

Focus on Basics

CONNECTING RESEARCH & PRACTICE

IN THIS ISSUE:

Workplace Education

1

After the Grant Is Over
by Connie Nelson

6

Around to Stay
by Shirley Penn & Mary Zorn

10

A Conversation with FOB
*What Benefits Does Workplace
Ed Offer the Provider?*

13

Reading Work
by Tracy Defoe & Sue Folinsbee

16

Much More than ABE
by Don Block & Lori Keefer

19

**Balancing the Agendas of
Management, Student, and
Teacher in Workplace ESOL**
by Anthony Moss

22

Workplace Literacy Education
*Definitions, Purposes, and
Approaches*
by Paul Jurmo

27

**Education Leads to
Investments**
by Cheryl Jackson

30

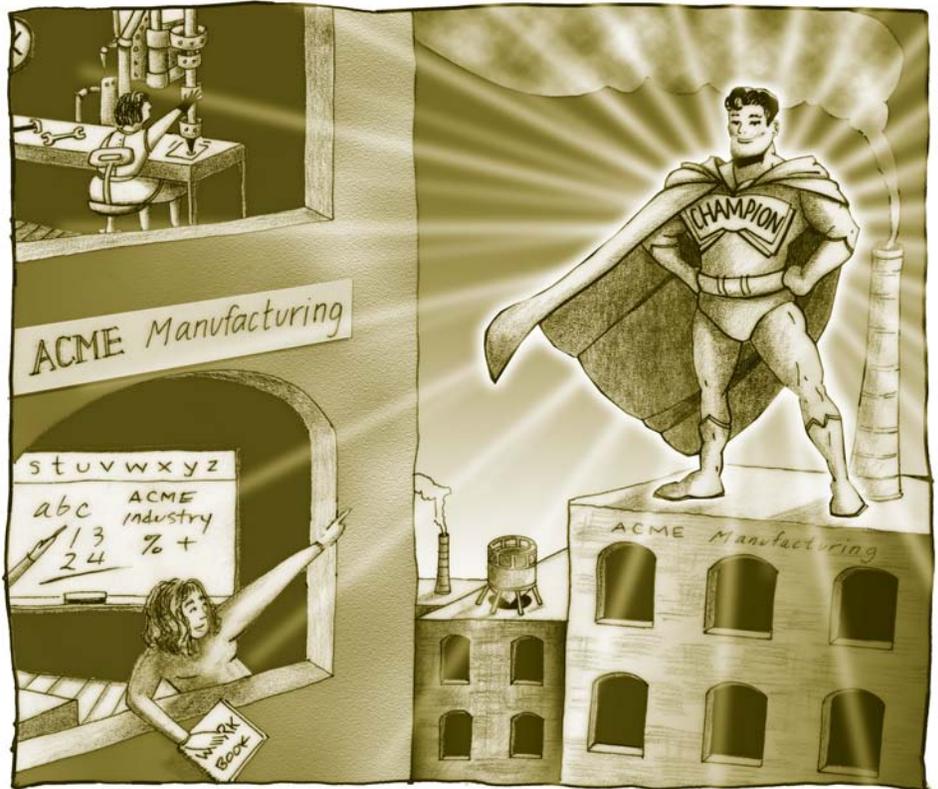
**How States Approach
Workplace Education**
by Diane Foucar-Szocki

37

Our Own "Crossroads Café"
by Andy Tyskiewicz, Aileen Halloran,
& Alpha Nicholson

39

Blackboard



After the Grant Is Over

*Do workplaces continue to fund programs
that were initiated with public funds?*

by **Connie Nelson**

How can government promote education programs in the workplace? One strategy is to offer so-called "seed" funding grants to partnerships between businesses and literacy providers. The implicit assumption in the seed funding strategy is that, given some support in the form of funds and, often, technical assistance, workplace education programs will be established and prove helpful to businesses, unions, and workers. The explicit expectation is that programs will continue with employer funds after the seed grant period. Does this really happen? Since 1987, Massachusetts has awarded approximately 140 grants to providers with a wide range of employer and union partners. Workplaces ranged *continued on page 3*



Focus on Basics is the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It presents best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policymakers. *Focus on Basics* is dedicated to connecting research with practice, to connecting teachers with research and researchers with the reality of the classroom, and by doing so, making adult basic education research more relevant to the field.

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Welcome!

Workplace education programs are partnerships between literacy providers and employers. In theory, these partnerships bring more resources into the system and make education more accessible to employed learners. They are maturing partnerships. Questions of “How do we get employees to enroll without feeling a stigma?” have given way over time to questions about program longevity, sharing costs across employers, and uncovering the management issues that often underlie what are mistakenly thought to be literacy-related problems. This issue of *Focus on Basics* explores how workplace education partnerships and state policymakers across the country are addressing these challenges and others.

Many workplace education programs are initially supported by government grants designed to stimulate development of the business/adult basic education partnership. Do the programs continue after the grant is over? Read our cover story, by Connie Nelson, to find out. In the article on page 6, Shirley Penn and Mary Zorn write about one program that continued: a decade-old partnership between a meatpacking business and Morgan Community College in Colorado, which had started with a government grant.

Workplace education benefits to both participants and employers are obvious. The positive impact on the provider is not always as transparent. Greg Mittelstadt, of Wisconsin’s Lakeshore Technical College, gives evidence on page 10 that workplace education can be a stellar marketing tool and provide a significant professional development opportunity for education providers.

Canadian workplace educators Sue Folinsbee and Tracy Defoe’s ethnographic research in workplaces revealed that a literacy activity cannot be disengaged from the broader work task, nor can it be considered independent from the written and unwritten rules of the culture of a particular workplace. They report on these findings and their implications in the article that begins on page 13. Don Block and Lori Keefer’s work with a Pennsylvania hotel’s housekeeping staff demonstrates those concepts revealed in Folinsbee and Defoe’s study. The course they offered, described in the article on page 16, focused on communications and problem solving skills rather than reading and writing. Teacher Anthony Moss writes on page 19 about how he grapples with similar problems facing janitors in a workplace education English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program in California.

Paul Jurmo provides a historical account of how approaches to workplace education content have evolved over time, from decontextualized to contextualized approaches. Anyone contemplating starting a new program should read his article, which starts on page 22, for ideas on curriculum. And for innovation in math, Cheryl Jackson takes us to Washington, DC, where, as she points out, the paycheck received by participants in workplace education programs motivates them to learn about financial planning, investing, and home ownership. See page 27 for details.

At least six states have been proactive in strengthening workplace education as part of their overall adult education efforts. These states build identity, enhance expertise, provide financial support, increase accessibility, and promote collaborations. For strategies for your state, read Diane Foucar-Szocki’s article on 30. For an example of how Connecticut is trying to enable employers of small numbers of workers to offer workplace education, read the report by Andy Tyskiewicz, Aileen Halloran, and Alpha Nicholson, page 37, about an ESOL class for employees who have in common not their employer but their native language.

These days, newcomers to workplace education, as well as those with experience in the field, have rich resources to draw on, as exemplified in the diversity of approaches detailed in this issue. In addition to the insights and background provided by the authors of these articles, you will find useful the related web sites and resources listed in the “Blackboard” on page 39.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Garner".

Barbara Garner
Editor

After the Grant is Over

continued from page 1

in size from 50 to more than 5,000 employees, and represented a variety of industries. To find out whether the seed funding strategy resulted in continuation of the program with employer funding, I followed up on 50 of the grant-funded programs.

Do Programs Continue?

The question “Do programs really continue?” breaks down into many sub-questions. In this article, I report on the number of programs that continued, the characteristics of workplaces that help to explain why the programs did or did not continue, patterns related to continuation, and factors that affected the decision to continue. Several of my interview questions addressed characteristics of the firm and of the program, while others dealt with the decision-making process and what changes occurred since funding stopped. To collect data, I interviewed representatives from 50 workplaces out of 112 that had implemented workplace education programs funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) between 1988 and 2000. I was unable to interview anyone from firms that went out of business, did not finish out the grant, did not have eligible respondents still working at the company, or that declined to participate. The 50 workplaces had characteristics representative of the larger population of workplaces that originally implemented programs with Massachusetts DOE funding. Most of the interviews were conducted between July, 1998, and June, 2000, with a few carried out in 2001.

I was able to interview only one respondent from each workplace. An

eligible respondent was a person who had been a business or labor representative to the program’s planning and evaluation team (a required feature of each program) when the decisions about continuation were made, typically during the third year of the grant. Most often this was the human resources manager, but respondents also included owners, operations managers, union representatives, training directors, and supervisors. Interviewing only one person per company was a serious limitation. Questions about which factors were



most important in the decision-making process, for example, would likely have elicited a broader range of opinions had more than one person from each company been consulted.

Large Firms Continue

Of the 50 programs, 24, or 48 percent, continued their workplace education programs in some form for at least a year after their public funding ended. Larger firms, those with more than 500 employees, were more likely to continue. Programs that did continue shared several features: an internal champion who had decision-making power or knew how to influence those who did, a well-identified internal issue or problem, and evidence that the program had helped to address that issue.

The quantitative findings confirmed those of other studies that have examined which firms offer workplace education at their own

expense (Ahlstrand et al., 2001; Bassi, 1992; Hollenbeck, 1993). Of 15 firms with more than 500 employees, 14 continued. Only eight of 34 of the medium-sized firms (100 to 500 employees) continued, and within that range no size-related patterns emerged. The two smallest firms, with fewer than 100 employees, also continued, using a model of one-to-one tutoring. While the use of this model by these small firms was intriguing, their ability to continue their programs did not affect the overall trend.

The decision to continue the workplace education program with employer funding had no apparent correlation with industry type. Instead, the relationship to size proved true within industries. Larger manufacturers tended to continue; smaller ones did not. Large hospitals continued; small nursing homes did not. Programs in unionized companies had a slightly higher rate of continuation than did programs in nonunionized companies: 11 of 17 (64 percent) unionized workplaces continued, compared to 13

of 33 (39 percent) nonunion workplaces. However, unionized workplaces also tended to be larger, so some of this difference can be attributed to size of the company. When controlling for size, union status did not show a statistically significant relationship to continuation.

