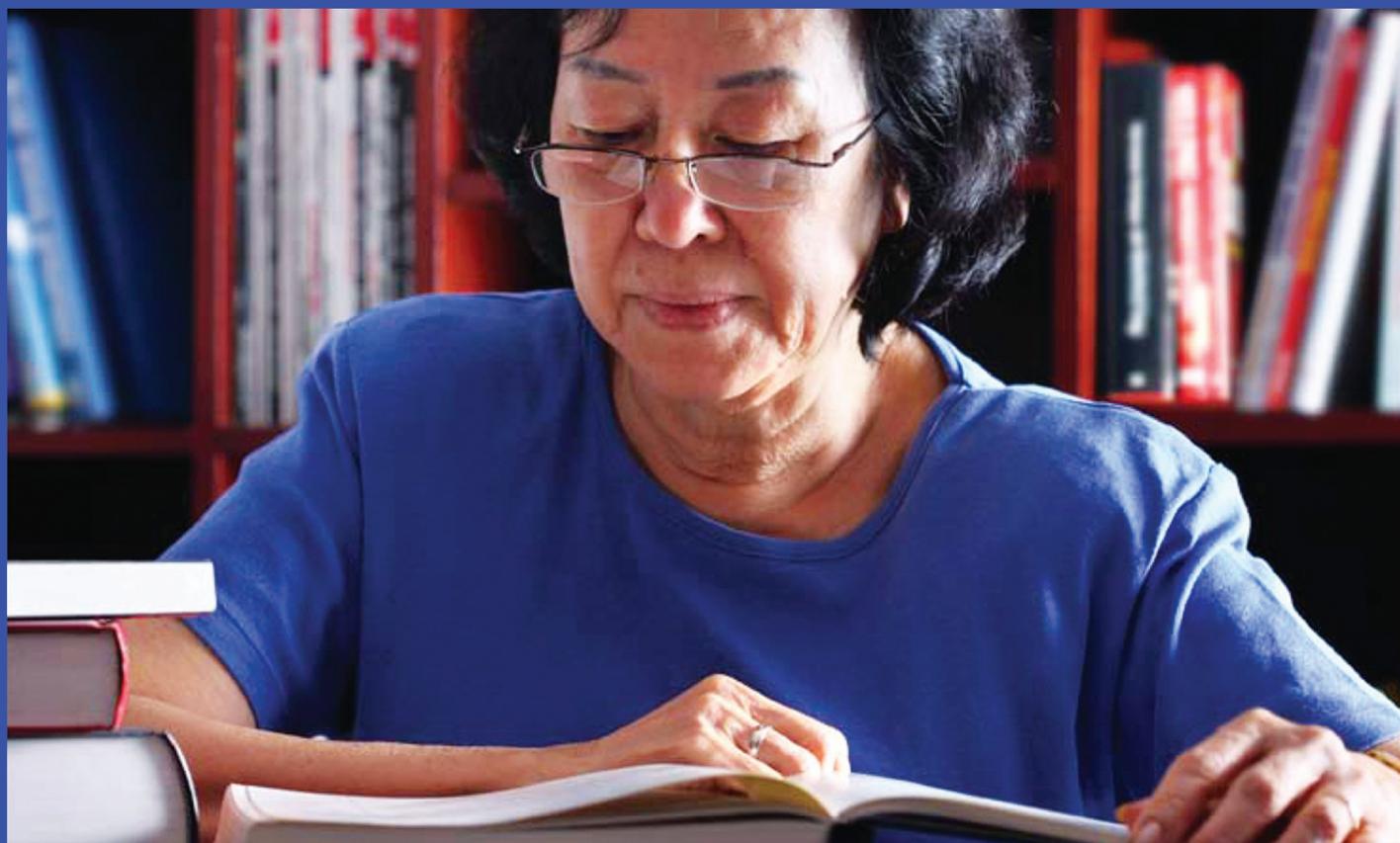# Education for Adult English Language Learners in the United States
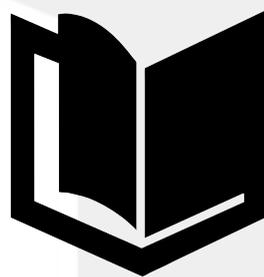
Trends, Research, and Promising Practices

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Education for Adult
English Language Learners
in the United States

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Acknowledgments

This paper has benefited from the perspectives of a number of knowledgeable practitioners and researchers. It is through their comments and suggestions that we were able to bring together the many relevant aspects of the delivery of instruction for adults learning English in the United States.

Executive Summary

Adult English language learners comprise a substantial proportion of the adult education population in the United States. In program year 2006–2007, 46% of participants enrolled in state-administered adult education programs were in English as a second language (ESL) classes. This percentage does not include English language learners enrolled in other types of programs, such as adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE).

To meet the increasing demand for English language instruction, existing adult education programs are expanding and new ones are being established. In addition to federally funded programs, services are offered by volunteer- and faith-based organizations, museums, libraries and other community centers, private language schools, and academic institutions.

This paper describes education for adult English language learners in the United States, focusing on the following topics:

- Characteristics of the foreign-born population
- Foreign-born adults enrolled in adult ESL programs, their access to and participation in programs, and factors that affect their participation and success
- The types of instructional programs that serve adult English language learners
- Professional development for teachers of this population
- The U.S. adult education assessment and accountability system
- Future directions in English literacy education and lifelong learning

THE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States has seen a steady increase in the number of foreign-born residents since the 1970s. In 2006, the number was 37,547,789—12.5% of the total U.S. population, up from 10.4% in 2000. Between 2002 and 2006, the level of immigration averaged 1.8 million per year. Hispanics and Asians are the two largest groups represented. Traditionally, the majority of immigrants have settled in a few states, the top five in 2006 being California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas. At the same time, many states have experienced recent growth in foreign-born populations, with 14 states experiencing a 30% or greater increase from 2000 to 2005.

The educational levels and English language proficiency of this population vary widely. The majority (68%) have earned at least a high school diploma in their home countries or in the United States, and 52% report speaking English "very well."

Foreign-born adults play a significant role in the U.S. civilian labor force, with the number growing 76% from 1990 to 2002, compared to a growth rate of 11% for native-born workers. Some studies indicate that immigrants have a positive effect on the overall economy of the United States. However, immigrants often earn lower wages than native-born workers. Factors affecting the income levels of the foreign-born population include level of education, length of time in the United States, immigration status, and English language proficiency.

LEARNER PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES

Many factors have an impact on learner participation in adult education programs. Learner factors include work schedules, family responsibilities, opportunities to learn and use English outside of an instructional setting, marital and family status, and personal motivation. Program factors include availability of classes, class schedules and locations, instructional setting, type of entry into the program (open or managed enrollment), length of courses and frequency of classes, and training and expertise of the teachers.

When considering factors that affect gains in English language proficiency and other educational outcomes, it is important to keep in mind the amount of time that may be required for adults to reach the goals that are set. Studies in second language acquisition of school-age children suggest that it can take 2–3 years to develop social language and 5–7 years to develop academic language proficiency. One study estimates that adult immigrants may need to study 103 hours for 6 years to reach the level of English proficiency necessary for civic integration or postsecondary education.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Adult ESL programs serve a diverse population through a variety of funding streams, depending on learners' status (e.g., immigrants, refugees, asylees), goals (e.g., basic or functional literacy, family literacy, workplace education, citizenship preparation), and circumstances (e.g., farm workers, displaced workers, incarcerated youth and adults). The diversity of learner populations served, program settings, systems of delivery, and instructional philosophies result in a wide range of program designs and instructional practices.

Adult education programs seldom provide only language and literacy instruction. Rather, they may provide English language learners with access to information they need for success in their roles as parents, employees, consumers, and lifelong learners. The most common types of programs and classes for adult English language learners are lifeskills or general ESL classes, family literacy programs, English literacy (EL)/civics programs, vocational ESL (VESL) programs, and workplace ESL classes.

Large classes, or classes of learners with widely varying English language proficiency levels (multilevel classes), are not uncommon. In fact, in some parts of the country, multilevel classes are the only option for learning English. Technology provides additional instructional options—in the classroom, through distance education, and in extended self-study. However, while computers and the Internet play an increasing role in adult ESL learners' and teachers' lives at work and at home, there are segments of both populations that do not have easy access to technology.

Across intructional settings, there is a recent emphasis on the development of both content and program standards to ensure the quality and consistency of the content and program provided to learners. Content standards specify what learners should know and be able to do in certain subject or practical domains. Program standards specify the components of quality ESL programs.

Another area of importance is the transition of English language learners through the upper levels of ESL courses and into and through programs that will help them attain their goals, such as earning a degree or a certificate in a vocational program. There is some evidence that if English language learners have moved through the beginning levels of ESL classes and into a workforce training program, they are more likely to complete the program and attain their goals for learning English and participating in the workforce.

RESEARCH ON ADULTS LEARNING ENGLISH

Funding for major research efforts in adult education in the United States, including the education of adults learning English, has not been extensive. However, there is information about promising practices based on descriptive studies (e.g., case studies, ethnographic research, and teacher research) and on the research base in adult second language acquisition and reading development. Recent efforts to fund major research studies that focus on adult ESL instruction or that include adult English language learners and programs that serve them will expand the currently limited research base.

Available research focuses on learner populations (e.g., the Adult Reading Components Study, projects funded by the Adult Literacy Research Consortium, and the Illinois Health Literacy Research Project), instructional strategies (e.g., studies of learner interaction and language development conducted at the Adult ESL Lab School at Portland State University), and second language acquisition (e.g., studies of learner motivation, opportunities for interaction, task-based learning, focus on form in instruction, and the development of English literacy). Promising instructional strategies that have emerged from this research suggest that teachers and programs need to do the following:

- Incorporate principles of adult learning, adult second language acquisition, and working with multicultural groups into their instruction.
- Begin with an assessment of learners' needs and goals and include ongoing opportunities for language assessment and evaluation of learner progress.
- Acknowledge and draw on learners' prior experiences and strengths with language learning.
- Employ a number of instructional approaches that match diverse learner needs, motivations, and goals and provide opportunities for interaction, problem solving, and task-based learning.
- Provide courses of varied intensity and duration, with flexible schedules, to meet the needs of learners who may be new to this country and occupied with settlement demands or multiple jobs.
- Use technology to expand or individualize learning inside and outside the classroom in accordance with learners' language proficiency, preferences, and needs, and to reach learners who cannot attend classes.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER QUALITY

The need for qualified personnel to work with adult English language learners has risen rapidly in recent years due to the ever-increasing demand for classes. In addition, changing immigration patterns and demographics have had an impact on teachers and on their professional development needs. New teachers are entering the field, experienced teachers are being asked to take on greater challenges, and many adult basic education teachers are working with English language learners in classes along with native English speakers. Much of this is occurring in areas where the adult ESL education infrastructure is limited or nonexistent. Professional development is crucial for these teachers.

