

Meeting the Needs of Workers with Limited English Proficiency For Good Jobs and English Language Skills

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INTRODUCTION

With documented and undocumented immigrants now making up approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population—the highest percentage since 1930¹—unions, community-based organizations, and employers are seeking ways to accelerate the process by which immigrant workers can obtain higher skilled, better paying jobs. Most skills training programs for these better jobs currently require participants to have a high level of proficiency in English. However, according to a publication of the National Center for ESL Literacy Education, it is likely to take adults many years to become skilled in English. Because there are few studies on how long it takes for adults to learn a new language, they extrapolate from studies on children's acquisition of a foreign language.

Studies suggest that it takes school-aged children 2 to 3 years to develop social language (conversational skills) and 5 to 7 years to acquire academic proficiency in a second language to reach parity with native English speakers (Cummins, 1991; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Moreover, school-aged children usually attend school 5 days a week for approximately 6 hours a day, which is considerably more than adults in adult education programs do.²

Given the amount of time it takes to learn a second language, when the requirement for entry into occupational training is English proficiency, millions of immigrant workers are routinely excluded from training programs. Furthermore, without training they are stuck in low-paying jobs and often must work multiple shifts and/or part-time jobs in order to sustain their families and support their communities. These conditions virtually preclude further occupational or language training and education and condemn many workers with limited English proficiency (LEP) to low paying, dead-end jobs.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) in a Policy Brief titled *The Language of Opportunity* (2003) points out that:

Virtually all of our nation's new workforce growth for the foreseeable future will come from immigration, so failure to assist immigrants in improving their language and job skills is likely to hurt workforce productivity over the long term. Other key national priorities, such as meeting high educational standards in our public schools and helping welfare recipients move toward economic self-sufficiency, also depend on expanding

¹ *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990*; Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, February 1999

² National Center for ESL Literacy Education, *OECD Review of Adult ESL Education in the United States*, Washington, DC: Author 2003, p. 19

opportunities for individuals with limited English skills and helping them gain the skills they need to get ahead economically and socially.”³

The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute found, through its work in different industrial sectors and in different regions of the country, that there is a great deal of interest on the part of labor and community-based organizations in meeting both the language and occupational skill needs of immigrant workers. However, many of these organizations have little notion of what kinds and models of programs would serve this population most effectively.

SCOPE AND APPROACH OF THIS PROJECT

We found a number of programs that are helping LEP workers get and keep good jobs. The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute studied seven workplace education and training programs serving adults with limited English proficiency in four industrial sectors in which the Institute was actively engaged -- construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and healthcare. The programs we examined were chosen with the help of an Advisory Committee of 13 members.⁴ The Advisory Committee members were selected because of their expertise in the fields of workplace education and training for adults with limited English proficiency. The Committee included program leaders, program developers, researchers and academics, funders concerned with LEP workers, and advocates for immigrant workers. The programs that were studied all had excellent reputations. However, the selection process was, of necessity, somewhat hit or miss. To our knowledge and the knowledge of the Advisory Committee, there is no comprehensive inventory of programs that serve both occupational and language needs of the LEP population.

Each program that we studied had been developed in response to the particular circumstances of the industry, the needs of the participants and stakeholders, as well as the social, historical, and cultural conditions in their regions. Each program was designed to prepare workers for jobs with a future -- jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits and/or jobs with well-defined and achievable career paths. Their accomplishments demonstrate the ingenuity of employers, unions, educational providers, and community-based organizations that are committed to finding, placing, and retaining good workers, including those with limited English language skills.

While each program we examined produced good results for workers and other stakeholders, limited resources, and in some cases lack of experience, kept them from fulfilling their full potential. In addition, a dearth of opportunities for networking and dissemination of good and promising practices led programs to develop approaches without the benefit of established models and benchmarks, resulting in staff experiencing the challenge and frustration of working in a vacuum. The good news is, however, that despite all the structural and financial challenges they face, good programs are, in this laboratory of innovation, helping LEP workers get and keep good jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits.

³ Wrigley, H.S., Richer, E., Martinson, K., Kubo, H., and Strawn, J. *The Language of Opportunity: Expanding Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills*. Center for Law and Social Policy Brief. #.2 August 2003, CLASP, DC, p. 11

⁴ See appendix

This paper is organized in the following manner. First, we familiarize the reader with the basic features of each program as well as the impact the industrial sector has on program development and design. We then address some of the program features that enhance success and discuss the major challenges that programs face. In some cases, we were not able to obtain all the outcome information we would have liked. Unfortunately, not every program has the capacity to aggregate individual data and track outcomes—a barrier for their own program design as well as a challenge for policymakers in this field. Consequently we report both statistical outcomes as well as anecdotal information. We conclude by summarizing the major challenges these programs face and making recommendations for ways to improve the access and delivery of language and occupational instruction to LEP workers.

