



Supporting Teachers Through Flexible Curriculum Design

Background and Context

[The Content-Integrated Language Instruction for Adults with Technology Support](#)

(CILIA-T) was designed not only for learners but also with teachers in mind.

Developed through two pilot rounds with six teachers and 95 learners across Minnesota, the project emphasized content integration, technology use, and classroom community. Teachers were expected to facilitate lessons that combined reading, writing, listening, and speaking with civics and history content, while also supporting learners' digital literacy.



The Challenge: Providing the Right Amount for Support for Teachers and Determining the Appropriate Level of Course Materials

Early in development, the team created detailed lesson plans to guide implementation. These teacher-facing documents were over 20 pages long with detailed lesson plans. While the level of detail was intended to provide scaffolding for instructors of varied experience, in practice the plans were overwhelming.

Additionally, teachers varied in their access to technology. Teachers, in correctional settings needed printable PDFs for paper-based instruction. Other teachers copied and used a Google doc version. A single rigid format could not meet all these needs.

During the first implementation in four classrooms, it became clear that the intermediate learners had some difficulty and had to go slower compared to the other three classes. One aspect of the problem was that this intermediate hybrid class was completely online although there were always 2-3 students in the classroom who followed the lesson online, along with the majority of students joining from home. In addition, class activities including the final project presented additional vocabulary and language challenges. For that reason, the CILIA-T team aspired to revise the curriculum so that it would be more appropriate for the learners.

Strategy 1: Streamlining and Diversifying Teacher Supports

In response, the team shifted toward a student-facing design with simplified teacher notes. Instead of lengthy narratives, suggested answers were embedded directly under activities, reducing preparation time and providing immediate guidance in class. ‘Cheat sheets’ and answer keys were added for quick reference, and each module concluded with a concise teacher section offering practical implementation tips. The whole curriculum was moved from a paper-based version to an eBook format so that teachers could use it as an electronic resource or print sections and use as a traditional textbook. In addition, each module in the eBook had files in various formats such as:

“Multiple formats allowed teachers to choose what best suited their classroom environment. . .”

Each module was made available as:

- **PDFs** for to use as printed handouts.
- **Google Docs** for teachers to copy and adapt
- **Google Slides** for teachers preferring interactive presentations.

These multiple formats allowed teachers to choose what best suited their classroom environment, whether online, hybrid, or in-person with limited internet.

The Strategy: Targeting Community and Tutor-Based Programs

Despite these obstacles, the team leaned into the opportunity to serve programs that had traditionally been underserved by large edtech providers. They concluded that it was no longer enough for adults to advance their literacy only through paper-based genres. Because digital environments are integral to workforce, family, and educational literacy tasks, building digital literacy alongside reading skills was essential.

The pandemic also offered a silver lining. With the widespread diffusion of smartphones and increased familiarity with web-based platforms, both adults and instructors had stronger baseline skills to draw on. ARC had been originally designed for learners with limited digital experience, so its usability aligned well with this moment. To support instructors—many of whom lacked deep training in teaching reading—the team created professional development materials that explained the research base behind ARC’s evidence-based comprehension strategies and guided teachers in effective implementation.

Strategy 2: Determining the Right Level of Course Materials

The CILIA-T curriculum has anchor texts that are read four times for different purposes: getting an initial gist; reading in sections to learn vocabulary in context and answering comprehension questions; reading for fluency; reading to prepare for deep analysis. The civics and history vocabulary was chosen according to the key topics of the text and the most common words in the Academic Vocabulary List index for history, education, social sciences, and law (Gardner & Davies, 2014).

The team began their revisions by examining the grade equivalency tables related to common assessments (e.g., TABE, CASAS) to determine the grade level of our materials in English. Based on the readability analyses, the anchor texts were at Grades 8-10 level, and the target group was intermediate and beginning advanced English learners.

During the first implementation in four classrooms, it became clear that the intermediate learners had some difficulty and had to go slower compared to the other three classes. The first revision involved reducing the complexity of the sentences such as by deconstructing embedded clauses and simplifying words that were not part of the vocabulary instruction. This brought the readability level to Grades 6-9. In the following second implementation in four classrooms, we did not observe any serious vocabulary challenges.

In addition, in their first revision, the CILIA-T team included more visuals throughout the materials, added opportunities for writing activities, adjusted the font of instructional materials for readability, and provided a student materials packet to help learners track in-class activities. In the second round of revisions, the team expanded the use of visuals, included a dictation of a simple summary text by generative AI, an audio of the text that can be played at two different speeds and incorporated more review activities.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Teacher feedback during the second implementation confirmed that the revised structure was far more manageable. The simplified, student-facing design made lessons easier to facilitate, and multiple formats expanded usability across diverse contexts. Teachers appreciated having clear, ready-to-use resources, while learners benefited from more streamlined activities with consistent supports.

Key Takeaways

Supporting teachers effectively requires balancing detail with usability. Overly complex lesson plans can overwhelm rather than assist. By shifting to student-facing materials with embedded supports and offering multiple formats, the CILIA-T team made the curriculum more practical and adaptable across diverse adult education contexts. Using an implementation→ evaluation→revision→ implementation spiral enabled the team to respond to teacher and student's concerns to make the curriculum more user-friendly.