and dislike regarding life here. It will also give you a glimpse of your culture from the outside.

⁵⁶ Kalervo Oberg, a Canadian anthropologist, came up with the idea of cultural adjustment stages back in the 1950s. For a concise description of them and how to manage cultural stress see Princeton's advice to students heading abroad: <https://www.princeton.edu/oip/practical-matters/Cultural-Adjustment.pdf>

This is a good place to talk about ‘language shock’, namely the stress caused by inability to communicate in a new language. Frustrations over not being able to express one’s true self plus uncertainty over whether one has gotten the real message expressed by others compounds the difficulty of acculturation. Language learning can be an exhausting, overwhelming task. Incorporating songs, games and other more relaxed activities into your lessons can be a welcome break.

Crossing Cultures Means Facing Fear

If your team is encountering new cultures for the first time, those stages of cultural adjustment are likely relevant for you as well. Expect to encounter that fear factor, which is a natural component of human nature when faced with differences. Recognizing our fear of the unknown but reaching out anyway and getting to know people is the first step in crossing cultures.

One ministry leader recommends the team approach. She feels the best way to overcome the fear of crossing cultures is to “create an opportunity in the church to make friends (with newcomers), and it just changes everything, ‘cause most of us are afraid of new things, but if you do it as a team, it’s not so scary.”⁵⁷

On one of my first church training sessions I went to a rural area of Ontario. I had asked the church to find potential students ahead of time, so I could use them in a demonstration lesson. I told church members that once I had completed the demonstration and debriefed them, it would be their turn to pair up and work with these students for 15 minutes. I could see from their expressions that they would definitely be outside their comfort zones. Nevertheless, when the time came they gamely dove into the task.

Once they had finished, the final debriefing was eye opening for all of us. One woman had been matched with a Spanish-speaking young man, who worked on a nearby farm. She confessed, “You know, my husband didn’t want me to come here when he heard farm workers might be involved. He was afraid there could be some rough characters, but I really enjoyed talking with ‘Miguel’. Do you know that he is a yoyo master? He showed me some amazing tricks! And, I’m pretty sure he is a Christian!”

One of my favourite Biblical passages is 1John 4: 13 – 21 that talks about love, fear and the opposition between them. It also talks about the triangular relationship between God’s love of us, our love of God, and our love for one another. In Christ we are secure in God’s love. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” Because He first loved us, we are able to love others. When faced with our own fears and prejudices, we must remember what God overcame to love us. We may even discover a brother or sister in Christ once we step across cultures in faith.

⁵⁷ interview with Patricia Love, March 22, 2018

How to Learn More

Students Are Our Teachers

Once you begin to interact with your ESL students, you will have ample opportunity to get first-hand information on their cultures. Be a life-long learner and ask questions about what is polite, how things are done, and what they find strange about our culture. Remember to suspend judgment on student behaviour until you find out the cultural value or belief behind it. Asking questions has the added benefit of reversing student-teacher roles, making them the experts. It also gets them talking, which is always a good thing.

Don't be afraid to ask about religious beliefs and practices. Most cultures don't consider that a taboo topic, since it is interwoven with their daily lives. It also frees them to ask and us to talk about our beliefs and practices.

Culture Experts

Once you know which cultures your students are from, find someone from those cultures who can communicate easily in English. It may be an advanced level learner from your ministry, or you can ask your students if they know of anyone from their community whom you can invite for teacher training. Try asking students if they have anyone who usually helps them with English translation.

If you do get a translator, you can invite that person and a group of your students for a special session of cultural learning. Explain that you want to know more about their culture and have your questions ready. It might also be a good idea to give an honorarium or gift certificate to the translators for their services along with a note of thanks.

Years ago when our church first welcomed families from the Karen people of Burma, we were fortunate to find just such a translator, who also happened to be a brother in Christ. Because most of the families were newly arrived refugees, there was so much left unsaid due to the language barrier. When Mie Tha Lah arrived, we finally got a window into their feelings, struggles and hopes.

Experts in Crossing Cultures

Before you begin your ministry, consider having a training session on the common newcomer experience. Ask someone who has been through cultural adjustment to tell about culture shock, language shock, etc. Perhaps someone from your own congregation has lived abroad, or has immigrated to Canada.

Retired missionaries or those on home assignment are also good cross-cultural information sources. In addition, they know about inroads and barriers to the gospel for particular religions and worldviews. Contact missions in your area to find the right person.

In summary, knowing the way that students see the world can help you choose teaching methods that fit your students and show you how to introduce new ways of doing things in a sympathetic manner. When you recognize their values it can also help avoid offense and build relationships. Finally, when you appreciate where your students are coming from, you can better understand how the gospel might impact them, and where they may be most open to it. In the next chapter we move from a general exploration of crossing culture into crossing cultures as ambassadors for Christ.

7. Training as Ambassadors for Christ

Any time you say, “I am a Christian”, you identify with Christ and your actions reflect on Him. In Acts 1: 8 Jesus clearly states, “...You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” That short statement covers just about every possible type of individual with whom Christians may have a chance to interact. Jerusalem is close to home where we meet friends, family and neighbours with whom we usually share a similar culture and understanding. Judea is our region, outside our hometown or city where culture may differ slightly. However, Samaria is culturally different though still close to home. We may never have a chance to go to ‘the end of the earth’, but there may be a ‘Samaritan’ from a different culture living across the street or even across the hall.

In John 4 the woman of Samaria was hostile at first, and she was not shy about confronting Jesus with their differences in worship place and practice – namely, ‘on this mountain’ versus ‘in Jerusalem’. Jesus’ interaction with her gives us the perfect example of speaking truth and acknowledging differences while giving an invitation to know God. “You worship what you do not know, we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.”⁵⁸ Jesus accepted her as she was, and her realization of who Jesus was changed everything.

Though we are already Christ’s ambassadors, this chapter lays out knowledge and ways to become better representatives of our King. The second part of the chapter focuses on common stumbling blocks and inroads when presenting the Gospel cross-culturally to our students. Helpful references that can be used in team training are included throughout this section with some others listed at the end. Finally, I conclude the chapter with three stories of how God used ESL ministry as one part in drawing students to Christ.

Being the Best Ambassador

Remember the value of what we have. People’s openness differs, but the Good News remains the pearl of great price. We never want to take the benefits of being adopted into God’s family for granted. Think about what you have and what it would be like to live without the daily privilege of God’s presence or His insight and guidance, not to mention sure hope of eternal life. This is what we have to share as Christ’s representatives!

⁵⁸ John 4:22 - 23

Be Yourself

This job is personal in a literal sense. We all have our own personalities – introverts, extroverts or somewhere in-between - and we show love in different ways. We have been uniquely created, and there is no point in trying to be someone different in a mistaken attempt to be a better evangelist. This is not to say our attitudes never need correcting, but know that God can use anyone for His purposes if they are willing to be used.

I remember a missionary couple we got to know many years ago. They had been working in partnership with a Korean pastor and his wife to plant a church in the Far East. When we visited them I couldn't help but notice the personality contrast between the two women. The Korean wife was charismatic and outgoing with a gift for encouragement. My friend was a quiet, gentle introvert who had a gift for relating to children. During our visit my friend remarked wistfully that she wished she could be more like the dynamic pastor's wife. Yet, many years later she and her husband have a vibrant children's ministry that has touched a great number of families in the area. One of their recent newsletters told of how three generations of one family had come to Christ. The grandson's participation in their summer camp had been one thread in how God brought this about.

The common foundation to being a quality ambassador, no matter your style or personality, is dependence on God. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Without Him we can do nothing. Therefore, you will be ineffective if you don't stay close in prayer and seek insight from scripture. This also holds true for the team. Pray for your students as a team and for each team member's opportunity to share what God has been doing in their lives that week. Remember, you do not have because you do not ask! (James 4:2) As you begin the semester, ask God to show each team member one person to focus on. Perhaps there is a natural connection with a peer, although it is wisest to seek someone of the same gender or relate couple to couple.

Drawing Students into God's Presence

Just as there are diverse types of ambassadors there are different ways of introducing students to the power and presence of God. Trust the Holy Spirit to prepare the way, and remember that you are not the Saviour. The Saviour Himself stated, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..."⁵⁹. We are instruments of God, and the results of our efforts are not in our hands, though our obedience is.

Prayer

Praying with students is one way we demonstrate our faith while demonstrating God's love for them. When opportunities present themselves, ask your students if you can pray for them, either after class or even in your group as the Spirit leads. At Clairlea church prayer has opened up many encounters. The ministry team leader

⁵⁹ John 6:44

related, “One of our Muslim students called us and told us that he had a job interview for a promotion. The two co-teachers got together and did some research on potential interview questions for jobs in that field, then emailed the questions to the student. When he came to class they were able to discuss those questions, and before he left, he said, ‘Please pray for me’.” Other students from different faiths have asked for prayer as well once they knew the team was willing to do that.

Prayer was a key piece in one former student’s coming to Christ. She was in the middle of a family crisis, and a friend in the congregation asked to pray for her. She told me later that during the prayer she felt deeply moved. She wasn’t sure exactly what she had experienced, but she felt power. Over time as the prayers of Christian friends were answered for her one by one in amazing ways, she came to believe.

God’s Word

One of the pleasures of being a Christian is having guidance from God through His Word. The Bible is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”⁶⁰. When I first became a Christian, I got my own Bible and started to read. Although I had plenty of exposure to scripture as a child, reading as a believer became a whole new experience. Certain verses became precious to me, and I noticed that many seemed to apply directly to what I was facing in life.

Whether or not someone accepts the Bible as God’s Word, it still has power. I can’t count the number of times that I’ve been able to share a verse I read in the morning with someone else who needed to hear it. One time I was speaking with a student who was convinced she had met a great guy. I knew she had recently had a bad experience with a man, and the more she told me about this new relationship, the more concerned I became. I had been reading in the Song of Solomon that morning, and a verse just popped out of my mouth during our conversation, “Oh daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken love before its time!” We were able to talk about the meaning of those words and how they might apply to her situation.

If you know the Bible and how to apply it to your life, you have a means to introduce others to who God is and how He has revealed Himself to us.

Testimony

Another way to represent God to our students is to speak up when He intervenes in your life. Be open about what is happening day-to-day so they can see how God leads you, answers prayer, and gets you through tough times. This doesn’t necessarily have to happen during class, especially with more personal matters. Once you have a connection with someone it’s good to get together for deeper conversation. You can meet for coffee, a meal at your home, or invite them to a fun event. Be aware of barriers to this stemming from our individualistic culture. We tend to like our privacy. I was reminded how exclusive we’ve become when one

⁶⁰ 2Timothy 3:16

acquaintance dropped the hint that only her closest friends were allowed to call her on the phone directly, though she wouldn't object to my texting.

The stronger your relationship with God, the more matters you will have to share with others. Keep close to Him in prayer and have your eyes open.

Christian Community

Finally, seek ways to introduce students into the wider church community. This does not necessarily mean they have to be present for Sunday worship. In fact, students with no church experience might connect better to a smaller group at first. Is there someone in the congregation who shares students' occupations, someone who can fix a leaky sink, or someone who has spare furniture needed for a first apartment? Is there a family with children the same age? You can be the connection to Christian community. One missionary serving in a Muslim country made this point:

*The biggest obstacle, which does not even exist in the mind of a person from an independent culture, is the sheer terror of finding oneself without a community, without the broader "family" that is the air a person breathes in an inter-dependent culture. My ... Christian friends and I believe it is not enough to share the Good News without also providing an alternative community, the broader "family" that is foundational to this culture."*⁶¹

If Christians are truly treating one another with family love, students will notice. When students are given a way into Christian community they can observe God at work.

Barriers and Inroads to the Gospel

In the previous chapter, I outlined some major cultural differences. Those differences have to do with worldviews, or assumptions about truth and the way things should work, particularly relationships with one another and with God. Examples of this would be putting one's honour above speaking the truth, since shame must be avoided, or putting a work deadline above helping a friend.

Christine Dillon illustrates how worldviews can be barriers to the gospel by using the illustration of a brick wall in her book "Telling the gospel through story"⁶². Cultural concepts are the bricks that stand between the person and understanding and accepting the Gospel. Truth cannot be heard when a person is behind the wall. Dillon explains the importance of discovering what those bricks might be so that we can address the lie behind it⁶³. In urban Canada I am aware of bricks such as "There

⁶¹ Taken from an anonymous quote in an internal missionary publication. Used with permission.

⁶² Christine Dillon. (2012) *Telling the gospel through story: Evangelism that keeps hearers wanting more*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, p.48 This book presents detailed instructions about the best ways of choosing stories, telling the stories and allowing the listener to draw conclusions through discussion.

⁶³ *ibid*.

are many paths to God', 'There is no God', or 'God can never really be known. Therefore, I can decide what God is like. Anyway, spirituality is personal'.

The following section sets out some common Gospel barriers. Each barrier is a brick in the wall preventing truth from getting through. I have also included three inroads that may help to displace them.

Barrier: Misunderstood Gospel

When I first accepted Christ as Lord, I was clueless about sharing my faith, particularly in an increasingly secular culture. During a church training session, I was taught the 'Roman Road', a series of verses from Romans that lays out the basics of the Gospel: the broken human condition (3:23), the penalty for sin (6:23), God's remedy (5:8), and our part in claiming the gift of salvation (10:9 – 10). Though every single point is true, this approach has been criticized for being too simplistic⁶⁴. For example, the resurrection, our repentance and our obedience cannot be omitted. More importantly, the Roman Road presumes a common cultural understanding of some basic concepts.

One example of cultural misunderstanding is the concept of sin. If you have been a Christian from an early age, it is easy to assume this is a universal human concept, which it is, but sin defined as disobedience to God is not culturally universal. In my lifetime I have seen North American culture redefine sin as whatever denies human choice, whether or not the choice pleases God. In Chinese the word for 'sin' is translated as 'crime' thus rendering 'sinner' as 'criminal'. Explaining that sin is disobedience, like that of a child disobeying a parent, immediately clarifies the concept, since obedience to parents is valued in Chinese culture.

Define all your terms! Jesus did this through stories, such as The Good Samaritan, which defined the term, 'neighbour'. (Incidentally, stories are an excellent method for communicating in a second language and for communicating the Gospel as you will see in the following section.)

Another danger of simplistic evangelism is an expectation that once you've stated the basics, you have done your Christian duty, and it is then up to the other person to make a decision for or against following Christ. However, if your listener has zero biblical background, it is unlikely they have heard enough over a long enough period of time to make any kind of an informed decision. A missionary in North Africa has this advice:

"Giving the entire Gospel in one go, when that has not been requested, is counterproductive. As God brings me across someone's path, I have an opportunity to speak part of the message of Christ's love. Then it is best to leave them in God's hands to bring them across my path again, or that of another

⁶⁴ See Andrew Perriman in <http://www.postost.net/2012/05/what-s-wrong-romans-road-salvation> and David J. Stewart in https://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Basics/romans_road.htm

Christian, each one led by the Holy Spirit as the Father relentlessly draws them to his Son.”⁶⁵

When students are in your ESL ministry for a semester or even years, they should have many opportunities to hear those messages from many team members, and there is space for the Holy Spirit to work.