Value is the Reason

The great majority of companies that continued their workplace education programs cited value to the business as a reason to continue. Respondents mentioned increased confidence of employees, increased communication skills, decreased errors, improved productivity or service, promotions, and improved retention and recruitment as evidence of the value; I was unable to verify these claims. In a few cases, the program was seen primarily as an employee benefit, although the employer may

also have realized and acknowledged it as a benefit to the company. This was often the case when collective bargaining was the strategy for attaining sustainability of the program.

Although some companies wanted their programs to continue but failed to develop and execute a successful strategy to make that possible, others chose not to continue when the grant ended. Although all respondents rated their programs at least satisfactory, and mostly very good or excellent, some felt their original goals had been met during the grant period and did not see a need to continue. Others had raised standards for new hires, and believed that in doing so they had met their commitment to raising the skills of current workers. A few found that employee interest had waned over the life of the grant, and concluded that filling new classes would be difficult: the workers with the greatest enthusiasm had met their goals and recruiting for the classes took more time and attention from management. Some workplaces likewise believed that they lacked the internal capacity to support the program. They no longer had a staff person who could give the program the necessary attention, act as liaison with the education provider, recruit students, deal with scheduling, and perform other related duties. Some companies faced downsizing, which meant remaining personnel were doing more and something had to go: the workplace education program.

The Champion

The 24 programs that did continue all shared five common elements: a champion, a strategy, a problem, evidence, and access. A champion was someone from within the company who advocated for the program. Each continuing program had at least one champion and he or she had a strategy. The job of the champions varied: human resources

manager, owner, union representative. Some programs had multiple champions who each connected with a different constituency. Potential champions became actual champions once they were convinced that the program addressed a real issue at the workplace, usually a problem within their purview. The programs made the champions' work lives better and the

“The programs made the champions' work lives better and the champions wanted to make the programs permanent.”

champions wanted to make the programs permanent. Champions could identify the issue addressed by the program and why it mattered. They may have taken on the role because of their own perceived problems, but in many cases they also looked for other conditions in the workplace, important to potential supporters, allies, and decision-makers, that the program could attach itself to as a solution, or part of a solution. In this way they built support for the program among multiple constituencies.

The champion had evidence that the program addressed that issue, although the evidence was not necessarily quantifiable. In fact, several champions shied away from traditional return on investment formulas or cost-benefit analyses, believing that these indicators would not necessarily capture the worth of the program to the business. What mattered was that the evidence was convincing to key supporters and decision-makers. Champions also saw to it that the evidence was effectively and regularly presented.

Champions considered whether the program model had to change to fit into the workplace culture. Some programs remained essentially the same, with the same provider, while

others underwent considerable changes in format, intensity, or content. Finally, the champion had access to the financial decision-makers. The champion knew what budgets or cost centers were likely funders of the program, and who made decisions about them. In a few cases, no obvious funding was available, but champions and their allies created them.

In the simplest case, that of a factory, all of these elements coalesced around just one person: the operations manager. He was also the financial decision-maker for his facility (“Corporate lets me do what I want as long as I make a profit.”) The problem he perceived was that morale was low and communication poor in the workplace. He saw that partici-

pants in the program were more communicative with supervisors and with him (“They used to run when they saw me coming.”) and became convinced that it was helping the company's communication and morale. So he wrote the program into the budget, as it was, with no changes.

Most cases were far more complex. The champion needed strategies to bring the program and its benefits to the attention of potential allies and funders. In one workplace, the champion, a human resources manager, knew that managers and supervisors supported the program. But training budgets were devoted to technical training done on an as-needed basis. The company did offer tuition reimbursement benefits to managers, but not to hourly workers. The champion argued that if hourly workers were provided those benefits, and if the benefits of 15 workers per year were pooled, that amount would pay for the program. With the help of department managers who lobbied their superiors, the proposal was adopted and the program continued to operate. In fact, it expanded, both in the number of classes and in the content.

In another case, a union steward became the champion when the work-

ers in the class complained to her that the class would be ending. Since their contract was up for renewal, she encouraged them to bring up the issue in precontract meetings and surveys that the union local conducted to identify bargaining issues. They also enlisted the support of friends and co-workers in other departments, and saving the class became an issue at the bargaining table. It was successfully bargained into the union's next contract.

Losing a Champion

Workplaces that did not continue their programs may have had some of the elements of success, but not all of them. Loss of a champion often meant loss of the program. For example, one champion was fired for reasons having nothing to do with the program, but the program was identified with him and discontinued, along with some other training initiatives he had favored. In other cases, the champion left the company and when no one else took on the champion role, the program ended. Continuing programs lost champions as well, but they were able to replace the champion. For example, one program had a strong champion in the human resources manager. When she was laid off, the union president, who had been a moderately involved member of the oversight committee, became the champion. In another workplace, the general manager and chief union steward had acted as co-champions from the beginning. When the steward left, the general manager continued as sole champion, knowing the groundwork for union cooperation had been effectively laid.

Failure to Continue

Some programs had all the elements for success, but still failed to continue. Usually this was because of competing claims or a change in situation. For example, in a nursing home, the human resources manager had presented her evidence to the

owner and convinced him to continue. Then a competing claim intervened: a law was passed requiring nursing homes to have a type of equipment this home did not have. The owner used the funds that had been earmarked for the program to comply with the new law.

In another case, a change in ownership meant a loss of access to financial decision-makers, which proved fatal to the program. A foreign multinational bought the local company and denied their request to continue the program.

Implications

Size is the strongest predictor of program continuation, but it is also a major predictor of which firms are likely to provide workplace education without grants. This finding highlights a policy dilemma. Targeting larger employers for public-funded workplace education programs because they are more likely to continue these programs after the end of the grant may inadvertently create a disincentive for larger workplaces to provide workplace education

“Policymakers may need to acknowledge that small- and medium-sized workplaces face greater challenges in continuation and address them.”

on their own. Public funds might, for three years of start up, replace what was previously provided by employers. One of the reasons for workplace education is access: enabling adults who need adult basic education but cannot get to traditional programs because of scheduling problems. Most Massachusetts workers are employed by small- and medium-sized firms (State Workforce Investment Board, 2004). Targeting large firms

does little to further the goal of increased access to education for workers in small- and medium-sized firms.

Policymakers may need to acknowledge that small- and medium-sized workplaces face greater challenges in continuation and address them. The government seed grant allows workplace education partnerships the time to develop the elements and processes that have been proved necessary for workplace education programs to continue. Larger employers seem to be able to do it in three years. Smaller employers may take longer or need more help. In some cases, continuation may not be appropriate for smaller companies.

Aside from company size, the pivotal role of the champion suggests that policymakers should incorporate policies to encourage the identification and development of a champion or champions. Funders could require sustainability plans during the second and third years of funding, and offer technical assistance in successful strategies from other workplaces such as those mentioned in this article.

Conclusion

This exploratory study shows that in about half the cases programs were able both to leverage private investment beyond the term of the grant and leverage matching funds during the grant period. Another more rigorous study could measure how long and to what extent the investment continued, but we do know that some of the programs continued for more than 10 years at similar levels of investment.

Seed grants are a useful tool in introducing educational programs into workplaces. The multiyear time frame allows a program to develop educational quality and become incorporated into the culture of a given workplace. It also provides the evidence of success that workplaces may need in making budget decisions. Program continuation, however, is not necessarily a goal in all cases. It may be that most of the

originally defined needs are met within the time frame of the public funding, and the program rightfully ends when the grant does.

In the majority of cases, however, the workplace and its various stakeholders would be well-served by a continuing educational program. This study shows that this goal has been inconsistently achieved. It does not happen automatically or simply because a program has gone well during the grant period. A strategy and a champion are required to execute that strategy. Elements can be identified, steps can be taken, and plans can be made to improve the chances of continuation. Like the programs themselves, the plans for continuation must be carefully developed and thoroughly integrated with the particular characteristics, needs, and culture of the host workplace. 

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About the Author

Connie Nelson is the Director of the Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable, a network of union and labor-management education and training programs, which is involved in teacher training, technical assistance, and policy development. This job makes use of Connie's experience on the shop floor, in an academic ivory tower, and in the workplace classroom. ❖

Around to Stay

The Workplace Education Program and the Workers Who Participate

by Shirley Penn & Mary Zorn

Centered on northeastern Colorado's High Plains, Excel Corporation is the area's largest company. A beef processing plant and a subsidiary of Cargill Corporation, it is a community within a community that offers a wide range of opportunities for its employees, including food service, health services, warehouse sales, and a workplace education program. The program began as and continues to be a partnership with Morgan Community College (MCC). On site in the plant since 1993, MCC/Excel Workplace Education offers employees English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), computer skills, preparation for the tests of general educational development (GED), college placement assessment, and academic and financial aid advising.

A majority of Excel Corporation's more than 2,000 employees are immigrants to the United States. Excel's immigrant employees often have language and literacy barriers that hamper their acclimating to a new workplace as well as to the United States. Workplace education has been an asset for Excel's employees. It has also benefited the company. Plant manager Mike Chabot has emphatically stated, "The impact on our

company is huge. Our people who are part of workplace education are here to stay."

Retention as a Goal

The beef processing industry, like many others of its magnitude, finds it more beneficial and economical to build the skills of existing workers than to recruit and train new ones. Further, as the industry increasingly adopts computerized equipment to track product and control quality, current employees who have learned computer skills can be trained to handle new ways to do their job. Workplace education trains employees for the next level of skill and responsibility in their jobs while teaching essential skills in reading, writing, math, and problem solving. The workplace education program has helped Excel raise its employee retention rates and meet its commitment to promote from within, particularly for management positions.

Partnership

Morgan Community College proved to be the perfect partner for Excel because of MCC's commitment to meeting the needs of community businesses and its experience running a successful ABE program. The relationship between the plant and the college began in the mid-1980s. Denna Weber, MCC Director of ABE, began working with several Excel employees who came to the MCC ABE Center seeking help with reading their safety manuals. From there she initiated conversations with plant managers about what the employees needed and what her center could provide.

