

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ACCULTURATION EFFORTS FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN MINNESOTA

A report prepared for The McKnight Foundation
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March 2003

“It’s ironic that we allow native speakers of English at least 12 years to obtain basic skills and we expect immigrants and refugees, many of whom have little or no formal education, to get that in less than a year.”
— Interviewee

INTRODUCTION

During the last quarter of the 20th century, immigration to the United States became increasingly diverse. Regardless of the status under which immigrants arrive in this country, the vast majority comes to build a better life. Some new Americans are able to carefully plan their journey to America seeking economic and other opportunities that may not exist in their country. Some come into the country with proper documents while others enter without legal documentation. Some arrive because of fear of political persecution, forcing them to abandon their familiar surroundings. While some new Americans are highly skilled individuals with advanced degrees, there are thousands from war-torn regions who have little or no formal education.

Although the State of Minnesota does not have nearly as many immigrants as coastal states, it has seen an increase in the number of foreign-born residents during the last decade. While immigrants and refugees may initially resettle in other parts of the country, Minnesota has become a popular destination for second migration. The state is home to the highest number of Somali refugees and the second highest number of Hmong refugees. Some move here to reunite with family members while others seek employment opportunities. When immigrant and refugee families arrive in America, their children attend school and immediately learn how to speak English. As a result, they learn about the many aspects of American culture. Parents, on the other hand, are often limited in opportunities to interact with Americans. As children become proficient in English and have more knowledge of the different systems, parents are often at a disadvantage in their role.

The purpose of this report is to examine what is available in Minnesota to help new Americans learn English and the extent to which language classes also incorporate acculturation skills and activities. The McKnight Foundation is interested in understanding how immigrant and refugee parents acquire language and acculturation skills to complement their own cultural parenting values and practices so that they can be more effective parents in their new country. The

Foundation believes that parents have the responsibility for nurturing their children. In order for immigrant and refugee parents to help their children, they need to be empowered with adequate tools to complement and support their own parenting skills. Often, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes may be the first and only contact immigrant and refugee adults have with Americans. The Foundation's overall goal is to help refugee and immigrant families integrate/assimilate into their new home while preserving their family strength and keeping the family intact.

Within this context, there are two underlying values which the Foundation holds: 1) learning English is an additional tool for parents to have, although it is not to be confused with "English as an official language" and 2) acculturation is meant to help parents understand the context in which they are raising their children and is not about immigrants and refugees rejecting their own history or culture. Five specific questions were raised by the Foundation:

- What are the various purposes of English learning?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches to learning English and/or acculturation, and is there a coherent system?
- What are the funding sources?
- What are the gaps?
- What possible role can McKnight play?

There are seven sections in this report. The first describes the methodology used to gather data. The second section provides an overview of the foreign-born population in Minnesota that is useful in understanding current English language needs. The third section includes a literature review of adult ESL practices. The fourth section provides an overview of funding for English language services. The fifth section discusses the findings from interviews with key informants and survey responses from sample ESL programs throughout the state. The sixth section outlines recommendations and the seventh section is the conclusion.

This report is based on three main source of information:

1. Review of adult ESL literature and documents pertaining to immigrants and refugees;
2. Interviews with key informants; and
3. Survey responses.

I. METHODOLOGY

In July 2002, The McKnight Foundation contracted Chia Youyee Vang of CHIA Consulting Inc., to explore services available throughout the state to help immigrant and refugee parents acquire language skills and learn about American culture. A literature review was conducted to obtain best practices in the field of adult ESL through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database.¹

¹ ERIC is a nationwide information network that acquires, catalogs, summarizes, and provides access to educational information from all sources.

In collaboration with Foundation staff, the consultant developed an interview protocol for key informants in the field and a survey using the same questions to gather information from a sample of ESL providers throughout the state.² Surveys were sent to 25 people and structured interviews were conducted with key informants from 16 organizations.³ Informal conversations with many service providers working with immigrants and refugees also took place. All data was collected during July and August 2002. Overall, this report has been influenced by the comments of about 50 people in the field.

II. FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS IN MINNESOTA

To understand the depth of the English language needs in Minnesota requires a broader understanding of U.S. immigration policies and procedures, and the major political events around the world that have helped shape the current situation in Minnesota as well as the rest of the country. Historically, the United States has always had a significant number of foreign-born residents. Since the start of this country, immigration policies have excluded persons of particular backgrounds depending on U.S. interests in different parts of the world.⁴ More recently, doors have opened up to many regions of the world that have not had as much access in the past. This is reflected in the 2000 Census count of the U.S. foreign-born population.

According to the 2000 Census, the number of foreign-born residents in the U.S. was 28 million, which is 12% of the total U.S. population. Seventy percent (70%) of the nation's foreign-born population is concentrated in six states: California (31%), New York (13%), Florida (10%), Texas (8%), New Jersey (4%) and Illinois (4%). Large immigrant states such as Florida saw the percentage of foreign-born residents increase more than 50%. Although in 1990 Minnesota's foreign-born residents were only 2.6% of the population, this doubled in 2000 to 5.3% of the state's 4.9 million population. Despite major efforts to ensure accurate counts in communities of color and new American communities during the 2000 Census, many community leaders felt that the counts were lower than actual. Of those counted, the 2000 Census found that 260,463 of Minnesota's residents were born in another part of the world, including:

- 105,153 from Asia;
- 62,556 from Latin America;
- 43,652 from Europe; and
- 34,469 from Africa.

The U.S. refugee admissions throughout the 1980s were principally from Indochina, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. In addition, asylees from Central America arrived in the U.S. in increasing numbers. The refugee population changed again in the 1990s. The Gulf War resulted in many Iraqi and Kurds fleeing their war-torn countries. Somalis, Eritreans, and Ethiopians fled fighting in the Horn of Africa. Bosnians, Croatians, and Serbs fled war in the former Yugoslavia.

² See Appendix A for data collection instrument.

³ See Appendix B for a list of interviewees.

⁴ See Appendix C for an overview of U.S. immigration.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW OF ADULT ESL PRACTICES

As the numbers of persons seeking protection from persecution increased and safety from violence became a more urgent need in so many parts of the world, many cities across America saw an influx of new Americans who did not fit the profiles of immigrants in the past. As local communities work to help new Americans integrate into American society, they are faced with the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of the newcomers. A review of the literature on adult ESL services reveals many obstacles facing practitioners and learners. Often, adults with limited English proficiency enroll in classes to improve their English skills, to help obtain employment or to get promoted on their jobs. ESL classes are also taken to obtain citizenship, assist their children with schoolwork, and increase their own confidence and self-esteem as family and community members (Brod, 1995). Essentially, learners come to class to learn English and strengthen their literacy skills so they can create a better life for themselves and for their children. For many, ESL classes are a first chance to formally learn English and develop school-based literacy. An investment in education, training and other services can ensure that immigrants will make lasting contributions to their communities. Ignoring their needs will magnify public sector costs and social and economic challenges (Little Hoover Commission, 2002).

A. ESL Learner Profiles. Learner profiles in ESL classes reflect immigration trends. Adults learning English as a second language (ESL) come from different cultures and countries, vary in their educational backgrounds, and have diverse reasons for learning English. Brod describes two primary factors—personal and program—that influence why about one third of ESL learners leave by the end of the second month (Brod, 1995).

Personal factors include:

- low self-esteem coupled with a lack of demonstrable progress;
- daily pressures from work and problems at home such as scheduling childcare and transportation;
- lack of support of the native culture and family culture for education; and
- the age of the learner.

Program factors include:

- lack of appropriate materials for low-level learners;
- lack of opportunity to achieve success;
- lack of flexibility in class scheduling;
- multilevel settings that place those with no literacy skills with those quite literate (or those with very high oral skills are mixed with those with very low oral skills);
- lack of peer support and reinforcement; and
- instructional materials that are not relevant to learners' needs and lives.

Innovative adult ESL literacy programs serve nontraditional students in nontraditional ways. Using practices supported by cognitive theory and research in second language acquisition, the practices promote second language acquisition as a process that links the experience of the

learner to culture, language, literacy, and learning (Wrigley, 1993). Practitioners in innovative adult ESL programs realize that literacy education is most effective if it is tied to the lives of the learners and reflects their experiences as community members, parents, and participants in the workforce. Language and literacy teachers and administrators support instruction that is learner-centered and meets the needs of individual learners. A variety of approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies are used in the teaching and learning process. In most cases, instructions are provided for beginning, intermediate, and advanced level learners with specified goals, measurable objectives, and outcomes for each level (Weinstein-Shr and Quintero, 1995).

