



**Framework for Quality Professional Development for  
Practitioners Working With Adult English Language Learners**  
Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Network  
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**Introduction**

The United States is experiencing a growing immigrant population across the country, with new immigrant populations settling in states that had limited numbers of immigrants twenty years ago. As a result, many adult education programs are working with new populations of adult learners who need to learn English. Given the labor market demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, these adult educators need to prepare English language learners to transition to postsecondary education and/or employment. There is a need for a strong workforce of trained and knowledgeable practitioners who can work effectively with adults learning English and facilitate these transitions. A framework is needed to guide the development of high quality professional development opportunities for practitioners working with adult English language learners. (See Appendix II for background on the need for this framework.) This document outlines the components of such a framework. The framework can be used by practitioners across the United States to plan, implement, and evaluate professional development for practitioners working with adult English language learners at the state and program levels.

The framework is based, in part, on *An Environmental Scan of Adult Numeracy Professional Development Initiatives and Practices* developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR; Sherman, Safford-Ramus, Hector-Mason, Condelli, Olinger, & Jani, 2006). AIR's environmental scan of professional development in adult numeracy education resulted in the following essential and desirable features of professional development in adult education. Professional development:

- Occurs over time and is not a “one-shot” activity;
- Is built on activities that help instructors advance their own understanding of the subject matter and the ways adults learn this subject matter;
- Helps instructors connect content and materials to real-world situations;
- Reflects the research on how adults learn;
- Reflects national or state standards;
- Is designed for instructors from adult education programs;
- Contains materials that accommodate different learner backgrounds with the subject matter;
- Includes an evaluation component to appraise change in instructor knowledge and practice;

- Incorporates an affective factor intervention (e.g. study skills, time management, reduction in anxiety); and
- Uses appropriate technology to prepare and support participants before, during, and after the intervention.

In addition to the features outlined by AIR, this framework is also informed by professional development frameworks developed by professional associations, research from peer-reviewed publications in adult education journals and relevant K-12 journals, and other relevant publications that focus on professionalization of practitioners working with adult English language learners. (See Appendix III for the list of references that inform this framework.)

### **Purpose and Uses of the Framework**

This framework focuses on the knowledge and skills that practitioners (teachers and administrators) working with adult English language learners need in order to work effectively with the learners in their programs, and on the professional development systems and processes that need to be put in place so that practitioners can acquire this knowledge and these skills. State- and program-level administrators, professional developers, teacher trainers, and teachers can use the framework as they seek to improve instruction and, ultimately, learner progress through a systematic, coherent, and sustainable professional development effort. This process can enhance the design of professional development opportunities, which can in turn improve instructional quality, practitioner responses to learner needs, and learners' progress. The desired outcome is that states will have a workforce of trained, knowledgeable practitioners who can respond to the needs of adult English language learners through high quality evidence-based practice.

The framework has three components:

- The *content* that practitioners need to be successful working with adult English language learners;
- The *process* for planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development for these practitioners; and
- The *context* in which these practitioners work and the professional development process is provided. (See Appendix 1 for a diagram of the framework.)

Each of these components, with its specific elements, is listed below. The elements that are on AIR's list of features of high quality professional development are designated with an asterisk (\*). (Each element listed has a space to mark elements that will be focused on [with an X] or to determine the order in which they will be addressed [with a number].)

## Framework for Quality Professional Development

### I. Professional Development Content

The content of professional development focuses on the knowledge that practitioners (teachers and administrators) need in order to work effectively with the adult English language learners in their programs.

The content of professional development should differentiate between *received knowledge* (knowledge typically provided through workshops or classes is foundational in nature and draws from the established tenants of the field) and *constructed knowledge* (knowledge created by or among practitioners through practice and focused reflection; it may draw from received knowledge as well as teaching experiences and beliefs) and integrates the two. There is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between received knowledge and constructed knowledge. (Borg, 2006; Crandall, 1993, 2000; Day, 1991; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998, 2004; Vygotsky, 1986; Yates & Muchisky, 2003). Therefore, knowledge received in professional development sessions has an impact on program design and delivery and on teaching and learning in classrooms, and knowledge constructed in classrooms and programs influences what practitioners need to receive next in professional development sessions.

For example, teachers and tutors can be presented with the definition of “interlanguage” in a professional development workshop: Interlanguage refers to the intermediate patterns of language use between the target language (English) and the learner’s first language (Selinker, 1972; Ellis, 2000). In moving from the native language to the target language, learners make hypotheses about how a language works. These hypotheses are part of the learner’s interlanguage. Learners will produce forms because they may have a faulty hypothesis about the target language at this stage of learning (Dulay & Burt, 1972, 1974a, 1974b, 1976; Ellis, 2000). For example, learners may make all past tense forms end in the letters “ed,” even those that are irregular verbs, such as “went.” If a teacher sees a pattern in the forms the learner is producing, as putting an “ed” on every verb to make it past tense, then the teacher can deduce that the learner has a faulty hypothesis about English. Teaching can strategically address this problem.