Studies of professional development in adult education shed light on the factors to consider in designing and delivering professional development to teachers of adult English language learners. They identify the need to do the following:

- Examine data to see what kinds of teachers are needed and what those teachers need.
- Design professional development that is coherent and reflects what we know about how adults learn. Include opportunities for the application of new ideas in instruction, collaboration among practitioners, and feedback.
- Ensure that teachers have access to professional development opportunities.
- Encourage the participation of teachers who work together and promote reflective practice and the formation of professional communities.
- Increase the time and duration of professional development.
- Provide a system for professional development.
- Use technology to offer professional development that optimizes financial resources, reaches scattered teachers and programs, and promotes collaboration and community.
- Encourage teachers to bring theory, second language acquisition and reading research, and practice together through practitioner research or joint projects between teachers and researchers.
- Implement systems for teacher credentialing and certification based on the skills and knowledge that teachers working with adult English language learners need to demonstrate.
- Deliver professional development that meets national guidelines for quality and is consistent with other national efforts.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Learner assessment is a priority in adult education. Programs use a variety of assessment tools to place learners in classes, inform instruction, evaluate learner progress, and report outcomes of instruction. These tools include standardized tests, materials-based and teacher-made tests, portfolios, projects, and demonstrations. Needs assessment and goal-setting activities also play an important role in determining the areas on which teachers and classes need to focus.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA; Public Law 105–220), which funds adult ESL instruction through the U.S. Department of Education, requires states to evaluate each local program's performance according to outcome measures established under the National Reporting System (NRS),

which include educational level advancement and subsequent goal achievement. States have the flexibility to choose which assessments and procedures they will use to measure these outcomes as long as the assessments are standardized and conform to accepted psychometric standards for validity and reliability. Assessments currently approved for use for NRS reporting include *BEST (Basic English Skills Test) Literacy*, *BEST Plus*, *CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems), CELSA (Combined English Language Skills Assessment), Compass ESL*, *REEP* (Arlington Education and Employment Program) *Writing Assessment*, and *TABE CLAS-E (TABE Complete Language Assessment System—English).*

The adult ESL field faces a number of challenges in the selection, use, and development of assessments for accountability reporting:

- Staffing issues, such as inexperienced instructors and volunteers, high teacher turnover rates, part-time and temporary employment, and limited professional development, may affect practitioners' knowledge of assessment, its purposes, and its alignment with instruction.
- Program administrators may not know how to use assessment data to make decisions about instruction, program, and professional development needs.
- Students may attend class sporadically, making it difficult for teachers to align instruction and assessment and to show educational gain for accountability purposes.
- Tests used may not align with the goals and content of instruction, or they may not document incremental changes in learning that occur over short periods of instructional time.

Recommendations for the development and use of adult ESL assessments indicate that assessments must

- Meet standard psychometric requirements related to appropriateness, reliability, validity, standardization, bias review, and test development procedures
- Have a clear purpose and a defined construct and be able to reliably show learner gains over specific periods of time
- Evaluate language proficiency through learner performance
- Be useful for all stakeholders involved in teaching and learning through timely, clear, and accessible scoring, interpretation, and reporting of results
- Include documentation that supports the recommended number and intensity of instructional hours necessary to show learner progress
- Be cost effective and incorporate an understanding of ESL program limitations in terms of funding, personnel, time, materials, logistics, and support
- Be carried out within the context of a comprehensive program evaluation plan
- Include uses of technology as appropriate
- Be informed by a variety of perspectives, including new research on language learning processes, psychometrics, educational measurement, and curricular frameworks and instructional content areas

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

As is true for native-born workers, success for immigrants in the United States is related to educational attainment and literacy levels. Those with a higher level of education and better literacy skills in English earn more and are more likely to be continuously employed than those without. The education level and literacy of parents also influences their children's educational progress and success. The adult education field is connected to and influenced by a variety of workforce and postsecondary education challenges and opportunities and by the tasks in daily American life that require knowledge of new technologies. Opportunities for developing needed knowledge and skills include the following:

- Transitioning from adult education programs to workforce training and postsecondary education
- Workforce training and instruction to prepare for the workplace
- Training and instruction for those who are employed
- Workforce training and career pathways to provide opportunities for advancement
- Distance education for those unable to attend traditional instructional programs

CONCLUSION

The adult education system in the United States is committed to providing high-quality instruction for adults learning English. The emphasis on learner assessment and program accountability, professional development for practitioners, program and content standards, transitions to postsecondary and vocational education and the workplace, and uses of technology will help meet this goal. More research needs to be conducted and disseminated on how adults learn English, which instructional and assessment methods are most effective, how practitioners implement professional learning in the classroom, and how technology can best be used for learner instruction and teacher training. In addition, support for efforts in all of these areas is needed from federal, state, and local agencies and practitioners.

| Overview

Adult English language learners comprise a substantial proportion of the adult education population in the United States. According to recent statistics, 46% of all participants (1,101,082 out of 2,408,525) in state-administered adult education programs during 2006–2007 were enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) classes (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). This percentage does not include English language learners served in other sectors of the U.S. education system, such as those enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) or adult secondary education (ASE) classes.

Adult English language learners seek to improve their lives as individuals, community and family members, and workers. Many are settling into communities that have never had large populations of immigrants. To meet the increasing demand for English language instruction, existing adult education programs are expanding, and new programs are being established. Goal 5 of the strategic goals and objectives of the U.S. Department of Education (2002) mandates enhancing the quality of and access to postsecondary and adult education, and federal policy requires accountability for reporting program outcomes.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 launched adult basic education programs and authorized instruction "toward the elimination of the inability of all adults to read and write English," thus establishing services for English language learners within the federally funded adult education system. Subsequent legislation continued to support language instruction for immigrants and refugees, sometimes setting aside discretionary monies for services for specific populations (e.g., Cuban, Haitian, and Southeast Asian refugees) or for the development and teaching of specific content, such as citizenship and civics (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Adult education classes for English language learners are offered through agencies that are eligible to receive federal adult education funds through the state delivery systems. In 2003–2004, ABE, ASE, and ESL programs were administered through

local school districts (54%), community-based organizations (24%), community colleges (17%), and correctional and other institutions (5%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a).

Adult ESL services are also provided through other organizations that may or may not receive federal funding. These include faith- and volunteer-based organizations, museums, libraries, private language schools, workplace-based programs, and academic institutions that are financed through means other than federal funds (e.g., some community colleges). Significant numbers of adult English language learners are served in programs sponsored by community-based organizations and large national volunteer literacy organizations such as ProLiteracy, but reliable data are limited on the number of English language learners served through these organizations.

This paper describes education for adult English language learners in the United States. It gives an overview of the foreign-born population in the United States and provides a closer examination of those enrolled in adult ESL programs, including their access to and participation in these programs and the factors that affect their participation and success. Also discussed are the types of instructional programs that serve adult English language learners, professional development for teachers of this population, teacher quality, the adult education assessment and accountability system, and future directions in English literacy education and lifelong learning for adults learning English. Each section discusses the state of the field, research, and promising practices.

The goal of this paper is to provide adult education practitioners (teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, volunteers, and administrators), researchers, and policymakers with a thorough overview of the field of adult education for English language learners and a clear understanding of what is needed to ensure a quality education for and the ultimate success of this population.

II The Foreign-Born Population in the United States

This section describes the foreign-born population in the United States: their characteristics, the states in which they reside, and different perspectives on their economic contributions to U.S. society. The foreign-born population consists of legal immigrants (including naturalized citizens), refugees and asylees, and undocumented immigrants. Demographic information about the U.S. foreign-born population is collected through the U.S. Census Bureau and related analyses, including the Current Population Survey and the American Community Survey, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, organizations such as the Migration Policy Institute, the Pew Hispanic Center, and the Asian American Justice Fund use data from the U.S. Census Bureau to study the demographic, educational, linguistic, occupational, and socioeconomic status of the foreign-born population. Nationwide surveys, such as the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003), provide information about the language proficiencies and educational achievement of foreign-born individuals.

BACKGROUND ON THE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

Data on learners enrolled in adult English as a second language (ESL) classes or adult education classes are limited. However, data on the foreign-born population overall are documented in census reports. Recent statistics are available from the U.S. Census Bureau's (2006) American Community Survey (ACS). These include data on the number and percentage of foreign-born individuals, their countries of origin, ages, educational attainment, English speaking ability and literacy, and employment status and income levels.

Number and Percentage

The United States has seen a steady increase in the foreign-born population since the 1970s. According to the ACS, there were 37.5 million foreign born individuals in the United States in 2006, representing 12.5% of the total U.S. population. In 2000, there were 28.4 million, or 10.4% of the population. Between 2002 and 2006, the level of immigration averaged 1.8 million per year.

Naturalized citizens and refugees are two subgroups of the foreign-born population. Of the 37.5 million foreign-born individuals in the United States in 2006, 15.7 million (almost 42%) were naturalized citizens (Terrazas, Batalova, & Fan, 2007). In 2007, 48,281 refugees arrived in the United States, with the majority coming from Burma (20%), Somalia (14%), Iran (11%), the former Soviet republics (9%), and Burundi (9%) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

Countries of Origin

Hispanics and Asians are the two largest groups represented in the foreign-born population. In 2006, 47% of this population was of Hispanic origin; 31% of this population was born in Mexico. Projections for the size of the Hispanic population in the future range from 15.5% of the total U.S. population in 2010 to 24.4% in 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). From 1990 to 2004, the U.S. Asian and Pacific Islander population doubled in size; the Asian population rose from 7 million to 14 million, and the population of Pacific Islanders rose from 500,000 to approximately 1 million (Asian American Justice Center and Asian Pacific American Legal Center, 2006).

Other highly represented groups include those from the Philippines (4.4%), China (4.1%), India (4.0%), Vietnam (3%), El Salvador (2.8%), Korea (2.7%), Cuba (2.5%), Canada (2.3%), and the United Kingdom (1.8%; Terrazas, Batalova, & Fan, 2007).

Age

Data from the 2006 ACS show that the majority of foreign-born individuals in the United States (71%) are between ages 25 and 64 years; 8.1% are age

0–17 years; 9.6% are age 18–24 years; 43.7% are age 25–44 years; 27.2% are age 45–64 years; and 11.5% are 65 years of age or older.

Educational Attainment

The educational backgrounds of foreign-born adults vary, but the majority (68%) have earned a high school diploma in either their native country or the United States. Of those age 25 years or older, 26.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

English Speaking Ability and Literacy

The English language proficiency of U.S. foreign-born residents also varies widely. Data from the 2006 ACS reveal the following:

- 52.4% of the 37.2 million foreign-born persons age 5 years and older reported speaking English less than "very well" in 2006, compared with 51% of 30.7 million in 2000.
- 84% reported speaking a language other than English at home.
- 31.4% live in linguistically isolated households (i.e., one "in which no person 14 years old and over speaks only English and no person 14 years old and over who speaks a language other than English speaks English 'very well'").

A recent report claims that 55% of immigrants eligible to naturalize, and 67% of immigrants soon to be eligible have limited English proficiency (Passel, 2007). Another report argues that 5.8 million legal permanent residents need English language instruction to pass the naturalization exam and be able to participate in civic life, 6.4 million unauthorized immigrants will require English language instruction to pass the naturalization exam and obtain legal permanent resident status, and 2.4 million immigrant youth age 17–24 years will need English instruction to begin postsecondary education without remediation (McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007).

