

A silhouette of a person standing on a mountain peak with arms raised in triumph against a bright, cloudy sky. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, standing on a dark, jagged rock formation. The background features a vast landscape of rolling hills and mountains under a sky filled with large, white clouds. The sun is visible in the upper left, creating a strong glow and lens flare effect. The overall mood is one of achievement and success.

Success Stories: How ESL Students Achieve Their Goals with Support from Teachers and Community

- **Teaching ESL & serving refugees since 2010**
- **ESL trainer**
- **Not an optimist**



Literacy ConneXus

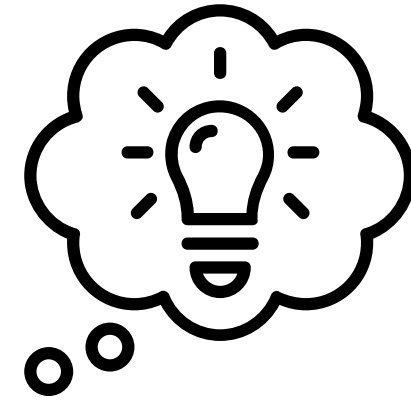
empowering community and faith-based
organizations to promote literacy

Matthew Johnston





What is success?



think



pair



share

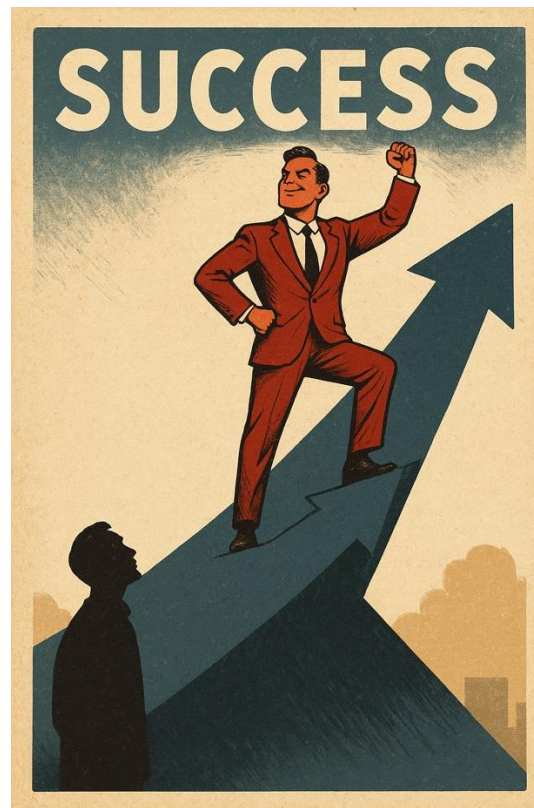


Word cloud created on <https://www.wordclouds.com/>

SUCCESS

A motivational illustration featuring a man in a red suit climbing a large, dark blue arrow that points diagonally upwards from the bottom left towards the top right. The man is in a dynamic pose, with one foot on the arrow and his right arm raised in a fist, looking upwards with a determined expression. In the bottom left corner, a black silhouette of a person stands looking up at the climber. The background is a light, textured yellowish-brown. At the top, the word "SUCCESS" is written in large, bold, white capital letters against a dark blue, textured banner. In the bottom right corner, there are faint, stylized silhouettes of city buildings.

Rethinking Success



This is success.



This is also
success.



AI generated image of "Journey" by ChatGPT
– July 8, 2025

Word cloud created on <https://www.wordclouds.com/>

Rethinking Success

Success as Destination	Success as Journey
Destination / Arrival	Journey / Progress / Ongoing
Linear Beginning → End	Messy / muddled Story - The messy middle
Performance & persistence	Being and Becoming
Measurable Tests, diplomas, sales	Meaningful Relationships, feelings, skills
Individual	Communal
Static	Dynamic
Metaphors: Ladder, climbing, keys	Trees, garden, trip, road, playdough

A person stands triumphantly on the peak of a rugged mountain, arms raised in celebration. The scene is set against a vast, cloudy sky with a bright sunburst effect behind the person. A large, green, rectangular stamp with a distressed texture and a double border is placed diagonally across the upper right portion of the image, containing the word 'SUCCESS' in bold, green, sans-serif capital letters.

