ADULT ESL/LITERACY

FROM THE COMMUNITY TO THE COMMUNITY

A Guidebook for Participatory Literacy Training

By Elsa Auerbach with Byron Barahona, Julio Midy, Felipe Vaquerano, Ana Zambrano, & Joanne Arnaud
Adult ESL/Literacy

From the Community to the Community

A Guidebook for Participatory Literacy Training
The contents of this book were partially developed under two grants, Grant No. X257A20021 from the National Institute for Literacy, and Grant No. D/ED T003V90080 from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the National Institute for Literacy or the U.S. Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Correspondence regarding this book and the projects described in it can be directed to:

Elsa Auerbach
English Dept.
University of Massachusetts/Boston
Boston, MA 02125

Joanne Arnaud
Boston Adult Literacy Fund
666 Boylston St.
Boston, MA 02116

Correspondence regarding specific components can be directed as follows:

Haitian Creole literacy component:
Haitian Multi-Service Center
Adult Education Program
12 Bicknell St.
Dorchester, MA 02121

ESL component:
Jackson-Mann Community School
500 Cambridge St.
Allston, MA 02134

Spanish literacy component:
Harborside Community School
312 Border St.
East Boston, MA 02128

First Published by
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
10 Industrial Avenue
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

Transferred to Digital Printing 2009 by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10016
2 Park Square Milton Park, Abingdon Oxon OX14 4RN

Copyright © 1996 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by photostat, microform, retrieval system, or any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Adult ESL/literacy from the community to the community: a guidebook for participatory literacy training/ by Elsa Auerbach ... [et al.]
       p. cm.
       Includes bibliographical references (p. ).
       1. English language--Study and teaching--Foreign speakers--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. English language--Adult education--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Literacy programs--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 4. Community life--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 5. Auerbach, Elsa.
       PE1128.A2A324 1996
       428'.007--dc20
       95-40919
       CIP

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.
Foreword

Communities as sources of knowledge and producers of new knowledge are usually unrecognized, underestimated, and underutilized by educators. In the case of immigrant communities, their expertise is also lost under the misunderstanding of language and cultural barriers. Adult ESL/Literacy From the Community to the Community: A Guidebook for Participatory Literacy Training is an example of how, in a collaborative and participatory educational project, community needs are addressed by community resources, using the language(s) of the community and the expertise of its membership. The importance of this model is that, in addition to validating community knowledge, it contributes to community development.

The narrative of the book is easily accessible to practitioners, policymakers, and community members. It combines the personal experiences of community participants, Mentors and Interns with the theoretical and philosophical arguments that serve as the tenets of the model. The complex issues addressed—those of maintaining an authentic, unedited voice, of implementing a truly democratic, participatory curriculum for community participants and teachers-in-training, and of maintaining an equal collaborative model between a university and three community organizations—are of great value to those concerned with egalitarian and democratic practices in education.

At a time when immigrants are under attack and their communities are in danger of losing the few economic resources they have, inviting community residents to educate themselves and their communities is of paramount importance. Training community residents to further the education of their own communities not only helps meet community demands for services, but also contributes to community development by creating jobs in the community rather than draining it of its resources. In addition, when using a participatory curriculum that addresses the needs of adult participants, community teachers are of great value because they have a shared history; they live and face the same issues with other members of the community. This engenders a curriculum that truly addresses the needs of the community and its members.
From the Community to the Community also addresses the use of the linguistic and cultural resources of the community by implementing curriculum in the language(s) of the participants. It acknowledges the uses of literacy for real life—that literacy has purposes and meets goals, and that it plays a role in the everyday lives of the participants as family members, immigrants, community residents, and social agents.

The use of the native language in a participatory educational project not only facilitates the learning of English as a Second Language, but also opens the possibility for adults to serve as agents of change in public schools. At El Barrio Popular Education Program, for example, adult participants are critically analyzing and investigating how their participation in an adult literacy program is impacting their relationship to their children. Preliminary findings show that children are learning to appreciate their mothers' efforts to acquire an education and that this affects their own involvement with education. They also show that the mothers are getting more involved with their children's education, both at home by doing homework together, and in the community at large by exercising their rights to demand better education for their children. The adults are documenting these research findings in a video that will be available to the community at large and thus, making this knowledge immediately available to the community. This type of project can be viable when adult participants are able to voice their concerns and address their issues in the language they feel comfortable in and the language that is of predominant use in the community. In this way language is used to further education and promote change.

Finally, From the Community to the Community offers a new way of looking at teacher training; it reminds us that, in order not to replicate traditional educational models that fail to take into consideration the learners, it is important to design teacher training models that practice participatory education to allow teachers to learn by experiencing the model of action-reflection. By informing the readers of the experiences of the three programs in Boston, this book also validates and disseminates the work of small, participatory, native language literacy programs in ethnic and minority communities in the United States and in countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Klaudia M. Rivera
El Barrio Popular Education Program
New York City
Contents

Foreword.................................................................v

Acknowledgments......................................................ix

Preface: What is this Guidebook? ..................................xi
  What is the “from the community to the community” model?..xii
  What was our project?..............................................xiii
  Who are we?.........................................................xiv
  What is our philosophy?..........................................xv
  Why did we write this Guidebook and who is it for?......xvii
  How was this Guidebook written?...............................xviii
  How is this Guidebook organized?.............................xxi
  Some notes on terminology.....................................xxii

Chapter One: The Context and Rationale......................1
  The sites.............................................................2
  What was the history of the project?........................5
  What were the objectives and key features of the project?8
  How is this model supported by theory and research?....9
  Why a meaning-based, culturally variable view of literacy?9
  Why a participatory approach?.................................11
  Why native language literacy and bilingual transitional ESL?13
  Why literacy teachers from the communities of the learners?16
  Why is this kind of project important?......................20

Chapter Two: Project Structure and Participants............22
  How was the project set up?.....................................22
  How was the project administered?.........................23
  What was the training design?.................................24
  Who were the Mentors?..........................................25
    What were the Mentors’ backgrounds and why did they join the project?28
  Who were the Interns?............................................36
    How were the Interns selected?..............................37
    What were the Interns’ backgrounds?.......................41
    Why did the Interns want to participate in the project?43
  Who were the students?...........................................47
    What were the students’ backgrounds?......................50
    What brought the students to literacy and ESL classes?52
Acknowledgments

This book is truly the product of a group effort. The projects that it describes were in many ways the brain child of the staff at participating adult education sites. Key administrative personnel at these sites contributed many hours to developing and implementing the projects as well as the model on which they are based. Special thanks go to Kathleen O'Connell and Paul Trunell of the Harborside Community Center (HCC), Mary Davies and Shelley Bourgeois of the Jackson-Mann Community School (JMCS), and Jean-Marc Jean-Baptiste and Carol Chandler of the Haitian Multi-Service Center (HMSC). Many other people at the sites also deserve thanks for their dedication and commitment to the projects. In particular, the Interns contributed many hours of their own time beyond the call of duty. Project Mentors, Julio Midy, Ana Zambrano, and Felipe Vaquerano played a key role in shaping the structure of the report and provided critical comments on each section as it was drafted. The work of Byron Barahona and Eugenie Ballering was also critical to the development of the model described in this book. We would also like to thank Klaudia Rivera, Cathy Walsh, Kathy Brucker, Loren McGrail, and Maria Gonzales for joining us to facilitate workshops.

Joanne Arnaud, the Executive Director of the Boston Adult Literacy Fund, deserves particular gratitude, not only for her insightful and timely assistance with the writing of the report, but also for her constant good cheer at every step in the implementation process. She was, in many ways, the midwife of this Guidebook, providing key support from its inception until its completion.

Several people at the University of Massachusetts at Boston provided invaluable support in implementing the projects. We are grateful to Dr. Donaldo Macedo, Director of the UMass Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program (BES) for writing the proposal for the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project through which the collaboration between the sites was initiated. Pam Price gave tireless and meticulous attention to the details of day-to-day work, as well as to transcription of the tapes. Fernando Colina provided critical technical assistance with computer matters, including rescuing project documents (and project staff!) at various points. Barbara Graceffa made space for our work in her busy schedule and busy office. We cannot thank them enough. Finally, Marc Prou, also on the BES faculty, deserves special mention for his key role in the supporting the development of Haitian Creole literacy instruction in the Boston area through a pioneering course in Creole linguistics that he taught at UMass/Boston in the early 1980s. One of his students, Jean-Marc Jean-Baptiste, originated the Creole literacy component at the HMSC.

