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## SHOP TALK # 7: More Promising Practices

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**Bison Building Materials, Houston Texas:** Harris County Department of Education has been providing English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to employees of Bison Building Materials since February, 2006. The class meets from 11:00– 1:30 (5 hours/week). Of the 15 workers participating in the first cohort, 80% were tested at the Basic Literacy level. Workers at this level cannot speak or understand English, or understand only isolated words or simple learned phrases. As of April, 67% of these workers had moved up one functional level.

Satisfied that this project was beneficial to the workplace performance of workers, Bison started a second cohort of 13 workers in May. 72% of the workers tested for this class are also functioning at the Basic Literacy level. These workers were progress tested on June 29, but progress data was not yet available at the time of this release.

**Bruce Miller Farms, Edgewood Texas:** Trinity Valley Community College (TVCC) currently has a partnership arrangement with Bruce Miller Farms of Edgewood Texas for English as a Second Language courses. These courses are taught on-site. Bruce Miller Farms is a nursery operation employing between 30 to 35 Spanish-speaking workers, many of whom are struggling with basic literacy issues. The college was tasked to provide essential workplace English for the employees to be able to understand instructions and communicate on nursery issues at a minimal level.

TVCC provides the teacher and some materials, and Bruce Miller Farms provides supplies for the students, pays them for their required participation, and provides a meal on class evenings. The class meets from 5:15-8:30 on Tuesday evenings, immediately after closing. The nursery manager has attended all the sessions and helps out with logistics and anything he can do to help the teacher, including providing nursery materials and vocabulary lists, as well as reinforcement and encouragement to the workers. A second round of instruction is planned in August.

**Empire Truss, Huntsville, Texas,** manufactures and assembles large wooden trusses for construction. Employees need to be able to read basic layouts, measure accurately, cut materials to specifications, and assemble the materials according to specifications. Employees also need to communicate effectively with office staff regarding payroll and benefit issues. After determining that some of its employees needed to improve their English proficiencies, Empire Truss began looking for ESL classes for its limited English proficient employees as well as Spanish instruction for management, supervisory staff, and office personnel.

Last fall, Region VI Adult Education began to offer ESL instruction for Empire Truss employees. 32 employees completed baseline assessment and participated in the three month long initiative. The initiative was interrupted when the program lost its day time instructor, but plans are to resume classes this fall. Adult education is working with the company to schedule classes around its peak production periods – not an unusual challenge in workplace education. Lupe Schneider, instructional coordinator for Adult and Safety Education at Region VI, notes that “services to educationally disadvantaged employees must respond not only to a company’s needs but its production schedule as well.”

**WRS Group, LTD, Waco Texas,** recently wrapped up a round of ESL instruction for its employees with instruction provided by McLennan Community College (MCC). WRS employs approximately 140 employees. Due to recent manufacturing process changes, eight employees needed to improve their English communication skills. Kristina Franks provided instruction under the supervision of Shirley Crocket, Director MCC’s adult education program. The company’s president, Gary Hutchison, sent a letter, thanking MCC for assisting employees in improving their communication skills - a great testimonial of support from a local employer!