

WHAT'S NEW?
REACHING WORKING ADULTS WITH
ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER
LANGUAGES INSTRUCTION (ESOL)

A BEST PRACTICES REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2001 the Center for Impact Research (CIR) completed a needs assessment, *Barriers to English Language Learners in the Chicago Metropolitan Area*,¹ which detailed the needs of immigrant working adults for English instruction and determined the barriers they faced in learning English.

CIR's 2001 report documented the fact that many of these employed immigrants take advantage of overtime, hold down two jobs, and are often subject to changing or rotating work schedules that make attendance at regularly scheduled classes difficult. Evening English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes that occur twice a week lasting between one-and-a-half to three hours also present difficulties, because they interfere with parenting and family duties; fatigue of the attendees after a long day's work also makes learning problematic.

Some Friday evening and Saturday morning classes are available, but seldom are there any classes on Sundays. ESOL providers report that they are unable to schedule weekend classes because of the lack of trained and qualified teachers who are willing to work on Saturdays and Sundays. Volunteer tutors could assist ESOL learners, but they too are reluctant to make commitments for weekend hours.

The metropolitan Chicago ESOL system faces an additional problem in that it cannot meet the needs of those immigrants who are interested in, and able to attend ESOL classes. CIR's analysis of demographic data finds an estimated total population of potential English Language Learners 18 years of age or older in the Chicago metropolitan area in 2000 at 277,700. According to the Illinois Community College Board, in Fiscal Year 2001 68,815 adults in the Chicago metropolitan area received some ESOL instruction through programs funded by the Board, meaning that only about one-quarter of the need was able to be met. Sixty-two percent of these learners were in beginning ESOL classes. Many area ESOL providers report long waiting lists for ESOL classes, and some say they are implementing lotteries for classroom places.

How then, can ESOL learning be reorganized to enable adult learners who are employed to upgrade their English language skills? Can ESOL services be offered along a continuum, with systems providing various services, geared to immigrants with differing levels of commitment to learning English, as well as changing or rotating schedules and time limitations? How can effective learning opportunities be offered in the home, at the workplace, and in accessible community locations, such as shopping centers and churches?

¹ Available at www.impactresearch.org

METHODOLOGY

We undertook research to find out whether and where new approaches have been developed and implemented in North America, and what is known about their success and efficacy. Our ESOL consultant, Robert Wisz, spoke at length with ESOL programs and experts throughout the country to identify new programs and approaches, understand the philosophy behind them, and obtain information about their success and evaluation. Our advisory group members, comprised of area ESOL providers and government officials, met to help us generate a list of best practice ideas for research. Later, they helped us review and assess these ideas and to determine which ones might be recommended for the Chicago metropolitan area, and have also provided one-on-one assistance with the compilation of this report.

This report will detail two important models or approaches with proven effectiveness that we believe have the potential to assist working immigrants who want to learn English in the Chicago metropolitan area and who find it difficult to attend ESOL classes. We outline current policies that present barriers to the implementation of these ideas in Illinois, and suggest how we can begin to implement some of these new practices.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

I. DISTANCE LEARNING MODELS

Create opportunities that promote self-directed study and practice and that also embody community-based learning, in which other family members and community members provide tutoring, language practice, support, and assistance in key community institutions such as libraries, schools, churches, and community centers that are in close proximity to learners.

What is distance learning?

Distance learning is a process connecting learners with resources without the resources having to be physically located in an educational institution that may be far distant from the learner. In a sense, distance learning also democratizes education, in that it depends on the learner's own time and commitment in the use of these new interactive learning tools. Adults can learn anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace by using electronic technologies and/or prepared print packets. Distance learning has been successfully implemented for college and graduate courses, in which assignments can be transmitted by e-mail and corrected, with dialogue between teacher and students occurring over the Internet. This technique can connect learners in geographical areas very remote from the instructor and can result in the transmission of knowledge from the instructor to the student.

Distance learning opportunities rely on the interest, skills, and commitment of the learners to follow the program at home. Distance learning programs are also designed to use resources that are nearer to home. Family members or children who know some English, and other community resources such as drop-in, structured conversation groups in public libraries, led by high school or college students, augment the distance learning materials at the same time as they link newcomers to the community and to the community's cultural values and social milieu.

Distance education, which has its roots early in the last century in correspondence study, now commonly uses television and, increasingly, computers to deliver instruction. The program most in use around the country, according to the Public Broadcast System, is the Kentucky Education Television (KET) program, *GED on TV*, recently replaced with the updated program *GED Connection*, available now in at least 40 states. GED Connection consists of television programs, workbook lessons and optional online instruction and practice tests.²

Can distance learning, however, be effectively implemented for ESOL instruction? Until recently, distance learning tools for ESOL did not exist. At the moment there are three distance learning

² For a summary of distance learning strategies for adult learners, see *How States are Implementing Distance Education for Adult Learners*, National Institute for Literacy, State Policy Update, 2000, available at www.nifl.gov/nfl/policy/distance.htm

programs for ESOL that exist in videotape format. Another program, one that will be solely web-based, is due to come on line in 2003.