Additional thanks go to Susan Lytle, Trudy Smoke, and James Tollefson for their thoughtful and timely reviews of the manuscript. Finally, we would like to thank our editor, Naomi Silverman, for enthusiastically embracing this project, editing the manuscript with sensitivity and respect for its intent, and moving the publication process quickly. It was a joy to work with her.
Preface: What is this Guidebook?

The need for adult literacy and ESL services within immigrant and refugee communities in the United States cannot be disputed. The National Adult Literacy Survey dramatically underscores the extent of this need with its finding that 25% of those performing in the lowest proficiency level were immigrants. At adult education centers across the U.S., these statistics translate into long waiting lists, large classes, inadequate resources, and pressure to move students through programs quickly. More and more of the students coming to the centers for ESL classes have had little chance to go to school in their own countries and are unable to read and write in their first languages. Teachers who are unfamiliar with the languages and cultures of these students often feel overwhelmed and underprepared. Clearly, the question facing policymakers, administrators, and teachers is not whether there is a need for adult ESL and literacy services, but how this need can best be met.

At the same time, however, resources within the communities of the learners often go unrecognized. Refugee and immigrant communities are rich with people who have strong educational backgrounds in their own languages and a desire to contribute to their communities. Because they have shared the experiences of coming to a new country, they are intimately familiar with the needs and concerns of literacy students, as well as with issues of cultural and linguistic transition. Yet they are often unable to make use of their strengths because of limitations in their English ability or lack of formal credentials; even as their English improves, it is difficult for them to find meaningful work or to access higher education. Thus, it is not uncommon for highly skilled, community-minded immigrants and refugees to find themselves working on assembly lines or cleaning offices.

This Guidebook describes a model for drawing on and enhancing the strengths of this latter group of immigrants and refugees in order to address the needs of those with minimal prior education, ESL, or literacy. It is a model based on the principle of from the community to the community in which community needs are addressed by community resources. The book documents a collaboration between three adult education programs that worked with the University of Massachusetts at Boston and the Boston Adult Literacy Fund to develop, implement, and evaluate a project designed to train immigrants and refugees as adult ESL and native language literacy instructors in their own communities.
**What is the “from the community to the community” model?**

The model described in this Guidebook has several key features:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>community leadership development</td>
<td>Immigrants and refugees from the communities of the learners are trained to teach ESL and literacy in their own communities. Outstanding language minority adult literacy teachers are trained as Mentors; they, in turn, participate in training immigrant and refugee Interns who have demonstrated commitment to their communities as adult students, community activists, or tutors. Thus, the project develops leaders who come from the community and go back to the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participatory approach to literacy instruction</td>
<td>The approach to teaching literacy is participatory. Adult learners participate in setting goals, identifying needs, choosing learning activities, and evaluating progress. The curriculum content focuses on the learners’ experiences and concerns. Because the teachers come from the learners’ communities, they are able to understand the social problems learners face and work with them to address these problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participatory approach to instructor training</td>
<td>Likewise, the approach to training Interns is participatory: Interns identify their goals and needs, shape the direction of the training, and evaluate its usefulness. Training content is drawn from the interests, experiences, and concerns of participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>native language adult literacy instruction</td>
<td>Adult immigrants and refugees who have little prior education and minimal literacy proficiency in their native language are taught basic literacy in their native language as a basis for ESL instruction. Once they have acquired this basic literacy proficiency, they make the transition to ESL through bilingual literacy instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>Community-based organizations work with each other and with a university so that they can learn from each other’s experiences, share expertise, and address common concerns collaboratively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was our project?

The model described in this Guidebook is based on a university-community collaboration designed to train literacy instructors from immigrant and refugee communities to teach in their own communities. Three community-based agencies in the Boston area were involved in the project:

- **the Harborside Community Center** (HCC) in East Boston, which serves a large Central American population

- **the Haitian Multi-Service Center** (HMSC) in Dorchester, which serves Haitian immigrants and refugees

- **the Jackson-Mann Community School** (JMCS) in Allston, which serves over 26 different nationality and language groups.

The collaboration was funded from 1989 to 1992 by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBELMILA) of the U.S. Department of Education as the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project (BCLTP) and then, from 1992 to 1993 by the National Institute for Literacy as the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy (CTAFL) Project. The Boston Adult Literacy Fund (BALF), an organization that secures funding for the Boston adult literacy community, was the grant recipient and fiscal administrator for the CTAFL. The Project Coordinator was a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts at Boston (UMass/Boston), continuing a six-year history of collaboration between the university and local community-based literacy sites.

Through the project, Mentors from each of the agencies worked with Interns from the communities of the learners. Training took place both at the sites and at UMass/Boston. The site-based component consisted of on-going mentoring in the classrooms and weekly teacher-sharing meetings. The university-based component consisted of biweekly workshops for all of the Interns and Mentors.

The adult literacy instruction at each of the sites was designed to meet specific needs of the surrounding communities. Because there is a growing population of Haitians and Central Americans with little prior education or literacy background in Dorchester and East Boston, the project provided initial literacy instruction in Haitian Creole at the HMSC and in Spanish at the HCC. Because of the diversity of language and literacy backgrounds at the JMCS, instruction focused on beginning ESL there.
Who are we?

Before we tell more of the story of our project, we need to say a little about who we are and what we believe. The “we” in this book generally refers to the project staff, which included three Mentor Teachers (one from each of the sites) and the Project Coordinator. The Mentors are immigrants or refugees who come from the communities of the learners and share many experiences with them. Although the stories of the Mentors are told in more depth in Chapter Two, we’ll introduce ourselves briefly here to give you a sense of our backgrounds:

• **Felipe Vaquerano**, the Mentor at Harborside, is Salvadoran. He began studying ESL at the JMCS in 1989 while working in a factory. In 1991, during the BCLTP, he became an ESL Intern at the JMCS, and went on to become the Mentor at Harborside in the CTAFL project.

• **Julio Midy**, the Mentor at the HMSC, is Haitian. Like Felipe, he started working in a factory; he has been an ESL teacher at the HMSC since 1985, and was the Master Teacher for the Creole literacy component of the BCLTP.

• **Ana Zambrano**, the Mentor at the JMCS, is Colombian. Before coming to the U.S. in 1984, she was an adult literacy worker in Colombia. She started studying ESL in a church in East Boston. She has taught ESL for 7 years, and was Master Teacher at the JMCS for the BCLTP.

• **Elsa Auerbach**, the Project Coordinator, is a North American whose parents were refugees from Germany. She too worked in a factory for several years before being hired as a part-time ESL teacher at UMass/Boston. She has coordinated several other university-community collaborative projects.

The “we” in this Guidebook also includes Joanne Arnaud, the Executive Director of BALF, who was very much a part of the project, as well as the Interns who were trained in the project. The Interns, like the Mentors, came from the communities of the learners and shared many of their background experiences. Most of them had been ESL students at the sites and/or at UMass. The Interns at HCC were Central American; those at the HMSC were Haitian; one of the Interns at the JMCS was Honduran, and the other was Peruvian of Japanese descent. Their histories are discussed further in Chapter Two.
### What is our philosophy?