Throughout the paper there are references to the Workforce Investment Act, the One-Stop Centers and Core, Intensive and Training Services. A short definition of each of these terms should help those unfamiliar with the programs.⁵

Workforce Investment Act (WIA), passed by Congress in 1998, replaced the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and provides Federal funding for workforce development nationwide.

One-Stop Career Centers are local, publicly funded facilities that provide individuals with employment-related services including helping establish eligibility for training.

Basic Services Under WIA:

Core Services refer to a universally-available set of services for job seekers -- regardless of their earnings history -- that must be provided at all One-Stop Career Centers. Examples of these services include helping prepare resumes and reviewing local job announcements.

Intensive Services are available to adults and dislocated workers who need additional assistance to gain employment. Examples include personalized skills analysis, career counseling, and in some cases job readiness training, basic skills education, and/or ESL.

Training Services can be made available to unemployed adults and employed adults whose income falls below the self-sufficiency standard and/or those who require more training to qualify for a job.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Nevada Partners/Culinary Training Academy (CTA)⁶

Nevada Partners is a not-for-profit organization that operates a satellite One-Stop. It runs training programs in partnership with the Culinary Training Academy, a program of the Hotel

⁵ These short explanations are adapted from a special insert of the Working for America Institute publication Connections. For more information see our website at www.workingforamerica.org.

⁶ Information on Nevada Partners obtained from interviews with program staff and observations of classroom instruction

Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) Local 226 and most of the major casinos in Las Vegas. This partnership offers a Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) job readiness program. Workers with limited English skills attend a three-week, 30-hour program that prepares them to apply for a job (primarily in the hospitality industry) requiring an English language job application and an English language interview. Participants are primarily Spanish speaking although there are significant numbers of workers from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. The first VESL job preparation program served 124 workers, 60 percent of whom were placed quickly in the hospitality industry. The program has not yet collected information about workers who were not immediately placed. New placements received an average wage of \$9 to \$10 per hour in union jobs with generous benefits and negotiated step increases. Because the program is new, retention data is not yet available.

Atlantic Cape Community College⁷

The Atlantic Cape Community College, in partnership with the public workforce development One-Stop system in Atlantic County, New Jersey, provides a VESL job preparation program for immigrant workers. In addition to the One-Stop program, the College's partners include the casino industry and the hospitality union, HERE Local 54. This VESL program includes 175 hours of training, generally running for five weeks, five days a week. It provides instruction in what the program terms "survival English" and helps prepare participants to complete English language job applications and pass English language job interviews. The instruction is primarily, but not exclusively, tailored for the casino industry. The greatest numbers of participants are Spanish speakers (not all of whom are immigrants) and Asian immigrants from China, Vietnam, India, and Bangladesh. In the period from November 2001 through July 2003, 241 participants enrolled in the course; 63 percent completed the program. Of those who completed, 80% were placed in jobs, the majority of which were in the hotel and casino industry. The average wage for those placed was over \$8 per hour. Those placed in union hotel jobs are entitled to frequent step increases and a good benefit package, including health, vacation, and pension. Retention rates are tracked through 120 days. 97% of the ESL program placements retain their jobs during that period.

Support Training Employment Program (STEP)⁸

The U.S. Department of Labor and the United Way provide funds to help underemployed (those on temporary layoff or reduced hours) San Francisco hotel workers train for food and beverage jobs such as banquet busser, restaurant busser, or barback. These are jobs with clearly defined career ladders that the class A hotels in the region identified as having both current and future openings. Project staff from HERE Local 2 run the program under the auspices of a Joint Training Oversight Committee with representatives from the San Francisco Hotels Multi-Employer Group, Local 2, the Labor/Management Education Fund, the San Francisco Labor Council, and the City College of San Francisco. The program provides two levels of language instruction to workers with limited English proficiency to prepare them for training for hotel service jobs that require English language skills. Workers are immigrants primarily from Latin American and Asian countries. In the pilot program that began in May of 2003, 20 workers completed the General ESL class and 18 completed the Food and Beverage VESL class. The 18

⁷ Information obtained from interviews with Director, staff, union officials, and observation of a class

⁸ Information obtained from interviews with program director, class observation, and written materials describing program and outcomes.

completers progressed to an 8-week, 48-hour food and beverage skills training class to qualify for the targeted positions. The classes ended in early November 2003. It is too soon to gauge the placement and retention rate of completing workers.

Instituto del Progreso Latino⁹

The Instituto is a community-based organization that has been providing services to the Latino community in Chicago, Illinois for almost 30 years. Among the myriad social, educational, and cultural services they provide, the Instituto runs a bilingual manufacturing bridge¹⁰ program for workers with limited English proficiency. This program, of approximately 440 hours, provides VESL classes to prepare workers to take a bilingual course in advanced manufacturing offered in partnership with the Westside Technical Institute. The goals of the program are job advancement for incumbent LEP manufacturing workers and placement of dislocated workers (most of whom have manufacturing experience) in advanced manufacturing. These goals remain viable even with the downturn in the manufacturing sector because of continuing shortages in critical manufacturing skill areas. At least 90 percent of the participants are Spanish speaking. In fiscal 2001-2002, 77 workers completed the VESL program. Of these, 53 completed the bilingual manufacturing course with 73% placed in manufacturing jobs with an average wage of \$10.15 per hour. The program also seeks to “bridge” students into certificate and degree programs at the community college as part of its career path approach. Even after workers are placed in jobs, they can continue training in skilled manufacturing to qualify for higher paid, higher skilled jobs. Instituto tracks retention at 30, 90, and 180 days. At the 180-day reckoning, retention is approximately 80%. According to Tom Dubois, Workforce Programs Director, those who leave their jobs after placement usually do so because they have found better, higher-paying jobs.

