3 An Overview of Adult ESL in the U.S. Context

> *I don't say learn the language out of any sense of etiquette or duty. Do it so you can participate fully in the life of the nation and make the most of living in this country.*
>
> —Arnold Schwarzenegger (2008, para. 5)

On the 25th anniversary of becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen, Arnold Schwarzenegger, action film star and former governor of California, reflected on the fact that he came to the United States speaking very little English. "To make it in business and Hollywood, I knew I had to take English lessons, speech lessons, accent-removal lessons—anything to improve my chances of success. And I happily did it all" (Schwarzenegger, 2008, para. 6). He represents, however, only one kind of adult English language learner in an ocean of such learners in the United States.

An ocean is a large context, and within that context there are many dramatic environmental habitats: open water, coastal water, coral reefs, salt marshes, mangrove swamps, and so on. The online context for the adult English language learner in the United States is similarly made up of multiple learning avenues: intensive English programs (IEPs), proprietary schools, federally funded adult education programs, privately funded community-based and faith-based organizational programs, work-based programs, and privately conducted group lessons and tutoring. To paint a picture of some of these avenues for learning, we will look at Jack, Claudia, Maria, Tuan, and Edna as exemplars.[4]

Jack at the Intensive English Program

Jack came on a visa from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like 39,990 other people on student visas to the United States who were enrolled in English language programs in 2013 (Institute of International Education, 2013). He is attending

4. These are representative, composite characters based on data and experience with students in these different contexts. They are not based on any individual students.

English classes for at least 20 classroom hours per week, plus going on some field trips and receiving personalized instruction (formerly known as tutoring). Jack is 19 years old and hopes to enter regular university classes next semester. In fact, he often expresses his belief that he does not need to be in a special English class at all. He believes his English is good enough to make it through the freshman year of college.

Jack has 15 classmates: 4 from Saudi Arabia, 2 from Japan, 2 from Venezuela, and 1 each from Colombia, Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, and China. The majority of students entering university English programs in the United States in 2013 were from Saudi Arabia (10,852), Japan (5,825), and Venezuela (6,158; Institute of International Education, 2013).

Like most intensive English programs, this school does not have a true distance learning program. The idea behind intensive English is that students are fully engaged in English studies in a live (i.e., not digital) environment for large chunks of time. However, a few schools, like Sacred Heart University in Connecticut, have fully online English programs along with their intensive English program, particularly for students for whom travel to an English-speaking country is not feasible (Sacred Heart University, 2014).

Jack's school does not have this option, nor does it require much online interaction with his teacher or classmates. Still, almost all of the textbooks Jack uses have online components. He has to log into the school's intranet and access his grammar and vocabulary text to complete his homework assignments. He gets instant feedback from the program, and his teachers can see exactly where he is doing well and where he may need more help. His writing instructor uses the school's learning management system not only to make assignments, but also for students to submit their essays and receive feedback. She has a discussion board where she requires that students make weekly posts and respond to at least two posts by their classmates, but Jack writes only the minimum amount required to maintain his grade average in the class. He prefers to avoid the computer lab, so he uses his smartphone application for the discussion board and sometimes even to submit his essays.

Claudia at the Proprietary (Private, For-Profit) School

Not all people who come to the United States temporarily to study English enter into intensive English programs. Claudia is a professional website developer and analyst for a large marketing company in Brazil. She studied English in high school and through the university, but she has never been quite comfortable with her spoken English since she has little opportunity to practice with native speakers. In 2013, she decided to invest in a short-term language course offered by a private language school in California. In Brazil, several agencies help match English language learners with English language programs in the United States, and Claudia used one of these agencies to find her school. She based her final decision on familiarity with the text used at the school, which was the same one she had used in her university studies in Brazil, and had the agency help her make arrangements to enter the program. Many proprietary schools like the one Claudia attended are directly tied to private or state universities, but unlike most regular IEPs, they often offer short courses. Claudia had a choice of a 4-week or 3-month course. Because she had only 4 weeks of vacation, she opted for a month's stay.

Like the IEPs, the focus of the proprietary school is to offer an immersive experience. As a result, participants in the program spent very little time on a computer. They had a few digital projects to do, which they did with word-processing and presentation software. They also had access to some online activities that accompanied the text they were using, the same as Jack in the IEP, but these activities were optional, and most students decided to spend their time on other things, like sightseeing and hanging out with their classmates. The only distance communication happened before Claudia arrived on campus, to handle logistics and provide guidance prior to her trip, and after she returned to Brazil, when she received a short evaluation survey via email to determine her satisfaction with the program and advise her of a discount if she returned in the future.

Both Jack and Claudia came to the United States fully intending to return to their own country after their studies. Maria came with no intention of returning, and her experience with learning English in the United States was significantly different as a result.

Maria at the Public School Program

Maria was just 26 years old when she successfully crossed the southern U.S. border with her husband Gilberto, her son Ivan, age 9, and daughter Elsa, age 6. They paid a "coyote" (a human trafficker) US$8,000 to help them get past the border checkpoints. She did not realize at the time that getting past immigration patrol was just the start of her worries.

Without a legal visa, she and her husband encountered and overcame multiple barriers to providing a better life for their children, which is all they wanted. Without permission to work, Gilberto often had to take low-wage, low-status jobs. In some cases, the company refused to pay him at all and threatened to turn him in to immigration if he complained. In Texas and several other states, undocumented immigrants are unable to acquire a driver's license, which also means they are not able to purchase car insurance. Gilberto chose to drive without a license or insurance, and twice was stopped by police for traffic violations. The fines were over $500 each time and if he failed to pay, he knew he would likely be deported. On the other hand, if Gilberto did not drive, he would have to find a job close to their home or figure out other means of transportation. Although they wanted to save for the future, Maria and Gilberto were unable to open a bank account because they did not have the types of identification

required by federal rules for banking. They kept their savings in their freezer and were twice robbed while they were at work.

At first, Maria was not interested in learning English because she had settled in the southwestern part of the United States, where Spanish is commonly spoken by about a third of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). However, once her children entered school, she found herself at a disadvantage when speaking to their teachers, especially the ones who spoke limited or no Spanish. She decided to enroll in a free, federally funded family literacy English language and civics class being offered at her daughter's elementary school.

Maria had no computer experience when she walked into the classroom, but the teacher set up an email account for her on the first day of class. Every week for the first few weeks, the teacher took the class to the computer lab, where they practiced using email: sending email, formatting text, forwarding email, adding attachments, archiving messages into specific folders, and so on. Eventually, the parenting specialist came to the class to help Maria and her classmates set up accounts on the public school's parent access program. At that point, her children's teachers began to keep her updated by email, and although Maria did not have a computer, she was able to access the parent engagement program and her email on her phone.

As the semester went on, she had several projects to prepare which required new computer skills. By Christmas, she was able to write essays using a word processor, prepare a presentation, and even edit a short film on how to make empanadas. When the semester resumed in January, the teacher started requiring students to view instructional videos prior to coming to class so that they could spend more time in the classroom actually practicing the skills. This flipped classroom concept (see the Promising Practices section in Chapter 4 for more on this topic) was difficult for students at first, especially because fewer than half had access to a computer at home, but before the first month of the year was finished, everyone was able to access the private YouTube channel to view the lesson explanation and enjoy more of their class time in conversation and practice. Gilberto, who was unable to attend classes because of work, often watched the videos with Maria at home and started to be interested in learning English for himself. He even went so far as to enroll in the evening classes offered at the same school.

A few weeks into the spring semester, the teacher introduced optional distance learning activities. Gilberto had bought a laptop for Maria and the children for Christmas, so Maria was one of the first to apply to participate in the distance learning program. Each week, in addition to her in-class activities, she completed one or more units of an online English language learning course, USA Learns (www.usalearns.org). When Gilberto was unable to find work and Maria had to leave the class to help support the family, she continued using USA Learns until she was able to return to the regular classroom. Before the year ended, she had been promoted to the adult basic education class with native English speakers, the first step toward passing the General Education Development (GED) test, which is considered equivalent to a high school diploma in the United States.

Tuan at the Faith-Based Program

Not all ESL programs are as fortunate as Maria's to have computer lab access and integrated technology instruction. Tuan, who came from Vietnam, found a free English class offered by a church in his neighborhood. The teacher was experienced and enthusiastic, and he and his classmates were dedicated, but the classroom resources were very limited. There was no dry erase board, much less a computer and projector. The teacher brought one old laptop for the students to use to do some practice activities, but as there was no wireless Internet access in the church, the types of activities were limited to those available on CD-ROM. To further complicate matters, the majority of the students not only had no computer skills, many had no first language literacy skills either. Initially, the teacher spent as much time trying to have students identify the different keys as she did having the students take turns practicing, and even then it was awkward having small groups of students huddle around the small laptop screen so that she could demonstrate what to do. Tuan was an exception, being both highly literate and very comfortable with computer technology. He soon became the classroom expert for the "computer center" and helped the other students with both learning the English alphabet and using the computer.