In 1993, when a National Work-

place Literacy grant became a possibility, Weber spoke more frequently with Russ Weimer, then Excel Human Resource Director. Once she started to write the grant proposal, the two of them could often be found working together while on the sidelines of their children's ball games, brainstorming ideas for the proposed program. After the grant was awarded, MCC conducted a three-month analysis of the beef plant and customized the workplace program using those data. The program's creation and implementation were unique to Excel: it was not an existing ABE program dropped into an industry setting. For example, classes were taught on site.

Growing Pains

A workplace advisory board with representation from management and labor at Excel, the union, the local school district, and the college was established to create and guide the program, which initially provided classes for 40 students. Right away the fledgling program encountered some problems. One involved lack of space: classes were held in the Excel training department classrooms and often had to be canceled so those rooms could be used for plant meetings and industry training sessions. Another stemmed from a lack of communication: the company selected employees to participate in the program in light of their potential for promotion, without explaining this to them. As a result, some students were unsure why they were attending classes while other employees who wanted to participate wondered why they had not been selected.

Using suggestions from the advisory board, changes were made. Permanent classrooms were designated by the plant and equipped by the college, and the workplace pro-

gram was opened to all employees at the plant who wished to participate. As a genuine show of support for the program, Excel paid the students one-half of their regular hourly wage for time spent in class. The first computers and software for the program were purchased and the college accepted the responsibility for upgrading and maintaining the system. The computer lab continues to be an important part of students' success.

By the end of the first 18 month grant, 120 students were attending

“Program data collected by the program partners from the students, management, and educators were used to compare company-wide employee retention to the retention of students participating in workplace education.”

the MCC/Excel Workplace Education Program at the plant, and in March, 1994, the Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System (CCCOES) presented Excel and the workplace partners the first Excellence in Workplace Learning Award for their innovative and successful implementation of the program.

Onward and Upward

A second National Workplace Literacy grant enabled the program to expand. More levels of ABE and GED preparation were added. Additional class times made learning opportunities accessible to more employees. One of the requirements of the three-year grant was to determine ways to sustain the program after the National Workplace Literacy grants ended. It was time to measure the impact of the program on Excel, their employees, and the college, and to explore its long-term viability.

Program data collected by the program partners from the students, management, and educators were used to compare company-wide employee retention to the retention of students participating in workplace education. The results of the data were positive. New hires who participated in workplace education were two-and-a-half times more likely to stay in their jobs and approximately 10 percent of the workplace students earned a promotion within a year after completing classes.

The state system of community colleges recognized the workplace education program's success and began investigating ways to sustain the programs with existing funding streams. The workplace directors interviewed college administrators about the customized instruction policies and staffing rules for their campuses. College administrative staff also supplied information about grants that could be used for workplace education.

At the conclusion of the second grant in 1998, Excel and MCC reached financial and administrative agreements that allowed the workplace program to continue. Several workplace certificate programs were created that aligned the workplace programs with MCC's for-credit program and allowed the workplace program to receive related funding.

MCC/Excel Workplace Education now enrolls more than 200 students each year — more than 10 percent of the Excel workforce — in regular classes. Employees also attend workplace-scheduled workshops and make use of workplace tutoring, while others learn to use the computer or receive college placement advising and assessments. Employees receive assistance with in-plant resumé and interviews, preparation for the US naturalized citizenship exam, one-on-one tutoring, and skills instruction specific to their job.

The program currently supports a full-time director, four half-time

instructors, one half-time administrative assistant, and two MCC work-study students. Three levels of ESOL, essential skills classes, and GED classes are offered three times a day, four days a week. Classes are held before and after each work shift. The company employees are still paid one-half their hourly wage for attending MCC/Excel Workplace Education classes. Plant manager Chabot speaks for Excel when he says that employee retention is a tremendous benefit for the company.

Since the culmination of the second federal Workplace Literacy grant in 1998, MCC/Excel Workplace Education has been supported by three partners, whose contributions have been supplemented by other short-term grants for special projects.

Those partners and their percentage of funding are Excel (44 percent), MCC (20 percent), and the Colorado Department of Education (36 percent), which is the administering agency for federal Workforce Investment Act grant funds. Short-term money from the Colorado Department of Migrant Education made hiring another instructor possible and a Southland Corporation (parent company of 7-11 Stores) grant established a library in the plant.

Workplace Education Works

The students from all levels of the company are the real success stories of the 12-year-old program at Excel. Abel Carrera is now a fabrication superintendent who encourages supervisors in his division to attend workplace education classes, while taking advantage of the program to improve his own skills. He religiously attends one-on-one tutoring sessions in reading, math, and computer skills three hours per week. Rather than practicing his reading on unrelated materials, Carrera is reading *Reframing Organizations* by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal in order to understand

better how organizations embrace change. Carrera's willingness to speak to groups in the plant about his own workplace education experiences exemplifies his enthusiasm for learning. According to other workers, he has been an inspiration for them to become involved.

Jorge Guerrero completed his GED and gained his US citizenship while in the workplace program.

“MCC staff never assume they know what their partners are thinking.”

Originally a production line worker who was afraid to touch a computer, Guerrero is now Excel's lead education trainer and only needs occasional help with his PowerPoint presentations. Having received persistent encouragement from the workplace director, Guerrero is more than half way through earning his Associates of Arts degree at MCC. In the community, he served on the school district accountability committee and volunteers for United Way.

Maria Torres, a young mother of three, came to the workplace program while working full-time on the production line at Excel. Coming to class was not always easy. More than once the demands of her extended family made it difficult for her to attend class and she dropped out of the program. Before long, encouraged by others and by her personal motivation, she came back. She earned her GED in the workplace program and then completed training for her certification as a licensed practical nurse at MCC. Currently, she is gaining valuable experience in the nursing department at Excel while furthering her training as a registered nurse degree at MCC.

Workplace education has been a

family affair for Berna Galindo. She, her husband, and her son simultaneously earned their GEDs during regularly scheduled workplace classes when education opportunities were extended to adult family members. Because workplace classes are taught on site, her participation was possible even though she lives 53 miles away. Her 18-year tenure at the plant and educational accomplishments earned Galindo a new position at Excel as export coordinator for the plant. She was the first woman in the industry to hold that position.

Tough Times

These students, and others like them, inspire the workplace program partners when external circumstances change. For

instance, according to MCC President Dr. Michele Haney, “Community colleges in Colorado have seen a 26 percent decline in state support in the last two years while growth in student population has increased 17 percent. MCC is continually faced with the tough decisions about what to cut and what to keep.” But even in tough financial times, MCC has remained committed to the workplace program. Budget cuts for workplace education have been made, but the rates of these reductions have been consistent with those made throughout the college, rather than more severe. Haney explains, “Community development is part of MCC's mission and is not considered auxiliary. It is part of our primary focus at the college. You don't cut a program that contributes to the well-being of the community.”

Along with funding cuts for higher education in Colorado, the beef packing industry had its own problems. The latest mad-cow disease scare prompted an embargo on US-produced beef, which had a major impact on business at Excel. Such incidents, along with other complications that often arise in the world of labor and industry, never allow room for complacency.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Fundamental to the MCC/Excel Workplace Education program is communication. MCC staff never assume they know what their partners are thinking. For example, at a meeting held at MCC, Mary Gershwin, state director of the Workplace Education project, challenged the MCC/Excel Workplace Education Advisory Board to identify ways that workplace education could make a difference for Excel. The educators were sure the answers would involve safety issues, problem solving, and communication skills. The advisory board began brainstorming. Soon the white boards around the meeting room were filled with ideas, which were then prioritized.

What a surprise! This group of competitive, no-nonsense Excel personnel chose increased self-esteem as the number one area in which they would like to see improvement in their workplace education employees. The educators challenged their thinking: how could self-esteem be more important than safety, communication, literacy skills, or even speaking English? The group defended its position: "When a person has positive self-esteem and self-confidence, all the other areas will improve."

After that experience, self-esteem became an important piece of the program evaluation process created by the advisory board. Supervisors began providing additional comments on their evaluation sheets about observed changed behavior in employees, such as: "Employee is more willing to help others; employee asks questions on how he can improve; and employee is excited about learning and states he enjoys school."

Soon after creating the program evaluation process, the advisory board developed a model for evaluating employee performance that involved asking workplace education employees questions about their training needs

and their satisfaction. Supervisors were asked, "Have you observed any changes in the employee over the last year?" When the data came back, it showed that the program was making a difference in how employees and supervisors communicated with each other and in how they viewed or respected each other. Some of the supervisors who initially seemed the most negative about the program provided some of the most positive responses.

Not on Auto-Pilot

The MCC Workplace Education program at Excel has had the good fortune of consistent leadership. Plant manager Chabot was instrumental in initiating the program and remains fully supportive of the program. Weimer, who helped plan the program at his son's baseball game, still oversees the project for Excel, and Shirley Penn has also been with the program since the beginning. The stability of the instructional staff is also notable: the first instructor hired for the program retired in August of 2004.

Nonetheless, personnel and leadership changes do occur, and when such changes take place among any of the workplace education partners, the program parameters have to be revisited. The same questions that were asked in the beginning must be readdressed: "What is workplace education and how is it different from company training or ABE?"

"What is the nature of the relationship among the partners and how do we work for the benefit of all involved?"

"How is the success of the program going to be measured by the partners?"

A recurring stumbling block for workplace education is satisfying federal mandates for curriculum and assessment. These often shift and are irrelevant to specific workplace programs or geographic area. Instructors find required standardized tests confusing to students. Sometimes the students lack the specific vocabulary to test successfully even though they have knowledge about the concept or skill in question. Consequently,

instructors have to analyze the tests so they can teach to the vocabulary of the test. The accountability requirements and procedures for fulfilling them are extremely time-consuming. Moreover, they distract from the true task at hand: educating students. A large gap in content remains between the immediate needs of a business and its workplace students and the performance standards approved by the government funding agency.

A workplace education program cannot be put on auto-pilot and remain successful. It must respond to changes in the workplace and the needs of the students it serves. It must also be attentive to the partners' expectations. When collaboration is taken for granted, the program suffers. Partners and staff should strive to avoid the slide into complacency and focus on regular communication, which lies at the heart of maintaining a successful program. As illustrated by MCC's experience, other important elements of longevity include consistency in staffing and leadership, the willingness and flexibility to respond to the needs of all the stakeholders, and a proactive posture towards securing funding from a diverse range of sources.

