Teaching for Communicative Competence
Interaction in the ESOL Classroom

by Donna Moss

*T*he 20 students in the intermediate-level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class were sitting at round tables in small groups. They had been studying English in the context of communicating on the telephone. In a pre-topic needs assessment, the students identified situations that are particularly difficult for them when they talk on the telephone. Talking to the obstetrician-gynecologist (two young women were pregnant), talking to the pharmacist, ordering take-out food, and calling a child's school to report absences

Welcome!

Adult basic education (ABE) programs use a variety of modes of delivery: group, individualized, and online instruction; one-on-one tutoring; permutations of all of these; and probably a few others I've never heard of. In preparing this issue of *Focus on Basics*, I was struck by how little empirical evidence has been gathered on the relative impact of the different modes of delivery. At the same time, it was pleasant to find that three authors, when writing about the modes of delivery they use, explained them through the lens of building learners' reading skills.

In our cover story, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teacher Donna Moss, of Arlington, VA, reviews the research on the important role that interaction plays in enabling learners to acquire a second language. She includes suggestions on how to structure group instruction to give learners opportunities for rich language interaction. Susanne Campagna's ABE students spend most of their time in group instruction in their Springfield, MA, program, but once a week she limits their interaction and focuses them on sustained silent reading. By doing so, her students build their reading fluency and explore content areas of interest to them (page 8). Teacher Susan Watson, who is based in Kentucky, writes about the struggle she faced in luring her students from individualized instruction into group-based book clubs. Once they made the switch, they haven't looked back, and their reading skills continue to flourish (page 10).

On page 13, Mary Ann Corley provides an overview of differentiated instruction (DI): an approach to group instruction through which teachers offer multiple avenues via which their learners can master material. Teacher Catherine Saldana was struggling to meet the needs of her multilevel class in San Bernadino, CA, when she heard about DI and decided to try it. Find out how it worked for her class on page 17.

The Ahrens Learning Center, in Jefferson County, KY, combines group and individualized instruction. Staff joined me for a discussion of why and how they do this; turn to page 19 for this conversation. Perrine Robinson-Geller writes about individualized instruction, its probable origin in the 1960s, and its strengths and weaknesses, in the article on page 24. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy researcher Hal Beder discusses his research on learner engagement, which he describes as students "working hard" — an important component of (but not synonymous with) learning. He also shares what his research team learned about individualized instruction in the course of their research. See the article on page 27.

Will Summers has been a volunteer tutor in Illinois for nine years; Marianne Buswell has tutored learners as teacher for Vermont Adult Learning for eight. They describe their experiences in the articles on pages 30 and 36, respectively. Mary Dunn Siedow fills out this picture of tutoring with the theory behind it, the pros and cons, and how best to support tutors, in the article that begins on page 32.

Marisol Richmond, Marian Thacher, and Paul Porter teamed up to evaluate online instruction in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in California. They share their experiences: advanced intermediate ESOL learners with prior computer knowledge seemed to fare best using this mode of delivery. Read more about it on page 38.

All the articles in this issue highlight the importance of the teacher in making each and every mode of delivery work well for learners. We hope that this *Focus on Basics* encourages you to experiment with different modes of delivery and enables you to ensure that the mode of delivery you now use works well for your learners.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner

Barbara Garner
Editor

Communicative Competence

were high on the list. The teacher began the lesson by saying that she had to call her auto mechanic to make an appointment to have him check out a problem with her car. The teacher asked the class to help her plan for the telephone conversation by suggesting what she should say and predicting possible responses and questions from the mechanic. After the class helped her plot a possible conversation scenario on a worksheet, the students worked in small groups according to their own topic interests and plotted scenarios for telephone conversations. Four students were in the "ordering take-out" group.

Juan: Okay, who writes?
Ahmed: Sana is good. Sana, you write.
Sana: Okay. I write the paper. You tink. [laughs]
Bun: Huh?
Sana: I write. You tink… [She points to her head]. Tink!
Ahmed: Oh! Think. Th…it's th. Think.
Sana: Yeah.
Juan: You need 'th.' Think.
Sana: Okay. I write. You THink!

The two pregnant women worked together.
Monica: My doctor she…uh… doesn't speak Portuguese.
Dalia: Same my doctor, she don't speak Arabic.
Monica: I need say when I have …um…um…the pain. The doctor…she told me the way. I forgot.

Dalia: The pain?
Monica: Yeah. The pain … the pain before the baby.
Dalia: Eh! Pain. Teacher, can you help me? How do you say pain for the baby in English?
Teacher: Pain for the baby? The baby has pain?
Monica: No. No. When I have to call doctor and say the pain before the baby. It's special pain for the mother… for pregnant.
Teacher: Contractions?

Monica: Yes, contraction.
Teacher: Contractions.
Monica: Yes. Thank you. How you…do you spell it?

Perhaps you read the scenarios and realized that you have heard similar conversations between learners in your classes when they were working in groups. Group instruction is not new to many of us who teach ESOL. It makes sense to give language learners an opportunity to talk with others in the target language. Research also supports the idea that interaction aids in second language acquisition (SLA). This article discusses what research has to say about the role of interaction in SLA, ways to provide interaction opportunities, challenges in providing these opportunities, and types of activities that foster interaction.

Changing Views

Notions about how best to teach adult English language learners have changed over the years and have been influenced by research in how second languages are learned. Today, perhaps the most accepted instructional framework in adult ESOL education is communicative language teaching (CLT). The goal of CLT is to increase communicative competence, which means being able to understand and interpret messages, understand the social contexts in which language is being used, apply the rules of grammar, and employ strategies to keep communication from breaking down (Savignon, 1997). With CLT, instructional emphasis shifted from grammar translation, memorization of dialogues, and drills and practice of structural patterns to using language in real-life contexts for meaningful purposes (Savignon, 2001). Grammar practice with drills can be appropriate at certain times, but CLT demands authentic use of language, which means people interacting with other people.

The primary principle underlying CLT is that language learners need opportunities to use the language in authentic conversations. After all, daily life requires people to communicate in a wide range of contexts for many diverse purposes. This interactive view of language teaching has its roots in SLA research studies that have examined how interactions contribute to SLA (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003). Studies report how negotiation of meaning — an exchange between a speaker and listener to solve a comprehension problem — affects what learners produce (Ellis, 1999; Pica, 2003). Researchers have

Interactive Classroom Activities

A number of activities for pairs and small groups foster interaction and focus on meaningful communication (Ellis, 1999). Some activities have very specific guidelines and parameters; others are more loosely constructed. In interactive classroom instruction, a variety of activities is used depending on the lesson goals and objectives. These activities include, but are not limited to, information gap, ordering and sorting, jigsaws, conversation grid, problem solving, and discussions.

INFORMATION GAP activities are widely used in ESOL instruction. At the most basic level, two people share information to complete a task. In one-way information gap activities, one person has all the information (e.g., one learner gives directions to a location and the other plots the route out on a map). In two-way gap activities, both learners have information to share to complete the activity. Two-way information gap activities have been shown to facilitate more interaction than one-way information gap tasks (Ellis, 1999).

JIGSAWS are highly interactive activities that require learners to pool their information to complete a task. For example, in a jigsaw reading activity, learners work together in small groups to unscramble a text. A text is cut into logical chunks and the group works together to put the text back into the proper sequence. Learners use their background knowledge and their knowledge of the language to put the text back together. The interaction among learners often includes questions, explanations, and requests for clarification.

CONVERSATION GRID ACTIVITIES work well for beginning-level learners. They provide learners with an opportunity to practice gathering and giving the same information over and over again, thus helping to build automaticity. They also provide learners with a chance to negotiate meaning. For example, to review asking and answering personal identification questions in a family literacy class, learners can speak to classmates to gather information and complete a table such as the one below.

First name	Last name	Child's grade	Child's teacher's name

The number of rows can vary depending on how many interviews you want students to conduct.

A conversation may ensue such as:

Ana: What's your first name?
Marta: Marta
Ana: Spell, please
Marta: M-A-R-T-A
Ana: M-A (student writes the letter E)
Marta: M-A…A…no E

And so on.

ORDERING and **SORTING** activities include classification, ranking, and sequencing (Willis, 1996). For example, in a discussion about talking to children about drugs and alcohol, parents are given cards with statements such as, "beer is not alcohol," or "the legal drinking age is 21." Learners work in pairs or small groups and must put the cards in either the "True," "False," or "I'm not sure" pile. To complete the task, learners have to discuss their choices, provide explanations for them, and achieve consensus (Siteki, 2004).

PROBLEM-SOLVING activities work at all levels. Learners work in small groups and discuss issues that are relevant to their lives, such as finding ways to use English outside the class, or how to plan a budget for a family of five. Problem-solving groups work well when each member of the group has a specific role and the tasks are clearly set out for them. Learners use language to communicate for real reasons: to explain their ideas, make suggestions, and, finally, reach a consensus.

For beginning-level learners, problem-solving activities can be created using picture prompts or picture stories that deal with everyday problems that adults commonly confront. Using the language experience approach, learners tell the teacher what is happening in each picture and the teacher writes what they say (Singleton, 2002). After the story is established, learners can make suggestions about how characters in the story can solve their problems. (See http://www.cal.org/caela/health/ for examples of problem-solving picture stories related to health issues.)

DISCUSSIONS, which are an obvious way to promote interactions, can be about almost anything, from cultural issues, education, learning English, to current events and "hot" topics. Discussions seem deceptively easy to set up, but they require preparation and thought so that they run smoothly and learners get the most out of the exchange of ideas. The purpose of the discussion should be made very clear to the learners. The benefits of small-group discussions on language development should also be made clear to them: they are an opportunity to practice listening for main ideas and details, build vocabulary, use English to explain and elaborate, and use strategies to keep the conversation from breaking down. It is also helpful to set time limits, assign roles and responsibilities, and debrief with the whole group after the discussion. ❖

studied interactions between native speakers and language learners as well as interactions exclusively between language learners. They have also examined social interaction between individuals and the interaction that occurs in our minds (e.g., the interaction among our knowledge of the first and second languages, the content and context of a message, and our background knowledge). (See Ellis, 1997, 1999; Gass & Selinker, 1994, for in-depth discussions of different theoretical perspectives.)

A growing body of research seems to show that interaction plays an important role in learning a second language (Ellis, 1999). Understanding the concept of interlanguage, which is language spoken by nonnative speakers, is key to understanding the research on interaction.

"The basic assumption in SLA research is that learners create a language system, known as an interlanguage (IL). This system is composed of numerous elements, not the least of which are elements of the NL (native language) and TL (target language). There are also elements of the IL that do not have their origins in either the NL or the TL. What is important is that the learners themselves impose structure on the available linguistic data and formulate an internalized system" (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 11).

In other words, interlanguage periods are transitional and systematic. They follow rules and change over time as learners learn more about the new language.

Language learners make changes in their interlanguage when they recognize that changes need to be made. SLA research (Swain, 1995) seems to support the argument that language learners' interactions with native speakers and more proficient nonnative speakers positively affect the process of interlanguage

development. During interaction, learners may notice things about their language use that do not match a native speaker's or more proficient nonnative speaker's use. During interactions, communication may break down and the listener may let the speaker know of the confusion by asking for clarification, confirmation, repetition, or by correcting the speaker. The speaker may respond by changing the message in some way in order to make it understandable. Both the listener and the speaker are actively involved in the negotiation

> **"***…the teacher is responsible for providing opportunities for interaction in which learners control the topics and discourse.***"**

of meaning (Long, 1996). One of the participants in the interaction may be a native speaker or a nonnative speaker at a higher proficiency level than the other participant(s) and may provide assistance during the interaction. In other interactions, participants may all be language learners who construct knowledge of the language through both their successful and unsuccessful attempts at communication.

Consider the conversation samples at the beginning of this article. In the first sample, Bun does not understand what Sana means when she says "tink," so Sana modifies her messages by adding a gesture. Ahmed points out to Sana that she has mispronounced the word, so she modifies her pronunciation. In the second sample, Monica is searching for the word "contractions" and she elicits Dalia's aid by attempting to define the word. Dalia cannot supply the word, so she asks the teacher for help. Dalia tries to define the word, but the teacher doesn't understand. Monica revises

her earlier definition and the teacher is able to supply the word. Monica immediately recognizes it as the one she heard from her doctor. These samples illustrate exchanges that can help build knowledge of the new language.

Although researchers continue to research and debate the effects of interaction on SLA, they generally agree that it plays an important role in promoting acquisition. For teachers, the question becomes how to incorporate interaction into instruction effectively.

Creating an Interactive Classroom

Interactive language instruction involves the teacher and learners engaging in activities that create conditions that foster language use, which lead to further language development.

First and foremost, the teacher is the initiator of interaction. That does not mean that the teacher is always in control of the discourse, such as in models where the teacher initiates, the students respond, and the teacher provides feedback. It means that the teacher is responsible for providing opportunities for interaction in which learners control the topics and discourse (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 1999). Research seems to suggest that language acquisition is aided when learners have control of the discourse topics and the discourse (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 1999). This supports what teachers believe to be good ESOL practice: selecting content and classroom activities, based on learners' needs and interests, that are suitably challenging and promote language development (Florez & Burt, 2001). To create conditions for effective interactions in the classroom, teachers ideally do the following:
• Plan lessons that are logically sequenced and that provide proper

scaffolding — the instructional support that enables learners to make a leap in knowledge or skill — so that learners can be successful in their interactions (Florez & Burt, 2001).

- Release control and step out of the role of class leader. Teachers let learners take the initiative for interactions, experiment freely, and take risks with the language.
- Facilitate learner-to-learner interactions by monitoring and providing assistance when students request it or when students are unable to repair communication breakdowns on their own.
- Initiate and sustain interaction by using a variety of questions ranging from knowledge questions (e.g., yes/no; choice; or who, what, where, and why questions) to evaluation questions (e.g., opinion questions).
- Understand that interaction does not necessarily mean that student participation is always verbal. Sometimes students learn by listening to others interact.
- Recognize that regular use of pair and small group work promotes interaction.
- Effectively implement group work.
- Teach learners strategies to negotiate meaning (e.g., ask for clarification, paraphrase, and use circumlocution).

To create effective interactions, teachers ideally also know when it is appropriate to talk about language and when it is appropriate to let learners use language, and how to balance fluency and accuracy work. Research suggests that there is an appropriate time and place for form-focused instruction and that direct grammar instruction can help acquisition for some learners (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Research seems to suggest that grammar instruction is most effective when it is focused on raising learners' awareness of how a structure is formed, what it means, and how it is used rather than on practicing drills for accuracy (Ellis,

1999; Long, 2000). Learners gain more understanding by processing what they hear and read into their interlanguage than learning an isolated grammar rule followed by pattern practice (Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

Challenges

Interactive language instruction may be new for some learners. Learners may have expectations of how instruction should proceed based on their experience with school-based education and previous language instruction. For these reasons, discussing with learners the benefits of and the rationale for having them interact with each other during class time, in meaningful discourse, is difficult but important. Teachers can begin the discussion by brainstorming with learners the things they do that help them learn English. Teachers can introduce the phrase "use it or lose it!" and learners can be asked to talk about what it means. What are ways for learners to use language in the classroom?

The classroom setup can hinder or enhance interaction opportunities. If the desks are in neat rows with everyone facing the chalk board and the teacher, learner-to-learner interactions are more difficult to initiate. Round tables, desks arranged in small groups, or even a semicircle of desks help make interactive tasks easier.

Interactive activities need to be managed well and the teacher needs to stay engaged throughout, even when learners are working in pairs and small groups. Teachers need to be ready to facilitate and provide resources for learners. It is important to spend time listening to learners talking. Teachers may hear something that the whole group would be interested in talking about when the class debriefs, or they may discover vocabulary problems or problems with learners' use of a grammar form that is causing communication breakdowns. These problems can be addressed later

during a time in class, when it is more appropriate to focus on accuracy.

To make interaction meaningful and effective, teachers need to know their students well. Which students work well with which other students? Are there individuals who would not be comfortable working with each other? What are the learners' goals, interests, and expectations? What do they want to get from the class? Interactive opportunities will flourish in classrooms where there is a sense of trust and community. This begins with the teacher and the teacher's interactions with learners. Brown (2001) suggests that teachers can create positive relationships by showing interest in students, encouraging learners to voice their ideas and feelings, valuing what learners think and say, having a sense of humor, providing feedback on progress, and praising good work.