Inroad – Chronological Bible Stories

New Tribes Missions was one of the first to advocate for a chronological Bible story approach when sharing the gospel to those with no biblical knowledge⁶⁶. I think of this as the ‘drip method’ of evangelism. By telling stories, beginning from Genesis and extending through to Revelation, we lay down faith foundations. From the beginning, common scriptural themes such as the holy nature of God, the helpless, fallen nature of humanity, and God’s love for mortals as proved by His intervention throughout human history shine through the Bible. By starting at the beginning, these themes are laid out for the listener who has ears to hear. Important theological concepts are repeated in story after story, building up until the need for a Saviour is self-evident. Instead of teaching theology out of context, we illustrate with examples from history. For instance, when people have heard the story of the first Passover with God’s detailed instructions on how to avoid death by placing the blood of the lamb on their doors, it is much easier for them to understand the crucifixion when Christ delivered us from death by His sacrifice.

Christine Dillon, a missionary with Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), has authored a practical book based on this method⁶⁷. She recommends choosing Bible stories according to the truth barriers present in the listeners. She gave an example of a young woman who told the Creation story to her grandfather. He believed that Christianity was only for Westerners, but she challenged him by asking whether the Creator had made all humanity, or just those from the West. “After a little more discussion, her grandfather admitted that if God really was the creator, then following him was for everybody”⁶⁸.

There are other resources that use the Genesis to Revelation approach. *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* by John R. Cross⁶⁹ takes an in-depth journey through

⁶⁵ Taken from an anonymous quote in an internal missionary publication. Used with permission.

⁶⁶ Download Don Fanning’s article for further explanation on the development of this method:
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=cgm_theo

⁶⁷ Christine Dillon. (2012) *Telling the gospel through story: Evangelism that keeps hearers wanting more*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ John R. Cross. (2006). *The stranger on the road to Emmaus*. Good Seed International.

scripture, highlighting key portions and connecting the basic truths of the Old Testament to the New Testament. A series of illustrative videos is now available with the book. Although it is not suitable for anyone below an advanced English level, I would recommend it for the ministry team as training for sharing faith. Another text, *All that the Prophets Have Spoken*, by Yehia Sa'a⁷⁰ is part of the same book series. It takes the same approach but focuses on truths that can be stumbling blocks to Muslims, such as the Trinity or the authority of the Bible.

The Hope is a video series with accompanying ESL curriculum⁷¹, and it is available free online. The English is clearly spoken at a measured pace, although the vocabulary could be a challenge. I have used it with students at an intermediate level or above. Each video lesson is between 8 – 12 minutes, so I often give students a chance to view it two or three times. I might add that since it has been translated into many languages, it makes a nice gift for students.

To sum up, when you speak about God and what He has done take the time to establish necessary concepts such as the fallen nature of humanity, our inability to save ourselves, the holiness of God and how He has shown His love from the beginning of time. Then tackle who Jesus was, why He came and what this means for humanity. Of course, this assumes you will include this knowledge within the ESL ministry. (The following chapter on approaches and materials addresses this issue.)

Barrier: Assumption that Western values equal Christian values

If you were an anthropologist entering into North American culture for the first time, and you were gathering information from TV, movies, and radio talk shows, what conclusions would you make about their values? I'd guess freedom of the individual would be one, particularly with regard to sexual freedom. Serial marriages, no marriage at all, or marriage to any other human being is acceptable. Attention to personal appearance by getting the right hairstyle, clothing or body shape might be another. Newcomers may assume that they are entering a Christian culture, and therefore the behaviour they observe around them reflects Christian values.

I remember a discussion with a student who was getting ready for her marriage. She confessed, "I'm really nervous about my wedding night. You know we Muslims don't sleep together before we marry." She was surprised when I assured her that Christians also valued chastity, both for men and women. I then explained that a

⁷⁰ Yehia Sa'a . (2006). *All that the prophets have spoken*. Good Seed International.

⁷¹ *The Hope*. Mars-Hill productions. <https://www.mars-hill.org/the-hope/store/the-hope-esl-software-curriculum>

Colin Brewster has also developed some ESL curriculum for *The Hope* listed on the SOCEM website: <https://sites.google.com/site/eslministries/Home/esl-bible-study/the-hope-esl-curriculum>

large number of people in Canada did not practice Christianity, which was news to her. One concept Christians and Muslims share is submission to God. Where our culture departs from God's standards, it is important to point out that Christians live a counter-cultural life.

Your students may have other misinformation about Christianity. A good practice is to ask them what they know or understand. Then you can clarify what we actually believe.

Inroad: The Gospel is above Culture

I must admit that I squirm a bit when I hear North American culture described as 'Christian'. To a certain extent that is true; there are Christian roots in our historical foundations. However, just as individuals, even Christian ones, have their own character strengths and weaknesses, so different cultures have particular godly and ungodly aspects. In fact, there are some cultures that are closer to God's standards in certain respects than our own. For example, I've been touched by the sacrificial hospitality I've experienced as a guest in some Central Asian homes. It is a strong part of the culture. I have also been impressed with the devotion to family that I've seen in South Asian cultures. When a member is in trouble, they will do everything in their power to help, and that includes extended family, whether or not the personal relationship is close.

When we cross cultures, we must recognize where our culture falls short of God's standards, and learn from other cultures that may be closer to those standards on certain points. The Gospel is above human culture, because God's ways are not human ways. In fact, being clear about where Christians disagree with aspects of our own culture can be a powerful witness to the fact that all human cultures and by implication all human beings fall short of God's holiness. Pointing out aspects of our students' cultures that do match God's standards can provide common ground on which to build the gospel message.

As we point out how God's ways are counter-culture and how human standards do not meet God's standards we can address the lie that Christianity is a 'foreign religion'. One young Japanese man, whom I'm still praying for, took pains to point out that being Japanese meant practicing Shintoism and Buddhism. It was a matter of personal identity.

My own husband felt the same way when we first met. When I accepted Jesus as Lord a few months into our relationship, he asked me, "Why wasn't Jesus born in China?" In other words, why wouldn't God send the Messiah to the largest continent with one of the oldest civilizations on earth? By the grace of God, I had an answer gleaned from my church childhood. I took out a map of the world and drew 2 lines: one connecting Asia to Africa, and the other connecting Europe to Africa. The lines crossed in the Middle East, showing that Jesus was born at the crossroads of the world upon the spot where trade routes met. God knew what He was doing in order to spread the Good News to all humanity.

Barrier: Legalism

It is a human desire to be independent and 'do it ourselves'. This includes building a stairway to heaven in the form of good deeds, spiritual practices and various other ways of earning merit. When we attempt to climb our way up to reach God according to our own understanding, we put ourselves in charge of our salvation.

In Islam there are the five 'pillars', or actions, that adherents must follow. Practicing faith confession, prayer five times daily, fasting for Ramadan, giving alms, and pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime, give hope of reaching heaven, although God's will alone determines salvation⁷². There are beliefs that lend themselves to a legalistic worldview such as having two angels for each individual, one of whom records good deeds and the other bad ones⁷³. On Judgment Day the records are revealed.

Earning merit, or good karma, is also a common element of Buddhism and Hinduism. This is the belief that good and bad deeds are rewarded accordingly, although the reward or punishment may occur in future reincarnations. I once lived in an area where Tibetan Buddhism was practiced. One way of gaining merit was to strap on special wooden guards on the hands and knees and make a pilgrimage by a maneuver resembling an inchworm. The person first kneels, prostrates himself, stands, takes three steps, then repeats the action kilometer after kilometer⁷⁴. Despite the incredible amount of physical effort, there is never an assurance of how much is enough to achieve escape from hell's torments⁷⁵, let alone reach eventual enlightenment.

Barrier: God(s) can be manipulated

Another theme in human religions is that if you make the right donations, go through the proper rituals, or make the right sacrifices, then the gods will grant your desires. The idea is that the gods can be bargained with, and the relationship between humans and the divine is business-like. Can't have a baby? Go to the local temple and make a large donation so the monks will chant the right prayers. Facing illness? Bring a goat to the shaman and have her sacrifice to the local god for healing. This worldview is common in animistic religions such as Voodoo, and some branches of Hinduism, but it has also crept into Buddhist and Daoist practice as these beliefs have mixed with local religions in East Asia.

⁷² The Glorious Qur'an, text and explanatory translation by Muhammad M. Pickthall, 1999, Sura 82: 19

⁷³ Ibid.: Sura 82: 10 – 15; 50: 16 – 18 (Read Sura 50 to get a picture of how good and bad deeds might add up to hell or heaven.)

⁷⁴ See film clip illustration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrU5pZ9gs0o>

⁷⁵ Tibetan Buddhism affirms the existence of many hellish realms where evildoers are punished: <http://www.tibetanbuddhistaltar.org/what-creates-a-hell-realm/> Sri Lanka is known for graphic images on this subject, though they are not for the faint-hearted: <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/wewurukannala-vihara>

There is another side to this type of relationship with spiritual forces, and that is fear. Please the gods, and good fortune is yours, but displease them and suffer the consequences. I have had much frustration with some Chinese and Vietnamese friends because of this religious worldview. They are happy to hear about Jesus, and they even respect His power to answer prayer, but they will only accept Him on their terms, not the other way around. They might consider adding Jesus to their god list - no harm in covering all the spiritual bases - but they will not subtract their ancestral deities for fear the old gods might seek revenge.

A Barrier and an Inroad: Grace

Grace is hard to understand for those used to manipulating their gods. Grace means God accepts me just as I am without my payment, but it also means I belong to Him completely as His child and as His servant. Jesus is not just my Saviour; He is also my Lord. I am no longer in a bargaining position. I must accept His way and seek what He wants for me rather than bribe Him to grant what I desire.

The positive side of belonging to Christ and knowing He is Lord of Lords is freedom from fear. Stories of how Jesus cast out demons and overcame death itself are very important for those living in fear of spirits. A Buddhist friend of mine kindly tried to give me a protective amulet that had been blessed by a powerful monk. I am sure that it had not come cheap, but I gently told her that while I appreciated her thoughtfulness I had all the protection I needed in Jesus who was above every other spirit.

A common metaphor for human religions is that of many paths going up the mountain to reach God at the summit, with the idea that all religions lead to God. (This also assumes that no paths lead over a cliff.) One of the best sermons I have heard on this topic used a very different image of human beings stranded on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. In order to reach God they must swim to the other side, or take the ship that He has provided. Even Mount Everest has been conquered, but no one ever has or ever will cross the ocean on her own power.

The Gospel is truly good news because the central message is that God has already provided the way to Himself as a gift. Human beings are utterly incapable of reaching a Holy God on our own because we are unholy. This can be very hard to accept for those coming from a legalistic worldview. The idea of grace can bring on suspicion, because it sounds too good to be true. It also means giving up on the concept that we deserve salvation because we have earned it through our good deeds. Jesus had to tackle the issue of self-righteousness head on in His day, and His examples are worth re-telling ⁷⁶. (I think they make good reading texts as well.)

The Lordship of Jesus Christ and our obedience is an important truth that must be introduced in conjunction with grace. Many newcomers are dismayed by the loose

⁷⁶ See Matt. 15: 1 – 20, 20: 1 – 16; Mark 2: 1 – 11, 15 – 28; 7: 1 – 13; Luke 7: 36 – 50; 23: 39 – 43

morals they see portrayed in North American media, which they may attribute to the mistaken belief that Christians may do whatever they wish since Christ has taken sin's penalty away. Paul addresses this directly in the sixth chapter of Romans, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" He then goes on in chapters seven and eight to explain the role of the Holy Spirit in motivating and enabling us to obey God.

I know I am repeating myself, but only the Holy Spirit can bring someone to the point of surrender to God. All we can do is pray for them and tell what surrender looks like in our own lives. (That would be a good training topic for your team to discuss.)

Inroad: Love

Understanding obedience to God from the heart versus imposition from outside is difficult for those who have never experienced the change in conscience, inner guidance, and transformation of God's Word through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, we can talk about our inner motivation for loving our students and serving God. We can talk about the difference in our own lives before and after we accepted Christ as Lord. We can talk about the assurance we have of God's love and how He gives us love for others. We need to let our students know that we don't have to earn points with God but rather it is our joy to serve Him and them. Though it is difficult to understand, it may be easier to sense its truth when love is genuine and we go the extra mile.

A Christian friend of mine got a job at a private Islamic school because she felt God's call to witness to Muslims. Like many private schools, it struggled with managing finances, and the teachers were paid sporadically, if at all. Most teachers quit after a short time, but she stuck with the job, even getting work cleaning to make ends meet. She told her students, "I teach you because I love you. I vacuum to make money." At the end of the semester, the students anxiously inquired, "Miss Emily, our teachers never stay. Are you coming back next semester?" And one student piped up, "Of course she's coming back! Remember, she vacuums for money, but she teaches us because she loves us!"

Further Training

The barriers and inroads I've listed above are by no means exhaustive. Once you know your students, you can add to it and read for more specific information.⁷⁷ Of course, the most accurate information about your students and what they believe comes from the individuals themselves. Be careful of generalizing from broad

⁷⁷ A good reference for various beliefs and practices is: Winfried Corduan. (1998) *Neighboring faiths: A Christian introduction to world religions*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. This book not only describes basic beliefs and practices of major world religions in all their variations, but each chapter includes "What you might expect" when meeting a person from that tradition, and it finishes with tips for relating the Gospel to that person.

descriptions since there is huge variation of beliefs and practice within religions and cultures. Think of the variation within the Protestant branch of Christianity alone! As well, any given individual may vary in belief or practice. Find out how God has been working in a person's heart. Don't assume. Just ask questions then listen carefully.

If you have a majority of students from a certain area of the world, contact missions who have associates there. If there are some on home assignment, you can invite them to train the team. Many missions do their own pre-field training, and they might be willing to train in cross-cultural evangelism.

There are also online resources available. Dillon has a website that provides demonstrations and training for chronological Bible storytelling: <http://storyingthescriptures.com/>. The Bible Story of God Institute does training in both the U.S. and Canada: <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-chronological-bible-storying-and-storytelling-institute>

Three Stories of Students who Followed Christ⁷⁸

'Selene'

'Selene' came to Canada from the Middle East along with her husband and daughter. They ended up in a house for refugees established by a Christian organization who referred them to our ESL ministry. Both Selene and her husband were placed in the lowest level of English, and communication was difficult. However, Selene was determined to learn the language and she wasn't afraid speak. In the ESL we had a Christian woman from a Muslim background, and she became friends with Selene.