Most of the approaches to teaching adult ESL classes focus on language functions, communicative competence, and grammatical forms or structures. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are taught using instructional materials with a life-skills content, especially for beginning level ESL students. Allender discussed the following learner characteristics that have been found to have an impact on the pace and success of formal language learning:

- no formal education;
- limited formal education (i.e. less than seven years);
- no experience of formal learning as adults;
- disrupted education due to war or other political crisis;
- functional illiteracy in first language;
- non-roman script background;
- elderly; and
- suffering severe effects of political torture and trauma.

Allender further states that learners' cultural backgrounds and educational perspectives that differ significantly from Anglo cultures also impact their progress in English language acquisition. Research conducted with adults in the United States in recent years shows that reading in the native language aids the acquisition of and reading ability in a second language (Rivera, 1999). Recent changes in welfare, immigration, and citizenship policies have affected the ability of programs to offer instruction in the native language. Because of the limited amount of time that students are allowed to remain in adult education programs before obtaining employment, there is pressure to offer instruction exclusively in English. The degree to which a program uses the native language of learners in instruction is not only the result of educational goals and funding policies, but also depends on the availability of personnel who speak the native languages of the students, the number of different native languages spoken in the program, and the availability of curriculum materials in these languages (Holt, 1995).

B. Approaches. Five common philosophies/approaches used in adult ESL literacy instruction include:

- *Freirean or participatory education*, which revolves around the discussion of issues drawn from learners' real-life experiences;
- *Whole language*, which emphasizes that language must be kept whole when learned or it is no longer language, and that written language is as natural as spoken language and needs to be integrated with it in learning;

- *Language experience*, which allows learners' experiences to be dictated, then transcribed, either by the teacher or other learners, and the transcription is used as reading material;
- *Learner writing and publishing*, which encourages adult learners to write about their experiences, and programs internally publish these writings, making them available for other learners to read; and
- *Competency-based education*, which has four components—assessment of learner needs, selection of competencies based on those needs, instruction targeted to those competencies, and evaluation of learner performance in those competencies (Peyton, 1995).

C. Curriculum and Instructional Strategies. Instructional approaches vary depending on underlying theories and beliefs about the development of language and literacy and the program model in which they take place. Many programs place learners' native languages and cultural backgrounds and experiences at the center of the educational program, using them for instruction. Characteristics of "successful" strategies include:

- Focus on the learners' immediate personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, familiar topics, and concrete real-world materials, rather than abstract and decontextualized themes for learners with limited first-language literacy (Allender, 1998).
- Use concrete but age-appropriate materials to enhance instruction by providing a context for language and literacy development (Holt, 1995).
- Acknowledge that in a multilevel classroom learner perceptions of what constitutes sound language learning may not match those of the teacher; thus use teacher's enthusiasm and goodwill to encourage learners who resist unfamiliar and non-traditional classroom activities to participate fully in the class (Shank and Terrill, 1995).
- Use poetry as a tool for learners to read, discuss, and write about poems and how they speak to their life situations; learners can also create poems of their own to express their feelings, thoughts, or beliefs (Peyton and Rigg, 1999).
- Recycle language and skills, include physical activities, and make frequent changes of activities for learners who have limited previous experience of education, because such learners benefit from instruction in techniques for study management, problem-solving, memorizing, categorizing, the use of reference tools such as dictionaries, and the explicit transfer of skills to other contexts (Holt, 1995).
- Use music in the adult ESL classroom to create a learning environment; to build listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills; to increase vocabulary; and to expand cultural knowledge (Lems, 2001).
- Allow learners to have "dialogue journals," which are written conversations in which a learner and teacher (or other writing partner) communicate regularly over a semester, school year, or course whereby even learners with limited literacy skills to write can begin their journal work by using a few words or by drawing pictures, with the teacher drawing pictures in reply, perhaps writing a few words underneath or labeling the pictures (Peyton, 2001).

- Encourage the use of a particular core series or provide a library of materials from which instructors can choose to meet the multiple needs of learners (Schlusberg and Mueller, 1995).

Although the identified role of the teacher is to teach English language skills, the teacher's role as a cultural broker is very important as well (Adkins and Sample, 2000). Working with diverse refugee groups, ESL educators need to be aware of and sensitive to the migration, acculturation, and traumatic stress that many learners experience.⁵ Although ESL teachers are not expected to be therapists, acknowledgement of the prevalence of violence generally—and of that experienced by those in the adult ESL and literacy community specifically—is critical to the development of instructional approaches that make classrooms safer and learning more possible for adult immigrant learners (Isserlis, 2000). This is important since language learning demands control, connection, and meaning. Adults experiencing effects of past or current trauma are particularly challenged in learning a new language. It is critical that teachers take steps to make the classroom safe for all.

D. Assessment and Evaluation. At the national level, the Workforce Investment Act and the National Reporting System (NRS) have set criteria that states must meet in order to receive federal funding, but states have leeway to set their own performance measures and assessment procedures for meeting that criteria. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998) requires each state to report educational gains of learners in terms of level descriptors defined by the NRS.⁶ This requirement has intensified the debate among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers as to what constitutes success and how to measure it (Van Duzer, 2002). The NRS implementation document states that a standardized assessment procedure (a test or performance assessment) is to be used to measure level gains, but the choice of procedure is left up to each state. Most states have chosen a standardized test. Several give choices among a list of approved tests. A few states allow a standardized test for initial level determination and then a competency checklist or uniform portfolio for level exit.

According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, the most commonly used standardized tests for adult ESL learners are the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). These standardized tests are often used because they are easy to administer to groups, require minimal training for the test administrator, and have documentation of reliability (consistency of results over time) and validity (measuring what the test says it measures). Using a test that assesses everyday vocabulary and tasks (e.g., BEST or CASAS) can yield satisfactory results due to the focus on real-life and practical content in adult ESL instruction (Van Duzer, 2002). However, there is concern that standardized tests may not be able to capture the incremental changes in learning that occur over short periods of instructional time. Consequently, alternative assessments that ask students to show what they can do have proven to be useful (Tannenbaum, 1996). Authentic or alternative assessment describes efforts to document learner achievement through activities that require integration and application of learned knowledge and skills and are based on classroom instruction (Florez, 1998). Such alternative assessments generally meet the following criteria:

⁵ Refer to Appendix D for glossary of terms.

⁶ See Appendix E for NRS description of levels.

- Focus is on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students;
- Emphasis is on students’ strengths (what they know), rather than weaknesses (what they don’t know); and
- Consideration is given to the learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds, and grade levels of students.

Although these alternative assessments provide valuable information to learners, instructors, and other program staff, some experts argue that their use for accountability purposes is currently limited. In addition to being time consuming to administer and score, they also have to be standardized to produce reliable, quantifiable data required for high stakes assessment (Van Duzer, 2002).

IV. ESL FUNDING

In 2000, 1.1 million adults enrolled in ESL programs that received funding through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). This number represented 38% of the overall national adult education enrollment of 2,891,895 learners for that year. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE), the other components of federally funded adult education, represented 37% and 25% respectively.⁷ ESL services are made possible both by state and federal allocations. It is one of the seven ABE service areas administered by the Department of Children, Families and Learning (DCFL) in Minnesota. Table 1 shows the increase in ABE funding since fiscal year 1995. Funding support for ABE in Minnesota has increased from \$15.8 million in 1995 to \$42.5 million in 2003. It is important to note that the vast majority of the funding is from state allocations. As seen in FY 2003, federal aid accounts for only about 15% of the total ABE budget. Because of the high percentage of state aid, Minnesota’s ABE system has the highest funding per capita in the nation, according to Dr. Barry Shaffer, MN State Director of Adult Education. In addition to federal and state allocations through DCFL, funding is also available through the Department of Human Services Refugee Program—but the emphasis is on English for work related purposes.

Table 1: ABE Funding Allocations, Enrollment and Cost Per Learner from FY1995 to FY2003 in Minnesota

Funding Source	FY 1995	FY2001	FY2002	FY 2003
State ABE Aid	\$8,374,000	\$30,074,000	\$32,150,000	\$34,993,000
ABE Local Levy	\$4,100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Federal ABE Aid	\$3,288,000	\$5,177,706	\$6,055,135	\$6,488,967
Grant Programs	\$0	\$1,833,000	\$1,100,000	\$1,100,000
TOTAL \$	\$15,762,000	\$37,084,706	\$39,305,135	\$42,581,967
Enrollment	45,322	78,443	82,778	84,000 (est.)
Cost per Learner/Year	\$348	\$473	\$475	\$500 (est.)

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning

⁷ University and college students, as well as the many adults served in programs not receiving federal funding, are not included in this number.

