

# Teaching Tips and Strategies

PBLA is being implemented across Canada in a variety of contexts:

- Classes combining ESL and ESL Literacy learners
- Classes that include CLB Stage 1 and CLB Stage 2 learners
- Homogeneous classes and multilevel classes
- Full-time and part-time classes
- Classes with a specific focus (e.g., settlement, skill-based, and ESP classes).

Consequently, there is no fixed way to integrate PBLA activities into the teaching/learning cycle: strategies will vary according to the context of instruction. This section suggests a few tips and strategies that might help with implementing PBLA in your classroom, including using the Language Companion (CIC, nd).

## Using the Language Companion (LC)

The Language Companion (LC) is a resource given to all ESL learners and ESL Literacy learners to support their language learning, PBLA activities, and settlement in Canada. Each binder includes basic reference material about Canada and helpful English that can be used to complement classroom teaching materials or to support independent study.

Three versions of the LC exist: ESL Literacy, Stage 1: CLB 1-4, and Stage II: CLB 5-8. Learners receive the appropriate version from their program. Administrators can order copies by contacting their local IRCC officer.

## Organization of the Language Companion

Each version of the LC is divided into the following main sections:

**Canadian Language Benchmarks**, which includes CLB descriptors based on the *Can-Do* statements.

**My Canada**, which has basic reference information about Canada.

**Where I Live**, which has information related to provincial, regional, and municipal features and services.

**Helpful English**, which has useful reference material about the English language.

**My Notes**, an empty section where learners can file class notes, skill building activities, rough drafts and other program/classroom handouts.

**My Portfolio**, which learners use to organize their PBLA artefacts.

The ESL Literacy version of the LC references the same CLB 1-4 *Can Do* statements as those found in the Stage I: CLB 1-4 binder; ESL literacy learners work towards the same benchmarks as their literate counterparts (with additional scaffolding and support). However, the Literacy Language Companion is highly pictorial and includes simplified texts.

The sequence of the sections in the LC binder can be changed to make it more user friendly. The sections *My Portfolio* and *My Notes* are used regularly so some teachers move them to the front of the binder to reduce wear and tear.

### Introducing the Language Companion

When working with learners with no prior experience with PBLA, consider introducing the LC and PBLA processes separately to minimize the learning burden. Activities that can be used to introduce the LC include:

- Explain the purposes of the LC:
  - To help them access information on settlement and language
  - To keep their daily notes and handouts organized
  - To keep samples of their language learning for assessment purposes.
- Build key vocabulary for the binder itself (front cover, back cover, dividers, rings) and phrases for using the binder (*Put it in your Language Companion; Put it in front of...; Put it behind...*).
- Have learners look at the tabs, predict what they might find in each section, and check their predictions. Ask how they might use each section in school or at home. Or, have them use the Table of Contents in each section predict content.
- Engage learners in a scavenger hunt activity to familiarize them with the information in various sections.
- Working in small groups, assign each group one section and ask them to give a very brief presentation to the class about what their section includes and how it could be used.
- Familiarize learners with the CLB section. Have learners work with the *Can Do* statements.
- Ask learners familiar with the LC to orientate new learners to the binder and help them set up their portfolios.

**ESL Literacy:** The Literacy Language Companion should be introduced slowly over an extended period of time. These activities can help:

- Create vocabulary cards with pictures and the titles of each section (e.g., an ear for Listening). Have learners match the vocabulary cards with the tabs in their binder.

- Create picture cards for each of the topics in the My Canada or Where I Live sections. Have learners work in pairs to sort the pictures in the order of topics in the LC.

### Using the Language Companion throughout the Term

Continue to use the LC throughout the term to support, perhaps with these activities:

- Using the competency statements on the *Can Do* pages, have learners work in small groups and brainstorm possible community, work or study tasks for a specific theme.
- Use the information in the *My Canada* and *Where I Live* sections
  - As the basis for developing language tasks or as reading or listening texts.
  - As jumping off points for research projects,
  - For awareness-raising activities prior to a deeper exploration of a subject or issue.
- Encourage learners to personalize the *Where I Live* section with researched information about local conditions and services.
- Refer to the *Helpful English* section to develop skill-building activities related to specific tasks; have learners find specific information (e.g., four ways to ask for the location of grocery items in a store).
- Use the LC as a place to compile and organize additional language learning or settlement information (e.g., flyers about community services).
- Have learners brainstorm and discuss ideas for using the LC for independent study; assign homework activities using different texts in the LC.
- Discuss transferable skills with learners and have them brainstorm how the skills outlined in the LC might apply to other contexts.

**ESL Literacy:** The Literacy Language Companion can be a useful tool at many points in the term. Several activities are possible:

- Have learners copy the name of an activity and the date on to a simple inventory sheet so that they can keep track of the artefacts they put into each skill section of their portfolio.
- Have learners sort sample artefacts into categories, using pictures to represent indicators of ability. Or, have small groups decide on categories and sort samples accordingly.
- Give learners a list of key words related to a topic and have them look for and highlight the same words on a specific page in their Language Companion. For example, for a topic on government, learners might find and highlight the words, *representative, community, local, federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and councillor* on page 5 of the *Where I Live* section.

## Introducing PBLA Concepts and Skills

How you introduce portfolios to learners with no prior experience will vary according to the CLB level(s) of the class, the type of class being taught, and the learners themselves. It will also be easier with learners at higher CLB levels than with learners at lower levels. However, regular PBLA activities will help learners become more comfortable over time.

