Focus on *Basics*

CONNECTING RESEARCH & PRACTICE

Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum that Incorporates Real-Life Materials

by Charissa Ahlstrom

My formative experiences as a teacher of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) occurred 10 years ago, as I began teaching in and coordinating Inglés Para la Comunidad, a church-based ESOL program serving Latin American immigrants in New York City. The program's founders were committed to shaping the program around a particular understanding of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. One of their focuses was on Freire's premise that a liberating education needs to be "co-intentional" (Freire, 1972, p. 56). They

Focus on Basics

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of
Adult Learning and Literacy

WORLD EDUCATION

Welcome!

Curriculum is at the heart of adult basic education. It reflects our educational philosophy and beliefs about the goals of education. What are the different philosophical approaches to curriculum? What does research tell us about curriculum? How do teachers, programs, even states go about creating curriculum, and what lesson can we learn from them? In this issue of *Focus on Basics*, we explore those questions.

In our cover article, Massachusetts teacher Charissa Ahlstrom describes how she develops her curriculum as she goes, based on her students' interests, working within a loose framework developed by her program. She brings in "real life" materials that connect the classroom to students' day-to-day lives. The classroom-to-real-life connection is important, according to research teams led by Victoria Purcell-Gates and Heide Spruck Wrigley (see pages 5 and 13). How do you bring the outside into your curriculum?

Different approaches to curriculum reflect different world views, writes Amy Prevedel in her overview of key curriculum theories (see page 8). She describes three major categories of curriculum — traditional, learner-driven, and critical — and the strength and weaknesses of each. Into which category does your approach fall?

Kay Taggart and Sara Martinez help teachers in El Paso, Texas, understand how to optimize the impact of bilingual curricula (see page 18). The judicious use of English along with students' native language leads to conceptual understanding and communicative competence. Wrigley's research (page 13) reinforces this: students in classes of English for speakers of other languages had higher gains when they shared a language and the teacher used the language to give instructions or to clarify points.

How does curriculum change when the mode of delivery changes? That's the issue Jane Martel and her colleagues faced when Kentucky's professional development for adult basic education went online. Benefit from the lessons they learned by reading the article that begins on page 22. And while Kentucky was converting its professional development curriculum, Oregon was revising its adult basic education curriculum. How does a state change curriculum? It takes policy, practice, and professional development. Teacher Dennis Clark shares his experiences as a leader in that process in the article that starts on page 26.

Sometimes the context has a huge impact on the shape a curriculum takes. That was the case in Guinea, West Africa, where I worked with World Education colleagues to develop a basic literacy program for adults. Turn to page 30 to read about how we managed to reflect our educational values in a resource-poor environment.

When your learners are not making the progress they should, it's time to look at curriculum, writes Mary Lynn Carver, a teacher in Illinois, in the article that begins on page 32. Curriculum change in her program spread from individuals to the system, and encompassed not just what was taught but how classes were scheduled.

Whatever your philosophy and approach to curriculum, we hope this issue provides you with insights and resources you need to strengthen your program.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner

Barbara Garner
Editor

Real-Life Materials

interpreted this to mean that students and teachers should engage in dialogue, investigating themes as equals and creating new understandings of the world together. The curriculum had to address student needs, reflect collaboration between the learners and the teachers, and include regular student evaluation.

Ever since then, I've tried to create curricula that reflect collaboration between the students and me. Today, my curriculum includes student-identified themes combined with structured language practice, and an emphasis on communication. Sometimes I use the themes in a Freirean way, as ways to enter into an examination of underlying power structures. I often use the themes more simply as a way to ensure that students are learning content that matters to them. I try to use a wide variety of material and media, prioritizing student-created texts and materials that students might encounter in their daily lives. In this article, I'll explain why and how I do this.

The Students' Perspective

In the orientation we provided to volunteers at Inglés Para la Comunidad, we shared this story from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972). Freire describes an educator who was working with Brazilian tenement residents and wanted to do a lesson on alcoholism. The teacher showed the tenement residents a picture of a drunken man and three men talking, and asked them to comment on the picture. Rather than comment negatively on the alcoholism, the residents said:

The only one there who is pro-

ductive and useful to his country is the souse who is returning home after working all day for low wages and who is worried about his family because he can't take care of their needs. He is the only worker. He is a decent worker and a souse like us" (p. 111).

Freire used this example to demonstrate how teachers should begin "thematic investigations" (p. 112). I like this story because it reminds me not to assume that I know my students' perspectives or needs with regard to a particular theme. Auerbach (1992) also stresses the importance of this collaborative process of identifying "the real (rather than imagined) issues of each group" (p. 1).

It's easy to get carried away with my own excitement in creating curriculum or with my own perspective on an issue. Once, when I was teaching a unit on shopping, I asked the students what problems they encountered at stores. One student complained that cashiers had treated her unkindly because she used food stamps. Hearing that, I immediately planned to have the students practice writing letters to a manager. But then I remembered that I should pose the question to the students and brainstorm ideas so we could collaboratively reach solutions.

They said they were more inclined to talk to the manager immediately, so we practiced conversations, in addition to brainstorming multiple ways to respond to the situation.

At Inglés Para la Comunidad, we did not consider formal grammar instruction to be ineffectual (Krashen & Terrell, 1995), but, at the same time, grammar was not an end in itself. Communication was the primary focus: we worked on grammar within the context of the themes brought out by the students; and we also addressed grammar in its role as an aid to effective communication. If students had difficulty with the past tense, and we were discussing health, we had students share past experiences at the doctor, in the hospital, and how they dealt with illnesses in their country. We used these contexts to introduce or review past tense forms, and examined how grammar issues impeded their effective conversation and writing.

Program Framework

I currently teach ESOL at the Adult Learning Program (ALP) of the Jamaica Plain Community Centers, in Boston, MA. I am teaching a class of

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My Definition of Curriculum

Underlying my use of the term "curriculum" are two interrelated assumptions. First, building on my understanding of Freire (1972), I believe that curriculum is not neutral. The curriculum I use supports the development of English language skills. It also instills values and political views. This transmission of knowledge and values is both explicit and implicit. I also agree with Cornbleth's understanding of curriculum (1990) as a "contextualized social process." Curriculum includes not only the entirety of activities, methods, materials, and physical and social environment of the whole learning center, but also the dynamic processes that shape and change these components. Multiple bodies and forces, for example, the staff, the broader sociopolitical forces, a program's funders, the students themselves, as well as community and national or international events, shape these processes. While the term "curriculum" can refer to the entirety of learning occurring within a center, in my article I often use the term to refer to the environment of my class, including students' input alongside the program's criteria for my level.

—Charissa Ahlstrom

advanced beginners (level two of six levels of ESOL); the lowest ability level in the class is SPL 2-3 as measured by the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the Arlington Education Employment Program (REEP) writing assessment. My students are from Haiti, Somalia, and Latin America; their educational levels range from some higher education to only three years of education. My class is held three evenings a week for a total of eight hours a week. We have classes throughout the year, with on-going entry. We do not have exact "sessions," although September, January, and June emerge as times of greater transition for students entering, leaving, and advancing to higher levels within the program.

In our program, the ESOL teachers have created level guides that identify what standards we use to advance students to the next level. These lists include such items as "demonstrates familiarity [with] and usage of simple present and present progressive" and "able to use a bilingual dictionary." Teachers created the original checklists a number of years ago. Each year, the teachers work together to "tweak" the lists so that they reflect the current students' needs, adjusting them if students' language needs have changed significantly. The level guides are helpful tools to use when talking to students and to other teachers about students' progress, as well as for initial placement. We also use these lists to guide, but not dictate, language and skill instruction at each level. The teacher and the class determine the manner in which a class covers these skills and language.

Soliciting Themes from Students

I build curricula by soliciting themes from students and combining them with language skills typical of

our program's level two, using our level guide as the reference. I use a variety of structured activities, such as checklists (with pictures) or brainstorming, to discover what themes are interesting or important to students. I also gain ideas informally, noticing which topics engage students emotionally. For example, during a recent conversation about what people did over the weekend, one woman told us that her car was stolen. This sparked an active discussion, with many

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students recounting their experiences of crime, and sharing advice and suggestions on crime prevention. Class members were very concerned, so I included crime prevention as a subsequent free-writing and conversation topic.

Once I have ideas about students' wants and needs, I follow the example of a colleague and place the themes on a list and ask students to vote on which topic to cover next. When I finish that unit, which may take anywhere from six to eight weeks, the list goes back up, the students add more topics if they like, and they vote again. (Since they are level two students, sometimes I put pictures up next to items on the list to help them decipher the vocabulary.) This past year, the students concluded most thematic units with projects. For example, at the end of a unit on maps and directions, the students composed directions to their homes, and we all used one student's work when she invited the class over

for dinner. At the end of a unit on reading the newspaper, the students created their own newspaper, writing columns, horoscopes, an advice column, and drawing cartoons.

Spontaneous themes sometimes emerge from my own reading of our class dynamics, or when I want to emphasize alternatives to the dominant US culture. For example, I often highlight Muslim culture and holidays and ask Muslim students if they are willing to present their traditions, since their peers have expressed a lack of knowledge of the words mosque, Muslim, and Ramadan, and why students leave the room to pray. If difficult or large-scale political or news events occur, I provide time in class to discuss and explore them, and develop them further as themes if students are interested. If a difficult issue has arisen in class, such as an offensive comment or a conflict between students, I try to address it quickly through the curriculum and in a class discussion.

Materials

Based on the themes and goals the students have chosen, I use whatever materials are needed to build students' abilities to address their goals: this often includes what I call "real life" material, but not necessarily or exclusively. The term "real-life" implies to me certain survival-level and practical themes related to daily life in the community, such as shopping, getting jobs, and transportation, which are often — but not always — the themes students choose. Others use the terms "real life" and "authentic" fairly interchangeably, and apply them to a wider range of materials. Nunan (1988) uses the term "authentic" materials to describe those that "reflect the outside world," and "have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" (p. 99). Purcell-Gates and colleagues (2001) describe authentic materials, or learner-

contextualized materials, as print materials that occur naturally in the lives of learners outside of their adult education classrooms (p. 19). Some obvious examples are newspapers, magazines, bills, maps, job applications, or novels. Radio broadcasts, music, television, or videos can be considered authentic "listening" materials, and an important element of ESOL.

I also use technology — mostly computers, but occasionally tape recorders, cameras, or camcorders as well — for real life purposes. While I occasionally use an ESOL software program to reinforce a theme or language skill in a traditional "school" way (for a drill, for example), I focus on creating lessons that allow learners to use the computer in ways they want to outside of the classroom. For example, my students have set up e-mail accounts, looked up information from their countries, examined web sites created by other ESOL learners, contacted legislators, learned games, practiced typing, and typed their own writing using the computer.

I use real life materials to connect further the theme the students have chosen to their learning goals. Widdowson (1990) points out that it is not the text or source itself that fosters student learning, but rather students' engagement with it. Poorly selected or presented authentic — real life — materials can be irrelevant or inaccessible to students. Collaborating with students to choose themes and materials is an important aspect of ensuring that materials are meaningful to the learners, but so is ensuring that the materials are accessible.

What It Looks Like

Once the class has decided upon a topic, I ask the students for more details. For example, my students recently voted to review maps and directions, so I asked them what maps they found difficult, and which ones they wanted to practice. A few said the "T" (Boston subway) map was pretty easy, but the Massachusetts or

NCSALL *Research* FINDINGS

The Impact of Use of Authentic Materials and Activities

The Literacy Practices of Adult Learners Study (LPALS), sponsored by NCSALL, looked at changes in the literacy practices of adults as a result of attending literacy classes. Students who participate in classes that include authentic, or learner-contextualized, materials and activities are more likely to say they had started new literacy practices or had increased the amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities outside of school. This was true even when the researchers controlled for (or accounted for) students' literacy levels and the amount of time they had been attending class.

When one looks closely at the questionnaire and interview data, many of the students in the LPALS reported that they began, increased the frequency of, or stopped specific reading and writing practices when their lives changed in some way. These life changes brought with them different types of texts, different purposes and requirements for reading and writing, and different inclinations to read and write. New mothers began writing to family members for the first time after their children's births. Immigrants found new types of texts available for reading in their new country. When children began school, parents began receiving letters and directions from school authorities, many of which required written responses. New jobs meant having to learn how to read and write different types of materials, including, for example, bus or train schedules. Moving away from home meant reading and paying bills for the first time. Literacy practices (actual reading and writing in life) are always interwoven with peoples' lives and the ways in which they are lived. Classes that were sensitive to the changing nature of students' lives outside school were seen as doing a better job of supporting students in their learning of new uses for reading and writing.

With these findings, the researchers are able to provide empirical justification for the beliefs of many adult educators: Bringing the lives, needs, and interests of the students into the classroom is an integral part of best practice. *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom, A Handbook for Practitioners,* a book designed to help teachers turn these findings into action in the classroom, by the LPALS research team of Erik Jacobson, Sophie Degener, and Victoria Purcell-Gates, is available now from NCSALL. Access the report online at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu, or contact Caye Caplan by phone at (617) 482-9485 to order a printed copy for a small charge. Additional articles based on this research are available in Volumes 4D (pp. 19-22) and 3D (pp. 26-27) of *Focus on Basics,* also available on the NCSALL web site.

Boston neighborhood maps could be very difficult. Since they were familiar with the "T" map, I used it to introduce and practice new vocabulary and to review prepositions, which seemed to be difficult for them. I introduced the other two maps once they were more comfortable with giving and getting directions.

In that example, the students used actual "real-life" materials as a basis to learn to use more difficult

authentic materials. But sometimes students cannot immediately use the materials in the ways that native speakers may use them. Widdowson (1990) discusses how "meanings are achieved by human agency, and are negotiable; they are not contained in the text." I need to present the materials in a way that students can create the most meaning from them, and therefore I may need to scaffold them into a particular text or media.

For example, when the class and I look at bills together, we sometimes examine small pieces of the statement at a time. We do preliminary brainstorming on the parts and difficulties of bills. If students want to work together on filling out job applications, for example, they might create work and education time lines as a first step before jumping to the format of actual applications. We might do some games, activities, or exercises to reinforce new concepts or vocabulary found in the materials.

