

## *Skills for America's Future*

### **Case Study: McDonald's English Under the Arches™**

#### **English Under the Arches: An Introduction**

Begun through a series of pilots in 2007, English Under the Arches™ (EUA) is an English language learning program specifically designed for McDonald's managers and manager trainees.

McDonald's has a long history of promoting from within—70% of restaurant managers and 50% of U.S. company officers began their careers in entry level positions in a McDonald's restaurant. During recent years, McDonald's found that to continue helping some employees take on more responsibilities, they needed to help them improve their English language skills. To be most effective, language training needed to be both available on the job to accommodate busy schedules and tailored to the specific communications tasks required of a McDonald's manager.

With these criteria in mind, McDonald's developed English Under the Arches, a program to develop employees' English skills and to help them advance in their careers at McDonald's. The program currently operates in over 30 sites around the country and is slated to continue to expand in the coming years.

#### **How the Program Works**

Individual franchise owners, known at McDonald's as "Owner/Operators," select managers and manager trainees to participate in the program, pay their tuition and provide paid work time for the employees to attend classes while at work. The program is voluntary and Owner/Operators participate when they identify high-potential managers who would provide continued value and would progress rapidly with the aid of language training.

Many McDonald's employees work more than one job and have family responsibilities. To allow employees time to study, classes are held during their work time in McDonald's restaurants (five hours/week), often in their restaurants' "crew room" via computer. Employees connect with other student-employees (in nearby restaurants) and the teacher in real time in a "virtual classroom," allowing employees to gain the language skills they need to advance without losing work or transportation time. Students receive regular wages for the time they spend in language training and are able to immediately apply what they learn to their work.

In addition to the virtual classes, students learn through:

- Face-to-face classes: traditional classes with students and the teacher in a convenient location.
- E-learning practice: independent work by students on an online program.

#### **Fast Facts**

- Over 30 sites around the country
- Over 1500 participants since 2008
- 85% course completion
- 90% retention year-to-year
- Over 95% of participants increase their wages following participation in the program

- On-the-job practice: students are assigned specific activities to practice their English skills on the job

The four courses include:

1. **Shift Basics:** this eight-week course focuses on listening and speaking skills needed to train crew in English and prepares students to succeed in the EUA Shift Conversation course.
2. **Shift Conversation:** this 22-week course covers listening and speaking tasks needed to run a shift (delegation, feedback, maintaining a respectful workplace, customer complaints).
3. **Shift Writing:** this 12-week course covers reading and writing tasks needed to run a shift (telephone messages, communication log, incident reports)
4. **Conducting Performance Reviews:** this eight-week course is the newest course available through English Under the Arches. It covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills needed to provide performance feedback.

Course sites are determined by groups of Owner/Operators who see a local need for English language courses, and new sites are opening as interest grows. As a commitment to Skills for America's Future, McDonald's has pledged to continue to expand the program over the next year. At most sites, McDonald's works with local community colleges to recruit exceptional English teachers and, in some cases, the face-to-face classes take place at community colleges.

## Results

Measurement has been a critical element of program development, including pre- and post-testing using BEST Plus, a nationally used, oral evaluation tool. On average, 86% of students have progressed 1 or more language levels after completing each conversation course. McDonald's has found that the contextualized curriculum helps to accelerate language learning and the unique delivery model encourages the high attendance and high graduation rates.

*"Before I took the class, I was afraid of a lot of things—when I was at work, talking to the customer, and with my co-workers. I was afraid of talking to my kids' teachers ... But now, the people that I work with and my customers CAN understand me. I have relationships with them."*

*- Edna Barrera, 1st Assistant Manager, EUA graduate*

Since the program began in 2007, over 95% of participants who complete an English Under the Arches course have received a pay raise due to the increased responsibilities they are able to take on. Significantly, in a high turnover industry, 90% of participants were working for McDonald's three years after completing the program.

Owner/Operators report that the most important results are the changes they see in their employees' behavior. More confident in their English, participants are able to interact with customers, solve problems on their own and answer the phone—all tasks many would have been unable to do before participating in English Under the Arches.

**Skills for America's Future is a non-partisan partnership of businesses and community colleges. Its purpose is to address the dual problems of high unemployment and the difficulty many employers face in finding workers with the right skills. Skills for America's Future helps connect employers to community colleges and workforce partners so students are better equipped with the skills necessary to find and retain jobs.**

For more information about how your company can partner with community colleges and Skills for America's Future, contact Karen Elzey at [karen.elzey@aspeninst.org](mailto:karen.elzey@aspeninst.org)

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