The faith-based program had the same access to USA Learns as Maria's federally funded program, but it did not have the resources to adequately prepare students with the necessary technology skills. The teacher brought in her hotspot to demonstrate the program, hoping some students would participate, but only a few, Tuan among them, ever created an account. In the end, Tuan was the only person who was actively using the distance learning option. Before the 3-month course was over, many of his classmates had not only stopped using the online program, but also stopped coming to the class as well. For many, family and work demands made it difficult or impossible to continue. Tuan eventually realized he could use the USA Learns courses without being part of the church's program and also stopped attending the class. When he completed all three of the USA Learns course options, he found other free sites on which he could practice his English at times that were more convenient for him.

Edna at a Work-Based Program

Work can be a complicating issue for many adult immigrants who want to study English. Some are fortunate enough to have English lessons offered at or through their jobs. Since coming to the United States from Honduras 3 years ago, Edna has been working as a housekeeper in a local hotel. Her job responsibilities along with taking care of her children and husband did not allow her enough time to also take English lessons, and while she wanted to learn English, she did not feel any sense of urgency to do so. Her supervisor and coworkers always spoke in Spanish, so she usually managed with no problems at work. Her children

were enrolled in bilingual classes, so communicating with their teachers was not a problem either. However, sometimes a hotel guest asked her for something and she had to shake her head and say, "No English." When her hotel manager decided to offer English lessons to the staff in order to improve their customer service rating, Edna was one of the first to sign up.

The class met for just 1 hour 2 days a week, but the instructor also had the participants use a special module of a business English course that addressed English for the hospitality service industry. This module allowed them to engage in role-playing situations with the computer even when the class was not meeting. The computer program gave Edna feedback on her pronunciation and helped her gain confidence when guests asked for simple things like towels and soap. During the class meetings, Edna's instructor was able to monitor her progress and give her feedback about her lessons. Edna's manager was happy because she received better customer service scores. Within 4 months, Edna had been promoted to a supervisory position and was being groomed for management as long as she continued with her English studies.

Summary

As we can see by the experiences of Jack, Claudia, Maria, Tuan, and Edna, teaching in the digital context for adults learning English in the United States varies greatly. In general, programs that cater to adult learners who plan to return to their home country focus more on face-to-face personal experience and less on digital contexts. However, some of these programs are starting to offer fully online courses to reach potential students who are not able to come to the United States. Publicly funded programs that reach adult learners who plan to remain in the United States often include computer literacy (or workforce literacy, which includes computer literacy as a 21st century skill) in their English language programs. Moreover, almost every U.S. state currently offers state-funded distance learning options for adult learners in English language and civics programs, those that do not are planning to do so soon. These programs are offered through community colleges (2-year postsecondary schools), public school districts, and community-based and faith-based organizations. The character of each organization, including its use of technology, is dependent on the organization's mission, funding, and student base, although there is a general movement toward including more technology in almost every adult learning context.

We have viewed these experiences from the point of view of the learners. In the next few chapters, I will draw on my own experience and informal interviews with colleagues to look at three digital contexts in particular: the U.S. college and university system, the U.S. adult education system, and tutorials and classes by private instructors offered worldwide via the Internet.

4 The Digital Context in U.S. University and College Settings

> *I was expecting to be able to speak more fluently and better than I can speak now. We speak with other students like me from EFL so we make mistakes and we don't notice that those are mistakes.*
>
> —student quoted in Study in the USA (2014)

When talking about English as a second language in college in the United States, it is helpful to distinguish between two different kinds of institutions: 4-year universities and colleges and 2-year community colleges.

4-Year Institutions: Intensive English Programs

There are more than 600 intensive English programs (IEPs) in the United States, including both general academic English and English for specific purposes, such as aviation and business. These programs are sometimes called university "cash cows" as they can bring in large amounts of revenue based on out-of-state and specialized tuition programs. However, they are highly susceptible to world events such as natural disasters and economic downturns and as such are easy targets for university programming cuts when enrollment slows (Rentz, 2012).

Students applying to a traditional 4-year university generally have to pass entrance exams (such as the SAT for undergraduates and the GRE for graduate school). Most schools require applicants to write an entrance essay, and many programs are highly competitive, meaning even excellent students may find themselves attending their second or third university choice. One marketing advantage of IEPs in overseas markets is that many are able to integrate with their host university to accept international students based on successfully completing the IEP program instead of a standardized English test like the TOEFL (Rentz, 2012) and have preferential entrance into the for-credit university program.

The cost of postsecondary education in the United States is extremely high, even at public universities. Students who are state residents can expect to pay

nearly US$9,000 for 1 year of college, while students coming from outside of the state will have to pay US$22,000 per year—$30,000 if they elect to attend a private university—and these figures do not include student residence, meals, or books (College Board, 2014).

The majority of students in university IEPs are students from other countries who plan to return to their home country or who want to enter a U.S. university but lack university-level English language skills. Their motivations for studying in the United States vary. Some students come simply for the experience of living in the United States. Others must improve their skills in order to start the undergraduate or graduate program of their choice. Some simply believe that studying in the United States will improve them as a person and enhance their career prospects.

A quick count of the intensive English programs listed under the Online/Distance Learning category on the Study in the USA website (www.studyusa.com) lists more than 115 programs, approximately 16% of all of the university English programs. However, some of these, such as Kaplan, are proprietary programs listed in various states, and others, when you follow the link, offer no information about online or distance learning.

The lack of true distance learning programs is not surprising. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the main draw of intensive English programs is living and practicing English in an immersion environment. Nonetheless, the digital world is still important in this context. Instructors use technology during instruction and require that students use supplemental online resources. U.S. textbooks these days almost always have some sort of online component. Essays and research papers require students to access library databases as well as other online resources, and universities often have learning management systems on which some teachers require discussion board posts. In fact, many of the teachers in my community of practice are constantly looking for best practices for integrating technology into their intensive English classes.

Community Colleges

While university IEP students tend to be younger (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005) and focused almost exclusively on learning the language (most cannot work in the United States because of their student visa status), community college English language students tend to be older (around 29 or 30 on average) working adults attending part-time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Participants at the community college are usually immigrants who need English to improve their quality of life in the United States. The difference in students' prior education levels, life experience, and motivation are notable. Moreover, there are many reasons why students may choose a community college over a 4-year institution when studying ESL in the United States.

Cost is one of the primary reasons that some students, including nontraditional students (those who did not transition directly from high school into postsecondary education), may choose to attend a community college. Public 2-year colleges have a price tag of about $3,250 per year, compared to the $9,000 per year for in-state tuition at 4-year public universities (College Board, 2014). In addition, many community colleges have programs that articulate directly with larger 4-year institutions, meaning that after completing the 2 years at the community college, students can feel confident that any credits they have earned will be accepted at the 4-year university with which the community college has forged a relationship. In other words, by attending a 2-year college first, students can save over US$11,000, which can be an incentive to start at a 2-year college even for a 4-year-degree career goal.

Substantial savings are, however, only one reason students may choose to attend a community college. In some cases, the chosen career may not require a 4-year degree. Community colleges offer many skilled-labor certificates and associate's degrees for technical jobs, which are currently in high demand in the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). If a student can accomplish his or her career goal with a certificate or 2-year degree, there is little sense in applying to and paying tuition at a 4-year institution. Immigrant adult English learners may choose a 1-year certificate or 2-year degree to expedite their entrance into a career. In some cases, they are able to build on their career decisions by acquiring different levels of certification as they continue working. For example, a home health worker might pursue a 1-year certificate in medical assisting, moving up to a 2-year degree in vocational nursing, and then moving on to a 4-year registered nursing program, all the while continuing to work and support the family.

Another reason students may choose a community college is that the entrance requirements tend to be less stringent, so those who did not do well in secondary school or who did not successfully pass required placement tests at the college level can still take noncredit remedial classes. This testing difference is especially important in the case of nonnative speakers of English. Most community colleges administer their own English language placement tests, and even students who cannot pass a standardized English test like the TOEFL will be accepted into noncredit community English or remedial for-credit English classes.

Community colleges have two basic types of English language programs: credit programs for advanced English language learners, which are typically for those who intend to pursue further education in the United States and need to improve their academic English, and noncredit programs for those who need practical, daily English to live and work in the United States. Another distinction between these two types of courses is the students' level of English proficiency. The basic English programs use the National Reporting System (NRS) scale for measuring student proficiency. This scale ranges from Beginning ESL Literacy to Advanced ESL. However, Advanced ESL on the NRS scale does not represent fluent or near-fluent proficiency in English. "To the ears of a native speaker, they

would speak English with an 'accent,' make errors in grammar and syntax that most native speakers would not make, and command a limited English vocabulary" (Chisman & Crandall, 2007, p. 13). Noncredit courses teach survival skills, social and work English, and because they are generally part of the national adult education system, they are offered at low or no cost. These types of classes will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on adult education programs.