Although project staff had different backgrounds and experiences, through our work together, we came to share several basic beliefs about literacy education. These beliefs shaped the model and guided the training.

| about the adult learners... | **We believe that the starting point for working with adult learners is respecting their knowledge and their experiences.** When adults come to ESL or literacy classes, it's already uncomfortable for them, at their age, not to know how to read and write, or not to be able to express themselves in English. We believe it is important to show them their own capacity to learn by drawing out what they already know and using their stories and experiences to teach them. The message they get should be, “You may not know how to read and write but that doesn’t mean you don’t have something to offer.” |
| about the teacher's role... | **We believe that the relationship between teachers and students must be one of mutual respect in which they learn from each other.** This means breaking away from the traditional approach in which the teacher knows everything and it is his or her job to give this knowledge to the students. If the teacher is seen as the only one with something to offer, learners will feel less comfortable. |
| about literacy... | **We believe literacy practices vary according to cultures and social contexts.** Literacy is more than just a set of discrete, mechanical skills or functional competencies. Teaching must take into account culture-specific ways of using and understanding literacy; it must focus not on isolated skills but on socially significant literacy uses in learners’ lives. Meaning is more important than form in literacy instruction. |
| about the goal of teaching... | **We believe that good literacy education means more than just teaching students to read and write.** What is important is how they can use what they learn to get involved in issues that affect their lives. Immigrants and refugees face many problems: being unable to find work, dealing with discrimination on the job, raising children in a new country, maintaining communication with their families at home, and more. We believe that education should enable participants to understand the social nature of these problems (rather than seeing them as personal problems or inadequacies) and to work together in finding ways to address them. |
| about the content of classes... | **We believe that students learn best when content is related to their own experiences.** They are able to do more when learning builds on what they know. This means that the curriculum comes from within the classroom. It draws on their own cultural and... |
personal histories: as such, the content doesn’t have to be related only to life in the U.S.; it can also include telling, writing, and reading stories about their own countries and cultures.

We believe that any literacy work that supports parents in their efforts to make a better life for their families is family literacy. Family literacy means much more than parents reading bedtime stories or helping children with homework; family literacy includes whatever strengthens communication within families and enables parents to advocate for family needs. Rather than imposing family literacy content through the instruction of particular practices or lessons, teachers should integrate family literacy concerns throughout the curriculum as they arise organically.

We believe that students’ first language should be seen as a resource, not an obstacle, for literacy or ESL acquisition. Beginning literacy students can use their existing oral language as the basis for learning how to read and write. They can use first language (L1) literacy as a bridge to ESL. In ESL classes, students can decide when and how to use their first language to support learning English.

We believe that a variety of methods and materials should be used in classes. Because of past experiences, learners (and sometimes teachers) may expect teacher-centered and textbook-based classes focusing on mechanical and rote learning. However, relevant, engaging instruction entails interaction, meaning-based activities, and learner-generated materials. Thus, to reconcile students’ expectations and teachers’ styles in an effective approach, traditional and nontraditional methods should be integrated.

We believe that people who share the culture, language, and life experiences of the learners are uniquely qualified to teach them. A shared background can enable teachers to know what is relevant to students, how to make them feel comfortable, and how to draw out their concerns. We believe that these qualifications should be recognized and enhanced; committed immigrants and refugees who don’t have credentials (or can’t afford higher education) should be given the opportunity to utilize and develop their skills.

We believe that teacher training should be participatory. The knowledge and experience of trainees should be an integral part of training. As such, our view of training is similar to our view of teaching. Mentors and Interns should learn from each other so that everyone’s expertise is valued. Training should emphasize dialogue, sharing, and investigation, rather than transmitting knowledge or prescribing teaching practices. The content of workshops should build on participants’ classroom experience.
Why did we write this Guidebook and who is it for?

The first thing we should say about our model is that it is nothing new! The ideas of participatory literacy education and native language adult literacy are widely accepted in many parts of the world, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In particular, the idea that teachers should come from the communities of the learners is the basis for most literacy campaigns around the world. It is only in the U.S. (and other industrialized countries) that this practice is not the norm. Thus, one of our main goals is to make this model more accessible in the U.S.

The first purpose of this Guidebook is to tell the story of how we adapted and implemented this model on a small scale in a North American context. In it, we have compiled and evaluated our own experiences in order to give other teachers and programs the chance to see what we did, what worked well, and what didn’t. We were fortunate that our funding agency (the National Institute for Literacy) suggested that grant recipients write a final report that would be useful to practitioners. We see the Guidebook as a way to present our communities and our projects to the outside, especially to other education centers and people who are doing the same job we are doing.

Thus, in addition to presenting what we have done, we hope that it will be a reference for teachers, to help you serve your students better. We hope that others who are considering implementing a similar training project will use our experience as a guide. However, as Julio said, “the Guidebook is not a Bible”; we don’t assume you will agree with or follow what we’ve written. Each teaching context is different and no one can tell someone else what to do in his or her situation. The paradox of planning is that you can’t actually know what to do until you listen—until you’re in the situation with the people that you’ll be working with, learning about their living situations, histories, and hopes. That’s why much of the report is written in the past tense: we think it is more helpful to tell you what we did than what you should do.

The Guidebook also has another purpose (maybe ultimately its most important one!) and that is to convince funders and policymakers that this is a powerful model for addressing the literacy needs of immigrant and refugee adults so that they will commit more resources to it. For this reason, we have not only evaluated our own particular work, but incorporated evidence from similar projects that indicate its potential.
How was this Guidebook written?

Although this Guidebook was originally written as the final report for the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy Project (CTAFL), it incorporates experiences that go beyond the time frame of one project. All of the project staff had worked together in a prior collaboration, the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project (BCLTP), which was founded on the same philosophy and principles. Because there were differences in the structure and scope of the two projects, we decided to include findings from both in order to incorporate the broadest possible base of knowledge and data. Although the one year time frame of the CTAFL limited what we could do, the wealth of experience from the prior project allowed us to compare what worked and what didn’t in each. The lessons we learned in that project, and the lessons we learned in writing about it, are very much a part of this Guidebook.

One of the principles of a participatory process is that everyone’s voices and contributions are valued. In order for the voice in any documentation such as this to be truly authentic, each participant or participating agency would have to write about their own work. In fact, outsiders have often written about the work at participating sites, leaving site staff feeling that their voices were not represented. Although everyone on the staff of our project agreed in principle that it would be desirable for sites to write about their own practice, no one felt it was entirely feasible, given the constraints of time, funding, and experience. On the one hand, Mentors felt that any time spent writing should be paid; on the other, they felt that their priorities were teaching (and if money were available, it should be spent on services for students). In addition, the notion that only site representatives can write about the project obscures the collaborative nature of the project; much of what we did was done together, in joint work.

We addressed this dilemma about voice by trying to make the writing process as participatory as possible, even though one person (Elsa) did the actual writing. We started by looking at a range of models of final reports and literacy training guidebooks; each Mentor reported on features that he or she liked from the samples. Then, the Mentors generated a list of questions that practitioners and policymakers might ask about our project (these are the questions that form headings in each chapter). We then had a series of meetings in which we discussed each of the questions as a group, with everyone contributing what he or she thought should be
included in that section. Elsa took minutes of those discussions, recording participants' actual words, and used what was said as the basis for each section. Elsa then wrote drafts that incorporated these discussions, as well as documentation that had been collected throughout the project. This documentation included:

- **minutes of meetings:** We had detailed minutes of core staff meetings, training workshops, and teacher-sharing meetings; these minutes recorded the actual words of Mentors and Interns.

- **samples of work:** We collected samples of Interns', Mentors', and students' work throughout the projects. These included lesson plans, writings, reports of discussions, and so on. Because many of the samples of learners' work that were collected include reflections on their own learning, their voices are also represented through these writings.

- **interviews:** Interns and Mentors interviewed each other at the beginning and end of the project. Interns also interviewed selected learners at the end of the project.

- **evaluation results:** We used a variety of evaluation tools (site surveys, anecdotes, student profiles, etc.), the results of which are included.

The drafts were then distributed to project staff, as well as to the BALF Director and interested Education Coordinators at the sites. Everyone gave feedback, which was discussed and incorporated into the final version. We struggled over various interpretations of the history or the project. The participatory nature of this process broke down to some extent as the deadline for submission of the report drew near: there wasn't enough time for the final chapters to be fully discussed by the group.

In writing this report, we faced several challenges. The first was how to present findings in a way that adhered to the conventions of final research reports and, at the same time, present them in a way that is useful for practitioners. If an evaluation is technical and quantitative, or uses a very academic discourse style, it may exclude many potential readers. In our report of the first project (the BCLTP), we used somewhat academic language at times because we felt this would legitimate our findings to funders and policy makers. Because the purpose of this Guidebook is to popularize the model, we have chosen to use a colloquial and less academic style.
A related challenge was how to write this Guidebook in a clear and accessible way while at the same time capturing the richness and complexity of the issues we addressed. How could our writing be simple without being simplistic? How could it be usable without being prescriptive? How could it be straightforward without being mechanical? In addition to using a colloquial writing style, we have tried to address these concerns by including many examples from our practice. Whenever we suggest a particular tool, activity, or procedure, we try to include an account of our experience with it and reflections on how it went for us.