Funding is allocated to service providers based on a formula that consists of the following criteria:

- Base Population Aid, set at \$1.80 per school district resident;
- Prior Year Contact Hour Revenue, about \$3.50 per contact hour;
- Prior Year K-12 LEP Revenue, about \$35 per LEP unit; and
- Over 20, No Diploma Residents Revenue, \$3.50 per resident.

There are 57 ABE consortia (administrative units) statewide that deliver services at over 500 sites located within public schools, workforce centers, community/technical colleges, prisons/jails, libraries, learning centers, tribal centers, churches, and community-based nonprofit organizations. Unlike some other states where adult basic education is provided through only community colleges, the vast majority of Minnesota’s programs are delivered through the public school system, making it more accessible to a greater number of participants.

As discussed earlier, Minnesota’s population has become increasingly diverse. The number of foreign-born residents has grown, which is seen in the shift in users of adult basic education. As Table 2 illustrates, ESL participants account for nearly 50% of all adult basic education in fiscal year 2002. It is anticipated that this percentage will continue to increase as the population of foreign-born Minnesotans increases.

Table 2: Minnesota ABE Enrollment for Fiscal Year 2002

Area	Total Enrollment
Basic Skills (general)	28,311
ESL Participants	37,554
GED Participants	16,855
Family Literacy	1,660
Workforce Prep	1,199
Citizenship	1,424
Total Enrollment	82,778

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (duplicate counts in last 3 categories)

V. FINDINGS

A. Demographics.

Participating Organizations. A total of 47 individuals in the field representing 31 organizations participated. Sixteen interviews were conducted; 14 were face-to-face and two were done over the telephone. The 16 interviews involved 21 people since more than one person from a few organizations participated. Twenty-six individuals completed the survey.⁸ There is representation from state departments, statewide literacy organizations, regional adult learning centers, and nonprofit organizations serving the broader community as well as those that are ethnic specific. The geographic distribution of participating organizations was: statewide (3), rural (9), suburban (5), and urban (15).

⁸ A couple of organizations had multiple people fill out the survey to obtain information from both front-line staff and those in leadership positions.

In addition to the interviewees and survey respondents, informal conversations and email correspondence addressing the areas in the interview and survey protocols also took place with representatives from such organizations as the Center for Applied Linguistics, U.S. Department of Education, MNSCU, Hennepin County, Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and the Wilder Foundation’s New-American Collaborative.⁹

Location of ESL Programs. The participating service providers provided language services in a variety of locations, including community/neighborhood centers, adult area learning centers, nonprofit organizations, schools, county human service buildings, churches, homes, shopping malls, technical/community colleges, workplaces, apartment complexes, government centers, city libraries, and courthouses (rental spaces). Interviewees and survey respondents were asked to list the populations that they served. While several participants mentioned more general characteristics (such as international visitors, east Europeans, middle Easterners, east Africans, former Soviet Union citizens, and Spanish speakers), others listed specific ethnic groups. Their responses included Latino, Somali, Hmong, Vietnamese, Sudanese, East European, Middle Easterner, Mexican, Korean, Chinese, Kosovars, Cambodian, Colombian, Portuguese, Lao, Russian, and Eritrean. One participant stated that there are learners from at least 25 countries represented in the organization’s ESL program.

Funding Sources. Funding for ESL services received by the participating organizations is primarily from government sources. A few organizations have obtained additional support from foundations and corporations as well as from religious organizations and individuals. Those who have received some foundation support emphasized that the support is minimal. Three organizations stated that they received in-kind space to conduct their classes. All three sites were located in churches. Table 3 lists the funding sources.

Table 3: ESL Funding Sources of Participating Organizations
Sample pool: 29 organizations

Funding Source	#
Government Only	17
Government and Foundations	4
Government, Foundations, and Corporation	3
Government and Contracted Services	1
Government and Individuals	1
Government, Foundations, Individuals, and Religious Organizations	1

Source: Author’s tabulations.

Levels of ESL Services Offered. Of the 29 direct service providers, 18 offer all four ESL levels: preliteracy, beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Nine organizations offer 2–3 levels and two have one level available. The fact that a level is offered at a site does not necessarily mean that there are classes available. As one interviewee stated, “In theory, we have preliteracy classes, but in practice it’s becoming harder and harder to serve this population because of the intense help the learners need.” Finding enough volunteers, then, becomes a challenge. Another interviewee further explained, “Preliteracy classes are very hard to offer. When learners have no experience

⁹ Although Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Charities are involved in resettling refugees, they do not provide direct language services. They collaborate with literacy providers and make referrals to programs in communities.

with literacy and are trying to overcome many barriers, it's difficult. It also demands more manpower because students need a lot more one-on-one support."

B. Purposes of Learning English. As the literature review showed, new Americans enroll in ESL classes for many different reasons. Interviewees and survey respondents discussed reasons why immigrants and refugees participate in ESL classes that are similar to what the research documented. Since no conversations took place with learners themselves, the purposes and reasons suggested are based on service providers' perspectives of why learners participate. The common purposes discussed by interviewees and survey respondents fall into the following categories in order of most frequently mentioned:

1. Gain necessary language skills for employment leading to self-sufficiency. This is the most common reason for enrolling in ESL classes. Examples of comments include:

"The primary purpose of our ESL program is to give students a literacy ability to obtain meaningful employment." (Survey Respondent).

"...Achieving economic self-sufficiency is primary. The requirements of welfare reform are proving insurmountable for many Hmong. Eleven percent of public assistance recipients in Ramsey County have no formal education—and 86% of these are Southeast Asian, mostly Hmong. Despite the lack of education, limited English, and large extended families, Hmong are required to find and secure employment, and to become self-sufficient. Teaching them to read, write, and speak English while providing an overall educational foundation and practical assistance as they transition into a new environment is a challenge we take very seriously." (Survey Respondent)

"With state and federal laws, the goals of ESL have become job placement, retention, and advancement. Language acquisition is the most general purpose of being in a class, but there are definitely specific workforce objectives." (Interviewee)

"Work, either to get work or to get a better job." (Interviewee)

2. Obtain survival/communication skills to meet basic needs. Maneuvering through hundreds of different systems in America is an insurmountable task for many new Americans. The inability to communicate forces many to live in isolation from the mainstream community. Thus, they enroll in ESL classes to gain communication skills in order to survive in this literate society. The following statements best describe this situation:

"Learners may come with particular goals such as learning work skills, but our goal is to help them have skills to meet many other needs, such as buying food and calling in their own doctor appointments. Our philosophy is to teach English for whatever purpose they need and whatever they want to use it for." (Interviewee)

"The primary purpose of all of our ESL classes is to help students learn English so that they can function more fully in society. The ESL class that I am going to use to answer the questions has a primary goal of getting limited English speaking people ready for work and life. These are some of the outcomes we look for with our ESL students: the basics of speaking, writing, reading, and understanding more English; being able to call the transit bus; being able to make doctors' appointments; being better able to talk to their child's school and teachers – both verbal and written communication; being able to fill out a job application; and functioning in the community better. (Examples: using the post office, grocery store, etc.)" (Survey Respondent)

"To give students the skills they need to survive in the U.S. not just in a basic simplistic manner but to actually integrate into the new culture/society, containing an integrated approach that uses speaking, reading, writing,

and listening. One goal is to build students' level of independence and self-esteem/self-confidence. (Students need to be able to function without a translator in real-life situations.) We want to teach not just the basic language, but to incorporate the idioms and idiosyncrasies that a native speaker uses. Students need to be able to experience the English language in all its richness." (Survey Respondent)

3. Learn about other cultures. Interviewees and survey respondents felt that ESL classes are essential for learning about American culture as well as the cultures of the learners. Given the very ethnically diverse learner populations, many interviewees and survey respondents indicated that they have observed learners sharing and supporting each other. For example:

"We purposely invite and recruit multicultural groups to come together, share each other's stories and empower one another." (Interviewee)

"Our goal is to encourage each student to keep his or her own culture, but at the same time learn about life here in America. We promote taking the best of each culture and sharing it." (Interviewee)

"Another strength of our current approach includes multicultural classes: We do not divide students from certain ethnic/country groups into separate classes. This allows our students to learn about one another's cultures/countries and positive coping skills for living in a multicultural neighborhood. For many, the United States is the first place they have lived near people from different ethnic/country groups." (Survey Respondent)

4. Prepare for college. Higher education is highly valued by many immigrants and refugees who came from backgrounds where they may not have had many opportunities. Although a small percentage, interviewees and survey respondents said they had a few learners who were preparing for their GEDs so that they can attend college.