In Conclusion

For many learners, the ESOL classroom is the one place they get to think about language, practice it, take risks with it, and reflect on their use of it. Providing learners with activities that nurture this exploration and that allow for interaction is important for language development and for preparing learners to use the language successfully when they leave the class environment. Not long ago, I was giving the BEST Plus, a standardized English language assessment, to a learner in my program. I asked her to tell me about something new she recently learned. I don't remember her exact words, but she started her answer by saying that every day she learned something new in her English class. She said that every time she talked to other learners in the class she learned new English words or she learned something new about American culture. Then she added that she learned new things every day because her teacher could explain things well. She said now she uses English every day after class. "Not

much, but step by step and every day."

When you prepare for your next class, think about interaction. Look at your lesson plans. What kinds of interactive activities did you choose to use? Why did you choose those activities? How will they help in language acquisition? Have you given learners enough preparation and support? What are they learning? By establishing interactive language instruction, ESOL teachers are setting up language learners for success.

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About the Author

Donna Moss is the family literacy specialist at the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Arlington, Virginia. She has been in adult ESOL education for more than 20 years as a teacher, curriculum developer, teacher trainer, and researcher. She was a contributing author of the *Collaborations: English in Our Lives* series from Heinle and Heinle. ❖

Sustained Silent Reading: A Useful Model

Inserting time for learners to do individualized reading was the right choice for a program that uses group instruction

by Susanne Campagna

Teaching reading, writing, and math while allowing learners to stay focused on their individual goals requires careful planning, excellent time management skills, and flexibility. This is no easy task when an instructor sees her students a mere 10.5 hours a week or less. So why, you might ask, would our program set aside an hour and a half of instructional time every week to have our students engage in sustained silent reading?

Read/Write/Now is a small library-based adult basic education (ABE) program in Springfield, MA, that was established in 1987 with a grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. We offer beginning to pre-GED group instruction, led by professional teachers and supported by trained volunteers, in a classroom setting. Classes are held in both the daytime and evening. We currently serve about 75 students who range in age from 18 to 70 years and come from many countries, including the United States, China, Guatemala, and Jamaica. When I began teaching at Read/Write/Now in 1992, the practice of having students read silently for sustained periods was already in place. I cannot take any credit for being innovative in this regard; however, I embraced this model.

Read/Write/Now's original purpose in setting aside sustained silent reading (SSR) time was to get students accustomed to reading, and to help them build fluency. This reasoning was supported by the research of Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (2001), who writes, "SSR is based upon a single simple principle: Reading is a skill — and the more you use it, the better you get at it" (p. 140). In the past few years, we have found that SSR also enables us to provide students with time to read the content they need to meet their individual learning goals: information about the Commercial Driver's License (CDL), for example, or child development, or the history or civics content needed to pass the citizenship test. We allot 45 minutes of class time, twice a week, for independent reading.

The Process

Our classes meet in a large, partitioned room in the Pine Point branch of the Springfield City Library. This space accommodates three classroom areas as well as a small computer lab. During independent reading time, every student is asked to spend that 45 minute session engaged in SSR. All classroom instruction ceases and talking among the students is minimal. Students can leave the classroom and find more comfortable reading chairs in the library but, for the most part, they opt to read at the table or in the computer lab using computer-assisted technology.

Our classrooms have a wealth of materials geared to the literacy levels of our students. Because our program is part of the library, we also have ready access to its resources. Teachers assist their students in finding books from our classroom library or the regular library. Book selection takes place at the beginning of the SSR time. We encourage learners who can independently select books from the library to check them out. Those who need help with book selection are generally assisted by their teacher and, on occasion, by the library staff. Books from the classroom are signed out so that they are available to learners until they have finished reading them. During the independent reading session, teachers briefly check in with each learner to answer questions or make changes if the reading materials selected seem too difficult or uninteresting. I try to find out whether a book is too difficult by asking students to keep count of the number of words they do not know on the first page of the book. If they write down more than five words and cannot give a simple summary of what they read, I suggest finding a less difficult text. For example, Read/Write/Now has several different versions of the Bible. One of my students chose a fairly difficult version to read. After just a few minutes, she closed the book and said, "I know these words, I just can't read them." I suggested she try *The Story of Jesus Part One* (1980), which is written at a much easier level and has an audio tape to accompany it. She was so thrilled to have access to this book that she asked me to order a copy for her to keep so she could reread it anytime. If something at a lower level cannot be easily found, accommodations can be made using a scanner and the computer, as detailed below. This does, however, require some extra preparation time, so the student may have to wait until the next SSR session to begin the book.

Technology Helps

Today almost every kind of printed document can be made accessible by using either tape recordings or software programs. Getting a learner's permit to drive is a common goal among our students. Because the reading level of the driver's manual is difficult, we recorded it so that students can listen to it on cassette tape. We also used commercially produced books with cassette tapes such as the *FYI* series by New Readers Press for CDL instruction, citizenship preparation, and learning about health topics. Students follow along in the text while listening to the cassette tape using headphones. In addition, we use a variety of computer software such as Read Please (www.readplease.com), Scan and Read Pro (www.incrediblehorizons.com/scan-read-pro.html), and CAST eReader (www.enablemart.com). These programs convert text into speech so that students at all levels can benefit from them. The software programs are installed on our computers so they can be used frequently. With Read Please or CAST eReader, students decide on a text document that can be opened on the computer. This includes on-line documents saved as text files, e-mail text files, Web pages, or word-processed files. First, the student opens the software program. Using the toolbar, the student opens a text document or cuts and pastes a document into the program. The program begins reading the print aloud when the student clicks on the play button. Using networked computers and individual headsets, a number of students can use these programs, each with different documents. Our students have used computer-assisted technology during SSR to prepare for the US citizenship interview or the CDL test, read articles from the newspaper, and read Bible passages.

About a third of our learners choose to read books on tape or

books from the *Start to Finish* series, a set created for literacy students (www.donjohnston.com). These books come with a cassette tape as well as a CD ROM. Students can listen to the book via computer or read the book on the computer screen without sound. However, if they come to an unknown word or phrase, they have the option to select it and listen. Students read independently, but can access sound immediately so that comprehension is not lost.

Reading for Pleasure

Some students do not identify mastering certain subject matter as one of their reading goals, saying, instead, that they want to read a book from beginning to end. "I want to read like 'other people' read," is another common response to the intake question "Why do you want to read better?" Reading for pleasure is one way in which other people read, and is how some students use their SSR time. Janice L. Pilgreen, author of *The SSR Handbook: How to Organize and Manage a Sustained Silent Reading Program* (2000), writes that "…for an SSR program to be of value to the students the silent reading periods should be between 15 and 45 minutes [and take

place] at least two times a week. This allows reading to become a habit and not just an academic exercise" (p. 14). Our SSR period gives our learners time to practice reading so that it can become a habit.

Overcoming Resistance

Many students begin our program with preconceived notions of how reading should be taught to them. Some of the Jamaican students, for example, spell out each letter of an unknown word because that is how they were taught to read. One of my students recently told me, "I can read, I just can't break down the words I don't know." Some students expect that instruction will focus on decoding words and reading out loud with the teacher's guidance and correction of every mispronounced word. Some have to be convinced that learning to read better requires active reading practice employing those skills taught in the group but practiced individually. Fortunately, most students do accept the theory that good readers read for a variety of purposes that require him or her to engage in silent reading. When working on goal-setting with students, I explain that the SSR session is an independent reading time during class for them to work on a self-identified goal. It is not a difficult model to explain, but often a student lacks the confidence in his or her ability to focus on print silently for the allotted time. Some feel uncomfortable with the expectation because it is a new and somewhat challenging experience. Others have expressed concern that their reason for being in school is to get reading instruction: if they could read by themselves, they would not be here. Winning over these skeptics isn't always easy, but it can be done. I find that making sure the learner has chosen a book that is accessible, interesting, and targets a goal he or she has set helps. Students who do well

with this model are often those who realize that they can make significant progress on their own goals during this time. When students make progress, they feel their time and efforts are being rewarded, especially when they reach their goals. The students are in control of what they read during the SSR session: while the session is mandatory, the choice of reading material is not, and therefore they can experience ownership of their own learning.

Conclusion

As a seasoned adult education instructor, I highly endorse the practice of using instructional time for SSR. Once students begin to experience success and accomplish their goals, they realize the positive impact that this reading session can make. We see continuing proof of this on our wall of accomplishments. Here we post photocopies of library cards, licenses, learner's permits, and other certificates of achievement our students have gained. Students keep copies in their personal portfolios as evidence of progress. They also keep a reading log of books that they have read. Students have shown evidence of learning in other ways as well. They participate in discussions, answer questions about what they have read, or write a list of questions to help them learn more about a particular topic. This is a model for success in our adult education program.

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About the Author

Susanne Campagna has been an ABE instructor at the Read/Write/Now Adult Learning Center in Springfield, MA, for more than 10 of her 20+ years in ABE. She has facilitated both a health team and student leadership team at her center. ❖

A Slow Conversion to Reading Groups

by Susan Watson

My first day at the Powell County Adult Education Program (PCAEP) began with an introduction to our one-room classroom/computer lab and the teaching resources that were available. I asked, "Where are the books?" The program had very few reading books, and those we had were mostly for beginners. So, I began my adult basic education (ABE) career in 1998 in rural Eastern Kentucky with few reading books to offer to students. I used some instructional money to purchase books, getting them from our textbook companies and a local, nationally known bookstore. The more books I gathered, the more frustrated I became. Students were checking them out and returning them unread. They were scoring below 500 in the reading subtest of the tests of General Educational Development (GED). The individualized approach we used, in which students worked on their own with intermittent help from an instructor, was not resulting in student achievement. That mode of delivery would certainly not work when we implemented state mandates to increase enrollment. Change was needed.

I took a graduate class to learn more about teaching reading. That class focused on k-12 reading instruction and encouraged the use of reading groups. One day in October, 2001, a new student walked through the door. She seemed ready to learn. Her Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores indicated that she needed reading instruction to meet her goal, which was to earn a GED. I thought about engaging her in some form of reading group, and decided that if I could not find other students willing to join a group, she and I would be the group. And so we were. She read every day for two weeks, and at the end of that period we discussed the book she had read. We did this for three weeks, reading and discussing eight books. After 40 hours of this, I retested her with a TABE: her reading level had increased four levels. This may not have been a valid test for gains, but it certainly had a tremendous psychological impact on her. She became very excited and wanted to read more and more. During her stay at the PCAEP she read an amazing total of 36 books! She was enrolled for three months, attending an average of three days a week for at least four hours a day. The reading level of the books she read went from easy to higher: from the Jesse Stuart readers *Old Ben* and *A Penny's Worth of Character* to *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver, and more.

No Interest

After this success, I desperately wanted to initiate reading groups, but it proved to be very difficult. Four or five students agreed to join, but only one showed up. I thought that the first student's results would help the

other students get excited about reading. This was not the case. I had to let go of the idea for awhile.

I again enrolled in a graduate class. The Kentucky Adult Educators Literacy Institute is a year-long, primarily online graduate-level course offered through three Kentucky universities and supported by the state adult education office. This class also covered reading groups, but this time for ABE students. I tried again, for a class project, to start reading groups in our program, but found that I was facing the same barriers as before: no students wanted to become involved, stating that they did not have time for it.

The graduate course was ending and I needed to do a group activity with students to complete an assignment. I gathered four students and begged them to participate. They agreed, telling me they would help me because I had helped them. We began the book group using *Women in the Material World,* by Faith D'Aluisio and Peter Menzel, which profiles women from many different cultures around the world. We compared and contrasted two women, one from the United States and the other from India. Other students listened in, crowded as we are in our single room, watching their fellow students' engagement in learning. They asked to be included in the next reading group.

Pivotal Moment

This was the pivotal moment. It was 2002, and this represented my first success in using group instruction with students. Most students later admitted that they were reluctant to be involved in a group (class) not because of time constraints, but because they were afraid of being

called on and feared they would not be able to answer a question. I began the new group with a book talk, during which I read the title of the book, displayed the book jacket, read the back of the jacket, and talked about the author. We discussed what we thought the book would be about and talked about what we would do during the reading group. I reassured them that I would not call on anyone unless they volunteered.

Since then, the students have been excited about coming to class and seldom miss a session. When group members are unable to attend,

Mary Paulette Sons, on the left, and author Susan Watson demonstrate that two participants are enough to start a reading group.

they either call or ask other students to let them know what the group did that day, so that they can do the reading or assignments at home. The reading group has grown from the one student with whom I started in 2001 to 14 who participate at least three times a week. We have discovered so much about reading. The students now understand how to preview a book, summarize what they have read, and write a reaction to what they have read or discussed. The books we choose are stories of trials and triumph. We have read *Life is So Good* by George Dawson with Richard Glaubman, *Ellen Foster Story* by Kate Gibbons, and *The Day No Pigs Would Die* by Richard Peck, which was a favorite of the students. Their most favorite books were *A*

Child Called It, The Lost Child, and *A Man Named Dave,* all by Dave Pelzer.

Impact on Academic Progress

The results from my most recent group of students demonstrate the effect on academics of the substantial amounts of reading the students do as part of the reading group. I retested the students to check on the gains they were making. We had been meeting as a reading group for about six weeks. Some students had made four- and five-level gains in reading.

Our students who are not involved in the reading groups do not usually demonstrate this kind of level gain in reading in such a short period of time. Something else was happening: their math scores were rising as well. The ability to read for information and to look critically at the reading was likely providing them with the tools needed to solve math reading problems, which is an area that almost all students had reported as being difficult. Students' GED test scores rose. Students who had taken the test and needed an increase in points in order to pass took the reading test again and made substantial gains in that area. In one student's case, the scores rose from 470 to 620 on the actual GED. Another student's GED score improved from 420 to 480.

One of the most exciting things that I witnessed since beginning reading groups happened when I was out of the room: a small group of the students went over to the bookshelf and discussed what book they would choose to read next. They talked about why they thought one book was going to be better than the other. They eventually decided that some of

them would read one title and the others another title, and then discuss the books with each other and decide who had actually chosen the best book. Students are now checking out books on a daily basis, and sharing what they read by doing book talks. Students who have never read books before are reading.

Practical Tips

I would advise teachers who are starting reading groups to provide more books than they think they will need. Often I thought I would only need a certain number of books, but did not have enough for all the students who wanted them. Gather books that have interesting content and are easy to read and discuss. Ask a librarian to recommend titles. We are in a rural community with a great history and many local writers, so I started the group with books by local authors because I thought my student would connect well with these authors' experiences. We moved on to books that provided a contrast to our community. I began our book collection by buying a small number of books with program instructional money. I also ask students to check out titles from the public library. I now run classroom sales so that the students can buy books inexpensively and I can earn points from the book company to purchase more classroom book sets.

Pictured with the group: Susan Watson, Jo Angel, Clara Henson, Janice Reddix, Helen Whittington (only her hair is visible), Luda Bishop, Betty Tucker, Judy Smith, and Mary Crowe.

Other Skills Also Improve

Group instruction has imparted to our learners skills they might not have gained working on their own from textbooks in the individualized instruction model. They seem to be more receptive to peers as well as more able to share and interact with them. Students sit with each other and talk about what we are going to do that day. They usually ask each other how far each has read into the book. Of course the greatest impact has been made on the increase in their skills and corresponding rise in test scores. We now offer group instruction in math, as well as our

reading groups. I am very eager to continue to move our entire student learning into groups.

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About the Author

Susan Watson is the Instructor/Program Coordinator for the Powell County Adult Education Program in Stanton, KY. Susan earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Eastern Kentucky University and also holds certifications as a reading specialist and teacher of gifted and talented. ❖

Ingredients for Successful Reading Groups

Harvey Daniels (2002, p. 18) lists 11 key ingredients of successful reading groups:

- Students choose their own reading materials.
- Small temporary groups are formed.
- Different groups read different books.
- Groups meet on a regular schedule.
- Participants use notes to guide their reading and discussion.
- Discussion topics come from the participants.
- Groups aim for natural conversations about books, so personal connections and open-ended questions are welcome.
- The teacher is a facilitator.
- Evaluation is by teacher observation and learner self-evaluation.
- A spirit of fun pervades the room.
- Readers share with their classmates when books are finished. ❖

# Differentiated Instruction
Adjusting to the Needs of All Learners

by Mary Ann Corley

*H*ow can classroom teachers maximize the learning potential of their adult basic education (ABE) students while, at the same time, attending to differences among them? Instead of expecting learners to adjust to the lessons they plan, teachers need to plan their lessons to adjust to the learners at hand. To do this effectively, teachers need to understand and know their learners, including their learners' current skill levels, strengths and challenges, interests and preferences, and needs and goals. The challenge is for teachers to ensure that the needs of all learners are equally valued and equally served. Differentiated instruction is an approach that does just this. This article defines differentiated instruction; describes ways in which teachers can differentiate content, process, and product; suggests instructional strategies; and outlines challenges in implementing differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction is an approach that enables teachers to plan strategically to meet the needs of every student. It is rooted in the belief that there is variability among any group of learners and that teachers should adjust instruction accordingly (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). It is the teacher's response to the diverse learning needs of his or her students.