Several years ago, when Morgan Community College adopted a mascot, the school chose the roadrunner because of its ability to survive and prosper in a challenging environment. A successful workplace education program must also adopt a roadrunner attitude to survive in today's competitive and ever-changing economic environment. Only by doing so will a program preserve its ability to be a value to students and businesses alike. 

About the Authors

Mary Zorn, Director of Marketing and Communications at Morgan Community College, taught secondary and preschool education for 25 years before joining the staff at MCC.

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A Conversation with **FOB...**

What Benefits Does Workplace Ed Offer the Provider?

Businesses commonly ask, “What value does workplace education provide us?” Workplace education providers should ask themselves the same question. In Cleveland, Wisconsin, Lakeshore Technical College (LTC) asked that question, and found that their workplace education program has become quite a marketing tool. It also provides a source of professional “replenishment” for staff, and an income stream in the form of workplace education contracts. Their model of service provision helps make this happen. Greg Mittelstadt, Coordinator of Workplace Education at LTC for the past 15 years, talked to Focus on Basics about the LTC model and how it adds value to the college in a variety of ways.

FOB: Tell me about LTC. How did the college get started in workplace education?

GREG: We’re a state-run technical college, which is like a community college. The college has 50+ programs. Back in 1989, we got started in workplace education with a state

grant. We used the standard model: we hired teachers specifically to teach basic skills and literacy. We worked in one company. By 1992, we had a total of six workplace education programs, funded with a combination of state and federal grants. Over the course of 15 years, we have had 14 government-funded workplace education grants, two or three at a time, to work with 14 different companies. We’re starting our 15th grant with a 15th company. The 14 others [companies] are all off of grants now and running on the company dime.

All the grants, as a requirement of funding, had to have education centers on site. Companies had to designate a space. In one company, it was a doublewide trailer, another company gutted a warehouse. They had resource libraries, computers, classrooms, self-paced learning materials, and classes. The education centers were open during all three shifts. We got people to come in [to the education centers] off shift. It wasn’t unusual to find people using the software or text books, or working together at 9 at night. We also ran Saturday classes. Grant funding required that we provide services in these physical centers via self-study time, course hours, and lab time (usually on their own time, provided as a benefit to the employees), with staffing for tutoring, counseling, etc. Only about 10 to 15 percent of

the companies paid their employees to attend the labs; primarily it was viewed as a benefit. When we provided structured classes, about half the companies paid people to attend, usually when the class was relevant to the worker’s job. By and large the workers appreciated it and took part. We also had cross-functional oversight committees to steer the program at each company. The committees had management representatives, worker representatives (union or nonunion), and me or a designee representing the education provider.

FOB: So what happened?

GREG: Government-funded workplace education grants often fund just basic education. But some of our staff could teach technical topics as well as basic skills. As time went on, we uncovered among our workplace students quite a few needs that were sequential. That is, as classes “turned people on” to learning, the students would start to think about how education could enhance their potential in the company. The students could move from basic skills to technical and sometimes into managerial or so-called soft skill courses. We ended up with many — 25 to 30 percent — people who started in our basic education classes but who wanted to continue in more technical courses. So the companies started to hire us outside the grant to provide the additional training. We got started with companies via the basic skills classes, but as the companies became familiar with LTC and its resources, they naturally turned to us for other education and training. All 14 companies that were originally grant funded have remained contract customers: we provide them with specially tailored workplace education courses, many of which are technical courses that wouldn’t be allowable under federal or state workplace education grants. A couple [of these companies] are smaller companies that may contract with us for one or two courses a year; others come to us 25 to 30 times a year.

The number of companies coming to us for basic skills for contract work (not on grants) has shrunk over the last few years. It used to make up 15 to 25 percent of our workplace education work. Now it's very rare. I attribute it to the economy. Wisconsin has had lots of layoffs and plant closings. Our technical colleges are bursting at the seams right now because we've got so many dislocated workers; these people are taking basic skills and work skills classes.

FOB: Despite the economy, that's quite a record. LTC started with one company via a Wisconsin grant; 15 years later you're still providing on-site workplace education — sometimes in technical areas, sometimes in basic skills — and you have company members also enrolling in courses on your campus. The workplace education grant concept, by which the government provides the seed money but the company eventually takes over, has certainly worked for you.

Let's talk about how the LTC model evolved. At first you hired basic skills instructors for workplace education, which is pretty common. Then what?

GREG: Over the course of 15 years, we kept the best of the externally hired staff, the best with skills in basic education, but we eventually replaced most of them with our full-time staff. We looked for instructors with the right people techniques. As time went on, we moved to about a 75 to 25 percent mix of tech staff to basic skills adjuncts, which is what we have now. It's a constant juggling act to keep all these programs staffed.

FOB: How do you recruit the tech staff?

GREG: I do a lot of internal marketing. When we started in these grants in 1989, I already had a 17-year

history with the college, so I could easily get permission to present at staff meetings [to recruit for staff]. I stressed that teaching in a workplace program would get instructors out into the workplace where they could see what kinds of equipment are used, what the daily jobs are. This turned out to be a real carrot. Financially, I offer additional wages, which is an added impetus.

Now, our model considers all LTC teachers as potential workplace instructors. It's an ongoing process; deans introduce me to new staff and I introduce them to the idea of working

“We got started with companies via the basic skills classes, but as the companies became familiar with LTC and its resources, they naturally turned to us for other education and training.”

for workplace education. We might use 10 to 15 out of 100 instructors in any two-year grant period. I occasionally draw from the other technical colleges in the Wisconsin system as well.

FOB: What about orientation to workplace education for people used to teaching at a college? Do you provide that?

GREG: I team tech teachers with experienced workplace teachers and have the former shadow their more experienced counterparts. I want to make sure those new to workplace education know the special population they will be working with. Being an ex-workplace teacher myself, I coteach, maybe once a semester, with people who request it. Before they go into the classroom [if they're on a grant-funded project], I give them an opportunity to sit on the cross-functional workplace education oversight committee to get a feel for the company as well as for faces and names.

FOB: What are the challenges inherent in using college technical instructors as the workplace education staff?

GREG: We haven't had many problems. That may be because I was a trusted entity beforehand. That said, one challenge is the need to be careful, at the dean level, to make sure that they [deans] don't view me as usurping or draining the energies of their staff. I communicate with all seven of our deans, asking, for example, if I can have Jane or Joe to work at night. The deans may worry that teachers

who also teach in workplace education won't be prepared for their work the next day... so we make sure we don't overbook people.

I also have to choose the right people. You can be blown away by a person who is great in the tech college lab, but discover he can't relate to adults in a specific company culture. I look for an empathetic personality,

someone who's a good listener, with an easy style, like a broad-brush generalist. [They need] good group dynamics skills and relationship-building skills.

Companies have personalities, and some instructors won't fit in well with some but will be great in others. One company might have a no-nonsense, top-down management style. Workers in that company expect traditional approaches. A company that is team-driven needs a different kind of instructor.

FOB: So now you have all these LTC technical instructors working part-time in businesses in geographic proximity to the college. What is the impact?

GREG: The greatest impact has been positive marketing for the college. Instructors get to know people on a first-name basis, and market the college without intending to do so. For example, if Alfredo is a mechanics instructor, teaching math and blueprint, his students will ask about

getting credits at the college. They think “This was good, I did it for my job, but what if I want to do it for me?” We help people reach beyond their previously imagined dreams. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of our workplace education students end up taking other courses from us at the college, or taking credit classes at the workplace site.

I have become an informal LTC representative: it’s not unusual for someone from one of the companies with which we work to call and ask about some aspect of the college, such as admissions. The instructors get all kinds of calls, too. We have first-name basis relationships with training, management, and foremen at all these companies. They call me repeatedly. Once I write contracts with those companies, they become a revenue stream that we at the college can use to enhance our programs and allow us to stay current.

FOB: So workplace education teachers get professional development via their exposure to industry. At the same time, the teachers act as a conduit, introducing students who never would have thought of college, to the idea that they could succeed at LTC. Workplace education seems to be having quite an impact on the college. What’s the administration’s perspective?

GREG: To them, it [workplace education] started as a blip, but as time went on they heard people from companies talk about the effectiveness of the workplace education centers. So it started rising as a priority. The other thing that promoted and made workplace education more visible to LTC upper management was the staff, who reported that the classes were providing real value to the college. People in the original 14 companies became members of our advisory groups. LTC’s marketing department even started coming to us for photos and quotes.

FOB: What have you learned in terms of contracting with companies?

GREG: In the beginning, I was a typical sales guy, going after the numbers. Eventually, I started asking each company what they were interested in, in terms of end result. If they said 25 hours of hydraulics, welding, or soft skills, I’d ask, “Why are you spending money on this? What does your company hope to get out of the investment?” Some people would say “I have a training budget I want to

“The greatest impact has been positive marketing for the college.”

spent or I’ll lose it;” while others might say “I have people not getting along.” I’d reply “What is the real value of LTC providing this service?” I’d ask: “Is it reduced scrap, increased productivity, or enhanced office environment?”

Asking potential clients what the end result should be doesn’t kill the sale, it enhances it because it gives you real credibility. And it unearths needs that clients don’t really know they have. Many issues may be driving the need for training that clients aren’t even aware of. The whole secret to contract training is credibility and relationship-building and having the company’s best interest at heart.

Typically in contract training, the provider deals with an individual, but, when possible, I try to get all the players together. I think of it as an ethical obligation, in my professional capacity as a service provider, to ask how the client legitimizes spending this money. In retrospect, I can’t say I’ve lost many sales because of this approach.

We don’t invoice until after the training is over. Every two or three years, a company says the training didn’t meet their needs. In those cases, we don’t bill them.

FOB: What do you do when you find that the two constituencies — management and labor, or those who are arranging for the workplace education and those who are taking it — have different goals?

GREG: Well, you’re an outsider and you have to tread lightly, but you are a quasimember of the company. I believe in consensus. In our original grants, we had to have cross-functional oversight committees. They bring constituencies together. You really get to respect every one’s viewpoints.