Last year, students wanted to read newspapers, such as the *Boston Globe,* the *Metro,* and the *Boston Herald.* Yet my students find even *News for You,* a newspaper written for adult learners and published by New Readers Press (see www.news-for-you.com), very challenging, and, for a few learners, over-whelming. Many students, for example, have difficulty under-standing the difference between "article" and "advertisement," and differentiating an article from an advertisement in the newspaper. Many do not know how to use the index or list of contents. I scoured the popular papers for articles that were short and accessible to some, and also conducted activities that familiarized students with the formats of newspapers. In addition, I provided them with opportunities to discuss and build their knowledge of current events, by watching the TV news or reading newspapers from their home countries online and reporting on the articles in English in class or small groups. So although they did not use the newspapers as full reading texts, they increased their abilities to navigate and understand the media, as well as to discuss current news topics.

Practicing Conversation "Authentically"

Using authentic materials can be a struggle when students want to focus on conversation. This past fall, students chose the theme "conversations with the doctor." How can I replicate individual doctor conversations? I can't bring their individual doctors in, so I created situations to simulate conversations, and had them practice with each other. After they chose health topics they wanted to practice discussing, they used "authentic materials" to do some research. The medical pamphlets, encyclopedias, and health books were often too difficult, so a

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volunteer tutor and I simplified a few passages, and provided videos and children's health books on the topics as well. Then they used tape recorders to tape spontaneous dialogues on their topics. The students transcribed and edited their dialogue, then retaped them in a more re-hearsed way. We used these tapes as the texts for listening and comprehension, as well as the transcripts for reading texts.

This undertaking was our project-based component. In between these activities, we had conversations about problems people had with the doctor, and we compared American hospitals and concepts of health and medicine with those of the students' native countries. The students read photo-stories (created by adult learners) and short books (created for adult learners) on breast cancer and debated the question of prescribing medicine for children diagnosed as hyperactive. They also shared opinions and stories on these issues, and gave presentations on their stories.

Student-Created Materials

My students often create things, such as the transcriptions of dialogues described above, as well as newsletters, tapes, or stories that, with permission, I can use in future classes. Sometimes, students take pictures at work, or bring in objects from their home as sources for conversation or writing. I use learner-created materials to provide texts that are relevant and meaningful to my students. The materials are usually accessible to others in my class, and they create a base of learning that is centered on the class's own knowledge. Students appreciate reading the work of their peers, and I want to use the inherent power of my position as a teacher to validate students' work as rich texts.

Integrating Specific Language Skills

When students need to review specific language skills, I inten-tionally integrate activities that focus on those skills. For example, I present the structures, and then incorporate activities for students to self-edit, paying attention to these particular structures in their own texts. I lead a few drills and games to practice an isolated pattern, and I try to draw on the students' native language knowledge to help them understand or analyze a particular language structure. To the extent possible, I use students' own work as well as the thematic topic as the point of departure for work with grammar.

Old Favorites

Regardless of what themes or language topics learners choose, I always assign dialogue journals, which involve correspondence between individual students and me. The

journals help students to develop their abilities and provide more individualized opportunities for skill development than activities that are more collectively created. They are by nature on-going and run concurrently to the shorter-term thematic units. I don't mark the journals, but provide students with feedback via the questions I pose. I also model correct spelling or structures within my response letter. The students also keep free-writing journals, in which, twice a month, they write without any restrictions on topic, without any editing or correction of grammar. Both journals give students an opportunity to reflect and explore about personal topics that might interest or concern them. For example, sometimes students write about why their work day was difficult, or that it's their child's birthday. Their entries provide me with insight into what shapes or affects them as learners.

I also have students engage in reading circles or specialized circles throughout the year. In the former, students choose from a list of some longer books to read (often texts created by and/or for adult learners), and separate into groups based on their choices. The books can take up to 10 weeks for the students to finish. These groups meet once a week during class to read and discuss the books together, with pre-reading or post-reading activities specific for their book. When students finish these reading circles, I introduce specialized circles, for which students choose an area of focus: speaking and listening, reading, or writing. These groups then meet once a week and focus on activities for their specific needs, often ending with a small project or presentation to share with the class. Individual spelling or vocabulary cards provide students with reinforcement for spelling or

word issues — not theme-based — that have been difficult for them. Some students have fewer cards, and some students do not need the same amount of review. All these activities provide more individualized opportunities for students to focus on vocabulary or topics that are difficult or interesting for them.

In Conclusion

One of my highest priorities in building curriculum is that the material is drawn from learners' lives, and that the students are continually part of shaping the curriculum. As a result, I have an emergent, theme-based curriculum, where I integrate student-created and authentic materials on a regular basis. I use authentic — real-life — materials in multiple ways, and

I also integrate other sources such as stories created for adult learners, student-created texts, poetry, as well as some workbook, but more often teacher-created, activities. Sometimes I forget to go to the students for further ideas, and sometimes I get too focused on a student's ability to do

isolated skills. Yet the structures I have set in place for building curriculum keep bringing me back to students for ideas and focus.

Collaborating with students to create a theme-based curriculum is always dynamic. Each class has slightly different needs and goals. New facets of a familiar topic emerge as individuals bring their own experiences to the discussions that shape our agenda. Each year brings new topics and interests as well. When I approach a new or repeated topic, the collective process makes each unit unique. ✎

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About the Author

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Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum

by Amy Prevedel

Most simply put, a curriculum is a guide for learning. Many adult basic education teachers and literacy tutors pick up existing texts or curriculum packets and start teaching, without knowing why they're using the curriculum or what philosophy of education it reflects. But "curriculum always represents somebody's version of what constitutes knowledge and a legitimate worldview" (Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p. 80). Everyone who chooses or creates curriculum needs to develop a personal philosophy of teaching and learning, examine the values and beliefs behind that philosophy, and design or select a curriculum that reflects those beliefs and values. In doing so, they must also recognize that they exercise a lot of power: their choices will convey to students a particular world view.

This article is designed to provide adult basic education (ABE) practitioners with an introduction to three approaches to curriculum development, as a starting point for greater awareness about curriculum choices. The first approach, "traditional," is borrowed from the K-12 school setting. The second, "learner-driven," incorporates theories specific to adult literacy education as well as recent research about teaching and learning. The third approach, "critical," sees education as a distinctly political act,

and curriculum development as functioning in personally or politically empowering ways. These three approaches to curriculum development emphasize different beliefs about education, but in practice the lines between them are blurring more and more. None of them represents a fixed ideology or body of thought. Each functions more as an organizing tool. Some of the research and theory used to explain one approach may appear in more than one category depending on the purposes and contexts in which they are being used. In the same way, teachers and tutors may find that, in the classroom, they draw from all three approaches when they create curriculum. The important point is that teachers be conscious of why they are choosing to use each approach.

The Traditional Approach

The traditional model was laid out by Ralph Tyler in 1949 in his seminal book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction,* and is generally considered the mainstream way to conceptualize curriculum development. Many educators and adult literacy students find it familiar because of its wide use in public schools in the United States. The approach has a "subject-centered" orientation: students gain mastery of subject matter predetermined by a set of "experts." Curriculum is organized around content units and the sequence of what is taught follows

the logic of the subject matter (Knowles, 1984). The organizing principles, laid out in the introduction to Tyler's book, identify the school as the holder of power in decision making about what gets taught:

1. "What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives?
3. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? and
4. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?" (1949, p. v-vi).

In Tyler's view, curriculum is a

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cumulative process: over the course of the schooling years, educational experiences accumulate to exert profound changes in the learner, "in the ways water dripping upon a stone wears it away." (1949, p. 83). Knowledge and skills are not duplicated, but instead, are taught sequentially over time. One spiral approach, in which learners return to topics, in more complexity over time, can also be considered a traditional approach. Skills-based or competency-based instruction, common in adult basic education, often draws upon a traditionalist approach to curriculum, with students mastering a given set of skills or procedures in a logical instructional sequence.

Advantages

One of the advantages of the traditional approach is that students like it: they're used to it and it fits

their idea of what school should be. Learning discrete skills in a step-by-step fashion lends itself to traditional testing. Test scores can be easily quantified and explained to funders as program outputs. Program administrators can use the results of traditional tests to justify their programs' achievements. Students, tutors and teachers can point to quantifiable progress, and that is certainly motivating.

Traditional curriculum also lends itself well to mass production: publishers can produce workbooks that break down reading or math into subskills and processes, which students and teachers can easily navigate. The traditional approach is efficient in a field in which resources for staff development are scant. While teachers can create their own materials using a traditionalist approach, they can also draw upon commercially or locally developed materials and methods. Volunteer tutors and adult basic education teachers without much training or time can easily teach from an existing curriculum.

The traditional approach is also accessible. Commercially produced traditional curricula and materials, via workbook or computer, are widely available to learners who are interested in studying on their own. They don't have to wait for a class to start or fit it into their schedules. Since National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) research (Reder & Strawn, 2001) finds more people with low literacy skills engaged in self study than we might have assumed, the availability of these materials is important.

Disadvantages

In the traditional approach to curriculum, someone other than the student controls what is taught and when: the state, which has mandated a curriculum framework; the program, the teacher, or the book publisher. This perpetuates a power dynamic in which the teacher has a more valued form of knowledge, and more control, than the student. The student's role is passive, and serves as an example of "banking education," in which the expert teachers deposit knowledge into the student who lacks knowledge (Freire, 1970). Whether conscious or not, this approach supports the view that low literacy skills are the burden and/or the responsibility of the individual as opposed to the result of a complex interaction involving culture, race, class, language, gender, families, communities, economies and institutions of learning.

In its most extreme, the traditional model omits the importance of learner

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Three Approaches to Curriculum

Issue	Traditional Approach	Learner-Driven Approach	Critical Approach
Who determines curriculum?	• Curriculum developer (publisher, state, institution) sets goals and chooses learning experiences, evaluates, plans and proposes curriculum	• Students articulate learning goals that spring from their real-world roles • Students help plan curriculum	• Teacher leads the class while following the lead of learners • Students, rather than "outsiders," become experts
What does knowledge look like?	• Appears neutral and equitable in its availability • Exists "out there," can be organized and transmitted • Is observable and measurable	• Created through the interaction of student and text • Builds on what learners already know • Relevant to students' real-life context	• Not fixed — dependent upon interaction among students, text, and teacher • Autobiographic – depends on the politics of identity brought to learning • Complex interaction between text, the teacher, and what is taught • Knowledge is created, rather than taken in
What are the underlying assumptions?	• Pre-determined goals • Learning happens in a linear, step-by-step fashion • Expert knowledge is important	• Learning happens in social contexts • Instruction is transparent and based on purposes students determine • Learners actively build on knowledge and experience	• Education is political • Language and power are connected
What might this look like in action?	• A classroom with lesson plans, homework, grades possibly • Skills-based/sequenced textbooks or workbook with pre-determined learning goals	• Apolitical on the surface • Drawn from adults' lives in their everyday contexts	• Abandons technician mentality • Addresses social and community issues of importance • Curriculum not set in advance; emerges from "action and interaction of the participants" (Doll, 1993)
How is learning assessed?	• Objective, observable "scientific" means • Can provide comparative scores	• Performance of the student's contextualized goal • Continuing, involving metacognitive strategies	• Portfolios, self-assessment instruments • Measures of social and personal change • Levels of critical consciousness reached • External performance levels do not apply

experience, requiring a learner to accept, rather than challenge, the information being transmitted. In addition to insinuating to the adult learner that he is not capable of determining what it is he needs to learn, the cumulative element of the traditional approach can work against an adult's needs. Adults often have immediate needs and motivations for learning and may not have time to accumulate years of knowledge and skills to apply in the future. Discrete skills can be taught under the assumption that they will automatically transfer to any variety of situations outside the classroom.

The Learner-Driven Approach

In his theory of adult learning, Malcolm Knowles, often considered the father of adult education, says that adults come to education "with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning. For the most part, adults do not learn for the sake of learning" (1984, p. 12). This view acknowledges the possible motives for learning that students bring to literacy education. A NCSALL study has shown that making progress toward self-determined learning goals is a major factor in adult learner persistence in ABE programs (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 2000). These two perspectives show adult learners as a dynamic force in ABE orientation to curriculum.

The term learner-driven is tricky. It suggests that the adult learner — not the subject matter — plays a central role in determining curriculum. Almost everyone I've spoken to who works in literacy says they work in a learner-centered program, where presumably everyone uses a learner-centered curriculum. However, someone's definition of learner-centered may mean that students get to pick out a skills workbook or decide where to sit

in the library. I prefer the pithy and challenging definition coined by Fingeret (2000, p. 14): students are involved in "developing instructional materials that respond to students' interests and respect their culture and prior learning." This definition sees

> ❝*A learner-driven approach to curriculum by definition gives power to the learners: they are identified as the experts in knowing what they need to know.*❞

students taking an active role in developing curriculum; the curriculum is based on their reasons for learning as well as what they bring with them into a learning situation. A more recent term, "learner-driven," better describes the dynamic nature students bring to curriculum and instruction, which is why I chose it for this article.

Learner-driven approaches draw upon constructivism, a theory of learning in which "people learn when they relate new information and skills to what they already know, actively practice the new information and skills in a supportive environment, and get feedback on their performance. Learners construct their own understanding from what they are exposed to in the classroom and what they have experienced in the rest of their lives" (Cromley, 2000, p. 10). Lev Vgotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognition posits that mental functioning has its origins in social life; the very act of processing information goes beyond the direct functioning of the brain's structure (Wertsch & Kanner, 1992). Historical, social, and cultural influences play major roles in shaping the way individuals think and

learn, and a learner-driven curriculum acknowledges these influences. The learner-driven approach also draws upon the work of contextual theorists, who believe that effective learning is situated within the social context of real surroundings and situations. Learning skills means applying skills, which involves practice with the real activities and materials that come out of real-life situations (Bransford et al., 2000).

To develop learner-driven curriculum, teachers need to view learners as active inquirers who use previous experiences — both mental and social — to make meaning of the world. Curriculum springs from students' purposes for learning and uses real-life materials and contexts. To identify and address students' goals and purposes for learning, teachers ask adults what they want to learn more about or be able to do better. Literacy education becomes less about attaining a discrete set of skills and more about gaining expertise in the literacy activities of everyday life. Students learn basic, mechanical, reading and writing skills in the process. As researcher Marilyn Gillespie writes about this approach in discussing the Equipped for the Future initiative from the National Institute for Literacy, "Teachers begin with tasks learners need immediately in their daily lives and then 'back into' the knowledge, skills and strategies required to perform those tasks. This does not mean that basic skills are not covered, but they are addressed in an iterative rather than a sequential manner" (2002, p. 4).

