

ESL Book Cart

Beth Easter

Distance Learning and Citizenship Coordinator
Minneapolis Adult Basic Education Program

The ESL Book Cart is a mobile library that travels from classroom to classroom one day each week. The purpose is to encourage adult ESL learners in levels three through six to read for pleasure.

Learners are given 30 to 45 minutes of in-class reading time each week and are expected to spend additional time reading at home. The book cart is stocked mostly with guided readers that have controlled vocabulary and are designed specifically for adult ESL learners. In addition, the book cart has several good biographies that can be found in the young readers' section of local bookstores. The books range from a basic vocabulary of 200 words to over 2,000 words. They are grouped into one of six levels according to the number of words, and then are color-coded. Many of the books are accompanied by an audiotape, which allows learners to listen and read at the same time.

Each learner keeps a reading log of books he or she reads and fills out an index card with a brief (20 to 30 words) reaction to each book. In some classes, learners have monthly "book talks" – small group discussions in which they give positive or negative reviews of the books they have been reading. Learners check out books by filling out a card that is kept in a pocket in the back of the book. This allows the instructor to keep track of which books are being checked out and to follow up with overdue notices if necessary.

The main goal of the book cart is for learners to develop an enjoyment of reading. A major benefit is that while building vocabulary, the learners are also building confidence. Learners are encouraged to read without using a dictionary, so that they learn to become comfortable with some ambiguity when encountering new words. An unanticipated benefit of the book cart is that many learners are sharing books with their families, reading aloud to their children and vice versa. Many learners are going to public libraries and are finding books on their own. A unique feature of the book cart is that it allows the learners to go beyond the classroom reading texts and become engaged in *extensive*, rather than *intensive*, reading. There are no exercises to complete, so learners can read in a more relaxed way without the pressure of giving an immediate response.

The book cart is easy to replicate. Adult ESL readers are available through Delta Systems, Pearson Publishers, Contemporary Books and New Readers Press. Most of the books on the book cart are priced between three and six dollars.