Milwaukee HIRE Center¹¹

The HIRE Center functions as a satellite One-Stop for dislocated workers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is a consortium of the Private Industry Council/Workforce Development Board, the Milwaukee Area Technical College, the AFL-CIO Labor Education and Training Center, the Milwaukee County Labor Council, United Way, and the Wisconsin Job Service. The program provided (the bilingual programs is currently in hiatus) 16 to 19 week, 600-hour bilingual training with supplemental VESL instruction to dislocated workers in Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining. A part-time, 212 hour program for incumbent workers in Industrial Maintenance Mechanic (IMM) was also offered after work hours. The first iteration of the project, which ended in 2001, provided 28 dislocated Latino workers (from any industry) with CNC training. They achieved a training-related placement rate of 79% with an average wage of \$10.40 an hour (105% replacement wage). An extension program provided CNC and IMM training for dislocated and incumbent manufacturing workers. For dislocated workers in the second program (21 completers), the training-related placement rate was 86% with an average wage of \$11.01 (approximately a 90% wage replacement rate). For incumbent workers (48

⁹ Information obtained from written materials, interviews with staff and program leadership, and observations of several classes.

¹⁰ Bridge programs generally provide instruction that links educational and language instruction to skill training so that workers are able to move smoothly from program prerequisites to occupational instruction linked to skilled jobs.

¹¹ We are familiar with the HIRE program from previous presentations at conferences and a congressional briefing attended by WAI staff. Interviews with the Project Coordinator were conducted over the phone.

completers), 96% retained employment in manufacturing at a time when Milwaukee was facing major layoffs in the sector, and 67% received wage increases with average wages increasing from \$12.54 to \$13.57 an hour.

Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund and the Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California¹²

The Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund is a national joint program of the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) and the Associated General Contractors (AGC). The Fund supports comprehensive education and training programs and services to LIUNA members. One of its responsibilities is to train instructors for the 75 participating local funds that support apprenticeship and training for Construction Craft Laborers in the United States and Canada. We observed one of these funds, the Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California. This Fund offers courses for skill certifications for both highly skilled journey workers and entry-level apprentices in the union. Within the areas served by the Southern California Trust there are four sub-regions. According to the Apprenticeship Director of the Long Beach, Wilmington, and Orange County sub-region, of the almost 160 apprentices in the first program, 50-75% are immigrants and approximately 35-40% are Spanish speakers with limited English proficiency. Currently, the apprenticeship does not specifically track the numbers of immigrant workers or those with limited English proficiency. According to the instructors, the majority of apprentices with limited English proficiency are passing the program's required courses. Wages range from \$11.55 an hour for a beginning apprentice to \$23.10 an hour for a journeyman.

Bill Michelson Home Care Industry Education Fund¹³

The Bill Michelson Home Care Industry Education Fund is part of the New York Hospital League/SEIU 1199 Education Training and Job Security Fund and serves unionized home care workers in the New York metropolitan region. In addition to providing ESL classes and other educational services, the Fund is also addressing the nursing crisis. Through the Foreign Born Registered Nurse Program, it provides programs designed to help foreign-educated and certified nurses, currently working as home care workers, get certification as nurses in the United States. The instructional part of the program consists of intensive language instruction and preparation to take the N-CLEX, the [National Council Licensure Examination](#), for nursing certification. The duration of the project is two years. Forty workers are participating in the program, 27 of whom are TANF-eligible¹⁴ home care workers. Workers are provided with replacement wages and benefits during the training period. Russian speakers comprise the largest group, with others speaking primarily Spanish, Creole, and French. While the first cohort has not yet completed the program, only three workers have dropped out: one due to a death in the family, one as a result of pregnancy, and one was a voluntary withdrawal.

LOOKING AT OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING FOR LEP WORKERS THROUGH A SECTORAL LENS

¹² Information on the National and Local organizations was collected from interviews with local and national staff, on site visits, and observations of several classes.

¹³ Information obtained through interviews with the Fund director and staff and written materials.

¹⁴ TANF stands for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and is the program that replaced Welfare

Hospitality: No longer a “haven” for LEP workers

The hospitality industry has changed significantly since the turn of this century. These changes have had an impact on workers and on the programs that prepare them for employment and upgrading. All three of the program operators in this sector with whom we met¹⁵ noted the same trend in the labor market. They reported that in the 1990s, employers faced labor shortages and were willing to hire many immigrant workers with or without English language skills. Applications were translated into Spanish and other languages. Job interviews were conducted in a variety of languages. Workers with limited English language skills were usually hired for “back of the house” jobs such as room attendants and bussers.

