



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA: *Developing Life Long Learning*

Tierra de Oportunidad - Module 6

Access to Adult Learning

Overview

Access to education, particularly learning to speak English, is a key element in immigrants' occupational advancement. While many immigrant parents may feel that they will make whatever sacrifices are necessary on behalf of their children, research indicates that investing time in their own education may be the best way to help their children. Lifelong learning, in structured, formal learning programs, and in the full spectrum of informal social interactions is a reality all of us must accept.

Even if there are long waiting lists for entering an adult learning program, there are many alternative ways of learning and motivated adult learners can even undertake their own self-directed course of learning in virtually any field -- relying on the many resources of the Information Society. Adult education programs provide a variety of learning opportunities at no cost or at low cost. Similarly (even though Community College fees have risen dramatically), community college courses represent a tremendous bargain for people wanting to invest in developing their own potential.

Adult learners who are immigrants face formidable barriers in achieving the competencies they will need to fulfill their potential in American society -- learning a new language, new occupational skills, and the broad range of information skills required to participate in community life, to engage in meaningful social interaction, and to make use of resources that are available.

It is necessary for adult immigrant learners to understand that they will not learn to speak English in class. In class, they will learn to start speaking English but their learning must continue outside class in all facets of life -- in family life, in social interactions, on the job, and as part of community participation. To the extent that "learning English" is a metaphor for learning to function with ease and agility in U.S. society, the same process of extending learning from the initial "foot in the door" of classroom learning to non-stop lifelong learning is also a necessary one. New cultural and social skills are almost as difficult to build as are language skills. Different workplaces will, also, each have a distinctive "corporate culture" which workers will need to recognize and adapt to.

For families with children, learning with their children is one mechanism to continually absorb new language skills and information about an unfamiliar society. This learning, sometimes, may take the form of conflict as children are exposed to new points of view, values, and as they experiment with new ways of interacting and relating with their parents. The clashes that, when poorly directed, escalate into serious generational conflict can be better managed when recognized as opportunities for both children and their parents to learn how to function better in a multi-cultural society.

Basic Skills Development

This curriculum module serves to build several basic, generic skills. It will be useful for the instructor to emphasize to the students how the module and the class activities contribute to these skills.

<i>Reference skills:</i>	Using catalogs, pamphlets, newspapers, diagrams
<i>Communication skills:</i>	Discussing topics where there is difference of opinion
<i>Problem Solving:</i>	Resolving educational access problems
<i>Team work:</i>	Contributing to the group with ideas suggestions and effort
<i>Applied Numeracy:</i>	Estimating the economic value of education
<i>Resources:</i>	Planning and allocating resources for education

Teaching Points

- 1. Access to lifelong learning is necessary to achieve social and economic equity in the U.S.** The U.S. is an information society. Without the ability to gather crucial information, and analyze it thoughtfully, people will not be able to effectively confront the problems they face -- either on the job or in their lives. Everyone can learn -- if they develop the self-confidence to learn and if they demand that they get quality instruction. There are many sources of information and resources for assistance in learning and even if a classroom program is not accessible, motivated learners can learn on their own.
- 2. Adults' rights to low-cost learning opportunities irrespective of immigration status are now in question but some opportunities remain.** Most adult education programs do not require evidence of legal immigration status but community colleges are now required to request that immigrants make an effort to secure evidence of legal residency to secure low-cost tuition rates. The issue is currently being litigated. Employment training programs currently require proof of employment-authorized status. Many employment training programs have been reluctant to serve limited-English participants but job training applicants who are willing to stand up for their rights can improve their chances of becoming enrolled in an educational program.
- 3. Adults who have attended an adult education class for a number of weeks or months must understand that the difficulties they have experienced in achieving their long-term educational goals do not mean that they are bad learners.** An ESL, basic skills, or vocational education class that lasts for only a few weeks or months cannot be expected to overcome the tremendous educational gap between the skills of an adult learner with an elementary school education and the skills needed in the contemporary workplace. Adult learners must recognize that one of the most important skills they can learn in class is "learning to learn" and that one of the most important commitments they make will be to continue learning once the class is over.
- 4. Adult learners must recognize that classroom instruction needs to be supplemented by constant efforts to extend learning into the realm of everyday life. A key misconception is that complex new skills can be acquired simply by "being a good student" in class, i.e., attentive, diligent, and involved.** The skills' development process must be nurtured and recognized to take place over a period of years, not a period of days, weeks, or months. "Learning to learn" competencies include the motivation to learn from all facets of everyday life and the conceptual bridges to relate classroom learning to ongoing learning in informal contexts. Motivation is ultimately the learner's responsibility but learning why and how to extend learning beyond the classroom must be actively emphasized and practically taught by ABE and ESL instructors working with immigrant learners.

5. **Libraries, as well as public radio and television are a resource for self-education.**
Libraries in the U.S. are developing at least small collections of books, newspapers, and periodicals in Spanish. The more these community resources are used, the more they will grow. Libraries are free and are strongly committed to serving their "customers" but they are not yet used fully by immigrants, as most staffs do not speak Spanish and few books in their collections are in Spanish. California has a strong Spanish-English public radio network but no Spanish-language public television stations. In the future, there are likely to be more and more opportunities for on-line learning accessed through computer terminals.
6. **Employer-sponsored workplace learning programs provide an effective way for immigrant workers to build their English-language, mathematics, and basic skills.**
Workplace learning programs are usually initiated by employers but employees can often suggest the idea. The California Department of Education is promoting the establishment of workplace learning programs and workers can refer their employers to local adult education agencies.

Sample Learning Activities

1. Invite a Mexican or Mexican-American community leader to talk to the class about the educational challenges they faced in getting to their current position.
2. Ask each participant to discuss their long-term educational plans.
3. Estimate the value of an education based on different earnings of blue-collar workers, technical workers, and professional workers.
4. Invite a speaker from the local private industry council, an employment training provider, or community college to discuss skills training options available in the community.
5. Discuss with the class different philosophies about language learning -- e.g., Immersion, Transitional ESL, Bilingual -- and discuss their personal preferences about how best to learn a new language.
6. Help students in your class set up a cooperative learning support group of family, neighbors, or friends to continue learning after they have completed your class.
7. Discuss what class participants have learned about the U.S. from different television programs. Is the information conveyed by television programs accurate or not? If the information is not accurate, describe the inaccuracies and compare and contrast which programs are more or less accurate.
8. Survey the class to see if any class participants rely on magazines for practical information. What kind of information? What kind of information can not be found in magazines?
9. Make a list of jobs that require some forms of credential or certificate and those that do not. For which of those jobs requiring credentials or certificates, the certification could be secured through community college attendance, four-year college, or still more education?

Resources Checklist

- Local community college catalogue

- Local adult school catalogue
- Local Private Industry Council list of employment training programs
- Television section of the newspaper
- Community events section of the newspaper
- Classified Ads section of the newspaper

Commercial ESL Textbooks

- Choices: Discovering Your Community, Contemporary Books
 - Unit 1, Are You Moving?
 - Unit 6, I Checked Out This Book
- Choices: Families and Schools, Contemporary Books
 - Unit 12, I Love Being a Doctor
- Workskills, Book 2, Prentice Hall Regents
 - Unit 9, Goal Setting
 - Unit 10, Job Training and Continuing Education Book and Audiotape
- Workskills, Book 3, Prentice Hall Regents
 - Unit 10, Job Training and Continuing Education Book and Audiotape

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