Advantages

A learner-driven approach to curriculum by definition gives power to the learners: they are identified as the experts in knowing what they need to know. Students see their needs clearly reflected in the classroom, which is very motivating. The learner-driven approach creates a direct link between in-class work and learners'

need for literacy outside the classroom. As a result, learners can more easily transfer new skills to day-to-day use (Purcell-Gates, et al., 2001). The immediacy of this transfer of skills at home, at work, and in communities also encourages learner persistence.

The constructivist element of this approach honors the social and cultural context of the learner. Given that adult basic education learners are predominantly from marginalized groups in American society (D'Amico, in press), respecting learners' perspectives is a bold political act. Learner-driven curriculum development provides a rich picture of adult learning and moves beyond the image of ABE merely as "school for big people."

Disadvantages

A learner-driven approach often relies on the teacher's ability to create or select materials appropriate to learners' expressed needs. This requires skill on the part of the teacher, as well as time and resources: at a minimum, texts brought in from real life, a wide pool of commercially available materials from which to draw, and a reliable photocopier. Given the reality of teachers' professional preparation and working conditions (Smith, et al., 2001), lack of skill, time and resources makes creating curriculum with this approach difficult.

Teachers may also find it difficult to strike an acceptable balance among the competing needs and interests of students. Students are often initially uncomfortable with the seemingly ambiguous nature of a curriculum that is molded jointly by teacher and learners. Teachers, too, are often uncomfortable with asking students to share issues in their lives, they struggle with the balance between skills instruction and content necessary in this approach. In addition, while this approach recognizes the individual backgrounds of students, it does

not explicitly address political and power issues that cause and perpetuate marginalization and low literacy skills.

Finally, adult basic education programs, pushed to produce concrete outputs such as test scores, may feel that the creation of learner-driven curriculum is a luxury that they can not afford.

The Critical Approach

Those who embrace the critical approach consider education a political act, one that should function in emancipatory ways (Pinar, 1978). The pioneer of this approach was Paolo Freire (1985), a Brazilian adult literacy educator who worked with laborers, peasants, and fishermen and was greatly influenced by his experiences with these economically marginalized social classes. He believed that "illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust

> **"***The critical approach to curriculum is, by definition, political, putting power issues front and center. It doesn't ignore the difficulties that learners face in life but provides a way for learners together to meet them head on.***"**

social reality" (1985, p. 10). Instead of the traditional "banking" model of adult education in which the teacher deposits politically neutral, technical knowledge into students, critical pedagogy assumes that education is a value-laden process. Learners actively create knowledge as they participate

in learning by taking a "critical look" at who has power and what impact that power has on the lives of those without it, recognizing the causal and circumstantial relationships that cause social injustice. Gaining power with words translates into gaining personal power and making change in the world.

Freire's theories, and the curricula that spring from them, promote critical thinking, dialogue, and decision-making activities that support democratic ideals and move toward socially critical consciousness. In developing critical curriculum, teachers must first learn about important issues in their students' lives through conversations, journaling, discussions, and lots of listening. This research enables teachers to identify issues that relate to the experiences and concerns students identify. Reading and writing skills develop in tandem with critical thinking skills, and ultimately, literacy learning becomes a means of transforming students' lives and communities. Often, a unit of curriculum ends with meaningful action that addresses a community need.

Within Freire's activities and overarching goals, however, other theorists have located areas to further develop. For example, feminists point out that critical theory does not explicitly include gender issues, even though women often experience low literacy skills, or marginalization, in different ways and in different situations than men do. While Freire's ideas take aim at disparities in social class, theorists writing after Freire have expressed a "sharpened interest in power and language, with an emphasis on a multiplicity of perspectives that include race, class, gender, and culture." (Hemphill, 1999, p. 2). Curriculum design — and adult education in general — needs to move beyond the concept of a universal adult learner and have the flexibility to include adults' diverse identities and experiences.

In this third approach, students are central to the process of constructing and interpreting knowledge. Critical curriculum activities include journals, portfolios, and other autobiographical, literary and artistic methodologies (Slattery, 1995) that focus less on external objectives than on internal experiences. William Doll, a theorist who views curriculum as a means of gaining personal emancipation (1993), sees opportunity for two powerful actions in critical curriculum: self-organization and transformation. He writes, "Plans arise from action and are modified through actions...., this translates into course syllabi or lesson plans written in a general, loose, somewhat indeterminate manner. As the course or lesson proceeds, specificity becomes more appropriate and is worked out conjointly—among teacher, students, text" (1993, p. 171). The negotiation that takes place engages both students and teachers in decision-making; students see themselves as equal partners in solving problems in the classroom and beyond.

Advantages

The critical approach to curriculum is, by definition, political, putting power issues front and center. It does not ignore the difficulties that learners face in life but provides a way for learners together to meet them head on. By doing so, it does not create a separation between learners' lives and what they are learning, which, as in the learner-driven approach, is motivating. In addition, the call to action inherent in this approach helps learners bridge the "classroom/real world" divide. This method is rooted in the social justice movement. Teachers who believe in adult literacy as an element of social justice embrace the premises underlying this method.

Disadvantages

The critical approach to curriculum has many of same disadvantages of the learner-driven approach. It takes time. Teachers need a particular set of facilitation skills in addition to the skills needed to teach reading and writing, or English for speakers of other languages. Learners are not usually familiar with this approach, and may be uneasy with it. They may initially have trouble understanding how a class taught using this approach will help them, for example, pass the tests of General Educational Development (GED).

Since taking action is a crucial element of the curriculum, teachers need to recognize the potential that learners' actions may cause backlash from powers that are being questioned or threatened. The teacher and program need to be committed to supporting learners, rather than abandoning them if, for example, a landlord decides to evict students rather than rectify housing problems.

Conclusion

Many teachers are not free to choose their curriculum: the state, funder, or program has made that choice, or time and resources present so many restrictions that the choice is virtually made for them. In recognizing that curriculum design always reflects someone's values and beliefs, those who have the luxury of making decisions about curricula have the responsibility to ensure that their choices reflect their views about the goals and purposes of education. That said, it is true that the lines between the approaches have blurred considerably. Many textbook series were developed with extensive input from learners. Some pose critical questions about issues of power; others include activities that help learners bridge the classroom/real life divide. Many teachers find ways to use traditional texts in learner-driven classrooms; and learner-driven curriculum can be a means of explicitly taking action for social change. My guess is that, like most teachers, you will draw from the best of each approach, creating your own, eclectic curriculum.

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One Topic, Three Approaches to Curriculum

A class that uses a traditional approach to curriculum might cover the topic "housing" in a series of lessons nested within a workbook that focuses on "life skills." In a learner-driven class, a student might indicate interest in better understanding a rental agreement. The teacher might first find out what the students already know about contracts and rental agreements. Then the teacher might use the rental agreement to help learners build reading skills and develop reading strategies. In a class that uses a critical approach to curriculum, if students indicate that housing is an issue, a teacher might display pictures of types of housing, and lead a discussion about the kinds of housing with which students are familiar, the differences in housing, the underlying policies and power structures that lead to substandard housing. Reading and writing activities might center around writing letters to protest current housing policies, or discrimination in certain housing markets.

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About the Author

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A Conversation with FOB...

What Works for Adult ESL Students

Heide Spruck Wrigley was the content specialist on "What Works for Adult ESL Literacy Students," a study funded by the US Department of Education and carried out jointly by the American Institutes for Research and Aguirre International. The two principal researchers on the study were Larry Condelli (AIR) and Heide Wrigley (Aguirre International). Heide discussed the study, its findings, and their implications for curriculum with Focus on Basics.

FOB: Can you briefly describe the study for us?

HEIDE: The study was designed to take a look at what helps literacy students who are new to English develop their English reading skills as well as their oral interaction skills in English. These are students who have fewer than six years of schooling in their home countries and who, by definition, don't have strong literacy skills in their home language nor do they generally have strong skills in English. But we do know that literacy students have strong skills that a curriculum can build on. They negotiate their daily lives in an environment that is both English-speaking and print-rich; they often have developed a score of sight words they rely on; and they use compensation strategies by drawing on their background knowledge and life experience to help them make sense of things. They all speak at least one language fluently and are now in ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] classes in an effort to pick up English and learn the basic skills they missed by not having been able to complete their schooling in their home countries.

The study is particularly pertinent now that immigration from poorer countries is increasing and includes many more individuals who had to leave school early because they had to work or their country was in the midst of civil strife. The largest group of these new immigrants comes from Mexico, where educational opportunities are limited for much of the population (two-thirds of immigrants from Mexico haven't completed high school), but refugees from Southeast Asia (primarily Hmong) and from Africa (Somalia, Sudan, and a number of West African countries) are also among the literacy students. These groups have not been well served in conventional ESOL classes where the class starts with a book and the curriculum assumes that students have a certain level of literacy. These students — with limited literacy — have trouble in these ESOL classes, since students with higher levels of education drive the speed of the class and basic literacy is seldom taught. That was the concern behind the study.

It's an observational study, involving about 500 students who spoke more than 20 languages, with the majority being Spanish speakers. It was grounded in a framework that looked at literacy and language acquisition as a multidimensional construct. ESOL literacy involves learning how to deal with different kinds of text, and learning how to write for different reasons (for self-expression and functional literacy, for example). ESOL literacy also requires learning English, understanding it and producing it; learning grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the other subskills. We developed a framework that identified the components of ESOL literacy, starting with print awareness, so that we could observe the classes to see to what extent are teachers are working with these different forms of literacy:

> **"**One of the key findings for reading development was that students learned more, as measured in movement on standardized tests, in classes where the teacher made the connection between life outside the classroom and what was learned in the classroom than in other classes.**"**

narrative, document prose, etc. We looked at literacy development, second language development, and ways of connecting oral and written language.

We also looked at learning opportunities: to what extent did people get to interact with each other and to what extent did students get a chance to talk about their own lives, be involved in spontaneous conversations, or deal with problem solving? We wanted to see to what extent teachers used authentic materials or materials that reflect the literacy demands of the world outside, beyond the classroom. We noted the language (English or the native language) used by the teacher during the ESOL literacy classes. The study used a multi-variable statistical model of analysis, looking at intraclass variation, holding various factors constant to see what kind of teaching made a difference. The model allowed us to look at complex relationships among literacy, teaching, and learning. That is what learning literacy while you are trying to learn a second language is: a complex relationship.

FOB: What were the study's key findings?

HEIDE: One of the key findings for reading development was that students learned more, as measured in movement on standardized tests, in classes where the teacher made the connection between life outside the classroom and what was learned in the classroom than in classes that did not. So, for example, if teachers led field trips where students had to use English; or brought in grocery fliers or catalogues to read and discuss; or used as literacy materials cereal boxes or soup cans to figure out calories, all of which are materials and information that reflected the literacy that students deal with in their everyday lives, the impact was stronger. We called this "bringing in the outside." Bringing in the outside made a significant difference in reading gains on standardized tests.

In one class, for example, the teacher helped a group of displaced workers learn how to order food in English at a local fast food restaurant. This seems like a small task but was hugely important to the group since their children always had to order for them. Ordering themselves helped restore the parental role to what the students considered a more natural balance. The group spent a great deal of time discussing the menu, predicting questions, and practicing what to say: "Would you like that supersized?" "No, thank you." They then went to the fast food restaurant and, for the first time, ordered their food by themselves.

We also did a literacy practices inventory to see what kind of things people were reading and writing in their native languages and English. We didn't see a really close relationship between what they were reading and how much they were reading and gains on standardized tests; there are just too many variables involved. Of course, people who had higher scores to start with tended to read more because it was easier for them.

FOB: Did you happen to look at whether, if a teacher "brought in the outside" to class, students increased their use of literacy skills outside of class? That's something that Victoria Purcell-Gates studied in her research (see the box on page 5 for a description of her findings).

HEIDE: I can't say that there was no relationship between teaching approach and use of literacy, because we didn't analyze for that. We were looking primarily at the relationship between the kind of ESOL and literacy emphasized in the classroom and the way it was taught, and learner outcomes (as measured by standardized tests). There were other findings as well, related to growth in oral proficiency, for example, and we had some interesting findings in terms of attendance.

FOB: Were there any findings you did not expect?

HEIDE: Yes. Judicious use of the native language made a difference in both reading and oral language skill acquisition as shown by results on standardized tests. We didn't have any native language literacy classes, and we didn't have any classes in which teachers did a great deal of translating for the students. But students had higher gains when the students in the class shared a language — (in our case, Spanish) — and the teacher was bilingual and used Spanish here and there, to give instructions, or to clarify, or to offer a quick translation of a difficult term. In classes with other language groups, the group either spoke multiple languages, as was the case in Seattle and New York, or the teacher was not bilingual, as was the

case with Somali and Hmong classes.

The classes where the teacher used the native language here and there had higher gains. This makes sense, particularly for literacy students who had little English, because their brains are busy trying to speak, to figure out print, to understand what the teacher wants, all while dealing with a new language and a new culture. Many of the students had not been in a classroom since they were small children, so school tasks were new to them as well. In these cases, where you are cognitively taxed to your fullest extent, if someone comes in and explains it to you, it really frees up mental space to focus on the task itself. In ESOL classes that are all in English, so much of students' time and energy is spent trying to figure out what it is the teacher wants them to do. Once the instructions are clear, the task becomes manageable.

Something else new, although not totally unexpected, was that students need practice and they need variety. I think in our emphasis on communicative competence we sometimes forget how much practice is needed before literacy and English take hold and become internalized or "automatized." On the other hand, if language input and language tasks become repetitive and boring, the brain shuts down and learning slows way down. Students who experienced mainly skill and drill in their classes didn't do as well as other groups who had more varied experiences. By the same token, if everything was new all the time, and lots of different activities came at the students without a clear focus on what they needed to learn, they didn't do as well either.

The students who got both sufficient time on task with a particular component and a chance to encounter that component in various ways (reading, writing, hands-on activities, talking about they were

reading) showed higher gains than the rest. Students need a chance to interact with print, to practice, and to "get it down." At the same time, they benefit from different kinds of experiences that reinforce language and literacy skills. This kind of balance between routine and variety made a difference in their scores on standardized testing.

FOB: The two findings seem like they may be related: judicious use of native language, to introduce procedures and to clarify complex points, for example, and the need for routine. Both indicate that time should be spent on the content — on the learning — rather than on the procedures.