The increasing competition in the hotel industry, the economic downturn of the new millennium, and the recession in the hospitality industry after 9/11 changed that situation. Now, in a time of high unemployment, when job openings occur, employers can be more selective and are demanding higher-level English skills. In addition, increased competition among higher-price hotels has resulted in efforts to improve customer service. Many of them have reclassified room attendants and bussers as “front of the house” jobs, thus requiring the workers to interact with customers in English. In response to these changes, programs are preparing workers for jobs in the industry by offering vocational English skill instruction as part of a job preparation program—even for entry-level jobs that in the past did not require it. Both the Culinary Training Academy and the Atlantic Cape Community College also provide incumbent workers with VESL to help workers develop their long-term options for job mobility and access to further training. The STEP program is another example of linking language skills to career ladders in the industry.

Manufacturing: National trends obscure significant local VESL training needs

Workplace education programs that target the manufacturing sector face particular challenges. While the sector may be shrinking, there are still job openings and even shortages in many parts of the country for skilled workers, particularly in small and mid-sized companies. Training and education are part of industrial retention strategies in a number of areas in the Midwest. The programs we studied (in Milwaukee and Chicago) take a proactive part in economic development that emphasizes industrial retention. By helping companies train their LEP workers for re-engineered production, increases in productivity, and changing technology, workforce development programs have been able to slow, and in some cases prevent (at least temporarily), the movement of manufacturing out of the Midwest and the country.

Programs that train workers for shortages in skilled manufacturing are facing restrictions on the use of WIA dollars for dislocated workers because general data on the labor market show a decline in manufacturing. A mandate of the WIA system is job placement. Consequently, labor market information is a significant factor in determining what jobs to train for. But the “big picture” analysis in manufacturing can also obscure a more detailed view that shows continued labor shortages in skilled manufacturing in small and medium-sized companies in some regions of the country. Immigrant workers have a particular stake in manufacturing. While immigrants make up 13.1% of all workers, they make up 15.7% of manufacturing workers. Successful

¹⁵ John Carrese, STEP; Patricia Owens, Atlantic Cape Community College; and Maria Gatti, Nevada Partners/Culinary Training Academy.

programs, such as Instituto del Progreso Latino, unfortunately have to struggle to maintain financial support for their manufacturing programs.

Construction: Bilingual training and VESL are needed for the better jobs and for greater economic security

The building and construction trades are facing a skills shortage as a retirement bubble looms and as U.S. high school students, who meet apprenticeship requirements, increasingly choose post-secondary education or other careers over skilled trades. Although many immigrant workers are employed at entry-level positions in the construction industry, most do not have the skills and technical knowledge they need to become journey level workers. To get the skills, required certification, and licensing for the better and more secure jobs in the field, they must get training through apprenticeships or other programs. Joint labor/management apprenticeships are an excellent option because training is free and workers earn while they learn. Moreover, step raises are tied to skills and experience, and the journeymen status conferred upon completion is recognized around the country.

Labor/management apprenticeship programs are increasingly opening their doors to immigrant workers, including those with limited English skills. Unions and their signatory employers are experimenting with ways to integrate these workers into programs that have traditionally been offered only in English. In many parts of the country, such as the Southwest, construction workers have little need for English fluency because many on their construction teams speak their language. Contractors who need skilled workers, no matter what language, often have foremen who are multilingual. In some cases, instruction is offered in workers' native languages with translated materials.

However, unions and employers are also recognizing that, regardless of the demographic characteristics of the region, workers who participate in apprenticeship and training programs in construction still need vocational English. They need it for health and safety reasons, to understand the nomenclature of tools and equipment, and for job mobility and access to career ladders. In construction, many workers move from employer to employer and even across states and regions. Without English, their options for employment are limited to the parts of the United States where their language is commonly spoken.

The Laborers-AGC is attempting to address these problems by providing staff development to instructors in principles of adult learning, multi-sensory instructional methodology, and language and literacy instruction. They are also providing intensive Spanish language instruction to encourage more bilingual instruction.

Healthcare: Training and education to fill demand jobs with incumbent workers

Labor and skill shortages are endemic to the healthcare industry. The current nursing crisis has been well documented. Not only are nurses aging out of the workforce, but also Registered Nurses (RNs) are leaving the bedside faster than new nurses are graduating in part because of reported job dissatisfaction. One of the ways joint labor/management programs are addressing the crisis is through the development of programs that help incumbent, lower-classified healthcare workers move into the nursing field. The rationale is that incumbent healthcare

workers are familiar with working conditions and industry culture and are less likely to leave the nursing profession—once they are qualified and upgraded.

Joint labor/management partnerships in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are taking this approach with much success. The Foreign Born Nurse Certification Program, supported by the Bill Michelson Home Care Industry Education Fund, is an example of looking within the existing healthcare workforce to help solve labor shortages.

