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LESLLA aims to support adults who are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives in a new language. We promote, on a worldwide, multidisciplinary basis, the sharing of research findings, effective pedagogical practices, and information on policy.

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THEORY AND PRACTICE IN TEACHING IMMIGRANT ADULTS WITH
LIMITED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

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ABSTRACT: Skilled and knowledgeable teachers are the key to student success. For practitioners working with adult immigrants with limited education and literacy in their home language, who are developing oral and literacy skills in the language of their new country, there is limited access to specialized training and professional development. The EU-Speak project is addressing this need. Here we report on the project, starting with the results of two international surveys of teachers and program managers that aimed to determine existing and desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The survey results and consultations with experts informed the content of six online modules in five languages for practitioners around the world. The modules focus on the educational needs of the learner population, bilingualism and multilingualism, language and literacy in their social contexts and from a psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary learning, and acquisition of morphosyntax.

KEYWORDS: LESLLA learners; teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes; teacher training and professional development needs; online modules; curriculum framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

International efforts in developing countries have led to a decrease in the number of adults with limited education and little or no literacy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). However, immigration of non- and low-literate adults to post-industrialized countries continues. Education efforts in these countries often focus on children, and many of these adults are well past the age of compulsory schooling. Therefore, they often enter adult education programs.

Full- and part-time paid teachers, volunteers, and program managers who work with this learner population in adult education programs need the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to be effective. Although they may have experience teaching languages to adults or teaching reading to young children, they often have limited or no training or professional development that focuses specifically on the backgrounds, needs, and potential of these adult learners. In fact, in most countries, no specific training exists. In many instances around the world, there is considerable reliance on part-time teachers and volunteers. They have even more limited opportunities or resources for any training or professional development that exists or for collaboration with other educators.

The need for such specialized training and professional development is underscored by three factors: 1) the difficulties that these adult learners (LESLLA learners in this article) have in education programs around the world to move beyond basic language and literacy in the language of their new host country (e.g., from below the lowest level, A1, to the intermediate level, B1, of the six-level *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Council of Europe, 2001; see discussion in Kurvers & van de Craats, 2008); 2) the desire of these teachers to be able to work successfully with these learners (Young-Scholten et al., 2015); and 3) the progress that these learners make when they are taught by qualified teachers (Condelli et al., 2010).

This article describes the motivation for, development and delivery of, and participant evaluations of free online modules that the EU-Speak-3 project is designing to address the challenges described above. The content of the modules, each of which lasts six weeks, is informed by two international surveys of teachers needs and wishes and by consultation with experts (EU-Speak-2 project, 2014-2015). The modules are designed to be cross-national (involving English-speaking teachers from various countries) and multilingual (with versions also in Finnish, German, Spanish, and Turkish, supported by mentors who speak the language and a multilingual discussion forum). The EU-Speak project partners, all of them actively working with LESLLA learners in various capacities, are committed to the idea that the best instructional practices are connected to relevant research findings. Research is rarely conveyed to practitioners in an accessible form, and the project is committed to doing so through these modules.

2. PROJECT MOTIVATION: THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES THAT TEACHERS WANT AND NEED

The goal of EU-Speak is to improve the instructional support that adult learners with limited education and literacy in their native or home language (LESLLA learners) receive, so that they will be successful in their new country. The overall effort consists of three projects:¹

- *EU-Speak 1* (2010-2012): A partnership exchange with workshops to share ideas on and experience with all components of working with this learner population: goals, policies, instructional approaches, materials, learner assessment, and professional development.
- *EU-Speak 2* (2014-2015): Teacher surveys and expert consultation; a draft curriculum; and pilot testing of a module informed by survey results.
- *EU-Speak 3* (2015-2018): Development of six online modules, each delivered twice in English, Finnish, German, Spanish, and Turkish.

The first EU-Speak 2 survey focused on the knowledge and skills that those who work with LESLLA learners, along with program managers, believe they have, need, and would like to gain in their training and professional development. The starting point for the survey was a similar survey by the Nordic Adult Literacy Network, with which EU-Speak's Finnish partner was involved (Franks & Christensen, 2013). There were over 300 responses from those in the partner countries: Finland, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, and the United States, as well as from Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Ireland, New Zealand, and Thailand.

The results were used to compile a list of knowledge, skills, and attitudes specific to working with LESLLA learners. Experts in the field of LESLLA education (managers, trainers, activists, and researchers) in the same countries as those of the survey respondents were then asked to respond to the list and make further suggestions. A second survey was then conducted to ascertain whether respondents agreed with the highest scoring items on the first survey and to find out what opportunities are available to develop the relevant knowledge and skills.

