Vocational English Language Assessment

A Preliminary Study

Prepared for the English As A Second Language Division
King Edward Campus, Vancouver Community College

prepared by Dave Aquila and Barbara Forster-Rickard

March 1995

Vocational English Language Assessment

A Preliminary Study

Prepared for the English As A Second Language Division
King Edward Campus, Vancouver Community College

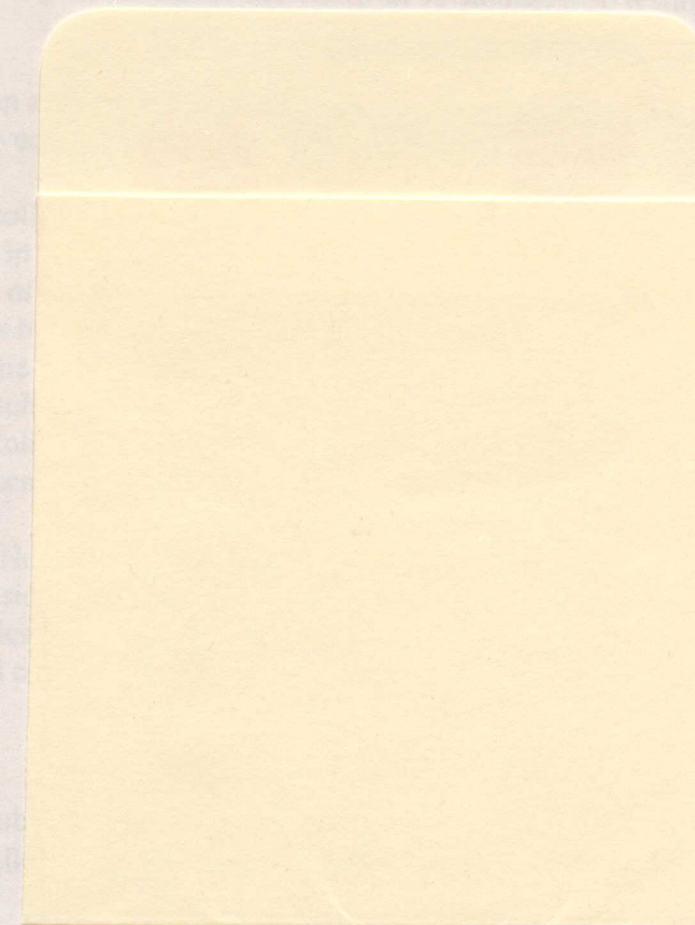prepared by Dave Aquila and Barbara Forster-Rickard

March 1995

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Background

The following report is the result of preliminary research we did to investigate the development of a "Vocational ELA". The need for such an assessment tool seemed to be based on two assumptions : First of all the notion that while the ELA was seen as a good assessment tool to channel students into the various levels in the ESL programs in the English Language Skills and College Preparatory English Departments, its effectiveness to act as a good predictor for student success in vocational programs at City Centre and King Edward Campus was questioned. In particular, there seemed to be a frustration in several departments because the lack of sufficient language skills in ESL students in mainstream classes, for example Electronics, was seen as a major factor in slowing down the program. Skills instructors felt that they did not have the expertise or time to deal with ESL-type problems in their classes. Secondly, there was a fear that the ELA screens out some students who might have the background and motivation necessary to do well in vocational programs because these students lack the academic skills to do well on an ELA-type test.

Our study was divided into eight steps:

1. Analysis of the material provided in a preliminary materials search by Cathy Perry from the King Edward Campus Library and of additional relevant material.

2. Survey by means of a questionnaire and follow-up phone call or personal interview of Associate Deans, Department Heads and Instructors in the different Vocational Departments at King Edward Campus and City Centre.

   The purpose of the survey was to

   - establish the current level of satisfaction with the
     English level of ESL students in the various programs .

   - find out what test(s) was(were) used to admit students into the program.

   - have departments rank the importance of listening, speaking, reading,
     and writing for success in their program.

   - identify language skill weaknesses that prevent students from
     succeeding in the program.

   - identify skill areas in which departments felt students should be tested.

3. Analysis of the survey results .

4. Analysis of selected tests.

   A. Looking at the components of each test.
   B. Getting feedback on test reliability as predictors of success in vocational programs.
   C. Investigating trends in vocational testing at other community colleges.

5. Drawing conclusions from the study.

6 . Making recommendations for assessment for Vocational Programs at VCC

7. Drawing up a prototype test for a Business and a Health-related Module

8. Developing some sample items for testing students' ability to perform tasks required in
   specific vocational programs.

FINDINGS OF RELATED REPORTS

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR ESL OCCUPATIONAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMS IN HEALTH AND HOSPITALITY

by Christel Nierobisch/Vancouver Community College

In her report, the author looks at ESL foundation training leading to subsequent career training in the occupational fields. Students in a foundation program would acquire language skills, learning strategies and knowledge about the proposed occupational field.

She states that the *language prerequisites for entry* into these foundation programs should be seen as *guidelines*. Factors such as *prior training, experience and motivation* should also play a part in determining success. Students *learn language through meaningful content*, and general academic language preparation does not work well in occupational programs. Thus, *content is the basis for language skills development*, which itself engenders confidence and fluency.

HEALTH OCCUPATIONS

Requirements: *good interpersonal skills, appropriate language and cultural understanding* Ability to ask *clear and concise questions* and to *listen actively and objectively.*. Discussions in groups are frequent and care-providers must *observe, evaluate and record* results.. They need to *create rapport* with people of all ages and backgrounds.

Instructors' perspectives
- many second-language students seen as *"at risk "* or *"having difficulty"*.
- *limited language* may result in *injury to patient or caregiver*.
- *weak comprehension* might be obstacle to efficiency
- *inappropriate tone/register* might be construed as rudeness
- *lack of confidence* hinders high level of functioning within team
- *mispronunciation* results in *miscommunication*, especially in anxious or medicated patients
- reading, writing and test-taking are considered adequate

Language skills needed in the classroom
- *academic language* and learning skills
- *much discussion* of topics based on articles and texts
- Students need to *define concepts, analyze principles* and *evaluate outcomes*
- often Students must *evaluate experiences/scenarios in writing*

Language skills needed in caregiver role
- Students need grasp of *idiomatic English; clear speech, normal rate, stress and intonation*
- must *comprehend normal speech flow* and be aware of *cultural context*
- *contextual and body language clues* are also important, especially in health care

Students often believe reading and writing skills are paramount. However, in the health care field, *oral communication is the dominant skill*. There is a need to use an *integrated skills* approach to prepare Students to deal with practical communication demands.

HOSPITALITY OCCUPATIONS

requirements
- basic core vocabulary
- understanding values and assumptions related to food
- good interpersonal language skills and social skills
- solid level of reading comprehension
- conversational fluency and good aural comprehension

instructors' perspectives
- Students fail to seek clarification on what they hear and say
- Students are reluctant to request and provide feedback
- Students have a fear of correction/may imply personal failure
- Students tend to group themselves ethnically, hindering language acquisition
- Students have problems in distinguishing /differentiating similar sounds

language skills needed
- competencies for both classroom and practical training
- ability to read, follow lectures and take exams
- integrated skills approach to develop learning skills to deal with practical communication

LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED BY ESL STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN SELECTED CAREER AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS: ACCOUNTING, COMPUTER PROGRAMMING, SECRETARY AND ELECTRONICS TRADES

By Michael Otte / Communications Department , B C I T

In his report, Otte presents the results of a two-month study at BCIT and VCC's City Centre Campus intended to produce inventory language skills required by students to succeed in Accounting, Secretary, Computer Programmer , and Electronic Trades Vocational and Career Programs. Otte states that most of the critical core language skills are common to all four programs:

Reading
- Understanding of basic technical terminology,
- Knowledge of effective textbook study technique (i.e.SQ3R)
- Ability to take notes involving translating reading material into visual form (tables/flow charts/ diagrams etc.)
- Reading/following tutorials in software manuals
- Scanning materials relevant to field

Listening
- Identifying overall structure of lecture
- Identify and distinguish between main ideas/supporting explanation
- Identifying /explaining examples and their significance in lecture
- Taking notes that make use of diagrammatic representations (key visuals) of information in lecture

Speaking
- Asking effective questions to clarify/confirm points
- Paraphrasing material to make oral presentations (not simple recitations)
- Using effective planning/delivery techniques in oral presentations
- Using group discussion techniques in classroom discussions and group project activities

Writing
- Paraphrasing material using "*their own words*" beyond simple rewording but demonstrating understanding of material and ability to apply it to specific problems. Using *oral paraphrasing* as basis for written work

- Distinguishing between *writing* required by assignments at *different levels of learning taxonomy*, i.e. at the "application" and "analysis" level versus the "knowledge" and "comprehension" level.
- Following standard procedure in planning, organizing, writing, revising l longer written assignments papers/reports/essays)

- Following effective exam writing strategy for objective/subjective type questions.

