



Title of Report: Workplace training at a retirement facility

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1. Identify and describe the training program.

Beginning in March 2010, ProActive English was asked to deliver onsite training for non-native English speaking employees at five senior resident communities under the same ownership in northern California. The initial proposal addressed one year of training with the possibility of renewal pending successful program outcomes. The program was renewed in March, 2011.

A total of six classes of up to twelve trainees each were set up to meet once a week. At two of the communities, the class met for a single hour. At a third community, the class met for one hour and fifteen minutes, and at the last two communities, one of which held two classes, weekly classes lasted for one-and-a-half hours.

The classes met over eleven-week ‘sessions’ in two locations and for twelve weeks in three locations, followed by a break period (intersession) of four to six weeks in between sessions. The purpose of the intersession was to allow program participants, trainers, and managers to review progress and reflect on goals identified by all stakeholders.

In addition to weekly class meetings, class participants (‘trainees’) met outside of class with residents of the retirement home who volunteered for weekly tutoring sessions. These volunteers, some of whom had been classroom teachers before retiring (though not ESL teachers), also attended the small group classes as aides in four of the five locations. ProActive English offered support for the volunteers by leading workshops on teaching ESL and by providing materials for volunteers to use in tutoring sessions.

The six classes (one site added a second class for three months) have been taught by five teachers, all of whom hold masters degrees in teaching English as a second language. Their wide-ranging experience includes work in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the United States, both as teachers and as teacher trainers. In addition to working in more traditional learning venues in community colleges and intensive English programs, the teachers hired have worked in refugee camps and corporate training. They have also done extensive materials development.

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2. Describe the target audience for the training programs.

The trainees are primarily Spanish-speaking employees from Mexico and Guatemala. Other well-represented countries among the fifty most consistent participants in the program include the Philippines, China, Korea, Eritrea, Vietnam, Burma, and several countries of the former Soviet Union. Most of the trainees have been in the United States for at least five years and most have had very little in the way of formal ESL classes.

The trainees work in food services (in the kitchen and the dining hall), in housekeeping, on the maintenance staff, and in nursing care. Most have had education through at least high school in their native countries and some have been trained as certified nursing assistants. Others were educated in their native countries up to fourth grade and have never been in a formal ESL class until they participated in this program.

The client is the organization that runs the retirement communities. In delivering the training, ProActive English has worked closely with the corporate human resources office, which understands the benefits of providing the training and has demonstrated tremendous support for our efforts.

3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.

The ProActive English staff began our needs assessment with a series of telephone interviews with onsite managers and human resource personnel to establish program priorities from their perspectives. These interviews were followed by a request for documents, such as training manuals, safety guides, lists of protocols, and any other resources that might be viewed as challenging material for non-native speakers.

In addition, ProActive English used our Web-based technology to make audio recordings of managers and residents of the community speaking about everyday activities or making requests as they might to the trainees. This process generated hours of content for the class, and also served as another window to establish program focus.

Finally, onsite visits were conducted, during which ProActive English completed the individual assessment process. We also met with managers of trainees to ask follow up questions about training priorities.

4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The purpose of the program is for participants to improve their English language and communication skills so that they can contribute more productively and work more



independently in the retirement community environment. Another major goal was for them to communicate more effectively in English when carrying out daily work responsibilities.

The training content focused on applications of English in vocational settings. By the end of the annual program review period, program participants are expected to be able to do the following:

- interact more effectively with residents of the retirement home and with workplace colleagues;
- use and describe more accurately equipment and work-related procedures, including being able to read necessary sections of equipment operation manuals and other documents; and
- engage more effectively in mandatory training and other staff development program.

5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.

ProActive English contract trainers are asked to tailor the curriculum to the daily communication requirements of community employees and use a variety of student-centered approaches in delivering training. These approaches include, for example, community language learning, in which students recount experiences at the retirement community while the trainer writes language on the board. After acknowledging any emotional concerns behind the expression – such as a description of a conflict between a manager and a trainee –the trainer then examines various aspects of English language usage with the class.

