



SHOP TALK # 17: Effective Transitions from Adult Education

The *National College Transition Network* recently hosted its first National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education in Providence, Rhode Island. What initially began as a New England initiative just a few years ago drew adult educators and their community college counterparts from thirty-three states. The common interest: preparing adult learners for successful transition into post-secondary education and/or training. The conference provided a forum for sharing promising practices in strengthening career pathways and ESL programs, preparing adult learners for college-level reading, writing, and math, and helping students develop self-efficacy skills to succeed.

The conference opened with some sobering statistics from the National Commission on Adult Literacy¹:

- Nearly half of the current U.S. workforce has only a high school education or less. Some 25 million workers aged 18 to 64 lack a high school diploma/GED; another 52 million have no post secondary education.
- About two-thirds of our 2020 workforce is already beyond the reach of elementary and secondary skills; in other words, K-12 reform will have virtually no impact on this population or the business community.
- The current pool of skilled workers among prime-age adults is already equal to the next 17 years of high school classes.
- Only about one in four adults with less than a high school education participate in any kind of education or job training, and many of those who do participate do not persist long enough to earn any credential.
- The lack of alignment between federal and state adult education, job training, and post secondary education policies is a significant barrier to learners' successful transitions. Current adult education, post secondary, and workforce development policies create silos, hindering collaboration and limiting lower-skilled adults' access to a continuum of education, training, and support services.
- Two additional obstacles: financial, personal, and family challenges faced by adult learners; and the limited capacity of education and training providers to respond effectively to these challenges.
- The "tipping point" for experiencing a substantial earnings payoff appears to be approximately a year of post secondary occupational credits plus a credential.
- There is a common misperception at state and local levels that federal policy does not allow funds to be used for integrated programs and other transition activities.
- Integrating adult and post secondary education and training for lower skilled adults can help increase persistence and completion by shortening the timeline for earning marketable credentials and by helping adults see the relevance of remediation to their career goals through contextualization.

¹ Strawn, 2007. *Policies to Promote Adult Education and Post Secondary Alignment*, National Commission on Adult Literacy, N.Y. Publication available at www.caalusa.org and focuses on helping adults with lower skills and limited English proficiency earn post secondary credentials that open doors to family-supporting jobs.

A number of valuable resources are available to adult education professionals and their partners as they work to develop college transitions components and services. While some initiatives focus on academic transition only, others target learners' successful transition into training programs that lead to gainful wages and career opportunities. For example:

- The National College Transition Network (NCTN) attracts national membership and offers both free and fee-based services. www.collegetransition.org.
- *The College Transition Toolkit* (CD and printable materials) will be available in 2008. Cost: \$75 plus shipping and handling. For ordering info, contact NCTN@worlded.org or go to www.collegetransition.org.
- *Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL* (Crandall, 2007). This research report takes a look at five community colleges (urban, suburban, and rural settings, geographic diversity, homogeneous and diverse English language learner populations) efforts to design effective college transition programs for English language learners. www.caalusa.org/publications.html#esl
- *Breaking Through* is designed to help strengthen post secondary outcomes for low-income adults by focusing on strategies that create more effective pathways into and through pre-college and degree-level programs (<http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/index.php>).
- El Paso ISD's Adult Education Program, in a first time collaboration with El Paso Community College, is offering a Pre-Transition pilot to a cohort of 17 adult learners interested in pursuing a post secondary credential (occupational training certificate and/or academic / associate's degree). Both adult education instructors and college faculty are engaged in the development of the course, which focuses on four areas:
 1. academic readiness (reading, writing, math, computer literacy, strengths and challenges to success)
 2. career exploration (available pathways and their requirements)
 3. college survival skills (navigating the system and understanding the culture)
 4. personal readiness (support systems).

The course includes 268 hours of instruction delivered over a twelve week period, and will be repeated in the spring semester. Eventually, self-contained modules will allow individual workshops to be dropped into regular ABE/ASE classes, maximizing flexibility.
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Other sessions at the conference offered tips on establishing a mentoring program for non-traditional students; introducing the language of college; 100 Things Every Adult College Student Ought to Know; College for a Day initiatives; and ways to engage college faculty in transition programs.

A Local Note:

Austin Community College offered its first College for a Day on November 15. Adult learners were given the opportunity to participate in college demonstration classes.
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