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# Training Adult ESL Volunteers In College And Career Readiness Standards

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TRAINING ADULT ESL VOLUNTEERS IN COLLEGE AND  
CAREER READINESS STANDARDS

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in ESL

Hamline University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....5

    Volunteer-Led

    Classes.....7

        Differences Between Staff and Volunteer-led

    Classes.....9

        College and Career Readiness Standards.....10

        Background of Researcher.....11

        Summary.....11

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review .....13

    Education Standards.....13

    Common Core to College Readiness.....14

    English Language Arts and Literacy.....18

        Complexity.....18

        Evidence.....21

        Knowledge.....22

    Volunteer

    Teachers.....23

        Shortcomings in Volunteer

    Training.....24

	3
Impact on Students.....	26
Training	
Volunteers.....	28
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER THREE: Project Description .....	31
CCRS Lesson Plans for	
Volunteers.....	31
The Audience.....	32
The Context.....	33
Framework for Creating Lesson Plans.....	34
Rationales for the Chosen Format.....	35
Description of Project.....	36
Summary.....	36
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusions.....	36
Major Learnings.....	38
Revisiting the Literature.....	39
Project Limitations.....	40
Project Implementation and Possible Implications.....	41
Main Takeaways.....	42
Summary.....	43
REFERENCES.....	45
APPENDIX A.....	49

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Relevance of ELA/Literacy strands.....	15
Table 2 - Relevance of mathematics strands.....	16
Table 3 - Quantitative measures of text complexity.....	19
Table 4 - Level gains and post test rates.....	27
Table 5 - Key principles of communicative language teaching.....	35

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

On a Wednesday afternoon in April of 2013, I wrote an email to an Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) school in St. Paul, Minnesota expressing my interest in volunteering in one of their ESL classes. I was an undergraduate majoring in history at the time, and I was looking for a volunteer opportunity that would give me some experience in a classroom. A friend of mine was already volunteering at this school in St. Paul, and he encouraged me to apply for a volunteer position there. The following week I was asked to come in for an interview at the school. The volunteer coordinator told me a bit about the classes and different levels of students. She showed me the different classrooms, and she explained how many of these classes were led by volunteers who planned and co-taught each class together. The interview went well and I was asked to come back that Thursday evening to observe one of the classes.

I ended up co-teaching the class that night. It was an overwhelming experience. I had wanted to get teaching experience in the classroom, but I was imagining dipping my

toes in rather than getting thrown into the deep-end of the pool. My fellow volunteer co-teacher was kind, but she had only been teaching this class for about two months. We rushed to put together a lesson plan using books neither of us were familiar with while I asked questions for which she did not know the answers. The class went well considering my feelings of inadequacy. The students were friendly and seemed to enjoy getting to know new faces. If they sensed our inner havoc, they did not let on. The following weeks presented similar experiences, and after a month or two my co-teacher quit, and I was placed with a new volunteer co-teacher who now looked to me for guidance. This trial-by-fire approach to training happened to work for me. I often felt bewildered, but I loved the students I got to interact with each week, and I soon developed my own strategies for how to plan engaging lessons and present them to my class. I also was fortunate in that I had a very flexible schedule as a college student. Eventually, I was able to also start volunteering in an afternoon class with a staff teacher from whom I learned much.

This experience is what drove me to further my education in the field of ESL teaching and it is what guides this Capstone Project with the question: *how can College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?* In establishing the relevance of this question, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section establishes the current context for volunteers at my school and describes the impact volunteer-led classes have on students. The second section explores the differences between volunteer and

staff-led classes and highlights knowledge of education standards as a key difference between the two. The CCRS are briefly described in this section as well, and the idea of creating example lesson plans as a way to familiarize volunteers with CCRS concepts is introduced. The final section describes the background of the researcher and reiterates why this topic is important to the researcher.

### **Volunteer-led Classes**

The deep-end of the pool approach that was articulated above is not effective for many incoming volunteers. Many spend only a quarter term or less at the school, and even more do not have the flexible schedules to volunteer in morning or afternoon classes to co-teach with a staff teacher. Fortunately, the circumstances of new volunteers have changed since my experiences in 2013. Since then several new staff teachers have been hired, including myself. Instead of the four staff teachers there were in 2013, there are now eight staff teachers - five in the mornings and afternoons, and three in the evenings. Instead of five volunteer-led classes, there is now only one class that is led solely by volunteers. So there are now many more opportunities for volunteers to pair with staff teachers in the classroom. Volunteers also receive more support. There is a training for volunteers every quarter, and a volunteer coordinator assigned for the evening classes who can help with lesson planning and other support. The benefits of these changes especially can be seen in the morning/afternoon classes, where some volunteers have been teaching for over four years. These volunteers report positive experiences and they show great dedication to their classes. In contrast, the volunteer-led evening class is still a



struggle to fill every quarter, as volunteers often fail to show up or contact the coordinator at the last minute about their absence. These evening volunteers also are more likely to quit before their quarter long commitment is even over.

The impact of this is reflected in the experiences of students. It is already difficult to build a trusting relationship with a teacher when there are different teachers every night, but this difficulty is compounded when those teachers rarely stick around for more than a few months. It is much harder for students to build a community under these circumstances, or engage in behavior that most encourages student persistence. Data from my school proves this point: 74% of students in staff-led classes have post-tests, meaning they attend class for at least a minimum of forty hours; meanwhile, only 45% of students in volunteer-led classes have post-tests. Of the 55% of students without post-tests, around half stopped showing up to classes after less than twenty hours of instruction.

Academically, students in volunteer-led classes are at a disadvantage as well. My school tracks student progress through Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) testing, a series of assessments created by a nonprofit organization of the same name with a longstanding relationship with the U.S. Department of Education (CASAS.org, 2017). While making level gains through CASAS is only one measure of success, the gap between students in staff-led classes and volunteer-led classes is significant. While 57% of students in the staff-led Intermediate Class have made level gains in the last ten months, only 18% of students in the volunteer-led class have made similar gains. This staggering gap indicates that there is a significant disparity in the quality of instruction between staff-led classes and volunteer-led classes. While it is

perhaps unreasonable to expect that volunteers who come once a week will coordinate lessons that ultimately match the quality of those made by staff who teach every day, it is only right and responsible that something be done to try and lessen this gap.