SUCCESS

Learning English!

What my ESL program measures:

- Pre and Post Test results
- Attendance &
Contact/Instructional Hours
- Measurable Skill Gains
 - Diploma
 - Moving up a level
 - Job training*

What my ESL program measures:

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Literacy looks like this:

What my ESL program measures:

- Pre and Post Test results
- Attendance & Contact/Instructional Hours
- Measurable Skill Gains

Seny passed the exam and moved up to the next level.

Literacy looks like this:

Noor completed his forklift certification.

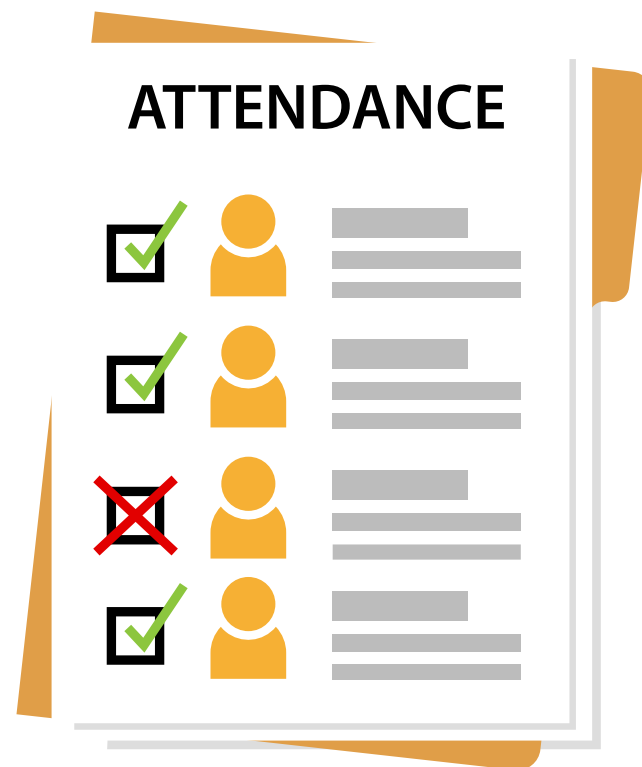
Noor gained confidence, studied in class and on his own; wrote his first ever sentence (in any language).

Amin bought a house now that he has a new/better job. His wife no longer attends ESL because it is too far.

