

## **SHOP TALK # 34**

### **Victoria College:**

# **Connecting *TISESL* to Health Career Opportunities**

Introducing new curricula such as the *Texas Industry Specific English as a Second Language (TISESL)* curricula is no small task in any community. Rural and small programs may have to employ different tactics to get new programs off the ground. Knowing one's community needs is the place to start. Knowing one's stakeholders and the importance of their support is another critical factor.

Victoria College's Adult Education Program has taken a unique approach to implementation. Trying to build a base of support and attending to the immediate needs of learners is a balancing act. For Victoria College, embracing the motto, "think big but start small", seems to work.

Knowing that it would take time to recruit sufficient numbers of students willing and able to commit to 200 hours of instruction (the estimated time needed to deliver a full curriculum), Victoria College has started with parts of the *TISESL* curriculum to meet the needs of three students in Cuero, Texas. Instructor Sandi English, who is also Patient Education Coordinator at the Parkside Family Clinic in Cuero where the class is held, is already witnessing student success.

Part of the *TISESL* healthcare curriculum is being used with incumbent workers at a local nursing and rehabilitation center to assist individuals employed in housekeeping to qualify for the Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) program offered by the center (the dropout rate among CNA training participants is currently 60% to 80%). One student has begun asking questions (in English) of the center staff as she has become more familiar with the healthcare vocabulary. She has demonstrated a genuine interest in the residents and their care – so much so that Center staff encouraged her to enroll in CNA training concurrently with *TISESL* instruction; when she becomes certified, the Center will hire her. She continues to meet with the *TISESL* instructor on an as-needed basis. The comprehensiveness of the *TISESL* materials makes it possible for the instructor to follow and support the student as she progresses through the CNA training and prepares for the state certification exam.

Another student who has joined *TISESL* instruction was a certified nursing assistant in a hospital in Mexico but needs certification here plus improved English language proficiency. A third student working in a day care center was required to take a CPR class in English. This whetted her appetite for the health care industry.

The instructor finds the *TISESL* materials well constructed and on target for adult learners interested in exploring career opportunities in healthcare. "The information holds their interest, can be delivered in manageable chunks, and generates lots of questions from the learners. Because classes are held at the Parkside Clinic, students have the opportunity



to interact with staff at the nurses' station. Interest in the class is growing, and students participating are now being offered opportunities to shadow clinic staff on Saturdays.”

These are first steps for learners who can commit to entry level employment opportunities, with the option of eventually continuing their education toward family-supporting careers. As interest builds in the community, Victoria College plans to expand its use of the **TISESL** healthcare curriculum to include the math, technology, and employability components. Proving to local industry (healthcare providers, CNA providers, and workforce development) that Adult Education has something valuable to offer is a goal. As interest grows, so grows the investment local stakeholders are willing to make (funds, support to duplicate materials, greater access to a continuum of post secondary education and training).

Another step in the right direction: the coordinator of Allied Health Continuing Education at the college has had an opportunity to look at the **TISESL** curriculum. She is excited about the employability section and hopes to hire an instructor (with both an adult education and nursing background) to integrate the employability activities into a CNA night course being offered by the college. This may eventually lead to the development of a new bridge or I-BEST like model the local workforce center could support with federal stimulus funds.

It's all about strengthening post secondary outcomes for low income adults by focusing on strategies that help them succeed in occupational and technical degree programs. Adult education and community college partnerships can play innovative roles in helping adults gain the valuable skills and credentials that are gateways to family-supporting careers. Victoria College has taken some exciting first steps. Stacey Weaver is Director of Adult Education at Victoria College.