Differentiated instruction has been a buzzword in k-12 education for the past two decades but has only recently gained ground in adult basic education. The cornerstone of differentiation is active planning: the teacher plans instruction strategically to meet learners where they are and to offer multiple avenues through
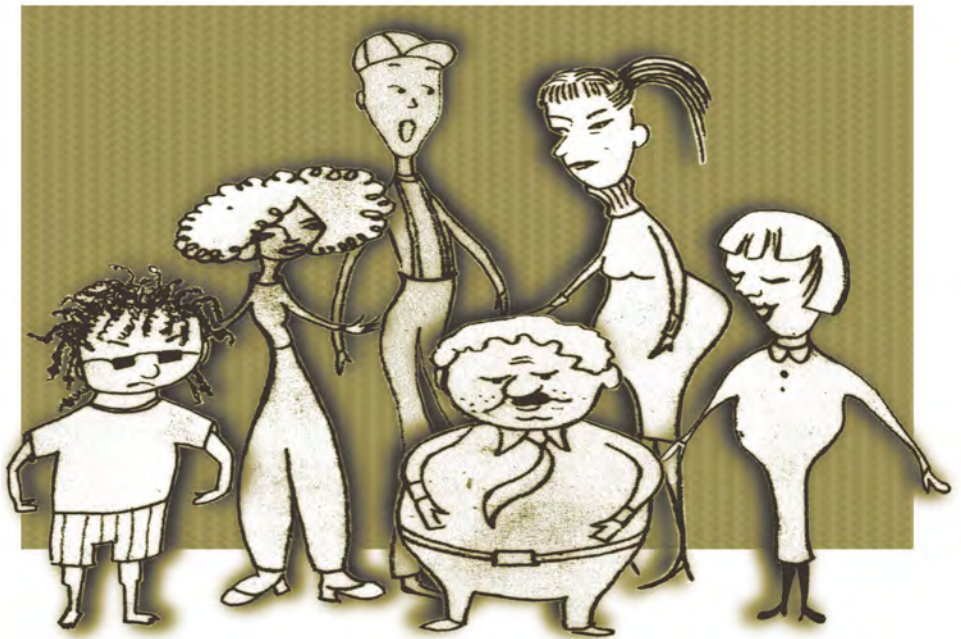
which they can access, understand, and apply learning. In differentiating lessons to be responsive to the needs of each learner, teachers must take into account not only what they are teaching (content), but also whom they are teaching (individual students). They need to know the varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of each of their students and then design learning options to tap into these three factors.

Evidence indicates that students are more successful in school and are more engaged if they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels (Vygotsky, 1986), their interests (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and their learning profiles (Sternberg et al., 1998). According to Tomlinson (2001, 2003), in adopting differentiated instruction, teachers try to address these three characteristics for each student.

Readiness

Readiness refers to a student's knowledge, understanding, and skill related to a particular sequence of learning. It is influenced by a student's cognitive proficiency as well as prior learning, life experiences, and attitudes about school. Readiness can vary widely over time, and according to topic and circumstance. As Tomlinson (2003) points out, if readiness levels in a class vary, so must the complexity of work provided. Tiered activities are one way to address readiness effectively; for example, all students study the same concept but complete activities appropriate to their readiness levels. Readiness also can be addressed through small group sessions or the provision of one-to-one teacher and peer support or coaching.

Focus on
Basics

Interest

Interest arises from topics that evoke curiosity and passion in students and in which they want to invest time and energy to learn about. When a student's interests are tapped, that student is more likely to be engaged and to persist in learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1962; Sousa, 2001; Wolfe, 2001).

Learning Profile

Learning profile refers to how a student learns best. Preferences for learning are shaped by learning style, intelligence preference, culture, and gender. Teachers differentiate by learning profile when they provide learning activities that offer students choices for demonstrating mastery of learning: journals, videotape presentations, role plays, oral histories, or project-based learning. When different modes of learning are offered and supported, more students successfully complete learning tasks (Campbell & Campbell, 1999; Sternberg et al., 1998).

Content and Process

In response to the learner characteristics of readiness, interest, and learning profile, teachers can differentiate, or modify, learning experiences in the three areas of content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). Content refers to what students need to learn: the major concepts, principles, and skills that are taught. All learners should be given access to the same content. Teachers should adjust the degree of complexity using diverse instructional processes to teach the content. In this way, all students learn the same concepts but in different ways.

Process refers to ways in which the content is taught: the activities that help students understand and eventually own the concepts and skills being taught. (For examples of processes, see the box to the left). The key to differentiating process is flexible grouping, in which learners are sometimes grouped by readiness levels, sometimes by interest, and sometimes by learning profiles. For example, an instructor might group learners with a similar readiness level for reading instruction and then regroup them by interest to discuss current events or a movie they have all viewed. By varying the groups in which learners participate, teachers prevent labeling learners as members of the "fast group" or the "slow group," thus encouraging a respect for difference among learners. This approach also supports the growth of a strong community of learners among everyone in the class. It would be difficult to differentiate instruction without using flexible grouping.

Products

Products allow students to demonstrate whether they have learned the key concepts and skills of a unit and to apply the learning to solve problems and take action. Different students can create different

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Techniques for Differentiating Instruction

To manage effectively the differentiation of process, teachers need to employ a range of instructional strategies (Tomlinson, 1999), such as:

- Setting up stations in the classroom where different learners can work simultaneously on various tasks. Such stations naturally invite flexible grouping.

- Having students set agendas, or personalized lists of tasks to complete in a specified time, usually two or three weeks.

- Structuring problem-based learning to have students actively solve problems, either individually or in small groups, much the same way that professionals perform their jobs (this also supports building a community of learners).

- Assigning tiered activities to allow learners to work on the same concepts but with varying degrees of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness.

- Using entry points (Gardner, 1994) so that learners can explore a topic through as many as five avenues: narrative (presenting a story), logical-quantitative (using numbers), foundational (examining philosophy and vocabulary), aesthetic (focusing on sensory features), and experiential (hands-on).

- Using choice boards from which learners can select one of several work assignments that are printed on cards and affixed to the choice boards.

- Employing compacting: teachers assess learners' knowledge and skills before beginning a specific unit of study and allow learners who do well on the preassessment to move on to more advanced work.

- Chunking, or breaking assignments and activities into smaller, more manageable parts, and providing more structured directions for each part.

- Encouraging students to use different tools to perform the same task: paper/pencil, manipulatives, computer.

- Using flexible pacing to allow for differences in students' ability to master the key concepts.

- Encouraging independent study for students who want to work on their own on topics of interest to them.

- Using portfolios as a means for reflecting on student growth over time.

products based on their own readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences (Tomlinson, 2001). Students should be given a choice of four or five products from which they may select to demonstrate mastery of learning. Students also may elect to work alone or in small groups on their products. Examples of products include a written report, an oral presentation, a group discussion on key concepts, a short book in which the key concepts are explained and described, a game centered around the characters and theme of a book, or an event planned within a specified budget. Products should be related to real problems, concerns, and audiences, and they should synthesize rather than summarize information.

Challenges and Conclusion

The greatest challenge to implementing differentiated instruction relates to time: the planning time that teachers need to assess learners' needs, interests, and readiness levels; to determine key concepts and organizing questions; and to design appropriate activities for each learner. The next issue relates to classroom management and the changing role of the teacher from dispenser of knowledge to facilitator of learning. The third issue concerns the need for teachers to acquire and use strategies that may be new to them. The only way to address all these concerns is through effective professional development that strongly encourages teachers to apply the skills and then provides coaching throughout the process of moving toward differentiation as a teaching approach.

It takes the commitment of teachers, administrators, and students to make differentiation a reality. For teachers and students, the challenge is to move comfortably into a new instructional paradigm. For administrators, the challenge is to support teachers' professional development,

provide teachers access to a variety of instructional materials, and encourage the use of new methodologies and teacher support networks or peer coaching (Smith et al., 2003). Throughout the process, administrators need to be the keepers of the vision of an instructional program that responds to the needs of all learners. A differentiated classroom offers appropriate levels of challenge according to learners' abilities, interests, and preferred learning profile, and maximizes learners' potential. 📖

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The Theory

Underpinning the concept of differentiation is a compilation of many educational theories and practices. Many teachers assert that their classrooms have been transformed significantly and for the better by differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1995, 2000), pointing toward differentiation as a promising practice. There nevertheless remains a need for empirical validation of differentiated instruction as a package. Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2003) cites these principles, which are basic to any good teaching, as critical to and the foundation for successful differentiated instruction.

The learning environment must make students feel emotionally safe before learning will take place (Howard, 1994; Jensen, 1998). This means that teachers demonstrate and encourage an openness to and respect for student differences, and that they value all learners (Watson, 1985; Tomlinson, 2001; Pettig, 2000). They provide places within the learning environment where individual students can work quietly and other places that invite student collaboration. They establish a routine for providing support to all students through individualized and small group work, direct instruction when needed, and peer coaching. They select learning materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings, and they celebrate successes.

Humans learn best with moderate challenge (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Howard, 1994; Jensen, 1998; National Research Council, 1999; Sousa, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wolfe, 2001). This means that the learning tasks must be neither too easy nor too hard, but at an appropriate level to challenge growth. The difficulty of skills taught should be slightly above the learner's current level of mastery. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to the state of "flow," the condition that exists when the learning task appropriately challenges learners so that they remain engaged in and excited about learning. This is the state in which learners are at their most productive and most creative.

Learning is the construction of understanding, with each learner needing to make his or her own meaning of the ideas and skills being taught. Therefore, effective teaching is based on concepts rather than so-called factoids. With concept-based teaching, learners are more likely to construct and enhance frameworks of meaning, understand the relationship of the parts to the whole, and relate the subject to their own life and to other topics (Kesner et al., 1993). They also are more likely to retrieve and remember the ideas and information (Erickson, 1998) and to use the ideas more readily (Keverns et al., 1997). In addition, learning occurs more readily when the brain is actively engaged in solving problems and applying ideas than when it passively absorbs information (Pally, 1997). ❖

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Web Resources on Differentiating Instruction

Differentiating Instruction for Advanced Learners in the Mixed-Ability Middle School Classroom
http://ericec.org/digests/e536.html

Leadership for Differentiated Classrooms: The Challenge with Mixed-Ability Groups is to Satisfy both Equity and Excellence
http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1999_10/tomlinson.htm

Using Technology to Differentiate Instruction
http://www.lakelandschools.org/EDTECH/Differentiation/home.htm

Differentiated Instruction
http://www.cast.org/ncac/index.cfm?i=2876

Strategies for Differentiating
http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatingstrategies.html

How to Plan for Differentiated Instruction
http://www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/differentiate/planning/

What is Differentiated Instruction
http://www.smcm.edu/academics/EdStudy/d7-Proj/Projects/ResearchSites/acbrowning/index.htm

Differentiating Instruction For Advanced Learners In the Mixed-Ability Middle School Classroom
http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/diff_instruction.html

The Definition of Differentiating Instruction
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.3adeebc6736780dddeb3ffdb62108a0c/

Differentiating Instruction: Finding Manageable Ways to Meet Individual Needs
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/ed_topics/cu2000win_willis.html

Reconcilable Differences? Standards-Based Teaching and Differentiation
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/ed_topics/el200009_tomlinson.html

An ASCD Study Guide for Leadership for Differentiating Schools and Classrooms
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.8f136d86e0aa2b9cdeb3ffdb62108a0c/template.article?articleMgmtId=72c40f05c1520010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD

Differentiated Instruction Resources
http://www.sde.com/Conferences/Differentiated-Instruction/DIResources.htm

About the Author

Mary Ann Corley is Principal Research Analyst for the American Institutes for Research, currently serving as director of the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO) and as professional development specialist for the National Reporting System project. She was director of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities (ALLD) Center, leading the development and national training effort on Bridges to Practice. From 1988 to 1996, she was Maryland State GED Administrator and has many years of experience as a local adult education program supervisor and teacher of ABE, GED, and ESOL. ❖

Differentiating Instruction for a Multilevel Class

by Catherine Saldana

I 'd slipped into a rut. I was doing whole-group instruction with a multilevel class, teaching to the middle of the class. This particular class was more challenging than others I have taught, not only because the students ranged from low-level adult basic education (ABE) to those eligible for the tests of general educational development (GED), but some students were undergoing drug detoxification and still suffering from effects of chronic drug abuse. Many of them also told me that they had been assigned to special education when they were younger. A fight between two women occurred in a class during group work, and I was reticent to try group work again. Individualized work resulted in about one-third to one-half of the class putting their heads on the table to sleep away our three-hour sessions. I was feeling drained and searching for new ideas when I heard about California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPPRO) workshops for adult educators.

The Differentiated Instruction (DI) workshops I chose focused on meeting the needs of students in a multilevel classroom. DI emphasizes the notion of viewing students as seekers of knowledge and teachers as facilitators. We learned how to discover students' learning modalities, interests, and abilities, then create instruction based on this information. We learned grouping methods designed to engage the students with the information and with each other. The presenter, who teaches a multilevel class of English language learners, enthusiastically described her class's success publishing a classroom newsletter: a project idea for implementing DI. Her enthusiasm was infectious. I came back to my classroom with renewed energy.

Implementation

I decided to tailor an activity I had used a few years ago in a GED-level classroom to fit my current students. My students refer to this activity as "research report writing." When I first introduced it, asking them to write one-page research reports on social studies and science topics contained in books that I brought into the class, many of them groaned and complained that

they "couldn't write." And, indeed, one or two students in any given year of about 60 learners cannot form letters into coherent words, mostly because of spelling problems, but also because of problems with understanding where words begin and end. Most of my students, however, simply hate to write about things that they feel are not relevant to their lives. I had to institute some incentives to get them to put pen to paper: I used raffle tickets culminating in a weekly drawing for a California lottery "scratcher," an investment of $1 per week on my part.

To enable students to work at their own levels, I ask students who are ready to take the GED to produce five-paragraph essays, complete with an introduction and a conclusion. I encourage other students to use their creativity to illustrate a topic; for example, I might ask them to illustrate a timeline on a historical topic, or copy an illustration, such as a diagram of a cell, and label it. I tell beginning-level writers that they can copy sentences right out of the book; this helps these students understand spacing between words and the use of punctuation marks. Over time, I encourage them to switch to their own words rather than copying. Sometimes, I stand next to students as they read their papers aloud and help with pronunciation.

I consider their learning styles when suggesting what they might do for their reports. Every few months I administer to new students a learning style assessment called the "Adult Learning Style Profile," a one-page assessment published in 1995 by S.E. Pues, in Tarzana, CA. I have also used assessments from Thomas Armstrong's adaptations of Dr. Howard Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences (see *Focus on Basics*, 3A, at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/ 1999/ fobv3ia.htm). I emphasize that everyone is smart in

different ways and that being "school smart" is only way to be smart.

What makes this activity "differentiated" is the types of writing — or even illustrating — the students do, and the use of books at various levels of reading ability. I have purchased about 150 books for this activity, with an emphasis on books on social studies or science that are physically large (but not long), filled with pictures, and catch my interest. Some of the books are intended for elementary school readers, and some of them are for readers at the high school level and beyond. Some weeks I bring in books on science topics such as anatomy, astronomy, chemistry, physics, weather, and geography. In other weeks I may bring in social studies books on American and world history, the Constitution, ancient civilizations, modern cultures, and law. At other times I bring in a mixed lot.

Impact

Since we are an open-entry program I get new students all the time, and they are a bit taken back by the enthusiasm of more established students. They call out preferences for the 30 to 35 books available at any time, and jump in to the writing of their research papers Not only do the all the students write one-page reports (about 200 words) on the subject of their choice, but most of them also read their reports out loud. The class is amazingly quiet for approximately 40 minutes as students struggle to produce papers of which they can be proud. Some of the students are also motivated to have their papers displayed on the bulletin board in the classroom.