### **Differences Between Staff and Volunteer-led Classes**

How to lessen this gap is the first question I asked myself. Hiring staff for the evening ESL intermediate class would be the easiest way, however, finding funding for additional staff is not realistic for my school or most other adult ESL schools. With that option out of the question, I had to ask what separated our volunteers from our staff teachers. The main answer to that question is time, money and training. Staff teachers teach every day of the week, and they have one to two hours of prep for each class, while volunteers usually teach once a week with less than one hour of prep. Asking a volunteer to commit to teaching four nights a week and coming two hours before class is not an option. Paying volunteers is also not an option as it would mean they would no longer be volunteers, and as I mentioned above, we do not have funding to hire another staff teacher. That leaves training.

The staff teachers at my school come from a variety of teaching backgrounds. Some have worked in K12 or postsecondary schools in the United States, others have taught English abroad, and still others have come from non-education backgrounds but had plenty of volunteer teaching experiences. Our education backgrounds have been varied as well. Some were hired with Masters in Linguistics or ESL already completed,

while others were hired with Teaching English as a Second Language (TEFL) certifications, or Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC) trainings. These MLC trainings are mandatory for volunteers who do not have any teaching experience, and most of our new volunteers have gone through these MLC trainings already. Unfortunately this has not appeared to have a significant impact on their success as volunteer teachers. What I now realize distinguishes volunteers from staff teachers, besides years of experience, is that staff teachers are all familiar with the standards and best practices for how to teach certain skills and abilities in the classroom. Recently, these standards have been organized into the CCRS for Adult Basic Education (ABE).

### **College and Career Readiness Standards**

The CCRS handbook was developed in 2013, and it was based primarily on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for K12 education from 2010. Since its inception, ABE/ESL programs throughout Minnesota have been encouraging their staff to familiarize themselves with these standards and to start implementing them. My own school has had trainings for its staff in the standards, and based on my own experiences and those of my colleagues, we have found the CCRS to be a good fit for our program. Rather than disrupting our old methods of instruction, we have found that the CCRS already aligns with what we consider to be important to teach in the classroom. Based on that, I concluded that implementing the CCRS into lesson plans for volunteers would be one way to attempt to lessen the achievement and student retention gap between volunteer and staff-led classes. I focused on the CCRS Key Shifts in English Language

Arts and Literacy standards, which emphasize regular practice with complex texts and academic language; reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational; and building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction. Building these skills in volunteer-led classes should increase student achievement and help them make level gains, which will eventually lead them into higher level classes that are led by staff teachers.

### **Background of Researcher**

This matter of volunteer-led classes being of a lower quality is important to me because I take a substantial amount of pride in my school being a welcoming place for adult ESL students of all backgrounds to come and achieve their goals. I was a volunteer teacher at this school for three years, and I have been a staff teacher there for three more. I have taught at all the ESL levels at my school and I currently teach a job skills Civics class, and a college preparation class. A great portion of my adult life has been dedicated to working at this school and improving its ESL program. The mission statement of my school is to “Support St. Paul individuals and families on their journey to a more stable and rewarding life.” If so many of these individuals are coming to our classes and quitting after only a few weeks, or staying in the same class level without moving up, then in my view, we are failing in our mission statement.

### **Summary**

In this project, I have focused on creating a series of lesson plans that implement the CCRS in an understandable and accessible manner. It is my intention that this will

give volunteers a sturdier foundation on which to teach classes on their own. This additional support and instruction should hopefully improve the experiences and capabilities of volunteers in the evening intermediate class, and more importantly, improve the time students spend in class, making it more meaningful and useful to their goals.

In Chapter One, I introduced my project by establishing the purpose, significance and need for the project. The context of the project was briefly introduced, as was the role and experience of the researcher. The guiding question was also established: *how can College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?* In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the literature relevant to methods of training volunteers, volunteer-led classes and CCRS. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the current project, including the research framework, relevant findings, intended audience, and rationale behind the specific format for the project, along with a series of CCRS compliant lesson plans that are accessible to volunteers. Chapter Four presents the conclusions and reflections, including how my ideas about teaching have been influenced and how I can apply my learning in the future.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this project is to address the question, *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?*

Pursuant to this question, the following chapter will detail a short history of standards in education and the development of the CCRS, give an overview of the English Language Arts and Literacy standards of CCRS, and then discuss the current literature available on volunteers in adult education and ESL classrooms, as well as the current theories on how best to train volunteers to succeed in those settings.

### **Education Standards**

Since 1989, a number of educational and professional organizations have worked to develop standards-based instruction for various content areas in K12 and adult education arenas. Standards-based instruction is the practice of using a set of academic standards to show educators where to focus their energies and guide instruction in their classes. Critics of standards-based instruction claim that this focus shifts classroom instruction away from individual student needs (Karlsson, 2015), but others have praised it for raising expectations of students and increasing the rigor of classroom instruction

(Pimentel, 2013). The standards that have been developed are not intended to dictate every aspect of classroom instruction; rather, they are meant to serve as a tool which educators may use to design curriculum, inform instruction, and carry-out assessment (Karlsson, 2015).

Until recently, the various academic standards developed by states have been broad in scope, and there was a lack of agreement about what skills and knowledge are necessary for students to know if they are to be ready for postsecondary education, work, and/or citizenship (Pimentel, 2013). With the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics in 2010, the discussion has been rekindled, and as of 2013, 46 states have adopted CCSS for their K12 programs (Pimentel, 2013). The CCSS aims to give states common expectations for English language arts and literacy, and mathematics so that graduating high school students across the country find themselves with the essential skills and knowledge for college and work (Conley, Drummond, de Gonzalez, Rooseboom & Stout, 2011). These aims differ from past efforts to create state standards in that the CCSS was selected purely based on empirical evidence of what employers and college admissions truly required of future employees and students (Pimentel, 2013).

### **Common Core to College Readiness**

The question of how CCSS might be applied to adult education was asked not long after its adoption by so many states. Adult educators expressed concerns that many standards on the expansive list of K12 standards from the CCSS were unnecessary for

adult students, who often come to programs with some education in their background, as well as valuable life experiences (Pimentel, 2013). Tables 1 and 2 show the results of a survey of 1,897 adult educators across the United States who were asked to rate the relevance of various ELA/literacy and mathematics categories within the CCSS. They were asked to say “yes” or “no” in answer to whether they thought a particular category was relevant to their adult students’ lives. As demonstrated in the tables, half of the categories in ELA/literacy were rated irrelevant by over two-thirds of the adult educators sampled, and all of the mathematics categories were rated irrelevant by over half of the sample (Conley et al., 2011).

