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A BLOG BY THE EDITORIAL WRITERS OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

Learning English the Web Way

By

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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Almost every aspect of immigration in the United States these days is controversial. Here is one that should not be.

It's USA Learns, a free Web site from the Department of Education that helps people learn to speak and write English.

There's a crying need for English-language instruction among immigrants. The 2003 [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#) found that 11 million adults in the United States were not literate in English, and that state and local language programs were reaching only about 1 million of them.

The Web site, launched this month at www.usalearns.org, is not a perfect substitute for an abundance of amply funded, not-overcrowded English as a Second Language classes. But it's a good start.

People who don't have the time, money, or luck needed to get into E.S.L. classes, or who want to practice on their own, can now cozy up to a library computer and get hours of valuable training in the practical language of taxes, government, health, parenthood, and other useful subjects.

Immigration tough talkers like to insist that English should be the national language of the United States, but seldom support efforts to help more immigrants learn it. Maybe they will find something to deplore about this modest initiative, too. But to us it sounds simple, useful, and long overdue.

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