

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

A PROCESS FOR WORKING WITH ADULT ESL STUDENTS ON SHORT-TERM GOALS

(Developed by Donna Moss, Project Coordinator, and Project Learner Staff at REEP)

Also included below: sample goal worksheets

Part A: BACKGROUND READING

This century has seen an increasing interest in the adult learner as separate and unique from the child and adolescent learner. One distinction made in the literature is that an adult's readiness to learn is related to life's demands. The literature often mentions learning related to individual goals and needs. A study conducted by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) sought to "identify and explore the forces that are supporting adults to persist in their studies and the forces that are acting to hinder their persistence" (Comings, Parrella, and Soricone, 1999). The findings suggest that "participants who have goals in mind are likely to persist in their studies, and changing a goal through experience appears to be a positive decision" (ibid.).

Effective adult programs today strive to provide meaningful, learner-centered instruction that is informed by learners' needs, interests, and goals. For example, at REEP (an adult ESL program with classes of 25-30 students), tailoring instruction to class needs and class goals is accomplished through class curriculum negotiation, whereby students negotiate the course content and set class goals. Such a process gives learners a voice in their instruction, informs and tailors instruction, and improves practice through a better understanding of learners' needs. See Needs Assessment on side bar.

All the benefits described for class needs assessment apply to working with individual learners on their specific goals. Also, such work provides a way of better addressing individual needs in large classes. It can increase motivation and confidence. Learners commit more time to study outside of class, a problem with busy adult students. Including goals in a program's assessment system also provides a way to report gains not reflected on standardized tests. It also helps the field better articulate the importance of education in our adult learners' lives.

Yet, working with individuals on their specific goals is undoubtedly more time consuming and complicated than class goals and raises questions that programs and instructors need to address. For example: What is a goal? How much class time does it take? How can a teacher help 20+ students with their individual goals? Read on to find out.

Part B: WHAT IS A GOAL?

The way programs or instructors approach goal work with individual learners is influenced by their definition of a goal. A goal can be defined in numerous ways:

A dream is a wish that your heart makes. A goal is a dream with a deadline. (Meta Potts, E-mail correspondence, 10/12/98).

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

The end toward which effort is directed. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

Goals are expected learning outcomes given the needs and abilities of learners, the types of educational/tutoring services provided, and the designated time periods assigned for goal attainment. (Goal Attainment Scaling)

Long term learning ventures are prescribed courses of learning (e.g. GED) and use standard measures in pre-test/post/test process to determine a learner's starting point as well as to measure progress. (Lennox McLendon)

A goal is a short-term learning objective that can realistically be accomplished within one instructional cycle, i.e. 4-15 hours per week over 12 weeks. (REEP)

Short term learning projects address a short term need that is very context specific. For example, a limited English proficient custodian wants to be able to respond to inquiries for directions. (Lennox McLendon)

Achievement, purpose, winning, career, being an expert, reaching, dreams and wishes. (REEP learners, 10/98).

What is your definition of a goal? How does your program define goals?

Part C: INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES: INDIVIDUAL SHORT-TERM GOAL WORK

To plan, adults need to be able to set and prioritize goals, develop an organized approach to activities and objectives, actively carry out the plan, monitor the plan's progress, and evaluate its effectiveness while considering any need to adjust the plan.

EFF standard statement for the skill, Plan

As indicated in the above quote, working with learners on their individual goals does more than help them achieve a stated goal. While working on a specific goal, learners are developing many other skills that can be applied to future education goals as well as other life endeavors. These skills are represented in the instructional objectives covered at REEP:

- 1) Understand the concept of goal setting.*
- 2) State a realistic goal for the instructional cycle.*
- 3) Identify strategies to achieve the goal.*
- 4) Create a plan to achieve the goal.*
- 5) Carry out the plan, monitor goal work, and refine goals and strategies, as needed.*
- 6) Evaluate and demonstrate achievement of/progress toward goal.*

These objectives as well as the progress made toward achievement of the stated goal are assessed at the end of the goal process.

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

Part D: INSTRUCTIONAL STEPS

The process/instructional steps used at REEP mirror the instructional objectives outlined in Part C and consist of 1. class needs assessment, 2. identifying goals and 3. carrying out the plan/monitoring progress.