Students in for-credit programs have a higher level of English proficiency but do not have the academic English required for understanding lectures, academic writing, and academic presentations that college-level classes require. As a result, these courses typically focus on academic writing and speaking, and students pay tuition for these classes like any other college class. Like some intensive English program students, students in these classes may feel that they simply have to get through these classes to get on with their academic career. For example, in a case study on coping strategies utilized by community college ESL students, one student said, "I just need to get this language down, so I can move on to my other classes" (Richards, 2011).

Like intensive English programs, community colleges in the United States usually make supplemental use of online activities such as textbook support, practice software in language labs, and learning management systems. As people are becoming more and more proficient with Web 2.0 technology, however, some promising practices are beginning to be used more extensively.

Promising Practices

Three instructional strategies that integrate online technology that frequently appear in the literature in both intensive English programs and community college for-credit programs are project-based learning, hybrid models, and flipped classrooms.

Project-based learning is a teaching strategy that involves tasking students with solving a problem, coming up with a digital product, or both. It is different from simply preparing a teacher-assigned project in that the students themselves come up with a driving question (problem), determine what they know and what they need to know, and decide how to go about finding the solution and presenting it to an authentic audience. In general, you can tell the difference between a project and project-based learning because all the projects presented in a teacher-assigned project will look essentially the same, or very similar, whereas the products that groups of students produce through project-based learning look very different from one another. In project-based learning, how the project develops depends on the interactions among group members, although the teacher should provide some guidance and assistance. As a result, each group's project reflects the collective and individual character and decisions of that group.

Both projects, especially technology projects, and project-based learning are effective teaching tools, but project-based learning meshes particularly well

with adult learning theory principles: Learners determine what they want to know and how they will go about finding that information, they are essentially self-directing using the instructor more as a resource, they have to rely on prior knowledge and mental models, learning is problem-centered and contextual, and the learning process is valuable to them because they choose the question themselves (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012).

In Kessler, Bikowski, and Boggs's (2012) study, 38 students used Google Docs, a web-based word processor with collaborative writing technology, to plan and conduct research. One of the useful features of Google Docs is that it maintains a history of who wrote or changed what over time; therefore, if necessary, an instructor can go back and see how each student contributed to the final research report. In this study, the students were allowed to group themselves according to their interests and come up with their own research questions. In the analysis of the collaborative writing, the researchers found that most students' entries concerned the meaning of words but that the group members also corrected errors and became more accurate writers over time. One interesting finding was that the students who contributed less to the actual writing made highly accurate changes (79% accurate) when they did decide to contribute (Kessler et al., 2012). As online collaboration becomes more and more popular, teachers may consider including more of these kinds of projects, perhaps with classes in different parts of the globe working together.

Kessler et al. (2012) used a hybrid approach. Writing instruction and some of the planning took place in the classroom. In hybrid or blended models of learning, face-to-face and online components are melded together. The online portion of this model might be a class conducted synchronously, often in a computer lab, or it may be asynchronous participation in online activities, including posting to discussion boards or e-portfolios. (E-portfolios are electronic repositories where students create, store, arrange, and share evidence of their learning activities. They have an advantage over traditional paper-based portfolios for English language learners because all kinds of digital media can be included: photos, audio files, videos, presentations, documents, and so on.) In order for hybrid learning to be most successful, the instructor must make the relationship between the classroom activities and online activities very clear to students. In addition, the teacher needs to monitor students' online activities and provide feedback when appropriate. Particular to language learning, having students record responses and receive individual feedback about pronunciation is one advantage of incorporating online activities. Some research suggests that students who may not respond in class may actually participate more willingly in the online environment (Grgurovic, 2011). Furthermore, research on writing instruction has shown that the use of a blended learning environment can support both collaborative and autonomous learning (Larsen, 2012).

A specialized form of blended learning is the flipped classroom. In a traditional classroom, students come to class, where the teacher explains information

and/or demonstrates a skill. The format is "front-of-the-room" or teacher focused. Students then practice the concept alone, as homework or independent study. Some students are fortunate enough to receive help from family or friends, but not everyone has expert advice readily available. In the flipped classroom model, students first prepare for class by watching a video explanation or working through online modules that the teacher has prepared (or selected). Students can then spend their time in class practicing the skills, with the teacher available to answer questions and help hone the skill. The video lectures are sometimes paired with interspersed quizzes or other online activities to support understanding. In fact, one of the advantages to the flipped classroom model is that students are able to pause, rewind, and replay the lecture as many times as necessary to understand all the main points. In a traditional classroom, this is not the case. For students who have difficulty understanding spoken English, the ability to rewind and replay the explanation is a distinct advantage over traditional in-class explanations. Plus, spending class time on applying the skill or knowledge means the teacher, acting as a resource or expert, can more easily identify problems that individual students have in understanding or application (Educause, 2012).

In analyzing 24 research studies published between 2000 and 2012 (all but one of which were from the postsecondary level), Bishop and Verleger (2013) found the research focused mainly on student perceptions rather than student outcomes, although the outcomes that were reported were generally positive. In a study of preservice TESOL teachers in a Malaysian university, flipping the classroom had a positive effect on active learning. Having viewed the lecture part of the class beforehand, students reported enjoying the class more, being more attentive, and participating more actively in class (Jamaludin & Osman, 2014).

Clearly more research needs to be conducted on flipped classrooms in ESL at the college level in the United States (and elsewhere). Since the focus of intensive English programs and community college for-credit English is to prepare students for academic English, dispensing with too much teacher talk at the beginning of the class by using a well-prepared, 5- to 7-minute video lecture may enable instructors to make the best use of their limited class time, especially for such activities as writing conferences, in which the teacher gives individual feedback on students' writing in class.

These practices—project-based learning, hybrid or blended models, and flipped classrooms—are also common in adult basic education in the United States, which we will discuss in the next chapter. The main differences are, in general, the relative difficulty of the material, and the assumptions instructors make about students' technology skills.

3 The Digital Context in Adult Education and Workplace ESL in the United States

My wish is to read in English. Now I can say that I can write, read, and speak a little. I couldn't before. I was shy and embarrassed to speak and made mistakes. Now I am excited about studying English and understanding other people. I still hope to speak better really soon.

—Maria (quoted in Salazar, 2011)

In this chapter, we will look at two types of adult education programs in the United States: English language programs and workplace programs.

Adult Education English Language Programs

Approximately 77,000 teachers in the United States work in adult education, which primarily includes teaching basic literacy, teaching English as a second language, and preparing adults for the General Educational Development test (National Center for O*Net Development, 2010). Without giving specific details, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) states, "Many positions for this occupation are part time, and full-time positions are uncommon and difficult to find. As a result, prospects will be best for workers who are willing and able to take a part-time position." Being part-time means that most instructors teaching English as a second language to adults in community programs have no insurance or retirement benefits. Some adult education teachers have full-time jobs in education or other fields. Some are retired or have other sources of support such as a working spouse or partner. However, many have to juggle teaching posts at two or three organizations in order to make ends meet.

In my early career, all of my teaching positions were in the evening, 2 to 3 hours a night, 2 or 3 nights a week. Twenty to thirty students made their way into the classroom after working long hours in mostly physically demanding jobs. For publicly funded programs, financial support is funneled from the federal government through the state to local programs through the Workforce Investment

Act (WIA) of 1998. The WIA was replaced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, but at the time of this writing it is unclear exactly how the new act will impact adult education, especially English language instruction.

WIA was intended to provide resources for members of the population with the most need: "low income adults who are educationally disadvantaged; individuals with disabilities; single parents and displaced homemakers; individuals with multiple barriers to educational enhancement, including individuals with limited English proficiency; criminal offenders in correctional institutions and other institutionalized individuals" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

In other words, the English language students I taught in publicly funded programs worked hard, but they were generally living below the poverty level in the United States. These students had priority in the class based on funding, and the class was almost always full. Because of their socioeconomic situation, a host of other considerations had to be on my mind as an instructor. Could my students afford to buy a textbook? Could they even afford to buy paper? Did the story a student just told about his interaction with an employer indicate exploitation or discrimination? What did another student mean when he said there was no water at home? Was the plumbing broken or was he unable to pay the water bill? I imagine every English language teacher in publicly funded adult education in the United States could add dozens of questions to this list. As their instructor, I tried to make the classroom a safe, welcoming environment. Outside of my class, the majority of these students were invisible people: construction workers, housekeepers, food vendors. In my class, if nowhere else, I was determined that these men and women would feel that someone noticed them, someone cared about them, and someone respected them for who they were as well as for the skills and abilities they already had.