A third challenge was how to present our project in its most positive light (because our ultimate goal is to advocate for the expansion of this model) and, at the same time, present it in its full complexity. Like anyone involved in a demonstration project, we want to show how successful our work has been because we believe so strongly in the power of this model. But we also want to be honest because this is what will be most useful to others. How often, when we read about other projects, do we think, “It sounds wonderful, but I wonder what really happened?” We often feel constrained to write about the ideal, to make our work sound unproblematic even though, as any practitioner knows, there are always difficulties and limitations as well as contextual factors that shape the outcomes. This book tries to present both the power of our model and the challenges we faced implementing it.

Another dilemma concerned the product of our work. Research studies often frame conclusions in terms of outcomes; training projects often frame them in terms of training packages or curricula. However, because our interest was in the complexity of the process, we didn’t want to reduce our findings to a set of quantifiable outcomes. Likewise, because every teaching context is different, we didn’t feel it would be appropriate to prescribe a single, predetermined training design that could be imposed or transposed regardless of the context. We did, however, arrive at generalizable conclusions and identify significant implications of our work. Thus, the findings presented in this Guidebook will be framed in terms of the processes of the development of our model; it will document why we did what we did, how our thinking and practice developed, and how we made sense of participants’ reactions. Issues and contradictions we faced along the way will be integrated throughout the book, because it was the struggle with these issues that was the real motor force of the project, helping us to clarify our perspective and arrive at our conclusions.
How is this Guidebook organized?

Chapter One presents the background of the project, starting with the context at participating sites, explaining why and how they became involved with this model. It then presents the rationale for the project design, including a brief explanation of each of the key features of the project. It shows where the ideas for this design came from as well as how they are supported within a broader framework of theory, research, and practice. It ends by showing how we translated them into objectives.

Chapter Two, the overview of the project structure and participants, looks at how the collaboration was set up and administered, how the training was structured, who the participants were, and how they were selected. It introduces the Mentors and the Interns, giving a sense of their backgrounds and why they wanted to participate in the project.

Chapter Three presents a description of the Intern training, including our general approach, what we did within each training component (workshops, teacher-sharing meetings, mentoring), and issues that emerged in the process. It explores the meaning of participatory training, as well as the challenges that arise in implementing it.

Chapter Four presents a brief overview of the relationship between the training and what actually happened in the ESL and literacy classes. It includes key literacy teaching tools and gives examples of how they were used. It also addresses teaching issues that emerged from practice.

Chapter Five focuses on project evaluation—their approach, plan, and evaluation tools. It outlines the process of evaluation and how the design changed. It goes on to present results of the evaluation, discussing the impact of the project on Mentors, Interns, learners, and sites.

The Conclusion summarizes our findings regarding each of the key characteristics of the “from the community to the community” model. In addition, it examines dilemmas and challenges we faced and includes recommendations for the field of adult literacy, discussing the broader potential of this model and what is necessary to realize it.

The Appendices include an article about the Spanish Literacy Component at the Harborside Community Center (written by Byron Barahona, the original Spanish literacy Master Teacher at that site) and an analysis of how Creole literacy was promoted at the HMSC. The third appendix presents descriptions of workshops held at UMass during the BCLTP, as well as reflections on those workshops.
**Some notes on terminology**

| native language | We use the term *native language* to refer to learners' first language or mother tongue (the language that is primary for them). The terms *native language*, *first language*, and *mother tongue* have different connotations in various parts of the world and to different people. In this book, we use them interchangeably. In the context of our work, some Haitian Creole speakers and some Spanish speakers were placed in native language literacy classes because they had minimal prior education and did not have a basis of first or native language literacy; the rationale for this model is explained in Chapter One. |
| L1 and L2 | L1 is used to refer to someone’s first or native language; L2 is used to refer to someone’s second language (which, in the case of our project, was usually English). |
| Creole Kreyol | Although there are many kinds of Creole used in the Boston area (Cape Verdean Creole, Jamaican Creole, etc.), Haitian Creole was the only one used in our project; for this reason, when we use the term *Creole* in this report (e.g., the Creole literacy classes), we are referring to Haitian Creole. We have not used the Haitian spelling, *Kreyol*, because the report is in English. |
| training | We called our projects *training projects* because this is the commonly accepted way of describing short-term programs for teaching specific vocationally oriented content. However, we are uncomfortable with this term because it often connotes transmitting specific skills or techniques; our approach focused much more on drawing out group knowledge and sharing experience than on transmitting a particular method or technique. Our goal was not that participants would “master” a predetermined body of knowledge or teaching competencies, but that they would develop a stance or approach to teaching. We use the term *training* because we haven’t found a better one, but don’t view it in a mechanical way. |
| Master Teacher and Mentor | In both the BCLTP and the CTAFL, each site had one experienced teacher who was responsible for supervising and mentoring the Interns at that site; these teachers were part of the core staff of both projects. In the BCLTP, we called these teachers Master Teachers, but we decided to change the title to Mentor for the CTAFL because the term seems to imply less of a hierarchical relationship with Interns. |
Chapter One: The Context and Rationale

The idea for the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy Project did not fall from the sky or emerge from an ivory tower: it was a response to realities confronting the communities of the participating sites and was based on a history of practice at the sites. Its impetus and rationale came from the sites' specific needs and built on initiatives that they had already undertaken to address those needs. This chapter looks at the contexts at the sites, the history of the project, and the reasons for its design. The so what? sections highlight implications of our particular experience for others undertaking similar projects.

the contexts at the sites

The collaborating sites have many commonalities. Each has deep and long-standing roots in the community where it is situated; all are well known among local immigrants and refugees and have long waiting lists for classes. Each has had an adult education program for at least 10 years and has participated actively in the adult literacy community in the Greater Boston area. They provide a range of services in addition to ESL classes, from counseling to childcare, and, in some cases, health care, and legal services.

In addition, the sites share a commitment to developing the leadership of people from the communities of the learners and to expanding services for learners with minimal prior education and literacy backgrounds. Before we began working together, each had begun developing this model, but had not had sufficient financial or structural support to sustain these efforts independently. The collaboration, thus, became a vehicle for continuing initiatives already under way at the sites.

At the same time, however, the conditions at the sites are quite different in terms of the backgrounds of students they serve, the kinds of services they offer, the internal structures of the sites, and the relations of the sites to the learners' communities. The project component at each site was tailored to fit the needs of students within its community. This background information is included here because, in any project, the context is critical in shaping the content, direction, and outcomes.

Thus, our experience suggests that collaborations need to both provide a common framework for participating sites (based on their shared needs and vision for training and instruction) and, at the same time, respond to site-specific conditions. Balancing the tension between common purposes and particular conditions is precisely the challenge of collaboration—the challenge of adapting commonly held principles and processes to differing contexts.
East Boston Harborside Community Center Adult Literacy Program

The most striking characteristic of the context of the Harborside Program is the rapidly changing demographic situation in East Boston, where it is located. According to the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, the growth rate for Hispanics in the state of Massachusetts between 1970 and 1980 was 11 times faster than that of Whites and 5 times faster than that of Blacks; Hispanics accounted for 67% of the total population growth in the state during that period; 22% of the population in East Boston are refugees and immigrants, many of them recent arrivals from Central America with limited English language abilities and few economic resources. Hispanic families have the highest poverty rate of any group in the area. An estimated 20% of the Hispanic adults who seek educational services have less than a fourth grade education and are minimally literate in Spanish.