Student-generated learning activities also include preparing students for speaking tasks, such as preparing to interview residents in the retirement community. The students are then sent out into the retirement community during class time to interview a resident. Afterwards, the class reconvenes and reviews the discussions that ensued.

Trainers also integrate the presence of resident volunteers in class activities. Their participation is helpful in pair work or whole group activities, especially when a model of communication related to a local community is needed.

6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.

Classes include use of a high-beginner to intermediate level workplace ESL textbook *Hotel English* by Holloway, Hoppe, and Timpa to provide a more familiar learning context for participants expecting a more traditional class format. Several trainers recognized early on that many participants were at a higher level and so ultimately relied on more open-ended resources such as *The Oxford Picture Dictionary*, by Shapiro and Goldstein.



ProActive English also generates 'real' content from the workplace by recording managers and residents in the community speaking on a variety of topics from daily work instructions to examples of interactions in the dining hall or when trainees clean rooms to descriptions of life outside of work. These recordings (over eighty of them) are then transcribed and used in a variety of open-ended and more structured learning activities. Recordings are also made available on the Business English Web from ProActive English for trainees and tutors to access on line or in CD-ROM format during tutoring sessions.

In addition to the ESL workplace textbook and the recordings mentioned above, trainers used the solicited documents from site managers, such as training materials, lists of protocols, handouts on safety training from HR, schedules, inventory lists for kitchen preparation activities, and anything else that was made available. These materials have been modified for classroom use by trainers. ProActive English also provides materials such as picture story sets emphasizing the workplace and aspects of American culture and resource or activity books such as the *Oxford Picture Dictionary*.

Participants also have the opportunity to use the Business English Web – a web-based asynchronous e-learning application that allows users to audio record and get audio recordings and text feedback from a trainer. This tool is especially helpful for more advanced students, such as the nurses and certified nurse assistants who have a critical need to focus on clarity of speech and fluency skills. For this group, a distance learning class was created with class sessions taking place as the schedule allowed, usually every month or six weeks, with the nurses accessing the Web-based technology in between class sessions. A description of the Business English Web can be seen at www.proactive-english.com/fmovies/demo-v2.htm.

7. Explain the content of the English language training program.

A. What written and spoken genres are covered in the training program?

Training activities addressed speaking in one-on-one meetings with managers or at team meetings, speaking with residents when receiving instructions or engaging in casual interactions. The training also addressed how to write short notes related to work or for outside of work, such as communicating with children's teachers or doctors and completing forms. Several special sessions also addressed interviewing skills, as participants prepared to interview managers, residents, and coworkers.

B. What communicative functions are covered in the training program?

Language and communication skills addressed in the curriculum included, but were not limited to the following:

- listening skills for everyday use of English with residents and colleagues,



- initiating and participating in basic to higher-level conversations with community residents and colleagues on work-related and socially-appropriate topics;
- strategic communication skills such as interrupting to participate, seeking clarification, formulating and responding to questions, gathering and providing information, managing specific types of information such as names, terminology, numbers, and directions; and
- identification and description of job tasks.

The points noted above can be applied to situations in which trainees are entering resident rooms and determining what needs to be cleaned, how the trainee can be of assistance, and whether there are any medical needs of pressing importance. There are also communications in the dining hall over food choices, table setting needs, and other issues related to the meal process. Other interactions are about cleaning or maintaining the community site and responding to requests from managers and residents to help out in some way.

Other important communicative functions include the following:

- improving reading and writing skills for basic job and personal needs, such as completing forms and required paperwork related to tasks at work;
- understanding cultural differences and the expectations of workplace behavior in American culture, with an emphasis on communication with senior citizens; and
- developing a better understanding of company policies, procedures and expectations.

Another important focus is improving skills for completing other non-language training required by the employer. For example, if employees need to complete an e-learning module on aging or other issues related to community life at the sites, the curriculum includes content drawn from such training and associated tests.

