Evaluation of a Videoconferencing Pilot Project: Training for Volunteer Literacy Tutors for speakers of English as an Additional Language (EAL)

An iCCAN Pilot Project in Collaboration with the Rural Routes Initiative January 2010 Final Report

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Publication Information

This report provides an overview of a literacy tutor training pilot project delivered via video-conferencing through the iCCAN project in association with the Rural Routes Initiative, Norquest College.

iCCAN is a not-for-profit provincial network of videoconferencing sites creating unprecedented learning opportunities and greater access to training and professional development for all Albertans, regardless of where they live. Led by a partnership of Community Learning Network, Literacy Alberta, and Volunteer Alberta, iCCAN has funding from the Alberta Government's Access to the Future Fund until March 31, 2010.

iCCAN's numerous partnerships, technical expertise and training programs ensure that simultaneous educational programming is delivered to multiple communities as seamlessly as possible and that interaction among learners, and between learners and instructors, is properly facilitated. Through iCCAN, collaboration and resource sharing among community adult learning councils, literacy organizations, volunteer centres, and other non-profit organizations is creating efficiencies and expanding programming in ways not previously possible.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an evaluation of a literacy tutor training pilot project entitled **English as an Additional Language (EAL) Literacy Tutor Training**. This training project was delivered over four days via video conferencing (VC) to two separate cohorts.

Major aim of the pilot project

This pilot project intended to explore how video conferencing can provide timely, responsive, cost–effective, convenient, safer and innovative professional development training opportunities for EAL literacy tutors via desktop and classroom–sized videoconferencing units supported through the iCCAN project.

Overview, time and resources required

2 groups each received 2 sessions of VC professional development. Each session was 2 hours long. So each group received 4 hours of PD. As there were two groups who received a total of 4 hours of PD each, this pilot project encompassed 8 hours of training, plus preparations and evaluation of the pilot.

The majority of the resources required, in addition to the facilitator's time, expertise and materials, were those contributed by the iCCAN project staff. This included their expertise in videoconferencing and adult education, technical and troubleshooting knowledge, ability to "bridge" in participants and ensure that participants were successfully connected. This constituted a major part of the preparations (and subsequent success) of the pilot.

Careful tracking of the hours spent by all individuals involved revealed that this pilot project required a total of 164 hours of time, including preparations, facilitator training, content preparation, follow up and evaluation.

Impact

This pilot project is, as far as we know, was the first of its kind in Canada.

Participant comments included "Fascinating process and content", "Excellent", "Network opportunities to connect with other people interested in literacy", "Supported me as an ESL teacher with tools, taught strategies, allowed me some introductions to other ESL (in our community) teachers", "Of extreme value – [this was] my first learning opportunity in a literacy training session" and "Extremely valuable tools to enable strategic instruction of ESL literacy learners".

This pilot also demonstrated the feasibility of the concept, particularly in regards to programming goals of the Innovative Communities Connecting and Networking (iCCAN) project, which is to bring educational and professional development opportunities to all areas of rural and remote Alberta at the community level.

The need for iCCAN to perform platform and technical support and troubleshooting was also highlighted.

This pilot project intended to explore how video conferencing can provide timely, responsive, cost–effective, convenient, safer and innovative training opportunities for literacy tutors via desktop and classroom–size videoconferencing offered through iCCAN. The was achieved according to participants. As one tutor commented, "[Videoconferencing] saves gas, saves risking our lives on winter roads, less greenhouse gasses, lost time, etc."

Selected recommendations

A comprehensive list of recommendations is provided at the end of this report. Some key recommendations were:

- Since the pilot shows that the concept is feasible, and there appears to be a likelihood of demand growing, it is worth investing the resources in refining and scaling the project to offer it again. A "beta test" approach of having a larger pilot (rather than a full scale offering) to continue to improve the methodology and delivery, is an appropriate next step.

- Remote site facilitators need VC training. Lead facilitators should take part in all the training offered by iCCAN: Coffee Hour, Content Provider training, Leadership Training.

- Inviting participants from disparate communities across the province, into the VC medium, should be continued. This was an excellent opportunity for participants, who would otherwise not work together, a chance to meet, discuss, learn, and plan to meet again on their own terms.

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iCCAN Video Conferencing Pilot Project – Report

Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of a literacy tutor training pilot project entitled **English as an Additional Language (EAL) Literacy Tutor Training**. This training project was delivered over four days via video conferencing (VC) to two separate cohorts. The idea for this project originated with Ms. Yvonne Stewart, iCCAN Technical Support, who envisioned how the iCCAN project could transform EAL literacy tutor training in Alberta. Ms. Stewart proposed the idea to Ms. Martha Urquhart, ESL Consultant, Rural Routes (Norquest College), who shared her enthusiasm and interest in exploring the possibilities of VC facilitated learning, and so this pilot project was born.

About the iCCAN Project

iCCAN (Innovative Communities Connecting and Networking) is a not-for-profit provincial network of videoconferencing sites creating unprecedented learning opportunities and greater access to training and professional development for all Albertans, regardless of where they live. Led by a partnership of Community Learning Network, Literacy Alberta, and Volunteer Alberta, iCCAN has funding from the Alberta Government's Access to the Future Fund until March 31, 2010.

iCCAN's numerous partnerships, technical expertise and training programs ensure that simultaneous educational programming is delivered to multiple communities as seamlessly as possible and that interaction among learners, and between learners and instructors, is properly facilitated. Through iCCAN, collaboration and resource sharing among community adult learning councils, literacy organizations, volunteer centres, and other non-profit organizations is creating efficiencies and expanding programming in ways not previously possible.