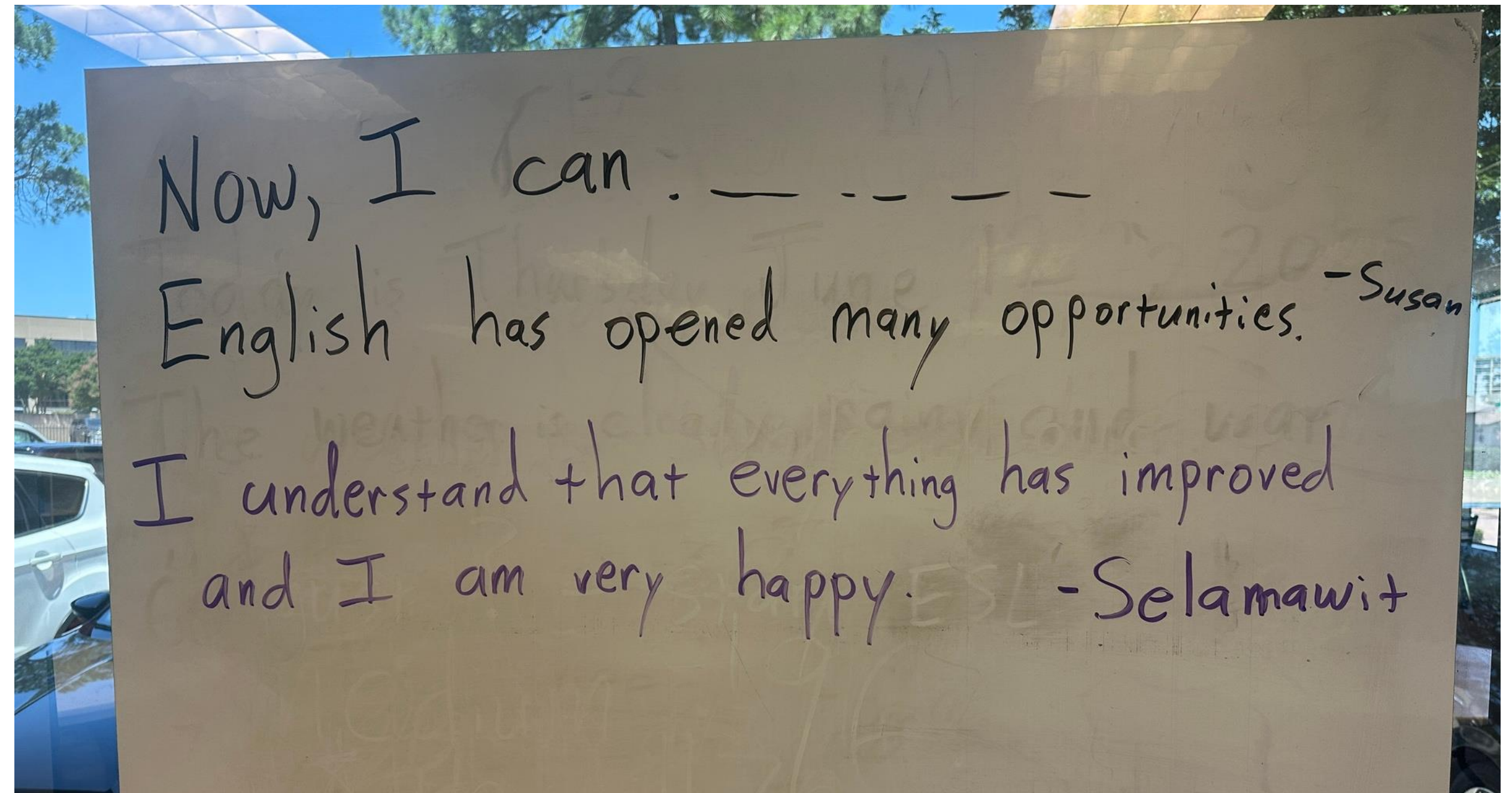
Crystal & Jamilah started cosmetology school. Their attendance in ESL has dropped to 50%.



Remember My Class?



VS.





Success Stories

- Jamilah is enrolled in beautician certificate class
- Kasraw is taking college classes
- Hokoma is applying for a better job
- Juru Nora got a job at Kraft
- Kadijah got a job at Wal-Mart last month
- Blanca is now a cook at Chilis.