HEIDE: I think a certain amount of routine is good, particularly for adults who have little experience with schooling and who often doubt their own ability to learn. School-based learning is important to them and they want to get the basic skills that they have missed. But they often really come alive when they get a chance to work with important

> **"***Judicious use of the native language made a difference in both reading and oral language skill acquisition as shown by results on standardized tests.***"**

concepts, such as figuring out what all the charges on a phone bill are for or whether buying vegetables at a farmer's market or in a supermarket is a better deal. The finding also points to the importance of giving instructions that are simple and clear, and of demonstrating and modeling so that

frustration and anxiety are reduced and students can focus on "meaning-making." And that can be done in English as well as in the native language.

FOB: Any other findings to share?

HEIDE: The basic attendance finding was that it didn't matter how many hours for class that students came but the percentage of class time they came. Rate of attendance matters more than the hours per se. For example, a student who comes to class almost every day and then drops out after three and a half months ends up doing better than a student who only attends sporadically but stays for the full six months of the course. This is true even when the total number of class hours attended are the same.

FOB: What are the implications of the findings of your study for curriculum?

HEIDE: We found that building on what students are interested in outside of the classroom results in success. This supports the idea that you want to have a curriculum that connects literacy development with oral language development and connects it back to students' lives. You can't read in English if you don't know English. We didn't see that a narrow approach that focused solely on narrow notions of reading was successful, although spending time on some of the subskills related to fluency and decoding certainly is necessary for students who don't have these skills. As we keep hearing, these subskills are necessary but not sufficient and I think our study shows that.

The findings speak for building a rich curriculum that makes a connection between the language and literacy used inside and outside of the classroom and lets these students see that they are gaining skills that reflect what's needed in daily life. Use of objects (real foods, household items),

environmental print (flyers, labels, signs), mail (including notes from schools), and trips to neighborhood spots where literacy is needed are not the only materials that are useful. Language experience stories, personal writings, and stories and songs build engagement and can become the starting point for discussions and further language use. These materials also form the basis for building fluency, discovering patterns, developing vocabulary, and practicing various subskills. Their use ties back in with the finding about practice and variety.

"Varied interaction and practice" is important. We do need to draw students' attention to what it is we want them to learn. There needs to be focus, engagement, and practice if language and literacy learning is to take place. A lot of times in ESOL teaching we're doing way too many things that don't connect to each other. Tightening the connections, doing fewer things, focusing on what students need to get in order to move forward is important.

In terms of the native language, we do need to rethink that "English only" idea, and that fear that any minute spent in native language takes away from English learning. That is actually not true. We need to really think about how to provide opportunities for students to have enough time on task really to become fluent in English. This calls for multiple opportunities to use English while facilitating learning by using the native language here or there or, if that is not possible, taking time out to demonstrate or model the tasks or use visual information to get our point across.

I mentioned before that language learners need enough energy in terms of cognitive resource to focus on language learning. If tasks are constantly changing or if instructions contain new words and phrases, learning is really inhibited. So I like to encourage teachers to keep a certain amount of classroom interaction routine when they are introducing new concepts. That lets people focus on the learning rather than on the procedures. But overall, in terms of curriculum, the findings suggest a rich language and literacy learning curriculum that provides opportunities for students to use English outside of the classroom, both through interactions with English speakers and through engagement with various forms of print. But the study also points toward the need to provide a sufficient focus on structure and practice. We can't just assume that literacy students will pick up reading and writing skills on their own, through mere exposure and continued acquisition of English. This may be true for students who have a sound foundation in literacy in the native language, but it's not true for students who lack these skills. Through our curriculum, we will need to give ESOL literacy students practice in acquiring basic reading and writing skills within the context of their lives without making these skills the primary focus of the curriculum.

FOB: Thanks for sharing all this with us. Where can readers go for your full report?

HEIDE: The report is still under review by the Department of Education. It's difficult to tell when it will be released. As soon as the study is released, it will be available on the web. We will announce its availability in various newsletters and list serves, including the *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list (to subscribe, see the box on this page).

Resources

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One Classroom, Two Languages: Adult Bilingual Curriculum Development

How should ESOL programs use learners' first language to build their acquisition of the second?

by Kay Taggart and Sara Martinez

Over the past 10 years, in programs involving more than a dozen companies in El Paso, Texas, workplace literacy classes have focused on rudimentary English language skills that employers perceived that workers needed while working in their current jobs. However, in homogeneous bilingual communities, individuals in entry-level jobs often do not need much English to do a job well. We found that employees attended instruction either because their employer asked them to attend and they felt obligated or because they hoped to acquire English skills they could use at home with their children who were learning English in school. When curricula and instruction focused on workplace themes (which workers had said they did not feel they needed), students consistently dropped out. It was not uncommon to lose more than half of the class enrollment before the end of the course. How could we change this?

In 2001, Johns Hopkins University conducted observations, interviews, and surveys of instructors working in retraining programs for dislocated workers in El Paso. These programs serve mostly women who have been dislocated from the garment industry, and others who work but need to increase their skills to advance within their places of employment. Typical students are Mexican immigrants who attended three to eight years of schooling in Mexico as children. They possess high-beginning to high-intermediate levels of literacy in Spanish and beginning to low-intermediate levels of literacy in English. Dislocated workers receive federal retraining dollars and attend school 20 to 30 hours per week for periods up to 18 months. Those involved in workplace instruction at their places of employment attend instruction four to 12 hours weekly. Instruction for both groups includes job-specific skill training, computer technology training, and related English skills development.

We observed instructors using Spanish for a variety of purposes: orally translating job-specific material written above the eighth grade level; providing oral explanations when students "appeared" confused; giving directions and instructions; and encouraging students. We also observed some instructors expecting students to engage in activities that required high-level, work-specific critical and creative thinking tasks using English only. When students

Native Language Use

Using the adult learners' native language in the workforce-training classroom is not a new concept in our community or around the nation. Beginning in the latter half of the 1970s and continuing through the mid-1990s, the US Department of Education funded a number of Bilingual Vocational Training (BVT) projects under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. Some of these projects developed native-language instructional materials and used Spanish, Chinese, or another language to teach job-specific skills; related vocational English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) helped students learn English related to the work area. Other programs simply used bilingual assistants to provide supportive one-on-one tutorials as needed when students did not understand content provided in English (Gillespie, 1996).

Formal and informal bilingual programs continue to operate in various venues. Adult ESOL/literacy and workforce/workplace skill instructors who are themselves bilingual and work within homogenous bilingual communities have used informal bilingual strategies in the classroom for many years. Many instructors move between the two languages with little thought as to why and when to use the native rather than the targeted language.

Curriculum Example 1:
Computer Office Skills Program

Computer Office Skills Program

Computer Skills Training

Students receive instructions **in Spanish** covering computer functions and use of common office programs. Students learn key computer terminology **in English**. Students will also create documents using **English**.

English for the Office Environment

Instructors teach bilingually. Students explore critical themes **in Spanish**. These themes "bridge" into English as students learn English vocabulary and language structures they will need to communicate effectively while working.

GED Test Preparation

Instructors teach strategies and content knowledge **in Spanish**. Students take the test **in Spanish**.

Staff collaborates to develop curriculum activities relevant to common office themes. For example, a thematic unit relating to "Office Supplies" includes the following activities, framed with Equipped for the Future Standards. EFF is a framework for adult literacy curriculum and program development, developed over the past ten years under the National Institute for Literacy (Stein, 2000).

Instructional Theme: Office Supplies

Use Information and Communications Technology

Students learn to use Excel Spreadsheets by reading Spanish-language instructional manuals and receiving oral instruction and coaching in Spanish. However, the software used is the English-language version, and students create a spreadsheet to track office supplies inventory using English supply terms.

Listen Actively & Speak So Others Can Understand

Students learn the English vocabulary they need to understand verbal requests for office supplies and to make verbal requests for office supplies. Students engage in total physical response activities, which requires then to perform actions in response to verbal cues, such as "put the paper in the printer" and role-playing.

Solve Problems and Make Decisions

Students use Spanish to discuss related critical issues, such as: What do you do when you cannot access the supplies you require to complete a work task? What do you do if your boss expects you to complete the task anyway? This activity bridges into more English vocabulary and language development with role-playing as students deal with the final questions: To whom do you speak? What do you say? How do you say it?

Read with Understanding & Convey Ideas in Writing

Students use Spanish to discuss the organization of supply catalogs, to learn about the rationale for the use of purchase orders, and the path these documents take through a company to a vendor. They work in pairs or groups to read supply catalogs (in English), to compare products and prices from different vendors, and to complete purchase orders.

The lesson—lasting over the course of about 20 hours of instruction—culminates in a comprehensive bilingual debriefing, during which students reflect on the entirety of the experience and delineate what they have learned, and why, and project ahead to their future roles as workers.

struggled to report on small group work using English, one instructor remarked, "They can't even think!"

Written surveys indicated that instructors had difficulty determining what type of activities might best be implemented bilingually, and what type might best be implemented in English only. Students' comments reflected this confusion. It was common to hear "The instructor speaks too much English" and "The instructor doesn't speak enough English" uttered by students in the same classroom.

We hypothesized that by using Spanish and English for specific and different purposes within areas of curriculum and instruction, students could develop both English and job skills simultaneously. As we worked to design and implement effective workforce and workplace training programs for dislocated as well as incumbent workers, we sought to answer the following questions:

- If students are not able to use their native language to relate prior knowledge to classroom contexts, express ideas and opinions, and develop higher-order thinking skills relating to their targeted career field, will they fully benefit and thrive from the educational experience?

- How can we maximize learning of English and job skills by using both languages in the classroom?

Bilingual Strategies for Contextual Curricula

Bilingual curricula and instruction do not mean direct translation of all course content. They mean using students' native language to build conceptual understanding and to process knowledge and skills, while developing interpersonal communicative competence in English. Instructors must be clear

about when and how to use Spanish and English in the classroom (Baker, 1997). Our observations indicated that instructors who use too much Spanish can slow student language acquisition to a crawl; instructors who use too much English can quash the development of higher-order thinking skills. For bilingual instruction to be effective, we have found it critical that course developers, teachers, and students agree on what components should implemented in English and what components should be implemented in Spanish for the maximum benefit of the student. Instructors and students may move between the two languages at some points. For instance, students work with their teachers to analyze the similarities and differences between the two languages. This process helps to demystify the second language.

Following the research described above, we spent six months working with a group of 12 bilingual instructors. We met weekly for three months for training and collaboration, focusing on bilingual teaching strategies for reading, writing, listening, speaking, and cooperative learning.

The curriculum developers and teachers we work with begin developing a program by pinpointing a work-relevant theme. To do so, they first collect information from company personnel or from more general information gathered about the target job. They ask the following questions and reach the following conclusions about use of first and second language in instruction (Taggart & Martinez, 2002):

- What pieces do students just need to "know" in order to carry out tasks relating to this theme? **We can teach much of this in the students' native language.**

- What will students need to read, listen to, write, and talk about in English related to those tasks? To whom will they need to speak? **We must teach the English vocabulary and language struc-**

tures students need to be able to communicate in work-related contexts.

- When students engage on the job, what critical issues may arise around this theme? **We can use the students' native language to explore these issues, and then move to English to develop any additional language skills that emerge as a result of these discussions.**

Input from business and industry is important during this phase of curriculum development and instructional planning. Individuals who perform related tasks in the workplace are invaluable in helping us determine which components to teach in English and which to teach in Spanish. Interviews, focus groups, and observations help us answer the questions posed above.

Bilingual instructional curricula and strategies are integral to our instructional programs for retraining dislocated workers, and to programs providing on-site instruction for incumbent workers seeking to move up within their work environment. The programs have multiple components; students participate in work-specific training, related vocational ESOL instruction, and computer technology training. Some also attend preparation classes to take the tests of General Educational Development (GED) in Spanish. See pages 19 and 21 for examples of curriculum from projects underway.

Challenges

Our initial inquiry revealed that instructors did not make choices about language of instruction based on any explicit criteria. Even when they are trained in concepts of bilingual education, and practical strategies for using two languages in the classroom, teachers have a tendency to fall back on prior practice. Even when teachers understand the advantages of strategic language use, it is only with continuing professional development and

Curriculum Example 2:
Leadership and Communications

Workplace Leadership and Communication

Leadership Concepts

Students receive instruction **in Spanish** covering such topics as group dynamics, team collaboration, and organizational models. They participate in a great deal of role playing and collaborative problem solving. The instructor also introduces key concepts **in oral English** and provides English handouts to reinforce this vocabulary.

Communicating for Leadership

Students develop the vocabulary knowledge and language usage skills necessary to engage in effective interpersonal communications **in English** on the job. Students participate **in Spanish-language** discussion that relates communication themes back to leadership concepts.

Technology Skills

Students receive instructions **in Spanish** covering computer functions and use of common office programs. Students learn key computer terminology **in English**. Students also create documents using **English**.

"Communicating for Leadership" provides opportunities for students to do the following:

• **Examine a communication challenge that exists in the workplace**. A short dialogue introduces the challenge. For instance, employers report that workers are reticent to request clarification when they do not understand instructions. The introductory scenario is in English and focuses on an employee who does not understand, but tells his boss he does. The scenario provides a way for students to begin to connect with the communication challenge. It is a jumping off point for discussion and learning activities.

• **Students then work in small groups to examine the communication challenge**, discussing why workers are reticent to admit they do not understand, including listing potential repercussions that could result if an employee admits she does not understand, and if an employee does not admit it. Discussion may diverge to address questions such as: What happens if you ask for clarification and your boss does not want to bother explaining again? What happens if your boss decides you are not qualified to do your job, since you do not understand? What do you do? What do you say? How do you defend yourself? This discussion is undertaken in Spanish and connects to leadership themes, as students critically examine the challenge from the point of view of a supervisor trying to lead his or her employees.

• **Instructors help students to develop English vocabulary and phrases needed** to request clarification, address related situations (discussed above), and help elicit clarification questions from other individuals (whom they may supervise in the future).

• **Students rewrite the original dialogue** in English and effectively "turn around" the situation. For instance, in the rewritten scenario, the employee might ask for clarification after his or her supervisor provides a prompt and some encouragement. Other dialogues may focus on related challenges that could occur. Instructors circulate and help student with English constructions. Instructors may interject mini-lessons covering specific language usage points. Students practice the scenario and "perform" in front of their peers.

• **Students engage in peer critique** designed to help the actors in the dialogue refine their language production. This critique usually will occur bilingually, as students analyze the situation and work to help each other improve on multiple levels.

support have they been able to implement it effectively.