Aims of the pilot project

VC can provide numerous advantages and conveniences in an adult education setting, including: Reaching a wider audience of learners more frequently; as well as reducing time, risks, and costs associated with travel (Carville & Mitchell, 2000; Olaniran, 2009; Tomlinson, 2002; Waring, 1999). This project aimed to take advantage of all of the above. Specifically, it aimed to explore how VC tutor training could reach new tutors as they join literacy or EAL programs in their area, without having to wait until a large group is assembled, without tutors or trainers having to travel long distances, and without them having to risk poor road conditions. An additional aim was to test how to use video conferencing as an effective means to deliver tutor training. With the iCCAN VC project, tutor training could be provided on an as-needed basis to new tutors. Furthermore, this project intended to demonstrate the quality of desktop VC in teaching and learning as compared to class-room sizeclassroom-size models, both of which are installed by the iCCAN project.

In summary, this pilot project intended to explore how video conferencing can provide timely, responsive, cost-effective, convenient, safer and innovative training opportunities for literacy tutors via desktop and classroom-size videoconferencing offered through iCCAN.

Aims of EAL Literacy Tutor Training

There are dozens of volunteer literacy trainers throughout Alberta. These are dedicated individuals who give generously of their time in their own communities to teach other adults literacy and essential skills. They work with a variety of learners, some of whom are "ESL literacy learners" or "EAL literacy learners". This specialized sub-group is defined is comprised of those who is learning English and who lacks adequate literacy skills in their own language. This makes it much more difficult for them to learn English, which is largely a print-based language. The EAL literacy learner must face such things as learning the concept of a classroom environment and study skills, etc. This is in addition to learning things such as the concept of an alphabet and other literacy skills.

This pilot aimed to provide professional development to those volunteer tutors who dedicate their time to helping adult EAL literacy learners in their home communities in Alberta. The participants who took part in this pilot received the training free of charge.

Aims of this report

To provide feedback, a record of events, and recommendations for future action to the following people and organizations:

1) iCCAN staff who designed this project.
2) iCCAN project steering committee.
3) Funder, partners, and colleagues in the field.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation conducted here was formative and participatory. Formative evaluation intends to improve a program as it is taking form, whereas, summative evaluation intends to prove that the program worked the way it was planned (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Formative evaluation is an iterative process and requires the input from multiple program implementers.

A participatory evaluation (PE) approach was also utilized – that which aims to incorporate, include, and learn from all project stakeholders and participants (Bessette, 2004). In PE, the evaluator draws out the unique and specialized knowledge of the different stakeholders and participants. Then the evaluator applies their research, data collection, analysis, and reporting skills (Cousins, 1996). In this context, evaluation is not about getting the facts right or providing a true or objective report on the matter under investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participatory evaluation is instead about documenting the success, the triumphs, the problems, the roadblocks, and the learning process that has unfolded. One of the many strengths of formative and participatory evaluation is the comparison of perspectives across authors or contributors (Weston, McApline, & Bordonaro, 1995).

Perspectives included in this report:
- Literacy tutors
- Site facilitators
- The instructor
- The technical support person
- Evaluators/observers

Data collected included:
- The perspectives and experiences of program participants
- Member checks (interviews) with program planners and facilitators
- Evaluator observations
- Norquest Workshop Evaluation
- iCCAN Session Evaluation
- Literature and research in the field

Project Summary

Collaborators

Person	Organization	Pilot Project Role
Martha Urquhart	Rural Routes Initiatives, Norquest College	Facilitator/Trainer
Yvonne Stewart	iCCAN	Technical Support/Project Planner/Site Trainer
Barb Hudkins	iCCAN	Technical Coordinator
Cathy King	iCCAN	Remote Site Training & Content Adaptation for VC
Sharon Matthias	iCCAN	Evaluator
Sarah Eaton	iCCAN	Evaluator
Courtney Hare	iCCAN	Evaluator

Project Overview

DAY 1		
When	Tuesday, November 17, 2009	12:30–2pm
Who	Norquest College	Martha Urquhart (ESL Consultant, Rural Routes (Norquest College))
	iCCAN	Yvonne Stewart (iCCAN & Share Technical Support)
	iCCAN	Barb Hudkins (VC Technical Coordinator)
	Wetaskiwin Community Literacy Program S.P.E.L.L. Hosted by the Community Adult Learning Council for Wetaskiwin and Area	Judy Bortnik (Site Facilitator) 9–12 Literacy Tutor participants 2 Executive Directors/Managers Charlene Schnick (provided the classroom and video conference equipment.)
	Rainbow Literacy Society – Vulcan	Marilyn Dixson (Site Facilitator) 4–5 Family Literacy Worker participants
	Lacombe Life Long Learning	Carol Wilcox, Literacy Coordinator (Last minute and temporary participant)
	iCCAN and Norquest College Observers	Lorene Andersen & Shelley Goulet (Norquest College), Sarah Eaton & Courtney Hare (iCCAN)

