

I. Introduction

The area around Foothill College is often called Silicon Valley or the tech corridor. The large tech companies based in Silicon Valley have brought enormous wealth to the region and many jobs. Some of the jobs directly support tech companies such as food workers in a café at Google, while some professions are influenced in a less direct way such as housecleaners for tech employees. Although there has been an influx of jobs in Silicon Valley, there is a large wage disparity between the tech workers and the workers that directly or indirectly serve the tech companies. A 2014 report from the Silicon Valley Index notes that the average per capita income in this area was \$70,243 in 2012 but the average per capita income for Latinos was \$19,049. A recent report from the California Employment Development Department cites software developers as making \$63.62 an hour but janitors are only making \$11.39. The large tech companies may pay their employees well in wages and benefits but often the support workers are not working for the tech companies. Those workers may be contracted employees who are often paid minimum wage with few benefits resulting in a large disparity of pay and standard of living. Some of these low-wage workers are working minimum wage jobs and are unable to advance or find another job because they are not proficient English speakers. This report is looking at the VESL needs of workers in the area between Sunnyvale and Palo Alto and at the possibility of developing curriculum to meet those needs.

II. Context

Before developing VESL classes for Foothill's service area, it is important to be aware of what is already available. Specifically, which schools, colleges, and organizations are already offering classes to meet the vocational ESL needs of the tech corridor. There are some courses being offered at specific job locations for specific companies but these are rare and for the most part there is relatively little that is easily accessible and available to anyone. There are currently not many VESL options but there seems to be interest in developing more, in part due to the discussion going on in the press concerning dramatic differences in pay in Santa Clara County.

A. Adult Schools

The adult schools contacted and researched for this project were Mountain View/Los Altos Adult Ed, Fremont Union High School District Adult School (Sunnyvale/Cupertino), Palo Alto Adult School, and Sequoia District Adult School. None of these schools are currently offering free VESL courses. The schools are primarily offering general ESL, citizenship ESL, parenthood, and a few advanced business English classes for native speakers as well as second language learners. Classes are generally free at the lower levels and cost once the classes become more advanced. Some of the schools, such as Mountain View/Los Altos Adult Ed offer free childcare but often have limited space and so admittance is contingent on living in that specific community. Fremont Union High School District Adult School (Sunnyvale/Cupertino) is one of the largest adult schools and offers many ESL classes but again the emphasis is on free

general skills courses that then transition to more advanced courses with the ultimate goal of funneling students into an academic track.

B. Other Colleges

Skyline, Canada, and De Anza were contacted and researched for this project. These colleges have limited to no non-credit courses available. The Vocational ESL classes that are available are usually credit and only health care or childcare related. Of the three colleges, Skyline is the one that is beginning to make noncredit VESL classes a priority. The college has been reaching out to the tech industries in Silicon Valley and is starting on-site VESL classes.

- Skyline College

Skyline does not currently have a noncredit program but they are beginning to delve into VESL. They are developing free worksite classes and have just put into place a pilot program for the food service workers contracted to Google by Bon Appetit. Bon Appetit is a large catering company with 10,000+ employees that services many of the tech companies in Silicon Valley. The program comes out of Skyline College and is headed by a regional Deputy Sector Navigator, Andrea Vizenor, for the San Mateo County Community College District. This VESL program is relatively new but there are plans to expand to other companies serviced by Bon Appetit. Since this program is funded by a grant awarded through the State Chancellor's Office of California Community Colleges there is potential to partner on the project. This is especially true as the companies that will be offered these VESL classes frequently lie within Foothill's service area.

Skyline has also been adding to its limited credit workplace and Vocational ESL options. For professionals, they offer a class to improve office English and an English class for childcare workers. They have also recently begun to offer on-site or off-site classes tailor made for a specific business and marketed by Skyline as “corporate ESL.”

*This is a potential college to partner with in some capacity concerning VESL classes.

- Canada College

The only noncredit VESL program at Canada is community based English tutoring (CBET). The program requires students to pass on the knowledge they attain by tutoring school-aged children at the completion of the program. The program’s website describes the VESL component as being “language and computer skills classes for the workforce.” The program ideally intends to matriculate students into ESL credit classes at Canada or in careers. The program is funded by proposition 227, which requires the students to become tutors. Canada does offer VESL credit courses in early childhood education, human services, and health science.