As a result of their report writing,

students seem more interested in topics presented in the GED textbook and other classroom material. When we read our textbook together, they refer to their research reports: "Tim's report on hurricanes told about a train being lifted and thrown far off its tracks due to the force of the wind," or "Carly, didn't you report on the rights of individuals to receive a fair trial when you covered law last week?" I also gain insight into the interests and topic preferences of my students and use that insight to plan future lessons. My students discover that books can be interesting and relevant. For example, one Native American student appeared to come alive in his research into early Native Americans. Prior to this assignment, he had expressed hostility towards me. I noticed a remarkable change when I brought the same book the following week and shared my appreciation for his interest and excellent research. One student, who relocated from a midwestern state and had not previously spoken up in class, spoke with enthusiasm about his experience living through a tornado when he had the chance to read his report. He seemed much more responsive in class after that. A number of pregnant students have eagerly researched the science behind what they are experiencing.

Implementing this activity and other DI techniques takes work and energy. I started this research report-writing activity, for example, with whole-group instruction. Then, as students became comfortable with the expectations I had of them, they needed less direction. This allowed me to spend more time working one-on-one with struggling students.

The Differentiated Instruction workshops inspired me to try other group activities in my current class. I've been pleasantly surprised at the results. Students remember these special activities and request them over again. Most of the time, I let students form their own groups, but I have counted them off into heterogeneous groups and closely monitored tension and frustration levels. I know that I am one of many educators who hope to make a difference in not only the education of my students but also their understanding and tolerance of people in the world around them. Differentiated Instruction gives the students a chance to work with others who are very different from themselves. It is simply better teaching that results in better students who can make the world a little better place.

About the Author

Catherine Saldana has been teaching at San Bernardino Adult School (San Bernardino, CA) for more than six years. Prior to that, she worked in the business world for about eight years, culminating in self-employment as a marketing contractor. She finished a Master's in Education and received school psychology and school counseling credentials in 2004. ❖

A Conversation with FOB...

The Best of Both Worlds

Using Individualized and Group Instruction

Why not have the best of both worlds, decided the staff of the Ahrens Learning Center, Jefferson County, KY. This urban adult education center enrolls nearly 1,500 learners a year into adult basic education (ABE), literacy, basic skills upgrade, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), workplace, and college transition classes. After using individualized instruction — students working on their own at their own pace, with help from a teacher — for many years, Ahrens tried a few models before settling on a combination of individualized instruction and group instruction. Since the program restructured its classes, enrollment has doubled. Focus on Basics talked with teachers and staff of Ahrens to learn why they made the switch, how the change was greeted, and what their model looks like today.

FOB: I understand that your program has changed its method of delivery of instruction. What did the original program look like?

KITTY: Years ago, the students were in a large learning lab. We drew some students out occasionally to do group work. The big change came when we divided the lab into individual classrooms, with one teacher in charge of each classroom. We did that about five years ago. That was the best thing that has happened to us.

FOB: Why?

ANNE: At the time the teachers and I decided to change our method of instruction, we were in a period of malaise. We knew we were doing as well as we could, given the limits of the independent learning model, but our experience made it clear that this model wasn't effective for many of our learners. We used Allen Quigley's *Rethinking Literacy Education: The Critical Need for Practice-Based Change*[1] as an initial catalyst for change and to try to keep current on new research. The 2002 *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*[2] is one of the most recent documents that has influenced our instruction.

The decision to change was mostly made cooperatively; both teachers and students saw the benefit to dividing the study-hall-type learning lab into smaller communities of learners. We worked hard to give students lots of information on the benefits of classes with group instruction. We constantly assured our students that they would be in a safe learning environment; they could disclose an area of academic weakness without fear of embarrassment.

FOB: What happened when you broke the lab into smaller individualized instruction settings?

KITTY: The students felt like they had their own classroom. They got settled, hung up their coats, made coffee, and were seeing the same people every day. Bonding occurred; it never did when we were in the big lab. I had just one group lesson a day, along with individualized instruction, at that point. About two years ago, we were strongly encouraged to go to a college-like setting, with one group after another. Using only group instruction didn't work because it didn't give us enough time for individualized instruction.

> **"**We knew we were doing as well as we could, given the limits of the independent learning model, but our experience made it clear that this model wasn't effective for many of our learners.**"**

FOB: So you went from individualized instruction in a big, rather impersonal lab with different teachers at different times, to individualized instruction in a classroom with a set teacher, to a traditional model of group-based instruction in different subjects. Now what are you doing?

DIANE: Each teacher is using teaching methods and strategies that are effective with his or her specific

class. With my literacy-level students, I usually have an hour and a quarter of individualized instruction with students, everyone working on their own. Then we take a break and I do an hour of group instruction. If I have a volunteer that day, I like to break [the group] into two groups.

FOB: How do you pick the topics to teach in the group instruction?

DIANE: I pick topics based on the students' test results: usually some type of reading skills, like summarizing, cause and effect, [and] sometimes we do vocabulary work, or a phonics lesson on decoding skills. I try to vary it each day. Right now the research shows that we need to do more strategic teaching of phonics and fluency, so I try to include alphabetics and guided oral reading, procedures including repeated reading, paired reading, and echo reading. All of us use things from the newspaper, authentic materials; recently we were studying American history, and voting procedures.

ANNE: What about the activity with James Holmberg?

DIANE: We had an author who was writing a book on Lewis and Clark. He wanted our class to proofread it, since he was aiming for a four- to six-year-old reading level. The students were honored to have an author in the class. They told him what they didn't understand, what vocabulary was new to them. They got their names in the book as guest editors.

The group component adds so much. The students look forward to working together as a group. As they share their ideas, they try to help each other. A lot of times someone's question is beneficial to the whole group. Group work, from my perspective, has turned out to be wonderful, and has presented many teachable moments.

NONIE: When I am trying to address a variety of learning styles —

I'm explaining verbally, drawing diagrams, using manipulatives, getting students to write, read, formulate questions, and analyze information — the entire group is getting instruction in multiple modalities. If I employ enough strategies, everyone in the group will find at least one and maybe more than one explanation that helps him or her.

KITTY: I love hearing the students contemplate answers to multiple

> **"***If I employ enough strategies, everyone in the group will find at least one and maybe more than one explanation that helps him or her.***"**

choice questions out loud. They agree, disagree, and go through the thinking process together. They truly learn from each other. Sometimes I just sit back and listen. If the students feel comfortable enough to make mistakes around each other and really listen to each other, they are helping each other refine their cognitive skills in the process. When I observe all of this positive interaction in my classroom, I feel as if I am accomplishing a big part of my goal as a teacher.

NONIE: Working together as a group allows us [teachers] to model the thinking process. We can think out loud and work our way through difficult reading comprehension questions and math problems involving multiple steps, using context clues to understand new vocabulary, and so on. This helps students learn how to tackle these questions on their own.

DIANE: I've noticed that as students read silently they're decoding, but not working on comprehending. The group gives me the opportunity, as we read out loud, [to work on this with them]. I say "This is the picture I have in my mind as I read" and I

model for them how to make meaning as they move along. Then I tell them to practice.

MERYL: That was one of the things I was doing this morning: explaining that when we read, we make a video in our minds. When I read a title in class, I explain the picture that comes to my mind, and I ask them what they're imagining. Then the conversation really snowballs.

KITTY: The GED test [tests of General Educational Development] now takes cognitive skills to a higher level than before. Many students have a difficult time getting past the comprehension level. They still try to look for answers directly stated in passages. Making inferences and drawing conclusions are higher-level thinking skills. Group work is a wonderful way to develop these skills.

NONIE: Another benefit is it allows you to help students see that they have to connect what they're reading about to what they already know. Yesterday, for example, we were reading about a mathematician in 1777 Germany. I asked, "What do you know about the year 1777?" Someone answered, "I know 1776 was when the Declaration of Independence was signed." That helped us establish a frame of reference, and the class had some idea of what life was like and how people dressed. It encouraged them to think of this time in history. That's an important reading skill: tying prior knowledge to the passage they're reading.

KITTY: When we're introducing anything new to the students, they always ask, "Is this going to be on the GED?" I say, "This came from such and such book. You're going to be asked critical thinking questions, [you're going to need] good reading skills." As long as we tell them how this is going to be applicable, the students are generally very receptive. They want to know that their time is

being well spent and that the material is relevant.

FOB: So, by providing group instruction, you can model processes you want students to learn, such as helping them learn how to link their background knowledge to what they're reading. This helps them develop the higher-order skills they need to pass the GED. What other benefits do you see group instruction offering?

MERYL: We need to ask our adult learners what types of jobs they have or have held in the past. Many of the jobs today involve working together in teams, and may require skills that the learners need to practice or improve. We have many people in our center who have jobs in fast food restaurants, and they need to be able to work with others. The group work in our classes can provide opportunities to enhance the skills they need to do so. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to model conversations in ways that can improve learners' ability to work in teams.

FOB: How do you structure the individualized time?

KITTY: Teachers structure their classes differently. In my class, the first half hour is spent getting settled. That's the time when I give students work, check over their assignments, and talk with new students. I then teach a group lesson in reading, science, social studies, or writing for an hour. We take about 30 minutes after that for individualized instruction, and then I teach math for an hour. After math, I am available for approximately two hours to help individual students with their work. I also use this time to retest students.

NONIE: I have all my students enrolled in PLATO, a computer program developed by PLATO Learning, Inc. (http://www.plato.com). It is perfect for individualizing

instruction in either a broad topic, like reading, or something specific like finding the main idea, or multiplying fractions. It's thorough, gives students a lot of feedback, and keeps them engaged in ways that sometimes a book does not. Most learners enjoy it and can work for extended periods of time when I am busy with the group.

Occasionally I have someone who knows the material but needs to brush up. Usually I give them the option of working from the book and reviewing or skimming the material.

DIANE: For the learners I work with, I don't think one without the other would work: as much as everyone benefits from groups, in reality, each student has his or her individual goals. If we're doing group work on how to blend letters, sometimes one person needs work on decoding. The individual time is the time for that.

FOB: How do people make sure they get a teacher's attention during individualized instruction?

NONIE: When my students are using the computer, I check on them

> **"***Choice is really important. Choice encourages students to take responsibility for their learning.***"**

frequently, looking for anyone experiencing frustration. Some of our older students aren't familiar with computers, so I check to see they're not stalled.

When I'm teaching the group lesson, the individual learners know they're on their own, but we don't have such a huge group that the independent learners can't come get me when they have a PLATO-related question. If I have 15 to 18 students

in the room, two or three are likely to be working independently. When I'm not doing the morning group instruction, it's all individualized. In the afternoon, the room is quiet; I can give each student individualized instruction.

FOB: You mentioned two or three students working independently?

NONIE: I have two, and often three, classes a day, but I usually have several people who need to work independently. There's always that choice. For example, I have one student now who is working independently on the computer to beef up one skill to pass the GED. If I have someone who is very behind the class in math, I may have that person work independently on math and join us for group writing.

ANNE: Choice is really important. Choice encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. We urge the students to be partners with their teacher in making these choices.

MERYL: It's so important to shift the power to the adult learners' shoulders. It helps to build the partnership in the learning process. It's so important for them to know why [we do what we do].

NONIE: I use the word *partnership* when I talk to adult students about their role as learners in my classroom, and I do respect their wishes if they choose to work independently. However, I stress that we know that learning is social, that it is a result of demonstration and collaboration, and I very seldom have students who decide to work exclusively on their own. To teachers interested in exploring the value of group instruction further, I would recommend books by Frank Smith, or read his article "Learning to read: The never-ending debate" in the February, 1992, issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*. Another excellent source for information on this topic is Judith A. Alamprese's "Teaching reading to first-level adults; Emerging trends in

research and practice" in *Focus on Basics*, 5A (ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/2001/alamprese.html).

FOB: You offer group instruction and individualized time, and students can opt to spend group time working alone if they would like. Do you use any other models?

KITTY: Sometimes I have the students work in small groups or in pairs. For example, [in my GED class] we did some newspaper reading. I organized them into pairs. Students started asking me questions. I asked them to ask each other. They were timid at first but then they opened up. If we make the students feel comfortable in the classroom then their level of anxiety goes down and they're free to ask questions and share ideas with each other.

ANNE: Our evening classes meet twice a week. Because the instructional time is limited, these classes are more like some college models, with primarily whole group instruction. The classes are divided both into skill levels and into reading, math, and science/social studies content areas. Students are scheduled into two classes and are assessed for progress as a group every six weeks. Learners change schedules when appropriate.

We initiated this latest learning model in July, 2004, and are still smoothing out some bumps. Because we operate on an open-entry basis, we found that some students felt overwhelmed; they didn't have the slow adjustment period that a four-day program can allow. Some also felt unprepared to do the academic work. We revised and lengthened our orientation to address these issues. We now provide conference time to discuss normal feelings and apprehensions. We give them a menu of what to do if they feel their needs aren't being met. We don't want them

to "vote with their feet" and walk away. We want them to talk to us about their learning.

FOB: What made you decide to offer content area group instruction at night?

ANNE: When we looked at last year's statistics, we saw a revolving door. We are a big center; we should have had people attending more consistently and for longer periods of time. With our new schedule we have eight different classes taught at one of three skill levels: fundamental, inter-

> **"** *When we had the large learning lab, it was quiet. Now it's wonderful to hear the students share stories with each other about their jobs and children, help ease new students into the class routine, and support each other in their quest to meet their goals.* **"**

mediate, or transitional. The level descriptions are vague, so people feel encouraged about their placement. The curriculum is circular and ongoing; it spirals. We are teaching a similar curriculum every six weeks, but embedding new skills or using the skills in a new context. For example, if the math instructor teaches perimeters, some pairs of students might be working with situations that require only whole numbers, while others might work with a perimeter application that uses fraction or decimals. If students don't progress out of a level, they repeat the class, but the curriculum spirals up a bit so they don't feel unsuccessful.

FOB: Can you describe the initial changeover from a learning lab to individual classes and then to group instruction?

NONIE: I came on board after the change had been made to individual classrooms, but the teacher who had my classroom was not doing group instruction. The students missed their former teacher, were accustomed to their own quiet independent work, and were not highly receptive to a new teacher and a new style of learning. Anne was encouraging me to start group instruction, and I was very willing, but I couldn't get much cooperation from the learners in forming small groups to work together. One day Anne asked again, and I heard myself tell her that I was going to start whole group instruction the next day. In truth, I had no clue how to persuade the students to try something new. The next morning, however, I said "I would like everyone who has not passed the GED writing test to join me over at the blackboard." The entire class looked stunned and suspicious, but slowly got up and came over to join me. We simply had a class, and then the next day, everyone took his seat by the blackboard in readiness for the class. The transition was that easy.

FOB: To pick up on a theme you mentioned earlier, the group instruction model helps build — and probably depends upon — community in the classroom.
Do you do things consciously to set the stage, to build community?

NONIE: I address every student by name every day and use names in class frequently, so everyone picks up on names right away. Of course I model supportive behaviors and talk about that when necessary: "Remember that reading is not a performance; we're all going to get stuck on difficult words from time to time. Be sure you give the reader enough time to think about

pronouncing a word before you help out. Reader, let the class know when you'd like some help — we're all learning together, and asking for help is one way to learn." I find that adult learners tend to be patient and helpful with each other, but I am always modeling those behaviors myself.

KITTY: I do the same thing. When we had the large learning lab, it was quiet. Now it's wonderful to hear the students share stories with each other about their jobs and children, help ease new students into the class routine, and support each other in their quest to meet their goals. I try to remember the students' birthdays, and I ask about their families and their jobs. I try to make the classroom a comfortable and welcoming place to learn.

FOB: Students can enroll at any time at your center. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the model you use in terms of open enrollment?

KITTY: One of the weaknesses is that we get new students weekly, and those students then join the groups already in progress. Sometimes the students feel as if they need to catch up, especially in math. Since I can't keep re-teaching the same skill over and over because the existing students are ready to move on, I try to begin each lesson with a quick review and then move on. Sometimes this leaves students frustrated. They tell me that they feel as if they're not catching on to what I'm teaching at the time. I assure them that they just need to try to understand the concept to the best of their ability, and that if they continue to feel frustrated after a week or so, they can work on their own. I also offer to help them individually in the afternoons. Most students deal with it very well, though. Other students are always eager to help the new ones, and this definitely helps ease the transition period.

