

**THE CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS AND ENGLISH FOR  
ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

In the British Columbia context, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curricula have been articulated and aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) in an attempt to facilitate transference nationwide (See the Articulation Guide for English as a Second Language Programs in the British Columbia Post-secondary Transfer System, 2008). Because the CLB is designed to be used as a standardized framework to assess ESL learners' proficiency across Canada, learners may need to achieve CLB levels 8-9 to enter mainstream academic programs. Nevertheless, CLBs have only partially impacted on curricula. This study examined EAP programs in relation to the CLB in a local BC college. It investigated the use of the CLB in the EAP program syllabus and its influence on curricular decisions. I interviewed teachers and administrators using structured-questions that targeted their perceptions of a) the CLB concept and critiques and b) theoretical and practical issues that affect the functionality of the CLB when used for academic purposes. The findings show that some of the reasons for implementational shortcomings seem to involve the uncertainties and ambiguities of the CLB Theoretical Framework. In addition, participants voiced their concerns about the usefulness of CLBs for preparing learners to achieve academic readiness, questioning the benchmarks functionality in such context and adopting other frameworks. Thus, I explored some of the dilemmas participants face having to assess how learners function from the CLB 'can do' standpoint in relation to a given, more generic context, i.e. English for academic purposes. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that the CLB has partially impacted on the syllabus of programs, which also prepare learners to enter mainstream post-secondary courses, namely Applied programs. For this reason, I claim that if a socio-semiotic approach would be taken in account, examining the contexts where communication takes place, these practitioners could be better equipped to achieve the goals of the program, as well as those of the learners. Additionally, because the CLB outcomes are not goal-oriented, if a clear purpose were

to be achieved, one could be able to foresee implementational demands in relation to contextual needs.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents to whom I owe everything. I am most thankful for their support and prayers, which have given me the strength I need to continue my pursuit of knowledge, to you mom and dad, my eternal gratitude.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Many English for Academic Purpose (EAP) programs that prepare learners to enter mainstream post-secondary courses in British Columbia (BC) have been aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) to facilitate transferability within the secondary school system, not only in this province, but also across the country. The use of the CLB to provide an organizing framework for EAP programs should have caused an impact on the curricula of these courses; however, the application of the CLB in this context does not seem to provide empirical evidence of its impact on curricula. In order to explore the use of the CLB and its application on the curricula of these benchmarked programs, I conducted a study that focuses on exploring both the use of and resistance to applying the CLB to inform the EAP program syllabus of a college in BC. In this chapter, I introduce the background issues and problems of CLB implementation. I also discuss the purpose of this study, examining aspects of implementation that provoked the research. Later, I present the significance of this kind of study for the ESL community. Next, I define the technical terms that underline the study. The chapter concludes with the organization of the thesis.

### **1.1. Background of the Problem**

In the BC ESL context, immigrants and international learners whose first languages are not English may need to meet language proficiency levels equivalent to the CLB levels 8 to 10<sup>1</sup> to enroll in mainstream post-secondary programs. The CLB level to be achieved varies according to the skill

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1 The CLB scale ranges from 1 to 12 and is divided in beginner (1-4); intermediate (5-8) and advanced (9-12).

assessed (The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer /BCCAT, Benchmarking First-Year English, 2008). Even though the CLB is used to assess learners' levels of proficiency across Canada, in BC especially, there is limited standardized CLB-based curriculum across the programs provided, which may cause inconsistencies in syllabi and assessment processes. Although efforts have been made by the ESL Articulation Committee to articulate the BC post-secondary English program curricula to meet the CLB outcomes (See the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer /BCCAT), in practice the CLB does not seem to have been informing EAP curriculum to date. Hence, more research to explore the use of the CLB and its application on the curricula of EAP benchmarked programs could assist the ESL community to better understand the challenges of implementing the CLB outcomes for this specific purpose.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Even though the CLB does not determine curriculum, it is designed to be used as a framework to inform benchmarked program curricula whose outcomes should be to prepare learners to be assessed using the CLB scale. In fact, the CLB seems to be seen as a tool of assessment rather than a guideline for syllabus decision-making because it attempts to provide a national standard for 'level' assessment across institutions (See Brindley, 1998, Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002, Abbott, 2004). However, there appears to be a dearth of evidence about the use and effects of the CLB in specific, local classroom contexts, especially in advanced levels. In particular, little appears to be known about the extent to which administrators and teachers use the benchmark standards as they work towards preparing learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs, which leads to the research questions this study

pursues, 1) to what degree does the CLB influence EAP curricula decisions made by teachers and administrators in a local BC college?; and 2) what practical and theoretical issues are most relevant to the processes of CLB implementation?

### **1.2.1. Implementation Issues**

Implementing the CLB in the curriculum of a program may be problematic. In fact, to distinguish the CLB from curriculum and syllabus seems to be one of the first issues. For this reason, it is important to underline the difference between them. First, in order to develop a program curriculum one has to examine who it will serve, the content to be covered and the teaching methodology that is going to be adopted (Richards, 2001). In this sense, curriculum design looks at the broad picture of the program stages step by step, organizing the content that is going to be delivered and describing how it should be presented to the learner. For instance, in the context of this present study, EAP learners should be taught the academic skills they will need to enter mainstream post-secondary programs as measured by the CLB descriptors; however, the CLB measures each band descriptor in relation to three domains, study, community and work. These other domains fall outside the main objectives in creating the curriculum of EAP programs even if their outcomes are aligned to the CLB.

Above all, curriculum is expected to foresee how the goals of the program are going to be ordered according to the outcomes to be achieved. By way of comparison, the CLB could be mistaken for a curriculum because it displays an overall plan; nevertheless, because it primarily describes levels of proficiency within three specific domains, according to the tasks that can be accomplished, and it does not orient the user to how the outcomes should be achieved, the CLB does not satisfy the criteria

of a curriculum. There is a lot more involved in the process of developing curriculum than is represented in the CLB. For instance, the specification of developmental stages, decision making roles, and products (Johnson, 1989) are three criteria of a fully developed curriculum that the CLB does not include.

A syllabus is generally concerned with the organization of one course within the whole curriculum. In essence a syllabus is one of the products of curriculum development. When developing a syllabus framework for a specific purpose program such as EAP, more refined attention to the goals of the program is needed to provide the basis for the focus and content of the course. In EAP programs aligned to the CLB the goals of the program should be to achieve the level of language proficiency described for each skill. To be granted a benchmark the learner has to be able to perform tasks according to the descriptors. For instance, the Global Performance Descriptor for writing at a benchmark level 9 states that the “learner can write formal and informal texts needed for complex routine tasks in some demanding contexts of language use (business/work, academic or social)” (CLB: 2000 p. 168). Benchmarked EAP programs should prepare learner to achieve this level of proficiency and the syllabus should include such performance as an outcome.

Naturally, one would expect that the syllabus and teaching methodology in benchmarked programs would conform to the CLB's approach. However, benchmarked program curricula could be following different approaches. For this reason this present study investigates the syllabus of an EAP program, a more refined representation of curriculum, in search of a more in-depth evaluation of correlations between the CLB outcomes and the syllabus outcomes of this specific program. The study also attempts to analyze specific reasons educators might give for either adopting or resisting the CLB.

### **1.2.2. Decision-making Roles**

The CLB was developed based on models of communicative competence (See Chapter Two for a review of the CLB Theoretical Framework). The theory that underlies the CLB should impact on the pedagogical practices that implement benchmarked programs. Consequently, in decision-making roles, curriculum writers, teacher trainers, administrators and teachers need to associate the philosophy behind the benchmarks to those of their programs in order to produce teaching materials and curricula that support and promote the CLB outcomes.

Although administrators decide which framework should be utilized in the program to serve learners' needs and prepare them to achieve the level of proficiency and goals they desire, teachers should be the ones responsible for deciding which materials and syllabus would better suit the program and learners' goals (Rodgers, 1984). Administrators' concerns involve programs and implementational policies and their perspectives are relevant to this study because observing implementation from their viewpoints may provide a macro-picture of issues, constraints, and reasons for curricular decision-making. Similarly, teachers' perspectives are essential as they are closer to implementation impacts in the classroom and its affects on learners. From teachers' standpoints one is able to sense the process of implementing curricular frameworks in practice. For instance, their experiences of the impact of the syllabus and classwork can assist and inform administrative decisions.

In that sense, the roles of administrators and teachers are interrelated and complement each other. Furthermore, those two decision-making stakeholders should work collaboratively to provide a smooth flow of the goals each party needs to achieve. Unquestionably, those who hold decision-making positions directly influence the challenges of producing framework outcomes in the classroom.

### **1.2.3. Teaching Materials and Teaching Acts**

Ultimately, the teacher is the one who has the role of implementing curriculum in the classroom, making the material chosen for the course work towards the goals of the program, and choosing other resources to be used in the classroom. Such responsibility requires teachers to be knowledgeable about the many elements of the teaching process. According to Roberts (1998), a teacher's knowledge can be divided into the following categories: practical; content; contextual; pedagogical; personal, and; reflective knowledge. Therefore, choices of teaching materials should be made by knowledgeable teachers because it is their selection of teaching materials that serves as a key resource to promote effective curriculum outcomes.

In any event, all the steps of the teaching process should be intertwined with all the variables at stake, namely, the CLB framework, benchmarked programs' curricula, assessment tools and stakeholders (e.g. teachers, administrators, learners and the ESL community at large, and so on). In an ideal world, all these variables inform each other in order to achieve the goals of the process.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

This study examines the application of the CLB in the syllabus of an EAP program in a college that is part of the BC Articulation System, studying both administrators' and teachers' viewpoints. Since in benchmarked courses the CLB should be realized through the syllabus, including the text selection, program goals, and assessment processes, what the study inquires into is how the CLB has been informing a local benchmarked EAP course syllabus.

The specific goal of the study is to examine some of the reasons why practitioners would refrain from using the CLB higher-level descriptors, more precisely CLB benchmarks for levels eight and nine

in reading and writing, to inform syllabi in this EAP program. This question was put forward to administrators and teachers to collect their reasons for possibly not fully articulate the use of the benchmarks in their program.

The sub-goals of this study are fourfold: 1) to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of possible correlation between the CLB outcomes and the texts and learner activities to achieve the course goals; 2) to explore examples of classwork as potential instantiations of the CLB descriptors; 3) to gather information about administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the theory that underlies the CLB descriptors 4) to analyze administrators' and teachers' reasons for using, or not, the CLB to assist the achievement of the program goals.

By collecting information about the administrators' and teachers' perceptions of various aspects in their EAP program, I examine the factors that pertain to the challenges to applying the CLB descriptors in this specific context. For this reason, it is also important to understand two steps of implementation — program implementation and classroom implementation.

### **1.3.1. Understanding Aspects of Implementation**

When implementing an EAP program, the type of language to be learned, the level of proficiency, and the specific purpose of the course demarcate the goals and outcomes of the applicable curriculum. In this sense, there is an internal relationship between what motivates learners to take an EAP program, the appropriate teaching methodology according to learning goals, and the clarity of what goals are to be achieved in the program. Pedagogical and curriculum goals ought to take careful account of the goals of the learners, and in benchmarked EAP programs these goals should also be



interwoven with the CLB outcomes.

The role of classwork is to serve as a vehicle for the teaching and learning of the outcomes to be achieved in the course. Classroom implementation is a more specific level of implementation because it is susceptible to immediate responses that can and should reflect changes in the upper levels of implementation. As a result, examining teachers' selections of materials to prepare learners to achieve these benchmarked outcomes provides useful insights into how classwork informs curriculum, syllabus change and needed program modifications owing to difficulties or shortcomings during the process of implementing a new syllabus in the classroom. Research should therefore look for evidence at the practical level of implementation in order to find solutions to the problems that arise in the classroom setting.

### **1.3.2. Research Question**

In order to answer the research questions, 1) to what degree does the CLB influence EAP curricula decisions made by teachers and administrators in a local BC college? And 2) what practical and theoretical issues are most relevant to the processes of CLB implementation? I approached the study assuming that the CLB does not inform a local benchmarked EAP curriculum, an assumption based on informal but extensive observation. I investigated the reasons administrators and teachers have for not using the benchmarks to inform the syllabus of their EAP program. In simple terms, this study looks at a) the frameworks used to inform the EAP syllabus; b) CLB theoretical shortcomings, and; c) the relation between practical and theoretical issues.

The study focuses on the role of the CLB in this EAP program examining two aspects of concern

a) practical issues, i.e. what are the impediments to pedagogical implementation of the benchmarks into curricula, or; b) theoretical issues, e.g. do CLB descriptors instantiate EAP goals? Moreover, it is important to stress that the study is about use and resistance to apply the CLB to inform the syllabus of one local EAP program that is aligned to the benchmarks, according to practitioners in the institution to investigate the problem in this one context. The answers given by the administrators and teachers interviewed for this study provided substantial data; the implications of these responses are discussed in Chapter Four.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

Ever since I started teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and later ESL, I have been intrigued by learners' frustrations and difficulties to achieve their ultimate goals in the target language. Many of my students are compelled to learn English as an additional language to fulfill job requirements, or to pursue further education. My role as a teacher is to select materials and design a syllabus that facilitates students acquiring the skills they need to achieve their goals. However, as a teacher, I also have to implement curricular practices imposed by programs' outcomes, which may not support learners' goals. At times, balancing out these variables is quite challenging.

Most recently, I have been teaching in the English Language Center of a college in Vancouver where students are prepared to achieve English language proficiency to enter University Transfer programs. The EAP courses offered by this college are articulated to other EAP programs in BC and aligned to the CLB because this institution is a member of the British Columbia Post-secondary Transfer System, as many other BC colleges (for a list of colleges see Articulation Guide for English as

a Second Language Programs in the British Columbia Post-secondary Transfer System, 2008).

Despite the fact that our EAP programs are aligned to the CLB, we adopt other frameworks to prepare learners to post-secondary academic programs. This fact made me wonder about the reasons for using the CLB only for level equivalence without changing curricula to reflect the benchmarks. I was immediately curious about other colleges' curricula and assessment practices. This curiosity instigated the questions that led me to start this present study.

This study is significant for two reasons. First, considering that the syllabi in most benchmarked EAP programs in BC do not directly reflect the benchmarks, local EAP programs may be struggling to fit their goals into CLB outcomes; it is important to learn to what extent the CLB is useful for EAP. For this reason, a close examination of one instance in which this disconnection may occur can provide better understanding of the struggles practitioners may undergo when having to implement the CLB into the classroom.

Second, because the CLB provides a common ground for most ESL stakeholders in the Canadian context, a critical investigation, from both administrators' and teachers' viewpoints, about the reasons for refraining to use the CLB for preparing learners to succeed in mainstream post-secondary academic programs could provide answers and suggestions for a more successful implementation of the CLB in EAP program syllabus.

In effect, finding out to what degree the CLB outcomes are present in a syllabus, the program goals and learners' assessment of a local EAP benchmarked program can benefit those who need to implement the CLB in their courses. Primarily, this study proposes to investigate how the CLB is used in the syllabus of this local EAP benchmarked program in order to evaluate what dilemmas

practitioners face and whether they are of practical or theoretical nature. A second point is to examine the usefulness of the CLB for EAP programs. In this sense, the study can serve as a vehicle to voice critiques that administrators and teachers may have about the alignment of their EAP to the CLB.

## **1.5. Definition of the Vocabulary**

The major terms used in this study to refer to the CLB are found in *CLB 2000: Theoretical Framework* glossary of terms (pp.66-79). The CLB glossary unfolds the theoretical approach of the CLB. The terms that are relevant to the study are the following:

- 1. Benchmarks:** A reference point: a statement describing what a person can do in English as a second language at a given level of communicative proficiency in four competency areas (social interaction, instructions, suasion, and information) (p. 66).
- 2. Framework:** A proficiency framework is an overall structure, based on models of communicative proficiency (language ability), and relating descriptions of language use, language teaching, and language assessment. CLB is a framework of reference for adult ESL learning and ESL programming (p.74).
- 3. Register:** Language varying according to the function it is to serve. Register depends on what activity is going on, who the participants are, and what role the language is playing (the purpose to be achieved). (p. 79).
- 4. Assessment:** Often used interchangeably with evaluation. However, in its stricter sense, while evaluation focuses on the past (what has occurred and how it happened), assessment focuses on the present and the future (what is or what should be). Language assessment is often used instead of the term 'language testing', both for purposes of placement (placing learners in appropriate programs) or achievement (assessing learner outcomes against program objectives) (p.66).
- 5. Outcomes:** In the CLB framework, curriculum outcomes (end results) are related to curriculum / syllabus objectives (specific goals set in the beginning). Both are derived from the CLB standards. Outcomes are actual results measured against the initial objectives, and tell us what a person can do in accomplishing tasks in English at various Benchmark levels after participating in a CLB based curriculum as a learner (p. 78).

I use a socio-semiotics theory of language, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as a lens to examine the CLB theoretical intent and usefulness for EAP specifically (later discussed in Chapter 5). In this sense, SFL provides the theoretical framework to investigate the CLB utility for EAP preparation, through the use of a text-context theory. For this reason, Hallidayan terms, for instance field, genre, and functionality, amongst others are defined next. In Chapter Five, SFL is further discussed. Thus, SFL terms relevant to the study are,

6. Instantiation: The relation between system (potential) and instance (particular text). System is the potential that lies behind all the various instances (Halliday, 2007, p.275).
7. Field: Refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs, and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but the whole activity of the speaker or participant in a setting (Halliday, 1978, p. 33).
8. Tenor: Refers to the relationship between participants, not merely variation in formality but such questions as the permanence or otherwise of the relationship and the degree of emotional charge in it (Halliday, 1978, p. 33).
9. Mode: Refers to channel of communication adopted: not only the choice between spoken and written medium, but much more delicate choices related to role of language and situation. (Halliday, 1978, p. 33).
10. Genre: General purpose of a text within a culture identified in text structure and social purpose; structural pattern (Based on Butt et al., 2000).
11. Functionality: Goal-oriented; serving the purpose and achieving the goal it aims to reach according to field, tenor and mode, i.e. the functionality of a framework is measured by the degree to which it fulfills the goals imposed by context, participants and channels of communication.

## **1.6. Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter Two presents the CLB and is divided in three parts. First, it looks at the background of the CLB, addressing the theoretical framework and discussing its linguistic backgrounds and the

relationship between the theoretical framework and the benchmarks. The second part focuses on the implementation of the CLB, addressing its influence on pedagogical approaches and the impact on curriculum and assessment, looking at the BC Post-secondary Articulation process. The final part presents a critique on the CLB theoretical approach and examines the CLB theoretical approach and the concept of task in the CLB.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used in the study. It presents the research site, participants and the data collected, providing recording procedures, the material sampled and the theory of the interviews. It also addresses the methodology of analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings, the CLB perceptions, major issues and functionality implications. Lastly, Chapter Five presents recommendations for changes that should be made to assist practitioners in the dilemmas they face to achieve learners' and programs' goals and implement curricula under the scope of SFL text-context theory. In conclusion, it presents a synopsis of the study and suggests areas where there is a need for further research.

## **Chapter 2. The Canadian Language Benchmarks**

This chapter presents a review of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), its elaboration, theoretical framework and implementation. It also offers a critical examination of the CLB theoretical approach, looking at the gaps and inconsistencies in the Theoretical Framework. The chapter begins with the standardization movement and the benchmarking approach, examining the reasons for a national benchmark movement in Canada and the creation of a work group to develop the CLB. Next, it addresses the principles of CLB Theoretical Framework, its linguistic backgrounds and the relationships between the Theoretical Framework and the benchmark descriptors. Then, it examines the pedagogical approaches promoted by the CLB, as well as the CLB impact on curriculum and assessment, also looking at the BC Curriculum Articulation for ESL Programs initiative, which aligned ESL programs to the CLB. In conclusion, I look at the CLB concept of communicative tasks, questioning aspects of goal orientation and contextualization of such tasks as a means to achieve communicative proficiency.

### **2.1 Background: The Standardization Movement and the Benchmarking Approach**

The standardization movement started as a response to the communicative competence approach initiated in the early 1970s (See Hymes, 1972; Leech & Svartvik, 1975; Swain 1985; Nunan 1987; Savignon, 1990), and the need to define more specifically the notion of language proficiency in order to measure levels of competence of language use (Hadley, 2001). Measuring competence meant to evaluate learners' language use in a given and specific context (Higgs and Clifford, 1982). Looking more closely at the North American context, one finds the American Council on Teaching Foreign

Languages (ACTFL) as an example of an institution that adopts the benchmarking approach.

In the Canadian scenario, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) noted that when immigrants arrive in Canada, they need to have their language proficiency assessed and classified if they want to find a job or go to school. The CIC realized that immigrant language assessment and classification could be made easier if there was a standardized framework to be used by educational institutions, employers and learners equally. In response to such needs the CLB was created as a tool to be accessibly used by all stakeholders, i.e. ESL practitioners, employers and learners (CLB: 2000).

### **2.1.1. A Response to the Language Learning Needs of Immigrants**

In search for a common method that described the English proficiency of adult ESL learners in Canada, the CIC started an investigation and detected that there was no standard “instrument, tool or set of “benchmarks” appropriate to Canadian newcomers’ needs.” (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, CCLB, 2009). Therefore, the CIC decided to provide support and training to ESL practitioners for the creation of the first version of the CLB, the 'Working Document', issued in 1996, to standardize the levels of English proficiency across the country.

The CLB mandate is to serve as a reference to assess the language proficiency of ESL/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) population in Canada, measuring learners' ability to use the language “they need to enter a program of study, occupation, or profession”, so learners can plan “their own paths of language learning to attain their goals” (CLB: 2000, p. v).

### **2.1.2. The National Working Group on Language Benchmarks**

The National Working Group on Language Benchmarks (NWGLB) was established in 1993,



made up of teachers, program administrators, government officials, and immigrant groups from across the country to inform and assist the team of writers working with Grazyna Pawlikowska Smith in order to develop the CLB (CCLB, 2010).

The 1996 CLB document, containing 12 bands on oral communication, writing and reading skills, was officially recognized by the CIC as the instrument to classify learners' English competence, and at the same time, to serve the ESL community in the country with a standardized tool to measuring learners' language skills (CIC, 1996).

The following step the NWGLB took was to create the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) in order to give support to the implementation of the CLB across the country (CCLB, 2009). Those were the planning stages of the creation of the CLB, in which government institutions, i.e. CCLB, the English Language Service for Adults (ELSA), the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program (LINC), amongst others, had intense participation. However, the benchmarks are designed to serve the ESL community in Canada as a whole, to provide a common reference to language teaching and learning.

### **2.1.3 A Common Approach to ESL Proficiency**

The CLB is mostly a tool for level assessment because it is a scale of communicative proficiency, described in statements of progressive ESL performance tasks. However, it is also intended to provide “a common professional foundation of shared philosophical and theoretical views on language education” (CLB: 2000, p. VIII). Through the CLB, ESL learners can be trained and assessed according to their language knowledge and skills.

The CLB is not a curriculum, nor is it meant to prescribe curriculum. Nevertheless, in spite of

being designed as a tool of assessment, the CLB can be used as reference for planning ESL curricula. With that in mind, the CLB: 2000 provides a section about what may need to be taught to prepare learners to achieve a given benchmark after each stage and for each skill (For an example, see the CLB: 2000, p.17).

In order to understand the benchmarks it is advisable to look at the *Theoretical Framework*, *Additional Samples and Task Ideas*, *Companion Tables*, *a Guide to implementation*, and various CLB based assessment tools created to complement the CLB descriptors (CCLB, 2009). These adjunct documents were designed along the years perhaps with the intention to help implement the benchmarks into programs.

Amongst the four documents cited, the *CLB 2000: Theoretical Framework* is the one that provides the theoretical background and the philosophical approach that underlines the CLB; the *CLB 2000: Additional Samples and Task Ideas* displays a list of sample task ideas in the four skills of language proficiency; the *CLB 2000: Companion Tables* provides an overview of all benchmarks from 1 to 12, and the *CLB 2000: A Guide to implementation* gives practical applications of the CLB.

Although these documents seem to focus on curricular implementation, the CLB has been mostly used as an assessment scale. A statement for appropriate uses of the CLB guidelines and assessment tools emphasize the purpose of the CLB to describe, measure, and recognize second language proficiency of immigrants for living and working in Canada. It also suggests that the CLB could be used for international college and high school learners, for work-related purposes, children and young-teens, aboriginal Canadian learners, adult-Canadian born learning an other official language of Canada, which is the case of Francophones learning English, or Anglophones learning French (The French benchmarks, the Niveaux de Competence Linguistique Canadiens, NCLC, would be applied).

Ten years after the CLB was last issued, a review of the benchmarks is scheduled for 2010, and for this reason a National Consultation on the CLB: 2000 has already started. The Consultation takes

place concomitantly with this present study, and surveys ESL practitioners to collect information about recommendations they may have. The survey also considers new uses, applications and new contexts in which the benchmarks have been applied. For this reason the Consultation has the following outcomes: validation of the current structure of the CLB, understanding of the core services to be offered by the CLB; future directions maximizing potentials, and planning for future advancement (CCLB, 2009). This national investigation on the applications of the CLB may shed light on the benchmarks' shortcomings as a common approach to ESL teaching and learning nationwide.

## **2.2 The CLB Theoretical Framework (TF)**

To understand the CLB philosophical and theoretical views, one needs to engage with the *CLB: Theoretical Framework*. This document looks at three models of communicative competence that draw on Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) models of communicative competence, all of which refer back to Hymes (1972) concept of communicative competence. In effect, the *CLB Theoretical Framework* examines language ability in two parts, linguistic and strategic.

The models of communicative competence cited above inform Bachman's model of communicative language ability (1990) and Bachman and Palmer's model (1996). In turn, Bachman and Palmer's model underlies the CLB understanding of communicative proficiency. It is a five competence model that looks at the following competences: 1) linguistic (grammar); 2) textual (Coherence, cohesion); 3) functional (pragmatic); 4) socio-cultural (sociolinguistic), and; 5) strategic (communicative language ability). The CLB associates Bachman and Palmer's 1996 model to Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell (1995) pedagogical model of communicative competence to measure language proficiency in the benchmarks.

These models look at language from a social perspective and require practitioners who adopt the

benchmarks to observe learners' language knowledge from two standpoints, organizational and pragmatic (As described in Bachman and Palmer, 1996, p. 68). As a result, the CLB identifies learners' proficiency levels and measures what they can do using the language, describing the learner's proficiency in statements. In this sense, the benchmarks are proficiency indicators according to level (Beginner to Advanced), skill (Oral, writing and reading) and domain (Work, school and community).

### **2.2.1 The Nature and Scope of the TF**

In essence, the *CLB Theoretical Framework* looks at proficiency from a communicative competence standpoint. It refers to communicative proficiency as competence to communicate based on Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model of communicative proficiency. However, if there is a line between the terms proficiency and competence, it does not seem to be clearly demarcated. Whether these terms are seen as equivalent, it is not clear either. The CLB defines proficiency as,

Degree of skill in communication measured without reference to a particular curriculum. (Oxford p.237) It includes: 1. communicative competence / language ability (organizational and pragmatic language competence, or what the learner knows, and strategic competence activated in a situation of language use), and 2. performance, which is observable and measurable. (Bachman, 1990; Savignon, 1972, cited in the *CLB Theoretical Framework*, p.89)

In other words, the CLB seems to understand proficiency as the ability to perform Bachman and Palmer's competences. This communicative proficiency approach examines language knowledge in two parts, organizational language knowledge and pragmatic language knowledge. Organizational language knowledge involves grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge. The former addresses vocabulary, syntax, phonology and graphology, and the latter looks at cohesion and rhetorical organization. Organizational knowledge according to this model seems to focus on form, while

pragmatic language knowledge is concerned with function.

Bachman and Palmer's model further divides pragmatic knowledge in two, sociolinguistic knowledge and functional knowledge. Sociolinguistic knowledge accounts for knowledge of dialects, registers, natural expressions, cultural references, and figures of speech. Additionally, functional knowledge is divided in ideational, manipulative, heuristic and imaginative (Bachman and Palmer, 1996, p. 68). These four functional types of knowledge are central to the CLB approach to measuring learners' communicative proficiency and are called macro-functions.

These macro-functions are summarized in the *CLB Theoretical Framework* as competence areas to be achieved. On the one hand, it looks at social interaction; instructions and suasion (getting things done), called the manipulative macro-function and information competences (expressing information, knowledge, opinions), classified as ideational macro-function. On the other hand, heuristic and imaginative macro-functions are defined as non-communicative language use, where strategies and activities such as learning, practising, rehearsing, memorizing, processing, playing, and enjoying, in spite of their contribution to the acquisition of the more communicative competence, are not considered to be communicative.

ESL practitioners using the CLB for curricular and assessment practices should follow this model of competences to inform curricular outcomes. Moreover, ESL learners need to be aware of these competences to accomplish the tasks needed to demonstrate communicative proficiency according to the CLB standards because looking at proficiency from a communicative competence standpoint underlies the nature of the *CLB Theoretical Framework*.

### **2.2.2 Linguistic Background of the TF**

The CLB follows a pragmatic approach to language, looking at speech acts, discourse, politeness,

and communicative competence following Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) models. Moreover, the CLB adopts a theory of language proficiency rather than a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) one, which may cause some difficulties to implementing the benchmarks in ESL curricula because the theoretical approaches may be different.