*Table 1*

*Educators’ responses to the relevancy of different English Language Arts and Literacy categories in CCSS*

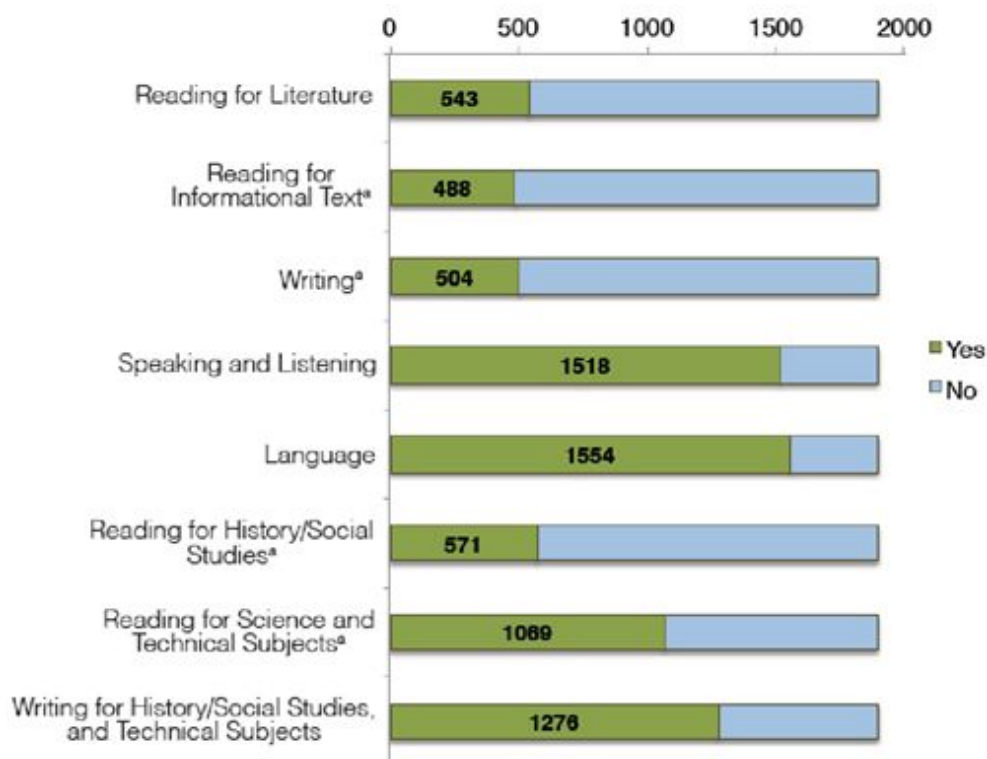
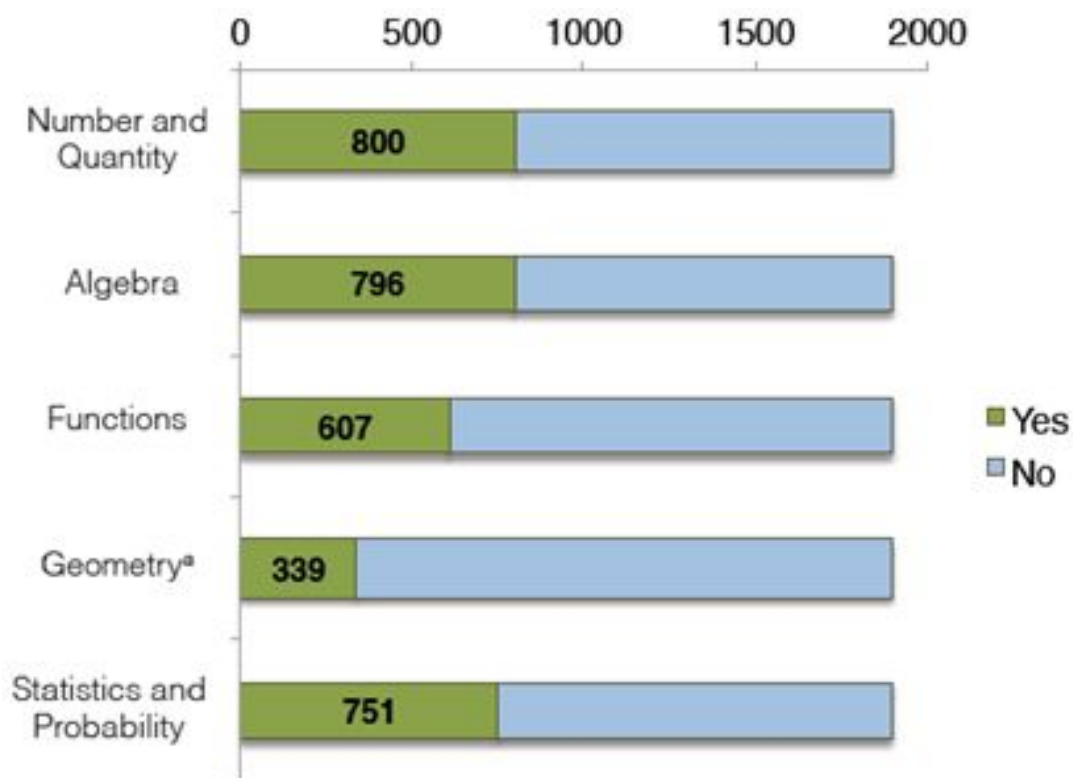




Table 2

*Educators' responses to the relevancy of different Mathematical conceptual categories in CCSS*



The time demands of the CCSS were also a concern to adult educators, whose students do not have 40 hours available in their week to dedicate to learning like K12 students (Pimentel, 2013). With work and family obligations, the average adult student participates in adult education programs for less than 100 hours in a program year (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012). This raises the question of what part of CCSS was most useful and important for adult education students. A study designed by the Educational

Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) partially answers this question. A range of postsecondary instructors were asked to rate each CCSS standard on its applicability and importance to the course they taught.

Because of the range of course categories, not every standard was found applicable. Geometry and functions, for example, were rated quite low by instructors, while non-literary reading and writing standards were rated very highly. Instructors from almost all backgrounds rated speaking and listening standards, as well as language standards, as applicable and important by a large margin (Conley et al., 2011), which indicates just how essential good instruction is within ESL adult education programs.