C. Curriculum and Instruction. ESL programs need to use a nationally normed standardized test to measure basic competency skills—but there is no one curriculum that all practitioners must use. Even though there are basic reading, writing, and comprehension skills that learners need to gain, a great deal of flexibility exists for practitioners to design their programs. Results from the interviews and surveys place programs in the following four categories in order of the most common practices:

1. Develop own curriculum based on multiple resources. The most common practice in ESL programs is to create their own curriculum. Comments pertaining to this flexibility include:

"There is a variety of resources that we use, including *Oxford Picture Dictionary*, books that are level appropriate and written exercises. Our curriculum is very much staff and student driven." (Interviewee)

"Teachers know the competency levels and are usually given various resources to guide their activities in the classroom. Teachers have support, but are not told what to use. We do use some information from the *Crossroads Café* curriculum. We have a family literacy curriculum and use *Uncommon Ground* for our civics curriculum." (Interviewees)

"I teach a curriculum based on learning the skills necessary to successfully complete the situations. I choose lessons out of numerous books on each topic and meld them together. Some of the text I have referenced are: *Survival English*, *Real Life English*, *English Through Pictures*, *Everyday English Activities*, *Going Places*, *Life Prints*, and *Grammar in Context*." (Survey Respondent)

2. *Use one specific/package ESL curriculum.* Despite the fact that they also use additional materials to teach particular concepts, several service providers say that they use a specific curriculum. Some of the ones mentioned are: *Grammar in Action*, *English ASAP*, *Real Life English*, *Reading Seminar*, and *Life Prints*. The following statement gives a detailed description of some of the contents in the *Life Prints* curriculum:

“The curriculum we are currently using, *Life Prints*, does work with acculturation skills. Some such themes include Neighborhoods (common places found in, community resources), Families (family structure, diversity of families); Keeping in Touch (using the phone and postal system in the U.S.); Getting From Here to There (Commonly used modes of transportation, directions, map reading); Feelings (commonly used expressions for different feelings and situations); What Did You Do Before? (Jobs in the U.S., scheduling and the idea of timeliness, filling out forms such as applications); The Cost of Things (Clothes in the U.S. and in our region due to climate, writing checks); Getting Well (identifying illnesses, filling out health forms, discussing the use of insurance, and going to the doctor and or drug store); Asking for Help (emergency situations and the appropriate response, repair work and communicating with landlords, skills for shopping in a supermarket).”
(Survey Respondent)

3. *Use a variety of materials.* A number of interviewees and survey respondents said that they use a combination of resources, but have not created their own curriculum. One interviewee said, “We use a variety of different curriculums. Just about all of the materials do address acculturation. Some of the different services we use are: *Azar English Grammar*, *Real Life English ASAP*, *Life Prints*, and *Oxford Picture Dictionary*.”

4. *Teach practical life skills.* An underlying theme throughout the interviews and survey responses is teaching practical life skills. A wide range of topics include: shopping, tenant/landlord relations, money handling, library use, proper diet, bus/transportation systems, citizenship, drivers license, government forms, and advanced education options.

5. *Create activities to enhance learning/acculturation.* Most ESL instructors and administrators operate under the belief that learners need real-life opportunities to broaden their understanding of concepts and to expose them to different aspects of American culture. However, the majority said they do not have the financial flexibility to make available such opportunities. Only a few have been able to offer additional activities, such as the following:

- Having a book borrowing project where learners receive a free book after having borrowed 10 and returned them;
- Taking field trips to such places as an art museum, schools, key cultural locations, businesses, and community service locations;
- Setting time for ABE students and ESL students to have conversations;
- Deciphering mail for students;
- Touring hospitals;
- Talking about and celebrating holidays; and
- Inviting speakers to the classroom from different institutions such as the police department.

D. Assessment. Given the many perspectives on the roles, functions, and uses of literacy, it is not surprising that approaches to literacy assessment in adult programs vary widely as well. Some programs focus on evaluating communicative competence through integrated tests; others concentrate on particular skill areas such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. While most

literacy assessments measure knowledge and performance by asking learners to choose the right answers on multiple choice tests, there is increasing support for assessments that try to capture actual reading and writing performance as well as reading and writing processes by using assessments such as interviews, surveys of literacy behaviors and practices, and portfolios.

As described in the literature review section, the federal government mandates that states use standardized tests in order to receive federal funds, but the states have flexibility in choosing the tests. The State of Minnesota does not require providers to use a particular test, although DCFL does provide free training for administering the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). Consequently, some providers perceive that the State is “mandating” the CASAS. The vast majority of the service providers interviewed or surveyed indicated that they use only CASAS, both for placement and to determine gains made by the learners. A few said they used both the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and CASAS, while a couple of organizations use only the BEST. Still, a few providers use CASAS and other customized instruments. One interviewee explained, “At entrance, we use CASAS, which is mandated by the State, but we also use a customized test that is aligned with our own curriculum. The customized test is a combination of multiple tools, including personal interviews. We also do ongoing assessment to track progress.” Practitioners who use the BEST indicate that it is a better tool for lower level learners. Interestingly, one interviewee stated that they were not testing largely due to the low literacy skills of learners. The interviewee felt that tests intimidated low-level learners, thus potentially discouraging them from participating.

E. Strengths of Current Approaches. Minnesota is often noted as a leader in education. In many aspects, the commitment at state and community levels clearly supports this reputation. Interviewees and survey respondents outlined the following critical factors that contribute to the success of ESL services throughout the state. The factors are listed below in order of most mentioned:

1. Learner-center/program flexibility. Interviewees and survey respondents emphasized the benefit of having the flexibility to meet learners exactly where they are. A few of their comments are highlighted below:

“In the last year there has been a strong emphasis on communicative teaching approaches. In my opinion there is no one effective teaching approach. It is important to understand that each classroom is unique and that each learner is unique. Teachers and tutors need to be trained to be able to adjust the teaching materials to their learners’ needs. What might work for one group might not work for the next group. This is important to keep in mind and is something that makes teaching such an interesting job.” (Survey Respondent)

“Our strengths are the variety of methods and materials our learners are exposed to. Different teachers focus on various aspects of a language or culture point. By having teachers who choose materials that fit their focus, our learners are not learning the same limited aspect of a language or culture point, but instead have varied lessons that better reflect the true-life aspect of learning. The lesson from one book may prove more accurate to the learner’s actual experience outside of the classroom than the lesson from different materials.” (Survey Respondent)

“What has worked well has been practical activities. For example, participants would bring up topics and raise issues that are important or of concern to them. We then respond to those concerns in a couple of different ways. We had a safety issue at one of our suburban sites that the participants brought up. We decided to invite

several speakers to come and address the concerns. That made people feel better and allowed them to better concentrate on learning.” (Interviewee)

2. Collaborations to increase access in communities. There is no doubt that new Americans face many challenges at any given time. Survey respondents and interviewees emphasized the need to be aware of the many complex issues in peoples’ lives. When there are multiple services provided to help reduce the number of barriers learners have to overcome, they are more likely to excel. Working across systems has increased access for more learners. The following comments illustrate the benefits of collaborative efforts:

“Community-based organizations, who are mostly ethnic-specific, offer classes that are appropriate for their respective communities. Some of these are lower level learner classes, but higher learner level classes are available through the public school systems.” (Interviewee)

“When possible, family literacy initiatives that are collaborations between different organizations serving families by sharing resources are effective in reaching the whole family. When children are in structured activities, parents feel more comfortable in class. Additionally, parents and children have opportunities to spend quality times together.” (Interviewee)

“When multiple stakeholders such as schools, community organizations, and faith-based groups collaborate, families tend to be better off.” (Interviewee)

“Nonprofit organizations, the state, school systems, and other organizations are collaborating at some level to reach the hardest-to-reach new Americans. These efforts have improved relationships between community-based organizations and the state. It’s the grassroots efforts are making things happen.” (Interviewee)

“Community organizations have helped to open up access to lowest level learners.” (Interviewee)

One component of a “successful” collaboration is the opportunity for providers to come together and share. The few participants who felt that this was a good component said that providers were meeting outside of what is necessary to secure funding to address a variety of issues. Another factor of strong collaborations is the active engagement of school boards and community-based organizations.

3. Strong commitment to helping immigrants and refugees integrate. Many ESL classes are taught by trained, paid staff. Nonetheless, there are hundreds of volunteers who spend countless hours working with individuals and small groups of learners. Volunteers range in experience. Through the training and support program that staff provides, even volunteers with no prior teaching experience are able to help learners. Many volunteers are retired educators with a high degree of teaching experience. Depending on philosophy, some service providers prefer bilingual instructors who can address acculturation issues as well as translate and define terms and situations, while others offer “English-only” classes under the belief that the speed and accuracy of a person’s acquisition of another language is directly correlated to the amount of time that person spends using it.