As opposed to most ESL programs, the benchmarks are not linear, sequential or additive. The CLB looks at communication ability within certain contexts each of which demands a more delicate level of competence and consequently the realization of more complex tasks; however, they most likely may not follow the same rank of complexity present in ESL program curricula.

In essence, the *CLB 2000: Theoretical Framework* states that in the CLB “the communicative competencies are not grammar-driven, but 'meaning and function-driven” (p. 25). It defines 'communicative competence' as,

Competence to communicate; knowledge of the language; knowledge (conscious and formalized or not) of rules for comprehension and production of correct and appropriate language and discourse; a complex system of rules operating simultaneously at many levels that determine the choice and organization of grammatical forms for communication and other language functions; underlying ability to perform language functions; mastery of the use of language; the ability to utilize language effectively in a given language community. (Theoretical Framework, p. 76).

In other words, the CLB adopts Bachman and Palmer's model to measuring competence to communicate, examining; organizational and pragmatic language knowledge to indicate language proficiency. According to the CLB, communicative proficiency is achieved when the learner combines organizational and pragmatic language knowledge with strategic competence when performing a task.

The CLB:2000 states that the benchmarks are task-based and that the “task-based proficiency descriptors in the CLB have a clear language competence focus to ensure that it is *language proficiency*, not non-linguistic skills, that are being primarily described” (p. VIII, bold in the original text). Because the CLB is task-based, it may suggest the use of the task-based approach as a

pedagogical practice to improve learners' communication proficiency; however, the CLB does not provide clear guidance to 'how' learners can achieve the communicative proficiency measured in the benchmarks.

Assessing communicative proficiency according to the CLB without a 'common' application of what 'communicative' means may not help practitioners to have 'a common professional foundation of shared philosophical and theoretical views on language education'. By simply looking at the CLB models of communicative proficiency, following a 'common' approach to implementing the CLB in the classroom may be a challenge.

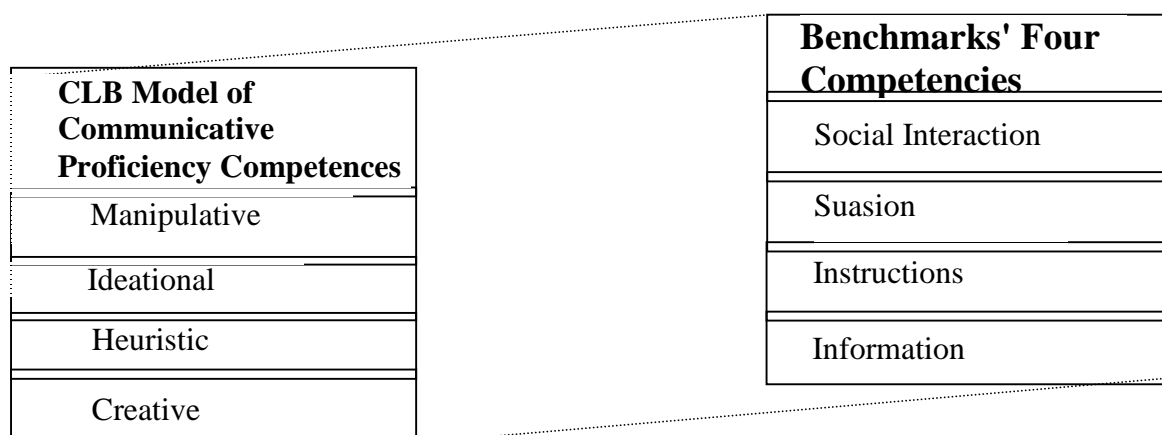
### **2.2.3 Relationships between the TF and the Benchmarks**

As seen earlier, the CLB measures communicative proficiency according to Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model; however, the descriptors were elaborated also based on the concept of language use, following Coder (1973)'s concept of language usefulness that looks at frequency, functionality and utility. In other words, the benchmark descriptors are based on language use and “how useful and important they are in real communication situations and tasks that a newcomer learner may encounter in the community, in educational contexts, and on the job” (Theoretical Framework, p. 25). This approach begs a question: does the CLB model of communicative proficiency competences match the benchmarks' competencies of social interaction, suasion, instruction and information?

As discussed earlier, the CLB theoretical model is divided in four macro-functions while the benchmark bands describe four competencies according to language usefulness. The CLB states that the descriptors describe competencies and,

A competency can usually be further broken down into smaller components. Examples of competencies: “can take part in a short casual exchange/small talk”; “can write a note to someone or leave a voice-mail message for a specified purpose” (p. 25).

The four areas Competencies are divided in, social interaction; instructions; suasion, and; information. They are 'observable and measurable outcomes' and should match the outcomes of CLB-based curricula, as suggested in the *CLB Theoretical Framework* (p. 26). However, the benchmarks are performance indicators that describe what a learner can do at each level of proficiency. Nevertheless, the connection between the descriptors and the theoretical model is not clear (See Figure 2.1 below).



*Figure 2.1* The Unclear Connection between the CLB Model and the Benchmarks

It seems that the benchmark descriptors follow another approach different than that measured by the communicative proficiency competences. However, in fact the CLB examines proficiency from these two angles and adds two more elements to it, functions/uses and dominant skills (See Table 2.1).

In order to understand the relationship between the theoretical intent and the benchmarks one may need to draw a connection between the proficiency **competences** and the language use **competencies** to understand how they complement each other. The CLB text differentiates them by using the terms 'competence' and 'competency'; however, the connection one holds to the other is not sufficiently well developed.



Table 2.1 *Benchmark Competencies and the CLB Macro-functions Competences*

Macro-Functions	Manipulative	Ideational	Heuristic	Creative
Functions/ Uses	Interpersonal Directive	Referential/ expressing and exchanging facts, ideas, feelings	Learning/thinking/ problem solving	Creating / enjoying
Dominant Skills	Interactional Transactional		Thinking skills Learning skills	Creativity
Benchmark	"Social Interaction"	"Information"	No benchmark	No benchmark
Competencies	"Instructions" "Suasion"		standards	standards

The Table above summarizes the CLB proficiency assessment approach, looking at macro-functions, functions/uses, dominant skills and their relations to the benchmark competencies. To implement benchmark outcomes one has to associate these four approaches to prepare for and assess language proficiency.

## 2.3 Implementing the CLB

Looking at communicative competence in order to measure communicative proficiency without specifying how the outcomes should be achieved, or how to implement the theoretical model in the classroom may be problematic. Therefore, in order to apply the CLB in curriculum and assessment, ESL practitioners could benefit from having a clear, step-by-step model of implementation.

In this sense, the *Guide to Implementation (2000)* may be a useful document to assist

practitioners develop CLB-based curricula. It dedicates one chapter to curriculum development (Chapter Six), divided in five sections, *planning a curriculum, planning a course, planning a module/unit of work, planning a lesson, as well as helpful readings*.

The *Guide* carefully points out the difference between the terms curriculum and syllabus stating the following,

A curriculum is a generic framework on which courses for specific groups of learners can be based. It includes philosophy, purposes, design and implementation of a whole program. A syllabus specifies the content of the course with principles for ordering/sequencing elements of the content. It defines the what, why, the sequence and often, the how of the course (p. 79).

The *Guide* portrays syllabus as an instantiation (representation), a more delicate representation of the generic term curriculum. However, it is concerned with curriculum per se. It follows Stenhouse's steps of curriculum development and draws on Nunan's (1992) recommendations for the need of carrying out analyses for the development and implementation of curriculum explaining that,

A needs analysis for curriculum development takes into account the need of all stakeholders with interest in curriculum. This includes all the potential groups of learners with their diverse backgrounds, communicative goals, language learning needs, learning styles, general education needs etc. (1992a, p.82).

In other words, designing curricula means to look at outcomes in order to plan the best approach to achieve them. Therefore, the CLB outcomes should relate to learners' goals in benchmarked programs, and curricula need to account for them. For this reason, the *Guide to Implementation* argues for advantages of developing curriculum based on the CLB. It states that because the benchmarks are meant to concatenate the content to be learned within a specific period of time, and foresees proficiency progression in a well-structured fashion; thus,

A curriculum based on the CLB framework provides some continuity over time. In addition, many Adult ESL programs and classrooms operate without a curriculum. Teachers plan interesting, engaging lessons and activities for learners based on the understanding of learners' interests and goals for learning English. They gather information and suggestions from published textbooks and other sources and create units or modules based on themes and functions of interest to learners. However, in the absence of a curriculum, it may not be clear to learners or teachers how these individual activities and lessons fit into an overall plan. A curriculum linked to the CLB can provide this overall plan, linking a course to related courses and to courses and programs across Canada (p.83).

Apparently the core argument of the *Guide*, ascertaining the coordination of a whole program from the lowest level to the most advanced in a clear and coherent manner across the country, resonates with the CLB purpose to serve as the standard framework nationwide. It also suggests that those who choose to incorporate the CLB into their programs should be assisted with a tool of great calibre. However, the tone of discourse in the *Guide* has been criticized as being self-promotional and imposing on teachers and administrators a solution to problems they may face when developing their own curricula. In this sense, the *Guide* does not seem to have effectively helped practitioners implement the benchmarks. The following is a critique that addressed the *Guide* shortcomings,

Unfortunately the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation (Guide) is less successful. This text is meant to interpret and clarify Benchmarks for teachers and program administrators. It fails in large part because it is more accurate to say that this document is designed to convince teachers that benchmarks are more effective and appropriate basis for language teaching and program planning and that they are a useful and usable exposition of competency-based language teaching. This gives the text a promotional cast, an effect heightened by the inclusion of testimonial inserts (Cray, 2003, p.619).

Cray's critique also suggests that the benchmarks have been presenting problems in their implementation, and that practitioners need clarification to interpret the benchmarks to apply them into

curricula, but that they have not been assisted in that matter. A guide to implementation that does not assist practitioners with *how* to implement the benchmarks falls short of making implementation accessible or easy. One may even question the usefulness of the CLB if the descriptors are difficult to implement, or if they do not match the outcomes practitioners want learners to achieve.

Perhaps the lack of specificity in the CLB is due to careful attention to not interfere in teachers' autonomy and decision-making. The CLB text vehemently states that it is not meant to be used as a prescription for elaborating curricula or assessment tools (See CLB: 2000, p. VIII); however, the extent to which standardized frameworks allow for teacher curriculum decision making may be questionable.

Teachers' autonomy in curriculum decision-making brings up concepts of power and agency (Kumaravadilevu, 2001), and national frameworks could be a threat to such autonomy, where teachers may be assimilated into the overall plan that these frameworks provide (Brindley, 1989; Moore, 1997). Nevertheless, the CCLB refutes such claims, emphasizing that the CLB serves only as a guideline for curriculum planning purposes. Practitioners are encouraged to use the benchmarks for planning purposes, but the CLB only provides ESL practitioners with an idea of developmental and linguistic needs of the learner (CCLB, 2009).

Because of such unspecific guidance, the benchmarks may represent a challenge to curriculum developers, especially for those who need to plan CLB-based curricula because their programs are aligned to the benchmark descriptors. At least they are free to decide how their programs' outcomes need to be achieved. Whether the CLB is going to be chosen to assist curricular goals may depend on how useful benchmarks are for achieving the program's goals.

Apparently the *CLB Guide to Implementation* has not been helping practitioners implement the CLB descriptors into curricula. In fact, it has fomented discussions about assessment, more precisely with regards to task difficulty. Assessing learners using the CLB descriptors as a base appears to be one of the issues practitioners face when following the CLB standards. Fox and Courchène (2003) claim

that assessing task proficiency according to the CLB is difficult to manage without assistance because of uncertainties one may have when interpreting the descriptors,

The CLB identify three proficiency stages (basic, intermediate and advanced), with four benchmarked standards at each stage. According to the CLB scale, these stages are marked by “progressively more demanding communication tasks and contexts, and progressively higher expectations and quality of communication” (CLB, 2003, xi). However, although the CLB descriptors of proficiency standards provide a general overview of increasing language proficiency, individual institutions, program coordinators, curriculum developers and language teachers across Canada have been left to their own devices in managing the inherent ambiguity in the proficiency descriptors themselves, as well as the messiness that characterizes the progression of task difficulty (2003, p.14).

The difficulty of assessing proficiency based on tasks according to the CLB descriptors may cause problems with curricular implementation as well. Nevertheless, the CLB claims that it can be used to inform curriculum development, without dictating, or prescribing rules for such. If that is the case, pedagogical practices should be naturally aligned to the CLB approach.

### **2.3.1 Pedagogical Approaches Promoted by the CLB**

Because the benchmarks are task-based, they seem to favour the task-based pedagogical approach. The task-based approach has been widely utilized by ESL practitioners as a means of using the communicative approach (Stern, 1992; Estaire and Zanon, 1994; Willis, 1996). Nevertheless, one of the main challenges of implementing the CLB in curriculum is to deal with the broad generalization of its task descriptors, as Fox and Courchêne (2003) claim. Another challenge is to organize a task-based outline according to task-difficulty and level of proficiency.

One way to approach tasks is to look at Nunan's (1991) approach. Nunan classifies tasks as open and closed. He claims that “an open task is one in which there is no single correct answer, whereas a

closed task is one in which there is a single correct answer or a restricted number of correct answers” (1989, p.285). In analyzing how learners perform these two distinct tasks, Nunan found that these different task types stimulated different performance patterns, suggesting that different levels of learner competency would benefit more from one type of task than the other. In this sense, task selection would depend on the pedagogical goal the syllabus has.

Another way to approach task is to look at gap task, which Pica (2005) defines as Nunan's closed task. Pica further suggests that gap tasks require an exchange of accurate and comprehensible information for the task to be accomplished successfully. Consequently, more attention is given to negotiation of meaning and form in a collaborative manner. Pica claims that gap tasks are goal-oriented, and tag essential forms; however, she questions the authenticity of such activities and claims they are difficult to incorporate into curriculum, especially for research purposes to pilot or verify the efficacy of such activities.

A third approach to task is suggested by Long (1995). Long's target tasks are defined as, “those identified as required in order for an individual to function adequately in a particular target domain, be it occupational, vocational, or academic” (p.91). Target tasks seem to resonate with what learners are required to perform in order to achieve the CLB level descriptors for each domain. However, Long (2007) warns practitioners that there is a need for reliable and valid task-based achievement assessment that is authentic enough to reproduce real world contexts in order to be valid task-based performance tests. Due to the complexity of task-based activities, before going further on the subject, it is important to understand the concept of task more precisely.

### **2.3.2 Task-based Pedagogical Approaches**

In *Task-based teaching and learning* (2003), Ellis states that a task differs from an activity in that

tasks require six criterial features. A task is a work plan; it focuses on meaning; it involves real-world processes of language use; it can involve any of the four skills; it engages cognitive process; and it has a clearly defined communicative outcome (p. 9). Ellis goes on to explain that in designing task-based language programs one should be concerned with task types that realize the outcomes of the syllabus. If the syllabus is thematic based, tasks should be unfocused on specific language features. In case features of language, for instance structures or form, are the goal of the syllabus, the tasks should be linguistically focused.

Other studies prior to Ellis' provide further understanding of the concept of task (e.g. Long, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Long and Crookes, 1992; Coughlan and Duff, 1994). These studies mostly emphasize the fact that tasks should be organized according to difficulty and the cognitive demand needed for the task to be accomplished. Cognitive demand seems to be what measures proficiency competence in the CLB. One of the advantages of creating a task-based syllabus for CLB-based programs is that it enables practitioners to assess learners' proficiency in performance. However, Fox and Courchène (2003) suggest that because teachers tend to evaluate tasks based on subjectivity, they should follow a standardized guideline. Whether the CLB could be the standardized guideline to help eliminate assessment subjectivity still appears to be a questionable matter.

A task-based curriculum approach suggests a hands-on learning process in which learners and teachers are engaged in using language for contextualized meaning-making. Nevertheless, a standardized framework that is task-based, such as the CLB, should align its theoretical framework into curriculum and assessment. Whether that is the case of the CLB, it will depend on how clear the theoretical intent is and how it relates to the benchmarks. Otherwise, CLB-based teaching and learning approaches may be undermined.

The purpose of having a framework such as the CLB is to support the practice of most if not all ESL stakeholders involved in the learning process. Pedagogical approaches should resonate the

theoretical framework they are implementing. In this sense, using a task-based approach could assist practitioners to apply the CLB in the classroom. Therefore, CLB-based programs may be compelled to follow such an approach in order to facilitate the implementation of benchmarks in both curriculum and assessment.

In addition to the task-based approach, the CLB adopts proficiency-based and competency based approaches<sup>3</sup> as stated in the *Theoretical Framework* document,

The CLB is both proficiency-based and competence-and-task-based. It combines the concept of proficiency bands (general benchmark descriptors, 1 to 12) with competencies and tasks as specific criterion-based standards for each band (social interaction, instructions, suasion, and information competencies for each Benchmark)  
(*Theoretical Framework*, p. 37)

These outcome-based approaches together with the task-based pedagogies may serve as reference to CLB-based programs in order to facilitate CLB implementation in the classroom. In these ways, the CLB appears to have promoted pedagogical approaches that might already be used in most ESL programs. Nevertheless, practitioners may choose not to use these approaches altogether.

### **2.3.3 The CLB Impact on Curriculum and Assessment**

As much as the CLB is not the only framework to assess ESL learners' academic readiness, it should be used to inform the curricula of benchmarked courses in order to allow for fair assessment. However, the benchmarks may not serve EAP programs' goals due to the scope of contexts it is designed for.

Because the Canadian Language Benchmarks address a very wide range of language

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of proficiency and competency-based approaches see Savignon 1985; Schulz, 1988; Spolsky, 1989; North 1995.



types and tasks found “in educational, training, community and workplace settings” (CLB website), the descriptors cover a wide range, yet only those descriptors addressing academic language are appropriate for the EAP alignment. The CLB alignment only describes the best approximation of a very narrow band of the EAP skills, and conversely, the EAP outcomes only overlap with a small portion of the skills and contexts addressed by the Benchmarks. This is in part because EAP courses and programs focus upon college readiness and academic contexts and so better reflect the unique competencies required for the challenge of making this transition and the tasks appropriate to build those competencies (the *Articulation Guide*, 2005, p. 8).

The argument above could also be used to question the usefulness of the CLB for English for Specific Purpose programs (ESP). Because the learner has to show command of “all competency objectives to obtain the benchmark credential” (CLB, 2000, p.130), in order to use benchmarks for specific purposes one would have to narrow down the focus of the program, or go beyond the intended goals.

Despite the claim that benchmarks are too broad for EAP programs, a report published by the British Columbia Council on Admission and Transfer (BCCAT) suggests that the alignment of EAP program outcomes to those of the CLB has impacted on curriculum (See the ESL Articulation Guide, 2007). Due to its relevance in this present study, the BC Curriculum Articulation initiative is going to be further examined in the next section.

Although the CLB does seem to have impacted on curriculum development, the impact on assessment is noticeable, maybe because the benchmarks accompanying documents show careful attention to assessment. The *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical Framework*, for instance, dedicates one whole chapter (Chapter three) to principles of assessment based on the CLB, providing “additional information about the purpose, principles, concepts and definitions behind the CLB rating scales” (p.35). Perhaps because assessment was the principal motivation for the CLB, it is better developed. Hence, since the benchmarks were first elaborated, many assessment tools have been

created.

One example of CLB-based assessment is the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA), a test designed to place adult newcomers in language programs that are appropriate for their level of proficiency in English. The CLBA can be used to assess learners' progress in the program, and to place adult immigrants in appropriate English language programs. It was elaborated with basis on the CLB outcomes (Norton & Stewart, 1996; Pierce & Norton, 1997; Norton, 1999).

When describing the arduous process of elaborating the CLBA, Norton and Stuart highlight the difficulty to measure task-based performance, arguing that it is difficult to simulate authentic tasks. Furthermore, the authors claim the necessity to align the framework of the test to those of the programs learners are enrolled in (Norton, and Stewart, 1999), which calls for constant attention to the variables that are at stake when utilizing the benchmarks. In this sense, curriculum and assessment tools should follow the same principles of the framework adopted in the program.

The difficulty of providing fair assessment has also been questioned by other scholars, who critiqued the cultural aspect of the CLBA. For instance, Abbott (2004) questions the reading component of the CLBA arguing that it favours certain cultural groups over others. Similarly, Abbott argues for the alignment of assessment and instruction,

Fair, equitable assessment is tailored to the individual learner's instruction context and background including his or her prior knowledge, cultural experience, language proficiency, cognitive style, and interest (Joint Advisory Committee, 1993). Therefore substantive statistical research devoted to examining and promoting accuracy and fairness when developing and using assessment tools such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA) is essential (Abbott, 2004, p. 3).

Abbott's argument begs a question: have learners been trained to be assessed according to the CLB proficiency scale in benchmarked programs? Theoretically, benchmarked program curricula

should be designed to prepare ESL learners to achieve the CLB outcomes. Thus, programs aligned to the CLB need, for this matter, to base their curricula outcomes on the CLB proficiency descriptors.

In practice, benchmarking curricula may represent a challenge to those involved in the process because of the abundance of possible interpretations the descriptors allow and the varied ways to translate them into program outcomes. This is one of the possible reasons for the CLB - to have had negligible impact on adult, ESL curricula in Canada.

The usefulness of the CLB could be questioned if it cannot be applied in curriculum and assessment equally. For fairness of assessment, the curricula of benchmarked programs need to prepare learners to be assessed according to CLB-based assessment tools. The CLBA, for instance, is a criterion-referenced test, and as such it is meant to measure instructional objectives.

Other assessment tools have been created based on the CLB, for placement, such as the Canadian Language Placement Test (CLBPT), for exit assessments, and to measure language proficiency for working purposes, i.e. the Work Language Assessment (WLA). Similarly, standardized assessment tools have been continuously elaborated by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) and other institutions have also referred to the CLB for elaborating assessment tools, such as the University of British Columbia (UBC) Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPPI), which assesses the language proficiency of potential UBC international students whose first language is not English. The CELPIP can also be used for measuring the language proficiency of immigrants to Canada, as it is officially accepted by Immigration Canada for the purpose of Federal Skilled Workers selection (See CIC website). Hence, it is a natural assumption that learners may be able to find CLB-aligned programs to be trained to take CLB-based assessment tests.

In this sense, most benchmarked curricula are found in government-funded courses offered in many provinces. For instance, in British Columbia there is the English Language Service for Adults (ELSA), which has benchmarked its programs up to CLB level 5. In Ontario the Language Instruction

for Newcomers to Canada program (LINC) benchmarked its curricula to CLB level 7. Another example of a curriculum based on the CLB is found in Ontario, *The adult ESL curriculum Guidelines CLB 1-12*, published in 1998 by the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) to assist teachers with the implementation of the benchmarks in their program. The TCSB has quite a few publications on curriculum design based on the CLB and may serve as a start point for those willing to use the benchmarks in their programs (TCDSB, 1999).

A further example is the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program (MIIP), which has shown progress in benchmarking syllabi and developing curriculum since 1998, with the development of an adult English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum framework based on the CLB document from 1996 (Pettis, 2007). The *Manitoba Adult EAL Curriculum Framework 2009: Foundations* is the latest document found on curriculum development elaborated by the MIIP. This document was published by the Manitoba Labour and Immigration to support teachers by providing guidance for syllabus development in their own courses. If other institutions would refer to such documents in order to start benchmarking their curricula, there would be more ground to gather empirical evidence of the impact of the CLB on curricular practices.

The *Manitoba Adult EAL Curriculum Framework 2009: Foundations*, also a government initiated document, provides a literature review of the implementation of the CLB in curriculum. However, as opposed to showing models of how the CLB has been implemented in curricula, it portrays the trends of ESL methodology over the past decade in order to support the use of the CLB as reference to implement the latest approaches in ESL teaching. Rather than revealing institutions whose curricula have been developed based on the CLB descriptors, the document elaborates on the current literature of English language teaching to support their reasons to use of CLB as a reference to their own curriculum framework. In part, such approach is suggested by Nunan in the *Guide to Implementation 2000*.

Despite the examples mentioned, after ten years the Guide has been in existence, one would expect that more programs would have referred to the CLB to develop their own curricula, serving as models of CLB curriculum implementation to other institutions. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. A question that remains unanswered is with respect to CLB implementation in the higher levels, can the CLB be used to inform curriculum at EAP levels, for instance? The answers to this question are pursued by this present study and will be further explored in Chapter Five.

When examining the impact of the CLB on curriculum and assessment, it is not enough to merely observe the impact benchmarks have had on EAP program curricula. Although there are some examples of the CLB impact on government founded program curricula, they are mostly at the lower levels of the CLB scale. Other institutions, in particular the private ones, do not seem to be using the CLB to inform their curricular practices, especially for academic purposes (See the *ESL Articulation Guide*, 2007). For this reason, it is important to examine BC ESL programs, which are aligned to the CLB.

### **2.3.4 The British Columbia Curriculum Articulation for ESL Programs**

As mentioned earlier, many ESL programs in BC have been aligned to the CLB (See the *Articulation Guide for English as a Second Language Programs in the British Columbia Public Post-Secondary System* Fifth Edition 2005/2006). However, more specifically in EAP programs, the curriculum goals may not prepare learners to achieve levels of CLB proficiency. In particular, the extent to which the CLB has been impacting on EAP curricula may be directly proportional to the correlations between the CLB outcomes and those of EAP programs. Therefore, it is important to examine how EAP programs in BC were aligned to the CLB.

The BC ESL Articulation Committee is the body responsible for the alignment of the BC post-

secondary system to the CLB. During the process of aligning the CLB to the EAP levels and outcomes the Committee realized that the correlation between the CLB outcomes and those in EAP courses was too narrow, and that ESL learners in the BC secondary system who intend to enter mainstream college and university-level courses may not be prepared to meet the minimum CLB level requirements, or show language proficiency, according to the CLB scale.

To align EAP programs to the CLB, all institutions which took part in the Articulation process needed to discuss their program curricula in order to find commonalities that would allow their curricula to be articulated and then aligned to the CLB in order to promote easy transferability across institutions. They found that their EAP programs are designed to prepare learners to achieve academic readiness as described below,

All participating institutions agree that courses listed in the following grids are equivalent. Students who have successfully completed Level IV of English for Academic Purposes will have the language skills necessary to enter academic, technology, career and vocational programs, including those requiring English 12 prerequisites. They will be capable of functioning effectively in formal, extended, unpredictable and challenging situations typical of a North American academic environment (ESL Articulation Guide, 2007, p.10).

However, it seems that the articulation of these programs' curricula has not helped transferability across institutions within the system, making it even more problematic across provinces. The BCCAT reported the following in 2008,

The ESL Articulation Committee believes that when students complete the highest level of ESL courses articulated at English for Academic Purposes (EAP Level IV), they should be able to move into university-level courses without further testing. Within institutions, this is often the case. However, when a student moves to a different institution, the transfer may not be smooth. For example, if students have successfully completed EAP Level IV at one institution in BC and thereby have met that institution's language requirement, it is not clear that they will be accepted into another without doing an assessment test (p.10).

In effect, all the institutions that participated in the Articulation process articulated their EAP

curricula and then aligned them to the CLB levels. However, if their curricula are not CLB-based, learners may not be uniformly prepared to enter university-level courses across institutions. Hence, the CLB has not helped standardize programs. For that reason, further investigation of the degree to which the CLB impacts on the curricula of the programs involved in the Articulation process may question the CLB functionality in regards to developing their EAP curricula.

Moreover, BC articulated programs are directly connected to the benchmarks, but are not under the umbrella of government funded institutions. If these programs are aligned to the CLB, they should be using the benchmarks to inform their curricula. However, these institutions may refrain from applying the benchmarks in their curricula due to lack of assistance, such as personnel training, expertise on the CLB theoretical framework and funding.

Fourteen years after the CLB was created to provide a common language for ESL practitioners to prepare and assess ESL learners in Canada, the benefits the scale has brought may raise questions about the usefulness of the CLB as a common tool to assess and train ESL learners equally across the country, especially in advanced level programs.

## **2.4 A Critique on the CLB Theoretical Approach**

The CLB implementational shortcomings of the CLB appear to be caused by the complexity of the theoretical approach addressed in the *CLB Theoretical Framework*. I believe that the reasons for such difficulties are threefold. First, the communication proficiency model requires the learner to accomplish too much in order to show communication competence, which may also be problematic for assessment. Second, the benchmark descriptors do not seem to consistently instantiate the theoretical model because of its complexity. The framework adopts four competencies to be related to the four macro-function competences in Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model, and to account for language use

and dominant skills acquisition that the Proficiency Indicator Descriptors attempt to describe, which may allow for subjectivity of interpretation. Third, the documents that accompany the benchmarks seem to have been created as an amendment to the lack of clarity in the CLB: 2000 document.

These three issue areas, theoretical model, CLB descriptors and adjunct documents, show that to apply the CLB properly practitioners need to be familiar with at least three of the many documents created to complement the CLB: 2000, the *Theoretical Framework*; *The Guide to Implementation and the Companion Tables*. If practitioners need to use this amount of assistance to apply the CLB in curricula, it is understandable why such application has been mostly noticed at the lower levels and in certain programs, where the application may be less complex.