As the Hispanic population grows in the United States (Guzman, 2001), and as the need for "thinking" workers increases, adult bilingual workforce training holds great potential for helping individuals advance on multiple levels simultaneously.

About the Authors

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Same Curriculum, New Mode of Delivery

Adapting ABE Professional Development to the Internet

by Jane Martel

Before December, 2000, Kentucky's Department for Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) had delivered all professional development opportunities to its 900 adult educators in face-to-face workshops. The best attended of these was usually the two-day Orientation to Adult Education, required of new instructors and program managers (Kentucky has approximately 120 new adult educators each year) and typically offered four times a year in various locations around the state. In May, 2001, we piloted our first "blended" professional development (PD) course: part delivered face-to-face and part delivered via the Internet. This quickly became our professional development branch's preferred format for nearly all of our professional development opportunities. Getting to this stage, however, many hard lessons were learned along the way, which we share in this article.

Reasons to Change

Kentucky ventured into the online PD world via a blended format for a number of reasons. First, in April, 2000, Senate Bill 1, also known in Kentucky as the Adult Education Act, passed. Kentucky's

professional development system needed to prepare to support practitioners serving 300,000 adult learners a year by the year 2020 in comparison to the approximately 50,000 served in FY 2001 (Kestner, 2002). As a result of the Adult Education Strategic Agenda that grew out of Senate Bill 1, Kentucky's adult education programs are accountable for meeting increasingly challenging performance indicators. DAEL Commissioner Dr. Cheryl King wants practitioners to maximize the time they spend assisting learners in meeting their goals and minimize the time spent traveling to attend PD workshops. PD delivered online makes it possible to offer orientation information without interfering with teaching and learning activities at adult learning centers. The time new teachers needed to spend away from their learning centers to attend the two-day orientation training was halved by one-day face-to-face training supplemented with online work.

Improved consistency and reduced travel expenses for trainers and participants were other good reasons for trying what we termed "e-PD." One of the most compelling factors supporting the use of web-delivered training was the opportunity to offer orientation information any time, day or night. Our online courses could be started at any time of year using any computer connected to the Internet; new instructors no longer had to wait for our next scheduled face-to-face session to be introduced to their roles and responsibilities. Also, the foundation for relationships with DAEL staff and

with peers across the state could be built immediately.

Before adopting this blended approach, we had burdened newcomers with reams of paper that they probably never read. No matter how excited participants are after a workshop, few have the time to research further and read materials taken home. With our new approach, participants are asked to complete online modules in advance of a workshop. This let us raise the incoming level of knowledge and expect higher quality interactions in the face-to-face components of the training.
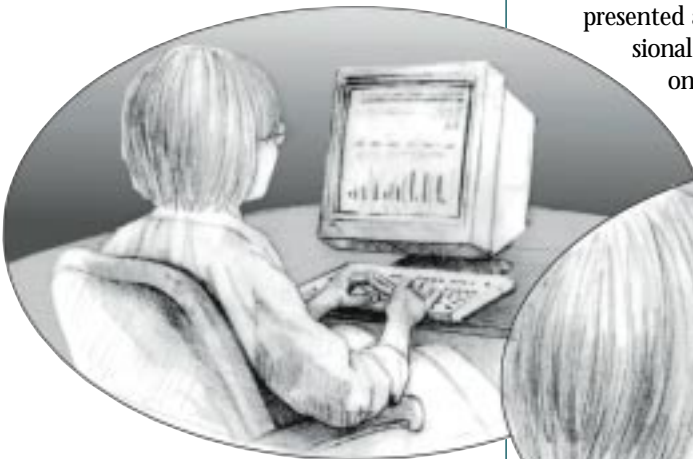
From information gleaned at regional professional development meetings with peer PD professionals, it seemed that few states had ventured very far into online PD delivery. At the time, much had been written about both online education and face-to-face training. Only now do we see a proliferation of material on the topic of blending the two formats. Our interpretation of the merits and challenges of the online environment combined with what we knew about face-to-face realities suggested that blended courses offered the best opportunity to capture the strengths of both delivery methods.

Testing Our Theory

Plans were underway by May, 2001, to create a web site and "portal" for virtual adult education with the

assistance of our new partner, Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU). Without a strong tech partner, such bold efforts in new territory would probably not have happened as soon as they did. Our challenge was to convert our two-day Orientation to Adult Education to a blend of one-day of face-to-face training followed by five units of online information. We embraced online course creation as an opportunity to use a new tool, make background material and facts "come alive," and differentiate cognitive information from behavioral changes. Using the Internet, we were able to link users immediately to exciting sites related to the information presented and to generate professional discourse by creating online discussions.

PD branch members met to adapt curriculum to this new instructional environment. To determine which topics to deliver in a workshop and which to post online, we reviewed what we knew at the time: "Cognitive objectives are the most easily adaptable to distance education" (Thach, 1996, p. 11). Performance-based and attitudinal objectives and those requiring use of interpersonal skills were determined most appropriate for classroom delivery (Thach, 1996, p. 11; Brown, 2000).

We also considered the complexity of the material and its relative importance to new practitioners. Those topics deemed complex and/or vital to adult education — recruit-

ment (45 minutes), orientation and goal setting (two hours), assessment (two hours), and professional development (15 minutes) — were covered in our one-day face-to-face training. We expected that those topics would generate many questions and would require the explanation of concepts and procedures in a variety of ways. Topics that were primarily information only (cognitive objectives) and that were less likely to require discussion (e.g., an overview of adult education, the adult learner, learner support and retention, and legal issues) were converted for online delivery.

Creating an interactive group environment online differs from creating it in a face-to-face environment. In the latter, other group members tend to assist, or at least serve as catalysts, in the effort to draw out communication from reticent participants. Based on our experience and on discussions with facilitators of other online courses, however, in an online environment, this responsibility seems to fall entirely on the facilitator. Each participant was encouraged to post comments about the online material to a discussion board. More difficult, however, was ensuring that the discussion board would contain conversations among participants, not simply postings of reactions by individuals. Schweizer (1999) identifies numerous ideas on maximizing the use of the online environment. Among them are linking web sites to the content, bringing course members together for face-to-face interaction to build group cohesiveness, communicating regularly with course members in an informal and clear writing style, being responsive to questions and concerns, using separate discussion boards for each group, and using the discussion board

LESSONS LEARNED

Since our Orientation to A Education pilot, we have developed and delivered 11 other e-PD courses, most in a blended format. The lessons we have learned are obvious when viewed in retrospect. At the time, however, the choice was either to do it right or do it now. We chose the latter and learned much from doing so.

All participants need to have the minimum hardware, software, Internet connectivity, and the technical support needed to access and participate in an online course. Course developers often fail to consider that many educators use computers less sophisticated than those on which the materials are developed; they also often face the challenges of firewalls, proxy servers, etc. Such issues should be addressed before an educator registers for an online course or unit.

Courses must be built with the lowest common technology denominator in mind. Posting huge files, such as video-streaming, long audio clips, and PowerPoint presentations, which take several minutes to download using a 56K modem, results only in frustration for low-end users. Lower-tech options should be offered for low end users. For example, if an audio clip is included, then a written script should also be available.

Beyond hardware considerations, ***participants must have the requisite computer skills prior to taking an online course.*** It was sobering for me to realize how many of our educators had never accessed the Internet or used a computer. We now list prerequisite computer skills in our course publicity and in registration confirmation letters, although we do not offer training through the DAEL. Participants must be able to start a computer, connect to and navigate the Internet, manipulate windows, be able to print, scroll through, and read and reply to e-mail.

All participants should have their own personal e-mail address. Not all employers give part-time instructors e-mail accounts. Free e-mail services exist; however, many adult education centers function within restrictive environments that do not allow for the receipt of e-mail from free account sites. Without an ability to communicate by e-mail, much of the potential benefit of an online course is lost. As in a face-to-face environment, the communication that occurs among participants, and between the instructor and the learner, is critical. Some course management systems offer an internal messaging interface that operates independently of

e-mail and can be used for individual or group communication.

What if an instructor cannot meet the first three conditions of participation? Despite the requirement that literacy providers have access to computers and the Internet, and that new staff must complete the Orientation in whatever format it is offered (e-PD), not all do. Those without computer skills, access to the Internet, and e-mail had no alternative way to partake of our PD offerings.

Pilot testing a new course with a limited number of participants is preferable to immediately launching it statewide. Running a pilot, or field test, allows for the identification and correction of problems, errors, and areas of confusion in the course in a relatively controlled environment. In the long run, it saves time.

Experienced current practitioners should be consulted every step of the way, from creating the course outline, to providing content or editing drafts, pilot testing the course, providing feedback, and perhaps facilitating online discussion. The idealistic vision of state department staff must be tempered with the realistic perspectives of those in the field if online course curriculum development is to be successful.

Ample time must be allotted for course development and delivery. The amount of time required to create and manage an online course should be generously estimated, and then tripled. Creation of the course is but a small segment of the time required. We grossly underestimated how time consuming it would be to teach or facilitate a course.

What do facilitators do? Facilitators answer learners' questions about navigating the course, reveal content at appropriate times during the course (to keep learners more or less together, we displayed two modules a week so that learners would not bound ahead and finish), respond to submitted assignments, start discussions and moderate the course discussion board, monitor learner participation, and fix broken web links (Schweizer, 1999). Without adequate facilitation time, a course threatens to become a stale repository of content and more of a self-paced tutorial than a place and reason for lively exchange and sharing among participants. Our instructors so loved their

time together in workshops that we wanted to keep this aspect of sharing and exchange of ideas alive online as well as in the workshop. What takes so much time? Responding to myriad e-mails from participants. And, unlike a workshop, answering once does not instantly benefit the entire class (although a message board or posted announcement can be used to avoid answering the same question from multiple participants). Monitoring the discussion board can take hours. Inappropriate messages must be dealt with, erroneous information must be corrected, and participation by non-responding students must be elicited repeatedly. Then there are the technical problems to be corrected: a file won't open, a participant can't log in, the font is too small and the content too long to comfortably read on the screen, a participant needs assistance printing material. It all takes time, and lots of it.

Advance promotion of the online concept is a must. Learning online is foreign territory for many. Given the opportunity, many would choose to remain off-line. Offering strong material, sharing testimonials from your pilot participants — their respected peers — and promoting the new venture in a positive and exciting way in advance will do much to dispel initial resistance. As with any marketing endeavor, the benefits must be clearly presented.

Delivery and support partners should be selected with care. Work out in detail and in advance exactly what role each party will play.

- Who will provide technical support to learners and to course instructors and what, exactly, does that mean? During what hours and days of the week will support be provided? In what form may users request help (e.g., e-mail, telephone, web form)?

- Where will you place your courses? What platform will you use? Who controls it? Will it disappear at the end of a one-year contract? What happens to your courses then? Who will be responsible for maintaining and updating the content?

- Will you build a "front end" system for information and registration? Why? Is the process designed primarily to benefit the learner or management? Be wary of the latter, if it interferes with the consumer's experience. ❖

to summarize discussions and raise new questions. We used these ideas as guidelines when building our course.

Our first restructured Orientation to Adult Education was offered to a pilot group of 21 new instructors from throughout the state. All 120 of the ABE program managers in Kentucky were notified via e-mail of this pilot and were asked to encourage their new instructors (hired within six months) to participate. All new adult educators who expressed interest were allowed to participate. We started by gathering the group for a day of face-to-face training. Thereafter, participants had three weeks to complete the online units.

We had several goals for the course. As course developers, we wanted the pilot to answer the following questions about the online component:

- What was the average amount of time it took to complete the course? This would allow us to award professional development credit appropriately.
- What was confusing about each module? This would allow us to improve upon it for future course delivery, such as identifying modules that lent themselves better to face-to-face delivery (e.g., data collection and reporting).
- What suggestions did users have for improving the course? This allowed us to improve future course delivery.

Upon completion of a unit, the participant was required to e-mail answers to four questions to the online instructor. This let us know whether they mastered — or even looked at — the material. Three subject matter experts contributed content for the online course but only one (JM) facilitated the online course. I forwarded the module evaluations to the subject matter expert who had provided its content. The questions were subjective, prompting opinions of what material was most important and most confusing, and allowing participants to offer suggestions for improvement and to identify the amount of time they spent on the unit. At the end of the three-week course, we asked several of the participants to join the DAEL PD staff for a focus group. Notes taken on their likes, dislikes, and suggestions were used in conjunction with the e-mail responses to improve the course for its next delivery.

Results of the Pilot

Reactions to our blended orientation were, for the most part, very positive. Some summed the experience up with "It was fun." Other supportive adjectives used by participants included "convenient" and "informative." They liked the tasks and wanted more optional activities added to the course and more information added about the topics that were introduced. They liked the quizzes and research requirements.

The negative responses included those from participants who preferred in-person discussions to the "discussion board responses that seemed fabricated to complete the assignment." Some were frustrated by the amount of supplemental resources offered online; although these readings were optional, they wanted to read all of the materials and explore all of the links but did not have the time to do so. Others experienced technical difficulties accessing some of the online materials or had no access to the Internet at work, requiring them to complete the course from home on their own time. Based on the evaluations of each module and the focus group, we determined that some topics warranted coverage both online and face-to-face. For example, data collection and reporting were too important and too confusing to deliver solely online. As a result of the pilot, we split this unit so that it is covered using both delivery methods. The focus group suggested that we reverse the order of the blend: instructors should be allowed to go online immediately upon hire to receive an introduction to every unit. The day of training would follow the online experience, allowing face-to-face discussion and an activity to reinforce the material presented online.

We have offered all of our blended courses this way since the field test. Starting with the online portion allows for learning on demand shortly after hire, but our online participation rate has suffered as a result. In our field test, 10 percent of participants did not complete the online course requirements in the time allotted, compared to closer to 30 percent failing to complete it now. Practitioners are more confused as to how to get started. Also, participants seem more reluctant to participate in online discussions, perhaps because they have never met their online peers. In our pilot, we did not create groups, but we plan to do so in the future in an effort to stimulate discussion within a more intimately sized unit.

"Like any other instructional tool, technology can serve to perpetuate poor educational practice or it can become a means for transforming learning" (Imel, 1998a). Using technology for PD is not magic; principles of adult learning must still be applied and built into any PD curriculum. These include involving the target audience in planning and implementation; using participants' experience as a resource; encouraging self-directed learning and collaboration; creating a supportive learning environment; using materials relevant to the world of the learner; and incorporating the use of small groups in learning activities (Imel, 1998b).