An interesting outcome of the first survey was that responses indicated more focus on the need for instructional skills than for background knowledge. Although none of the responses demonstrated significant differences across questions, the following skills received the highest scores. The ability to, with this population of learners ...

- Use teaching methods that facilitate their active participation in class
- Use authentic conversational situations and materials in teaching that reflect their daily experiences and meet their needs
- Use instructional approaches to support their development of oral language skills
- Guide them in the process of developing reading and writing strategies that they can use independently in their daily lives

1. 2010-2012: Grundtvig 2010-1-GB2-GRU06-03528
 2014-2015: Grundtvig 539478-LLP- 1-2013-1-UK-GRUNDTVIG-GMP
 2015-2018: Erasmus+ 2015-1-UK01-KA204-013485

Areas of understanding and knowledge that received the highest scores are closely related to these skills. The items with the highest scores were related to ...

- Learners' backgrounds, situations, and learning potential to guide course planning and teaching
- Current teaching materials suitable for use with them
- The effects of their first language(s) when learning the second/additional language
- The kinds of written information that learners encounter in their daily lives

In the responses to the second survey, we found that respondents receive limited relevant training or development, that what they receive which is relevant focuses primarily on developing oral language skills rather than on literacy, and (again) that respondents prefer training and professional development that focuses on instructional strategies over background knowledge (theories and research findings).

One of the recurring themes in survey responses was the need to provide materials and information to teachers in their native languages, because English is not always appropriate as a language for training and professional development with educators who are teaching the language and literacy of the country they work in. (See Young-Scholten et al., 2015; Young-Scholten, Sosiński, & Martín-Rubio, 2015, for detailed discussion of the surveys, profiles of the respondents, and how the surveys and expert consultation informed development of the six online modules).

3. THE PROCESS: DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF ONLINE MODULES

3.1. ASSUMPTIONS GUIDING MODULE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to what is discussed above, development of the six online modules was guided by the research that has been done on education of adults with limited schooling and literacy and the observation that module participants would be unfamiliar with certain bodies of research. This process resulted in three assumptions about the learners:

1. Adult immigrants can, despite lack of schooling and literacy, and even without specific instruction in the second or additional language, reach high levels of oral proficiency in the L2 (Hawkins, 2001; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 2011).
2. Even at older ages, individuals can learn to read for the first time in an L2. Researchers have observed important similarities to the ways that children learn (Kurvers, Stockmann, & van de Craats, 2010; Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010; Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006).
3. However, many adults with little or no formal education and home language literacy fail to move beyond CEFR A1, and some don't reach this level (Condelli et al., 2003; Kurvers et al., 2010; Schellekens, 2011; Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2009).

And three observations relevant to teaching:

1. When taught by well-qualified teachers, learners progress faster (e.g. Condelli, et al., 2010; Paget & Stevenson, 2014; Schellekens, 2011).

2. In most countries, teachers have little or no access to training and professional development specific to teaching this learner population.
3. Teachers', volunteers', administrators/managers' knowledge of the learning process and learning trajectories of learners, and their expectations of their abilities and growth, grow out of their previous teaching experience and are not always aligned with this learner population (Gil, Marsden, & Whong, 2013; Lightbown, 1984).

In this context, where professional development is clearly needed, we find the following trend: Basic skills education for adult immigrants is evolving as an international-level concern. Practitioners who work with this adult learner population have much in common, given the lack of rigid institutional structure in adult immigrant basic skills education in most countries and the common origins of LESLLA learners. Thus, training and professional development can be offered internationally.

3.2. PILOT TESTING OF A MODULE AND DEVELOPMENT OF A CURRICULUM

Before the development and delivery of the first of the modules began, in February-March 2015, the EU-Speak-2 team piloted online delivery of an international "study circle" on *Vocabulary Learning*. This was a 15-hour module, delivered over 5 weeks, offered on a Moodle platform. A sixth week was later added to allow participants time to complete assigned activities and apply their new knowledge and skills in their classes. Much of the module content was developed by Professor Andreas Rohde, the Cologne partner, and included ideas about vocabulary learning that participants would not have come across. Because there is still very little research on LESLLA learners' vocabulary development, part of the module involved extrapolating findings from the wealth of research on children's vocabulary learning. Participants then reflected on similarities to LESLLA learners, who, unlike highly educated learners, less often use the conscious, metalinguistic word learning strategies that educated adults use. This module will be refined, based on participant evaluations, and offered two more times (in the spring 2017 and again in 2018). A target of 50 participants was set, and 51 participated. Participants were from Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, the UK and the United States. Knowing about others' experiences with offering online professional development, we expected attrition, and while there was some, about 75 percent of the participants completed all of the activities.