Additionally, the CLB is a generic framework that displays global descriptors to measure proficiency within three contexts, community, study and work (*The CLB 2000*). Due to its approach and broad scope, the theoretical framework uses an array of terms, such as 'functional', 'communication tasks', and 'communicative', in an attempt to define its approach coherently, as noted in the following passage,

The Canadian Language Benchmarks is based on a functional view of language, language use and language proficiency. Such a view relates language to the contexts in which it is used and the communicative functions it performs. The focus of the Canadian Language Benchmarks is thus on communication and communicative proficiency in English as a second language. Communicative proficiency is not an abstract concept of "absolute" language ability. Rather, it depends on situations of language use. It is described as adequate control over language skills for a specified purpose (e.g., for studying, performing a job, functioning independently in a community, negotiating a business deal). Depending on what communication tasks will be required, certain components may be given priority in a description of communicative proficiency, and others may not be included at all.

(Theoretical Framework, p.6)

Packing in too much information such as seen above is a characteristic of the *CLB Theoretical Framework*. The *Theoretical Framework* brings together broad concepts, i.e. functional view of



language, language use, and language proficiency, to describe and interpret language. However, the absence of models of application of the theoretical intent, in particular for informing specific purpose courses, such as English for sciences, or even in a broader scope academic English, may make CLB implementation unfeasible.

If the benchmarks fail to assist practitioners providing a useful, common framework for the purposes they require, there will be stronger arguments against the practicality and usefulness of the CLB. While nationalists claim that it is important to preserve the national framework after all the effort and research involved to elaborate the benchmarks, some experts defend the adoption of other frameworks, for instance the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR), claiming its usefulness (See Pepin, 2008 and Vandergrift, 2006).

The *CLB Theoretical Framework* emphasizes the role of the benchmarks as reference for standardized assessment of outcomes. However, it is necessary to bridge the gap between theory and implementation to promote a more effective impact of the benchmarks on curricula and assessment. Implementational shortcomings may be caused by inconsistencies in the *CLB Theoretical Framework*, and as a result, incorporating the CLB into curriculum may require in-depth adjustments to adapt the benchmarks for the outcomes practitioners require.

#### **2.4.1 Gaps and Inconsistencies in the CLB Theoretical Framework**

As it has been discussed thus far, the *CLB Theoretical Framework* has a 'functional view of language, language use and language proficiency' and measures 'the communicative functions' to describe learners 'communicative proficiency'. The proficiency descriptors account for how 'functional' the learner is in a given context, and the term 'functional' in the CLB means to have 'illocutionary competence' (Bachman, 1990).

The CLB descriptors should instantiate the *Theoretical Framework* effectively to facilitate the application in curriculum and assessment; however, the CLB theoretical intent is not clearly developed into the benchmark descriptors. In fact, the descriptors do not seem to instantiate the theoretical intent, for instance, they describe expected learners' proficiency at levels of competency, but it is not clear what communicative macro-functions are involved in each descriptor, or how to associate these functions to language use.

The *Companion Tables* are meant to assist the benchmark descriptors, presenting other aspects that the theoretical framework does not cover, such as task length and performance duration. As the descriptors are general statements, designing a curriculum that prepares learners to achieve performance indicator outcomes may be a complex task. The extent to which an incoherent theoretical framework can be instantiated in the outcome descriptors may be questionable. Hence, in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice in the CLB, it may be necessary to re-design the theoretical framework, or to observe it from a different perspective.

#### **2.4.2 Examining the Concept of Communicative Tasks**

The concept of task in the CLB is seen under the scope of communicative proficiency. Communicative proficiency is measured through the ability to accomplish 'communication tasks', or 'communicative tasks' (CLB: 2000). Nevertheless, to accomplish such tasks one needs to know what a communicative task is. As the *CLB: Theoretical Framework* does not clearly define communicative tasks, perhaps looking at the definition of communicative performance may help.

The CLB states that communicative performance is “the actual use of language in concrete situations to accomplish a communicative function or task; demonstrates the degree of communicative proficiency through the application of language knowledge, skill and strategic rules” (p.76). In that

sense, it seems that for a task to be communicative it requires the learner to use communicative proficiency, in other words to use language in a given situation to 'accomplish a communicative function'. But what is a communicative function? Is it a macro-function? Such lack of clarity in the terms used in the CLB may lead practitioners to draw conclusions based on personal interpretation of, for instance, “a person's ability to use the English language to accomplish a set of tasks” (CLB: 2000, p. IX). How can a person show such ability if one is not told how to consider a task accomplished?

In order to accomplish something the goal has to be achieved. What are the goals to be achieved in the CLB communicative tasks? For instance, examining a task such as making a telephone call, where the Performance Indicator is “can use the phone to communicate simple personal information; communication without visual supports is still very difficult” (Benchmark 5, speaking), one does not know the purpose of the telephone call. Thus, being able to 'use the phone to communicate simple personal information' without knowing what goal to achieve to display communicative proficiency seems to be impossible to accomplish.

On the other hand, considering that a person knows how to say her name, nationality, address and knows how to use the phone, would the task be accomplished if that person picked up the phone and said, 'hi, my name is... I am from... I live at...'? This person was able to communicate simple personal information, but to achieve what?

In other words, to achieve language proficiency when performing a task, one should have the ability to use language in order to achieve a goal. The goal is usually imposed by the social context. By achieving the goal imposed by context, the speaker is able to show what she can do (and what the language “can do””) (Halliday, 2005, p. 134). Moreover, in order to examine language competency in context to measure how functional a language user is, it “requires us to analyze more carefully how language is being used, in which form (oral or written, genre), in what situation, between what persons, and for what purpose” (Larson-Freeman, 1999, p.4).

Hence, in the phone call task, one would be able to show language competency if the task was to call your boss to inform that you are going to be absent due to illness. Consequently, to show 'use of language' in this concrete situation and to accomplish the task, the learner has to be aware of the social relations imposed by the context, the type of language used 'to demonstrate the degree of communicative proficiency' to accomplish the task goal.

The situation in which the task is to be performed, the participants (employer/employee), and the channel of communication (phone conversation), impose and constrain the language choices one can make in order to perform a task successfully. All these elements that pertain to the context in which communication takes place seem to be lacking in the CLB. If these elements are not clearly specified in the CLB communicative tasks, how can teachers help learners achieve communicative proficiency using the CLB outcomes? How helpful is the CLB to prepare learners to achieve the language proficiency they need to reach their goals? What can learners who are granted a benchmark do in real contexts? The answers to these questions are pursued in this present study through an empirical investigation of the CLB application in context and the methodology applied in the study is presented in the next chapter.

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I examined the CLB, looking at its background and theoretical framework. The chapter addressed the benchmarks' linguistic models and explored the pedagogical approaches promoted by the CLB, i.e. task-based approach. The impact of the CLB on curriculum and assessment was observed and a critique of the *CLB Theoretical Framework* presented, focusing on inconsistencies in the relation between the benchmarks and the theoretical intent. The chapter concluded with an examination of the CLB concept of task, in which aspects of goal orientation and contextualization

were questioned. These issues raised questions with respect to the CLB utility to prepare learners to achieve communicative proficiency. The questions raised are going to be further explored in Chapter Five

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology used to examine how the application of the CLB in a local college EAP program is perceived by five practitioners of this institution. In particular, the chapter introduces the research site and participants, as well as the reasons for having selected those specific participants for the study, i.e. their roles and the relevance of their viewpoints. The chapter also presents the theory of the interviews, where I explain the interview processes, i.e. how the interviews were conducted; documents that were brought to the interviews; the theory used in the interviews; the method of analysis; coding procedures, and; the application of Talmy's (in press) concept of *interview as social practice*. The chapter concludes with the data codification, where I present how the information collected was categorized in the analysis.

### **3.1. Research Site**

In order to investigate the usefulness of the CLB in a local EAP program, I chose a college in BC that is a member of the BC ESL Articulation Committee, the body responsible for the alignment of the EAP outcomes to the CLB (As discussed in Chapter Two). This institution utilizes the CLB as reference for assessment, course goals, and curriculum design in many of its programs. This college offered particularly valuable conditions for the study because most practitioners in this institution are familiar with using benchmarks.

This institution offers ESL classes for immigrants, refugees, and international learners living in British Columbia. The ESL programs range from English Language Service for Adults (ELSA), Low

Beginner level, English for Academic Purposes, University Transfer programs, to First-Year University English. The college has four main ESL departments: the EAP department, where the mandate is academic English, the Professional and Career English department whose mandate is to provide Applied programs for the work place, the General English Language Skills department, leading up to CLB 6/7 level, and a Community-based Skills department, whose program levels also go up to CLB 6/7 (See Table 3.1 below).

Table 3.1 *ESL Departments in the Research Site*

Department	Mandate	CLB Exit Levels
EAP	Academic English	7 - 9
Professional & Career	Applied programs	7- 9
English Language Skills	General English	6-7
Community- based	English for community	

At first, only the EAP department was going to be approached. However, other departments that also prepare learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs showed interest to participate in the study. According to the information provided in the interviews, academic preparation had originally been done in the EAP department only, but recently with the urgency to recognize the language needs of internationally educated professionals for the workplace, Applied programs have also been serving as a bridge to mainstream post-secondary programs. In other words, in the institution where the data were collected academic preparation lines are blurring and learners may choose different pathways to enter post-secondary programs.

### **3.2. Administrator and Teacher Participants**

ESL teachers and administrators in three of the four ESL departments of the institution were invited to participate in the study. These specific practitioners were chosen because of the different roles they have, which seems to have influenced their viewpoints on the CLB. However, the differences in relation to programs, i.e. Applied versus EAP, were more noteworthy than the different positions participants have, i.e. administrative and pedagogical, mostly because some of the teachers had already been administrators and vice versa. An example of the combined roles some participants have is found in one of the teacher participants, who is currently the Head of the Professional & Career department; nevertheless, she answered the teacher interview questions.

All participants were contacted through a Letter of Contact (Appendix A). Volunteers were screened according to their knowledge of the CLB and their experience in programs leading to mainstream post-secondary programs. The EAP department Head, members of the ESL faculty in other departments, i.e. Applied programs, General ESL and the Head of the General English department, whose higher level is equivalent to EAP level I (CLB 7), were also contacted. All participants signed a Consent Form (Appendix B), which was collected before the interview, and those participants who requested clarifications were given further explanations about the Consent Form before signing. In total two administrators and three teachers participated in the study.

### **3.3. Theory of Interviews**

Amongst the different ways of conceptualizing interviews that I examined, i.e. neo-positivist; romantic<sup>4</sup>, and; constructionist, which “captures both the importance of social interaction for the co-

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4 Neo-positivist (according to Foddy, 1993), whose focus is on having, “a clearly defined topic about which



construction of interview data, as well as the focus on examining the resources people use to describe their worlds to others” (Roulston, 2010, p. 9).

I took into account not only the content collected, but also how it was collected, by whom and under what circumstances, all of which were relevant to the analysis of the data. Thus, I adopted what Talmy (in press) refers to as “research interviews as social practice, in which the research interview is explicitly conceptualized and analyzed as social action” (p.3). As Talmy explains, examining the interview social interactions is paramount because “data do not speak for themselves; analysis centers on how meaning is negotiated, knowledge is co-constructed, and interview is locally accomplished” (p.8). Those aspects were used in the interview and applied in the analysis, also accounting for how meaning is co-constructed according to the context in which the data were generated.

Therefore, in the context of this present study, in which interviewee and interviewer engaged to co-construct knowledge, participants' perceptions of the CLB were taken into account according to their pedagogical and administrative experiences, all of which allowed me to examine the transcripts as elaborated from the standpoint of the roles that participants represented in the interviews, i.e. teacher, administrator, or combined. In this sense, I was able to note that the way in which they reflect upon their practices is directly related to how they position themselves in order to describe the application of the CLB as a framework to achieve their programs' goals.

In this sense, the central purpose of the study was to gather information about the extent to which the CLB has been successfully implemented in a specific EAP program as perceived by that community, represented by the five participants. That is why the data were collected within a specific

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participants have information that they are able to access within the research setting; that interviewers and interviewees share a common understanding of the interview questions, and interviewees are willing and able to respond to these” (Roulston, 2010, p.3). Romantic, “in which interviewees provide exposés about intimate personal details to interviewers who appear to be compassionate, sympathetic, and sensitive” (p.6).

context and examined as co-construction of information provided by the participants according to the relation each participant has to the application of the CLB and guided by the questions that were posed to them. Thus, I conducted a series of interviews<sup>5</sup> based on structured questions. In doing so, I intended to target teachers' and administrators' perceptions of a) the CLB concept and critiques, and b) theoretical, practical and functionality issues.

During each interview, the questions were read to participants and segments of some questions were repeated whenever necessary. All interviews took place in quiet settings, sometimes in an office and other times in empty classrooms. Moreover, the interviews followed a face-to-face format, which stimulated discussions and promoted a relaxing atmosphere.

Interestingly, by examining the interviews from a social angle, I was allowed to observe the emotional reactions participants displayed during the interviews, i.e. frustration, cynicism, irritability, and so forth. The positive and negative emotional reactions that each participant had to the CLB informed the data and are also relevant to the findings because the theoretical approach used in the analysis accounts for 'how' participants' viewpoints are socially\_\_ thus emotionally\_\_ construed (I discuss the method of analysis more in-depth later, in section 3.4).

At first, the estimated time to conclude all interviews was a month, in which each participant would be interviewed individually in one-hour sessions. Interviews started on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and finished on November 11<sup>th</sup>, four days earlier than anticipated. The one-hour sessions were sufficient to ask all questions and collect responses from administrators. However, a second interview was set up with the teachers to discuss and examine classwork.

Questions that addressed classwork produced long responses because teachers were asked to elaborate on the texts they selected to bring to the interviews. Similarly, questions that addressed the

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5 According to Palys and Atchison (2008), interviews have “a more social-verbal” (P.153) dynamic than questionnaires, difference which applies especially to the goal of this present study, which was to collect information in

functionality of the CLB for their EAP program outcomes produced very detailed answers. Sometimes the answers would include information related to the next question, showing that participants were anticipating the next step of the interview. The apparent repetition of questions, perceived by some, gave participants a chance to reflect deeply upon the responses they had given before, enabling them to add or change information.

### **3.3.1. Data Collection Processes**

Two methods were used to collect the data. First, I interviewed participants using structured questions (See Appendixes C and D). All questions targeted participants' views of the benchmarks as a tool to inform their curriculum goals. Second, I asked teachers to bring classwork samples and talk about the reasons for their selections in relation to what they wanted to achieve through those activities.

The discussions about the relationship between the programs and the CLB, as well as the documents teachers brought to the interview, provided the primary data for the analysis. In some interviews I took field notes of information pertinent to the research questions as an aid to my memory. Additionally, all interviews were audio-recorded. I used a digital recorder that was efficient most of the time.

The audio-recording started a few minutes before the interview questions were asked, to test if the recorder was properly set, and ended a few minutes after the questions had been answered and the interview had ended. I placed the digital recorder on the desk nearer to the interviewee for better sound quality. The sound quality was good in most of the interviews, but on some occasions I had trouble hearing a word or phrase due to background noise. Nevertheless, there was negligible interference.

All interviews were subsequently transcribed and sent to each interviewee before being analyzed

(See Appendix E for Transcription Conventions). Those who wanted to could add or change information if they thought it necessary to do so.

During the classwork examination, I asked teachers to evaluate correlations they perceived between their syllabus and the CLB outcomes for those specific skills, levels and purposes, specially focusing on the CLB descriptors' outcomes corresponding to the same proficiency levels to be achieved at the end of the program (CLB levels 7-9). Participants provided substantial information and showed interest in learning the final results of the study. The material selected instantiated pedagogical approaches, bringing in an extra resource of evidence to support logical conclusions and attempt to avoid biased interpretation (Herriott and Firestone, 1983, cited in Yin, 2009).

### **3.3.2. Classwork Sampled**

Classwork, selected by each teacher, instantiated different text types, e.g. reading for academic purposes texts, comprehension task texts, as well as texts for writing tasks, whose purposes are to prepare learners to improve reading and writing skills in order to achieve academic readiness. These documents supported teachers' pedagogical approaches, as mentioned earlier, because they represent, to some extent, the program syllabus goals. Classwork also served as samples of tasks teacher-participants use in order to achieve the goals of the program, some of which correlate with the CLB outcomes.

Hence, classwork constitutes one of the units of analysis because it instantiates information about the classroom context. When examining these documents, teacher-participants referred directly to classroom practices and the functionality of the CLB for the purposes required in their programs.

### **3.3.3. Administrators and Teachers Questions**

I conducted the interviews using two types of structured questions, one for administrators (Appendix C) and another for teachers (Appendix D), because of the different roles participants have. Administrators' questions focused on information about program implementation while teachers' questions aimed at classroom implementation. Both sets of questions ask about the utility of CLB to inform programs' syllabi and curricula. Questions addressed participants' perceptions of the CLB, specifically addressing the CLB descriptors pertinent to the study (CLB 8-9 for reading and writing).

Administrators' questions involved the following themes: CLB descriptors; theoretical framework, as well as the approach used in their EAP programs to prepare ESL learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs. In addition to these same themes, teacher participants were asked to provide information about their program syllabus, pedagogical approaches, and practices of assessment related to reading and writing skills.

Before the interviews, teachers were asked to bring two or three samples of texts and tasks they normally use in the classroom to prepare learners to achieve the reading and writing outcomes of the program. More specifically, teacher interviews pursued the following themes: 1) possible correlation between the CLB descriptors and teachers' text selection; 2) syllabus goals; 3) program assessment framework, and; 4) learners' goals in the program. All questions were intended to give the interviewees a chance to reflect upon their practices in relation to the CLB outcomes.

## **3.4. Method of Analysis**

In order to perform a critical analysis of the functionality of the CLB in the context of this local

EAP program, I set up a study where participants were asked to examine the extent to which the CLB impacts on their practice, i.e. for their EAP program curriculum and syllabus design and for assessment practices. Thus, I looked at the CLB implementation through the lenses of five participants who use benchmarks in their programs.

I decided to approach the study assuming that the CLB had not been informing that EAP program curriculum. This approach helped me to develop discussions about the degree to which the CLB had actually been used, and thus find out what specific purposes the CLB has served. Hence, listening to participants' perceptions of the CLB in relation to their experiences and the larger issues confronted in implementation, I could evaluate the application of the benchmarks in their practices.

As mentioned earlier, in order to examine the data, I approached the interviews as social practice, taking into account how the information was co-construed by the participants of the study in relation to that specific context. Hence, contextualizing the data helped me to critically examine the texts produced (transcripts).

Additionally, by analyzing the interview data in relation to how participants perceived the functionality of the CLB in that specific context, i.e. the CLB being applied in the EAP program within that institution, I was able to perceive how the participants were constructing the CLB utility for that specific context.

In sum, this present study is an empirical inquiry of its topic, the role on the CLB in EAP syllabus. It “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p.13). By investigating the phenomenon according to those who experience it day-by-day within its context, I used each of the five sets of interviews that comprise the whole study as a different source of evidence. Therefore, I further discuss the analysis of these multi-layered perspectives of the same phenomenon next (see Table 3.2 below for a summary of the data categories).

*Table 3.2 Data Categories*

Category	Definition
1. Program	English instruction organized according to a specific area
2. Roles of Interviewee	Social position or function
3. Aspects	The way in which issues of the CLB are being addressed by an interviewee
4. Classwork	Reading and writing texts and tasks used to prepare learners to achieve program goals

In short, as Table 3.2 displays, to analyze the data I examined participants' major propositions and coded these propositions into four categories. These categories have sub-categories, each of which are defined accordingly, i.e. Category One classifies Programs and their variables; Category Two presents the Roles of Interviewees; Category Three classifies Aspects related to the CLB, and; Category Four presents Classwork.

In other words, the transcripts were examined based on these four units of analysis (See Appendix F for the Data Classification Dictionary). These four major categories and sub-categories were applied to all interview transcripts to classify the data nuances and similarities according to participants' perspectives (See Appendix H for Coded Transcripts). In doing that, a great divide was noticed in relation to the roles of participants, especially concerning how participants working in EAP and Applied programs perceived and used the CLB in their practices. These and other relevant findings are discussed next, in Chapter Four.

## Chapter 4. Findings

Chapter Four presents a summary of the findings of the study. I analyzed the interview data, taking into account the social interactions and the way information was co-constructed to analyze the transcripts according to the context of this study. In doing this, four major units of analysis were examined as they became salient themes: 1) Programs; 2) Role of Interviewees; 3) Aspect (of the CLB), and; 4) Classwork. Each of these major categories is divided in sub-categories, i.e. Program: EAP: Curriculum: BC articulated (See Appendix F for the Data Classification Dictionary). The findings are introduced in four parts; part one focuses on the role of interviewees and their perceptions of the CLB, addressing how they present their viewpoints according to their programs. Part two presents participants' perceptions of the CLB theoretical, practical and functional issues, addressing functional and non-functional aspects of implementing the CLB for academic purposes. Part three presents classwork and text varieties, i.e. literature, form-filling, report, and so forth, considering whether the classwork sampled is CLB-based or not. Lastly, part four addresses the dilemmas teachers face when implementing the CLB outcomes and other frameworks in their programs' syllabi in order to achieve programs' and learners' goals. To conclude chapter Four, I address participants' suggestions for changes required to improve the functionality of the CLB, particularly with regards to using the benchmarks for academic purposes. As the findings suggest that preparing ESL learners to achieve academic readiness has become broader, i.e. learners may choose to take Applied programs as opposed to EAP in order to enter mainstream post-secondary programs; academic genres<sup>6</sup> may need to be re-conceptualized from different contextual needs.

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6 Occupational genres that have specific goal-orientation as opposed to generic EAP approaches.



In order to answer the research questions, 1) to what degree does the CLB influence EAP curricula decisions made by teachers and administrators in a local BC college?; and 2) what practical and theoretical issues are most relevant to the processes of CLB implementation?, I examined how administrators and teachers co-construed the CLB in that context. Thus, variables such as participants' roles and programs encompass elements that show how their perceptions have been influenced in relation to their positions and as such underlined the reasons given for not fully implementing the CLB to assist the achievement of the EAP program goals. Therefore, I start presenting the findings from the relations participants hold with the CLB.

#### **4.1. The Roles of Participants**

When examining participants' perceptions of the CLB according to their roles as administrators, teachers, or combined, I noticed that there was a divide in relation to the programs participants were affiliated to, i.e. EAP or Applied programs such as nursing or English for health sciences. This dichotomy between programs influenced the perceptions participants have of the CLB, directly relating their opinions to the outcomes of the programs these participants represented.

On the one hand, Applied programs use the CLB more frequently to inform their practices, i.e. curriculum and syllabus development, as well as assessment practices. On the other hand, participants in EAP programs choose to follow different frameworks, which are going to be further addressed later. Nevertheless, academic preparation is provided in EAP and Applied programs.

The reasons for the tensions created around the application of the CLB in these programs underline issues of implementation. These implementation issues are associated with the theoretical intention for which the CLB was designed. In other words, the negative and positive reactions to the CLB that participants in EAP and Applied programs respectively presented are linked to how well the

CLB fulfills their programs' outcomes.

#### 4.1.1. Participants' Perceptions of the CLB

As mentioned earlier, participants' judgments about the CLB are directly related to their perceptions of the usefulness of the benchmarks for the achievement of their programs' goals. Hence, I examined participants' viewpoints according to the programs they represent (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 *Labels of Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Program</b>
P1	Administrator	General English
P2	Combined	CELBAN
P3	Teacher	Health Sciences
P4	Administrator	EAP
P5	Teacher	EAP

For instance, Participant One (P1) has a positive perception of the CLB because of the fact that “some of the Applied programs here (in the institution) have been benchmarked, what levels students need in reading, writing, listening and speaking. And, in that way, in a sense CLB works” (P1). P1 relates her positive impression of the CLB to Applied programs only. Conversely, Participant Four (P4) when addressing the EAP program explains,

We have found that CLB doesn't work very well for us. The bands are much too broad (..) we need to have very specific groupings, and the system that we've used (..) works extremely well and to adapt it to (...) CLB will be a retrofit, right? (P4)

This negative perception of the CLB is supported by other participants when referring to the

CLB for use in the EAP program. However, I noticed that Applied program-participants, whose practices are CLB-based, referred to the CLB positively, opinion that was supported also by EAP practitioners. Nevertheless, when referring to the CLB used for EAP programs, Applied program-participants' opinions were negative. Moreover, participants' perceptions of the CLB unveiled power relations with respect to the programs they were involved with during the study, i.e. the EAP program was portrayed as having a more prestigious status than Applied programs, which can be perceived in the following proposition,

We do something that is quite specific. It's not for everyone, you know, this is a choice that students have when they reach a certain level. (P4)

The passage above shows the social status of the EAP program. According to P4, EAP, 'is not for everyone', which is reinforced by the suggestion that learners have to 'reach a certain level' to be able to follow that path. The proposition implies that learners could settle for a less difficult approach, other than EAP. These status differentiations set apart EAP from Applied programs and affect their outcomes as well; despite the fact that these programs are intended to prepare learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs.

#### **4.1.2. EAP and Applied Programs' Outcomes**

One of the differences EAP and Applied programs have is with respect to the goals each program has. Applied programs focus on a specific area, i.e. health sciences, or nursing, as opposed to EAP programs whose focus is depicted by one participant as 'hybrid'. When asked to describe EAP curriculum, P4 explains,

It's a long established program [\_\_\_\_\_] We use a lot of authentic materials, in many ways our program is not really ESL. I mean, it is sort of a hybrid, it is a blend of high school language arts, you could say, maybe high school and ESL. (P4)

The approach in this EAP program is non-CLB based, for the 'program is not really ESL'. One of the reasons for using a different approach is to build proficiency through content, as P4 further explains, “rather than just provide a broad (...) a needs-based (...) program like a negotiated curriculum. We do something that is quite specific” (P4). This quote seems to be covertly criticizing the CLB 'broad' outcomes, made for 'everyone', which could be used to give support to the claim that the CLB is not suitable for EAP outcomes.

Another EAP program participant explains that although the CLB has been used in the institution for benchmarking purposes, it serves Applied programs better,

I sat on a committee of department Heads and assistant department Heads that actually voted to apply for funds to look at benchmarking all of our English courses at the college (...) a lot of the Applied programs in nursing (..) have been benchmarked, and students are starting to be accepted into those programs based on benchmarks (..) that seems completely appropriate (..) for them and for their purpose, and we move students back and forth all the time between the two departments. (P5)

The appropriateness of CLBs for Applied programs is also supported by the pedagogical approach they follow. Because Applied programs use a task-based approach, the CLB is seen as appropriate to inform task-selection in these programs. Nevertheless, there is lack of CLB-based material and curricula, especially for one of the Applied programs that participated in the study (I further discuss the lack of CLB-based materials in Section 4.2.1). Again, despite material limitations, Applied program-participants are CLB-based and use the CLB to inform their curricular choices.

## **4.2. Perceptions of the CLB Theoretical Intent**

According to participants the CLB theoretical intent involves three areas; it serves as: a) an assessment tool; b) a standardized framework, and; c) a means to measuring functional competence.

When asked about the CLB theoretical intent, participant Five (P5) suggested that the CLB functional approach is a characteristic of ESL pedagogical approaches, but it should be associated with developing learners meta-cognitive skills, which is not part of the CLB concept in her view,

We all do functional teaching (...) You also need, I think, for most learners after they have passed a certain level, you have to develop their meta-cognitive skills, and I'm not 100% certain that that is (...) I may be wrong, but I'm not 100% certain that that is part of the benchmark program, or a benchmarked curriculum. (P5)

According to P5, the CLB framework does not help develop meta-cognitive skills; however, it is noteworthy the lack of certainty in the proposition, perhaps caused by the complexity of the CLB theoretical intent, i.e. the functional competence concept, in which one of the four macro-functions the heuristic function (Learning/thinking/ problem solving) seems to account for meta-cognitive skills, is just another of many obscure concepts to be considered.

Another participant addressed the CLB concept of functional competence, but from a different angle. In her interpretation, functional competence is related to language proficiency, described in the CLB as benchmarks competencies. In her view, functional competence involves linguistic concepts,

In order to have functional competence of course you have to use the form of the language that is accurate within that function, so that does bring in grammar, of course you must have the language, the word choice or the technical terminology to get to the level. (P2)

These idiosyncratic views of fundamental concepts of the CLB theoretical intent may produce questions about the extent to which the CLB is an accessible framework to be implemented in the classroom. Additionally, the CLB is task-based, and to some extent this characteristic seems to have limited the CLB use (in the programs which participated in the study) to those that follow the task-based approach.

In fact some participants referred to the CLB task-based approach to define the benchmarks. P4, for instance, described the CLB theoretical intent thus, “what they've tried to do there is kind of create

a task-based approach to describing language as an observable phenomenon” (P4). In contrast to P4's interpretation of the CLB, the CLB:2000 emphasizes that what should be observed is the ability to use language and not language per se, claiming that it 'is language proficiency, not non-linguistic skills, that are primarily being described' (p. VIII, Theoretical Framework, cited in Chapter two). However, 'language proficiency' can be interpreted differently, and what the CLB purports as 'clear language competence focus' may actually seem unclear to practitioners and, as a result, present challenges that are subjected to personal interpretation.