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE SKILLS BEYOND CORE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS IN THESE PROGRAMS

Accounting
Examples and anecdotes to illustrate and clarify concepts are frequently used in accounting. Students often misread the features of the example as defining the characteristics of the concept. Students must understand how examples work, be able to identify them and explain which point about the concept an example is illustrating.

Computer Programming
Students have to plan and present training sessions for general student population and must therefore be prepared to master classroom management skills as well as oral presentation skills.

Secretary
Intense practice of listening skills associated with transcription from audio tapes is required in this program. There is considerable emphasis on speaking skills, including pronunciation, tone and usage, in the context of interpersonal communication.

Electronics Trades
Increased emphasis on writing and speaking skills. Tasks/Questions in assignments and exams require that students use their own words. Students can expect greater oral component in the future.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: IMPROVING ACCESS AND INSTRUCTION FOR ESL STUDENTS AT CITY CENTRE

by Christel Nierobisch, March 1991

In her report, Nierobisch points out the weaknesses of a system in which assessment and remediation for City Centre-bound Vocational students are conducted *off site* and in the *hands of KEC specialists* :

1. ESL generalists are divorced from realities of City Centre program content and requirements

2. Assessment Services are geared to placing students into existing hierarchy of general ESL classes at KEC

3. Level cut-offs for different programs do not reflect the range of entrance skills and language competency requirements of particular programs. (She cites the example of the prospective Nursing Aide needing the same level of language proficiency as the Building Service Worker. Note* The entrance requirements for these programs have since been changed to better reflect the language competency level needed in these areas)

Nierobisch recommends that

1. " Assessment should be evaluating a person's control of language against the criteria of the actual demands that will be placed on her within the training and on the job" (Nierobisch, 1991, p. 22)

2. ' Broad stroke definitions of language proficiency' be abandoned and replaced by a variety of assessment tools for areas of training which would mirror the foundation courses: **Health, Business, Technical Programs and Hospitality**.

3. In addition to language, prior experience and formal training be given consideration to determine suitability for training.

4. In cooperation with King Edward Campus, City Centre establish an Assessment Service at the Pender Street Campus and that this service devise and validate assessment tools which assess the English competence of applicants as measured by the actual language demands of program content and functional communication in performing the job .

5. VCC learn to share expertise and cooperate closely in order to cope with the changes in student population

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

1. Some departments (e.g. Automotive and Institutional Aide) express a high level of satisfaction with their ESL students. In general, however, there is a concern about the language abilities of second-language students. The most pervasive concern is that there is a lack of communicative skills, which hinders success in the course and subsequent job placement. Nursing, Pharmacy Tech. and Drafting cite this as a major factor and other programs see it as a concern. It is also a factor in attrition during the programs.

2. Despite the above, there is a consensus that language is only one predictor of success. Other factors such as motivation, maturity and previous experience all contribute to a student's success.

3. Skills instructors are not trained to teach ESL where necessary. Could we begin adjunct or co-requisit ESL courses which emphasize communicative skills?

4. There is a real question of fairness to students when a program such as Pharmacy Tech. has a major ESL attrition problem and a job placement rate, for ESL students, of about 5%. Can we enhance the communicative skills component of an entry test so that those students who get into the program have a better chance of success?

SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

1. The needs and requirements of all skills areas are too diverse to allow the creation of one vocational ELA which would serve as an assessment tool for all areas.

recommendation

      -to create modules for groupings of vocational areas with similar skills requirements:
        Business-related
        Health-related
        Food and Hospitality related
        Technology/Trade-related

      - include test items related to skills needed in the program

      - determine pass mark depending on importance of particular skill e.g. for practical nursing, students would need a minimum mark of 25/30 in listening and speaking. For Electronics, a strong mark reading would be required.

2. There are some obvious implications for program development, since some programs are graduating students who cannot find related employment, due to poor oral/aural skills.

    recommendations - adjunct ESL courses
                       - higher level pronunciation courses
                       - communicative skills courses
                       - study skills courses

RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRES TO VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL DEPTS.

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEVEL?
SCALE OF 1 TO 5.   1 - not at all   3 - somewhat   5 - very

DEPARTMENT		COMMENTS
BUILDING SERVICE WORKER	-4	If applicant does not have completion of lower intermediate, dept. accepts highly motivated or industry-experienced applicants.
INSTITUTIONAL AIDE	-4	Seems to be quite a range of competence. In general, results are fine.
AUTOMOTIVE	-4	Very satisfied with ESL students - in top 20% of graduates - most have previous experience, motivation and maturity.
PHARMACY TECH.	-2	Academically, ESL students are fine, but their language skills are a real problem.
B.E.S.T.	-2/3	Students show inability to use language in group situations..
EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR WOMEN	-5	ESL students have not had any problems understanding and applying course materials.
DIESEL MECHANICS	-3	Requires more training/ descriptive meaning of technical terms. Language seems to vary greatly. Better listening and speaking skills required. ESL seems either high or low - no in-between.
BAKING AND PASTRY ARTS	-5	Competency level is U.I. to U.A.
ELECTRONICS	-1-3	Communication usually satisfactory. Most of the students couldn't read English at a level to comprehend technical texts. Much better to do the ESL component concurrently with the electronics. Poor comprehension. ESL needs to be better as these students can slow down the class.
DENTAL ASSISTING	-1-3	Students are at a relatively high level when entering the program, but the ELA does help

to identify problems prior to placement.

PRACTICAL NURSING   -1.65

Many students have difficulty expressing their ideas on paper, following sequenced directions, dealing with written material & extracting key points from discussions. The students comprehension, writing and speaking abilities are at an unacceptably low level in some cases.

COULD YOU GRADE THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR CLASS? 1 - not at all   3 - somewhat   5 - very

DEPARTMENT	SPEAKING	LISTENING	READING	WRITING
BUILDING SERVICE	4	4	3	2
INSTITUTIONAL AIDE	5	5	4	4
AUTOMOTIVE	5	5	4	4
PHARMACY TECH.	5	5	5	5
B.E.S.T.	4	4	3-4	3-4
E.E.A.W.	5	5	4	4
DIESEL MECHANICS*	3-5	5	5	4.75
BAKING/PASTRY ARTS*	4.5	4.5	5	3.75
ELECTRONICS *	4	4.5	5	4.5
DENTAL ASSISTING*	4.75	5	5	4.5
PRACTICAL NURSING*	5	5	4.75	4.75

* averaged for departments with multiple responses

COMMENTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

INSTITUTIONAL AIDE -   Because this is a training program we stress skills in communication

COMMENTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

AUTOMOTIVE   -   Program has a lot of reading and computer skills. Students must read manuals and follow specific directions. Written work involves describing the problem with a vehicle, copying specifications and writing reports.

PHARMACY TECH.   -   These skills are also important for the graduates to get and keep a job.

B.E.S.T.   -   A lot of the program involves group process and interaction - many ESL students are unable to function well enough to gain much.

BAKING/PASTRY ARTS-   Students with low reading skills find recipes and the manual difficult to follow. All language skills are very important for learning the practical skills.

ELECTRONICS   -   The electronic industry is an area of work where reading technical articles and manuals is mandatory.
Most classroom learning requires good listening skills. Also reading will be essential for any future learning outside the classroom.

DENTAL ASSISTING -   Dental assistants must be able to communicate with patients / clients. Texts and resources are at 1st-year University level. All skills are very important to be successful in dental assisting.

PRACTICAL NURSING -   Our students have a large theory component. In addition, they need excellent communications for working with clients. As members of the health care team they need to document accurately on a legal chart.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE ANY WEAKNESSES IN LANGUAGE ABILITY WHICH AFFECT THE SUCCESS OF ESL STUDENTS IN YOUR PROGRAM?

DEPARTMENT	COMMENT
BUILDING SERVICE -	Language deficiencies which are caused by an inability to relate socially or vocationally are very difficult to deal with ; e.g. personality traits block successful learning strategies.
INSTITUTIONAL AIDE-	Listening, the ability to get the "gist" of a conversation and identify the key elements.

AUTOMOTIVE -	Some weakness in oral communication.
PHARMACY TECH. -	The inability to follow oral instructions is a real problem. Also telephone communication.
E. E. A. W. -	Writing skills required for further training and employment.
DIESEL MECHANICS-	Reading/interpretive meaning - ability to orally describe a system or concept. Inability to listen and follow instructions. Pronunciation and sentence structure. Listening skills are most important
BAKING/PASTRY ARTS-	Pronunciation problems
ELECTRONICS -	Words that sound alike (error/air) Difficulties interpreting written instructions. Lack of confidence. Students need to be able to listen, comprehend, and read at a higher level. Formulating and asking questions. Comprehension.
DENTAL ASSISTING-	Low level of understanding English. Understanding "technical" dental terms. Usually reading and listening problems. Texts are written at University level and reading requirements in the course are heavy. Difficulty in understanding "technical" language.
PRACTICAL NURSING-	Reading and oral/aural comprehension; slow and inefficient reading skills; inability to deal with complex concepts and group discussions. Also writing skills - spelling and use of medical terms. Better listening and speaking skills required ESL seems either high or low - no in-between

OTHER COMMENTS

BUILDING SERVICE -	Job placement assistance is provided and rate of placement is consistently high.
INSTITUTIONAL AIDE -	Sometimes we could use additional help during the program for specific problems.

