



SHOP TALK # 20: Adult Education in Brownsville ISD Linked to Construction Electrician Journeyman's Exam

Sometimes 24 hours in a day are just not enough. With approximately sixty percent of adult learners already in the workplace, it should come as no surprise that skilled craftsmen are in need of adult education services. A growing number of workers with limited English language skills are among those seeking certification and credentialing in their trade. One example of this is the promising partnership between Brownsville ISD's Office of Adult Continuing Education and the University of Texas Brownsville / Texas Southmost College.

In an effort to implement a Skills Development grant awarded by the Texas Workforce Commission, Ruben Caballero, Coordinator of Special Projects at UTB/TSC, turned to Brownsville ISD for assistance with a group of construction electricians in need of English language instruction. To enable these individuals to prepare for the state electrician journeyman's exam, Brownsville's Adult Continuing Education program is offering ESL instruction on the front end of the college's industrial education program.

Under the guidance of Dr. Oscar Cantu, Director of Adult Continuing Education, Brownsville ISD is administering the BEST Plus / Literacy Assessment and providing occupation-related English language instruction at UTB/STC's Industrial Education Center. ESL instructor Clemente Torres is working with the students in developing the language skills needed for their occupation. These include verbal communication skills, occupation-specific vocabulary, reading strategies, and test taking skills. With an extensive background in the manufacturing industry, Mr. Torres is able to relate to their work environment and help them make the connection between English language instruction and the world of work.

Like many adult learners, these students' work schedules make it difficult to take optimal advantage of traditional classroom instruction. They must often choose between opportunities to work overtime and classes four evenings a week (two evenings ESL and two evenings of technical training). Together, Mr. Caballero, Dr. Cantu, and Mr. Torres are exploring ways to retain the students and support their learning. The collaboration is encouraging as they explore some of the following options in preparation for a second cycle of instruction expected to begin in late spring:

- providing each learner with instructional materials they can take home to study (as opposed to a class set that cannot be removed from the classroom);
- utilizing an online program called *Skillswise* from the British Broadcasting System (BBC) which provides teachers and students with downloadable fact sheets, games, quizzes, and vocabulary worksheets for electrical, plumbing, plastering, carpentry, retail, childcare, healthcare, and catering/hospitality;
- exploring the possibility of purchasing *Sed de Saber Construction* kits;
- providing access to UTB/TSC's Distance Education lab, where trainees can access the soft skills modules available in both Spanish and English); and
- opportunities for instructors to observe technical training courses.

SHOP TALK is a series sponsored by Texas LEARNS to highlight promising practices and address issues, concerns, and questions related to meeting the adult education needs of Texas' emerging, incumbent, and displaced workers. For additional information or to request that a particular topic be addressed, contact Barbara Tondre at btondre@earthlink.net