PROGRAM MODELS FOR CONNECTING LANGUAGE TO JOB-RELATED TRAINING¹⁶

- Remediation and Preparatory Training
- Pre Employment VESL
- Incumbent Worker VESL
- Bridge Programs
- Bilingual Instruction
- Supplemental English

Describing a typology for models that connect language instruction to job-related training is complicated because programs do not adhere to strict models but often improvise based on the changing needs of their stakeholders. In general, the first model involves skill remediation that is not necessarily blended with occupational instruction. The next three models listed generally blend language instruction and occupational training. (However, pre-employment VESL at the Instituto includes a first level of fairly straightforward beginner ESL.) The last two models are focused on work-related learning, but they may or may not blend both language and occupational instruction. Bilingual instruction may focus on using a worker's native language in addition to English to impart occupational knowledge -- with language acquisition a secondary outcome. With supplemental English, the instruction may focus on general English language competency and/or English literacy to enhance worker performance or mobility or it may have a technical focus.

Remediation and Preparatory Training

For some jobs, such as those in food service and hospitality, employers are demanding that applicants be able to communicate with customers in English as the first screen for employment. In manufacturing and construction, however, that initial screen is basic math (rather than language). Since many of the workers served by the programs we observed in construction and manufacturing had less than nine years of schooling, math remediation was important. Study skills classes and an orientation to the expectations of the training programs are also part of preparing workers for further training in some of the programs we examined.

The Milwaukee HIRE Center described their preparatory aspects of their training program:

¹⁶ In some cases there is not a sharp distinction between the types of services offered in preparatory or remedial programs and those offered in the models listed below. The differentiation is significant more because of how the instruction is positioned in relationship to occupational training. In other words, is it considered a part of the occupational training or concurrent with the occupational training or is it a prerequisite for it?

For Spanish speakers, pre-training activities focused on acquisition of basic math, with the aim of preparing candidates for technical training with instruction in decimals and fractions, so they would be ready for Industrial Mathematics needed to support other technical courses. Also included in pre-training activities was the beginning of the occupational English course, with an emphasis on developing study skills and group cohesion. Other pre-training activities included plant tours and orientation sessions by project faculty to provide overviews of each content area.... Pre-training and remediation were important for more than academic reasons. Pre-training activities and remediation were purposely geared toward building group cohesion and a strong “cohort effect.” For workers struggling with basic skills, the creation of a warm ambience for admitting and struggling with academic deficiencies is critically important, and project staff paid great attention to building that atmosphere in the pre-training period.¹⁷

Instituto del Progreso Latino offers two levels of preparatory ESL. These are the classes taken prior to formal entry into the bridge program. The first focuses on oral communication. The second level introduces a vocational component that prepares workers to enter the bilingual manufacturing program. These program components were developed based on the staff’s assessment that many workers needed additional specific oral language skills before they could be successful in the fast-paced bilingual manufacturing training.

Pre-Employment VESL

Both the Culinary Training Academy and Atlantic Cape Community College offer a VESL job preparation program. In these programs, workers are assessed through an interview, by demonstrating their competency in filling out sample applications, and by responding to a mock English-language interview. Since the program timeline is short, pre- and post-tests of English language competency are not likely to demonstrate a gain in general language competency. In addition, the testing itself would significantly lessen instructional time. However, the students demonstrate increased competency as measured by job application completion and success in an English language interview. In both programs, the instructional methods included group discussion, scenarios, language practice, and technical vocabulary. Grammar, the usual backbone of language instruction, is subordinate to practical application of language. The significant outcome measure in both these programs is placement. Nevertheless, both programs note learner improvement in specialized English language performance.

Incumbent Worker VESL

The Instituto del Progreso Latino, the Culinary Training Academy, and the Atlantic Cape Community College all conduct VESL classes for incumbent workers under contracts with employers. The Instituto’s development of a-fee-for-service program for employers has helped the program increase its overall capacity. This customized VESL program assists the Institute maintain a corps of full-time instructors, build additional relationships with employers who may hire program graduates, and increase the number of individuals it serves. While we did not observe these classes directly, we did receive curricular material from the Instituto and the CTA. In these three cases, the curriculum developer is a full-time employee of the program.

¹⁷ Milwaukee Spanish Track Project, HIRE Center. Final Report. Milwaukee, WI. March 2003, p.12

The curriculum developer from Instituto spends time at the workplace observing the jobs done by the workers, their interactions with each other, and the written materials they encounter. Based on his observations and the materials he collects, he develops customized curricula for each participating employer. The curriculum includes job-related conversation, technical vocabulary, job-related reading, words and phrases that assist workers in resolving problems on the job, and words and phrases that help to explain and clarify job processes.¹⁸ Each of these programs uses a variety of assessments that include both formal and informal measures. Because the programs are customized, teacher-made assessments are a critical part of testing achievement in the contextualized learning environment.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs help workers who would not otherwise meet entry qualifications for a training program. They assist LEP workers overcome barriers to participation while being introduced to occupational content. They usually prepare workers for well-paying jobs in industries that require technological skill. The Instituto del Progreso Latino offers a bilingual version of a manufacturing technology bridge. It begins with VESL classes and continues with a bilingual program for math, communication, and an introduction to technology. These classes lead to a bilingual machine tooling class at the Westside Technical Institute and a path from low paying jobs to good manufacturing jobs. Depending on assessments and prior experience, there are different entry points. Instituto's counseling and placement services provide workers with multiple exit points, including job placement and additional post-secondary education. The program measures success by training completion and job placement.