Day 2		
When	Thursday, November 19, 2009	12:30–2pm
Who	Norquest College	Martha Urquhart (ESL Consultant, Rural Routes (Norquest College))
	iCCAN	Yvonne Stewart (iCCAN & Share Technical Support)
	iCCAN	Barb Hudkins (VC Technical Coordinator)
	Wetaskiwin Community Literacy Program S.P.E.L.L. Hosted by the Community Adult Learning Council for Wetaskiwin and Area	Judy Bortnik (Site Facilitator) 9–12 Literacy Tutor participants 2 Executive Directors/Managers Charlene Schnick (provided the classroom and video conference equipment.)
	Rainbow Literacy Society – Vulcan	Marilyn Dixson (Site Facilitator) 4–5 participants (1 of whom was a family literacy coordinator)
	iCCAN Observers	Sarah Eaton & Courtney Hare (iCCAN)

Day 3		
When	Monday, November 30, 2009	6:30–8pm
Who	Norquest College	Martha Urquhart (ESL Consultant, Rural Routes (Norquest College))
	iCCAN	Yvonne Stewart (iCCAN & Share Technical Support)
	ABLE Medicine Hat College, Brooks Campus, Brooks	Heather Kazimir (Site Facilitator) 8 tutor participants
	Hanna Learning Centre, Hanna	Donna Spath (Site Facilitator) 1 tutor Participant
	Killam	Due to technical difficulties Killam's participation was limited.
	Slave Lake Community Reading Program, Slave Lake	Kim Mills (Site Facilitator) 2 tutor participants, 1 literacy coordinator
	iCCAN Observers	Courtney Hare & Sharon Matthias (iCCAN)

Day 4		
When	Tuesday, December 1, 2009	6:30–8pm
Who	Norquest College	Martha Urquhart (ESL Consultant, Rural Routes (Norquest College))
	iCCAN	Yvonne Stewart (iCCAN & Share Technical Support)
	ABLE Medicine Hat College, Brooks Campus, Brooks	Heather Kazimir (Site Facilitator) 11 tutor participants
	Hannah Learning Centre, Hannah	Donna Spath (Site Facilitator) 1 tutor Participant
	Slave Lake Community Reading Program, Slave Lake	Kim Mills (Site Facilitators) 4 tutor participants
	iCCAN Observers	Sharon Matthias (iCCAN)

Time Invested

Planning and discussion surrounding the project began in the summer of 2009, registering remote site participants began in the early fall, and the first training session was held on November 17, 2009. An extraordinary amount of time, preparation and activity went into planning, implementing and evaluating this program. The following chart is a summary and approximation of the people-power invested in this pilot project.

Time (Hours)	Activities	People
4	Community outreach, promotion, advertising and recruiting	Ms. Stewart
10	Preparing remote site facilitators	Ms. Stewart, Ms. King
14	Content provider and content adaption training	Ms. Hudkins, Ms. King, Ms. Stewart.
2	Virtual meeting room scheduling/booking	Ms. Hudkins
30	Facilitator preparation (including content development)	Ms. Urquhart
5	Connectivity tests and site coordination	Ms. Stewart
18	Test-run (1.5 hour x 2times)	Ms. Urquhart, Ms. King, Ms. Stewart
15	Technical support and testing	Ms. Stewart
18	Prep time, including phoning, room set up, emailing, VC equipment, photocopying, debriefing. (3 hours for one site facilitator x 6 sites)	Site Facilitators (Estimate provided by Ms. Dixson, Vulcan)
8	Project facilitation	Ms. Urquhart
8	Facilitation follow-up, reporting, paperwork	Ms. Urquhart
32	Evaluation and reporting (observation, discussion, reviewing evaluation forms, debriefing, reporting, collaborating)	Dr. Eaton, Ms. Matthias, Ms. Hare, Ms. Urquhart, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Hudkins.
164	**TOTAL HOURS**	

Data and Analysis

Evaluator Observations and Interviews with Planners

Notes and comments from observing the four days of training are organized below by the following themes: Facilitation, participation, technology and adult education. Data and details were double-checked with the facilitators and planners.

Day 1 & 2 (Wetaskiwin and Vulcan)