Although many first-generation adult immigrants struggle to become proficient in English, English language proficiency appears to increase with each subsequent generation. For example, the Pew Hispanic Center conducted a study

that surveyed 14,000 Latino adults on their ability to speak English (Hakimza-deh & Cohn, 2007). The study found that while only 23% of first-generation Latino immigrant adults reported speaking English very well, 88% of second-generation, U.S.-born Latino adults reported speaking English very well, and 94% of subsequent U.S.-born generations of Latino adults reported speaking English very well. The study found that the level of education, age of arrival in the United States, and number of years in the United States had an impact on Latino immigrants' ability to speak English very well and to use it often.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003) provided in-depth information about the different types of literacy abilities found in native- and foreign-born adults living in the United States (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007). The NAAL measures adults' knowledge and skills in prose literacy (text-based), document literacy (noncontinuous texts), and quantitative literacy (computations). Participants' abilities in each of these three literacy domains are described as *below basic*, *basic*, *intermediate*, or *proficient*. NAAL data disaggregated by native language and ethnicity show the following:

- Approximately 11 million adults in the United States (5% of the total population) were estimated to be nonliterate in English, as defined by their inability to complete a minimum number of questions on the assessment.
- Average prose and document literacy decreased as the age at which individuals learned English increased.
- Of adults who learned English at age 16 years or older, 39% performed at *below basic* prose literacy, and 63% who performed at *basic* prose literacy had attended or were currently enrolled in adult ESL classes.
- Of adults who learned English at age 16 years or older and who had never enrolled in an adult ESL class, 82% had *below basic* prose literacy, compared with 63% of adults who had attended such classes and 69% of adults who were currently enrolled.
- Of adults who spoke only Spanish before starting formal schooling, 62% had *below basic* prose and quantitative literacy, and 49% had *below basic* document literacy.

- Average prose and document literacy for adults of Mexican and Central or South American origin declined, except for those who were still in high school and those who had a college degree or higher.
- Spanish-speaking adults with *below basic* prose literacy increased from 35% to 44%.
- Prose, document, and quantitative literacy levels of Asian/Pacific Islander adults did not change significantly.
- The percentage of the U.S. adult population who spoke only Spanish before starting formal schooling increased from 5% to 8%. The percentage who spoke only English before starting school decreased from 86% to 81% (Kutner et al., 2007).

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Foreign-born adults play a significant role in the U.S. civilian labor force (defined as individuals age 16 years or older who are employed or seeking employment). In 2007, 24 million workers—15.7% of the U.S. workforce—were foreign-born individuals (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). From 1990 to 2002, the percentage of foreign-born workers grew 76%, compared to a growth rate of 11% for native-born workers (Grieco, 2004).

Immigrants often earn lower wages than native-born workers. Although they represented only 12.4% of the total U.S. population, immigrants made up 21% of all low-wage workers in the United States in 2005 and 45% of all workers without a high school education (Capps, Fortuny, & Fix, 2007). In 2007, the median weekly earnings of foreign-born full-time wage and salary workers was $554, compared to $722 for native-born workers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008).

A number of factors can affect the income levels of the foreign-born population. These include level of education, length of time in the United States, immigration status, and English language proficiency.

Education. Foreign-born workers age 25 years and older with less than a high school education earned $405 per week in 2007, compared to $1,057 for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Immigrants with bachelors'

degrees or higher earn almost as much (98.3%) as native-born workers with equivalent levels of education (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008).

Length of time in the United States. A study conducted in 1997 found that immigrants who have lived in the United States for more than 10 years earned about 10% less per household than native-born individuals (e.g., $45,400 versus $50,200) (Fix & Passel, 2001). Foreign-born workers with 10 or fewer years in the United States tended to have lower incomes than those who had lived in the United States longer.

Immigration status. A study conducted in 2001 found that among immigrant groups, undocumented immigrants showed the lowest annual household income level, reported at $32,200. Refugees earned more than undocumented immigrants, $34,000, and legal immigrants earned the most, $44,000 (Fix & Passel, 2001). A more recent study found that those students who enrolled in ESL classes, obtained a year of college credit, and received a credential went on to earn about $7,000 per year more than ESL students who did not continue their education after exiting ESL classes (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2005a).

English language proficiency. Martinez & Wang (2005) reported a 46% wage differential between immigrants who spoke English and those who did not. Even after adjusting for education and work experience, those who spoke English earned 12% more than those who did not.

The 2000–2005 survey of the U.S. refugee population conducted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement found that refugees who indicated that they did not speak English were less likely to be employed (45%) than those who indicated they spoke English (63%). The survey also found that the average hourly wage of employed refugees who reported speaking English well or fluently at the time of the survey was $9.07; for refugees who did not speak English at all, it was $7.95 (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

A study of immigrants in Los Angeles and New York City conducted by the Urban Institute found similar results. Many of the adult immigrants studied did not speak English "well" or "at all" (51% in Los Angeles and 38% in New

York). This group was poorer than immigrants who spoke English "well" or "very well." In Los Angeles, 33% of the former group lived below the poverty rate compared with 13% who spoke English well. In New York, 34% of the immigrants who did not speak English well lived below the poverty rate compared with 14% who spoke English well (Capps et al., 2002).

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Traditionally, the majority of foreign-born individuals have settled in a few states, the top five in 2006 being California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois, as shown in Table 1. In 2007, California, Texas, Minnesota, New York, and Florida were the top five states for initial refugee resettlement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). California leads the nation in the number of foreign-born residents, and Los Angeles has the greatest number of any city in the country: 36% of its 9.9 million residents and 46% of the workforce are foreign born, and approximately 2 million residents are considered limited English proficient (Fix, McHugh, Terrazas, & Laglagaron, 2008).

Table 1. Top Five U.S. States by Number of Foreign-Born Residents in 2006

State	Number of Foreign-Born Residents in 2006
California	9,902,067
New York	4,178,962
Texas	3,740,667
Florida	3,425,634
Illinois	1,773,600

Source. Terrazas, Batalova, & Fan, 2007.

At the same time, as shown in Table 2, many other states have experienced recent growth in foreign-born populations. From 2000 to 2005, 14 states experienced an increase of 30% or more (Jensen, 2006; McHugh, Gellatt, & Fix, 2007). One reason for this trend is that immigrants are settling in states with employment opportunities in construction, industry, and tourism (Singer & Wilson, 2006).

Table 2. Top Five U.S. States by Increase in Foreign-Born Population Between 2000 and 2006

State	Percentage Increase in Foreign-Born Population from 2000 to 2006
Delaware	53.1% (from 44,898 to 68,722)
South Carolina	51.8% (from 115,978 to 176,018)
Nevada	50.3% (from 316,593 to 475,914)
Georgia	48.9% (from 577,273 to 859,590)
Tennessee	48.7% (from 159,004 to 236,516)

Source. Terrazas, Batalova, & Fan, 2007.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRANTS TO U.S. SOCIETY

Immigrants accounted for 51% of U.S. labor force growth between 1996 and 2002, while they constituted just 14% of the total U.S. population (Orrenius, 2003). Although data are limited and localized, and various groups considering this topic have come to different conclusions, some studies indicate that immigrants have a positive effect on the economy of the United States (Waslin, 2008). For example, in Arizona in 2004, immigrant workers contributed an estimated $2.4 billion to the state tax revenue. After estimated immigrant-related fiscal costs of $1.4 billion (for education, healthcare, and law enforcement), the net 2004 fiscal impact of immigrants in Arizona was approximately $940 million (Gans, 2007). Another study found that from 2002 to 2004, Florida's immigrant workers each contributed almost $1,500 more per year in federal, state, and local taxes than they received in benefits such as Social Security, supplementary income and assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid (Eisenhauer, Angee, Hernandez, & Zhang, 2007). More research is needed on this question to gain a better understanding of the roles of native- and foreign-born adults in the U.S. economy.

SUMMARY

A complete picture of the nationalities, educational attainment, English language proficiency, and employment status of foreign-born individuals in the United States is helpful in understanding who they are and how their unique

needs might best be served in adult education programs. These factors also influence their children's socioeconomic status and education. Further collection and analysis of disaggregated data on the foreign born from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, labor and economic reports, and educational measurements, will continue to inform decisions and policies related to immigrant integration in the United States.

III Participation of Foreign-Born Adults in Adult Education Programs

This section describes the funding for and structure of adult education programs, factors that influence the participation of English language learners in these programs, and outcomes of their participation.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the federal government provided $564,079,550 in grants to states for program year 2004–2005 for adult education programs. Nationally, this amount represented approximately 26% of the total amount spent in states and local communities to support adult education and literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). From the federal monies that states receive, each state awards 82.5% to adult basic education providers and keeps 17.5% for program improvement activities and administrative expenses (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a).

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Although the majority of federally funded adult basic education programs are administered by local school districts, community-based organizations, and community colleges, the sites where these services are provided vary considerably. In fiscal year 2003, these sites included public schools, adult learning centers, community centers, adult correctional facilities, faith-based facilities, workplaces, community colleges, libraries, and learners' homes (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b).

ADULT LEARNER PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS

In program year 2006–2007, there were 1,101,082 adults of all ages, nationalities, native languages, and English proficiency levels enrolled in federally funded, state-administered English as a second language (ESL) programs in the United States (46% of adults enrolled in these programs. The five states with the highest number of English language learners enrolled in these programs were California (414,568), Florida (117,773), New York (77,327), Illinois (70,001), and Texas (59,174) (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Of those enrolled,

- 48% were enrolled in literacy or beginning-level ESL classes
- 3% were age 16–18 years, 19% were 19–24, 56% were 25–44, 17% were 45–59, and 5% were 60 or older (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b)

According to the National Household Education Survey of 2005, 1% of the 211,607 adults surveyed reported taking an ESL class within the previous 12 months (O'Donnell, 2006). Most of these classes were held in public schools, adult learning centers (46%), and postsecondary schools (37%). The average number of ESL classroom instructional hours per learner was 72.

In a related study, combined data from the National Household Education Surveys of 2001 and 2005 found that an average of 54% of adults surveyed (between the ages of 16 and 64) reported participating in at least one formal learning activity during the 12 months prior to the survey. Adults with no high school credential (4.4%) were more likely to be enrolled in ESL classes than those with a General Educational Development (GED) certificate (0.4%), a high school diploma (0.9%), some college (1%), or a bachelor's degree or higher (0.6%) (Kienzl, 2008).

FACTORS RELATED TO LEARNER PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS

Many factors can have an impact on learner participation in adult education programs. *Learner factors* include work schedules, family responsibilities,

opportunities to learn and use English outside of an instructional setting, marital and family status, and personal motivation. *Program factors* include availability of classes, class schedules and locations, instructional setting, type of entry into the program (open or managed enrollment), length of courses and frequency of classes, and training and expertise of the teachers (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003).

An important program factor is availability of classes. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials conducted a study to examine the wait times associated with popular adult ESL programs across the country (Tucker, 2006). Among 176 adult ESL providers surveyed, 57% reported that their wait list was from a few weeks to more than 3 years. In some parts of the country, such as New York City, waiting lists have been abolished, because the wait has become too long. Rather than put students on waiting lists, some programs place students in available classes that may not meet the students' specific goals or are not the appropriate instructional level, in the hope that space in a suitable class will open up.

LENGTH OF TIME AND INTENSITY OF INSTRUCTION FOR ADULTS TO ACQUIRE A SECOND LANGUAGE

There is limited research on the length of time it takes adults to acquire a second language (e.g., Collier, 1989; *Competency-based Mainstream English Language Training Resource Package*, 1985). Extrapolating from the studies of children's language acquisition cited below, it appears that it can take several years. For example, studies suggest that school-age children need 2–3 years to develop social language (conversational skills) and 5–7 years to acquire the academic language proficiency needed to reach parity with native English speakers (Cummins, 1991; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Moreover, school-age children usually attend school 5 days a week for approximately 6 hours a day, which is considerably more hours of instruction than adult education programs provide. Therefore, when considering factors that affect gains in English language proficiency and other educational outcomes, it is important to keep in mind the amount of time that may be required for adults to reach the goals that are set.

McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix (2007) examined the number of instructional hours needed for the approximately 5.8 million adult lawful permanent residents currently in the United States to reach a level of proficiency necessary for civic integration or to begin postsecondary education. They found that an estimated 103 hours of study per person per year for 6 years would be necessary (600 million hours of English language instruction per year for 6 years for over 5 million immigrants). This number of instructional hours is comparable to the number provided to immigrants in other countries, such as Australia and Germany). However, the costs of implementing such a plan would be significant.

The Center for Applied Linguistics examined the National Reporting System (NRS) educational level gain of 6,599 adult English language learners, as measured by the oral proficiency assessment *BEST Plus* (Young, 2007). This descriptive study found that the more hours of instruction received and the higher the intensity of instruction, the greater the rate of gain across the six NRS educational functioning levels. The effect of instructional hours was particularly strong for students who pretested at the Beginning ESL Literacy level (21% difference in gain between those with the least number and those with the greatest number of instructional hours) and the Advanced ESL level (16% difference). There was also a general trend toward greater NRS level gain for students with high levels of instructional intensity than for those with low intensity. Intensity of instruction had the greatest effect on students in the Beginning ESL Literacy, Low Intermediate, and Advanced ESL levels.

Transition from noncredit to academic studies is another measure of progress in English language development. A 7-year longitudinal study of 38,095 noncredit and 6,666 credit ESL students at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) examined students' rate of persistence and advancement in academic coursework from the noncredit ESL program through the credit ESL program and beyond (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). Sixty-seven percent of CCSF's noncredit ESL students began at the lowest NRS levels (Beginning ESL Literacy and Low Beginning). Of these noncredit participants, 44% advanced only one level within the six NRS educational functioning levels. The students most likely to advance were those with the most instructional hours; on average, students who advanced a level had re-

ceived 100 instructional hours. Students age 16–19 years were more likely to advance than other students and were more likely to transition to credit programs. Most of the transition students had reached the NRS Intermediate level prior to leaving the noncredit ESL program. According to the report, those students who transitioned from noncredit ESL to credit ESL and beyond performed as well as or better than those students who began in credit ESL or other credit programs at the college.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In program year 2006–2007, 39% of students enrolled in ESL classes advanced to the next proficiency level. Table 3 gives information on the percentage of students making gains at each ESL level in the NRS (www.nrsweb.org).

Table 3. State-Administered Adult Education Programs. Educational Gains by Educational Functioning Levels. English Literacy. 2006–2007 Program Year.

Level	Number Enrolled	Percentage Completing Level
ESL Beginning Literacy	192,667	38%
ESL Beginning Low	148,712	40%
ESL Beginning High	189,888	46%
ESL Intermediate Low	258,714	42%
ESL Intermediate High	163,972	40%
ESL Advanced	147,129	22%
Total	**1,101,082**	**39%**

Source. U.S. Department of Education, 2008b.

The NRS also collects information about learner outcomes beyond educational functioning levels, including information about obtaining and retaining employment, earning a high school degree or equivalency diploma, and entering a postsecondary education program. At the time of this report, the U.S. Department of Education did not disaggregate ESL student data from general adult education data for these additional outcomes, although it is safe to assume that many of the learners who got and kept jobs, and at least some

of those who achieved their GED, were English language learners. Outcomes for general adult education for program year 2006–2007 are provided below:

- 19% of the 2,408,525 learners enrolled in adult basic education (ABE, adult secondary education [ASE], and ESL) entered postsecondary education or training at the conclusion of instruction
- 31% of all students entered the workforce
- 34% of all students retained employment
- 44% of these 2.5 million students were English language learners
- 44% (1,070,341) were Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b)

SUMMARY

Because a variety of adult English language learners enroll in a diversity of programs across the United States, no one program model has proven to be consistently effective in serving these learners. English language acquisition rates are affected by both personal and program-related factors, such as availability of classes, learner motivation, and learner attendance and persistence. There are different ways to measure and track English language ability and progress; the assessments that are used to measure progress through the NRS are discussed in chapter VI of this publication.

IV Program Design and Instructional Practice

Because of the growing demand for English as a second language (ESL) classes, qualified personnel to work with adult English language learners, and appropriate resources to support these efforts, critical issues have emerged in program design and instructional practice, professional development and teacher quality, and assessment and accountability. At the same time that changes in federal policy are calling for increased accountability for all programs receiving federal funding, programs are confronted with serving populations of adult learners that they may not have served in the past. Adult learners need to prepare for the complexities of modern life, particularly the workplace, and equip themselves with the skills necessary for success. This section focuses on the types of programs available to these learners and on specific instructional approaches.

STATE OF THE FIELD

Adult ESL programs serve a diverse population through a variety of funding streams, depending on learners' status (e.g., immigrants, refugees, asylees), goals (e.g., basic or functional literacy, family literacy, workplace education, citizenship preparation), and circumstances (e.g., farm workers, displaced workers, incarcerated youth and adults). The diversity of learner populations served, program settings, systems of delivery, and instructional philosophies result in a wide range of program designs and instructional practices.

In general, the hallmark of adult ESL programs is flexibility. To be effective, programs need to offer classes that vary in terms of scheduling, location, duration, and content in order to maximize learning opportunities while accommodating the realities and constraints of adult learners' lives.

Program Types

Adult ESL programs seldom provide only language and literacy instruction. They may also provide English language learners with access to information they need for success in their roles as parents, employees, consumers, and lifelong learners in their new land. (See descriptions of adult education for English language learners in Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007; Hughes & Karp, 2006; Mathews-Aydinli, 2006; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 1998; Taylor, 1997; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003; Weinstein-Shr & Quintero, 1995; Wrigley & Guth, 1992.) The most common types of programs and classes for adult English language learners are described below.

- *Lifeskills or general ESL classes* focus on development of general English language skills. Language skills are often developed in the context of topics or functions of daily life, such as going to the doctor, getting a job, shopping, or managing money.
- *Family literacy programs* address the family as a whole, providing English language and literacy instruction for adults and children. Often, these programs include parenting elements and information that parents can use to promote their children's literacy and general educational development. Some programs, such as Even Start, are collaborations between K–12 and adult education programs.
- *English literacy/civics (EL/civics) programs* integrate English language instruction with opportunities to learn about civil rights, civic participation and responsibility, and citizenship. While instruction of this type has been offered for some time, there is new interest in developing EL/civics classes since a specific EL/civics initiative was enacted by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education in fiscal year 2000. Outcomes (e.g., manuals and curricula) from the seven demonstration grants awarded are available for program planning and use (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/elcnote.html).
- *Vocational ESL (VESL) programs* prepare learners for jobs. These programs may concentrate on general pre-employment skills, such as finding a job or preparing for an interview, or they may target preparation for jobs in specific fields, such as horticulture or hospitality.

- *Workplace ESL classes* focus on developing and improving English language skills that are directly relevant to the work setting. They may be offered at the workplace during the work day, before or after the work day, or in a mixed configuration, with the first hour of the class, for example, held during the work day and the second after work. Workplace classes may be funded by the company, by the labor union, through a grant from the U.S. government or a foundation, or through a combination of funding sources.

Instructional Formats

Given the increasing demand for adult ESL instruction, large classes and classes of learners with widely varying English language proficiency levels (multilevel classes) are not uncommon. In fact, in some parts of the country, multilevel classes are the only option for offering ESL instruction (Mathews-Aydinli & Van Horne, 2006; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 1998; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003).

Technology provides additional instructional options in the classroom, through distance education and in extended self-study options. ESL teachers use technology both as an instructional tool (e.g., integrating multimedia packages and PowerPoint presentations into instruction) and as instructional content (e.g., learning word processing programs, using the Web to access information, and using English through email communications). Similarly, distance learning has become an area of interest for many adult educators (National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2003). The Office of Vocational and Adult Education is exploring the feasibility of developing a national portal for adult learning, Strengthening Programs through Technology (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b). While computers and the Internet play an increasingly larger role in adult ESL learners' and teachers' lives at work and at home, there are still segments of both populations that could benefit from easier access to this type of technology and the information it conveys (Children's Partnership, 2000; Terrill, 2000).

Content and Program Standards

Across intructional settings, there is a recent emphasis on the development of English language acquisition content and program standards to ensure the quality and consistency of the content and programs provided to learners. *Content standards* are broadly defined as what learners should know and be able to do in a certain subject or practical domain (American Institutes for Research and U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Kendall, 2001). Content standards are the foundation for designing curricula, instruction, and assessment, but they do not stipulate the types of lesson plans, activities, or teaching methodologies that should be used. In the education of adults learning English, content standards offer teachers and program administrators a shared vision of the education to be provided and offer students guideposts to follow as they make progress in learning English (Schaetzel & Young, 2007; Young & Smith, 2006). Although there are no national content standards, some states and two national adult education organizations—the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville—have developed content standards. There are similarities across states' content standards, but overall they reflect the unique approaches to teaching adult English language learners that have been developed by each state. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education has established a Content Standards Warehouse (www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov) to facilitate states' development and use of content standards. The warehouse features standards from 12 states, CASAS, and University of Tennessee at Knoxville; a guide for establishing content standards; and field resources, including examples of content standards from other countries and information on how to implement them.

In addition to content standards to guide instruction and learning, program standards have been developed by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL; 2003) to define the components of quality ESL education programs. Program indicators in nine areas (program structure, administration, and planning; curriculum and instructional materials; instruction; learner recruitment, intake, and orientation; learner retention and transition; assessment and learner gains; employment conditions and staffing; professional development and staff evaluation; and support services) can be used to review an existing program or as a guide for establishing a new program (Peyton, 2005).

Learner Transitions

Transitioning English language learners through the upper levels of ESL courses and into and through programs that will help them attain their goals, such as those leading to a 2-year associate's degree in a vocational program, is another area of emphasis. A study of ESL services at community colleges carried out by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL; Chisman & Crandall, 2007) examined five community colleges that exceed national and state norms in learner gains and transitions. The study showed that these colleges had developed innovative strategies for improving services to help learners progress and attain their goals. The following three strategies were identified for increasing learner gains:

- Deliver high-intensity programs with managed enrollment.
- Expand learning outside the classroom.
- Adapt curricula to learner needs.

These colleges also use the following strategies to increase learner transition rates:

- Integrate English language learning with college preparation.
- Co-enroll students in English and community college content classes.
- Design VESL programs.
- Offer the GED in Spanish.
- Offer strong learner guidance and counseling systems.

Mathews-Aydinli (2006) highlights the importance of addressing non-academic factors in transition-focused programs (e.g., providing counseling services and student orientation), addressing academic factors (e.g., using content-based ESL instruction), and strengthening programs through co-operation (e.g., forming a strong relationship between the ESL program and associated postsecondary education institutions).

There is some evidence that if English language learners have moved through the beginning levels of ESL classes and into a workforce training program, they are more likely to complete the program and attain their goals for learning English and participating in the workforce. A 2005 evaluation report on pilot

ESL Integrated Basic Skills Training (I-BEST; vocational education) programs in the state of Washington found that ESL students were five times more likely to earn college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training than were traditional ESL students during the same amount of time (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2005b).