Teachers and tutors can grasp the concept of interlanguage and how it affects a learner’s movement towards producing correct target language forms. However, if they are to come to a deeper knowledge of what interlanguage is and how to benefit from this knowledge in their teaching, they need to apply this knowledge to their own students. After a training in which teachers and tutors receive this knowledge, they are then given an assignment to construct this knowledge in light of their own students’ learning. They may be asked to analyze several pieces of student writing for interlanguage patterns and ascertain if there are consistencies in the forms used and determine what hypotheses the learners may have about English. Then they can detail what they would teach to lead the learners toward a correct hypothesis about the language. Through this activity analyzing their own students’ writing, they are constructing their knowledge about interlanguage.

In future professional development sessions, teachers can discuss what they have learned and obtain more information about this topic.

In working with adult English language learners, the knowledge that practitioners both need to receive and construct includes:

\_\_ The processes of second language acquisition for adult learners (e.g., interlanguage, the impact of native language proficiency on second language acquisition, stages of acquisition) (Dulay & Burt, 1972, 1974a, 1974b, 1976; Ellis, 2000; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Florez & Burt, 2001; Muchisky & Yates, 2003; Yates & Muchisky, 2004)

\_\_ The processes of learning language components (e.g., sound/symbol correspondence, grammar, vocabulary) (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Muchisky & Yates, 2003; Yates & Muchisky, 2004)

\_\_ The types and impact of native language literacy on English language and literacy learning (e.g., nonliterate, literate in a non-alphabetic script, literate in a Roman alphabetic script) (Birch, 2002; Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003; Hilferty, 1996; Huntley, 1992; Strucker, 2002)

\_\_ Affective factors that can influence adult learning (e.g., study skills, time management, reduced anxiety, increased confidence)\* (Fillmore & Snow, 2002, Florez & Burt, 2001; Gee, 2004; Hawkins, 2004; Haynes, 2005)

\_\_ Cultural background of learners and its impact on classroom learning (e.g., mixed gender classes and groupings, cultural conceptions of learning and teaching a language) (Gee, 2004; Hawkins, 2004; Haynes, 2005; Lee, 2002)

\_\_ Evidence-based principles and instructional strategies for teaching adults learning English (e.g., direct method, communicative language learning, project-based learning) (Brown, 2000; Hall & Hewings, 2001)

\_\_ Appropriate uses of technology to support adult learners before, during, and after instruction\* (e.g., guided practice, communicative practice, application of language skills) (Chapelle, 2003; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003)

## **II. Professional Development Process**

The professional development process includes planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development. This cyclical process helps to ensure that professional development is planned in response to practitioners' needs and that experience and feedback guide the design and planning of subsequent activities.

## *Planning*

\_\_\_ The content planned is designed for practitioners working in adult education programs.\* (AALPD, in press; Early & Bob, 2004; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003)

\_\_\_ The content planned is responsive to practitioners' assessed needs.(Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kutner et al., 1997)

\_\_\_ The content planned reflects requirements in national and state program, content, and teacher standards.\* (American Federation of Teachers, 2002)

\_\_\_ The content planned reflects requirements in state and federal policy directives. (AALPD, n.d.; Early & Bobb, 2004; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003)

\_\_\_ The content of professional development, and the ways that it is delivered to and applied by practitioners is shaped by data. (Fullan, 2007; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kutner et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2003)

\_\_\_ The content of professional development is planned by a team of practitioners (teachers, administrators, and professional developers). (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; Corley, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Joyce & Showers, 2002; NCTE, 2006; Senge, 1990,; Smith & Rowley, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004)

## *Implementing*

\_\_\_ The presentation of content reflects research on how adults learn.\* (AALPD, in press; Early & Bob, 2004; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003)

\_\_\_ The presentation of content accommodates different participant backgrounds covering the breadth of topics needed by new practitioners and the depth of knowledge needed by more experienced practitioners.\* (American Federation of Teachers, 2002)

\_\_\_ The professional development program uses technology to support participants before, during, and after the professional development sessions.\* (Dede, 2006; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003)

\_\_\_ Professional development sessions are not one-shot but rather are followed up by ongoing opportunities for reflection and practice.\* (Fullan, 2007; Garet et al., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007)

\_\_\_ Opportunities are provided to learn and apply content occur over time and are not confined to one-shot activities.\* (Fullan, 2007; Garet et al., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007)