Conclusion

Despite setbacks, Kentucky persists in its commitment to blended PD. We are offering three new blended courses. We envision an increased use of webcasts and, perhaps, materials available on CDs (to reduce total reliance on the Internet for those with slow or limited access), and a strengthened resolve for fostering interaction in our blended courses. Never satisfied, we look forward to new lessons to be learned and to using them to improve our e-PD program for years to come.

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About the Author

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Changing a State's Approach to Curriculum: Insight from Oregon's Efforts

by Dennis Clark

With approval from state and program administrators, a group of practitioners in Oregon began a statewide curriculum change process. Even with a "top-down" mandate and "bottom-up" participation, the process moved slowly. What steps are necessary for effective curriculum change? What lessons can be learned from Oregon's experience? Practitioner Dennis Clark, a key participant in the effort, reflects on the process as it appeared from his perspective.

In 1997, Oregon was awash in educational reform. The public schools had developed a 10th grade Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and were working on a 12th grade Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). The university system was promoting a Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS), while community colleges were constructing a set of proficiency expectations for entry into programs. Oregon's existing Adult High School Diploma (AHSD) curriculum guidelines needed updating. In Oregon, basic skills programs are housed in 17 community colleges, which are two-year colleges created as comprehensive adult educational institutions. Skills enhancement is a core element of the system. Some of us in adult basic education (ABE) feared that, without similar educational reform in ABE, the AHSD diploma and General Educational Development (GED) options might be seen as lower tier credentials than the CAM, out of step with the growing expectations of education in our state.

Oregon had AHSD and ABE/GED curriculum committees, sponsored and supported by state and local program directors. I was teaching at the time in our local adult high school, and was chairing the AHSD curriculum committee. A new curriculum specialist at the state office joined our group in the spring of 1997. After familiarizing herself with our curricula, and taking into account the other state and national curriculum efforts that loomed large, she was convinced of the need for something other than the incremental curricular updates that had been done over the past decade. In December, four of us — myself, two other basic skills instructors, and a program director — from the AHSD curriculum committee met with her to brainstorm what might be done. We hoped to create some short- and long-term objectives that would address changing curriculum needs in the state and help us to find a place in this new educational landscape.

Someone suggested that we work backwards from our desired outcomes, creating a plan based on what we wanted to achieve. We did not recognize the symbology of this act. Our choice mimicked the standards-based curriculum paradigm that was sweeping the rest of Oregon's educational system. We sketched out a timeline for the transition. We estimated two years to complete, three years at the most.

Proposal to the State

After the December, 1997, meeting, we created a proposal — which was accepted — to the state basic skills program directors for moving ahead on state curriculum reforms. The state directors agreed to support one or two instructors from each of their colleges to be on the working group. The activity had widespread support: our committee was originally created with state-level approval, the state curriculum specialist was involved, and program-supported instructors were included. We set up a liaison system through which information would be channeled. Each effort would inform and be informed by the efforts of the other levels. I was particularly excited because I saw this as curriculum change from the bottom up: instructors being a moving force behind it. Policy would emerge in parallel and the feeling of compliance from above would not be an issue. Yes, an "official" decision to change had been made, but it was left to teachers to determine what that change would be. We did have to solve several dilemmas: ensure what we did fit with state secondary level curriculum guidelines, the changing GED, emerging Equipped for the Future (EFF, the National Institute for Literacy's change project) standards, and existing secondary guidelines. Although the impetus for change came from the outside, the creation of a new approach was under the direction of instructors. Isn't that the ideal?

Developing the Guidelines

Our next step was to recruit the instructors whom the programs agreed to support. To broaden the circle of grass-roots-level participation, we gathered likely "early implementers" of change: instructors who were considered leaders in the state adult education field. About 20 people joined our working group, which came to be known as Cohort One. After examining a variety of curriculum ideas, we decided on a standards format. We set out to learn more about standards, acting as a loose study circle, reviewing everything we could find on standards. We also reviewed lessons, units, and courses currently in use in Oregon's adult basic education system, and considered
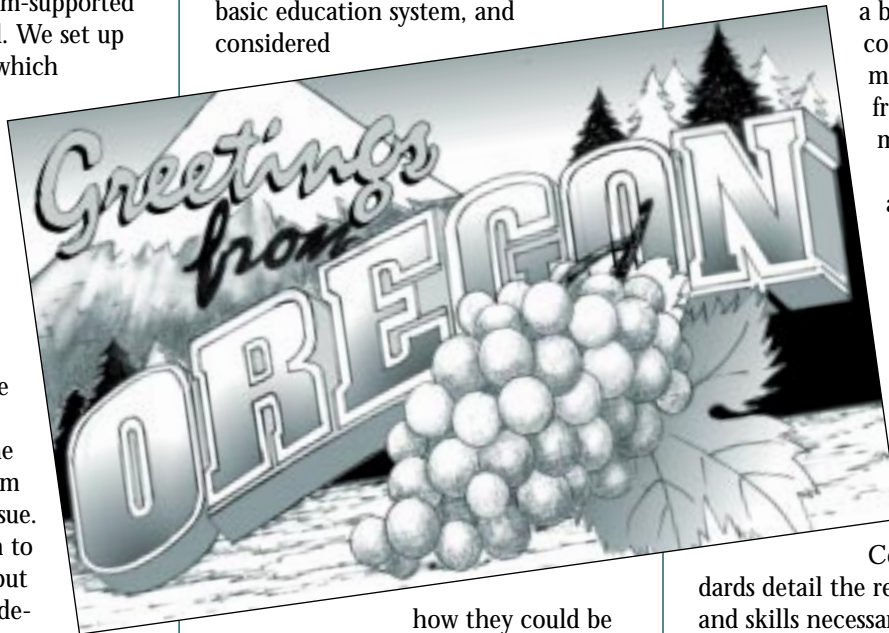
how they could be adapted to a standards-based approach.

We thought that we could cross-reference the variety of standards-based systems such as EFF, SCANS (the Department of Labor's list of standards required for workplace success), and CIM/CAM (the Oregon High School's sets of secondary standards). We wanted to create a large chart that displayed the correlations among them, allowing people using one set of standards to see how they related to the others. We considered it important for our secondary standards to align with the Oregon public high schools because the latter would only refer people to our alternative programs if they believed that our programs would be meeting the state's intended secondary requirements.

I attempted to create the matrix, as did a graduate student at Oregon State. We both found that each group that created a set of curriculum standards used a different conceptual structure and vocabulary. For example, what a student should be able to do, which is the first element of many curriculum standards guidelines, might be accomplished by reaching a benchmark (Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century); meeting specific criteria (PASS); being deemed proficient (PREP); or demonstrating performance at a benchmark along a continuum (EFF). The matrix task was both frustrating and ultimately impossible.

We finally arrived at a list of general content areas for Oregon's GED/AHSD secondary standards curriculum: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, workplace skills, and life skills. Course content standards detail the required knowledge and skills necessary for each subject area. We also developed a list of tasks through which mastery of a standard could be demonstrated, and ways in which to assess a student's successful demonstration of the task.

Once the standards guidelines had been created, I started making small changes in the way I taught. By the time I was reassigned to the skills center of a one-stop workforce development center, in 1999, I was starting to function from an outcomes perspective. A lot of my old curriculum was of the "understand" and "know" variety, concepts that are pretty subjective in nature. The teacher decides if the student knows it or understands it. Standards-based curricula provide more clarity about what students need to know and be able to do, what tasks they can do to

demonstrate their ability, and how they will be assessed. In many standards-based assessments, a matrix is used to display what constitutes a developing performance level, what meets the standard, and what proficiency exceeds the level required.

Introducing the Work to Others

In Oregon, significant professional development takes place at summer conferences; they are also a place where ideas can germinate. One of our strategies was to share our emerging set of curriculum standards at the Adult Secondary Standards Retreat, held in July, 1997. The three day event was attended by about 80 people, about half of whom had elected to come because, we hope, of interest. The other half were sent by their program directors. We introduced how to use a standards-based curriculum, how to do unit planning, and how to create and use scoring guides. We provided some planning forms the cohort had developed that instructors could use to create curriculum using a standards paradigm, and included time for teacher reflection. At the end, small groups shared examples of classroom activities that they had created at the retreat.

Over the next year, the standards were refined further, public comment was solicited, policy issues were addressed, and a second cohort of instructors was trained. A second, larger conference, "Equipped for the Future: A Promise to Oregon," held in August, 1999, familiarized more of Oregon's ABE practitioners with standards-based curriculum and connected us with the emerging energy of the national EFF movement. We led two sessions: an open house that featured information on standards-based projects and materials developed and imple-

mented by members of our group; and a workshop in which the state of our curriculum work was explained. Reviews of the sessions were positive, but a general attitude of "wait and see" prevailed. They wanted to see the policy guidelines before they made personal changes in their method of instruction. In a video about paradigm pioneers, "wait and see" folks are called settlers: defined as those who will not go into the new frontier until the explorers and the paradigm pioneers tell them that it is safe. I think change is difficult for many people, and time for curriculum development is not always compensated for. It was becoming clear that systemic change would not be successful without support being provided for staff training.
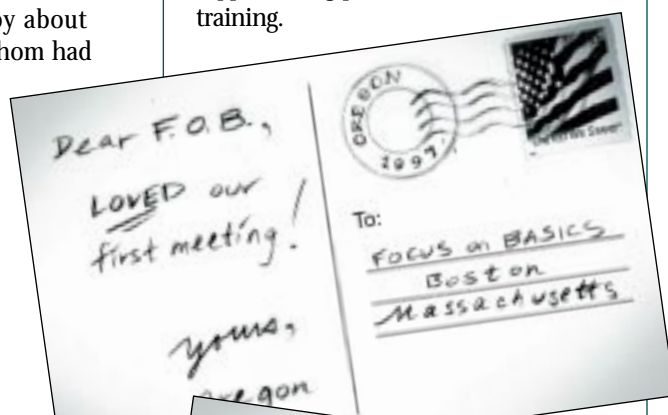
Policy Development

While our group of instructors was working, albeit more slowly than we expected, a group of program directors and state officials — a subcommittee of the Oregon Council of Adult Basic Skills Development — met quarterly

to create the policy guidelines that would make our standards-based curriculum official. I was the liaison between the instructor group and the policy group.

This group tackled several major issues and many smaller ones as well. For example, a big issue was whether GED preparation and AHSD courses should have the same set of outcome standards. The discussion was philosophical and challenged many of us to think differently about what we want to provide for our students. Did we want to simply prepare students to pass their GED exams, thereby responding to the voiced goal of just about almost every adult who comes to us for GED preparation? Or, do we have a greater responsibility to prepare them for higher education or for their roles as workers, community members, and family members? In the end, we agreed that furthering life skills is as important as helping people get a secondary certificate and therefore the same standards for curriculum should apply to both activities. To get to this decision, however, took more time.

Another stumbling block was unanticipated. Community colleges are the home base for ABE programs in Oregon. We have two types of high school programs in them. In one, the ABE/GED department provides the instruction using the state curriculum guidelines. The other type supports learners who, although they dropped out of high school, can pass the local college entrance exams and go straight into college classes. But these students want high school diplomas. Several colleges had a correlation system, so that an adult getting an associates degree could meet the high school requirement at the same time. It sounds good and, for a small number of students, it is great. The dilemma occurred when we realized that, in

Hello F.O.B.!
Policies
Coming along.

Regards,
Oregon

To:
Focus on BASICS
Boston
Massachusetts

Hi F.O.B.!
2002 guidelines revised.

Sincerely,
Oregon

To:
Focus on BASICS
Boston
Massachusetts

shifting to a standards-based approach, we were saying that students needed to be able to know and do certain things within their course work, but these students were not subject to the same outcome requirements in college classes. Dealing with this dilemma took time: everyone's needs had to be represented in the policies.

And, of course, all along the way we were discovering that many schools had developed their own ways of doing things. For example, we traditionally allow learners to bring credits from an accredited program into the adult high school. But what if someone comes in with a "D"? In a standards-based system, it is unlikely that that person demonstrated an adequate level of knowledge and skills in a course while achieving a D grade. Many such challenges emerged to slow down the policy development process.

A draft set of guidelines, titled Oregon's Adult Secondary Program Manual, was published in June, 2000, after being approved by the State Board of Education. A slightly revised and improved version was released in 2002. While the guidelines were created, field tested, and revised, the state office continued to conduct training around the state on an individual program or regional basis. One such effort explored what our new secondary standards had in common with EFF. A statewide electronic discussion list was created on which practitioners could share information, curriculum ideas, and read working committee reports. The list was very helpful for sharing information and reports, but for some reason did not generate the curriculum-sharing chatter that we had anticipated.

Theory and Practice Today

Policy guidelines are in place, and the project is moving to another stage. On paper, the systemic changes have been achieved, but much more work remains to bring the standards-based curriculum approach into the classroom. An intensive professional development training is planned for two colleges this calendar year. A set of trainers will work closely with program instructors over six to eight weeks to support individual and group transition.

My own teaching has changed. On a daily basis, I am conscious of what I hope students will be able to learn and demonstrate that they have learned while I have them. In the past I had a curriculum outline: I went from a to b to z. Now I focus more on "today we're doing "x" and "what I want you to come away with is …" For example, in a workshop on workplace culture, I might say that an outcome is that everyone learns at least two new ways to determine the culture of a business where they are applying for a job. At the end of the activity, I ask each student what new perspectives he or she had acquired as a result of this class related to understanding workplace culture as a job seeker. I get an informal assessment immediately from each session.

Lessons Learned

The past five years have been an interesting, crazy journey. We certainly learned a lot. A major curricular change takes longer than we ever imagined: collaborative work and systemic change involve hard work. We tried to involve as many people as possible, at different levels, from the beginning. We also tried to keep stakeholders informed at every step of the way. Perhaps we did not do a good enough job early on making sure that the need for change was well understood by teachers.

I still think that the best way to make a major curriculum change is to start at the classroom level, with teachers, discovering their issues and fears, and then enlisting them as the agents of change. That scenario was difficult to put into practice. At some point, we understood that change was

> **"Professional development support has also proven to be an integral aspect of this change effort."**

not going to occur until the policy guidelines did.

Professional development support has also proven to be an integral aspect of this change effort. What I think we did in Oregon was try to bring in new — although not radical — ideas and make them our own as we

created the supporting policy system. Teachers are meeting now, since the guidelines have moved to a compliance phase, to share curriculum and exchange ideas for teaching in this new way. As one early participant mentioned recently, "I suppose none of us could have predicted where we are now, how long the project would take, or how our roles in supporting it would change. I'm so glad that we're still carrying the project forward."