My best efforts notwithstanding, by the end of the semester, it was not unusual for my evening class to start dwindling down, from 30 to 20 to fewer than a dozen students. Work schedules changed. Family demands caused "stop-outs," which refers to students who leave the program but who come back later. Most, according to research, never considered themselves to have quit the program. They just had their studies temporarily interrupted (Belzer, 1998). As a teacher, this was frustrating, but it was also frustrating for the students. Because of missing class, they would often feel like they were not learning, and then they would quit or stop out again. Here is how one student, who did consider his stop-out as quitting, described the experience of coming back to class:

> When you realize it's not easy, you feel it is better to quit. But later, when you meet your classmates who were studying with you in the same classroom, and see they are speaking English better than you, you regret not being consistent about studying English. Then you try going to school one more time. (Juan, quoted in Ramos, 2003)

Eventually, I was fortunate enough to secure a full-time position in adult education with Austin Learning Academy. The position was only 30 hours per week, but it did at least have health benefits. It was in a family literacy program, so my class met while the children were in school. I worked with a coteacher who taught the adult students' preschool children while I taught the mothers (and sometimes fathers) English. As a result, I had the adult students for 6 hours a day, 4 days a week. Having so many student contact hours was marvelous. Students made considerable progress in what seemed like a very short amount of time. In addition to learning English, they learned about U.S. history and government, community action, health, parenting, math, science, and computer literacy. Persistence to the end of the semester was better than 90%, an amazing rate for adult education. However, students still often had to miss class for various reasons, sometimes for weeks at a time, and the evening class I had been allowed to start continued to have the same challenges with regular attendance as all evening adult literacy classes have.

At this point, I worked with the Austin Learning Academy's directors to have the organization become state-approved to offer distance learning to both our ESL and adult basic education students. Like traditional classroom programs, distance learning in publicly funded adult learning programs is governed by rules set forth by the National Reporting System. These rules state that students must have at least 12 direct contact hours to be counted as students in the reporting system. If students start a distance learning course but do not complete the 12 contact hours, they do not count for reporting the organization's activities to the federal system. Therefore, it is important to make sure that the 12 contact hours take place early in the semester. Most programs use at least part of the 12 hours for orientation to make sure that they can report students' progress in the federal data tables.

The regulations also identify three basic types of distance learning models that programs can use: clock time, teacher verification, and learner mastery. In a clock time model, the computer program reports the actual amount of time the student uses the program. The teacher prints out a report generated by the software and enters the corresponding hours into the data management system for the program or state. Teacher verification means that the teacher must check the student's work and determine that it is satisfactory before awarding a predetermined number of hours, based on the unit, to the student's record. Learner mastery requires that students pass a computer-graded test with at least 70%–80% (depending on the program's standards) before being awarded a fixed number of hours.

For our distance learning program, we chose a learner mastery model for two reasons: The programs, USA Learns (www.usalearns.org) and English for All (www.myefa.org; now defunct), were free and required the least amount of additional planning and follow-up on the part of the teacher. That is not to

say that there was not still a considerable amount of additional work involved. Students had to go through an additional orientation about the requirements of the programs if they wanted to participate. They had to show that they could send and receive email without difficulty and that they could log on and off the website on their own. In addition, I had to monitor their progress daily, evaluate their writing activities and report their awarded hours in the adult education data management system for the state.

At the end of the first year of using English For All with my class, most of the students had participated to some degree, but only a few had finished the online course. The next year, I implemented a systematic introduction to computers before introducing the distance learning component. Students began emailing the first week of class, and before Christmas they had written reports on a word processor, created graphs and charts in a spreadsheet, conducted projects and shared the results in slideshows, and even produced short how-to videos on cooking their favorite dishes. Before the semester break, they were ready to engage in distance learning.

This gradual introduction to computers better prepared students to be successful in the distance learning component. To help students, I acquired copies of the videos for the course on DVD, as some of them had difficulty viewing the videos online, either because of bandwidth issues or because their computer would not allow the video to play. Students still had to complete activities online, but they were not stymied by poor video quality.

We enrolled 66 English language students, and 48 completed at least one level. Combined, they added more than nearly 3,000 additional hours to their regular studies (Texas Educating Adults Management System, 2012). In addition, according to the results of an internal survey we conducted that semester, students in my class ($N = 25$)

- increased in computer ownership by 19%,
- increased in home Internet access by 33%,
- increased in ability to use a search engine by 38%,
- increased in ability to use email by 27%.

In fact, on 23 different indicators we measured at the beginning and end of the school year regarding computer use, the class as a whole showed significant improvement on all but three: "I know what a URL is," "I know what a PDF is," "I have used social media on the Internet." Regarding that last item, students did not consider using social media on their phones as using social media on the Internet, so there may have been a change that did not show up in the survey.

This increase in skills that my class reported is reflected in state-level data. By 2014, most publicly funded adult education programs in Texas had some sort of distance learning program in place. Figure 1 clearly shows that students who engage in hybrid distance learning programs (having both traditional classroom

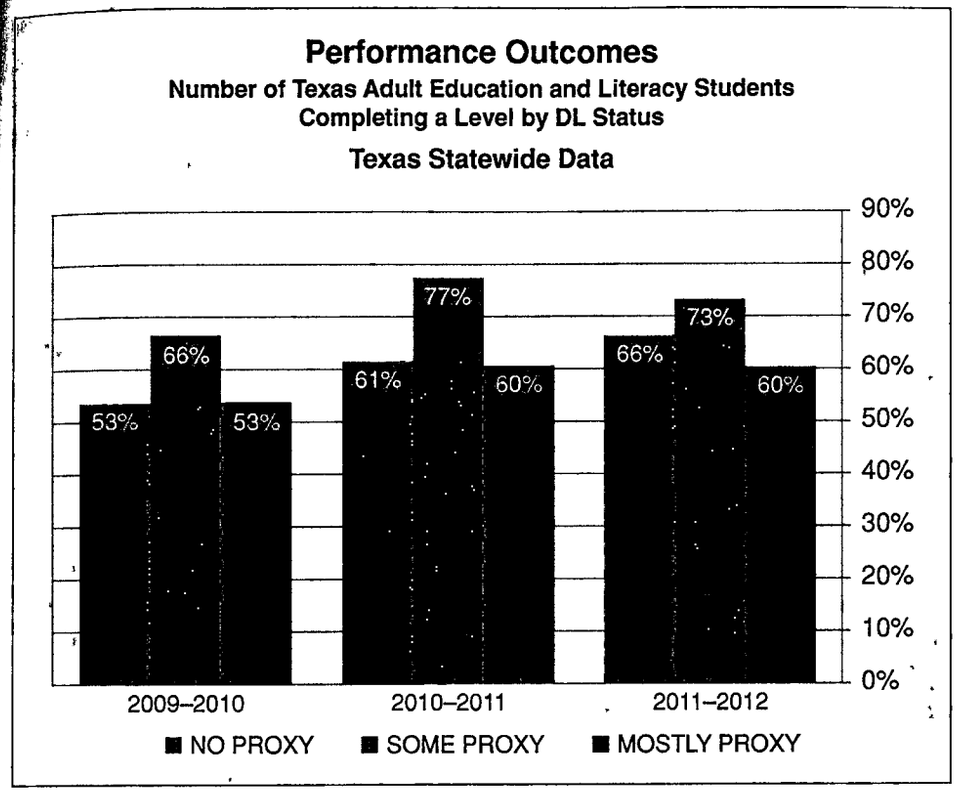

Figure 1. Student Performance in Traditional, Hybrid, and Distance Programs

and distance components) outperformed both students who participated only in traditional classrooms and those who participated primarily in distance learning programs. Proxy hours are hours earned when studying at a distance when the student's identity cannot be easily confirmed, that is, when not in a traditional classroom setting with an instructor present, on a phone call, or in a video conference.

Workplace Programs

Community education programs, whether state-funded or privately funded, are not the only place that adults residing in the United States learn English. Many businesses are also encouraging their employees to improve their English by offering classes on site. One nonprofit organization in central Texas, English @ Work (http://englishatwork.org), has worked with 30 employers in grocery, healthcare, and hospitality industries to provide accessible English lessons.

In fact, in a recent survey of 336 enterprise-sized companies (1,000 employees or more) investing in English language instruction, 57% in the United States

and Canada provided English language lessons on site, while 58% offered courses to their employees using Internet-based software solutions. Virtual classroom training was reported to be used by 49% of companies. (These percentages are not mutually exclusive.) These organizations reported that improving the English language level of their employees improved customer satisfaction, productivity, and sales (Rosetta Stone, 2014).

In the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014, I also had the opportunity to teach in a workplace English program offered by McDonald's Corporation called English Under the Arches (EUA). EUA is designed to help managers and manager trainees who need to improve their English. Since 2008, more than 2,500 employees have participated, with a course completion rate of 91%. These participants were also very likely to improve their salary and remain with the company for several years after their course (Aspen Institute, 2014).

The design of the EUA program may hold the key to its success. First, participants are paid to attend their weekly English lesson, in person or online, and are also paid for one additional hour of online activity each week which their manager plans into their schedule. In my case, the regional coordinator was very proactive, communicating regularly with store managers to make sure that the participants were scheduled correctly and able to attend all the classes. In other words, support for the program came from every level of the organization, which undoubtedly contributed to individual successes.