Through the refugee centre Selene heard the Gospel and enjoyed times of worship, especially the songs. She began to attend a church where they used visual media and simple English during worship. Since her family arrived with nothing, they availed themselves of our church's weekly Food Bank ministry, directed by 'Charlie'. Before long she was serving as a volunteer there, and she paid attention to the genuine compassion behind the handouts.

One day Selene surprised Charlie by saying, "One day when I become a Christian, I want to be just like you." At the time, we didn't take it seriously, but after more than a year Selene went through the waters of baptism.

It was wonderful to see Selene's face as she came up from the water and we sang the first hymn she had ever heard, "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart". Her tears of joy mingled with the baptismal water, and there were few dry eyes in the congregation. In Selene's faith journey God put together a network of His servants to show the way. Those serving in the ESL and Food Bank ministries, staff at the Christian

⁷⁸ All names have been changed.

refugee centre, the Muslim-background believer in our congregation, and friends at her local church were all part of this woman coming to Christ.

‘Sharon and Farrell’

‘Sharon’ and her husband ‘Farrell’ immigrated to Canada in the ‘90’s. They were highly educated engineers who were part of an immigrant wave from China at that time. Sharon happened to be passing by the church on a summer Sunday morning when she heard the sound of singing from the open windows. She was drawn into the church and sensed something different in the atmosphere.

Sharon and her husband were very happy to hear about our ESL ministry, and they soon became regulars. They enjoyed the English practice, but the caring community of people was an equal draw. At that time we were blessed to have an SIM missionary couple as volunteers, and they invited the many Chinese students to a special ESL Bible Study, where my husband, Cheming, and I also participated. Having come from an officially atheist society, Sharon and Farrell were curious about religion. Sharon seemed to be very open and accepting, but Farrell remained a skeptic.

Sharon and I had a lot in common. We are both strong-willed women used to getting our own way, and we had both married easy-going husbands. Despite Farrell’s laidback personality, I could see occasional tension when Sharon wasn’t shy about giving him a piece of her mind. One time our ESL Bible Study Group took a field trip to the zoo with Cheming driving our church van. As we were loading up to go, I asked my husband, “Where do you want me?” He pointed, and I sat down without another word. Later on after they both decided to follow Christ, I heard that Cheming’s gentle manner and my giving way had made a deep impression on Farrell. God used a combination of Gospel knowledge, the care from the church community and examples of Christian relationships to open their hearts.

‘Maryam’

Maryam was a newcomer from a Muslim culture, and she got to know some Christian neighbours in her suburban home. Hoping to get Canadian work experience, she used their connections to secure a volunteer position helping with registration at an ESL ministry. This was despite church policy of only having Christians on the team, but Mary, the team leader, trusted the former team member’s reference and decided to interview her anyway.

Something about those Christians must have intrigued Maryam, because though she was honest about the fact she was Muslim, she qualified that by saying, “But I’m searching”. When Mary heard that, she felt, “It was like God telling me, ‘You’ve got to get her in here’.” About the break time when there was no one left to register, she invited Maryam into her advanced Bible-based class since her English level was high. “At the end of the class Maryam was in tears. She said, ‘This is just what I’ve been looking for!’” Mary lent her a Bible, until a permanent one was available, but the

woman went out and bought her own, unable to wait for another week. By the third week she joyfully approached Mary, saying, “I have to give you a hug! I’m now a believer.”

Once again, God had rallied His children to feed a hungry heart. The ESL Ministry was one piece in Maryam’s journey. As Mary put it, “That time we were the midwife”, while others had gone before to plant the seeds and water.

It is rare that one experience or one person’s witness leads to the decision to follow Jesus. ESL ministries are only one part in the process. As students move through the ministry your job may be to plant and water without seeing the harvest. One teacher mentioned a lady from Iran she had tutored. Since the tomb of Daniel is located in Iran, “I started studying the Book of Daniel with her, but that didn’t last too long. She has been to our Sunday service a few times. Then she had to study, and she is working full time. The door was opened. She was exposed to the Gospel.” God alone knows the end of that woman’s story, but the ESL ministry has played a part in her life.

Though every story of someone being drawn to Christ is unique, the ways God uses to do so have some things in common. There are worldview and personal barriers to overcome. The person has to hear and understand who Jesus is, why He had to die, what the resurrection means for Christians, and the cost of following Christ. In short, they have to hear all parts of the Gospel. Seeing it lived out as well as hearing also grows understanding and faith. It is worth noting that all the people in the accounts above had discipling after their decision, and as far as I know they continue to follow Jesus.

8. Launching the Ministry

Let's assume you have your ministry team, you have been meeting regularly at the times you have determined for your ESL classes, and you have had some training. You are ready to roll up your sleeves and meet your neighbours, but there are still many decisions before opening the doors to students. This chapter gives options for the most important decisions you need to consider and provides some advice on what might fit your congregation and neighbourhood.

First of all, having researched the neighbourhood and knowing the gifts of your team, what kind of ESL classes will you offer? How should spiritual content fit into your curriculum? This section also provides examples of how different churches have handled those questions and gives references for appropriate materials.

The second section lays out ways of registering students based on the kind of information you need from them and the type of classes you offer. There are four descriptions of how other churches of different sizes handle that process with two examples of forms they use.

The last section covers a list of practical details that most people may not think of before launching a ministry. Venue and insurance requirements, publicizing the classes and whether to charge a fee are some of the smaller decisions that need to be made.

What Kind of ESL Classes Should We Offer?

If you are starting an ESL ministry from scratch with little knowledge of your prospective students, it is best to start simply. I would recommend a narrow, skill-based focus, such as a speaking class. This approach allows for building your student body gradually since students can enter the class at any time. This is also a good choice if you have a small team. Don't be afraid to stay general in the beginning then specify your language focus and materials based on the students who arrive. Expect God to lead in this; one size does not fit all.

If you have a large team and you know your students, consider offering all four language skills and/or tailoring classes to some special needs. Many churches have branched out once their ministries are established and it becomes obvious where students most need help.

In Chapter 4 I described different language learning factors such as educational background, age, and motives. These factors can also affect the type of class and language skill students need. For example, someone who is older without many years of academic learning will probably need a lot of repetition in a slow-paced class. The same goes for someone illiterate in the first language. A young

professional who has years of academic learning, but little experience in spoken communication will need focus on listening/speaking skills, whereas someone who has little academic learning but years of on-the-job spoken communication will likely want help with reading and writing, possibly in relation to improving job prospects. (One church I know of actually lists the four skills on their registration form and asks students to check off the ones they most need.)

Remember it is unwise to invest in a large order of materials ahead of time. Start with the online materials that are free to download. I remember one person who spent a fair amount of money on student workbooks that were designed for those with no exposure to English reading and writing. Unfortunately, the majority of students who registered turned out to be highly educated but needing oral practice.

You should also consider what kind of opportunities your students will have to hear the gospel. There are different ways to include spiritual content and different degrees of depth, or you may choose not to include any at the start.

The following section describes various approaches to ESL teaching in order to get you thinking about present and future options. See who your students are, find out where and when they need English and what is giving them trouble. Keep praying and adapt as you go!

Low Basic / Literacy Class

In any approach you take, you may have to include English for low-level students. Some nations have a wide disparity in the quality of education between rural and urban populations, private and public schools, or between men and women. Depending on the population in your neighbourhood, you may have students who have never studied English before. They may have had little or no education in their first country. This is where knowing your neighbourhood is so important. If you have been talking to your neighbours and find that English exposure is at a minimum, be prepared for at least one class at this level.

I should warn that teaching low Beginners can be exhausting, but it is also greatly rewarding. If you have skilled, experienced teachers, this is where they will be most needed.

Despite researching your neighbourhood, you may still be surprised by low-level students on registration day. At Queensway Baptist they had marketed the class as a 'Conversation Class' in the beginning, but once the students arrived, they had a group that was too low to really have a conversation. They adapted their curriculum and just did vocabulary with another teacher working on basic grammar. They still had some conversation groups, but the lower ones were customized.

If you have students beginning at zero, use materials that deal with practical matters of interest to adults. Include as many visual aids as possible as you plan lessons. The

Unilingual English version of the New Oxford Picture Dictionary⁷⁹ can be used as a textbook, and the publisher also offers accompanying workbooks that can give you ideas on how to use it.

You can create your own materials as well using real resources that your students encounter. For example, one teacher had a lesson that was just on grocery store flyers, focusing on food vocabulary. Another conversation practice was based on ordering at McDonald's. "This particular student went to McDonald's and wanted to have tea, but she was given coffee instead. She didn't know how to say it. The teacher taught them how to say, 'Tea. Double-double'. Next time she got exactly what she was asking for and she was so happy!"⁸⁰ This church was also blessed with someone on the team who could teach basic sentence structures so students had an idea of how to put new words together.

If you have students who come from a language that does not use the alphabet or who may be illiterate in their own language, you may need to open a Literacy class⁸¹. This means you are starting from the abc's, possibly including phonics lessons, using loads of pictures and going at a slow pace with much repetition. Even if you have a handful of students in this category, it is good to recruit a teaching assistant since literacy students benefit greatly from one-on-one instruction.

Conversation Circles

Conversation Circles isn't a bad place to start when launching a new ministry, since the majority of newcomers want to improve spoken communication no matter their level of English. Speaking is also a skill that may not get much practice in the regular classroom due to a larger number of students.

Taking this route simplifies the registration process because speaking and listening are the main skills to assess. This approach also fits a small ministry team since each team member can take a small group that is generally at the same level in those skills.

The usual approach to this kind of class is to have one expert speaker facilitating the conversation on a particular topic. This person should be a good listener and mediate the conversation, ensuring that all in the group have a chance to speak. The conversation leader also needs to intervene when there is communication

⁷⁹ Adelson-Goldstein, J. & Shapiro, N. (2016). *Oxford picture dictionary: Third Canadian edition*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

⁸⁰ Thanks to the ESL Ministry team at Queensway Baptist Church in Toronto for these ideas.

⁸¹ Literacy and Evangelism International has a series designed for students who need to work on basic literacy skills. They have an office in Canada, and they also do teacher training: lecanada.ca

breakdown, whether due to mispronunciation, word use or grammar confusion, and to seize teachable moments.

There are many free materials for Conversation Circles available online both with and without spiritual content⁸².

Four Skills Class

There are four separate skills in learning a language: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Most language curricula try to integrate all four together. For example, a unit might begin with a reading passage, require written answers in response to questions on the reading then include discussion of the passage. Sometimes one activity will include several skills. One teacher designed a Jeopardy review game⁸³ that required reading the clues and then huddling with teammates to come up with the best answer. Once the students got the idea of how the game was played, they divided into two teams and wrote clues for each other, making the game a practice of reading, speaking, listening and writing.

A four-skills class tends to be more formal and structured, as does the curriculum. Students with a background in formal education are often comfortable with this type of class, because they know what to expect. If you decide on this type of teaching, look for curriculum that incorporates practice in all four skills. You may end up using a number of texts to put together a variety of activities, or use one course that integrates all skills⁸⁴.

Bayview Glen Church in Toronto focuses on the four skills and they have gathered a number of different materials such as phonics, reading passages or grammar references, especially at the lower level. In the higher levels they use Bible-based courses from Joy Two Publications⁸⁵. They have at least two trained ESL teachers on

⁸² For materials specific to Conversation Classes see

<https://sites.google.com/site/eslministries/Home/esl-lessons/conversation-classes>

The Southern Ontario Cooperative for ESL Ministry (SOCEM) has lots of free materials and links to various curriculums. Check out the left-hand sidebar: <https://sites.google.com/site/eslministries/> The Calgary ESL Cooperative also has resources: <http://eslcooperative.ca/resources/for-teachers/>

⁸³ See this free website for making your own Jeopardy games for class:

<http://www.superteachertools.us/jeopardyx/>

⁸⁴ See this website for free downloads of materials that integrate the 4 skills.

Materials are designed to complement the Canadian federally funded LINC program, and they are arranged by level according to the Canadian Language Benchmarks: http://wiki.settlementatwork.org/index.php/LINC_1-4_Classroom_Activities

⁸⁵ Joy Two Publications has a series of ESL courses using the Bible as text. In one sense it is a Bible study, but the focus is on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and

the team who are familiar with ESL texts, and they have a collection of them. If you decide this approach is what your students need, it would be good to consult with an ESL teacher and find out which texts are useful for which levels. You could also visit a large bookstore or reference library and compare different texts.

If you do not have any advice from someone with ESL experience, this is probably not the best approach to take. Once your ministry is well under way, find out which skills your students most need. Discover which jobs they hope to get, how they use English in their daily lives, and which skills they have already. It may be impractical to teach all four skills in your ministry, and it is fine to focus on the one or two that are most needed.

Specialized Classes

Once your ministry is running and you have a good sense of your students, consider offering particular classes that suit their needs and interests. At Clairlea church they had educated professionals hoping to pass the IELTS exam, which is required for certain categories of Canadian permanent residence applications. Peter Newbury explained that, “We started off as conversational, but the need was always English. We always said that we didn’t want to turn anybody away. So we would tailor things to what people really needed. If people really wanted to study to take a test, we would help them out somehow.” Job Readiness, Preparing for Citizenship, or Presentation Skills are other specialized classes I’ve heard offered by ESL ministries.

Spiritual Content

There are many choices about how to bring the gospel into the classroom. You might choose to include a little, a lot or no spiritual content in your language curriculum. You could pair language curriculum with spiritually themed curriculum, but keep them separate. You could use Bible-based curriculum that is language-focused in whole or in part. If you do include religious content, always be upfront about it both in your advertising and at registration.

Of course, spiritual conversations don’t just happen in the classroom, and there may be greater freedom to speak in a private conversation. Nevertheless, I urge ministries to deliberately include spiritual content, even if it’s in a class that is one of many student choices. Whether or not a given student shows any interest or curiosity, at the least it provides a way to discern where the Holy Spirit may be working in hearts.

four-skills practice while including spiritual discussion. I’ve used it successfully in our ministry with intermediate and advanced students and the price is reasonable for digital copies:

<https://joytwopublications.com>

Case Studies

In Westminster Chapel's ESL Speaking Class I've used the SOCEM Conversation Guides⁸⁶ that include a Bible verse related to each topic. At some point during our discussion we briefly talk about its vocabulary and meaning. Some of the topics such as 'Fear and Superstition', 'Worship', or 'Emotions' might lead the conversations into spiritual territory, but we never push where students don't want to go. At registration I've found almost no potential students who might be put off by the verse, but I assure the focus is on language study, which is true. Sometimes I might show them a sample of the handouts they'll be using in class.