MPR Associates, Inc., the group that prepared the definitive report on CCRS for the U.S. Department of Education, also wanted to look at what standards from the CCSS are most useful and important for adult education students. Two panels (one for ELA/literacy, one for mathematics) were assembled to look at the CCSS with relevance to adult students in mind. The panels had representatives from a variety of fields, including adult education, community college, career and technical training, and the military. This process was not to create a completely new set of standards or to change the CCSS, but to determine what aspects of the CCSS were most relevant to adult students, and then use those for adult education, only making edits to wording when it was K12 specific. A report of their decisions was prepared for the U.S. Department of Education in 2013 (Pimentel, 2013), and has since been distributed to adult education programs throughout Minnesota as the set of standards being recommended. The CCRS

standards for Mathematics are detailed in the same report, but this paper will review only the Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, as those are most applicable to the discussion of English language learners (ELLs). This is not to say that the Mathematics Standards are not also important for ELLs, however, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **English Language Arts and Literacy**

ELA/Literacy panelists found that three key shifts highlighted by CCSS were relevant to the interests of adult students: (1) regular practice with complex texts and academic language, (2) language production grounded in evidence from texts, and (3) building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction (Pimentel, 2013).

#### **Complexity**

The importance of text complexity in relation to student success was known before the adoption of CCSS and CCRS in education programs, and some research suggests that the ability to read complex texts is the greatest predictor for student success in college and work (Pimentel, 2013). Its inclusion in the key shifts, however, has led to new research into how to define and measure text complexity (NGA, 2013). Table 3 shows the results of research into the quantitative measure of text complexity, which takes into account various aspects, such as word frequency, sentence length and text cohesion, all factors better measured through the use of computer programs because they are difficult for a human reader to evaluate effectively. Six computer programs were used to analyze the text complexity of different passages compared to student performances on standardized tests and educators' evaluations of texts. The findings were that all six

programs measured text complexity with the same reliability, and that there was a strong correlation between grade level and student performances with text difficulty. Table 3 shows how each program rates text complexity and compares the scores across programs, as well as showing how they align to grade levels (NGA, 2013). The use of one of these programs to measure text complexity is a key aspect of choosing texts to use in lessons that comply with the CCRS. For example, for an Intermediate ESL class, an instructor would run a potential text through one of these programs to see if the level of complexity aligns with levels B or C. If the instructor knows that the text contains unfamiliar concepts and ideas, then perhaps they would try to choose a text with a lower rating (B), but if they think students will be familiar with the content, then they might choose to challenge students with a higher rated text (C).

*Table 3*

*Quantitative measure of text complexity (Pimentel, 2013)*

<i>Common Core Level</i>	<i>ATOS</i>	<i>Degrees of Reading Power©</i>	<i>Flesch-Kincaid</i>	<i>The Lexile Framework©</i>	<i>Reading Maturity</i>	<i>SourceRater</i>
<i>2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> (B)</i>	<i>2.75-5.14</i>	<i>42-54</i>	<i>1.98-5.34</i>	<i>420-820</i>	<i>3.53-6.13</i>	<i>0.05-2.48</i>
<i>4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> (C)</i>	<i>4.97-7.03</i>	<i>52-60</i>	<i>4.51-7.73</i>	<i>740-1010</i>	<i>5.42-7.92</i>	<i>0.84-5.75</i>
<i>6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> (D)</i>	<i>7.00-9.98</i>	<i>57-67</i>	<i>6.51-10.34</i>	<i>925-1185</i>	<i>7.04-9.57</i>	<i>4.11-10.66</i>
<i>9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> (E)</i>	<i>9.67-12.01</i>	<i>62-72</i>	<i>8.32-12.12</i>	<i>1050-1335</i>	<i>8.41-10.81</i>	<i>9.02-13.93</i>
<i>11<sup>th</sup>-CCR (E)</i>	<i>11.20-14.10</i>	<i>67-74</i>	<i>10.34-14.2</i>	<i>1185-1385</i>	<i>9.57-12.00</i>	<i>12.30-14.50</i>

Qualitative measures for analyzing text complexity were considered as well. Aspects like structure, language conventionality and clarity, levels of meaning and purpose, and knowledge demands are all factors that only an attentive human reader would be able to accurately measure (NGA, 2013; Pimentel, 2013). Texts with low complexity by these measures, for example, would have simple and conventional structures, rely on literal, clear and conversational language, make few assumptions on the reader's background knowledge, and have a clearly stated purpose with no double meaning. A complex text may use more non-conventional structures, such as flashbacks or multiple points-of-view, use figurative or academic language, necessitate that the reader have more background knowledge, and be able to decipher deeper layers of meaning or infer less clear purposes (Pimentel, 2013).

The final measures are reader and task considerations. Knowing that both of the above measures could prove fallible in certain situations, the educator is also expected to use their professional judgment to choose texts that are well-matched to certain students or tasks. Because adults come from a variety of backgrounds and can have vast arrays of life experiences, it is not always as simple as assigning a reading based purely on what the computer program assigns as appropriate. Depending on the reader and the topic, more advanced texts may be an effective way to encourage a reluctant reader to get interested in reading. Or as Marilyn Jager Adams (2009) put it, "while no text on dinosaurs would pass a readability criterion for second graders, many second graders nonetheless read about dinosaurs with great satisfaction" (p. 29). Many level appropriate

readings for adult students are not actually content appropriate, so it is no wonder why some adult students struggle to become interested in a text.

### **Evidence**

The second key shift in ELA/Literacy standards is that production of speech and engagement with text are grounded in evidence. This means that students are not relying entirely on their experiences or prior knowledge when understanding and producing language about a text (Pimentel, 2013). A common strategy for engaging students is to have them relate their own experiences to a text, and while this is a valuable way to engage reluctant speakers and writers by making them feel more comfortable about the topic, this second shift involves students making statements grounded in textual evidence, and being able to cite where in a text they are drawing their answers from.

The ability to seek evidence within a text or multiple texts to answer questions or create arguments has been found to be an essential skill for successful postsecondary students (Conley, 2008). This standard is demonstrated with reading when a student can read closely to determine what a text says and make inferences from it, citing specific textual evidence when producing language to support their conclusions (CCR Reading Anchor 1<sup>1</sup>). This may express itself in different ways depending on the level of the class.

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<sup>1</sup> The anchors refer to different standards within each of the ELA/literacy strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language/grammar. These anchor standards identify a broad College and Career Readiness skill, and then break down how that skill is demonstrated according to a specific level, which corresponds to the K12 grading system. For instance, Reading Anchor 2 says students will be able to “determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development and summarize the key supporting details and ideas” (Pimentel, 2013, p. 15), and this is demonstrated at the 1st grade level by identifying the topic and retelling key details, while the 4th grade level

In an Intermediate ESL class, for example, students may be expected to refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says or drawing inferences from it (R.4.1).