RESEARCH

Funding for major research efforts in adult education in the United States, including adult ESL, has not been extensive (Sticht, 2002), and the research dissemination efforts of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) ended on March 31, 2007, with the completion of the NCSALL's federal funding. Some British organizations, such as the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), continue to carry out research and develop review methods for the social sciences, including education. One of the EPPI-Centre's recent reviews focused on effective strategies to widen adult participation in learning (EPPI-Centre, 2003). There is a substantial body of information about promising practices based on descriptive information (e.g., case studies, ethnographic research, and teacher research) from the field (e.g., articles in refereed professional journals, such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *Applied Linguistics, Language Learning*, and *Language Testing*) and on the research base in adult second language acquisition (SLA) and reading development. Recent efforts to fund major research studies that focus on adult ESL instruction or include adult ESL populations and programs will expand the somewhat limited research base that currently exists.

Learner Populations
Studies include such efforts as the Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS), conducted by NCSALL (Strucker & Davidson, 2003). This study focused on the various types of readers enrolled in U.S. adult basic education (ABE) programs, including native speakers of English and those for whom English is an additional language. Of the English language learners tested in the ARCS study, 78% were native speakers of Spanish. The study found that 80% of the native Spanish speakers had adequate or bet-

ter native language literacy skills than predicted by their ESL instructors, their reading ability in Spanish was directly related to years of schooling in Spanish, and all were weak in perceiving and producing English consonant sounds. These findings may help practitioners and policymakers better understand the challenges adult English language learners experience in reading and how to design instruction to strategically meet their learning needs.

The Adult Literacy Research Consortium—a partnership of the National Institute of Child and Human Development (NICHD), the National Institutes for Literacy (NIFL), and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)—has funded six projects with 80 research sites in six states. Two of these projects, The Illinois Health Literacy Research Project and Improving Literacy Instruction for Adults, examine the literacy skills of English language learners, as well as native English speakers. Preliminary findings of the Illinois Health Literacy Research Project show that although ABE/adult secondary education (ASE) and ESL groups are all vulnerable in their health literacy knowledge, ESL learners may be especially limited in their ability to access and successfully use this knowledge, which appears to be related to their level of literacy (McCardle, 2006).

Instructional Strategies

The Adult ESL Lab School managed by Portland State University has conducted research on dyadic (interaction between pairs of students) interaction and microgenetic (individual case) studies of language development. Their recent study found that the rate of positive feedback that adult learners received from peers is associated with their course level promotion (Reigel, 2008). This research finding has important implications for classroom practice. Teachers need to find ways to incorporate and maximize positive peer feedback. Even though the core funding for the Adult ESL Lab School has ended, research studies are continuing with a grant from the National Science Foundation.

NIFL has commissioned background papers on adults with limited literacy, career pathways for adult English language learners focusing on healthcare, and uses of technology in adult English language and literacy education. When

these papers are released, the field will not only know more about promising practices, but will also know how to implement them in the ESL classroom.

Research on SLA—how people learn to speak a language other than their native language—guides ESL teaching practices. Recent research has focused on learner motivation, opportunities for interaction, task-based learning, and focus on form in instruction.

Motivation. Studies by Gardner and his colleagues support the theory that integrative motivation—the notion that the learner wants to learn a language to become part of the target community—promotes SLA (Gardner, 1993; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Moreover, these studies have found that integrative motivation promotes SLA regardless of the age of the learner or whether the language is being learned as a second or a foreign language. Motivation research also suggests that socially grounded factors affect students' attitudes, effort, classroom behavior, and achievement. Therefore, teachers should encourage group cohesion in the classroom to foster a conducive learning environment, and they should cultivate opportunities outside the classroom that can foster language use outside regular class hours (Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994).

Opportunities for interaction. Another area of SLA research focuses on the role of interaction in second language learning. Interaction provides learners with opportunities to receive comprehensible input and feedback (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994) and make changes in their own linguistic output (Swain, 1995). This is because it allows learners to "notice the gap" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986, p. 311) between their command of the language they are learning and the correct, or target-like, use of the language.

Task- and problem-based learning. *Task* is generally defined as "an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective" (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001, p. 11). Research suggests that interactions are most successful when tasks contain elements that are new or unfamiliar to the participants; require each learner to exchange information

with his or her partner or group members; have a specific, or closed, outcome; involve details; center on a problem, especially an ethical one; and involve the use of naturally occurring conversation and narrative discourse (Ellis, 2000).

The What Works study, a study of instructional strategies used in classes for learners with limited formal education and very little English language and literacy skills (Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, in press), found that students learned more (as measured by changes in scores on standardized tests) in classes in which the teacher made connections between instruction and life outside the classroom than in classes in which teachers did not make such connections. Making connections with life outside the classroom often involved task-based learning. For example, one teacher conducted an activity to teach learners to order their food in English, as if they were ordering at a local fast food restaurant.

Similar to task-based learning, problem-based learning focuses on solving real, open-ended problems to which there are no fixed solutions (Ertmer, Lehman, Park, Cramer, & Grove, 2003). Because problem-based learning shifts the emphasis of the learning activity from the teacher to the students, it can help students become more autonomous learners and transfer the skills they learn in the classroom to their lives outside the classroom (James, 2006).

Focus on form. Research has examined the role of focus on the grammatical forms of language in instruction. A focus-on-form approach to language teaching draws learners' attention to grammatical form in the context of meaning (rather than teaching grammar in isolation), and teachers' attention to form is triggered by learners' problems with comprehension or production (Long, 2000). A meta-analysis of research studies has found that instruction that uses a focus-on-form approach is as effective as more traditional grammar-teaching approaches (Norris & Ortega, 2001). The use of focus on form in communicative lessons can result in high levels of learner uptake—that is, learners may be more likely to incorporate new learning into their language use (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Pica, 2008).

Literacy Development

The Center for Applied Linguistics, with support from OVAE, reviewed what is known about how adult English language learners learn to read in English and published *Research on Reading Development of Adult English Language Learners: An Annotated Bibliography* (Adams & Burt, 2002). This bibliography was developed to present a comprehensive view of research that was conducted on reading development among adult English language learners in the United States from 1980 to 2000 (with some additional research conducted in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom). Descriptive studies, case studies, and practitioner research were included in addition to experimental research studies, as were theoretical studies describing models of reading processes. Research on English language learners in adult education programs and in intensive English programs also was included.

From the research in this bibliography, a synthesis paper was developed, *Reading and Adult English Language Learners: A Review of the Research* (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). It summarizes research on adult English language learners reading English, offers adult ESL teachers and administrators suggestions for practice, and points to areas where further research is needed. The paper reviews the kinds of native language literacy that English language learners bring to the ESL classroom and the ways that native language literacy affects learning to read in English. Savage (1984) and Huntley (1992) describe four types of literacy in the first language that affect English literacy development and should be considered in adult ESL literacy instruction: preliterate, nonliterate, semiliterate, and non-Roman-alphabet literate. Birch (2002) adds nonalphabet literate to these types, and Birch and others (Hilferty, 1996; Strucker, 2002) add Roman-alphabet literate.

The Burt et al., (2003) paper also discusses the following four reading skills that researchers have identified as necessary for English language learners to develop in order to read fluently (see, e.g., Burt, Peyton, & VanDuzer, 2005; Coady, Mgoto, Hubbard, Graney, & Mokhtari, 1993; Davidson & Strucker, n.d.; Jones, 1996; Koda, 1999; McLeod & McLaughlin, 1986; Strucker, 1997, 2002; Tan, Moore, Dixon, & Nicholson, 1994):

- *Phonological processing*: Recognizing and reproducing letters and other graphic symbols related to the language
- *Vocabulary development*: Creating an ever-growing vocabulary bank
- *Syntactic processing:* Understanding and applying grammar and usage conventions and identifying and using structural and organizational features common to English
- *Schema activation*: Initiating appropriate strategies for reading comprehension, including identifying and setting a purpose for reading, gaining meaning from context, using pictures and other graphics, predicting, and skimming and scanning.

The report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth revealed two important research findings that are relevant to all English language learners (though their focus was on children and youth; August & Shanahan, 2006). First, teaching specific reading and writing elements can be beneficial to second language learners; for example, explicit vocabulary instruction leads to improved knowledge of the words studied. Second, learners need to have sufficient knowledge of oral English while learning English literacy; instruction in the components of reading alone is not enough. Instruction must teach these reading components while fostering extensive oral English language development.

Another study focusing on literacy development is the Pathways Project, a cognitive strategies intervention developed by the University of California-Irvine Writing Project. The project involved teaching secondary school students specific thinking tools, such as activating prior knowledge or establishing a purpose, and provided teachers with instructional and curricular approaches to support the development of these thinking tools (Olson & Land, 2007). The project involved 55 teachers in all of the secondary schools in a California district where 93% of students speak English as a second language. After being taught these thinking tools, Pathway students had greater achievement in writing for 7 consecutive years and outperformed non-Pathway students in grade point averages (GPAs), standardized tests, reading assessments, high school exit exams, and community college placement tests.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Some SLA research informs instructional practices that are employed in the adult ESL field. Giving students opportunities to interact with the teacher and with each other, planning instruction around tasks that promote these activities, and teaching language forms in the context of meaningful learning activities are applications of second language research to the classroom environment (Condelli, et al., in press; Florez & Burt, 2001; Mathews-Aydinli, 2007; Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 1998; Olson & Land, 2007; Smith, Harris, & Reder, 2005; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2000; Van Duzer, 2002; Wrigley, Chisman, & Ewen, 1993; Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

The following promising instructional strategies for adult ESL education have emerged from SLA and reading research:

- Incorporate principles of adult learning, adult SLA, and ways to work with multicultural groups.
- Begin with assessment of learners' needs and goals (e.g., where and why they use or want to use English) to establish instructional content that is relevant to and immediately usable in their lives outside the language classroom.
- Employ a number of different instructional approaches to match diverse learner needs, motivations, and goals, and provide opportunities for interaction, problem solving, and task-based learning.
- Acknowledge and draw on learners' prior experiences and strengths with language learning.
- Include ongoing opportunities for language assessment and evaluation of learner progress in becoming proficient English language users.
- Provide courses of varied intensity and duration with flexible schedules to meet the needs of learners who may be new to this country and burdened with settlement demands or multiple jobs.
- Use technology to expand or individualize learning inside and outside the classroom in accordance with learners' language proficiency, preferences, and needs and to reach learners who cannot attend classes (e.g., individualized activity stations, self-access learning labs, and online courses) (Burt, 1999; Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Gaer, 1998; Hacker, 1999; Hawk, 2000; Terrill, 2000).

SUMMARY

Because adult immigrants living in the United States need to learn English for many different reasons, there are a variety of programs designed to meet their language learning needs. SLA research shows that motivation, interaction, and task- and problem-based learning are key features of successful language learning. Instructional practices that reflect these features show promise in adult ESL instruction.

V Professional Development and Teacher Quality

STATE OF THE FIELD

The need for qualified personnel to work with adult English language learners has risen rapidly in recent years because of the ever-increasing demand for classes (Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007). While this demand is not new, changing immigration patterns and demographics have had an impact on professional development. As a result, new teachers are entering the field, experienced teachers are being asked to take on greater challenges, and many adult basic education (ABE) teachers are working with English language learners in classes along with native English speakers. Much of this is occurring in areas where the adult English as a second language (ESL) education infrastructure is limited or nonexistent. Professional development is crucial for these teachers (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2000).