OTHER COMMENTS

INSTITUTIONAL AIDE -	Difficulty to distinguish between language and learning problems.
PHARMACY TECH. -	The majority of our ESL students do notget related jobs, due to poor listening and speaking skills. Most of the students who drop out are ESL students.
B.E.S.T -	We service only a few ESL students and the ones who enter our program are generally verbally skilled already.
E.E.A.W. -	This is a career planning and exploration program, so many of the students go on to their training course of choice after EEAW.
DIESEL MECHANICS -	We only know which students are working if we place them, or if the student calls back
PRACTICAL NURSING -	All of our students take the CAAT test, not the ELA. Our program requires accurate reporting and recording of patient information - also teaching

N. B. DEPARTMENTS WITH STATISTICS ON JOB PLACEMENT ARE:

INSTITUTIONAL AIDE
PHARMACY TECH
PRINTING PRODUCTION
DIESEL MECHANICS
BAKING/PASTRY ARTS
ELECTRONICS

Results of Interviews with Department Heads and Associate Deans and Combined Skills Instructors

Questions asked:

1. How are students admitted into your program ?

2. How satisfied are you with the calibre of students you get through this process?

3. What tests other than the E.L.A. does your department / division use to place students into the appropriate level ?

4. What *language* skills that be tested do you think students need to succeed in your programme ?

5. What skills are important in your programme? The lack of which particular skills holds students back in your programme ?

Eddy Wakulchik , Department Head, Business, Accounting, Computer

1. 80 % of students in programme are ESL. Language is only one predictor of success. The Accounting Programme has a 20-30 % attrition rate. In the 'mainstream program' very few students don't pass because of English, even though they don't get any special treatment and have to take the same exams. They cope with the course work by doing a lot of translating.

2. Math is not usually a problem. The English language part of the **CAAT** was used on all students for 1 1/2 years, both ESL and others. (approx on 200- 250 students). The CAAT was *good at* identifying students at a *low learning levels*. It placed students anywhere from **grade 7 to post-secondary.** In addition , students had to write a paragraph on topics like 'Why have you chosen this field/ What do you hope to get out of this program?' to establish motivation and general writing skills.

4. Students need high reading level. Writing needs to be clear, concise and simple.

5. **Problems :** Communication: Listening skills, Pronunciation. Specific legal terms.

6. **Placement**: informal stats show: Within 6 months after graduation, 75% students are placed.

7. **Suggestions for Vocational ELA:** general business type questions. Paragraph : Why have you chosen this field (see above) .

Pat Bawtinheimer, Department Head , Long Term Care and Allied Health

1. Admission into program is a problem. Often times we don't know where students come from (high school, KEC)?

2. Largest Number of students have grade 10 (there is a concern that the college will 'up' this requirement).

3. There is more writing in the class than in the actual workplace. Students are freaking out about having to write 'essays' and written assignments. They are apprehensive about the expectations: having to write legibly and having to make sense. This is important however, because in a clinical situation, a report written by them might have to be used as legal evidence.

   Instructors do not view their skills courses as English language courses : they do not correct and they do not take off marks.

4. Job Placement Problem: Prospective employers, like institutions, administer the CAAT test to applicants as a screening tool. Graduates cannot succeed in the CAAT Test and fail to get jobs, even they are good communicators and are good at their jobs.

5. Skills required: in a clinical situation, students need to clarify things they don't understand. While most students don't fail because of their writing, they **do fail**, if they do not clarify and go ahead with something, or if they fail their exams.

Ray Oksanen, Department Head, Diesel Department

1. Students that come out of TTA with borderline marks struggle in the mainstream classes.

1. Students need to have good listening skills to be able to follow lectures and instructions. In the Diesel and Automotive programs and in the industry there is a lot of reading required so students need fairly high reading skills. It is also necessary that students are able to think through a process.

2. The mechanical reasoning part of the CAAT test looks suitable to test students' mechanical reasoning skills. Part of an assessment test might include a component where they have to describe the logical steps in a process 'How to park a car' or 'How to change a tire'. Instead of a general topic, the composition writing could be about the students' reasons for getting into this field and their experience in the industry. (To

establish their motivation and prior knowledge). The reading might include something that requires logical sequencing.

Dianne Westwood, Department Head , Nursing

Satisfaction with English Level: 2-3 somewhat

Admission: grade 12 or equivalent (accreditation through Hirsh Kramer at Open Learning Agency- who evaluates foreign credentials. If credentials are questionable, students take ELA. All students take the language part of the CAAT. Often department does not know previous ESL history. Freedom of information act makes it difficult to ask about credentials once they have been admitted into the programme -- students fill in voluntary form and then have an interview. A substantial number of students have only been in Canada for a few months and are not acculturated yet.

Type of work done in courses:
Practical nursing changed curriculum drastically from objective multiple choice type assignments and tests to more subjective **open book tests** and **papers** and this has been hard for students. The curriculum writer for the Nursing Program instructed teachers to take off no marks for spelling but to only correct the grammar.

Importance of language skills : 5 in all (listen / speak / read / write)

Typical Assignments:

-*Respond in writing* to two questions based on materials in this chapter: scored holistically using band levels.
-*Charting*: listen to tape and chart information
-*Work as team members*: assess a patient, communicate the assessment to others, go through charts/read doctors orders, interpret them, then execute the orders.
-*case study* students have a week to prepare to solve a problem verbally and in writing. They are given a patient case study and have to prepare a plan on how to approach this person.

Important skills:
- reading skills to go through medical text
- good alphabetizing/dictionary skills
- analytical/problem solving skills
- study skills
- paraphrasing (using own words to explain something: i.e. what do you mean when you say this person has hypertension)

Skills to test for:

Study attack skills (how to deal with large amount of work/ locating information quickly: **skimming /scanning**

paraphrasing : using own words

skills that hold students back:
slow reading ability
lack of coherence on paper/ in oral communication
lack of logical thinking

Doug Mauger, Department Head, Meat Retailing

Requirements:
Math grade 10 too high. Students only need to be able to add, subtract, multiply and divide.

Satisfaction with English level: High . 2 ESL students went through the apprenticeship programme successfully. Overall happy ---- **wants more ESL students**: College should advertise more.

Skill level needed in programme:

Listening - 4, Speaking - 3, Reading - 3, Writing - 3.

Course materials are mostly fill-in-the- blanks from a lecture. Most things are explained by demonstration

Skills important for success: reasonable communication skills, good dexterity, (good with hands).

Comments: Program has had dyslexic, blind and deaf students who have done well.

Wayne Marshall, Department Head, Drafting

1. Only a few ESL students in the program. There was an attempt to start a combined skills class, but there was insufficient response.

2. Some ESL students have difficulty in the mainstream program. They are highly motivated, but language problems. Specifically, oral quizzes designed to mimic real-life supervisor / employee situations are a real problem .

3. Listening skills are a priority; need to follow directions, take instructions and discuss the task at hand.

Jackie Kinnersley, Dept. Head, Travel and Tourism

1. Classes usually have quite a few ESL students. They need to be people-oriented and as such need good communication skills. Most make it through the program and over 90% of graduates find related employment.

2. Course demands some business writing, itineraries and destination reports. Also fair amount of reading. Need to communicate with the public; this can be a problem, especially with ESL students educated abroad.

3. Testing needs: write a report on why you want to become a travel agent; also 2 or 3 short interviews by instructors in program subsequent to formal testing (to better measure oral fluency and communicative competence).

4. Wholesale program could have 4 months of skills training and 2 months adjunct ESL.

Results of Interviews with Associate Deans

Sid Hartley, Acting Associate Dean for Business and Computer Studies

We get students through Admissions, not from KEC (students might send others to take ELA for them) Students who do take ELA **before** and after taking business courses do not see an improved score. While they have done well in vocabulary and their content area, general English and Communication skills have not improved. Skills instructors don't have the skills to teach aural/phone communication skills. Combined Skills Courses for Business to teach higher Interpersonal and Communication Skills. are necessary as students don't seem t get these skills through English 099.

Problems:

Listening /Speaking, Phone Communication / how to present oneself well are the major areas students need help with.. If students perform poorly in these areas, they will hit a glass ceiling once they are in the work force. Departments try to help students develop their oral skills by having them perform role plays i.e. in Law.

Testing:

ELA did not work well because it only tests for entry levels into ELS and CPE. Business Programs use their own assessment tool , the **Business Language Study** Test (**BLS**) as a post-admissions assessment tool to sort students into levels. * See *Overview of Commonly used Tests.*

The **BLS** was correlated with **CAAT** and there was a correlation of 50 %. Students who did well on test were roughly equal to grade 10 on the CAAT. Test was administered to roughly 300 students and had different modules: for Business, Accounting, Traffic and Transportation. Statistics were kept on student success.

