



Case Study *December 2002*

Literacy through E-learning The Second Language Learning Café at the Bank of Canada

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. This case study addresses workplace literacy.

OVERVIEW

The Second Language Learning Café was developed in-house by the Bank of Canada as a personal computer support mechanism to solve a major second language training challenge. In the 1990s, the Bank had an internal language training section to support its bilingualism objectives. After June of 2001, however, most of the Bank's second language training was outsourced, due to a major overhaul of human resources functions. In addition to the external training courses, employees still benefited from a variety of standard and customized in-house courses and support mechanisms such as the Second Language Learning Café.

OBJECTIVES

The Second Language Learning Café was created at the Bank of Canada to:

- support employees' second language training;
- provide work-related and job-specific language materials through e-learning; and
- assist Bank employees who wish to refresh their second language skills between training sessions or as a complement to their learning program.

Effective practices case study in providing training and supporting workplace learning.

Name of Program
The Second Language Learning Café

Date Established
2001

Skills Developed

- Literacy
- Personal Management
- Teamwork

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The Bank of Canada is the country's central bank. Its role, as defined in the original *Bank of Canada Act* of 1934, is "to promote the economic and financial well-being of Canada." The Bank is a Crown corporation with considerable power to carry out its responsibilities. It is the sole issuer of bank notes and facilitates management of the country's financial system. Specifically, the Bank is responsible for monetary policy, central banking services, bank notes, and administering public debt. Its commitment to providing services in both official languages prompts the Bank to offer second language training opportunities to employees.

TARGET GROUPS

All Bank of Canada employees across the country have access to the Second Language Learning Café and are encouraged to make use of it through the Bank's intranet system.

ACTIVITIES

The Café includes a comprehensive series of work-related language exercises for both English and French, as second languages. A series of modules contains learning tips, information on policies and resources, interactive exercises, and games that challenge the learner's knowledge of important grammar structure and work-related vocabulary. All activities are designed to deliver immediate feedback to the user. There is also a listening module that exposes the learner to correctly pronounced language, as well as a reading module that features articles written by Bank employees. Individual walk-through sessions are provided to staff, managers, human resources consultants, and others, upon request.

An additional component of the Café is the Quiz of the Month. Café subscribers receive the Web-based, interactive quiz via e-mail. Its content varies from month to month and is inspired by feedback received from subscribers.

RESOURCES

The project started as a human resources initiative, and was designed by two staff trainers. Ongoing resources include trainer time for content upgrades and inquiries, as well as the internal technological support needed to maintain an intranet-based resource. Users of the Café have continuous access through the Bank's internal computer network system. Management supports the use of employee time for participation in Café activities.

INNOVATIONS

The Café is one of the first Web-enabled language tools to be designed specifically for adults working in Canada's two official languages. A desktop learning approach promotes continuous learning and motivates staff to stay engaged in the learning process. It also allows internal language trainers to identify and gauge priority topics.

The Café is client-driven. Users are asked for ideas about what would best help them learn. Employees are encouraged to make suggestions for exercises, vocabulary lists, monthly quizzes, and other activities.

In addition, the Second Language Learning Café uses everyday vocabulary and phrases dealing with the workplace to maximize the relevancy of the subject matter to its users. Subjects include:

- employee performance;
- client services;
- economics;
- project management;
- teamwork; and
- grammar to enhance proficiency at work.

BARRIERS

A significant problem facing employers who need a robust language training strategy is finding consistent e-learning materials related to second language training. There are few language training related public Web sites, and even these are not intended to support the requirements of a bilingual work environment. In the work environment, it would be useful to have second language instruction on business procedures, such as how to conduct meetings, manage employee performance, or provide client services. The Bank's options were to create its own training content or to use existing but less relevant materials for its e-learning second language training program.

A further challenge in developing and delivering an e-learning strategy is that not all employees are comfortable using Web-based tools. In addition, these tools for language training do not take into account different learning styles.

SOLUTIONS/KEYS TO SUCCESS

To address the lack of e-learning materials for second language training, the Bank of Canada decided to launch its own language training e-initiative. Using available in-house technology and expertise, the Bank created an intranet-based French-as-a-second language (FSL) tool, and an English-as-a-second language (ESL) learning resource. The Second Language Learning Café is an interactive language learning resource that is accessible to all employees across the country, 24 hours a day, via the Bank's intranet.

The key to the Café's success is the fact that employees are engaged in learning activities on-line from their workstations, at a time and pace convenient to them. The electronic delivery method is highly efficient because it offers easy access to language resources and immediate feedback to the learner. It also serves as a permanent (and ever-expanding) database of job-related language exercises used by employees and language instructors. Electronic delivery also provides an efficient mechanism for keeping in frequent touch with learners and responding to their language needs in a timely manner.

The chart below summarizes how the Bank matched solutions to its second language learning challenges.

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of e-learning materials for second language training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal staff created training material content, based on job tasks and client suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for formal second language training courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a language learning resource that employees can access any time, at their desk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee base is spread across Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide simultaneous access to learning for all employees, through the Bank's existing intranet system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide immediate feedback to learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using an electronic delivery method, feedback is provided instantly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep track of individual employees' learning progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computerized database creates customized learning for each employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a catalogue of language training activities and exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electronic delivery system serves as a permanent (and ever-expanding) library of language exercises

OUTCOMES

The Second Language Learning Café has been recognized for contributing to staff capability. The Café was identified as a major achievement by the head of human resources. Managers and employees alike find the Café's content to be especially useful when they have to provide feedback to other staff, participate in meetings, or respond to clients in their second language. A work-specific language learning tool specially designed to meet work-related second language requirements has been found to be particularly useful in assisting employees to work in Canada's two official languages.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

Due, in part, to the success of the Second Language Learning Café, the language training section is now seen as innovative, creative, and well-equipped to serve clients. This bilingual on-line language resource is accessible from workstations at head office, as well as in the regions. It is a key asset in some regions, where language resources and training are difficult, if not impossible, to access. The Café's resources are also available to employees who may not be identified as priority candidates for more formal Bank-sponsored language training.

USE AS A MODEL

The Second Language Learning Café was presented at a national conference in 2000, and information was shared with other Crown corporations on various occasions. A number of government and private sector organizations have expressed interest in replicating the model. This type of learning model could be used by organizations with an existing computer network system, where employees have the skills and access to use an on-line system. The start-up requirement of having good (to excellent) workplace computer technology available to employees makes this type of learning program a substantial investment, but one with significant returns for employee development.

Our thanks to interviewees and others who provided comment, including:

Denis Alarie, The Bank of Canada
Marisa Guagneli, The Bank of Canada

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. The case studies provide in-depth analysis of the methods used to develop, assess, implement, and deliver education and lifelong learning in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, and communities. They focus on goals, activities, resource requirements, achievements and outcomes, benefits, innovations, and keys to success and challenges.

This case study is one of a series addressing workplace literacy and basic skills development. The series is part of the *Overcoming Barriers* research project on Workplace Literacy being undertaken by The Conference Board of Canada and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.

Literacy through E-learning: The Second Language Learning Café at the Bank of Canada
by *Alison Campbell*

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