The materials are specifically contextualized to working at McDonald's, but include tried-and-true activities such as general conversation, think-pair-share, role-playing, and so on. Contextualizing the materials in words, objects, and situations with which the participants are already familiar may help improve learning. For example, the program at McDonald's would include vocabulary such as names of products (*Big Mac, McFlurry*), equipment (*fry basket, dump tray*), and processes (*restock lids, assemble sandwiches*), which may not be common in everyday conversational English but are heard daily in the McDonald's restaurant environment. Further, learners are immediately able to apply what they are learning at work through required on-the-job activities. By immediately applying what they are learning, students seem to become aware of their own improvement and stay highly motivated throughout the course.

The hybrid model of the course also contributes to its success. The teacher and students meet together in a traditional class at the beginning of the course. This face-to-face meeting helps establish rapport and also ensures that expectations are clearly communicated. Moreover, much of the first meeting is spent making sure that participants can easily log into the online component. The online space contains the link to the meeting room for their weekly lessons online with their teacher as well as activities that they have to complete on their own.

Periodically, the teacher returns for another face-to-face class. This reinforces the teacher-student relationship. My students became very accustomed to sending

me text messages between lessons and to communicate if they were going to be absent or late. Most of the participants improve in the English they need for work and their general English as measured by the Basic English Skills Test and testimonials such as this one:

> Before I took the class, I was afraid of a lot of things—when I was at work, talking to the customer, and with my co-workers. I was afraid of talking to my kids' teachers. . . . But now, the people that I work with and my customers CAN understand me. I have relationships with them. (Edna Barrera, quoted in Aspen Institute, 2014)

Although I've specifically discussed companies based in the United States, I would like to point out that companies involved in international commerce can be based anywhere. The movement toward providing English language lessons to employees is not limited to companies based in English-speaking countries. English is the lingua franca of international business, and many companies around the world provide incentives for their employees to improve their English language skills.

Clearly, teaching English in the digital context in publicly funded adult education and workforce programs is helping students achieve their goals in new ways. In the next chapter, we will look at how teaching English in the digital context is helping individuals around the world reach their goals through private and group lessons.

6 The Digital Context for Social Media Lessons, Tutoring, and Webinar Classes

> *I was really very scared with talking to native speakers. My opinion is now totally changed. As you remember that I am very shy to talk first time with a strange person. So after this experience I feel more confident and now I don't feel any hesitation to talk with native speaker. I improve a lot, a lot confidence.*
>
> —Saba (quoted in S. Memon, personal communication, June 9, 2014)

In the past few chapters, we talked about people learning English while living in the United States, as either students or immigrants. The programs in which they are enrolled offer at least some face-to-face hours with the instructor or some aspect of blended online/offline instruction. However, over the past 5 years, I have become more and more engaged with learners around the globe learning English—with me at home in the United States and them at home in their own countries. These are students whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting in the physical world. It is a context unique to the digital age. We are simultaneously oceans apart and together in the same room. In this chapter, I will talk about this unique context in terms of social media classes, online tutorials, and webinar classes.

Social Media Classes

Nowadays, there are various ways to connect with people online, especially people you may have never met in person. One of the most common ways is through the use of social media such as Facebook and Google+. This is generally done asynchronously, meaning that each person makes posts and responds to posts but is not typically together with other people online at the same time; however, both Facebook and Google have instant message options.

When I first started using Facebook for education, it was mainly for classroom administration purposes such as reminding students of registration dates and upcoming events. Students who were missing at the beginning of class would receive a Facebook message along the lines of "Class is starting. Where are you?" Having received this message, more often than not, my wayward students would slink through the door 20 minutes later. I created a Facebook group page on which students could share photos and engage with each other outside of class in a "safe" network. Most of them ended up "friending" each other outside of the class page, and soon the page became pretty much obsolete as everyone was seeing everyone else's posts on their own profiles anyway.

I have also seen some very creative uses of social media by other instructors, such as having students post and respond to video presentations, Twitter classes, and Pinterest collages. Pinterest is a social media site that allows users to post pictures on different "boards" so that they can organize and share them. You can also put pictures from other people's boards onto your boards. I use mine primarily to find and organize teaching materials. My board is public (www.pinterest.com/DrGlenda), but you can also make boards private, which is excellent for creating a class Pinterest account.

Nonetheless, these uses still mostly benefit local students. In 2011, I was asked to facilitate the LiveEnglish with Livemocha Facebook class. I had already been providing "expert reviews" on Livemocha for about a year, and when they needed a new teacher to replace the incomparable Nina Weinstein (who ventured off on her own to start Nina's Easy English), Livemocha asked me to take over the class.

For 3 years, I met with hundreds of people from all over the world every weekday for an hour in what was essentially an evolved synchronous chat class. I posted a comment or question. Students simply read the comment and responded if they so chose. We would refresh the screen and continue on. While more than a thousand people typically viewed the posts, only about 15 to 20 people engaged in the lesson by commenting.

I use the term *evolved synchronous chat* because the lessons were not limited to text. I shared videos, either from the web or ones that I uploaded. I could share photos and clip art. To focus on listening, I often recorded and/or uploaded an audio file to Vocaroo (www.vocaroo.com) and shared the link. These listening activities were great for warm-up dictations or listening comprehension activities, or to clarify pronunciation, especially of informal English. The lessons covered all kinds of topics and skills. We worked on grammar, reading, writing, informal speech, and cultural norms. On Fun Fridays I would often offer an "open mic" and spend the entire lesson simply responding to questions the participants posted at the beginning of the lesson.

In 2011, I was giving a conference presentation on teaching using Facebook at a statewide conference for the Texas Association for Literacy and Adult Education. Facebook itself had been around only for about 7 years at that time, and the

concept of using it as a teaching mechanism rather than a purely social or online gaming mechanism seemed pretty radical. The room was completely filled with people interested in learning how to use Facebook for teaching English, but one attendee kept interrupting to argue that I could not teach English on Facebook. If I used a word like dialogue or *conversation*, he quickly jumped in to let everyone know that it was impossible to have a dialogue or conversation using text only. He was so adamant that other members of the audience began to argue with him on my behalf. For the rest of the conference, people would come up to me and say, "I'm so sorry about that guy."

While it was somewhat annoying to have a heckler at a professional conference, the only things I remember thinking at the time were: (1) Why did this man come to a session on teaching on Facebook when he was clearly opposed to the concept of Facebook in general? (2) And, more important, what was it about the idea of teaching on Facebook that caused him to feel threatened? Did technology somehow challenge his self-perception as a teacher? Perhaps he felt that he would be obsolete in the digital English learning environment. I wish I could have allayed his fears. Teaching in the digital context requires different skills, but the essence of teaching remains the same.

The mode of delivery, even if that mode is based in high tech, cannot replace a living, breathing, skilled teacher. Teaching English in a live, synchronous class on Facebook is not easy and it required every skill I had garnered over the years. I had to use my background in syntax, phonology, reading, and writing instruction. In addition, I had to handle questions about international English and adjust my responses to "incorrect" answers if I found that the grammar or vocabulary item was correct in a different variety of English.

On top of that, I had to use all of my technical skills. To keep up with the class, I had to read and type very quickly. If I made a typing error, someone (or everyone) would surely let me know. Lurking critics were quick to point out if I made a grammatical mistake, typed the wrong word, or simply explained something in a way that is different than what they would say. I was extremely grateful when Facebook Pages added the edit option to posts in September 2013. At least now I can correct the mistake before two dozen people comment on it.

Since text does not have tone or facial expressions, wording becomes very important, as does timing. If I make the posts too slowly, students lose interest. If I go too fast, they complain that I do not give them enough time to respond. This balancing act is further complicated by the different capabilities and connection speeds of the devices students use to participate in the class. Occasionally, a student may become offended or upset and make an inappropriate remark. Classroom management techniques then come into play. Fortunately, on a Facebook Page, the administrator has the ability to hide or delete inappropriate posts, but I still need to follow up with the student to find out what I did to cause offense, to explain appropriate ways of expressing complaints, and try to ensure that the offending student knows she or he is still welcome in the lesson.

Nonetheless, it is extremely rewarding to get the feedback from students, particularly when they pass a standardized or classroom test, had a conversation in English for the first time, or were offered the job they interviewed for in English, and credit their regular attendance in the Facebook lessons as contributing to their success. Clearly, these language learners are doing more than just attending the Facebook lesson, but the students themselves attribute their success in part to the lessons there. In addition, cultural bridges are made in almost every lesson. People talk about their religious holidays, learn to politely discuss points about which they disagree, such as political situations, and still show respect and concern for their Facebook classmates. Many true cross-cultural friendships were started in the Facebook English class.

When Livemocha, which had been purchased by Rosetta Stone, made the decision to stop these classes, I could not imagine not spending an hour of my day in such a dynamic, vibrant classroom, so I started offering similar lessons on the GREAT English Online page. Amazingly, these dedicated students made the switch very easily. At the time of this writing I am still offering these extremely lively and enjoyable live lessons there (www.facebook.com/greatenglishonline), and I have no intention of stopping anytime soon.

Regardless of the Facebook naysayer at the conference, I can assert that I have, in fact, been teaching English on Facebook for many years, and my students have indeed improved and, perhaps more important, have developed a community of learners among themselves.