Delivery of this module informed the focus and implementation of the other five modules and allowed the project team to address issues including platform selection, effective ways to make materials available, successful means of promoting participant involvement, and languages for participant mentoring, materials, publications, and other resources. After reviewing lessons learned from the pilot test, the following procedure was followed for developing and delivering the suite of six-week modules. A master curriculum was developed that outlines the topics for and components of each module.

1. Decide on six module topics
2. Schedule when each module (first delivery) would go live
3. Decide on a platform for delivery (Moodle has been used, supported by other interactive technology)

4. Create a syllabus for each module
5. Write the content and readings for each module
6. Create activities to link theory and practice
7. Collect supporting resources for each module
8. Translate the module into the partner languages
9. Upload the module onto the platform
10. Have an independent reviewer evaluate the module
11. Recruit and select participants
12. Run the module and use mentors to facilitate participant involvement
13. Evaluate its success

3.3. ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULES

The modules developed respond to what teachers have said is critical to their practice. While each six-week module is self-standing, they are being offered in succession (and will be offered a second time in succession). After the project ends, the modules will be available through another provider (e.g., the LESLLA organization). (The Appendix lists the purpose of, objectives for, and topics covered in each module, with a sample of the activities that participants engage in.)

Module 1: Working with LESLLA Learners

Designed by Virginia Commonwealth University, launched February 2016; April 2017

Module 2: Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Designed by University of Jyväskylä, launched October 2016; May 2017

Module 3: Language and Literacy in their Social Contexts

Designed by Boğaziçi University, launched May 2016; October 2017

Module 4: Reading Development from a Psycholinguistic Perspective

Designed by University of Granada, launched February 2017; November 2017

Module 5: Vocabulary Acquisition

Designed by University of Cologne, launched May 2017; February 2018

Module 6: Acquisition and Assessment of Morphosyntax

Designed by Newcastle University and Northumbria University, launched October 2017; April 2018

There is a strong focus in each module on building community among the participants and creating local communities of practice. In 2014-2015, we used the term “study circle,” but because it is not widely understood, we adopted the term “module” and identified where interaction would take place: in a discussion forum supported by local facilitators, who live and work in the partner countries. Country-specific interactions take place, in the language of the country, and participants also have opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences with those from other countries. In the pilot module and Modules 1 and 2, cross-country interactions were usually in English, and there was little interaction across languages. With Module 3, we ran a single, multilingual discussion forum, allowing posting in any language. Reactions have been highly positive, and details will be shared in the next LESLLA proceedings.

4. REFLECTION AND LEARNING: PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS OF MODULES

An important component of a module is participant evaluation of its success and whether it helped them in their work. Evaluations are informing development and facilitation of the remaining modules and their second delivery. But since not all of the modules have been delivered, we report here results of evaluations of Modules 1 and 2. In addition to what is noted above regarding cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interaction:

Participants were enthusiastic about having the opportunity to share experiences with those from other regions and countries and to learn new ideas from them.

Publications that support the content of modules are overwhelmingly in English; there are far fewer in other languages.

Participants completed most of the discussion forum questions, commenting that they allow them to gain new knowledge from their fellow participants. (“It was most helpful to suggest an idea and then for another participant to suggest ways to improve the idea.”)

At the same time, many did not contribute to the forums for a number of weeks. They mentioned that they “never got notifications if someone commented on [their] posts,” didn’t receive enough “feedback from experts in the field,” and said they preferred face-to-face interaction with mentors and peers.

Participants reported a high level of engagement in completing activities that fostered interaction between them and the learners in their classes (e.g., completing a study of the languages used in learners’ homes and communities). They were less engaged in activities focused purely on background information but not instruction (e.g., developing a “world map of languages” that the students in their classes speak, primarily because it was difficult to complete it with learners with limited proficiency in the language taught; completing a “Why is prosody important?” activity, because it was difficult and not as relevant as it might be to their teaching).

Organization	Knowledge & Skills Gained	Participant Engagement
93% said it was well organized	86% said the publications provided deepened their knowledge	89% enjoyed the international interaction
93% agreed that six weeks was a good length	79% said the content covered deepened their knowledge	85% liked the online mode of learning
86% noted clear module objectives	79% said that participation in the module helped their teaching	64% logged on at least three times a week

Table 1: Participant Reactions to Two Modules Delivered.

5. NEXT STEPS

As can be seen in the list of modules in Section 3.3, not all of the modules have been offered. Interested individuals or groups can still participate in them. In addition, after

all of the modules have run, individuals or groups can offer these modules in face-to-face teaching. If you would like to offer a module, contact us at Info.EU-Speak@ncl.ac.uk or visit www.EU-Speak.com. In addition, we plan that LESLLA as a formalized organization will host the modules after 2018.