RESEARCH

Research on professional development in adult education is limited, but the few studies that have been carried out shed light on the opportunities and constraints in designing and delivering professional development to teachers of adult English language learners. In addition to research studies in adult education and K–12 professional development, *An Environmental Scan of Adult Numeracy Professional Development Initiatives and Practices* developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) (Sherman, Safford-Ramus, Hector-Mason, Condelli, Olinger, & Jani, 2006) provides the first comprehensive look at what constitutes quality professional development for adult educators. This report identifies seven areas to be considered in the design and delivery of professional development for teachers of adult learners, including those learning

English. The *Framework for Quality Professional Development for Practitioners Working With Adult English Language Learners* (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010) also looked at research on areas to be considered in planning professional development for practitioners working with adult English language learners. The research examined for both the CAELA Network framework and the AIR environmental scan suggest that the following activities are important when planning and implementing professional development.

Examine Data to See What Types of Teachers Are Needed and What They Need

In planning and designing professional development for teachers of adult English language learners, it is important to look at data to see what types of teachers are needed at which levels and what these teachers need to know to be more effective with the students they will be teaching (Sherman, Kutner, Tibbetts, & Wiedler, 2000; Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003). Teacher needs assessments should cover areas of strength, areas for improving instruction, individual learning preferences, and preferred approaches to professional development (Sherman et al., 2000). As a result of their study, Smith et al. (2003) recommended that teachers think about what they need to know and work closely with professional developers to design professional development activities that are most relevant to their needs.

Design Professional Development That Reflects What We Know About How Adults Learn

What is known about how adults learn most effectively should be incorporated into the design of professional development activities. Dennison and Kirk (1990) describe the cyclical nature of adult learning in their cycle of "do, review, learn, apply, do, review, learn, apply." Through the cyclical nature of adult learning, adults build on prior learning. Teachers can build on their professional wisdom and their classroom knowledge through professional development activities.

Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) evaluated the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, which supports professional development for math and science teachers, and identified three core factors

that teachers reported as being important to their learning and to changes in classroom practice. These include the following:

- A focus on content knowledge
- Opportunities for active learning
- Aligning professional development with other learning opportunities

PROVIDE A COHERENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Many researchers argue that for professional development to become a natural part of teachers' lives and program goals, a shared vision across a broad range of practitioners is needed. A shared vision for professional development should reflect the needs and goals of teachers, tutors, program directors, and state education officers. The needs and goals of teachers, in turn, need to be incorporated into professional development offerings (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001; Belzer, 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Marcinkiewicz, 2001; Senge, 1990).

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF TEACHERS WHO WORK TOGETHER

In designing professional development activities that are coherent, Garet et al. (2001) found that it is effective to have the collective participation of teachers from the same program or subject area. Much K–12 professional development presumes collective participation because it is delivered to a grade level, subject group of teachers, or a school. Collective participation is more challenging in an adult education setting because there are few times during a term that teachers within a subject area or an entire program meet together (Smith & Gillespie, 2007).

INCREASE THE TIME AND DURATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To improve professional development, it is important to focus on the duration of the professional development activity (Garet et al., 2001). One-day workshops with little or no follow-up do not have a lasting impact on teaching practices (Sherman et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Garet et al. (2001), two measures of duration—time span and contact hours—were shown to have substantial influence on what they term the core features of professional

development (content, active learning, and coherence). The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reports that K–12 teachers received 25–33 hours of professional development in the 1999–2000 school year. Few adult educators receive as many hours of professional development in one calendar year. Smith & Gillespie (2007) report that working part-time, as many adult educators do, makes participating in professional development regularly or for extended periods of time challenging.

Provide a System for Professional Development

To design and deliver professional development that is timely, based on data, and coherent, states need a system to facilitate its delivery (Belzer et al., 2001; Brancato, 2003; Senge, 1990; Smith et al., 2003). Such a system would include planning processes that begin with a needs analysis, a shared vision for programs and the practitioners working in them, involvement of administrators who can provide support and ensure that the system is sustained, use of ESL program and content standards, and teacher quality standards and credentialing paths.

In their analysis of data from the nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey, Smith and Rowley (2005) found that K–12 schools with a stronger commitment strategy (a school organizational design that uses collaborative and participatory management strategies to improve teaching quality and student achievement) may be better able to achieve their reform goals because of increased teacher participation in content-related professional development activities. This finding indicates that when administrators support professional development activities and teachers have influence over policy and processes, the impact of professional development is greater and there is less teacher turnover.

Ensure that Teachers Have Access to Professional Development Opportunities

Smith and Gillespie (2007) chronicled many of the challenges related to making professional development accessible to teachers of adult English language learners (e.g., the part-time nature of employment and limited funding to attend professional development). One way to make professional development opportunities more accessible to practitioners is through the use of technology. If adequate atten-

tion is given to instructional design and content, online professional development can help overcome geographic and time barriers and facilitate teachers' access to relevant, personalized, and meaningful professional development. Emerging applications include development of Web-based courses and training programs that integrate face-to-face meetings with Internet-based, video-based, or teleconferencing components (Mathews-Aydinli & Taylor, 2005). For example, the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO) and the Virginia Department of Education offer online orientation courses for new ESL teachers. National online projects for adult ESL teacher professional development include *ESL/CivicsLink*, which is managed by Kentucky Education Television and offers short online courses on teaching adult ESL and civics (see www.pbs.org/literacy/esl for more information), and the National Reporting System training courses (see www.nrsweb.org for more information). Hamline University in Minnesota offers an online graduate certificate for teachers of adult English language learners (www.hamline.edu/graduate/landing_pages/gse/online_esl.html).

PROMISING PRACTICES

Professional development efforts that show promise have been described in the literature (e.g., Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008; Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008; Farrell, 2004; Florez & Burt, 2001; Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007; Sherman et al., 2006; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Smith & Hofer, 2002). Key factors in these efforts include the following:

- Building teachers' knowledge in the areas of adult learning principles (in ESL contexts), second language acquisition processes, instructional approaches for working with second language learners, techniques for working with multicultural and multilevel groups, affective factors that influence language learning, appropriate uses of technology to support language learning, and ESL content standards
- Ensuring that professional development is designed using data to determine which topics and delivery methods are most relevant to practitioners, and that it is implemented and evaluated so that professional development and its follow-up can have an impact on the instruction learners receive

- Exploring professional development formats that include opportunities for the application of new ideas in instruction, collaboration among practitioners, and feedback
- Promoting reflective practice and professional communities through efforts such as mentoring, practitioner research groups, reading circles, and peer teaching
- Using technology-based approaches to offer professional development options that optimize financial resources, reach geographically scattered teachers and programs, and promote collaboration and community
- Encouraging teachers to bring theory, second language acquisition and reading research, and practice together through practitioner research or joint projects between researchers and teachers
- Developing new models for teacher credentialing and certification based on the skills and knowledge that adult ESL teachers need to demonstrate to ensure that the United States has a qualified teacher workforce capable of working effectively with adult immigrants (see Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008, for discussion of credentialing and certification requirements of the 50 states and the District of Columbia).
- Focusing on delivering professional development that meets guidelines for quality (e.g., guidelines being developed by the Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers)
- Focusing on professional development that is consistent with other national efforts, such as *Program Standards for Adult Education ESL Programs* (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003) and *Standards for Teachers of Adult English Language Learners* (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, in press)

SUMMARY

With the demand for highly qualified practitioners increasing, more emphasis is being placed on the design and delivery of professional development for those working with adult English language learners. Building on professional development research from K–12 teaching and adapting the findings to the adult education environment is one of the current challenges in adult education. Many promising practices are emerging,

including an increasing array of professional development formats to enable practitioners to enhance their knowledge and skills with current best practices of teaching and learning.

VI Assessment and Accountability

Learner assessment is a priority in adult education. Many adult education programs use a variety of assessment tools to place learners in classes, inform instruction, evaluate learner progress, and report outcomes of instruction. These assessment tools include standardized tests, materials-based and teacher-made tests, portfolios, projects, and demonstrations. Needs assessment and goal-setting activities also play an important role in determining in what areas (e.g., language skills, content areas, functional life skills, literacy) the learner needs the most work.

STATE OF THE FIELD

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA; Public Law 105–220) funds adult English as a second language (ESL) instruction through the U.S. Department of Education. WIA requires states to evaluate the performance of every local program according to outcome measures established under the National Reporting System (NRS) (U.S. Department of Education, 2007b). These outcomes include educational level advancement and follow-up goal achievement. States have the flexibility to choose which assessments and procedures they will use to measure these outcomes.

Upon enrollment in an adult ESL program, students place into one of six ESL educational functioning levels based on their pretest scores on an approved standardized assessment. Their progress through these levels is reported each year by state departments of education to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Each state negotiates a target percentage of students at each educational functioning level that will advance at least one level (educational level gain) each year. A state can set different standards for different service providers or for different levels of pro-

ficiency. For example, the percentage of learners expected to move from the lowest proficiency level could be lower than the percentage expected to move from higher proficiency levels. This recognizes that a learner who enters a program with no literacy skills may require a great deal of instruction before achieving level gain.

Following the NRS state assessment policy guidelines (www.nrsweb.org), states identify standardized assessments and procedures that programs can use to determine learners' functioning levels, establish timeframes for assessments to be given (either at specific times during the year or after a given number of hours of instruction), and train program staff to administer the assessments. Educational level gain in language and literacy is measured by pretesting students with an approved standardized assessment, then posttesting them with an equivalent form of the same assessment after a predetermined number of instructional hours or at the end of an instructional cycle. The minimum number of instructional hours recommended between pretesting and posttesting for NRS-approved assessments ranges from 40 to 120 hours. For reporting purposes, adult ESL programs must pretest and posttest all students who attend 12 or more hours of class annually.

The six NRS ESL educational functioning levels are used to place adult learners based on their scores on an approved standardized assessment. The NRS ESL educational functioning level descriptors describe what students know and can do in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and functional and workplace skills at each level (see Appendix). These level descriptors focus on what students can do with the language in daily life outside the classroom. They are intended to provide examples that guide assessment and instruction but are not complete descriptions of all of the skills a student may possess at any given level. The descriptors were revised in 2006 to reflect the larger number of adult ESL learners at the lower levels and the need to show the progress of learners at these levels (Table 4.)

Table 4. Original and Revised NRS Levels

Original (Program Year 1999 – 2000 to 2005 – 2006)	Revised (Program Year 2006 – 2007 to Present)
Beginning ESL Literacy	Beginning ESL Literacy
Beginning ESL	Beginning ESL Low
	Beginning ESL High
Intermediate Low	Intermediate Low
Intermediate High	Intermediate High
Advanced Low	Advanced
Advanced High	

Source. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, 2007b.

The focus of the NRS is language proficiency, "the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations" (see Buck, Byrnes, & Thompson, 1989, p. 11). Unlike the assessing of achievement, assessing proficiency is not necessarily confined to measuring content knowledge that is taught in the classroom (Kenyon & Van Duzer, 2003).