Private Tutoring

Through Livemocha and also through the live Facebook classes, I came into contact with many people who wanted English tutorials via Skype. While I had used Skype as a way of communicating with students in the past, teaching on Skype was a novel idea at first. The first issue, of course, was trying to find a time convenient to both the teacher and the student when we live half a world away from each other. When initially resolving this issue, I came across the World Clock Meeting Planner (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html). These days, however, there are many free applications to assist with scheduling across time zones. I use Schedule Once (www.scheduleonce.com) because it integrates with my Google Calendars (personal and professional calendars) and can be easily embedded on my website. English language learners simply go to the website or to my calendar at meetme.so/greatenglishonline, set their local time zone, and choose a time. I have set Schedule Once for my regular availability, but the program also reads my Google Calendar. If I want to make an exception to the rule, I simply put "unavailable" on my calendar for any times that are not officially scheduled, and the learner is left to choose only from times when I am actually available.

Teaching on Skype, or any videoconferencing platform, comes with many challenges. I use or have used Google Hangout, Blackboard, GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, Genesys, and WebEx and have found that each of them has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Here are some things I've learned:

- *Be presentable.* Even though I am working from home, I dress for work. When I am about to tutor, I check the camera. Do I look professional? What about the background? The learner may or may not turn on his or her camera (because of personal preference or bandwidth issues), but most of the time learners want to see me, at least at the beginning and end of the lesson.
- *Be totally present.* My clients are paying for my time. My dogs often have to get thrown outside or upstairs temporarily if they are disrupting the lesson, even a little. (My students will sometimes say "hi" to my dogs by name when they bark during the lesson and I have not yet turned off my microphone to deal with them.) This dedication to being focused on the lesson is extremely important for paying clients. I had several clients start working with me because their previous teacher had a young child at home and they felt they were not getting their teacher's full attention. It is also important to close all the other programs on the computer to avoid being tempted to check email, look at social media, or do something else on the computer during the lesson.
- *Be tech savvy.* I invest in good equipment, and I use a computer connected by wire to the Internet for most of my lessons. Wireless does not work as well in general. I make sure my computers are fast enough and have enough memory for the demands of multiple large programs. A good headset or podcasting microphone makes a world of difference. Also, a good battery backup system is critical, as well as a Plan B, such as getting in touch with my student through a phone or tablet application if that becomes necessary. I also use a virtual private network so that if I need to access my home computer, I am still able to conduct any business I need to conduct while traveling.
- *Be organized.* Each of my private tutoring clients has a folder on Dropbox (www.dropbox.com), a cloud storage program. Any files that we need to share, including notes of our meetings, go into those folders. I also keep all of my curricular materials on Dropbox so that I can easily access it and share files regardless of what computer I happen to be using.
- *Be creative.* I often use a Word document as a white board, and I purchased a lower cost portable document file editor (PDF Studio by Qoppa) that allows me to make all kinds of annotations and "Good Job" stamps. Using a graphic tablet makes my handwritten notes onscreen a little easier to read. (I find it terribly difficult to write legibly with a mouse!) I also

have an application that turns photos into portable document files on my phone and tablet, both of which are linked by an application called Mighty Text to sync with my desktop. In using technology, the questions I constantly ask myself are: How can I do this better? What is going to help the student have a better experience?

- *Be flexible.* This is true for both equipment and content. If I start out on Google to find that my student's network is not working well in Hangout, we switch to Skype or WebEx. Many students have figured out how to make international calls for free on the Internet, so sometimes they simply call me. As far as content, I may have spent time planning for the lesson, but if a teachable moment arises, or the student has something specific that he or she wants to address, the lesson plan can wait. We can use it another day. I have to be ready to teach anything and everything every day.
- *Be clear about boundaries.* Another challenge for teaching on Skype and Google Hangout in particular is that students can see when you are logged into those accounts. Of course, you may sign out of these applications, but then people who need to get in contact with you will not be able to do so. Some students may not realize that being online does not mean that you are available to speak with them. Establishing the rules for online communication with students is essential regardless of the teaching context, but it is especially important for individuals you have never physically met. I am careful to let them know not to call me if they do not have a lesson scheduled as I am most likely working with another student or teaching a class. They are welcome to email me, and I have an email set up expressly for this purpose. Or they can send me an instant message and I will return it when I am able. To this date, I have not had anyone violate that request.

That is not to say I have not had some difficult situations when dealing with online-only students. One student insisted that I sponsor him to come to the United States and essentially cursed me for not being willing to do so. A student I had taught for a very short time asked me for a letter of recommendation for her master's degree program and did not understand why I did not feel comfortable providing that recommendation for her.

Despite these sometimes uncomfortable situations, the rewards from teaching English to private clients through web conferencing are immense. I become very close with all of my clients. They send me pictures of their children and we share our joys and frustrations, just as students in my local classroom do. I cannot imagine my life without having met them, and I sincerely hope to meet at least some of them in person at some point in the future.

Webinar Classes

Another way that I interact with students that I have never physically met is through webinar classes. When Livemocha started tutorials online, one of the creative ways I worked within the tutorial system was to have four or more individuals share their lesson time. By doing so, all four paid for only one lesson but got to meet with me and three other people every week. These conversation classes were very popular and eventually Livemocha started offering their own version of online classes, Livemocha Classroom.

Livemocha Classroom initially was based on Livemocha's Active English series, but it soon became evident that students did not want a rehashing of the material they had already studied online. Why do adult English language learners sign up for a live, online webinar lesson? The majority do so because they want to interact in English. The classes were redesigned to provide students with the opportunity to communicate in spoken English as much as possible.

The truth is, the majority of my webinar class students studied English for at least a few years in school. In fact, some of them have studied extensively and are themselves English language teachers in their home countries. To be honest, most of my students have watched more movies in English than I ever plan to, listened to music in English that I have never heard of, and watched English language television programs I know nothing about. These strategies—watching movies, listening to music, viewing videos and TV programs—are all excellent practices for developing receptive skills, but they are not as effective for promoting speaking skills. And the students *want* to speak.

So regardless of the topic of the class (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, reading, etc.), the majority of my online class time is dedicated to providing students with the opportunity to use their voices. That is not to say that I am quiet the whole time. If you have not yet guessed by my writing style, I have been gifted with the ability to talk the ear off an elephant, whether or not the elephant cares to respond.

Nor should I be silent, because often the allure of the class is having a teacher with a native accent who may or may not adjust her speech rate for you. However, when designing the lesson for the class, I make sure that everyone will have an opportunity to speak and respond to everyone else. Just as in a traditional classroom, I stay alert for teachable moments and remain flexible enough to change directions midway through the lesson.

Unlike the traditional classroom, though, I have to manage technological issues. Often, managing a digital classroom means having a Plan B, Plan C, and Plan D in case the materials I choose to use fail to upload or share, or the platform is too unstable, or the audio for half of the students suddenly stops working. Again, I have used multiple platforms for small groups, and each platform has its own benefits and challenges. Skype has better sound, but Google Hangout has better application sharing. WebEx has better stability and allows me to take over a

student's keyboard and mouse if necessary, but Blackboard Collaborate has better previewing (i.e., seeing what the student sees). This added dimension of classroom management is one of the true challenges of online teaching.

The second, and perhaps most important, challenge is creating a cohesive community of learners among people who have never met one another. Establishing trust among these individuals is essential so that they feel able to share in whatever English they have without fear of judgment. In order to promote trust, I have to provide many different opportunities for students to connect with each other, not just in the group lessons, because "as the level of interaction increases, a greater sense of community can occur, where learners can share their divergent thoughts and perspectives to construct knowledge and understanding" (Stavredes, 2011, p. 131). In an online class with students at different levels, strategies such as asking advanced speakers to speak more slowly or asking lower level students to type their answers (they are often more comfortable writing than speaking) may be useful and make all participants sensitive to the needs of their classmates.

I should point out that I currently offer two very different types of webinar classes. The first type is a drop-in class. These classes are independent of one another and do not require registration. I never know who, if anyone, is going to show up. In the beginning with Livemocha Classroom, I often was sitting in the room by myself. Fortunately, for my own lessons at GREAT English Online, I have yet to have an empty class.

For these drop-in classes, I post the class information on the website each week: grammar, accent reduction, songs and music, slang and informal speech, article discussion, and conversation. In order to offset the problems of international currency and the digital divide, these classes have no set charge. Students pay whatever they are able to pay, if they are able and if they care to do so. Establishing trust with new students in this environment can be difficult, as I never know who is going to be in the class on any given day. Designing nonthreatening class activities and conversation questions is the best I can do. Unpredictable attendance notwithstanding, regular attenders of these lessons tend to develop friendships that spill over into out-of-class connections.

The other type of webinar classes I offer simulates an intensive, all-skills course. In addition to two webinar classes each week, I use the free learning management system (LMS) Schoology (www.schoology.com) to post unit activities: text, listening activities, video, workbooks, vocabulary flash cards from Quizlet (www.quizlet.com), writing exercises, audio discussion posts, projects, and quizzes. Students receive grades and certificates of completion. It is a rigorous and demanding class.