In addition to the Speaking Class, we have offered an ESL Bible Study on another evening. It's worth noting that the best attendance we ever had for that class was when the Speaking Class was on a semester break. Although not all students were interested in the spiritual content and may not have attended if there had been another choice, once they started, they told me it was helping their English. (Our first student to register also ended up getting baptized that year.)

Bayview Glen offers a two-hour Bible-based class twice a week. Class begins with a language point related to their text in the first half and then they get into the Bible story in the second. The language point might cover grammar, an idiom or punctuation. Sometimes even a life skill could be the focus. Most students will stay for the second half. After the morning class there might also be extra classes such as a discussion of News headlines or a discussion on the Book of Daniel offered for those who wish to join in.

Though the director did relate one incident in their 15 years of an angry Muslim student who accused them of 'teaching lies' during a series on Abraham, she stated, "We didn't have issues being Bible-based. It certainly attracted the people that wanted that. They were the ones that came, because so many of the Chinese came wanting to know about Jesus. It was part of Western culture and that's what they wanted to know more."⁸⁷

Jennifer Tong of Parkway Forest Church has developed "The Virtues Curriculum"⁸⁸, a four-skills approach that integrates spiritual content as part of a cultural overview. The curriculum contains units based on topics such as Courage, Honesty, or Love.

⁸⁶ Free for use in church ministries with permission. An email explaining your ministry is needed to get the password for downloading:
<https://eslministries.org/resources/teaching-materials/conversation-lessons/>

⁸⁷ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

⁸⁸ This curriculum gives practice in the four skills, and is aimed at intermediate to advanced students. It is free to download from the SOCEM website:
<https://eslministries.org/resources/teaching-materials/bible-study-christianity-lessons/>

Each unit consists of 3 - 4 lessons, beginning with texts from world cultures, moving on to texts from North American culture, and finishing with scripture on the given topic.

Foothills Alliance Church in Calgary has established a unique approach. Within their large ministry they have constructed a 'Pathway' towards the gospel. ESL is one of many classes within their 'Settlement Programming'. Other classes include 'Job Talk', which is about employment, and 'Immigrant Transition', which deals with culture shock and stages of adjustment common to the newcomer experience. They even have classes in the sport of curling and in line dancing, which promote social interaction and build relationships. At this level there is little or no spiritual content.

The second level of ESL classes offered is called 'Bridging Programming' with topics such as English Language, Canadian Culture and the Life of Jesus. These classes are offered on Sundays, and they include a spiritual component. The focus is on language, but scripture or spiritual topics might be included, such as Christian holidays. These classes serve the curious and those who are spiritually open or searching.

The last level of the 'Pathway' is 'Spiritual Programming', which as its name suggests is spiritually focused. Classes include ESL Bible Studies, Preparation for Baptism, and an Alpha Program.

Patricia Love, the Pastor of Intercultural Ministries at Foothills, has found that in general out of 200 newcomers who attend Settlement classes in a given week, about 80 of those would continue into the Bridging classes, and about 50 of them would continue into the Spiritual Studies classes. She describes how this pathway works:

"We found that someone might come to a line dance lesson. They're very unlikely to say, 'Oh, I want to go to a Bible Study', but they're very interested in the other settlement classes. ... Then because we're very careful about advertising any spiritual content in our classes ... trust grows. Then we say, 'You know we do have another class where we study Canadian Culture, English Language and the Life of Jesus', and people are very comfortable making that move into something that is a little more spiritual. They may attend those bridging classes for over a year or more, and then they might say, 'You know I do want to study the Bible, I want to know more about Jesus'. We find that it's a smooth pathway. We genuinely want to help people with settlement, and offer them the opportunity to continue into spiritual programming."⁸⁹

Pastor Love told of a woman who came to Christ on this 'Pathway':

"A student who was attending for seven years just a few months ago said, 'I want to follow Jesus. I want to give my life to Him now'. This woman had been in the 'settlement classes' – employment, ESL, etc. Then, she came to the

⁸⁹ Interview with Patricia Love, March 22, 2018

Sunday 'Bridges class' for two years. Finally she said to me, 'Patty, I don't want to be a student in this class any more, I want to volunteer, 'cause now I know everything'. So, she joined our event planning team for two or three years. We do pray on that team for help in the planning, and we never pressured her to pray, but after one such prayer time that's when she said she wanted to follow Jesus too."⁹⁰

How do We Register Students?

Registering students is the first step in learning about who your students are and what they need. The essential information you want is contact information, language level and a sense of the person. The registration process should tell you where they are coming from, literally and figuratively. It should also help you make decisions about how to match team members with students and the kind of classes to offer as the ministry develops. Depending on what fits your ministry and your students, the registration process can range from an informal, intuitive approach to an academic assessment.

Measuring English Levels:

Depending on the formality of your classes, it may be helpful to know which level a student is at when they register for your ministry. However, many successful ministries do not do any assessment.

If you would like to know more about levels, one good free resource is the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) ⁹¹. In the early '90s, the Canadian government began funding language instruction for newcomers, now known as LINC. To help standardize assessment of learners they invested in the CLB project. The whole idea was to have a common measurement of language ability across different schools and programs. The measurement, or 'benchmark' was simply a description of what a learner could actually do to communicate. For example, when someone completes Level 4 that person should be able to have a short, simple phone conversation, follow simple instructions, read and understand a 2 – 3 paragraph narrative and write about personal experience in familiar contexts. The CLB is detailed and complex, and you will probably NOT need to determine fine differences in levels for the purposes of your ministry. However, I think it is a good resource for getting a sense of language levels.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹. The latest, more streamlined updates of this document are available online: <https://www.clb-osa.ca/benchmarks/overview> (March 20, 2018) They also have an unofficial online self-assessment tool, which will give you some general ideas about how to determine language ability: <https://www.clb-osa.ca/home?pageid=6>

If you just wish to do a rough estimate of language level, here is an example of what I've used for a speaking class:

- **Low Basic:** Student has literacy issues; few years of education; may not read or write in either first language or English; working mostly on vocabulary and sentence structure. **Note:** This level needs its own group with lots of repetition.
- **High Basic:** Can read; speak in simple sentences with many grammar/vocabulary errors
- **Low Intermediate:** Can converse about most common things; struggles with grammar re: verbs & sentence structure; still has some trouble finding the right word
- **High Intermediate:** Fairly fluent speaker but working on many points of grammar & more abstract vocabulary
- **Low Advanced:** Able to discuss abstract ideas, working on academic vocabulary, complex grammar and increased fluency
- **High Advanced:** Very fluent, approaching native-like; may want to polish grammar, have more pronunciation work* and acquire academic vocabulary.

*(*Pronunciation work may be needed at all or none of the levels, depending on the individual student.)*

When to Register

There are different ways of holding registration, and each has strengths and weaknesses. You can hold a pre-registration event on the same day of the week and at the same time as your future class. This is the way to go if you intend to register once a semester, and it is a good approach if you have a large ministry team and facilities for many specialized classes in different levels and skills.

The other way is to have registration the same day as class, allowing extra time before classes begin. I would recommend doing this with continuous intake (new students register every week). An added advantage is student retention tends to be slightly better if they have a chance to bond with their teacher and classmates by trying a class immediately. However, taking this route when launching a ministry means having decided on the curriculum ahead of time.

One warning - do not expect all of the students to return once they've registered. I have found that with adults attending a non-credit, free class, there is about a 30 – 40% dropout rate after the first contact, especially if they haven't had a chance to try out a class the same day.

Registration Case Studies

Both large and small ministries can decide on very informal registration. Jennifer Tong who runs a 'Conversation Café' of about 10 – 15 students says, "We just talk to them and then we get some contact information". Patricia Love, who oversees a

ministry averaging 200 students a week, does the same because they feel a low-key, informal approach makes the ministry more welcoming, and that is one of their main values. “We’re not a language school and we’re not running a language school. We’re just friendly Canadians helping our neighbours.” They don’t even assign levels to the students, but rather have them self-sort. “On Saturdays we have four levels, and sometimes the students ask us ‘Which one do you think I should go to?’ After chatting with them for a few minutes, we might make a suggestion.” They also let the students know, “If it seems too easy or too hard you can go to a different class the following week”.

In my church’s ministry serving 20 – 30 students we tend to be a bit more formal. We focus on listening and speaking skills, which means we are not assessing reading or writing, except to ensure they can read the English alphabet. We advertise the class as a place to work on pronunciation and fluency, so we want the groups to be at approximately the same level in order to keep the conversations at the same pace. Depending on the number of team members volunteering, we roughly sort students into 4 – 7 groups, and we check at break time to ensure they are comfortable there.

This is the procedure we use to determine English level:

1. Ask basic personal questions using the student information sheet (see below).
 - a. *If this is easy, go to step 5.*
 - b. ***If it’s difficult, they are likely basic level; proceed to steps 2 – 4 as needed***
2. Ask them to write their name in English.
3. Ask them to spell it for you using the alphabet.
4. **If they cannot write in English** ask them to write their name in their first language.
5. Finish asking about their English education in their home countries and here in Canada. Note the *LINC level* if they have studied in a federally funded ‘free’ program. (This means they’ve already been assessed with the Canadian Language Benchmarks.)
6. Ask the student to talk about a picture with a common scene. (Use a picture dictionary)
 - a. **If this is too easy, they are likely advanced.** Go to step 7
 - b. **If this task takes effort, they are likely intermediate.**

Note : What kind of vocabulary do they use to describe the picture?
 How much time does it take?
 Are they fairly fluent or must they rephrase a lot and search for words?

7. If the student is fairly fluent ask them about their line of work and why they came to Canada.

(Note: Don't let accent or bad pronunciation mislead you on your assessment.)

8. Make a guesstimate on which level they are at under 'Comments' at the bottom of the Student Information Sheet.

When deciding on the class to assign, we also consider which groups have space in addition to group dynamics. If family members are registering, we try to split up husbands and wives, parents and children. Otherwise, the dominant family member inhibits the other. Sometimes we also split up close friends for this reason, but if they provide moral support for one another, we try to make everyone happy and keep them together.

Westminster Chapel Student Information Sheet

Date:

Name:

Country of Origin:

First Language:

Other languages spoken:

Address:

Phone number: home:

Cell:

Email:

Education:

Previous English study

- first country:
- Canada:
 - o (if in a LINC program) LINC level

Comments –

Class Placement:

Oral Assessment
Bayview Glen Church

Oral Assessment

1. Name	
2. Home address	
3. Email Address	
4. Country	
5. How did you find out about ESL? Newspaper __ Brochure __ Sign __ Friend __ Other _____	

FORMER COUNTRY

6. What kind of work did you do in your country?	
7. How much education do you have?	

ARRIVAL AND FAMILY

8. When did you come to Canada?	
9. What made you decide to come to Canada?	
10. What do you miss most about your country?	
11. Tell me about your family.	

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CURRENT STATUS

12. Are you working now? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, what kind of work do you do? _____	
13. What other interests do you have? (e.g. sports, art)	
14. What have you found most difficult about living in Canada?	

LANGUAGE

15. Did you study English in your country? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, how long?	
16. What aspect of English would you like to improve the most? (speaking <input type="checkbox"/> listening <input type="checkbox"/> reading <input type="checkbox"/> writing <input type="checkbox"/>)	

MISCELLANEOUS

17. Did you ever go to church in your country? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about it.	
18. What have you heard about God?	
19. What have you heard about Jesus?	
20. Who do you think Jesus is?	
Explain our Bible ESL.	

Final Score

2

Class _____

Assessor _____

(Please print your name)

Date _____

Approximate Scores (only a guideline but overall impression is important)

Conversation (no grammar)	38 - 40 }	} Ask if they want grammar
Advanced (some grammar)	38 - 40 }	
High Intermediate	35 - 37	
Middle Intermediate	31 - 34	
Low Intermediate	28 - 30	
High Basic	25 - 27	
Middle Basic	21 - 24	
Low Basic	15 - 20	
Preliterate	2 14	

Comments: _____

Mary Hogan coordinates the ESL ministry at Bayview Glen Church, which serves an average of 200 students each week and is designed like a language school. They use Bible-based curriculum in a ministry that runs two mornings a week and covers all four language skills. For that reason they have a more formal and involved registration process.

Their ministry registers new students throughout the semester, but they also have one big registration day in September at the beginning of their academic year. Last year they registered 150 students on their opening day with a special registration team of around 35. As the ministry has developed over 15 years, the process of assessing that many people has become a challenge. The night before the mass intake, Mary has a meeting for the team going through every step. The goal is to make new students feel welcome, discover which language class best suits them, and get a sense of spiritual interest and knowledge. Another goal is to take students through registration before 11:00am. The time limit is important so the process isn't too grueling for the students and so students can meet their teachers and get a sense of the program at a shortened, introductory class.

As the students come in, one member of the registration team does the triage, deciding whether a given student should be assessed at the Beginner or Intermediate/Advanced level. Then they have escorts from the team to take registrants to the right place for further assessment.

Bayview Glen has created its own assessment tools. Their oral assessment (see above) uses a series of 20 questions that not only reveals listening and speaking ability but also gathers information about a student's personal and spiritual background. In addition, it includes a prompt at the end for the assessor to explain about the Bible-based nature of the classes. The student answers are written down verbatim, with a score of 2 for each question understood and answered correctly, a score of 1 for those needing repetition or clarification and 0 for those not understood or answered.

Besides the oral, students take different written assessments. Those assessed at the lower level have some advanced students to help translate, if that is needed. The assessors decide whether to start with the easiest picture/word match or a match using numbers and words plus a prompt for writing other vocabulary they might know. If they manage this, they try a written assessment with 4 parts. If they pass part 1, they go on to part 2, etc. If they can pass all 4 parts they get an oral assessment to see if they might go over to Intermediate level.

Those flagged for the higher levels take a written test evaluating grammar, reading, and vocabulary. Many volunteers mark the papers for quick decisions on results. Students have to have a minimum level in all 4 skills in order to pass, but students can still switch over to a more appropriate class if there is a mismatch, which happens less than 5% of the time.

Mary is the first to admit that Bayview Glen's registration and assessment process does not fit all ESL ministries. I find it significant that the majority of their students are of East Asian origin where testing is a constant component of schooling and a sign of serious study. Students from other cultures may be put off, however. My advice would be to keep registration simple in the beginning and modify the process as your ministry develops.

Practical Details

How many students?

When you get started you may not have many students to begin with, but it is good to have a maximum number in mind, especially if you have a small team. Decide what kind of student – teacher ratio is best. In our speaking class, we deliberately limit each speaking group to six students plus the teacher. That ensures they all get a chance to talk. Smaller groups usually help build closer relationships. On the other hand, if you already know of a specific need such as running a citizenship preparation class, you may want to open the class to as many students who want it, rather than turning people away. Having said that, waiting lists are not always a bad thing as long as the wait is short. It lets students know that though the classes are free, they are in demand.

