

From **Crisis** to **Opportunity**

The Emergence of a New Generation of Adult ESOL Education

By: Jen Vanek (Director of Digital Learning & Research, EdTech Center @ World Education. Facilitator of the IDEAL Consortium, Director) and **Burlington English Inc.**

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The COVID-19 pandemic likely pushed you or your program to move some or even all of your instruction online. You are not alone. There has been a sharp rise in online learning across the globe, affecting over a billion learners (Moe and Rajendran, 2020). Because you are working so hard to deliver quality instruction in such difficult times, it would be reassuring to know that the changes you have put into place are sustainable and evolving to help students meet their educational and career goals.

Some scholars refer to the rapid shifts made during the early months of the pandemic as emergency remote teaching or ERT (Hodges, Morre, Lockee, Trust, and Bond, 2020). In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, ERT is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses, and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated. Based on their research, Hodges, et al. concluded that educational planning during crises requires creative problem-solving to address rapidly changing needs and resources. This became apparent during the pandemic as educators across the country realized that what was initially thought to be a temporary shift, was becoming much more a reality with no end in sight.

While the shift to remote instruction was a new idea to some, many educators had already begun to explore its possibilities for adult students, but lacked the resources and confidence to fully develop their programs. The unfortunate circumstances of the pandemic accelerated this process. According to Moe and Rajendran (2020), "Coronavirus provided an enormous catalyst to accelerate the opportunity of the future to today." Thinking long term about the shifts taking place during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic was a guiding motivation for a group of driven adult education and distance leaders who gathered at the [*Innovating Distance Education in Adult Learning \(IDEAL\)*](#) Consortium Summer Institute in August, 2020. At the annual convention, representatives from member states got together to share challenges and innovations in policy, instructional strategies, and educational technology adoption that have supported the shift to remote instruction.

In this article, we will explore four themes that emerged from these conversations, with the goal of helping practitioners and programs across the U.S. make the shift from ERT to sustainable remote instruction:

- Ongoing Student Recruitment
- Purposeful Student Orientation
- Flexible Instructional Models
- Comprehensive Program Management

1 | Ongoing Student Recruitment

Adult education programs understand that the key to recruiting students is flexibility. To meet the needs of their adult students, some of whom have jobs, small children, or both, many programs offer evening classes, childcare services, and in some cases, assistance with transportation. Prior to the pandemic, the predominant method of recruiting students was through word of mouth – students told other students. With reduced face-to-face meetings between students, institutions have begun utilizing social media to spread the word about programs and their features. Programs can make the most of this medium by posting student success stories (videos, if possible) or relevant podcasts, in addition to providing detailed information about how to enroll. These innovative ways of recruiting are proving to be the barrier-breaking solutions we needed all along.

Lord Fairfax Community College – Northern Shenandoah Valley Adult Education has used a Facebook Messenger greeting to attract potential learners who visit their Facebook page. They use Facebook Messenger to streamline initial communication with learners, and have integrated a chatbot into their greeting to make it easier for students to ask questions about their program. (You can read more about this example, and see others, in the EdTech Center’s free online course, [*Transforming Distance Education*](#)).

How would you get the word out?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Email
- Digital Flyer
- WhatsApp
- Phone Calling



BurlingtonEnglish has put together a Student Recruitment Kit that programs can request to have customized with their institution’s logo and registration information. This free kit includes a flyer, email, LinkedIn banner, and social media posting to use to reach new and former students.

There are clear advantages to utilizing social media as a means of outreach and recruitment. Whereas in the past an institution may have relied on a marketing department or word of mouth to find new students, an unexpected outcome of the pandemic is that administrators, teachers, and students can all play an important role in connecting with existing and potential students to join ESL programs.

BurlingtonEnglish will provide you with the tools to get started TODAY



Social Media Post

We have a new, easy way to learn English online.

Contact us to get started!

ABC Sample English School
(123) 456-7890
ABCsample@EnglishSchool.com
www.ABCSampleEnglishSchool.com



Email

We have a new, easy way to learn English online.

Contact us to get started!

ABC Sample English School
(123) 456-7890
ABCsample@EnglishSchool.com
www.ABCSampleEnglishSchool.com



Flyer

We have a new, easy way to learn English online.

Contact us to get started!