The Harborside Community Center (HCC) offers the only free ESL classes in East Boston. Its Adult Literacy Program has been offering basic education services since 1983. It provides four levels of ESL classes, as well as reading, writing, and math for native English speakers, from basic literacy levels through high school equivalency. Over 300 adult literacy students from many ethnic, linguistic, racial, and class backgrounds enroll in it annually; of these, 34% are Hispanic. Thus, although the learner population at Harborside is a mixed one, and the agency serves many different ethnic groups, it is clearly the central place in East Boston that Hispanics go for educational services. The HCC also offers a range of other programs including After School Day Care, After School Reading, Community Counseling, Peer Leadership, summer camps, and, most recently, a program aimed at giving East Boston youth a safe place to go after school where they can study, meet other teens, and work on projects that give something back to the community.

In addition, in 1989, the HCC initiated Khmer literacy classes to meet the increasingly apparent needs of the Cambodian community. This project supported the HCC Adult Learning Program's commitment to multicultural, participatory adult education in which the content of classes is driven by the interests, experiences, and community concerns of learners. Part of the HCC's mission is to "utilize participatory classroom activities and curricula which encourage our students to use their personal experiences and goals as the basis for a meaningful learning experience." The HCC has a history of training, hiring, and promoting staff from the communities of the learners. The staff has included several language minority ESL teachers; in addition, bilingual aides (like the Cambodian aide in the Khmer class) and bilingual volunteer tutors have assisted in classrooms for many years.
The Haitian Multi-Service Center

Over the past decade there has been exceptionally rapid growth in the number of Haitians living in the greater Boston area, making it presently one of the largest Haitian population centers in the U.S. (following Miami and New York). Current estimates place the Haitian population in the state at over 60,000; the majority of Haitians – up to 25,000 – live in the Dorchester and Mattapan areas of Boston. Despite this continuing increase, the HMSC is the only agency that provides educational and social services specifically targeted for the Haitian community in Boston. It is located geographically in the heart of this community. It is the largest human service agency serving Haitians in Massachusetts.

The mission of the HMSC is based on a “Haitians serving Haitians” model; it provides human and educational services as well as promoting community development and leadership in a culturally and linguistically familiar context. It has a broad range of services; in addition to adult education, it provides preschool, pre-natal care, AIDS outreach and education, refugee resettlement, legal services, family counseling, and translation services. Adult education is its largest component, serving over 300 students daily in 18 classes. The waiting period for regular classes is up to 3 years, and the waiting list numbers over 400 students.

The Adult Education Program provides morning, afternoon, and evening classes. It includes two levels of Kreyol (Creole) literacy, four levels of ESL, and a high school diploma program. Through the Massachusetts English Literacy Demonstration Project (MELD), the HMSC has provided advanced reading and writing classes to students transitioning from ESL to high school diploma classes and college credit reading, writing and math classes through Roxbury Community College. The HMSC Study Center provides a computer lab available for all classes, elective classes in math, as well as conversation and program development support for teachers to explore ways to integrate math, science, and technology in the curriculum.

The HMSC has been committed to the hiring of bilingual/bicultural staff since its inception. In the mid-1980’s, the Adult Education Program established a 2 year Bilingual Teacher Training Project to address the need for increased recruitment, training, and hiring of bilingual Haitian teachers in adult education. In addition, the HMSC has worked extensively with local colleges and universities to recruit Haitian undergraduates for internship and work-study positions; it was instrumental in establishing the Student Literacy Corps at UMass/Boston. Students at the HMSC are also encouraged to take on responsibilities within the program and are often hired to teach or administer Study Center activities.
The primary difference between the Jackson-Mann Community School in Allston-Brighton and the other project sites is the incredible diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups represented in its classes. According to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Boston Household Survey for 1985, 20% of households in Allston-Brighton identify a language other than English as their primary language; early indications from the 1990 Census suggest that this percentage is growing. Allston-Brighton is home to 28% of all Hispanics living in Boston, 43% of the city’s Russian residents, 26% of the people from other Eastern European countries, 30% of Boston’s Asian community, and 15% of its Brazilian population. The population served in Allston-Brighton is predominantly low income, including local public housing residents, AFDC recipients, and the working poor. Although many of the students in the program hold jobs (and some hold more than one job at a time), most are low-wage, entry-level jobs: housekeeping, janitorial, fastfood cooking and counter positions, and assembly line jobs.

The classes at the JMCS reflect the diversity of the area’s population: the program serves 450 students per year from 25 to 30 different ethnic groups. An estimated 5% of the adults in the ESL classes have less than a fourth grade education in their home countries. Thus, at this site, the need is more for beginning ESL than for first language literacy; further, because classes are so linguistically mixed, ESL is the only viable option for the immigrant and refugee learners. The program has four components: ESL, ABE, GED (General Education Development), and EDP (an External Degree Program for high school equivalency). Because many of the students are employed, most of the classes are held at night at the JMCS.

There are over 400 adults on the waiting list to get into ESL classes. The JMCS has never had to actively recruit students because it is well-known among immigrant and refugee communities as a center that offers free quality ESL classes. In addition, the issue of waiting list length has been addressed by having class sizes of up to 30 and involving students as much as possible in assisting teachers and working with other students.

The JMCS has a long history of promoting leadership from within the learners’ communities. It has had advocacy training projects to develop students as community activists. It has hired language minority teachers and teaching assistants. Students have produced a magazine and been involved in various aspects of program governance (including a student council).
What is the history of the project?

These were the conditions at the sites that gave rise to the ideas underlying the CTAFL project. As the following account indicates, the basis for the project was already in place long before it actually began.

In the mid-1980s, a group of community-based agencies in the Boston area had identified the need to diversify the adult education workforce (which until then was predominantly made up of White, Anglo North Americans with undergraduate and/or graduate degrees) and to train instructors from the learners' communities. With resources limited, many programs were seeking additional ways to continue providing services for incoming students while at the same time, increasing opportunities for advanced students who had completed existing courses. The idea of training exceptional students to become instructors for lower levels was seen as a way of providing a "step up" for them as well as addressing the demand for increased services and a multicultural workforce.

In addition, a growing need for first language literacy had been identified. At Harborside, a Khmer literacy program was initiated in 1989; further, a previously hidden population of immigrants with limited educational backgrounds (many of whom were Central American) began to enroll in classes in order to meet requirements for amnesty. These were students who had been too intimidated to come to a school setting until they needed to do so for legalization purposes. Once enrolled, students who didn't know how to read and write in their first language were struggling (and often failing) in ESL classes. The existing ESL classes were unable to meet their needs and the few places that taught literacy in Spanish required students to pay for these services. Thus, Harborside saw the need to start a Spanish literacy component for the growing numbers of learners who might otherwise have been relegated to the waiting lists or never come for classes at all.

The Haitian Multi-Service Center (HMSC, had been providing Creole (Kreyol) literacy instruction since 1984 to serve the needs of a growing number of refugees coming to Boston as a result of political and economic instability in Haiti; many of them had had no access to education in Haiti and needed basic literacy instruction. Attitudes toward Creole were changing since it had become the official language in Haiti after the fall of Duvalier. Further, a Creole linguistics course at UMass/Boston taught by Marc Prou fostered this interest. In the mid-1980s, through a collaboration with Roxbury Community College, the HMSC provided workshops in Creole linguistics for teachers and college interns.
As a result of all of these conditions, a number of projects were initiated by community-based organizations during the 1980s:

- **The Boston Adult Literacy Fund** secured funding for a city-wide pilot project to train people from the communities of the learners as teaching and administrative assistants.

- **The Haitian Multi-Service Center** had decided to recruit, hire, and train bilingual teachers in the early years of its program development and actively pursued funding for this purpose. It secured funding from several sources to establish a Bilingual Teacher Training Project, which was successful in providing a pool of trained Haitian teachers for the HMSC’s educational program. At the same time, the HMSC actively recruited bilingual interns and work-study students from local colleges and universities as tutors and teaching assistants. As a result of this work, an increasing percentage of the staff was Haitian and included college interns and program graduates. In addition, the HMSC initiated Creole literacy instruction in the mid 1980s.

- **The Jackson-Mann Community School** had received a grant to train advanced students to become community educators for employment and housing issues. It also worked with two other community-based agencies (the Community Learning Center and El Centro del Cardenal) and UMass/Boston in the English Family Literacy Project which included a Spanish literacy component.

- **The Harborside Community Center** received funding to initiate a bilingual Khmer ESL class; in the spirit of commitment to community leadership, it hired a bilingual North American ESL teacher and a Cambodian teaching assistant for this project.