Foothills Alliance with its much larger team has determined not to cap enrollment. They have a number of temporary team members they can call on to fill emergency gaps in staff when there is a surge of students.

Semester system or continuous intake?

A semester system means you have a set period of time with one intake of students at the beginning, keeping the same students until the end. If you have continuous intake, you allow students to register at any time during the class term. Both systems have advantages and disadvantages.

A semester system is a good choice if your lessons build week by week. In other words, knowledge from the previous lesson is needed to understand the following lesson. An example would be an ESL Bible-study class or the afore-mentioned Virtues Curriculum. Having the same students for a set period also helps the group dynamics as they bond together. The disadvantage is that with adult students there tends to be a high attrition rate, and by the end of the semester you could end up with very few or no students.

A continuous intake system helps ensure that you keep numbers up. As your ministry becomes known in the neighbourhood, students will often tell their friends and you may have a bunch of them wanting to register at any given time. If you are using a semester system, those friends may not be willing to wait until the end, and you will lose them. The disadvantage for teachers is that the group dynamics can change week to week and the work of registration is continuous.

My advice to a brand new ministry is to start out with continuous intake and allow for your student body to build. Choose curriculum that is skill-focused rather than knowledge-focused. For example, conversation groups center on practice of speaking and listening skills rather than a set of information.

Fee or free?

As registered charities, churches must be careful in what they charge for. Charging for materials is legitimate, and some churches decide to collect a small fee to cover the cost of photocopying. There is also a theory that a nominal charge causes students to put more value on the class.

Bayview Glen Alliance Church has an average of 200 students attending each week, and they charge \$25 / year for refreshments and materials. The ministry leader feels, “They’re more committed when they put money out.” She also mentioned that for their population, the fee was easily affordable.

Our small ministry hoped that a fee might improve commitment to the class for our 30 students. Once we decided to charge ten dollars for a binder of handouts but with the promise to refund the fee for anyone having 80% attendance. Unfortunately, student attrition remained the same, and at the end those with high attendance refused the refund in appreciation for the class. Queensway Baptist who has a ministry of similar size had the same result. “People probably wouldn’t force themselves to come because they want the money back. It’s probably not very effective in terms of getting them to attend consistently.”⁹²

What are the venue regulations?

Whether classes are held in a building you own or in a rented space, check the requirements of what is allowed. There may be a cap on the number of people, or the types of activities permitted. Check your church’s insurance policy and read the fine print of any rental agreement carefully. No matter which building you are in, make sure everyone is aware of fire drill procedures and the nearest exits.

You should also ask about government policies. For example, our province requires police background checks for all volunteers dealing with ‘vulnerable’ populations, such as refugees, children, etc.

How do we publicize our classes?

If you are hoping to attract young, foreign students, make sure your church’s website and/or Facebook page prominently features ‘ESL Classes’ on the first click. Look into advertising on other websites. For example, SOCEM lists ESL ministries on their website as does the Calgary ministry coop⁹³.

⁹² Interview with Tony and Susan Tsoi, April 9, 2018

⁹³ See Southern Ontario Cooperative of ESL Ministries (SOCEM):

<https://eslministries.org/>; Calgary ESL Cooperative: <http://eslcooperative.ca>

Some of the best advice I got was to invest in a brightly coloured banner at the front of the church, the more garishly eye-catching the better. We are on a busy street with streetcars zipping by. Many of our students reported that sign was what brought them in.

Another method is word of mouth. When one church wanted to launch a ministry they encouraged congregation members to hand out invitations to any who might benefit. However, if you do that, don't assume someone needs the class just because English isn't their first language. Simply offer the invitation to "anyone who needs it whom they might know". Once your ministry is established, student word-of-mouth is often the only advertising necessary. If you are meeting a need, people will hear about it from your satisfied students.

Printed notices and posters are another method. Some churches have done a mail drop, putting invitations into mailboxes in the neighbourhood. Look for local notice boards at Laundromats, supermarkets and libraries. If you are renting a venue, ask them if you can put up a poster or if they can help advertise. When Clairlea church got started they found, "Most of the attendees got the flyer from the library, even though we went house to house and to the schools." Put an ad in the local newspaper, and if there are multilingual papers consider getting your ad translated into those languages.

It may even be possible to advertise at your local ESL program. Make sure you talk to their administrator first. Ensure your classes are not offered at the same time as theirs, and assure them that what you offer is complementary to their program, if that is the case. You could also suggest that they send you students who don't qualify for their program.

Ready or not...

Don't expect to ever feel truly ready to open your doors. Uncertainty means you recognize God is in charge and you have human limitations. Once you have made the needed decisions covered in this chapter, send word out to your prayer supporters and launch!

When the students enter the ministry and become regulars, it's good to do an ongoing assessment of what they can do and what they most need to practice. Don't be afraid to consult the students themselves. Be flexible and adapt.

The next chapter is about expectations. You probably had some before you started, but keep reading to discover you are not alone when things don't go as planned.

9. What to Expect

You have decided on what kind of ESL to offer, you have advertised, and you have your registration forms ready. Your congregation and team have been praying for that first day. What might you expect when the doors open?

One ESL ministry coordinator who has been on the job for over 15 years told me the best advice she could give those launching such a ministry is, “Have no expectations!” Another told me, “Expect problems!” Nevertheless, this chapter is meant to encourage you through the ups and downs of a first semester. I have included challenges that were mentioned more than once by ministry leaders. I have also included some surprising ways God has worked.

Changing Ministry Team

The core team may not stay intact despite their initial commitment of a year’s service. Life happens, and team recruitment, which I’ll address more in the next chapter, is an ongoing task. This should not just be the job of the official team leader. Rather, each member needs to be talking to others in the congregation about their experiences with the motive of getting others interested in serving.

The good news is that I have rarely found anyone who thinks ESL ministry is a chore to be endured stoically as a sacrifice for God. (If that is the attitude, I doubt they belong on the team.) It can be tiring, even exhausting, but it is almost always fun, encouraging and exciting as we see God working. Of course, there is sacrifice, but when others are invited to observe a class they will want to get involved more often than not. If a friend gives an invitation to observe a class with no commitment, that is a lot less scary than being asked directly to join a ministry with unknown demands.

Student Attendance

When we launched a new ESL ministry at Westminster Chapel, we had only three students show up the first day. After ten weeks of training the team, it was an anticlimax to say the least. We had a ratio of two teachers to one student for the first while. At times half the team would have a student to teach and the others would go aside to pray.

EastRidge Church in Stouffville, Ontario saw a similar pattern when they first launched. Just a few students showed up in September, and by December they had around 13 attending in their morning class and fewer than 10 in the evenings. Then in January there was a sudden spike in numbers. One of their students who had great appreciation for the class had begun to champion their ministry to his community. He told all his friends, and once they came, they told their friends.

Expect a slow build up of the student body. Advertising can only do so much to get the word out. Word-of-mouth testimonies about the value of the ministry are always the best way to recruit students. Keep praying as a team and give it at least six months for classes to fill. Don't take it personally when adult students suddenly disappear. Life as a newcomer is filled with the unexpected: a new job opportunity, family illness, or perhaps a move to better accommodation.

Some students will attend one class and decide it just isn't for them. This is normal. You can't suit everyone. Do follow up on absent students if they've attended for at least three consecutive classes. This shows you care. In our ministry we also encourage students to contact their teacher if they know they will be absent. At Clairlea Church they've found that keeping up the personal contacts with students can provide ministry opportunities. "One time there was a couple in our class who called to say, 'We can't make it because we've had a car accident. Would you please pray!'"⁹⁴

If you still have low attendance after 6 months, consider the time your class is offered. Newcomers often work odd hours such as late evenings or weekends. In Stouffville, they found a large group of Chinese seniors who were free only during the day when their grandchildren were in school. There may be mothers with young children who can only attend if there is childcare. If your team is able, consider trying another time or adding a team member for children's ministry.

At any time during the ministry there may be a week with a sudden mismatch between the number of team members and the number of students showing up. Perhaps a bitterly cold day discourages the tropical flowers within your student body from coming to class. Maybe half your team members succumb to a virus that's making the rounds. I remember when one student recruited her entire private language school class, thus increasing the student numbers by 30%.

Don't panic or be discouraged. God is still in charge, and He may have a good reason for who is there and who isn't. I recently heard a story from a ministry leader about how her class was reduced to only two low-level students one evening. However, the student who had a bit more English was a Christian, and she was able to answer her classmate's questions during the Bible-based lesson. By the end of the lesson, her classmate decided to become a Christian⁹⁵.

I've also found that our Heavenly Father makes arrangements for times when teacher and student numbers don't match up. Somehow the classes carry on, whether two groups merge under one teacher, team members pair up to teach one or two students, or a supply teacher arrives at a moment's notice.

⁹⁴ Interview with Peter Newbury and Diosa Ramos, January 8, 2018

⁹⁵ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

Student Resistance to Change

Once students bond with a teacher and classmates, they are usually resistant to moving on into another class. Building solid relationships and bonding is what we hope for, but as English improves and new students add to the mix, class re-organization becomes necessary. If your ministry has divided time into semesters, you also have a structure in place to move students onward. Let them know ahead of time that a new semester means new beginnings. It is a time to meet new friends and get used to a different style of English with a new teacher.

This change is easier if you also have regular social activities with the whole group. This way you can reassure students that they will still see their old friends and teachers at these events. There is also no reason they can't get together outside of class, and if teachers have an established friendship with a particular student, they should keep up contact.

Wide Difference in English Levels

Back in Chapter 3 I recommended having a minimum number of four members on the team in order to offer at least three different English levels. At Queensway Baptist Church in Toronto I had prepared the team to hold a Conversation Class, expecting that their potential students would be similar to the ones we had, namely people who had studied English through high school and who needed speaking confidence before looking for work. The ministry was using free materials that were suitable for those who could put a sentence together. Unfortunately, only some of their students could use the materials, while a sizable portion “turned out to have basically no English at all. They were unable to express themselves, so the teacher in that group had to devise or find their own material.” Students also had some skills that were stronger than others. “They generally could read better than speak, depending on which country they were from, how they learned and how they were coached.”⁹⁶

If you have a small ministry, you may have to include a wide difference in levels within each group. Nevertheless, if you establish a welcoming, friendly atmosphere, this should not be a problem. Encourage students to help one another, recruit teacher's helpers for those who need extra attention, or divide your group into 2 or more levels when they work through a particular task. You can also give the fast ones an extra task to do while the slower ones take their time.

Possible Opposition

Don't be surprised when you face opposition once the ministry begins. It is part of human nature to fear change and what is different, and fear is a favourite weapon of the Enemy when we enter into his territory. Resistance may come from within as

⁹⁶ Interview with Tony and Susan Tsoi, April 9, 2018

well as from without. There may be some friction from inside your congregation, or anti-Christian sentiment from the community at large.

Fear in the Church

When an ESL ministry is successful it should bring change within the congregation. However, not everyone may be comfortable with all the new faces they are seeing. One ministry leader described the adjustments needed when their ministry bore fruit. “Our congregation is growing and ...reflecting our neighbourhood’s diversity, and not everyone was happy about that, especially the first few years. But our church leadership has always been very supportive. As things grow and change, the support grows too”.

When I asked about how she dealt with resistance to newcomers, she told me the best way to win people over is to, “Create an opportunity in the church to make friends.” In other words, find a way to get those digging in their heels to participate in some aspect of the ministry where there are team members to encourage them.

One of my first ministry volunteers, ‘Diane’, admitted to me much later that she had joined the team out of friendship to me. Her main motivation to help newcomers stemmed from a desire to stop them “murdering the English language”. God has a sense of humour, and I ended up pairing her with the most advanced student, a professional English translator from Russia. Diane soon discovered this man was a fascinating individual. He was an amateur entomologist, had more education than herself, and he was a Christian! Despite his amazing vocabulary and understanding of English grammar, he ‘talked like a book’, so Diane was genuinely able to help him with conversational skills. I have already addressed the need to face fear of the foreign when training the ministry team. If your team has overcome this issue, they can also help others get through that fear. (The last chapter talks about events that can help with this.)

Sometimes you might face a strong, ingrained prejudice against a certain group of people. At one church I encountered a man with hatred against Muslims, which was the very group their new ministry was supposed to reach. In fairness, he had grown up as a persecuted Christian minority in a Muslim majority culture, and I understood where he was coming from. He most objected to my call for connecting to students outside of class and building relationships, saying, “Why would I invite a snake into my home?” When I asked him, “How do you think God sees these newcomers? What do you think He wants for them?” the man continued to rail that all Muslims were evil. If you ever face direct opposition within your congregation from someone holding such deep-rooted bitterness, the spiritual leadership of your church must deal with the person regarding this spiritual issue.

We can be confident that scripture backs up treating a foreigner as we would want to be treated. Jesus himself treated Gentiles according to their faith rather than their

ethnicity⁹⁷. As one ministry leader stated, “It’s a challenge when people don’t get it that God’s heart is with the foreigner and with the vulnerable.” She quoted the verse from Leviticus 19:34 - “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” Our ancestors may not have come from Egypt, but she draws a parallel. “Some Canadians don’t remember that their grandfather came here from Ireland (or other places) and somebody helped him adjust.”

Understanding of Evangelism

There may be another aspect of opposition within the church regarding mismatched concepts of evangelism. Evangelism, defined as getting the Good News out to those who haven’t heard, calls up various pictures within the minds of Christians. Some envision knocking on neighbourhood doors, others imagine inviting unbelieving friends to an event featuring a ‘professional’ evangelist, still others by how many non-Christians they can escort into the church building on a Sunday morning. God can use all these methods, but ESL Ministry and building relationships over time may not fit within those ideas of outreach.

In one church I heard about a spirit of competition present. There was a small group who didn’t join in the community prayer walks in preparation for the ministry, nor did they join the ministry once it was established, despite one being a qualified teacher. “They seemed to believe that bringing people to church was the way to measure ‘outreach’”. The ministry team was not daunted. “We decided just to pray for them”, which is always good advice.

Opposition from without

It is always a risk to form a partnership with those who do not follow Christ, though I know of God using such an arrangement for His purposes. If you do so, you can likely expect some friction from those who fear the church or at least ‘Evangelicals’. Beware of partnerships with those who are not like-minded as it is always arduous to be unequally yoked. Nevertheless, God is able to overcome if He is clearly leading in this direction.

One example of this was a church in a small city that began an extensive ESL program designed to serve refugees sponsored by those in the community. Many of those sponsors were not at all happy to have English offered at the church, and there was an undertaking to move it out, which put stress on those involved. Interestingly enough, that opposition disappeared, but last I heard some dissatisfaction had surfaced within the church. Nevertheless, God is using this ministry, despite the obstacles.