C. What speech events are covered in the training program?

As noted previously, the primary focus of the workplace training is on the interactions trainees have everyday with coworkers and residents at each site. These interactions can include everything from receiving a simple set of instructions from a manager on what needs to be accomplished that day to the more nuanced and spontaneous communication that occurs when a nurse or a certified nursing assistant enters a resident's room and needs to complete an assessment of that person's medical status. Other employees are engaged in more predictable transactional communication that takes place in the dining hall when a dirty spoon needs to be replaced, to the more consequential performance evaluations with human resources personnel.

8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.



Classes meet every week except during the four- to six-week intersession sessions. During the intersession periods, trainees continue to talk with tutors if they are able to find mutually convenient times to meet.

While the Web-based technology is accessible and helpful for the more advanced learners—primarily the four nurses participating in the program—it is not as accessible for lower-level workers, primarily due to lack of computer literacy and the extensive arrangements it may take for trainees to find the several computers at each site that corporate human resources personnel have made available for them.

As noted above, participants meet face-to-face with individual tutors – volunteers from the retirement community. The tutor and the trainee schedule these sessions at their convenience.

9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.

Assessment of program participants took place at each community site several weeks in advance of the start of classes. Assessment components included individual recorded informational interviews of up to ten minutes. These interviews were designed to generate natural conversation between the trainee and the interviewer, and allow the trainees to demonstrate their ability to communicate as English language speakers.

The assessment interview was also used to help establish a relationship between the participants and the trainers. The interviews were scored according to a rubric developed by ProActive English. It evaluated clarity of speech, discourse, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar on a scale of 1-5 for each category (1 = lowest, 5 = highest). A second recorded interview was conducted at the end of the first year of the program and results were compared.

Participants also completed the one-hour CAL BEST test, described by CAL as a “standardized competency-based assessment using functional literacy tasks to read and write in authentic situations in the United States.” Different forms of the test were given at the end of the first year of the program. An initial comparison of test results after one year of the program versus initial test results shows a consistent improvement in test scores of ten to thirty percent among most program participants who attended class regularly.

10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.

Program evaluation completed by the client is primarily an internal process to which ProActive English does not have access. To support the internal-decision making, ProActive English provides documentation for the client at the end of each eleven-week session including.



This documentation includes attendance reports for each site, program participant goals statements signed by the participant, and the trainers summaries of participants' progress.

At the end of the first year of the program, ProActive English also provided the client with a detailed report of assessment results, including comparative scores (pre-program and at the end of the first year) of standardized BEST test and scores for the ProActive English speaking skills assessment. The client was satisfied that the benefits of the program outweigh the cost, and as a result, the client has renewed the program for a second year.

At each site, ProActive English also works with local human resource managers to address the logistics of the class including changes in schedule, attendance issues, bringing new employees into the class, and, in some cases, managing communication with volunteer tutors. Several of the local sites have experienced substantial understaffing over the past year, which has impacted attendance in class. The understaffing has also created tension between managers and the program itself as some coworkers not in the class have expressed resentment over the fact that their colleagues are allowed a paid hour – or more – of time away from work.

An additional area of tension exists internally at the company between corporate human resource offices and local human resource site managers. Some site managers who worked with a previous training provider had different expectations for the program based on their perception of the program as an activity for the resident volunteers as much as a training program for employees. This view meant that some decisions made by ProActive English in the interest of focusing on trainee needs were met with resistance if they impacted the extent of participation in the program or the quality of the experience the volunteer sessions were having as tutors.

11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.

One challenge was creating a culture of language learning success, which is born from a series of successful language learning experiences. Successful experiences occur when trainees have appropriate level language learning and communication tasks which they can succeed in, and when they do succeed, their efforts are recognized, not just by the trainer, but by the organization.

At the end of the first year of the program, ProActive English led a Celebration of Accomplishment at each of the five training sites. Managers were invited to share their comments about the program, as were human resource administrators, tutors, and program participants. The positive message that trainees received was that this program matters, not just to them but to the entire workplace community – and the entire community is seeing improvement.