One of the positives is that we can accommodate people who have jobs, young children at home, and difficult life situations. We've found, though, that sometimes open enrollment can keep students from making a strong commitment to their schooling. When students know that they don't have to come to school every day, they can find reasons for not attending. This happens a lot with some of the younger students and with those not totally committed to furthering their education. It's one thing for them to say they want their GEDs and quite another actually to be disciplined enough to come to school every day in order to see those dreams realized. As a teacher, having

> **"***We've found, though, that sometimes open enrollment can keep students from making a strong commitment to their schooling.***"**

the same students every day is an appealing idea, but we have very aggressive enrollment goals given the funding we receive. We are, however, looking carefully at other options.

NONIE: I agree with Kitty that "open" works well. Although it can be a bit chaotic at times and is definitely not perfect, it does work, and we have yet to come up with something better to suit students' needs.

ANNE: Finding out which teaching practices are most effective with adult learners is a process. We talk about it; we discuss ways to improve instruction all the time. In the last five years we have evolved from the learning lab model to classes and then to group instruction. We now include strategic teaching, modeling, guided practice, cooperative learning, and the posing of open-ended questions that encourage learners to think, discuss, and share

ideas with one another in our repertoire of teaching tools. We don't have it perfectly right yet, but we are always looking at how we can improve our instruction.

Resources

For more on changing from one mode of delivery to another, see "Getting into Groups" by Michael Pritza, in *Focus on Basics* 2A, http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/1998/pritza.htm, and "Implementation Isn't Easy" by Janet Geary, in *Focus on Basics* 7A, http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/2004/geary.html

Participants

Meryl Becker-Prezocki is the Ahrens resource teacher who works with both teachers and learners in the area of special learning needs. She has a background in special education, and more than 30 years in elementary, middle, high school, and ABE.

Diane Graybill, a reading teacher at the Ahrens Center, has taught in ABE for 10 years, starting in a welfare-to-work program, and moving onto a GED program.

Anne Greenwell, program coordinator, started at Ahrens in 1990 after having taught high school English, and moved from teaching to coordinating nine years ago.

Kitty Head started in ABE in 1986, integrating handicapped adults into an ABE program, and three years later started teaching in the GED program, which she continues to do.

Nonie Palmgreen has been working in ABE for 17 years, including three and a half years teaching job readiness skills and the remainder of the time focusing on GED and upgrade instruction.

Notes

1 Quigley, A. (1997). *Rethinking Literacy Education: The Critical Need for Practice-Based Change.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

2 Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/adult_ed_02.pdf ❖

Individualized Group Instruction: A Common Model

by Perrine Robinson-Geller

Individualized Group Instruction (IGI) describes the adult basic education (ABE) classroom model in which learners work independently on assigned workbooks or worksheets with a teacher available to help them as needed. "Group" is used in the term because learners often are assigned a particular class and teacher and meet at a specific time. IGI differs from tutoring because the learners are not sitting with a teacher one-on-one for the whole time, although one-on-one inter-actions occur as the learners need help. IGI is commonly used with ABE and prepa-ration for the tests of General Educational Development (GED)-level classes. Except

for language labs (equipped with computers or tape recorders), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classrooms do not often use IGI because learner-to-learner interaction is essential to mastering a new language (see the cover article for more on this). For the purposes of this article, the term ABE will encompass the full range of adult basic education classes excluding ESOL classes. The term IGI was coined by John Comings, director of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), in 2003.

IGI takes several forms. For example, in some classrooms, learners are never grouped and minimal structured interaction occurs between learners. In other IGI classrooms, the teacher groups students for mini-lessons or other tasks; in yet others, the teacher begins with a whole-group activity followed by individual study. Supplementing IGI with small group work, either impromptu or planned, is a common variation. Learning centers and computer labs that use computer-aided instruction (CAI) are also using a form of IGI.

In general, IGI is characterized by the following:
- heavy dependence on materials (usually commercially produced, sequential, and leveled by difficulty);
- initial placement, by the teacher, into levels and their corresponding materials by means of diagnostic testing;
- progression through the materials monitored by mastery testing; and
- learners working independently, with teachers assisting as needed.

Little research has been conducted on modes of delivery in ABE, so there are no empirical data on just how prevalent IGI is. The studies that have looked at instructional practice in ABE classrooms have not differentiated between tutoring and IGI. However, the term individualized instruction is common in ABE. The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs in 1992 found that 57 percent of programs were using individualized methods (Young et al.,

1995). A 1990 study examining adult literacy services found that "individualized instruction has become the principal format in basic skills classes" (Kutner et al., 1990, p. 20).

History

IGI as a mode of delivery has been used since ABE started receiving federal funding in the 1960s. At that time, enrollment was increasing exponentially and new teachers and new methods were needed. Programmed instruction was popular in higher education and appealed to adult educators as an instructional system that was well suited to the adult population and the structural issues presented by ABE.

Programmed instruction is based on a behaviorist model of education in which every task is broken into small steps; learners get immediate feedback and must achieve mastery before proceeding to the next step. Programmed instruction is usually done individually. Applied to adult education, it became IGI. It fit nicely with adult education learning theories of the time, such as the self-directed adult learner (Knowles, 1970). Early federal teacher training institutes encouraged programmed instruction and the individualization of instruction. As teachers who received this training went out into the field they took those ideas and adapted them to the realities of ABE, and IGI became part of the fabric of ABE.

The Administrator's Perspective

IGI enables administrators to handle open entry/open exit enrollment and sporadic patterns of attendance in ABE classes: since in IGI each learner works independently, new learners are not disruptive. IGI makes it easier to offer instruction to students at a variety of learning levels: learners work on materials at their levels and in the topic areas on which they need to focus. IGI also allows new teachers to step into existing classes with minimal disruption.

The Teacher's Perspective

IGI allows teachers the flexibility needed to enroll, assess, and orient new learners while existing learners continue their work. The IGI teacher is a facilitator, helping learners to understand and process information. The interaction between the learner and the materials is supposed to be the primary guide for the learner. This does not mean that IGI teachers do not teach: they do. It is a responsive and reactive teaching. Teachers do not always know what they are going to teach and when, since the teaching generally consists of impromptu mini-lessons given when a learner gets stuck and needs help.

Some teachers thrive on the diversity that the IGI classroom offers. They enjoy the variety of subject matter they are called upon to teach and the wide range of learners with whom they interact. Others find it frustrating or boring. It is challenging to have the in-depth knowledge of material needed to assign appropriate materials and offer alternatives to struggling students. The stresses of teaching this way are well expressed by the following excerpt from an interview with a respondent with 15 years of teaching experience and 10 years of administration and staff development experience.

"I literally within minutes would switch from teaching somebody decoding at a very basic level to teaching someone, oh, trigonometry… it was fairly daunting and challenging to have the kind of immediate switch. You're just click, click, click, click all day long from one subject to another, from a young high school student to an older re-entering vocational student to a single parent who had some emotional issues going on to somebody who had learning disabilities. Just constant moment by moment switching of ways of interrelating with the students. I remember at the end of the day, I was always exhausted."

The Learner's Perspective

The IGI model offers benefits and drawbacks to the learner as well. Learners are able to work at their own pace and on materials specifically targeted at their level. They do not need to spend time on material that they have already mastered. They are not penalized for missing a class, because they can continue right where they left off; they do not miss anything (nor do they hold others back) when they are absent. Learners do not need to be self-conscious about not keeping up with a group or about outpacing a group. IGI is better suited for someone who has a clear, attainable goal and needs some intensive brush-up work in a particular area to attain it. Learners may develop a close relationship with the teacher.

At the same time, IGI requires a level of independence and ability to negotiate printed text, which makes it unsuitable for very-low-level learners. It also requires a learner to be self-directed, independent, and comfortable asking for help when he or she needs it. Because they work independently, learners may not experience a sense of cohort with their peers, which research is showing to be important for learner retention and success (Kegan et al., 2001). IGI's heavy dependence on materials such as workbooks and worksheets, which present material in small isolated chunks, may lead to the acquisition of discrete facts but not an overall, big picture understanding of a topic.

Best Practices

To ensure that learners are well served, teachers who use the IGI mode of delivery need to address the issue of waiting time. This occurs when a learner is either finished or

struggling with materials, and has to wait for the teacher. To alleviate their own stress and that of their learners, teachers can provide for each learner some ideas of what to do if they need to wait: for example, enrichment activities that build on materials they have already mastered.

Some teachers simply say that they are available and sit at the front of the room. Skilled teachers are explicit about how learners can access them, either going from one learner to another as the learners needs help or getting to each learner to check in and see where he or she is. This works to the favor of learners who are not comfortable seeking help. It also allows the teacher to know how each learner is doing. Nevertheless, getting to each student in a timely way is always challenging. As an experienced IGI teacher remarked:

"It (IGI) means that once they get help, they get exactly the help that they need. But sometimes it's not possible to do that. If you've got six people lined up waiting for your help, five of them are going to be sitting there twiddling their thumbs. They may well get to a point where they're just so stuck that they can't do anything without some assistance. That part of it can be frustrating for the teacher, who has this sense that people are just waiting and waiting and for the student who gets the sense that everyone else is coming before him or her."

Many teachers occasionally form small groups in IGI classes. They sometimes group learners who all need help on the same topic, such as fractions, and provide a group mini-lesson. Learners follow this with appropriate individual work. Teachers also sometimes invite members of the class who are interested in a particular topic, such as writing, for example, to join in an enrichment group. Members of the class who do not wish to focus on writing continue in their independent work.

Teachers must familiarize them-selves with available materials and make careful choices about which materials to use. Since the materials play such a prominent role in IGI, choosing the highest quality materials that meets learners' goals is especially important.

In Conclusion

As with any instructional delivery system, IGI works best with skilled teachers who have had an opportunity to learn how to teach in this configuration. Although IGI is not a new classroom model, no empirical evidence demonstrates its effectiveness. Little has been written about how to do this type of teaching and what factors contribute to successful learning experiences with its use. Additional research would contribute to an understanding of this very common form of ABE instruction.

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About the Author

Perrine Robinson-Geller has been a research assistant with NCSALL at Rutgers University since 2000. Before that, she was based at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, OH, as a teacher/coordinator for three workplace literacy programs and an ABE program. She also worked at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. ❖

Research on Factors that Shape Engagement

Rutgers-based NCSALL researcher Hal Beder and his research team have been conducting a study that explores what factors shape whether adult basic education (ABE) students engage in instruction. They define engagement as "focused effort on instructional tasks." They are also examining the relationship between engagement and whether a learner drops out of a program or not. They expect the study to provide guidance to teachers on how to engage learners and how to maintain engagement.

Although engagement is not the same as learning, it is a necessary step in learning, explains Beder. "You can't learn unless you engage. So if we can understand engagement, we will know a lot more about the process of learning." Engagement is synonymous with trying hard to learn, or "working hard." The literature from k-12 has a great deal of information on engagement but, to Beder's knowledge, this is the first engagement study in adult literacy. Some of the k-12 literature looks at engagement broadly and includes such things as engagement in school as an institution, while other traditions in the k-12 literature focus on engagement as mental activity. However, this literature is not a particularly useful guide for Beder's study because of the great differences in context between k-12 and adult literacy. For example, in contrast to children, whose "work" is to go to school, adults are voluntary learners, independent from parents and teachers. Adult learners therefore have different motivations than children do.

The outcomes of the engagement study are not yet ready for release, nonetheless, the team is finding that the students who persist in ABE show high engagement while in class. The team's analysis of the data is also suggesting a finding that will be of particular interest to adult basic educators: teacher conduct — a factor over which educators have direct control — seems to be a factor in engagement.

The Research Site

For the past two years, the Rutgers research team has been collecting data via classroom observations recorded on video, followed by stimulated recall interviews, in which the team interviews students after the students have viewed themselves on video. The team videos in six classrooms — three basic and three secondary level — at the Rutgers lab site, a partnership between NCSALL-Rutgers and the New Brunswick Public Schools Adult Learning Center (NBPSALC). In the lab environment, the research team gets to know the students, teachers, and program context very well, and the team feels that this familiarity enriches the study. The disadvantage of using a lab site is that it affords less variation in the context than would research conducted in randomly selected programs.

The classrooms in which the research is being conducted use what the Rutgers team calls individualized group instruction (IGI; more commonly known as individualized instruction). In this mode of instruction, students work on their own, using materials geared to their academic levels. When
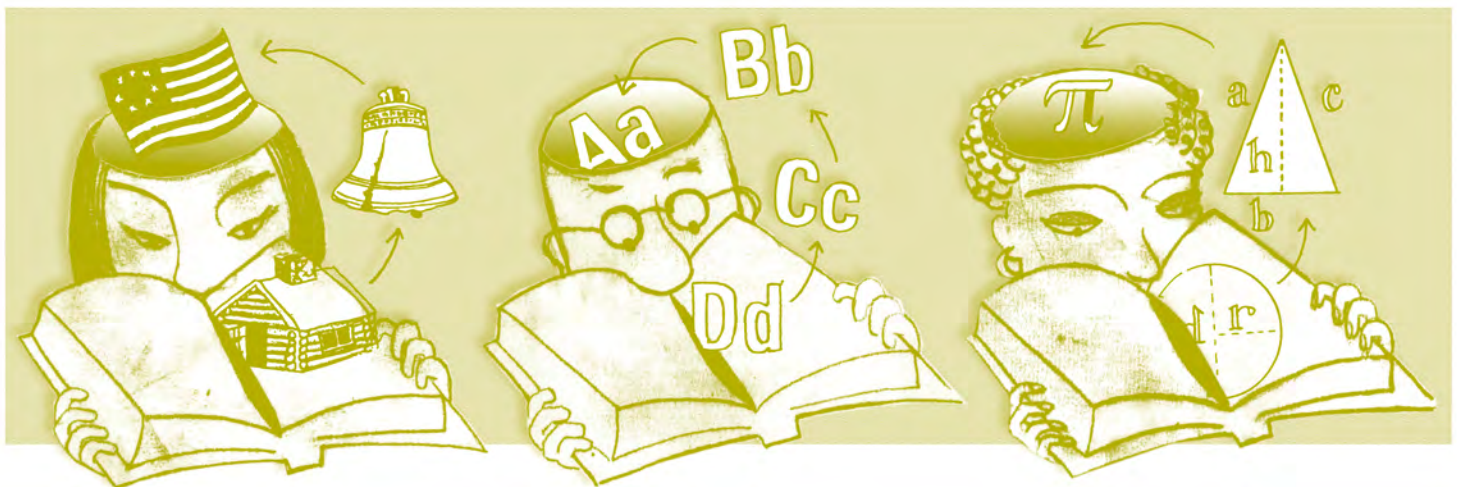
they finish a set of materials, the teacher corrects the exercises and gives them more materials. The materials do most of the teaching; the teacher is there to help.

Preliminary Findings

Learners in these classes are very highly engaged, mostly because they're highly motivated. Motivation is closely linked to engagement, Beder reports. Students engage for a purpose, because they want to achieve a goal, he says. "It is the achievement of that goal that provides the motivation. So motivation and engagement are like different sides of the same coin."

"When we first started to interview learners in terms of motivation," explains Beder, "the statements were so glowing we didn't believe it. These are voluntary learners. So if they're not motivated, there's no reason for them to come to class. What we're hearing from the interviews is a high degree of motivation, pretty concrete goals, and the desire for postsecondary education, whether or not they actually go [to college]."

The team hypothesizes that the self-paced nature of the individualized instruction model makes the model learner friendly. A substantial amount of the data from the interviews indicates that learners really appreciate that. One of the things these learners say about their experience in k-12 is that they fell behind and felt belittled. In the interviews, Beder explains, "we often asked them what they thought of IGI. That they didn't have to worry about falling behind came out several times as a response." Learners also point out that they can pick up where they left off in the materials, explains Beder, so they don't miss anything if they can't come to class, as would happen in group instruction.

The Teacher's Role

The researchers are also finding that how the teacher interacts with learners is an important factor in engagement. Very few of the teachers in the study had experience with individualized instruction models before they became ABE teachers. They had to create their own role definition and an identity as an individualized instruction teacher. Because of this, the classes vary a great deal. For example, all the teachers in the study systematically encouraged their students, and this supported motivation. However, how teachers encouraged students differed from class to class.