One of the ways I promote trust in that class is by having students respond to each other's comments in class and to their writing assignments in the LMS. They do not typically respond to the English language use in the writing, but to the content only. For example, in one assignment we were practicing using *used to* for

past habits. The students wrote paragraphs about their childhood memories that included one thing that was not true. Other students had to respond by identifying what the incorrect information was. The surprising part of this activity on the discussion board was the manner in which they accomplished this.

Joe wrote a long paragraph that ended, "Every Sunday, I would also walk my dogs and play with my polar bear cub." Melanie responded "I'd sooo like to see a picture with you and your polar bear cub . . . :-)." Rather than simply point out the false comment, Melanie responded the way a friend would, informally. Both Joe and Melanie are professionals in their 40s. Although it was early in the course, I could easily see from the tone of the exchange that the class was going to become a community quickly. Having activities that invited authentic expression and interaction helped make that possible.

We have looked at the digital context as it applies to adults learning English as a second language in formal learning programs such as intensive English programs in the United States, community education programs and workforce programs in the United States, and online-only lessons (social media, tutorials, and classes). In the next chapter, we will consider what the future is likely to hold for teaching and learning English in the global digital context.

7 The Future of ESOL in the Online Context

> *Technology gives us power, but it does not and cannot tell us how to use that power. Thanks to technology, we can instantly communicate across the world, but it still doesn't help us know what to say.*
>
> —Jonathan Sacks (2012, para. 11)

"Why are there so many songs about rainbows and what's on the other side?" asked Kermit the Frog in *The Muppet Movie* (Frawley, 1979). That year, in 1979, I remember spending hours on my TRS-80 computer writing and debugging a simple code so that the song would play while the computer randomly displayed colors on my television screen. One of the first home computers, the TRS-80 we had did not come with a monitor, and to save data, you had to attach a cassette player that recorded your program onto metallic tape with a horrendous metal-on-metal squeal.

A little more than a decade later, in 1992, I was able to take my five-pound (2.3 kg) IBM Thinkpad laptop into my beginning ESL classroom to demonstrate colors and other items on PowerPoint. We had only one computer in the classroom, and we did not have Internet access.

Another decade passed, and by the early 2000s I was fortunate to have access to a full computer lab connected to the Internet. The textbook series I was using came with CD-ROM exercises and videos, and students used Microsoft Office products to prepare their reports and projects.

In 2013, I had a class set of tablets wirelessly connected to the Internet. Students watched a popular children's show character, Kermit the Frog, sing "The Rainbow Connection" for themselves and wrote about their dreams for the future. Where do we go from here?

When I think about the future of ESL in the digital context, the first thing I consider is English as a global language. There are more nonnative speakers of English than native speakers of English. It is the lingua franca of many businesses, countries, and, in general, of the Internet. If this trend continues, English

will not be considered a foreign language but an additional language for many people (TESOL, 2008). For teaching English, the focus will shift from English as a medium for communicating with people from English-speaking countries to English for international communication, with more conversations taking place between nonnative English speakers. The cultural aspect of the language will have to be tempered by international culture for business and travel. In one recent post on LinkedIn, for example, a practicing EFL teacher noted that "the students were interested in learning English to communicate with their Asian counterparts (Expanding Circles) and hence there was absolutely no need for them to know about an Inner Circle culture" (Mohamed, 2014), such as U.S., British, or Australian culture. For teaching English in the digital context, this shift in the use of English will require sensitivity on the part of online language instructors to why students are seeking to improve their English. If English language learners are not planning to interact with native speakers, then imposing cultural lessons into their learning could be viewed as hegemonic.

Another factor that will influence the future of teaching English in the digital context is the continued penetration of affordable and stable Internet access in areas where it is not currently available. Many nonprofit organizations such Close the Gap and GeekCorps are working toward the goal of making the Internet available to everyone on the globe. As previously underrepresented areas come online, remote teachers of English may become a daily part of a virtual classroom in previously underserved areas.

In addition, as Internet speeds continue to increase, the resources available to online teachers will continue to explode. Currently, I have to weigh the resource that I want to share against the bandwidth available to my students. If I share my screen or turn on my webcam, will students risk being "kicked out" of our classroom? If I share a video, will it stream appropriately or will it be broken up and unintelligible? If I pass access to my mouse and keyboard to a student, how much time will I have to allow for the delay of movement? In the future, I expect Internet quality to continue to improve and these considerations to become less and less important.

A factor that may still exist will be sociopolitical instability. While I fully expect to see the Internet continue to improve, human history is not so encouraging with regard to our ability to avoid armed conflicts. Online teachers will have to continue to consider the living situations of students. Even in local classes, students sometimes decide not to share the most unpleasant realities in their personal lives. As adult learners, they have the right to disclose or not to disclose that kind of information with their instructor. The same is true for online students; nonetheless, if we are aware by way of international news that they may be in a crisis situation, it stands to reason that we may need to make some adjustments to our topics, our meeting times, or simply our tone of voice. We still must respect students' right to decide what to share and what not to share, but we also

must stay informed about situations that may affect their ability to participate in online learning.

Computer technology is becoming better at being able to understand and respond to humans. One of the computer programs I used to support learning in my beginning ESL classroom was Learn to Speak English, by the Learning Company. This program had early voice recognition software and gave students feedback via a red-yellow-green gauge that indicated how "native" their pronunciation was. At the end of each lesson, there was a computer simulation. My favorite simulation was the very first one, where the student was at a virtual party. Students had to identify their gender and the program adapted to their response. For example, if a woman asked a man at the party if he was married, the computer simulation would ask, "No, are you?" in a sexy voice. If the computer could not understand the student after two or three tries, it would very politely say, "Well, I have to go now."

The Turing test is "test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to, or indistinguishable from, that of a human. In the original illustrative example, a human judge engages in natural language" ("Turing Test," 2014). No computer passed the Turing test until June 2014, at which point a computer was able to convince 33% of the people it interacted with that it was a 13-year-old boy from Odessa, Ukraine. The test was conducted in English, so essentially, during the Turing test, the computer program was able to convince 33% of the people that it could speak English like a 13-year-old Ukrainian nonnative speaker (McCoy, 2014). While that may not be a true "pass," it does indicate that technology is moving toward an artificial intelligence with which a human can truly interact.

Does that mean language teachers will no longer be necessary? That the online proliferation of self-study courses will replace living, breathing English teachers? Perhaps, but it will likely be several decades before such technology is readily available. Currently, online translation is not consistently reliable. Anyone who has had a student turn in a paper translated using an online service can tell you that the available online translators still have a great deal of room for improvement. In fact, one expert estimates that electronic translation will not reach the same level of accuracy as human translation until around 2029 (Kelly, 2011). However, Kelly (2011) points out that using a translator is not the same thing as learning the language for oneself, because cultural references and humor are founded in interpretation. The primary purpose of language is, after all, to be able to communicate with other humans, and while practicing with a computer may be appealing to some because of convenience or lower risk to self-esteem, eventually language learners need to interact with people who speak the target language.

There is the possibility, however, that technology will develop a universal translator. This technology has already been introduced in the genre of science

fiction. In the television series *Star Trek: Enterprise,* which was first screened between 2001 and 2005, we find out that the Universal Translator was invented to get rid of the language barrier on Earth, eventually leading to world peace. The technology was then extended to other species as they were encountered until, eventually, it could even be used with nonbiological life forms, although there were limits. For example, in a commentary on the complexity of legal language, the Universal Translator could not translate the language of a race who spoke in legalese (the language of law and lawyers; "Universal Translator," 2014). The key characteristic of the Universal Translator in the television series was that it functioned through some sort of wave technology so that people heard others in their own language regardless of the language spoken, functioning as a kind of technological in-ear simultaneous translator.

We already have technology that can alter perceptions in the brain to help those with disabilities. Neil Harbisson was born with a rare disability that makes it impossible for him to see color. He is not just color blind (having difficulty distinguishing shades of color), but actually sees the world in shades of gray, a condition called achromatopsia. He had a device implanted into his brain that interprets color frequency as sound frequency, so that he can "hear" the color he is looking at (Harbisson, 2012). It is, then, not too far-fetched to imagine that technology will be developed that will use voice recognition and digital translation to allow us to hear what someone says, regardless of the language spoken, in our own language. In the event of the development of a universal translator, learning English, or any language, will no longer be a necessity but a matter of personal choice.

Changes in technology delivery will also impact how we teach. Currently, when I teach online, I ask that students not use their tablets or mobile phones to access the live lesson unless there is simply no other alternative. Smaller devices in general are not quite ready for the memory and bandwidth demands of live webinars online. In addition, the application versions of the webinar platforms are often missing some aspect of the course, such as the ability to share screens or view videos inside of the platform itself. This problem will likely be resolved as mobile technology continues to improve.

Also, the move toward mobile technology will continue to introduce more and different kinds of activities for learners and teachers. Learning management systems will become more robust. Pronunciation checkers already exist and will start to provide not only feedback but adapted instruction. Podcasts will include listening comprehension tasks. The possibilities seem endless, but teachers and students will need preparation to take advantage of the world of mobile-assisted language learning (Tai & Ting, 2011).