The U.S. Department of Education (2007b) requires states and local adult education programs to "measure educational gain with standardized assessments that are appropriate within the NRS framework and conform to accepted psychometric standards for validity and reliability (e.g., Mislevy & Knowles, 2002). Assessments that measure educational gain should be designed to measure the development of basic English literacy and language skills through pre- and posttesting" (p. 23). *Validity* is the degree to which the information gained from an assessment matches the inferences or decisions that programs make about learners or actions that they take as a result of that information. *Reliability* is the consistency of a measurement when the testing procedure is repeated on a different population of individuals or groups (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council in Measurement in Education, 1999; Messick, 1989; for further discussion, see Kenyon & Van Duzer, 2003).

Assessments that are currently approved for use in one or more states for NRS reporting include *BEST (Basic English Skills Test) Literacy*, *BEST Plus*,

CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems), *CELSA (Combined English Language Skills Assessment)*, *Compass ESL*, *REEP* (Arlington Education and Employment Program) *Writing Assessment*, and *TABE CLAS-E (TABE Complete Language Assessment System—English)*. New OVAE regulations require that adult ESL assessments be submitted and approved each year prior to being used for accountability reporting in the NRS.

Although educational gain is measured by the percentage of learners who move from level to level during the funding year, there is no research to support how long it takes to advance from one NRS level to the next. Because it takes several years to learn a language well (Thomas & Collier, 1997), the time it takes to show level gain on a proficiency scale depends on both program and learner factors. Because of these factors, it has not been possible to show the exact conditions (which combinations of learner and program factors) under which NRS level gains are achievable (Young, 2007).

The adult ESL field faces a number of challenges in the selection, use, and development of assessments for accountability reporting. Adult ESL staffing concerns, such as inexperienced instructors and volunteers, high teacher turnover rates, part-time and temporary employment, and limited professional development, may affect practitioners' knowledge of assessment, its purposes, and its alignment with instruction. Program administrators may not know how to use assessment and NRS data to make decisions about instruction, program needs, and professional development. The students themselves may attend class sporadically, making it difficult for teachers to align instruction and assessment and to show educational gain for accountability.

The growing emphasis on alignment of assessments with course content adds another layer of complexity to test selection. The results of standardized assessments will have meaning to learners and teachers only if the test content is related to the goals and content of the instruction (Van Duzer & Berdán, 1999). If the items in a standardized test reflect the actual curriculum, then the test may accurately assess the achievement of the learners. However, if the items do not reflect what is covered in the classroom, the test may not adequately assess what learners know and can do.

There is also concern that standardized tests may not capture the incremental changes in learning that occur over short periods of instructional time. Test administration manuals usually recommend the minimum number of hours of instruction that should occur between pre- and posttesting, yet the learning that takes place within that time frame is dependent on the program and learner factors discussed above. In an effort to ensure that learners are tested and counted before they leave, program staff may be posttesting before adequate instruction has been given. In such cases, learners may not show enough progress to advance a level unless they pretested near the high end of the score ranges for a particular NRS level.

RESEARCH

In response to the issues described above, staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted an exploratory study to examine the status of adult ESL assessment in the United States, particularly as it is implemented in federally funded adult ESL programs. The goals of the project were to identify the limitations that exist in available testing instruments for use in adult ESL programs and to provide recommendations regarding the need for assessments that measure adult English language learners' growth in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English. CAL staff worked with a panel of seven external advisors over a period of 18 months to meet these goals (Kenyon, Van Duzer, & Young, 2006).

Nineteen existing assessments and their accompanying materials were examined to evaluate the test characteristics as related to test construct, psychometric properties, usefulness, and logistics of implementation. This evaluation of the assessments (many of which were not widely used or standardized) pointed to the following needs to be addressed by test publishers so as to improve the available adult ESL assessment offerings in the United States:

- Better and more explicit connections between test constructs and theories of second language acquisition
- Test purposes, uses, and language constructs that are clearer and easier to operationalize

- Demonstrated evidence of psychometric rigor in the test development process
- Availability of equivalent parallel test forms and research to support the equivalence of existing forms
- Consideration of logistical factors that may impede or invalidate test implementation or assessment results
- Consideration of the potential role of technology in administering and scoring assessments

Overall, the review identified the need for more adult ESL assessments that cover a greater range of proficiency levels and language skills and that provide complete and well-researched links to the six NRS ESL educational functioning levels. However, NRS reporting is not the only purpose for adult ESL assessments. Adult English language learners want to know how they are progressing, teachers want feedback on the effectiveness of their instruction, program administrators need proof of success in meeting the goals of the program and the needs of the learners, and funding agencies must determine if their money is being well spent. A single assessment may not meet all of these needs. For example, an assessment that relates scores to broadly defined NRS proficiency levels and is useful for determining level gain may not provide diagnostic information related to mastery of specific knowledge and skills outlined in ESL content standards.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The findings of the review and study described above were ultimately incorporated into a design plan (Kenyon, Van Duzer, & Young, 2006) with recommendations for the development of adult ESL assessments and for revision of existing ones to bring them in line with the needs of the adult ESL field. Recommendations for promising practices related to the development and use of assessments include the following. Adult ESL assessments must do the following:

- Meet standard psychometric requirements related to appropriateness, reliability, validity, standardization, bias review, and test development procedures, and meet OVAE requirements for test approval (see, e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 3).

- Have a clear purpose and a defined construct, or "definitions of abilities that permit us to state specific hypotheses about how these abilities are or are not related to other abilities, and about the relationship between these abilities and observed behavior" (Bachman, 1990, p. 255), for the knowledge or language skill being assessed, within the context of the NRS. Tests used in this context and for this purpose are able to reliably show learner gains over a certain period of time when learners are pretested and posttested with an appropriate, valid, and reliable standardized assessment (Kenyon & Van Duzer, 2003).

- Evaluate language proficiency in a performance-oriented, standardized way. Proficiency descriptors, such as the NRS ESL educational functioning levels, should provide information about content, structure, and quality for language use performance tasks to be developed, indicating a learner's progress through or mastery of the these levels. For each of the NRS functioning levels, tasks need to be developed and validated that would represent completion of each proficiency level. Scoring rubrics and guidelines for evaluating performance need to be in place.

- Be useful for all stakeholders involved in teaching and learning through timely, clear, and accessible scoring, interpretation, and reporting of assessment results. Adult ESL program administrators and teachers should be able to read, understand, and make sound educational decisions based on assessment scores; provide useful feedback to learners about their progress that will allow them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses; and formulate goals and strategies for improvement.

- Include documentation supporting the recommended number and intensity of instructional hours necessary to show learner progress, in order to inform state assessment policies, better prepare teachers for effective instruction, and ultimately provide better feedback to learners regarding their progress. If the assessment is used for NRS purposes, evidence must also be provided that the instrument can validly place students into one of the federally designated adult ESL educational functioning levels.

- Be cost effective and incorporate an understanding of ESL program limitations in terms of funding, personnel, time, materials, logistics, and support.

- Follow procedures to be carried out within the context of a comprehensive program evaluation plan. State and program staff, learners, and external stakeholders should work together to set goals for the program, develop

measures to assess progress toward those goals, and identify how progress will be determined. A comprehensive plan allows learners to know how they are progressing, teachers to assess the effectiveness of instruction, administrators to monitor progress toward program goals and to gain feedback for program improvement, and external stakeholders to see the results of their investment (Holt & Van Duzer, 2000).

- Consider the roles that technology can play in assessing learners. Such roles may include allowing content to be tailored to the learner's background; item difficulty to be tailored to the learner's skill level (e.g., an adaptive test); scoring to be automated (and thus reduce the risk of human error); and low-level literacy or visually impaired learners to be accommodated by alternative response mechanisms, such as touch-screen systems or larger fonts. Multimedia technology can make multiple input formats available to allow for more extensive assessment of all four language skills. Technology has the potential to assess knowledge and skills that cannot be measured by traditional paper and pencil tests. In addition, the use of technology may reduce the risk that construct-irrelevant factors, such as the size of printed words or unfamiliar response mechanisms like bubbling in response sheets, affect student performance on the assessment. Technology also allows for more flexibility in scheduling tests, Web-based scoring, and new item assessment formats by influencing how results and relevant data are scored, transported, converted, and kept within an instructional program.

- Be informed by a variety of perspectives, including new research into language learning processes, psychometrics, educational measurement, and revised or expanded curricular frameworks and instructional content areas.

SUMMARY

As the field of adult ESL education continues to implement higher standards, assessment frameworks look not only at what students know about the language, but also at what they can do with it in everyday life. The United States has made progress since 1999 in creating a cohesive system of adult education through legislation, such as WIA, and frameworks, such as the NRS. At the same time, accountability requirements reflect the challenges of building such a system. For there to be a link among classroom

instruction, adult learner proficiency in English, and NRS educational gain, standardized assessments that meet both learner and program needs and NRS accountability requirements must be developed and used.

VII Future Directions for Lifelong Learning

As is true for native-born workers, success for immigrants in the U.S. workforce is related to educational attainment and literacy levels. Those with a higher level of education and better literacy skills in English earn more and are more likely to be continuously employed than those without (Greenberg, Macías, Rhodes, & Chan, 2001). The education level and literacy of parents also influences their children's educational progress and success (Martinez & Wang, 2005). English knowledge and ability will become increasingly significant if proposed immigration reform takes place in the United States, requiring undocumented immigrants to demonstrate mastery of English. A redesigned citizenship test is set to be released in October 2008 that may have an impact on millions of lawful permanent residents whose naturalization status could be affected by their performance on the test.

The adult English as a second language (ESL) field is connected to and influenced by a variety of workforce and postsecondary education initiatives. These initiatives, in turn, are affected by a greater number of tasks in daily American life that require knowledge of computers and new technologies. Adult immigrants may depend on technology not only for these tasks but also for learning English when a traditional adult education class is not available or attendance is not feasible.

Several initiatives to address the challenges and provide needed benefits are outlined in this chapter.

WORKFORCE TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION TO PREPARE FOR THE WORKPLACE

The National Work Readiness Credential was released in 2007 to provide a means of demonstrating workers' capabilities (based on the Equipped for the Future standards of learning; National Institute for Literacy, 2004) to perform in entry-level positions by identifying them as "work ready" or "needs more skill development to be work ready" (National Work Readiness Council, 2007). The credential is granted with a passing score on the four modules of the National Work Readiness assessment (situational judgment, oral language, reading with understanding, and using math to solve problems), with nine related skills identified by businesses as critical for success in a global economy. These skills include the ability to

- Speak so others can understand
- Listen actively
- Solve problems and make decisions
- Cooperate with others
- Resolve conflicts and negotiate
- Observe critically
- Take responsibility for learning
- Read with understanding
- Use math to solve problems

The National Work Readiness Credential is designed to provide clear and accurate information to learners and educators for determining what the learner's skills and needs are and what goals they have for instruction and for aligning instruction for the needs of business. An accompanying curriculum guide, *Getting Ready for the National Work Readiness Credential* (National Work Readiness Council, 2007) can be used by workforce preparation trainers and instructors to guide workforce instruction in a way that is responsive to the demonstrated needs of the learners.