Despite the great need for programs like these and their many successes, there was generally inadequate financial or structural support for them. Although funding agencies and policymakers often paid lip service to the importance of diversifying the field and promoting leadership from within minority communities, they did little to concretely follow up on these goals. Other L1 classes around the city were taught by volunteers, who, in many cases, had no training; funding and logistical support for these classes was minimal. As a result, despite their successes, these initiatives were often unstable, lasting a few months, with frequent teacher and student turnover. However, the HMSC, JMCS, and HCC were exceptions, and their endeavors inspired the projects described in this Guidebook; for example, the particular structure of the HMSC’s Bilingual Teacher Training Project became a basis for the project model described here.
Given this proliferation of community-based initiatives, it was clear that the historical moment was ripe for training community literacy instructors. It was at this point that the idea for a university-community collaboration arose. The proposal to train community literacy instructors was submitted to and funded by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs. This project, the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project (BCLTP), focused on three kinds of literacy classes in accordance with the conditions at the sites: Haitian Creole at the HMSC (as well as ESL), Spanish literacy at the HCC, and ESL at the JMCS. It was a 3-year project that involved monthly training workshops, weekly site-based teacher sharing meetings, and mentoring. Up to 16 Interns were trained each year.

The HMSC played a key role in this process, both in terms of developing a model for the training of community literacy instructors and in terms of bringing it to the university. Because the HMSC was founded on a “Haitians serving Haitians” model, the primary goal of its Adult Education Program had been, from its inception in the early 1980s, to actively recruit and train bilingual Haitian teachers. As mentioned earlier, the HMSC developed a Bilingual Teacher Training Project which recruited and trained teachers for its Adult Education Program. This HMSC model was then shared with the Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program at UMass/Boston. Several aspects of the HMSC model informed the subsequent collaborative projects (including recruitment of participants from the community, site-based and on-the-job training, co-teaching and mentoring). In addition, the HMSC played a key role in the inclusion of native language literacy instruction in the projects’ design. During the first year of the BCLTP (in which the HMSC was the only participating site) the HMSC educational staff made the decision to focus its training on native language literacy instruction in order to expand its Creole literacy component; as such, it was the first site in the collaboration to specifically gear instruction to native language literacy.

It was with this history of joint work that the sites embarked on the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy (CTAFL) project. The new project was similar to the BCLTP in terms of the overall model, approach, and rationale; however, it differed in terms of time frame, scope, and training design. These differences are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. We have included information about both projects because our experience with each enriches the knowledge base about the “from the community to the community” model.
What were the objectives and key features of the project?

Based on the needs identified by the sites and the priorities of the funders, we identified the following objectives and key features in our CTAFL proposal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• to recruit and provide opportunities for professional development for teachers and Interns from underserved ethnic minority groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to develop a multifaceted, practice-oriented model for training community Interns to teach adult and family literacy based on recent adult literacy research and theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to train a core group of bilingual Mentors to supervise on-site training and model teaching to community Interns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to train a core group of bilingual community Interns to become instructors of adult and family literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to facilitate the development of the literacy proficiency of non-English speaking adults, including parents of bilingual students, increasing their educational attainment, their ability to function in ESL classes, and their ability to support the literacy development of their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to build the capacity of community-based literacy programs serving the needs of adult ESL and literacy students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to disseminate the model so that it can be replicated and implemented on a nation-wide basis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• a meaning-based, culturally variable view of literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a participatory approach to literacy instruction and teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• native language literacy for adult learners with little prior schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• training and leadership development of community instructors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How is this model supported by theory and research?

Although the rationale for our model arose directly from the concrete conditions, needs, and initiatives at the sites, we were by no means alone in arriving at these conclusions. There is substantial justification for each of the key features of the model from a wide range of other sources. This support comes from language acquisition and literacy theory and research, as well as from the work of other practitioners and projects both nationally and internationally. The next sections briefly examine some of the research, theory, and practice, indicating why each of these project’s key features is educationally sound.

Why a meaning-based, culturally variable view of literacy?

The past decade has seen advances in the theoretical understanding of the nature of literacy, and, in particular, of the ways it varies according to culture and context. Studies of literacy practices in a range of cultures indicate variation in types of texts, participant interactions around texts, purposes for creating and using texts, social meanings/values attached to texts, ways of producing texts, and ways of socializing children through interactions with texts. A new paradigm has emerged in which literacy is viewed not just as a set of isolated decoding skills to be acquired in an essentially similar universal process, but rather as a set of social practices that vary according to cultures, contexts, purposes, and participants. This means that culture-specific aspects of language and literacy use must be taken into account in literacy programming and curriculum development; wherever possible, teachers must be aware of culture-specific discourse practices, literacy uses and forms of learners’ cultures (Heath, 1983; Reder, 1987; Street, 1984; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Another aspect of this emerging paradigm is that, increasingly, the divide between oral and written language has come to be questioned. Older views claimed that literacy was unique in that it allowed meaning to be represented autonomously, without reference to context; recent studies show that, in fact, there are many features of what has traditionally been thought of as oral discourse in written language and vice versa. A new conception of literacies has emerged in which a variety of discourse forms are seen to encompass a range of features of both oral and written language. Culture-specific uses of oral language shape the way that learners take and make meaning through texts. Teachers must draw on learners’ oral language practices in developing their reading and writing (Gee, 1990; Tannen, 1982; Street, 1984).
Further, this paradigm claims that literacy acquisition involves not just mechanically connecting sounds and symbols, but making meaning by interacting with texts. Reading and learning to read are active, constructive processes, as are writing and learning to write: learners bring their own knowledge to texts in order to make sense of them. Culture plays a role in learning: learners' cultural familiarity with the content and forms of texts shape their reading processes. Learners become proficient to the extent that instruction is connected to their background knowledge, life experiences, and communicative purposes. Traditional approaches that focus on the individual's acquisition of skills without consideration of social context disconnect literacy acquisition from learners' knowledge and lived experience. Thus, it is critical that instruction be meaning-centered, rather than mechanical, and that content be relevant to the life experiences of learners (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Street, 1984).

Current literacy theory suggests that literacy is meaningful for learners to the extent that it enables them to better understand and shape their world. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire says that there must be a connection between the word and the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Mechanical approaches that focus on the acquisition of isolated skills without consideration of the social conditions of learners' lives disconnect literacy acquisition from their knowledge, concerns, and experiences. As literacy educator Susan Lytle (1991) says, "Being and becoming literate means using knowledge and experience to make sense of and act on the world" (p. 8). In the approach proposed by Freire (1970), instruction starts with learners' social reality, providing a context for analyzing it and taking action on it. If literacy acquisition is linked with this kind of critical analysis, it can enable learners to challenge the social conditions that disempower them. Thus, literacy instruction should involve exploration of the social issues and concerns of learners' lives.

Findings from this theoretical and practical work suggest that:

- Training must explore various conceptions of literacy; participants' views of literacy acquisition must be made explicit. Training should also explore ways of connecting literacy instruction to issues of importance in learners' lives.

- Similarly, work with students should involve dialogue about their conceptions of literacy and their prior learning experiences; literacy instruction should incorporate culturally familiar literacy forms and practices, building on learners' oral language resources.
The view of literacy just outlined is congruent with recent perspectives from adult learning theory which suggest that adults learn best when instruction is contextualized in their life experiences, related to their real needs, and when they are involved in determining instructional goals and content. Their purposes for reading and writing can be expected to vary according to social contexts. Thus, adult learning theory, like literacy theory, suggests that the content of instruction should be linked to meaningful, authentic language and literacy use (rather than focusing on abstract, decontextualized decoding skills or generic topics). It must reflect students' everyday reality so that literacy becomes a tool that can enable learners to understand and change their lives (Kazemek, 1988; Knowles, 1984; Lytle, 1991; Nunan, 1988).