4. Strong funding commitment at the state level. While the ABE aid has remained relatively small, it is evident that there is strong commitment to improving adult education in Minnesota based on funding trends during the last few years. As stated by one of the interviewees, “Minnesota has a very good ABE system with support from the federal government as well as the state.” Another said, “We have remarkable resources as a state.”

5. Improving the referral system. Some of the interviewees and survey respondents felt that the state's referral system was improving and that people generally know that language classes are available. Several people attributed this improvement to the Minnesota Literacy Council's efforts. For example,

“Programs realize that there was a problem with the system, which led to the creation of the Minnesota Literacy Council's hotline, which is making things a little better.” (Interviewee)

“The Minnesota Literacy Council system is working well. And, the referral system is effective. There are strong consortiums and it is easy to share information through them. The state is responsive. Although there is some competition, communities are working together to help out. There is some duplication of services, but I think that's OK because programs often operate during different days, at different hours and may have different approaches. I think that the more classes available makes it more accessible to those who need the services.” (Interviewee)

F. Gaps and Challenges. In spite of the many positive components of adult ESL services in Minnesota, interviewees and survey respondents felt that there are gaps in the current system. The underlying issue is that there is a system in place, but the extent to which services are delivered effectively is questionable. Issues such as waiting lists for services, ineffective multilevel classrooms, and inappropriate assessment tools to accurately measure the knowledge and progress of learners seem to be prevalent in many areas of the state. The challenges identified are mostly systemic, but it is important to note that difficulties in the learners' personal lives do have an impact on the system, such as inconsistent attendance due to mobility, lack of childcare, and job changes. Systemic challenges include:

1. Inability to meet the needs of a diverse learner population. It is not uncommon that ESL classes would have up to 15 learners from 15 different countries speaking different languages in the metropolitan area where the vast majority of foreign-born residents live. Language, age, cultural, and educational background, and disability or mental health factors all contribute to the inability of the current system to meet the needs of the immigrant and refugee populations. This is best illustrated with the following statement:

“Learning disabilities' diagnosis is a problem. Sometimes students would not learn and we would think that they just did not have the right skills. However, when they go through the health screenings, we would find out that they could not hear well or that they have vision problems.” (Interviewee)

2. Unskilled teachers. While there are many dedicated teachers and volunteers in the adult ESL field, interviewees and survey respondents felt that the training necessary to increase someone's skill in teaching a second language is inadequate. Several problems are highlighted in the following statements:

“Few of our teachers have any knowledge of teaching a second language or of even having learned a foreign language. Very few have an ESL background in teaching. Many of our teachers come from the K-6 educational system and initially often compare our adults' learning to 'X' grade. Although some training is offered sporadically during the school year, little is focused on the essential skills inherent in teaching a second language. Also most of our staff is part-time and often have a first job or are semi-retired and the additional training falls into their 'other life's' schedule.” (Survey respondent)

“Inconsistent training of staff—even when a teacher is able to go to a training, there is no follow-up that allows that teacher to determine if he/she is implementing the desired methods.” (Survey respondent)

“There are many volunteers, which is beneficial, but it appears that our field is still trying to become a ‘professional’ field. Volunteers may have received some training prior to taking on specific tasks; however, if they are not in the teaching field, they might not be adequately trained to assist learners.” (Interviewee)

“For level 0, preliterate, it requires a skilled instructor, who is often a licensed teacher because you have to use a lot of non-text materials every day in every lesson.” (Interviewee)

“We depend so much on volunteers because the funding we receive does not allow much for administrative support. The volunteers are great, but it makes us more limited in what we can do to help participants.” (Interviewee)

3. Insufficient resources and opportunities for learners to gain real-life experiences. Although much of the research shows that learners who have opportunities to practice and use their newly acquired language skills are more likely to progress faster, many of the interviewees and survey respondents expressed concern that there are not enough resources available to provide those real-life experiences. For example:

“Some of the weaknesses of the current approach are that it does not deal as much as it could with real-life situations. More of a hands-on approach is needed such as reading to children and dealing with police on the street, etc. We do give the language tools to be used, but a lot of the work will be learned through experience.” (Survey Respondent)

“I would like to see our students get out into the community more for learning experiences.” (Survey Respondent)

“We need more interactive efforts, like field trips, restaurant visits, and check writing exercises, etc. Field trips do cost money, but without the real-life experiences, it’s hard for students to really understand.” (Interviewee)

“Learning takes place when people are able to share. When adult learners have contacts with native speakers, they seem to progress faster. ESL teachers can teach as much vocabularies and issues to students as we can in the classroom, but when there is no practical opportunities for students to practice and/or use what they have learned, it becomes not very helpful.” (Interviewee)

“What immigrants and refugees want is to become successful Americans. This means that they need to have access to practical, real-life experiences, such as taking field trips. Funders, whether it’s the government or private foundations, are not interested in practical issues.” (Interviewee)

4. Lack of standard curriculum. It is clear that practitioners value the flexibility to incorporate what they determine is most beneficial to learners in their classrooms. When there is too much flexibility, however, it can become ineffective. Despite the basic standards that guide teachers to help learners, there is tremendous freedom for practitioners to decide what is appropriate. The following two participants stated:

“The biggest gap, as I see it, is a comprehensive list of what should be covered in teaching English and/or acculturation. Everything gets ‘piecemealed’ together and things get left out at some class sites. I also question whether everything we think ESL students want to and should learn is really necessary to them. People are great at doing *to* them rather than *with* them. We try to stop and take the time to find out what they feel is important for them to learn and then incorporate it into the curriculum.” (Survey Respondent)

“On a personal level, I am moved by the high level of motivation to learn by the students. I see how sometimes the move from preliterate to literate may seem small to some, but for the individual student, it is a huge gain. On an academic level, it is frustrating that there is not consistency in the level of sophistication of some of the

programs. When you look at the different programs statewide, you see that there's a diverse degree of sophistication in terms of delivery." (Interviewee)

5. Lack of "true" collaborations. There is no doubt that collaborative efforts exist in Minnesota to respond to the ABE needs, but several people questioned the authenticity of the collaborations. The best illustration of this issue is expressed in the following statements:

"There isn't a coherent system. St. Paul probably has the best system because of the consortium. It's the only system in the state that's collaborative and trying to fill gaps. Many others meet because of funding only." (Interviewee)

"The system exists, but it is questionable as to how it is delivered. The Minnesota Literacy Council's hotline is one statewide effort, but there really is no other way to learn about what's going on with other providers." (Interviewee)

6. Lack of understanding about barriers faced by new Americans, cultural awareness.

Inadequate instructional skills have been identified as a problem. But beyond this surface lie greater issues. The burden is often placed on new Americans to learn about the systems and American culture while very little is expected of Americans to further expand his or her knowledge of the immigrant or refugee's background. In large and small communities across the state, there are insufficient opportunities for mainstream teachers and volunteers to learn about the cultural backgrounds of the many new faces in their classes, which could help break barriers and increase understanding and respect. Issues raised by participants are:

"We can't even communicate to our new neighbors about our services. They don't feel comfortable coming to our centers because they don't know that they can. Moreover, they don't feel welcome because the folks around here don't understand why we need to help immigrants adjust to their new life. For example, after many years of having Lao people in our small town, we celebrated Lao new year for the first time this year. It brought greater awareness to the larger community and we're working toward better understanding and appreciation. But we still have a lot of work to do." (Interview)

"Programs need to be designed based on what immigrant learners are interested in and immigrant learners need to be able to go where they feel comfortable. Sometimes mainstream society do not see immigrants as equally credible. Many immigrants and refugee learners are sent to mainstream classes where teachers become frustrated with the learners and treat them as though they cannot learn, or are just not intelligent enough, when the learner does not progress as fast as they want them to." (Interviewee)

7. Political push to place people in jobs versus life skills. When the federal welfare law was implemented in 1997, there were very strict work requirements that all program participants had to follow regardless of whether they were citizens or legal immigrants. It is clear that welfare reform has impacted the lives of individual families as well as communities. Many organizations had to change the way they provided services. Issues raised were:

"There is a tendency to focus on work-based English. The government thinks that training people to go to work is the answer and emphasizes partnerships with businesses. However, civic engagement is also very important, but yet there's less support for it." (Interviewee)

"The challenge is that there is tension in the system between obtaining lifelong learning skills versus 'get a job.'" (Interviewee)