According to some participants, the CLB also fails to serve as a common language and to provide national standards across the country. When describing the CLB intention to serve as a national standard for ESL practitioners and learners in Canada, P4 mentioned that the intention was good, but he referred to it as an attempt only,

It's quite a (...) project, I think, to try at a national level to have national standards, which allow students to transfer within provinces, or between programs. (P4)

P4 suggests that although the CLB attempts to be a national framework, in fact the benchmarks have not served this purpose. This view is also supported by P5, who adds that the CLB could serve as a common language amongst ESL practitioners, as well as help learners achieve their goals faster, as she explains the reasons for the institution to have adopted the CLB,

We were thinking that at the time, my reasons for liking benchmarks were first it's a common language right across (...) it might be a way of getting students into the jobs they wanted or the fields they wanted more efficiently. (P5)

Having a common language to be used by practitioners across the country was an appealing idea; however, the use of past tense and modality, i.e. 'were thinking', 'at that time', and 'might be', signals that in practice the CLB has failed to achieve this aim. In order to be a common language used across the country, the CLB has to help ESL practitioners achieve their programs' goals and this is not the

case for the EAP program that participated in the study, as it is perceived by participants (P4 and P5) who responded to the interview questions from an EAP standpoint.

Accordingly, four of the five participants said that the CLB was not intended for English for academic purposes. For example, participant Three (P3) questioned the utility of the CLB for academic purposes, claiming that there is no ground to evaluate whether the CLB could be used to prepare learners to achieve academic readiness,

I had questions early on about how the CLBs could be used in an academic framework. We don't know particularly what would work and what wouldn't work because we don't have the context. (P3)

In the excerpt above P3 claims that there is no empirical evidence that the CLB could be useful for academic purposes because there is no context in which the benchmarks have been used to prepare learners for academic readiness. Hence, P3's claim can raise a question about the CLB theoretical shortcomings with respect to more generic academic outcomes such as those required in the EAP program-participant. If the CLB theoretical intent cannot be implemented for the required purposes, it may be the case that the CLB theoretical framework needs to be re-visited in order to facilitate implementation.

#### **4.2.1. Issues Implementing the CLB**

Due to the theoretical and applied issues cited in the last section, implementing the CLB proved to be a challenge to most participants. One of the practical aspects of CLB implementation addressed was that the benchmarks are not grammar related. Perhaps because the descriptors are 'not grammar driven', P1 claimed that the CLB does not focus on grammatical accuracy, which causes difficulties for curricular implementation in her program,

“We are not a grammar-based program, but we do teach grammar and we think that grammar accuracy is really important. That's where we found CLB to be lacking” (P1).

Perhaps P1 is referring to lack of grammar-focused statements in the descriptors, i.e. can use simple present tense accurately, which is not part of the CLB, but seems to be required in her program. On the other hand, participant Two (P2) claimed that the CLB fulfills the needs of the program she teaches because the goal is to prepare learners for the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN). Hence, P2 does not experience issues of implementation. First because the program goal is CLB-based, thus the benchmarks fulfill the program's requirements, and second because there is more willingness to implement the CLB in P2's department,

Implementing the CLB in the area that I work I think there has been less resistance because we have been looking for a framework, a vehicle a way of describing higher level language skills and outcomes, but in a way that's not the typical academic pathway and measured by TOEFL or something like that. (P2)

Note that in the quote above P2 draws a line between CELBAN preparation and a 'typical academic pathway', which in her view is not a characteristic of the CLB. Nevertheless, when I examined the practical issues other participants perceived in relation to the implementation of the CLB in their programs, the findings show that most problems are in the area of assessment and curriculum, more specifically related to programs' syllabi, which is going to be discussed in the next section.

Again, looking at how participants perceive the CLB, the divide between programs was clear. For instance, P3 explained that a difficulty her Applied program has is the lack of models to follow, as she explains,

Our context in BC is quite limited in that we only have ELSA and ELSA is not linked in the same kind of overall way that LINC is in other parts of Canada (P3).

The argument above suggests that because there are not many pilot programs available, the



application of the CLB is limited to lower level programs, such as ELSA. Hence, for the higher levels P3 claims, “there is this issue of programming. Where do those programs ladder to?” (P3). Although this participant adopts the CLB avidly, she suggests that the benchmarks should be facilitated for implementational purposes,

P3: “people just need to have a by-the book...”

Interviewer: To be facilitated?

P3: “yes, like go for it, and that's what we don't have in Canada”

In other words, there is a lack of models, i.e. CLB-based syllabi, curricula and assessment tools for CLB implementation according to most participants. If more models were available, participants would have a tangible support to implement the benchmarks in their programs.

#### **4.2.2. Partial Implementation of the CLB**

All participants claimed that the CLB has been partially incorporated in curricula, but what does partial incorporation of a framework mean? Administrator participants argued that the CLB has impacted on the curricula of some programs in the institution, “in the areas of speaking, some writing tasks and some reading tasks, which are used for students only at the lower levels.” (P1) and also in settlement programs. In contrast, when asked why the CLB has not been informing his EAP curriculum, P4 replied,

Well, it's not entirely unused. We do use CLB to some extent. In an indirect way of course we are influenced by CLB descriptors. It is part of our regime of influences and sources that inform our curriculum, but it's not the basis for our curriculum [\_\_\_\_]  
I do want to make the point that we use a variety of influences and sources to inform our curricular choices. We've worked for several years with CLB and some aspects of CLB assessment have been a very good fit for the division, particularly in our settlement program. (P4)

Note that the choices in wording support the claim of partial implementation of the benchmarks, i.e. 'not entirely', 'to some extent', 'in an indirect way', 'it is part of our regime', 'some aspects'. The partial implementation that P4 and other participants refer to seems to address the impact that the CLB has on the curricula of some programs, except on the EAP program. The reasons for partial implementation to occur, but not affect EAP programs, are outlined in the different approaches that the CLB and the EAP program follow. For instance, when describing EAP curriculum, P4 highlighted some differences he sees between the CLB and EAP purposes,

I don't think our curriculum is primarily functional. I think largely what we do is we want to develop students generic skills rather than the specific tasks, rather than practice specific tasks which tend to be more based in English for special purpose. (P4)

According to P4, one of the major differences between EAP and the CLB is with respect to pedagogical approaches, i.e. EAP is not functional and not task-based. The CLB suggests specific tasks and the EAP program focuses on developing 'generic skills', which seem to refer to academic skills. Because the approaches in the CLB and the EAP program are different, EAP curricula are informed by non-CLB frameworks.

When further describing EAP curriculum P5 explains why the CLB does not inform curricular practices more effectively,

Our department pre-dates the development of benchmarks by a long, long time. So, basically the curriculum that was developed in this department has changed over the years, and some of the changes in our curriculum have reflected benchmarks. (P5)

Again, the partial use of the CLB is brought up when P5 mentions 'some changes', apparently referring to the alignment of EAP programs to the benchmarks (As discussed in Chapter Two). Because of commitment with other colleges in BC, this EAP program follows frameworks other than the CLB. For instance, the BC EAP Articulation framework has been developed based on the CLB outcomes as BC EAP programs are aligned to the CLB. Nevertheless, the alignment to the CLB did

not actually cause changes in this EAP program curriculum, as P3 suggests,

In BC we have quite a fabulous Articulation process where institutions have a great deal of trust in each other's course completion. So, there is the sense, if there is nothing wrong, why fix it? (P3)

The rhetorical question raised above suggests that BC EAP programs' curricula serve their purposes and there is no need to change it into CLB-based curricula, especially because the CLB does not serve EAP purposes. Looking more closely into the EAP program syllabus, the data reveal that the EAP program follows a secondary English 12 approach. Furthermore, the EAP curriculum focuses on literature to improve learners writing and reading skills, which according to P5 is because,

The students don't like to think of themselves as ESL, so they have developed the sort of pre-first year courses to improve reading and writing skills amongst those students, and that's the kind of focus of this department, and (...) that's the kind of focus of all the other colleges that do EAP. So we {All the BC public colleges} are all articulated together to provide that kind of training. (P5)

Interestingly, P5 describes EAP programs as not being designed exclusively to the support of ESL learners' language preparation. Even though, according to P5, these learners are second-language users of English, EAP practitioners choose to follow a curricular approach used in mainstream secondary English programs, disregarding the language needs of learners who use English as a second or additional language. In this sense, P5 brings up issues of the negative image ESL classes have (See Gunderson, 2000)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the framework adopted in this EAP program impacts on the classwork selection and for this reason it is going to be further addressed later (See 4.3).

Another issue that has caused EAP participants to avoid using the CLB to inform their curriculum is the lack of reliability of CLB-based assessment tools. This claim is also supported by Applied program participants, who argue that there is a need for reliable CLB-based assessment tools,

One of the practical barriers to implementation, I believe, has been a lack of assessment

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6 Voices of the teenage diaspora. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult literature*. Vol. 43: 8, pp. 692-706

tools that are CLB aligned and there is often a kind of a washback effect, I think, with assessment [\_\_\_\_\_] I think that what people want is more, more test bank items because not only consistency and reliability are questions, but also confidentiality issues. (P2)

Due to lack of CLB-based assessment tools, other frameworks have been used to assess learners.

For instance, in her Applied program, P3 explained that she uses the BC Articulation framework, which is based on the CLB, but upgraded to assess the outcomes needed in the program,

I use the Access descriptors because the Access descriptors will of course get everything that is in the 2000 (...) So, earlier in the term, I hand this out (...) and I have them do a self-assessment. So, I take a look at what the students should be doing in terms of competency [\_\_\_\_\_] I also look at some of the overlapping skills. What they should have been doing between genres and I also look at the vocabulary, and I look at the grammar descriptors. So, that's something that we need to add into the BC descriptors that weren't in the original 2000. (P3)

Although Access descriptors cited above are CLB-based outcomes, developed by the BC Articulation Committee for work related programs, in order to use the CLB in this Applied program P3 has to refer to a CLB adapted framework, which had to have necessary information added to as the CLB does not provide. Once more one can notice that the CLB presents a challenge to implementation because it does not provide practitioners with the necessary tools required to design a solid, effective syllabus to prepare learners to improve their English language proficiency, i.e. grammar awareness and goal-oriented outcomes. Nevertheless, P3 uses the Access descriptors to select program's and learners' outcomes, balance them out and finally design the syllabus outcomes to be achieved, a laborious exercise that not many teachers would have the time to pursue.

Once more emphasizing the lack of models, P3 further explains that she has to develop CLB-based tasks,

What I'm trying to do is create a whole bunch of tasks where you're pulling on a number of things. (P3)

Tasks have to be created because there is no material available. A further challenge is to

incorporate syllabus decisions into the post-secondary program curriculum. P3 suggests that to ease the problem, “one of the things is talking to the program areas on a regular bases and making sure that it (...) in their area exchange (...) that our curriculum is compatible with that” (P3). The efforts P3 makes to develop a syllabus that is in consonance with the program curricula may represent an impediment for other practitioners to implement the CLB in their programs. As a consequence, many practitioners may choose frameworks that have been successfully implemented along the years, especially due to lack of accessible CLB-based material or curricula to work with, as some participants described.

For assessment practices, a tendency of CLB-based programs is to use portfolios, following other models, which have been effectively implemented in other provinces. The Applied programs in this present study have been using portfolios. As P3 explains, portfolios have helped plan learners’ outcomes,

We're using a portfolio which is (...) the CLB work which Manitoba has done, looking at needs assessment (...) the Tara Holmes work, the Toronto thing whatever, in terms of establishing what the key criteria of the course are, and what are the individual bodies in front of me? where are they at? and where does that particular body need to get to? (P3)

The portfolio approach resonates with the CLB intent to serve as an assessment tool to be used by learners to measure their outcomes themselves. In this sense, the CLB empowers learners and invites them to participate more actively in the learning process. However, in the EAP program, which is non-CLB-based, other assessment practices are used. As the EAP program is not geared towards portfolio assessment practices, instead specific assessment tools are designed, some standardized with other EAP programs in BC, and others developed by instructors in the institution,

We have to standardize some aspects of our assessment due to our articulation agreements with the EAP levels I to IV, which we share with all the other community colleges within the province (P4).

The BC Articulation framework is also mentioned by another EAP participant, when referring to

the assessment practices in EAP. P5 explains, “we have an assessment department of our own, which we still have, which developed a test called the English Language Assessment, and it was used to assess students coming in” (P5). More specifically related to her program syllabus, P5 added,

I often work within the framework of the BC EAP Articulation Guide, which has the outcomes. So, the framework is the old curriculum that we developed over the years, and other colleges have developed. (P5)

Hence, this EAP program uses the BC EAP Articulation framework to design a syllabus that prepares learners to be assessed according to the skills they learn in the classroom, i.e. reading and summarizing texts. These skills are perceived as some of the academic skills learners need to achieve in the program in order to reach academic readiness, thus seen as functional for the purposes of the EAP program; the CLB, on the other hand, presents functionality issues for EAP use.

#### **4.2.3. Functionality of the CLB**

Implementing the CLB in the programs that participated in the study was considered problematic by all participants. However, Applied program participants rated the CLB as more useful for their program purposes than did EAP participants. When analyzing the degree of functionality of the CLB in each program, I considered whether the CLB suited the programs' outcomes and was used to prepare learners to achieve these outcomes. In short, the CLB was found functional when the CLB outcomes were applied to serve the goals of a program that is goal-oriented, task and outcome based.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the CLB deploys a functional view of language use and language proficiency to measure learners' functional competence according to four macro-functions, ideational; manipulative; heuristic; and imaginative (See Bachman 1990, pp. 92-94). The macro-functions are represented in the four competency areas in the CLB. The benchmarks' descriptors relate competency

at each skill to these macro-functions, predicting that learners would perform many functions at a time (See Table 4.2 below for an example of the manipulative macro-function).

Table 4.2 *An Example of the Manipulative Macro-function*

<b>Macro-function</b>	<b>Manipulative: Instrumental, directive</b>
Goal	To read information; to get things done and to learn what others want us to know or do
Examples of tasks	Manuals, directions, recipes, formulas, procedures
CLB related competencies	Reading instructions and instructional texts; Following instructions, and instructional texts

Note: Table based on the Reading Benchmarks competencies Table in the *Theoretical Framework*, p.16 (Not related to any specific level).

The Table above summarizes the relation between a macro-function (as described in the *Theoretical Framework*) and competencies (as established in Benchmark descriptors) to achieve a given goal, using specific tasks and texts. Although the relation between the CLB theoretical intent and the benchmarks seems to be problematic, the macro-functions need to be taken into account in order to evaluate the degree to which the CLB is functional for the purposes of the programs that participated in the study as a base to evaluate whether the CLB outcomes were applied in the goals of a program.

In participant-programs where the goals are to meet the CLB outcomes, such as the CELBAN test preparatory program, the material is CLB-based and it has been specially designed to prepare learners to take the test. Nevertheless, the participant who represents this program questioned a task used for writing purposes because it also requires skills other than writing,

This writing activity is filling in a charge based on a video with a nurse patient interaction and then they have to fill in the assessment record. The reason I say that we might not have taught it in the same way is this task in my mind (...) could also be viewed as a listening task actually rather than a writing task, and so I think there is some kind of cross purposes there. (P2)

According to P2, the task described above was prepared by CLB professionals responsible for developing CELBAN tasks; therefore, she relies on the material because it was developed by CLB experts. Nevertheless, one could question the validity of the task, as it requires another skill for the task to be accomplished, other than what is being assessed, and one could even ask if it follows the model of functions and benchmark competencies. Hence, what needs to be considered is the extent to which having a framework which is incoherently developed may cause problems for the elaboration of well-developed material, i.e. tasks, curricula and assessment tools.

#### **4.2.4. Functional Aspects of the CLB**

Participants considered the CLB functional in three aspects; the first one is for benchmarking program levels, i.e. some Applied programs in this local institution have been assigned a benchmark. The second aspect is for pedagogical approaches that follow the task-based approach, i.e. programs in which teachers usually use tasks to develop learners' language skills. The third aspect is for programs that use CLB-based classwork and assessment tools, i.e. ELSA programs.

All these three aspects are present in one of the two Applied programs that participated in the study, the CELBAN test preparatory program whose mandate is to prepare learners for the CELBAN test. The other benchmarked Applied program uses a task-based approach, but CLB-based classwork has to be created to align the syllabus to the CLB concept; therefore, this program does not fulfill all the aspects required to present CLB functionality. Despite the efforts of the teacher in this program,



CLB outcomes had to be adapted for the purposes of the program. Also, because of the commitment of the institution to use the BC Articulation descriptors as outcomes, the CLB is not directly used to inform the syllabus.

In this sense, only the CELBAN test preparatory program, which is assisted by CLB-based material and uses the CELBAN test itself as the assessment tool, presents CLB functionality. This finding suggests that for the CLB to be functionally used in a program, it is necessary to develop CLB-based classwork and assessment tools. Otherwise, if classwork and assessment tools are not standardized and if models of implementation are not available, other curricular frameworks will be used to assist practitioners with implementation.

To illustrate how the CLB is implemented in the CELBAN program, P2 describes how learners are prepared for the test, giving details of tasks used to prepare learners to achieve the outcomes measured in the test,

For the CELBAN test, they need to do three types of reading tasks, a skimming and scanning, a reading comprehension, and a cloze activity. The outcomes really would be to (...) look at the structure of the document to (...) give students some strategies to work with a piece of text that is other than just starting at the beginning and reading to the end. (P2)

The approach described above is based on CLB outcomes; hence it uses the CLB to achieve the purposes of the program. Additionally, P2 mentions that following a CLB-based framework has assisted other teachers in the program,

The instructors have built confidence. They've also being able to look at the tasks that they use that they either selected or developed themselves in the classroom and they feel confident that those tasks are roughly at the level that they're intending them to be at. (P2)  
However, most practitioners do not have a CLB-based curriculum to follow, consequently the

CLB has been mostly used to standardize program levels and to serve as a common reference to describe learners' proficiency, i.e. this learner is benchmark level 8. Nevertheless, being granted a benchmark level does not indicate what the learner has been trained to do, nor does it specify whether

the learner fulfills the language proficiency outcomes needed to achieve goals such as pursuing further education, which may raise questions about the utility of the CLB as a framework to prepare learners in EAP programs. Moreover, in the context of this present study, the CLB has especially presented issues of functionality in many aspects, as it is going to be examined next.

#### **4.2.5. Non-Functional Aspects of the CLB**

Many of the CLB shortcomings reported earlier cause the benchmarks' non-functionality. According to participants, some of the CLB non-functional aspects can be found in implementation, i.e. curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and assessment. Other non-functional aspects are related to the descriptors and address the lack of level specification and clarity. Also, the CLB outcomes do not relate to some of the programs' outcomes, i.e. CLB outcomes are not EAP focused, but designed for settlement and work related programs, as stated earlier.

Additionally, P2 remarks that CLB implementation is non-functional because some of the challenges imply changes in pedagogical approaches and curricular practices,

I think we underestimate how challenging that is to get people to really change their practice (...) Implementation is challenging it's been challenging for everyone, for the institution, it really does require that we look at our curriculum in a deep way and that we look at our practice because it is different (...) and curriculum revision really requires time. (P2)

The argument above once more calls for the need to design CLB-based curricula. Another participant argues that bringing in the CLB did not represent change, as she explains, “the department signed off and has said that 'yes, we accept these benchmarks' (...) but they're not really in place I would say (P3). Not having benchmarks 'really in place' is further elaborated by another participant,

We have established curricula here that work very, very well for us and we have a variety of sources of documents that inform our curricular choices. Benchmarks is one

of them, but it's not the basis, and why should it be, you know, why should it be? (P4)

The question P4 asks seems to relate back to the CLB purposes. As the curricula work 'very, very well' for the intended purposes, there is no need to change them into a CLB approach, which as the findings show is non-functional. This point is also raised by another participant, who adds,

What we teach, we have (...) questions and queries about the benchmarks at the higher levels, and whether they fit what we're doing. We (...) people in [EAP department in the Institution], I think feel comfortable that what they are doing is preparing students for where those students seem to want to go (P5).

In other words, if the approaches are different, if the CLB does not serve the EAP program purposes and if participants cannot rely on the benchmarks as outcomes, why should the CLB be implemented? When asked why the CLB does not inform EAP curriculum, P5 gives two reasons. First,

The other problem with curriculum is that we teach a very limited curriculum and it is an academic curriculum. It's trying to give students the skills to function in an academic environment, their reading and writing skills (P5).

As the CLB is not academically specific, it cannot be used 'to give students the skills to function in an academic environment'. The second reason P5 gives is the following,

EAP does some things that are in the benchmarks, but to be able to say it's a benchmarked curricula, you're supposed to be able to say you're doing 70% of the stuff that's covered (...) and we don't. We only do a small part of it. And (..) in reverse benchmarks do not cover certain language skills that we do. (P5)

The CLB concept of measuring learners' language proficiency is considered inefficient for academic purposes because it goes beyond the EAP program's scope. Moreover, most participants have deemed assessment as being one of the causes for the CLB non-functionality. For instance, P5 explains that assessment practices in the institution is functional and when they attempted to use a CLB-based assessment tool, it failed to serve the EAP program's purpose,

Our own English Language Assessment seems to test the things we want for what we

teach. We've been using the CLBPT recently (...) again it works really level up to a certain level and after that it's just not accurate enough (P5).

Level equivalency is also an issue as seen earlier. The CLB level cut does not seem to discriminate levels as precisely as the institution needs. Therefore, most participants claimed that CLB-based assessments are unreliable for their purposes because the bands are too broad. If the CLB bands do not discriminate levels precisely enough, CLB-based assessment tools may not measure the outcomes precisely either. This lack of precision has been sensed by other participants. For instance, P5 and P3, representing EAP and Applied programs respectively, reported the same issue,

The other problem was that we seemed to have more ESL levels (...) than the benchmarks have (P5).

And,

Another final point on why the benchmarks may not be working is there is a sense that the levels are really broad compared to what we have. (P3)

Examining the descriptors more precisely, one finds that the lack of level specification and the broad bands may be caused by the generalization of the language used in the descriptors. P4 raises two points about the lack of trustworthiness of CLB-based assessment. First, he claims the CLB influences the program, but with some reservations with respect to functionality,

It's influenced (...) some of the ways we do our assessments (...) but at the same (...) time to go directly to the CLB document and use it (...) it would not be useful. (P4)

The hesitation with which P4 describes the CLB influence on assessment, noticed in the number of long pauses, works as a preamble for his later remark on the non-functionality of the CLB. P4 addresses the use of CLB for accepting learners into the program, which in his view is also problematic,

Our concern about CLB profiles is that if we were to get students (...) sometimes they are now coming with CLB profiles, we're not a 100% (...) we really can't guarantee that we would know where to fit a student, and of course you're probably going to hear about the CLBPT as an instrument which is completely unreliable (...) But, dealing with a CLB profile from an outside institution from the assessment centre, we would really be skeptical of that in terms of our placements here. (P4)

The concern raised brings up issues of learners transferability across institutions based on CLB bands. For instance, a learner that is granted a benchmark in one institution may not be given the same band in another, as the CLBPT does not seem to be consistently measuring learners' English language proficiency. Thus, because the CLB presents several implementational issues, as P4 points out, “the deeper that you go into the implementation, the more you find the practical obstacles and contradictions” (P4), and these 'obstacles and contradictions' impede the CLB functionality; the CLB outcomes are limited to and better used in certain programs, i.e. settlement and work related,

You know, you could have, a (...) settlement ESL program, which could be very effectively informed by CLB, I think, and call it CLB 7, or CLB 8 even, or job orientation (...) but still would not be EAP, right? (P4)

Once more the unsuitability of benchmark outcomes for academic purposes is addressed. In the quote above where P4 pins down the argument that other participants support, the CLB is not EAP oriented; it only serves community and work domains, and that is why the CLB is effectively used in these areas, but not in EAP, as P4 insists,

It was definitely (...) it serves better the (...) settlement interests, I think, and Access interests rather than EAP (...) some of the CLB language actually do (...). some of the things we do, but not very much (P4).

The argument above resonates with what P5 stated earlier. P5 also represents the EAP program and perhaps because of this she shares many viewpoints and has similar arguments to P4's when explaining why the CLB has not been used to inform their EAP curricular and assessment practices.

### 4.3. Text Types in Sampled Classwork

Classwork sampled served as an instantiation of the syllabi used in the participant-programs. In this sense, when I analyzed the classwork it was interesting to observe that EAP and Applied programs share some similarities. Both EAP and Applied programs use: authentic texts, report writing, literature; form-filling; report; formatted texts, essay and the same reading text book<sup>7</sup>. Along with text types the following tasks were also identified: inferences; critical thinking; identifying bias and logical relations. This finding begs the following questions, if these programs share some commonalities in texts and tasks used to achieve outcomes, what makes the CLB more functional in Applied programs than in EAP to prepare learners to reach academic readiness?, and what differences in preparing learners to achieve academic readiness do these programs present?

The answer to these questions may rest on the perceptions that each participant has of the CLB and in how they relate their viewpoint to their practice, leading those who think the CLB is useful for their programs' purposes to use CLB-based classwork and assessment practices as opposed to those who do not. Another possible answer could be that there seems to be more CLB-based material and assessment tools developed for the Applied programs that participated in the study than for the EAP.

Despite having different approaches, academic preparation is done in EAP and Applied programs, as P2 explains, “typically traditionally the academic preparation has all been done in [EAP], but I think the lines are sort of blurring”. Academic preparation lines are blurring because learners in this institution can choose Applied programs that have been benchmarked, i.e. nursing, dental assisting, and digital graphic, as an alternative pathway to mainstream post-secondary programs.

In the Applied programs learners are prepared to enter non-ESL programs by doing classwork that are more likely to be encountered in their specific academic contexts, i.e. in the nursing Applied

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7 *Ten steps to advancing college reading skills*, John Langan, 2006.

program, a text type that is used is incident report, which is occupationally focused and goal-specific. The use of goal specific text types in Applied programs may suggest that there are genres being used to prepare learners for post-secondary mainstream programs other than the used in EAP programs, which are more generic and less goal-oriented. As learners have being trained to enter post-secondary mainstream programs in a broader and more specific way, i.e. with a clear occupational goal-orientation, practitioners may require a re-conceptualization of academic outcomes. In that case, for EAP curricula to become more functional, different outcomes, other than reading and writing for academic purposes, would need to be addressed, as P3 claims,

At the end of the day, I want them to have had enough variety that I can say, 'yes, those people' (...) and they can say, 'yes those people (...) can do it'. I see these skills as not been only occupational, but really crossing over with whatever we see as an educated person. (P3)

Similarly, when referring to reading activities P1 suggested, "maybe at our advanced levels students do need other kinds of reading besides academic reading". In this sense, text variety has been a concern in Applied programs, mostly because the CLB suggests a wide variety of registers, i.e. tables, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers, fiction, and so forth. Contrasting Applied program classwork to those in EAP programs, P2 remarks that she uses CLB-based material,

The material is really very CLB oriented. Comparing to a more generic EAP class the material for the most is authentic. It's occupationally focused, so I think in the more generic EAP class it's not. It's not based on (...) different types of literature for example. We do the form filling and we do incident report writing. They do have to adapt to the genre, the professional standard in nursing. This has been one of the strengths, I think of doing the CLB. We have made a very real effort to bring in formatted documents, real world documents that people are using in either their profession or their training courses. (P2)

The EAP program is again described a 'generic' as compared to the specificity of Applied programs. Because P2 teaches the CELBAN test preparatory course, in her opinion she does not do much work on inferences or critical thinking, but according to her, in the other Applied program,

English for Health Sciences, “they do a lot of work on inferences, a lot of work on critical thinking and (...) reading for bias” (P2).

Nevertheless, the tasks cited above are also present in EAP programs, which can give support the argument that academic preparation has also been done in this Applied program, as it uses tasks and text types which are also covered in the EAP program. The difference is that in Applied programs learners are being trained to enter post-secondary mainstream programs in a specific field of study while in EAP they do not focus on a specific purpose.

When describing the texts used in the program, P2 emphasized that the goal-orientation, the purpose of the texts, is perceived by learners as different,

What's really different for a lot internationally educated nurses is that (...) is the legal liability held around this documents. It's almost the purpose for the document (...) is different. (P2)

P2 notices that the goal-orientation of the text varies according to the context. In other words, texts vary according to genre and register, i.e. reporting an accident in North America versus reporting an accident in China, may present differences in the text discourse. Although text-context approach is not directly mentioned, it seems to be inherent to P2's argument, as she claims that the differences in the context (another culture, another language) affect the text and the differences are naturally perceived by learners.

Similarly, P3 (representing English for Health Sciences program) suggested that authenticity of texts and purposes, as well as text types in the classwork are influenced by the current contextual situation. Additionally, she suggested that formatted texts have been overlooked in EAP,

I do think with the rise of the internet, the use of technology, the ease in which students can do computing (...) I think that working with all of that formatted reading (...) I think there has been an absence of that in EAP programming. (P3)

Again comparing her Applied program to EAP, P3 added that in her in her program, “the scope



of genre is much narrower. It's narrower in terms of what they will do academically, but they also can do other things, and they could do them well" (P3). P3 also emphasizes that the different channels of communication, i.e. the internet, the use of technology, have affected text construction. Conversely, in EAP programs, besides critical thinking and inferences, the focus is on writing and reading skills, as P4 explains, "I think what we try to do in writing (...) various rhetorical forms along with, as I said, the research report, the research essay. The reading we try to emphasize, critical thinking skills".