The STEP program also runs a type of bridge program for entry-level workers (e.g., housekeepers and dishwashers) interested in learning new skills to prepare them for food and beverage jobs in the hotels. Based on assessments developed by the City College of San Francisco, workers are placed in either a beginner or intermediate VESL class. This sequence of VESL classes helps them achieve a level of English competence sufficient for an occupational skills class and puts them in a position to bid directly for some of the available jobs. While the college's assessment of the learners qualifies them to move from class to class, the objective of the program is completion of occupational training, followed by opportunities to work in food and beverage jobs. Food and beverage jobs are tipped positions so workers can earn more and also have greater opportunities for career advancement in the industry.

Bilingual instruction

Bilingual training encompasses a number of practices ranging from instruction delivered primarily in a foreign language to instruction in English with occasional translation. In the Milwaukee HIRE Spanish tech track project, instruction was primarily in Spanish with supplemental VESL. Workers in that program learned an advanced manufacturing skill and

¹⁸ For a VESL course in a meat processing plant, one lesson includes a reading passage about where meat comes from, what happens to it in the plant, and where it goes after it leaves the plant. The course covers common abbreviations and technical terms. It also includes identification of serial numbers, different kinds of meat, the expression of English system weights, and how to report discrepancies on the job. The curriculum developer prepares assessments that test the workers' English oral comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking as related to the customized curriculum.

survival/technical English at the same time. Their training-related placement rate ranged from 79% to 86%.

The Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California offers instruction primarily in English. We are including a more detailed report of our observations of this program because it is an interesting model that may be unfamiliar to many of our readers. The Laborers bilingual program uses accessible materials, hands-on activities, and an interactive teaching style to assist workers who have limited English skills. The instructor uses his judgment to gauge when translation is needed and when to adjust his instructional style to meet the needs of the apprentices.

In one Air Tools class, at least half of the 25 workers were non-native speakers. Of those, at least half had very limited English skills. Good instructional methodology and attentiveness to the learners created a vibrant learning environment that appeared to transcend differences in language proficiency. The teacher introduced himself in both English and Spanish. He reminded workers frequently that they were free to ask questions in English or in Spanish. He stopped instruction periodically to talk to workers in both languages to assess their understanding of the material and to solicit questions. The workers were also grouped with at least one bilingual person in each group who provided running commentary and supplemental translation. The instructor used pictures of tools and working environments along with hands-on training as additional instructional methodologies.

Assessments for entry into the apprenticeship program includes interviews, job histories, drug testing, and strength testing. Language level is not assessed. Each course has a summative assessment resulting in certification. In the Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California, tests and test preparation have been adapted to maximize the opportunity for workers with limited English skills to demonstrate their competence. For example, the written part of the test in the Air Tools class in English accounts for 80% of the test with the other 20% a hands-on performance test. The passing grade for the test is 80%. A worker could pass the English part of the test with a 60% and still get an 80% passing rate by achieving a perfect score on the hands-on portion of the test. This system of using both written and performance assessment has helped make it possible for the majority of workers to succeed.

The Instituto and Milwaukee HIRE took a different approach and combined vocational and language instructors for technical training. This approach integrated LEP workers into a class that included workers who were English-language proficient (as did the Laborers bilingual program). It also addressed the problem of finding instructors with expertise in both technical skills and language instruction. In these two programs, instructors from both the vocational and ESL fields worked as a team.

Supplemental VESL

In addition to bilingual classes offered through the Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California, one of the Locals in the Long Beach, Wilmington, and Orange County sub-region offers an ESL class in the mornings at the union hall. Both apprentices and journeymen gather at the hall when they are between jobs so they can catch new job dispatches as they come

in. These open-entry, open-exit classes give Laborers an opportunity to learn language skills while they are waiting for work.

Laborers-AGC also offers take-home instructional videos to union members. These include English language instruction as well as occupational instruction. The tapes provide visual reinforcement and are additional resources for workers with limited English skills to learn their craft. Workers with low levels of literacy also use these materials. The program believes that using materials in the privacy of one's home contributes to their wide distribution.

The Milwaukee HIRE Center offered supplemental VESL for workers going through CNC and IMM instruction in Spanish. The extra VESL not only introduced them to technical terms in English but also prepared them for work in a majority-English speaking environment.

