In 2018, the National Literacy Directory (NLD) sponsored cohort 1 of a pilot program for adult educators -- NLD Adult Learning Communities. Adult educators from 12 ESL programs, selected for cohort 1 from across the country, created an online community by sharing best practices on improving student recruitment, engagement, and persistence. They then implemented projects in their communities from the knowledge gained.

NLD identified teaching strategies for adult English language learning as their cohort 2 topic. The Mother Veronica Resource Center was one of thirteen organizations chosen by the National Literacy Directory (NLD) in 2019 to participate in cohort 2 of the NLD’s pilot program. Educators from 13 ESL programs participated in an eight-week online cohort to explore current research and best practices to teach adult English language learners. Participants then identified a problem of practice and created an innovation to address the problem. The chosen organizations received a $2,000 stipend to design and field test a program innovation and were to share their results at the 2019 National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) annual conference, which was held in Louisville, KY from November 4-6, 2019. Sister Cara Garofalo (director) attended the conference and presented a poster to display the Center’s project and results.

Three instructors – Dietlinde Hoffman, Carina Sanchez, and Yvette Santiago – collaborated with S. Cara to address two challenges: 1) teaching students of varying competency in the same class level; and 2) reinforcing previous learning in a way that would allow new lessons to progress in a timely manner.

The innovation devised, ESL Circle Time, was a structured review component used at the start of every class session. This review format was piloted for six weeks, adapted for three levels of ESL classes – Foundations, Beginners, and High Beginners/Low Intermediate. Three written tests were given to the students – at the first class of the September 2019 semester; then again at three weeks and at six weeks – to assess learning.

We hoped to increase students’ confidence in their learning ability, reinforce their motivation to learn, and promote student retention. All three classes showed an increase in learning from baseline to week three, but only the Foundations class consistently showed further recall at six weeks. The teachers also provided an evaluation as part of the innovation project’s protocol, which included student feedback, so we were able to identify factors contributing to our results as well as areas for future work to improve the ESL Circle Time product and its means of assessment.

This was a wonderful opportunity provided to the Center by NLD, which contributed to our learning new teaching strategies and developing a promising means of review instruction.