We work with more than 100 companies a year now in contract (nongrant) training, and the contracts don’t provide the opportunity to have cross-functional oversight committees. I, as a salesperson, keep asking my questions: Do the line workers support this training? Have you communicated to them you’re not trying to threaten and expose them? It’s my job to keep those issues alive. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. Also, I try to involve management groups that need to be brought into the loop, not only to promote but also to understand the business reasons for offering employee development opportunities.

Having a good understanding of who asked for this program is important. If it’s obvious that a company is working top-down to put basic skills in without the consensus of the workers, I try to get workers and management together. I start with management and volunteer my time to be part of the process. I always say that if you don’t make this a collaborative effort, chances are it won’t be very successful. We have turned down contracts that we felt were set ups for failure, or where the motivation for training was inappropriate. It’s rare, but it has happened.

FOB: How do you do quality control? What kinds of feedback do you get, and from whom?

GREG: Steering committees are great sources of feedback. I’ve tried to formalize, with varying degrees of suc-

cess, a process to get feedback from line people. I ask the teachers to go out and randomly ask people what they're learning, how they're using it, what we can do to improve the course they're in. In a workplace setting, people are pretty honest in giving feedback.

In addition, every instructor I pay is required to have an anonymous evaluation completed by students. The evaluation asks: Was the content appropriate? Was the instructor effective in the delivery? I also ask the [company] supervisor to talk to three or four people out of any class of 15. If a class is really job-specific, sometimes a company will request an in-class test to show what the learners have learned. That gives us good feedback.

We do try to find measurable objectives, such as amount of scrap per week —when the scrap is attributable to workers making math errors — and see if that changes. When we can find quantifiable data that can be captured by some type of written test, we try to do that kind of testing. But that takes time and effort, which means money, from the company.

FOB: Is it fair to say that basic skills got the college into workplace education, but your focus is now on what you call “contract training”? That seems to be such a large percentage of the workplace-related business.

GREG: The college was in workplace education as far back as the late 1980s, but most of it was quality improvement training. Technical and basic skills weren't as big for us. As they became popular we saw this type of instruction as a useful way for us to go into the workplace. Providing these services is a good way to go in and see quick and measurable impact. This has let us show companies that we can do other things. It also gave us a way to show potential students that they could access education. It is a marvelous way to help people understand that they have a lot more potential than they might have previously thought. 

Reading Work

Literacies in the New Workplace

by Tracy Defoe & Sue Folinsbee

The idea that workers' “basic skill deficits” were to blame for the “ills” of today's workplace did not match our experience as workplace educators, nor did the view of literacy as a discrete set of skills to be mastered by individuals coincide with our opinions. Literacy at work is more than just reading and writing: it is also social in nature. Literacy is an integral part of the workplace that must be examined in the context of the overall workplace environment. Considered in this way, literacy takes on broader meanings. We had the opportunity to participate in a research project in which we examined literacy from a social practice view. We looked at what else was happening when difficulties at work were identified as problems of an individual worker's skill, investigated why workers do or do not participate in literacy practices at the workplace, and reflected on what this means for our work as workplace educators.

We participated as two of five researchers conducting a five-year ethnographic study called the In-Sites Studies in Workforce Literacy. The team conducted research at four work sites in Canada: a food processing plant, a textile manufacturing firm, a high-tech manufacturing plant, and

an urban hotel. Our team was a collaboration among practitioners and academics; we are two of the three workplace educators who participated. Our findings have been published as a book entitled *Reading Work: Literacies in the New Workplace* (Belfiore et al., 2004). This article is based on our research as published in *Reading Work*.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand the lives of the individuals on whom the research focuses, from their own point of view rather than the researchers'. Ethnographic methods primarily involve talking to people and observing what is going on. We chose ethnography for our study because most of the literature on literacy and skills does not include the point of view of workers.

Each of us spent six to eight months at our research site. We collected data in many different ways. We hung out at the workplace: on the shop floor, in training sessions, in all kinds of meetings, in the lunch room, and at other social events. We conducted in-depth interviews with people at all levels at our site, sometimes more than once. We reviewed formal and informal print materials used at work. One researcher got permission to be a “participant observer.” She worked alongside workers at her site and got to feel what it was like to be inside some of the different jobs that workers do there.

Spending so much time observing and asking questions at a workplace enabled us to understand events that unfold over time. For example, a Non-Conformance Report (NCR) is a quality improvement tool used at Texco, a textile manufacturing com-

pany. Employees are supposed to — but do not always — complete an NCR when something goes wrong. Managers thought staff did not fill them out because their writing and spelling skills were inadequate. However, our research revealed that workers did not complete the forms for many different reasons.

Many saw the form as a disciplinary tool that could be used against them or their co-workers. To protect themselves or others, they did not complete the form. Conversely, some workers completed the form when someone else did not, to cover themselves. Using an ethnographic research method allowed us to uncover and understand these contradictions around the use of paperwork and documentation. Managers wanted a workplace education practitioner to design a course to teach workers how to complete the NCR forms and explain why the forms were important. Looking back, we can see that such a course would have been only partially successful because the underlying issues would not have been resolved.

This is only one example of how doing this research changed the way we look at our work.

Lessons Learned

We learned that we could not separate “applying essential skills” or “using literacies” from working; literacy was intrinsic to all the work we saw. Consider the example of machine operators in a manufacturing plant. Each one works with digital micrometers to measure tight tolerances, keeps histogram and run charts for Statistical Process Control tracking of production, reads engineering drawings, writes on maintenance logs and checklists, uses a computer to look

on the corporate intranet for the up-to-date Bill of Materials. When is the machine operator just working and when is he or she using literacies? They are inseparable.

We learned to look beyond the official uses of forms and documents

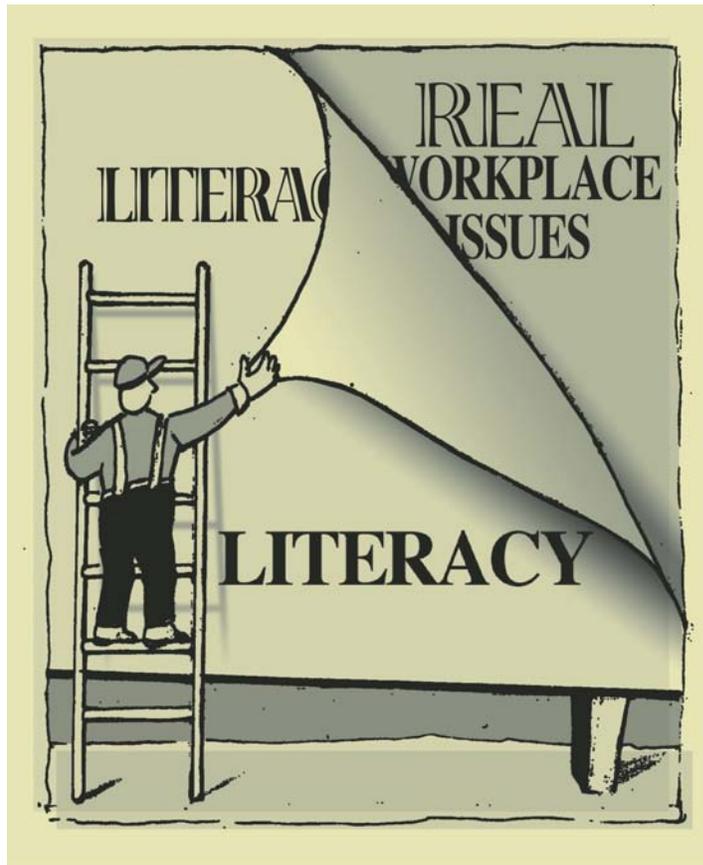
unskilled” or “communication issues vs. work-related issues” became problematic. By trying to see complexities, and trying not to simplify every issue into a skills issue, we learned that what prevents a worker from engaging in a part of work life might relate to his or her literacy “skills,” but it might stem from something else.

Implications

This has implications for many aspects of our work. Assessing the needs in a workplace, which is usually the first step in creating a workplace program, relies upon both mapping the workplace accurately and making recommendations. For example, one commonly stated aim of workplace learning is to help people participate at work. But if that is a goal, the question arises: Is anyone willing to listen? At the textile factory, for example, management talked a lot about the need for worker empowerment and initiative. However, not all workers felt empowered. Rather, they said that

they had been reprimanded for taking initiative or giving their opinion. They feared that if they were honest and their opinion was different from management’s, they would be out of favor with management. When operators were asked whether or not people write anything on the blackboard under the heading, “New Comments and New Ideas,” one said, “Nobody writes nothing. Do you think they are going to listen to anything we have to say?”

In the future, we will be cautious about focusing our attention just on literacies and skills, as we now see we have done in the past. We have always relied upon joint labor-management committees to guide our work and to ground it locally, but we



to understand the ways in which workers interpreted them that were different from the official purposes. Workers chose to participate in literacies and work life, or not, depending on specific local meanings: the meanings held by the people in that particular place, about their specific situations. Sometimes, for example, the official idea of an International Standards Organization (ISO) audit is that it checks on systems, but many workers and managers believe that an ISO audit evaluates them personally.

As practitioners who work in workplaces, we cannot draw hasty conclusions about situations, or about individuals who are not participating. Any neat divisions into “skilled and

have not always given full weight to their concerns. Sometimes the links they see between the learning situation and the workplace did not make sense to us, so we reinterpreted their ideas through education filters. We now see that we should listen closely to their interpretations, and make a place for their understandings of complex situations. We will ask follow-up questions and when it seems someone on the committee “doesn’t get it,” we will ask ourselves if it is us who are missing the point.

We also learned the value of stories for illustrating a point. For example, at the high-tech factory, a group of machine operators were not completing their production tracking documents. Did they need lessons in working with data and charts? No. Did they need to learn the importance of tracking to production quality? No. They had been told that, in their particular case, with the short-run parts they made, the data was not going to be useful for analysis. So they stopped keeping it. They did not realize that the data was also used for warranty information, so in fact they did need to record it. Once the operators learned this, they started to keep the records. In this case a meaningful reason for this practice was understood by all concerned, both the workers and their supervisors. If no one had taken the time to find out what lay behind the operators’ failing to complete these forms, we might have started teaching document skills and measurement—both of which would have been unnecessary.

