SHOP TALK # 38
Successful Transitions: Strategies That Work

Almost every individual who walks through the door looking for an adult education class is in a state of transition. Transition has many faces and is an evolving state in the education continuum. Adult learners want to improve their English skills for a myriad of reasons. Others want to improve their basic skills or earn a GED certificate. Many have their eye on gainful employment in a period made more difficult by the economic challenges they face. Adult education is a critical catalyst in the adult learner’s quest to achieve goals that lead to further education and training, employment, or a change in lifestyle and family position.

Adult education changes lives, sometimes in immeasurable ways. This SHOP TALK and others to come will focus on efforts by adult education practitioners working with adult learners engaged in one kind of transition or another. These are their stories.

Lone Star College – Cypress Fairbanks (Cy-Fair) partnered with Harris County Department of Education to recruit recent GED graduates to participate in their Intensive Summer Program (ISP), with the goal of transitioning recent GED graduates to postsecondary education. Made possible by a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the initiative offered participants a number of incentives: $25 gift certificates to those who completed the course, a set of StartSmart books, and an access code for online registration to My Foundations Lab.

The developmental English and Math department chairs and the director of counseling at Cy-Fair identified instructors for the three components of the program: a 30 hour Mathematics Success course, a 40 hour Language Arts Success course, and a 10 hour Student Success seminar. Instructors then met to develop a common syllabus for the learning cohort. Topics such as study skills, test anxiety, time management, attitude and goal setting were addressed in College 101, the 10 hour Student Success seminar, and integrated into the language arts and math content sections as well. College 101 provided a venue for students to discuss their own learning behavior and that of others, to talk openly about what worked and what didn’t, why they made the choices they did, and what choices they might make in the future.

Delivered in a hybrid format employing an individualized/modularized approach, instruction allowed participants to work on their needs as determined by initial diagnostic tests. Instructors integrated online learning activities with face-to-face meetings on campus for five hours twice a week. My Foundations Lab adapts to individual learning styles and strengths while providing support and practice in areas of reading, writing, and math where students need the most help. Each course includes full online instruction, extensive exercises with guided feedback, and cross-discipline connections that assist learners in applying concepts across courses. The series includes interactive tutorials,
videos, and activities to help students learn and apply strategies for twelve major skills such as time management, effective note taking, and preparing for exams.

The program provided academic support in the form of mentors, tutors, supplemental instruction, career planning, and financial aid assistance. In addition, the Langham Creek YMCA, in partnership with Lone Star College Cy-Fair, conveniently offered childcare to students enrolled in the ISP.

Instructional objectives focused on collaborative teaching strategies and collaborative learning techniques, a wide use of technology, and cross-disciplinary skills such as problem solving, reasoning, and conducting research. Also emphasized were cognitive skills such as intellectual curiosity, academic behaviors, work habits, and academic integrity – all key to entry level college courses. Technology was integrated into the curriculum, and instruction for all courses was organized around collaborative learning, was project-based, and had a real life focus. The Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) were incorporated into both the Language Arts instruction and the Mathematics Success course. The Mathematics course focused on mathematic fundamentals, algebra, geometry, and problem solving required for College Algebra. The Language Arts Success course emphasized the refining of reading and writing skills required for college assignments. Students focused on developing strategies to meet writing requirements in the form of note taking, writing research papers, reviews, and reports as well as the development of textbook and article reading skills.

One of the objectives of the ISP was to have participants develop a system for learning as well as an individualized learning plan for use in future studies. Students learned to ask questions, make contributions to class discussions, and work with others on class projects in spite of the brevity of the course (8 weeks).

The results for this cohort of ten students:
- All ten finished the course, with nine of them taking the THEA post test (the tenth student had pre-tested at college level and had already been accepted to Houston Baptist University)
- There was an 80% success rate in Language Arts and Mathematics Success Courses
- There was a 90% success rate in the Student Success (College 101) Seminar
- Three students tested into Freshman English
- One placed into Introductory Algebra (second of three development math courses)
- Six students showed gains in math but not significant enough to qualify for a higher level developmental math course
- All showed significant gains in Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI) scores related to anxiety and information processing
- Five showed gains in concentration, self testing, and time management
- Four showed gains in study aids and test strategies
- Three showed gains in attitude, motivation, and selecting main ideas

Mentoring and tutoring services were options for all participants, although some did not take advantage of these opportunities. Including mentors and tutors in the formal orientation process will hopefully encourage future cohorts to avail themselves of these services. Both staff and participants concluded that the course of study was too short, and that more time was needed for the math and study skills sections. For additional information, contact Anne Albarelli at Anne.T.Albarelli@lonestar.edu