BEGINNING		ON GOING	END
Class Needs Assessment	Goal Articulation.	Learners and Teachers Monitor Progress.	Teachers and learners assess goal work.
	Plan.	Learner/Teacher Conference mid-way.	Learner Teacher Conference.

1. CLASS NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND GOAL SETTING (Also see Needs Assessment.)

Individual goals should grow out of the class needs assessment process. This helps maintain a connection between individual and class work and assists with management and facilitation of multiple goals. If possible, individual goal work should be linked to the learner's long term goal since successful short-term goals are often components of longer-term goals.

For class needs assessment and goal setting, the teacher uses level appropriate tools to assist learners in:

- * Identifying their long-term goals/reasons for studying English,
- * Selecting topic units to be covered as a class, and
- * Identifying and prioritizing language skill needs and focus.

From the needs and priorities identified through the above activities, the teacher selects a tool(s) to focus learners on an individual goal that can be accomplished during the time frame designated for the goals process. Some questions to facilitate the transition from class needs assessment to individual goal articulation include:

Why are you studying English?

Which language skill did you choose as most important in the class needs assessment (reading, writing, speaking, or listening?)

Why is this skill important for you?

When is that skill difficult for you? Think of a time when you couldn't do something in English.

What do you want to be able to do when you finish this class?

2. IDENTIFYING GOALS AND PLANNING

In this critical step, the teacher guides the learners in identifying and articulating an individual goal as well as developing a plan to achieve the goal.

The goal needs to be realistic, achievable, and measurable within the given time frame. Examples of potential realistic goals (given the time frame as well as the level and ability of the student), include:

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

I need to improve my writing in order to write letters to my daughter's teachers.
I need to describe symptoms to the doctor.
I want to improve my listening so that I can understand TV news programs better.
I need to practice speaking so I can have a job interview.

If the goals are not realistic and achievable, the learners will be frustrated by the process and will not have the sense of accomplishment or progress that is a motivating factor with individual goals. Unrealistic goals tend to be too broad, have more than one goal embedded into them, lack focus, have no criteria or context, and need qualifiers. Examples of unrealistic goals given the time frame allotted at REEP include:

Learn English. (Too broad)
Improve my pronunciation. (Lacks focus, needs criteria and context)
Practice speaking. (Lacks focus)

Modeling and samples are critical in assisting learners in articulating a realistic goal and planning strategies to achieve the goal. The teacher should model the process with a sample student goal or a goal of his/her own. Given a particular context (e.g. family literacy, a unit on health or work), the teacher and students can brainstorm a list of possible goals. Samples of unrealistic as well as realistic goals help learners understand the concept of a short-term vs. a long-term goal. Then, using a realistic goal as a model, the teacher can work with the class to state the goal, do a pre-assessment, and develop a list of strategies to achieve that goal.

A formulaic goal statement helps learners identify a measurable language goal that is achievable given the time frame. The goal statement should include what (e.g. identified skill) and why (in order to/so I can), for example:

I need to improve / practice my (identified skill) in order to (do something).

- *I need to improve my **reading** in order to **read cookbooks.** (Student wants to be a chef.)*

I need to improve (identified skill) so I can (do something).

- *I need to improve my **speaking** in order to **ask questions in the supermarket.***

Once the process has been modeled and worked through as a group, the learners write out their goal and strategies and complete the goal pre-assessment (e.g. where I am now and where I want to be). The assessment serves as a baseline assessment against which to measure progress made throughout the goal process. Even if the goal is not achieved, it is helpful for the student to see progress. It also helps the learner and teacher identify whether or not the goal is too broad, given the time frame and learners' abilities.

The teacher reviews the goals, plans (strategies), and self-assessments. If the goals seem unrealistic or the plans do not match the goal, the students can self or peer critique the goals/plan. Some questions could include: Can this goal really be accomplished in 12 weeks? Will the strategies in my plan help me achieve my goal and how?

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

3. CARRYING OUT THE PLAN/MONITORING PROGRESS

Depending on the type of goal, plan, and learning style of the student, **learners reflect on their progress and activities in various ways throughout the goal process.** Some learners enjoy keeping a record of their goal activities, e.g. on a log or in a portfolio; others resist these approaches. Typically, learners enjoy and benefit from periodic opportunities to share their progress with each other and get feedback from other learners on their progress and strategies. This can be done as a whole group, in homogeneous small groups (learners with similar goals), or heterogeneous small groups (learners with different goals). Learners generally want to talk with and get feedback from their teachers about their goals. This can be accomplished during the middle and end of cycle individual progress conferences.