Additionally, P5 further explains that for reading skills in the EAP program they use the text book chosen for the program, once again stressing that this approach is not CLB-based,

In reading anyway every instructor would have a prescribed reading text. So, if you look at this compared to benchmarks, it may strike (...) this is not very functional, or (..) task-based, but (...) this book was not made for second language learners. This is a text book (....) developed in the States. (P5)

The text book mentioned above, *Ten steps to advancing college reading skills 4th Ed.* by John Langan, is divided in three parts. Part one introduces ten steps to advancing college reading, focusing on vocabulary, main and supporting ideas, implying, transitions, patterns of organization, differences between opinions and facts, inferences, purpose, tone, and argument. Part two, presents texts and reading comprehension exercises, and part three has combined-skill tests to apply the knowledge acquired in part one.

Interestingly, despite being adopted in EAP and Applied programs, this text book was mentioned more directly by the EAP teacher participant. She stressed that one of the reasons why the book is adopted is because it suits the non-ESL approach of the EAP program. In my opinion, it is a positive point to have a book that is not made specifically for ESL learners. I personally believe that ESL adapted texts are a disservice to ESL learners because they instantiate a context that does not exist. As far as register is concerned, this book instantiates, to some extent, authentic texts learners will be dealing with in non-ESL programs.

Additionally, *Ten steps to advancing college reading skills* is an American text book. This is an interesting element because it marks the non-CLB based approach once more, as the CLB suggests the use of Canadian material. Besides this characteristic, the EAP teacher-participant discussed other characteristics pertinent to the book, i.e. contextual information, text goals and teaching approach (See Table 4.3 below).

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Table 4.3 *Classwork Sample: Ten Steps to Advancing College Reading Skills*

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<b>Context</b>	Developed in the States, not made for ESL learners, a real pre-college book for people coming out of grade 12 college reading
<b>Text Goal</b>	to focus on vocabulary, main and supporting ideas, implying, transitions, patterns of organization, differences between opinions and facts, inferences, purpose, tone, and argument
<b>Teaching Approach</b>	literature-based, non-fiction, combining skills

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P5 uses literature, i.e. short-stories, fiction and non-fiction, as one of the main text types due to the secondary school approach in the EAP program, as she describes, “we alternate reading a short story, a Canadian short story, and reading a journal” (P5). The EAP program also uses text types that are more related to academic contexts, i.e. reports and expository essays. As an example of an activity that P5 considers 'very academic', she says, “library workshop (..) on how to do research online (..) in the library and online. This was very academic”(P5). Additionally, when asked about texts types used in the program, P5 replied,

We have a vocabulary text (...) we don't do enough (...) in graph reading and non-linear

reading (...) most of what they're getting is of a formal register because that's what we're preparing them to read, formal or literary (...) logical relations. (P5)

In short, the EAP syllabus was described as having specific characteristics that differ from a traditional ESL class, making the program more mainstream like. The EAP program syllabus characteristics are summarized in the Table 4.4 below, and the approaches used to implement each of them are described. Note that some of the registers and text types cited are also present in the CLB outcomes, i.e. short stories, reading for ideas and opinion (reading skills), summarizing, and so forth, marking some correlation with the CLB.

Table 4.4 *EAP Syllabus Characteristics and Approaches*

Characteristic	Approach
Use of authentic material	Program blends High school and ESL approaches
Use of Literature	Short stories; poetry; for reading and oral skills
Writing research reports, research essays	Research process
Citation workshops	Scaffold process
Firm grounding in academic learning	Learners are trained through mainstream texts skills and strategies

EAP-participants claim to use authentic materials as part of the text variety in the syllabus apparently because of the High school approach the program takes, which characterizes the program as having “firm grounding in academic learning skills and strategies” (P4). Nevertheless, Applied programs, which as opposed to EAP follow a CLB-based approach, use the benchmarks as reference for text selection, and also claim to use authentic texts.

The extent to which this EAP approach is in fact preparing learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs could be questioned because of the text types chosen to prepare learners for academic contexts, i.e. the use of literature, short stories and fiction. In this sense, one could ask the reason why literature is used to instantiate academic registers in order to achieve the outcomes of a general academic program. Conversely, another text type used in the program is definitely more academic, i.e. putting lecture notes into graphs, and “mapping them depending on the organization of the lecture” (P5).

In sum, although the approaches are different, EAP and Applied programs' syllabi are designed to prepare learners to enter mainstream post-secondary programs. The differences noticed in the syllabi were in text types and purposes, i.e. occupationally focused or generically academic, CLB-based or non-CLB-based. Despite the differences, all participants reported difficulties to apply the CLB to suit the programs' purposes. These difficulties are going to be discussed next.

#### **4.4. Dilemmas Faced to Implement the CLB**

In order to examine the extent to which the CLB has been implemented for academic purposes in the context of the study, I focused on issues perceived in relation to the EAP program, considering the use of the CLB to achieve programs' and learners' goals. Most of these issues are related to implementation and many of the critiques participants made were with respect to the CLB descriptors, and the lack of CLB-based curriculum and assessment tools, as mentioned earlier.

For this reason, the CLB represents a challenge to participants as opposed to offering a solution to practical issues. One of the dilemmas participants face is having to achieve programs' outcomes, inform curricular and assessment practices, as well as serve learners' purposes referring only to the CLB. Because the CLB does not comply with participants' needs, other frameworks are used to achieve

the purposes of the programs. According to all participants, the CLB can only be implemented in their EAP program if the outcomes were more specifically related to academic preparation, which calls for a revision and upgrade of the outcomes of CLB.

#### **4.4.1. Critiques on the CLB**

Participants criticized the benchmarks' outcomes because they are difficult to be applied for assessment and curricular practices of the institution. Most participants agreed that implementing the CLB in their programs causes many problems. For instance, P2 showed frustration implementing some CLB concepts in her program syllabus, claiming that it may not suit the goals of the program. She explained that it was difficult to match the CLB descriptor outcome, 'to identify the writer's bias and the purpose/function of the text' (CLB 8: Reading), with her program outcomes because she teaches a test preparation program besides being a CLB-based program, as she states,

I'm really struggling with that (..) the course that I teach because, yes, there is inference in small places and kind of critical thinking. Where? in the reading comprehension part. (P2)

The struggle P2 faces when asked to apply a CLB outcome to her program syllabus may support the claim that this struggle has been also sensed by other practitioners, as P2 suggests, “many of the challenges that were outlined at the Guide to implementation are some of the challenges that we've faced here”. P2 concludes claiming that implementing the CLB is actually 'a lot of work', “I think that we had expectations for the CLB by bringing it in. Now it just seems like a lot of work to people” (P2).

Similarly, implementing the CLB without having samples of classwork to prepare learners to achieve the CLB outcomes is another challenge participants voiced. P3, for instance, expressed her frustration saying that the CLB “should be more accessible (...) I don't want to make any more stuff. The samples are few” (P3). As the CLB does not seem to assist these practitioners with ways to

implement the outcomes in the classroom, they need to work intensely to design classwork that is CLB-based.

P4 was very critical of the CLB outcomes, questioning their suitability for EAP purposes. As opposed to the CLB, in his EAP program, he explains, “we're not only dealing with language proficiency, but we are also dealing with content, with academic content, and that is not so clearly addressed in the CLB document” (P4). In P4's view, his EAP program is content-based, therefore it should not look at language proficiency as the CLB does. Instead, EAP should focus on content skills. Once again comparing the CLB to the EAP program approach, P4 explains, “we cannot be all things to all people, given the limitations of time, and the content that we have to cover”.

Apparently P4 sees the CLB as meant to be 'all things to all people' and that is another reason why the CLB is not suitable for the EAP program's outcomes. Additionally, P4 shows skepticism towards using the CLB to inform EAP outcomes because, according to him, the CLB is better suited for work related outcomes,

It seems that there is a lot of funding that is driven by CLB now and because the government [bureaucrats] has this kind of preoccupation, so there is a lot of politics involved in this here. The attraction of CLB is of course the idea of getting immigrants into jobs more quickly, right? (P4)

Other critiques raised are with respect to the CLB application. First, the CLB descriptors were not seen as reliable because, “there is a lot of vague and subjective language within the descriptors” (P4). Second, EAP participants did not believe that CLB-based assessment tools can measure learners' academic readiness. In other words, if the CLB is not reliable to measure language proficiency, it should not be reliable to inform programs' outcomes. Similarly, the utility of the CLB to inform curricular practices was a target of participants' critiques, especially to inform EAP curricula, as many of the critiques addressed the difficulty participants face to implement the CLB in the classroom, especially for EAP programs' assessment and curriculum practices, as noted before, the outcomes are

not goal-specific and do not relate performance to grammatical accuracy.

Although some critiques on the CLB were related to theoretical issues, most of them addressed practical issues, i.e. goal-orientation and outcomes that are aligned to practitioners needs for curricular implementation and assessment practices. Therefore, according to participants most of the changes required to improve the CLB functionality relate directly to implementing the benchmarks in the classroom. In the next section I present the changes participants suggested to improve the CLB functionality.

#### **4.4.2. Required Changes to Improve the CLB Functionality**

Despite the fact that all participants considered the CLB non-functional for academic purposes, not many suggestions were given to improve the CLB functionality. Nevertheless, most participants pointed out that implementing the CLB in the programs was a challenge 'for everyone in the institution' (P2). Amongst the reasons for benchmarks to not impact on curriculum there is the fact that 'curriculum revision requires time' (P2) and funding, as well.

According to P2, implementing the CLB also requires change in teaching approaches. These different approaches could be addressed in a guide specifically created for academic purposes, as P2 suggested,

I think we under estimate how challenging that is to get people to really change their practice. What might be really helpful is a very (...) a guide to implementation for academic programs (P2).

It seems that what P2 perceives as necessary to improve the CLB for EAP use is extra guidance to implementation, a model for practitioners to use benchmarks in order to inform their curricular practices. However, if the CLB outcomes do not serve EAP, and if the benchmarks do not measure the

proficiency required, as it is the case in the EAP participant- program, the solution would be to improve the descriptors, as this other participant suggests,

The fact that the benchmarks seemed to work really quite adequately at the lower levels, but at the higher levels they need to be looked at and re-edited and re-written, and made more specific (P5).

Starting from the premise that the CLB is not appropriate for academic purposes because benchmarks are not specific at the higher levels, as P5 points out, one can argue that for the CLB to be functionally applied in EAP programs the goal-orientation of the descriptors have to clearly address academic requirements. Otherwise, the CLB is going to be used only as reference for standardizing proficiency levels, as it has been found in the context of this present study.

Moreover, the findings have shown that the ways to prepare ESL learners to achieve academic readiness have become broader. For this reason, in order to build up knowledge of academic text types that take contextual variables in account (Christie, 1994; Gibbons, 2001; Hammond, 1990 cited in Gibbons, 2007), and that have specific goal orientation, one needs to be familiar with the texts that instantiate these academic contexts. Nevertheless, considering the context of this present study, the participants affiliated with the EAP program choose to approach academic preparation based on secondary English 12, while the Applied programs, which are goal specific, focus on text types that learners are more likely to encounter in post-secondary programs. Additionally, participant-programs focus on pedagogical genres, such as expository essay writing, research papers and so forth, thus claiming to use authentic texts.

The findings have shown that the struggles teacher-participants go through in order to choose the best approach to achieve the goals of their programs are related to having to use a framework that lacks models of curriculum implementation, material development, as well as assessment practices. If frameworks such as the CLB fail to assist practitioners with elements that pertain to the contexts



learners need to function well, there is no reason why such a framework should be implemented in curricula. In the next chapter I discuss these and other implications related to the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 5. Discussions and Implications**

This study explored the impact of the CLB on the curriculum of a local EAP program that prepares learners to enter post-secondary mainstream courses. The questions that guided the study were: 1) to what degree does the CLB influence EAP curricula decisions made by teachers and administrators in a local BC college?; and 2) what practical and theoretical issues are most relevant to the processes of CLB implementation? In an attempt to answer these questions, I interviewed two administrators and three teachers who are familiar with using the CLB for preparing ESL learners to enter post-secondary mainstream programs. The interviews were guided by structured questions (See Appendixes C and D), which together with the classwork sampled, produced the data for the analysis. The findings of the study suggest that the CLB is not intended for academic purposes as the outcomes do not suit the EAP program goals. The most pertinent reasons for the little impact the CLB has on EAP curricula are: a) the lack of CLB-based models to implementation, i.e. goal-oriented tasks and outcomes, as well as curricula and assessment tools and b) the EAP curriculum is articulated to other EAP programs in BC, thus EAP participants choose to follow a non-CLB-based framework. Nevertheless, intriguingly, in the Applied programs, which are more goal-specific, the CLB has been informing syllabi more effectively.

In sum, this chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and examines the implications of using the CLB as a framework for academic contexts, suggesting a socio-semiotic approach to improve its applicability, under the scope of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) text-context and register theories. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

## **5.1. Synopsis and Discussions**

The study of the impact of the CLB on the curriculum of a local EAP program that prepares learners to enter post-secondary mainstream courses provided key findings with reference to both theoretical and practical issues. The findings show that although the CLB theoretical framework accounts for English language proficiency from a functional standpoint, it does not clearly assist practitioners with informing how to achieve the outcomes needed, especially in academic contexts. Moreover the lack of goal-oriented tasks leads participants in the study to perceive the benchmark descriptors as 'too generic' for the purposes of their EAP program (as discussed in Chapter Four). For this reason, assessing how learners function from the CLB 'can do' standpoint in relation to a given, more generic context, i.e. English for academic purposes, has been a challenge to participants, who claimed that it is problematic to evaluate learners' performance according to generic benchmark descriptors, as they are too subjective.

Similarly, as the CLB follows a competency-based approach (discussed in Chapter Two), in order to measure learners' competency in terms of language proficiency, one needs to examine communication competence; however, the contextual purpose where communication takes place has not been taken in account.

Moreover, the lack of clarity of the CLB theoretical approach may also be the cause of the issues participants considered about curriculum implementation. Similarly, participants pointed out the need for material development, and the elaboration of CLB-based assessment tools, which require the development of more specific, outcomes. Thus, because the CLB outcomes are not goal-oriented, if context were added to the benchmark outcomes, one could be able to foresee implementational demands in relation to contextual needs, as it is discussed later in this chapter.

### **5.1.1. Considering the CLB Implementation Issues**

The CLB implementational issues found in the study seem to have been caused by the difficulty participants have to apply the descriptors into the EAP program's curriculum to match the program outcomes. However, such mismatch can be a reflex of the fact that the CLB is not a curriculum framework but a scale of English proficiency, following a competency-based approach, and measuring learners' competency in terms of language proficiency (as noted in Chapter Two). Furthermore, the CLB does not provide models for curriculum development, especially because the benchmarks do not instantiate the theoretical framework and they are too unspecific. Thus, the lack of specificity, goal-orientation and contextualized outcomes appear to be resulting in implementational problems.

In other words, because the CLB outcomes do not specify the contextual situation in which the English language needs to be used, it becomes more challenging for the learner to perform effectively and show what she 'can do', in a given task. For example, in writing at CLB level 8, the learner is asked to 'convey a personal message in a formal short letter or note, or through email, expressing or responding to appreciation, complaint, disappointment, satisfaction, dissatisfaction and hope'.

In the task mentioned, the situation in which 'appreciation, complaint, disappointment, satisfaction, dissatisfaction and hope' have to be expressed, is not clear, as per what the learner is attempting to do (what is the goal to be achieved); who are involved in the communication (the negotiation of meaning), and how the language has to be used for this 'communicative task' (discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.3.2) to be completed successfully. This is to say that the 'whats', 'whos' and 'hows', which are fundamental contextual elements whose awareness could help learners perform the task more efficiently, are not clearly specified in the CLB descriptors, nor in the task, as noted in the example above.

In this sense, as it has been claimed elsewhere, the “CLB uses Performance Indicators (for

example Addresses the purpose of the task; Expresses main ideas and supports them with details)  
(From the Australian Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP) fact sheet, 2007) and “these Performance Indicators do not indicate every element that might be in a particular genre or text, but rather convey descriptions of what one would expect a particular text to do.”(p.3).

In my view, such claim could give support to one of the reasons why the participants have been considering the descriptors too subjective to be consistently applied, especially at the higher levels of the scale, where contextual variables are more complex. In other words, if the context is not clear, the text cannot be properly instantiated, and as a consequence measuring learners' performance may be problematic.

Another problem the CLB seems to have (according to the findings) is that the benchmarks focus mainly on linguistic aspects, i.e. “can reproduce complex extensive information and ideas from multiple sources as an accurate outline...Demonstrates good control of grammar, vocabulary, and general organization...”(writing at Benchmark 10, Theoretical Framework, p.70). This extensive focus on linguistic aspects may intensify requirements to use grammatical features accurately, as was mentioned by some participants.

Nevertheless, there are extra linguistic aspects that influence text construction, which have not been considered and which may be yet more important to the elaboration of a text. For instance, in the writing task mentioned earlier, if one chooses to respond to a parent's complaint as opposed to a friend's, the text produced has to vary accordingly and more deeply than simply addressing the task and expressing ideas using examples and details to support these ideas through the use of 'good control of grammar, vocabulary, and general organization'. In this sense, key elements that are inherent to context have not been considered; although they add essential information to the contextual situation of a task. That is why, in my view, it is important to contextualize the task.

Hence, in order to contextualize a task, first one needs to look at the contextual variables to be able anticipate elements that ought to be present in the text. For example, when responding to a parent's complaint in an informal manner, the interlocutors, i.e. daughter/ parent, would more likely choose to convey a personal message, producing a text where choices such as letter, note, or email would also imply differences in the language used to elaborate the text.

Thus, using language in relation to context could provide the basis for an 'authentic', real-world approach to meaning-making so that the language user can be more equipped to function in 'real, situation contexts, i.e. work, study and community. Such contextual awareness seems to be the intent of the CLB; however, more contextual specificity is lacking in the outcomes, which may be undermining implementation.

Conversely, in contextualized language use, it is indeed important to examine meaning-making needs for language users to function effectively in the situations they will be required to use language. In fact, when applying a framework, learners' needs should provide the basis for curriculum design. Moreover, in order to develop curriculum based on a theoretical framework such as the CLB, the framework should be informed by the target contexts learners will need to be familiar with, i.e. academic, work-related, and social contexts.

Especially for academic purposes, which seems to be the most urgent required application of the CLB, the outcomes should be oriented towards preparing learners for academic contexts, and the CLB framework should adjust to such implementational needs. Additionally, if the CLB theoretical framework could be realized in practice i.e. be implemented as programs' outcomes to inform curricular choices, consequently these programs would pilot models of implementation that in turn could be followed in order to be well and consistently implemented in other programs.

### **5.1.2. Raising Contextual Awareness in the CLB**

As the findings suggest, the CLB outcomes need to be upgraded in order to serve academic purposes. One way to make the CLB more clearly applicable for academic purposes is to raise academic contextual awareness. By taking a contextual approach, as it has been argued thus far, one may be able to predict textual features, looking at extra-linguistic elements that are found beyond the text: context. That is so because it is context that motivates text production. Furthermore, context signals purpose, defines interlocutor roles and the speaker intent. Therefore, in my view, by being aware of contextual configurations, teachers can be better equipped to assist learners to produce well-structured texts and also to evaluate learners' performance. Hence, next I will attempt to demonstrate that when building contextual awareness, one can also build language proficiency.

First, in order to build contextual awareness, one should look at the variables imposed by the context where the communication is taking place. These contextual variables are usually imprinted on the texts if they are effectively produced, i.e. aspects such as written or spoken modes; communication purpose; sender/recipient roles and motives; formal/informal style. These elements are samples of textual features determined by context. Therefore, noticing such contextual configurations (Hasan, 1985) allows for textual predictions, which helps one choose from the linguistic repertoire what feature of the language can better convey the intended message.

In other words, context limits textual predictions and such limitations are expected by language users of a given community. Furthermore, if contextual configurations are not respected, the texts produced will not fulfill the communication purposes and this misfit is easily identifiable. In this sense, one notes that the benchmark descriptors spell out what type of text the learner is expected to produce in a given situation, i.e. “learner can write formal texts needed for complex routine tasks in many demanding contexts of language use (business/work, academic, social)” (Benchmark 10 for writing).

Nevertheless, there is no mention of contextual configurations to guide the learner to perform this CLB 'communicative task' effectively, i.e. how to achieve the level of complexity the task requires.

Conversely, the descriptors use attributes such as 'formal' and 'complex' to describe what type of text is expected. As a result, such description allows for subjective evaluation.

In contrast, if performance is evaluated according to context, looking at the different textual choices it imposes, i.e. formality, use of business-related vocabulary and discussion of business transactions these choices are easily identifiable. If one does not follow the rules imposed by the context, communication problems will arise. For instance, addressing a person one meets for the first time in a business situation in an informal manner, using colloquial language and talking about personal problems would be seen as inappropriate.

Hence by having contextual awareness according to the specific situation language is being used, one can build textual awareness that in turn builds contextual awareness (Halliday, 1991). In this sense, context and text are interdependent, two sides of the same token. Separating one from the other turns language learning into a more difficult and unnatural process. Nevertheless, such contextualization seems to be absent in the benchmarks even though practitioners and learners could benefit immensely from having outcomes that look at context to guide the purpose to be achieved in a text.

For the reasons stated above, it would be indeed useful to raise context awareness to help practitioners apply the CLB outcomes. However, before going into more pragmatic uses of a contextualized framework, it is equally important to differentiate competency from proficiency in order to specify what the benchmarks seem to attempt to measure.

Competency refers to achievement, the outcomes learners should be able to achieve. Proficiency addresses placement, the level of language use one demonstrates to have (Feez, 2002; Joyce and Burns, 2007). In this sense, proficiency seems to be the major focus of the CLB; however, the benchmarks do not specify ways to achieve the descriptors outcomes. Thus, in an attempt to suggest how context



awareness could assist practitioners to use the CLB more efficiently, I shall discuss text-context approach under the scope of socio-semiotics in the next section.

### 5.1.3. Considering the Socio-semiotic Text-context Approach

As it has been discussed thus far, when examining contextual features, one should take into account a text-context approach. Considering Hasan's (1996) view, “context precedes text” (p. 46), thus in order to use language efficiently, one has to account for context when attempting to communicate effectively. Additionally, in the Hallidayan socio-semiotic theory of *Register*, contextual information is identified according to the contextual configurations that specify the 'whats', 'whos' and 'hows' of a given situation (field, tenor and mode, respectively, as displayed in Figure 5.1 below).

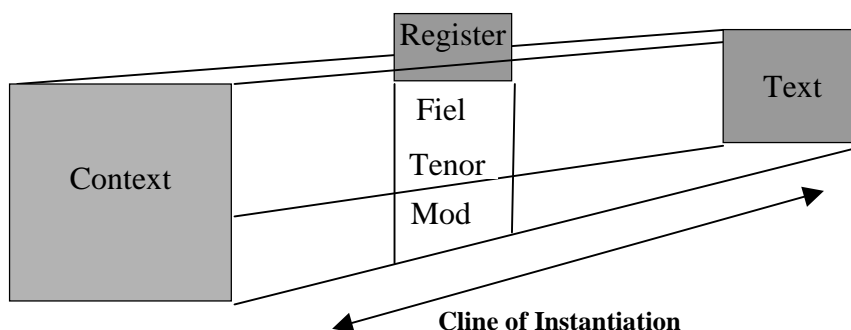


Figure 5.1 Text-context Cline of Instantiation

The graph above shows how context is realized by text through contextual configurations, which are directly identified in the text. In order to explore the socio-semiotic text-context theory it is equally important to be familiar with the Hallidayan theory of *Register*.

M.A.K Halliday's socio-semiotics theory of language, namely Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), examines language in context. According to Halliday, context is realized by text, as 'these are aspects of the same meaning-making processes' (Halliday, 1985). To develop the theory of *Register*, Halliday revisits Malinowski's (1923) theory of *context of situation*, i.e. the environment in which any given text is created, and Firth's (1935) description of context of situation that includes “the participants in the situation, the action of the participants, verbal and non-verbal, surrounding objects and events of the situation and the effects of the verbal action” (see Halliday, 1985. p.8). Building on Malinowski and Firth, Halliday's theory of *Register* is a tool “to interpret the social context of a text” (p. 12).

Additionally, Halliday defines register as “the semantic variety in which a text may be regarded as an instance” (1978, p. 110). As opposed to Ferguson and Gumperz's (1971) definition of register as lexicogrammatical differences, Halliday uses the term register to identify text varieties according to what is being spoken or done, by whom and how, according to a given social context. In short, Halliday claims that register is 'a semantic concept' related to a situation and identified according to field, tenor and mode to construe the meaning of a text.

More specifically, field encompasses “the nature of social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). Looking at tenor, one can account for “who is taking part, to the nature of participants, their status and roles”, and mode is “what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation” (p. 12).

In particular, the Hallidayan *Register* theory examines language as a process and not as a product. This approach links back to the constructionist analytical tool used in this study, as Talmy (in press, p.8) explains, “analyzing not only the whats, or the product of the interview, but also the hows, or the process involved in the co-construction of meaning”. Interestingly it is to say that although the

CLB considers the Hallidayan register approach, the Theoretical Framework does not use it in the way it has been suggested here (see Theoretical Framework, p.83).

Thus, a pertinent question when approaching language from a context standpoint is with respect to the differences, advantages, and purposes of taking such approach. Would a text-context approach serve well any sector of language teaching, or is it limited to content-relevant language courses? I would like to attempt to answer this question from a socio-semiotic standpoint, looking at language as a tool to realize meaning, and using a Hallidayan SFL lens.

From an SFL perspective, one sees that the relation context holds to language is a dependent one. Language is shaped by context and this premise guides the text-context approach suggested in this study. In contrast, it seems to be the case that most SLA theories have been looking at language from a social, interactive and in-context viewpoint, adopting the communicative approach as effective language teaching and learning practices (Johnson, 1982; Kramsch, 1993; Kasper & Kellerman, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Nevertheless, most teaching practices, including those represented by the participants in this study, appear to be approaching language as an isolated unit, detached from context, cultural and situational factors, all of which, although external to language, are present in the linguistic choices one can make to communicate the meanings that need to be expressed.

One of the major differences an SFL approach to language has, if compared to other SLA approaches, is the role language has in communication. In SLA approaches, language seems to be examined in its form and function, but the relation one holds to the other and the reasons why such relation exists seem to be overlooked. Moreover, some SLA approaches do not clearly incorporate context to the equation. Learners are taught fragments of language; they are taught about language and not through or with it, or how to use language to construe texts. Thus, examining how language functions in order to communicate the intended meaning becomes a quasi-unreachable goal to many learners. Most learners, and teachers as well, seem to be language guessers and some give up working

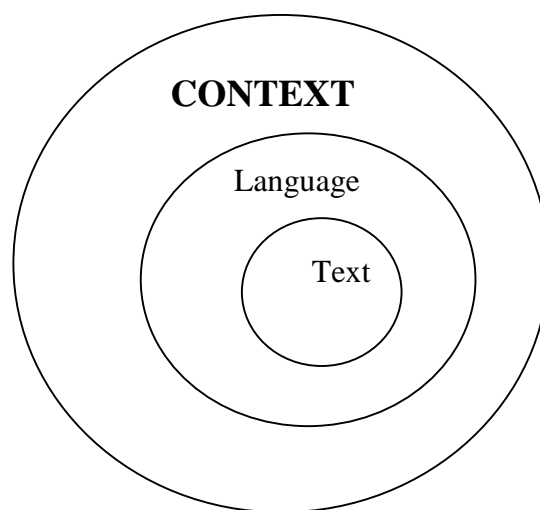
out the problematic imposed by having to learn the many linguistic variables that L1 language users intuit and additional language users struggle to apply.

Conversely, the socio-semiotic approach to language is a functional approach to language use in that language is a tool to communicate meaning. Although the CLB also takes a functional approach to language, claiming not to follow any SLA theory, the benchmarks attempt to explain language use and language competency, neglect the importance of context. Even though it is true that many practitioners, including those who participated in this study, consider context when teaching, some either rank it down or do not look at the extent to which language is shaped by it, not taking in account that the linguistic choices one makes are motivated and limited to the context they serve.

In my opinion, the advantages of looking at language as being embedded in context are countless. Context, as an extra-linguistic element, allows those who consider it first to perceive the reasons why language is being used in a given way. Since language serves the purpose of communication, looking at the world one is surrounded by is paramount to perceive 'what' is being communicated, 'who' is involved in the communication and 'how' communication is being achieved.

Once context is perceived as an essential element for text construction, language is used to express meaning, i.e. feelings and ideas, through text in a more consistent manner. Consequently, looking at how language is organized according to context enables language users to make conscious grammatical and textual choices in order to construe a better structured text.

In SFL terms language is goal-oriented in that it serves purposes of communication. The many purposes that language can be used for are delimited by context and realized by text. In that sense, in the Hallidayan concept of language use, the relation context and language have to each other is a top-down one. Hierarchically, context is above language that, although being external to context, is imbedded and commanded by it. It is not language that shapes context, but the other way around (See Figure 5.2 below).



*Figure 5.2 Context-language-text Relation*

The graph above shows that the force context exercises over language is a centripetal one, and that text is in the core of a context-language co-relation, as a realization of context. Considering text as a product of the relation context holds to language, one can examine linguistic, textual, and pragmatic elements in a given text at once, as text encompasses all these elements altogether. In that sense, the answer to the question raised earlier, 'would a text-context approach serve well any sector of language teaching, or is it limited to content-relevant language courses?', is a positive one, for a text-context approach allows practitioners to better judge texts that instantiate the target context in any given program in order to prepare learners to 'function' in any given context and thus use language for any given purpose.