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www.ABCSampleEnglishSchool.com

BURLINGTON ENGLISH
THE POWER OF YOUR VOICE

ADVERTISE CONNECT TEACH NOW!

Public Service Announcement Template
To Advertise Your Program and Connect with Your Students

Topic	Sample Script	Your Script Here	Screen Visuals
Who we are, and benefit to the viewer	<p>New Students: Hello, we are so happy you are (listening/ watching/hearing) this today. At _____ we are ready to help you learn English at home.</p> <p>Current Students: If you are already enrolled in our program, you can continue your classes online.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subtitles Program name Program logo Optional: Contact info at bottom
Ways to start learning - what we offer	You can learn English from home using a smartphone, tablet, or computer.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Images of devices Image of student studying from home
First steps for you to take	<p>Sample Option A: Please call us at xxx-xxx-xxxx to find out more about how easy it is to learn English from home.</p> <p>Sample Option B: Please email us at xxx@xxxx.edu and we will reply with easy steps on how to learn English from home.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact information

Script for Public Service Announcement

2 | Purposeful Student Orientation

A comprehensive student orientation for adult education programs should cover goal setting and expectations, as well as student services, to support persistence and retention. Additionally, key elements also include ensuring that students have adequate technology, internet access, and digital literacy skills. A well thought-out and executed student orientation can positively impact students' success, and ensure they are starting out with a solid foundation to build upon within a program.



Because of the fluid nature of social distancing requirements, programs need to explore ways to set up flexible options for delivery of these orientation activities, so that they can safely be conducted in person or in a remote format. [*The Congress Heights Community Development and Training Corporation*](#) in Washington, D.C. offers Integrated Education and Training programs (IET) in a blended, mostly distance format. They have repurposed the largest classroom on site to be an intake center, placing 12 plexiglass-shielded desks 6 to 10 feet apart in a ventilated room. They even shifted their budget to have a full-time staff person to oversee the intake. Students use the space to take CASAS tests and to receive quick onboarding for online instruction sites and Google Meet. Other orientation activities such as goal setting and making initial connections happen in small groups via meetings held through Google Hangouts.

The increased flexibility means that even after the pandemic, students who are unable to attend or cannot commit to a comprehensive in-person orientation can opt for a blended format. Additionally, the online orientation session can be recorded for students to watch if the timing for live remote options does not fit their work schedule.

From the time of registration, programs should ensure that students have access to the internet and the devices they need for class. Tech-lending programs are becoming popular in adult basic skills programs across the U.S. Many programs are providing technology devices such as Chromebooks because of their low-cost and easy integration with Google Apps. Comprehensive online curricula, such as *Burlington Core*, are completely mobile-friendly, enabling students to access lessons anytime and anywhere. Many programs are also creating single sign-on scenarios, making it even easier for students to log in and access their coursework.

Using an online curriculum is one way to offer more opportunities for learners to develop digital literacy skills. With support, students will gain confidence to transfer newly acquired computer skills from one lesson or activity to another and ultimately be able to work independently. In an effort to achieve this goal, many programs offer computer skills training from day one. For example, at Rio Salado, a Community College in Arizona, students in their ESOL classes attend a computer basics training for the first four days of a term, where they work through the Northstar digital literacy curriculum.

Sherry Lehane, a teacher in Rhode Island, facilitates a mini-tech orientation at the beginning of every live class – whether in person or online. She ensures students are comfortable with the technology before moving into the content of the day, and that content learning does not progress until students are comfortable with the technology required for that day’s work.

BurlingtonEnglish offers *Using Your Computer (UYC)* to support students with limited English proficiency and digital literacy skills, and helps them become proficient with their online devices. A series of short animated videos helps students develop basic digital literacy skills such as maneuvering the mouse and using the keyboard, as well as gain a basic understanding of a computer. *UYC* is aligned to Northstar V2.0 Standards for Basic Computer Skills. Burlington also provides detailed teaching notes, so teachers can incorporate these videos into their lessons during live on-site or online instruction.

Schools are finding creative ways to encourage students to participate in online classes. At Wayzata ABE in Minnesota, students who log 100 hours of independent online work earn a free laptop. Programs can consider lending Wi-Fi hotspots or, if local rules allow, keeping on-site computer labs open during the pandemic with social distancing, of course.

