

## **Early Childhood Education Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) Career Pathway Certificate Program**

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**Partnering to create Early Childhood Education certificates aligned to the Oregon Professional Registry & focused on English Language Learner student success**

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### **Background & Organizational Context**

In spring 2013 Lane Community College offered a cohort of English Language Learners (ELL), most of whom had not passed the Accuplacer-based college placement test, the opportunity to complete a Career Pathway Certificate through Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) option. The VESL component allowed students to take Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses in the Early Childhood Education (ECE), while developing their ESL skills, college readiness skills, and career and job development skills simultaneously. The pilot project was highly successful, and also provided the opportunity for “lessons learned” to further adapt the approach. The goals of the project included:

- Support employer demand for more ECE bilingual/bicultural professionals.
- Recognize the current trend to increase educational expectations of childcare providers.
- Ensure alignment with professional registry and industry standards.
- Improve access for professionals in field to increased levels of education.
- Develop a model by which English language learners or low skilled adults can gain skills necessary to be successful in ever increasing levels of education.

The overall project generated an enormous amount of excitement among CTE areas around the college, ECE employers, and ESL and Adult Basic Education (ABE) professional educators. We are now looking at not only continuing the model that was piloted in ECE, but expanding it into other CTE departments at Lane.

Prior to engaging in Career Pathways work, the Early Childhood Education Program at Lane Community College offered a two-year degree and a one-year certificate of completion. Now there are three Career Pathways Certificates aligned to the Oregon Professional Registry of Child Care providers. The three certificates are embedded in the ECE associate degree. Prior to the VESL component described in this case study, there were no specific interventions to recruit or support ELL students or low-skilled adults interested in the ECE program.

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**Family Connections of Lane and Douglas County** located at Lane Community College offers non-credit professional development and certification support for approximately 600 childcare providers. Approximately 20% of these providers have self-identified as Spanish speaking. Many childcare providers seek regular professional development opportunities to maintain their certification or move up in their field. They are fortunate to have access to scholarships and professional development funds; however, the typical professional in the field works during the day and can only attend classes in the evening or weekend. While the range of education may vary widely among providers, a large proportion may have little to no college credit education. Family Connections continues to seek ways to connect their providers to credit classes that lead towards an associate degree in ECE and beyond.

**The Oregon Professional Registry of Child Care Providers**, managed through Portland State University, has created a state standard for employment in the childcare field. Professionals in the field are able to submit their professional development work, including college credit classes, non-credit professional development courses, or industry credentials; and the registry will interpret their experience and education into “steps.” The “steps” are then aligned to specific employment positions in the childcare field and set as a standard for most mainstream childcare centers in Oregon. In Oregon all community colleges offering degrees in Early Childhood Education agreed to offer some Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), for those individuals who reached step 7 in the professional registry. At Lane Community College, this CPL translates to 3 classes, totaling 8 credits.

### Critical Innovations

Through this pilot project we created high quality and well-aligned curriculum integrating ECE content into ABS Learning Standards. We were committed to developing an “approach” that was innovative, sustainable, and replicable. The approach included three elements: *embedded in a high quality Career Pathway infrastructure, curricular and instructional integration, and intensive student service and instructional collaboration*. For more detailed information on how this approach was applied request a copy of our internal guide (available May 2015).

**Embedded in a Career Pathways infrastructure:** The foundation of the VESL ECE approach is a high quality Career Pathways infrastructure. This includes a CTE program with stackable credentials and strong relationship with the industry and local employers to identify competencies and needs. We developed an entry-level certificate in ECE “Guidance and Curriculum” which contained six individual courses as the initial certificate for the VESL ECE program. Three of the six courses were available as CPL for professionals in the field through the Oregon Professional Registry. We started with the expectation that we would be recruiting primarily professionals; therefore it was the remaining three classes that were identified for ESL intervention.

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**Curricular/Instructional Integration:** The classes were taught in a learning community cohort format where all students attended all courses together. Over three quarters one ECE CTE course was offered each quarter along with one ESL course. The ESL instructor maintained progress toward ESL learning standards, and the ECE instructor maintained progress towards ECE CTE course outcomes. It was critical that there were gains in both areas and that the fidelity of all learning outcomes remain intact. At the same time there was also the expectation of achieving curricular integration, common learning outcomes, and collaborative assignments.

Both instructors used the same textbook as a platform for their assignments. Students would read a specific chapter, see films, or research an area for their ECE content class over the weekend. Tuesday evening the students would attend an ESL class where they worked on their reading, listening, and speaking skills in the context of their ECE assignment. They would also scale up other skills necessary to understand the activities and assignments that would take place in the proceeding ECE class. By the time the students attended their ECE class on Thursday evening, they had engaged in the language enough to fully engage in the ECE content itself. Each Friday the teaching team met to reflect on student progress, review the content material for the upcoming week, identify potential challenges, and plan activities and teaching strategies to support learning. Written summaries and updates were also used between team planning meetings to support active communication and address student learning needs. Full transparency and clarity of all learning outcomes and all assignments both among instructors and to the students was critical for this model to be successful. It is also acknowledged that this model works best when both instructors use project-based instruction based in constructivist learning theory rather behaviorist-based instruction.

**Student Service and Instructional Collaboration:** Four primary roles were needed to carry out the program including: project coordinator, navigator/career coach, ESL instructor and content instructor. Success of the project rested on the ability of these four team members to work closely together and maintain active communication from inception to completion. The core team was invested in the success of each individual student within a cohort model, which led to a formative process of information sharing and problem solving to address the identified needs of the students, whether personal or academic. Follow up was done largely around attendance, assignment completion, personal challenges, and classroom behavior. Student needs were also addressed through teaching strategies and learning methods (e.g. project-based learning in small groups) and support (e.g. language, cultural adaption, academic skill, self-care) to increase the likelihood of success.