ProActive English has worked hard to help trainees become aware of their responsibility for improving their English language skills. They must also be willing to make time outside of class for their own improvement. Trainers provide trainees with achievable tasks, such as meeting with a native English speaker for fifteen minutes and interviewing that person, or finding an article in the newspaper and being prepared to share it in class.

Another challenge was engaging all stakeholders in the process. Well before the end-of-year celebrations, ProActive English had to establish an expectation of success among all stakeholders by calling for their input into program goals and content wherever possible. We also asked for their assessment of participant levels and priorities.

We have shared with the participants all measures of program accountability including goal statements from trainees, attendance records on a weekly basis, and trainees' end-of-session summaries of progress. Ultimately, the engagement of all stakeholders is a function of the time they can devote to the process – and that is limited. Toward that end, any communication must be concise and in a digestible form. This can be challenging.

The workplace schedule is the ever-present elephant in the room. Organizations are under tremendous pressure to meet operational needs. Sacrificing ninety minutes of employee time in the middle of the day even one time per week adds to that pressure. The solution to this challenge is largely internal and often depends on the commitment of a single human resource manager to convey the long-term benefits of providing such training.

Working with volunteers from retirement homes presents a unique set of challenges due to their diminishing physical and sometimes mental skills, their clear ideas about what they can do as teachers (especially those who are former teachers), and what they are willing to do if their lives are busy with other activities around the community.

This group also has significant experience with and recollection of methodologies, in many cases, from their teaching days twenty years ago or more. This fact means that it can be challenging to introduce an approach that is different from what the tutors understand language teaching and learning to be. ProActive English has spent a significant and unexpected number of hours working with tutors to clarify and explain our approach, listen to their feedback on our approach, and generally try to find ways to support the activities of tutors without compromising our priority of supporting trainees as the focus of the program.

12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.

As noted previously, most program participants demonstrated gains of ten to thirty percent on standardized test scores for reading and writing skills after one year of training. In addition, participants showed consistent if not dramatic gains in speaking skills, based on recorded speaking skills assessment interviews conducted by ProActive English staff.



By themselves, these measures are interesting but of limited value if the stakeholders cannot attest to seeing improvement among participants, or if participants do not recognize that their skills are improving. ProActive English is in the process of gathering anecdotal evidence through surveys distributed to managers at each site. Recently, at each of the end-of-year Celebrations of Progress, managers of program participants and their tutors stood up on their own and lauded the progress of trainees with these kinds of comments:

- "...speaking more confidently to managers and residents of the community."
- "...no longer in need of a translator when I am giving instructions on a daily basis."
- "...able to help each other in class instead of relying on tutors all the time."
- "...I see a LOT more confidence in their daily work."
- "... before the English class, conversations with [Jenny] were very difficult....she called me on the phone the other day and for the first time in the five years I've worked with her, I could understand every word she said."

While ProActive English has made preliminary estimates to measure time saved as a result of the improvement managers are seeing in their trainees, we believe that the following assumptions are reasonable:

- Participants are saving an average of fifteen minutes per day because of improved communication with managers and residents, including improved comprehension of assigned tasks resulting in less repetition of tasks and of communication with managers.
- Assuming forty regular attending trainees (from 64 who started), fifteen minutes per day of time saved translates to six-hundred minutes per day (ten hours per day) or fifty hours per week.
- Assuming forty-five work weeks per year (a conservative estimate), the total hours saved is 2,250.
- Assuming each hour of labor, including associated taxes and benefits, is worth \$30 to the company (again a conservative estimate), these savings amount to \$67,500 in one year. Additional savings result from time saved by managers and by immeasurable costs associated with catastrophes that are avoided due to increased comprehension and communicative competence.
- Assuming that fifteen minutes overstates time saved by 50% and actual time saved is ten minutes, the total savings is still \$45,000 per year.