In order to implement this goal, the traditional concept of curriculum development must be changed; in the traditional model, the teacher identifies what to be covered in a course (e.g., skills, grammar, competencies) before coming in contact with students; instruction then is a process of finding the most efficient way of transmitting this information from teacher to students. In place of this model, the concept of learner-centered and emergent curriculum development is becoming increasingly widespread. The new model involves collaborative discovery of learners' goals and concerns, involving constant dialogue and negotiation at every step of the way (Nunan, 1988). Chris Candlin (1984), a curriculum theorist, describes this as an interactive syllabus model which is social and problem-solving in orientation rather than one which transmits preselected and often predigested knowledge. The model thus becomes one in which participants, both teachers and learners, are encouraged to ask questions from the outset about syllabus objectives, content, methodology and experiences. (p. 34)

North American adult ESL educators have extended this learner-centered model to include content specifically focused on the social context of learners' lives, combining Freire's approach to literacy pedagogy with the emergent approach to ESL curriculum development (Auerbach, 1992; Barndt, 1987; Wallerstein, 1983). This participatory model for adult ESL literacy offers a systematic process for building curriculum around learners' lived experiences and social realities. As one of the Interns in our project said, in this model, "The students' lives are the curriculum."
This participatory curriculum development process developed through this practice involves moving toward a model with the following components:

• **Investigation and identification of themes:** Teachers investigate the social conditions of learners' lives with them in order to identify their concerns and goals.

• **Re-presentation and dialogue:** As teachers discover what is important in learners' lives, they create or select materials to present the themes back to students as lesson content. Participants then discuss these issues in terms of how they have experienced them, their root or social causes, and possible strategies for addressing them.

• **Extension:** A range of tools are utilized to extend language and literacy proficiency, exploring these issues as the content of instruction. Materials and learning activities (language experience stories, grammar and vocabulary work, reading and writing, role plays, etc.) focus on the issues.

• **Action:** Students apply what they have learned inside the classroom to address concerns outside the classroom.

• **Evaluation:** The class evaluates the learning process and the actions they have taken.

Of course, the challenge is adapting this model to particular groups of students. When the social context of learners' lives is incorporated in instruction, relevance is ensured. As students participate in identifying themes that are important to them, in developing learning tools they will use, and in evaluating what they have learned, they gain a measure of control over their own learning which extends to their lives outside the classroom.

Findings from this theoretical and practical work indicate that:

• Adult learners should be involved in curriculum development at every stage of the process, from deciding the content, methods, and processes of instruction to participating in evaluation.

• Curriculum content for adults (whether in a training or literacy instruction context) must incorporate the realities, concerns, and goals of participants.
Why native language literacy and bilingual transitional ESL?

The theoretical framework outlined previously suggests that oral language should be used as much as possible as a bridge to literacy. This means that teachers must be able to draw on learners' linguistic resources in a culturally appropriate way, to the extent possible, and teach literacy through oral language usage. Further, research on ESL literacy acquisition indicates that strong first language literacy and schooling are key factors in second language/literacy acquisition (Cummins, 1981). Although this is a widely accepted finding for children's literacy acquisition (and, in fact, has been the basis for the bilingual education movement), it has been less widely accepted for adult literacy acquisition. Adult ESL literacy research, however, indicates that it is equally relevant for low-literate, non-English speaking adults. It is relevant first because of the difficulties that adult learners face when they try to learn English without being literate in their first language, and, second, because of the positive consequences for literacy and ESL acquisition when they start with L1 literacy classes (Gillespie and Ballering, 1992; Klassen, 1991; Rivera, 1990; Robson, 1982).

A number of studies document the difficulties of adult ESL students with minimal first language literacy proficiency. They indicate that people who are not literate in their first language are at a double disadvantage: on the one hand, ESL literacy programs often turn them away because their oral English is not adequate and, on the other hand, they often have difficulty functioning in or benefitting from ESL classes because these classes assume L1 literacy.

- Klassen (1991) found that, without first language literacy, ESL classes were virtually inaccessible to Spanish-speaking adult learners. Students in monolingual ESL classes reported that they had no idea what was going on in their classes; they responded by becoming completely silenced, making virtually no progress, or dropping out. The lack of English, in turn, affected their ability to find jobs, to support their children's schooling, and had important negative implications for their self-esteem.

- Strei (1992) found that those with little L1 literacy background and schooling (whether from Spanish-speaking or another linguistic background) are often caught in a "revolving door syndrome" in which learners start a course, fail, start again, and eventually give up.
Likewise, there is strong evidence showing that first language literacy is critical to economic and political participation, as well as to the acquisition of English literacy.

• Studies by Vargas (1986) and Wiley (1990-1991) indicate that those who are literate in their first language (even if they are not literate in English) have advantages over those who are not functionally literate in either language in terms of economic success, political participation, and employment.

For these reasons, adult educators are increasingly advocating L1 literacy instruction as a basis for ESL acquisition for adult learners with little prior education and bilingual ESL instruction for those with slightly more L1 literacy. Although these L1 literacy programs are still few and far between in the U.S., practitioners, researchers, and learners involved in them report positive results (Collingham, 1988; Gillespie and Ballering, 1992; Rivera, 1988).

The first benefit of such programs at the beginning levels is that they attract and retain previously unserved students. These include students who had been unable to participate in ESL classes because of limited first language literacy and schooling: students who report having dropped out of ESL classes come back to classes when first language literacy is offered.

• Strei (1992) reports that a pilot native language literacy program for Haitians in Palm Beach County, Florida dramatically increased their retention rate once they enrolled in ESOL classes: the drop-out rate decreased from 85% prior to the program to only 10% after it was started.

• Teachers at Centro Presente, a program in Cambridge offering bilingual ESL, report that many of their current students had previously dropped out of monolingual ESL classes.

A second benefit of using the L1 is that it reduces affective barriers to English acquisition, and thus allows for more rapid progress.

• Hemmendinger (1987) found that a bilingual approach to ESL for nonliterate Hmong refugees was more effective than monolingual ESL; students who had made almost no progress in 2 to 3 years of monolingual survival ESL classes, made rapid progress once a Freirean bilingual approach was introduced. She attributes this in part to the fact that the latter approach allowed language and culture shock to be reduced.
D’Annunzio (1991) reports that nonliterate Cambodians made rapid gains in ESL in a program involving “pedagogically unsophisticated” bilingual tutors. Despite a relatively short total instructional time, highly significant results were attained in speaking, reading, and vocabulary, as indicated by pre- and post-test scores on a number of standardized tests, portfolio analysis, and ongoing informal assessment.

Teachers at Centro Presente report that use of the L1 naturally gives way to increasing use of English. They claim that because students don't just start by thinking in the L2, allowing for the exploration of ideas in the L1 supports a gradual, developmental process in which use of the L1 drops off naturally as it becomes less necessary.

Garcia’s (1991) research on effective instructional practices found that academically successful students made the transition from Spanish to English without any pressure from teachers and were able to progress systematically from writing in the native language initially to writing in English later.

A third benefit of native language literacy instruction is that it promotes a meaning-based conception of literacy among learners. Starting with the L1 reduces anxiety and enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner-centered curriculum development. Most importantly, it allows for language to be used as a meaning-making tool and for language learning to become a means of communicating ideas rather than an end in itself. As such, it is congruent with current theories of language acquisition, literacy and adult learning.

Findings from this theoretical and practical work indicate that:

• Literacy in the first language is an essential resource for the transition to second language literacy for low-literate adults.

• Where possible and as needed, native language literacy classes and bilingual transitional ESL classes should be offered for these adults.

• Knowledge of the learners’ first languages should be considered an important teaching qualification.

so what?
Why literacy teachers from the communities of the learners?

The final feature of our project which fits with a social-contextual view of literacy and a participatory approach to adult education is its focus on training people from the communities of the learners as teachers. Although the idea of hiring teachers who do not have either traditional higher education or teaching credentials may seem unusual in the U.S. context, it is not uncommon in other parts of the world.

• In the early 1960s, a classic study of Spanish literacy acquisition among Mexican Indians found that learners taught by Indians from their own community with little pedagogical training learned to read in both the vernacular and in Spanish better than did those taught by native Spanish speakers from the dominant culture with more training (Modiano, 1968).

• Many of the mass literacy campaigns of third world countries are based on the principle that people who know a little more can teach people who know a little less. International organizations like UNESCO promote the strategy of relying on these nontraditional teachers as the main way of addressing widespread illiteracy.