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### Strategies and Services

**Intensive and supported admissions process:** The application process initiated the relationship between career coach and student. Each applicant was required to write an essay, submit a reference letter, develop a budget plan, time management plan, and support plan to participate in the cohort. Although these were intensive application components, applicants were not left to do this alone; rather they worked with the career coach to develop their plans. They were, however, expected to ultimately develop and submit all application components in a high quality, well-thought-out manner.

**Rubric-based acceptance:** In general, we accepted students who had not yet passed the college placement test, and were at least at a high-intermediate level in their ESL course sequencing at Lane. However, through faculty and student service collaboration, an admissions rubric was created to fully consider each applicant including those who tested above or below the target language level. The rubric included elements such as: CASAS score, Accuplacer score, ESL level, ECE content knowledge and experience, level of education in native country, ability and time to commit to educational expectations, motivation, and willingness to fully engage in the project.

**Orientation and commitment letter:** Once accepted, students sat through discussions of commitment and behavioral expectations. They were asked to sign a commitment letter outlining several key expectations. Students participated in student success and study skills workshops prior to starting the program. Students were given syllabus and their first reading assignment prior to the first day of class.

**Navigator/Career Coaching:** Very intensive career coaching and case management style proactive and intrusive advising was included. Navigator engaged in attendance tracking, billing tracking, proactive problem solving, educational planning, service referrals, career development, and job search support.

### Critical Partners

The success of this project is highly dependent on collaborative efforts among various internal and external partners:

**Lane Community College Internal Partners:** Departments of Early Childhood Education, English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Secondary Education; Family Connections of Lane and Douglas County, Counseling and Advising, Workforce Development, Financial Aid, Enrollment Services, Lane Child and Family Center, International Programs and others.

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**External Partners Included:** Local employers including New Dream bilingual child care center, Relief Nursery and others. Local agencies that serve English language learners such as: Downtown Languages, Centro Latino Americano, NEDCO, Parenting Now, Migrant Education, High School Equivalency Program, Latino family outreach centers in the school districts, and others.

### Financing and Funding

Two grants sources provided the funding for research, development, and the pilot project implementation: Career Pathways grants from CCWD (2011-2013 and 2013-2015 bienniums), and the Department of Labor CASE grant. Where possible, we leveraged funds including general funds for the ESL, and ECE instruction, as well as leveraged services across campus. Students were able to access Betty Gray scholarships, educational awards available to them through the Oregon Professional Registry, as well as IDAs, and financial aid awards.

### Challenges

Many of the challenges/barriers that arose during pilot project implementation were either anticipated or identified early enough to allow for appropriate adjustment and intervention.

**Buy-in for variance:** In general the college has placement tests and formal admissions processes in which every student must participate. In this pilot, we needed to ensure the fidelity of the processes but allow for alternate options. These alternate options were planned and prepared with significant faculty and student service input. This allowed for full participation and buy-in to what could have easily been a major roadblock.

**Varied Skill Levels Among Student:** As mentioned before, a rubric was created for admission. We still stand by this rubric; however, the result was a varied skill level among the students. Some students had stronger English writing skills than others, and some came from backgrounds with a college-level education in their native country while others had finished only primary education. This caused many challenges for the instructors who needed to maintain the integrity of their outcomes.

**Student Specific Challenges:** The students faced many individual challenges including childcare needs, financial crisis, family crises, deaths in the family, domestic violence, divorce, homelessness, documentation and visa concerns, academic preparedness, time management issues, and many more. When you really get to know your students, it's shocking just how many barriers they all face. Many

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students identified this VESL cohort as a place of stability and support.

**Age Concerns:** Out of 21 total participants, only 3 students left before completing the three quarters of VESL courses. One left to care for her dying mother and student plans to rejoin a future cohort. The other two were the teenage students. We realize our program and services were likely geared to the more mature and often professional student. Future cohorts will collaborate with High School Connections to conduct outreach to youth and young adults.

**Program Structure & Career Coaching:** The most significant challenge and lesson learned from this project is the level of support students received (or did not receive) upon completion of the VESL program. As mentioned before, the VESL project included only 3 of the 6 courses that are part of the Career Pathway certificate of "Guidance and Curriculum." The other three courses are available as CPL. Originally our intent was to recruit primarily childcare providers who either already qualified or were close to qualifying for CPL. However, only about half of the students in the program were professionals in the field. This required a whole new level of services which we were not prepared to provide. First, many students were now more than willing and prepared to take the additional mainstream classes. For those students who were able to take classes during the day, this worked. For the others, classes not offered in the evenings became a significant barrier.

For students who qualified for the Credit for Prior Learning credit, there was a challenge in awarding the credit itself. Even though a statewide agreement had been made allowing students to award the credits, this option was so underutilized that a system for transcribing credits was not available.

**Lessons Learned & Improvements made:** Through this project we paved the way to a systemic approach for CPL attainment. We are working more closely with Family Connections and Lane's ECE department on potential evening course offerings. We had our career coach fully trained in the registry so as to support students through their professional track. We developed plans with Lane Family Connections so that future cohorts may receive pre-and post-professional development classes that will accelerate students' progress to Oregon Professional Registry level 7.

Finally, learned over and over again just how critical the career coach is to the success of the program. Even though the students had all successfully completed the VESL, they needed navigation support through the completion of their first Career Pathway Certificate and through the CPL credit award process.

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### By The Numbers / Outcomes

# of ELL students	Retention		
	Term I	Term II	Term III
entered	19	2	X
continued	X	17	18
dropped	X	1	X

### Credit Class Eligibility Based on College Placement Accuplacer

# students Passing test	Before Term I	After Term I	After Term II	After Term III
	4	8	12	14

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