In writing, the standards require that students be able to conduct research to answer focused questions, gather pertinent information from various sources while taking into account their credibility, and draw evidence from these sources which supports their analysis (CCR Writing Anchors 7-9). An Intermediate ESL student may be required to conduct short research projects using several sources in order to build knowledge on a topic (W.3.7), and be able to recall information from experiences or different sources, taking notes and sorting evidence into provided categories (W.3.8).

Academic speech is the focus of the standards for speaking and listening in ELA/Literacy. Students should be able to contribute to discussion with accurate and relevant information from the topics they have studied (CCR Speaking and Listening Anchor 1). Intermediate ESL students should be able to engage in a variety of discussions, including one-on-one, group and teacher led, with diverse conversation partners. They should be able to build on the ideas of others and express their own thoughts clearly, coming to discussion prepared by the materials used in class (SL.3-5.1).

### **Knowledge**

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must determine the main idea and explain how it is supported by key details, as well as summarize the text. Both level-appropriate expectations for the same anchor standard. To cite these standards, the strand, grade and anchor are listed in that order. So R.1.2 stands for Reading, Grade 1, Anchor 2, and W.5.1a stands for Writing, Grade 5, Anchor 1a (Pimentel, 2013).

The third key shift is about building knowledge in different content areas, such as science, social studies and technical subjects. Several studies have shown that knowledge in these content areas has a strong correlation with college and career success (Conley, 2008). Informational texts especially are crucial to cover in adult education programs, as they make up the majority of readings in college and workplace settings (Pimentel, 2013). Adult education programs should integrate goal-oriented reading of technical informational texts into their curriculums, and have students read to find specific information to accomplish goal-related tasks (Gillis, Jones-Moore, Haynes & Van Wig, 2016). Building knowledge through focusing on literacy in these different content areas, and placing special emphasis on comprehending informational texts, will prepare students for success whether their goals are postsecondary or moving forward in their careers.

The understanding of and ability to incorporate these three key shifts into lessons is of the utmost importance for my project, which seeks raise the standards of volunteer-led classes to those of staff-led classes by demonstrating how the CCRS can be incorporated into lesson plans. Using suitably complex texts that build knowledge in relevant content areas and assessing student comprehension of those texts with text-dependant questions is a key component of my project.

### **Volunteer Teachers**

Given the rigor of the CCRS, numerous trainings have been offered throughout the state of Minnesota in an effort to explain the standards and advise on how they can be



implemented in the classroom. Adult education instructors have been encouraged to take part in these trainings, whether through online seminars or at ABE/ESL conferences. My own program has had workshops on the CCRS for its instructors to attend. Given this information, it would seem like implementation of the CCRS in the classroom has a strong foundation, however, many classrooms are led not by staff instructors, but rather by volunteers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 42% of instructional staffing in adult education programs receiving federal funding is volunteer (Belzer, 2006; Gomez, 2012).

These volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds (Belzer, 2006), and while a growing number of volunteers are retired former teachers or undergraduate/graduate students enrolled in education programs (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2013), the majority are generally unlicensed, with limited to no training or experience in adult or ESL education (Gomez, 2012; Perry, 2013). Many of these volunteers find themselves in auxiliary roles, such as acting as a classroom aide, group leader or one-on-one tutor, but many take on the role of primary instructor. Smaller programs organized by community organization like the YMCA, libraries, community centers or religious institutions are often entirely run with volunteer instructors (Gomez, 2012). While these volunteers can come with a wide range of experiences depending on their education and professional backgrounds, and bring commitment and passion to their classes, adult and ESL programs often experience high rates of volunteer instructor turnover (Gomez, 2012; Perry, 2013).

### **Shortcomings in Volunteer Training**

Inadequate training of volunteer instructors is one of the primary weaknesses of adult education and ESL programming (Bradley, 1998). Current trainings for volunteer instructors of adult ESL programs are usually 10 to 18 hours long, and they occur before any opportunity for classroom instruction. During this training, future volunteer instructors are taught various strategies for teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as some basic lesson planning training (Gomez, 2012). Unfortunately, this is not proven to be effective. Belzer (2006) found that there was almost no resemblance between what volunteer tutors were taught and what they actually practiced with students. Indeed, other research suggested that volunteer instructors struggle to find appropriate materials, respond to reading errors or develop comprehension strategies (Ceprano, 1995). Belzer's study (2006) confirmed this. She found that almost none of the volunteers asked comprehension questions based on the reading, and no writing practice was done. A study by Roderick (2013) showed that only 20% of volunteers even mentioned lesson planning in an interview with a researcher, despite its emphasized importance in their training. One volunteer stated that she bought a book and taught straight from that, while another volunteer only mentioned lesson planning to state he never did it; he just went into each lesson and worked on whatever the students brought. Yet another study showed that the amount of training volunteers received seemed to make no difference in the level of knowledge they acquired (Zeigler et al., 2009). Instead of teaching strategies based in current pedagogical theories, another study found that

volunteers typically just used whatever teaching strategies they were exposed to as learners (Ceprano, 1995).

Volunteers themselves also expressed that trainings were inadequate. A survey at YMCA Princeton revealed only a quarter of volunteers rated the training they received as effective (Wu & Carter, 2000). In interviews with volunteers, Belzer (2006) asked what the most important influence on their teaching was, and none of the volunteers mentioned the training they received. Only two of the volunteers interviewed even mentioned ideas they learned from the training that they found useful to reading instruction. Many of the adults in these classes quit after only a few hours of instruction, while others failed to make progress despite how hard they and their tutors were trying (Belzer, 2006). One case study found that volunteers felt unprepared for the teaching they were being asked to do with adult refugees, even if they had previous teaching experiences or certifications (Perry, 2013). In a survey given to volunteers in my own program (2016), a majority of the respondents said that they wanted more support in preparing for their lessons, stating that they often felt unprepared for class. All of these volunteers had gone through a volunteer tutor training provided by an outside program, but several volunteers expressed that the training did not prepare them for the specific circumstances they found themselves in.