Facilitation
- This was clearly a well organized, well planned, and well prepared pilot project. The enthusiasm of the planner (Yvonne Stewart, iCCAN Technical Support) and facilitator (Martha Urquhart, Rural Routes Initiative) was contagious.
- The instructor, Ms. Urquhart, welcomed participants, facilitated introductions and provided excellent clarification as to who was participating and where. Participants were made aware of technical support offered throughout the program by Yvonne Stewart and how to reach her at any time.
- The format for the training remained consistent over the two days of training. Some changes were made to the facilitation style based on participant evaluation and observer feedback.
- Ms. Urquhart was highly skilled in VC etiquette, keeping eye contact with the camera, moving slowly/minimally and engaging her participants well. Ms. Urquhart kept a positive, can-do, attitude throughout the entire session, smoothing over minor technical glitches, the exiting of one participant, and reconfiguration of some group work.
  - Comment: It should be noted that Ms. Urquhart was a "natural" with video conferencing facilitation. However, the iCCAN team provided detailed and lengthy training on VC facilitation to Ms. Urquhart.
- Each site had a designated site facilitator. In Vulcan this was Marilyn Dixson and in Wetaskiwin this was Judy Bortnik. They were the first point of contact for the trainer and were responsible for connecting with technical support if there were any problems. They did their jobs well. Cathy King (iCCAN Project Manager) worked with the site facilitators prior to the pilot project in order to prepare them for their role.
- Resources were distributed to the participants/sites via email prior to the training session.
  - Comments: This is a convenient and efficient method for sharing workshop materials. However, there were times that participants (and observers) were wondering what hand-out the instructor was referring to and where it was in our pile of handouts. One handbook of hand-outs, ordered, and numbered would have made finding the hand-outs easier.
- Oral directions were given. Participants had to listen carefully for questions, instructions, and what hand-out or activity they were supposed to be focusing on. The facilitator did hold up pages in front of the camera for participants to observe.
  - Comment: It may be helpful to show the page in front of the camera a little while longer. Alternatively, and at a later date, it may be beneficial to or integrate PowerPoint or flip chart so that participants may follow along more easily and so we attend to more visual learner needs.

Participation

- An order for questions/contributions from sites was pre-determined and indicated to participants.
  - Comments: Designating or starting with the same group for questions/ contributions put some pressure on the same group/individual to respond. Vulcan commented, "This is hard – Thinking on your feet," when they were asked to first follow up with comments in the pre-determined order. Having sites raise their hand to contribute or alternating the request for questions and comments may solicit contributions more equitably and at the participants own pace.
- A manageable number of remote sites and participants joined the daily sessions, however, fewer sites than expected ended up participating.
  - Comment: It is important to find out why the site(s) that were expected to participate did not and how we can prevent absentee participants in the future. This can be expected in the pilot stage of the project but in future programming we would not want to turn away participants due to capacity concerns that turn out to be unwarranted.
  - Lorene Andersen, Norquest College, commented on the improved impact a train-the-trainer cascade model would have. If this program was intended to train trainers of literacy tutors instead of tutors directly then the impact could be much broader and larger.
- The trainer instructed two sites to work together over video conferencing while the other group muted their equipment.
  - Comments: This was an interesting suggestion and came with a few challenges. The sites seemed a little confused on how to implement the request and who was doing what. Then one site/participant had to exit the session. This left no groups working together over video conference any longer.
  - Comment: Connecting the literacy tutors directly was a unique opportunity for sharing and learning. Researchers have noted the learning benefits of connecting distanced groups of learners – it becomes an opportunity for participants to gain a broader understanding of literacy tutoring across diverse communities (Daley, Spalla, Arndt & Warnes, 2008).
  - This was only attempted once. In the following sessions the individuals at the sties worked together rather than collaboratively (site-to-site).
- Once the group work was completed then the groups shared their learner profiles and the results of their group work. Ms. Stewart made notes from this discussion for sharing and then emailed the notes to participants.
  - This was helpful record keeping of participant contributions. However, this may have been an onerous task for the technology support person to complete as well. In the future it might make sense for a participant to volunteer to take notes and then distribute them.

Technology

- Four sites were planned to attend this training session, however, there were some technical difficulties that could not be resolved.

- The sites participated in a brainstorming session: Sites took turns contributing ideas on the differences between literacy learners.
  - Comment: There were some minor tech glitches throughout the session. For example, sites forgot to mute their microphone and some feedback and echo were heard. Yvonne Stewart worked with these sites immediately to resolve the issues. There were no such technical glitches on day 2.

- o Comment: Ms. Stewart provided immediate support and guidance to participant sites, was on call throughout the program and generally did a wonderful job ensuring that the program ran smoothly.
  - o Comment: Ms. Stewart's competence and confidence likely provided a great deal of comfort to site facilitators and was integral to the project's success.
- Upon reconvening for day two, the observers noticed that the technology seems less visible and that we were paying more attention to the workshop content and communication rather than the technology.
  - o Comment: Interestingly, at the end of the session both sites commented on this phenomenon of ease/comfort or being more engaged with the workshop and less engaged with the video conferencing technology. The trainer also commented on feeling more at ease.

> **"I felt more relaxed today."**
>
> **"It was more exciting, entertaining and helpful today."**
> – Participants' comments at the end of day 2

- The Trainer utilized the desktop videoconferencing equipment/technology that many iCCAN community members have received.
  - o Comment: There have been some misperceptions of the quality, quantity, and clarity that desktop videoconferencing can provide. It was obvious to participants of this pilot that desktop videoconferencing can provide high quality training and learning opportunities, equal to that of classroom–size VC equipment also installed by iCCAN.

Adult Education
- Remote site participants were sitting in a row or rows.
  - o Comment: This was conducive to VC etiquette but not conducive to group work or collaboratoin. This may be an area of interest/pedagogical research or further exploration.
- Participants (tutors) were given opportunities to contribute, communicate, dialogue and add to the conversation. Sites used "thumbs up" signs. Site facilitators were appointed for the majority of communication, however, Ms. Urquhart opened up the floor to participant tutors at each site. One site had participants take turns making contributions or adding their comments. The other site elected their site facilitator to speak on their behalf.
  - o Comment: This was an excellent opportunity for participants to choose to participate and to share their experience and knowledge.

