



## SHOP TALK # 21: Workforce Literacy Summit in San Antonio a Success!

The first summit focused on addressing the training and employment needs of Texas' rapidly growing limited English workforce was hosted by the Alamo Community College District April 21-23 in San Antonio. Host partners included Texas LEARNS, Alamo Work Source, and the City of San Antonio.

Dr. Federico Zaragoza, Vice Chancellor for Professional, Technical, and Workforce Education, challenged participants to take a hard look at work-based literacy models for a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Joanie Rethlake, State Director of Texas LEARNS, and Chakib Chehadi, Executive Director of Alamo Work Source, welcomed participants and restated the challenges set for the summit gathering. The summit attracted individuals representing workforce development networks, adult basic education programs, community-based organizations, GREAT Centers, literacy coalitions, SER Jobs for Progress National, Texas community colleges, and Texas employers.

Keynote speakers included Dr. Heide Spruck Wrigley, president of LiteracyWork International, a small social science research firm focused on language and literacy issues for hard-to-serve youth and adults. She is the author of *The Language of Opportunity: Expanding Education and Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills*.

Dr. Alec Levenson, a research scientist at the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California, focused his remarks on paths to improving workplace-centered basic skills programs, including improving design and employer funding.

Dr. C. Adolfo Bermeo is a senior scholar with the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and works closely with the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE). Dr Bermeo works with state, national, and international organizations committed to increasing access to higher education for historically underrepresented, first generation, low income, and immigrant students. Highlights of his presentation entitled, *Creating a Culture of Excellence*, will be made available via TCALL, as will those of other presenters.

Summit participants spent an afternoon learning first hand about six "Models in Action" featuring a variety of responses to the workforce literacy needs of English language learners. Presentations included the following:

- *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)* initiative from Washington State, which pairs English as a Second Language instruction with workforce training and career pathway opportunities (<http://www.northseattle.edu/services/ibest>);
- *Making Connections*: a systems collaboration between El Paso Community College and El Paso ISD's Adult Education program focused on helping adult learners make successful transitions into post secondary education and training;
- *Adult Technology Training for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency* (grants from the Texas Workforce Commission to the Alamo Community College District, the San Jacinto Community College District, Harris County Department of Adult Education,

and WorkSource/Greater Austin Area Workforce for innovative approaches to work-based language skills development for high demand occupations;

- *Adult Bilingual Training Models* presented by Dr. Ana Macias of the University of Texas at El Paso, makes the case for accelerating learning by English language learners by providing an integrated educational model delivered via two languages;
- *The Entrepreneurial Connection*, a San Antonio SEED Program sponsored by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) which promotes micro enterprises as a means of growing business leaders among those facing multiple barriers to economic self-sufficiency; and
- Milwaukee Area Technical College's *Workforce Initiative: Transitioning English Language Learners into Bilingual Occupational Education Programs*, offering concurrent services in English language improvement, workforce readiness, career path opportunities, higher education, and gainful employment.

Summit participants heard from employers who hire workers with limited English proficiency as they described the challenges and tremendous need to engage English language learners in career path opportunities in healthcare (UT Health Science Center), manufacturing (Tier 1 suppliers to Toyota Mfg), and industry (Houston Business Roundtable).

Dignitaries addressing the participants included U.S. Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, State Senator Carlos Uresti, Alamo Community Colleges Trustee Chair Robert Zarate, President and CEO of the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Cheryl Fuller, Director of the Texas Workforce Investment Council. Ms. Fuller's remarks were followed by group activities to assist summit participants in moving toward solutions and implementing promising practices in their communities. Each group identified challenges and made recommendations for "next steps".

Notes from group activities, along with recommendations and highlights of speakers' presentations will be made available via the *Workforce Partnerships* page found on the website of the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL) at <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu>. Alamo Community College District hopes to establish a Work-Based ESL Collaborative Network and to sponsor quarterly follow ups to the summit proceedings. Additional information will be posted via the **SHOP TALK** series and the WorkforceLit email discussion list, as it becomes available.

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**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](mailto:btondre@earthlink.net)