Let's Get Practical

Notes App

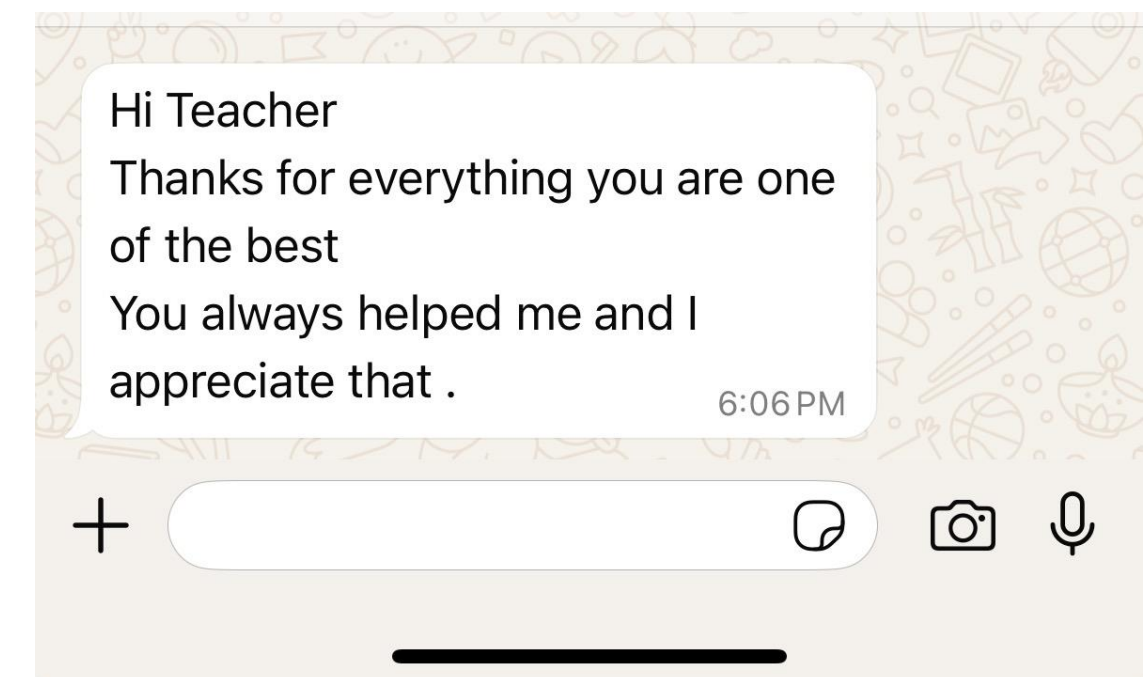
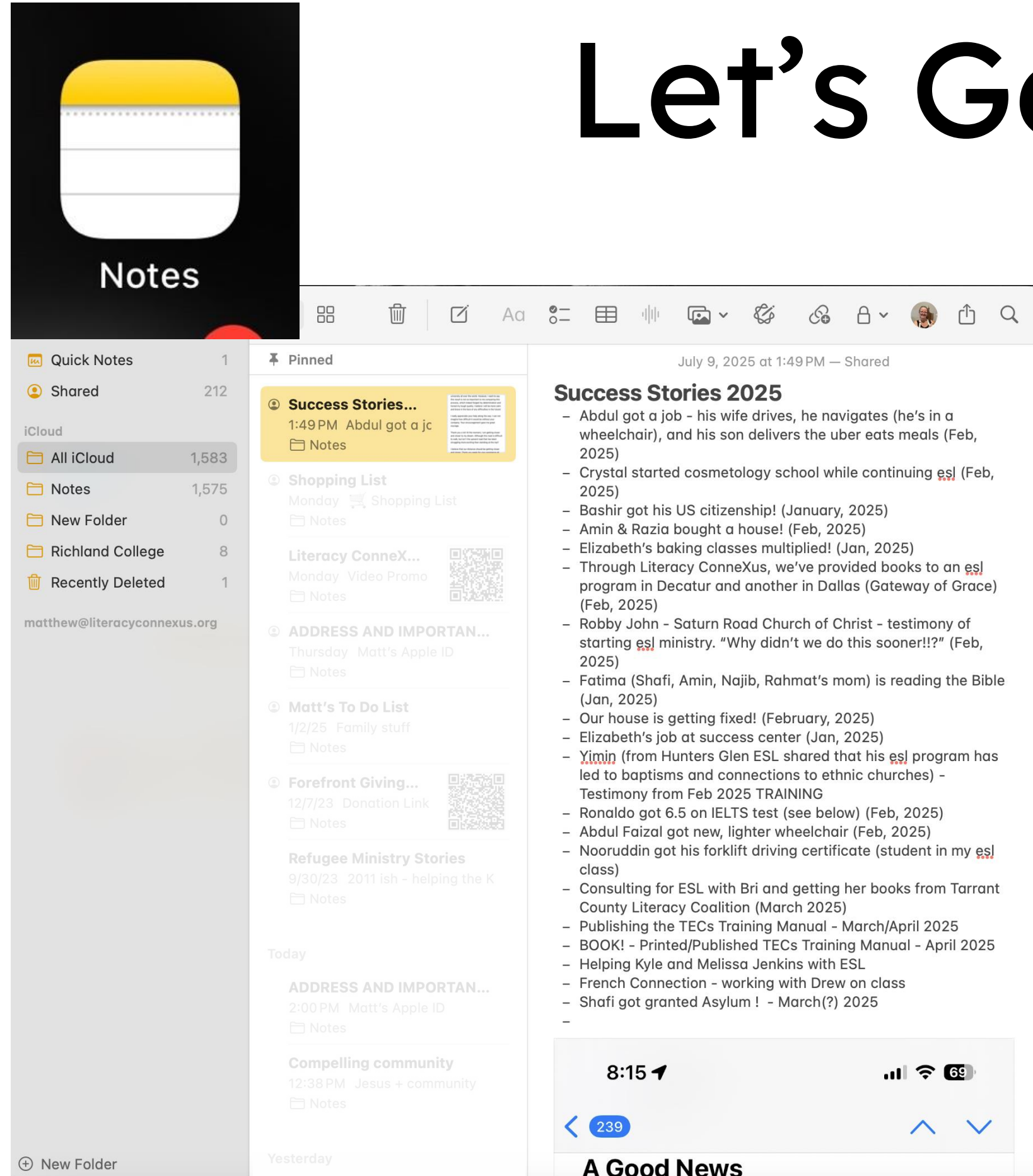
Since January 2025