Skills needed in Accounting:

Accounting uses common language to describe specific events. Therefore, students need to develop a totally new glossary for words that have a different meaning in common English.

Suggestions for Voc. ELA :

Lower entry requirement; Basic reading level as required for business should be sufficient. * See comments made by Olivia Thomassen.

Pat Hartley, Associate Dean, Health Sciences

1. Entry requirement: Instructors get no statistics on student intake: on day one, they only get student's name and SIN. Officially students have to have **grade 12** and take parts of the **CAAT**: Reading Comprehension, Spelling and Language/ Vocabulary.

2. Satisfaction with English level: Somewhat

Comments : Speaking and listening skills are a problem. Instructors say: students don't understand instructions. This is a problem in health care where students have to deal with the elderly and the sick.

Importance of language skills for success in class:
speaking: 5   listening: 5   reading: 5   writing : 5

Comments : In nursing, the documents written by nurses are legal documents. Incorrect spelling / grammar may impact on the legality of these documents.

Weaknesses that may hold students back:
There is a lot more expected of students in the health care programs than before: they have to be really capable and **good communicators**

Placement: informal stats (by word of mouth and students getting in touch with department) 80- 85 %.

Language skills that could be tested for success in programme:
Basic Pronunciation / basic sentence structure, written/spoken. We expect them to come in with basic reading and writing skills. Some students need computer skills once the have started. Logical thinking (as required in sequencing i.e. making a meal.) Academic skills: Dental reception/assisting students have to put together a coherent paper/bibliography.

Settimo Sicoli, Associate Dean, Tourism/Hospitality Programs City Centre

1. Quite satisfied with the English level of students in the programs. In general, ESL students tend to stick it out more than regular students because they are more mature.

2. The importance of listening, speaking, reading and writing is between 4 and 5 in the Hospitality/Tourism programs. Students need to have a decent reading and writing level. In particular, In the Food and Beverage, Culinary Arts and Hospitality Administration Programs students need to do a fair amount of reading.

3. **Lack of skills that hold students back from succeeding**: This varies from program to program: whereas some programs require a high level of reading, others only require a basic level. Poor study skills will hold students back in Culinary Arts where 25 % of the class is theory. In some programs manual dexterity is more important than language.

Marta Gardiner, Associate Dean, English as a Second Language Division

1. Combined skills students are tested prior to entry into a program. The English entry requirements are set based on the skills course. Marta expressed concern that this does not happen in the regular streams.
2. Combined skills does an excellent job of supporting students through their skills training. There is concern, however, about the level of communication skills, as well as technical skills, needed to both secure and succeed in a job. There is not enough time in the combined skills classes to effect a major change in communication skills. In the mainstream classes, adjunct ESL classes might work to help with language difficulties?

Jean Cockell, Associate Dean, Academic Programs and A.B.E.

1. All language skills are important for success in the programs. Many of our students are ESL so we are comfortable with their entry levels. The assessment works and we adjust where it doesn't.

2. Academic/A.B.E./A.S.L. fit best with the current E.L.A.

Jerome Schatten, Associate Dean, Applied Arts and Technology

1. Up to 80% of students are ESL background. Pass rate is good; other factors besides language lead to success, e.g. motivation, industriousness and preparation.

2. Would like to see students tested on mechanical reasoning (CAAT test) as well as their language, for admission into appropriate programs.

3. Need for adjunct courses for students with obvious deficiencies. If program model changes to course model, this would be more feasible. Question of students' time and motivation to take adjunct ESL. Must be integrated with regular skills course.

Results of Interviews with Instructors

Chris Stechinsin, ESL Combined Skills, Electronics

Dissatisfied with ESL level because entrance requirements are not enforced. Students with problems slow down the class.   There should be a fixed reading requirement .

The **SLEP Test** seems to be a good predictor for students success in other programs and she wants to use it in the electronics program.

Articulation between the colleges in vocational programs is essential.

Skills that could be tested:
- language level sophisticated enough to manipulate language: roots, prefixes, suffixes.
- Logical understanding of a process: the steps involved in a process: manipulating sentences to put in correct order/describing a process: e.g. how do you park a car.
- Meta-cognitive skills: describing/ ideas
- Oral testing that requires production : specific to vocational areas.

Roma Sedgman, ESL Combined Skills, Residential Care Attendant Program

Satisfaction with ESL level: good if students are at the formerly required Upper Advanced level and o.k if the currently required Lower Advanced level is enforced. There is a concern that Admission Centre will further lower requirement.
Problems occur if students come into the programme without being assessed but purely based on prior experience or training at other institutions.   One students was allowed into the RCA programme from Burnaby College where she had been at a U.B. level and is clearly misplaced.

Lack of skills : Students have trouble making 'small talk' to create a comfortable atmosphere. Have difficulty making/asking appropriate questions: i.e. can't use do/does

Skills to test for: *listening / pronunciation* to see if they can understand speech that is slurred and not very intelligible, as this will be a situation they will have to cope with when they deal with the elderly. Students have to be able to *comprehend and respond appropriately*. Understanding *patterns of communication*. Set **high standard** for **oral component.** i.e. minimum of 22- 24 out of 30.

Roma likes the idea of the listening test consisting of a video in which students have to understand oral communication by the elderly and by non-native speakers and can then choose the most appropriate response from some multiple choice answers.

Olivia Thomasson, ESL Combined Skills Instructor, Business Office Training

This is an 8-month stand-alone course for students wanting to get into low-end office jobs.

Importance of skills: Speaking/ Listening 5, Reading / Writing 3
Writing: spelling, knowledge of standard letter formats, conciseness are important.

Reading: Proofreading

Weaknesses affecting success: grammar, spelling, pronunciation

Satisfaction with Language Level:
Very satisfied if students were admitted through BLS **and** a brief **oral interview.** Oral interview helped establish motivation, knowledge of business environment, communication problems.   Based on the interview, some students were asked to get more ELT first. Students were most successful if they were at the **Upper Advanced** level or **strong UI** completion with business background. Merely UI completion **too low.**

*Instructor Comment :
Oral interview necessary together with BLS. Interview **must be administered by an ESL Instructor. Holistic approach** is best when evaluating skills.

Tom Wudke, Instructor Auto Collision Repair
No problem with Language in programme. If students' English is not good enough, department does not take them.

Azim Bhimji, Combined Skills Instructor, Technical Training Access

Satisfaction with English level: pretty satisfied

Importance of skills: speaking, listening, reading: 5 ; writing 3
If students intend to go on to take auto trades, they need excellent reading skills. They need listening speaking skills for social/job situations. Writing is limited to report writing.

Weaknesses: Pronunciation problems are common among oriental students.

Testing: The use of the mechanical reasoning part of the CAAT worked well as a tool to assess mechanical aptitude but did not assess students English ability. All new intake students passed this CAAT component but several had problems with English in the TTA class. One could use the mechanical reasoning part of the CAAT as a paper and pencil test for TTA students if the language is adapted to a Lower Advanced level.

Overview of Commonly used Tests

Part I : Test Components

E.L.A. (English Language Assessment)

Skill	Component	Type	# of Items	Time
Reading	Reading Vocabulary	M. C.	40	15 min
	Reading Comprehension 6 passages	M.C.	30	30 min
Grammar	Grammar	M.C.	20	15 min
	Error Recognition	M.C.	20	15 min
Writing	Sentence Completion/ Paraphrasing		3	15 min
	Sentence Combining		4	
	Composition (General Topic)			30 min
Listening	Questions		8	20 min
	Statements		7	
	Conversations		6	
	Paragraphs (3)		9	
Oral	Interview			10 min
	Grading criteria: Pronunciation, Fluency, Grammar, Vocabulary, Comprehension			

A-LINC

The A-LINC Test was designed to assess students' survival level English skills. Its reading and writing components are at a low functional level and are not suitable to assess students who are going into vocational programs at a Community College level.

CAAT (Canadian Adult Achievement Test)

Skill	Component	# of Quest.
Reading	Vocabulary (some technical language) (only three distracters per item)	34
Reading Association	*Reading Passages*: Science, History, Biology, Geology, Poem	29
Functional Reading	- Classified Ad	4
	- Label	4
	- Appliance Ad	5
	- Warranty	4
	- 'Thank You' Reply to Business Letter	
Spelling	Spelling individual words (M.C. error recognition)	32
Number Operations	Includes problem solving, reading pie-shaped graphs interpreting bus-schedules	40
Problem Solving	Reading drawings, graphs, mathematical figures	
Mechanical Reasoning	interpreting visuals i.e. two gears: in which direction is gear 'B' moving ?	70
Vocabulary Use		12
Language Use	Which sentence expresses the idea best many questions from science/some pictures	9
Error Recognition	In context: 1 letter, 3 passages Grammar, Punctuation, Capitalization , No Error	
Logical Thinking	Organizing passages of 4 sentences each in logical sequence	
Science	M.C. includes reading charts, symbols	50

B L S
Business Language Study (1 hour)

Error Recognition Standard letter that has twenty errors (grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization). Students have to locate errors and correct them.