DAY 3 & 4 (Slave Lake, Killam, Brooks, Hanna and Brooks)

Participation
- Participants in this session interacted across sites, responding to each other's comments and questions.

  - o It was excellent to observe the interaction of literacy tutors who would otherwise not have connected in literacy tutor training due to the regional organization of literacy support in our province.

Facilitation

- Martha began the session as she had the previous two by explaining the session procedures that each site would be called upon for comments and contributions in the same order each time, who the site facilitators were, etc. She then asked each group to introduce themselves.

- The session got underway with definitions, the questions of what is the different between an ESL Literacy Learner and an ESL learner. Each site participated.

- One of the participants commented that they would have liked to have been sent the learner profiles for all the sties so that they could follow along more easily.

    - Comment: It appeared again that one handbook of all materials numbered and ordered may have provided a simpler method of distributing information and keeping everyone "on the same page."

Technology

- The original meeting room plan for the evening provided some technical difficulties for the session. The original plan was that the iCCAN team would dial out to each site. Instead, Service Alberta had to provide the meeting space and the sites were to dial in. All of the sties dialed in and were present but we could not see each other. We could only see the site that was speaking.

- The Killam site could not see anything or hear anything with their videoconferencing equipment. However, we could see them and hear them discussing what was happening, the trouble they were experiencing, etc. It was obvious when Ms. Stewart called them on the telephone and made them aware that they were visible and audible to all the other sites. They quickly muted their microphone.

    - Some video conferencing etiquette was absent in this group as they did not believe they were audible or visible to the group. When the session got underway they sometimes talked over the trainer before they were instructed to mute their microphone. Although they were prepared well in how to be a remote site, how to be a remote site host, etc, these are some of the nuances of pilot project and first trials. It was not overly disruptive but we would want to prevent this in the future.

- Martha informed us all that Service Alberta was working on remedying the situation so that we could all see each other, and that Killam could participate, but for now we would proceed with the session. Ms. Stewart continued to work to resolve the problems at the Killam site and with the Service Alberta Bridge, so that could see all the sites simultaneously and so that Killam could join us.

- At 7:30 pm the visual problems with the Alberta Service Meeting room were resolved. We could all of a sudden see each group. Killam was then able to hear the session but not see it. They agreed to participate via audio conferencing only. Martha invited Killam to introduce themselves and she clarified where we were in the session.

- The session resumed and participants at different sites were interacting with each other. Martha checked in with all the sites to "see how they were doing." Everyone could hear well, see well, and were enjoying the session except for Killam who said they felt a little lost without visuals but that they were doing okay.

- Martha instructed the sites to do some group work/brainstorming together. Killam took this opportunity to check in with Martha on what had been covered and what went on.

- Killam commented that they weren't sure what to do with all the information they had been given over audio conferencing instead of video conferencing. They weren't sure what pages they were supposed to be looking at and that they had pages all over the place. They said that tomorrow night would be better for them and that they would likely fall right into step. However, the technical difficulties with Killam were not resolved in time for day 4.

> **"It's nice to have this technology so that we didn't have to**
> **drive to Slave Lake!"**
> – EAL Literacy tutor participant

Adult Education
- Martha explained that she is one of 3 Rural Routes consultants in the province. She indicated where the other two operated and that they were all available to follow up with literacy tutors face-to-face if needed, or one-on-one and that the could provide individual mentoring. She essentially invited participants to keep in touch with her and to continue learning with her and her colleagues in this area.

  o Giving participants an opportunity to follow up with the facilitator was an excellent approach to ensure that participants learning needs were met. It was also an excellent networking opportunity for participants in the same literacy region – knowing that they could meet face-to-face for training as well.

- A Brooks participant in this session invited the Hanna participant down to Brooks.

  o Although these two communities are relatively close, they are not in the same literacy region for Rural Routes and so would otherwise not have an opportunity to meet or work together. The VC medium gave participants, who would otherwise not work together, a chance to meet, discuss, learn, and plan to meet again on their own terms.

Participant Evaluation Forms

The following summarized data was obtained from the workshop evaluations of Norquest College and iCCAN, collected from the literacy tutors/workshop participants.

Day 1 & 2

> **"I love face to face workshops but having participated in several video conference trainings I really am beginning to appreciate all the 'pluses' with technology"** – EAL Literacy tutor participant

Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive regarding the VC mediated learning and the content. No one selected "Not at all satisfied" for any of their responses. However, some participant did express concerns. Themes from the evaluations collected from the Vulcan and Wetaskiwin sites included:

Suggestions or Concerns: Participant commented that it was difficult to understand the many terms introduced and that the content was more for veteran tutors than new tutors. One participant commented that "videoconferencing is 2nd best to actually having a speaker in the room" and another commented "I have trouble with this format of learning." Several participants noted that it was difficult to follow instructions or questions from the facilitator. Several participants suggested the use of PowerPoint as a visual aid to instructions.

Second Session Phenomenon: Several participants noted that there were more comfortable with the training on day two. For example, one participant commented "Today was great – probably because I was more relaxed with the technology," and another participant commented, "Somehow today seemed more relaxed and less overwhelming for me" and another "Today was better than yesterday."