In the context of this present study, if text-context approach were to be applied to the CLB for academic purposes, one could benefit from looking at texts that are commonly produced in academic contexts to allow for the application of benchmarks that have goal-oriented outcomes which are directly related to academic contexts. Then, it would be less subjective to evaluate how effectively the learner can function in specific academic situations, i.e. writing a research paper. Additionally, having

a clear goal to be achieved would help teachers evaluate whether the learner's performance is 'good', 'complex' or 'formal' in relation to the purpose of the text according to the context it realizes.

## **5.2. Upgrading the CLB Outcomes for Academic Purposes**

One of the reasons participants suggested for the little impact of the CLB on their EAP curriculum was that the outcomes do not fit the purposes of their academic program. This may be the case perhaps because the purposes of the EAP program are not as specific as those in the Applied programs. In this sense, if one needs to design a curriculum based on a competency-based framework such as the CLB, it is important to devote careful attention to the outcomes that learners need to achieve. Moreover, it is paramount to decide first whether the curriculum is going to be negotiated with the learners in all aspects of course, i.e. content and methodology, or if teachers will be the ones conducting a needs analysis with learners, and then develop content, materials and methodology with basis on this analysis.

In the EAP program-participant, learners' curriculum is not negotiated, rather it is dictated in a top-down fashion. Moreover, although the EAP program is aligned to the CLB, the benchmarks do not inform the program outcomes. Additionally, participants claimed that the CLB is not intended for academic purposes, as the descriptors do not suit EAP programs' needs; therefore, there is no reason to incorporate the benchmarks into the curriculum.

Similarly, another relevant finding is that the CLB theoretical framework does not seem to be clearly understood, which suggests that the theoretical intent needs to be coherently developed in order to be clearly applied in the classroom, thus requiring a revision of the present CLB Theoretical Framework, which also calls for the elaboration of outcomes that are reliable, that instantiate the theoretical intent, and therefore are valid.

Such claim is supported by the final report document on the *National consultation on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 and Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006* (March, 2010). The report states that “some institutions are reluctant to use the CLB, expressing caution about their validity particularly at the higher levels and their utility for academic purposes.” (p.47). Furthermore, the report recommends that “[to facilitate use of the CLB more definition between levels (particularly higher levels), clear descriptors and suitable tasks that reflect critical thinking are required.” (p.47). Such finding resonates with what participants of this present study voiced in the interviews, reinforcing the suggestion that further attention should be given to the elaboration of goal-specific outcomes and tasks.

In order to elaborate valid 'academic related descriptors' the outcomes need to focus on the goals that have to be achieved. To have outcomes that are intended for academic purposes, I believe it is fundamental to look at academic contexts and texts, as discussed earlier. For instance, the EAP program-participant focuses on pedagogical text types and academic tasks, i.e. essay writing, reading for bias and so forth. However, the purpose of using such text types and activities is not clear, as per what is intended to be achieved through the use of such texts. In other words, what learners are able to do by learning through the use of these texts should be clear.

Conversely, as an example, if one examines some academic contexts, i.e. those found outside the classroom, “teacher-student consultations, library inquiries, administrative inquiries, and in-and-out-of-class conversations with other students, assignment guidelines, assessment criteria, degree regulations, course descriptions, and subject outlines” (Paltridge, 2000, p.76), the outcomes of learning how to produce texts for such situations would have a clear goal. Thus, tasks involving the elaboration of situational text types would require the learner to achieve the purpose of each context through text, i.e. ask the teacher for clarification on a grade received in an assignment. Hence, preparing learners to function in such situations could be part of EAP curricula and thus be used as programs' outcomes as

well.

Once academic outcomes have been set according to purpose, it becomes easier to define a curriculum based on outcomes that in turn would lead to the selection of 'authentic' text types, as they instantiate learners' academic needs. For instance, in an EAP program that looks at pedagogical and social academic contexts, the curriculum could explore the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, through texts that instantiate these contexts.

In that sense, curriculum will create opportunities for the teacher to re-visit the most relevant academic contexts through the use of 'authentic texts' that instantiate 'authentic' contexts, foreseeing the situations one must undergo when immersed in the day-by-day academic setting. Hence, academic contexts could be construed in the classroom by examining the situations that characterize these contexts. That way, learners could build academic context awareness through the repetition of the production of academic texts through tasks, looking at contextual nuances instantiated in these texts, by engaging in academic related tasks.

### **5.2.1. Choosing Tasks that Instantiate Academic Contexts**

Primarily, in order to instantiate the academic contexts where learners will need to demonstrate language competency, classwork should have a selection of texts that represent these contexts. Elaborating on points made by Hammond (1987) I will set out a three step guideline teachers could follow before selecting classwork,

1. the contexts that need to be covered in the program have to be clearly selected according to learners needs.
2. the texts chosen to instantiate these contexts should address spoken and written modes so that all the four skills, oral (listening and speaking), writing and reading can be covered, and;



3. texts should serve as models for the production of similar or related texts. Such teaching and learning process follows a spiral fashion, focusing on language functions and meanings in context.

On this matter, Halliday (1985) explains that, “because of its nature as a semantic entity, a text, more than other linguistic units, has to be considered from two perspectives at once, both as a product and as a process.” (p.10). With this in mind, having regulated text input (process) and output (product) according to the academic registers chosen, the teacher can rely on a syllabus whose goals are to help learners achieve the program outcomes, as those outcomes are developed to raise language awareness and enable the learner to function effectively inside and outside the classroom. When learners acquire knowledge of how to use language according to context in order to produce texts that follow the expected discourse patterns, they will improve their competency and consequently their proficiency.

As it is expected, most academic text types are content-based. Such texts instantiate contexts that are not found in the day-by-day interactions. In other words, academic texts are usually marked by lexically dense discourses, which follow a written-like mode even when these texts are produced orally. For this reason, learners who are not given explicit instruction on how to identify (process) and produce academic texts may face difficulties in dealing with these texts when transitioning from ESL into mainstream programs. Especially if these learners have not been trained to function in the specific area of study they are going to pursue in post-secondary programs.

To illustrate the difficulty learners face when dealing with academic texts, a simple examination of any academic text type, i.e. scientific texts found in medical programs, is sufficient to note that such texts tend to be highly nominalized (changing verbs and adjectives into nouns), which causes those texts to be considered lexically dense. This phenomenon is typical in written texts such as the one below,

We describe the basic design of a system for automatic **detection** of protein-protein **interactions** extracted from scientific abstracts. By restricting the **problem domain** and imposing a number of strong **assumptions** which include pre-specified protein names and a limited set of verbs that represent actions, we show that it is possible to perform accurate **information extraction**. (Blaschke et al., 1999, p.60)<sup>8</sup>

The vast use of nouns in the excerpt above (not bold in the original) is a feature that can be easily found in most academic texts. This feature is used to help pack information concisely (Halliday and Martin, 1993). This particular use of grammar was coined as 'grammatical metaphor' by Halliday (1985), a feature of language use where one part of speech takes the form of another to realize the intended meaning, shaping the text into a very technical-termed text. Thus, learning how to decode highly dense texts may help learners to be able to construe such texts, as well. By 'doing' so, they can become members of this very selective group of language users, those who are competent in communicating in academic contexts.

In other words, preparing ESL learners to function in diverse mainstream academic contexts require a very sharp notion of the registers they are most likely to encounter, i.e. expository, argumentative, descriptive, narrative, and so forth. These registers may vary according to the field of study learners will follow. For this reason, learning how to write an expository or an argumentative essay from text models that instantiate these academic registers is fundamental.

Moreover, any post-secondary program requires a large amount of reading followed by essay writing. Therefore, learners should be familiarized with the academic culture if they are planning to take post-secondary courses. Although most EAP programs focus on reading and writing skills, the texts chosen to instruct learners may not be academically contextualized (as noted in Chapter Four), nor are they goal-oriented. Instead, learners are taught about the language, through grammatical units that are limited to sentence structures and dissociated from the discourse patterns inherent to academic

registers. Conversely, by taking a text-context approach, one raises awareness of the production of spoken and written texts that learners should produce in reference to those produced by the teacher. Text production in this sense is not only goal-oriented, but it also follows rules dictated by the context it represents.

Although the focus of this study is on EAP, the text-context approach can be used for other purposes as well, i.e. for work and community settlement. For any of these domains the procedures of implementation of a text-context approach would be the same. This text-context approach could assist practitioners with the development of curriculum and assessment tools, as well as inform teaching practices.

This way, the contexts to be addressed in the classroom would vary according to the program goals. For instance, Applied programs training ESL learners to enter mainstream post-secondary courses would also need to select the contexts those learners will have to deal with in 'real' life and then select texts that are commonly found in those contexts. In a sense, that is what has been done in the Applied programs that participated in this present study; however, these programs do not focus on text-context relationship in the way it has been suggested here. In fact, these Applied programs have also experienced issues of implementation, although to a less extent, perhaps because of the lack of context related outcomes and tasks in the CLB.

### **5.2.2. A Sample of Text-context Tasks**

As a sample of programs that follow a text-context approach to develop curriculum and classwork, I will use the work of the “Sydney School” (See Hyon, 1996 for a review). In doing that I intend to examine the curricular practices developed in the Australian Adult Migrant English

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scientific text: Protein-protein interactions, Blaschke et al., 1999).

Programme (AMEP) to instantiate tasks that are goal-oriented in juxtaposition to those that impact on the curricular practices of some participant-programs influenced by the CLB. The AMEP curricular approach could thus serve as a model to elaborate text-context based tasks to effectively assist learners to improve their linguistic competency.

The AMEP has created a curriculum that encompasses the four language skills, from beginner to advanced competency levels, examining Genre and Register<sup>9</sup> impact on text construction in order to explore discourse and grammar nuances. Ultimately, learners' competency is assessed by measuring learners' achievement of curricular goals in a criterion-referenced basis. In other words, the AMEP programs assess competency by evaluating learners' use of the registers assigned in the curriculum, instantiated in the syllabus through context-related text types, and practised in the classroom through tasks that are presented to the learner in teaching-learning cycles.

In a teaching-learning cycle approach “the organizing principle is the study of whole texts in context” (Feez, 2002, p.64). For this reason, the tasks are introduced by the teacher, who has to explicitly instruct learners about the structure and patterns of texts, using models, deconstructing texts and scaffolding text construction.

As a result, learners can better perceive how to apply the mandatory contextual variables that must be present in the text for it to be a sound instantiation of the context represented. This dialogical exercise, developed between teacher and learners, results in the acquisition of crucial information, which may be used to inform task selection, as well as to organize and plan syllabus. In this fashion, the classroom becomes a live laboratory for teaching and learning experiments.

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9 The AMEP focuses on Genre theory over Register theory (See Leckie-Tarry, 1993, and Matthiessen, 1993 for a discussion of Genre and Register different theoretical positions). Nevertheless, the nuances of choosing one approach over another is beyond the scope of this present study, which examines contextual variables from a register standpoint according to Halliday and Hasan (1985).

### **5.2.3. Examining the AMEP Teaching- learning Cycle**

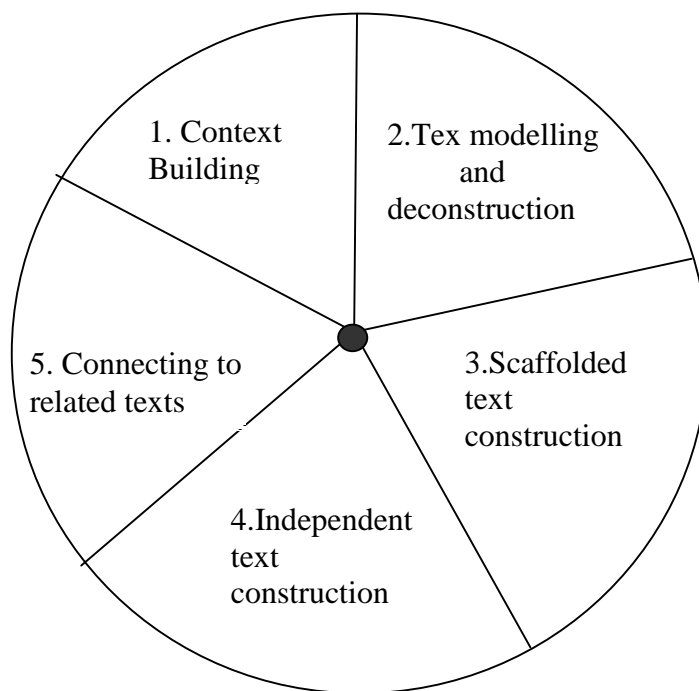
Following a text-context approach, the AMEP has created the Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE), which uses a teaching learning cycle based on the Vygotsky's (1978) model. In his model Vygotsky claims that learners progress by learning interactively because it supports them to achieve their 'potential performance'. Vygotsky's model was further developed by Rothery (1996) and adapted by Burns, Joyce and Gollin (1996).

Burns, Joyce and Gollin's model suggests that the approach to teaching-learning has to start from context building. Then, context provides the meaning potential resources for the elaboration of a text, which then is deconstructed to raise learners' awareness of the register patterns. After, learners are helped to construct the text based on the same register patterns. When learners are ready, they move on to constructing texts independently. The final step in this teaching-learning cycle is to bring in related texts. Furthermore, this teaching-learning cycle promotes learning through the acquisition of knowledge of social context \_ both context of culture and situation. However, as opposed to focusing on the theory of register, the AMEP teaching and learning cycle follows the Genre approach (Martin, 1992), but also looks at the connection that context holds to text.

Basically, the AMEP teaching and learning cycle model has three stages: “1. the teacher provides a model of the target text; 2. the teacher and students co-produce an instance of the target text; 3. students independently produce the target text” (Feez, 2002, pp. 64-65). Each step of the teaching-learning process focuses on contextual features that are realized by the register patterns. Thus, in order to apply a teaching-learning cycle in the classroom, it is paramount that teachers and learners have a solid knowledge of contextual features; otherwise, all steps of the cycle are compromised.

The diagram below (Figure 5.3) illustrates the steps of a teaching-learning cycle based on Feez and Joyce (1998a). The diagram presents the five stages that teachers and learners engage in when

using texts that instantiate the context they need to focus on. The stages are based on the interaction that learners and the teacher have when studying a given context.



*Figure 5.3 A Teaching-learning Cycle (based on Feez and Joyce's Teaching Learning Cycle Model, 1998a, in Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives, p. 66)*

The diagram above shows that in a teaching-learning cycle model text is construed in reference to context. However, even though there are five stages, the cycle does not follow a crescendo order. The stages are used according to learners' needs. That is to say, tasks are elaborated according to any stage of the cycle depending on learners' needs. In this sense, teaching-learning cycles are adjustable to each required situation. None of the stages is absolutely mandatory. The teaching-learning cycle can be used to elaborate tasks, select texts, develop curricula and so forth, whether the learner has already gotten the expertise to work independently, or is a novice, needing more scaffolding.

Moreover, those who use teaching-learning cycles (such as the AMEP) claim that these cycles

can be applied to any methodology the teacher finds more suitable for the program's purposes. In this sense, teaching-learning cycles are not a limiting approach. Rather, they are able to incorporate most teaching practices without being biased. Nevertheless, teaching-learning cycles foment teaching and learning practices based on a fundamental premise, learning can happen more efficiently when it is exercised in relation to context. For this reason, looking at the contextual variables required for the construction of sound, well-structured texts, practitioners who choose to implement a teaching-learning cycle in the classroom would naturally follow the text-context approach.

Although other approaches can be incorporated to the text-context approach, if the teacher decides to follow the communicative approach, using 'communicative tasks', as suggested in the CLB, it is relevant to bear in mind that a clear definition of what 'communication' means is fundamental. To restate, the communicative approach suggested in the CLB is not well elaborated so that those applying the CLB theoretical framework would need to have a solid notion of what is meant by *communicative* in the benchmarks. In SFL terms, as Hasan (1996) puts it, “from the developmental point of view there is continuity in communication as communication, especially if we see communication as meaningful behaviour. This meaningful behaviour must in some sense, be related to the communicator's needs” (p. 24). Hasan's definition of communication as meaningful behaviour goes along with what has been claimed in this study: that communicating only for the sake of it, without a clear goal and with no connection to the contextual needs learners have to be familiar with, does not promote effective 'language use' learning.

Essentially, language use has to serve a purpose, and this purpose is what outlines language learning needs. On this matter, Hasan (1996) explains that “both purpose and a society where purposes get recognized are essential to the growth of language” (p.25). Consequently, language serves the purpose of communication of meaning, communicating the meanings that individuals need to express. Therefore, language is goal-oriented, as it is motivated by context in order to construe meaningful

texts.

For this reason, when following a task-based approach, such as that promoted by the CLB, the goal of the task should be context motivated and goal-oriented, otherwise how can one “identify main ideas of a five to 10 paragraph text about a current event; summarize the text into 150 to 200 words” (CLB:200, p. 95. Reading B:8), if the context and goal to be achieved in the text are not specified. Using Hasan's words once more, “to my mind, there cannot be clearer evidence for the hypothesis that the growth of language in an individual is the function of that individual's engagement in a variety of set activities, calling the use of language. You can only learn how to mean, by attempting to mean” (p.26). In this sense, because in the task above the learner is not informed about how language is to be used to demonstrate that meaningful choices have been made to elaborate text, it is equally difficult to evaluate learners' performance.

In this sense, learning language is learning how to make meaning in order to achieve a communicative goal, and to achieve the goal of communication, one has to follow sociocultural rules imposed by context. For instance, performing a task where one has to read for information in an academic setting in a Canadian institution requires the understanding of the rules that govern the construction of such text in that specific context with respect to culture, situation and language. These rules may differ from culture to culture, from situation to situation and from language to language. Thus, to accomplish any given task one has to be aware of these contextual differences, which are found in texts that are typically found in such contexts.

### **5.3. Typicality of Texts for Academic Purposes**

As it has been suggested thus far, when examining academic contexts from a text-context standpoint, one notes that texts are construed according to what Hasan (1985) calls contextual



configurations, i.e. the subject matter being addressed (field); the sender/receiver of the message (tenor), and; how the message is construed (mode), all of which signal the variations in register, perceived in a text. For instance, persuasion or argumentation are typical academic register variations, in which texts require convincing the reader of a given point, using facts or opinion to support the point one intends to favour, in a written to be read mode. Typically, academic text types follow a rhetorical pattern that organizes information in a hierarchical manner, i.e. introduction, background, argument, evidence, and so forth.

Nevertheless, depending on the purpose of the text, field, tenor and mode may differ to engender the text according to its purpose. In this sense, texts' typical patterns constitute the text typicality, which can be found both in semantic and lexicogrammatical levels. As a result, when looking at texts that were written for learners, one may note that they tend to display more background information than texts written by experts for experts of a given subject matter, thus varying according to tenor.

However, texts written for ESL learners may display discourse patterns that are not typically found in non-ESL contexts in that choices in field and tenor may be different and these differences can be noticed in the lexicogrammatical level, as well. For instance, describing a scientific experiment to inform secondary learners in their L1, as opposed to describing a scientific experiment to inform ESL learners may require different choices such as the use of simpler clausal structure and vocabulary to make the information more accessible to these learners. Nevertheless, these differences cause the text to be unrealistic or non-authentic because it is not an instantiation of a scientific L1 text type.

To put it another way, using ESL adapted texts to prepare learners for mainstream contexts may actually be inefficient and the reasons for this are threefold. First, because these texts are not typically found in post-secondary academic contexts, they do not instantiate texts that learners will encounter in this context. Second, as a consequence, ESL learners will acquire registers that instantiate ESL adapted contexts solely, which may not be usefully transferred into 'authentic' English texts. Lastly, if ESL

learners are not given 'authentic' context models to base their language competency on, they will need to adjust to more complex academic registers than the ones they are used to as ESL learners. Therefore, I am arguing for the use of text types that instantiate 'authentic' contexts. This is to say, those which are realized by 'authentic' texts (For a discussion on authentic texts see: Morrow, 1977; Harmer, 1983, Breen, 1985; Nunan, 1989; Bachman, 1990)<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, working with authentic text types can help learners identify the textual constraints imposed by context. In turn, text has to be an authentic instantiation of the cultures and situations these learners will encounter in real life. In my view, using texts that instantiate contexts that are artificially construed is thus a handicap and forms handicapped learners because, not only do these learners sound foreign, due to non-standard, accented pronunciations, but they also experience context as outsiders.

In fact, any language user who is not familiar with a given context within a community will behave as an outsider, even if she is a member (L1) of that language community. For this reason, I believe that being familiar with the required contexts, registers and text types helps the language learner communicate efficiently, becoming a legitimate member of the target community.

### **5.3.1. Reading and Writing Academic Tasks**

In order to choose text types that instantiate authentic contexts, in-depth knowledge of these contexts is required. Hence, because of the focus of this present study, I am going to take in account two academic contexts, EAP and English for Specific purposes (ESP), as it is goal specific and encompasses Applied programs. From these two academic contexts, I shall examine reading and writing tasks, as these skills have been the focus of this present study, as well.

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term authentic texts here to refer to texts that follow the typical discourse and lexicogrammatical patterns apparent in the contextual configurations \_ field, tenor and mode (according to Halliday and Hasan, 1985) of academic texts.

Participants have claimed that the EAP syllabus has a more generic focus, and less specific outcomes because the goals of the program are not to prepare learners to use English for specific purposes, but rather, to improve learners' academic skills. These academic skills include reading information texts that may contain statistics, flow charts, research findings, controversial or polemic social issues, et cetera.

As noted earlier, academic texts are densely packed with information, some of which may not be familiar to the learner at first, especially to learners who do not have an academic background in their L1. Therefore, working from the contexts that motivate such texts, i.e. role-play an appointment with a professor to discuss issues related to the course, or read an area-related journal article and write a paper arguing for or against the author's viewpoint. This way, by examining the contextual configurations that are used to locate the text within a register, both novice and more advanced learners can benefit from such approaches because learning more about the target context seems to be extremely useful for learners to make predictions, inferences, and improve critical thinking, as well as to anticipate discourse and lexicogrammatical patterns.

Accordingly, because learners need to be prepared to function in post-secondary non-ESL programs, they must become familiar with the typical academic registers they will most likely deal with in these programs. Such academic registers can be easily found in mainstream program text books, as they naturally instantiate the contexts learners will encounter when attending post-secondary mainstream programs in a given area of study.

Many post-secondary texts books compile texts in various registers, such as research reports, argumentative essays, recounts, narrative, descriptions and other academic registers, which instantiate the many academic contexts one may encounter in post-secondary programs. Therefore, choosing these types of texts would better prepare learners for academic contexts. Such awareness could be key for selecting EAP classwork that most efficiently helps learners improve language proficiency.

In more advanced stages, EAP programs could consider presenting texts found in academic journals, which despite being challenging at first, they shall serve as authentic instantiations of academic registers. By the same token, academic social context texts, i.e. texts about teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, as well as those texts found outside the classroom, i.e. texts produced in university contexts requesting student services, such as housing, meal plan, clubs and other services that involve living the life of a university student. All these academic social context texts can compound classwork selection, as discussed previously in section 5.2.

In addition, reading tasks can serve as models for writing practices as well because they provide the discourse input learners need to acquire to produce similar texts. These texts can be examined, deconstructed, constructed, and critically questioned (following a teaching learning cycle), so learners can be aware of contextual configuration choices of field; tenor, and; mode that one has to make to construe a text within a given register. Thus, learners can use these same patterns to produce their own texts in similar, or in related registers. In this sense, writing tasks should require learners' ability to construe texts following an efficient model where contextual choices are consciously made.

Moreover, in order to realize the appropriate discourse, notions of text typicality and contextual meanings should be clearly expressed in the texts produced. Because, text production is an excellent way of ascertain learners' output, both in oral and written modes; these texts should follow models that are well-construed, as they instantiate the target context. Again, these texts should be authentic representations of context, as it has been argued here.

Similarly, writing tasks would be more effective if the tasks encompassed the same registers used in reading tasks. These repetitions of patterns could facilitate learners' acquisition of register models both in input (process) and output (product). Therefore, classwork could focus on registers that instantiate the same contexts in reading and writing, consequently sharing meaning patterns, to thus benefit learners' contextual awareness.

For instance, in working with the register of research report, the teacher and learners could analyze the context, looking at field, tenor and mode, as well as lexicogrammatical patterns that constitute the text typicality. Then, with a typical text model to follow, writing a research report could be an easier and more natural follow up task. This is to say, with a clear and strong command of the typical features found in these texts, learners would be better equipped to produce written texts that display higher linguistic competency, are easier to be transferred into other contexts and also simpler to be assessed. Furthermore, learners' oral skills could also benefit. Hence, listening and speaking tasks should follow the same structure as reading and writing.

### **5.3.2. Using Text-context Approach in ESP Contexts**

In ESP programs, such as the Applied program-participants, the goals of the programs are usually more specific to an area of study, i.e. health sciences, or business English. Thus, the goals of the syllabus can be narrowed down into the contexts of a given domain. In this study, I examined Applied programs that prepare learners for nursing and health sciences post-secondary programs, where I noticed that because they are context-specific courses, the teachers were able to sift the curricular goals, choosing 'authentic' texts to prepare learners for the outcomes they need to achieve.

In this sense, Applied program-participants claimed that one of the reasons for such on-target, goal-oriented approach was that they used the CLB extensively, which motivated these teachers to be focused on the target descriptors, as well as to follow a task-based approach. Hence, in these Applied programs, the CLB was used to inform curriculum, classwork selection, teaching and assessment practices more efficiently than in the EAP program. Nevertheless, Applied program-participants also criticized the benchmark descriptors' lack of specificity, especially when they were used for assessing learners' proficiency. For this reason, I am arguing for a more in-depth attention to text-context relation

as an aid to the application of the CLB in the classroom for any given purpose.

Furthermore, although these Applied programs' approach was task-based and goal-oriented, focusing on specific goals in order to elaborate tasks that are meaningful for the contexts learners will have to function in, such approach did not have a clear emphasis on how these specific contexts influence the texts that typically arise in the situations learners will naturally encounter. Thus, the learners may not be aware of how language will need to be used to express the intended meaning effectively.

Additionally, although, the teachers in these Applied programs expressed their appreciation for the CLB 'can do' approach, they also pointed out the difficulties faced in selecting texts that prepare learners to achieve CLB outcomes (see Chapter Four, section 4.2.1). For instance, in the CELBAN test preparatory program, even though classwork selection was made based on the contexts learners are going to find in nursing mainstream programs, the pedagogical approaches used to examine these texts did not follow a text-context relation, but rather a pragmatic approach. Such pragmatic approach incorporates a social notion of using language, in that it takes in account how language is used within interactions in a given society; nevertheless, it does not address the constraints context directly impinges on the way language is used.

Looking at language from a pragmatics viewpoint may have been a pedagogical approach influenced by the CLB, whose theoretical approach follows Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model, dividing pragmatic knowledge in two, functional and sociolinguistic. Interestingly, Bachman and Palmer suggest a 'functional' language knowledge that addresses meaning functions, ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative, and a sociolinguistic knowledge that involves contextual elements such as cultural nuances, social conventions and register differences (as it has been further discussed in Chapter Two).

However, Bachman and Palmer's taxonomy, although similar to the Hallidayan functional

approach to language, separates meaning from context, and context from text. Conversely, in the SFL text-context approach suggested here, context and meaning are realized concomitantly through language within the text. For this reason, divorcing context from text is like dividing waters, or splitting hair. Similarly, using texts that instantiate the target context without associating them to the linguistic choices one can make through contextual configurations, is examining language as an isolated part of a complex system.

Using an SFL approach, when developing reading and writing tasks for ESP, one can follow the same model suggested for EAP, focusing more specifically on the target contexts of the program, i.e. health sciences and nursing. In this sense, ESP contexts also encompass giving and receiving information that are instantiated in text types that are typical in that context, i.e. informative, expository argumentative, and so forth.

As well as in EAP programs, most learners taking ESP programs may be required to become familiar with written and oral texts, such as in the Applied program-participants; however, to realize health related contexts, i.e. medical issues, sickness prevention procedures, and other health related situations. Hence, it is easier to define outcomes that are goal-oriented in ESP programs. Nevertheless, I believe that learning the purpose of a text is essential for those willing to achieve higher levels of language competency and improve proficiency in the target language for any given purpose one has to use the language.

For the reasons presented above, tasks ought to be elaborated with a clear goal to be achieved through language use. Therefore, in order to examine what meaningful purposes language serves, I shall discuss the SFL concept of register in a more in-depth manner, now from a lexicogrammatical standpoint.

## **5.4. Focusing on Register Theory**

As I have pointed out earlier, given that context has a primary importance in SFL, examining context from a situational viewpoint, as opposed to focusing on linguistic elements in order to analyze how discourse is realized in a text, assists learner to use language more effectively. Hence, I will now attempt to distinguish text variations from a register standpoint.

Following Matthiessen's (1993) argument, “we can interpret register variations as the linguistic system’s response to pressures from above, from the diversity of contexts of communication: language has to accommodate this diversity and it does so by varying itself” (p. 235). In other words, registers vary because context imposes upon the text the need to adjust the contextual configurations (field, tenor, and mode) in order to serve the purpose of communication.

Thus, contextual configuration variations pressure the language (semantically, lexically and grammatically) to vary accordingly. For instance, addressing someone in written mode is different than in an oral mode, and the differences are noted in the text produced independently of the register, i.e. when writing reports in the work place, as opposed to reporting events orally, the text construed would be naturally different than the written one. The reason for such variation is that a change in mode (channel of communication) may also imply changes in tenor and field; therefore, the register is engendered differently (reporting orally would be closer to a recount, or storytelling).