Every Success →

STOP → Make a Note

Big or Small

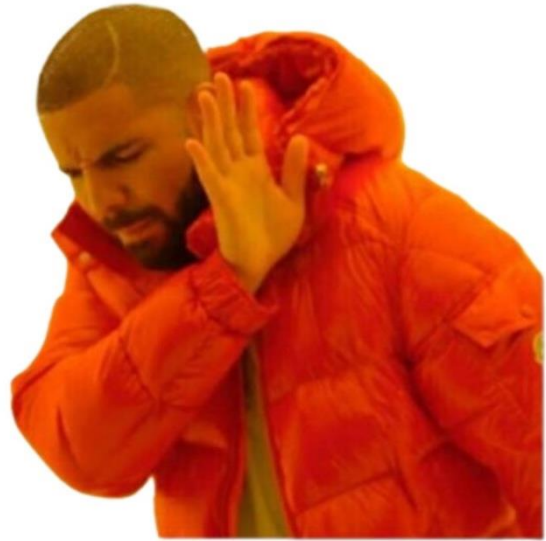
Include picture or screenshot



Let's Get Practical

What are you measuring?	How are you measuring it?	How are you celebrating it?
Academic English skills	Pre- and post formal written test	→ Diploma at graduation → Show students progress on test
Life Celebrations or Wins	Asking students 1x a week to share good things	→ Celebration wall → Share time at end of each month + birthday party or baby shower
Job Skills / Workforce English	In-class (mock) job fair + interview; skills activities (cashier)	→ "I'm work-ready" badges → Skill badges (typing, computer, cashier, etc.)

How do students know they are successful?