Learning Achieved: Participants responded that they were "Fully Satisfied" or "Somewhat Satisfied" that they could use what they learned from the session and that what they learned will help them achieve their goals as a volunteer. One participant commented, "I will know what resources to look at so I can plan how to meet my student's learning needs."

Day 3 & 4

"**Video conferencing is exciting**"! – EAL Literacy tutor participant

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Evaluations were overwhelmingly positing regarding the VC session and the content. However, there were greater technical difficulties during this session and participants commented on this. Themes from this set of evaluations collected from the Slave Lake, Brooks, Killam and Hanna sites included:

Suggestions or Concerns: Not all participants were "Fully Satisfied" with the sessions on day 3 & 4. These responses may or may not have been from the group in Killam that was prevented from fully joining due to technical difficulties. Participants commented on the difficulty of following where they were in the handouts, for example, "It would have been great if the handouts could have been numbered and contained in a package." There were several more comments requesting the use of PowerPoint.

Second Session Phenomenon: Comments that the second session was better than the first were reported again, however, not as prevalent as the first session.

Learning Achieved: Participants provided detailed comments on what they learned and how they will use it. Two comments included, "I am a new tutor & this opened my eyes to the complexity of teaching ESL" and "This workshop was valuable to me as I heard lots of different suggestions of working with people at different literacy levels."

In summary, participants generally appreciated and enjoyed the sessions. They provided helpful feedback on how to improve future sessions. Furthermore, every single respondent indicated that they would participate in future VC sessions.

Facilitator Feedback

Martha Urquhart shared the following comments and suggestions in regards to her experience as the pilot project facilitator. The following format is based on evaluator questions for Ms. Urquhart and her responses.

What would you want people to know about this pilot project?

Many people have a concern that video conferencing might take over face-to-face learning. It's a concern that simmers in the background. However, I see how the two work to support each other. One is not meant to take over the other. You can use VC as alternative in a bad weather situation or on an as-needed basis. That way you don't need to cancel a literacy training event. Face-to-face and VC complement each other. I can see going out to do a face-to-face workshop and then following up with VC. You can provide more training opportunities with VC, without reducing the face-to-face opportunities.

I also want people to know that it was relatively easy to do! I mean, I sure had a lot to learn and I wasn't sure what to expect because I was new. However, it wasn't just talking to a camera – it was interactive!

I think it's important for people to know that having experienced literacy coordinators worked in our favour – they understood how to facilitate the tutor training session at the remote sites.

What would you tell other first-time VC facilitators?

It's just like facilitating a workshop. Of course there are differences in medium, but you're still trying to facilitate well. It's hard because you can't walk around the room and connect with participants during their group work – it's nerve wracking – just looking at the clock and waiting for the allotted time to finish. If sites have muted their microphones and you don't know how the group work is going and if they're staying on task. Basic rules need to be covered for video conferencing so that the groups stay on task.

Other first-time facilitators should relax! Have fun with it! It's a workshop! Chances are you know your content so you just need to focus on learning VC. I would recommend that they take part in all the training offered by iCCAN; Coffee Hour, Content Provider training, Leadership Training, attend them all.

What do you like most about VC mediated learning?

The convenience and the potential for increased training. Literacy coordinators can divide up the workload with VC. We can provide more sessions with less work. We can greatly improve the quality and speed of literacy tutor training. We then improve the literacy accomplishments of learners. Better trained tutors means that they enjoy their volunteer experience more and they are more successful, which means longer term commitment with tutoring/volunteering.

What do you like least about VC mediated learning?

Waiting! I felt disconnected. I couldn't observe, eavesdrop on participants, or hear a question or dilemma that a group was experiencing. In face-to-face format you can walk around the room and experience all that. In a VC environment you lose that and you're just left waiting.

Debriefing

The following notes were taken during a debriefing discussion with Martha Urquhart, Yvonne Stewart, Sharon Matthias, and Courtney Hare. The following themes were discussed: Plan B (in case the technology failed); connectivity Issues; the second session phenomenon; two pronged learning; order of questioning; remote site classroom formation; building a community of literacy tutors; site facilitation and piloting

Plan B

While there were technical glitches surrounding the participation of several remotes sites, those sites that did attend for the duration of training experienced a rather flawless videoconferencing session. This may not have been the case. Disconnection and difficulties may have ensued, prompting the technical support person and facilitator to recommend that they move to "Plan B." In this project, the session would have been rescheduled/post-poned in order to attempt the session again.

Connectivity Issues for Remote Sites

Several sites were unable to participate in this training project due to regional connectivity issues beyond the realm of the iCCAN project. Inviting sites to participate and then having them experience major technical issues may discouraged them from attempting VC mediated learning learning. It also reduced the number of planned and expected session participants. The following suggestions were put forth:

- Remote sites interested in participating in pilot projects or training should experiment with their regional network capability first. They can do so by attending iCCAN Coffee Hour sessions, for an example.

- Exploring connectivity capability should be done at least one month in advance of a training session.

However, the Killam site in session 3 and 4 should not have had any difficulty joining the session however. They often participated in iCCAN Coffee Hour and other videoconferencing sessions. The difficulty they experienced remains unresolved.