More Questions Than Answers

As we completed the analysis of our data, we moved from asking “What happened at your site and what did it mean?” to wondering, “What are we going to do now, and why?” At our next workplace education assignments, we do not want to write learning goals

that are not meaningful, or participate in pushing a learning agenda that is irrelevant. Some of the questions we posed to help us reflect on implications for practice included the following:

- How can we “read” a workplace?
- Can we learn about social practices by paying attention to resistance?
- How can we explain literacies as social practice to other educators?
- How can we focus on content and meanings?
- How can we bring multiple meanings into the picture?
- How can we explicitly identify contradictions and work within realities?

Together we looked back on our practice of more than a decade each, and we reflected on our experiences using our new filter of social practice. What did we not see because we were looking for basic skills? What did we

“When is the machine operator just working and when is he or she using literacies? They are inseparable.”

miss because we were focusing on the individual person and his or her skills, rather than on the complex situation and work group that surrounded him or her? Too often in the past, the level of our interest was set on the potential student; the actual work that was most real for her was merely background, serving only as a context that we described but did not take fully into account in our work. That has changed now.

We see that we always used authentic materials, but relied too much on what those materials meant to us to form lessons. We saw the material as examples of language in use, rather than as real parts of our learners’ work days. The materials

were more than out of context: they were next to meaningless in situations in which the real challenge lay in the politics of how people behaved together and not in how a form or memo was written or read. We now check with a wider group of people and ask open-ended questions like “How does this work?” when we find a form, memo, or newsletter article that we think might be a worthwhile focus for teaching and learning. People have told us surprising insights: “That is the way people cover themselves and make my department look bad,” was one answer. We were never comfortable with deficit descriptions of individual workers (listing what they are not good at, for example), but this response demonstrates that much more is involved in forms not being filled out than writing skills or aptitudes.

We now see the value of working with work groups, not just the people who are nominated as needing help. We recognize that understanding systems and individuals, and finding out how things work in practice as well as how they are supposed to work, will help us keep a social practice framework. This does not mean we are ignoring basic skills or individual learning; we are trying to maintain a wide focus on the workplace while also focusing on individuals and groups. We are still practitioners, but we will strive not to be innocent about the lived reality of workers’ lives.

Implementing This Approach

How can we put this perspective into practice? We plan learning objectives for individuals and groups, much as we always did. Now, however, we invite our learners to bring in material that they judge important. With a pen and paper, or a cassette recorder and a digital camera, we will go out onto the shop floor with our machine operator student and see how communication can break down when the operator tries

to talk with a maintenance worker or an engineer. These are the people the students really need to work with, to learn to communicate with, to practice what they are working on in writing or speaking up. This takes letting go of some control. It takes courage on everyone's part.

We will strive to identify needs and rechart a learning course over time. We have to convince our joint committees to see the goals of a learning program in this new way, and that the change in work culture that people often hope to realize from workplace education comes through this kind of process. We will use every opportunity to gather information, observe, and ask what things mean. In cases in which events or even a single document holds different meanings for different groups, we will know that we have found one of the keys to better understanding a workplace and the people who work there. 

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About the Authors

Tracy A. Defoe is an independent workplace education consultant and researcher with an interest in building inclusive and peer-led curricula for learning at work. She is currently puzzling through the challenges of participation in lean manufacturing.

Sue Folinsbee has worked in the field of workplace education for almost 20 years. She is presently working on a number of projects coordinated by the Labour Education Centre including the "Hospitality Workers' Resource Centre" and a "Union Passport to Learning" in Toronto, Canada.

The In-Sites Research Group members are *Mary Ellen Belfiore, Tracy Defoe, Sue Folinsbee, Judy Hunter, and Nancy Jackson.* ❖



Much More than ABE

by Don Block & Lori Keefer

As workplace literacy educators, we have learned that workplace classes rarely resemble standard adult basic education (ABE) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. Workplace education programs have to align with the incentive and evaluation systems that govern employees. Companies often have an idea of what they want to achieve but are not able to express it in specific educational terms. Working with a team of management and employees, we develop the course curriculum in response to their needs and then describe the objectives in educational terms. We teach content not traditionally found in an ABE or ESOL course. No two courses are exactly the same.

We are staff members of Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, one of the nation's largest community-based organizations in adult literacy. Our agency has an annual budget of \$2 million and 33 full-time employees. We have been involved in workplace programs since 1987. The program that we describe in this article — supported with a grant from the Pennsylvania Workforce Improvement Network, a statewide workforce literacy effort (see page 30) — may not reflect the norm in workplace programs; it does, however, highlight the flexibility that we all need as we design these programs. In this program, carried out in 2004 with the housekeeping department of a Pittsburgh hotel, we moved farther away from basic literacy

skills than in many of our other workplace programs and found ourselves teaching teamwork and communication as well as ABE.

"The Basics"

We initiated contact with the hotel to interest them in workplace education. As we were negotiating the course objectives with the hotel's human resources managers and employees, we noticed that they never expressed their goals in traditional literacy terms. They never said they wanted a certain number of housekeeping workers to improve their reading and writing, or that a certain number of employees should obtain their certificates of General Educational Development (GEDs). The objectives for the course all had to do with employees' ability to demonstrate quality consciousness and to practice concepts that the hotel calls "The Basics," which are 20 customer service principles including, for example, "I Practice Teamwork," "I Practice Safe Work Habits," and "I Use Telephone Etiquette."

The hotel discusses The Basics with employees at a daily 15-minute meeting. Each department holds one of these morning meetings, and attendance is mandatory for all employees. The meeting is scripted by the company and is usually led by a member of management. The staff can follow along with the script, although scripts were not given out at the meetings we attended prior to the beginning of our course. The purpose of the meeting is to go over one of The Basics and to relay other information about things happening in the department and the hotel.

The Basics are listed on a company calendar: one principle is assigned to each weekday in a month. The premise is that if the employee knows and applies these Basics, then the customers

will be satisfied and the department will receive higher Guest Satisfaction Scores. The scores are based on surveys that guests complete after their stay.

Although the ability to provide good customer service may not seem at first to be a literacy skill, it is one of the items listed in the Foundation Skills Framework for Pennsylvania's workplace literacy programs (see www.pawerc.org/foundationskills/cwp/view.asp?Q=92970). We used the Framework as a planning tool to help management and employees to identify the categories and specific skills that needed to be addressed through the course. As a result of the planning meetings with hotel management and a representative group of employees, the following objectives for the course were selected:

- 1) Employees will participate in morning meetings and offer suggestions for better service at least twice a week.
- 2) Employees will contribute to an improvement in the Guest Satisfaction Score of the housekeeping department regarding room quality.

- 3) Employees will be able to name and give examples of the 20 Basics with at least 80 percent accuracy.

Lori, the instructor for the course, attended all of the planning meetings held prior to the start of the class. She also observed one of the 15-minute morning meetings to get a sense of the content and level of participation. She noticed that staff members of the housekeeping department were not engaged in discussion of The Basic for that day. Some of them were having side conversations, others were looking around, and no one responded to the leader or asked a question. They did not appear to be invested in the morning meeting process.

The Students

The class had eight students, including two nonnative speakers of English: one was a beginning English speaker and the other was more advanced. This class was mandatory for selected employees, who were chosen for their leadership qualities and their ability to influence others in their department. We decided that



our agency could not afford a separate ESOL class for only two students, so we provided a Spanish-speaking tutor to the nonnative speaker of English who needed instruction in basic reading and writing in English. The other students in the class had sufficient reading and writing skills for the purposes of the course. Instruction was conducted entirely on company time. The course ran for 16 weeks with one two-hour session per week.

Based on the results of a teacher-made pretest covering the customer service principles, we observed that students had some needs in the areas of reading, writing, and understanding The Basics, but our class focused on the underlying concepts of team-

work and effective communication that would bring about quality improvement. This content-focused approach differentiates the class from our other ABE programs, which usually feature a skills-oriented approach.

Before teaching The Basics, we felt it was necessary to get staff members' opinions about what actually happens at the meetings and what impact the meetings could have on their department and the hotel. It took us three or four sessions to create an environment in which employees could be completely open and honest about how these meetings did or did not work for them. The discussion eventually turned to vision and mission statements. The group worked on understanding the meaning of the hotel's vision and mission and then created vision and mission statements for their department to support the hotel's overall vision. This activity combined oral and written communication skills and literacy. The written statements were revised numerous times to reflect the consensus of the group.

It was an important step for the employees to understand how their actions relate to the bigger picture of the hotel's overall performance.

All of the examples used or discussed in the course were taken from the employees themselves. They offered suggestions about things that were relevant to The Basic for the day and to their department. The topic for each class was a communication or team-building skill in addition to several of The Basics. When a topic did not seem immediately relevant to the participants, Lori found ways to relate it to their work or their personal situation so that they could see how learning the communication skill might help them. For example, one class was on active listening: restating what one

has heard back to the speaker. Lori suggested that employees could use this with other employees and with hotel guests. Employees then gave examples from their everyday work where this skill would be useful.

One of the course objectives was to prompt employees to offer suggestions for improvement at the morning meetings. Prior to this class, due to the format and style of the morning meetings, the employees did not know that management cared about their participation. During the first session of class, employees stated that they did not see how their work would have an impact on the Guest Satisfaction Scores or how the department affected the overall success of the hotel. Management responded that employees would be given the opportunity to make changes to the morning meetings so that they and others would have the opportunity to participate.

Problem-Solving

About six weeks into the course, Lori taught the participants ways to analyze a problem and to plan for suggesting changes. She used activities for problem-solving from *Pump Them Up!* by Lorraine Ukens (1996). She also used activities that assisted employees in examining a problem from different perspectives and then identifying various parties who might be affected by the proposed change. The students, who represented the three levels of employees in the department — housekeepers, inspectors, and supervisors — voted on and agreed to analyze an issue of particular concern for the department: the availability and distribution of supplies for housekeeping workers. The workers needed the right supplies in the right places at the right time for the work to go smoothly. Inadequate provision of supplies was causing delays in work and dissatisfaction among the housekeepers and inspectors. The students suggested action steps that might solve the problem, keeping in mind barriers or resistance that might emerge.