"The system is pushing for work and often people are not getting the language skills needed." (Interviewee)

“I don’t believe that there is a coherent system of teaching acculturation and English together. I have seen the change from just teaching reading and writing English to teaching English with acculturation in just the last six or seven years. I feel the change really started with the welfare system changes. People couldn’t just keep going to English classes forever anymore. People needed to be out working. Those that didn’t have enough English to go to work come to our classes to learn English for a brief period of time and then went to work. We had to change what we taught and how we taught it.” (Survey Respondent)

8. Geographic issues. Rural areas have seen a growth in the number of new Americans in their communities and it has impacted them in many ways. Resources, which are not exclusively financially related, are insufficient. While rural communities may struggle to fill a class, urban communities often have waiting lists. Additionally, it is more expensive to operate a program in rural areas due to the low number of learners. As one interviewee stated:

“In rural communities, transportation is a challenge for all learners, but there are greater issues than just that. It seems that in the urban areas, immigrants are able to find out information from people in their own community. In rural areas, we have no translators, so we can’t even market to immigrants that our services are available for them. We need bilingual people, but we don’t have the resources.” (Interviewee)

9. Lack of a holistic approach. Several interviewees and survey respondents indicated that, in order for parents to be successful, programs need to include the whole family. Inconsistent attendance is often attributed to the lack of childcare. When parents are worried about their children, it is difficult for them to concentrate and learn. Currently there is very little investment in family literacy, due primarily to a lack of funding.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on suggestions made by interviewees and survey respondents, as well as the author’s assessment of the most significant points to address among challenges for adult ESL services in Minnesota. Although it is important to have collaborative efforts at all levels, the recommendations are divided into action steps that need to take place at the state and local community levels.

A. Statewide.

1. Create new assessment tools and support for low-level learners. Difficulties have been identified by interviewees and survey respondents pertaining to serving learners who are at the preliterate level. The push to place people in any job as soon as possible has not been effective in providing them with the necessary skills to advance in those jobs in the long run. Job search for many new Americans may not be the appropriate strategy. Instead, learners in this category could be served best by receiving more intense language services that are based on a combination of what they would like to know and what is necessary to participate in the labor force.

2. Examine further the possibility of a standardized curriculum. Giving practitioners choice is valuable in that it allows them to choose appropriate materials, but it has also created inconsistency across the board. Despite the fact that there are texts and curriculum that are commonly used, they are not delivered uniformly. In addition to service delivery, other concerns

have been raised regarding the content of the existing resources. Some practitioners feel there are not enough resources that contain multiple ways of teaching the same concept. Teachers and volunteers often have to “guess” what the learners need and some have expressed doubt about whether or not what they are teaching is what learners need. Furthermore, few materials are age-appropriate. Practitioners often use materials that are developed for children to teach adult ESL learners. Creating a “menu” from which practitioners can choose could be helpful.

3. Increase availability and coordination of services. Despite the significant resources in Minnesota that have helped to increase access to learners, there are waiting lists in different areas and many practitioners do not feel they have a good understanding of what is happening in other communities. In addition to the annual training institute provided by the Literacy Training Network and the Minnesota Literacy Council’s (MLC) statewide efforts, regional activities would be beneficial. The geographic issues also need to be discussed more in-depth, and opportunities to share best practices are needed beyond an annual literacy conference. A number of informants in this report have stated that the services listed are not as comprehensive as indicated, which complicates the referral system. A comprehensive list and levels of what is actually available for learners is needed. Additionally, when learners move from one provider to another, limited communication exists. Accurate information and effective tools must be available throughout the state.

4. Offer cultural training for volunteers and/or teachers. ESL services depend heavily on volunteers with varied skills. Concerns have been raised about volunteers/teachers not having knowledge or sensitivity to the many unique challenges that immigrants and refugees have in acquiring English language skills. Offering training on the culture and history of different populations with whom they work will help increase their capacity.

5. Make available more programs for families. It is clear that many immigrants and refugees in programs throughout the state are struggling with attendance due to such factors as transportation and childcare. Finding resources and strategies to eliminate these major barriers to regular attendance would assist in learners making progress toward their goals. Because funding is partially allocated based on contact hours, family literacy programs do not generate as much revenue. Consequently, it is not cost effective for service providers. Steps could be taken at the state level to review the possibility of allowing more hours to be counted for family literacy projects.

B. Local Community: Increase Opportunities to Learn English Outside of the Classroom.

Findings from the interviews and surveys clearly show that programs are taught based on the skill level of learners. However, many fall short of offering activities for learners to learn outside of a classroom environment. It is not enough to just teach concepts in the classroom. Learners need experiential opportunities such as:

- Field trips to different places that are aligned with what they are learning in class;
- Opportunities to converse with native speakers; and
- Learning English as part of such activities as sewing.

These activities cannot be carried out without adequate funding. Increasing discretionary funding at the state level that is not specifically tied to work-based English language training would ensure that learners have practical learning experiences.

Gather learner input. Through the literature review, interviews, and surveys, it is clear that practitioners have various opinions of what learners need to know. What is lacking is learner input on what is working for them and what is not helpful. Gathering learner input would be beneficial to all who are working with new Americans. Learner input could be gathered through focus groups, classroom observations and individual interviews with new Americans. Interviews with learners who are currently in classes as well as those who have succeeded will help identify key strategies that have been effective as well as obstacles that learners have to overcome.

Convene meetings with stakeholders. After gathering learner input, stakeholders should convene meetings with community organizations, public school systems, MNSCU, and state departments working with new Americans to share best practices and to identify possible strategies that will meet the needs of learners.

VII. CONCLUSION

All the research into the learning needs of special needs learners stress the need for time—time to get their families and lives together, time to heal and build confidence in the future, time to bridge the massive cultural chasm between their old and new lives, and time to learn how to learn. Language courses contribute to settlement-related outcomes as well as to language development. The concurrent development of less tangible, non-linguistic skills and qualities such as confidence, cultural awareness, and learning skills would seem essential for the achievement of language gains. Instead of viewing people with limited English skills as dysfunctional and unable to contribute productively to the national economy, the community should recognize and value the skills that they already possess. The path to successful settlement in this highly literate, technologically driven society will nevertheless be long and painful for the new American learners due to both personal and programmatic factors. With the resources that exist in Minnesota, the state and local communities have the opportunity to take a proactive role in responding to the language needs of new Americans. This state is unique in having a large refugee population; thus, it requires the willingness of all stakeholders to try new approaches that will help these families integrate into American society.

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APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The McKnight Foundation
**Framework for Immigrant and Refugee Work
 Language Acquisition and Acculturation Process**

Questions about the survey? Contact Chia Y. Vang at (612) 728-1177 or Chia_Consulting@msn.com

Name and Position: _____ Organization: _____
 Address: _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____
 Telephone: () _____ Email: _____

Program Description
 (Check as apply).

Population(s) served	Location of ESL class	Funding sources	Levels available
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Foundation	<input type="checkbox"/> Preliterate
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Nonprofit org.	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporation	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginning
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Advanced

1. What is the primary purpose of your ESL program? (What outcomes do you consider important?)
2. Does your program teach only English language or does it also incorporate learning about acculturation skills? (Please list specifics.)
3. How do you measure students' skill levels? If you use an assessment tool, which one(s)? (Do you test students before and after attending your program? Are there standards for you to follow?)
4. Which curriculum do you use? Does your curriculum address issues of acculturation?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches to learning English and/or acculturation? Is there a coherent system?
6. What are the gaps in the current approaches?
7. Is there anything else that would be helpful for me to know?

Is there anyone else that should be contacted who also works with ESL or acculturation programs?