Some teachers see their role as one in which they "correct and direct": correct student's materials, assign new materials, and end with praise. Other teachers are more interested in whether the learners

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Data Analysis

The research team videotaped students in six classrooms, then reviewed the videos for student behaviors that were of theoretical interest, such as when they engaged, how they engaged, and with whom they engaged. The team noted these episodes. Next, the team showed the episodes to the students who were in them, and interviewed them as they watched the video episodes. The team asked questions of the students such as: Why were you doing that? and What were you thinking when you did that? This enabled the team to couple their observations about students' behaviors with the students' own thoughts about them. These are called stimulated recall interviews. Teachers are also in the videos, and their perspectives were recorded when they participated with the research team in data analysis, but stimulated recall interviews were not conducted with teachers.

The research team analyzed the video and stimulated recall data using grounded theory, a methodology that uses constant comparison. For example, if one teacher acted in one way and another teacher acted in another way, the researchers asked themselves what might account for the difference. The answer became a point of analysis that they investigated as they analyzed more data.

When they reviewed the data, they looked for evidence of engagement. They knew someone was engaged if they saw eye movements, hand movements, and turning of pages in the videos. They report that it is fairly obvious when someone is engaged. If the data included an oral encounter — a discussion between the teacher and student, or between two students — they examined the nature of the dialogue to see if the topic matter was related to class. They found that the discussion in class between students is highly directed toward the work of the class. They report seeing very little enjoyable socializing. It was all very businesslike, with a substantial amount of the dialogue involving students helping each other, says Beder.

The researchers were concerned at first that their presence might cause the students to behave differently than they would have had they not been subjects of a study. But the team reports that the videos make it evident when someone is grandstanding for the camera. They do, they admit, have several episodes where it looks like that's happening. But students quickly got used to being videotaped. Very few episodes reveal someone being influenced by the researchers' presence. ❖

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comprehend their work, in addition to its being correct. There is variation in terms of how well the teachers actually understand the materials themselves. Some teachers know them backwards and forwards, explains Beder, and know where learners are going to have problems understanding the materials. Talking with and observing the teachers showed the research team that other teachers are less familiar with the materials and are less able to predict where learners will have problems.

In IGI, teachers have to make an important decision that affects engagement: whether to spend less time helping each learner and thus reach more learners during a class, or to give more in-depth help and reach fewer learners. If a teacher decides to spend less time and reach more learners, fewer learners have to wait for help. But spending less time with each learner makes it more difficult for the teacher to diagnose learners' problems thoroughly and help them overcome those problems. If the teacher spends more time with each learner, however, then more learners disengage because they are waiting for help. Obviously the size of the class is a factor. In all the classes in the study, the learners had to wait for the teacher to get to them, although the wait time varied a lot. The lesson is that teachers need to do things that make wait time productive. Encouraging learners to help each other is one strategy that has merit, suggests Beder. Providing alternative work that learners can do while waiting is another commonly used strategy.

Individualized Group Instruction Model

The engagement research is taking place in a program that uses the individualized group instruction mode of delivery: students working on

their own, with materials chosen for them by the teacher, based on results of assessment tests. The instruction is primarily provided by the materials. Although this model was not the focus of the research per se, the high level of engagement evident in the preliminary findings did surprise the research team because of common criticisms that individualized instruction is boring for learners. Some researchers, including, for example, Robert Kegan and the Adult Development Research Group

> **"** *. . . how the teacher interacts with learners is an important factor in engagement.* **"**

(2001), have found that group instruction provides social interaction and the cohort formed helps keep students attached to the program. However, Beder explains that the assumption that group experience is intrinsically better is not supported by any evidence they have been able to find. "These people [in the study] are progressing: they're attending, they're participating, they're doing all these things," he says. In the individualized instruction model, learners have a lot of control over their own instruction, which is something learners don't have in group instruction.

Beder also points out that one of the arguments against individualized instruction is that it doesn't teach critical thinking and problem solving. He is not so sure that is true. "I think the learners pick up other skills, such as self direction and problem solving in terms of their strategies for working through materials," says Beder. "I suspect that there are skills learned [indirectly] beyond what's taught in materials, although we don't have any evidence of that." Oral skills, he admits, are not taught in individualized instruction. Beder adds, "I don't think

our work has made us proponents of individualized instruction but neither do we think it's the evil some people make it out to be. Our objective should be to make it better, not to ban it. We hope our study will be helpful in this regard."

Another Component to Come

Another component to the study will examine the relationship between engagement and learning outcomes. This is a quantitative study and it employs two ways to measure engagement. One is via the survey instrument the team created. "When we developed the survey we were worried that low-level learners would not be able to complete it, but when we piloted the survey, we were pleasantly surprised to find that even the low-level learners had little trouble," explains Beder. The other measure is observational: a team of trained researchers will rate learners' level of engagement as they view video clips of learners working in class.

For outcome data, they will use teachers' assessments of student progress, gains on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and persistence in the program. The Rutgers team is working with researchers from the University of Georgia on this study. The Engagement Project has three connected studies: the qualitative study that uses video and stimulated recall, and two quantitative studies. The research team thinks that looking at engagement from three different directions will give a much more complete picture than a single-component study. Look for the findings in *Focus on Basics* a year from now.

–Barbara Garner

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Powerful Motivation

This long-time tutor is motivated by helping learners

by Will Summers

I n rural Illinois, literacy programs use volunteer tutors to provide services. Tutor/learner pairs meet in public buildings such as schools and libraries. Biologist Will Summers began tutoring with the Reading Link Program of Kaskaskia College, Centralia, IL, nine years ago. He works primarily, but not exclusively, with young men who are institutionalized by the courts. He talked with Focus on Basics about his experiences as a tutor.

FOB: Tell me about yourself as a tutor.

WILL: I tutor for the Reading Link program, which is part of Kaskaskia College. I tutor everyone they send me. I've been doing this for nine years. I keep it [the tutoring] pretty informal, but coming as I do from the Department of Defense, I'm pretty regimented, although I'm not unfriendly. I call myself a "tutor," not a teacher, and the people I tutor are "learners," not students. That's more positive. That's something Kaskaskia College taught me.

FOB: What training did you receive from Reading Link to prepare you to tutor?

WILL: The training consisted of eight hours of classroom work, spread over two Saturdays; quarterly or semiannual refreshers; and what we call "tutor talks," which are monthly or bimonthly meetings of the tutors in each county. I try to attend at least two formal refresher training classes each year. They help me stay fresh and learn some new ideas. They also keep me interested in the program, and I get to know the other tutors involved. We're a bit of a team. Teamwork and community support are important. The local library provides me with a conference room, a lot of material, and duplicating services. I received my training nine years ago. They're more stringent now, and beginning tutors observe more experienced tutors.

FOB: How many people do you tutor, and how often?

WILL: I try to keep two learners going at the same time. In the last four years I've been going into a Youth and Family Services-sponsored children's home, tutoring young men aged 18 or 19 who are under court supervision for involvement with illegal drugs. They're street smart, they can survive, they're "with it" characters, and they often have two or three children. Some have served jail time, either before or after I began tutoring them.

Not everyone is under court supervision. Betty, who I'm working with right now, is 36 [years old], has a certificate of attendance from high school, and works in a factory. I tested her and I know she can't read above the sixth level according to the test the college provides: Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT).

I set aside two hours a week per learner. Tim on Tuesday, Betty on Thursday. Betty and I meet at a local high school library from 5:30 to 7:30 every Thursday night.

I would like to meet with my learners every day but time doesn't allow it. I encourage them to get assistance between the times we meet. I don't overload them with a heavy workload of assignments or homework.
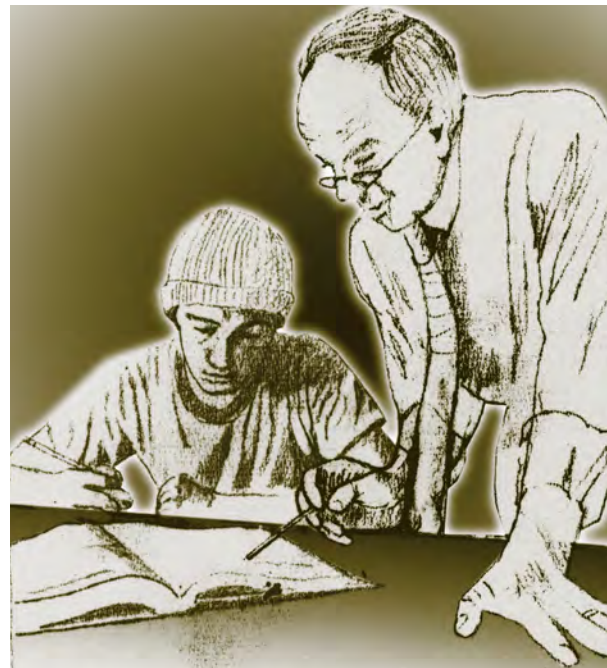
FOB: How do you structure your tutoring sessions?

WILL: I've found a method that has been effective for me. For each lesson, I use segments that take not more than 30 minutes to complete. I prepare six or seven different lesson segments in my lesson plan every night, so if the one I choose doesn't grab the learner, I turn to another. I work on keeping a high level of interest. Sometimes we work more than two hours, in 20- to 30-minute segments, if they are willing.

In our first meeting, I have to win them over. I'm not a laugh-a-minute kind of guy. But everyone likes to talk

about themselves, so I ask them their age, their birthday, even their [astrological] sign; I want to be able to remember and send them a card. I look for the individual in them and gain their trust. I'd ask about their favorite donut, soda, chips: corn or potato? I bring them a soda and their favorite chips when I tutor them, and we read the ingredients and try to understand the nutrition. I ask about their interests in sports and music. I work to get into their heads: favorite movie, singer, actor? I refer back to that interview page more than anything in the coming months or years. I take their picture and put that into things to read, too. With current word processing technology and digital cameras you can do that. I also get their goals. I ask: "What do you want to do when they grow up?" If they don't have a clue, that's cool.

FOB: Do any particular activities work best for you in the one-on-one situation?

WILL: I like to use newspapers. When I hear "I don't like to read the newspaper," I give the learner a felt-tipped marker, have him read an article that catches his fancy, and have him highlight every word he understands. Seeing all the words he knows highlighted builds his confidence.

We also read "Dear Abby" and "Ann Landers." I read the part of the reader, the person who writes in, and I make my voice sound like a forlorn person. He reads the columnist's answer. The answer is usually much briefer and more to the point and full of reason. He's the voice of reason and maturity. Learners respond very positively.

We also read menus. This helps them survive in day-to-day life. We study particularly menus from Chinese, Italian, and Thai restaurants that they're not familiar with. These menus help build their use of phonetics.

I make my own flashcards by

cutting words from magazines, words that start with the same letter, or compound words. We play a game — we did this last night — where I lay out the flash cards. The learner turns them over, picking them up one at a time and reading the compound word. If he gets it right, he gets the card. If he doesn't, we work on it till he knows it, but we turn all the cards over and start again.

Poetry is very important because it teaches rhyming and anticipating

> ❝*In our first meeting, I have to win them over.*❞

what word is coming next. I spend a lot of time, whether it's using Dr. Seuss; Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" or "Lenore;" Maya Angelou, Shel Silverstein, Longfellow, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How Do I Love Thee?" It's a little schmaltzy, but these guys even cry sometimes.

I have them dictate their life's story to me. I type it up. I give them a disposable camera to have them go through their day and take pictures. I have a double set of prints made and give them one set and use the other in a book that they write. I create a three-ring binder with photos and a story of their life they get to keep.

> ❝*I look for the individual in them and gain their trust.*❞

FOB: How do you know your learners are making progress? With Betty, for example, and with Tim?

Will: I test my learners every other month using the SORT provided by Reading Link. We keep track of the learner's successes. I also submit a monthly report stating the reading materials used, goals achieved, and

other notes on my learner's progress.[1]

FOB: What are some of the drawbacks to tutoring?

WILL: It is sometimes hard to work with this particular population. One guy got violent with me one night. If you say the wrong word to some of these kids they'll be on you or in tears. That's one drawback. Not being able to do enough is another. Seeing your star student hauled off to jail by the police can break your heart.

Not having enough time with each learner each week is another drawback. I try to pack as much as I can into one week's session, but you're limited by what you can expect your learners to absorb.

FOB: It's obvious from your enthusiasm and longevity as a tutor that you find this rewarding. Can you tell us what keeps you motivated to devote eight hours a week — four of prep time, four of tutoring time — plus travel time, to tutoring?

WILL: I keep motivated by the accomplishments of my learners, no matter how slowly they sometimes reach them. I am also encouraged by the support I get from Kaskaskia College Reading Link program. Lastly, I see this is a team effort by all the other reading tutors like me. I am always encouraged by, and try to encourage, my fellow tutors.

The motivational force that keeps me going — especially with the kids — is that it matters: helping them improve their reading ability may make a significant difference in their lives and in the lives of the people they encounter. ☞

Notes

1 In general practice, such a short interval between pre and post-testing is not considered good practice. However, additional circumstances in this case led this tutor to test monthly. *Focus on Basics* is not recommending frequent testing ❖

One-on-One Tutoring

by Mary Dunn Siedow

One-on-one tutoring is a major means of delivering instruction in adult basic education (ABE) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programs in the United States, often as the primary means and sometimes as a supplement to class-based instruction. Although sometimes provided by a professional teacher, tutoring is most often done by a volunteer: indeed, adult literacy-related volunteerism and tutoring are often thought of as synonymous. By 2000, volunteers made up approximately 43 percent of all adult education personnel reported by state-administered adult education programs (US Department of Education, 2000).

The Learners

From a learner's perspective, being tutored provides a level of anonymity: only the program administrator and tutor need know the learner's literacy level. After spending years hiding literacy problems, merely taking the steps needed to request a tutor can be a major accomplishment for some learners. Many learners believe that having the full attention of a tutor will result in a positive learning experience. They are willing to trust a tutor, while the thought of participating in a class and revealing literacy needs to a room of other learners creates anxiety. For other learners, the choice of a program that uses one-on-one tutoring is pragmatic. It offers logistical flexibility: the tutor and learner can jointly determine appropriate meeting times.

Adults who had no opportunity to attend school, or who left school early, often succeed in one-on-one instruction. These adults are likely to be beginning-level learners who primarily need access to education and do not present exceptional difficulties with learning. If, on the other hand, learning difficulties, personality, or health issues played even some part in a learner's decision to leave school, one-on-one tutoring may pose some special challenges to tutors. Sandlin and St. Clair (2005) suggest that volunteer programs are least likely to have tutors trained in the skills and approaches needed to serve students with learning difficulties successfully. In these cases, an experienced teacher or tutor is needed.

For ESOL learners, one-on-one tutoring presents a different picture: it provides learners with opportunities for personal assistance and plenty of conversation time with their tutors. However, it also reduces their exposure to the multiple voices found in groups and may deprive them of the kinds of language interaction that are better addressed in group-based problem solving activities (see the cover article for more on this).

The Tutors

Individuals who are willing to become tutors, especially volunteer tutors, come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are people who are driven by a desire to share their love of reading with others. Some are teachers, or former teachers, who are interested in using their skills in a new arena. They may have had experience as paraprofessionals, or may want exposure to the field of adult literacy. Whoever the tutors may be, they will likely play major roles in the education of their students.

The Program

Tutoring as a mode of instruction is appealing to different programs for different reasons. Some group-

instruction-based programs assign teachers who are well-trained reading teachers to tutor low-level learners who have learning challenges. Some volunteer-based literacy programs find it easier to entice volunteers to work as one-on-one tutors than as classroom teachers. Working with just one learner seems less intimidating for a minimally trained volunteer than running a class, according to Paula Greschler, director of a volunteer-based tutoring program in Massachusetts.

The logistics of one-on-one tutoring can make it an appealing mode of instruction to programs. Tutors and learners usually schedule

their own sessions, thus accommodating changing work schedules, transportation, and child care. The often public venues for tutoring sessions — libraries, adult learning centers, community centers — reduce the program's need to maintain classrooms while offering learners a place to meet that feels more "adult" than a school.

Training and Support

Before matching tutors with adult students, most programs require that tutors participate in some kind of training. The length and content of this preservice training vary considerably from one organization to the next. Most preservice training includes information and activities designed to provide a sense of how adults learn; suggestions for creating a curriculum and designing instruction; ways to determine student goals and to assess accomplishments; and information about the organization's expectations from tutors.