- De Anza College

De Anza does not offer noncredit courses or any Vocational ESL courses except for credit child development courses. The school’s Center for Applied Competitive Technologies creates on-site classes or trainings ranging from management skills to professional development. They do list VESL classes but this program is similar to Skyline’s in that it is “corporate ESL.” They are specifically targeting the large companies in Silicon Valley as their market. It is located on De Anza campus but has no connection to the Language Arts Department.

C. Groups of Interest

This list contains some of the organizations that do research and work to help increase equity in Silicon Valley. As of late, there seems to be much discussion concerning the low-wage workers supporting the tech industries and these groups are some of the most vocal and active in support of these workers. These organizations are potential partners and/or sources of information about and access to workers that have VESL needs.

- Building Skills Partnership (BSP)

This is a nonprofit with an anchor office in San Jose. Their website describes their mission as “to improve the quality of life for low-wage property service workers and their families by increasing their skills, access to education and opportunities for career and community advancement.” To that end, they offer about 15 different classes at about 10 worksites with students going to class during paid work time. They also have some community classes as well, which often involves partnerships with a local adult school. BSP considers their VESL classes to be their “flagship” program and thus is something they are highly invested in, but they are very receptive to the idea of sharing information and possibly partnering with Foothill. They have mentioned sharing the cost of the classes and helping with outreach and coordination. BSP has not updated their curriculum recently and would welcome some input in that area. BSP gets quite a bit of its funding from unions and so their focus is on union workers and especially janitors but they do work with some food workers.

*This seems like an ideal organization to partner with in some capacity concerning VESL classes.

- Working Partnerships

This is another organization with a head office in San Jose that focuses on low-wage workers. They do research as well as outreach and their website describes their group as “a community-labor organization dedicated to addressing the root causes of inequality for workers and communities of color in today's economy.” They have been challenging to make contact with but they do seem a valuable group to connect with in some capacity.

- Silicon Valley Rising

A new coalition that started in March of 2015 that works to help lower and middle-income workers in Silicon Valley. They are partnered with Working Partnerships among others and seem to be a more grassroots and political group. They have also been challenging to reach. This group may or may not aid Foothill in the development of noncredit VESL classes; they are included here because they are an organization to be aware of as they are really highlighting issues of equity in Santa Clara County.

III. Professions to consider

There are many professions that have workers with VESL needs but accessing those workers for the needs analysis and subsequent classes is and would be difficult. One of the issues considered when deciding what professions to focus on for the needs analysis was accessibility. Six different professions were considered with varying degrees of research. The two professions that were most thoroughly explored were construction workers and food service workers though more research is still needed.

- Health care workers/home support services

Some health care jobs and certainly the home support service profession tend to be low-wage and many of these workers have ESL needs. English is often not the native

language of the workers and this can hinder communication with the patients as well as supervisors. Home support service workers are sent out to care for lower income patients by Santa Clara County though the program is governed more by the State of California. Santa Clara County decides who receives care and so has relationships with the recipients but not with the providers. One company, Sourcewise, in Santa Clara seems to employ the majority of the workers.

Accessibility – Accessibility may not be a hindrance since a few companies appear to employ all the workers.

- Housecleaners

Many housecleaners work for themselves but there some large cleaning companies such as Merry Maids that could possibly be approached.

Accessibility – Since there are a few large cleaning companies near Los Altos, these potential students may be accessible depending on the reaction of their employers.

- Early Childhood Educators

This profession has very pressing ESL needs because it is transforming from a vocational field to a more professional field. The shift is coming from new requirements being introduced at the Federal level; workers are being pressed to have a B.A. with licensed childcare facilities now expected to have at least one teacher with a B.A. Workers in this field may have 20+ years of experience but they are unable to advance without a degree. The demands and expectations made on this group have gone up while the reimbursement per child from the state has remained steady so most workers average minimum wage. Many of the 2-year colleges have early childhood classes and some of

these are ESL, but there is little help for those already working in the field. Many of these workers have little educational experience and/or have not been in school in years, and they are now expected to pursue a B.A. San Francisco State (SFSU) has a program that offers free noncredit ESL classes in grammar and writing to childcare workers as well as some academic prep. SFSU is mentioned here because the supervisor of the program would like to work with more colleges to offer classes for these workers.

Accessibility – These workers have VESL needs but may be hard to access because they are not employed by one large organization. There are many licensed childcare facilities of varying sizes in the Bay Area; hence, the classes would have to be off-site.