### **Impact on Students**

This feeling of unpreparedness is confirmed by student data, at least within my own program, as seen in Table 4. In general, the morning and afternoon classes have

larger numbers of students, so the smaller class size of the volunteer-led evening Intermediate class is not surprising. Looking at the percentages of students who have been post-tested and received a level gain shows that there is a significant achievement gap between the volunteer-led class compared to staff-led classes. Less than half of the evening Intermediate students have been post-tested, meaning that less than half of the students registered in that class made it past 40 hours of class time. This has a real negative impact on the program, since we are not able to count those students' hours toward receiving funding from the state government. In contrast, the staff-led Intermediate class has over 75% of students post-tested, and is in fact extremely close to meeting its goal of 80% post-tests. Looking at the percentage of level gains also reveals a gap. The staff-led Intermediate class has over three times as many level gains as the volunteer-led Intermediate class.

*Table 4*

*Level gains and post-test rates of the Intermediate staff-led and volunteer-led classes*

<b>Pre Test EFL</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Hours*</b>	<b>Has PostTest</b>	<b>% Post tested</b>	<b>Completed a Level</b>	<b>% Level Gain</b>
<b>Total (All classes)</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>59,712.5</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>57.5%</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>32.6%</b>
<b>Intermediate AM (staff-led)</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>4,098.3</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>77.9%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>57.1%</b>
<b>Intermediate PM (volunteer-led)</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2,767.0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18.5%</b>

Level gains are certainly not the only measure of achievement, and I would not even rate them as one of the most important measures; however, such a disparity cannot

be ignored. It also has a negative impact on students, as level gains are the main measure of when a student should move up a level in English class. In the staff-led classes, another measure is the instructor's personal assessment of the student, so if a student is struggling to make level gains, but their teacher feels they are ready, they can still move up a level. This does not happen in the volunteer-led class, since the volunteers do not get to know the students as well, and often make poor assessments of their students' levels. Thus for the volunteer-led Intermediate class, level gains are almost the only way to move up, and yet students in that class make far less level gains.

Adult students already face challenges that K12 students do not. In addition to work and family commitments that make it difficult to find time to take English or GED classes 8-10 hours a week, the programs from which they could take those classes are not always at convenient times or in convenient locations. Lack of transportation or affordable child-care are further barriers to adult students taking classes (Committee on Learning Sciences, 2012). That, in addition to volunteer instructors who are not meeting their needs, means that many adult students do not persist long enough in class to achieve the literacy skills they need (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012). While many of the challenges mentioned above would be difficult for ABE programs to address, the improvement of the quality of instruction given by volunteer instructors is one that all ABE programs can and should work toward.

### **Training Volunteers**

The clear solution to this disparity would be to hire a staff instructor for the evening volunteer-led class, but that is not currently possible due to my program's financial realities, and I expect those realities are the same for many other adult education ESL programs. This means that many adult ESL students will likely encounter a volunteer instructor at some point in their education, so it is extremely important that these volunteers receive training that better prepares them to teach. Current and previous approaches to volunteer training have clearly not been effective, and yet few studies on the subject have been done (Gomez, 2012; Perry, 2013). Those that have, tended to focus on what the volunteer learns, and not on how the students of the volunteer benefit. In these studies, "volunteers are positioned as learners or as participants in a market exchange between themselves and the organization for whom they work rather than the clients they serve" (Belzer, 2006, p. 114). In researching new methods of training volunteers, it is vital that the students in these volunteer-led classes be kept at the forefront of one's mind.

Because of the various experiences and backgrounds of volunteers, training programs often try to cover a broad spectrum of ideas and methods of instruction. However, it is the very nature of volunteers' various experiences and backgrounds that makes this "one-size-fits-all" approach ineffective (Belzer, 2006). Ideally, potential volunteers would have time to work with a staff instructor, and learn from them in a sort of apprenticeship. This method of training new teachers has seen effective results (Sinclair, Dowson & Thistleton-Martin, 2006), yet the time constraints of volunteers may make this impossible for many to manage. A "less is more" approach is suggested by

Belzer (2006), who proposed that the number of initial training hours be shortened, and replaced by hours of supervised instruction or observations of staff instructors. The volunteer would receive ongoing support from a teacher or volunteer coordinator, and have multiple opportunities to reflect on their teaching experiences with a mentor or other volunteer teachers. Research has shown that when volunteer teachers discuss their work with other volunteers, they are able to grow as teachers, increasing their insight into their beliefs about teaching and the choices they make in class (Gomez, 2012; Konopasky & Reybold, 2015). Volunteer coordinators or program staff should also find ways to support individual volunteers to self-educate, such as through professional development or social networking opportunities, as well as doing reading and research on their own (Perry, 2013).

### **Summary**

This literature review details a short history of standards in education and the development of the CCRS, gives an overview of the ELA/Literacy standards of CCRS, and then discusses the current literature available on volunteers in adult education and ESL classrooms. It ends with a summation of the current theories on how best to train volunteers to succeed in adult ESL classrooms. The purpose of this was to give context to the issues relevant to my guiding question: *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?* In Chapter Three, I will

discuss my plans to create a series of lesson plans that volunteers in my program's ABE/ESL program will use in the Intermediate Class which is volunteer-led.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Project Description**

In Chapter Two, I detailed a short history of standards in education and the development of the CCRS, gave an overview of the ELA/Literacy standards of CCRS, and then discussed the current literature available on volunteers in adult education and ESL classrooms. The chapter ended with a summation of the current theories on how best to train volunteers to succeed in adult ESL classrooms. In Chapter Three, I will propose my project, which is an answer to the question *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?*

### **CCRS Lesson Plans for Volunteers**

In Chapter Two, I examined in detail the skills and abilities that experts in the field of adult education found essential for adult students to have if they want to achieve success in postsecondary and job settings. The CCRS were developed directly from the CCSS, but narrowed in focus to suit the needs of adult students, who come to adult



education and ESL programs with a range of knowledge and abilities that K12 students do not have. The CCRS details three key shifts in ELA/Literacy instruction, and efforts have been made in the last few years in Minnesota to train instructors on these shifts so that they may implement them in the classroom. During these trainings and at professional development events, I have witnessed instructors in distress over these new standards. However, my own experiences and those of my colleagues suggest that CCRS complements nicely with what we already believe to be best teaching practices. The previous chapter also detailed the achievement gap between students within staff-led classes versus those who are in volunteer-led classes, and it also goes into methods of training volunteers, finally ending with a summation of what I believe to be the most effective means to prepare volunteers to be lead instructors in the classroom.

