

SHOP TALK # 35: Seguin ISD Tackles *TISESL*

The adult education program at Seguin ISD serves Comal, Guadalupe and Kendall Counties in Central Texas. Located between Austin and San Antonio, the program serves communities including New Braunfels, Seguin, Blanco, Fredericksburg, and surrounding rural areas.

Involved in the initial development and piloting of the ***Texas Industry Specific English as a Second Language (TISESL)*** manufacturing and healthcare curricula since 2006, the program didn't stop with the pilot but has implemented the final products as well, partnering with local businesses and industries in the area.

The recent economic downturn, however, called for a change in program delivery. Former learners were suddenly working two jobs to make ends meet. As a result, both daytime and evening class enrollments dropped. With manufacturing no longer a strong area partner, the program administrator and instructional staff made the decision to switch gears. They would continue with implementation of the healthcare curriculum, drop manufacturing, and add customer sales and service in response to area industry needs.

The addition of an orientation session for English language learners introduces students to the two curricula which, because of the small numbers of students enrolled program-wide, is offered in multi-level ESL classes. Although a student may not be considering career opportunities in the fields of healthcare or sales and service, staff "sell" the classes, explaining that the content will nevertheless address the English language learner's needs. Plans call for the stand alone employability component to eventually be incorporated into ABE/ASE classes.

During recent discussions and review of the curricular materials, program staff shared what they have found to be both challenges and benefits to implementing ***TISESL***. The following include staff observations as well as some tips for implementation.

Advantages to offering *TISESL* instruction

- Goals and expected outcomes are specific and clear.
- Instruction prepares learners to consider life choices and career path opportunities.
- Lessons are well organized, flexible, and easy to supplement; instructors' manuals provide excellent direction.
- Lessons are a balanced mix of ESL, grammar, math, employability, and life skills.
- The employability stand alone component can be incorporated into ESL, ABE, and ASE instruction.
- Curricula respond to content standards and state mandates.
- While the curricula were originally intended for use with beginning level ESL learners, much of the material is suitable for use with intermediate level learners and higher.

Challenges to successful implementation

- Student materials vary in level of difficulty; instructor must adapt.
- Curricula are not a natural fit for multi-level classes but can be adapted.
- Instructors must become familiar with industry sectors.
- Students (and instructors) initially resist what is new and different.



- Scenarios are great - more needed.
- Curricula acknowledges Texas' large Spanish-speaking student populations but can be used with a variety of language speakers.
- Some ESL instructors lack familiarity with principles of second language learning.

Tips for programs considering **TISESL** implementation

- Instruction needs to be a minimum of two hours per class.
- Teacher preparation is an absolute must; materials can be otherwise overwhelming.
- Marketing is required; know your community's industry needs and educational requirements for employment.
- Use assessment data to determine student readiness for material.
- Afford instructors opportunities to become familiar with local industry sectors.
- Select Instructors with a background in second language instruction and a willingness to adapt.
- **TISESL** doesn't prepare students to go directly into the job market although students are better prepared to address their employment needs; ideally, **TISESL** is a prequel to postsecondary occupational training opportunities.
- There is no substitute for up front preparation; quality instructional delivery takes time.
- Access to technology makes for successful delivery of the curricula but should not prevent a program from implementation.
- Think big but start small; select curricula suited to your students' and community needs.

Student successes of all kinds

Success is a tricky term to define. But student success usually spells opportunities. Over the past two years, Seguin ISD has seen students move on to career opportunities made possible by their improved language proficiency. Just a few examples:

One student had been trying to get hired at a nearby nursing home as a certified nursing assistant. Her language skills were a barrier. After being enrolled in the adult education program's **TISESL** healthcare instruction, she inquired about employment again. Her English language skills had improved, but the employer wanted to know more about the **TISESL** curriculum and her class attendance. The instructor gladly wrote a requested letter about the student's educational efforts, and the student was hired!

Another student lost his job and was having trouble finding employment because of his limited language skills. He enrolled in the **TISESL** healthcare instruction for three months and attended class for twenty hours per week. His employment interests were not in the field of healthcare, but his commitment to improving his language skills landed him a better paying job in Colorado!

A third student was a lawyer in her country but could not get a job in a law office here because of her limited English language skills. She enrolled in the **TISESL** program and attended regularly for two years. A recent job fair sponsored by the local workforce development network landed her a job as a legal assistant with a local law firm!