Letter Writing Students have to respond to a job advertisement for a clerk/receptionist by writing a letter of application for that job.

Listening/ Transcribing Taped dictation of a letter. First the whole letter is played to fine-tune students' listening, then the letter is played phrase by phrase for students to transcribe .   15 min

S L E P
(Secondary Level English Proficiency Test)

Listening 25 Photos. Students listen to four sentences per photo. They choose mark a, b, c, or d for the sentence that best describes the photo.   25 MC   45 min

Listening/ Reading Students hear a sentence once. In their test booklet they mark the sentence a,b,c, or d that is identical to the sentence they have just heard.   20 MC

Listening/ Map- Reading Students look at a map with streets and marked buildings and landmarks, as well as four marked cars. They listen to a conversation and must decide from the description of the surroundings, in which car, a,b,c, or d the conversation is taking place.   10 MC

Listening Students listen to several conversations among students and a school nurse. Each conversation is followed by a question. For each question, students have to choose the correct answer, a, b, c, or d.   27 MC

Reading/ Association Students look at a picture depicting several scenarios and people. Then they read 12

statements relating to the picture. For each of the statements, students have to decide if the statement was made by (a) the older boy, (b) the girl, (c) the man, or (d) the young boy. in the picture.

Reading/ Association One Sentence and four pictures each. Students choose the picture a,b,c, or d, that shows what the sentence says.   15 MC

Reading/ Vocabulary/ Grammar Three reading passages with blanks to be filled in with multiple choice answers. (general: history, biology, science)   22 MC

Reading Compre- hension Comprehension questions about the above passages   18 MC

Reading Comp. 1 passage: excerpt from science fiction with comprehension questions   8 MC

E L P A
English Language Proficiency Assessment
for
B C I T   Financial Management Students

This was a post admission test administered to approximately 215 entering Financial Management students in the first week of the term. The test consists of three separate components:
1. oral skills (interview format)
2. reading (specially tailored version of the Can TEST)
3. writing (free writing using writing prompts)

The results are reported in **band levels**. The purpose of the test was to get information on
"- the levels of English language proficiency of all students entering BCIT's Financial Management Programme
- the utility of testing English proficiency by comparing assessment results with subsequent achievement as measured by BCIT course grades.
- the identification of students whose proficiency in English is such that success in their BCIT programme puts them at risk." (* From ELPA Test Notes)

Oral Interview

Integrated Reading Compreh./ Listening/ Speaking	10 minute oral interview consisting of three parts:

Part 1: Warm-up (3 minutes)
(Introduction, Purpose of interview, Clarification of information from background form)

Part 2: Discussion of Reading (5 minutes)
Comprehension and Restatement:

Expansion of Topic/Personal Opinion
OR
Relationship of topic to student's life

Part 3 : Wrap up (2 minutes)

Reading selections used for interview

1: Why Does Advanced Education Matter to You ?

B.C. Job Market Growth is "Possible"

Interviewers are provided with a summary of main ideas and supporting details for both readings.

Background sheet for students:
Includes instruction on selecting a reading to be discussed during the interview.
Asks about personal information: Name, Student Number, Languages spoken, Education/Training/ Work .
* Note: Lots of space is provided for students to write on the form

Rating form for interviewer
The interviewer has a rating form on which the overall rating according to band levels is recorded.
The form also includes ample space for comments on each part of the interview.

Reading	Reading Test 1: Skimming and Scanning (15 minutes)	
Skimming/ Scanning	Page from Ontario Hydro brochure covering service charges / billing	7 short answer questions
Skimming/ Scanning	Newspaper Article on population boom	5 short answer quests., 1MC
Skimming/ Scanning	List of new publications in Business and Accounting	7 short answer questions

---

Reading Test 2: Comprehension and Cloze (50 minutes)

Functional Reading	Business Letter	6 MC quest.
	Article on Census Data (approx. 550 words)	6 MC quest. 1 short answer
	Article on Leadership (approx. 570 words)	8 MC quest. 1 short answer
Integrated Voc.Comp/ Grammar	Cloze : New Technology for the Office	24 MC answers

Writing	Free Writing / Guided Writing	(1 hour 30 min.)

* Note: The writing assignment is accompanied by a clear explanation of its purpose :
(1) to identify students who might need more help to succeed and to
(2) serve as an impetus for content development in the writing curriculum.
Each question consists of three parts:

Part 1

Free Writing	Students are asked to describe situations where their written communication skills were important, specify successes/problem and reasons for those, and describe and give specific examples of anticipated future situations where oral or written communication skills will be instrumental to their success in jobs.

Part 2

Summarizing	Illustration and Information <u>Where Your Textbook Dollar Goes</u>. Guiding questions are supplied.
stating opinion/ making suggestions	Students use information in illustration and own experience to support opinion.
Giving examples	Students are asked to detect a bias in the illustration and cite examples of the bias.

Part II: Comparison of Tests

With the exception of the **CAAT** Test, all tests mentioned above were designed specifically for ESL students.

ELA : Objective/subjective /General English: includes Listening, Grammar, Comprehension and Vocabulary, Paraphrasing and Free Writing and Oral Interview.

CAAT: Objective / Technical and General English: includes Reading Vocabulary, Functional Reading, Spelling, Number Operations (Math), Problem Solving involving Visuals, Mechanical Reasoning, Error Recognition, Logical Sequencing, Science Knowledge. **Does Not** include Listening, Oral interview, and Writing.

BLS : Subjective /(integrates skills) Business English: includes Reading/Error Recognition, (Spelling/Vocabulary/Grammar) and Correction, Guided Writing, Listening / Writing (Transcribing /Paraphrasing), and , at times , included an Oral Interview, **Note*** Together with the five minute interview, the BLS was seen as an excellent predictor of student success in the program. When the administration of the interview was discontinued, the BLS became a less good predictor. **Does Not** include a Reading Vocabulary/Comprehension Section.

SLEP: Objective/ General English: includes extensive Listening component
*Note: students <u>hear</u> the answers and have to circle the appropriate letter whereas in the ELA they read the answers and their reading speed may influence their ability to choose the correct answer.),
Reading / Picture Association, Reading/Integrated Grammar & Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension. **Does Not** include a Writing Section or an Oral Interview.

ELPA: Subjective/Objective/ Business English: includes integrated oral interview based on field-related reading, Skimming/Scanning, Functional Reading, Cloze. The Free Writing, and the Summarizing/Opinion Stating parts are both based on Business Topic. **Does Not** include Listening Comprehension.

Part III : Reported Satisfaction with Tests

ELA
Combined skills instructors in the Business Office Training, Residential Care Attendant Technical Training Access and Electronics Program reported that students who come into their programs with the appropriate **ELA** level do well. The **ELA** seems to play only a minor role in admitting students into main stream programs where Grade Twelve is required and is thus not necessarily responsible for allowing students with inadequate English proficiency into the program. In fact, the Pharmacy Technician Program at KEC no longer admits English 099 graduates into the program unless they have achieved the post-secondary score of 145 out of 200 on the ELA .

CAAT
Components of the **CAAT** are used in Practical Nursing. The major complaint in this department is about students' unacceptably low oral and written communication skills.   The **CAAT** is designed for Native Speakers of English and does not have a listening comprehension, an oral interview, or a writing component. Therefore, ESL speakers might enter the program without the necessary skills for success in these areas. The **CAAT** is also used as a screening tool by institutions to which City Centre graduates of the Allied Health Program apply for employment. Graduates from the Allied Health Program at City Centre often fail this test and consequently do not get jobs.

The technical reasoning part of the **CAAT** was used in a 15 minute oral interview as an admission test for the first two groups ever to take the **Technical Training Access Program (TTA)** at KEC. While this use of the test worked well in determining whether students were technically inclined, it did not help much in predicting language problems that would hold students back in the class. Azim Bhimji suggests that in a technical ELA module, one might make up items similar to those on the mechanical reasoning part of the test and scale the language down to an Upper Intermediate/Lower Advanced level to be taken as a reading/problem solving test.

In the Business programs at City Centre where the Language parts of the **CAAT** were used for one and a half years, the **CAAT** was found to be useful in identifying students at a low learning level.

When the **CAAT** was used at Kwantleen it was found that students who had close to 550 on the TOEFL scored only at the grade 2-4 on the reading parts. One complaint about the **CAAT** from there was that it tests knowledge that is culturally too biased.

A major problem, with the **CAAT,** aside from the fact that it has no Listening, Speaking , or Free Writing component, seems to be that this , test designed for native speakers of English, is administered to native and non-native speakers alike and the same cut-off points are used for both to admit them into programs. According to Ross Barbour, choosing the same cut-off for native and ESL speakers is problematic, however. While a cut-off of point of 50 achieved by an ESL speaker, may indicate this person's ability to do well in the course, achievement of the same score by a native speaker may indicate that s/he might have problems in the course.