In addition to courses that prepare them for the N-CLEX, foreign trained nurses at the Bill Michelson Fund receive assistance in both general and occupational English to help pass the test and to succeed in a patient-care environment. Workers preparing for employment in nursing must achieve a high level of English competency in order to both pass a professional test and to interact with patients. Initially, the program predicted that nurses with the greatest proficiency in English would be the ones most likely to pass the N-CLEX quickly. After finding little correlation between scores on an initial English language assessment and the pass rate for the N-CLEX, the program began assessing workers' nursing skills in their native languages. They found that for these educated workers, achieving the level of English competency needed to pass the test was less of an obstacle than becoming proficient in nursing skills.

In some cases, programs focused on technical English as opposed to a more conversational and communicative approach to English. This was particularly common in manufacturing, although it was used in construction and programs that included a computer-training component. We reviewed a variety of instructional materials that included glossaries, pictures of tools with English names, and technical materials from the workplace.

PROGRAM FEATURES THAT ENHANCE SUCCESS

The Good Jobs Factor

The opportunity to get a good job is a strong motivational factor when workers sign up for a training and education program. The jobs that workers prepared for in our study paid, for the most part, over \$9 an hour with benefits including health, vacation, and retirement. Many jobs were unionized with regulated step raises, opportunities for advancement, and good benefits that support not only workers but also their families and the communities in which they live.

While many general ESL programs have difficulty demonstrating significant outcomes in part because of retention problems, the programs we looked at that connect workers with these good jobs were able to demonstrate significant outcomes in short time frames. In the two job preparation VESL programs we examined, the overwhelming majority of workers who completed were able to pass an English language interview, conduct a job search in English, and fill out an English language job application. These outcomes were accomplished in most cases in only 3 to 5 weeks.

The home care industry is not known as a place to find good jobs; and one of its biggest problems is staff turnover. Low pay, long hours, and poor working conditions make home care work less than desirable. The Bill Michelson Fund creates opportunities for workers in these positions to train for better jobs. They offer classes for workers to upgrade into a number of healthcare positions including the opportunity for foreign trained nurses to be certified to work in their profession in the United States. These opportunities are an inducement to workers to remain on the job. They are part of a benefit structure that improves the quality of those jobs and supports both employer and worker objectives. Opportunities for language instruction and upgrading can contribute to changing a bad job to a good one.

Going the Extra Mile Builds Greater Success

The Milwaukee HIRE Center encourages a close connection between workers, case managers, and other project staff. According to their final report:

Case management services for the project were provided by AFL-CIO and Job Service ... establishing a personal connection to staff who followed and promoted the progress of participants from entry into the project through placement and retention. Case management and project coordination required frequent visits to the classrooms and shops in order to maintain strong contact with the participants.¹⁹

The STEP program in San Francisco hired multi-lingual rank-and-file workers to provide direct and supportive services to workers enrolled in the program. This peer model, used in many workforce development programs around the country, helps workers in training feel at ease and supported. It also builds a link from the classroom to the workplace and helps keep the instructors focused on the occupational goal.

Instituto del Progreso Latino offers help to the entire family. Family literacy, after-school programs, voter registration, citizenship preparation, job search, counseling, and childcare are provided at their center. Workers who participate in the VESL and bridge programs are part of a larger, supportive environment. Their individual needs are recognized and they have options for varying degrees of participation.

Both Atlantic Community College and Nevada Partners/CTA provide extra help for workers who are not progressing as quickly as others. In some cases, they allow workers to repeat all or part of a course until they deem them job-ready.

Connecting Jobs and Language

The programs we studied connect language and occupational training. In most cases, language development was a byproduct of occupational training. Few of the programs tracked data on gains in language competency, yet each program increased workers' occupational competency and, to a certain extent, improved language proficiency. In some cases, workers had to demonstrate English language ability in order to get jobs. In other cases, workers had to improve their English in order to access training. And in other cases, workers had to know enough English to be able learn in English and/or pass certifying exams in English.

¹⁹ Milwaukee Spanish Track Project, HIRE Center. Final Report. Milwaukee, WI 2003, p 11.

Problems with attendance and student retention arose primarily in programs that were offered as a voluntary option for incumbent workers without clear links to improved job status. CTA staff observed that attendance at the contract VESL classes held on hotel sites for incumbent workers was irregular. (Predictably, classes held on work time had better attendance.) These classes were not linked directly to jobs or upgrades. The program was considering ways to increase motivation through incentives or other means.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

As we have described throughout this paper, many factors make the development and sustenance of programs that serve the language and occupational needs of LEP workers difficult. The major areas of challenge that we noted are assessment, data tracking and evaluation, curriculum development, staff development, and funding. These challenges are summarized below.

