SHOP TALK # 57
The C-4 Initiative:
A Workforce-Related Opportunity for Adult Learners

C-4 is not an explosive in this context! C-4 refers to that part of Advancing Texas: A Strategic Plan for the Texas Workforce System (FY 2010 - FY 2015), which calls for adult education to serve adult learners who, while their intent is to earn a GED® credential, are at risk of dropping out of the educational continuum before reaching this objective. The C-4 pilot initiative explores ways to provide intensive GED® Test preparation coupled with career readiness skills that will enable learners to earn their GED® credential and qualify for job training and/or employment. Ideal candidates for the initiative are learners who have begun GED® testing but may have “stalled out” and may be at risk of not completing. They must also be able to commit to an intensive schedule of instruction.

C-4 pilot sites in San Antonio, Houston, and Central Texas regions started in the fall of 2011, and the possibility of continued funding gives programs the opportunity to make needed changes in ABE services, develop/adopt new and innovative practices, and through documentation provide effectiveness of the pilot efforts.

So what’s new about an effort that has obvious implications for adult education? Desired outcomes include recommendations regarding changes to state and federal policy that would make partnerships between adult education and its workforce partners stronger and more effective. Another outcome: implications for statewide replication.

Texas is not alone in its efforts to better prepare adult learners for employment. States across the nation are striving for the same thing: successful transition to further education/training and work. The language is not new, but the emphasis on workforce readiness is unmistakable, as is evident in the following statements captured in an article about Oregon’s adult basic skills and college/workforce development initiative (Adult Career Pathways 2011):

- Adult education is in the business of accelerating the process of building a pipeline of adult basic skills learners who are prepared to enter postsecondary education, training programs, and jobs in high demand career areas.
- The development of formal connections to postsecondary education, learner support services, and one-stop centers facilitates this process.
- Lessons presented in a workforce context familiarize learners with workplace terminology, authentic tasks they might perform on the job, and other aspects of employment in specific fields.
- Instruction needs to include learner preparation of an individual career pathway plan that can be updated as the individual progresses through courses of study. Adult learners often don’t know what careers they’re interested in and aren’t always ready to commit to a specific track; hence the need for updates as plans develop.
- We know that some adult learners enter adult education with the primary goal of passing the GED® Test and not much direction beyond. Adult education can provide an avenue for students to explore different careers and college programs and develop future educational and career plans. This takes the primary focus away from simply passing the GED® Test.
and instead emphasizes the application of critical skills to further education and employment.

- While adult education supports achieving goals such as passing the GED® Test, it can also support longer-term goals such as completing a college certificate or degree and solidifying employment in a chosen industry.
- Belonging to a student cohort is a key component of learner success. This is direct, small group teaching with a lot of accountability.

The objectives of the C-4 pilots include the following:

- formation of a local workforce literacy resource team (WLRT) including adult education providers and workforce partners (one stop workforce centers)
- development of a cross-agency referral process to track learners’ educational and workforce-related activities
- development of a strong memorandum of understanding (MOU) that can withstand crises and changes in personnel at the local level
- a clear understanding and common language regarding eligibility criteria and characteristics of a successful transition from adult education to further training and employment
- development of clear guidelines for navigating local one stop workforce centers
- shared reports of student activities in TEAMS and other data systems (documentation of GED® Test completion and referral and placement in training and/or jobs)
- use a curriculum that intensifies GED® Test preparation and introduces learners to the soft skills needed for successful employment
- documented evidence of counseling and support in linking learners with training and work opportunities
- exploration of ways to recognize student accomplishments that are portable and recognized by workforce partners

One of the instructional tools being utilized in the C-4 pilots is Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE/ESOL Classroom (ICA). Pilot instructors, many of whom participated in the online ICA training in 2011, are in the process of “unpacking” the curriculum and repurposing it for integration into the C-4 initiative.

C-4 pilots are not without their challenges. Critical roles in the pilots include those of the instructor, adult education’s career or transition counselor, and key one stop center staff. C-4 is heavily reliant on strong partnerships between adult education and one stop workforce centers. A significant obstacle is the existence of silos of operation with no intersections between Title I and Title II performance measures. Making partnerships a win/win situation for all involved is key.

If your adult education program is already striving to accomplish goals and objectives similar to those of the C-4 pilot initiative and you would like to share your successes, or if you are interested in learning more about C-4 and the possibility of replicating it in your program, please contact Barbara Tondre at blondre@earthlink.net.