Tell them



Show them

Let's Get Practical

Final Ideas

Alternate Assessments

Self-Assessments & Self-Reflection

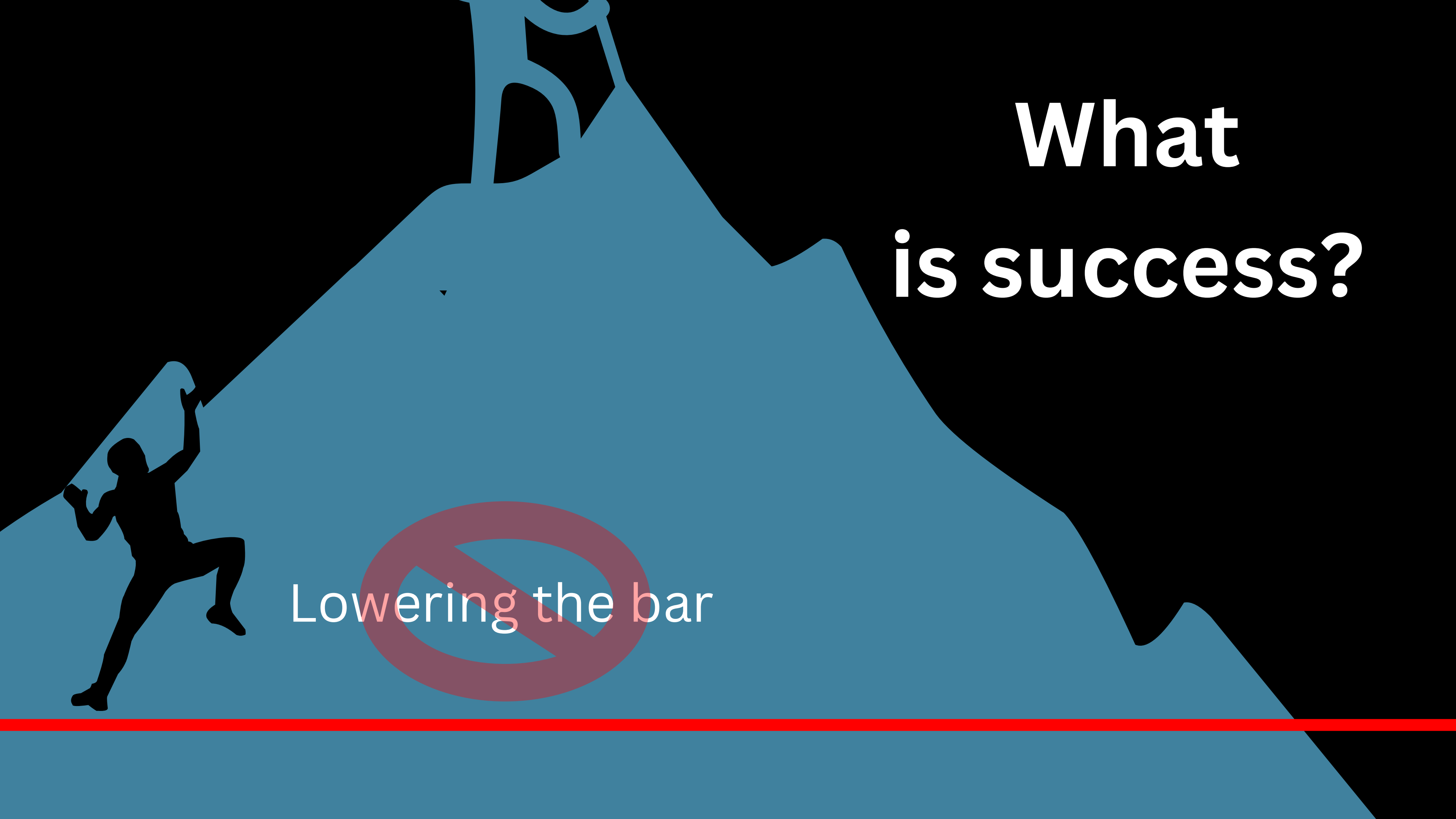
(See Handouts)

Learning English



Some Caveats

What is success?



Lowering the bar

“Learning English”