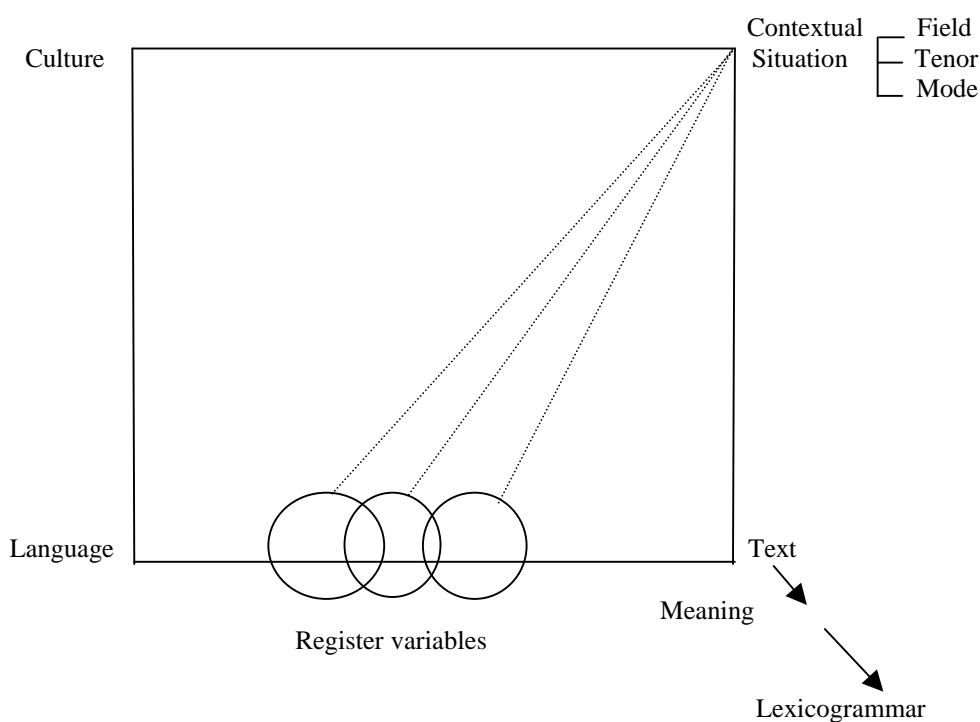
Because of the nuances mentioned above, contextual choices are pertinent to a register and a closer look at how language functions to respond to contextual needs reveals, at the lexicogrammatical level, register variations as well . Thus, the register provides a micro-picture of contextual configurations that shape text (Matthiessen, 1993). Thus, knowing that a given text is an instantiation of context, according to the purpose it is willing to achieve, may assist learners to use the language to achieve such purpose by looking at contextual configurations to analyze discourse patterns to perceive



'how' the text is classified into a given genre.

In that sense, before going further into register variations, it is imperative to examine the level below, that of discourse. In the discourse level, field; tenor and mode are the keys to detect the purpose of a text that in turn indicates the register it instantiates. Therefore, examining each of these contextual configurations more closely is paramount because they engender the text, signaling what is going on, who is involved in the communication and how the text is being construed.

These three aspects of contextual situations realize a register. Each register has a sub-potential of registers variables and these register variables share meaning patterns observable through lexicogrammar (See Figure 5.4 below).



*Figure 5.4 Contextual Situations Realized through Register (based on discussions with G. Williams).*

Examining the graphic above, one notes that contextual situations put pressure on language, forcing it to organize itself according to the contextual configurations of field; tenor, and; mode, that in

turn engender the register realized in the text through lexicogrammar. Hence, to better explain how these contextual configurations shape a text into a given register, I will discuss field, tenor and mode more in-depth in the next sections, focusing on how meaning is construed from each of these contextual configurations.

#### **5.4.1. Field of Discourse: What is Being Said?**

SFL considers elements such as context; register; discourse; meaning; lexicogrammar; phonology, and graphology, as linked to each other in a mutual fashion, paradigmatically and syntagmatically, influencing and being influenced by one another. Thus, SFL associates aspects of culture, situation, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation nuances, such as prosodic inflections, intonation and rhythm, looking at them altogether and at once. That is to say, SFL provides a polysystemic, multi-layered arsenal of tools on which teachers and learners can rely in order to use language functionally (Martin, 1992; Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995; Hasan, 1996).

When examining field of discourse, the focus is on “what activity is taking place in a text? and what in the text tells us this?” (Butt et al, 2000, p.186). The former question encompasses human experience whose meanings are made through text and realized through lexicogrammar.

Lexicogrammatical features encompass the latter question, what in the text implies the meanings experienced. For instance, in an activity such as teaching an ESL class to prepare learners to achieve academic readiness, the field of discourse would be slightly different if the activity were to teach English literature. This is so because the activity is experienced differently in each instance and those differences can be identified in the lexicogrammar level that constructs the texts. This is to say that “the location of discourse in time and space...known as MATERIAL SITUATIONAL SETTING” ( p.186), is apparent in the grammar, i.e. clausal structure and vocabulary (word choices), as well. These

differences may affect how the activity is experienced and therefore perceived in the text, thus altering the field of discourse.

#### **5.4.2. Tenor of Discourse: What are the Social Relations?**

The interactions constructed in a text and how these interactions are displayed define the nature of relationships or tenors of discourse in a text. The participants of a discourse can relate to each other from an equal status or from an unbalanced one. These nuances define formality, social distance, power and directiveness in communication. Tenor of discourse may also define text types. For instance, in teacher-student interactions the tenors of discourse are expected to have different status. In this sense, formality is expected. Language is used to signal social distance and power relations.

Taking in consideration tenor of discourse, a text can present variations on fulfilling its purpose, as well, for example, looking at the effect of choices such as the use of first person singular in the genre of essay writing. This tenor choice, perceived in the text, can unveil or include the writer in the discourse relating her directly to the reader. Such a bold approach could be considered appropriate by some, whereas, others would choose to avoid such use, maybe selecting first person plural to display more inclusive relationships and minimize social distance. In that sense, still in the genre of essay writing one can approach the text from different tenor relations, considering social distance, power relations and directiveness to persuade, argue, speculate, et cetera. In that case, although the text may present varied tenor choices, it may keep other discourse patterns that allow the text to belong to the same genre, although the registers may vary.

### **5.4.3. Mode of Discourse: How is Language Being Used?**

Mode of discourse is defined in the way the message is organized and what channel of communication is being used, i.e. oral, written, visual, and aural. In this sense, to give an example that is directly related to the context of this study, when examining academic discourses, one notes that a written mode is easily identifiable as being characteristic of such discourses. The manner in which academic texts are usually organized differs from oral mode interactions immensely.

As noted earlier, academic texts are characterized by grammatical metaphor (nominalization) and present a written-to-be-read mode. Typically, many different academic registers display texts that are lexically dense, packing information succinctly, yet heavily. Additionally, academic texts may also contain non-linear information, such as pictures, charts and graphs to support arguments or provide examples. Nevertheless, most learners are not competent in academic registers because these registers are not acquired in the contexts that language users are mostly exposed to.

In this sense, academic registers are mostly acquired at school, through practice. However, most of the times learners are not aware of the discourse patterns in academic texts, nor are they trained to function in academic contexts, as they are not usually explicitly taught the contextual configurations that are typically present in academic texts. As a result, both reading and writing academic skills are compromised.

Hence, I believe that looking at 'how' language is used to construe coherent academic texts must help learners to acquire academic registers faster because one is able to examine both the product (input) and the process (output) of how texts are engendered. Therefore, I am suggesting that taking in account a socio-semiotics view of language use, where context is essential, may assist practitioners with a tool to analyze communicative competence from a functional standpoint, as the CLB has attempted to suggest.

#### 5.4.4. A Functional View of Language Use

As discussed in Chapter Two, the CLB was developed to measure 'communicative proficiency' based on Bachman and Palmer's 'macro-functions'. Additionally, the descriptors examine 'language use', looking at 'frequency', 'functionality' and 'utility' (Coder, 1973). However the *CLB:2000 Theoretical Framework* does not specify what 'frequency', 'functionality' and 'utility' exactly mean. Additionally, practitioners are expected to evaluate “how useful and important they are in real communication situations and tasks that a newcomer learner may encounter in the community, in educational contexts, and on the job” (p.25), but these practitioners are not assisted with ways to apply the CLB theoretical intent in the classroom.

Furthermore, in the quote above, it is noteworthy that the concepts of 'real communication situations and tasks' are associated to 'contexts', both educational and work related; nevertheless, these aspects, which denote language use in relation to context, seem to be a rustically and poorly developed account of the socio-semiotic view of language use in context. Thus, following an SFL approach, if learning a language is learning how to mean (Halliday, 1975), then learning how to make meaning according to context depends on learning how to adjust communicative practices to use language functionally and appropriately. Hence, I am now going to attempt to further elaborate on the CLB account for 'real communication situations and tasks' associated to 'contexts' from an SFL standpoint, in which language is used according to context as a tool to make meaning in 'real communication situations and tasks'.

The key point to consider when applying a socio-semiotic approach to language use is that SFL examines language in context. Contexts are realized through the registers that are commonly found in a given community. For instance, ESL teaching practices are usually based on genres that are commonly found in English speaking day-by-day contexts, i.e. narrative, recount, description, information,

instruction, and so forth. This is to say that based on English as L1, ESL teachers should select genres learners will need to be familiar with in order to be considered a competent language user.

The use of formal language in academic registers have discourse patterns that are influenced by contexts of situation that motivated the elaboration of academic texts, i.e. course text books, journal articles, seminar discussions. In these texts, the possible choices one can make within the language construe meaning in the text through lexicogrammatical choices that in turn situate a text within a give register. Hence, learning how to construe a text within a register is therefore learning how to mean, or in other words, learning *how useful and important* these registers are to learning to participate in *real communication situations* and perform real tasks.

Because aspects of register are pertinent to language use, in order to construct texts it is indeed relevant to analyze what constitutes a register and what differentiates one register variety from another to thus be able to analyze “frequency”, 'functionality' and 'utility' mentioned in the CLB. When learning register varieties that are identifiable in the discourse structure, as well as in the contextual configurations noticed in field, tenor and mode of discourse, then one is able to use language fluently, well, and appropriately.

According to Christie (1999), who examines EAP from an SFL standpoint, a socio-semiotic view of language use is fourfold, 1. it presents a framework to recognize and make use of any text types in English, and also to be aware of grammar and discourse structures within the text; 2. learners can use Genre (register) as models of English-speaking culture and learn how to adapt or transfer them into other genres (registers); 3. it focuses on meaning making within authentic contexts in the English-speaking culture, and ; 4. it provides learners with a tool to critique sociolinguistic aspects construed in English.

In short, the socio-semiotic view of language use encompasses cultural, social, and linguistic aspects of the language, looking at text as necessarily realized within a specific context, in which one

uses language meaningfully. Learning what functionality denotes in this sense is learning how to mean in a given context. Accordingly, SFL focuses on meaning from a trinocular (Halliday 1978) perspective, each of which has a meaning function (meta-function), directly connected to the contextual configurations ; (Halliday and Hasan, 1985), i.e. ideational - what is being experienced (field); interpersonal - the relationships in the interaction (tenor), and; textual - the channels used to construe text (mode).

These three metafunctions are the lenses used to examine how meaning is construed in a text. When a text is well-construed, ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings are properly expressed. In other words, SFL looks at language from a sociocultural perspective, where culture and society shape up the context that influences the register which in turn construes the text through choices in the contextual configurations and lexicogrammar, i.e. addressing a text from a lexicogrammatical viewpoint one can look at person, clausal relations, transitivity, modality and thematic organization, to analyze how language is being used to realize meaning.

In sum, in order to help develop the concept of 'language use' in the CLB, I am arguing for a way to examine language as a meaning-making tool that is shaped by context. Each different context requires language to be used in a certain fashion, observing phonological, lexicogrammatical and semantic aspects to express functional meaning. This is to say that language provides a network of systems to communicate meanings and function in society effectively, by sending and receiving messages. Thus, when focusing on context, teachers and learners will be able to examine 'how' language is used.

With a more in-depth knowledge of language use, it becomes easier to develop a syllabus using a standard framework that examines 'communicative proficiency' according to language usefulness to measure outcomes. Measuring outcomes according to the programs' goals seems to be one of the many struggles participants of this study experience, as the quote below suggests,

In terms of establishing what the key criteria of the course are, and what are the individual bodies in front of me? where are they at? and where does that particular body need to get to? (P3)

It is noteworthy in the excerpt above that contextual configurations, field (what are the key criteria of the course); tenor (what are the individual bodies), and; mode (how the criteria are going to be established) are implicit in the goals that P3 aims to achieve in her program, all of which seem to underline the struggles and dilemmas that all participants of this present study presented in their perceptions of the CLB (as discussed in Chapter Four).

Hence in my view, a contextualized approach to language use could assist practitioners to better judge the variables they have to balance when implementing a top-down framework such as the CLB. Even when such framework does not account for the context and the practical issues practitioners need to face in order to achieve the goals of their programs, as well as to help learners achieve their own personal goals in the target language.

## **5.5. Limitations of the Study**

Although this present study aimed at investigating how the CLB influences the EAP curriculum decisions made by teachers and administrator participants in a local BC college, examining the practical and theoretical issues that are most relevant to the processes of implementing the CLB, the study did not consider learners' perspectives directly. The reason for such absence is that in the preambles of the investigations, potential participants suggested that most learners would not be familiar with the impact of using the CLB in the classroom, nor would they be able to evaluate how helpful the benchmarks have been to achieve their goals, as the benchmarks were not always informing classroom practices.

Thus, as I was looking for depth of information, as opposed to breadth, I decided to include



classwork as an indirect way to investigate how classroom practices and the enacted curriculum impacted on the learner. Examining the classwork gave teacher-participants a chance to present their viewpoints of how learners seem to be perceiving the application of the CLB in the classroom; however, those perceptions were an interpretation of what learners appeared to be experiencing. Nevertheless, in all interviews, participants included learners in their comments on how the CLB had been used in post-secondary mainstream program preparation.

The inclusion of learners in the participants' answers signals that learners' perceptions are relevant to the collection of further information about the application of the CLB in the classroom and as thus should be included in future investigations of the usefulness of the CLB for academic preparation, considering learners' viewpoints directly.

### **5.5.1. Suggestions for Further Research**

As it was mentioned in the last section, learners' viewpoints are indeed relevant to the evaluation of the application of the CLB in the classroom and it has been considered in the *National consultation on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 and Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006* (March, 2010). In this report, almost fifty percent of the Consultation respondents were learners, represented by “graduates as well as learners currently participating in language training programs: LINC/CLIC. Other publicly funded ESL/FSL programs Enhanced Language Training/Bridging Programs” (p.64).

However, interestingly, it seems that learners' viewpoints were not supposed to be taken into account at first, as it is stated in the document, “as a consultation with learners was not originally planned, this consultation was exploratory (p. 62). In this sense, because the survey was not primarily meant to investigate learners' viewpoints, the findings may be questionable because the questions asked

were not aimed at learners' viewpoints.

As the survey did not aim at collecting learners' opinions, even though the Consultation ultimately “gather perspective of learners about: strengths and benefits of the CLB and NCLC challenges and unmet needs experienced - related to the benchmarks themselves and their application recommendations for change” (p. 62), due to the circumstances in which these data were collected, the findings related to learners' viewpoints should in fact be considered under such limitations.

Hence, further research could investigate learners' expectations with regards to the language competence they are required to display if they were to be judged proficient in that language. In other words, the suggestion of such investigation reinforces the need to answer the questions raised earlier (in Chapter Two), how can teachers help learners achieve communicative proficiency using the CLB outcomes?; how helpful is the CLB to prepare learners to achieve the language proficiency they need to reach their goals?, and; what can learners who are granted a benchmark do in real contexts?

Those points were raised by the learners who participated in the *National consultation* as well, where they “validated the need to understand what CLB levels people require to work in particular occupations with 85.9% indicating that it would be very useful (4 on scale of 1 to 4) or useful (3 on scale)” and where “the need for a simple description of the language proficiency levels they have achieved was also identified as very useful or useful at 87.6% (p.50).

The finding above gives support to the fact that learners indeed feel the need to know not only 'about' the target language, but also what to 'do' with the language. In fact, learners seem to feel the urge to know how to use language to achieve the communication needs that are required for them to function in a community and become a legitimate member of that language group. In particular, learners need to know how to function in the 'real world', in real 'contexts and situations', being able to 'processes and 'produce' real, 'authentic' texts. In this sense, another area that could be further investigated is the use of 'authentic' classwork, i.e. texts and tasks that aim at preparing learners to the

goals they need to achieve in the target language.

For instance, take the program-participants in this study, in which authentic texts were used to prepare learners to achieve academic readiness. In order to evaluate the extent to which those texts are indeed authentic texts, as suggested in the findings (claimed by participants in the EAP and Applied programs), more research should be done according to theories of text authenticity (suggested in Morrow, 1977; Harmer, 1983; Breen, 1985; Nunan, 1989; Bachman, 1990, amongst others).

Such investigation would be very helpful as for the questions this finding begs, if both programs use authentic texts to achieve the programs' outcomes, what makes the CLB more functional in Applied programs than in EAP to prepare learners to reach academic readiness?, and what differences in preparing learners to achieve academic readiness do these programs present?

Perhaps examining these questions from the viewpoint of text authenticity, one could shed light to the nuances and similarities these two contexts share, which can be directly perceived in the way practitioners view these texts as authentic. Nevertheless, although those are fascinating aspects of the overall investigation of the impact of the CLB on academic preparation, they are beyond the scope of this present study, and as thus they were not further investigated.

### **5.5.2. Conclusion**

In the process of elaborating this study, I experienced in practice the application of the theory that has been suggested here (SFL *Register* theory and text-context approach) to improve the usefulness of a 'can do' scale, such as the CLB to be applied in any given context where language use is required. The choices I made with respect to methodology, i.e. research questions; theory of interviews; analytical tool, and; the approach to the construction of the text (using text-context), represented well the contextual elements of this study and served the goal I was pursuing.

In that sense, through the use of a socio-semiotic approach to language use, I had clear awareness that the information collected was being co-construed in the interviews, influenced by the participants, i.e. the researcher, as well as the participants. Moreover, these interpersonal relations, where meaning was expressed and shaped according to the demands of context, were apparent in the transcripts. Participants responded to the questions in relation to the programs they were engaged with and showed asymmetrical power relations in the EAP program when interfaced with the Applied programs revealing a divide in the way the CLB is perceived.

This dichotomy suggested that the CLB is considered more applicable in occupational related programs than in EAP. Additionally the questions raised about the applicability of the CLB for academic purposes led participants to conclude that the CLB is not fit for preparing learners to achieve academic readiness. Nevertheless, participants in the Applied programs affirmed that they have been using the CLB to inform their programs' syllabi as an alternative way to prepare learners to enter post-secondary occupational programs, which is a very intriguing finding.

One of the reasons why the CLB has not been considered effective for EAP programs, but more applicable for occupational programs is that in the Applied program-participants the goal orientation is very specific if compared to the more generic goals of the EAP program. Thus goal-orientation seems to be giving support to the use of the CLB in Applied programs. Nevertheless Applied program-participants also claimed that they face issues to implement the CLB because the descriptors are too generic for their purposes and thus not reliable.

In sum, this study concluded that the generic attributes of the CLB descriptors may be caused by the lack of clarity in the *CLB: 2000 Theoretical Framework*, which considers concepts such as language use; functionality; competence, and; proficiency in such a fashion that the theoretical framework seems to be a recipe to create the ultimate formula to measure communicative proficiency.

The CLB document claims that the approach suggested in the benchmarks is a 'movement'

compared to a 'revolution' (see CLB: 2000, p. V). However, in my view, because the CLB theoretical framework is excessively patched with a variety of theory of language acquisition trends, which are poorly developed, the CLB resembles what I call a Frankensteinian creature, for it is difficult to comprehend and have consistent, controlled and dialogical use. Furthermore, the CLB is out there to be utilized at anyone's will, which undermines a framework that is intended to serve as a standard to ESL teaching.

All in all, in this study, I took into account the dilemmas faced by the participants, who have to deal with the demands of the institution where they work, as well as fulfill provincial and national requirements and achieve the goals of the programs and those of the learners. Hence, to overcome the CLB shortcomings discussed in this study and to assist ESL practitioners and learners in their teaching-learning processes based on the CLB, we would benefit from a deeper integration of a socio-semiotic view of language use as a support to achieving goals other than those covered in the benchmarks' outcomes, such as being prepared to achieve academic readiness.

In conclusion, after considering the findings of this study, I suggest the use of a goal-oriented, contextualized language approach that takes into account the context of meaning-making, and additionally complement the theoretical intent of the CLB, which despite of focusing on language use from a functional standpoint, does not seem to assist practitioners and learners in their goals. Hence, because the CLB functional approach to language use is not clearly developed in the theoretical framework, I believe that the application of a socio-semiotic theory of language use in context may give support to those who want to speak English effectively. I hope that the benefits of applying SFL theory that I have discussed above can reach those who are looking for ways to use the English language meaningfully.

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## **Appendix A: Letter of Contact**

Dear ESL practitioner,

I am a graduate student working on an MA in TESL at UBC. I am conducting a study on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) examining reasons for its absence in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) syllabi. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this study because of your expertise in the CLB and familiarity with using the benchmarks. Because you are a member of the XXX department at XXX and your College is one of the members of the Adult ESL Articulation of the British Columbia Post-Secondary Transfer System Committee, you could provide valuable information that would enrich the findings of the study.

The study is concerned with exploring why the CLB do not inform curricula and are not present in the classwork of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs. In particular, it analyzes how administrators and teachers in the program perceive the outcomes of the CLB descriptors levels 8-9 for reading and writing vis à vis their EAP program goals and assessment practices.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and the information provided confidential. If you wish to participate, please contact me directly at [REDACTED], or via email [REDACTED] I will give you a more detailed explanation about the conditions for your participation through a consent letter.

I am looking forward to hearing from you. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Adriana Lima  
ESL Instructor  
MA candidate



## **Appendix B: Teacher Consent Form**

### **A Functional Approach to English for Academic Purpose Syllabus: A Case Study of The Canadian Language Benchmarks**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Geoffrey Williams  
Department of Language and Literacy Education,  
UBC

**Co-Investigator:** Adriana Lima  
Graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education,  
UBC

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the syllabus of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) programs vis a vis the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) looking at both administrators' and teachers' viewpoints. The specific goal of the study is to explore some of the reasons why the CLB higher level descriptors, more precisely CLB level (8-9) for reading and writing, do not influence syllabi in this local EAP program. The sub-goals of the research are fourfold: 1) to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of possible correlation of the CLB descriptors and the texts and learner activities utilized to achieve the course goals; 2) to explore examples of classwork as possible instantiations, or not, of the CLB descriptors; 3) to gather information about administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the functional approach of the CLB, particularly the theory of register that underlies the CLB descriptors; 4) to analyze administrators' and teachers' perceptions of reasons for not using the CLB to assist the achievement of the program goals.

#### **Study Procedures:**

You will be involved in a data collection that focuses on the absence of the CLB in your EAP program syllabus. You will be asked to point out reasons for such absence and discuss your understanding of the functional approach in the CLB theoretical framework and descriptors. Individual interviews will be conducted in one-hour sessions based on a questionnaire that targets your personal viewpoints and particular experiences about the CLB and your EAP program. You may be asked for a second individual interview to collect further information about your perceptions of the texts and writing materials you use in the course. The materials to be analyzed will be taken from your course material selected to prepare learners to enter mainstream academic courses. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcripts will be submitted to you for approval before being analyzed.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The identity of you, your program and school will be kept strictly confidential. Subjects will not be identified by name at any reports of the completed study. The co-investigator will distribute and collect

participants' consent forms. Every effort will be made to ensure that participants will not know who else is participating in the study. Data will be made available only to the investigators.

**Duration:**

Interviews will take place during one-hour sessions. The researcher will interview consent participants individually at a time and location that are convenient for the participant. Interviews will be conducted by the graduate investigator for a period no longer than a month.

**Refusals:**

Participation in the study is optional. You have the right to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**Dissemination of Research:**

The results of the research will be used as part of a graduate thesis and may be shared at national and international conferences and published in professional and research journals. Reports based on these presentation and articles will be available to all participants.

**Potential Benefits:**

The findings provided by the study will give a better understanding about the reasons why the CLB is not present in local EAP syllabi and assist the ESL community to better judge the value of the CLB and enhance its use in academic settings.

**Contact for Information about the Study:**

If you have further questions with respect to this study, or desire to obtain further information, you may contact Dr. Geoffrey Williams or Adriana Lima.

**Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above. You understand that your participation in this study is voluntary, and that you are willing to consent participation in this research. Your signature also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. You may withdraw your consent at any time without consequences to your employment or professional standing.

Please check the appropriate box for each line.

☐ I consent to participate in this study.

☐ I consent to be audio-recorded in this study.

---

Subject Signature

---

Date

---

Printed Name of the Subject

## **Appendix B: Administrator Consent Form**

### **A Functional Approach to English for Academic Purpose Syllabus: A Case Study of The Canadian Language Benchmarks**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Geoffrey Williams  
Department of Language and Literacy Education,  
UBC

**Co-Investigator:** Adriana Lima  
Graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education,  
UBC

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the syllabus of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) programs vis a vis the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) looking at both administrators' and teachers' viewpoints. The specific goal of the study is to explore some of the reasons why the CLB higher level descriptors, more precisely CLB level (8-9) for reading and writing, do not influence syllabi in this local EAP program. The sub-goals of the research are fourfold: 1) to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of possible correlation of the CLB descriptors and the texts and learner activities utilized to achieve the course goals; 2) to explore examples of classwork as possible instantiations, or not, of the CLB descriptors; 3) to gather information about administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the functional approach of the CLB, particularly the theory of register that underlies the CLB descriptors; 4) to analyze administrators' and teachers' perceptions of reasons for not using the CLB to assist the achievement of the program goals.

#### **Study Procedures:**

You will be involved in a data collection that focuses on the absence of the CLB in your EAP program syllabus. You will be asked to point out reasons for such absence and discuss your understanding of the functional approach in the CLB theoretical framework and descriptors. Individual interviews will be conducted in one-hour sessions based on a questionnaire that targets your personal viewpoints and particular experiences about the CLB and your EAP program. You may be asked for a second individual interview to collect further information about your perceptions. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcripts will be submitted to you for approval before being analyzed.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The identity of you, your program and school will be kept strictly confidential. Subjects will not be identified by name at any reports of the completed study. The co-investigator will distribute and collect participants' consent forms. Every effort will be made to ensure that participants will not know who else is participating in the study. Data will be made available only to the investigators.

**Duration:**

Interviews will take place during one-hour sessions. The researcher will interview consent participants individually at a time and location that are convenient for the participant.

Interviews will be conducted by the graduate investigator for a period no longer than a month.

**Refusals:**

Participation in the study is optional. You have the right to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**Dissemination of Research:**

The results of the research will be used as part of a graduate thesis and may be shared at national and international conferences and published in professional and research journals. Reports based on these presentation and articles will be available to all participants.

**Potential Benefits:**

The finds provided by the study will give a better understanding about the reasons why the CLB is not present in local syllabi and assist the ESL community to better judge the value of the CLB and enhance its use in academic settings.

**Contact for Information about the Study:**

If you have further questions with respect to this study, or desire to obtain further information, you may contact Dr. Geoffrey Williams or Adriana Lima.

**Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above. You understand that your participation in this study is voluntary, and that you are willing to consent participation in this research. Your signature also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. You may withdraw your consent at any time without consequences to your employment or professional standing.

Please check the appropriate box for each line.

☐ I consent to participate in this study.

☐ I consent to be audio-recorded in this study.

---

Subject Signature

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Date

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Printed Name of the Subject

## **Appendix C: Administrator Interview Questions**

1) Looking at the CLB descriptors for reading and writing at a CLB level 8-9, what role, if any, do these descriptors play in forming the syllabus of the course you teach?

Do you use them for planning purposes?

e.g.     setting goals?  
          selecting tasks?  
          selecting texts?  
          for assessment?  
          for motivating students?

If so, how? If not, why?

2) Does your EAP syllabus support the achievement of the higher levels of the CLB?

3) Could we look at some specific course materials, two or three samples to see if they relate to the CLB. Please tell me if you notice any relationships?

4) Does the CLB influence your decision about class work such as texts for reading and writing tasks that would help fulfill the goals of the course to meet the goals of the learners as well?

5) Can we see some samples of texts that target specific fields such as community; study; or work?

6) From what sources do you select texts? Why these particularly?

7) What different types of texts/registers do you intend these texts to represent (charts, table, articles, fiction, and letters)? Why?

8) In your opinion, do the CLB descriptors inform curriculum to help the achievement of the goals of the EAP program?

9) How do the CLB descriptors represent the goals of your EAP program in practice? Your learners' goals?