BLS

The **BLS** has been used to assess students for admission in the Business Office Training Combined Skills Course and as a post admissions test in the Business Programs to channel students into different levels. According to Olivia Thomasson, the BLS worked very well in predicting student success if it was used in conjunction with a five minute oral interview given by an experienced ESL instructor. The interview served as a tool not only to assess the students' comprehension and speaking ability (fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) but also to learn about their motivation and previous experience in and knowledge about the field. Without an oral interview, as it was later administered, the BLS became less accurate as a predictor of student success. There was a 50 % correlation between the BLS and the CAAT. Students who did well on the BLS scored at about the grade 10 level on the CAAT.

SLEP

According to Robin Russel, the **SLEP** has been used at Kwantleen College for admission of ESL speakers into the graduate nurses refresher course, a program into which only people with prior nursing background and a score of close to 550 on the TOEFL are accepted. The **SLEP** has been used for the last six years with students having to achieve 58 out of 64 at the balance score and seems to be a good predictor of student success. Robin says that although the SLEP was designed for 11 to 18 year-olds in secondary schools, it seems to work well as a predictor because it is non-academic and integrates skills.

Dennie Rothschield at Capilano College has used the **SLEP** in a Pilot project at Capilano College as a post admissions test in Capilano College's Business Office Training Program. A minimum score of 46 out of the balance score of 64 on the **SLEP** together with a successful oral interview and a writing sample was found to be accurate in predicting whether students would be able to do well in the course. A low correlation between the **SLEP** and the **TOEFL** was also established in this pilot project.

ELPA

Following is an excerpt from the BCIT ELPA Final Report.

1. A single reading test combining the skills contained in the reading sub-tests seems to be a better predictor of academic achievement than any of the subtests taken individually for *Business Communication, Financial Management*, and *GPA* at BCIT.

2. Among the subtests, *Reading Comprehension* is the best predictor, whereas the *Cloze* procedure is only a marginal predictor.

3. *Business Communication* and *Financial Management* are fundamentally different predicted by different sets of language measures, prior experience and learner characteristics.

4. The most reliable predictors for *Business Communication* marks were the reading and writing scores.

5. Reading score in combination with school marks were modest predictors for *Financial Management*. Other competencies that were not assessed seemed to have a greater influence on success in this course.

* In the Reading Test, Barbour in his analysis suggests that individually the tests, designed to measure different aspects of reading ability "were either too short or too easy" (Barbour, BCIT ELPA Final Report, p.5). He suggests that "a single test which combines a variety of skills targeted in the separate sub-tests would produce a more valid and reliable measure of reading ability than the sub-tests administered individually. " (Barbour, BCIT ELPA final report, p.6). The oral and writing assessment methods of the **ELPA** according to Barbour were moderately reliable.

Evaluation

Of the tests described above, both the **SLEP** and the **BLS** seem to be good predictors for the programs they are used in when combined with an oral interview and in the **SLEP's** case with a writing sample. The **SLEP** especially has a very strong listening component which is important in assessing students going into fields where strong aural skills are required. While the **SLEP** is a generic objective non-academic test and seems to work for fields as unrelated as Practical Nursing and Business Office Training, the **BLS** is course and field specific. It is more holistic and subjective in nature and more performance based. Another example of a similar test for prospective Home Support Attendant students is outlined in the section Developments in Vocational Testing at other Colleges .

Another form of assessment that is mentioned by Linda Hale in her report Communication across the Curriculum is student self-assessment. She says that studies on student self-assessment indicate that students are about as accurate as formal assessment tests when it comes to assessing their language competence.

Developments in Vocational Testing at other Colleges

Douglas College

Douglas College passed a Language Competency Standard Policy approximately 2 years ago. This policy covers standards for entry into and exit from Douglas College Programs/Courses. (see Appendix). In line with this policy, each program area is to establish the language competency needed by its students, to determine the skills needed for entry into the program and then to test students on these skills and language competence. ESL instructors are currently working with instructors in the skills areas to

- analyze the course content and the tasks required of students in a program,
- identify the competencies needed ,
- develop an integrated test for Reading, Writing and Listening ,

for specific Program areas, i.e. the CFCS (**C**hild/**F**amily/**C**ommunity, **S**tudies Program.). Once the test is developed, it will be piloted and administered by the Assessment Centre once a month. Students applying for a specific program will then be able to find out, if they have the required skills. If they do not, they can be directed to the appropriate class where they can pick up or develop the skills they are lacking or need to improve.

Field-specific Assessment for Home Support Attendant Program

This field-specific test that was developed and has been used for the last two years, is the test for applicants to the Home Support Attendant Program developed by Betty Emory and Joe Pumbley at Douglas. The test is administered to all applicants, ESL and native speakers alike. The test assesses students on their ability to perform tasks required of them both in the course (i.e. listening to / understanding and analyzing information / reading comprehension) and in the field (i.e. making themselves clear/ writing in a descriptive, narrative/chronological way / working interactively as a team member) .

Format of Test

One 2-3 hour evening 'Orientation' session. Non-threatening, casual atmosphere is created by having coffee and cookies.

Students: 35 applicants for the Home Support Attendant Program (ESL and Non-ESL)

Testers: Two ESL instructors and two people from the industry.
  *Note: People from the industry develop a sense of ownership if invited to participate in this process. They are also good judges of the qualities needed to succeed in the industry.

Listening: A twenty minute orientation lecture on the goals of the program

Guided Writing: Students respond to three questions:

  1. What did you hear ?
  2. What did you think about it ?
  3. How would you apply this to your work ?

Reading: Culturally unbiased reading passage from course textbook on house cleaning with multiple choice questions. (* This passage was found to be too easy: students did not need to read the passage to get the answers but knew the answers from experience)

Listening / Speaking / Interactive Skills

Students view video on house cleaning. Then they are put into groups and given some interaction questions. The testers go around observing and assess students performance in the group using *band levels*.

Criteria used:
Linguistic criteria:
i.e. comprehensibility (did other students understand them) comprehension: do they understand enough to participate/ are they able to ask for clarification).

Interpersonal criteria:
team/group skills (did they participate in the group/ were they too aggressive / did they use empathy, active listening,)

* **Note:** Plumbley reports that this part worked really well in identifying students with problems, among both native speakers and ESL speakers. These identified students are invited to a follow-up interview and, depending on their needs directed to the ESL department for placement into developmental classes, or to the career counselling service at the college to explore careers more suited to their personalities.

There is a reported high level of satisfaction with this assessment because it works well in predicting student success in the program. It is interesting to note some of the characteristics of this type of assessment:

- It is *program and field-specific*.
- It is *decentralized*, administered in the department where instruction takes place by members of the faculty and representative of the industry.
- It is *performance- based* and takes a *holistic* approach.
- In addition to assessing students academic skills such as reading, writing, and note-taking, it assesses students' *non-linguistic competencies* like interpersonal commu - nication skills that are instrumental for success in the field .

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON VOCATIONAL ELA - FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More systematic testing of students prior to admission

Given that the ELA is not used regularly to place students into vocational classes at City Centre, it would be unwise and premature to dismiss it as a poor assessment tool for vocational programs. Indeed, when it is used for placement into Combined Skills programs it seems to work well as a predictor of success. Instructors in those programs have said that the students placed through the ELA usually do well, whereas those who enter through some other avenue (transfer from different colleges, accreditation of credentials from foreign countries) do not. The greatest problem may be that some students undergo no testing at all prior to admission. Therefore, our first recommendation is to introduce systematic testing of students entering into vocational programs, both at KEC and City Centre. Until this is done, we cannot assume that current ELA is a poor predictor of success.

In addition, it might be useful to administer the ELA to students currently enrolled in certain programs (e.g. nursing) in order to see if they score at a post-secondary level. Diane Westwood, the Department Head of the Nursing program, has expressed interest in such a project.

A further suggestion would be to keep statistics on how students with identified weaknesses in certain skill areas (e.g. low reading comprehension marks) perform throughout the program.

2. Modifying the format of the current ELA

If another test is needed, it could be developed using the format of the current ELA, by keeping . the four skill components but adapting them to more field-specific items. For example, reading passages would be more related to the content of the program, plus a generic reading selection. Likewise, the writing component could ask for a more content-specific sample. The oral/aural part of the test would be largely unchanged. Also, for students entering into trades programs, the test of mechanical reasoning in the CAAT is seen as a useful tool. A modified version of the CAAT test at the Lower Advanced English level might be useful in testing both mechanical reasoning and level of reading competency.

3. Correlation between SLEP and ELA

The SLEP test has a good reputation as a placement tool for assessing students entering into a variety of vocational areas in other community colleges, such as Capilano and Kwantleen. In those programs, a combination of SLEP, an interview and a content-related writing sample might be an even better predictor. There is a need for research on the correlation between the SLEP and the ELA, perhaps as a post-admission test.

Capilano College has undertaken a pilot project for its OTEC program (Office Assistance Training for ESL students), in which SLEP was used as an admission test, together with an interview. Three months later (Dec/94) the class marks of poorly-performing students were compared with SLEP marks. There is evidence of a positive correlation. Kwantlen has used the SLEP as a proficiency test to admit students into their nursing refresher course for the past seven years.