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEES

Organization	Location	Contact(s)	Position
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (NE)	Virginia	Jill Schmitke	Program Specialist
Century Community and Technical College	White Bear Lake	Muriel Stoltzman	ESL Instructor
District 196 Community Education	Eagan	Cathy Whiteman	ESL Lead Teacher
International Institute of MN	St. Paul	Jane Grotman Katie Kolegas	Education Supervisor ESL Administrative Assistant
Metro North ABE	Anoka	Marrienne Hummel Julie Pierce	Assistant Manager ESL Teacher
Minneapolis Public Schools, Family and Community Educational Services	Minneapolis	Carlye Peterson	Manager/Adult Literacy
MN Department of Children, Families and Learning	Statewide	Barry Schaffer Diane Pecoraro	State ABE Director Specialist/ESL & ABE
MN Department of Human Services	Statewide	Gus Avenido	Resettlement Program Supervisor/Refugee State Coordinator
Minnesota Literacy Council	St. Paul- Statewide	Eric Nesheim	Executive Director
MORE-Multicultural School for Empowerment	St. Paul	Nancy Christianson Kathleen Spencer	Co-Directors
Mountain Lake Public Schools Community Education	Mountain Lake	Judy Harder	Community Education Director
Neighborhood House	St. Paul	Kira Kieselhorst de Saucedo	ESL Manager
Sabathani Community Center	Minneapolis	Cheryl Valiquette	ESL Lead Teacher
Somalian Women's Association	Minneapolis	Amal Yusuf	President & CEO
St. Paul Literacy Consortium	St. Paul	Tom Cytrom- Hysom	Facilitator
Urban Communities Association of Minneapolis	Minneapolis	Charles Crowley Roxanne Rudy	Executive Director ESL Program Director

APPENDIX C: OVERVIEW OF U.S. IMMIGRATION

The U.S. immigration process. So who gets to immigrate to the United States? The U.S. immigration system is based primarily on family reunification, needed work skills, employment creation, and recognition of refugees. Also, there is a lottery for people who come from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States.

Immigration policies have become more and more complex and new changes are consistently being made.¹⁰

Immigration to the United States is based on a preference system that is used to distribute the limited number of immigrant visa numbers available each year (Immigration and Naturalization Service-U.S. Department of Justice).¹¹ To be eligible to immigrate to the United States, applicants must fit into the following categories:¹²

- Family immigration;
- Employment immigration;
- Investment immigration;
- Lottery;
- Adoption; and
- Refugees and those seeking asylum.

U.S. law limits the number of immigrant visa numbers that are available every year, which is one of the reasons for the preference system. As a result, foreigners may not get an immigrant visa number immediately after their visa petition is approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In some cases, several years could pass between the time the INS approves an immigrant visa petition and the State Department gives the applicant an immigrant visa number. Because U.S. law also limits the number of immigrant visas available by country, applicants may have to wait longer if they come from a country with a high demand for U.S. immigrant visas.

Overview of the refugee resettlement process. Refugees are people who have lost everything: their homes, belongings, freedom, and their loved ones. The resettlement program in the U.S. operates according to a worldwide processing priority system. There are three priority categories: *Priority One* includes cases referred by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and those identified by U.S. Embassies, *Priority Two* is for groups of special concern identified by the Department of State where selection is based on individual circumstances, and *Priority Three* gives access to close family members (spouses, unmarried children, and parents) of persons residing permanently in the United States. Political instability both as a result of foreign influence and internal struggles have contributed greatly to the forced international movement of millions of displaced people. Since 1950 when the UNHCR was established, the agency has helped an estimated 50 million people restart their lives in other countries (UNHCR Global Report 2001). Today, there are about 20 million people who are of concern to UNHCR for a variety of reasons. Table 4 shows the number of persons around the world that are of concern to UNHCR by category.

¹⁰ Refer to Appendix C for a chronology of key U.S. immigration laws since 1950.

¹¹ The Immigration and Naturalization Service will be merged with the newly created Department of Homeland Security.

¹² Please see Appendix D for more detailed descriptions of categories.

Table 4: Persons of Concern to UNHCR as of January 1, 2002

Region	Refugees	Asylum Seekers	Returned Refugees	IDP* and Others of Concern	Total as of January 1, 2002
Asia	5,770,300	33,100	49,200	2,968,000	8,820,700
Africa	3,305,100	107,200	266,800	494,500	4,173,500
Europe	2,227,900	335,400	146,500	2,145,600	4,855,400
Northern America	645,100	441,700	-	-	1,086,800
Latin America & Caribbean	37,400	7,900	200	720,000	765,400
Oceania	65,400	15,600	-	300	81,300
TOTAL	12,051,100	940,800	462,700	6,328,400	19,783,100

Source: UNHCR

*Internally displaced, stateless, and war-affected populations.

Refugees often find themselves temporarily placed in another country before obtaining refugee status on a permanent basis in a third country. In 2001, Afghanistan was the origin of one major refugee population. Table 5 shows the 10 largest groups. It is important to note that of the 70,000 refugees to be admitted into the U.S. for fiscal year 2002, only 13,777 (20%) had arrived eight months into the year despite that fact that thousands had received clearance to come (Springer, 2002).¹³ This would make 2002 the year with the lowest number of refugees entering the U.S. in two decades.

Table 5: Origin of the Ten Major Refugee Populations in 2001*

Country of Origin	Main Countries of Asylum	Total
Afghanistan	Pakistan/Iran	3,809,600
Burundi	Tanzania	554,000
Iraq	Iran	530,100
Sudan	Uganda/Ethiopia/D.R. Congo/Kenya/C.A.R.	489,500
Angola	Zambia/D.R. Congo/Namibia	470,600
Somalia	Kenya/Yemen/Ethiopia/U.S./United Kingdom	439,900
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Yugoslavia/U.S./Sweden/Denmark/Netherlands	426,000
Democratic Rep. Congo	Tanzania/Congo/Zambia/Rwanda/Burundi	392,100
Vietnam	China/U.S.	353,200
Eritrea	Sudan	333,100

Source: UNHCR

*An estimated 3.8 million Palestinians who are covered by a separate mandate of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East are not included.

Although the United States has played a significant role in opening its doors to refugees, many other countries have also done so. Table 6 lists the nine main countries of resettlement of refugees in 2001.

¹³ Difficulties implementing stepped up security screening of refugees combined with travel restrictions on U.S. government officials responsible for identification and interview of eligible refugees are primarily responsible for the delays.

Table 6: Main Countries of Resettlement of Refugees in 2001

Country	Number of Refugees
United States	68,400
Canada	12,200
Australia	6,500
Norway	1,300
Sweden	1,100
New Zealand	760
Finland	740
Netherlands	630
Denmark	530

Source: UNHCR

Refugee resettlement in the U.S. is designed to operate as a public/private partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) playing a key role. The benefits refugees receive when they arrive in the U.S. are provided through a combination of public and private funding. Although states provide some financial support, public funding primarily comes from the federal government. Many NGOs raise considerable funding privately and recruit volunteers from local communities to provide a variety of services. Table 7 outlines the roles of the different public and private organizations involved in resettling refugees. The three federal departments involved in resettling refugees include the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Department of State (DOS), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These three departments work in collaboration with many private NGOs that place refugees in communities throughout the country. Volunteers coming from the local communities may be citizens or refugees and immigrants who have arrived earlier.

Table 7: Primary Organizations Involved in the Resettlement of Refugees in the U.S.

Organization	Roles and Responsibilities
United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR)	Established on December 14, 1950, to help the world's uprooted peoples by providing them with basic necessities such as shelter, food, water, and medicine in emergencies, and to seek long-term solutions, including voluntary return to their homes or rebuilding lives in new countries.
U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR)	Founded in 1958 to coordinate the United States' participation in the United Nations' International Refugee Year (1959). In the 40 years since, USCR has worked for refugee protection and assistance in all regions of the world. USCR is often the first organization to document human rights abuses and is the most persistent watchdog for refugee protection and assistance.
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Organizes the safe movement of people for temporary and permanent resettlement or return to their countries of origin. Also provides predeparture medical screening and cultural orientation programs.
Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)	Has statutory authority to determine which applicants meet the requirements for refugee status and are admissible to the United States under U.S. law.
Department of State (DOS)	U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. Coordinates resettlement policy and manages overseas processing, cultural orientation, transportation to the U.S. and provides funds to private, nonprofit, non-governmental organizations NGOs for initial reception and placement activities for newly arrived refugees.
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	Has responsibility for the domestic program of refugee resettlement services, which include cash and medical assistance to arriving refugees and a broad range of social services for refugees in the U.S. under five years. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at HHS provides funding for refugee programs through state health and human service departments.
Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA)	Nonsectarian network of nonprofit organizations that began to formally resettle refugees in the United States in 1975 where the vast majority of refugees arriving in the U.S. were fleeing war and persecution in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. (Minnesota affiliate is the International Institute of Minnesota.)
Private Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)	Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (NY) (Minnesota affiliate is the Minnesota Council of Churches). • U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops-Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) (Catholic Charities). • Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota). • Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) - ethnic community service and planning bodies with nonprofit status. They are refugee-specific organizations with refugee Boards of Directors and staff

Source: Author's Compilation

Once refugees arrive in the United States, the DOS Reception and Placement program (R&P) welcomes them at the airport, provides essential services, such as housing, clothing, food, and referrals to medical and social services during their first 30 days in the country. During this initial period, refugees are also linked to longer-term resettlement and integration programs funded by the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The cash benefits refugees receive depend upon family composition. Single adults and couples without children are eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance for up to eight months after arrival. They are expected to find a job by that time. Families with children under 18 years of age are eligible for the mainstream welfare program.

APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY

Acculturation. The process of learning about and adapting to a new culture. A new culture may require adjustments in all or some of the aspects of daily living, including language, work, shopping, housing, children's schooling, health care, recreation, and social life.

Acculturation Stress. Stress created by profound differences in the ways in which people live and relate to each other where even the simplest daily tasks, such as shopping for food or asking for directions, can become challenges involving language barriers as well as the potential for deep cultural misunderstandings.

Asylees. Asylees also meet the definition of "refugee" in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). However, asylees are individuals, who, on their own, travel to the United States, apply for, and receive a grant of asylum. These individuals do not enter the U.S. as refugees. They may enter as students, tourists, businessmen, or without papers. Once they are in the U.S., or at a land border or port of entry, they apply to the INS for asylum, a status that will acknowledge that they meet the definition of a refugee and that will allow them to remain in the U.S. Once individuals are granted asylum status, they are eligible for Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) services and assistance—but they are NOT eligible while their application is being processed, with the exception of certain Cuban and Haitian entrants.

Basic English Skills Test (BEST). The BEST was developed during the early 1980s by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) as a means of assessing the English language proficiency of immigrants and refugees who were entering the United States at that time. The BEST contains two parts, an oral interview section and a literacy section. This test was original in that it made use of authentic survival language situations, such as asking for directions, counting money, and telling time. In addition, it performed well at lower English proficiency levels.

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The CASAS Life Skills Assessment is used by Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to help identify the basic skills in reading, math, and listening needed by individuals to function successfully in today's society. Using CASAS assessment instruments, agencies assess learners as they enter a program, place them into appropriate educational programs, assess learning gains, and certify attainment of learner and program goals. The ESL Appraisal provides an initial assessment of an individual's ability to apply basic listening skills and basic reading skills in a functional context.

Internationally Displaced Persons. Displaced in their own country by persecution or armed conflict. These individuals are not protected under international refugee law because they remain in their own countries.

Migration Stress. Stress resulting from political violence, war, or other catastrophes that requires migration causing the loss of usual resources such as family, friends, and community.

Refugee. According to the Refugee Act of 1980, a refugee is "any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

Traumatic Stress. Stress resulting from extreme events that cause harm, injury, or death of loved ones, such as natural disasters, accidents, assault, war-related experiences, and torture that inevitably has psychological, social, and physical impact.

APPENDIX E: NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEM EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONING LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND OUTCOME MEASURE DEFINITIONS FOR ESL

Literacy Level	Speaking and Listening	Basic Reading and Writing	Functional Workplace Skills
<p>Beginning ESL literacy</p>	<p>Individual cannot speak or understand English, or understands only isolated words or phrases.</p>	<p>Individual has no reading or writing skills in any language, or has minimal skills such as the ability to read and write own name or simple isolated words; may be able to write letters or numbers and copy simple words, with no or incomplete recognition of the alphabet; may have difficulty using a writing instrument; or may be little or no comprehension of how print corresponds to spoken language.</p>	<p>Individual functions minimally or not at all in English and can communicate only through gestures or a few isolated words, such as name and other personal information; may recognize only common signs or symbols (e.g., stop sign, product logos); can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English.</p>
<p>Beginning ESL</p>	<p>Individual can understand frequently used words in context and very simple phrases spoken slowly and with some repetition; there is little communicative output and only in the most routine situations; little or no control over basic grammar; survival needs can be communicated simply, and there is some understanding of simple questions.</p>	<p>Individual can read and print numbers and letters but has a limited understanding of print only through frequent rereading; can write letters, numbers and sight words and copy lists of familiar words and phrases; may also be able to write simple sentences or phrases such as name, address, and phone number, as well as write simple messages and letters using simple punctuation (e.g., periods, commas, question marks); narrative writing is disorganized and unclear and contains frequent errors in writing mechanics (e.g., spelling, punctuation).</p>	<p>Individual functions with difficulty in situations related to immediate needs and in limited social situations; has some simple oral communication abilities using simple learned and often repeated phrases; can provide personal information on simple forms; can recognize common forms of print found in the home and environment; can handle routine entry-level jobs that require only the most basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated.</p>

Language Acquisition and Acculturation Efforts for Immigrants and Refugees in Minnesota Appendices

Literacy Level	Speaking and Listening	Basic Reading and Writing	Functional Workplace Skills
<p>Low Intermediate ESL</p>	<p>Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary; can ask and respond to questions using such phrases; can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some struggle; has some inconsistent control of grammar.</p>	<p>Individual can read simple material (most two- and three-syllable words) on familiar subjects and comprehend with high accuracy simple and compound sentences in single or linking paragraphs, but has difficulty with authentic material; can write simple notes and messages on familiar situations using simple and compound sentences, but often lacks complete clarity and focus. Sentence structure is simple and lacks variety, but shows some control of basic structure and mechanics (e.g., present and past tense, punctuation).</p>	<p>Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs and maps; can fill out simple forms, but needs support on some documents that are not simplified; can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication, but in which job tasks can be demonstrated.</p>
<p>High Intermediate ESL</p>	<p>Individual can understand simple learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with repetition; can communicate basic survival needs with some help; can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation; relies on description and concrete terms. There is a use and understanding of basic grammar with inconsistent control.</p>	<p>Individual can read simple texts that contain non-complex and clear underlying structure on familiar subjects, but has difficulty with more complex authentic materials; can interpret actions required in specific written directions; can review a paragraph and identify spelling and punctuation errors; can write simple paragraphs with main idea and supporting detail on familiar topics using combinations of all major sentence types; can write messages and notes related to basic needs and short paragraphs describing daily activities and personal issues; can use basic spelling and punctuation with some errors.</p>	<p>Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction and has some ability to communicate on the telephone; can complete basic medical forms and job applications; can handle jobs that involve basic oral instructions and written communication in tasks that can be clarified orally.</p>
<p>Advanced ESL</p>	<p>Individual can converse on many everyday subjects and some subjects with unfamiliar vocabulary, but may need repetition, rewording or slower speech; can speak creatively, but with hesitation; can clarify general meaning by rewording and has control of basic grammar; understands descriptive and spoken narrative and can comprehend abstract concepts in familiar contexts.</p>	<p>Individual is able to read simple descriptions and narratives on familiar subjects or with vocabulary that is contextualized; can make some minimal inferences about familiar texts and compare and contrast information from such texts, but not consistently. The individual can write simple narrative descriptions and short essays on familiar topics, such as daily routines; can handle basic writing mechanics with few errors, but makes errors with complex structures.</p>	<p>Individual can function independently to meet most survival needs and can communicate on the telephone on familiar topics; can interpret simple charts and graphics; can handle jobs that require simple oral and written instructions, multistep diagrams and limited public interaction.</p>

Language Acquisition and Acculturation Efforts for Immigrants and Refugees in Minnesota Appendices

Literacy Level	Speaking and Listening	Basic Reading and Writing	Functional Workplace Skills
Proficient ESL	Individual can understand and participate effectively in conversations on everyday subjects spoken at normal speed when directly addressed; can converse and understand independently in survival, work and social situations; can expand on basic ideas in conversation and use humor and sarcasm, but with some hesitation; can clarify general meaning and control basic grammar, although still lacks total control over complex structures.	Individual can read authentic material on everyday subjects and can handle most reading related to life roles; can consistently and fully interpret descriptive narratives on familiar topics and gain meaning from unfamiliar topics or text using complex language structure. The individual can write multiparagraph essays with a clear introduction and development of ideas; writing contains well-formed sentences, appropriate mechanics and spelling, and has few grammatical errors.	Individual has a general ability to use English effectively to meet most routine social and work situations; can interpret routine charts, graphs and tables, and complete forms; has high ability to communicate on the telephone and understand radio and television; can meet work demands that require reading and writing and can interact with the public.

Source: *National Reporting System*

APPENDIX F: BIOGRAPHY FOR CHIA YOUYEE VANG

Chia Youyee Vang is president and founder of CHIA Consulting, Inc., based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She specializes in developing culturally appropriate research and evaluation methods. A former refugee from Laos, Ms. Vang has resided in Minnesota for the last 22 years and brings her international, national, and local experience to her work.

Ms. Vang received her undergraduate degree in political science/international relations and French from Gustavus Adolphus College and earned a Master of Arts from the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. She is working toward a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota where she will conduct research in the area of global refugee resettlement. In 1994 she was named a Humphrey Scholar and in 2002 she was named a Kaplan Fellow, both at the University of Minnesota.

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