- Janitors/building maintenance

There is quite a bit of research that has been done specifically on this group and the large disparity of wages between janitors and tech workers. The above-mentioned groups, Working Partnerships and Building Skills Partnership, both focus on researching and working with janitors/groundskeeper. In the 2009 report, “The Janitorial Workforce in Silicon Valley” Working Partnerships cited the median annual income of a janitor in Silicon Valley as \$18,710. The same report also lists building maintenance as the most common profession after construction for Latino men. This is a profession that is usually contracted out by the large tech companies, so these workers should be more accessible in terms of both doing the needs analysis and offering classes. American Building Maintenance (ABM), which is one of the largest companies for janitorial services, has contracts with many of the Silicon Valley tech companies. Many of the janitorial companies, including ABM, already have relationships with Building Skills Partnership

and are receiving some VESL classes through their organization; therefore, they are already aware of the benefits of improving their employees' English.

Accessibility - Since just a few large companies employ many workers and some currently have VESL classes, the issue of accessibility may be easily addressed.

*Offering classes to janitors should be seriously considered in light of a potential relationship with Building Skills Partnership.

- Construction/Trades

These workers have ESL needs that some construction companies believe are so pressing as to necessitate hiring full-time on-site ESL teachers. So this is a group that was looked at more closely with the some information gathered from three construction workers and two teachers of VESL for construction workers. Since this is a small sample and does not involve many students, this is a preliminary needs analysis. More research would need to be done to have enough information to fully develop a needs analysis.

Student Characteristics:

The VESL teachers that were involved in the research cited their students as either Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese speakers) or Latino (Spanish speakers). The students average about seven years of schooling in their home country and about one year of English education.

Objective Needs of the Students:

1. Tech: Use English on the phone and in emails.

2. Paperwork: Fill out daily safety reports. Read and do up to 30 pages of homework for job trainings.
3. Trainings: Attend frequent meetings and classes.
4. Computers: Do online trainings. Fill out job applications online.
5. Speaking: Speak with supervisors, the public, and any officials e.g., OSHA or PG&E.
6. Job advancement: Competency is needed for any real job advancement.
7. Unions: To pass the union entrance exam and attend union trainings.*

* These workers want to join a union to become journeymen to be able to take advantage of the training as well as higher wages and job security. However, passing the union entrance exam usually requires about a 10th grade level in English. If the worker is unable to pass the test, he may be excluded from the union. There does seem to be some variance in how strident the requirements are to enter a union are depending on the specific trade, union, and location as well as certain workers being “grandfathered” in after a certain period.

Subjective Needs of the Students:

1. Mobility: Desire to get a better position at work or a better job.
2. Education: Finish a GED or go to a technical school.
3. Confidence: Feel more confident in daily life and at work.
4. Family: Read to children in English and help with homework.
5. Community: Improve communication with children’s schools and teachers. Be more involved in their community.

Accessibility – This group is very accessible at the union level as Foothill College already offers classes through the unions. Though the workers that really need English to advance and improve their wages are those that do not belong to the unions. These workers are harder to reach as there is no specific location to offer classes from that is convenient. Another challenge lies in the fact that the workers change locations when assigned a new job, so this makes it challenging for the workers to attend a course after work. Challenges withstanding, these potential students may have high motivation because the rewards for improving their English are very tangible, such as an opportunity to join a union and/or job advancement. This seems to be the case since City College of San Francisco is able too offer VESL for construction workers at two different locations.

- Food Workers

This is a group that was looked at more closely with the some information gathered from two chefs/supervisors. One chef works at a catering company but not in Silicon Valley and the other chef works at Google for Bon Appetit. Since this is a small sample and does not involve any students, this is a preliminary needs analysis. More research would need to be done to have enough feedback to fully develop a needs analysis.

- Student characteristics:

Both chefs said that if an employee's first language was not English, it was typically Spanish. The chef working for Bon Appetit also listed Hindi as another common first language.

Objective needs:

1. Recipes: Read and follow recipes.
2. Computers: Fill out job applications online.
3. Interactions: Check in orders. Speak with customers, peers, and supervisors.
4. Meetings: Attend meetings in English.
5. Trainings: Training for advancement.
8. Phone: Call in nightly orders.
9. Interactions: Speak with customers, peers, and supervisors.*

*At Bon Appetit there are many tiers of management. This management is also more accustomed to being quickly understood and is much less likely to be tolerant of language difficulties.

Subjective needs:

Unknown as there were no student questionnaires.

Accessibility – Since just a few large companies employ many workers, the issue of accessibility may be easily addressed. Large organizations may make it easy to do the needs analysis and to deliver the classes, but the size and fame of some of the Silicon Valley companies has also made it difficult to connect with the correct person.

*This seems like a suitable profession to focus on since there is need and accessibility.