4. Adjunct classes in communicative skills and/or study skills

Regardless of which test is given, students in many of the programs need to develop their skills in communication, both to do well in their courses and to find work in the field upon graduating. We recommend adjunct, or co-requisite courses in communicative skills. If City Centre changes from a program model to a course model, this will be more feasible. The BCIT experience in offering such courses might yield some useful information. Similarly, adjunct courses in study skills would help a student develop and/or maintain the skills needed to successfully handle the program content.

Even for vocational programs, students need academic skills as well as general language competency. Therefore, vocationally-directed students could be streamlined into classes which teach the study skills, in preparation for entry into mainstream vocational programs. We recommend using curriculum development funds to develop co-requisite courses so that students have alternate avenues into vocational programs.

5. Using benchmarks to assess students' competency

Benchmarks, developed by the NWGLB for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, are descriptors of learners' abilities to accomplish tasks using English. They focus on outcomes rather than courses or training; in this way, they honour previous learning and experience. Also, they take a more holistic view of the student. For entry into a Nursing program, a different set of descriptors for oral competency would be used than for entry into Electronics. This is because the nursing course calls for greater oral competency. Similarly, the reading benchmark for admission into Electronics would differ from that for entry into Culinary Arts, since the reading requirements differ greatly for each program.

Enclosed in Appendix I is the breakdown of writing benchmark 7, which would be appropriate for business-related courses, involving letters, memos and reports. The sample tasks, if completed successfully, indicate what the student is capable of doing in a business environment.

6. Decentralising assessments at V.C.C.

In March, 1991, Christel Nierobisch* recommended that an analysis be done of how well the VCC system of centralized assessment served the needs of City Centre. She said that City Centre programs require a range of entrance skills and language competencies which are distinct from general mastery of language. For example, oral proficiency for prospective Nursing students is the

same as that for prospective Cooking students. However, the nurse will be expected to provide potentially critical care, while the chef will provide a less intense level of service.

As an example of this, we can look at Norm Dooley's experience with the Business Language Skills assessment tool. The course instructors administered the test, which was accompanied by an interview. This combination appears to have worked well as a predictor. In fact, when the interview part of the test was dropped, the test results became less reliable.

In light of the above, and similar developments in other colleges, we suggest a coordinator of assessments be recruited, to be responsible for testing at both campuses, and to network with other institutions. Proper assessment of students affects all aspects of future learning, and developments in testing are such that someone with expertise in the area needs to be in place to pull it all together. Otherwise, we might never succeed in rationalizing our assessment needs.

* Breaking Down Barriers: Improving Access and Instruction for ESL students at City Centre Campus   by   Christel Nierobisch   March 1991

PROTOTYPE TEST FOR ENTRY INTO HEALTH-RELATED STUDIES

According to Nierobisch's report Core Competencies for ESL Occupational Foundation Programs in Health and Hospitality, students going into Health Occupation Vocational Programs need to have *core competencies for the field* as well as *core language skills* to do well in the classroom. An assessment test for these areas should therefore focus on assessing students in these areas.

1. Requirements for Health occupations:
   Good interpersonal skills, appropriate language, sound cultural understanding, ability to ask clear and concise questions and to listen actively and objectively. Discussion in groups are frequent and care-givers must observe, evaluate, and record results they need to create rapport with people of all ages and backgrounds.

2. Language skills needed in the classroom:
   - Academic and learning skills
   - Reading skills
   - Discussion skills for discussing topics based on articles and texts
   - Ability to define concepts, analyze principles, and evaluate outcomes
   - Ability to evaluate experiences in writing

3. Language skills needed in the caregiver role:
   - Grasp of idiomatic English: clear speech, normal rate, stress and intonation
   - Comprehension of normal speech flow and awareness of cultural context
   - Understanding of contextual and body language clues

'Students often believe reading and writing skills are paramount. However, in the health care field, oral communication is the dominant skill. There is a need to use an integrated skills approach to prepare students to deal with practical communication demands.'

Nierobisch, 1991

Additional requirements resulting from feedback in questionnaires:

- ability to grasp medical terminology / technical language
- extracting key points from discussions
- charting /documenting in writing

An assessment test to test students' current proficiencies in the above competency and skills areas would have to be of a holistic and subjective nature, use an integrated skills approach and be performance-based. Because of the nature of its interpersonal communication component, this assessment test would need to be administered to a group of applicants for these programs rather than to individual applicants.

We recommend the use of videos in lieu of taped conversations to test listening comprehension so students can pick up on body language and contextual clues.

PART 1: Listening and Interpreting Contextual and Body Clues

10 scenarios that show people in interacting in health-care situations (at home, in the hospital, care home, doctor's office. In these scenes, what people say is not always congruent with their body language. M.C. questions /answers of appropriate responses (i.e. this man wants a. more information, b. help, c. to be left alone, d. to talk to the doctor).

In order to be able to choose the correct answer, students would have to be able to pick up on tone, body language, contextual clues, and demonstrate an un - derstanding of the verbal and non-verbal communication that is going on.

PART 2: Integrated Listening / Note-taking /Guided writing

** See description of test for Home Support Attendant Program applicants at Douglas College.

A.   *Introduction*: Provides listening Focus for students instructs them that they are to take notes.

B.   *10-minute Lecture* on
    a. Program Goals
    b. Expected characteristics of health care providers
    c. Description of potential clientele students will work with

C.   ***Guided writing***
    a. Students summarize the main points of the lecture. (What did you hear ?)
    b. Students evaluate the content of what they heard. (What did you think about it?
    c. Students analyze how this applies to them/their work (How does this apply to
        you?)
    Evaluation: band levels

PART 3: Oral Interview / Guided writing
(integrates reading charted information, asking concise questions and transferring oral intake information onto a form).

Prior to the interview students are given a completed intake form like those used by doctors for new patients. * see sample in appendix. They are given instruction to read this form to gain an understanding of the *type of information* requested on it and of the *patient information* on the form.

The 10- minute interview is structured like the one for on the **IEPA** at BCIT.

Part I: Warm-up Phase: Get student background/ education/work experience/interest in field
    Evaluation: According to band levels.

Part II: Students answer questions about the patient information on the sheet. This requires that they *scan* their intake sheet to look for particular information.
    Evaluation: Interviewers record number of correctly answered questions within a certain time limit (possibly also number of correctly asked clarification questions)

Part III: Students are given a blank intake form and have to ask the interviewer for the intake information required on the sheet. This requires that they *ask clear, concise questions*, *ask for clarification* if the answers are slurred, *extract the key points in the answers* and *record* the information *legibly in point form* in the appropriate place on the form.
    Evaluation: 1. *oral*:   band levels
                2. *written*:   number of correctly recorded items

Part IV: Students are invited to ask questions about the program.
    Evaluation: band levels

PART 4 : Reading

A. Reading Vocabulary/Grammar : 20 multiple choice items of medical terminology.

Items test students' current knowledge of general medical terms and their ability to recognize prefixes and suffixes to determine and manipulate wordforms.

example: The _____ recommended that the client take a disability leave.
a. psychological   b. psychotic
c. psychotherapy   d. psychologist

* Note: I realize that distractors in a <u>pure</u> vocabulary test should not be testing grammar and that distractor <u>a</u> would therefore not be acceptable because it is an adjective whereas all other distractors are, or can be, nouns. However, for the purpose of this integrated exercise, I have chosen to ignore this rule.

B. Reading Comprehension 4 Passages with 5 to 6 multiple choice items each

Passages are taken from course textbooks at beginning levels or newspaper articles that are health-related. Questions include stating main idea, identifying supporting details / examples making inferences, paraphrasing technical terms.

PART 5: Interpersonal Communication/ Language Skills

Students are put into groups and each group is given a case study along with four to five possible steps of intervention. Each group has to come to a consensus as to how they would prioritize these steps. This involves every group member presenting how they would prioritize the steps and explaining why. Testers observe and evaluate students on linguistic and interpersonal criteria.
(* see Douglas College Test for home Support Students)

Evaluation: linguistic and inter-personal using band levels

PROTOTYPE LANGUAGE TEST FOR ENTRY INTO BUSINESS-RELATED STUDIES

READING COMPONENT

1. Skimming and Scanning

- the student will answer questions (short answer or multiple-choice) after reading a chart, a bill or an advertising pamphlet. These are examples of non-linear reading which will test the student's ability to extract information accurately and quickly from the kind of reading expected in a business environment.

2. Reading Comprehension

- the student will read a longer article and answer questions of various types (e.g. main idea, details, inference, reference, true/false)

3. Reading paraphrase

- the student will read a piece (article, letter, paragraph) and will complete a paraphrase of the piece. This will be in the form of a cloze exercise, where the student will fill in the blanks from a multiple- choice set of 4 or 5 choices.

WRITING COMPONENT

1. Paraphrase/summarize

- the student will write a summary (maximum ? words) of an article, incorporating its main idea, supporting details and the writer's purpose

2. Free writing

- the student will write a composition based on the response to one of several written prompts: e.g.
  What qualities should a person have to succeed in business?
  What prior experience or knowledge led you to choose this kind of occupation?
  How do you see your career path in the business field?
  Why do you want to take a course in the business field?