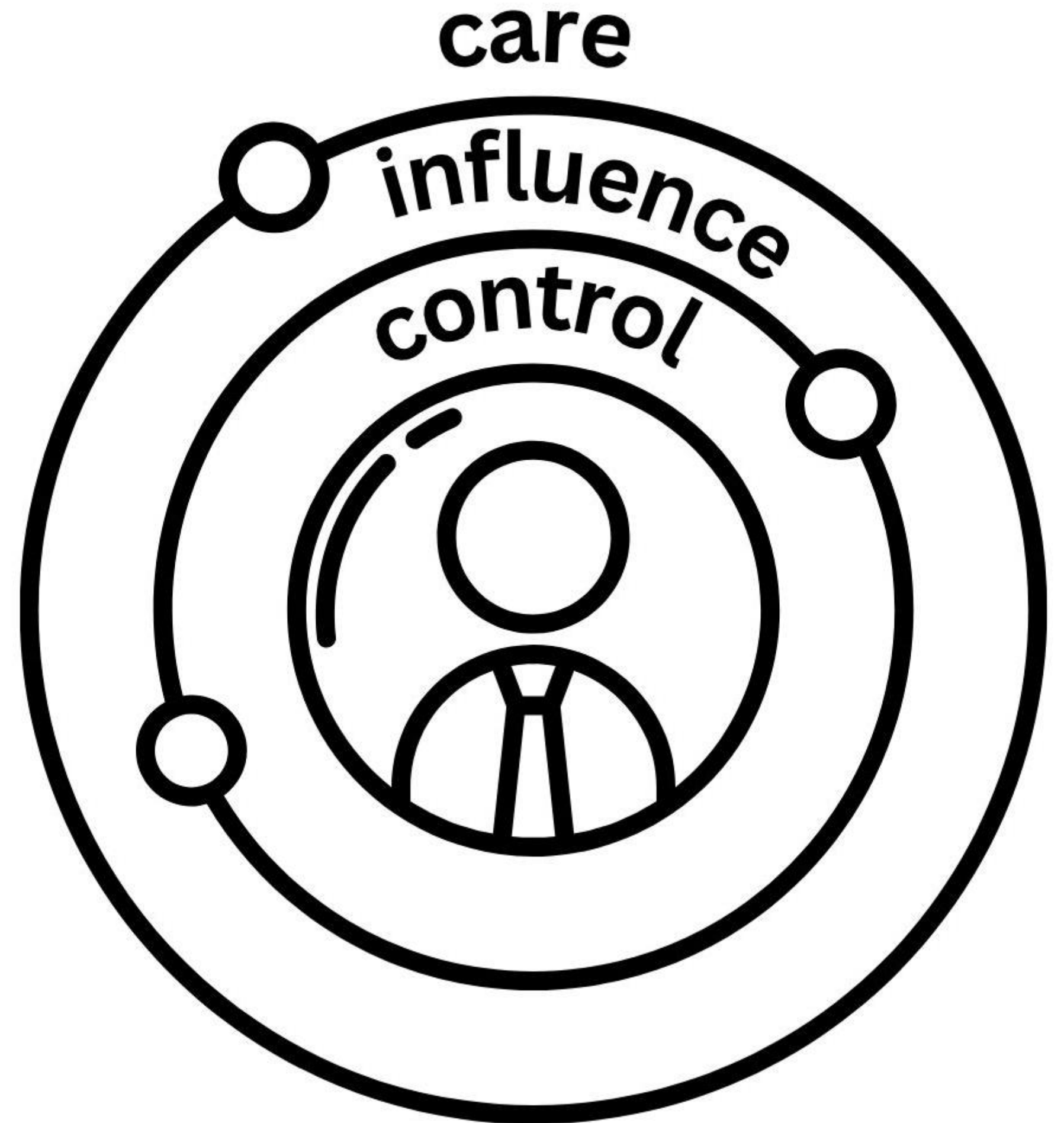
What is success?

Widening the bar

Literacy (maybe?)
looks like this?

Writing a sentence.
Literacy (often)
looks like this

I can't control everything



This idea is widely associated with Stephen Covey's 7 habits book:
Covey, S. R. (1989). The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in
personal change. Free Press, but I came across it in discussions with friends.

Final Reflection



Literacy ConneXus
empowering community and faith-based
organizations to promote literacy

Literacy ConneXus Celebrations (January–April 2025)



Lesson planning video updated –
Thank you, Kathleen!



Great training in the Valley –
Well done, Karen!