Preservice training is necessary but, by itself, is not sufficient. New tutors cannot learn all they need to know in a few hours, nor can they be expected to implement everything they learn without support. Most organizations that rely on tutors offer inservice training opportunities and many use paid staff to provide continuing support to tutors. Dominique Davis, program coordinator for a community-based organization in North Carolina, provides an initial 12 hour training, consisting of discussions of methodology, demonstration lessons, and opportunities to practice lesson planning with coaching from "support" tutors. During their first month of work, Dominique meets individually with new tutors to help them organize their first lessons. She and the support tutors observe lessons and make suggestions. A month after the initial training, Dominique meets with new tutors and provides support by encouraging them to share, answer

questions, and make suggestions.

Cook et al. (1994) conducted focus groups with 34 tutors who had less than a year to more than four years' experience. These tutors said that their initial training was adequate for getting started, but stated that they needed continued support and access to a range of instructional resources. In Corle's (1999) survey of 20 tutors in a community-based organization, respondents expressed positive opinions about the training they received and agreed that they needed support during the tutoring process.

Even with the most carefully planned training and support processes in place, organizations cannot ensure that tutors will always act in the way the organization hopes. Hambly (1998) documented that tutors do not always follow their training, and suggested that organizations should have in place means of following up with tutors to encourage good practice and reduce incidence of straying into inappropriate habits. Ideas on how to support tutors are included in the box below.

Instruction

Some literacy programs use a structured approach, in which instructional content and techniques are prescribed, with tutors following a guide or using a workbook series. In

these programs, instruction is highly driven by the materials provided. Many tutors place trust in the materials and only occasionally depart from them. Other programs encourage tutors to formulate lessons based on information provided by program staff, who have conducted intake assessments and identified a set of skills a student should work on. In these programs, tutors have greater responsibility for determining or helping students determine their needs and designing and carrying out instruction. Program staff make suggestions, answer questions, and offer in-service training to tutors. Whether a program is highly structured or more open to tutor input, one-on-one instruction may sometimes be supplemented with student meetings or other activities that bring learners together.

In some programs one-on-one tutoring is not the primary means of instruction, but is used to supplement classroom-based group instruction. In these programs tutoring may be a scheduled part of classroom instruction during which learners meet regularly with tutors as part of the total instructional design. As an alternative, tutoring may be conducted on short-term bases, to address a need, and then discontinued as students return to full class participation. Some programs may use one-on-one

Supporting One-on-One Tutors

- Provide tutor training (preservice and inservice) that mirrors the program's goals and outlook. Include a variety of instructional approaches and assessment techniques. Provide continuing support to tutor-student teams.
- Ensure that tutors understand the value of the training and support offered. Make them part of the decision-making about student goals and achievement.
- Ensure that tutors believe that they are well prepared to work with students, and that they base this belief on the content and quality of training.
- Make sufficient appropriate materials available to tutors. Assist tutors in securing materials that are appropriate for the kinds of learning activities they construct.
- Assist tutors in creating flexible learning situations.
- Ask tutors to report learner progress in ways that highlight real-life-related accomplishments. ❖

tutoring in addition to classroom instruction, with pairs of tutors and students meeting at times other than class times. Hunter-Grundin and Karagiorges (1983), for example, describe an ESOL program in which one-on-one tutoring in students' homes supplemented class instruction. The teacher–learner one-on-one instruction that occurs in adult literacy programs that rely on an individualized approach is not considered one-on-one tutoring. In that context, teachers are providing assistance to students who work at their own pace to complete assigned tasks.

Relationships

The success of one-on-one tutoring is largely dependent on the relationships that occur between tutor and learner. Sessions typically begin with conversations about everyday occurrences, family events, and other commonplace topics. As instruction begins, some tutors interweave information gleaned from these chats into lessons or create specific lessons around them. For example, some tutors structure lessons around manuals or forms from learners' workplaces. Because they know their learners well, tutors can take advantage of these teachable moments and weave into instruction lessons of a more personal nature that are concentrated on longer-term goals.

Empirical Studies

Despite its wide use, little empirical research has been conducted into the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring in adult literacy. The few studies that do examine this topic meet the criteria neither for sample size and selection nor design necessary for their findings to be considered generalizable. Nonetheless, it is instructive to review what has been learned about one-on-one tutoring.

Gold and Horn (1982) studied effects of one-on-one tutoring on youth and adults reading below fifth grade level. They compared pre- and posttest measures of reading for subjects who received one-on-one tutoring from trained volunteers. The subjects made significant gains in general reading and discrete reading subskills, leading the researchers to conclude that trained volunteers can be effective in increasing literacy skills of beginning level learners through one-on-one tutoring. The caveat here is to make sure that the tutors working with beginning level learners have sufficient training to meet the particular needs of this population.

Reynolds (2000) used a qualitative sociolinguistic approach to analyze expectations of students and tutors in an ESOL program. She identified a gap between tutor and student expectations for participation. Students preferred more teacher-directed conversation, while tutors encouraged greater student participation. Reynolds determined that this gap influenced students' acquisition of English and shaped their participation in the program. This suggests that tutor and learner should openly discuss their expectations and come to an understanding about them.

Student retention is sometimes used as an indicator of effectiveness in adult literacy programs. Darkenwald and Silvestri (1992) studied 40 learners in a one-on-one program and determined that an open and caring atmosphere, tutor training and support, and opportunities for learners to apply their improved skills were the most important factors that appeared to contribute to longer student retention. Knibbe and Duscewicz (1990) looked for evidence of one-on-one tutoring's effectiveness in student retention figures. They examined student records over a four year period (from 1985 to 1989) in a community-based literacy program. They discovered several factors that can support student retention: focus on student goals and interests, staff support for students and tutors, use of small group instruction for topic-oriented lessons, increased flexibility for students with special needs, and opportunities for students to drop into learning centers. In Comings' (2001) evaluation of five library literacy and ESOL programs, which use both one-on-one and small group tutoring, he notes that retention is related to learning. According to John Comings, co-author of the study and director of NCSALL, students learn in programs where they believe in themselves as learners, where they are involved in formulating their own goals and plans for meeting them, and where they understand what they are learning. Students demonstrate commitment to learning by remaining in the programs long enough to accomplish their goals.

Conclusion

That one-on-one tutoring is an effective means of instruction seems suggested more by its pervasiveness than by any empirical evidence. Is one-on-one tutoring as effective as other modes of instruction or even more so? Morrow et al. (1993) contrasted one-on-one tutoring with small group instruction for adults in a volunteer literacy program. Although they found no differences between one-on-one and small group instruction in reading achievement, they did note that students in one-on-one tutoring situations reported having achieved more of their personal goals than did students in small group situations. The results replicated findings of an earlier pilot study. Quigley and Uhland (2000), on the other hand, compared the effectiveness of small group instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and counselor-teacher team support for 20 adult learners, using retention as their measure. Although students in all three conditions remained in the program longer than control group students, the small group condition was most effective.

More research is needed to learn about the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring compared to other modes of instruction. One-on-one tutoring may be most valuable as a means to reach

and retain adult students who would not enroll in programs that use other methods of delivery. By furnishing programs with the ability to reach students who are in remote areas or incarcerated, or students who prefer anonymity, one-on-one tutoring meets a vital need, and remains a major mode of instruction in ABE and ESOL in general.

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About the Author

Mary Dunn Siedow works as an independent consultant conducting professional development activities with Equipped for the Future. She was the founding director of North Carolina Literacy Resource Center and executive director of a community-based literacy program. She holds a Master's and doctoral degrees in reading education from Indiana University and has published teacher/tutor manuals and student instructional materials. ❖

Organized Literacy Efforts Using One-to-One Tutoring

Two organizations, Laubach Literacy and Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), have used one-to-one instructional approaches since the 1950s. Today, ProLiteracy America (a merger of Laubach and LVA) continues to employ trained volunteers in one-on-one literacy instruction in its more than 1,200 US affiliates. The organization also encourages small group and class instructional approaches in programs in which use of these models is appropriate.

What began as a strictly volunteer effort became more organized during the 1980s. Volunteer organizations began to hire paid staff to coordinate tutor–student matches, train volunteers, and manage organizational operations. A study commissioned by the US Department of Education and conducted by Tenenbaum and Strang (1992) documented the growth and evolution of volunteer organizations and made recommendations for research and program accountability. Following passage of the National Literacy Act in 1992, with its "equitable access" language, volunteer organizations began to receive federal adult literacy funds in a more systematic way than previously. In the process they took on increased responsibility for accountability. Today, volunteer literacy organizations play significant roles in the adult literacy and ESOL systems in many states.

What remains crucial is the need for volunteer tutors to receive preservice training before being matched with students. Equally important is the need for tutor–student matches to receive support throughout their work together. LVA posited that equal time should be spent on tasks related to preparation for literacy (recruiting students and volunteers, training volunteers, matching) and on tasks that support and maintain literacy efforts, such as inservice training for tutors, data collection and reporting, and organizational support (DuPrey, 1992). ❖

The Home-Tutoring Model

by Marianne Buswell

Until recently, Vermont Adult Learning Program (VAL) used a mode of delivery that involved sending professional (paid) tutors to students' homes. Marianne Buswell was a VAL traveling tutor for seven years before becoming a center-based classroom teacher. Focus on Basics *talked with her about her experiences as a tutor.*

FOB: How did you get started as a tutor?

MARIANNE: I saw an ad [for the job] in the paper and applied. I hadn't taught. I had just completed an undergraduate degree in psychology and had taken some education courses. When I started, I primarily taught students one-on-one in their homes. I was considered a traveling teacher because I covered seven rural towns. Traveling teachers teach to all learning levels and subjects. Being able to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies, literature, and life skills to all different types and levels of learners was an overwhelming task, but one that was a pleasant challenge.

FOB: Why did tutors travel to learners?

MARIANNE: We are very rural here. Many students couldn't get in to the central location. At least that's what we thought at the time, although even when we were doing one-on one in the homes, we were trying to persuade students to come in. I started out with 30 students. I tried to see them each for an hour a week, but it was hard to get to all of them. We slowly started increasing the time requirements because we

realized we weren't seeing improvement in our students' skills.

FOB: What training did you receive to prepare you to tutor students in their homes?

MARIANNE: The program really didn't prepare me. I shadowed the teacher who I replaced for a week or two. He brought me around to the different families' homes, to introduce me and so I could see what they were working on. I was encouraged to connect with the other teachers and observe them, and was left to figure it out on my own. Vermont Learning is improving the orientation for new teachers now.

I did observe other teachers and skimmed many different educational materials. Since I was learning, too, I often sat beside each student and did the work with him or her. I noticed that the students didn't have strategies to be successful learners, so I taught them the ways in which I had learned. I later found out that this technique is called a "think aloud." I "thought aloud" to the student any questions, comments, or notes that silently went through my head while I was reading. Seven years later, I still use this technique.

FOB: What about teaching reading? That requires very specific skills on the part of the teacher.

MARIANNE: I ended up trying different things, different materials. I

was naïve, thinking "they can't read, no problem, but if we read together enough, they'll get it." At the time, I didn't know about learning disabilities.

Vermont Adult Learning lets teachers choose the workshops they want to attend for professional development, so I decided to find a reading workshop. I went to a two-day overview of the Wilson Reading System. The Wilson Reading System involves 12 books. The first package goes to book six and provides the instructions and the students' workbooks. The package also tells you which sounds to start with and what level of mastery the students need to achieve before they can progress to the next level.
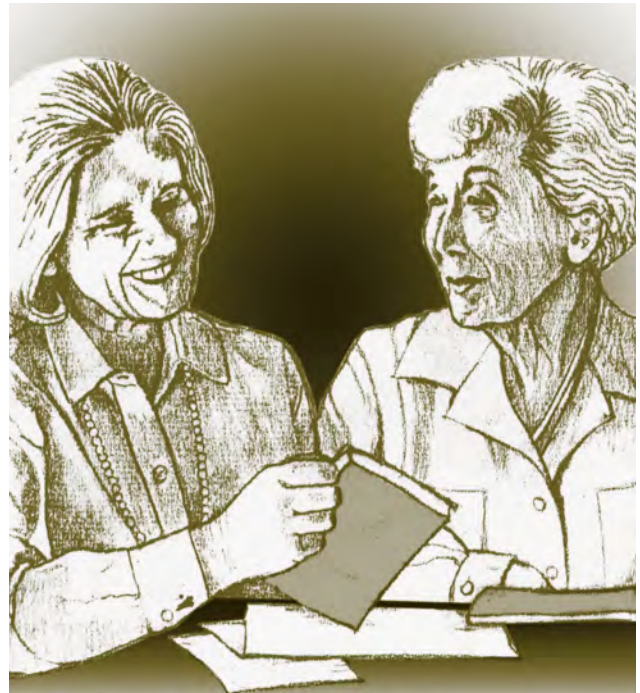
FOB: Do you like the Wilson system?

MARIANNE: The Wilson system works really well; it provided me with a curriculum to teach different sounds and syllables. My students were able to start grasping sounds rather than trying to memorize words. Instead of feeling frustrated and as if they were failures, the students and I started to feel that we were accomplishing something.

The problem was, because the system is structured a certain way, with only closed syllables through the end of book three, learners at this level still find it hard to read in the real world for quite a while. It leaves them somewhat stuck. It took a year to get through book one, which consists only of three-letter words, with those students. They had other interests, and we — the students and I — got bored doing only the Wilson. So I mixed some other things in. One of the learners, a man in his 70s, wanted to learn to read and write. His background is Native American, and he wanted to retell his grandmothers' tales, so we ended up making a book. He dictated the stories and I wrote them.

This student had a brother who handled his bills. I taught my student how to use a checkbook so he didn't need to rely on his brother. We came up with a system: I wrote all the numbers on a sheet of paper. Using that sheet, he copied what he needed in order to write out a check.

FOB: Did you structure your tutoring sessions in any particular way?

MARIANNE: I came up with a model for each learner and checked in with them occasionally to make sure I was still meeting their needs. For example, with the man I was just talking about, our meetings took place once a week for an hour and a half. We spent an hour on the Wilson, and then moved on to either the checkbook or the story for half an hour.

Another woman, who had very low skills, had the adult diploma as her goal. We did an hour of Wilson, then half an hour of math. She was also in the Even Start [family literacy] program, so we worked using children's books for 15 minutes or so, and spent 15 minutes on a writing activity.

FOB: Did any particular activities work best for you in the one-on-one situation?

MARIANNE: What works well for me? Reading books together with my students. I try to pick books that the student will enjoy, to give him or her a taste of reading for pleasure. For example, I'm using *Because of Winn Dixie* right now, with a student. He really enjoys it. There are a lot of neat characters in the book. I've used *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, and *My Side of the Mountain*. My student likes to talk about what's going on with the characters and how they are changing. With him, I do an hour of Wilson and 45 minutes of reading. We take turns reading each chapter. I some-

> **"Being able to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies, literature, and life skills to all different types and levels of learners was an overwhelming task, but one that was a pleasant challenge."**

times "think aloud" the notes I'm taking and explain why. When we're done reading, we each write down a reflection. I check with him about whether he wants to do this as either a structured or free writing exercise.

I recommend starting out with short chapter books. We always start off our session by sharing our recall of what we read before. We then take turns reading and make comments or questions during that process. At the end of our reading session, we write down our thoughts about what we have read. Sometimes we focus our writing about one situation or character, or we choose to keep it open to our own reflections. Then, we share what we wrote. We can also

use those notes the following week to refresh our memory of what we have read so far. Sometimes we like to challenge each other by coming up with a question to ask when we are done reading. At first, they are one-answer questions, or based on memory. As we get better at it, the questions turn into open-ended or inference-type questions.

With one student I just used children's books, since she wanted to read to her children. So we did Wilson for an hour and then spent time reading children's books. I talk to her about how to "read" books by having her girls interact with the pictures or by having the girls tell the story by interpreting the pictures.

Reading books with students is one of my favorite activities as a teacher. Books allow students to go all over the world to experience different life styles. Sometimes I use maps to show a student where our adventure is going to be that day. While I'm at it, I might have the student calculate the miles from where we are to the setting in the book. I also like to try to make connections with the characters in the book to our own lives.

FOB: What were some of the pluses and minuses of traveling to students' homes?

MARIANNE: Home tutoring was always unpredictable. I'd put a lot of miles on my car for a student who might not have been home for their appointment. You never knew what the crisis of the week would be: will they have heat, electricity, phone, food, clothing, and shelter? Often, the families needed to talk about these crises before I could even think about doing reading, writing, or arithmetic. Once we got started on our lessons, interruptions might occur because of the TV, phone, or visitors.

The high points were the relationships that you build with the students.