Crossroads Café, a video and print series produced through a collaboration among INTELECOM Intelligent Telecommunications, Heinle and Heinle, and the education departments of California, Illinois, Florida, and New York, receives high praise from adult educators who have been exposed to the materials. The only dispute revolves around whether the materials are of any use to adults who know no English at all, or are not literate in their own language, and it is here that strong differences of opinion have surfaced.³

Crossroads Café consists of 26 broadcast quality videos 25 minutes in length. The videos dramatize events in the lives of people who work at and visit a restaurant called the *Crossroads Café*. The episodes feature diverse ethnicities and real life stories; through comedy and drama, the stories depict cultural and social issues that are a part of everyday life in the United States. They also present short Culture Clips that introduce viewers to an aspect of U.S. culture and Word Play, a colorful animated segment that demonstrates the appropriate language to use when communicating specific types of information as well as grammar usage. Cultural issues include the importance of time, the role of the police, finding and interviewing for a job, and worker protection and benefits. In terms of language, students learn to ask for, give, follow, and clarify directions, report unsatisfactory service, read and follow directions found on public signs, interpret medicine labels, complete job applications, and write a note, invitation or letter, among other competencies.

There are two basic workbooks for *Crossroads Café*. The materials contain 16-20 pages of text with language exercises that support each video, a teacher's resource book, and tutor materials called Partner Guides that can be used for friends and relatives who assist learners.⁴ For the learner there are also Photo Stories with key elements of the main plot illustrated with photographs from the video and speech bubbles, which can be used before and after watching the video. They contain comprehension questions, exercises, and a photo dictionary.

Although the *Crossroads Café* producers claim that the materials can be used by any beginning learner and that many programs across the country are successfully using *Crossroads Café* with lower level learners, many of our advisory group members believe that adults must test at the low intermediate ESOL level in order to be able to view the videos productively.

English for All, or *EFA*,⁵ created by the U.S. Department of Education and the Division of Adult and Career Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District, consists of 20 fifteen-minute videotapes as well as exercises and activities supporting the content of the videos and available at the EFA website. The videos and website material are also available on CD-ROMS. *EFA* is designed for beginning learners and operates at a slower pace than *Crossroads Café*.

³ These differences came up in advisory committee discussions and in conversations with adult educators around the country.

⁴ Detailed information and samples of the *Crossroads Café* series are available at www.intelecom.org

⁵ See www.myefa.org for more information.

Another video series available is the Annenberg/CPB Project's *Connect with English*.⁶ *Connect with English*, designed for high beginners through low and high intermediate, presents materials at higher English levels than *Crossroads Café* and *EFA*. The series, consisting of 50 fifteen-minute video programs and coordinated books, also airs on the Annenberg/CPB channel, available to schools, and on some PBS outlets. The videos tell the story of Rebecca, an aspiring singer on a journey across America.

Another distance learning tool for intermediate learners is *Project CONNECT*. With funding from the U.S. Department of Education Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is developing an ESOL web-based project called Project *CONNECT* that will debut on the PBS website by 2003. PBS's partners include the National Center on Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, the adult education division of Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools, and several public television stations. PBS states that Project *CONNECT* is designed for supplemental instruction - learners can work at their own pace on the various units, and teachers can assign them for out of classroom activities. Each unit will include audio sections for structured listening and speaking practice, as well as thematic readings and guided Internet activities, and there will be a Community Space for chat rooms and other communications among learners.

Effectiveness of Distance Learning

What do we know about the effectiveness of these ESOL distance learning tools? We focus on *Crossroads Café* because it has undergone extensive field evaluation. The materials were piloted in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and San Antonio in the summer and fall of 1995 using three different modes of delivery: home self-study, self-study supplemented by the assistance of a teacher or tutor, and in-class use. The series has been formally evaluated in four major research studies.⁷ Before we turn to the evaluation results, it is important to remember that there are three basic *Crossroads Café* distance learning models.

- ✓ Home study using television-delivered video instruction, with or without workbooks or home study using videos checked out of the library or from an ESOL program (***pure self-directed learning model***)
- ✓ Home study using television-delivered video, or check-out video instruction with staff contact and coaching one-on-one, over the telephone, or in a regularly scheduled class where oral skills can be practiced (***facilitated distance learning model***)
- ✓ ***Laboratory model*** where learners view the videos on site independently and meet one-on-one or in small groups with instructor

All research on the *Crossroads Café* program to-date has yielded positive results in terms of student improvement and retention. Formal evaluation research of *Crossroads Café* has pre-and post-tested learners on vocabulary, cultural knowledge, reading, and writing. Overall, the learners, regardless of delivery models, demonstrated significant gains in all four areas. For example, in one of the *Crossroads Café* pilot evaluations in 1996, conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, a sample of 61 Chinese students in Los Angeles, all intermediate

⁶ See www.learner.org for more information.

⁷ For a summary of the research projects and their findings, see www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/AdultEd/Crossroads/learning.html

learners, were involved in the home study mode only, not the facilitated model. The average pretest score for the total group was 44 percent of the total points (176 points out of a possible 400). The average post-test score was 60 percent of the total points, 240 points, a gain of 64 raw score points or 16 percentage points. Over a third of the students reported spending six or more hours per week on the course materials, 22% spent one to two hours, and 43% three to five hours. Over half the students watched the videos three or more times. As the course progressed the students spent more time studying the workbook, and they said that the latter lessons were more difficult and thus required more time.⁸

In 1996 the Center for Advanced Study in Education of the City University of New York Graduate School for the Office of Workforce Preparation evaluated 22 sites with 755 learners participating in a pilot study of *Crossroads Café*. Three models were evaluated - 11 distance learning programs, with telephone or personal contact with the teacher once a week, seven facilitated models, combining self-study and classroom instruction, and four classroom programs. Retention rates overall were high, but retention was highest in the distance learning programs (87%) as compared with facilitated programs (79%) and classroom programs (75%).⁹

The median time per unit spent by pilot participants in all program models was an hour and-a-half, but the median time on task per weekly instructional unit spent by students in classroom and distance learning settings was 120 minutes, while in facilitated programs it was 90 minutes. In the distance learning model, almost 17% of the learners spent between 120 and 180 minutes per unit. Teachers noted substantial improvement in English language skills in 22% of the total sample and 57% of the entire sample registered some improvement. Classroom teachers rated the level of improvement as 3.5 compared to 3.0 in distance learning programs and 2.7 in facilitated programs, on a scale of 5=much improvement. It is likely, however, that teachers in the classroom setting had more opportunity to notice improvement among the learners. Unfortunately, this evaluation did not use formal pre-and post-test assessments as a measure of progress.

This evaluation did, however, make suggestions for specific programmatic and pedagogical practices and procedures that are required for the effective implementation of distance learning programs. The teachers believed that the telephone contact, which was the basis of most of the interaction in the demonstration sites, was not sufficient. They recommended that relatively frequent meetings, once every week or ten days, to review the students' work, bolster conversational skills, and maintain rapport, would be optimal. Meetings could be and were scheduled at other locations, including the public library or other locations near students' homes. Teachers also saw a clear connection between the length of telephone calls and student progress and success.

Evaluations

In 1998-9 five distance learning pilot sites using *Crossroads Café* were established in Florida. Two models were implemented. The first involved one class per week, with video and print materials

⁸ Evelyn Brzezinski & David Leitner, *Crossroads Cafe: Evaluation of the Summer 1996 Pilot Implementation, 1996, Submitted to the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.*

⁹ It is important to note, however, that participating students all had previous experience in adult education courses and had been specifically recruited for the pilots by their teachers.

provided for home use; tutoring was available in an open lab. In the second, learners worked independently at home, with tutoring available at the lab but without the weekly class. Pre and post-CASAS testing at all five sites showed significant gains in both listening and reading. The majority of the learners progressed one ESOL level in a 13-week period, although the evaluation report does not detail the amount of time learners spent on each unit.

The Florida pilots made some interesting discoveries. Because of lack of child care, some adults brought their children to class or to the lab. It soon became obvious that the children had been watching the video programs at home with their parents because they were familiar with the characters and the storyline. Their parents commented informally that the older children helped them with their worktext regularly at home. Because of this interest among the children, parents could spend time with their children as they themselves learned English, were able to obtain help from family members, and became motivated to work at home. In addition, many of the topics in *Crossroads Café* lent themselves to family discussion, such as gang involvement and single parenthood. The Florida report concludes, “By taking the videos home, learners could study more hours per week, and they were less tied to program location, rigid class schedules and teacher instruction...Retention over the 13 weeks was nearly 100 percent.”¹⁰

Successful Models

CIR has investigated several projects that have successfully implemented *Crossroads Café* across the country. We provide these examples to demonstrate the many ways that communities can structure distance learning opportunities using *Crossroads Café* materials, all of which can be helpful to working immigrants and their families.

Pure self-study. In Indianapolis, Indiana, *Crossroads Café* is regularly aired on cable-access channels in the Marion County area as well as on the public television station operated by Butler University. Each episode airs four times a day, four days a week, on four different stations for 26 weeks. The entire series is then rebroadcast during the second half of the year. ESL instructors in Marion County also have access to the series for in-class use. The *Crossroads* videos have been turned into an hour lesson by means of new 15-minute introductory segments featuring an ESOL instructor and a group of students, in which the instructor teaches the vocabulary for that episode and discusses the Photo Stories and Worktext activities, and it closes with a 15-minute review of key lesson points covered in the episode, making an hour-long program. A list of all ESOL providers located in Marion County is included at the end of each broadcast episode to encourage viewers to enroll in a formal class. The *Crossroads Café* textbooks are available for purchase and placed in local libraries for check-out. *For more information, contact Dan Wann, 317-264-1303.*

Self-study with long distance teacher back-up. Old Marshall Adult School, in the Sacramento, California Unified School District enrolls learners in a *Crossroads Café* course. As in Indianapolis, each episode begins with an opening segment, which introduces focus questions, and reviews material from the last episode. Following the *Crossroads Café* episode, there is a closing segment in which answers to the focus questions are offered and key vocabulary is discussed. Each episode airs three times in a one-week period on the city's cable access channel.

¹⁰ Teri McLean, *Crossroads Café Family Literacy in Focus*, Florida Human Resources Development, Inc.

Students may check out videos for supplemental viewing from one of a number of school-based check-out sites. When they do, they receive a copy of the script, so they can read along as the episode is replayed. Each student who enrolls is mailed a worktext at no cost. Each is sent an assessment exercise to complete after viewing each episode, and a stamped envelope in which to return it. ESOL teachers then mark and return the exercise with the next week's assignment. *For further information, contact Mary Prather, 916-264-4113.*

Springfield, Massachusetts implements the program in the same way, but students must check out the videos and return them. In implementing *Crossroads Café* in three locations in Massachusetts, students are expected to check in regularly with a teacher, coordinator or tutor, either by telephone, mail, fax, or e-mail. Lawrence, Massachusetts has successfully implemented a telephone contact system. *For further information, contact Roger Hooper, 617-287- 6998.*

In a program implemented by the Mount Vernon, New York Schools, the students use postage-paid envelopes to exchange videotapes and assignments with their instructors, who state that their system is ideal because due to employment and family responsibilities the adults are not able to attend on campus classes. Entering students complete and return an evaluation exam and receive photo stories or worktexts keyed to the appropriate level. As they master each level, they are provided study materials for the next. Individual writing assignments are mailed in to the instructors, who evaluate them and decide what supplemental assignments each student would benefit from, whether it is extra work on verbs or sentence structure. Officials state that enrollment in the program has doubled since they began using *Crossroads Café*. *For further information, contact Joan Uchitelle, 914-665-5696.*

In Yonkers Public Schools in New York, morning, afternoon and evening viewing opportunities seven days a week on the city's cable access channel are available, and additional broadcasts offered at community centers. Instructors are available by telephone 12.5 hours a day to answer students' questions and guide them through assignments. The thirty-minute episodes also have been augmented. Officials at the Center for Continuing Education in the Yonkers Public Schools visited area businesses and public work sites to shoot wraparound segments that demonstrate how the content of each episode applies to the world of work. At the same time as they are learning English, the students learn critical lessons about the nature of work and the expectations that American employers have of their workers. Distance learning students are instructed to watch each *Crossroads Café* episode several times before completing assignments that are mailed to them. They return their work in postage-paid envelopes for review and grading. The work is returned with a grade and comments, along with materials for the next episode. Instructors also add other ESOL materials to the package for each student, tailoring them to the skill level and educational needs of each student.

In the first year and a half, enrollment in the Yonkers Public School's Center for Continuing Education's *Crossroads Café* course has topped 2,500. Instructors have found that their distance learning students move up, on average, three-quarters of a level - in a four-level ranking system - during a 12-week period. As a result, the students normally progress from the first, or beginning level to the most advanced ability level within 36 weeks. *For more information, contact Bob Hassinger, 914-376-8600, ext. 227.*

Self-study with in-person backup. Central Piedmont Community College (Charlotte, North Carolina) requires that each student participate in an orientation before beginning the course, which includes pre-testing using CASAS, as well as instruction in how to use the videos and other materials. The instructor is available during several three-hour blocks of time per week that enable students to talk one-on-one with the instructor. Students also can use the time to participate in a structured group discussion, using the week's episode as the basis. *For further information, contact Gilda Rubio Festa, 704-330-6310.*

National Usage

The consistent enthusiasm for the Crossroads materials on the part of students and teachers, revealed through formal evaluations, is significant. But what is the picture in the entire United States? How far along are we in implementing these kinds of models?

CIR asked INTELECOM, one of the developers and the distributor of *Crossroads Café*, to provide us with figures on the national usage of the *Crossroads Café* series. Neither of Chicago's public education stations, WTTW-Channel 11, or WYCC-Channel 20 (the television station owned and operated by City Colleges of Chicago) runs *Crossroads Café*. We wanted to know how we compared to other localities.

INTELECOM estimates that out of about 350 public television stations in the United States, 20-30% are running *Crossroads Café* at any given time. In addition, *Crossroads Café* is available on many community access cable stations. One episode per week is aired, three or four times during that week, at varying times, but usually early in the morning and after work. Approximately 6,000 VHS sets of *Crossroads Café* are in use nationally, mostly ordered by adult education systems and public libraries. For example, the Orange County (Florida) Library System has just purchased the sets for each of its libraries.

Crossroads Café has been embraced and used in smaller sized cities and metropolitan areas where PBS stations, according to INTELECOM, may have more flexibility. Thus Chicago is not atypical of the other large metropolitan areas in the United States, which do not air *Crossroads Café*, and which notably, are the recipients of larger number of immigrants each year.

The work of Project IDEAL illustrates the fact that distance learning for adult learners has come of age. Project IDEAL is a multi-state collaborative effort organized by the Teaching, Learning, and Technology Program at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The project is creating resources for a consortium of states to help them implement and assess a variety of distance education models in their state, and the process includes building collaborative relationships among staff in the consortium states to facilitate the sharing of ideas. The 14 states participating include Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.¹¹ One of the work products will be a paper on ways to assess involvement and performance of adults studying at a distance, specifically geared to *Crossroads Café*. A Handbook on Distance Learning will be available that will explore issues of student recruitment, orientation,

¹¹ According to PBS, as of May 2002, Illinois representatives had not yet participated in Project IDEAL meetings. Personal communication, May 29, 2002.

support, tracking, and assessment of students. A four-week online course for teachers will also be available. These products will be created by September 30, 2002. As the project moves into the full three-year cycle each of these products will be updated as the states, with help from the IDEAL staff at the University of Michigan, learn better how to teach at a distance. Technical assistance also will be provided to the states and local sites as they experiment with, and demonstrate different distance learning approaches designed to yield program planning information.

BARRIERS TO ESOL DISTANCE LEARNING IN ILLINOIS

Expense. Distance learning is not inexpensive. Funds must be available for adequate number of video materials to be purchased and made available to students for checkout, depending on the model, at libraries and elementary schools. Computers for online study and practice may be required at various community centers, libraries, and churches. For facilitated models, funds for instructors, as well as paid tutors and volunteers need to be available for learner assessment, backup, and support, as well as postage and telephone costs. The lack of new funds for ESOL programming means that current resources for classroom-based efforts would have to be redeployed for distance learning at a time when there are waiting lists for conventional classes. More funds altogether would be required to avoid this result.

Funds must also be made available for effective outreach and adequate publicity about distance learning opportunities to attract those learners who want to take advantage of self-study programs. One efficient approach, recommended by the state of California, is to run multi-lingual paid advertisements on the local cable television and radio programs catering to speakers of other languages *during prime time*.

In Illinois, however, implementation of *Crossroads Café* is less expensive. Because Illinois was one of the original development sites, organizations in Illinois implementing *Crossroads Café* are entitled to a deep discount and can obtain multiple copies of the sets at cost. Public broadcasting stations (PBS) nationwide have the rights to broadcast *Crossroads Café*. No licensing fees apply for broadcast rights, although stations are responsible for costs of making or acquiring broadcast masters.

Educational policy issues. Funding formulas. To use Illinois Community College Board funds, ESOL programs implementing distance learning must be able to obtain reimbursement for educational programming to students who are not physically in class but who are participating in learning with teacher support. Reimbursement policies in Illinois currently make no provision for distance learning. Officially approved programs obtain reimbursement at an amount per unit of instruction, which consists of 15 hours of teacher contact time. Teacher contact time is presently not defined. One solution is to define teacher contact time to include that spent in distance learning support activities. This approach, however, does not make it possible for programs to implement pure distance learning programs that could help intermediate learners who may be able to proceed without support and who could gain from pure self-study opportunities. Legislation in California in 1993 allows adult programs approved by the California Department of Education to use up to 5% of their block entitlement for innovative techniques and nontraditional instructional methods and new technologies.

Some advisory group members strongly believe that state reimbursement formulas also need to be revised to provide suitable incentives so that programs will be encouraged and will choose to conduct distance learning programs. A further incentive would be the creation of a special fund at the Illinois Community Colleges Board, earmarked for distance learning demonstration projects.

Use of tutors. Paid tutors can be useful in structuring low-cost support for adults in facilitated distance learning models. The Illinois Community Colleges Board funds, however, cannot be used to pay tutors, only classroom instructors or volunteer coordinators. According to Patricia deJesus Lopez at the Illinois Community College Board, this rule is in place because the Board wants to encourage high quality service through paid experienced teachers rather than tutors, volunteer or otherwise, who are considered to be less qualified and experienced. However, in facilitated distance learning programs, paid tutors can provide the necessary student support at accessible locations and hours in the community to adult learners, under teacher supervision. Paid tutors in facilitated distance learning models, approved by the Board, should be an allowable expense.

Student outcomes. Illinois Community College Board programs are required to measure student outcomes by a pre-and post-test, as compared to program pre-determined percentage target outcomes. This enables Illinois to demonstrate to the federal government, from whom the bulk of the dollars come, that there is adequate accountability within the adult education system. These progress requirements currently make it difficult for pure distance learning programs to be funded with federal dollars; state dollars could be used, if the progress testing requirements were lifted, for pure self-directed distance learning initiatives.

Teacher training. Sites implementing Crossroads Café emphasize that many of their instructors are resistant to change and emphasize the need to take this into account when structuring new distance learning approaches. Unless a pure self-study model is contemplated, instructors need considerable training in the purpose and use of these new models. Teachers need to become comfortable with redefined roles as facilitators over time and space. According to one program director in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, staff development that expands the perceptions of how learning can occur is required.

IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

The State of California has developed some basic principles for *Crossroads Café* implementation that are important in considering implementation of distance learning strategies in the Chicago metropolitan area. These include:

➔ Provide orientation for all prospective learners---regardless of the model chosen--- that describes the program and offers some hands-on experience with the videos and print materials.

- ➔ Assess learners to make certain that they are at least at the low intermediate ESL level before being introduced to the material.
- ➔ Establish an individual learning plan for all learners. This learning plan explains the learner's and the provider's responsibilities and expectations from the learning experience. Pre- and- post testing is also a part of the learning plan.
- ➔ Ensure that adequate funds are available to acquire multiple copies of the video and print materials. The program must design an inventory system for retrieval and restocking of video and print materials.
- ➔ Make sufficient staff available for weekly student support by telephone, in groups, by tutoring appointments, or through the mail, and deployed at accessible locations and times (after work, and on Saturdays and Sundays). There must be opportunities for speaking practice built into the individualized learner plan.
- ➔ Support adequate staffing levels and provide in-service training.
- ➔ Undertake specialized outreach and recruitment to reach those learners who could benefit from distance learning and who need to know that there is a new option. California recommends that publicity target Limited English Proficient (LEP) families through local elementary schools. Publicity could encourage them, for example, to attend a meeting at the school to view sample *Crossroads Café* video clips. These could also be aired at monthly bilingual advisory committees, PTA meetings, and other school functions, and at food markets, health facilities, churches, and street fairs. Similar presentations need to be made to other social service agencies in the community so they can refer adults in need of English to this new option. Multi-lingual advertisements in the local media such as cable television, and radio are also required. Ongoing publicity to local businesses with workers with ESOL needs would also be helpful. (*Crossroads Café* could be aired by businesses during lunch breaks at the business site.)

Advisory group members were enthusiastic about these new distance learning opportunities. In our 2001 report, working immigrants reported wanting more opportunities for weekend practice and shorter, more accessible conversation groups. ESOL program videos present a focal point around which these opportunities could be organized. Self-study could be augmented once a week and on the weekends with a variety of support mechanisms that could include one-on-one tutoring, and small conversation groups, structured around that week's video, in accessible locations in the community. Use of community volunteers and paid tutors on the weekend, if the funding restrictions could be revised, not only would increase accessibility to working adults, but would also help to bring immigrant households together with community members, decrease their isolation, and speed up their integration into the community and its culture.

Use of distance learning technologies also could enable programs to bring some resources to adult learners who are languishing on program waiting lists, and could serve as a bridge to their enrollment into more formal classes after going through the distance learning program.

DISTANCE LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this was not the case in the past, basic tools and resources are now in place for distance learning for ESOL. Yet, as we have seen, implementation of distance learning models is complicated and can be expensive. How can we now move forward? Here are four key recommendations.

- * The Illinois Community Colleges Board, the main ESOL public funder in Illinois, should revise its funding and reimbursement formulas to enable high quality distance learning programs to be implemented in the state of Illinois. We understand that this process has begun; we urge that it be completed rapidly.

- * The Illinois Community Colleges Board should set up a special fund to enable different models of distance learning programs for ESOL to be established and evaluated in the Chicago metropolitan area. By this process a group of experienced distance learning program administrators and instructors can be created who could serve as trainers and provide technical assistance to others in the field. We would encourage private philanthropy to contribute to this fund, or, in the alternative, to work collaboratively with the Board to help establish demonstration programs. A distance learning specialist should be designated at the Illinois Community Colleges Board to promote distance learning initiatives in the field.

- * Distance Learning tools, including *Crossroads Café*, English for All, and Connect with English should be regularly running on Channel 20, the public broadcasting station operated by City Colleges of Chicago. Their failure to air routinely at the present time is perplexing. Opportunities for viewing (and videotaping) the series should then be communicated through adequately funded, multi-lingual advertisements on other broadcast media, and interested learners should have the ability to purchase workbooks locally or check them, as well as the tape series, out of their public library. Although pure distance learning programs may not be optimal, many adults can be helped by viewing these videos and using the print materials. We would also recommend that WTTW-Channel 11 seriously consider becoming part of this community literacy effort by running the series. Its ongoing collaboration with the Chicago Community Trust and the Chicago Public Library, “Chicago Matters,” provides a model that could work well here.

In addition to the PBS stations, cable television airing should also be established. Each cable franchise in the state includes public, educational, and government access channels. Hundreds of cable systems cross the country are airing *Crossroads Café* at convenient times of the day or night at no cost to local ESOL service providers.

- * The Illinois Community College Board should loosen restrictions on paid tutors so that high school, college, and graduate students to provide ESOL tutoring and conversational practice in accessible community-based locations, based on the video materials.

II. WORKPLACE LITERACY

➔ *Opportunities for workers to learn or improve their English at their own worksite have been proven effective and should be expanded in the Chicago metropolitan area.*

Since many immigrants spend large number of hours at work, the workplace is an important venue for ESOL learning opportunities. Although workplace literacy has been a topic of discussion for the last ten years, experts with whom we have spoken have indicated that workplace literacy is a movement that has yet to take off in the Chicago metropolitan area. Employers have not been motivated to invest their time, energy, and resources to develop workplace ESOL programming for their workers.

Workplace programs have also been found to be effective, not only because of their ease of access, but also because they most often integrate English language learning with workplace vocabulary, tasks, and responsibilities; this contextual learning is very effective for adults, and enables the learner to see a payoff rapidly in terms of job performance. Yet these workplace literacy programs require strong partnerships with local businesses and educational providers, and they can be difficult for small businesses to implement and maintain.

We do not lack effective models for workplace literacy, and there are and have been many successful ventures in the Chicago metropolitan area.¹² Lack of funds has hampered expansion. Workplace literacy costs come in two categories. First, resources must be located for instructors and learning materials. Secondly, there are additional costs to the employer in that effective workplace literacy programs require employees to come in an hour early or stay an hour after their shift, with the employer providing some paid release time at other times during the work week to match the contribution of the employee.

There are also several successful models of workplace literacy programs using the *Crossroads Café* materials, including a program in Orange County, Florida, targeting hospital service workers, and a Teamsters program in Minnesota. The selection of a restaurant from which to develop the individual stories make *Crossroads Café* a suitable choice for some workplace literacy programs.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

The major barrier to implementation of workplace literacy and ESOL programs is a funding mechanism acceptable to employers. According to the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, as most employers believe it is the duty of government to educate the workforce, they look to public funds. Because the employer reaps the benefits from workplace literacy programs, however, the government believes that the employer should bear a significant portion of the cost.

At the present time, most community colleges and some community-based organizations stand ready to provide customized literacy training at the workplace and market themselves to area

¹² The Illinois Secretary of State's Literacy Office has funded many effective programs. See page 17 of this report.

employers, but they expect the employer to bear the cost of the instructor as well as the costs of customized the curriculum. In other words, these workplace literacy programs must pay their own way.

There are some initiatives that do provide some economic incentives to area employers.¹³ For the past two years, The Illinois Community Colleges Board has provided money, through general revenue funds, for an Incumbent Worker Training Grant to community colleges. Priority is to be given to companies with fewer than 300 employees. Employers must contribute a 50% match. Although one of the priority subjects is English as a Second Language, the City Colleges of Chicago administrator and marketer of the Workforce Training Grant informs CIR that most of the 50 or so grants each year in Chicago have not gone for ESOL workplace training. Rather, the funds have been used for middle level customized training for skills in information technology, such as web sites and ORACLE training.

City Colleges gives several reasons for the employers' lack of interest in ESOL workplace training. Again, employers believe that taxpayer dollars, and not their own funds, should support this kind of basic instruction for newcomers. Since taxpayer dollars are supporting ESOL classes at community colleges, their workers should take advantage of these. This immigrant population is highly mobile and changes jobs frequently. Why should employers train someone for somebody else? And lastly, many employers do not have a need for English-speaking employees, as long as they have shift supervisors who are bilingual. In such workplaces as factories and hotel (for housekeeping services) English language skills are not strictly necessary for the employer, but obviously very important for the employee if he (she) is going to be able to advance. Where language training has been part of the Workforce Training Grant Program, it most often consists of Spanish and Polish for health care professionals so that they can better speak with the customers.

On the other hand, although they can be funded, workplace literacy initiatives are not a priority for the Illinois Community Colleges Board's adult education and ESOL initiative, even though they remain a key ESOL instructional strategy. This bifurcation of effort within the Board may ultimately not be helpful to the conceptualization of new strategies for English Language Learners in Illinois.

One workplace literacy funding program that does target ESOL is the Secretary of State's Literacy Office's Workplace Skills Enhancement Grant, providing funds to collaborations of businesses and experienced educational providers of up to \$10,000 for each of two years for workplace literacy projects. Employers must match 50% of the grant, but this can be accomplished with in-kind donations, including the value of the employee's paid release time. In its first decade of operations, the program has provided 550 grants to 359 companies, and over 15,000 employees have received instruction. The program has had no formal evaluation, and the Secretary of State's

¹³ The Illinois Training Expense Credit provides employers with a credit against state corporate income tax of 1.6 percent of all federally deducted amounts for educational or vocational training in semi-technical or technical fields or semi-skilled or skilled fields on behalf of employees. This tax credit does not cover ESOL, and takes a great deal of time in terms of paper work and auditing that makes it not worthwhile for many employers to file for it, especially in light of the low amount of income tax Illinois businesses pay.

Literacy Office does not know the number of employers that continue the programs after the grants have expired.

The third mechanism is the proposed TIFWorks Training Assistance Program, as of this writing being debated by the Chicago City Council. The program would provide grants for training, including ESOL instruction, to employers within newly designated Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts, or to programs providing training and education to individuals who will be placed with employers within the TIF district. Employers would have to contribute up to 25% of the training cost, which could include the value of paid release time to employees. Money for the program is drawn from the tax base, which is increased through development in newly designated TIF districts, and captured and used solely for improvements in the TIF district within 23 years, the maximum life of a TIF district. In some districts, funds will not be available because they have already been appropriated for development projects/bond paybacks. The program will be operated by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development. (For further information, contact Sean Harden at 312-746-7479.)

Whether this program will provide enough funds and enough employer incentives to promote more workplace ESOL in Chicago city areas remains to be seen. As more and more immigrant households can be found outside the City limits, this program will not be able to assist all the adults in the metropolitan area who need help learning English.

In times of economic downturn, there is also less likelihood of employers being motivated to make contributions of their own to the education of their workers. With a less than booming economy, the federal government, state, and city also have fewer public resources to devote to workplace literacy programs. Therefore, although workplace literacy projects hold much promise for immigrant workers, the likelihood of expansion of these programs within the next few years is not great. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, through its Center for Workforce Preparation, as well as the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce work diligently to convince employers of the value of workplace educational programming and to provide technical assistance to employers, but this is an idea in which interest seems to have waned considerably.

WORKPLACE LITERACY RECOMMENDATIONS

* We recommend that the Illinois Community Colleges Board, community colleges, and the Mayor's Office on Workforce Development reconsider formulas for employer contributions, which may still be pegged too high. Perhaps employers can pay for the customization of ESOL materials, but the colleges can contribute the cost of instruction by integrating these programs into their adult basic education plans and programming instead of handling them on a "pay as you go" basis. Viewing workplace literacy programs as part and parcel of adult basic education, and not separately as workforce development, may be the first step toward this goal.

* We recommend that the Secretary of State Literacy Office formally evaluate its Workplace Skills Enhancement Grant to determine how many employers did continue with the program when the grants expired, and what barriers they experienced in continuing implementation.

CONCLUSION

Increased utilization of distance learning opportunities and workplace ESOL programming would help bring ESOL instruction to many working immigrants. Facilitated distance learning opportunities, that combine self-study with teacher support, would appear to stand a good chance of assisting beginning learners and bring them into the current ESOL service delivery system, and there surely are many intermediate learners who would be interested in and could benefit from pure self-study opportunities. Distance learning and workplace literacy both require additional funding or reallocation of current dollars.

There is controversy, and ESOL experts will differ, on whether certain distance learning materials can be of use for beginning learners, but there appear to be enough materials and proven models to use in fashioning some demonstration projects in Illinois. The failure to experiment and demonstrate new approaches in ESOL in the Chicago metropolitan area has contributed to this stasis; the lack of local information and experience serve to cut the field off from approaches that appear to show promise elsewhere. Economic incentives and political leadership will be needed to encourage and make this change in the field a reality in the Chicago metropolitan area.