About the Author

Dennis Clark is a workplace skills instructor at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. He now teaches at a One Stop Skills Center leading classes and workshops in basic computer skills, becoming a more valuable employee, and creating your future. He is also an Equipped for the Future field researcher and life strategies coach. ❖

Resources on Standards-Based Curriculum

Harris, D., & Carr, J. (1996). *How to Use Standards in the Classroom.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R., & Kendall, J. (1996). *A Comprehensive Guide To: Designing Standards-Based Districts, Schools, and Classrooms.* Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory.

Stein, S. (2001). *Equipped for the Future Content Standards: What Adults Need to Know and Be Able to Do in the 21st Century,* 3rd ed. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Woodard, K. (ed.) (1999). *Alignment of National and State Standards: A Report by the GED Testing Service.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education, GED Testing Service.

Also see *Focus on Basics,* Volume 3, Issue C, 1999, devoted to standards-based education. Available online at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu

Creating Curricula for Challenging Circumstances

by Barbara Garner

I think of curriculum as a combination of scope and sequence: what will be taught, and in what order. I differentiate among curriculum, materials, and methods, although I recognize that together they result in what gets taught, how it gets taught, and, perhaps, what gets learned. As a classroom teacher, my preferred curriculum is one that emerges from the interaction between me and my students. That's a luxury we had to forgo in Guinea, West Africa.

World Education/Guinea staff members and I had to create a basic Pulaar literacy curriculum to be used by more than 1,000 adult basic education teachers who have no access to computers, photocopiers, or even flipcharts and markers. The restraints of the environment required that the materials be created for the teachers: no last minute rushing to a photocopier in a community 40 miles of unpaved road from the nearest electricity. The teachers would be volunteers chosen for their literacy skills and for their standing in their communities rather than for their professional status; most turned out to be farmers with two to five years of formal schooling. They would receive only two weeks of teacher training, so the methodology had to be predetermined as well. The task became developing a learners' book and a teachers' manual: curriculum, materials, and methods rolled into one.

Scope

The scope of the curriculum was easy. This literacy course is a component of a larger project that focuses on the community's role in improving the quality of public education at the local level. The project strengthens parent associations that, among other tasks, build schools, recruit teachers, dig latrines, and encourage families to send girls as well as boys to school. The topics covered in the course would be the same as those covered in the training given to the parent association board members. The reading skills covered would be letter recognition, sound/symbol identification, decoding, and comprehension. The writing skills would move from gripping a pencil to writing letters, words, and sentences. We did not worry about capital letters, punctuation — except for the lowly period — or grammar until the second phase of the literacy course, and the second phase of curriculum development.

The parameters of the project dictated the topics to be covered in the curriculum. The content — what to teach about each topic — had restraints as well. It had to be a manageable amount of information that the teachers either already knew or could master easily. A team of 30 Guineans responsible for training the parent associations reviewed each training topic to determine the three points about the topic that they considered to be the most important to convey. These points became the content.

Sequence

The sequence of the material was trickier. It would be determined as much by the methodology as by any

logical unfolding of topics. We would use a modified version of the lesson plan used in many World Education literacy programs around the world. Each lesson starts the same way: the learners work in small groups to analyze a picture that illustrates a problem related to the theme and content of the curriculum. Following the analysis and discussion, the teacher introduces a word or phrase related to the discussion, and, via that word, a letter, or sometimes two. The new letter or letters form the focus of the literacy skills part of the lesson. For example, the theme of one lesson is the value of having water available at a school. The illustration shows children outside a school, a hot sun blazing above, and everyone looking very thirsty. The related word is "water."

Why start with analysis of a picture? One reason is that it's interesting.

motivating for students. Another reason is that it gets the participants accustomed to analyzing and finding solutions for community problems they often have not realized that they can change.

The literacy part of the lessons hinges on what World Education calls a "key" word or phrase and the new letters therein. The image analysis and key word approach is an adaptation of the Frierien concept of codes: pictures and words used to initiate a critical analysis of a situation. In the classes in Guinea, however, because of the focus of the project and the limited amount of teacher training time available, the analysis rarely goes beyond the surface to the more political underpinnings of a problem.

Teaching words that relate to issues in the learners' civic lives is another deliberate choice borrowed

"hard" word: words that represent substantive issues in learners' lives are words worth teaching, regardless of their length or unfamiliar meaning. In addition, World Education's method doesn't make learners wait to read real words while they learn the alphabet. Moving directly into reading and writing words before the full alphabet is learned — a story, using words that include only the letters taught in lessons one to eight, begins in lesson eight — is motivating as well.

As for sequence, the challenge becomes determining what words or phrases to use to represent each topic, and in what sequence to put the topics. Each key word is the source of one or, at the most, two new letters. The sequencing of each word is of paramount importance. It's like doing three-dimensional tic-tac-toe. For example, the phrase in the first lesson is "be soodii defte," which means "purchase books." The first two letters are i and t. The phrase for the second lesson, "mahen suturaaji ka lekkol," which means "construct a latrine at school," contains i and t, and introduces two new letters: u and l. And so on. The same team of 30 teacher trainers and teachers worked with me to come up with appropriate illustrations and key words to introduce all the topics and all the letters of the alphabet. We shuffled and reshuffled words, moving words that provided high-frequency letters to early spots in the sequence, and moving those words with letters used less frequently in common vocabulary to later spots. Since we were actually creating the same curriculum in two languages, Pulaar and Malinke, we did it twice.

Learners in Guinea practice new literacy skills.

The learners are men and women who come to class after doing hard physical labor, gathering water and wood, cooking, and cultivating. It's hot outside, and even hotter in the classroom. The benches are hard. Knowing that class starts with an engaging, stimulating activity is

from Friere; it also honors the tradition of the Citizenship Schools, in which African Americans learned to read and write to pass the voter registration test, using the Constitution, among other texts. These schools emphasized problem solving and the idea that there is no such thing as a

Results

Once we were done, we had a curriculum: a scope and sequence — what would be taught and in what order. We also had materials, in the form of a learner's book, and methods, captured in the teachers' book. The

course is being given now in more than 200 villages. I'm writing this article in Dabola, Guinea, during a week of in-service workshops for 29 of the volunteer teachers and 11 teacher trainers responsible for supporting all the volunteer teachers. The impact of the course on communities and community members is already noticeable. Parents are giving their daughters less housework and more time to do homework, some girls have been enrolled in school based on what their parents learned in class, among other effects. Literacy skills have been put to use: tailors report writing down measurements (we also created a math course), parent association boards are keeping minutes of meetings, parents are checking their children's notebooks to make sure their children are being diligent in school.

While this approach to curriculum may not be my favorite — subject rather than learner focused, workbook-based rather than authentic — the curriculum, materials, and methods respond to the conditions in which they are used and to the resources of those who use them. In addition, the content of the curriculum is just what the learners want. Many of them are members of parent association boards. Their pleas for a literacy course that would enable them to do their jobs as parent association members were what caused us to create the course in the first place.

About the Author

Barbara Garner is the editor of *Focus on Basics* and a co-editor of NCSALL's *Annual Review of Adult learning and Literacy.* A former ABE and ESOL teacher, teacher trainer, and materials development specialist, she is also responsible for World Education's literacy work in Africa. ❖

Not By Curriculum Alone

This ABE program found that the class schedule needed to change to support curriculum changes

by Mary Lynn Carver

Over the past decade, as a teacher of beginning level adult basic education (ABE), I rarely had a semester in which I didn't feel frustrated. The students just weren't "getting it." I work for the College of Lake County (CLC) in Grayslake, Illinois, and for the Waukegan Public Library Literacy program's Adult Learning Connection (ALC). Adult Learning Connection is a coalition of the Waukegan Public Library, CLC, and the Literacy Volunteers of Lake County. For years, CLC's ABE classes followed a very general curriculum. CLC developed a loosely organized set of competencies in 1995, but never turned them into a full curriculum. We teachers were free to be as creative as we wanted, with minimal guidance as to specific materials or methodologies. We used the best methods available to us, but we all had high drop out rates and saw little measurable student progress, especially with learners who tested into our beginning level (0.0 to 3.9 grade level equivalent on the Test of Adult Basic Education [TABE]). We wanted to address the drop out rate and find a more effective way to serve beginning level reading students.

Teachers were not the only ones feeling frustrated. The ALC-trained volunteer tutors, who worked one on one with students or in classrooms, expressed concern that their students were not progressing quickly enough. The literacy program staff decided to start looking for ways to improve, thereby embarking on a reflective process in which we are still engaged.

Learning from Others

We started, about eight years ago, by talking to people who seemed to succeed where we were failing. At the Illinois *New Readers for New Life* conference, we connected with students from other programs who had success in learning to read. We participated in electronic discussion lists on the Internet and began networking with other programs. An awareness of what we might be missing began to grow. We met John Corcoran, author of *The Teacher Who Couldn't Read,* on a guest author visit at the Waukegan Public Library. John overcame his decades-long struggle to become a reader using the techniques featured in the Wilson Reading System methodologies and the Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes. He attended our annual tutor conference as a guest, and directed us to Meg Schofield, of the Chula Vista Public Library in California. Meg is a literacy practitioner who was trained in both the Wilson Reading System and the Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes. She has effectively translated both those systems into her practice with adults who have low literacy levels. Another former literacy student who has become an activist in the field of adult literacy, Archie Willard, also pointed us

towards the Wilson Reading System when we met at a conference later that year.

ALC staff began to read the work of Dr. Reid Lyon, Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. In a 1997 address before Congress, Dr. Lyon stated: "What our NICHD research has taught us is that in order for a beginning reader to learn how to connect or translate printed symbols (letters and letter patterns) into sound, the would-be reader must understand that our speech can be segmented or broken into small sounds (phoneme awareness) and that the segmented units of speech can be represented by printed forms (phonics). This understanding that written spellings systematically represent the phonemes of spoken words (termed the alphabetic principle) is absolutely necessary for the development of accurate and rapid word reading skills." Since his research focuses on how a beginning reader acquires the reading process, we wondered if it would apply to adults. In 1995, the research on how adults learn to read was sparse at best, so we were exploring new territory when it came to what might work for them. The research on children provided a glimpse into what we wanted, but it wasn't enough.

We asked our students: "What do you think we aren't doing?" As coassessors of their learning, they knew what they didn't know, which was how to "figure out words right." As we learned more about the sub-skills of reading and specific techniques for teaching those with learning disabilities, we began to understand what they meant. Financed by a combination of personal, grant-funded, and volunteer donations, various staff members participated in such training opportunities as attending sessions on the Orton-Gillingham method, a

phonemics-based program; participating in an overview of the Wilson Reading System, a multisensory, phonemics-based program organized around the six syllable types; and spending two weeks in California at a training on the Lindamood-Bell system, useful for helping students acquire an awareness of individual sounds in words.

Over the years, staff turned to the National Institute for Literacy's web site (www.nifl.gov) for reliable resources on reading research; we also

> **"We started...
> by talking to people
> who seemed to
> succeed where
> we were failing."**

scoured professional reading and learning disability journals such as the *Journal of Reading* and *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy.* We looked at information provided by Equipped for the Future and NCSALL's *Focus on Basics.* One staff member participated in the "Bridges to Practice" training offered by the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, which covered assessment of learning disabilities, planning, teaching, and fundamentals of the teaching and learning process.

Changes Begin

In 1997, the ALC offered experienced tutors two 2-day seminars with Meg Schofield. She came to Illinois from California in the middle of a Chicago winter to share her expertise on specific strategies to incorporate phonemic awareness into our teaching. Four of our literacy program staff are also employed by the college to teach the beginning level ABE classes. This

creates consistency between the two organizations and also coordinates much of what the ALC does with the CLC ABE program. About 20 volunteer tutors and two or three CLC ABE teachers who taught the lowest-level ABE classes and ALC staff attended the sessions. Our goal was to pull together everything we had learned to this point and effectively revise our program so that we could move students from one-on-one tutoring sessions into our ABE classes.

We wanted the learners to be able to transition smoothly and have consistency between the literacy program methods and the techniques used in the classes. At that time, we were looking at phonemic awareness as an additional tool to use in the classes. The reaction of the tutors to the training was positive and their enthusiasm and conviction that this was the missing piece of our instruction helped the learners accept the "new" methods we started to incorporate.

Two or three years later, we realized that a curriculum change needed to be our next step. The ALC tutors and staff were having success with their individual students. It was time to expand. One of the first changes ALC staff incorporated was how we think about what we teach (in class and in tutor training). Since 1997, we have been working to incorporate the development of phonemic awareness skills into the beginning reading (lowest) level classes and into the new tutor training program. With input from teachers at each level, we are beginning to implement these skills into the subsequent (midlevel) classes, another step towards our original goal of smoothing transitions for our learners.

The college agreed that it was necessary to update the curriculum for all ABE and General Educational Development (GED) levels. We now have three curriculum teams, each serving two levels of class. Each team

meets with the teams from the levels above and below them to discuss what skills should be covered at each level, what content is appropriate at each level, and what methods should be used at each level. The ABE curriculum teams consist of ALC staff who are teachers, and two midlevel ABE teachers who attended either the Meg Schofield or Wilson Overview training. They understand the underlying reasons behind what we are trying to do. The third team is made up of pre-GED and GED teachers who automatically have a more defined curriculum because of what they teach. By the time students reach those GED class levels, they should not need the same focus as lower ABE class levels.

Implementing Change

Going from being able to teach whatever you want to becoming structured and consistent has been a big change for teachers and tutors. Many students come in wanting to get their GED and find out that first they must learn to be better readers. It is still hard for me as a teacher to say, "You aren't ready yet, let's try this step first." Not everything has changed, however. Although my approach is more structured now, I still base my lesson plans on content in which my students have expressed interest. First we cover concepts, skills, and vocabulary, and then we apply it to that day's material. I get help from colleagues: with a small core of teachers, we find it easy to meet and brainstorm together, share materials and techniques, and help each other to refine ways in which to present different concepts.

Some learners are reluctant to try the multisensory techniques we now use, and a few students each term drop out. They often decide to try again. If they test back into my class,

I try to persuade them to stay and give these techniques a try. Other students tell them that these techniques are the best things that ever happened to them. The reluctant participants usually find that this approach to learning makes sense and provides them with the skills they need in order to progress.

