



SHOP TALK # 26: TRANSITION: DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Last December 2007 we realized the need to help adult learners be more successful in post secondary education and training programs. In our service area, we have adult students who have a high school diploma but who cannot read or write. We also have adults who have been out of school for many years and need to refresh their skills and build their confidence. We decided to introduce a Refresher Course targeting these students. Most of the learners who come to our Refresher Course are functioning at a low ABE (Grade levels 0-7) level. They need to read at the 8th grade level to qualify for workforce-sponsored training such as truck driving, or heat, ventilation, and air conditioning certificate programs. Students enrolled in the Refresher classes meet all the same criteria as GED students but they have different goals. They go through the same orientation and assessment. (Grayson County Community College, Donna Byrum, AE Director).

Adult education is all about transition, and transition comes in many shapes and forms, depending upon student need. Adult education is never a final goal or destination for adult learners. Learners pass through the corridors of adult education on their way to becoming literate and obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. As parents, they come to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in their children's educational development. Many come to complete a secondary school education that will open doors to other opportunities.

Adult education is *the* safety net for many adults who can not have these needs met elsewhere. It provides critical and unique opportunities not provided by any other educational entity. But the population it serves is always in a state of transition of one kind or another. The Grayson County Community College Refresher course is just one example of how adult education programs are helping students make successful transitions.

Sections 50 and 77 of House Bill 1, General Appropriations Act, passed during the 80th Texas Legislative Session, address the need to align adult basic education and post secondary education to ensure the success and persistence of students making the transition from adult education to post secondary studies. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency are to coordinate efforts to develop immediate and long-range plans that address at a minimum the following:

- outreach and advising;
- assessment, curriculum, and instruction;
- persistence interventions;
- state level accountability systems to monitor performance;
- service provider level performance measures and program evaluation;
- standards to enhance data quality and sharing among state agencies and service providers;



- needs assessment of students and service providers to identify other structural issues and barriers; and
- grants (including federal and other funds) to maximize effective use of limited general revenue funds.

Like Grayson County Community College, many local adult education programs already have some activities in place to assist adult learners in making successful transitions to post secondary studies, training, and employment. Another example follows:

Austin Community College District will host its second annual *College for a Day* event on November 14th. The purpose of the activities is to introduce ABE and ESL learners to community college life so they can envision themselves as college students. Individuals are given the opportunity to participate in interactive classes facilitated by college faculty. This year students will be able to participate in any two of the following classes: surgical technology, computer programming, game development, fire protection, nursing, emergency medical services, anatomy and physiology, commercial music, veterinary care assistant, physical therapy assistant, electronics, and education instruction.

In addition, a component specially focused on transitions for English language learners will be added to the program to assist them in navigating the registration process. An academic/continuing education ESL class will be also be presented so students can learn of the differences between adult education ESL and those ESL classes offered for college credit.

College President, Dr. Steve Kinslow, kicks off the event with a welcome address to the students. Students then have the opportunity to meet with college staff responsible for admissions, financial aid and other student support services. They also have the chance to hear firsthand from a panel of adult learners who have made successful transitions into post secondary studies.

During the year, follow up is conducted via post cards, phone calls, email, and personal contact with the students; registration and financial aid reminders, and advising services. The College's Mobile Go Center expands outreach efforts by taking services to individuals where they work, live, and study.

Providing adult learners with the tools necessary to make successful transitions into post secondary studies requires a team effort and careful planning. Helpful tips include:

- start early and meet often
- set a detailed timeline
- clarify responsibilities
- get marketing on board (this is a marketing opportunity for the college)
- prepare a 1 to 2 page overview of the day's events
- approach academic departments early in the planning and solicit input

Another topic to be discussed in an upcoming issue of SHOP TALK: *Curricular Opportunities to Bridge the Gap.*