Second Session Phenomenon

Based on observations, participants comments during the session, and feedback on evaluation forms, it appears that the second training session went more smoothly, was more enjoyable, and the technology was less visible. While as first this seemed more to do with the technology, Ms. Urquhart's knowledge of the training materials and further participant comments revealed that this had both to do with the content as well as the technology and session itself. The second session of training included more practical and hands on work and materials, which is why Ms. Urquhart believed this session was more appreciated by participants. In an effort to ensure participants have the opportunity to engage in the more practical material up front the following options were put forth for consideration:

- Have one session instead of two (with a good break in the middle).

- Maintain two session format but integrate more practical material in the first session.

There are obvious disadvantages and advantages to both format and both options may be worth pursuing in the second pilot project.

Two Pronged Learning

Participants in this pilot project were learning about VC mediated learning in addition to the literacy tutor training content. Both the participants and the facilitator commented on the VC learning experience and how they appreciated adding to their own skill set and developing skills with VC technology.

Order of Questioning

Observations of the pre-determined order of questioning brought forth questions regarding equal involvement of sites. It appeared to put unnecessary pressure on the first responders and less involvement on the last responders due to the fact that the majority of responses were exhausted by the time the last site was asked. The following option was put forth for consideration: Utilize a pre-determined order of questioning, however, the facilitator can begin questioning with a different group each time. This way, the sites always know whom they come after, but the same site isn't always required to respond first.

Remote Site Classroom Formation

Most of the remote sites utilized rowed seating in the classroom for the VC session. While this is conducive to VC etiquette and viewing, it is not conducive to group work and collaboration among learners. The following suggestions were put forth:

- Recommend to site facilitators that small groups may utilize a "U" shape seating position which is conducive to VC etiquette and viewing but also allow participants to see each other and work together.

- Site facilitators should be given instructions on facilitating group work during break-out sessions. Participants can get up and move around during the group work and discussion times.

Building a Community of Literacy Tutors

Remote site participants were not made well aware of other sites participants' names, information, or contact details. In an effort to encourage networking and community building the following suggestions were put forth:

- Participant could utilize large print name tags/signs so that participants can see the other participants names.

- During the registration process, participants could have the option of granting permission to share their name and contact information. The facilitator can then distribute a list of participants to everyone.

Site Facilitation

The technical coordinator and facilitator noted that site facilitation could have been improved. While the remote site coordinators were well prepared in facilitating the literacy tutor content, they were not well prepared for VC facilitated learning. The following suggestions were put forth:

- Site facilitatiors should be trained as to their roles and responsibilities as literacy tutor coordinators and as VC coordinators.

Piloting

The unique nature of a pilot-project training session brought forth the following suggestions:

- Keep it small. We do not want to discourage a large cohort of potential VC users from engaging in this technology in the case that there are unresolved technical issues. By keeping in small and gradually building participation we lower our risk of negatively impacting VC users.

- Pilot-projects are unique opportunities to engage participants as co-experimenters. Pilot project participants can be invited as active participants in the experimenting process in order to give details information on their experience, perspective and recommendations. For example, participants may be invited to share their experience of the VC session immediately following the training content. A 10-15 minute comment and question period may solicit different or more details feedback compared to written evaluations. The two methods of collecting participant experiences would complement each other.

- Participants of this pilot project should be thanked for their time, interest and willingness to be part of an innovative and pioneering process. Ms. Urquhart will be distributing letters of appreciation to participants.

Impact

This pilot project is, as far as we know, was the first of its kind in Canada, possibly in North America. Participant evaluations provided a clear picture as to the educational impact of this program and the benefits of VC mediated learning. Here are some examples of participants' responses to the question, "How was this workshop of value to you?"

- "Fascinating process and content"
- "The workshop is immeasurable"
- "Excellent"
- "Network opportunities to connect with other people interested in literacy"
- "Supported me as an ESL teacher with tools, taught strategies, allowed me some introductions to other ESL (in our community) teachers"
- "Of extreme value – [this was] my first learning opportunity in a literacy training session"
- "Extremely valuable tools to enable strategic instruction of ESL literacy learners"

The geographical impact of this pilot project is explored in Appendix A –Map of Participant Sites. Connecting ESL tutors from around the province and creating a community of tutors interested in improving their practice, were themes commonly shared by participants, facilitators, technical support and evaluators.

This pilot also demonstrated the feasibility of the concept, particularly in regards to programming goals of iCCAN, which is to bring educational and professional development opportunities to all areas of rural and remote Alberta at the community level. The need for iCCAN to perform platform and technical support and troubleshooting was also highlighted.

A side aim of the project was to improve perspectives or misconceptions of "desktop videoconferencing," which some users perceived as inferior to the classroom–size units that iCCAN has also installed. iCCAN community members can now see the equal benefits of both the desktop and classroom size videoconferencing units.

Finally, we learned that as participants gain experience with video conferencing, they feel more comfortable with it. Those who had previous exposure to VC through informal or other training or meetings were much more comfortable in the environment than those who were experiencing it for the first time. This pilot provided some people with the opportunity to try it for the first time and gave others the chance to continue to gain experience with it.

In summary, this project intended to explore how video conferencing can provide timely, responsive, cost–effective, convenient, safer and innovative training opportunities for literacy tutors via desktop and classroom–size videoconferencing offered through iCCAN. The was achieved according to participants. As one tutor commented, "[Videoconferencing] saves gas, saves risking our lives on winter roads, less greenhouse gasses, lost time, etc."