⁹⁷ See the encounters with the Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7: 24 – 30), the Samaritan woman (John 4: 7 – 30) and the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8: 5 – 13; Luke 7: 1 – 10)

Another example of an unlikely relationship is a partnership between an ethnic association and an evangelical denomination. The students are 90% Muslim and the teachers are 95% Christian, as is the coordinator. At one time some of the classes were expanded to a nearby church, although a few of the students refused to enter that building. There have been some tensions over the years, and one teacher was pressured to quit due to his evangelical activities outside of class. However, the association could not manage the program without the dedicated Christian teachers, and some wonderful relationships have been forged. Those who have attended the classes have championed the ministry among those objecting within their community.

The third example of outside opposition came about from classes that began as a church ministry but then came under partnership with a secular organization that was paying for their venue. The classes still rely almost entirely on Christian volunteers, but restrictions exist concerning the curriculum they use or what they can discuss in class. Despite this, those who serve in this program have decided to accept the constraints put on them by their secular managers. They have had some success in being Christ's ambassadors through building relationships and freely meeting with students outside of class. They are at liberty to invite students to special events arranged for newcomers at their church or to another ESL ministry run by a Christian organization. God has honoured this. The classes have expanded into new locations. Many have heard the gospel, and several students have chosen to follow Christ. Through God all things are possible, despite the World's opposition.

Expect to Make Mistakes and Learn from Them

When I began the first ESL ministry, it was just trial and error. We tried having classes in the winter, but then we discovered the attendance just sank in January and February, so we had a long winter break and re-started in March. We then discovered our summer semester was the biggest one of the year in terms of student attendance, so we worked around team vacations and kept going.

The material we used in the beginning had little or no spiritual content until one team member suggested that we add a Bible verse related to our conversation handout. Then our conversations started to take a more spiritual turn. When a missionary couple joined the team, we added an ESL Bible Study and students began giving their lives to Christ.

One year when I had to bow out of the ministry, the team decided to carry on without a designated leader. They each took on different tasks and started creating their own handouts, and the Conversation Guides we use today were born. Many years later when I had to bow out for good, the ministry died. What was the difference? I believe it was the lack of dependence on God and vision for the ministry's purpose within the team. In hindsight this may have been true for the congregation as a whole at that point in time.

I remembered this lesson at a new church when I once again withdrew from leadership. I prepared the team ahead of time to take over. I left and was delighted to discover improvements in the way they did things upon my return. The new leaders had begun keeping track of answered prayer and their prayer had become more specific. The team had recruited new members. Their dependence on God was obvious, and their zeal was catching.

These are just some examples of challenges faced by one ministry leader over time. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”⁹⁸ Trust God, ask Him for help, ask your leaders and congregation for help, and move forward in faith. He is faithful! What may be unexpected for you is never unexpected for Him.

Now that you are familiar with some of the unexpected challenges of carrying on with ministry, the next chapter addresses the details of expected day-to-day operations. If you are the person who is handling administration and/or team leadership, keep reading to see how to make your role easier.

⁹⁸ James 1: 5 – 6

10. Ministry Administration and Leadership

I recognize that the role of ministry team leader is not always identical to that of ministry administrator, though many times they overlap or at least function according to similar principles. For example, both roles require awareness of what is happening with the team and with the students, and the principle of delegation eases their burdens. Whether one person or a couple takes on these roles, they are highly interdependent. Therefore this chapter addresses tasks and issues faced by the two.

Keeping an Eye on Things

Most administrative and leadership tasks have the goal of ensuring all runs smoothly. In order to do that one needs to know what is going on. I have mentioned before that even with a small team it is ideal to have one person just do management rather than teach, although smooth operation may mean filling in to teach a class on occasion. When I had this role, I regularly dropped into the different groups. Because I was also the English teaching expert, it was a time I could answer some detailed inquiries on pronunciation or grammar. This helped me get a feel for group atmosphere as well as individual students. When the team met to debrief and pray after class I knew the situations better.

When Bayview Glen expanded their ministry into two mornings a week with many classes, the administrators realized the importance of keeping tabs on how things were running. Some of the volunteers did not have much training, so two experienced teachers worked in tandem to share the administrator role. They would take turns going into the different classes to take the pulse of each group and provide on-the-job training. The team always met before classes began to pray and to re-group. “We would spend a lot of time talking to the teachers after class to see how things went and any problems they had.”⁹⁹

Over the years I have had one or two team members who were not all that comfortable with me dropping in on their group. I suspect that one, who surpassed me in grammar knowledge, felt rather possessive of his students and didn’t see the need for the interruption. I respected his wishes and we dealt with any issues that arose during the team meeting. Class visits should always be about helping where needed, not judging a performance. Directly asking, “What help do you need? Is there anything you want me to pay attention to?” sets the tone.

Team meetings are a must! They keep everyone informed, strengthen the team, provide prayer support and deal with potential problems sooner rather than later. I have personally found that holding them after class is better than before. At one

⁹⁹ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

point I attempted to hold them before in an effort to get us all home earlier, but despite promises, people didn't manage to make it on time.

Students are another great source of information. When I have an administrative role, I try to talk to the new students to see how they feel. Don't be shy in asking those who can express themselves to talk about what they like or don't like about the classes.

Recruiting New Team Members

As gaps occur in the team, replacements must come in. This is a job for the whole team, not just the leader. The best approach is to have ongoing recruitment so that there are people waiting in the wings to step in before the need becomes urgent. Clairlea church has a system of team teaching. Each teacher has one 'helper' so that when one must be absent the other can take over.¹⁰⁰ The helpers expect to eventually take over the class when they feel comfortable with doing so.

In the previous chapter I recommended inviting observers whom you think would be good to serve in the ministry. Reassure those invited that there is no commitment to serve, but rather their visit is simply to test out whether God might be calling them in that direction. If someone wants to dive right into teaching, ask them to observe first to get a feel for things. That way you both can ascertain whether the ministry is a good fit.

Personal invitations almost always work better than a general call from the pulpit, and there is a better chance of getting people with the right gifts. Having said that, I know Queensway Baptist's ESL Ministry had great success in expanding the team when two enthusiastic team members got up on Sunday morning and told about the people they were meeting and how much they enjoyed the classes.

Supply/ Substitute teachers

It is always a good idea to have a list of people who can teach a class on short notice when emergencies arise. Your ministry team can have part-time as well as full-time members. When team members can no longer serve full time, ask if they are willing to fill in for emergencies. Part-timers can come to observe classes and learn about the ministry, then serve on the supply list.

Speaking the Truth in Love

One of the most difficult roles of a leader is handling ministry threats caused by fallible human beings. Given our weak human nature, sooner or later a leader may have to face this situation. I've already spoken about the importance of who is recruited into the team, but it might take some time before problems become obvious. In addition, we don't choose who comes in as a student.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Peter Newbury and Diosa Ramos, January 4, 2018

How we deal with people is a major testimony of our walk with God. Leaders are urged to be humble and lead by example, “not domineering over those in your charge”¹⁰¹. Nevertheless, there are times when it is vital to use one’s authority and correct behaviour that is out of line with ministry purpose. We do so lovingly and with respect, remembering that we all fall short in God’s eyes.

Team discipline

I am someone who hates conflict of any kind, and I tend to avoid speaking to problem people even when it’s needed. I recall one time when we had a man come in on a member’s recommendation to be an observer. He was not from our congregation, and I expected him to come once or twice, but then a third week went by. Neither students nor team members were impressed with him. He seemed to have difficulty relating to people, and he was constantly looking at his phone during class. During break times he wouldn’t engage in conversation. I finally asked to speak with him privately where I suggested this was likely not a good ministry for him, and I encouraged him to go in a different direction.

The good news is that real difficulties with team members are rare, especially if everyone is prayerful during recruitment. One ministry leader, who has dealt with hundreds of team members over 12 years, has only encountered 3 or 4 instances of people “Who the longer they were in it the more it became apparent that this just wasn’t the right fit for them.” She stated that usually the problem was either not honouring or not understanding the importance of their key ministry values, namely being welcoming, respectful, and interactive. “Then, I just talk with them and brainstorm ways we can be more respectful or interactive, etc...” In her many years in ministry, she has only had one person whom she advised might be happier in another ministry, and this decision came after consulting a fellow pastor.

In her role as administrator, Mary Hogan has had to talk the occasional volunteer off the team. “You do run into people who think this is something they want to do, but then you find out this really isn’t the best fit. They usually figure it out themselves. They might complain about different things. One teacher didn’t like the weekly registrations, saying, ‘I don’t want any new people coming into the class’. I had to tell her, “Then this isn’t the place for you to teach ESL. You have to accommodate them. Not everyone can do that. If it isn’t your gift, that’s ok.”

The Bayview Glen ministry has developed a code, and before people join the team, there are certain rules that they agree to abide by. For example, occasionally there might be team members who couldn’t show up on time, and they would get a gentle reminder about that agreement. Because they have a large team with many roles besides teaching, those who aren’t gifted in that capacity can serve in other ways and might be counseled out of working directly with students.

¹⁰¹ 1 Peter 5: 3 and many others: Matt. 20: 25; Luke 22: 25; Mark 10:43

Student discipline

In my experience problem students are very rare! Over 20 years I have only encountered two students who gave us trouble. The first seemed to have some kind of personality disorder. For better or for worse one of our pastoral interns spoke firmly to her, and she did not return. The other was an older European gentleman who had a thing for the young ladies in class. All the teachers were aware of this, and we kept an eye on him. At one point, I considered asking him to leave, but his teacher spoke up on his behalf stating that the class was having a positive spiritual effect on him. Eventually he too left due to health problems.

Mary Hogan, who has had hundreds of students attending over 10 years, can only recall two instances of having to deal with student problems. “There was one student who was a very unhappy person. He created a very negative atmosphere. He was never happy in whatever class he was in. He just sat there with a glare on his face. We had to deal directly with him. There was also a student who stole. Things would just go missing. One teacher saw her taking a remote control, so we had to be vigilant.”

Share the Load: Delegating

Whether someone is leading a large or small ministry, no one person can do it all, nor should they. It is worth repeating that many teams choose to divide the roles of spiritual leader and administrative organizer. (Just make sure there is excellent communication going on between those two!)

Delegating is an ongoing process. Once the ministry gets rolling, tasks to support smooth running should become apparent as problems arise. As the ministry grows, let the needs be known, and ask for help. Even figuring out what tasks need to be done in order to solve the problems can be delegated. Throw out the challenge to the team and solve the difficulty together. Pray for insight and approach a team member who has the necessary gifts to do a particular task, or ask for volunteers.

Team members will often volunteer to take on tasks that suit them, sometimes before being asked. Take full advantage of special gifts and talents. For example, I’ve spoken to two churches with members passionate about history. One of them took the job of communicating for a Remembrance Day assembly. Another member delighted students with historical accounts of their city and Canada. I’ve also been told of an artist who made all the props for class plays, someone who does centerpieces for banquets and another who specializes in games for parties.

I am someone who resists delegating, and I admit to often having too much on my plate as a result. In the beginning of our last ESL start-up, my husband and I did all the refreshments, cleaning up, putting out teaching materials, setting up tables and chairs, photocopying, contacting students and filling in for absent teachers. It was a lot to handle, and the team had little idea of what it took to carry on each night.

During the process of passing ministry leadership over, I had to force myself to relinquish many tasks. Planning a Christmas party was one example, and I was pleasantly surprised at how the team jumped in to make it a marvelous time. One member volunteered to bake a huge batch of Christmas cookies, and another prepared different coloured icings and sprinkles. The students had a unique experience decorating the cookies – a first for them all. It was the best party ever, and I never could have pulled it off on my own.

For large ministries, survival means delegation. At Bayview Glen, registration is a good example: “Our classes have continuous intake, so we have three people just on registration before each class. I have someone in charge of registration, and she does all the training for those registering. Someone else is in charge of taking attendance.”¹⁰²

Another leader of a large ministry relies not only on the core team, but also a backup team. “Because there is no cap on enrollment, a class team approach is important. There is someone to run and make photocopies, and there is a larger group of ministry volunteers to call upon when the team must expand with the enrollment.”¹⁰³

Keeping Track of Students

Administrative duties invariably involve one form of record keeping or another. This is something that can be delegated to a person who loves details and is gifted in organizing information. Record keeping with students is an important feature of ministry, and it is the means to keep up relationships between students, the team and the wider congregation.

Student Attendance

For one reason or another students may need to prove to someone that they’ve been trying to better their language. It may be a point in their favour if they are facing a refugee hearing or it could improve their resumes. They may ask for a letter to prove their attendance in the class. Always be honest that you are not running a credit program recognized by any school or government, unless, of course, you’ve jumped through those hoops and become accredited. However, if you do track attendance, you can assure students that you will testify in writing about their presence in the program. (See sample below)

¹⁰² Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

¹⁰³ Interview with Patricia Love, March 22, 2018

Attendance Letter Template

Date:

To Whom It May Concern:

NAME has attended our ESL Speaking Class from STARTING DATE to ENDING DATE. This is a non-credit class offered as a service to our community by Westminster Chapel at High Park. It is held every Monday from 7:00 – 8:30 and it focuses on intensive English speaking and pronunciation practice in groups of no more than six students.

Please feel free to contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marion G. Chang
Coordinator, ESL Ministry
Westminster Chapel at High Park
Email address
Phone #

Student Contact

If students have attended for more than two classes, contact them after two absences. It shows you care. Of course, students can take some responsibility. Our ESL has its own email account and students are asked to notify us if they know they will be absent. If a student is absent for two consecutive classes without notifying us, they know a student on the waiting list could be given their place, but we will contact them to check on how they are doing even if they don't take the initiative. This also might be an opportunity to pray, if they are struggling with something that is keeping them away from class.

Not every ministry believes in waiting lists, and some turn no one away. Our class is based on keeping groups small. When there is a class limit it can provide an incentive for good attendance, knowing others are waiting to get in. However, we try hard to accommodate everyone and we assure students on the list that a space usually becomes available within the month with dropouts and new teacher recruitment.

If you have semester breaks it is wise to contact all your old students before the new one begins. Put up a sign outside your venue announcing the new start and information about how new students can register.

If your church has regular office hours make sure your administrator has key information about the ministry. We even made a brochure that gave class times and semester dates to hand out to walk-in enquirers. If your church does not have regular hours or you hold class in a different venue, consider putting a phone number and/or email contact on your signs. That way you have someone ready to answer basic questions for those unsure of whether to take the class. Make sure that current class information is kept up-to-date on the church website.

Of course, keeping track of whether a student is still involved in the ministry is only one piece of knowing how they are really doing. As personal connections build, social media can play a part in entering each other's lives. Accepting and offering hospitality is another level of relationship. This doesn't happen with every student, but as we pray for deeper connections, God shows the way. When we have deeper connections, relationships can continue even after students leave the class for one reason or another.