3 | Flexible Instructional Models

On-site, Online, Anytime, Anywhere



Many programs have realized that in order to make remote instruction most successful for teachers and students, they must be flexible and “think outside the box.” For example, teachers who prior to the pandemic taught a four-hour class with 35 students, might consider dividing the class into 2 or 3 shorter sessions with fewer students. By creating smaller classes, teachers can provide students with more personalized attention, which is especially beneficial to teachers of multi-level classes. This flexibility also supports families in which the balance of obligations of family and work may have changed since the onset of the pandemic.

Stacey Downey, a professional development leader from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) in Washington, D.C., recognizes that consistent delivery of blended learning instruction can be a challenge for teachers who need to shift between on-site and online instruction at short notice. Downey notes that these shifts require flexible models of instruction to ensure consistent learning objectives, regardless of the mode of delivery. An unexpected, but positive outcome of this flexibility is that adult students have more learning options; those who are unable to attend on-site classes can still attend class and participate in distance learning. Many programs supported by OSSE make use of BurlingtonEnglish because of the flexibility of the online platform. The web-based program, with projectable teacher-led lessons, makes it easy for teachers to transition seamlessly between on-site and online instruction using one consistent curriculum.

Instructor Davona Eshman, from Rio Salado College in Arizona, finds that teaching with *Burlington Core* provides a tightly integrated comprehensive ESL curriculum that offers the flexibility she needs to meet these shifts. *Burlington Core* includes detailed lesson plans, projectable teacher-led lessons that support both on-site and online instruction, and online independent learning. Eshman uses *Burlington Core* for instruction with her intermediate level English learners who meet live for two-hour sessions, four times a week. Eshman says that the planning time she saves using the ready-made BurlingtonEnglish lesson plans has allowed her more time to address

specific needs of students. Additionally, she has been able to use ongoing student progress data from BurlingtonEnglish to better respond to individual student needs and tailor her instruction accordingly. Following her teacher-led instruction, Eshman also offers her students an hour long “virtual” learning lab, during which students work in *Burlington Core* online independent student lessons that reinforce what was taught during class. She remains in the lab to assist students who have questions or need additional help. As social distancing guidelines shift, Eshman could move any part of this instruction to in person or back online as needed.

In order for students to be successful in class (on-site or online), they must have the ability to stay connected with teachers, classmates, and content for the learning to continue. At the onset of the pandemic, BurlingtonEnglish quickly recognized the need to support programs with the sudden transition to remote instruction and the importance of staying connected with their students. Burlington presented a timely webinar, [5 Easy Steps to Serve Students Online](#) to provide programs with helpful strategies to ease the transition to online instruction.

Additionally, BurlingtonEnglish took the initiative to update its web-based platform and developed new features including the Virtual Class Scheduler and Class Announcements, which provide teachers with more effective ways to communicate with students and connect them to online instruction.

Ashley Winkel, a teacher educator with the [Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning](#) at Texas A&M University ([TCALL](#)), stresses the importance of frequent, ongoing teacher-student communication. Many educators have found that students are comfortable on WhatsApp and are now utilizing this app to stay connected with their students. WhatsApp is a useful tool for sending voice messages, written texts, images, or short videos (e.g., screencasts to help students log in). This connection encourages students to stay engaged and motivated, even in these challenging times.

At the College of DuPage in the Chicago metro area, instructor Shannon Wood uses WhatsApp with her classes. She uses it to assist students with their independent online work, sometimes making suggestions about specific activities or lessons to individual students. She noted that her students are quick to respond when she uses WhatsApp and that has helped with engagement in their independent learning.

It is important to keep lessons relevant and establish a sense of community for adults to feel connected to the content and motivated to continue their learning. Many teachers do this naturally in a traditional classroom setting, however, using web-conferencing platforms with functionality to creatively interact with your students has proven to be just as effective. For many programs, social distancing requirements have led to live instruction being conducted online via web-conferencing tools. By learning how to use the many features of these web-conferencing platforms, teachers can offer their students more engaging learning experiences. For example, products like Zoom or Google Meet offer chat, screen sharing, breakout rooms, and whiteboard features to make the conferencing experience more interactive and meaningful for students.