You build friendships. You get really excited when they've made some gains. You get involved with what's going on in their life, because they end up sharing with you. You get to see them blossom.

FOB: What were some of the pluses and minuses of the home tutoring model?

MARIANNE: Vermont Adult Learning realized that it wasn't cost-effective to send teachers to the home for one-on-one instruction, and slowly got away from the one-on-one model to center-based, group instruction. We started to have our classes in the local libraries, schools, and any other community center that would have us. Along with that change, VAL required students to participate at least four hours per week. Students needed to decide if they were ready to commit and make the effort towards attaining their educational goals. Those who made the commitment were often rewarded with educational gains.

Since I have changed from a one-on-one teacher to a center-based teacher, I am less frustrated. My students don't share their personal problems as much in a class setting. I no longer feel the need to have a second degree in social work. Classes allow students the opportunities to nurture friendships, so some of their personal issues are shared with their classmates instead of with me. Less time spent on personal issues amounts to more time spent on education. And even if one student cancels or doesn't show up, others do. The other benefit to center-based instruction is that I don't need to teach all subjects. I can send students to other teachers who are teaching specific curricula. This gives me a chance to explore and create specialized classes. Center-based instruction has taken some of the unpredictability out of my job description. Now when a situation arises and I need help to address it, a co-worker is only a room away, not miles away. 📖

Studying ESOL Online

by Marisol Richmond, Marian Thacher, & Paul Porter

As online classes have become more common in other areas of education, we in the field of adult English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) have begun to ask whether online instruction might work for our students. The San Juan Adult Education program in Sacramento, CA, hypothesized that it would be effective. We wanted to see whether students would want to study online, for which of our students an online model was most appropriate, and how student progress in this model compared with progress in other delivery models.

In fall 2002, we received funding from the TECH21 project (http://www.tech21.org/), a federally funded project from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, awarded to the National Center on Adult Literacy, to compare four ways of using English for All (EFA), a video-based intermediate adult ESOL curriculum that can be accessed online or via videotapes (see sidebar). The four delivery models we compared were classroom-based group instruction; lab-based individualized instruction; a so-called wrap around model, which consisted of students individually viewing the program on television from home and then calling in to interact and practice on air with the live television instructor; and online, using the EFA Web site independently from home with an online instructor. We recruited 26 students to participate in the online class, tested them before and after they used the course and interviewed them, and tracked their progress in completing the 20 lessons in the EFA curriculum. In this article we describe the online model and research process we used and what we learned, both about the online model and the ESOL population, and about the trials of trying to study a model as we created it.

Sample Selection

We recruited students for the online group by sending a flyer to the intermediate level ESOL teachers at Winterstein Adult School (part of the San Juan Adult Education program) announcing the class. The teachers read the flyer to their students and gave us the names of those who were interested. Our first surprise was that there was no shortage of volunteers. We weren't sure initially whether students would see online learning as a good way to study English, but many

did. A contributing factor may have been the 10 laptops that we offered to place in the homes of students who did not have Internet access at home. We recruited 10 students who needed to borrow laptops, and we also recruited 16 students who already had Internet access.

The second surprise was the demographics of the self-selected sample. Most of the students who volunteered already had computer skills. We screened out a couple of students who had no computer skills. Those who remained tended to feel comfortable using the Internet for other purposes. Half of the online students classified themselves as either daily Internet users or advanced users of the computer, as opposed to only 6.3 percent of the traditional classroom students and 14.3 percent of the TV students. Our tentative conclusion here is that students have a good sense of their computer skills and tend to self-select well in terms of their readiness to participate in an online learning program.

The overall education level was also higher in the online sample than in the TV or classroom groups. Of the online students, 35 percent (nine people) had bachelor's degrees or above, as opposed to 12.5 percent (two people) in the classroom model, and 12 percent (10 people) in the TV model; 14 of the online students were women; and eight were Spanish

speakers. Other languages spoken by students at home included Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean, and Farsi.

How It Worked

We held an initial orientation in the school computer lab, where we met the students, registered them on the EFA website, gave them CDs to use for watching the videos, and taught them how to get into the course and proceed through each episode online. We photographed each student and put their photos on a class Web site along with their bios, which they created as their first writing assignment. We also had an online discussion board separate from the EFA site that we introduced to students during the orientation.

After the orientation, we made appointments with the students who needed to borrow a laptop from us, to go to their home and help them get started. We then visited the home of each student with a loaner laptop once, to help them find a good workspace near a phone jack, since they were using a modem, and to show them how to get online. The laptop loan part of the project was relatively trouble-free. Except for one malfunctioning computer that had to be replaced, we did not get many requests for technical support. One significant factor in the success rate of these students may have had to do

with the presence of someone at home who could help them with the computer if they got stuck; all but two of the students had such help. All laptops, which had been well cared for, were returned by the end of the course.

Students in the online group progressed through the 20 lessons at their own pace. EFA provides a management system that enables the instructor to see when students have last logged on, which activities and episodes they have completed, how many times they attempted each activity and post quiz, and the score for their latest quiz attempt. Students varied widely in their rate of progress, and three students dropped out by the end of the four-month course. One had health problems, one moved away, and one had a baby in the middle of the course. The resulting retention rate was 88 percent, or 23 of the original group of 26 students.

When a student had not logged on for a while, the teacher contacted the student via the internal note-sending function of EFA, e-mail, or telephone. The teacher also posted a writing assignment for each lesson on the discussion board, and e-mailed students responding to their posts. At the end of the course we had another face-to-face meeting to celebrate, hand out certificates, and check in with the students.

Reading Level Results

The results of testing students before and after they used the online course using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) showed an average gain of 5 points, from 227 to 232. However, it is not possible to attribute the gain solely to the online class. This is comparable to the average gain of all students in the ESOL program at Winterstein, which was 5.6, and the average gain for all intermediate-level traditional classes in the program, which was 5.8, with a

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English for All

English for All (www.myefa.org) is a free web-based program for adult speakers of other languages who want to learn English. It includes 20 episodes, each with 15 minutes of video, six interactive activities, and a posttest. The videos are of high quality and engaging, with characters from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds. The videos are available on VHS as well as online. Print versions of all activities are available to be downloaded from the site.

The stories deal with real-life situations as experienced by immigrants acclimatizing to life in the United States. Topics include job and career advancement, job health and safety, managing family life, dealing with taxes, civic participation, and more. Students view the videos with or without viewing the script, practice oral vocabulary words, and complete a variety of activities related to vocabulary, grammar, life skills, and critical thinking, as well as complete a posttest for each episode. ❖

Recommendations

Programs considering implementing an online course for ESOL learners may want to consider the following important areas:

Providing the Technology — In order to make the program equitable, learners who do not have access to technology at home should be provided laptops and Internet access. Another option might be to provide access through an open lab, or refer students to the library near their home.

Language Level — Students at an intermediate-low level or above are more likely to be successful using EFA than students at a beginning-high level. The Internet itself requires some reading skills to navigate.

Computer Skills — Students without some fundamental computer skills are not likely to be successful online learners, or will need computer instruction and practice before they begin the online course.

Recruitment — Recruitment is most successful through some kind of organizational connection. In our case, the connection was with the adult school and the One Stop Career Center. Other programs have been successful in recruiting online students through the workplace or community organizations.

Oral Communication — The missing element in the online curriculum was oral communication. As technology advances, this can be remedied through the use of chat, instant messaging, voice over Internet, and Internet cameras that will share sound and images of participants as well as their written words.

Assessment — A significant unresolved issue about online learning is assessment. We do not have effective and valid methods of assessing students online. Issues of test security, confidentiality of test protocol, ensuring that enrolled students take the test by themselves, and other issues have yet to be solved. CASAS is working on creating an online assessment, as are some other testing services, but issues of identity and security have yet to be resolved (Young et al., 2002).

Documenting Attendance Hours for Online Students

Documenting attendance hours for online students is a challenge. San Juan Adult Education Program, led by Lynn Bartlett, has had an extensive distance learning program, including broadcasting its own TV programs for 10 years, and has learned over the years how to address this issue. To meet federal and state funding requirements, they organized a time equivalent formula for various activities associated with each distance learning class. For the online class, calculations include video viewing time, number of e-mails posted by the student, number of written assignment responses, meetings attended, and activity attempts. This method of calculating seat time, or attendance hours, matches the "Teacher Judgment Model" of calculating seat time based on fixed amounts of time credited for each activity and assignment, cited in Johnston (2004).

Hours of Credit for Learning Activities

	Episodes	Additional Activity Attempts	E-mails	Postings	Meetings	Total Hrs for Episodes	Total Hrs for Attempts Postings etc.	Total Attendance Hrs
Student A	5	2	5	5	1	10	7	17
Student B	10	5	10	10	2	20	14.5	34.5
Student C	20	8	20	20	5	40	29	69

Episodes — 15-minute video and activities: multiplied by 2 hrs

Additional Activity Attempts — number of additional times a student completed an activity to achieve 80 percent mastery or better: multiplied by .5 hrs

E-mails — number of e-mails sent by the student to the teacher: multiplied by .5 hrs

Postings — number of written assignments posted on the discussion board: multiplied by .5 hrs

Meetings — number of student teacher meetings and functions – per actual hour (Johnston, 2004).

In the first year of the online class, the average hours of attendance per student were 45, with a maximum of 70. In the second year, the average attendance hours per student were 35, with, again, a maximum of 70 hours. Because the students in the second year had a lower level of language skills and did much less writing, the average number of hours for the second year was considerably less. Because we considered the writing component of the course to be an important part of instruction, we concluded that the English for All curriculum in a purely online instructional model is best suited to students at an intermediate-low level and higher who have more than a minimal amount of computer experience. ❖

range of class averages from 4.3 to 8.1. Students exposed to all models showed a gain, with little difference in the level of gain among methods. We are not able to conclude that online instruction is comparable in effectiveness to other models, since the online students were also enrolled in a face-to-face class at the same time.

A Second Try

In the following year (Fall, 2003), we attempted to recruit students to study online who were not in any other English class. This proved to be extremely difficult. After two months of passing out flyers and door hangers in Russian in predominantly Russian apartment complexes, and trying to locate students who had left the local One Stop Career Center but would have liked to continue their studies online and who were at the appropriate language level, we had only recruited three students. As a result, we resorted once again to recruiting students from existing classes, this time at the One Stop. The conclusion we draw from this experience is that it is difficult to find motivated students at the appropriate (intermediate) level of English without some connection to an educational or other institution. Possibly it is easier for students who have made the initial contact with a traditional class to muster the confidence to enroll in an online program.

Retention Results

The retention rate of 88 percent for the online students seemed to show a high level of success. The average retention rate for intermediate-low ESOL students in California is 61 percent. The teacher was able to stay in touch with all students, and to obtain an explanation from those three who dropped out. One of our initial concerns was

that students might not be motivated to stay with an online learning environment because not all language skills were addressed, or because they would not have enough of a bond and a sense of community with the teacher and the other students. A topic for further research might be to study retention rates with online-only students, since the students in this study may have had the need for community met through their associations in their traditional class.

English for All provides a great deal of listening practice through the total of five hours of video. In the online lessons, the 15 minute video for each lesson is separated into six sections, and students complete some kind of listening or interactive activity after each section: completing related reading and answering comprehension questions, or reading a presentation on a grammar point and practicing by selecting the correct form of a verb in 10 different sentences. Written instructions and interactive activities are provided in vocabulary, listening comprehension, life skills, grammar, and critical thinking. Writing instruction is not included, but in our model we added writing activities via e-mail with the teacher and an online discussion board. The missing element was oral practice. At the end

of the course, when asked to give feedback, several students mentioned the need for some face-to-face interaction with the teacher, if not with other students, in order to get some oral practice. Some students also mentioned the frustration of not being able to get a question answered immediately, although they acknowledged that the instructor always responded to their e-mails.

The online course itself lacks opportunities to develop oral communicative competence (see the cover article). Communicative opportunities via writing were added through the discussion board and e-mail with the teacher, but more could be done in this respect. Based on our experience in the first year, we experimented with online chat and instant messaging in the second year of the project. However, we were not able to implement these as we had planned because the computer skill level of our students was more limited than in the first year. We also encountered technical problems with firewalls that made these kinds of communication impossible.
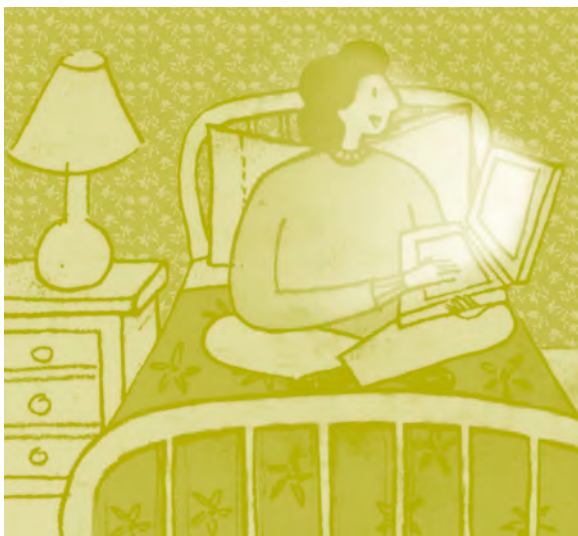
Despite these frustrations, the online students in both years persisted in the class and expressed enthusiasm for this model, particularly the convenience of being able to study from home on their own schedule. One student appreciated being able to be home when her son got home from school, fix him something to eat, and then get online and study while he went outside to play. Another student noted that she liked the ability to work at her own pace, and to repeat the activities, including the posttest for each lesson, as many times as she needed to. These comments point to the notion that distance learning helps to overcome some significant barriers to taking part in traditional classroom learning such as child care, distance, work schedules, among others.

A Blended, Not Pure, Model

We were assessing a blended model of online instruction, rather than a pure distance model, because the students attended the same school, and teachers reported observing the online students talking together about the online class at break time. So students had contact with each other, although not as a whole group, and we also had an initial and a final face-to-face meeting with them. One student had to return to Colombia after he had completed about half the course, and he was able to finish the course from an Internet café in there. This study may have identified a way that our adult learners become effective online learners: by starting in a supported model, where they have face-to-face contact with their instructor and other students, but in which the course content is delivered online. Through this experience, they gain confidence, computer skills, and facility in online learning so that they can function as purely online learners in the future, should they choose to.

We may find that a supported distance learning model is the best way to begin a program with adult ESOL students. For example, when students go to the computer lab for reinforcement activities or Internet-based tasks, the lab could be set up like an online class, thus helping to prepare them for being in an online class later on. The students would log in to the class Web site to get their assignments, post their work online, and communicate with the teacher and each other via e-mail or discussion board, all while they are in the lab together. We know that adult education students have to leave school for periods of time when their life circumstances change (Comings, 2002). Will students with some experience in online learning be more likely to become online learners when their life circumstances change and they need to leave school? As yet, it is too early to tell.

In Conclusion

We were not able to determine accurately the effectiveness of the online model compared to the others for a number of reasons. The online students selected for the study were also dually enrolled in on-site classes, so progress on the CASAS could not be attributed solely to the online class. Although dual enrollment encourages students to become effective distance learners while they are still in a supportive educational environment, it makes reaching research conclusions more difficult. Second, the academic levels of the students in each of the four delivery models studied varied too much. Levels ranged from beginning-low to intermediate-high. Also, keeping the actual amount of instructional time constant across all four models was difficult, due to the varied methods of instruction and the definition of instruction. In spite of these limitations, however, we learned useful things about online instruction for adult ESOL students as well as areas for future research.

For additional information on online courses and related research, visit www.cyberstep.org, the Web site of the Cyberstep Project, a multiyear effort to provide distance learning resources for adult basic learners and adult educators. The project was funded by the US Department of Education, and was completed in 2002. However, many of the products produced by the project continue to be used and improved.

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About the Authors

Paul Porter has served as a teacher, counselor, director of special education, Special Education Local Plan Area director, and, for 17 years, as a school district superintendent. He is currently an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Sonoma State University and has done extensive research and served as an independent evaluator for numerous distance learning and technology-related adult education projects.

Marisol Richmond has been teaching adult ESOL for more than 10 years. She has a Bachelor's degree from Skidmore College and a Master's degree in TESOL from Columbia University. She previously worked at the United Nations as a tour guide.

Marian Thacher is the Coordinator of Technology Projects for the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN), a California adult education leadership project. Previously she was an adult ESOL teacher, curriculum writer, online course developer, and workplace basic skills instructor. ❖

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