Several members of the class then presented the proposed solution to the department head, and management responded: the solution was implemented in the week between scheduled class meetings. Two months later, the new plan was still in effect and working. This was not an intended outcome of the course but was an example of how the teaching of problem-solving skills empowered the employees to make a recommendation for change and see it through to implementation. This success — and its direct benefit to their work — motivated the employees to become even more involved in class, demonstrating how the class could help them to communicate more effectively and to achieve results.

Reflections

At the beginning of the course, we considered it a daunting and unattainable goal to raise randomly selected guests' perceptions of an entire department by holding a class with only one-quarter of the department's employees. It seemed that too many factors were beyond our control. However, our students acted as leaders in the department, motivating their co-workers to participate more in morning meetings and modeling *The Basics*. By fully engaging the class participants in the process and empowering them to make changes, we achieved the goal. After 10 weeks of the 16-week course, the housekeeping department won an award for the most improved department in the hotel as measured by Guest Satisfaction Scores. This demonstrated that the employees were learning the problem-solving skills we were teaching and practicing them in their work.

The objectives for this course were very company-driven, but we do not always work in this fashion. Unlike some other classes we have run in workplaces, this class was mandatory for selected employees and conducted entirely on company time. The degree of control the company had over the curriculum was therefore higher in this case than in other programs in which attendance was voluntary and

that placed greater emphasis on employees' personal growth.

We have worked in a variety of corporate settings, and we prefer a situation in which employees contribute some of their personal time and the company contributes some paid time. This ensures that both parties have made an investment in the learning process. In this hotel project, the employees became invested in the learning process once they understood that, far from being punitive, their participation in the class was requested by management in recognition of their leadership potential.

A traditional ABE class might have emphasized reading the 20 Basics and writing examples of how these could be used in work settings. Our course was more action-oriented. We emphasized the skills of communication, team-building, and problem-solving, to enable the employees to bring improvement to their department. Employees realized that they could use these skills to benefit themselves and their families outside of the workplace as well. In this way we served both as adult basic educators and as consultants on teamwork and communication. 

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About the Authors

Don Block, the executive director of Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, has directed adult literacy programs for 24 years. The Council was recently honored with the Wishart Award for Excellence in Nonprofit Management, which is awarded annually to one nonprofit organization in the Pittsburgh region. Don has been a consultant and trainer across the nation in management issues for literacy programs.

Lori Keefer, program manager at Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, joined the agency six years ago after working in the private sector. She has taught several workplace classes in addition to serving administrative and training roles within the agency. She is currently completing her doctorate in educational administration at the University of Pittsburgh. 

Balancing the Agendas of Management, Student, and Teacher in Workplace ESOL

by Anthony Moss

I teach English to immigrant workers at their job site during paid work-time. My philosophy of teaching English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) goes beyond the mechanics of language instruction. I see myself as a coach, an instigator, a confidant, and a cultural bridge to English-speaking America. For the last two years, I have been working for a for-profit education company, which I will call Worksite Trainers. We provide customized ESOL programs for medium- to large-sized businesses, which I'll refer to as clients. To do so, we receive government grants in the name of the client to cover the costs of the managing the grants, designing the curriculum, and delivering the instruction.

My client is a prominent janitorial company in the San Francisco Bay area. The ESOL class evolved, after nine months, from an unpaid, lunch-time class to a class held on paid work-time for another nine months. The 22 students are unionized, day-time janitors. They have direct contact with the English-speaking tenants of the office park they clean and they have a need to speak with them. By and large, they are economic refugees from Mexico. They

speak Spanish and tend to live in Spanish-speaking communities, essentially recreating the feeling of Mexico here in California. Nearly all of my students have husbands, wives, American-born children, pets. They make house payments, and, according to informal discussions we have had before class, they plan to stay in this country and dream of watching their English-speaking children go to college and eventually take care of them. The students in my class have been in the states for an average of six to eight years. As a group, they have a wide range of work experience in fast food, factories, farm labor, grocery stores, car washes, painting, restaurants, and residential cleaning. I even teach a trumpet-playing Mariachi musician. More than half of the jobs my students have held are frontline jobs with exposure to English-speaking customers.

In general, my course materials contain dialogues that we create, popular songs like "Put Your Head on my Shoulder," workplace stories that we create and that more advanced students in past sessions have created, workplace forms directly from the company handbook, and worksheets with good graphics. Worksite Trainers requires that about 70 percent of the curriculum address employer-required language, such as: "Can you vacuum Building Five?"

"Did you punch in?" "Clean the bathroom, please." Approximately 20 percent consists of employee and union issues, such as filling out leave of absence forms and accident reports. Around 10 percent is devoted to daily-life language outside of work: "Where do you shop?" "Where is the post office?" "What is your daughter's name?"

Inherent Tensions

Two specific issues make teaching this class challenging. The first is literacy. Two of my students are functionally illiterate in Spanish. The second challenge is the inherent tension between providing our client company's staff with instruction that does not do too much to empower their employees and my desire to make my teaching relevant to my students' lives. I didn't expect the harsh reality of company politics within the context of learning in the classroom. I often found that even

"I didn't expect the harsh reality of company politics within the context of learning in the classroom. I often found that even seemingly innocuous topics of discussion could present political minefields."

seemingly innocuous topics of discussion could present political minefields. Although the majority of my company contacts were diligent leaders and principled people, a handful of human resource and line managers horrified me. Some managers kept their workers from attending class, badmouthed the class, or downplayed the importance of their employees

learning English at all.

In addition to the company-centric approach of Worksite Trainers and the agendas of many managers to limit the scope of our instruction to the minimum necessary for workers to perform menial tasks, the students, too, had their own agenda. This was made clear to me with one incident in particular. I had been training this particular section of janitors for over a year, when one day I was sitting in the classroom before class, wishing the students would hurry up. “They’re late, they’re late,” I muttered to myself. Then I heard them beginning to arrive.

“If we don’t do it, they’ll send us home without pay!”

“I won’t do it, I don’t care!”

“It’s discrimination!”

“It’s harassment!”

“It’s not even in our contracts!”

By this time all of the students had arrived. It was eight minutes past starting time, and I had to make a decision. Would we continue with weather and other small talk, as I had planned, or, would we dive into the issue they were discussing?

My pragmatic step-by-step realist voice said: This outburst is just an excuse for the students not to follow the program. Frankly, it’s irresponsible and undisciplined of you, the teacher,

to continually switch topics. It interrupts the learning process and undermines the lesson plan.

Wait a minute, another part of me said. Forget about your ordinary, oh-so-forgettable weather vocabulary and grab this emotional, lightning rod

issue. Finally, a bottom-up issue that is obviously engaging to the students. Why don’t you just direct their ire and allow them to take charge?

So I said, “Ya empieza la clase: What is all the commotion about?”

Someone responded, “It’s a new rule about our uniforms, look at it!”

In Spanish, I said to the students, “Ok, let’s make a deal right now. I will use the entire class today to discuss and explain the whole uniform issue, but as I have explained to all of you before, I want to be a neutral party. That means I will be happy to listen, to explain, and to interpret the whys and hows of the new rule. I will not, however, speak to the management or the union on your behalf.” I hesitated a moment to consider whether their discussion of the subject could be detrimental to them. Deciding that only discussing the issue with management or a union representative should be inconsequential, I added: “I urge you to, though.”

I was entering unscripted territory, and this is the tricky part: taking the energy from the issue and channeling it into a language lesson. I can teach what to say, followed up by how to answer. I can even

It is not fair because:

- The uniforms are designed for men.
- The uniforms are not designed for women.
- They do not fit us properly.
- The zippers fall down when we bend over.
- The shirts come out when we reach up.
- They make us look fat.
- We look ugly.

Question: What do you need to feel comfortable?
OR: What uniform would you like to wear?

Answer: We need or We would like:

1. Pants that fit women.
2. Shirts that fit.
3. Longer shirts.

teach variations of the question and answer. Not only can I, but I do. However, on a completely different level, as cultural translator, I wanted to convey the why.

From Why to Participation

In this particular case, part of the why of the new rule is rooted in our culture. Beyond today, and beyond this situation, I want the students to look for the why in other situations. Getting students to question is a step in the process towards getting them to participate — whether in English or, if necessary, in Spanish. When the students understand the motivation behind a regulation, they are equipped with the information that empowers them to make a decision: to follow it, request a modification of it, or present a logical argument against it for something that is better.

In this case, the students came up with their own reasons of why the rule was unfair, and I shaped the language lesson around their critique. (See the flipchart above for their ideas.) I modeled questions, they answered. They broke into pairs and asked questions and answered. They broke into groups and wrote questions. We returned to the group, and I asked questions and they answered more forcefully and knowledgeably. The students focused during this lesson more intensely

~ MEMO ~

TO: All Janitorial Staff

FROM: Management

Date: Effective in 48 hours

All workers must wear company issued gray slacks and white colored button-up work shirts. The shirts must be tucked in AT ALL TIMES. If you are out of compliance, we will send you home for the rest of the day without pay. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

because the subject matter was relevant to them.

No one from management had ever explained why tucking in their shirts is so important to the management, but I gave them a short anecdote to which many who grew up in the United States can relate. I said: “Ever since I was old enough to dress myself my parents told me, ‘Don’t be a schlump, tuck in your shirt!’ What that means is tucked in equals professional; untucked means bum. All of the supervisors and managers have parents who spread the same message. The tenants have parents who said that, too.”

That simple explanation put what otherwise appeared to be an illogical rule into context. It did not solve the problem, but it did give them the information they needed to understand why a tucked-in shirt is important to Americans in this situation. They could understand management’s thinking on this issue, and make decisions based on this knowledge.

The Students’ Side

I understood the issue more deeply as we went through the lesson and as the students volunteered more background information. The women workers wore uniforms designed for men. As they said, they didn’t feel good about themselves while wearing the uniform. They were embarrassed when the shirts came out of their pants while they were cleaning and even more embarrassed when their zippers came down, which apparently happened frequently.