One challenge discussed at the IDEAL Institute was the tendency for teachers to fall into the trap of too much teacher-centered instruction when they are conducting live-remote instruction. One way around this is to be sure to break up your lesson by building in reflection, an activity, or discussion after every 10 minutes of direct instruction. Breakout rooms are available in many web-conferencing platforms and allow teachers to divide students into smaller discussion and activity groups. Teachers in multi-level classes can be creative in the ways they divide their students into pairs or small groups

to allow for differentiated instruction. Nina Rasmussen at Wayzata ABE includes time during class for students to talk with each other in the breakout rooms. Using a digital curriculum, such as BurlingtonEnglish, students can practice conversations including job interviews, parent-teacher conferences, and visits to the doctor while in breakout rooms. Teachers can easily move between breakout rooms to check in on students and provide feedback while students work in pairs or small groups.

In addition to providing students with technology, teachers need to be provided with an online curriculum and training so that they can implement online instruction successfully. Ensuring that teachers have access to peer support when using a new curriculum and mode of delivery is one strategy used by Rio Salado College in Arizona. Administrator Lily Beth Brazones has set up a mentoring system, pairing new instructors using the same web-based curriculum, *Burlington Core*. Teachers engage in Professional Learning Communities, as well as in one-on-one mentoring sessions, where mentors observe their peer teachers and offer support, feedback, and encouragement.

More formal professional learning opportunities are also critical. Since the spring of 2020, opportunities for professional development on remote instruction and blended learning have been plentiful – at the local, state, and national levels. Teachers and administrators can explore opportunities offered through local programs or state adult education agencies. In addition, many national organizations, including [COABE](#), [ProLiteracy](#), and the [EdTech Center@World Education](#), offer professional development webinars. The EdTech Center also has a new series of free online micro lessons called [Transforming Distance Education](#) that comprehensively covers implementation and instruction in distance and blended learning. Publishers such as [Burlington English](#) and [Essential Education](#) also host professional learning webinars for the adult education community. Burlington English offers a range of complimentary training options for their customers, including live virtual training, on-demand courses and tutorials, and customized training with experienced Burlington English representatives. In many of these training sessions, teachers from across the country can communicate and collaborate to share ideas and support each other.

4 | Comprehensive Program Management



Finding more efficient ways for teachers to manage their classes and track student performance has been a goal for the Executive Director at Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa, AZ, Jesus Love. Love's teachers have learned to use the BurlingtonEnglish Virtual Class Scheduler to streamline the login and attendance process for teachers and students. Once logged in to BurlingtonEnglish, students can link to Zoom classes without another sign-in. This system has proven to be an effective way for teachers to manage attendance for the many students in their program, which has an open enrollment system.

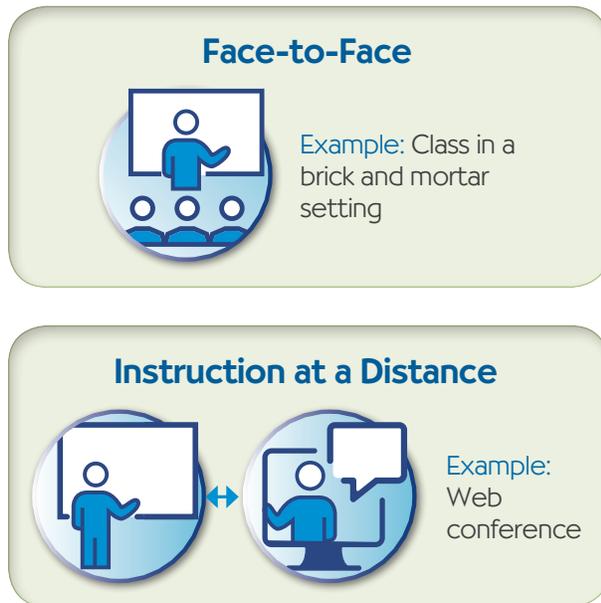
At the College of DuPage in the Chicago metro area, a variety of features of BurlingtonEnglish are helping Tine Kelly fulfill progress and outcome requirements of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). Kelly uses the digital student portfolio in *Burlington Core* as a way to compile and organize work samples. Because the ICCB requires programs to submit student samples from the beginning, middle, and end of a course, Kelly uses the portfolio feature in BurlingtonEnglish to provide feedback to students about their writing assignments and encourages them to edit their work as part of the writing process. At the end of the course, Kelly can select work samples from her students' digital portfolio that demonstrate learner progress. To satisfy a second requirement, a midterm and final exam for each course, Kelly uses sample tests in Burlington's *Prepare for CASAS* test prep course to help students prepare for the CASAS test. She is able to use administrative features in BurlingtonEnglish to track learning gains.