\_\_ Opportunities include activities that help practitioners advance their own understanding of the subject matter presented.\* (Farrell, 2004; Garet, et al., 2001; Richards & Lockhart, 1996)

\_\_ Opportunities help practitioners connect content and materials presented with the real-world situations in which they work.\* (Borg, 2006; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998, 2004)

### *Evaluating*

\_\_ Evaluation activities document the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the professional development activities. (AALPD, in press; Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002; NCTE, 2006)

\_\_ Evaluation activities are designed to document changes in teacher knowledge, skills, and practice\* (received and constructed knowledge). (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002)

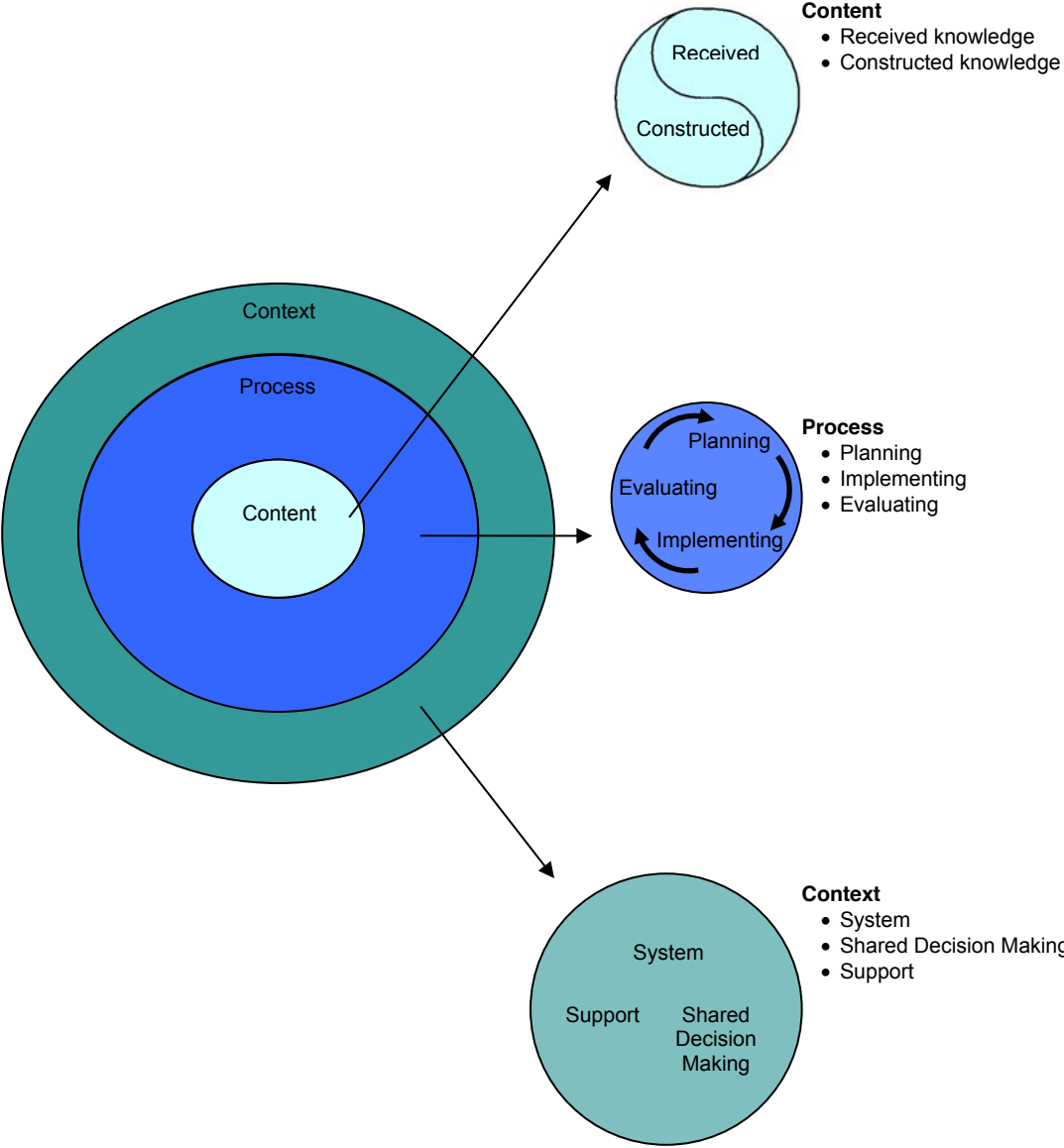
\_\_ Evidence of change in practitioners' knowledge, skills, and practice is collected in a variety of ways and at different intervals in time. (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Garet et al., 2001)