As technology continues to develop, traditional textbooks may one day disappear completely. I recently tried to purchase a "digibook" of a popular textbook. The idea of the digibook was interesting, having embedded audio and video files that students could click. Unfortunately, the download, even on my high-speed,

hard-wired computer, took several hours. Further, after waiting for the download, the installation program did not work properly and I was never able to use the product. I think the producers of this particular series would have better invested in a cloud version of the interactive textbook. Nonetheless, it is an indicator that paper texts may eventually become a thing of the past. Materials writers will focus on instructional design for online components that can be accessed on tablets, phones, and whatever other devices are developed over the next few years. These components will integrate authentic video and text from the Internet and create a language environment in the online language classroom that closely mimics the language environment in the physical world at large.

Finally, teacher training and professional development for English language learners will be redefined with changes in technology. There are already many online programs offering certificates and degrees in TESOL, and one might be tempted to assume that these certificates and degrees cover the topic of using technology in the classroom, but that is often not the case. Virtual and physical teacher preparation programs are still lagging behind in preparing teachers to teach with technology. With regard to mobile technologies, the training is almost nonexistent. As Hubbard (2008) indicates, it is not only best practices with current technology for which we need to prepare the next generation of teachers. The technologies I am using today did not exist when I started teaching. Some of them did not exist even 5 years ago. Therefore, we need to include in teacher training how to evaluate the usefulness of technology in our classrooms.

The future of technology in the professional development of English language teachers is twofold: Technology will be both the subject and the medium of professional development. Some self-study professional development is already available strictly online, such as the U.S. government–funded Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) English Language Learner University courses and the LINCS Technology and Learning course (http://lincs.ed.gov/courses).

While the online modules may be convenient, they lack the interaction with other colleagues that some language teachers prefer. Local workshops and academies are one way that instructors are able to improve their skills and interact with their colleagues, but the cost of providing local professional development can be considerable. Furthermore, while many teachers would prefer sustained professional development opportunities rather than one-shot workshops, paying for mileage, meals, and lodging accommodations for participants and facilitators makes single-day events more practical.

In the past few years, I have either participated in or facilitated several hybrid professional development academies. In the spring of 2014, for example, I worked for several months with a cohort of adult educators in Socorro, Texas. The Technology and Project Based Learning Academy met face to face once a month in January, February, and April. In between our face-to-face meetings, we met online to discuss what the participants had been putting into practice in their

classrooms. Participants commented on the advantage of having the between-session webinars. ESL teacher Neryza Rivera wrote, "During the webinars I gained some ideas from my colleagues that were adapted to my PBL [project-based learning]. I felt hesitant about the webinars, because it was my first on WebEx, but it went well and the second one was a breeze." Hybrid professional development reduces costs but still ensures that teachers have an opportunity to practice and get feedback on the strategies presented in professional development.

Professional development on technology is also critical. Teachers have limited time to look for, experiment with, evaluate, and implement new technologies. One of the reasons that teachers may be slow to integrate technology is a lack of confidence in their own ability to use that technology. In the Will-Skill-Tool model of technology integration (Christensen, Griffin, & Knezek, 2001), improved student outcomes were associated with the teacher's willingness to integrate technology, skill in using technology, and having the technology available to use in the classroom. The "will" and "skill" of the teachers were measured by self-report survey, meaning that it may not be the actual skill of the teachers, but their perception of their abilities with technology that influenced to what degree technology was integrated in their classrooms. With technology changing constantly, providing professional development on different technologies and their uses in the classroom will help teachers improve their confidence and competence in technology use. Providing sustained professional development will provide scaffolding as they experiment with new technology-based instructional strategies.

In short, nobody can predict with any accuracy what the next few decades will hold for teaching English in the digital context. Nonetheless, whatever the next iteration of language learning and technology holds, we must remember that technology is the tool. As Sacks (2012) writes, "It cannot tell us what to say" (para. 11). We must not lose sight of the fact that language is a social endeavor. The teacher-student and student-student relationships will always remain one of the most important "technologies" available in our classrooms.

8 Reflections on Writing About the Digital Context

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

—Confucius

Writing this book has been revelatory and challenging for me. It was challenging due to the enormous number of articles and vast amount of information available on the concept of learning language on the Internet. I had heard the term *big data* from students in information technology, but writing this book gave me a glimpse into how complicated managing so much information can be. Each time I began to research a point or look for an example, I invariably got lost for hours in a never-ending loop of hyperlinks, each piece of information more interesting than the previous and leading to yet more sites with more interesting information and more hyperlinks. As a researcher, I felt it necessary to confirm that the information I was reading was accurate, which would cause me to then spend more hours trying to corroborate undocumented statistics and information or trying to find, often in vain, the original source of the information.

Getting lost in cyberspace is probably one of the biggest drawbacks of living and teaching in the digital world. Estimates are that the amount of information available in the digital world is more than doubling every 2 years (Gantz & Reinsel, 2011). The vast amount of information on the topic of language learning online alone is overwhelming. My experience in leading workshops on integrating technology has confirmed for me that more is not always a good thing. In my first few workshops, I wanted to provide participants with as many useful resources as I could. As a result, I flew through examples at lightning speed, trying to get in as many resources as possible. By the end, many of the workshop participants were feeling frazzled from the blitz attack of information, but rather than provide them with specific information about how to get started with implementing technology, I simply left them with more information: long lists

of links and applications. In short, instead of helping these colleagues overcome their fears of technology, or "techno-geebies," I sometimes succeeded in simply terrifying them. Too much information and too many resources can be paralyzing to anyone trying to learn something new, including teachers.

In ancient times, sailors navigating the sea focused on a few stars to guide their way, not the entire ocean. When starting out in the digital context, the same approach may be useful. Taking into consideration the limited amount of time English language instructors have to look for and evaluate tools and resources, I purposefully select and provide sufficient demonstration and practice time for instructors to become comfortable implementing new technologies. Whenever possible, I determine the tools that would be most useful for the group of teachers I am coaching, based on conversations with their administrators and when possible with the instructors themselves. In the process of writing this book, I have become more determined than ever to focus on depth rather than breadth of knowledge when it comes to technology workshops.

The other challenge I faced surprised and frustrated me. In this information-rich day and age with "accountability statistics" available on numerous government websites, there were some data sets that simply did not exist. I could not find any solid statistics on community college English language learners, for example. Upon asking colleagues at the state level, I found that no one was collecting data on this population unless they were in the program on a student visa, which omits a great number of students, perhaps the majority of students, at the community college level. Most English language learners on student visas turn up in intensive English programs or proprietary schools. However, because no one is tracking what kind of students (on a visa, generation 1.5, citizen, resident alien, undocumented immigrant, etc.) are in the English language program at community colleges, I could not substantiate the complexity of the problem.

Similarly, I could not find any data on the number of proprietary English schools in the United States, who (if anyone) is monitoring those schools for quality to ensure people are not paying good money for poor language experiences, or any information about the people participating in those schools.

Nor could I find an exact number about online learning. How many strictly online, teacher-facilitated English courses are available? A quick Google search will give you 432 million hits in less than 1 second if you type in "online English courses." Talk about big data! I continue to have many unanswered questions about the proliferating number of "English course" websites. How many are teacher facilitated? How many are free or low-cost? How are those that are free financed? Who are the stakeholders and what is their endgame? How many "courses" are nothing more than a few ill-designed exercises? Who is taking these courses? What is persistence like? You can see how I could get lost for days trying to find answers. Eventually, I had to turn the monitor off and walk away. These questions will have to wait for another day.

The challenges of too much information and not enough information aside, through the process of looking at what other people were doing, I became aware of some wonderful practices and new resources. There are so many excellent teachers doing incredible things with online technology. As I reflected on my own practice, I was motivated to try some new practices and tools.

Recently I was at a Toastmaster's International meeting and the speech was on "stuff." The speaker pulled out some stuff that he had collected that was essentially useless: a cassette tape, a 5.25-inch floppy disk, a 3.5-inch floppy disk, a Read-Write CD-ROM, a zip drive (I had completely forgotten about these!), and so on. I realize that the technology that we think is so cutting-edge today is going to wind up in the computer museum in a very short time—and I will be joining them in the museum, if I do not purposefully and continually stay informed and in practice with new technologies as they become available.

However, the technology can make me a better teacher only if I continue to stay engaged with students, whether I see them face to face in my classroom, through a monitor on a web conference, or only through the exchange of messages in a text-based forum. The writers of the National Education Technology Plan observed, "Although using technology to personalize learning is a boost to effective teaching, teaching is fundamentally a social and emotional enterprise" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 42). For language instruction, I strongly believe the personal touch cannot be overstated. Language is meant for communication, and while computers can simulate this interaction, they fall short of producing meaningful social and emotional relationships. My final reflection is to remind myself and you, my reader, that technology is a tool. We are the teachers.

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