Developing New Leaders

If you are leading the team, I have news for you. You will not be around forever, and no one is indispensable. God forbid that you should get hit by a bus tomorrow, but from the very beginning you need to keep an eye out for the next person to lead and start developing your replacement. This is the only way to keep any ministry sustainable.

Recognizing Leaders

Once your team is working together, notice who is taking the initiative to get things done or coming up with solutions for problems. Is there anyone who is connecting well with students inside and outside the classroom while being salt and light within the team? If you think someone on the team has relational ability, some organizational skills and devotion to God, consider that person as a potential leader. When individuals come to mind, don't make the mistake of eliminating them from consideration because they are already too busy. Allow them the final refusal and ask anyway. If no one seems to fit the role, earnestly pray for God to bring a person onto the team who does.

Sometimes leadership comes in the form of a couple. When I was praying for my replacement there didn't seem to be one person that fit the role. A few weeks later, John and Sydney approached me and expressed a desire to get involved once again in ESL. I had trained them both at the ministry's start, but they had dropped out after marrying and getting jobs that changed their schedules. I realized that John had the gifts for spiritual leadership and the organizational skills. Sydney had wonderful gifts for communication and keeping track of details. Most importantly,

both of them had a heart for the students and shared vision for how God could work through the ministry.

Though I didn't warn them ahead that I had them in mind for added responsibility, I began delegating some tasks to this couple. I trained Sydney in the registration process and had John run the team meetings occasionally. When I had to be away, they took over. Testing them out with these matters proved my first impressions of their leadership potential had been correct.

Encouraging Leaders

Trying people out in leadership roles not only helps you recognize their potential, it can also be an encouragement to them. It shows your trust and recognition of their talents and gifts. When you delegate, let people know the reasons you think they would do well at the task. There will always be opportunities to bring in temporary leadership when people are away. It's not a not a bad thing to take a break occasionally and give others a chance. Debrief potential leaders when you return. Encourage them to be honest about what went well and what didn't. Complement them on their achievements and brainstorm about possible courses of action should they face the same difficulties next time.

Holding on to the reins too tightly or fearing change can be discouraging. Recognize when someone brings in innovation that improves the way things run. Ask for suggestions on what could be done better. Once John and Sydney took over our record keeping, it became much more efficient. My technology had been in the dark ages, and they soon had everything online in one account so that the whole team could both access the information and update their own classes. (I still don't understand exactly how they set it up, but I can testify it is user-friendly.) John also began keeping track of answers to the team prayers, which built faith for all.

Encouragement means your good thoughts have to move from your mind and be translated into action. I was convicted during a recent leadership seminar¹⁰⁴. While I often admire and recognize things that team members do well, I don't always say them aloud. I tend to be reserved in my praise, and that can be discouraging. Actively look for what team members are doing right and make it public! Encourage the team to do the same for one another.

There is one woman in our church who is a talented chef, and she uses her gift to feed the congregation. She brings in huge batches of homemade cookies for our after-worship teatime, and our ESL ministry is free to use them for our breaks. Students really noticed the quality of their snacks, and they were genuinely touched that someone in the congregation would go to all that trouble just for them. After hearing one of their complements, I finally recognized my need to write that dear sister a note. She was greatly encouraged when I explained how her gift was a tangible expression of love for our students.

¹⁰⁴ Arrow Leadership Forum – Dr. Steve Brown. See www.arrowleadership.org

Ministry Evaluation – How's it going?

Periodically ministry leaders need to step back and evaluate how the ministry is living up to their original vision for serving God and the neighbourhood. There are certain areas to cover as you assess what has been happening. The health of the team, the impact on the students, and how the ministry is affecting the congregation are all criteria for consideration.

Team health

Team harmony results when the fruits of the Holy Spirit¹⁰⁵ are present among its members. Not that we can expect perfection, but leaders should deal with rifts, cliquishness, or discouragement in hope of rapid healing by God's grace. Mary Hogan assesses joy to evaluate her team. Are they enjoying what they're doing? What is the turnover like? "When you have a happy group of volunteers, that says something to me - that they enjoy it and that something is working well."¹⁰⁶ When my team members eagerly recruit within the congregation, I know that serving God in this way excites them. When the word spreads that this is a fulfilling ministry, there is proof they love it.

Another criterion for success is team members' spiritual growth. Are they growing in faith as God answers prayer? Are you seeing signs of maturity in team members through service? Do they recognize students as potential brothers and sisters in Christ as relationships grow?

During my first years of ministry, Ann, a missionary, recruited a woman she was discipling onto our team. Although this woman seemed a little vulnerable, I trusted Ann's judgment, and she served well enough. Later that year this same woman was baptized, and I was surprised when her testimony included the ESL ministry as part of her journey towards Christ. She confessed that she had been raised as a racist and that serving in the ministry had caused her to question the hatred she had grown up with.

Student Impact

Keeping in mind that ESL as a ministry is meant to serve the whole person, you need to find out if students are improving in English communication, growing in relationships, and responding to God. Evaluating student impact doesn't always have to be formal. It's perfectly legitimate to ask, "Does the class help you? How? How could it help you more?" (When I've asked the latter question, I usually hear, "We need more hours!", which is a vote of confidence in itself.)

During a recent consultation, someone asked me how to tell whether a student's English had improved. As almost all ESL ministries are non-credit, I did not recommend testing. However, it got me thinking that informal assessment might be encouraging to the students at the end of the semester. For most ministries, the

¹⁰⁵ See them itemized in Galatians 5: 22 – 23, among other places.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

registration process involves placing students at a level that is neither too easy nor too difficult. Some comments on the registration form as to what they can or cannot do may serve as a baseline.¹⁰⁷ At the end of the semester, the teacher can tell the student about improvements they've noticed compared to their first day. Do they seem to understand more, pause less in their speaking, or use more words in their writing? Are they ready to move on to the next level for the new semester?

At Queensway Baptist, they go straight to the students for information. "The students tell us! At the end of the semester party when we go around the group and have each one say something, and they always bring out their thanks and appreciation." There are also signs of good relationships, for example, "One student brought flowers and a card for the teacher's 50th wedding anniversary."¹⁰⁸ Another ministry leader has a similar recommendation, "Listen to what the students say. They will tell me when a particular lesson is helpful or not." Attendance can be another indicator. "Sometimes (students) vote with their feet. We haven't advertised the ministry for 12 years. The students do it all for us. When I see them bringing their friends, I see they're getting something out of this that they want their friends to share in."¹⁰⁹

Every person coming into your ministry is at a different stage of openness to God. You cannot judge your ministry by how many baptisms you have each year. You should be looking at seeds sown, the watering influence of God-stories told in and out of class, as well as a harvest of souls. All of this evidence should be coming up during team meetings. Get the details person on your team to keep track of these instances. It will encourage the whole team, and it promotes accountability in witness.

Congregation impact

Church support for and involvement with the ministry should be evaluated after a year. Is the wider congregation aware of team prayer requests and answers to prayer? As your team establishes relationships with students, are the students also connecting to at least a few others within your church community? If not, are students included in private or public church social functions?

When two of our team members got married, the whole ESL student body was invited to the ceremony. The marriage service was in both English and Chinese, and the bilingual written program was a beautiful explanation of what Christian marriage should be. As it happened, one young Chinese woman responded to the

¹⁰⁷ See Canadian Language Benchmarks for a list of language functions by level. The latest updates of this document are available online: <https://www.clb-osa.ca/benchmarks/overview> (March 20, 2018) They also have an unofficial online self-assessment tool, which will give you some general ideas about how to determine language ability: <https://www.clb-osa.ca/home?pageid=6>

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Tony and Susan Tsoi, April 9, 2018

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mary Hogan, April 9, 2018

invitation, and the ceremony made a strong impression on her. Being invited into church circles serves students' need to belong, but also the congregation's need to enter into the ministry.

As your Christian students feel welcome to join the church, and the ministry bears the fruit of new Christians, the faces of your congregation will change to reflect the neighbourhood more closely. The next chapter gives some ideas about how to encourage congregation involvement and promote student inclusion into the wider church community.

11. Enfolding Students into the Church Community

Does your church have porous walls, or do they keep members in and others out? Do congregation members easily flow into your community? Are they accepting hospitality as well as giving it? Are they present at special events in their neighbours' lives? Is it easy for new people to flow into your church family life and feel welcomed into what is happening both inside and outside the building? Would you accept some changes in your church in order to welcome them more?

This chapter is about expanding ministry outside the classroom so that newcomer neighbours become not just your students but also part of God's family. The first section outlines the prerequisite for this to happen, and it addresses heart attitudes and states of mind. The second section lays out ways for congregation members to flow out and act as neighbours according to Christ's definition¹¹⁰. It examines true friendship and ways to establish those relationships. The third section deals with ways to increase and maintain the flow of our neighbours into the church fellowship by exploring ways of welcoming and including students into our church family.

Attitudes and States of Mind

Loving our neighbours as God intends assumes we have a certain attitude and state of mind¹¹¹. God so loved us that He came and lived among us. In doing so He crossed over into our world, accepting the hardships and limitations of a physical life while letting go of His divine rights. We are also called to be incarnational in relating to our newcomer neighbours. I must be willing to enter into the other person's world becoming "all things to all people, that by all means I may save some"¹¹². This is the opposite of a confrontational mindset, "Enter our world and accept our way as the way to do things". Without humility and genuine inclusion by welcoming people into our world while entering theirs, there can be no true friendship, because divine love is not arrogant or rude and does not insist on its own way.

This section is meant to provide some self-examination. Good intentions are behind every ministry start-up, but sometimes our unconscious attitudes can get in the way of bearing fruit. The following chart illustrates a different mindset towards evangelism coined as 'Withreach'¹¹³. It is important to recognize that those having a 'Withreach' mindset desire people to enter into salvation just as much as those with 'Outreach' attitudes, and both include speaking the gospel. However, the former uses

¹¹⁰ See Luke 10: 25 - 37

¹¹¹ 1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 6 asserts the necessity of love in all ministry, and verses 4 – 7 describe that divine love

¹¹² 1 Corinthians 9: 22

¹¹³ See <https://www.activateyourlife.org.uk/outreachisdeadlonglivewithreach/> for more explanation

humble inclusion of a person into our church family while depending on the work of the Holy Spirit as the power driving towards that goal. Three qualities that are vital to enfolding students into our church community stand out in the Withreach list: Humility, Valuing the Person and Inclusion.

Withreach vs Outreach

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Outreach	Withreach
Declining	Emerging
Confrontational	Incarnational
Unchurched are nameless faces and numbers	People are unique and vital treasures
We do good things for people	We do good things for people by doing things with them
Transformation imposed from the outside	Transformation created from within
Monologue	Conversation
Superiority	Humility
Churchspeak	Human voice
Religious jargon	Language of dreams (aspiration/spiritual purpose)
Paternalistic overtones	Honour and respect
Impatiently look for quick results	Patiently take the long view
Seek conversion within narrow set of goals	Seek relationship for multifaceted vision
Love shown with an agenda behind it	Love without strings attached
Great Commission priority	Great Commandment is the engine of mission
We have what you need; you have nothing to give	We both have much to give; we both have much to learn
You cannot contribute until post-conversion	You can experience God in giving and serving
Fearful of differences	Honouring of and dependent on diversity
Clergy/laity split	Priesthood of every believer
Sunday AM priority	24/7 community and holistic life
Church is domain of the sacred	Church is catalyst for God's rule in every sphere of life
‘Target’ segmented group	Create holistic community
Image of community	Authentic community
What would Jesus do?	What is Jesus doing?

Humility

I must admit that one aspect of teaching I enjoy is being the expert in relation to my students. My English is better than theirs, but I cannot let that fact blind me to qualities and knowledge they possess that are superior to mine. I am not a humble person by nature. I am academically smart, and in the early part of my life I assumed

this made me intrinsically better than others who weren't as smart. Apart from the fact that my variety of intelligence operates within a narrow area – for example, I am hopeless at holding numbers in my head - I can't take any credit since it is mine by grace alone.

Similarly, being Christians does not make us superior to our fellow humans, it only makes us saved. The one thing we can boast of is the cross of Christ by which it happened. Of course, if we are open to the Holy Spirit working within our hearts, God will transform us into more godly human beings, but those we serve in ministry may simply be at an earlier place on that same journey of transformation. God alone knows whether or not they will accept His salvation offer. In the meantime, our part is to relate as a peer, valuing them as precious to God.

There are many passages throughout the Bible concerning humility. My favourite is, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves...Have this mind among yourselves, **which is yours in Christ Jesus**, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant..."¹¹⁴

Because we belong to Christ, a humble mindset belongs to us as we allow God free reign. Having an attitude of humility is vital to building relationships outside the ESL classroom and introducing students to the family of God.

Valuing the Person

Seeing people as God sees them enables us to value them for their own sake and treat them with respect and agape love. We 'earn the right' to share the gospel and speak of how it transforms us through this type of relationship with others. Of course, this isn't saying you cannot or should not share the gospel whenever you see an opportunity, but consider yourself whether you would be more open to a worldview change coming from a stranger or from someone you respect and care for and whom you know respects and cares for you. Sometimes the soil needs preparation to receive the seed.

Newcomers are not poor objects of pity who need our sainted sacrifice. Yes, help is needed and probably sacrifice on our parts. Nevertheless, expect God to bless through the gifts, skills and experiences of both the team and the students. I am not suggesting that we make friends with a person simply for what we can get out of it, but we should value the person enough to expect gaining from the relationship. Be ready to receive as well as give. The bond should be between equals rather than donor and beggar, have and have-not. Every person is valuable in experience and knowledge. As God shows us the person within and gives us love for that person, friendship will grow.

¹¹⁴ Philippians 2: 3, 5-7a

When we see people as valuable, our motivation for relationship changes. For one thing, our incentive should be loving our neighbour as ourselves rather than accomplishing our own agenda. No one wants to be used. There is a difference between seeking someone's conversion in order to add points to a heavenly scorecard and earnestly loving people in hopes of seeing them experience the joy of knowing Jesus Christ, thus gaining a brother or sister. Of course, it's hard for human motivation to be entirely pure, but "love covers a multitude of sins"¹¹⁵.

Attitude of Inclusion

The Intercultural Pastor at Foothills Alliance Church illustrates this attitude well. Instead of the usual, 'First you must believe, then you can join things' ... "We've kind of flipped that and said, 'First you can belong, then you may choose to believe'."¹¹⁶ Students are naturally included in the ministry as volunteers in addition to others from the neighbourhood. One in six team members are not Christian, but they serve in non-spiritual roles. (The students have the added benefit of a job reference from the church once they have served.)