Changes to Assessment

Some students come to us through the college's placement testing system, and many are referred to the literacy

> **"**Going from being able to teach whatever you want to becoming structured and consistent has been a big change for teachers and tutors.**"**

program by their local library, via the Illinois Employment and Training Center, or by word of mouth. ALC staff administer the state-mandated Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT). Based on our new knowledge, if a student seems to struggle with vowel sounds and decoding, we decided to administer a modified version of the Wilson Assessment of Decoding and Encoding (WADE). This gives us an idea if the student understands sound/symbol relationships. If they do not understand them, we match them with a specially trained "Quick Start" tutor, who works to familiarize them with the alphabetic principle, short vowels, and consonants. When a student has an understanding of how the sound/symbol system works, we match them with another tutor. Our goal is to move them eventually into a beginning-level ABE class. We find that students experience the most

success if they come into class aware of the 44+ phonemes, six syllable types, and other fundamentals of the Wilson and Lindamood systems. When students leave the beginning reading level, they should have mastered all 44+ phonemes and closed syllables, and be familiar with the other syllable types. For some students, this may take only eight to 16 weeks. For others, who may have undiagnosed learning differences, it may take years.

In the next three class levels, (roughly equal to levels 2.0 to 7.4 on the TABE), students continue to master the remaining syllable types, prefixes, and suffixes. For students continuing from the beginning reading level, it provides an easier transition; for newer students, it is an introduction to the concepts. Included in all levels of curriculum are strategies for reading, writing, infographic interpretation, sight words, critical thinking, and computer skills. Students apply the phonemic awareness and word structure principles to reading materials in all class levels.

Delivery System Change

The ABE classes offered through the college are traditionally 48 or 96 classroom hours per semester. This translates to two classes a week, for three hours each, for eight or 16 weeks, with a five-day gap between weekly classes. By the time beginning reading level students returned the next week, they had forgotten much of what was covered. The Lindamood-Bell model requires a *minimum* of two hours a day, for five days a week, for extended periods of time. A curriculum change wasn't going to be enough; we needed to re-examine our delivery system. While we could never provide the intensity required by Lindamood-Bell, we wondered if a four-morning format would improve our learners' success rates.

Beginning in the fall semester of 2002, for one beginning reading class section, the college approved a pilot class with an intensive format. We changed the morning beginning reading level class to a six-week, four-morning per week, two-hour per day session. Since we still had to work within the 48-hour parameters, we requested two six-week sessions per semester for a total of 96 instructional hours.

Results

These changes seem to have been successful. The attendance rates of the students have increased (see Student Retention graph). The standardized SORT assessments have shown improvements over the test class's six month period from September, 2002, to March, 2003 (see Pre/Post test graph). Aside from quantitative measurements, the learners give us feedback on how well this format is working for them. Coming every day gives them a feeling of belonging, in addition to providing repetition and reinforcement of what they are learning. The work they do in a structured, predictable format helps them to build on their own achievements. Their self-confidence has increased as evidenced by their writing and reading. They write about being more confident at work, helping their kids with homework, even volunteering to read in public. These are students with 0.0 to 3.9 reading levels (as measured by the TABE), who have struggled for decades to hide what they didn't know. They are now willing to take more risks with their learning, and they decide what topics we will learn about next. They are truly partners in their own educational process.

It has not been easy to implement such a substantial change. The amount of material we want staff and volunteers to know requires significant

Student Retention
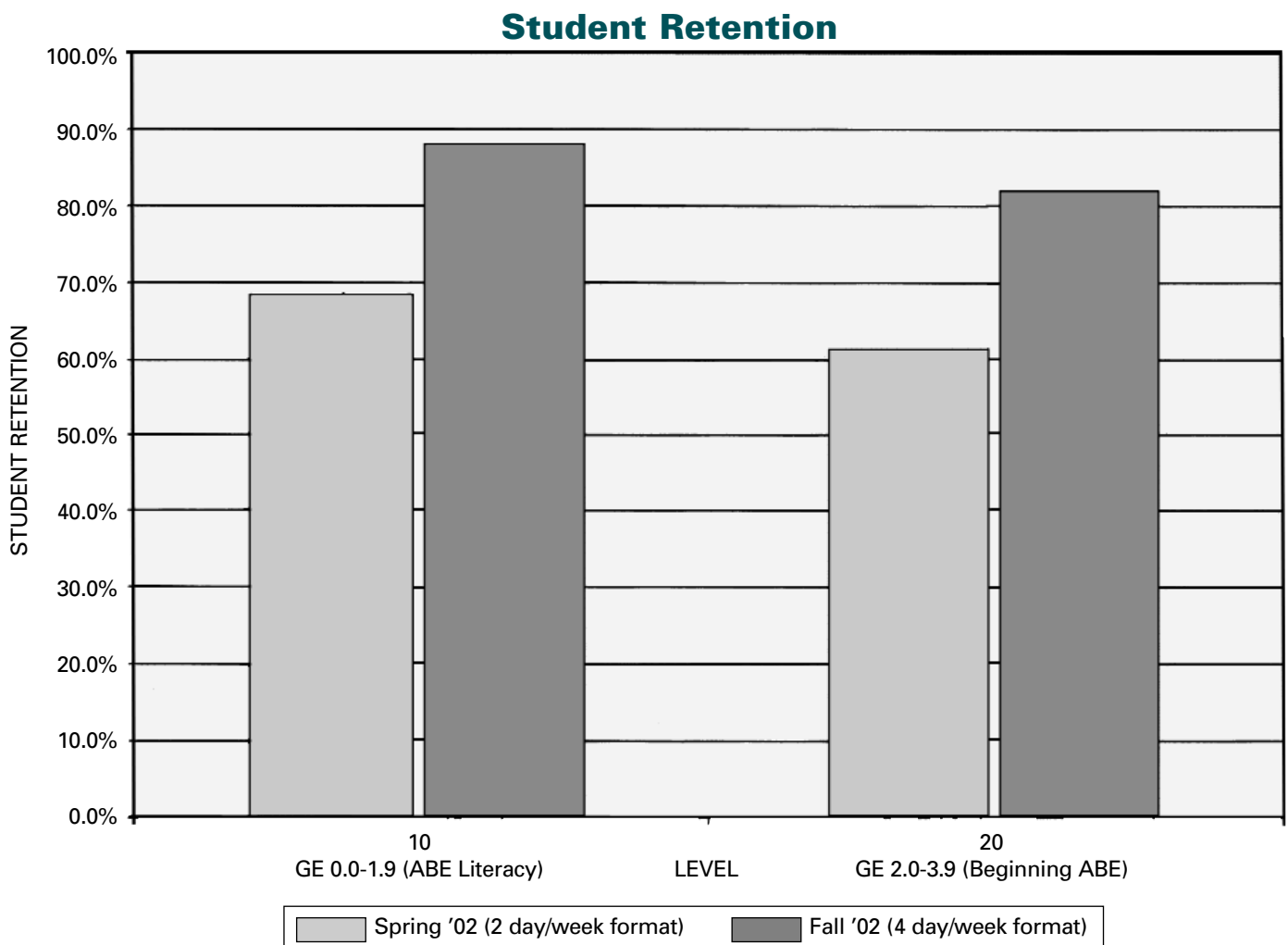
This compares attendance information from this class (24 students total) in the Spring Semester to the same class with the four-day-a-week format in the fall, 2002. While we were using phonemic awareness principles in the two-day class, too much time elapsed between sessions and students were not feeling (or testing) progress. By switching to the four-day format, we were able to provide more intensity and students reported they felt like they were learning more.

training time. Three hours of our program's initial tutor training introduces phonemic awareness. Tutors are also offered phonemic awareness workshops as part of a series of monthly tutor in-service training sessions run by ALC staff. Our staff has learned that the volunteer tutors need continuing support to facilitate or maintain confidence and consistency in their tutoring. Many tutors start out in a classroom with one of the paid instructors for extra training and practice, before being confident enough to work one on one with a student. We have invested in books and materials, including sets of the Wilson Reading System, magnetic journals, sound cards, and 8 x 11

inch white boards and markers for classroom use.

Developing a curriculum that works is an evolutionary process. Eight years ago, we had no long-range plan. ALC was committed to implementing a new program component and, as resources became available, took each subsequent step. We have found that direct, systematic teaching of phonemic awareness and word structure seems to be an essential component of ABE curriculum. A change in schedule was also important. We are currently mapping out our new curriculum. Our final document will provide the skills, strategies, methods, and materials appropriate for each level of student instruction, and be

the basis for teachers to plan their lessons. We hope that specific skills and competencies will be taught using student-generated topics of interest. Even when it is done, we will continue to attend professional development events and adult literacy conferences and incorporate new information as it becomes available.

Students have repeatedly remarked, "Why didn't someone show us this a long time ago?" We remind them we are all learning together. A successful curriculum is not static. It must keep changing as we learn new ways to present information and as we build on new research findings. Since including phonemic awareness in every aspect of my teaching, and since

Test Scores (SORT)
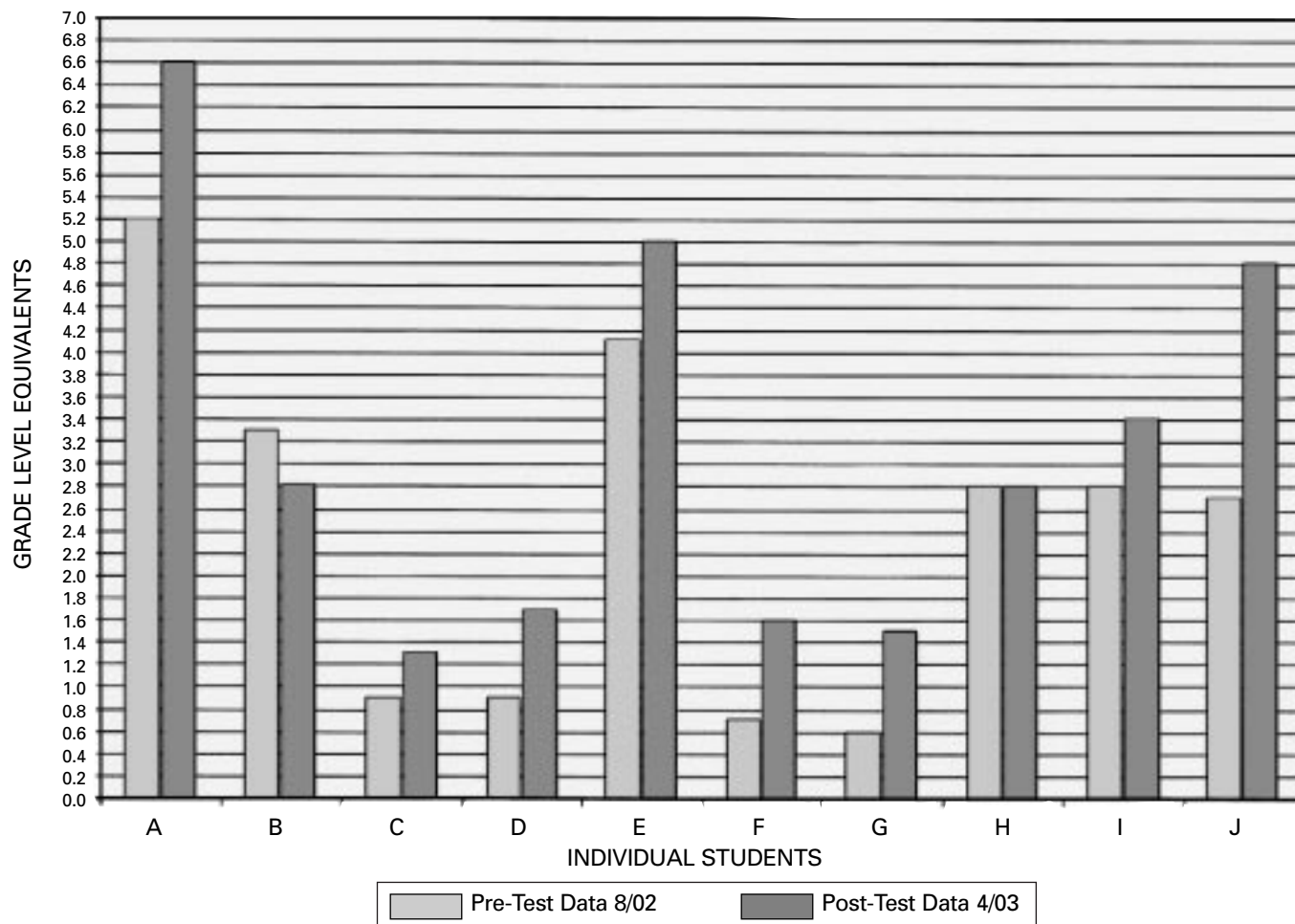
Data compares individual students pre/post test scores in one semester of the four-morning per week format. These are results over two semesters for this class only.

changing our calendar, I have not felt
as frustrated. The students are getting
it. We are all disappointed that the
end of term comes so quickly.

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The Orton-Gillingham Program,
Academy of Orton-Gillingham, P.O Box
234, Amenia, NY 12051-0234.

The Wilson Reading System, *Wilson
Language Training,* 175 West Main St.,
Millbury, MA 01527-1441; telephone
(508) 865-5699; fax (508) 865-9644.
http://www.wilsonlanguage.com

LiPS- Phoneme Sequencing Program,
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See *Focus on Basics* Volume 5A, August,
2001, on First Level Learners, for more
information on the methods the CLC
incorporated into its curricula.

About the Author

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for ALC volunteer tutors. ❖

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With LINCS as a starting point, you can also go, via regional LINCS, to individual state's Web sites, many of which have curricula available to download. Maine's ABE staff development center's Website has a report on their statewide curriculum development process, including a rubric on what constitutes quality curriculum. http://www. umaine.edu/call/profdev/ curriculumdev.html

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Mary E. Curtis and Ann Marie Longo
(Volume 1, Issue B, May 1997)

Developing Materials and Curriculum
Char Ullman and Aliza Becker
(Volume 1, Issue D, December 1997)

Additional Resources on ESOL and Curriculum by Heide Wrigley

Wrigley, H. (1993). "One size does not fit all: Educational perspectives and program practices in the U.S." *TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 3,* Autumn, 49-465.

Wrigley, H. (2004, in press). "We are the world: Serving language minority adults in family literacy programs." In Wasik, B.H. (ed.), *Handbook on Family Literacy: Research and Services.* Mawhaw, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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