

Texas program meets need for English as a job skill

WHEN GARMENT FACTORIES in South Texas moved their operations into Mexico, many Spanish-speaking immigrants in the El Paso area lost their jobs. These displaced workers were eligible for federal aid for retraining, but community colleges, training schools, and other adult education centers were not prepared for these new students.

Most of them were Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants, who knew little English because they had had no need to learn it. Many of them were women over 40, and most of them had little education and were not literate in their native Spanish. These displaced workers needed job skills, but they also needed language and literacy skills.

To meet this need, the Adult Bilingual Curriculum Institute was created (www.adultbilingualtraining.org). With a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and support from two local agencies, CRESPAR researcher Margarita Calderón and her colleagues in El

Paso designed a program to train teachers for adults with limited English proficiency who needed to enter, or re-enter, the workforce.

The project, "Training Instructors for Effective Bilingual Workforce Development," began in January 2001 at three sites with 18 teachers, who attended training once a week the following summer and monthly during the fall and winter. Program coaches also visited the teachers in their classrooms to offer support, suggestions, and follow-up. The initial phase concluded in May 2002 after a nine-month intervention. "We're very happy with the results," said Calderón.

Among the outcomes were workplace literacy classes that attracted more than 160 students, training sessions on Sheltered English Supervision for area employers, the production of training materials, such as handbooks for Spanish GED instruction, and curricula for Spanish-speakers being trained in a day-care center, and the identification of effective practices. More than half of the initial group

of teachers received additional training to become trainers of future instructors.

The curriculum institute is patterned after Success for All (SFA). Calderón is trying to adapt SFA's strategies to adult literacy in a setting that allows students to learn workplace skills while they learn English.

Given the limited financial support and length of the project, Calderón and her associates were not able to measure the program's effects on students through an experiment-control study. Rather, they used pre-post tests, teacher evaluations, instructor feedback, observations, and literacy patterns. She recommends, however, that comprehensive, five-year studies of the issues raised in this program be conducted, and that the program be adapted to other areas of the country with large numbers of non-native English speakers.

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