With that research in mind, I plan to create a series of lesson plans that demonstrate the key shifts in ELA/Literacy and comply with the CCRS to give to volunteers who lead-teach one of the ESL classes in my program. It is my belief that examples of ideal lesson plans will help inform their future lesson planning process, and that this will increase the quality of their instruction, leading to more students persisting in that class and making level gains. I will also give advice as to how these lesson plans may be used in congruence with ongoing training opportunities for volunteers in my program.

### **The Audience**

There is a wide range of volunteers who teach or co-teach in my program, both male and female, with ages across the spectrum. College students in their late teens or early twenties often come here for service opportunities, and there is also a range of retired volunteers, who have backgrounds from engineering to law to teaching at a university. Racially, volunteers are primarily white. In the evening Intermediate ESL class, which is the focus of my project because it is volunteer-led, there are currently eight volunteers, seven of whom are women and all of whom are white. Their ages range from late-20s to mid-40s, and all have at least some measure of postsecondary education. One has completed a TEFL certification, and another is a K12 teacher. The others have completed an eight hour MLC training before starting their service.

There are currently 31 students in the evening Intermediate ESL class, although only 22 of this number have attended class in the last month. Of this number, an average of about 10 students are in class at a given time. The majority of these students are Spanish speaking, in addition to one student who speaks Khmer, one who speaks Hmong, and one who speaks Tigrinya. Ages range from students in their early 20s to at least one in their 60s. The majority are in their 30s. Most of the students in this class have high school education in their backgrounds. Several have postsecondary education, several have elementary or middle school education, and two listed they had no formal schooling. All of the students have CASAS scores between 195 and 215. Most of the

students in this class are employed and work during the day, while several are homemakers who care for their children during the day.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Context**

My school's program is part of a larger organization which provides food and basic needs support, as well as other enrichment programs for the physical and mental health needs of the community. There are educational programs for early childhood, after school programs for youth and teens, and adult education programs for ESL, GED, College Readiness, Computers and Citizenship. The evening Intermediate ESL class is the focus of my project because it is the only ESL class that is not taught by staff instructors. This class runs all year, with four 1-2 week breaks interspersed. It is from 6:30pm to 8:30pm on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights. The classroom it is situated in holds up to 15 students comfortably, and if the class size grows, there are two larger classrooms that the class may be relocated to. Instructors have access to two whiteboards, a projector, two mobile computer carts, and a library of various ESL books with which to use as resources in the classroom and in planning their lessons.

### **Framework for Creating Lesson Plans**

For creating my lesson plans, I have chosen to use the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Parrish, 2004). CLT is ideal for adult students at my school who often require specific language functions in order to get by day-to-day at work and in their communities. The focus of CLT is the ability to communicate in a variety of

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<sup>2</sup> This demographic information is gathered from incoming students at intake and stored in an electronic database.

settings and a variety of ways, including verbal, non-verbal, and written (Parrish, 2004). Table 6 shows the key principles of CLT, which will inform the creation of my lesson plans. I believe these principles are most suitable for the type of environment we try to create in the classrooms of my program. Students take on active roles in furthering the conversations, and they get true to life language practice which is more useful to them in achieving their personal goals than strict lessons on grammar (Parrish, 2004).

*Table 5*

*Key principles of communicative language teaching (Parrish, 2004)*

<b>Key Principles of Communicative Language Teaching</b>
● The goal of instruction is learning to communicate effectively and appropriately
● Instruction is contextualized and meaning-based
● Authentic materials are incorporated from the start
● Repetition and drilling are used minimally
● Learner interaction is maximized; the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning
● Fluency is emphasized over accuracy
● Errors are viewed as evidence of learning

### **Rationale for the Chosen Format**

I chose to create lesson plans as a way to encourage volunteers to integrate CCRS standards into their instruction because I felt that a real demonstration of how the standards can be applied would be the most useful means of getting volunteers to

understand instead of speaking of the CCRS in the abstract. The lesson plans themselves will comply with CCRS, but they will not use any of the technical jargon which may feel alienating to volunteers who do not have the pedagogical background to speak on such things with familiarity. Appendix A shows the lesson plan template I will use for my lessons.

While these lesson plans will be the focus of my project, in advising my program on how to use them, I would stress that they remember Belzer's "less is more" approach (2006). I do not plan on giving volunteers a stack of lesson plans and leaving them to figure it out on their own, nor do I plan on having one training session in which I demonstrate a lesson or discuss in depth the contents of the lesson plans. Rather, I will follow current methods about volunteer training which suggest that it be done in a more on-going fashion, with opportunities for reflection with their peers and staff-instructors in the program (Belzer, 2006; Gomez, 2012; Konopasky & Reybold, 2015; Perry, 2013).

### **Description of Project**

I have created lesson plans based around a work unit for the Intermediate class. A typical unit from the curriculum is two weeks, and since the Intermediate class is Monday through Thursday, that there are a total of eight lesson plans for lessons that will be two hours each. This two-week unit is taken directly from the Intermediate curriculum at my school, and centers around the theme of jobs as a guiding topic. Week 1 focuses on various jobs and their related skills and requirements, and highlight the modal verbs can, must and should. Week 2 focuses on the job interview process and highlight the future

tense. All of the materials used in creating these lessons are the actual materials that my school provides for instructors, both staff and volunteer, to use in class. I have attempted to not create my own materials for these lessons, as this is not an option that many volunteers feel comfortable doing or have adequate time to do. For any that I have created, I describe how they came to be created to demonstrate how easily replicable they are.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Three, I provided a detailed description of my project, including the research, framework, relevant findings, intended audience, rationale for the project format, all of which are intended to answer my guiding question: *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?*

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Conclusions**

In the previous chapter, I detailed the research framework of my project, discussed the relevant findings, described my intended audience and the reason for my project's format. Finally, I described my project in detail, and how it was meant to address my guiding question: *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?* In Chapter Four, I will reflect on my experiences creating these lesson plans, detail my plans for using this project moving forward, as well as discuss some possible implications on future volunteer trainings.

### **Major Learnings**

When I first started my program at Hamline, it was with the expectation that I would eventually be completing a Capstone Thesis. I had no idea what kind of research I wanted to do for this, and I hoped that an idea would come to me as I approached the end of my program. When I learned of the Capstone Project, I was thrilled, because it seemed like this option would be something I could actually apply to what I am doing professionally, rather than just theoretically. The availability of this new option caused me to really look closely at my program and examine areas that could be improved. I had been aware of the discrepancies between staff-led and volunteer-led classes as this was something that my colleagues and I frequently discussed, but this was not an area that I put serious thought into improving myself because of the time it would take. With the option of creating a Capstone Project now available to me, this subject seemed like it would be the most promising.