LISTENING COMPONENT

Note-taking exercise

- the student will listen to a short lecture/presentation (on tape) and will complete a cloze exercise based on the lecture, such as completing a note-taking outline.

- other listening sub-tests following the ELA format.

SPEAKING COMPONENT

1. Integrated reading/speaking

- the student is given an article to read and absorb, in preparation for discussion of the article with the examiner (questions on main idea, details, inference and interpretation). The reading may include non-linear and visual forms of information.

2. General Interview

- following the ELA format

OTHER POSSIBLE COMPONENTS

1. Error Recognition

- the student will read a business letter which contains errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and usage. He/She will underline perceived errors and write in the correct form.

2. Job application

- the student will read a job advertisement and write a letter of application for the job.

COMMENTS

The above suggestions attempt to speak to the perceived needs of students in business-related classes, as noted in the questionnaire responses and the interviews with instructors and administrators.

Many of the suggestions are based on existing tests, which appear to be good predictors of success. We have incorporated ideas from three tests in particular. These are:

BUSINESS LANGUAGE STUDY 1 (created by Norm Dooley/VCC)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT (BCIT)

HOME SUPPORT ATTENDANT PROGRAM TEST (Douglas College)

References

Citizenship and Integration Policy Branch. Compilation of Responses to the Questionnaire on Replacement for A-LINC. Citizenship and Integration Canada. December 1994

Des Brisay, Margaret. Problems in Developing an Alternative to the TOEFL. in TESL Canada Journal, Volume 12, No.1 Winter 1994

Hale, Linda. Communication across the Curriculum. British Columbia Institute of Technology, November 1994

National Working Group on Language Benchmarks (NWGLB) . Benchmarks (Draft). Citizenship and Integration Policy Division and Communications Branch. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. 1994

Nierobisch, Christel. Breaking Down Barriers: Improving Access for ESL Students at City Centre Campus. March 91

Nierobisch, Christel. Core Competencies for ESL Occupational Foundation Programs in Health and Hospitality. Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development and Ministry of Skills Training and Labour December 1993

Otte, Michael. Language Skills Required by ESL Students to Succeed in Selected Career and Vocational Programs: Accounting, Computer Programming, Secretary, and Electronic Trades. Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development.

Tests

A-LINC: Assessment : Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada

ELPA: English Language Proficiency Assessment for Financial Management Students, BCIT

BLS: Business Language Study, V.C.C. City Centre

CAAT : Canadian Adult Achievement Test

CanTEST: Canadian Achievement Test of English for Scholars and Trainees, BCIT Version

ELA : English Language Assessment, V.C.C., King Edward Campus

SLEP : Secondary Language Equivalency

APPENDIX I : WRITING BENCHMARK 7

WRITING BENCHMARK 7: *Conveys information and ideas in memos, letters and reports*

WHAT THE PERSON CAN DO

Use a suitable type of document (e.g. memo, letter, simple report, electronic mail) and appropriate language for purpose

Organize information so that document is clear and easy to read

Narrate a past, present or future event

Request information

Describe a situation/problem clearly, with appropriate supporting details

Conditions:
- Content is formal
- Document is three or four paragraphs in length, conveying two or three main points
- Employs an expanded inventory of concrete, abstract and conceptual language
- Uses a variety of structure including compound sentences and modality (with errors)

Background Knowledge:
- Complex sentence structure
- Techniques/devices used for developing a coherent text, e.g. use of reference to an element mentioned previously or of link-words to signal function of what follows (example, conclusion)
- Basic correspondence formats; formal writing conventions and standard phrases (e.g. Dear Ms. Smith:)

SAMPLE TASKS

- Writes memos to employer:
  - explaining absence
  - requesting permission to leave early
- Writes letters:
  - asking for/giving information
  - ordering goods
  - outlining a short set of procedures, instructions or directions
- Compiles brief progress/incident/inspection reports
- Writes letters describing:
  - educational qualifications
  - work experience
  - current needs
  - holiday plans

NOTES:

APPENDIX II : SAMPLE INTAKE FORM FOR HEALTH-RELATED MODULE

* Note: This form would have to be simplified

Name(FML): _____ M/F   Birthday(MDY): _____

Address: _____   PHN: _____

_____   Phone H: _____ ( ) L/M. □

postal code: _____   W: _____

Alternate contact: _____   Phone: _____

Social History

Occupation	_____	Smoking	cg/day pk/yr sprty
Social	_____	Alcohol/drugs	_____ (CAGE)
		Contraception	_____ gay/straight
Family Hx	CVD,HT,Ca,(skin), psych,alcohol, DM	Diet	_____
		Exercise	_____
		Immunization	_____
		Weight	_____

Past History: medical, surgical, obstetric, psychiatric

GTPAL

mammogram: _____   Pap: _____   DRE: _____

Chronic problems

Pharmacy: _____   Allergies: _____

Medication	Refills			Brief meds

APPENDIX III : LANGUAGE COMPETENCY POLICY: DOUGLAS COLLEGE

E.02.04.01   LANGUAGE COMPETENCY STANDARDS

Effective Date: June 18, 1992.
(Replaced E02.04.01 and E02.04.02)

New : _   Revision : X
Replace: March 16, 1989
Page 1 of 2 pages

POLICY STATEMENT: Douglas College requires that all students will demonstrate appropriate levels of English language competency before entry into, and prior to exit from, programs/courses.

Language competency involves skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The enhancement of language competency should be a goal of instruction in every course and program.

PROCEDURES/RULES STATEMENT:

1.   Standards

1.1   Entry level standards will ensure that students can communicate in English with sufficient ability to complete anticipated coursework successfully.

1.2   Exit level standards will ensure that students can communicate in English with sufficient ability to handle future work-related and/or education-related communication tasks successfully.

1.3   Satisfactory achievement of exit level standards of language competency will be demonstrated by students as part of the requirements to complete a course/program.

1.4   Minimum standards of language competency will be established at entry and exit points to each program/department. Some programs/departments may choose to set their entry standards at the same level as their exit standards.

1.5   Entry/exit language competency standards will be related to specific course or program requirements and objectives. Each department/program will consult with the appropriate advisory committees, professional bodies, employers, colleges and universities to establish and/or review criteria.

2.   Assessment

2.1   The Assessment Centre will assist programs/departments to determine language competency following consultation with college faculty who have acknowledged expertise in language competency standards.

2.2   Students will demonstrate language competency through a variety of means: assessments, completion of specified prerequisites, completion of course/competency equivalents at other post-secondary institutions, challenges, etc.

2.3   The results of assessment will indicate recommended options for the student to meet language competency entry/exit standards.

2.4   Where necessary, students with special educational needs will be permitted to demonstrate language competency in alternative ways.

Page 2 of 2 pages.

3.   Jurisdiction

3.1   Each program/department area, after consultation with external advisory committees and college faculty who have acknowledged expertise in language competency standards, will determine language competency standards required for entry into and exit from the department/program area.

3.2   Where language development courses are required, each program/department area will determine the appropriate language development courses(s) for students following consultation with college faculty who have acknowledged expertise in language competency standards.

3.3   The content, format and delivery of courses, will be determined through a process of collaboration among the department/program faculty, and the faculty in the department(s) providing the language courses.

3.4   Program/department and assessment personnel will seek expertise from other discipline areas to ensure the relevance of assessment tools used.

4.   Implementation

4.1   The College will allocate resources for providing appropriate levels of assessment and instruction according to the needs of each department/program.

5.   Review

5.1   Faculty will determine, with broad consultation among interested constituencies within the college and the broader community, the extent to which language competency standards are being met in practice.

5.2   Where external language competency standards change, faculty will review and modify the pedagogy of programs so that external standards are met.

5.3   All unit reviews will include a language competency evaluation component.

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

ADMISSIONS AND LANGUAGE COMPETENCY STANDARDS
(subcommittee to Education Council)

<u>ROLE STATEMENT</u>

This Committee is responsible for reviewing admission requirements and procedures and language competency standards as determined by Department Education Committees and formulating decisions on behalf of Education Council. In addition, it is responsible for recommending changes to policy guidelines regarding admission and language competency standards for all courses and programs.

<u>RESPONSIBILITIES</u>

The Committee will:

1. Ensure a minimum standard for admission to College programs and courses is established that shall take into account the available time and resources within which the student and the college are expected to meet their mutual obligations. Within this limitation, the minimum admission standard is expected to identify as eligible, the largest possible number of students. The concept of admission standards recognizes that, given that these are the minimum requirements necessary for reasonable success in a given program or course, there may be fewer students admitted than the capacity of the program or course.

2. Provide a forum for discussion on admission and language competency standards.

3. Ensure that an entry level language competency standard permits students to communicate in English with sufficient ability to complete anticipated coursework successfully.

4. Ensure that exit level language competency standards permit students to communicate in English with sufficient ability to handle future work-related and/or education-related communication tasks successfully.

5. Refer matters of disagreement between departments and the Committee to Education Council.