### **III. Professional Development Context**

The context in which professional development is carried out provides the basis of and support for professional development that is coherent, systematic, and sustainable. Professional development is carried out within larger national, state, and local contexts that include immigration trends, legal requirements, and education policies and regulations. These elements of the context, while significant, cannot always be controlled. At the same time, the aspects of the context that can be controlled consist of three broad areas:

- A system for professional development: The system may include the personnel and processes to guide and deliver professional development for teachers and administrators who work with adult English language learners. It may include a mission and guiding principles, a person or team to manage professional development, trainers and professional developers, and a paid and volunteer workforce to provide for the educational needs of adult English language learning population.
- A process through which shared decision making occurs in the system: This may include a team to analyze patterns in learner and practitioner data, prioritize needs for professional development, and systematically plan ways to address those needs.
- Support for the professional development system: This may include an ongoing fiscal commitment to providing professional development, incentives for teachers and administrators to take part in it, and working conditions that ensure opportunities for and access to it.

**Appendix I.**  
**Diagram of the CAELA Network**  
**Quality Professional Development Framework**



## **Appendix II. Background on the Need for Quality Professional Development in Adult Education**

There has been interest in adult education for many years in teacher quality, effective instruction, and the impact of these on learner progress (see, e.g., National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), U.S. Department of Education plays a leadership role in providing resources to enhance teacher quality and guide the improvement of adult education programs. One area of focus is professional development for practitioners working with adults learning English. This focus generated the development of this framework. The framework addresses the need to facilitate learner progress through and beyond programs, and the resulting need for high quality adult education practitioners and professional development programs for them.

### *A growing immigrant population*

During the past 20 years, the immigrant population in the United States has continued to grow. Between 2002 and 2006, the immigration rate averaged 1.8 million per year (Meissner, Myers, Papademetriou, & Fix, 2006). In 2005, immigrants comprised over 12% of U.S. residents and 15% of the workforce (Migration Policy Institute, 2007a, 2007b). These population increases have not been evenly distributed across states. Instead of settling in large, urban centers, as in the past, many immigrants are now settling in states with employment opportunities in construction, industry, and tourism (Singer & Wilson, 2006). As a result, many states are experiencing record increases in immigrant populations (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002; McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007). For example, from 2000 to 2005, 14 states (including Arkansas, Georgia, Utah, and the Carolinas) experienced a 30% or greater increase in foreign-born populations (Jensen, 2006; Kochhar, 2006).

### *Learner progress*

In addition to increases in the adult English language learner population, there is also increased emphasis in programs on learner progress through and beyond adult education programs, into work opportunities and academic programs of study (e.g., Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007; Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Mathews-Aydinli, 2006). Thus there is a growing need for professional development that helps practitioners prepare adult learners to progress to higher language, literacy, and academic levels and to better work opportunities and further academic study.

### *A need for high quality adult education programs and practitioners*

According to the Workforce Investment Act (1998), national leadership activities, including professional development, need to be designed and implemented to improve and enhance the quality of adult education and literacy programs. Well-qualified teachers are the most important factor in improving student learning, raising student achievement, and helping students progress through programs (according to the U. S. Department of Education's Teacher-to-Teacher initiative, 2007, focused on K-12 teachers; see also research in Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2005; Sanders



& Rivers, 1993; Whitehurst, 2002). While many teachers are prepared to work effectively with adult immigrants, others, especially in states only recently experiencing increased adult English language learner enrollments, may not have extensive background in language teaching or experience with teaching adults learning English (Crandall, 1993, 2000; Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008; Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007). In addition to teaching English as a second language, teachers also need to help students understand cultural aspects of life in the United States, be prepared for additional responsibilities at work, and make smooth transitions to subsequent education (Haynes, 2005; McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007). In these cases, professional development is needed. "Both professional educational organizations and federal and state legislative bodies view professional development as essential . . . and are more invested in assuring that teachers have ongoing opportunities to learn as an integral part of their practice" (Rosemary, Roskos, & Landreth, 2007, p.7).

Teachers are not the only practitioners in need of professional development. Administrators who are designing and implementing programs for adult English language learners, and volunteers working with this population, also need professional development on topics such as second language acquisition, cultural differences, and English language teaching methods. A system for professional development that is responsive to teachers', administrators', volunteers', and other practitioners' needs may enable practitioners to meet the needs of adult English language learners more systematically and help them to progress through NRS levels and transition to work and advanced education opportunities (AALPD, n.d.; Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001; Brancato, 2003; Fullan, 2007).

The majority of adult education practitioners, including those working with English language learners, receive much of their preparation through in-service and on-the-job-training rather than through extensive pre-service training (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). However, practitioners are often part-time and not consistently funded to participate in professional development activities (Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008; Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Working to overcome these challenges, adult education programs and state agencies are designing professional development opportunities to increase practitioners' knowledge and skills. This framework is designed to help guide the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating these opportunities.

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