Because BurlingtonEnglish offers a comprehensive core curriculum with automatic progress tracking and features to monitor student outcomes, Kelly has everything she needs to meet administrative requirements without having to set up her own digital filing system on her computer, thus allowing her more time to spend teaching and working directly with students.

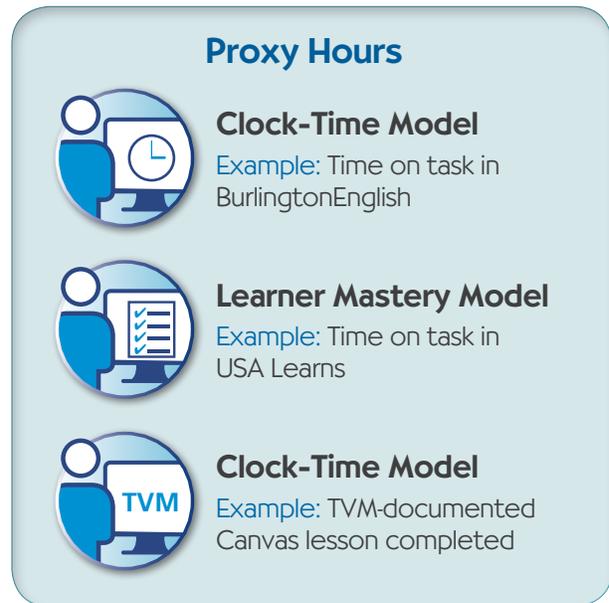
Early on in the pandemic, the [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education \(OCTAE\)](#) dropped the requirement for states to have a distance education policy in place in order to count distance time. However, the need to either craft or update state policies for the current situation was an important conversation at the Institute. Rhode Island, for example, did not have a policy for proxy hours prior to the pandemic. Policy makers quickly realized that the distance, blended, and hybrid learning landscape had changed, and there was a need to update policies to define expectations for the multiple models of distance instruction. One popular approach employed by states in the IDEAL Consortium is illustrated in this infographic from the Arizona Department of Education.

Attendance Types and Time-Tracking Models

Synchronous Contact Hours



Asynchronous Contact Hours



Teachers in Arizona take attendance for any “synchronous” instruction; that is, real-time instruction where the teacher and students meet at the same time, in the same place. This live instruction can be in person or at a distance, as indicated by the information on the left side of the infographic. Any time the learner works independently or through “asynchronous” instruction, when the teacher and students are not online together and engaged in the same activities, is counted as proxy hours. Each state has different policies for counting proxy hours; Arizona allows for three of the allowable options defined by the NRS Guidelines. Teachers can learn more about these different options in the [NRS Technical Assistance Guide](#). Programs should contact their program administrator or state ABE leadership for their state’s policy regarding attendance and proxy hours.

Once programs understand the policies for tracking data and choose a learning model(s), they need to identify a system to manage and track their data. With BurlingtonEnglish, teachers and administrators have access to ongoing, customized reports that track a range of data from student attendance to online usage including proxy hours, as well as teacher usage. Additionally, students can monitor their own progress in real-time as they work in their online independent student lessons, giving them the autonomy to take ownership of their learning – an aspect of andragogy that is so critical to adult learners.

■■■ | Conclusion

Across the spectrum of lifelong learning, we are witnessing an unprecedented acceleration in online education (Moe and Rajendran, 2020). Regardless of whether our country's institutions were prepared for the rapid shifts sparked by this life-changing pandemic, it is evident that individuals everywhere – administrators, teachers, and students – have stepped up to face the challenges head on. It would have been easy for programs to close their doors to adult learners. Instead, educators across the nation came together to share ideas and strategies, a collaboration that has not only helped institutions meet the ongoing needs of their students, but has resulted in innovative instructional opportunities that will likely become long term. The strategies highlighted in the four themes discussed above are breaking down barriers and creating flexible learning opportunities, allowing many more individuals to realize their educational and career goals. As stated so boldly by Moe and Rajendran (2020), "The genie is not going back in the bottle ... digital learning has come of age."

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