As I began taking a closer look at the data from the volunteer-led class, I was surprised by the actual class by class breakdowns of attendance numbers and level-gains. I would have predicted that the volunteer-led class would have lower numbers, but I would not have predicted that they would be so significant. This made me more determined that my program do better in training and supporting volunteers in that class for the sake of the students. I discussed with my colleagues what they thought would be most useful to help support volunteer instructors, and we eventually agreed that a series of lesson plans based on our curriculum would be helpful to serve as examples for how



volunteers could use the objectives and materials to create engaging and effective lesson plans.

### **Revisiting the Literature**

In doing research on this topic, I found that the biggest influence on my Capstone Project came from the research done about the CCRS, mainly from the CCRS handbook which details all of the standards (Pimentel, 2013). While my coverage of the standards was only a small fraction of Chapter Two, the familiarity I gained of them through my research was invaluable during the creation of my lesson plans. I had a general familiarity with the CCRS before taking it on as a facet of my capstone project, but I was not as informed as I would have liked to be. I would have said before this project that lessons I created would comply with the CCRS, but now I feel confident in showing exactly how they comply. While the explicit teaching of the CCRS to volunteers is not a part of my project, having a rigorous/intimate understanding of the standards was necessary in completing the lesson plans that will serve as models for what volunteers should try to do when creating their own lesson plans.

Belzer's research into effective training methods for volunteers (2006) was another major influence on my project, mainly in how I plan to implement it in my program. Through Belzer's research, I learned of many of the inadequacies in volunteer trainings; the main one being how training is often front-loaded, with volunteers being left to their own devices for the remainder of their service. My program already does some promising work in this regard. Rather than just having our volunteers receive

training before they start teaching, my program holds quarterly volunteer trainings, and recently, the manager of my program has started observing volunteers to evaluate their instruction and give feedback. Both of these efforts are recommended by Belzer as an effective method for training volunteers, and it is my hope that my project can be incorporated into these trainings and perhaps with some mentoring for the volunteers by my program manager.

### **Project Limitations**

Belzer's research is also what shows the limitations of my project. On its own, my project is just another document for volunteers to look at. It may help volunteers to just look at sample lesson plans, but it may also only encourage volunteers to follow a formula for creating lesson plans without actually teaching them to effectively engage with the materials available. My project will be most effective when it is paired with an in-person training and a live demonstration of the lesson planning process. Once my project has been implemented and I have had a chance to observe how the trainings go, and how volunteers react to the document, I expect that I will see additional limitations.

### **Project Implementation and Possible Implications**

I think there is potential for this project to grow at my school. I will be working with my colleagues to introduce my project to volunteers at our next volunteer training. I plan on presenting the lesson plans to the volunteers, and then walking volunteers through the creation of one of the lesson plans, showing them the process of taking objectives and materials from the curriculum and turning those into one cohesive lesson.

The lesson plans will be kept in a location accessible to volunteers so that they can use them as a resource/example when they choose.

Depending on the success of this training and feedback from volunteers, I think there is potential to expand on the sample lesson plans and create more based on different topics, and using different activities. Using these in congruence with trainings will hopefully help volunteers grow more comfortable and confident with the lesson planning process and improve the lessons they teach in class. Another idea for presenting the project to volunteers would be working with them to create a lesson plan from scratch using the objectives and materials from a day in the curriculum.

Finally, I want to work with our volunteer coordinator to introduce incoming volunteers to the sample lesson plans and potentially do an orientation with incoming volunteers to show how these lessons can be created. Since volunteers are continually joining and leaving the program, my hope is for this project to become a regular part of their intake, as well as something they are exposed to through future trainings. This could be a major benefit to my program, and perhaps others if they adopt a similar model. Because of the realities of ABE/ESL education, volunteer-led classes will likely continue to be a reality. If this project helps these volunteers create their own lesson plans more effectively, then my hope is that all the students who are in those volunteer-led classes will experience a positive impact.

### **Main Takeaways**

In doing the research and creating this project, I have come to appreciate the difficulty of managing a truly effective cohort of volunteer-instructors. The amount of

training necessary to help volunteers succeed in the classroom is made more difficult by the fact that volunteers are continuously joining and leaving the program. Only one class at my school is entirely volunteer-led, and there is turnover every quarter. For programs that rely more on volunteers, this must be even more of a struggle.

I have also come to see that volunteer training must be an on-going and involved process. While many programs require that volunteers go through trainings before starting their service, all of the literature supports the need to periodically reinforce this training with additional workshops and mentorship opportunities with more experienced instructors.

Finally, I now understand how much a good curriculum can impact the quality of a lesson plan. My school has a curriculum lead who works on curricula for every class each quarter. This project would not have been possible if the Intermediate curriculum did not exist. Instead, I would likely have created a curriculum for that class instead of the lesson plans. Because of the work that the curriculum lead does, all of the instructors at my school, both staff and volunteers, have a strong foundation of objectives and suggested materials with which to work.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four began with a reflection on my experiences creating a project that addressed the question of *how can CCRS be incorporated into lesson plans for an adult ESL intermediate volunteer-led class so that students may benefit from the same standards of instruction that staff-led classes follow?* I described what I have learned through the Capstone process, reflected on what aspects of my research came to have the

most influence on my project, and finally discussed some of the limitations of my project. The second section described my plan for using my project going forward and some possible implications that it might have on my program in the future, as well as reflects on some of the main takeaways of my experience creating this project.

The effectiveness of the project I have created has yet to be determined. While my colleagues and I remain optimistic about its use in our program going forward, we await feedback from volunteers that will come after the next volunteer training. Furthermore, the long-term benefits will only be seen after volunteers have had some time to engage with the lesson plans themselves. Perhaps in the future we will be able to see student persistence in the volunteer-led class increase, along with student level-gains.

The area of training volunteer-instructors is very under-researched, so there is a lot of opportunity for researchers to look into what kinds of trainings work most effectively. In my own program, we will continue to look for new ideas for what we can do to improve the quality of instruction that comes from our volunteers.

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## APPENDIX A

Lesson Plan

Week:

Day:

**Objectives:**

**SWBAT...**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**Time Frame:**

**Materials Needed:**

**Assessment:**

<b>Lesson Phases</b>