SHOP TALK # 68: ICA and Project-Based Learning

Each spring, San Antonio Northside Independent School District’s Adult Education program hosts an annual project fair. This year, ninety percent of the ESL, ABE, ASE, and Refugee classes chose to use lessons from the curriculum, *Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE/ESOL Classroom (ICA)* in preparing their projects.

The fair afforded instructors and learners the opportunity to explore project-based learning based on topics included in *ICA*. Some learners elected to explore career goals or health-related topics such as nutrition, exercise, obesity, and diabetes. Others focused on global warming, different countries and cultures, learning styles, travel, the internet, and dreams and ambitions. Students were provided with tri-fold poster boards plus supplies, and with their classmates began to explore their chosen topics via the internet, learning the basics of computer literacy in the process.

The results were impressive. English language learners worked in teams and mustered the courage to speak in front of others. Some developed PowerPoint® presentations on income potential, training, and education needed for specific careers. Learners were eager to present their work and had the opportunity to explore the work of others. Graphs and charts on budgets and personal spending habits were designed, checklists of job requirements were drawn up, and newspapers and magazines were perused for related pictures and articles. On the day of the project fair, some students even dressed in career-related uniforms!

Student evaluations of the project-based learning experience were revealing and supportive of the initiative. In addition to learning how to gather information, learners gained self-confidence and optimized opportunities to practice their English and public speaking skills. Still others claimed the following:

- A better understanding of the steps needed to reach personal goals, obtain the GED® credential, and become a professional in the U.S.
- Increased knowledge about careers related to a particular area of interest (from pastry chef to teaching to becoming an obstetrics nurse)
- The value of team efforts, pride in one’s work, and an appreciation of others’ hard work
- Using group work and research to improve reading, writing, listening, and speaking
- Learning to convey in English what learners already knew in their native languages
- Control and prevention of disease (family nutrition, diabetes, obesity)
- An understanding of other countries, cultures, foods, religion, traditions, and education

Requests for more time at the computer were pervasive, and students seemed pleased with their work and the time they devoted to their projects. Vocabulary learned was personalized, and learners gained an understanding and appreciation for different learning styles. Nancy Bentley Dunlap, her supervisory staff, and *ICA* key trainers already have plans to expand the project fair next year. Staff say student responses to integrating career awareness into all levels of instruction really paid off, and communities of learners surpassed expectations.