• In Nicaragua, for example, it was the shortage of teachers that initially prompted the campaign to train people who had themselves just learned to read and write to become literacy workers. According to Fernando Cardenal (1990), the director of the literacy campaign and a poet, this decision came really out of the pressure of not knowing at that point exactly what to do. But we put our trust in the people and the extraordinary result was that it was incredibly successful and most of these people became very good teachers. In fact, the literacy workers’ lack of traditional background was an advantage: they had shared the experiences of the learners and could say, “Look, I learned... so can you.” The literacy workers’ insecurity, lack of professionalism, and inexperience enabled them to be part of the students, helping them to overcome their fear of learning. (p. 45).

In the U.S., we would call this peer teaching; its power comes from the fact that barriers between teacher and learner are broken down.
Preliminary work in the United States suggests that this model is highly relevant for this context as well, and is particularly promising for adult native language literacy instruction. Beyond the fact that traditionally credentialed teachers may not be available (Anglo teachers may not be able to teach the L1 because they don't know it, whereas language minority teachers may opt for elementary or secondary positions because the pay is better), there are a number of reasons why community teachers are particularly suitable.

• In addition to sharing a linguistic background with learners, their shared cultural background can be a resource, enabling them to draw on culturally familiar discourse forms (e.g., fables, proverbs, rules for interaction).

• Their common cultural, political, and historical knowledge base can be integrated into learning.

• People from the communities of the learners are in a particularly good position to elicit and facilitate learning around learners' life experiences because they have shared them and can understand them. Their experience as immigrants or refugees, struggling with issues of transition to the new culture, can be a powerful tool for participatory curriculum development. Further, their own experience facing linguistic and cultural challenges enables them to act as role models for students and resources for colleagues trying to understand the issues facing language minority communities.

Several recent literacy programs and research projects provide evidence of the effectiveness of teachers from the learners' communities:

• D'Annunzio (1991) reports on a project in which Cambodians were trained to tutor ESL; he attributes much of its success to “the use of bilingual tutors who shared the students' experiences” and argues that, with brief training, bilinguals (who, in the case of this program, were “only high school graduates”) can become effective tutors and trainers of other tutors. He concludes that this model “may break the chain of reliance on heavy professional intervention” (p. 52).

• Hornberger and Hardman's (1994) study of instructional practices in a Cambodian adult ESL class and a Puerto Rican GED class corroborates the importance of shared background
between teachers and learners. In the case of the Cambodian class, they found that because the teacher herself was Cambodian, 1) the students had the option of using Khmer to respond to her questions and to help each other, 2) the teacher and students shared assumptions about the learning paradigm, and 3) classroom activities were intimately connected with learners' other life activities and cultural practices. Likewise, in the GED class, instructional activities were embedded in a cultural and institutional context that integrated and validated learners' Puerto Rican identity. Their study suggests that the reinforcement of cultural identity, made possible by the shared cultural background of learners and teachers, is critical not just for L1 literacy acquisition, but for ESL acquisition as well.

• Describing a project at the Quincy School Community Council in Boston's Chinatown, Hooper (1992) makes a powerful case for recruiting and training advanced ESL students as tutors for beginning learners. In his article, "Breaking the waiting list logjam: Training peer tutors for ESL," he reports that the project (called the Take and Give or TAG project) was designed in response to the fact that the program has over 1000 people on its waiting list who have to wait up to 4 years for a slot in the program. Students who have completed the highest level of ESL, but want to continue in the program and expand their ESL proficiency, are trained to provide home-based tutoring for students on the waiting list, utilizing a beginning ESL video series. According to Hooper, the fact that the tutor and the learner share a common first language and a common immigrant experience enhanced the model. Hooper claims TAG is working not only as an innovative solution to the waiting list logjam, but as a strategy for eradicating barriers to "empowerment, to personal and community resource development, and to self-direction and self-fulfillment...and to communication in English" (p. 4).

But what about the appropriateness of this model for ESL instruction? The notion that native speakers of English are the most qualified to teach ESL is almost axiomatic in TESOL circles. This notion rests on the assumption that linguistic competence is the single most important criteria for teaching and goes hand in hand with the assumption that English should be taught entirely monolingually. Increasingly, however, both of these assumptions are being challenged by researchers and practitioners.
• Phillipson (1992) claims that those qualities which are seen to make native speakers intrinsically better qualified as English teachers are, in fact, learned and can only be instilled through training. Moreover, he argues, nonnative speakers possess certain qualifications which native speakers may not: they have gone through “the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and...have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners” (p. 195).

• Thonis (1990) argues that anyone who teaches language minority students should possess the following qualities:
  
  • awareness of cultural differences
  • recognition of language diversity
  • understanding of the students' realities
  • sensitivity to the values of families
  • knowledge of the history and heritage of the group
  • recognition of the potential of all students
  • knowledge of second language acquisition theory
  • willingness to modify instruction as needed
  • solid understanding of curriculum imperatives students learning a second language (p. 19)

Significantly, the first six of these qualities may be more readily attributable to people from the learners' cultures than to native speakers of English. The last three are, as Phillipson says, acquired through training or education regardless of one's language background.

These arguments are presented not to discredit the skills and strengths of monolingual ESL teachers, but rather to show that bilingual teachers have qualifications which, until recently, have been virtually ignored and excluded from consideration. Being a non-native speaker of English has often been seen more as a disadvantage than as an advantage in ESL circles.

Findings from this research and practice indicates that:

• Because of their linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds, people from the communities of the learners may be particularly suited to implementing a culturally sensitive, learner-centered curriculum.

• With adequate training in curriculum development and literacy pedagogy, people from the learners' communities can be effective native language literacy and ESL instructors.
Why is this kind of project important?
What is its significance for the field?

Although there is ample theoretical and research justification for a “from the community to the community” model for adult literacy instruction, the strongest justification for this model comes from project participants themselves. Perhaps the best way to end this chapter is by summarizing their views on why this model is significant. Here is what the Mentors said about why this model is important for them as well as for Interns, learners, the sites, and the field of adult education as a whole.

for Interns and Mentors...

• It gives opportunities to immigrants and refugees who cannot afford the traditional route to getting a degree; it gives us access to training and jobs that wouldn’t otherwise be available.

• It gives us the chance to do meaningful, rather than menial, work.

• It gives us the opportunity to serve our own people while earning money at the same time.

• It gives us a sense of community with peers.

• It enables us to see people like ourselves as co-workers and to learn from our peers. It enables us to learn how to work with other people.

• It affirms our strengths and allows us to learn about ourselves.

• It demystifies the process of training and teaching others.

• It gives us a chance to learn about people from other cultures, to understand similarities and realize the extent of differences.

• It helps us build a work history and becomes a network for jobs.

• It gives us a chance to meet people and to extend acquaintances with others in the field.
for learners...

• It enables them to obtain services that would not otherwise be available, services which they thought they would not be able to get in this country.

• It gives them the chance to see people like themselves in teaching positions, as well as learning with them. It provides motivation for them.

• It enables them to change their lives for the better: they gain self-esteem and independence; they become more productive in society. It gives them a place to talk about and work on problems that they face.

• It enables them to accomplish specific goals like writing to their families, taking care of their own accounts, and so on.

for the sites...

• It enables the sites to expand services.

• It enables the sites to provide greater support to students.

• It enables the sites to provide leadership opportunities for learners.

• It increases the diversity of the teaching staff.

• It allows for greater rapport with various student populations.

• The collaboration allows for cultural sharing between sites. It enables sites to share their experiences and problems, seeing their own work in a broader context.

for the field as a whole...

• It provides a concrete process for diversifying the workforce.

• It expands the resources available to meet the need for literacy services.

• It enriches the base of cultural understanding within the field.
References


Hooper, R. 1992. Breaking the waiting list logjam: Training peer tutors for ESL. All Write News (Adult Literacy Resource Institute, Boston), 8(6), 1-4.


Ndaba, E. 1990. *I told myself I'm going to learn*. Johannesburg, South Africa: English Literacy Project.
*Need I say more: A literary magazine of adult student writings*. Boston, MA: Adult Literacy Resource Institute.