Assessment:

Learner assessment plays a critical role in programs. Screening, program design, curriculum development, data collection, instructional methods, and reporting outcomes all depend on capturing, tracking, and sharing information about learner assessments. Programs experienced problems in the following areas:

(a) Accountability measures:

Accountability measures required by WIA sometimes lead to exclusion of workers with barriers to training and employment. These barriers include low levels of English proficiency and low literacy levels. Serving this population is more resource intensive and takes longer. In a policy brief on WIA reauthorization (2003), the National Council of La Raza argues:

WIA's performance measures create a disincentive to serve persons who face obstacles to employment. The current performance indicators for employment and training activities are rigid and focused on getting participants through the system as quickly as possible. To meet WIA's performance measures, many providers "cream" the best individuals (i.e., the individuals most likely to get and retain a job) for training services. As a consequence, limited-English-proficient persons and others deemed as having greater barriers to employment are offered the more limited core services and shut out of the training system.²⁰

(b) Using the wrong assessment: Several of the programs used English literacy tests when they wanted to measure oral English language competency. In one case, a test of reading and writing designed for students entering college was used as a pre and post test by a college providing classes for program for service workers. College students need a much different level of reading and writing skills than service workers who, most importantly, must interact with customers. The assessment, and the fact that the teachers would be evaluated based on their students performance on the post test, influenced the

²⁰ Thomas-Breitfeld, S. and Liu, S. Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Reauthorization: Building a Better Job Training System for Hispanic Workers. National Council of La Raza. Washington, DC, 2003. p. 3.

curriculum and moved it away from the oral English instruction that would have better met the program objectives.

(c) Sharing assessments with instructors: A number of programs collect information about LEP workers' educational and employment history but do not share it with instructors. Without this information, instructors cannot be fully prepared to adjust their teaching to the specific group of learners.

Data tracking and program evaluation

Programs collect a great deal of information about learners through the intake process and classroom activity. Many of them do not have computerized data tracking systems that allows them to aggregate data, connect inputs to outputs, or track learners over time. Program after program talked of the huge expense of developing customized databases and not having the resources to get what they need and want. Even where databases could serve a good function, not having enough staff to do the data entries is another complication. Some of the important questions that better data collection and tracking could answer are:

- What is the relationship of an individual's educational history to program success?
- How does native language literacy influence program completion?
- Despite successful preparation, is there discrimination in hiring or promotion?
- Do certain instructional methodologies lead to greater achievement?
- What kinds of support or intervention are most effective?

Curriculum development

Combined language and occupational training and education is not a common model of instruction. Vocational and language instructors at the programs we observed expressed concern about their ability to meet simultaneously the occupational and language competency needs of their students. ESL teachers often do not have experience in developing contextualized curriculum and may have only limited knowledge of occupational content and working conditions. Occupational/vocational instructors are unlikely to know much about second language acquisition. Consequently, they tend to miss opportunities to teach and reinforce practical and functional language in their classrooms.

Staff development

Most teachers have experience in either occupational training or language education. Creating a cadre of instructors who understand both fields requires training and mentoring. Furthermore, many instructors in adult education are part time, contingent or contractual workers. Expending scarce resources on teachers who may not be involved in the program over a long period of time is a risky investment. Program leadership and staff also need to learn more about the many factors that will help LEP workers achieve English language and occupational goals. Knowing about successful models, understanding accountability measures, and familiarity with appropriate assessments are among the factors that help program staff work effectively.

Adequate funding

There is not enough funding available for programs that serve LEP workers. Meeting the needs of LEP workers is resource intensive. Customized curriculum, supportive services and staff

development all cost money. Some sources of funding pay for program delivery but do not cover the costs of capacity building and staff development. The future of the workforce includes a large percentage of immigrants and their children, many of whom have limited English proficiency. Lack of resources for program development, delivery, and capacity building will mean playing catch up in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Effective programs are serving the occupational and English language needs of workers who want to get, keep, and advance in good jobs. They need help to flourish. The public workforce system, the adult education system, private employers, private funders and foundations, and joint labor/management programs have the ability -- together and separately -- to make a contribution to the development of a comprehensive system of workforce development for workers who need both occupational and language education and training.

This study leads to recommend the following action steps that could help build and support successful programs.

1. Expand accountability measures to include those that do not create barriers for immigrant and LEP workers. Tie accountability to assessments that measure program objectives and worker achievement.
2. Provide support for the development of a flexible data tracking system that aggregates program information and incorporates both standardized and authentic assessment as well as student achievement and program information. The system should be easily adaptable to meet different program objectives.
3. Support staff development that:
 - helps occupational/vocational instructors learn more about assessment, language development and instructional methodology in non-traditional learning environments;
 - helps ESL instructors learn more about assessment and contextual curricular models that blend occupational and language instruction; and
 - helps program leadership learn about successful program models that combine language and occupational instruction.
4. Improve support for programs that offer language instruction to help workers get good jobs. Then continue support during incumbency so that workers' improvements in language skills can open doors to future advancement.
5. Provide incentives to employers who support incumbent worker language instruction.
6. Promote instruction on the during working hours while workers are "on the clock."

7. Support ongoing research on program success, instructional methodologies, staff development, the relationship between objectives and outcomes, and assessment methodologies and program outcomes.
8. Facilitate the combination and blending of language and occupational skill instruction through the workforce investment system.