Tina contacted 100s of churches
and updated them in NEON
software



Successful Metroplex Conference
@ DBU → TECs training



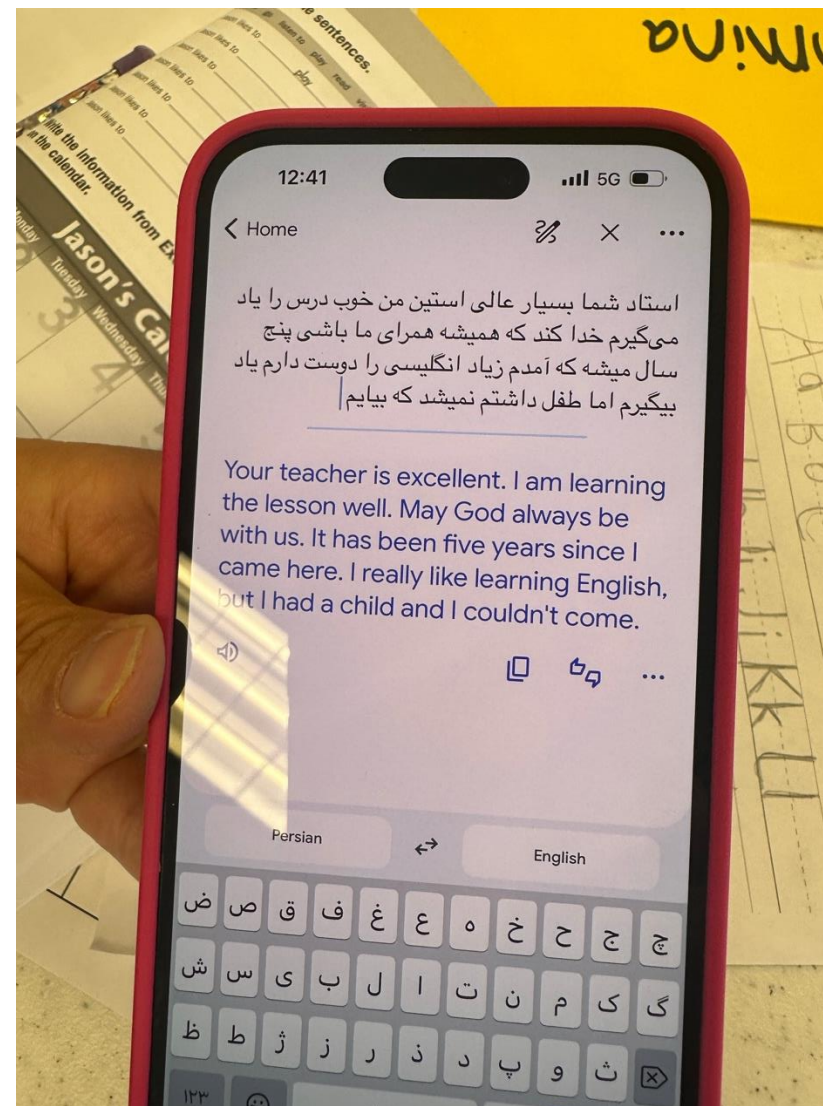
Advanced training
at Hunter's Glen



TECs Training Manual book
On Sale at Amazon soon!



T-shirt coming soon!



Let's Connect:

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ESL Trainer & Outreach Catalyst

Literacy ConneXus

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Sources

Covey, S. R. (1989). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change*. Free Press.

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (n.d.). *Assessment in the classroom*. Center for Applied Linguistics. https://www.cal.org/caela/scb/III_B_AssessmentintheClassroom.pdf

Measurable Skill Gains - Texas Workforce Commission. (2023). *Adult education and literacy performance guide*. <https://www.twc.texas.gov/sites/default/files/wf/docs/ael-performance-guide-twc.pdf>

Recommended Further Reading

Comings, J., Parella, A., & Soricone, L. (1999). *Persistence among adult basic education students in pre-GED classes*. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

<https://ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report12.pdf>

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (n.d.). *Assessment in the classroom*. Center for Applied Linguistics. https://www.cal.org/caela/scb/III_B_AssessmentintheClassroom.pdf

National Reporting System. (2019). *Measurable skill gains and MSG performance reporting*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://nrsweb.org/training-ta/online-courses/measurable-skill-gains-msg>

Auerbach, E. R. (1992). *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL literacy*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

Burt, M., & Peyton, J. K. (2003). *Reading and adult English language learners: A review of the research*. National Center for ESL Literacy Education.

Lenz, B. (2001). *Focus on Basics*, 5(C), NCSALL. [Using learner narratives as alternatives to traditional measurements or assessments – letting students say what success means to them]