INSTRUCTION FOR THOSE ALREADY EMPLOYED

Workplace instruction, vocational classes, and adult ESL classes can provide opportunities to learn workplace content, to practice the English literacy and communication skills needed for success in the workplace, and to learn cultural information. For example, for ESL participants who come from cultures where assertiveness, ambition, and speaking up on the job may not be valued, direct instruction in these areas may be necessary. Advancing in the U.S. workplace is a cross-cultural skill, which, like language and literacy, must be taught. However, there are strengths and challenges associated with each type of instructional program that must be carefully considered when selecting the most appropriate method of workforce preparation (Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

WORKFORCE TRAINING AND CAREER PATHWAYS TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Some adult immigrants have the necessary credentials to work but may have difficulty obtaining a job commensurate with their training and abilities (Creticos, Schultz, & Beeler, 2006). Others need training to obtain jobs that pay a living wage. Healthcare services represent one of the fastest-growing areas of employment in the United States, and significant workforce training will be required to meet the employment needs of this industry (Dohm & Shniper, 2007). Labor market research identifies labor shortages in all areas of healthcare (Chisman & Spangenberg, 2005), and an aging population will bring an even greater need for healthcare workers at all levels. Turnover among those currently employed as Certified Nursing Assistants is very high. Nonwhite racial and ethnic groups will comprise a majority of the American population later in this century, requiring greater racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity among health professionals (for more information, see Crandall, Spence, & Wrigley, in press). Another industry that holds the possibility for advancement and reports an upcoming shortage of workers is the manufacturing industry (The Manufacturing Institute/Center for Workforce Success/Jobs for the Future, 2006). The need to create career pathways in healthcare and other growing industries for immigrants will be a focus of adult and workforce education and training for the foreseeable future.

DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Because video-based and online distance education can use an asynchronous delivery method, learners who work at more than one job and whose responsibilities conflict with the time of regular class offerings can study whenever they have time. Those with transportation or childcare problems can study without leaving their homes. Learners who need to acquire new skills expediently can progress through the materials at a rapid pace; others may need or want to move through the program at a slower pace. Creating a free and accessible Web-based portal to help immigrants learn English is one of the U.S. Department of Education's planned projects. (For more information, see www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/index.html.)

INFORMATION ABOUT ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER POPULATIONS

Expanded and disaggregated demographic information is needed on the adult immigrant population and labor force in the United States, adult populations who self-identify as limited English proficient, and adult populations who are enrolled in public and private English language instructional programs. Recent data show a significant number of adult immigrants with low literacy levels in English and in their native languages. On the other hand, members of Generation 1.5—U.S.-born students who speak a language other than English and are still learning English (Harklau, 2003)—and of second- and third-generation immigrant families are increasingly enrolled in K–12, adult, postsecondary, and vocational education. These learners may have some fluency in both English and another language that could benefit the healthcare, education, and national security fields, for example, if they have the education necessary to fulfill these careers. To better meet the educational and employment needs of these individuals, more information is needed about their native language backgrounds and literacy levels, English proficiency in all four language skills, educational levels, and goals. The English for Heritage Language Speakers (EHLS) project being carried out by the Center for Applied Linguistics from 2005 to 2010 aims to help speakers of critical

languages develop their English proficiency to high levels, with a particular focus on language skills specific to the federal workplace (for more information, go to www.cal.org/ehls).

TRANSITIONS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thought must be given to next steps in the educational paths of adult English language learners who have reached the higher National Reporting System educational functioning levels. For example, the types and levels of English learners who need to obtain a secondary credential, enter into postsecondary education, or advance in their employment, and how those skills will be facilitated and measured need to be considered.

VIII Conclusion

Currently, 46% of the adult basic education population served in federally funded programs is comprised of English language learners. Population projections for the next 10 years indicate that the number of adult English language learners in the United States will continue to grow. The adult education system is committed to providing high-quality instruction for this population. The current emphasis on learner assessment and program accountability, professional development for practitioners, program and content standards, transitions to postsecondary and vocational education and the workplace, and uses of technology will help meet this goal. However, more research needs to be conducted and disseminated on how adults learn English, what instructional and assessment methods are most useful, how practitioners implement professional learning in the classroom, and how technology can be best used for learner instruction and teacher training. In addition, support for efforts in all of these areas is needed from federal, state, and local agencies and practitioners.

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OUTCOME MEASURES DEFINITIONS

Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels

Literacy Level	Listening and Speaking	Basic Reading and Writing	Functional and Workplace Skills
Beginning ESL Literacy *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores: • Reading: 180 and below • Listening: 180 and below Oral BEST: 0–15 (SPL 0–1) BEST Plus: 400 and below (SPL 0–1) BEST Literacy: 0–7 (SPL 0–1)	Individual cannot speak or understand English, or understands only isolated words or phrases.	Individual has no or minimal reading or writing skills in any language. May have little or no comprehension of how print corresponds to spoken language and may have difficulty using a writing instrument.	Individual functions minimally or not at all in English and can communicate only through gestures or a few isolated words, such as name and other personal information; may recognize only common signs or symbols (e.g., stop sign, product logos); can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English. There is no knowledge or use of computers or technology.
Low Beginning ESL *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores • Reading: 181–190 • Listening: 181–190 • Writing: 136–145 Oral BEST 16–28 (SPL 2) BEST Plus: 401–417 (SPL 2) BEST Literacy: 8–35 (SPL 2)	Individual can understand basic greetings, simple phrases and commands. Can understand simple questions related to personal information, spoken slowly and with repetition. Understands a limited number of words related to immediate needs and can respond with simple learned phrases to some common questions related to routine survival situations. Speaks slowly and with difficulty. Demonstrates little or no control over grammar.	Individual can read numbers and letters and some common sight words. May be able to sound out simple words. Can read and write some familiar words and phrases, but has a limited understanding of connected prose in English. Can write basic personal information (e.g., name, address, telephone number) and can complete simple forms that elicit this information.	Individual functions with difficulty in social situations and in situations related to immediate needs. Can provide limited personal information on simple forms and can read very simple common forms of print found in the home and environment, such as product names. Can handle routine entry-level jobs that require very simple written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge and experience with computers.
High Beginning ESL *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores • Reading: 191–200 • Listening: 191–200 • Writing: 146–200 Oral BEST 29–41 (SPL 3) BEST Plus: 418–438 (SPL 3) BEST Literacy: 36–46 (SPL 3)	Individual can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with some repetition. Individual can respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities, and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences. Shows limited control of grammar.	Individual can read most sight words and many other common words. Can read familiar phrases and simple sentences but has a limited understanding of connected prose and may need frequent rereading. Individual can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary. Meaning may be unclear. Writing shows very little control of basic grammar, capitalization and punctuation and has many spelling errors.	Individual can function in some situations related to immediate needs and in familiar social situations. Can provide basic personal information on simple forms and recognizes simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace, and community. Can handle routine entry-level jobs requiring basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge or experience using computers.

OUTCOME MEASURES DEFINITIONS (Continued)

Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels

Literacy Level	Listening and Speaking	Basic Reading and Writing	Functional and Workplace Skills
Low Intermediate ESL *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores: • Reading: 201–210 • Listening: 201–210 • Writing: 201–225 Oral BEST: 42–50 (SPL 4) BEST Plus: 439–472 (SPL 4) BEST Literacy: 47–53 (SPL 4)	Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetition; can ask and respond to questions using such phrases; can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty; and has some control of basic grammar.	Individual can read simple material on familiar subjects and comprehend simple and compound sentences in single or linked paragraphs containing a familiar vocabulary; can write simple notes and messages on familiar situations but lacks clarity and focus. Sentence structure lacks variety but shows some control of basic grammar (e.g., present and past tense) and consistent use of punctuation (e.g., periods, capitalization).	Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs, and maps; can fill out simple forms but needs support on some documents that are not simplified; and can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication but in which job tasks can be demonstrated. Individual can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions using technology (e.g., fax machine, computer).
High Intermediate ESL *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores: • Reading: 211–220 • Listening: 211–220 • Writing: 226–242 Oral BEST: 51–57 (SPL 5) BEST Plus: 473–506 (SPL 5) BEST Literacy: 54–65 (SPL 5-6)	Individual can understand learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with some repetition; can communicate basic survival needs with some help; can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation; and relies on description and concrete terms. There is inconsistent control of more complex grammar.	Individual can read text on familiar subjects that have a simple and clear underlying structure (e.g., clear main idea, chronological order); can use context to determine meaning; can interpret actions required in specific written directions; can write simple paragraphs with main idea and supporting details on familiar topics (e.g., daily activities, personal issues) by recombining learned vocabulary and structures; and can self and peer edit for spelling and punctuation errors.	Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction, and has some ability to communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects; can write messages and notes related to basic needs; can complete basic medical forms and job applications; and can handle jobs that involve basic oral instructions and written communication in tasks that can be clarified orally. Individual can work with or learn basic computer software, such as word processing, and can follow simple instructions for using technology.
Advanced ESL *Test Benchmark*: CASAS scale scores: • Reading: 221–235 • Listening: 221–235 • Writing: 243–260 Oral BEST 58–64 (SPL 6) BEST Plus: 507–540 (SPL 6) BEST Literacy: 66 and above (SPL 7) Exit Criteria: • CASAS Reading and Listening: 236 and above • CASAS Writing: 261 and above • Oral BEST 65 and above (SPL 7) • BEST Plus: 541 and above (SPL 7)	Individual can understand and communicate in a variety of contexts related to daily life and work. Can understand and participate in conversation on a variety of everyday subjects, including some unfamiliar vocabulary, but may need repetition or rewording. Can clarify own or others' meaning by rewording. Can understand the main points of simple discussions and informational communication in familiar contexts. Shows some ability to go beyond learned patterns and construct new sentences. Shows control of basic grammar but has difficulty using more complex structures. Has some basic fluency of speech.	Individual can read moderately complex text related to life roles and descriptions and narratives from authentic materials on familiar subjects. Uses context and word analysis skills to understand vocabulary, and uses multiple strategies to understand unfamiliar texts. Can make inferences, predictions, and compare and contrast information in familiar texts. Individual can write multiparagraph text (e.g., organizes and develops ideas with clear introduction, body, and conclusion), using some complex grammar and a variety of sentence structures. Makes some grammar and spelling errors. Uses a range of vocabulary.	Individual can function independently to meet most survival needs and to use English in routine social and work situations. Can communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects. Understands radio and television on familiar topics. Can interpret routine charts, tables, and graphs and can complete forms and handle work demands that require nontechnical oral and written instructions and routine interaction with the public. Individual can use common software, learn new basic applications, and select the correct basic technology in familiar situations.

Source. National Reporting System: Implementation Guidelines. Retrieved April 4, 2008 from www.nrsonline.org/reference/index.html?chapter=2&section=1&topic=1&subtopic=0

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CAL CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Adult English language learners comprise a substantial proportion of the adult education population in the United States. Nearly half of the learners enrolled in federally funded adult education programs are enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) programs. Adult English language learners are also enrolled in adult basic education, general educational development, and adult secondary education programs. To meet the increasing demand for English language instruction, existing adult education programs are expanding and new programs are being established. In addition to federally funded programs, services are offered by volunteer- and faith-based organizations, libraries and other community centers, private language schools, and academic institutions.

Education for Adult English Language Learners in the United States helps practitioners improve services for adults learning English by describing the current state of education for these learners with a focus on the following topics:

• Characteristics of the foreign-born population

• Foreign-born adults enrolled in adult ESL programs, including their access to and participation in programs and the factors that affect their participation and success

• Instructional programs that serve adult English language learners

• Professional development for teachers of this population

• The adult education assessment and accountability system in the United States

• Future directions in English literacy education and lifelong learning

As a comprehensive discussion of the trends, research, and promising practices in the field of adult education, this volume is an important resource for any practitioner interested in improving education for adult English language learners.