

## Introduction

The Hotel TEACH (Teaching English and Careers in Hospitality) Curriculum was created to address the needs of immigrant adults employed in “back of the house” jobs in hotels. According to data from the US Department of Labor, immigrants—many with limited proficiency in English— make up 30% percentage of the workforce in the hotel and lodging industry. Without better knowledge of the language and the necessary customer service and soft skills needed in this service industry, workers with limited proficiency in English are stuck at the lowest rungs of the career ladder with little chance of advancement.

In July 2005, the Center for Immigrant Education and Training at LaGuardia Community College in New York City received a demonstration grant from the US Department of Labor- Employment and Training Administration as part of President Bush’s High Growth Initiative in Hospitality in order to develop a curriculum that included English, soft skills and technology, and to run two pilot classes to refine that curriculum. The funding also supported the October 2006 “Bridges to Opportunity: Workforce Education for English Language Learners Conference. The proceedings of the conference are available at [www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ace/bridges](http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ace/bridges). One of the pilot classes funded by the project was aimed at incumbent workers in the industry while the second was for new workers seeking to enter the industry. The Hotel TEACH curriculum emerged out of our work with these classes whose participants were primarily at High Intermediate (Level 4) and Low Advanced Levels (Level 5) on the National Reporting System scale for Adult ESOL.

There are two major models for curriculum development: one that has the content, knowledge and skill sets that individuals need to know as the starting point and the other which has the individual learner as the starting point, and uses the individual’s interests, skills and perspective as the framing principles of the curriculum. In this curriculum we sought to bring both of these perspectives together. In our needs assessments and throughout the course, our goal was to respond to the needs of both the employer and the employees.

We began the curriculum development process by examining the industry standards and training materials geared towards native speakers, as developed by two major and relevant industry organizations- the American Hotel and Lodging Association and the National Retail Federation Foundation— as well as the internal standards and training materials from Starwood’s “Organizational Learning”, from the Human Resources Department of Sheraton Hotels,

New York, our employer partner. Through site visits and interviews with Sheraton staff, we then sought to pull out the sub-skills, competencies and knowledge implicit in the industry standards so that they could become content to be addressed through the curriculum. These industry standards provided the parameters of the curriculum.

However, as we began to work with our students, we also recognized that for the curriculum to be meaningful to them, the curriculum and the training needed to address where the students were and start from there—by identifying what they felt they needed to know and learn, and gathering resources that would help them learn successfully. The curriculum therefore reflects both of these challenges, seeking to address the industry standards and start from where the students are, build from their prior knowledge and guide them to apply that prior knowledge to the new content.

One of the key goals of the Hotel TEACH Curriculum is to orient English language learners to the skills expected of workers in the lodging industry. In pre-course assessments and interviews, employers communicated the necessity to have employees not only improve their language skills but to refine the interpersonal skills essential to providing exemplary customer service. Our students helped us learn what got in the way of their providing this service. The Hotel TEACH curriculum thus reflects both the students and employers input.

The framework for the content of the curriculum and its approach are the principles of Equipped for the Future content standards. The curriculum addresses aspects of each of the Broad Areas of Responsibility in the Worker Role of the EFF Standards: “Do the Work”, “Work with Others”, “Work within the Big Picture” and “Plan and Manage Professional Growth” as they are relevant to the hotel and lodging industry. The curriculum and lessons seek to implement key EFF principles such as building from what students already know, making the skills and learning explicit, helping students understand how to learn from observing, analyzing and reflecting on their own and others’ actions, and evaluating growth through the means of rubrics and checklists. This context of a set of nationally developed curriculum standards also makes it possible for the curriculum to link to other national curricula that have the same basis.

We sought to teach English not just as a set of discrete phrases, vocabulary or grammar items, but as means to communicate and interact with others in a social setting. The curriculum therefore focuses not just on elements of the language, but also on behavior and how meaning is communicated through language and body language within that social setting.

## Other Features of the Curriculum:

*The Career Counseling:* Each unit of the Hotel TEACH curriculum begins with a Career Counseling lesson which leads students through a series of exercises designed to help them reflect and identify their attitudes and abilities in the content being focused on. Values, beliefs, attitudes and the behavioral manifestations of these are at the core of the “soft skills” we sought to teach because, quite early on, we recognized that our students would be able to provide high quality and professional customer service only through developing a sense of pride and dignity in their own roles as professionals providing an important service at the workplace. Learning how to be a professional is not just about acting like a professional but of seeing oneself as a professional.

Soft skills like active listening and listening with empathy, along with speaking with confidence and taking initiative are certainly valuable assets to employers. But these skills also enable workers to have a sense of ownership and pride in their role and their ability to manage the challenges of that role. Since applying these skills was impeded by the fact that students did not know the appropriate ways to express them in English, the learning of the new behavioral and attitudinal skills was integrated with the learning of the language for expressing these skills appropriately.

*The Teaching of Transferable Skills:* Learning to identify essential life skills and reposition them as work skills is another theme of the curriculum, together with providing students with opportunities to acquire new transferable skills. These skills are not always easily visible or identifiable for students and there is an awareness -building component to the lessons. Students learn the value of their everyday life skills and how to market these skills by identifying how these skills translate to the workforce. This is an additional confidence building activity as students recognize their transferable skills and learn to verbalize those skills in an interview for a workplace context. Making connections between what they have done, either in previous work or life experience, and what they aspire to do gives them the confidence that they have tangible experiences they can refer to on the job and in an interview, and helps them value their life experience.

*Use of Instructional Technology:* Built into the curriculum is instruction in commonly used technology such as use of the email, the internet, and common Microsoft Applications (Word, Powerpoint and Excel). We also incorporated instructional technology such as a class Blackboard site, using MP3 players to download and record audio lessons and developed a podcast site on the internet to supplement training lessons. It is of

course possible to teach the core of the curriculum (the EFF standards, the Industry Skills, the Career Counseling lessons, and the English Language lessons) without incorporating technology into them. However, there are many important reasons to integrate the technology into the classroom. The ability to use information technology is an important skill in the workplace and many adults with limited proficiency in English also have limited skills and confidence in their use of these technologies. Improving their skills in these technologies gave our students more career opportunities and served to boost their confidence in their abilities to learn new skills. The Blackboard site and the podcast lessons became, for students who could not attend every class because of work or life commitments, a major means to stay abreast of what was happening in class and to continue their learning outside of class. That flexibility was important in working with a class of employed individuals. It was our experience that even students who attended the class regularly would find the time to go on the Blackboard site to do additional work in between classes.

This curriculum represents between 160-190 hours of classroom instruction. However, as any classroom teacher knows, the actual time and resources that a particular class needs varies. We used a range of supplementary instructional materials, both those existing in the market and new ones that we developed expressly for the course. We feel that the best way to use this curriculum is as a core set of lessons to be supplemented, modified and enhanced through materials and topics relevant to each new class of students and would urge all teachers to do so. That way, the curriculum and the instruction remain grounded in the lives and realities of the students.

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