Recommendations

The following is a summary of comments throughout this report constructed into recommendations based on feedback from all contributors. These recommendations are for actions to change, develop, or in some cases to continue or stay the same.

1

Collate and distribute all handouts in one, numbered, ordered document so that all participants have easy access to the handouts and information given to all sites. This will help in keeping everyone "on the same page."

2

It would be helpful to gather 10–15 minutes of participant impressions, questions, immediately following the session in addition to a written evaluation form.

3

Remote site facilitators need VC training. Lead facilitators should take part in all the training offered by iCCAN: Coffee Hour, Content Provider training, Leadership Training.

4

Having experienced volunteer coordinators was a benefit – they understood how to facilitate the tutor training session at the remote sites. One recommendation would be to have participants grouped according to their experience level: one session for brand new volunteers and another session for experienced volunteers. This would allow the presenter to adjust the content to be more pedagogically effective.

5

Integrate the use of PowerPoint into the presentation as a visual aid to verbal instructions and to provide visuals to more visual learners.

6

Designating or starting with the same group for questions/contributions put some pressure on the same group/individual to respond. The following options should be considered: Having sites raise their hand to contribute; alternating the request for questions and comments; maintain and order of questioning but begin in a different spot to the order each time.

7

It is important to prevent absentee site participants in the future. This can be expected in the pilot stage of the project but in future programming we would not want to turn away participants due to capacity concerns that turn out to be unwarranted. Inviting sites to Coffee Hours and other iCCAN provided training is an excellent way to test their connectivity. This should begin at least one month before training.

8

Lorene Andersen, Norquest College, commented on the improved impact a train-the-trainer cascade model would have. If this program was intended to train trainers of literacy tutors instead of tutors directly then the impact could be much broader and larger. A Train-the-Trainer model should be considered in future programming.

9

Connecting literacy tutors from across the province and from across literacy regions was a unique opportunity for sharing and learning. Researchers have noted the learning benefits of connecting distanced groups of learners – it becomes an opportunity for participants to gain a broader understanding of literacy tutoring across diverse communities (Daley, Spalla, Arndt & Warnes, 2008). Inviting participants from disparate communities across the province, into the VC medium, should be continued. This was an excellent opportunity for participants, who would otherwise not work together, a chance to meet, discuss, learn, and plan to meet again on their own terms.

10

Note taking of participant contributions may need to fall to a different volunteer than the Technical Support person who is juggling many other duties.

11

Interestingly, at the end of the session both sites commented on this phenomenon of ease/comfort or being more engaged with the workshop and less engaged with the video conferencing technology. The trainer also commented on feeling more at ease. It is unclear if this had more to do with the medium or the content. The following options should be considered: Having one session instead of two (with a good break in the middle); or maintain the two session format but integrate more practical material in the first session.

12

Having participants sit in rows facing the VC camera is not conducive to group work or discussion. We should recommend to site facilitators that small groups may utilize a "U" shape seating position which is conducive to VC etiquette and viewing but also allow participants to see each other and work together. Site facilitators should be given instructions on facilitating group work during break-out sessions. Participants can get up and move around during the group work and discussion times.

13

The facilitator should continue to offer follow-up face-to-face opportunities with VC participants. This was an excellent approach to ensure that participants' learning needs were met. It was also an excellent networking opportunity for participants in the same literacy region – knowing that they could meet face-to-face for training as well.

14

In an effort to build a community of literacy tutors, participant could utilize large print name tags/signs so that participants can see the other participants names. In addition, during the registration process, participants should have the option of granting permission to share their name and contact information. The facilitator can then distribute a list of participants to everyone.

15

Keep the pilot project small. We do not want to discourage a large cohort of potential VC users from engaging in this technology in the case that there are unresolved technical issues. By keeping it small and gradually building participation we lower our risk of negatively impacting VC users.

16

Since the pilot shows that the concept is feasible, and there appears to be a likelihood of demand growing, it is worth investing the resources in refining and scaling the project to offer it again. A "beta test" approach of having a larger pilot (rather than a full scale offering) to continue to improve the methodology and delivery, is an appropriate next step.

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IMPACT
Map of Participant Sites

Blue = Day 1 and 2

Green = Day 3 and 4

Slave Lake Community Reading Program
Kim Mills, Site Facilitator
4 tutor participants

Rural Routes Initiative
Martha Urquhart, Rural Routes Consultant
Literacy Coordinator

iCCAN Project Office
Yvonne Stewart, Technical Support
Barb Hudkins, VC Technical Coordinator
Sharon Mathias, Evaluator

Killam
3 tutor participants

Wetaskiwin Community Literacy Program
S.P.E.L.L.
Marilyn Dixson, Site Facilitator
9-12 tutor Participants

Hanna Learning Centre
Donna Spath
1 tutor participant

Lacombe Life Long Learning Centre
Carol Wilcox
1 tutor participant

iCCAN Project Office
Observers

Rainbow Literacy Society - Vulcan
Judy Bortnik, Site Facilitator
3-5 tutor Participants

ABLE Medicine Hat College,
Brooks Campus
Heather Kazimir , Site Facilitator
8-11 tutor participants

http://www.canada-maps.org/alberta-map.htm