6. CONCLUSION

Practitioners working in the field of adult education need the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively with a population of adult learners who have very different profiles from the learners that they have worked with in the past. Two surveys of practitioners and consultations with experts in the field provided valuable guidance for developing six online modules to provide the training and professional development needed, in the areas that practitioners need to know about, in ways they can easily access, and in cross-national, multilingual contexts. It is hoped that these modules will take us a long way in providing what is needed and will spark development of additional modules.

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EU-SPEAK Partners

Europe: Universities of Amsterdam, Cologne, Granada, Jyväskylä, and Newcastle
 United States: American Institutes for Research, Center for Applied Linguistics, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Project Web Pages

EU-SPEAK 2 project: www.EU-Speak.com (17-5-2017)
 Surveys 1 and 2: <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/eu-speak/eu-speak20102018/surveysandresults> (17-5-2017)
 Responses to Survey 2: <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/media/sites/researchwebsites/EU-Speak2/EU-Speak%20%20Knowledge,%20Skills,%20Understanding,%20Attitudes.pdf> (17-5-2017)

APPENDIX: THE MODULES

Module 1: Working With LESLLA Learners

Purpose: Develop understanding of adult learners who have limited education and literacy and how to work with them

Objectives: Participants will...

- Understand and be able to describe the characteristics of adult literacy learners
- Select materials and resources appropriate for the assessed needs of these learners
- Help learners develop print awareness and recognize sound/symbol correspondence
- Analyse techniques and strategies for incorporating literacy skills into a thematic lesson
- Design and implement an activity for literacy learners

Module 2: Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Purpose: Expand and deepen participants' knowledge of the fundamentals of speaking and reading in more than one language. Because the majority of LESLLA learners are parents or grandparents, the module focuses on bilingualism and multilingualism of learners' families and communities. This is intended to inspire participants to develop new and innovative ideas for connecting with learners' communities.

Objectives: Participants will ...

- Become aware of the bilingualism and multilingualism of their students
- Gain knowledge about their students' languages and their writing systems
- Understand various factors relevant to bilingualism and multilingualism
- Be aware of the linguistic, metalinguistic, literacy, and cognitive aspects of bilingualism and multilingualism
- Identify the influence of learners' native languages on the acquisition of additional language(s)
- Identify the interaction of learners' languages, writing systems, and orthographies during reading
- Reflect on how these factors have an impact on their children's education and learning

Module 3: Language and Literacy in Their Social Contexts

Purpose: Participants will gain knowledge about the various contexts in which language and literacy use and development occur and their impact on learners' language and literacy development

Objectives: Participants will understand that ...

- Language development is a social process and is not divorced from social contexts
- Language learning is rarely a purely individual process, and other people often have a role in it: shared vs. purely individual processes
- Language learners have different goals for learning, which include being able to participate in family and societal life. These have an impact on and are influenced by learners' sense of personal empowerment and agency.
- Basic literacy skills alone are not sufficient for full participation in society and work.
- Interactional skills, in addition to literacy knowledge, are needed to facilitate learning to read and write.
- Literacy takes specific forms and roles in Western societies (e.g., Northern and Southern Europe, United States), influenced by different values placed on being literate and different literacy practices. This includes amount of writing done and amount and types of texts processed; increase in technology-rich environments for literacy

Module 4: Reading Development from a Psycholinguistic Perspective

Purpose: Participants will learn the skills and knowledge that are associated with reading and how they are represented readers' minds and learn ways to develop these skills with the learners in their classes.

Objectives: Participants will ...

- Learn about the lower-level and higher-level processes involved in reading
- Learn about the relationships between oral language proficiency and reading
- Share how they measure students' reading skills and learn about other ways to do so

- Have access to new materials for word decoding (from the DigLin project)
- Have the opportunity create new materials for developing reading comprehension (including materials for pleasure reading)

Module 5: Vocabulary Acquisition

Purpose: Participants will learn ways to promote learning of vocabulary by their learners.

Objectives: Participants will

- Learn ways that children and adults learn new words, including implicit and implicit learning
- Learn one specific way to promote vocabulary learning, "fast mapping"
- Develop and implement pre-, during-, and post- reading activities for their classes

Module 6: Acquisition and Assessment of Morphosyntax

Purpose: Expand and deepen participants' knowledge about the fundamentals of the acquisition of morphosyntax in an additional language, with reference to the rich tradition of research on adult immigrants across a range of countries; demonstrate how this knowledge can be used in learner placement and assessment

Objectives: Participants will ...

- Find out about cutting-edge ideas in the field of language acquisition
- Gain knowledge of stages of morphosyntactic development in the language they are teaching
- Be able to measure their students' progress against a common framework of language development, which will lead to greater confidence about the ability to place learners effectively
- Become more sensitive to learners' mental trajectories with respect to morphosyntax
- Apply this knowledge to planning of tasks and selection of materials for individual learner needs