## **Appendix D: Teacher Interview Questions**

- 1) In your opinion, does the CLB inform curriculum to help the achievement of the goals of your EAP program?
- 2) In what ways do the CLB descriptors represent the goals of the program in practice?
- 3) In what ways does your EAP program syllabus prepare your learners to the achievement of their academic goals in mainstream programs?
- 4) How does your EAP program equip learners with what they need to know to go to university or college programs? In what ways?
- 5) In your opinion, what is the role of the CLB in the preparation of learners to enter mainstream university programs?
- 6) What suggestions can you make to improve the CLB so that it will fit your EAP program purposes?
- 7) What is good and what is not good about using the CLB as a reference for informing your EAP curriculum?
- 8) In your opinion, what changes should the benchmarks undergo in order to be a useful tool for informing curriculum for academic purposes?
- 9) In a scale from 1 to 5, how aware are teachers in your department of the CLB? How much should they know about it?
- 10) The CLB is going to be revised soon, What changes would you like to see in the benchmarks to make them more useful for your context?

## **Appendix E: Transcript Conventions**

The following transcription conventions were used in decoding audio-recordings:

word (Capitalized) word stress

(..) ^ (periods in parenthesis) pauses: (.) a short pause, (..) a longer pause, (...) longer

[\_\_\_\_] segment from a later part of the transcript but directly related

[word] (brackets) onset of overlapping talk. Question asked or information provided by the interviewer

(Also used to hide confidential information such as the name of the institution)

(?) inaudible utterance

(word) ( word in single parenthesis) best guess at a questionable transcription

{ word } words added by the participant after revising the transcript

## Appendix F: Data Dictionary

Categories	Definition
<b>1. Program</b>	English instruction organized according to a specific area
1.a EAP	English for Academic purposes
1.a.i Outcome	The result of the instruction
1.a.ii Curriculum	Planning, implementation and management of the program
1.a.ii.a BC articulated	Follows the BC Articulation Framework
1.a.ii.b non BC articulated	Does not follow the BC Articulation Framework
1.a.iii. Syllabus	Specification of what/how is taught in the program
1.a.iv Assessment	Evaluation of skills acquired
1.a.v Pedagogical approach	Methodology used for instruction
1.b Applied	English for work and career purposes
Same as 1.a above	
1.b.i Health Sciences	
1.b.ii Test preparation	
1.c General ESL	English for general purposes
Same as 1.a above	
<b>2. Role of Interviewee</b>	Social position or function
2.a Administrator	Organize and plan programs
2.b Teacher	Teaches and plan classes
2.c Combined	Organize and plan programs and teaches classes
2.d Emotional reaction to the CLB	Interviewees' affective perceptions of how the CLB affects their practice
2.d.i Positive	
2.d.ii Negative	
<b>3. Aspect</b>	The way in which issues of the CLB are being addressed by an interviewee
3.a Theoretical	Pertaining to the intention for which the CLB was designed
3.a.i as an assessment tool	
3.a.i.a used by teachers	
3.a.i.b used by the institution	
3.a.i.c used by learners	
3.a.ii as a standardized framework	
3.a.iii measuring functional competence	
3.b Practical	Pertaining to the application of the CLB in a program
3.b.i Models	CLB-based curriculum, classwork and assessment tools
3.b.i.a existing	models can be found
3.b.i.b lacking	models are needed
3.b.ii Curricular implementation	Informing curriculum, syllabus and classwork decisions
3.b.iii Assessment practices	Outcomes measured through the CLB descriptors
3.b.iv Purposes	Goals of the program



<b>Categories</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>3. Aspect</b>	The way in which issues of the CLB are being addressed by an interviewee
3.c Functionality	The CLB framework meets program purposes
3.c.i functional	The CLB theoretical intent is applied to serve the goals of a program
3.c.ii Non-functional	The CLB theoretical intent does NOT serve the goals of a program
3.c.iii Changes required to	Suggestions given by interviewees for the CLB framework meet program purposes
3.c.iii.a assessment related	
3.c.iii.b curriculum related	
<b>4 Classwork</b>	Reading and writing texts and tasks used to prepare learners to achieve program goals
4.a Text types	Text representing the goals to be achieved in the program
4.a.i Literature	Short story, fiction, journal (non-fiction)
4.a.ii Form-filling	
4.a.iii Report	
4.a.iv Formatted	Charts, emails, pamphlets
4.a.v Essay	Research papers, expository
4.a.vi Text book	vocabulary, texts, tests
4.b CLB-based	Represents the CLB tasks
4.c Non-CLB-based	Does NOT represent CLB tasks
4.d authentic purpose	aims at achieving a real world goal
4.d.i occupationally focused	work related goal
4.d.ii generic academic	non-specific goal
4.e reading skills	focus on reading skills
4.e.i inferences	
4.e.ii critical thinking	
4.e.iii bias	
4.e.iv formal	
4.e.v logical relations	
4.f writing skills	focus on writing skills
Same as 4.a above	

## Appendix G: Coded Transcripts

	<b>Unit 1: Participant One</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1c.iii 2a 3b.ii	We are not a grammar-based program but we do teach grammar and we think that grammar accuracy is really important. That's where we found CLB to be lacking
1c.iii 2a 3b.ii	The truth is we have incorporated some aspects of CLB into our curriculum.
1b.iv 2a 3b.iii	The institution has adopted benchmarks for students entering the applied programs
1a.ii 2a	I think there are issues in [EAP] because....their highest level 099 is equivalent to academic English grade 12 and they are articulated with other institutions in the province. The issues that they've had is they can't completely adopt CLBs because they need to be able to prove they've been doing the same thing as other institutions are doing.
1c.iii 2a	Although we have found that maybe at our advanced levels students do need other kinds of reading besides academic reading.
1b.iv 2a 2d.i 3b.iii 3c.i	Some of the Applied programs here have been benchmarked what levels students need in reading, writing, listening and speaking. And, in that way, in a sense CLB works.

	<b>Unit 2: Participant Two</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1b.ii/ii 2c 3b.iii	Implementing the CLB in the area that I work I think there has been less resistance because we have been looking for a framework, a vehicle, a way of describing higher level language skills and outcomes, but in a way that's not the typical academic pathway and measured by TOEFL or something like that.
1b.ii/ii 2c 2d.ii 3b.iv	I'm really struggling with that..the course that I teach because, yes, there is inference in small places and kind of critical thinking where?...in the reading comprehension part.
2c3b	Many of the challenges that were outlined at the guide to implementation are some of the challenges that we've faced here
2c 3a.iii	In order to have functional competence of course you have to use the form of the language that is accurate within that function, so that does bring in grammar, of course you must have the language, the word choice or the technical terminology to get to the level.
2c 3b.iii	I think that some of the philosophy or maybe theory behind a CLB kind of approach maybe favours certain kind of assessment as well, and I know that there is kind of an impetus towards moving to say portfolio
2c 2d.ii 3b	I think that we had expectations for the CLB by bringing it in now just seems like a lot of work to people

	<b>Unit 2: Participant Two</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
2c 2d.i 3b.iii	Hopefully one of the kind of good things benefits of looking at it from a CLB perspective is that students really should have a full understanding of what it is that they're...how they're being...the criteria that are being used to be assessed by
2c 3b.iii	I think that might even be a fault of the way the document is formatted...teachers only go to the descriptors.
1a/b.ii 2c 3b.iii	Typically traditionally the academic preparation has all been done in [EAP], but I think the lines are sort of blurring. We've benchmarked 19 different applied programs here.
2c 3b.ii	We've being trying to use the CLB 2000 document as that framework to...for task selection.
1.b.ii 2c 3b.iv	One of the reasons that implementation for us has been less of a challenge in that if we're looking at occupationally-focused programs, task is a very natural unit to work with and especially in the combined skills programs
1.v 2.c 3b	I can see that task at a high level would be very useful in an academic classroom , but it involves a real switch in the instructor's...way of thinking about how they approach language.
2.c 2d.ii 3b.i.b	One of the practical barriers to implementation, I believe, has been a lack of assessment tools and....that are CLB aligned and there is often a kind of a washback effect I think with assessment.
2.c 3b.i.b	I think that what people want is more, more test bank items because not only consistency and reliability are questions, but also confidentiality issues
2.c 3b.ii 3c.i 4b	The instructors have built confidence. They've also being able to look at the tasks that they use that they either selected or developed themselves in the classroom and they feel confident that those tasks are roughly at the level that they're intending them to be at.
1b.ii 2.c 3b.iv 3c.i 4b	for the CELBAN test, they need to do three types of reading tasks, a skimming and scanning, a reading comprehension, and a cloze activity. The outcomes really would be to...look at the structure of the document to...give students some strategies to work with a piece of text that is other than just starting at the beginning and reading to the end.
2.c 3b.i.b 3c.iiib	I think we under estimate how challenging that is to get people to really change their practice. What might be really helpful is a very...a guide to implementation for academic programs
2.c 3b.ii 3c.iiib	Implementation is challenging it's been challenging for everyone, for the institution, it really does require that we look at our curriculum in a deep way and that we look at our practice because it is different...and curriculum revision really requires time.

	<b>Unit 2: Participant Two</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
2.c 4a.ii 4a.iii 4b 4d.i	I think the material is really very CLB oriented comparing to a more generic EAP class the material for the most is authentic. it's occupationally focused, so I think in the more generic EAP class it's not. It's not based on...different types of literature for example. We do the form filling and we do incident report writing. They do have to adapt to the genre...the professional standard in nursing.
2.c 2.d.i 3b.ii 4a.iv 4b 4.d.i	This has been one of the strengths, I think of doing...of the CLB. We have made a very real effort to bring in formatted documents, real world documents that people are using in either their profession or their training courses
1b. i/iii/v 2.c 4.e.i/ii/iii	In the English for Health Sciences class that they do a lot of work on inferences, a lot of work on critical thinking and..reading for bias.
1b.ii/i 2c 4d	What's really different for a lot internationally educated nurses is that... is the legal liability held around this documents. It's almost the purpose for the document...is different...

	<b>Unit 3: Participant Three</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
2b 3b.ib 3b.iv	I had questions early on about how the CLBs could be used in an academic framework. We don't know particularly what would work and what wouldn't work because we don't have the context.
2b 2d.ii 3a.i/ii	So, I think we also have got the issue that the CLB is project funded the CCLB the Centre itself s project funded, so there is not a great deal of security, there is not a great deal of trust and confidence that this is a robust organization that has, you know, mechanisms to monitor, to revise, to keep up standards.
2b 2d.ii 3b.i.b	It should be more accessible...I don't want to make any more stuff[...]the samples are few.
2b 2d.i 3a.i.c	So, I think that when I think about CLB I think partly it's learner empowerment , and I think about the learner having the tools to be able to even know what the teacher's working at.
1.c.ii 2b 2d.ii	Our context in BC is quite limited in that we only have ELSA and ELSA is not linked in the same kind of overall way that LINC is in other parts of Canada.
1.i 2b 2d.ii 3b.iv	There is this issue of programing where do those programs ladder to?
1a.ii.a 2b	In BC we have a, you know, quite a fabulous Articulation process where institutions have a great deal of trust in each other's course completion. So, there is the sense, if there is nothing wrong, why fix it. And I think that there has been an effort to investigate, and there actually are on-going efforts...

	<b>Unit 3: Participant Three</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1.b.i/iv 2b	We have English for Access 1-8 which is exiting 8. Exiting 8 is no longer in for the EAP. Exiting 8, if called upon, if allowed, could give learners of English access to programs that require an 8 entry by passing the EAP completely.
1b.i/ii 2b	I think we are at an exciting juncture where regardless of what the EAP is doing ...there may be an interesting [?] in how people approach mainstream programming.
1b.i/ii/ 2b 2d.i 3b.ii/iii/iv 3c.i	I use the CLBs exclusively, nothing else absolutely everything, learners' expectations, goal setting, can-do checklist, rubrics, making materials, choosing materials, assessment...
1b.i 2b 3b.ib	The course that I'm teaching I haven't had the luxury of working with a program that has been developed by several...so...in a way...it's under development as we go so, many of the materials needed to be created.
1b.i/i/iii 2b	So, what we do is four skill class, listening, speaking, reading, and writing and what I'm trying to get to is I'm trying to get the students to a point where I could say regardless of the topic areas that are chosen, regardless of the individual idiosyncrasies of a the classical term, that I can say that the students leaving my class to be successfully achieving a B.
1b.iiia/iv 2b	I use the Access descriptors because the Access descriptors will of course get everything that is in the 2000 (...) So, earlier in the term, I hand this out (....) and I have them do a self-assessment.
1b.iiia/iii 2b3b.ib	So, I take a look at what the students should be doing in terms of competency. I also look at some of the overlapping skills. What they should have been doing between genres... and I also look at the vocabulary, and I look at the grammar descriptors. So, that's something that we need to add into the BC descriptors that weren't in the original 2000.
2b 3b.iii	One thing that people are concerned is test security, test security is an issue
1b.iii 2b3b.ib	What I'm trying to do is create a whole bunch of tasks where you're pulling on a number of things.
1b.i/ii 2b	Well one of the things is talking to the program areas on regular bases and making sure that it...in their area exchange...that our curriculum is compatible with that.
1b.i 2b 3b.ii/iv	We're using a portfolio which is [?] of the CLB work which Manitoba has done, looking at needs assessment, which [?] back at the Tara Holmes work, the Toronto thing whatever, in terms of establishing what the key criteria of the course are, and what are the individual bodies in front of me? where are they at? and where does that particular body need to get to?
1b.i/i 2b 2d.i 3b.iii	At the end of the day, I want them to have had enough variety that I can say, 'yes, those people'... and they can say, 'yes those people... can do it'. I see these skills as not been only occupational, but really crossing over with whatever we see as an educated person.

	<b>Unit 3: Participant Three</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
2b 2d.ii 3a.ib 3b.iii 3c.ii	Another final point on why the benchmarks may not be working is there is a sense that the levels are really broad compared to what we have at [institution].
2b 3b	The department signed off and has said that 'yes, we accept these benchmarks', so...but they're not really in place I would say
2b 2d.ii 3b.ib	I think people just need to have a by-the book [Q: To be facilitated?] yes, like go for it, and that's what we don't have in Canada.
2b 4a.iv 4b 4d.i 4e	This is a sample of a college like email that I turned into a fictional email by just changing names and date and...so, this went out to the college community.
2b 4a.iv 4b 4d.i 4e	So, in a way you're looking at formatted text. So, we have a pamphlet... and again a lot of the questions are maybe...tricky...all come down to tense, you know, and purpose and tone,
2b 4a.iv 4e	I do think with the rise of the internet, the use of technology, the ease in which students can do computing...so I think that mm.. working with all of that formatted reading...I think there has been an absence of that in EAP programming
1b.i/i 2b	I don't think they could do research papers, but the rest of it, yes...the scope of genre is much narrower. It's narrower in terms of what they will do academically, but they also can do other things, and they could them well.

	<b>Unit 4: Participant Four</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1a.ii 2a 2dii 3b.ii	We're not only dealing with language proficiency, but we are also dealing with content, with academic content, and that is not so clearly addressed in the CLB document.
2a 2d.ii 3a.ib	Now, a lot of research needs to be done on just how successful students are who go into the mainstream with just an assessment.
1a.ii 2a 2d.ii 3a.ii 3b.ii/iv	We cannot be all things to all people, given the limitations of time, and the content that we have to cover.
2a 2d.ii 3a.ii	They've tried to do there is kind of create a task-based approach to describing language as an observable phenomenon.
2a 2d.ii 3a.iii	It's not always the case that that lower levels and performance can be measured just only in terms of...it doesn't always move from concrete to abstract, or from simple to complex...even at the higher levels we see gaps.
2a 2d.ii 3a.i	There is a lot of vague and subjective language within the descriptors,
2a 3a.ii	It's quite a lot of...project, I think to try at a national level...to have national standards which allow students to transfer within provinces, or between programs...

	Unit 4: Participant Four
Coding	Transcript
1a.ii 2a 2d.ii	We're not hostile to the CLB document. It's just that we feel that we really don't have.... this burning need...to change our curricula, or our approaches, but rather we...want to evolve, we want to tweak, we want to... improve.
2a 2d.ii 3b	It seems that there is a lot of funding that is driven by CLB now. And because the government has this... kind of preoccupation, so there is a lot of politics involved in this here...the attraction is of CLB is of course some bureaucrats is just the idea of getting immigrants into jobs more quickly, right?
1a.ii 2a 3b.ii	We do use CLB to some extent...So in an indirect way of course we are influenced...by CLB descriptors...we use a variety of influences and sources to inform our curricular, our curricular choices.
1a.ii/iv 2a	We have to...standardize some aspects of our assessment do to our articulation agreements with the EAP levels I to IV, which we share with all the other community colleges within the province,
1a.ii 2a	It's a long established program.
2a 3a.ii 3b.iii	We've worked for several years with CLB and some aspects of CLB assessment have been a very good fit for the division [...] It's always important to recognize what the government...is kind of funding, and I think to some extent policy follows funding
1a.iii/v 2a 4d	We use a lot of authentic materials, in many ways our program is not really ESL. I mean, is sort of a hybrid, is a blend of high school language arts, you could say, maybe E... high school and ESL
1a.iii 2a	I think that we have more work to do with...speaking.
1a.iii/v 2a 2d.ii 3b.ii/iv	We try to...built in this proficiency through the EAP content that we provide... so, rather than just provide...a broad a needs-based... program like a negotiated curriculum...
1a.iii 2a 2d.ii 3a.ii	We do something that is quite specific. It's not for everyone, you know, this is a choice that students have when they reach a certain level
1a.ii 2a	We do definitely attend to what students needs, but we do still provide a kind of course outline at the beginning of the term and....which is a very, very much test ...there's a lot of specific test dates that need to be met... and content that needs to be covered
1a.ii 2a	Theoretical framework, I think it is really quite eclectic... So it's very pragmatic... there are bandwagons, but when you get into er... as I say practice, I think that, you know, your day-to-day life is just involved very much in making practical decisions about... curricular choices and...outcomes...without really thinking.

	Unit 4: Participant Four
Coding	Transcript
1a.iii/iv 2a 2d.ii	It exercises, indirectly, it exercises its influence upon us, not so here than... in other departments... here.. most of our instructors have developed their own...in writing their own grids, their own assessment tools...often based on... other kinds of descriptors like the descriptors, as I said from, the most influential would be from the BC Articulation Guide
1a.iii 2a	We try...our program is too generic in a sense that critical thinking skills are generic, you know, and transferable.
2a 2d.ii	Most of our students, oh excuse me, our instructors have some level...and worked with the CLB documents...People ARE aware and... it's just that... they are not inspired,
1a.i/iii 2a	What our students are guided through here in our program are...helping students to perform higher level functions and more effectively more... greater accuracy...
1a.iii/v 2a 2d.ii 3a.ii	I don't think our curricula is primarily functional. I think...largely what we do is...we want to develop students...generic skills...rather than the specific tasks...rather than practise specific tasks which tend to be more...based in English for special purpose.
1a 2a 2d.ii 3a.ib 3b.iii 3c.ii	We have found that CLB doesn't work very well for us. The bands are much too broad...we need to have very specific groupings, and the system that we've used...works extremely well and to adapt it to...CLB will be a retrofit, right?
2a 2d.ii 3a.ib	Our concern about CLB profiles is that if we...were to get students...sometimes they are now coming with CLB profiles. We're not a 100%....we really can't guarantee that we would know where to fit a student, and of course you're probably going to hear about the CLBPT as an instrument which is completely unreliable[...]But, dealing with a CLB profile from an outside institution from the assessment centre, we would really...be...skeptical of that in terms of our placements here.
2a 2d.ii 3b.ii 3c.ii	You know, you could have, a...settlement ESL program, which could be very effectively informed by CLB, I think, you know, and call it CLB 7, or CLB 8 even, or job orientation [...].... but still would not be EAP, right?
2a 3a.iii	They're going to come out with a new document...perhaps that functional approach may not...there may need to be re-visited in terms of whether it's going to inform you know, the... most current and, you know, useful theoretical framework. It may well be another choice at that point.
1a.iv 2a 2d.ii 3a.ii 3c.ii	It's influenced...some of the ways we do our assessments...but at the same...time to go directly to the CLB document and use it...it would not be useful.
2a 2d.ii 3a	We really haven't had the need to...you know, go in... back to the CLB 2000 document for what we're not...you know, for something more inspiring.
2a 2d.ii 3b	But I think that the deeper that you go into the implementation, the more you find the practical obstacles and contradictions.



	<b>Unit 4: Participant Four</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1a 2a 2d.ii 3b.iii 3b.iv 3cii	It was definitely it serves better the...settlement interests, I think, and Access interests rather than EAP...some of the CLB language actually do...some of the things we do, but not very much.
2a 2d.ii 3a.i	On the other hand there is a lot of students who now, you know, with CLB...that students just think of it as an easier way to get... through...sometimes even the benchmarks can be a barrier, because in some jobs is really the skill set more than the language proficiency that matters.
1a.ii 2a 2d.ii	We have an established curricula here that...works very, very well for us and...we have a variety of sources of documents....that inform our curricular choices. Benchmarks is one of them, but it's not the basis, and why should it be, you know, why should it be?
1a.iii 2a 4a.iii/v 4d.ii 4e.ii 4f	I think what we try to do in writing...various rhetorical forms along with, as I said, the research report, the research essay. The reading we try to emphasize, critical thinking skills.

	<b>Unit 5: Participant Five</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
2b 3a.ii 3b.iv	We were thinking that at the time, my reasons for liking benchmarks were first it's a common language right across...it might be a way of getting students into the jobs they wanted or the fields they wanted more efficiently.
2b 2d.ii 3a.ib 3c.ii	Our test is not benchmarkable. The benchmarks are too vague.
2b 2d.ii 3a.ii	But the problem I had is the original document was written by one writer and I think that when you're doing such a huge document it should have been [informed] by more people, but I'm...you know, sure that she looked at the council of Europe documents
2b 2d.ii 3a.ia 3b.ii	This is the kind of things that we have problem with. What does 'good control' mean?
1a.ii/v 2b 2d.ii 3a.iii	Well, we all do functional teaching...You also need, I think, for most learners after they have passed a certain level, you have to develop their meta-cognitive skills, and I'm not 100% certain that that is...I may be wrong, but I'm not 100% certain that that is part of the benchmark program, or a benchmarked curriculum... we don't officially...grammar is not part of our curriculum here.
1a.ii.a 2b	Our department pre-dates the development of benchmarks by a long long time. So...basically the curriculum that was developed in this department... has changed over the years, and some of the changes in our curriculum have reflected, have reflected benchmarks

	Unit 5: Participant Five
Coding	Transcript
1a.iv 2b	We have an assessment department of our own, which we still have, which developed a test called the English Language Assessment, and it was used to assess students coming in.
2c 3b.iii	I sat on a committee of department heads and assistant department heads that actually voted to apply for funds to look at benchmarking all of our English courses at the college.
1b.iv 2b	A lot of...the applied programs... in nursing and at the downtown campus, have been benchmarked, and students are starting to be accepted into those programs based on benchmarks...but we don't know. We have no stats on whether they are successful in the programs yet,
1a.ii 2c 3b.ii	We did a lot of PD opportunities with teachers, as much as we could, but not enough really to change curriculum, and many teachers became sort of half familiar with benchmarks,
2c 3b.iii	We had had instructors develop a reading test that was in fact a barrier test from that department into [EAP], and I said, 'can we benchmark this test?'
1a.ii.a 2b	The students don't like to think of themselves as ESL, so they have developed the sort of pre-first year courses to improve reading and writing skills amongst those students, and that's the kind of focus of this department, and...that's the kind of focus of all the other colleges that do EAP. So we{ All the BC public colleges } are all articulated together to provide that kind of training.
1b 2b 3b.iv 3c.i	We do have the department downtown [...] which is much more geared towards benchmarks, and that seems completely appropriate...for them and for their purpose, and we move students back and forth all the time between the two departments.
1a.ii.a 2b	I often work within the framework of the BC EAP Articulation Guide, which has the outcomes... So, the framework is the old curriculum that we developed over the years, and other colleges have developed,
1a.iii 2b 2d.ii 3a.ia 3b.ii	As an instructor, I don't go and look at what does it say in benchmark 8? what does it say about mm...writing an essay... I go by what I'm expected to do for my department in terms of teaching
1a.iv 2b	They'll have to be prepared to discuss it... summarize it with their classmates and talk about it, and it follows from what we do in the speaking class... they're totally assessed in these skills...
1a.iv 2b	We do a lot of peer evaluation for all sorts of activities in class.
1a.iii 2b 4e.v	And then, I give them actual samples of previous students reports, for them too because I learn from models. I think maybe they do.
1a.ii.a/iii 2b	I use fiction, I mean, it's part of our curriculum because we are not only articulated with all the ESL programs, we are articulated with adult basic education, so that's grade 11 and 12,

	Unit 5: Participant Five
Coding	Transcript
2b 3b.iii	Assessment tools I have...I think I actually have a copy in my office of the exit level tasks [?] to 10. And...I would like to try those in my class some of them I haven't, to see whether..to see how closely they match what my students are able to do
1a.i/iv 2b	I try to get my students to get their error rate down to something more like 5 or 4% because when they get to the top level, they should be in fact be focusing on the coherence of their ideas and developing the richness of their vocabulary.
2b 2d.ii 3b.ii	Three things actually for our department to have...to simply adopt benchmarks as the curriculum, or as the total basis for the curriculum...The first is that it couldn't be done without an awful lot of money
1a.iii 2b 2d.ii 3b.iv 3c.ii	The second reason would be that...what we teach, we have...questions and queries about the benchmarks at the higher levels, and whether they fit what we're doing. We...people in [EAP], I think feel comfortable that what they are doing is preparing students for where those students seem to want to go.
2b 2d.ii 3a.ib 3c.iiia	The fact that the benchmarks seemed to work really quite adequately at the lower levels, but at the higher levels they need to be looked at and re-edited and re-written, and made more specific
2b 2d.ii 3a.ib 3c.ii	The other problem was that we seemed to have more ESL levels at XXX than the benchmarks have.
2b 2d.ii 3a.ib 3b.iii 3c.ii	The third thing is the assessment, the placement assessment. Our own English Language Assessment seems to test the things we want for what we teach. We've been using the CLBPT recently...again it works really level up to a certain level and after that it's just not accurate enough.
1a.ii 2b 2d.ii 3b.ii/iv 3c.ii	The other problem with curriculum is that we teach a very limited curriculum and...it is an academic curriculum. It's trying to give students the skills... to function in an academic environment, their reading and writing skills.
1a.iii 2b 2d.ii 3b.ii/iv 3c.ii	EAP does some things that are in the benchmarks, but to be able to say it's a benchmarked curriculum, you're supposed to be able to say you're doing 70% of the stuff that's covered...and we don't. We only do a small part of it. And...in reverse benchmark do not cover certain language skills that we do.
1a.i/iii/iv 2b 4a.vi	The reason why a lot of us use this particular text is because those are the skills we feel students need to... For ..academic reading skills, and the tests they are given throughout the term are testing the same skills...Again assuming that that's something that they have to do... if they go on to Langara or BCIT or wherever other...and it's built up very incrementally between each level.
1a.iii 2b 4a.vi 4c 4d.ii 4e	In reading anyway every instructor would have a prescribed reading text...so if you look at this compared to benchmarks, it may strike...this is not very functional, or...task-based, but...this book was not made for second language learners. This is a text book....developed in the States...

	<b>Unit 5: Participant Five</b>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
1a.iii 2b 4a.i 4e	We teach literature too... we alternate reading a short story, a Canadian short story, and reading a reading journal
1a.iii 2b 4a.v 4f.v	The focus is on essay writing, and they write three different kinds of essays.
1a.iii 2b 4d.ii	We went for a library workshop yesterday that the librarian gave them on how to do research online...in the library and online
1a.iii 2b 4a.vi 4d.ii 4e.iv/v	This was very academic...we're using MLA...We have a vocabulary text. We don't do enough is in graph reading and non-linear reading...most of what they're getting is of a formal register because that's what we're preparing them to read, formal or literary because essentially that's what we're preparing them to read...logical relations...
1a.iii 2b	Our speaking Oral Skills course is note taking, and they listen to lectures, and they are taught skills for taking notes usually putting them in graphs, and putting them, you know, in...mapping them depending on the organization of the lecture, looking for definitions.

## Appendix H: Certificate of Approval – Ethics Board



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

### CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Geoffrey Williams	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Education/Language and Literacy Education	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H09-01896
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<small>Institution</small>	<small>Site</small>	
N/A <b>Other locations where the research will be conducted:</b> The study will be conducted at a community college in Vancouver which offers ESL classes for immigrants, refugees, and international learners living in British Columbia. Being one of the members of the Adult ESL Articulation of the British Columbia Post-Secondary Transfer System Committee, which is responsible for the re-alignments of the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels with the English for Academic Purposes outcomes, this institution utilizes the CLB as reference for assessment, course goals, and curriculum design in many of its programs; thus, it may offer particularly valuable conditions for the nature of the study.		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Adriana M. Lima		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> A Functional Approach to English for Academic Purpose Syllabus: A Case Study of the Canadian Language Benchmarks		

**CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:** September 30, 2010

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:	DATE APPROVED: September 30, 2009	
Document Name	Version	Date
<b>Protocol:</b>		
Research Proposal	N/A	September 17, 2009
<b>Consent Forms:</b>		
Consent Forms	N/A	September 29, 2009
<b>Advertisements:</b>		
Internet Message	N/A	September 17, 2009
<b>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</b>		
Interview Questions	N/A	September 17, 2009
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b>		
Contact Letter	N/A	September 17, 2009
<b>Other Documents:</b>		
Letter Of Approval	N/A	August 5, 2009

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

**Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
and signed electronically by one of the following:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair  
 Dr. Ken Craig, Chair  
 Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair  
 Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair  
 Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair