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MISSION STATEMENT

The journal's mission is to publish research on adult basic and secondary education and transitions to college and career programs. It informs practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and funders about best practices in adult literacy, numeracy, and English language education in publicly funded, community and volunteer-based programs in a wide range of contexts. Each issue will consist of research articles focused on a particular theme plus other content of interest to readers (e.g., resource reviews, opinion pieces, and debates and discussions on timely topics of interest to the field).

CONSULTING EDITORS:

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ProLiteracy Editorial Letter

Introducing the New Editorial Leadership of the Adult Literacy Education Journal

Dear readers, authors, reviewers, and partners,

We are honored and excited to serve as the new editorial leadership team for *Adult Literacy Education: The International Journal of Literacy, Language, and Numeracy*. Our team consists of three co-editors: Elizabeth Tighe, Ph.D. (Georgia State University), Daphne Greenberg, Ph.D. (Georgia State University), and M Cecil Smith, Ph.D. (Eastern Illinois University), as well as two editorial assistants: Christy Jarrard, M.S., and Ifedola Owoeye, M.A. (Georgia State University). Additionally, we are joined by our resource review editor, Kristine Kelly, M.Ed. (ATLAS, Hamline University), and our technology column lead Vi Hawes, M.Ed. (VH Ed Tech Consulting, LLC & Pima Community College). Finally, our consulting editors' group consists of individuals who have served in this role in the past, as well as several newcomers. We are grateful to all for agreeing to work with us in service of the adult literacy education research and practice community. Our goal as editors is to strengthen the research-to-practice pipeline and elevate the global adult literacy discourse. Due to the transition and timing of the peer review process, the current issue does not include research articles; however, we are excited to elevate research and encourage you to submit your research for review.

Our vision for the journal is that, as an international forum that connects rigorous research, actionable policy insight, and practitioner wisdom toward advancing the adult literacy field, we will:

- Publish accessible empirical research and policy analyses that have clear implications for research, practice, and policy.
- Elevate practitioner and learner voices and support emerging scholars.
- Expand international perspectives across authorship, readership, and editorial representation.
- Uphold transparent peer review and on-time publication.

As we take on our new roles, we extend our gratitude to our predecessors—Drs. Alisa Belzer, Amy Rose, and Heather Brown—for their hard work and dedication to the field. We especially thank them for spending time helping us in our transition to these new editorial roles. We look forward to thoughtfully reading, considering, developing, and publishing the very best scholarship, critical reviews, and practical advice that move our field forward.

Sincerely yours,

The New Editorial Team:

Elizabeth L. Tighe, Ph.D. | Georgia State University

Daphne Greenberg, Ph.D. | Georgia State University

M Cecil Smith, Ph.D. | Eastern Illinois University

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Viewpoint

The Intersection of Reading and Speaking Difficulties: Current Knowledge and Recommendations for Supporting Adult Literacy Learners Who Stutter

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Abstract

Adult literacy learners vary widely in their demographic characteristics and academic skill levels. However, much less is known about their speech skills. This article focuses on an understudied group among adult literacy learners: those with speech difficulties, specifically stuttering. It begins by describing general background information on stuttering, then briefly presents findings related to prevalence and reading skills in a study that explored adult literacy learners and stuttering. This article also provides recommendations for working with learners who stutter. These recommendations emphasize the importance of screening for both reading and speaking difficulties and adopting a holistic approach to better accommodate the complex needs of this overlooked population.

Keywords: adult literacy, stuttering, reading, instruction

Background

Adult educators are used to adult literacy learners who avoid reading out loud in class. They might sit at the back of the class, eyes averted, and a body posture shouting, "Please don't call on me." Over time, these learners typically start to feel more comfortable and gradually become more willing to read out loud. However, occasionally, some learners never become more comfortable participating in class. There are many potential reasons for this; one reason that is not often discussed in the field is speech difficulties. This article focuses on a specific speech difficulty: stuttering. If you are an instructor, you may have noticed that you have or

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have had a learner who exhibits verbal responses that are typically shorter or less complex, or contain false starts (beginning a sentence/word but then abandoning it for another). Additionally, they may often talk around a word or use substitutions, even if the substituted word is less accurate or appropriate in the context. The learner may also show noticeable difficulties when speaking, including frequent speech disruptions and high levels of physical tension. Sometimes, these speech disruptions and physical tension are accompanied by unexpected movements, such as frowning or head movements. Learners who stutter may exhibit these behaviors, which cannot be explained by their proficiency in the English language.

In this article, we share recommendations for working with learners who stutter. First, we will provide a brief overview of stuttering before sharing findings from a study that we conducted with adult literacy learners who stutter. In the following sections, "stuttering" will refer to the condition of stuttering, while "moments of stuttering" will describe the speech disruptions or symptoms characteristic of the condition.

What is Stuttering?

Approximately 1% of the general population stutters (Bloodstein et al., 2021), totaling over 3 million people in the U.S. and over 70 million worldwide. Stuttering may be more common in some groups, such as those with reading difficulties. For example, roughly one-third of adults with dyslexia report stuttering as children (Elsherif et al., 2021). Although the exact cause of stuttering is unknown, experts agree that it is due to a mix of factors, including genetics (Drayna & Kang, 2011). Individuals with family members who stutter are more likely to stutter themselves (Darmody et al., 2022). Stuttering typically manifests around three years old, affecting more boys than girls (Yairi & Ambrose, 1992).

Stuttering involves specific speech disruptions or disfluencies (Bloodstein et al., 2021). During moments of stuttering, the speaker may repeat the initial syllable/sound of a word (part-word repetitions; e.g., "y-y-you"), stretch or hold a sound (prolongations; e.g., "sssssstart"), or struggle to initiate a sound (blocks; e.g., "—yeah"; Ambrose & Yairi, 1999). Moments of stuttering can be accompanied by physical tension or struggle (e.g., eye blinking, frowning; Guitar, 2019), especially when the stuttering is severe. It is important to mention that other types of disfluencies, such as interjections (e.g., "uhm"), phrase revisions and repetitions (e.g., "a class—in my class"), word revisions (e.g., "reading—learning"), and pauses, are common in people who do not stutter and are not indicative of stuttering (Ambrose & Yairi, 1999).

The effects of stuttering go beyond its impact on communication. People who stutter, particularly those with more severe stuttering, are less likely to complete high school or attend college (O'Brian et al., 2011; Rees & Sabia, 2014). Many adults who stutter believe that stuttering reduces their employability, career advancement, and job performance (Klein & Hood, 2004; Klompas & Ross, 2004). Adults who stutter are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, hold lower-status jobs, and earn less than adults who do not stutter (Gerlach et al., 2018; McAllister et al., 2012). Additionally, stuttering can lead to anxiety, especially in social situations (Craig & Tran, 2014).

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its amendment, the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), disability is recognized as a physical or mental impairment that significantly restricts everyday activities, a documented history of such a condition, or being viewed as having such a condition (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). The ADA offers protection against discrimination based on disability, including communication-related conditions, such as stuttering (Gilman, 2012; Seitz & Choo, 2022). However, perceptions of stuttering as a disability vary widely among people who stutter (Bricker-Katz et al., 2010). Where some consider their stuttering as a disability, others do not share this view (Bailey et al., 2015; Constantino et al., 2022).

Our Study

We analyzed audio recordings of 120 adult literacy learners to identify speech patterns indicative of stuttering. Audio recordings to capture the learners' positive and negative reading experiences were collected in a quiet space at the learners' program location. Recordings varied in length depending on what the learners' chose to share, ranging between one minute to over 13 minutes in length. Learners were between 17 to 70 years old and enrolled in adult

literacy classes targeting the third- to eighth-grade reading levels. The learners consisted of 70 women (58.33%), 49 men (40.83%), and one learner who did not identify their gender. All learners identified as Black or African American and were part of a study to examine dialect use. Most learners (about 70%) did not complete high school. For more information about our study, please read Choo et al. (2023). The study revealed three notable findings. First, the percentage of individuals who stutter was higher in the learners who participated in our study than in the general population. Stuttering was determined by the presence of 3% or higher of stuttering-like disfluencies, following the guidelines by Ambrose and Yairi (1999). These disfluencies include part-word repetitions, prolongations, and blocks (see the "What is Stuttering?" section for examples). Second, there were no significant differences in reading abilities between learners who do and do not stutter. However, the third finding was that learners who stutter showed fewer significant correlations between different component reading skills than learners who do not stutter, for example, between passage comprehension and phonological elision skills. These findings are discussed in more detail below.

Higher Proportion of Stuttering in Adult Literacy Learners

We found that about 18% of learners in our study met the criterion for stuttering, which is a significantly higher percentage than the general population (Choo et al., 2023). This aligns with past research reporting a high frequency of reading problems among people who stutter and a genetic link between stuttering and reading difficulties (Ajdacic-Gross et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2014). About 8% of children who stutter have reading difficulties (Blood et al., 2003). Notably, they are five times more likely than children who do not stutter to have reading difficulties (Ajdacic-Gross et al., 2018). Moreover, the same genetic mutations associated with stuttering are also associated with an increased risk for dyslexia (Chen et al., 2014). These studies tell us that the co-occurrence of reading difficulties and stuttering is not uncommon.

No Differences in Standardized Reading Test Scores Between Learners Who Do and Do Not Stutter

The learners in our study (Choo et al., 2023) who do and do not stutter showed no differences in their standardized test scores measuring reading fluency, reading comprehension, decoding, expressive language, and phonological awareness[1]. This was true even for tests that required speaking, such as naming pictured objects and reading aloud printed words or simple sentences. In other words, in our study, standardized reading assessments cannot distinguish between learners who do and do not stutter.

Lower Correlations Between Reading Abilities in Learners Who Stutter

Two skills are positively correlated when performance in one skill is similar to performance in another. Conversely, a negative correlation indicates an inverse pattern: lower performance in one skill is associated with higher performance in the other. A statistically significant correlation, whether positive or negative, suggests that this relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. It also indicates a high degree of confidence that the correlation is substantive.

In our study, learners who stutter showed more negative and fewer significant correlations between reading and reading-related skills than learners who do not stutter (Choo et al., 2023). For instance, there was a significant, positive correlation between reading comprehension and reading fluency among learners who do not stutter, but this correlation was not observed in learners who stutter. For learners who stutter, this correlation was not significant and in the opposite direction (i.e., a negative correlation). This finding was unexpected given the established relationship between reading comprehension and reading fluency (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). These atypical connections suggest that learners who stutter have greater difficulty integrating different skills necessary for effective reading.

1 The tests consisted of the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, including Blending Words, Elision, and Phoneme Isolation subtests (Wagner et al., 2013); the Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (Hammill et al., 2006); the Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (Mather et al., 2004); the Test of Word Reading Efficiency Phonemic Decoding Efficiency and Sight Word Efficiency (Torgesen et al., 2012); and the Woodcock-Johnson III Normative Update, including Letter-Word Identification, Passage Comprehension, Picture Vocabulary, Reading Fluency, and Word Attack subtests (Woodcock et al., 2007).

Recommendations for Working With Learners Who Stutter

The complex profile of learners who stutter presents unique challenges for instructors. In the sections below, we list recommendations for working with this group.

Identifying stuttering It may be difficult for instructors to recognize stuttering, especially in mild cases. However, if you notice a learner who, compared to others, displays any of the following behaviors, it may warrant further attention:

- They provide short and simple verbal responses that do not match the context. For example, when asked to describe their reading experiences, the learner may respond with, "It was okay," without elaboration even when more details are expected or appropriate.
- They begin a sentence or word but then abandon it for another. For instance, the learner may start to say, "I bor-bor," but switches to, "I went to the library."
- They talk around a word or use word substitutions, even if the substituted word is less accurate or appropriate in the context. Instead of saying, "I know how to use the computer," the learner may say, "I know how to type on the machine."
- They show frequent speech disruptions and high levels of physical tension, sometimes accompanied by unexpected movements during moments of stuttering. For example, the learner may appear stuck and struggle to get their words out. During these moments, they may also nod, close their eyes, blink, or frown.

Once you feel that the learner may be comfortable with you bringing up the topic, gently initiate a conversation about their speech difficulties. Depending on the learner, an example of a way to start the conversation could be, "I notice that you seem more comfortable with writing activities rather than talking in class. Would it be okay if we talk about why that might be?" This could be followed by questions such as, "Do you find it difficult sometimes to say the words you want to say?" or, "Would you like to be put in touch with someone whose job is to help people feel more comfortable with speaking?" It is critical that learners dictate how far this conversation goes. If it is clear that the learner does not want to discuss their oral communication, the instructor should not further continue the conversation. Similarly, if the learner does not want a referral, the instructor should reply that if, at a later point, the learner ever changes their mind, they should feel free to ask the instructor for the referral.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2024b) offers a directory of certified speech-language pathologists through the ASHA ProFind platform. Users can search for a service provider based on various criteria, such as location and expertise. Medical insurance plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, may cover speech therapy if the service is deemed necessary by the individual's physician, although the extent of coverage varies (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2024a). Additionally, some organizations, including colleges and universities with speech-language pathology clinics that serve as training facilities, may provide free services or a sliding fee scale for services.

Interacting With People Who Stutter

It is important to be patient and avoid interrupting or speaking over people who stutter, especially during moments of stuttering. While it might seem helpful to finish their sentence, doing so can make the speaker feel rushed, potentially worsening their stuttering. A lack of awareness of stuttering may lead to inappropriate reactions when the speaker stutters, such as imitation or laughing. Therefore, instructors should be alert to these behaviors and be prepared to educate others about stuttering.

Using Person-First Language

Using person-first language, like "person who stutters" instead of "stutterer," helps avoid stigmatizing individuals. Although some people who stutter may prefer to use identity-first language and refer to themselves as "stutterer," it is still considered best practice to use person-first language.

Modifying Reading Tests

Speaking difficulties related to stuttering may be mistaken as reading problems. Reading tests requiring extensive speaking may be difficult for learners who stutter, especially those with severe stuttering. Assessments that reduce the need to verbalize responses can minimize

these issues. Further, instances where reading and speaking difficulties cannot be clearly distinguished should be excluded from assessments.

Managing Timed Assessments

Timed assessments that require speaking or reading out loud can exacerbate stress and moments of stuttering. Learners who stutter may take longer to respond, as moments of stuttering consume more time. Thus, selecting tests without time constraints may be necessary for assessments involving overt reading or spoken responses.

Integrating Skills

Research suggests that learners who stutter face challenges integrating the skills necessary for effective reading. While the optimal strategy to enhance the consolidation of these skills remains unknown, instructors should be mindful of the potential challenges faced by learners who stutter.

Managing Anxiety Levels

People who stutter may have heightened anxiety about speaking. Reading difficulties may worsen this anxiety, affecting their performance on reading assessments. Recognizing this anxiety is important in creating supportive learning environments for learners who stutter.

Conclusion

Support for learners who stutter starts with recognizing the unique, compounded challenges of reading and speaking difficulties. An integrated approach combining specialized instruction and speech therapy could be beneficial for this group. Nonetheless, more research is needed to fully understand the complex needs of learners who stutter. This knowledge will be foundational to developing optimal, comprehensive guidelines for evaluating, instructing, and working with this group.

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Field Report

Beyond Describing Signs and Symptoms: Promoting Health Literacy to the Adult English Language Learner

Jan Adversario, Austin Community College

The scope and definition of health literacy continues to expand and evolve. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies two types of health literacy: personal and organizational. Personal health literacy is defined as "the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others" (CDC, 2024). This definition places responsibility on the individual to acquire health literacy. Thus, it is different from organizational health literacy where the obligation falls on health providers and health systems to provide information to patients in ways that they can be understood. This article focuses on helping develop personal health literacy for adult English language learners (ELLs) and how adult educators can weave health literacy into their curriculum.

Health literacy is not just being able to read and understand health-related concepts. This understanding suggests that individuals who have appropriate levels of health literacy can make autonomous and sound decisions on their health and well-being. Low health literacy among patients may result in limited participation in disease-prevention and health-promoting activities (Rudd, 2017). Health literacy is a challenge for many individuals because of the medical terminology and technical jargon used. In other words, it is like learning a new language. Even native-born English speakers may have low levels of health literacy for this reason. Thus, minority and immigrant groups who are more at risk due to limited English proficiency (Rudd, 2007; Sepassi et al., 2023) may face greater health disparities and poorer health outcomes (Diehl, 2011; Sarkar et al., 2019; Ugas et al., 2023).

Like me, many English language teachers face challenges adopting health literacy curricula into lesson plans due to lack of medical understanding. To teach health literacy effectively, instructors must acquire new knowledge to be confident in their instruction (Diehl, 2011) and to convey health information accurately. I also struggle with the unfamiliarity of my learners' cultural beliefs on health. Cultural perceptions of health and medical practices vary widely, influencing how learners interpret and accept health information. Therefore, I must navigate these differences carefully to be mindful of my students' various backgrounds. It is also inevitable that there will be multiple levels in adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, and this exacerbates the intricacies of teaching health literacy. In the classes I have taught, there are high school graduates, but there are also students who have advanced degrees and medical practitioners from their countries of origin. Those who may lack prior knowledge about certain health concepts may have a harder time building a new understanding. Therefore, it is a challenge for instructors to level some of these topics.

My purpose in writing this article is to share effective instructional activities that incorporate and promote health literacy in the adult ESL classroom. This by no means is an exhaustive list of activities to teach this topic. Rather, it is what I find to be some of the most effective and meaningful to adult ELLs.

Class Overview

The class that I teach is an intermediate, non-credit ESL class offered through the adult education program at a

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community college. It is provided cost free to students. Enrollment in the class is ongoing throughout the year, so the students vary per term, but the class is generally composed of 15–20 adult learners from about 10–12 different countries. They have various lengths of stay in the country and varied ages (early 20s to late 50s). These learners present with various educational attainments, ranging from high school to college graduates; some even hold advanced degrees and professional certifications from their home countries.

Activities Incorporating Health Literacy in the Adult ESL Classroom

Writing Personal Stories When Seeking Health Services

Storytelling remains a powerful approach in language teaching (Nicholas et al., 2011). Through storytelling, adult learners can share their experiences with their classmates and take pride in what they know. They take ownership of these stories, and, in doing so, build confidence in using the target language. This activity helps to introduce health literacy and focuses on the learners' experiences seeking health services in the United States and their challenges using the language. I ask them to think of a time when they had difficulty speaking, reading, or understanding English related to getting health care services. I provide the following prompts:

- What was the situation like?
- Who was involved?
- Where were you?
- When did this happen?
- Why do you think this happened?
- How did you feel in that situation?

I stress the importance of sharing only what they are comfortable to share with their classmates and not to share personal health information.

The following are examples provided by my students. All names used are pseudonyms. Margarita wrote, "Four years ago, I was trying to pick up a prescription from the pharmacy alone. I was sick and needed that medication. I did not know what to tell the people at the pharmacy because I was just learning English. I felt nervous and frustrated." Alba shared, "When my son was going to enter pre-k, he needed two more vaccinations. So, we went to the pediatrician. The nurse did not speak Spanish. The nurse asked me something in English, but I didn't understand. I felt very embarrassed and sad because in my country, I always asked if I could hug my son during the vaccinations, but I did not know how to say this in English. My son cried a lot because he wasn't near me." Through this activity, learners reflect and share their experiences as we build a community of learners. They can relate to the stories and give advice to each other. Storytelling is cathartic and helps people heal their soul.

Explaining Personal Medical History

Beyond teaching parts of the body and learning how to express signs and symptoms for different illnesses, English language instructors must teach learners how to communicate about their personal medical history. Knowing how to communicate these pieces of information ensures that the learners and their family members receive accurate diagnoses and appropriate treatments. It is important that the instructor clearly differentiate past, family, and social history in the context of health care encounters such as doctor visits. Past medical history refers to previous illnesses, injuries, hospitalizations, medications, allergies, and immunizations. Family history, on the other hand, refers to conditions that may increase one's risk for hereditary diseases like cancer, diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and high blood pressure. Lastly, social history refers to the patient's past and current social behaviors and activities, such as exercise, occupation, and use of alcohol or tobacco products.

An interactive activity that can be used to teach the concept of personal medical history is classifying statements into the three aforementioned categories. Here are a few example statements: "I had my gallbladder removed six months ago," "I recently traveled to several countries in Europe," and "My parents have diabetes and high cholesterol." Students will discuss among themselves to determine the statements' correct classifications. This can be done by sorting the statements on the board for in-person classes or through an online content platform if the class is remote. By learning how to articulate their personal medical history in the target language, learners can communicate with their health care providers more effectively and advocate for their health needs confidently.

Navigating the World of Health Insurance

Health literacy requires an understanding of the health care system, which can be challenging for newcomers who are still adjusting to a new country and how it operates. To many ELLs, especially those who come from countries with a universal health care system, the concept of health insurance is extremely unfamiliar. Thus, navigating the health care system in the United States is a complex endeavor. Learning and teaching vocabulary is key in promoting health literacy. In my classroom, I begin the topic of health insurance by explicitly teaching basic and important health insurance terms: "claim," "deductible," "coinsurance," "co-pay" or "copayment," "policyholder," "premium," "primary care provider (PCP)," and "preventive care."

Next, I discuss a simple workflow of how the health insurance system works through an interactive activity where the learners must correctly sequence steps of the process. The learners are provided with several statements that describe the steps but are out of order. Some example statements include:

- Enroll in health insurance.
- Pay premium.
- Visit the doctor.
- Doctor sends bill to the health insurance company.
- Health insurance company reviews claim.
- Doctor sends a bill for any amount not paid by the insurance company.
- Send payment to doctor for remaining balance.

These steps oversimplify the health insurance process, but the activity provides the learners an overview of how the system generally works. A best practice is to provide multiple opportunities for exposure using different modalities. For this topic, I created a video that explains what health insurance is, why it is important, and how or where to get it. Additionally, this video provides a recap and a knowledge check on the health insurance concepts. Here is an example question: "The person whose name is on the insurance policy is known as the _____: a) policyholder, b) member, c) officer, or d) dependent." As the question is displayed on screen, I pause the video and survey the students for the correct answer. In this case, "a) policyholder" is the appropriate answer, and then I provide a quick explanation before proceeding to the next question. Basic health insurance knowledge allows the learners to understand a concept and a process that may be unfamiliar yet extremely important to them and their families. This type of exercise also prompts questions from the learners and allows the instructor to continue to offer more support.

Filling Out Intake Forms

"Teacher, can you show us how to complete a form in the doctor's office? I get very confused when filling them out." Erline, from Haiti, requested this as I was discussing medical history. She explained that she often asks her husband and other people when completing medical intake forms at the doctor's office. The challenge is that there is no universal intake form. Every specialty and practice will have different health forms and requirements. In addition, many medical offices have shifted from paper forms to electronic intake forms. One time, I took my 78-year-old mother to a doctor's appointment. As a new patient at the specialist's office, she had to fill out an intake form through a wireless tablet. My mother is an immigrant who has lived in the United States for almost 40 years. English is not her first language, but she speaks, reads, and writes English fluently. However, she had difficulty completing the electronic questionnaire because there were a multitude of questions that used medical and insurance jargon. She is also not well versed with using technological devices, so I assisted her in the process. I acknowledge this is not an easy task for ESL instructors; however, they can start the conversation with learners in class and make it a continual practice.

Once the concepts of medical history and health insurance have been introduced to the students, the next step is to teach them how to complete intake forms. Provide learners with different templates of patient intake forms. Then, review a simple form starting with the patient demographic section. Here are some of the important terms that may appear in this section: "primary/preferred language," "race," "ethnicity," "referring doctor," and "marital status." Next, focus on terms and phrases commonly found on medical forms, such as "allergies," "medications," "medical history," and "insurance information." It is important to break down the form into manageable sections and provide step-by-step instructions for each part. Practice filling out intake forms

in class regularly to build familiarity and confidence. It is important that instructors provide immediate feedback and corrections to the learners so that they understand and can correct their mistakes. Instructors can also build on this activity by creating role-playing scenarios where students play different roles (e.g., patient, doctor, receptionist) in a medical office setting, and completing an intake form will be one of the tasks. Teaching these processes in a step-by-step manner can help learners feel less overwhelmed.

Introducing Idioms About Health

Health-related idioms are common in everyday conversation, and learning about them can be useful when discussing health concerns with medical professionals. Understanding and using idioms can help ELLs build authentic language, communicate more effectively, and understand native speakers better. Also, idioms are a key aspect that can help ELLs gain insight to cultural attitudes and expressions related to health. Idioms are necessary to navigate social interactions in various settings.

To introduce this topic, it is important to break down what an idiom is and provide examples so that your learners understand the concept. A classic example that I provide is the idiom "raining cats and dogs." The goal is to make sure that the learners understand that idioms express an idea or a shared sentiment with culturally embedded meaning but not the literal meaning of the words themselves. To activate background knowledge, I ask the learners to share examples of idioms from their home countries. Once the class establishes a solid understanding of idioms, I introduce about 10–15 health-related idioms that they may often hear from native English speakers. Here are some examples: "as fit as a fiddle," "alive and kicking," "green around the gills," "under the knife," "under the weather," "back on one's feet," "skin and bones," "bundle of nerves," "out of shape," and "turns my stomach." In my experience, learners respond well when we first discuss what the words in the idiom mean literally, and then the students attempt to decipher the idiom's figurative meaning. For example, in the idiom "as fit as a fiddle," I explain what the words "fit" and "fiddle" mean first. Then, I give the learners an opportunity to figure out what the meaning is before I provide the correct answer and give an example sentence on how to use the idiom properly. A practical knowledge check is given at the end of the session to assess the learners' understanding of the new knowledge.

Conclusion

The activities here point to several best practices in the adult language classroom. First, instructors must cultivate a safe learning environment. For learners to share their health care experiences, they must feel safe in the classroom, regardless of whether they are in an in-person or remote setting. Thus, it is critical to establish confidentiality when initiating conversations and implementing health-related activities. It is imperative for educators to tell students not to share any personal health information from themselves or from others. Next, instructors must listen to and reflect on learners' stories, especially about their cultural beliefs about health. Learners' experiences in health care vary, so it is important to ask them to share only what they are comfortable sharing. Lastly, teaching health-related concepts is like teaching a new language altogether, so be patient with your learners. All in all, health literacy is not a one-time transaction. It is deeply rooted in lifelong learning. That is, learning about health and well-being trails individuals throughout their life. Health literacy leads to empowerment and fosters better health care outcomes, with ELLs having a greater sense of control of their own health. Thus, it is imperative for adult educators to facilitate and promote health literacy in their teaching settings.

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Field Report

Digital Technology Use in Four Adult Education Classrooms: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

We have created the new, free curriculum CILIA-T (Content-Integrated Language Instruction for Adults with Technology Support) to develop the U.S. history and civics knowledge, digital skills, and English proficiencies of adult language learners. The curriculum focuses on academic vocabulary, critical thinking, and learners' existing knowledge. During the first pilot implementation of this curriculum, we observed the classrooms and gave some digital tests to the learners. In this report, we document the digital landscape in adult education classrooms, the wide variety of digital contexts, the challenges adults face, and some of the solutions we observed.

Keywords: digital skills, adult education, ESL, civics, history

The goal in this Report from the Field is to discuss observations of four adult education classrooms and to describe the digital landscape—that is, the available technology resources as well as teacher and student digital literacy proficiency to access and effectively use those resources. The digital landscape in adult education varies widely due to differences in technology familiarity, usage frequency, and available infrastructure (e.g., internet connection, apps, and software) in classrooms and homes. While discussing this variability, this report also highlights some challenges and possible solutions adopted by the teachers. We hope that this brief snapshot of the digital landscape can be useful to educators as they plan for their classes and prepare learners for an increasingly technology-driven future.

Context of the Classroom Observations

The classroom observations were part of the pilot implementation of a new curriculum. This free College and Career Readiness Standards-aligned 16-module curriculum, called CILIA-T (Content-Integrated Language Instruction for Adults with Technology Support), teaches U.S history, civics, and English language in an integrated way, while also building in

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opportunities to strengthen learners' digital skills. CILIA-T activates and builds upon learners' existing knowledge; targets domain-specific and transferable academic vocabulary; and encourages critical thinking, analysis, and application. Module 1 focuses on an introduction of digital literacy skills (Hauge et al., 2024), which are then practiced throughout the modules as learners use tools such as Gmail, Google Forms, Quizlet, WhatsApp (hereafter shortened as WA), and Zoom in their coursework.

However, digital literacy includes proficiencies that go beyond skillful use of digital tools (Coiro, 2021). The CILIA-T curriculum targets six digital competencies: (1) functional skills to use tools, devices, and applications effectively; (2) finding and evaluating digital information to understand the quality, reliability, and relevance of information; (3) responsible digital citizenship to take part in an online (hereafter shortened as OL) community safely, ethically, and respectfully in both personal and professional lives; (4) technology troubleshooting to develop digital resilience, applying solutions to new tools and contexts; (5) comprehension and integration to understand multiple texts and information in different modalities; and (6) communication, collaboration, and creation in different modalities, using different tools (Eckersley et al., 2023). The CILIA-T curriculum also includes free video tutorials and educator resources to support the teaching or refreshing of these digital skills (Northstar, n.d.).

In a pilot study, four experienced teachers implemented CILIA-T in their intermediate/advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. The research team gave six mini-tests to learners before they started their CILIA-T course, assessing learners' digital proficiency in the following areas: smartphone apps, Zoom, Quizlet, WhatsApp, Gmail, and finding information.

Through the pilot, the CILIA-T research team observed classrooms to assess the technology infrastructure (including hardware [e.g., computers, projectors], software [e.g., learning platforms, apps], and internet connectivity), teacher usage and comfort, solutions to infrastructure limitations (e.g., using smartphones, shared devices, offline materials, peer support networks), and student digital proficiency and access.

The research team observed the classrooms during every CILIA-T lesson for the first five weeks, then half of the time for the remaining 11 weeks. The teachers dedicated different amounts of time to implementing CILIA-T curriculum, supplementing their English language instruction with other curriculum materials. Three classes were observed for 60 hours each, whereas one class was observed for 120 hours.

Course Delivery Methods and Technology Used for Instruction

All four classes included online teaching and learning. One class was fully OL, while the other three were hybrid, with some students attending OL and others in person. To address the challenges of a mixed group, each of the three hybrid classes had a different teaching approach.

In one class, only two to three students came to the classroom while 12–15 students joined OL. This teacher taught the class completely OL; even the students who were in the classroom with the teacher followed the course on their school laptops or their own phones and communicated with the students who were attending the class virtually.

In the second class, 15–20 students were in the classroom while three to four joined OL. The teacher taught as if it were an in-person class, using a whiteboard and camera for OL students to follow along. OL and in-person students had limited interaction. The camera showed different classroom views, but OL students struggled to follow discussions or see who was speaking. In-person students could not see OL students (most kept cameras off) but could hear them. For group activities, OL students joined breakout rooms while in-person students worked in small groups with paper copies of materials.

In the third and smallest hybrid class, three to four students came to class in person while four to five joined OL. In this class, the instruction was geared toward in-person delivery. The in-person students sat around a table, and the teacher usually left the laptop on the table so that all students could see and hear each other as afforded by the camera and speakers on the teacher's device.

Teacher Familiarity With Digital Tools

Two classes used Google Meet, and two used Zoom. All teachers could project and mark information using whiteboards, Jamboard, and online annotation tools, with varying degrees of use. Two teachers used two monitors, projecting class materials on one and keeping track of the OL students on the other.

All teachers were proficient in using Zoom/Google Meet and Gmail. Additionally, the CILIA-T research team asked them to use Quizlet for vocabulary review and Google Forms for OL homework. This required teachers to save copies of Quizlet and Google Form templates on their own computers and share those teacher-created links with their students. To support teachers, the research team held in-person meetings, modeled use, and provided support during class observations.

When the students read the materials, two teachers projected text sections to the class using Jamboard and Kami, marking key concepts and providing pronunciation keys. Another teacher wrote on a whiteboard and used the computer's camera to show OL students the notes.

Student Digital Proficiencies

Students were familiar with apps like Google Translate, WA, Zoom, and Google Meet due to personal use and increased use during the COVID pandemic. However, they needed guidance on Gmail, Google Forms, Quizlet, and OL safety. Teachers created WA groups for announcements, course links, and community building. Students used WA not just for academics, but also for social purposes—like notifying the teacher about absences (e.g., due to work, childcare, or transportation issues), requesting links, sharing class-related content, sending birthday wishes, sharing photos, or even asking the teacher to put their forgotten dinner in the fridge.

Communication With Students

All CILIA-T curriculum materials (detailed lesson plans and student materials) are on Google Drive, and, during the pilot, links to these materials were shared with the teachers. Teachers then shared links for these activities and materials with students. Given the variability in student digital proficiencies and available tools, teachers relied on multiple mechanisms to share information. In two classes, teachers printed out student packets and handed paper copies to in-person students. In all four classes, teachers shared the digital links to the materials using email and other apps such as WA or Remind. In one class, students with paper copies took photos of the pages and shared these with their OL classmates on WA. Three teachers always sent a reminder before a class, giving the Zoom/Google Meet link and links or PDF files of the materials.

Students shared their work in multiple ways as well. The CILIA-T curriculum deliberately includes activities to encourage students to use a variety of tools to build digital skills. Some responses were instructed to be shared by email as the students practiced their skills, such as email conventions or how to attach files and photos. Students also submitted their responses with WA. During the pilot, the CILIA-T research team found Google Forms to be the most convenient and efficient method for students to share their work. Google Forms enabled teachers to collect all the responses in one place rather than across multiple messages. Additionally, the software was easy for students to learn, allowing them to quickly complete forms individually, either in class or at home. Students used Google Forms to submit quick responses (e.g., multiple choice) and longer responses, such as their reactions to texts, photos, and videos. One teacher encouraged students to use the Remind chatbox for quick responses and emojis (thumbs up/down) to gauge the class's thoughts on an issue.

Challenges and Solutions

It is clear that OL instruction is here to stay. A recent review of adult education classes in Minnesota found that 25% of students are enrolled in online or hyflex/hybrid classes (Wetenkamp-Brandt & Cytron-Hysom, 2024). Even in classes in which all students attend in-person, OL resources may be used to provide additional support and practice. In this digital landscape, we observed the following challenges and the successful solutions used by teachers participating in the pilot.

Challenge 1

One major challenge was the variation in digital proficiency among students, from proficient to beginner, compounded by class size. Class observations and digital mini assessments showed that all learners needed at least some level of digital literacy support in the standards addressed in the curriculum.

Redundancy of digital tool use became important to support all learner levels. Teachers incorporated digital tools consistently to help learners build digital skills through multiple opportunities to practice. The research team observed teachers having success in use of clear and frequent communication through digital tools like messaging apps or email, ensuring that all students are on the same page regardless of their digital literacy level. These included sending links for electronic materials via email, WA, or chatbox message, and/or providing materials as paper copies, photos of texts, Google Forms, links, or PDF files. Additionally, to support various levels of learning, teachers tapped into the multiple capabilities of technology tools; for example, in Quizlet, teachers provided both the written words and definitions and played the audio for vocabulary for students to hear the word's pronunciation. For additional support, videos were also played with closed captioning, replayed, or played at slower speeds to facilitate learning. Importantly, teachers visited the digital tools repeatedly, in the same way, to help learners build digital literacy.

Challenge 2

Another challenge was hyflex/hybrid classes, which are almost like teaching two simultaneous classes, with teachers often needing support to interact efficiently with all of the students—both those in person and OL (Wetenkamp-Brandt & Cytron-Hysom, 2024). This setup often led to teachers feeling torn between their in-person and OL students. Participating in group projects and sharing work was also observed to be complicated, especially when some learners were in the classroom while others were OL. These factors made it difficult for instructors to provide the appropriate level of support for each student. The CILIA-T team also observed this difficulty and noted that sometimes OL students cannot participate fully when the teacher is interacting with those who are in the classroom.

Interestingly, while hybrid/hyflex classes are designed to offer students flexibility, we observed that students tended to choose one modality for the entire course and stick with it. The only time OL students attended in-person was when they had to come to their school site for testing. Similarly, students who typically attended in-person rarely switched to OL, even when unable to attend class.

A solution teachers incorporated to meet this challenge involved refining the way instructors interacted with students in a hybrid/hyflex environment. Teachers found that creating and using WA groups for their classes was effective, not only for sharing class announcements and links to course materials, but also to help build a community. Digital tools such as WA provide many opportunities for the students to get to know and support each other, which can affect persistence and build digital resilience combating the challenges of hybrid/hyflex classes.

Additionally, hosting all materials on Google Drive and sharing links with students allowed all learners to access a central hub of materials. Another effective way teachers built community in OL or hybrid/hyflex was through recruitment of learners as leaders. Students already provide tremendous peer-to-peer support, especially in using technology. Those who are more proficient in using digital tools help others. Making this more systematic and available in OL interactions was useful and provided opportunities for translanguaging and student leadership. Teachers did this by incorporating opportunities for small group work in both OL and in-person spaces.

Challenge 3

Finally, digital materials were often not easily organized to be revisited by students. We saw that many students interacted with the materials only once, either during the initial lesson or through OL resources. Afterward, they often struggled to locate or review the materials on their own. This issue seemed to stem from the inherent difficulty in managing digital files, links, and PDFs compared to physical materials that students might more easily organize in folders or notebooks. The challenge is ensuring that students can easily access and revisit digital resources when they need them, thus reinforcing learning and providing support beyond the classroom.

Teachers in the pilot addressed this challenge by creating structured, accessible digital environments. Teachers reviewed materials often (this included academic vocabulary, digital topics, and civics/history concepts). This was also enabled by the redundancies built in our curricula for two reasons: a) students using digital resources may not go back and review materials on their own, and b) new students need to catch up with their classmates. In CILIA-T, critical concepts are reviewed across multiple readings and activities. Additionally, the digital tools allow students to review materials while practicing digital skills. For example, vocabulary flashcards enables students to independently review academic vocabulary and add items for personal study.

After the pilot was completed, given the findings, we decided to move our whole curriculum to an ebook format, which is more accessible for both the teachers and the students,. This also provides a single resource for students to review, if they so choose.

Finally, independent video tutorials and educator resources (Northstar, n.d.) provided instructors with another method of onboarding and reviewing tools with learners using visuals. The research team also observed that instead of frontloading digital tools, a better strategy may be to start lightly with digital tools and then introduce and review additional tools when they are needed to practice the curriculum content. In some cases, offering physical copies of materials, like packets or handouts, in addition to digital formats, encouraged students to engage more consistently with the content.

Conclusion

In summary, the challenges faced by instructors in managing hybrid and OL learning environments are multifaceted, ranging from student proficiency with digital tools to the complexities of maintaining engagement across different learning formats. However, we observed that by using a variety of strategies, such as structured communication, collaborative digital tools, and organized access to materials, teachers can create more effective and inclusive learning experiences for all students.

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Field Report

How to Request and Use an Interpreter: A Lesson Plan for ELL Classrooms

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Abstract

Not all non-native English speakers (NNES) know they have a federal right to a Qualified Medical Interpreter (QMI), at no cost, when seeking health care at a medical facility that accepts federal funds like Medicare and Medicaid. We developed a lesson plan and video on interpreter rights and use of an interpreter for English Language Learning (ELL) programs. Faculty of the Intensive English Program, along with grant researchers, created, implemented, and evaluated a mini lesson and video to address this critical language need related to accessing health care. The goal was to provide NNES at all English language proficiency levels with the tools they need to obtain appropriate in-language care through a QMI, especially in emergency situations.

Keywords: English Language Learning programs, qualified medical interpreter, non-native English speakers, lesson plan

Over 40 million U.S. adults speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). When seeking health care, non-native English speakers (NNES) often face miscommunication, misdiagnoses, treatment errors, and poor health outcomes because they do not speak the same language as their health care providers (Al Shamsi et al., 2020). Health care facilities that receive federal funds (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid) are legally responsible for taking appropriate and reasonable steps to ensure their patients have a qualified medical interpreter (QMI) (National Health Law Program, n.d.). However, QMIs are not always available or used by health care facilities. Sometimes patients bring informal interpreters with them (e.g., a family member or neighbor) and decline a QMI, or the health care facility has no access to QMIs and uses an informal interpreter (Zendedel et al., 2016). Using a QMI

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to facilitate communication between health care providers and patients is the gold standard; when a QMI is used, NNES report better satisfaction, more appropriate use of health care services, and better clinical outcomes (Heath et al., 2023). Research shows that NNES experience overall better health outcomes when they can communicate in their first language when interacting with health care providers (Diamond et al., 2019).

Almost 40% of the 1.1 million adults enrolled in federally funded adult education programs in the 2022–2023 program year were enrolled in English Language Learning (ELL) Programs (National Reporting System for Adult Education, 2023). ELL programs provide a unique opportunity to teach practical skills as well as help with cultural integration and understanding. Georgia State University (GSU) runs two ELL programs. The first is the Intensive English Program (IEP), which provides intensive academic English to local and international students who wish to continue their studies at either the graduate or undergraduate level. The program has served thousands of students and is a skills-based program that prepares students for academic success. The second program is the Community English Program, which offers both basic English for daily living as well as some academic English courses, addressing the unique needs of hundreds of local immigrant and refugee students who are balancing studies, work, family, and adjusting to life in a new culture and language. This project focused primarily on the Community English Program.

Purpose

Not all NNES know they have a federal right to a QMI, at no cost, when seeking health care at a medical facility that accepts federal funds like Medicare and Medicaid. In our recent study, 40% of 477 multi-lingual NNES surveyed (Spanish, Dari, Bengali, Pashto, Arabic, French, Karen, Amharic, Burmese, and Swahili) did not know they had a right to a QMI. As part of an Office of Minority Health Promoting Equitable Access to Language Services (PEALS) grant initiative, the faculty of GSU's IEP and Community English Program, along with grant researchers, created, implemented, and evaluated two lessons on knowledge and use of QMIs within a broader 10-lesson health care lesson plan to address this critical language need. The overarching goal was to provide NNES with the tools needed to obtain appropriate in-language care through a QMI, especially in emergency situations. Research has consistently shown language proficiency and access to interpreters correlates highly with better health outcomes (Twersky et al., 2024; Wiles et al., 2023).

Prior to this project, the GSU language programs did not include health topics in their curriculum. There are some published health-related ELL curricula, such as the "Project SHINE ESL Health Units" that cover such topics as office visits, heart disease, nutrition, and medications (Center for Intergenerational Learning, 2008). But to the best of our knowledge, there is limited curricula that include teaching NNES about their right to a QMI in health care, how to ask for a QMI if one is not offered, or how to work with a QMI. Our grant initiative provided faculty with an opportunity to create a set of health care lessons that includes learning what a QMI is and how to use one. Using a QMI serves an important role by enabling communication, helping providers determine a patient's level of understanding, empowering patients to ask questions, and acting as a cultural broker (Suarez et al., 2021). Power inequities exist in the patient-provider relationship and can make establishing the patient's legal rights more challenging (Pavlenko et al., 2020). In addition to understanding the complexities of the U.S. health care system, there is a need to understand legal rights. Teaching NNES about legal rights can be challenging, but by incorporating it into curriculum, it can increase self-efficacy to obtain rights (Pavlenko et al., 2020). Research shows using a QMI can improve clinical outcomes, as trained interpreters make fewer errors compared to informal interpreters (e.g., family members, friends), which can result in reduced miscommunication and improved patient safety and outcomes (Habib et al., 2023).

Procedures

Faculty and researchers toured a local not-for-profit safety net hospital's Emergency Department (ED) that prioritizes care for the poor and underserved. In 2022, the hospital served 11,983 NNES who spoke 69 languages. We saw the multiple steps patients go through when seeking care in the ED. Patients needed to complete several forms, including a certification identification form if they did not have acceptable identification and a consent for treatment form. In addition, the registrar spoke with the

patient in English to document the patient's preferred language during check-in. Most ED documents during ED check in are available in English and Spanish; however, an interpreter is needed for all other languages.

An instructor with experience in English as a second language and English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) and materials development created 10 lessons on health care issues (e.g., English in emergency rooms, how to request a QMI, English in pharmacy/medicine contexts) using existing curricula and findings from our ED tour. The two QMI lessons focused on requesting and using an interpreter and were strategically placed midway through the semester: after lessons on communicating in emergencies and before lessons on pharmacy/medicine. This field report focuses on these two QMI lessons, which focus on learning relevant vocabulary, discussing how students communicate with providers, and practicing dialogue/role plays to request an interpreter when entering a health care facility.

The researchers created a two-minute in-language video on interpreter knowledge and access (https://tinyurl.com/QMIVideo) to include as part of the QMI lessons (Diabetes Clarkston, 2024). This video was created in early 2022 as part of the PEALS grant initiative and was disseminated broadly throughout the NNES community. For NNES who have limited reading skills in either English or their home language, watching a video may help provide equitable access to the material. The video script was written using plain language and health literacy guidelines (e.g., use simple words and phrases, write for your audience, use active words) to ensure it was understandable, actionable, and responsive to the audience's cultural and linguistic makeup (Shoemaker et al., 2014). The video was translated into 12 different languages, reviewed with community members for cultural appropriateness, and back-translated to ensure accuracy.

Implementation

The full 10-part health care lesson plan was taught in fall 2023 to three Community English classes that focus on basic English for daily living. There were 30 students speaking Dari, Pashto, and Spanish; three different teachers taught the classes and shared the video as part of the lesson plan. The video was also shown to 33 students in a level 3–5 Oral Communication course of the IEP in English only (these students have higher English level proficiency, and faculty requested English-only videos). These IEP students were emailed the video using a Qualtrics survey link to watch outside of class.

Evaluation

We evaluated the interpreter lessons with a pre- and post-survey. A research team member attended Community English class sessions to invite students to voluntarily participate in the evaluation study. All students would receive the two lessons and video even if they chose not to participate in the survey. The survey consisted of two multiple-choice questions: one about federal language access rights (correct answer: there are federal laws against language discrimination for non-native English speakers when they come to a hospital to get health care) and the other about what having the right to an interpreter under federal law means (correct answer: a qualified medical interpreter must be offered at no cost to the patient). The survey allowed us to determine students' knowledge before and after delivering the educational materials.

Surveys printed in Arabic, Dari, French, Pashto, Spanish, and Swahili were distributed and collected during scheduled Community English class sessions by a research team member. Teachers assisted with scaffolding, so students understood how to complete the surveys. Students in the IEP classes accessed the survey on Qualtrics and completed them electronically in English. A total of 54 Community English and IEP students completed both the pre-survey and post-survey. Before participating in the video and lesson, only 32.5% of students knew there were federal laws against language discrimination for NNES when seeking care at a medical facility; this improved to 53.7% after the lessons. Only 64.9% knew that having a right to a medical interpreter under federal law means a QMI must be offered at no cost; this improved to 70.4% after the lessons.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Teaching awareness and use of QMIs is a critical part of improving health care access, health outcomes, and health equity for NNES. As part of the PEALS initiative's long-

term goal of expanding knowledge of federal language policies within NNES communities, the 10-part health care lessons (including the two QMI lessons) were created as Open Educational Resources (OER), licensed under Creative Commons for open use and modification to fit local needs. . The lesson plan can be found at https://education.gsu.edu/research-outreach/alrc/alrc-resources/.

The lesson plan proved too complex for students at lower English language proficiency levels and needed some adaptation. Many of the instructional materials required visuals and scaffolding to ensure students understood the scenarios and contexts in which they could apply the skills they were learning. For example, prior to discussing the process of placing a 911 call, it was essential for students to understand the concept and purpose of 911. Similarly, before addressing the completion of medical forms, students needed foundational knowledge of insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid. As a result, a companion workbook was incorporated into the course to assist lower-level English students in practicing vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing within medical contexts.

Another significant challenge was ensuring that the content did not retraumatize students with backgrounds of forced migration. During lesson implementation, one instructor collaborated with a master ESL/EFL teacher to review the content for potential triggers and modify it to make it more appropriate. For example, instead of using a scenario involving a high-stakes emergency when teaching about 911 calls, the example was a non-life-threatening allergy symptom accompanied by a reassuring photo indicating that the situation was resolved safely.

Overall, we found implementing the lesson plan and video to be beneficial as students' knowledge and awareness about their rights increased. We plan to continue using the lessons and video in future courses and to modify the materials as needed to meet the needs of our students.

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Field Report

Connecting Learners through a Citywide Referral Network

Christine Piven, Philadelphia Business & Technology Center

Philadelphia has three WIOA Title II organizations, 35 (and growing) non-profit providers who offer adult education assessments and classes, a local workforce board, and a municipal government office to support adult education. In the mid-2000s, learners would have needed to locate any of these providers on their own. In 2014, the City of Philadelphia launched myPLACE[SM] (my Philadelphia Literacy and Adult Career Education), which offered residents centralized access to education and career development services through community-based partner programs. By 2020, the basic framework of myPLACE[SM] remained, but with the move to more virtual options during COVID-19 as well as the shrinking of the City's adult education office, there needed to be other ways to strengthen the system of connecting residents to adult education resources.

With so many disparate and discrete providers and funders, how can a resident seeking adult education resources find a single point of entry—a gateway—to connect to these available services? What existing investments can be leveraged? What relationships should be developed or deepened to support this effort? Where can coordination, collaboration, and integration be useful to better support Philadelphians and their connections to adult education? These were the challenges facing the city's efforts to support the community of learners.

Background

In 2020, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) to develop a six-month cohort of workforce boards to help cities and states expand their use of SNAP 50/50 to support residents' workforce and adult education needs.

There are a few programs under the SNAP umbrella that are administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), and one of them is SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T). The purpose of SNAP E&T is to assist members of SNAP households in gaining skills training, work, or experience that will increase their ability to obtain regular employment. SNAP E&T funds can be used to provide enhanced individualized services to program participants, such as childcare, transportation, and adult education connected to certification and jobs. SNAP E&T is funded in two ways, and one of them is through 50% Reimbursement Funds, or SNAP 50/50. For example, FNS reimburses states for 50% of state or local expenditures for supportive services, such as transportation and dependent care. For additional information about SNAP 50/50, see USDA's SNAP to Skills website.[1]

Philadelphia's local workforce board, Philadelphia Works, has worked over the years with the city's adult education office and the WIOA Title IIs to bring adult education resources to their clients. Philadelphia Works and the City of Philadelphia's Adult Education Office used the NAWB training to develop new areas for collaboration.

Patricia Blumenauer (Chief Operating Officer of Philadelphia Works) invited Christine Piven, Ph.D. (former Executive Director of Adult Education for the City of Philadelphia, currently Chief of Prevention, Office of Children and Families) to join the NAWB cohort. This

1 https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/about-snap-skills/what-is-snap-et

work helped to define several challenges—key among them was how to build a system to ensure residents have the necessary support to achieve both their education and career goals. An early result of this partnership was a successful $2.5 million application to a local philanthropic organization, the William Penn Foundation, to implement this system. A key component of the grant was to streamline access to services by creating a single-entry point for residents to access adult education, vocational training, and career services.

Local workforce boards have the option to create a call center as one way to increase access to services. Philadelphia Works took advantage of this flexibility and established a single number for residents to call for all their workforce needs. In Philadelphia, this toll-free number to PA CareerLink® is 1-833-750-JOBS (5627). In 2020, Philadelphia Works expanded their investment in this toll-free line due to expanding workforce needs during the pandemic. Residents' main reason for calling the toll-free line in 2021 was to access unemployment compensation, and the number of monthly calls was typically about 60 per month.

The Transition

The Adult Education Office and Philadelphia Works shared the same vision: increasing access to in-demand services, such as quality workforce and adult education programs. Driving traffic to a single place would help residents find both adult education and workforce opportunities, and the system would finally have a clear message: Call the toll-free number for all your workforce and adult education needs.

The budget for adult education was small in comparison to the need among residents, and Philadelphia Works had a fully funded call center. Philadelphia Works agreed to allow adult education to leverage their existing investment in the call center with no additional funding required from the city.

With leadership buy-in on both sides, the operating teams began to focus on five areas. These included:

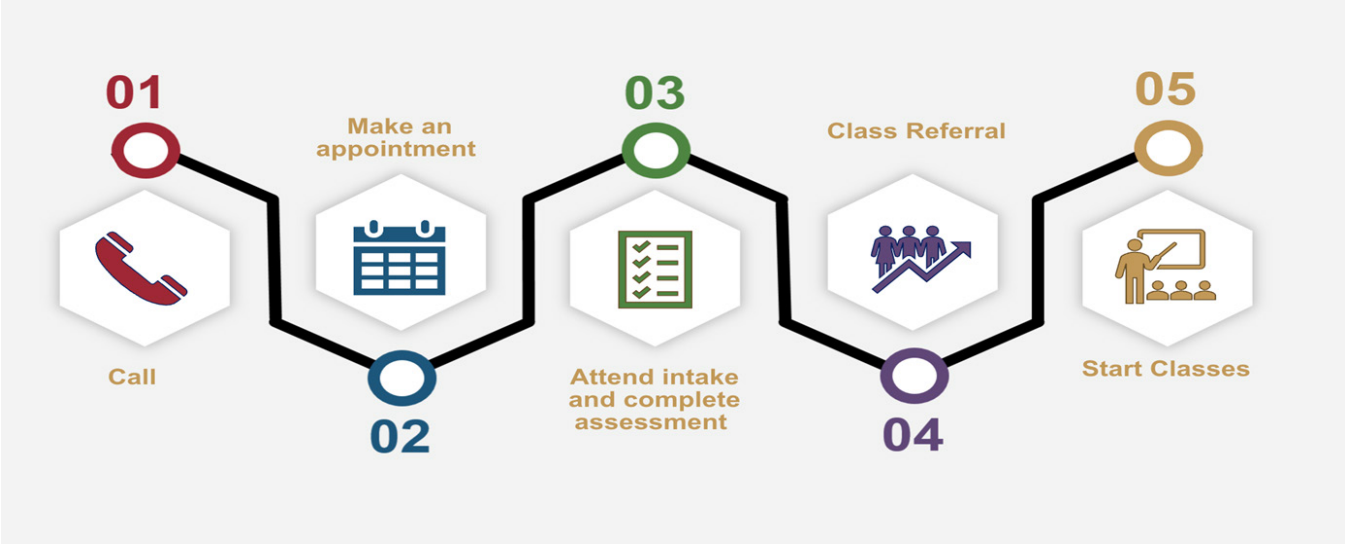
- changes to the adult education database that hold all learner data, class schedules, and referrals to allow easier navigation for the call center staff
- new designed scripts for call center staff that matched the database changes and were user-friendly
- training for the call center staff and re-training for Adult Education providers on how to navigate the new system
- development of a shared communications plan to inform residents about the toll-free number
- ongoing internal communications and continuous quality improvement to ensure a quality experience for residents, call center staff, and providers
- The collaboration launched publicly in May 2022.[2]

How it Works: Five Steps for Residents to Connect to a Class

Learners are connected to the call center through multiple avenues. This may include organic calls responding to the marketing for this resource, internal referrals from the PA CareerLink® Centers, the City's Adult Education Office, or from adult education providers who want to connect learners to other classes. The call center staff then have a defined script to collect basic information (such as contact information) and understand the needs of the learner. For example, a learner is asked about class type, desired location, and time of the class. The database itself holds class listings from providers across the city. Class types include Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Citizenship Prep, English for Job Search, Digital Skills (from computer basics to smart phones to video calling), and High School Equivalency Classes. Providers also offer both CASAS and BestPlus 3.0 literacy tests as a pre- and post-assessments. The call center staff then use the city's database to locate an organization that has open intake/assessment sessions that match the learner's needs and then sign up the learner for that session. Both the provider and the learner receive an email confirmation from the database of the upcoming session. Once the learner completes the intake/assessment session, they can be enrolled in the class that aligns with their educational goals and literacy level. This process can be seen in Figure 1.

2 https://www.phila.gov/2022-06-02-office-of-children-and-families-launches-next-level-learning-campaign-for-adult-learners-with-single-phone-call-access-to-program-information/

FIGURE 1: Title needed....



If there are any hiccups in the process (such as a learner missing a session or voicing concerns about a provider), the learner can call the toll-free number to be matched with a new session, and any concerns would be forwarded to the city for follow-up. Anytime a call center user creates a learner profile, they manually tag that profile as a "1-833" call, and the database itself logs the user account creating the learner's profile. Some callers might have a profile in the database already, so being able to combine multiple documentation methods to track which learner profile came through the call center helps with data accuracy.

The Data

In 2020, there were no calls for adult education to the toll-free line. In 2022, when the call center first accepted adult education calls, 907 of the 2,160 calls (or 42% of all calls) were for adult education. In 2023, 3,584 of the 5,875 calls (or 61% of all calls) were for adult education. In 2024, (01/01/2024–11/20/2024), there were 2,251 adult education calls. Together, the call center supported 3,724 unique learners between May 23, 2022, and November 20, 2024. Learners often reach out to the call center multiple times with additional questions, which is why the unique learner count is much less than the total call count. Of the unique learners who called the call center, 2,806 of 3,741 (75%) were validated with accounts in the adult education database. Some learners may have called asking for adult education but were routed to another part of the system after talking to the call center staff and identifying other needs. For example, a learner may have needed a workforce program, so they would be routed to a PA CareerLink® Career Navigator who could assist with both their workforce and adult education needs. Of the 2,806 learners with validated database profiles, 2,462 (88%) were enrolled into an intake/assessment session: the first step a learner takes to be placed in a class.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Since the launch of this new resource, the call center and the Adult Education teams meet on a consistent basis to catch errors, respond to provider or learner concerns, and problem solve. This allows for dedicated time to focus on a structured feedback loop with timely and thoughtful improvements. The two teams have worked together for more than a year and have built a trusting work environment, which allows for direct and immediate feedback, immediate responses to any mistakes, and potential revisions to improve the learner experience.

Since the launch of this partnership in May 2022, several areas of continuing collaboration have come into focus.

Provider Feedback Loop

This has been Adult Education's first opportunity to understand more fully what is happening between the provider and the learner. Prior to the toll-free number,

Adult Education had limited insights into the learner experience at the provider level. With this data now collected centrally, the length of time from the first call to the assessment appointment to being connected to a class can be tracked. In addition, how many times a learner calls the toll-free number and the types of follow-up questions they may have is also tracked. For example, a learner may call the toll-free number line again because they were not contacted by the provider or because they can no longer attend the intake session. This helps the Adult Education team provide feedback and support to the providers as well as ensuring the learner gets attached to the service they requested.

Learner Feedback Loop

The call center and Adult Education teams meet weekly to discuss anything that has happened over the last week at the call center. Originally, this meeting was set up for project-planning purposes, but it continued after launch to discuss implementation bugs, updates/changes, and caller feedback. Up until this partnership, the Adult Education team did not have a consistent and reliable learner feedback mechanism. This partnership unexpectedly created a feedback loop that is used to improve call quality, learner experience at provider sites, learner accessibility, and translation needs. Learners may call the toll-free number back to report a negative experience they had after working with the call center, and the toll-free number staff will report those calls to Adult Education for further action. We have learned so much from the feedback loop that call center managers decided to learn what the overall call quality is like for callers with specific needs. Currently, there are plans for a formal evaluation to measure call quality, which includes observing how different call requests are handled by call center staff members.

Refining the System

Through both the provider and learner feedback loop, some callers who reached the answering machine (either because they called after hours or because the line was busy) did not understand how to leave a message because the answering machine message was in English only. The teams worked together to ensure that language access was available for the four most common languages (excluding English) spoken in Philadelphia. Once the languages were selected, keypad options were given for callers to select their preferred language. Moreover, the teams provided phone-based translation services, which are used daily by the call center. Thus, if a learner calls the toll-free line and does not speak English, the call center will connect all parties to a translator who will support the learner and the call center staff member during the registration and enrollment process.

Conclusions

The partnership has been a productive collaboration on several levels—but can it be replicated? We think it can, and here are our recommendations for what other cities can take away from this Philadelphia example.

1. Learn about and build relationships with your local system-level partners. Who has significant investments in adult education or adult education-related opportunities?
2. What is the relationship between your local workforce board and adult education? Does your local workforce board have a call center? If not, how do they communicate with residents about their services? Are there any opportunities to partner around shared communications about both workforce and adult education opportunities? Or does your local workforce board have the appetite to invest in a call center?
3. What are the needs of your learners? Would this type of collaboration be useful to them? Would it increase their access to and knowledge of other resources available to them?
4. Incorporate enough time before implementation to build or leverage the relationships and resources needed to support the endeavor. Are there key stakeholders that can help manage the project through to completion? What capacity concerns are there and how will they be addressed?

Our aspiration continues to be creating a seamless and simplified system for both learners and providers, and to expand the community reach of the workforce system. By having strong, committed leadership, mission-aligned partners, clear communications, a commitment to quality programming, as well as flexible and ready information systems, we are able to take the next steps in our work together.

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Research Digest

College and Career Readiness Approaches in Adult Foundational Education: Directions for Research and Practice

Judith A. Alamprese, Alamprese & Associates

It is well recognized in the United States that adults require education and skills beyond the secondary level to obtain family-sustaining employment and advance their social, personal, and economic well-being. Recent data support a continuing trend of a positive association between adults' level of education and median weekly earnings, with the earnings of workers age 25 and older increasing with every level of education completed. In 2024, workers who had an associate's degree earned $1,099 per week—a 33% increase over workers without a high school diploma—while those with a bachelor's degree earned 52% more than workers without a diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025).

The projected requirements for jobs also reflect a premium on education. It is estimated that by 2031, 72% of jobs will require postsecondary education or training. Although there will still be jobs for individuals who have not received a high school diploma, many of them will not enable individuals to increase their economic mobility (Carnevale et al., 2023).

To encourage adults' further education and skill development, especially those with an education below or at the secondary level, the U.S. federal and state governments, philanthropic organizations, and other entities have invested in initiatives for adult foundational education (AFE) learners—adult basic education (ABE), English as a second language (ESL), and adult secondary education (ASE). These initiatives have been designed to facilitate AFE learners' transition to further education, training, and employment and to enhance state-level adult education and employment policy to support those transitions. The efforts have included demonstration programs to test approaches to AFE bridge programs, integrated education and training, and other career pathways efforts, as well as the provision of technical assistance and training for AFE state staff and local service providers to implement career and college readiness (CCR) activities. The initiatives have also promoted partnerships among education, workforce development, businesses, local community agencies, and other entities in support of a coordinated education and workforce development system (Cotner et al., 2016; Darnton & Warden, 2018; Eyster et al., 2018; Joyce Foundation, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education [OVAE], 2012).

As the interest in expanding adults' access to career pathways and in improving training and employment programs moves forward with initiatives such as the federal government's Talent Strategy (U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education, 2025), information about the types of CCR activities that can help to advance learners' education and training could be beneficial to AFE staff. Although CCR activities have been part of AFE services for decades, research on the effectiveness of CCR activities is limited (Seymour, 2009). This digest provides an overview of CCR activities that have been delivered in the context of AFE career pathways approaches and what is known about the effectiveness of these activities. The brief closes with steps that could be taken to strengthen the knowledge base on implementing CCR activities with AFE learners.

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Overview of CCR Activities

AFE programs have developed CCR activities to support adult learners' retention and success in transitioning from AFE to further education and in participating in career pathway programs. Funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 has enabled AFE programs to expand their services. They go beyond teaching foundational and English-language skills and preparing adults to earn a secondary credential to supporting adults to become ready for college and a career (U.S. Department of Education, OVAE, 2013; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2014). Discussed below are the activities that are involved in CCR, examples of how CCR activities have been delivered in AFE programs, and the available research on the effectiveness of those activities.

Defining CCR

A review of the literature on the inclusion of CCR in AFE transition and career pathways programs indicates that CCR activities are considered a critical component of those programs but that CCR activities may differ across the programs. Although the AFE field has not developed a formal definition of CCR, Conley's (2012) work in conceptualizing CCR in the context of high school preparation for postsecondary education is relevant to AFE.

Conley's CCR model posits that learners' readiness is determined by the extent of their skills in four areas: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills, and transition knowledge and skills. Cognitive strategies are the types of thinking required by college-level work. Key content knowledge is sufficient knowledge in core academic subjects, and technical knowledge and skills related to career goals. Learning skills consist of learning methods—such as study skills and time management—and learners' ability to set goals, persist in their learning, and develop self-efficacy. Transition knowledge and skills involve learners' ability to successfully pursue postsecondary education, including being aware of the careers that are possible options and understanding eligibility requirements and the costs of postsecondary education (Roberts & Grant, 2021).

AFE approaches to CCR include the components of Conley's model in varying degrees, and some approaches have additional skills that AFE learners may need to succeed in transitioning to their next steps. Below are examples of how AFE bridge and integrated education and training programs have incorporated CCR activities.

CCR Approaches in Bridge Programs

Bridge programs are "one of the first steps in a career pathway for low-skilled adults, that support the transition from adult education to the next step in an occupational pathway" (U. S. Department of Education, OVAE, 2012, p. 3). Two early bridge programs illustrate approaches to CCR that take into account the varied experiences of AFE learners and the types of counseling, advising, and career or college knowledge that adults may need to succeed in further education or training.

The Transition to College and Careers (TCC) model blended college preparation and career development for adult learners in New England. A key feature of the TCC model was the provision of proactive counseling and support in group or individual sessions to develop learners' resiliency and persistence, problem solving, and time management skills. Learners also prepared a Career and Education Plan. The findings from the project pointed to the importance of designing programs that can foster personal readiness as well as academic readiness and college knowledge. Furthermore, including career counseling and planning, as well as occupational-specific preparatory courses, can provide learners with background knowledge that can help them in finding a career that is a good match for their interests and aptitudes (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018).

The Oregon Pathways for Adult Basic Skills Transition to Education and Work Initiative (OPABS) involved 13 of the state's community college-based Adult Basic Skills (ABS) programs. OPABS included accelerated ABS courses in reading, writing, and mathematics that incorporated occupational applications from Oregon's high-demand industries. A College and Career Awareness (CCA) course provided information about the characteristics and educational requirements of jobs in local labor markets; the educational programs in the colleges related to these jobs; and learners' skills, interests, and educational and employment backgrounds. Learners also prepared a Career Pathway Plan and had access to Advising Modules (Alamprese, 2011). A quasi-experimental follow-up study of OPABS found that OPABS learners were significantly

more likely to enroll in and complete postsecondary transfer courses and earn a postsecondary certificate or degree than a matched comparison group (Alamprese, 2024). Furthermore, correlational analyses found that learners who took the CCA Course were 4.3 percentage points more likely to attain any postsecondary transfer or occupational credits ($p < .01$) (Alamprese & Price, 2021).

CCR in Integrated Education and Training

Integrated Education and Training (IET) is defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act as "adult education and literacy services that are delivered concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement" (WIOA, Section 203(11) and 34 C.F.R., 2014, p. 187). Accelerating Opportunity (AO) was an integrated education and training initiative that aimed to help adults with low basic skills earn occupational credentials, obtain well-paying jobs, and sustain rewarding careers. It was one of the first efforts to replicate and scale elements of Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model. The key elements of AO learner services were strategies to accelerate learning and credential attainment; academic and social student supports; dual enrollment strategies; and marketable, stackable, and credit-bearing certificates and degrees. Findings from a quasi-experimental evaluation of AO indicated that overall, the program helped participants with low academic skills earn more credentials from community college programs than similar non-AO learners. However, labor market gains for AO learners were mixed. Staff and learners also indicated that the individualized attention that AO adult education instructors and staff provided were important to learners' success (Eyster et al., 2018).

Strategies for Strengthening the CCR Knowledge Base

The evaluations of AFE transition and career pathways programs in which AFE learners have participated suggest that the multi-component CCR activities involved in these programs have facilitated learners' development of foundational skills, attainment of education credentials, and enrollment in further education and training (Peck et al., 2021). Descriptive studies of CCR activities in bridge and IET programs (Alamprese & Cheng, 2021) also reinforce the need for a range of services to support AFE learners' movement to and success in further education and training.

A gap in the current research on CCR activities is the lack of detailed information about the types of support services and college and career knowledge activities that are being delivered to AFE learners. The provision of more comprehensive descriptions of the operation of those activities, including defining the key services and specifying the assumptions about the use of the services, would provide AFE staff and researchers with a better understanding of the ways in which CCR activities are implemented and could be replicated.

Another approach to strengthening the knowledge base is to conduct analyses of the contribution of the components of services to the outcomes measured in a study (Klerman et al., 2023). This information could enable AFE staff to be strategic in determining the CCA activities that would be most helpful in facilitating learners' success and could contribute to the further development of CCR activities that support AFE transition and career pathways programs.

Conclusion

AFE programs have implemented transition services and career pathways approaches that involve a range of CCR activities to support learners' development of their academic skills, college and career knowledge, and social and emotional skills to help them further their education and training and obtain family sustaining jobs. Of particular interest is the range of support services (e.g., time management, study skills, social and emotional skills) and approaches to the development of college and career knowledge that are part of CCR activities. More detailed information about the design, delivery, and effectiveness of these CCR activities could be helpful to AFE staff in determining which services would be most helpful in facilitating AFE learners' success.

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Empowering Adult Learners with EdPuzzle

Vi Hawes, VH Ed Tech Consulting, LLC and Pima Community College

Abstract

As adult education evolves in the digital age, instructors and learners increasingly rely on online resources and flexible learning environments. Video content, once a passive medium, is now a powerful component of blended and remote instruction. However, simply watching a video rarely guarantees comprehension or engagement, especially for adults balancing education with work and life responsibilities. The challenge for educators is to leverage technology in ways that foster active engagement, real-world relevance, and skill development. EdPuzzle, an interactive video platform, is emerging as a practical solution for adult educators striving to personalize instruction, support digital literacy, and drive learning outcomes across diverse settings.

EdPuzzle is an innovative online platform that enhances video-based learning through interactive features tailored for educational purposes. At its heart, EdPuzzle allows teachers to embed questions, audio notes, and commentary directly into video lessons, transforming passive watching into active engagement (Rachman et al., 2024). Originally popular in K-12 settings, EdPuzzle's flexible tools for customizing video assignments have proven adaptable for adult education environments, fostering greater comprehension and retention by encouraging learners to interact with content rather than simply view it (Janaki & Surendran, 2022).

Features

EdPuzzle offers a comprehensive toolkit of features designed to enhance the interactivity, accessibility, and meaningfulness of video-based instruction for both educators and learners in adult education settings.

- Video cropping and editing: Teachers can crop, trim, and edit videos to focus learners' attention on the most relevant portions, removing unnecessary content and creating concise, purpose-driven lessons.
- Embedded questions: Multiple-choice and open-ended questions can be inserted at key points within videos (Figures 1 and 2). This transforms passive viewing into an active experience, ensures comprehension throughout the lesson, and supports formative assessment by requiring students to respond before proceeding.
- Live mode: EdPuzzle's Live Mode allows instructors to project an interactive video lesson in real time, whether in-person or via virtual meeting platforms (Figure 3). All learners answer embedded questions simultaneously on their own devices as the video pauses for group responses. This feature encourages real-time engagement, immediate discussion, and collective problem-solving, making it ideal for both hybrid and classroom settings where interactive participation is desired.
- Prevent skipping: The platform includes a feature that prevents learners from skipping ahead in the video, ensuring that they engage with the entire lesson in the intended sequence before answering comprehension questions.
- Instant feedback: Learners receive immediate feedback on their answers to embedded questions, which reinforces learning and allows instructors to address misunderstandings promptly.
- Detailed analytics and progress tracking: EdPuzzle delivers rich analytics on student engagement time spent on each section, video completion, and question-by-question performance (Figure 4).

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FIGURE 1: Embedding Questions

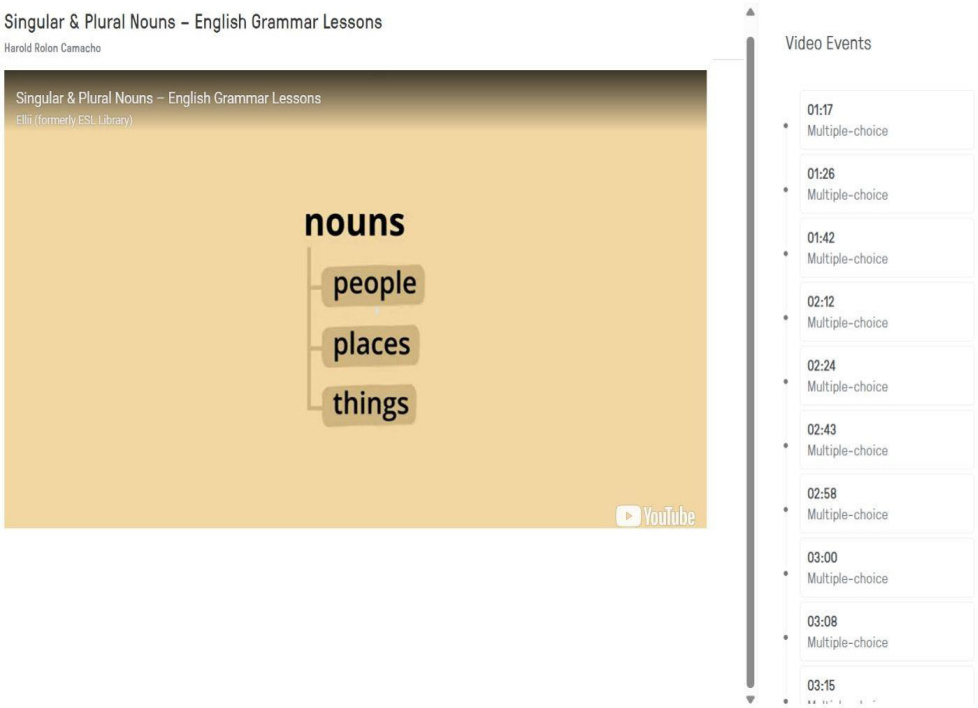


FIGURE 2: Question Generation

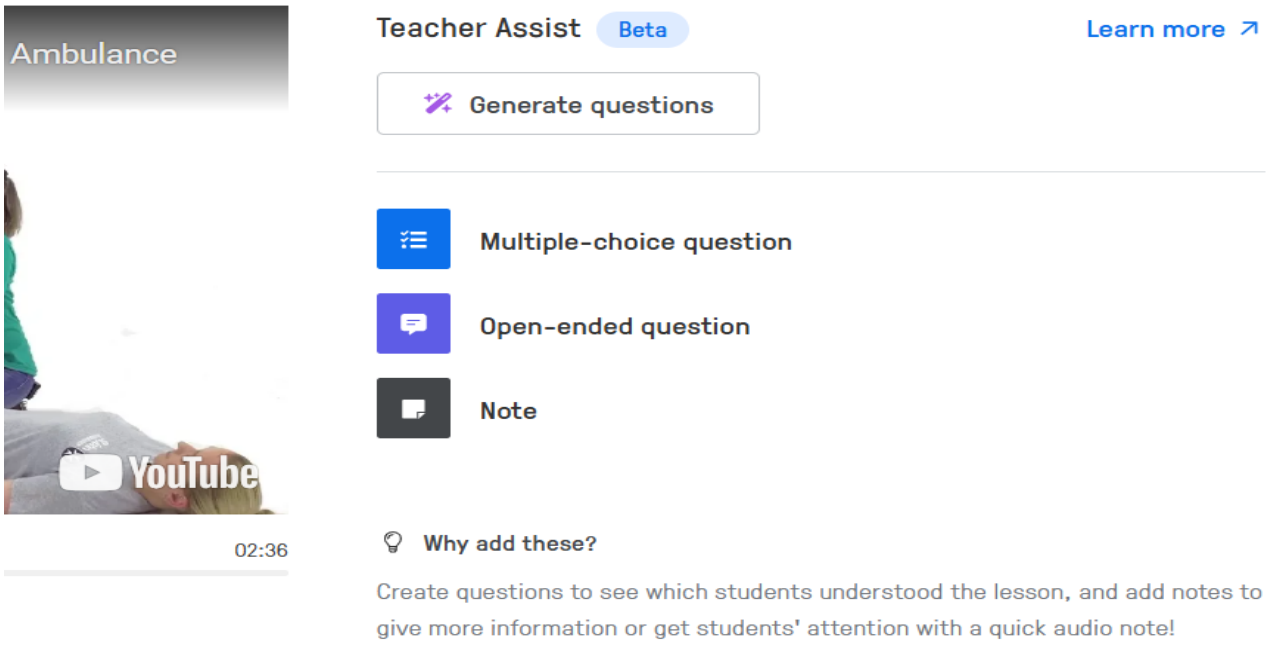
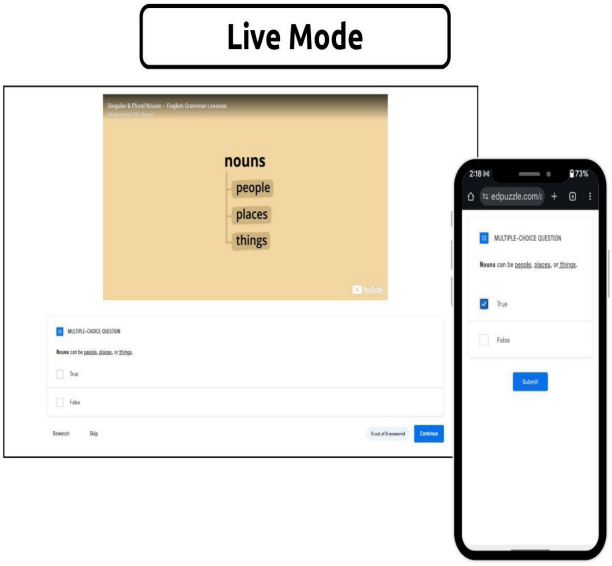


FIGURE 3: Live Mode Example



These reports enable educators to monitor learner progress and tailor instruction accordingly.

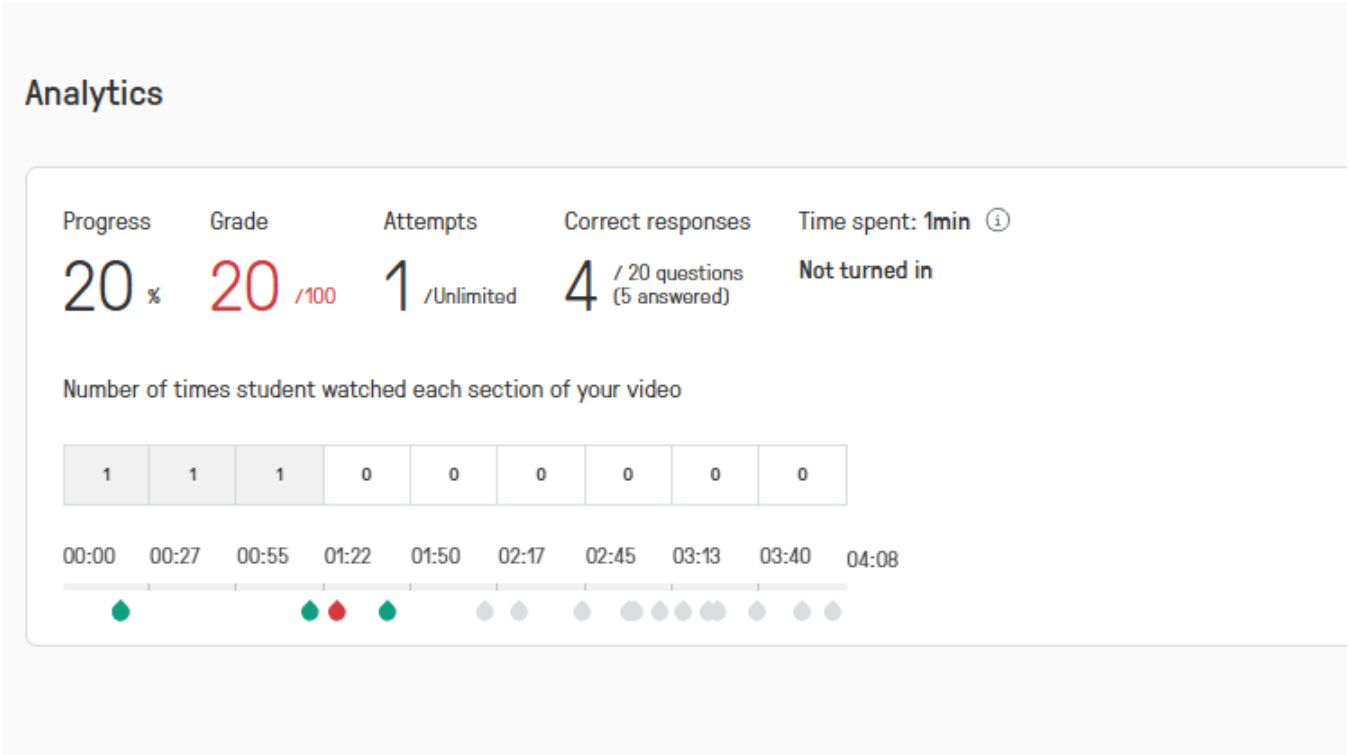
- Platform integration: Seamless integration with learning management systems, including Google Classroom, allows for easy assignment distribution, progress synchronization, and gradebook management.
- Support for asynchronous and synchronous learning: Whether used for self-paced assignments or real-time instruction, EdPuzzle accommodates different adult learning schedules and instructional formats.

These features collectively help educators transform static video resources into custom, interactive learning experiences that foster engagement, digital literacy, and deeper understanding for adult learners.

How EdPuzzle Addresses Teaching Challenges in Adult Education

Teaching adults requires respect for their autonomy, life experience, and practical needs (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Adult learners arrive with a variety of backgrounds, prior knowledge, and unique motivations for returning to the classroom. They often balance multiple responsibilities such as work, families, and community involvement. For these reasons, effective adult education

FIGURE 4: Analytics and Progress Tracking



is rarely one size fits all. It must be adaptable, purposeful, and immediately relevant. EdPuzzle rises to this challenge by aligning closely with best practices and theories in adult learning, specifically andragogy, offering features and experiences grounded in the realities of adult education (Rosa et al., 2022).

A major challenge for adult learners is finding the time to engage in educational activities. EdPuzzle's flexible, self-paced format allows learners to participate when it fits their schedules. Whether they are working night shifts, caring for family, or taking classes after a long day, adult learners can pause, replay, or review content to deepen their understanding. This asynchronous model recognizes that adults may need to revisit difficult material more than once and supports mastery over simple completion (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024).

Personalization is another crucial element for adult learning, and EdPuzzle excels by enabling the creation of lessons that can be contextualized to real-world experiences. Educators can choose or design video content that directly relates to learners' career fields, life challenges, or community contexts. This relevance increases intrinsic motivation and helps learners see the direct value of their coursework, which is especially important for retention and engagement among adult learners (Rosa et al., 2022).

Immediate feedback and formative assessment play key roles in supporting the success of adults in education. EdPuzzle's embedded questions and analytics provide both instructors and learners with valuable data in real time. As students work through a lesson, they receive instant feedback on comprehension questions. Teachers can then use detailed analytics to spot trouble areas, provide targeted guidance, and offer encouragement precisely when and where it is needed, thereby supporting growth and preventing frustration (Hidayat & Praseno, 2021).

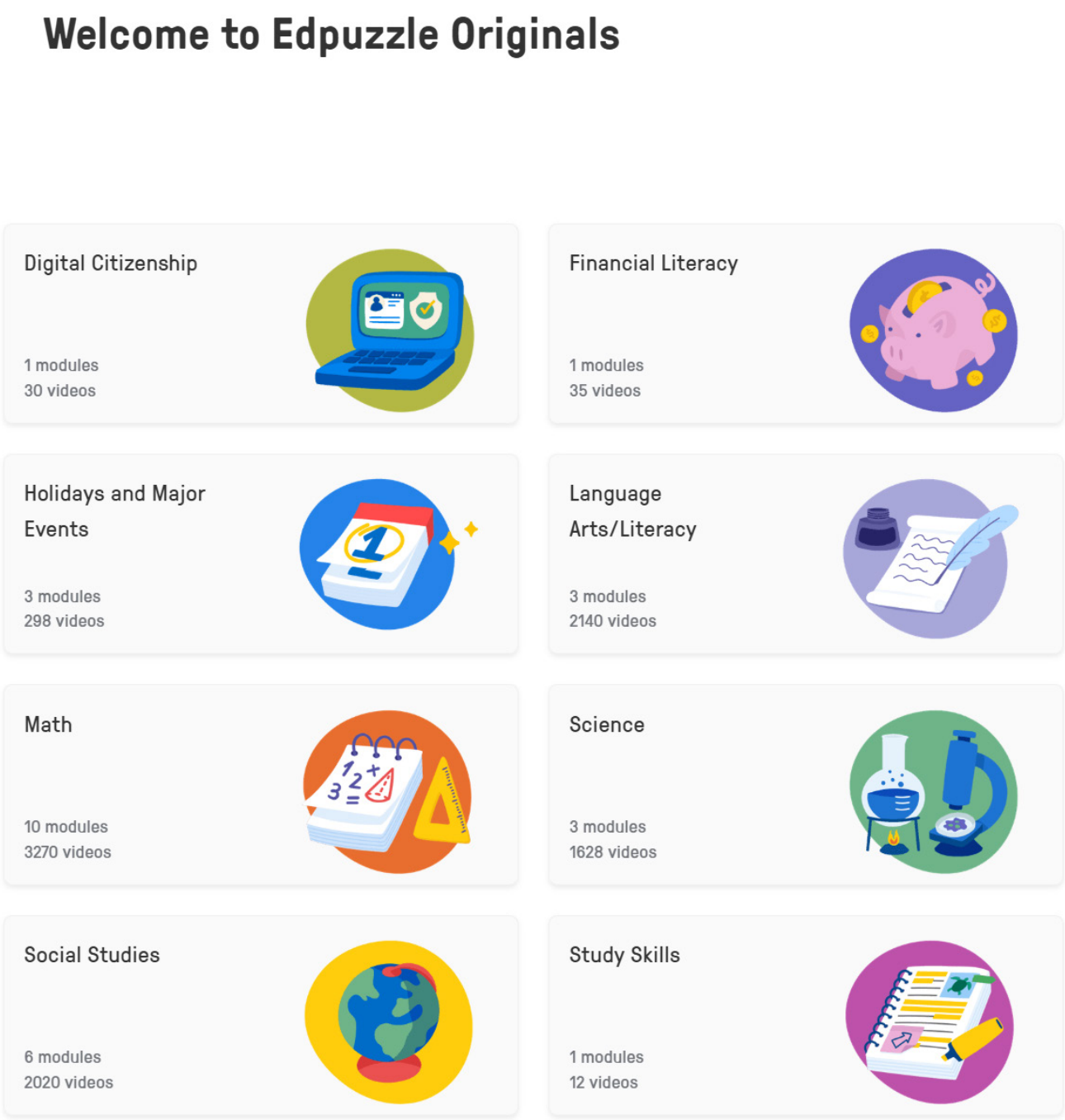
Finally, in today's world, digital literacy is a foundational skill in both personal and professional life. For many adult learners, developing confidence and agency with technology is as important as mastering course content. EdPuzzle's digital environment provides authentic opportunities for learners to practice navigating online resources and develop habits for success in technology-rich environments. As digital literacy is increasingly recognized as vital for sustainable adult education and workforce readiness, EdPuzzle becomes not just a tool for content delivery but a means of equipping learners for lifelong learning in a digital world (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024).

Real-Life Applications of EdPuzzle

EdPuzzle finds practical uses across a broad array of adult education settings, supporting both foundational skills and workplace readiness.

- Language learning: EdPuzzle supports English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction by embedding comprehension and vocabulary questions into authentic listening materials, such as real-world conversations, news reports, and workplace dialogues. Adult learners can pause, answer, and reflect as they progress, reinforcing listening skills and building practical language for daily life and work (Margawidjaya et al., 2024; Rini & Marpaung, 2024).
- Professional training: Instructors can develop interactive workplace scenarios, such as health and safety walkthroughs, customer service simulations, and technical tutorials. For example, employees might watch a manufacturing safety demonstration and answer scenario-based questions. Or they may participate in a simulated client meeting, analyzing communication skills and appropriate responses.
- Critical thinking and digital literacy: EdPuzzle encourages learners to evaluate digital content and practice analytical thinking through interactive assignments on topics like email safety, online banking, or media literacy. Instructors can assign videos on identifying misinformation or internet safety and embed critical questions to prompt deeper thought and application (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024).
- Civics and community education: EdPuzzle can be used in civics classes to help adults understand voting procedures, public policy, or community resources. Videos explaining how to register to vote or access public benefits can be paired with embedded quizzes or "What would you do?" scenarios to enhance engagement and understanding.

FIGURE 5: Video Topics



- Financial and health literacy: Videos covering topics such as budgeting, credit scores, or basic health care can be accompanied by reflective or problem-solving questions within EdPuzzle (Figure 5). Adults can practice decision making on real-life financial or health situations (e.g., managing household expenses or understanding prescription instructions).
- GED and test preparation: EdPuzzle allows educators to create practice sessions for high school equivalency tests by embedding quizzes and explanations into

math, science, or reading instructional videos. Learners receive immediate feedback and can revisit challenging concepts as needed.

- Remote/Hybrid learning and onboarding: Organizations and adult education programs use EdPuzzle to deliver asynchronous lessons when in-person attendance isn't feasible. This includes onboarding for new students or employees, remote instruction, or self-paced training modules.

Benefits of Using EdPuzzle

EdPuzzle stands out for its ability to personalize education and motivate learners. Below are some benefits of using EdPuzzle.

- Enhanced engagement: The interactive nature of EdPuzzle transforms traditional video viewing into an active learning process. Features like embedded questions, voice notes, and instant feedback keep learners involved, moving them from passive watchers to active participants. This hands-on interaction increases motivation, attention, and enjoyment, which leads to stronger retention and deeper learning (Janaki & Surendran, 2022).
- Improved outcomes: Studies show that adult learners using EdPuzzle achieve substantial gains in comprehension, listening, and vocabulary skills. The combination of videos, formative assessments, and opportunities for self-paced review gives learners the scaffolding they need to master complex material, reflected in measurable increases in test scores and demonstrated language proficiency (Margawidjaya et al., 2024; Rini & Marpaung, 2024).
- Supports lifelong learning: By integrating technology meaningfully into instruction, EdPuzzle helps adults develop digital literacy with the ability to navigate, analyze, and create information using digital tools. These skills are indispensable for continued personal and professional growth, ensuring that learners are equipped to participate fully and adapt in a rapidly evolving, information-rich world (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024; Knowles, 1980).
- Equitable access: EdPuzzle opens doors for adults who may have missed out on traditional education or need flexible second-chance opportunities. Because lessons can be accessed asynchronously and personalized for varying skill levels, EdPuzzle allows learners to study on their own terms. This flexibility and responsiveness make it a powerful tool for advancing the core mission of adult education: accessible learning for all (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024).

Challenges of Using EdPuzzle

While EdPuzzle offers numerous benefits for adult education, educators and learners still face real barriers as they utilize the platform. Understanding these challenges is crucial for planning curricula, supporting learners, and maximizing the impact of technology-enhanced instruction.

- Infrastructure limitations: Many adult learners and instructors face technological obstacles, such as unreliable internet, lack of access to computers or tablets, or limited digital support at home or in community spaces. These infrastructure issues can make it challenging for some learners to consistently participate in video-based assignments and for instructors to monitor progress effectively (Astutik et al., 2023; Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024). Programs can help bridge access gaps by working with community partners, libraries, or local agencies to provide device lending or hotspot checkout programs. A solution to this issue would be providing downloadable content or printable resources where possible to help learners with intermittent connectivity. Technology orientations for both instructors and students can promote digital readiness and confidence.
- Teacher preparation time: Creating engaging, effective EdPuzzle lessons takes significant teacher time, both in designing original content and in adapting materials to meet the diverse needs of adult learners. Educators may need professional development (PD) and ongoing support to develop their digital lesson-design skills, integrate relevant real-world examples, and keep up with evolving best practices (Rosa et al., 2022). Institutions can offer structured PD focused on instructional technology and collaborative planning time. Sharing lesson libraries among colleagues, adopting templates, and accessing open educational resources can reduce duplication efforts. Gradually building a bank of

reusable EdPuzzle lessons helps lower preparation time in subsequent terms.

- Motivation and participation: Keeping adult learners motivated and actively engaged can be an ongoing challenge, especially when learners come from diverse backgrounds, varying experience levels, and diverse goals. EdPuzzle lessons must be contextualized and tailored to adult interests, practical realities, and cultural contexts. Instructors must employ thoughtful, flexible strategies to encourage sustained participation and address barriers to ongoing engagement (Rosa et al., 2022). Embedding topics that reflect students' daily lives, work, or aspirations helps increase relevance. Providing choice in assignments, setting clear goals, incorporating peer collaboration, and celebrating progress can foster persistence. Regular check-ins and formative feedback from teachers can also support continued engagement and make learners feel seen.
- App download, account creation, and logging in: For many adults—especially those who are not digitally savvy—just getting started with EdPuzzle can be a significant hurdle. Downloading the app, navigating a web browser, creating an account, and learning to log in can be intimidating and time-consuming. These early access steps may lead to frustration, disengagement, or even exclusion for those with minimal technology experience. A potential solution would be to provide step-by-step printed guides and in-person or virtual onboarding workshops that guide learners through the setup process. Peer mentors or tech buddies can provide support before and after class. Where possible, instructors can demonstrate account setup on a projector or screen share. Facilitators should expect to allocate extra time for technology troubleshooting, and programs might consider creating "walk-in tech help hours" to lower the barrier to entry for all students.

Conclusion

EdPuzzle is a powerful resource for adult educators working to foster engagement, critical thinking, and digital literacy. As adult education moves further into the digital age, platforms like EdPuzzle help break down barriers to equitable, lifelong learning, but successful adoption requires attention to infrastructure, teacher training, and the realities of adult learners. The synthesis of research and foundational theory shows EdPuzzle is well-aligned with andragogical principles, which is supported by empirical evidence of improved outcomes in adult education contexts (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierma, 2014; Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024; Rosa et al., 2022).

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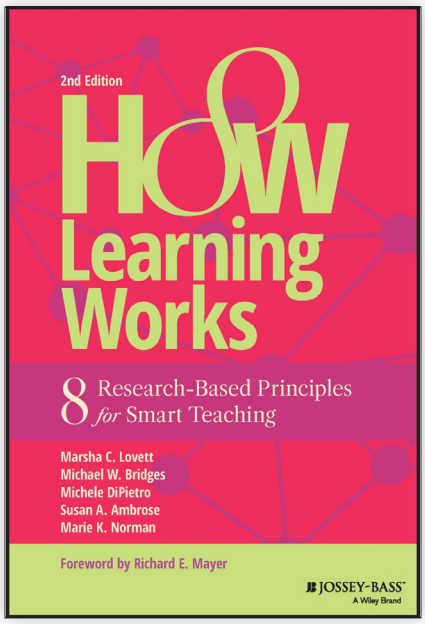
Book Review

Review of *How Learning Works: 8 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (2nd Ed.)*

Christy Jarrard, Adult Literacy Research Center, Department of Learning Sciences, Georgia State University

The purpose of this text is to summarize research relevant to teaching in varied settings with diverse learners. To achieve this objective, the authors, who have impressive instructional experience, condense their learning science research into eight principles. Originally (i.e., in the first edition; Ambrose et al., 2010), the authors outlined seven principles using research conducted with a predominantly English-speaking, Western lens on college students. However, Lovett et al. (2023) explain that an update was necessary to better address evidence of heterogeneity in the profile of participants in higher education. Hence, their second edition contains a newly added principle that emphasizes paying attention to how students vary, as it impacts how they experience the world, and this, in turn, impacts their learning. The authors use timely and culturally relevant real-world scenarios to discuss the eight principles, which address the impact of student differences, prior knowledge, knowledge organizations, motivation, mastery, practice and feedback, classroom environment, and self-directedness on student learning and performance.



Although not written specifically for adult literacy teachers, the eight principles have great relevance for how to foster essential aspects of learning in the adult learner classroom. Easy to read, each of the eight primary chapters follow the same pattern: presentation of two different but similar scenarios; an introduction of a principle; and a discussion of relevant research with visuals, implications, and strategies. The appendix contains several resources to facilitate integration of the principles into readers' instructional practice, including details regarding instructor and student self-assessment, concept map creation, classroom ground rules, rubrics, learner checklists, exam wrappers, active learning, and peer-review applications.

Lovett and her coauthors explain that the learning process for each student is typically non-linear with a unique path due to individual strengths and potential barriers. Effective instruction involves responding to who the learners are in the classroom, and each class has a new group of students with unique personal and educational histories. Learner individuality can be an intimidating obstacle as many teachers find it difficult to teach a classroom of diverse learners. Thus, this resource is particularly useful because it condenses learning research that addresses this variability into actionable teaching techniques, which are congruent with andragogical principles (e.g., Knowles et al., 2020) and are therefore extremely helpful for adult educators who often

Lovett, M. C., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Ambrose, S. A., & Norman, M. K. (2023). *How learning works: 8 research-based principles for smart teaching (2nd ed.)*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. 336 pages. $45.00 (hardcover), $36.00 (digital). ISBN: 9781119860143

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teach classes that consist of very diverse learners.

The very topical topic of misinformation is explained by describing prominent social psychological theories such as sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), and confirmation bias (Wason, 1960). To help teachers become aware of their students' knowledge gaps and misconceptions, Lovett et al. (2023) suggest strategies to gauge the extent of learners' prior knowledge, such as conducting brainstorming activities and drawing concept maps. Similarly, to navigate insufficient or inaccurate knowledge within the classroom, teachers can use techniques, such as epistemology discussions, consideration of opposing views, and justifications of reasoning, to challenge misinformation and facilitate the formation of new understandings. The authors also recommended that teachers intentionally activate accurate prior knowledge with analogies, everyday examples, and explicit connections to previous lessons.

Especially relevant for adult learners, goals are promoted as the guiding force pulling learners toward engagement in academic tasks. Lovett et al. specifically discuss self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) to define the subjective value of goals and outcome expectancies as integral aspects of motivation. Additionally, the authors emphasize how learner motivation is impacted by perceptions of ability and attributions. It is important to consider what learners think will happen (Bandura, 1997) and whether learners think that their success/failure is attributed to external or internal factors (Weiner, 1986). When applying this to adult education, teachers can facilitate learner motivation by providing early success opportunities, outlining clear expectations for assignments, and making explicit connections between controllable behaviors and successful outcomes.

I highly recommend this book for any teacher teaching any population in any context. The book is an excellent synthesis of learning theories and research, and all scenario applications reflect modern classroom experiences. What I find especially interesting is that Lovett et al. advise teachers to apply the eight principles of learning to themselves to be explicitly aware of their own learning processes and to be reflective of their teaching practices. In fact, they describe instructors as learners in constant flux, explaining how the zeitgeist bleeds into the classroom environment, and teachers must adapt to stay current with world events that impact their and their students' lives. Finally, the book is very engaging, and I believe it should be in the hands of all educators, whether seasoned or new, and should be included as required reading in professional development workshops.

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Resource Review

Curriculum Matters: A Comparative Analysis of Three Adult ESOL Curricula

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Adult education programs arose from a growing understanding of the importance of educating adults, including the many immigrants and refugees who want to learn English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL; Sandlin & St. Clair, 2005). Many community-based programs that offer English classes have been fortunate to find volunteers who take time out of their busy schedules to teach these adult learners (Vinogradova & Ross, 2019). While some volunteers, as well as part-time paid staff, may have a background in education, many do not. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that community-based programs have the necessary tools to offer practical initial training and ongoing professional development to practitioners. Given the reality that programs are often staffed by part-time teachers and/or volunteers, the quality of curricular resources plays an outsized role. Hence, it is imperative to evaluate instructional resources as well as any accompanying training materials that are available from the publishers.

Overview of Adult ESOL Curricula

The curriculum chosen at a community-based organization is a foundational decision to ensure the needs of adult English learners are met. This review analyzes three popular curricula used around the world in the field of adult ESOL: *Burlington English Core, Stand Out*, and *Side by Side Extra*. The comparison of each resource highlights these aspects of the curricula: (a) instructional approach, (b) integration of digital literacy, (c) alignment with the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) standards, (d) accessible assessment tools, (e) integration of culturally relevant andragogy, (f) available training resources, and (g) cost.

Table 1 provides a concise overview of *Burlington English Core*, *Stand Out*, and *Side by Side Extra* to support community-based programs to consider which curriculum best fits their organization and the needs of the adult learners they serve.

Discussion

This review compares three popular adult ESOL curricula to offer some guidance to adult ESOL programs on their decision-making. The analysis of *Burlington English Core*, *Stand Out*, and *Side by Side Extra* reveals gaps, particularly within digital integration, culturally relevant andragogy, and instructor training and support. It also suggests how cost can affect the quality of the curriculum and highlights the additional resources offered by the publishers.

Digital Integration

Being digitally literate can open many doors for adult learners, particularly for those entering the workforce. In fact, digital literacy skills are imperative in the 21st century. While each curriculum includes a digital component, they are not equivalent. Since *Burlington English Core* is solely a digital platform, which can be accessed via web browser or app, its digital integration is more comprehensive than *Stand Out* and *Side by Side Extra*. *Burlington English Core* has embedded videos, audio clips, and interactive activities throughout each lesson. Additionally, students can complete a placement exam and module tests on the platform. Students also engage in lesson activities and homework assignments online and receive immediate feedback. *Side by Side Extra* offers an ebook of its material and some additional online activities for students to complete through FunZone.

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TABLE 1: Adult ESL Curricula Comparison

	Burlington English Core (Burlington English, 2025)	*Stand Out 4th Edition* (Jenkins & Johnson, 2024)	*Side by Side Extra* (Molinksy & Bliss, 2016)
Instructional Approach	blended learning; intertwines language learning skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) with digital literacy skills	problem-based language learning with real-world applications	holistic approach to language learning focusing on speaking, listening, reading and writing; units heavily focus on grammar
Digital Integration	comprehensive digital platform that incorporates interactive/projectable in-class lessons, embedded videos, and skill-building activities with speech recognition technology; can be accessed via web browser or application	student ebooks through Spark platform and online videos that correlate with lessons; available via web browser or application	ebook and FunZone (digital skill building activities) via web browser
CASAS Standards Alignment	explicitly aligns with the workforce readiness and life skills sector	explicitly aligns with the workforce readiness and life skills sector	no clear alignment with CASAS standards
Assessment Tools	includes digital placement tests, print and digital end-of-module assessments, and digital progress tracking tools	includes digital placement tests, print and digital unit tests, and formative assessments implemented within each lesson	includes chapter checkup tests; unclear if curriculum includes placement tests
Culturally Relevant Andragogy	relevant real-life skills and topics discussed throughout the modules (e.g., getting a job, healthcare)	incorporates real stories from people across the world; uses problem-based learning to ensure real-life skills are being taught	no clear indication of culturally relevant andragogical approaches; curriculum uses cartoons versus pictures of real people/places
Instructor Training and Support	teacher resources available, extensive professional development, webinars and training sessions via website, instructor-training focused podcast, and physical support team available for in-person training	teacher resources with lesson-planning tools and webinars; professional development workshops via website	teacher resources, such as teacher edition, provided; webinars and blogs available via website
Cost	Highest Cost covers seat subscription, 12-month period, transferable if student leaves, and program updates automatically when changes are made	Medium Cost covers textbook and Spark digital platform	Lowest Cost covers the workbook and includes access to ebook and FunZone (additional digital activities for extra practice)

While FunZone does provide extra practice, the digital program itself is outdated and limited. As for *Stand Out,* the publishers have recently updated the fourth edition, adding the Spark platform where students can take tests. The Spark platform also provides "Life Online" sections that have been developed to support students to enhance their digital literacy skills (Jenkins & Johnson, 2024). Additionally, students have access to digital worksheets that align with workforce skills.

Culturally Relevant Andragogy

Culturally relevant andragogy is an essential component in teaching emergent multilingual adults. Intertwining Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Knowles' (1977) theory of andragogy affirms that adult learners deserve a curriculum that not only embraces their cultures and native languages but also focuses on supporting them to develop the skills needed in the real world.

A careful review of each curriculum's website and resources reveals some significant differences regarding how each curriculum infuses culturally relevant andragogy within their program. While *Burlington English Core* and *Stand Out* include topics that promote andragogy concepts, such as connecting the students' learning to their everyday lives

(e.g., career goals), *Side by Side Extra* focuses more on grammar concepts with no direct connection to real-world applications. Additionally, *Side by Side Extra* lacks authentic and relatable material due to its use of cartoon images compared to the photos and videos of real people from diverse backgrounds that are featured in *Burlington English Core* and *Stand Out*. Moreover, *Burlington English Core* and *Stand Out* infuse cultural diversity in their instructional activities, using various real-world scenarios. In contrast, *Side by Side Extra* lacks this cultural dimension, although an attempt is made by including cartoons that portray diverse races and ethnicities.

Instructor Training and Support

Without a doubt, initial training and ongoing professional development are foundational to ensure instructors are well-prepared to effectively teach adult English learners. While *Burlington English Core* and *Stand Out* both provide in-depth initial training for those who purchase their curriculum, *Side by Side Extra* offers fewer training options. For instance, *Burlington English Core* has regional representatives that can provide one-on-one training to programs that are implementing the curriculum. *Stand Out* also has local consultants that are available to explain how the textbook and Spark platform interact. While *Side by Side* does have webinars and blogs, the website itself is outdated compared to the other two curricular options' sites. *Burlington English* and *Stand Out* have modern websites with resources available for those who are interested in webinars or workshops. These websites are updated monthly and provide options for live webinars as well as access to recorded ones. These options give practitioners the flexibility to build their instructional toolboxes on their own time.

Cost

Providing quality programming for those they serve is at the forefront of community-based programs' missions. Yet, at times, community-based programs have to make difficult sacrifices to keep their doors open; quality curriculum should not be one of them. The curriculum can have long-term effects on adult English learners' progress and retention rates. It is perhaps no surprise that the least costly curriculum, *Side by Side Extra*, is the most limited regarding ongoing professional development, alignment to CASAS standards, alignment with culturally relevant andragogy, and digital integration. These limitations can have an impact on adult learners who deserve high-quality programs. While *Side by Side Extra* is limited, it may be appropriate for more informal settings, such as conversation classes or for individuals learning English independently on a budget.

The curriculum that offers the most robust digital platform also costs the most: *Burlington English Core*. This curriculum includes automatic revisions, eliminating the need to purchase updates as well as physical replacements. The cost for *Burlington English Core* can be justified, especially for programs who want to integrate language learning with digital literacy skills. *Stand Out* offers a middle ground option and also aligns with CASAS standards. What it lacks in digital sophistication, compared to *Burlington English Core*, *Stand Out* makes up for by its affordability.

Recommendations

Based on this curriculum comparison, community-based programs should prioritize selecting a curriculum that intentionally incorporates culturally relevant andragogy and provides meaningful ongoing support for instructors. Since practitioners may not come from an educational background, access to ongoing professional development is key for the success of the tutors and learners alike. Community-based programs that decide on *Burlington English Core* or *Stand Out* would likely benefit from the training webinars and workshops provided through their websites. *Burlington English Core* even provides a free podcast created for instructors wanting to improve their practice. Since neither curriculum incorporates culturally relevant andragogy to an ideal extent, supplementing with additional resources would be valuable.

In addition, digital integration should be seen as non-negotiable when selecting curriculum. Instructional materials that integrate digital literacy is a valuable investment since it benefits adult learners beyond the classroom. *Burlington English Core* is a good option for programs that want to provide digital literacy instruction through language teaching, while *Stand Out* provides a cost-effective solution to those who want both a physical textbook and some digital integration. Understanding that cost and access to technology is a concern, especially

for programs with restricted budgets, *Side by Side Extra* could be an option. However, programs using *Side by Side* should consider offering additional basic digital skills classes as a supplement.

Adult education programs must not only evaluate their curriculum choices by cost but also by the long-term impact the instructional materials will have on practitioners, adult learners, and the community. Though *Side by Side* may be the most affordable, it lacks integration of digital skills and culturally relevant andragogy, as well as in-depth training support and explicit alignment to CASAS. Programs are advised to select curricula based on their specific community's needs, including their instructional goals and budget.

Conclusion

Community-based programs that serve emergent multilingual adults, with dedicated volunteer tutors by their side, make tough decisions daily to ensure they can continue to provide much needed services. Choosing a curriculum is one of the most important decisions programs make. The goal of this review has been to offer guidance to decision makers on choosing which adult ESOL curriculum best fits the needs of their organization, particularly for volunteer tutors. When the curriculum features quality content, training, and digital integration, it can provide a strong foundation for any program's future.

Ultimately, no curriculum is perfect, which is why understanding each curriculum's strengths and limitations is key to making choices that lead to more impactful and effective instruction. Whether programs opt for the digitally savvy *Burlington English Core*, the balanced and standards-aligned *Stand Out*, or the budget-friendly *Side by Side Extra*, the key lies in understanding that each of these tools has pros and cons. The specific gaps that exist can be bridged to ensure that all adult learners receive the quality instruction they deserve.

While this article discusses only three of the many ESOL curricular resources currently available, the framework utilized here could well be drawn upon to review other curriculum products in the marketplace.

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