4. EVALUATING AND DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

Achievement of/progress toward the goal is assessed by the learner and the teacher at the end of the goal process. The process (i.e. instructional objectives) is assessed by the teacher.

Learners reflect on the achievement of their goal and record their assessment on their goal worksheet. Learners should show evidence of progress/achievement. Evidence could include demonstration of new skills, documentation from outside sources (e.g. a promotion, a certificate), statements about how the student feels/functions now, anecdotal statements, such as, "I spoke to my boss about...I couldn't do that before.", etc.

Teachers assess progress toward/achievement of the goal based on overall progress in the class, performance evaluation or student demonstration, learner self-assessment, and/or achievement of related class objectives. The teacher records the assessment and evidence on the learners' progress report. The teacher also assesses achievement of the instructional objectives (process), records the assessment on the learner's progress report, and discusses the learner's progress during the individual conferences at the end of the cycle.

PART D: CONCLUSION

The goal process outlined in this reading takes time and experimentation. However, when well implemented, learners, programs, instructors, and the field benefit. Goal work allows a learner to state a learning goal and make plans to meet the goal. The direction of the learning is conducted by the learner (Hiemstra 1990). It also helps the learner develop planning skills and practice language skills while working on a specific individual goal. Programs and instructors can learn more about their students and their needs through goal work. This information can be used to inform instruction and improve program effectiveness. Finally, fund providers want evidence of learners' educational gains and attainment of their learning goals. Goal work can be used to provide evidence that learners are making progress.

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

SAMPLE GOAL WORKSHEETS

For additional activities, see Learner Needs Assessment (Learner Generated Questionnaires and Information Grids)

GOAL STATEMENT

WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN? (12 week goal)

I need to improve my _____

so I can _____

GOAL PLANNING

HOW WILL I LEARN? (I will:)

I am going to achieve my goal by doing:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

GOAL MONITORING: Individual Log

WHAT DID I DO? (12 week goal)

<i>Date</i>	I did:	It was: very difficult difficult so so easy	Comments:
-------------	--------	---	-----------

GOAL MONITORING: Information Grid Activity

Name	Did you speak English on the telephone this weekend? Tell about the call. (or a question related to the student's goal)	Are you making progress toward your goal?	What can you do outside of class to help you achieve your goal?
------	---	---	---

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

Practice/teach grid questions. The boxes can contain complete questions or cue phrases. After doing an example, learners interview each other and record answers on the grid. The teacher can interview learners and record responses on an overhead transparency of the grid. That way, processing questions can be asked and results analyzed together. Note: Number of rows for learners to respond is indefinite.

GOAL MONITORING: High intermediate/Advanced

Name _____ Date: _____

Look over the personal goal you made at the beginning of the cycle. Then, answer the questions.

My goal: _____
_____.

1. In what ways have you been practicing in and outside of class to reach your goal? Give two or more examples of strategies you are using.

A.

B.

C.

2. Approximately how much time per week outside of class do you practice related to your goal? Is this enough?

3. Fill in "a lot of", "some", or "very little".

Since the beginning of the cycle, I have been making _____ progress toward my goal.

4. Do you have any questions (either for your classmates or for your teacher about how to get more practice related to your goal?

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

GOAL ASSESSMENT: Student Self-assessment

BEGINNING/INTERMEDIATE

MY GOAL:

HOW AM I DOING?

1. It is easier for me because
2. It is still difficult for me because

MY GOAL:

1. Did you achieve your goal?

If yes,
How do you know you achieved your goal? What types of practice helped you?

If no,
Why do you feel you didn't reach your goal? Do you think your goal was realistic?

TEACHER EVALUATION OF LEARNER GOAL WORK (Teacher completes for each student)

+ = OK < = more practice

- _____ 1. Understand the concept of goal work
- _____ 2. State a realistic short-term goal
- _____ 3. Identify strategies to reach goal
- _____ 4. Create a plan to reach goal
- _____ 5. Practice, check progress and change plans
- _____ 6. Evaluate goal work