Including students means reciprocal help. "We make sure that any volunteering by our students is 'social', like childcare or party planning. They're not just washing windows by themselves. They want to give, so if we have a mission team heading to Guatemala, we might make an announcement, 'We need these supplies, if you'd like to donate anything, just bring it in' ... It's surprising how often they'll help. That's how newcomers feel that they belong."¹¹⁷

Porous Walls: Flowing Out

When I was growing up all too long ago, a major goal in the process of winning someone to Christ was getting them through the church doors, preferably for Sunday worship. The hope was that the person would hear the gospel from the professional preacher, be convicted, and follow Jesus. Although there were exceptions, I don't recall a lot of lay movement beyond the church walls and into the community, unless it was far afield for a short-term mission.

Beginning with the team, and through introductions by the team to others in the congregation, those gathering in the church building on Sunday need to reverse the flow and get into homes and public spaces.

Individual Friendships

As an introvert who does not make friends easily, I had to give the whole concept of friendship some thought. Usually a friend is someone with whom I share certain interests, so we end up doing things together that we both enjoy. Or maybe their personality and mine seem to mesh, so we just like hanging out together. Perhaps

¹¹⁵ 1Peter 4:8

¹¹⁶ Interview with Patricia Love, March 22, 2018

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

we are at the same stage of life, such as dealing with aging parents or young children, so we can brainstorm our way through life's difficulties and offer support. The hallmark of true friendship is that it is mutually beneficial with give and take on both sides.

Team members won't be friends with everyone, but each member should seek a closer relationship with at least one student of the same gender, or couples with couples. At the beginning of the semester, pray for God to show you one student, and then be open to opportunities to act as a friend. As you pray for God to show you a friend-to-be, consider is there anyone in class with whom you share something in common? Are you both going through some of the same challenges at the same time, or do you share a passion for the same thing? Is there someone with whom you just seem to hit it off? Why not give an invitation to meet for coffee or a shared activity?

But how do we build friendships with strangers from another culture? I don't think it is all that different from those we build within our own culture, with the exception that we allow more leeway for how friendship may be expressed and give the benefit of a doubt when the unexpected occurs. For example, you give a dinner invitation and your guests arrive an hour late without calling, or you attend dinner at your friends' house and you are entertained with dancing. Reserve judgment, ask polite questions and keep learning.

How do we form relationships with non-Christians? For those who have few if any friendships with non-believers, it is not an idle question. Sometimes it can be an awkward start. In the last relationship I pursued, there was so much we did not share because she was not yet submitted to God. She seemed very materialistic, always posting on Instagram, talking about name brands and her latest purchases. I was tempted to brand her as shallow, yet as I pursued the relationship and prayed for insight, I noticed what we had in common. We are mothers who worry about our children. After a few weeks, I discovered we both wanted to know more about God. Expect awkwardness, keep praying, and give things time.

How do we treat friends? Could you drop into a good friend's home without notice and expect a welcome? In many cultures, that's totally fine. When my husband and I first got to know a bunch of families through our ESL Bible Study, we had a number of them drop in at various times when they were in the neighbourhood. In fact, that was a sign they considered us friends. Another sign of friendship is sharing special occasions. For my husband's 60th birthday a number of students from that ESL Bible Study came to the big celebration, and a few from the regular classes came for my own.

Is it possible to have friendship without food? I can assert that all of mine involve eating. Recently I got a lesson in Greek that has provided 'food' for meditation¹¹⁸. I

¹¹⁸ Many thanks to Pastor Justin Galotti of West Toronto Baptist for his message on Hospitality

knew that ‘xenophobia’ is Greek for fear of strangers/foreigners. But I did not know its opposite, ‘filoxenos’, that is literally ‘love of strangers’. The figurative meaning, however, is translated as ‘hospitality’ in the New Testament. Christians are instructed to open our homes to strangers (Luke 14: 12 – 14; Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2). Hospitality can be the beginning of turning strangers into friends.

Learning Partnerships

Finally, I am going to add an example of something God has used in my life to both make friends and make disciples. Over the last several years I have had a handful of language exchange partners. Once a week I have gotten together with women who wanted to improve their English in exchange for helping me become literate in Chinese. We meet at my house and I set the timer for one hour. When the buzzer rings, we switch to the other language for the next hour. I have a number of English texts they can choose from, or we just cover whatever they wish, but my Chinese text is from the Bible.

The first time I did it, by the grace of God and the intervention of other believers, my language partner became a Christian. The second time, my partner showed little spiritual interest, and she returned to her country after a few months. However, within a week of her leaving, a former student returned to Canada, and she accepted my invitation. Though she wasn’t a Christian, from the beginning of our lessons she turned our conversation towards the spiritual. I learned both her aunt and mother were Christians. (How humbling to be a possible answer to others’ prayers!) She met another woman through a Chinese church and invited her to join our exchange, which meant I had help with her complicated theological questions that were beyond my linguistic ability. Both her friend and I sense that she is close to following Jesus.

Of course, language teaching is my specialty, but this exchange principle could work with any skills you and the newcomer have, whether it be woodcarving, cooking, fishing or other hobbies. When you are both teaching and learning at the same time, the relationship is balanced and there is plenty of opportunity to talk about all aspects of life, including the spiritual.

Congregation Connections

From the beginning of this manual, I’ve talked about the importance of congregational prayer. However, there are many other ways church members can be directly involved in newcomer ministry apart from ESL. One aspect of friendship I enjoy is meeting the friends of my new friend. Introductions keep the circle growing as one presents new acquaintances to older friends. Once the team starts to form relationships with various students, they can act as a bridge to others in the congregation.

One way of bridging is to call on others for help. I remember one man who was not directly serving in the ESL ministry but was known in the congregation as a handyman. A refugee family headed by a single mother was setting up an apartment, and they had no means of hanging up curtains. Rick got a call, came over with his tool belt and got the job done. Over time, Rick got other calls from that family. They realized he could be trusted, and though they had strict customs concerning male-female relationships, he became adopted as an uncle.

Another man with the gift of keeping cool in tense situations took on the task of driving instructor, even lending his car for the lessons. His patience and perseverance enabled one newcomer to get his license, though it took three tries. Editing someone's resume, networking to find a job, or role playing to practice for an interview are other ways congregation members can join in ministry, just to name a few. When team members know of a need, get the word out and invite the wider church to fill it.

There are endless opportunities for entering into the lives of newcomers where they live. At Queensway Baptist they learned one of their students had suffered a stroke, so they went out to visit her. Another Christian couple had gotten to know a Muslim family who were going through an especially stressful time. The husband was in the middle of exams, the wife was having a troubled pregnancy, and their oldest child had medical appointments. The Christian couple had young children also, and they offered to babysit if needed. The woman kept the expectant mother company during an ultrasound appointment. Above all, they prayed for and with this family at their request.

Illness is an opportunity to be a friend, but so are happy occasions. Celebrating special events is another way of demonstrating love. A Tibetan woman was one of the first students when Queensway Baptist started their ESL, and she attended for many years. When she was about to have her first grandchild, they presented a baby gift basket. To their surprise and pleasure that family showed up at church after the baby arrived in response to that loving gesture. After another student had just had a baby, her teacher agreed to give lessons at her home. When baby's first birthday arrived, the ministry leaders accepted an invitation to the party held at a Korean restaurant.

Porous Walls: Flowing In

There are endless ways to have students flowing into the congregational circle in addition to ESL classes. Some of those happen inside the church building and others do not. The following section illustrates a wide variety of ways to draw students into your congregation for the purpose of entering into Christian community, which is one aspect of knowing Christ.

ESL Events

Special events make it easier for students to get to know the wider congregation as well as each other. These occasions are opportunities to invite guests both from the

congregation and from the neighbourhood. If you encourage your guests to bring friends and family, you can create a true community event!

Almost all the ministries I know make the most of religious holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter by marking them with parties celebrating their meaning. The ministry at Westminster Chapel has a big Christmas party where we talk about the Christmas story, sing Christmas carols and give out Bibles in different languages as presents¹¹⁹. At semester's finish there are potluck parties, and family members of the students and team are invited. This widens out the social circle.

At Foothills Alliance parties are also a key part of their ministry, because they serve social needs. They have at least one party a month and two during summer months. Since there is a large enough ministry team, a special party planning sub-committee exists, and students are welcome to join. At Bayview Glen they have monthly assemblies. Besides celebration of holidays, they have included plays, banquets and other fun activities. In one church whose neighbourhood includes a sizable Tibetan population, they had a 'Tibetan Night', and the pastor and deacons were invited to take part and experience the culture.

Congregational Fellowship

How often does your church get together for the purpose of Christian fellowship? At Westminster Chapel we have an annual church picnic, and monthly potluck lunches. We also have a sizeable College and Careers group who happen to be of the same generation as the majority of our students. Of course, smaller occasions for men's and women's groups, as well as children's events also exist. Each of these times can be a chance to invite students into Christian fellowship. If students get a personal invitation from a team member to join something that fits their interest or social group, they are far more likely respond to that than to a general invitation to, "Worship with us on Sunday".

When we first began the ministry at Westminster Chapel we had a number of Japanese students who were overjoyed at an invitation to join in a College and Careers event. Coming from a collective culture, they had felt isolated, and they were excited to finally be included in a group of their peers. Of course, they didn't understand everything that was going on, but they didn't care. They were grateful for the human interaction, and they admitted it helped their English.

Student flow into the church community doesn't always mean large groups or meeting in the church building. Fellowship can be more intimate. I know of two

¹¹⁹ The Canadian Bible Society sells Bibles in over 100 languages, including bilingual Bibles. See <https://www.biblescanada.com/> Depending on the languages and the number of students, the expense can add up, but it is well worth it! I have seen students in tears as they opened these presents. Even those who have never read the Bible are touched that we would go to the expense of such a gift for them.

churches that organize Christmas dinners at homes. They gather a list of families willing to host special holiday meals. Then they match them up with students, many of whom have never entered a Canadian home.

Linking English Support to Church Activity

Even when students reach a level of English to understand most basic conversations, Sunday worship is usually a challenge. Should curiosity or spiritual interest draw students through the church doors, they will need help with the specialized vocabulary not to mention the meanings behind the way your particular congregation does church. Take a look at your order of service. Think about it from an outsider's point of view and be able to describe why you do what you do in simple language. Define terminology such as 'scripture', 'benediction', and 'sermon'. For example, a 'Call to Worship' is the invitation for us to put away other thoughts and to put our thoughts on God.

There are other ways to provide support. Recently, Tony and Susan Tsoi, leaders of Queensway Baptist's ministry, have established close friendships with a group of Chinese mothers. Those women are here with their children who are attending high school as foreign students. Most of them are not Christians, but they are curious. These mothers began coming to the ESL and going to worship even though they admitted understanding less than 30% of the sermon. Susan took notes in English, and afterwards they discussed the message in Chinese. (One studious woman took a photo of those notes to study for later.) I have done something similar with my students coming to worship. They sit beside me and I make an outline of the message, noting any difficult vocabulary with simple definitions. Afterwards, I photocopy the page and give it to them. Our church has sermons online, so they can go back and listen to it again.

Besides Sunday worship, I know of one Sunday school who welcomed refugee mothers into the children's program. These mothers were very shy with the adults and their English level was fairly low, but they enjoyed the activities and participated enthusiastically along with their kids. (It also helped the kids integrate knowing their moms were right there.) Similarly, another church offered a special ESL summer class that was linked with their annual Vacation Bible School. Parents attended the class while their kids enjoyed VBS, so they could all come together and benefit.

Service

Newcomers are always looking for ways to gain work experience, and volunteering at the church is one way to get it. Students gain needed experience but also develop relationships in the process. I recall one woman from North Africa who was regularly helping to prepare our post-worship teatime, and she often aided in the food bank ministry. A number of the Chinese women who attended worship at Queensway Baptist also got active in the kitchen after service, becoming close to two of the teachers serving there and others in the hospitality ministry.

I think it is appropriate here to address possible prejudice against non-native speakers. I've already spoken of the difference between accent and bad pronunciation, but there may be some around who believe English learners cannot serve until they reach A+ fluency. The real question is, "Can they do the job?" Communication is a two way street. Someone's English does not have to be native-like in order to communicate well enough. Those on the ESL ministry team should encourage others in the congregation to make the extra effort in listening, and reassure them it will become easier to communicate with practice.

What Is It All For?

Just as I began this manual with the 'Why' of ESL ministry, I want to end it with consideration of how ESL ministry fits into the Kingdom purposes of God. I hope you will step back and consider the big picture, namely God's ultimate goal for humanity, that "every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages" would stand "before the throne and before the Lamb"¹²⁰ in worship.

From the earliest times of the Christian Church, God prepared the peoples of the world to become one in Christ as His Bride. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit sent Babel's linguistic division into reverse by enabling people from at least 15 different language groups to understand the gospel¹²¹. He sent a vision to Peter, an ultra-orthodox Jew, in order to convince him Gentiles were included in His salvation plan, and the lesson was passed on to the Church¹²². This prepared Greek-speaking Jews to spread the gospel outside Judaism among the many cultures within the city of Antioch and "a large company was added to the Lord"¹²³. This was also the congregation that God entrusted to send out Paul and Barnabas, the first missionaries¹²⁴.

Could God's plan for your church be to establish an intercultural congregation such as the one at Antioch where believers were first called 'Christians'? If you have an ESL ministry then your city has some of the diversity that Antioch represented. When your ministry bears fruit in the form of new Christians and they are discipled into maturity, expect some to become new leaders in the church.

¹²⁰ Revelation 7: 9

¹²¹ Acts 2: 8 - 11

¹²² Acts 11: 1 - 18

¹²³ Acts 11: 20 - 24

¹²⁴ Acts 13: 1 - 3 It is worth noting that the leaders mentioned in this text reflected the intercultural nature of the church: Barnabas was a Cypriot. Simeon was called Niger, meaning 'black' in Latin, suggesting an African origin. Lucius was from what is now Libya, and Manaen was likely part of King Herod's inner circle at court and thus ethnic Greek elite. It seems a natural progression for such a congregation to receive God's vision of taking the gospel to the known world.

The final piece of newcomer integration in the church is acceptance into leadership. This is especially relevant if there is a large community from one cultural group in your neighbourhood. This means change, which our human nature tends to resist. It means we may have to include a different cultural background as it affects our way of 'doing church', whether that be style of prayer, or choice of hymn.

Once others see themselves represented in the congregation, both in the pews and before the altar, they recognize that God calls to every tongue and tribe, not just the predominant culture. When people see our bond in Christ across cultures and languages, it is a testimony of belonging to the Kingdom of God.

Finally, my prayer for all readers is this:

May our Lord Jesus Christ fill you with full understanding of the Gospel. May our Heavenly Father guide you as you speak about the abundant life His Son offers. May His Spirit fill you with overflowing love for your newcomer neighbours. May the Vine produce much fruit in your branches as you abide and depend on Him in all ways.

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