SHOP TALK # 37: NCTN PROMOTES EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Transforming ABE programs to include helping learners make successful transitions to postsecondary education is an iterative process requiring new forms of instruction, enhanced services, and collaborative relationships with other agencies and organizations. Alamprese, 2009

Forty Texas adult educators attended the National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education held in Providence, Rhode Island, November 16 and 17. Hosted by the National College Transition Network (NCTN), topics ranged from preparing adult learners for the algebra portion of the Accuplacer to preparing non-native speakers for academic readiness, from career pathways to tech sector employment, to aligning practices and expectations in transition initiatives.

A common thread across the conference sessions was the challenge of addressing the many cognitive, affective, and logistic/systemic issues learners face in making successful transitions to postsecondary education and training. The universal goal: to move learners forward, reduce the need for remedial education at the postsecondary level, and build confident and successful students who are ready for college and careers.

Several programs featured at the conference provided websites at which can be found detailed information of interest to Texas adult educators exploring transition strategies:

The Colorado SUN Initiative (http://www.cccs.edu/foundation/SUN.html) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. It is designed to strengthen and increase the number of GED completers transitioning to community college. The initiative’s core transition strategies address the cognitive, affective and logistic issues in a holistic approach. They focus on integrating critical thinking/problem solving activities, study skills, and intensive academic modules into instruction for GED completers. The SUN initiative relies heavily on what is called a “navigator” to market and recruit, case manage, assist with college processes, help explore and plan careers, assist with the financial aid and advising processes, and work with students on motivation and persistence. SUN outlines its College Experience Class 101 on the website, provides a job description for a navigator/transition coordinator, and identifies its solutions to the challenges of operating a successful transition initiative.

The mission of Minnesota’s ATLAS initiative is to provide resources and professional development to advance adult education throughout the state. ATLAS supports an annual conference that brings together Minnesota educators from adult education and postsecondary institutions and facilitates training and projects to address the gap between ABE and post secondary education. In a session entitled, Aligning Instruction and
Expectations, ATLAS presenters outlined the process they used to survey educators in both adult education and postsecondary programs. College instructors rated the importance of particular skills needed for students to be successful at the postsecondary level, and adult education instructors rated the frequency at which a particular skill was addressed in classroom instruction. The two surveys and results can be accessed at http://www.hamline.edu/education/academics/centers/sltl/atlas/index.html. Results identify four areas in which there are significant alignment gaps: critical thinking skills, technology skills, presentation skills, and note-taking skills.

Another presentation of interest to adult educators was the TELL project sponsored by the U.S. Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE). It focuses on Transitioning English Language Learners (TELL) from ESL to Pre-College Arenas. The TELL project has completed its first year of research and study with the purpose of examining and describing policies as well as instructional and programmatic strategies that support English language learners’ advancement along a continuum of learning (Adult Basic, Adult Secondary, and Postsecondary education).

The first year of this study has focused on a literature review and field work involving four sites. One of the sites included is Austin Community College’s Adult Education Program in Austin, Texas. The study describes two prevailing types of transition processes utilized. Distinct processes are in place in programs that actually offer well defined transition classes designed for the purposes of preparing a cohort of ESL students for ABE, ASE, and GED classes. Indistinct processes are used in programs that do not have well defined transition classes but offer varied programmatic and instructional strategies to promote successful transitioning. Six additional programs will be included in year two of the study. A fact sheet about TELL is available online at http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/factsh/tell-fs-080812.doc. For an annotated bibliography on the study, go to http://www.air.org/projects/documents/TELL_Annotated_%20Bibliography-1-22-09.pdf.

PlugGED In is a six month regional program consisting of a contextualized GED curriculum with the goal of helping adults earn their GED credential while they prepare to move into targeted technology sector jobs. In addition to earning the GED credential, adults have the opportunity to earn a Career Readiness Certificate and various Microsoft certifications. Individuals who complete the program are guaranteed an interview with Northrop Grumman, which has a facility in southwest Virginia. Students also meet regularly with mentors from Northrop Grumman and CGI, Inc., an information technology company. The program focuses on four content areas: GED preparation, career readiness, digital literacy skills, and soft skills for the 21st century. Additional information is available from Richard Sebastian, Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, at rasebastian@vcu.edu.

Two Texas programs presented their approaches to student transitions at the conference. Lone Star CyFair Community College in Houston focused on its eight week intensive summer initiative to promote successful transition and college success for GED graduates. El Paso ISD featured its PAACT program at the San Jacinto Adult Learning Center and its collaboration with El Paso Community College. Look for details about these two programs and other successful intensive transition initiatives in upcoming SHOP TALK releases.