ESL Literacy learners will require considerable support to participate in PBLA. They will need explicit instruction, modelling and guidance as they complete activities and organize their portfolios. They will also need more time and more support than their literate counterparts when completing activities. Introduce PBLA slowly and have realistic expectations about accomplishments. In time, these learners will also become increasingly comfortable and independent. For suggestions on how to introduce PBLA activities to this particular group of learners, see the [\*CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit\*](#) (CCLB, 2015).

### PBLA Concepts

Learners should be made aware of several important concepts:

- A portfolio contains a selection of language tasks, but not every worksheet completed by a learner.
- A portfolio demonstrates what the learner can do in English.
- Portfolios are also used in other educational and professional contexts in Canada.
- In education and training, learning is improved when learners take responsibility for their learning, including being active and reflective learners.

### PBLA Activities

Here are some considerations when introducing PBLA:

- Have a sample *My Portfolio* as a model so learners see the end product.
- Model portfolio activities to help learners have a better sense of what is expected. Keep instructions clear and consistent.
- Connect the PBLA concepts and skills being learned in class to learners' lives outside of the classroom. For example; PBLA activities provide valuable opportunities for developing organizational skills that serve learners well in all aspects of their lives; reflecting on their learning is an important part of reflective practice in many workplaces.

Depending on the CLB level of learners in the class, you may also want to plan activities for the following purposes:

**To raise awareness and activate prior learning**, you could engage learners in a discussion on how learning is assessed in their former countries and how they think it is assessed in ESL programs in Canada.

**To develop vocabulary and useful phrases needed to participate in PBLA**, you could introduce some of the words needed to engage in PBLA (goal-setting, learning reflections, needs assessment, peer feedback, self-assessment).

**To support engagement in specific PBLA-related tasks**, you could support learners in developing relevant language skills:

- Understanding and following instructions related to portfolio management
- Writing and talking about their needs and goals
- Talking about their progress in learning English
- Filling out a skills inventory form for a portfolio section.

Tutela includes additional activities for introducing PBLA and the Language Companion in your classroom.

## Organizing for PBLA

Building regular time for PBLA will help you manage PBLA practice.

### Scheduling PBLA

Consider scheduling a regular time each week for portfolio management activities like filing artefacts in the binder and filling out skills inventories to help learners become accustomed to PBLA practices. Scheduled times could also be used for activities such as:

- Giving feedback on assessment or skill-using tasks.
- Having learners engage in learning reflections.
- Having learners work in groups to share strategies for practising or improving their English or for creating an action plan.
- Having learners correct errors on their work.

If your class meets five days a week, you could schedule a 30- to 45-minute period on Friday afternoons for portfolio management activities. Or, you might schedule PBLA time at the beginning of the week as a way to review the previous week's work.

If your class meets only two or three times a week, you might schedule 30 to 45 minutes every two weeks for portfolio management or for a PBLA-related activity like a learning reflection. Ultimately, it's up to you to determine which schedule works in your context.

The table below presents key PBLA activities for a term or reporting period. Scheduling will vary depending on a variety of factors, including the length of the program.

**Table 1: Portfolio Activity throughout the Term**

<b>At the Beginning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce the Language Companion:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Familiarize learners with binder sections, uses of the binder and expectations.</li></ul></li><li>• Introduce PBLA.</li><li>• Set up <i>My Portfolio</i> in the Language Companion:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Collect data for <i>About Me</i>.</li><li>○ Begin collecting skill using activities and assessment tasks.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>During the Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have learners add artefacts to their portfolios and record the artefacts on their portfolio skill inventory (during regularly scheduled PBLA time).</li><li>• Continue collecting language tasks for the Portfolio.</li><li>• Have learners complete learning reflections and self-assessments.</li><li>• Consider a periodic review of portfolios, supported by discussions about progress with learners.</li></ul>
<b>At the End</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluate (review) portfolios to complete Learner Progress Reports.</li><li>• Continue collecting language tasks, if appropriate, and regular portfolio activity.</li><li>• Discuss progress report in context of portfolio review during learner progress conferences.</li></ul>

### Intake Considerations

Learners arriving from a class or program that is implementing PBLA will already be familiar with general PBLA routines and procedures. They should be arriving with a Language Companion (LC) and portfolio of work done previously and will probably adapt quickly to the routines in the new class.

However, learners who are newly referred by an assessment centre and are unfamiliar with PBLA will require an orientation to both the Language Companion and PBLA. Often a program will have a general intake procedure that supports this. In your classroom, several strategies can also help:

- Have the LC set up and ready to go (learners could help with this).
- Set a specific/regular time in the week to give all new learners their LC and an orientation to PBLA procedures if this is not completed at the program level. Alternatively, work with a colleague to share orientation procedures: one of you can introduce the LC and PBLA while the other leads an activity with both classes.
- Partner new learners with experienced learners in the class for support while doing initial PBLA-related activities.
- Use volunteers to support the *Language Companion* orientation and other PBLA-related activities.

## References

Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. (2015). *ESL for ALL support kit*. Ottawa, ON: <http://www.language.ca/product/clb-esl-for-all-support-kit-pdf-e/>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (nd). *Language companion: ESL literacy*. Ottawa, ON: <https://www.7oaks.org/Programs/Settlement/Documents/PBLALanguage%20Companion,%20Literacy.pdf>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (nd). *Language companion: Stage one*. Ottawa, ON: <https://www.7oaks.org/Programs/Settlement/Documents/PBLALanguage%20Companion,%20CLB%201-4.pdf>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (nd). *Language companion: Stage two*. Ottawa, ON: <https://www.7oaks.org/Programs/Settlement/Documents/PBLALanguage%20Companion,%20CLB%205-8.pdf>