The supervisor had warned the workers about the strict enforcement of the dress code and advised women to order women’s pants if that is what they wanted. He didn’t understand why they would complain instead of just ordering the new pants. I asked the women students if this was true, and they said that it was. Then I asked why they didn’t just order the women’s pants. It was simple: the janitorial company was notorious for not

getting supplies to the workers on time. The pattern was that an employee would order work shirts. A senior manager would see the employee weeks after the order was placed and write him up for not having a company shirt. The company wouldn’t get employees what they needed in a reasonable amount of time. By the time the manager advised people to order other pair of pants, most of them figured, “Why should I? I’ll never get them, anyway.”

Everyone Learns

We became colearners. I taught the workers about the cultural issue and they taught me about how the company works. In a sense, I’m teaching them theoretical cultural observations while they are teaching me about a new industry and specific company policies. My teaching philosophy evolved. I’d started by adopting an approach that I thought was decidedly neutral, not exploring or utilizing workplace issues as material. Now I encourage the students to bring workplace issues to my attention so I can use them as topics in class.

For me, it comes down to impact. How are my three hours per week going to engage people? How can those three hours be the most effective possible? Although every group that I deal with has different language needs, all groups need clear lines of communication between the teacher and the student. When there is solid communication the worker can bring up relevant issues and the instructor can weave them into the class, making the experience richer and the learning deeper.

Balancing agendas is very challenging in workplace education.

Each player has a distinct agenda: Workplace Trainers values language instruction and political neutrality, the janitorial client values mops and bucket language without politics, the workers value daily language and the ability to talk about workers’ issues. I, too, have an agenda. My agenda is to connect with the workers in order to create a level of trust so that we can learn English. If anything, because we are together day after day, I err slightly on the workers’ side. And so I constantly need to remind myself who the stakeholders are, and I have to be honest about my biases.

I have to admit, I dislike constantly having to balance agendas. It’s true that I’ve had to and continue to make trade-offs. These compromises affect the areas of focus for the language instruction and often compel me to steer away from “hot” topics. On

“I taught the workers about the cultural issue and they taught me about how the company works.”

occasion, I’ve even been a mouth-piece for the management’s views. However, my dislike is insignificant compared to the overall enjoyment I get from teaching. I just have to close my eyes and imagine what it’d be like for my students, who are my primary clients, if they didn’t get English lessons at all. I then feel assured that my efforts, as imperfect as they may be, are worth it. 

About the Author

Anthony Moss has taught Spanish and English for speakers of other languages at Colorado Mountain College and currently trains workers and management in the San Francisco Bay area in ESOL and cross-cultural communication. ❖

Workplace Literacy Education

Definitions, Purposes, and Approaches

by Paul Jurmo

“Workplace literacy” became a focus of attention for news media, policymakers, employer organizations, and labor unions in the United States from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. This was evident in media campaigns, state and federal workplace education initiatives, corporate and union worker basic skills programs, research reports, and how-to guidebooks that appeared in that period (Jurmo, 1998). The terms “workplace literacy,” “employee basic skills,” and “workplace basics” were used to describe the essential communication, math, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that employees needed for workplaces that were increasingly high-tech and oriented toward individual and team-based decision-making and problem-solving (Carnevale et al., 1990; Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992; US Department of Education & US Department of Labor, 1988).

Much of the interest in delivering basic skills services in the workplace came from the adult literacy field. Nonetheless, many who worked in workplace programs moved away from

using the term “workplace literacy.” They felt that the term suggested that reading was the main issue when, in fact, employers and others were defining basic skills in a much more comprehensive way. Feedback from workplaces (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992) indicated that workers needed not just the traditional basic skills (reading, writing, oral English, and math) but the ability to work in teams, solve problems, track down information, and behave responsibly. The term “literacy” was also avoided because it was feared that calling a program a workplace literacy program would make it anathema to workers who believe that literacy programs are only for people who can’t read.

Many of those calling for investment in workplace basic skills programs argued that employee basic skills were key factors in keeping workplaces productive, safe, and competitive. Some also argued that worker basic skills played a role in workers’ personal and professional development, such as their ability to retain their jobs, qualify for promotions, manage their benefits, earn a high school credential and move on to higher education and training, and have positive relations with co-workers (Jurmo, 1998).

In response, employers and labor unions — individually and in associations or consortia — set up basic skills programs for their employees. These were typically run at employees’ workplaces, although sometimes they were held in union facilities or local educational institutions. The term “workplace literacy program” (and similar ones such as “employee basic

skills program” or, more simply, “workplace education program”) came to refer to an education program typically carried out in a setting provided by the workers’ employer or union and designed to help incumbent (employed) workers to strengthen their basic skills. Basic skills included reading, writing, math, oral language, and/or other skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, research, and sometimes basic computer operations. These skills were required to improve the organization’s performance and/or advance the workers’ personal and professional development.

Approaches

Workplace basic skills education has evolved in response to lessons learned through experience and research, changes in workplace conditions and available resources, and shifts in the political environment. Workplace basic skills programs can be broadly organized into two major categories: decontextualized and contextualized. Within those two categories is a wide variety of program models. These vary according to the content being taught, key decision-makers’ perspectives on how adults learn and how workplaces should operate, and the time and other resources available. This variety is, on the one hand, positive because it reflects flexibility and willingness to let program-level staff create their own responses to the workforce challenges they face. On the other hand, it probably also indicates that the field has not evolved very far and has only limited agreed-upon standards and guidelines for good practice.

Outlined within this article are three approaches: one decontextualized and two contextualized. For each approach, arguments for and against that approach are presented. Planners of workplace basic education programs are encouraged to consider each approach as they create a means of service delivery appropriate to their particular situations.

The First Workplace Programs: The Decontextualized Approach

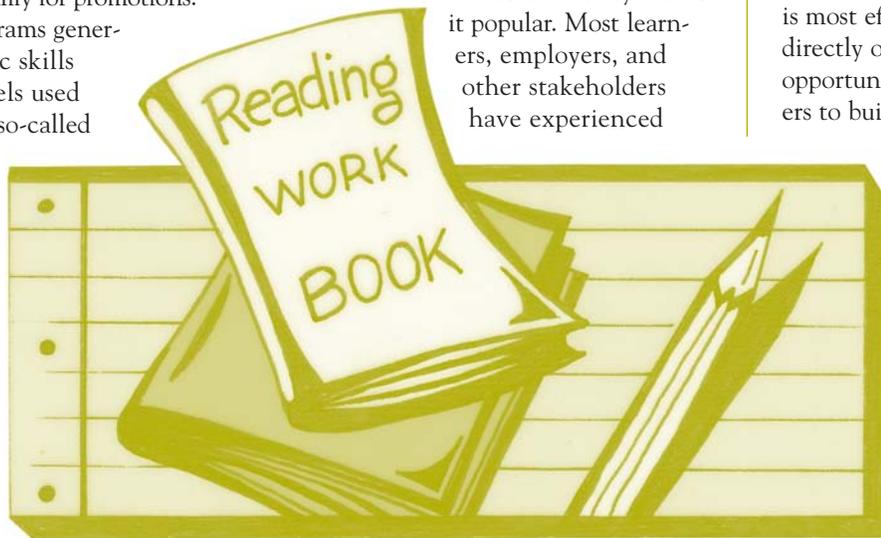
Some of the earliest workplace basic skills programs were implemented by the US military, which recognized that some personnel lacked the technical reading and other basic skills needed to understand manuals, participate in training, and qualify for promotions. These early programs generally adopted basic skills curriculum models used in schools. This so-called academic approach was characterized by a focus on mastery of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and/or math skills (possibly with the earning of a high school credential as a goal) with little or no direct connection to how participants used those skills in their work or possibly other real-life contexts.

Users of this approach often argue that it is important — whether in a workplace or other program setting — first to teach what they would term the basics in discrete pieces (for example, vocabulary, rules, letter-sound combinations) of oral or written language that learners will, it is assumed, eventually be able to combine and apply to real-life literacy or language tasks. In practice, users of this approach tend to rely on commercial workbooks or software that requires learners to fill in the blanks and otherwise produce an answer predetermined by the authors (Prevedel, 2003). This approach is found in many workplace education programs today.

Advantages

A strength of this approach is that it requires limited planning, because learning activities can be transplanted from existing, prepackaged curricula. It is easy to predict and organize: a matter of assembling ready-made lessons in a predetermined sequence. Only limited teacher training is necessary, since teachers can be handed lessons and jump right in and begin teaching.

Its familiarity makes it popular. Most learners, employers, and other stakeholders have experienced



schooling using this approach: it is similar to traditional curricula historically used in schools. Stakeholders thus know what they are getting into and do not require lots of explanation to clarify what will be taught.

With this approach, the teacher is positioned as the expert: the holder of knowledge that will be dispensed to learners. This hierarchical relationship between teacher and student is familiar to and preferred by many stakeholders.

It is relatively easy to assess whether learners have mastered discrete skills, using standardized tests that are easy to administer and grade. These tests produce data that can be used to compare participants to each other and to national averages.

In addition, some researchers support the view that literacy skills should be taught in a discrete, carefully sequenced way. This approach is

thought to be especially appropriate for people at a low level of skills, some of whom might have learning disabilities that make it difficult for them to process too much input at once (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2001).

Disadvantages

Workplace education programs have very limited time to help workers master specific literacy and language tasks they face on their jobs. Some have argued that this limited time is most efficiently spent by focusing directly on those tasks. This provides opportunities and incentives for learners to build on what they already

know, focus on tasks that are important to them, and get more immediate reinforcement to guide their learning. Otherwise, learners might end up mastering pieces of literacy and language skills in a vacuum and never learn how to apply them meaningfully in actual situations (Mikulecky, 1997; Sticht, 1997).

An Expert-Driven, “Functional Context” Approach Arrives on the Scene

The decontextualized approach came under fire in the 1970s and 1980s from researchers (Sticht, 1997) who drew on findings from cognitive science. These researchers argued that if improved job performance was the goal, employee basic skills programs should focus more directly on job-related content, build on learners’ job-related knowledge and motivations, and teach the strategies they need to apply basic skills to the tasks they face on their current or may face in future jobs.

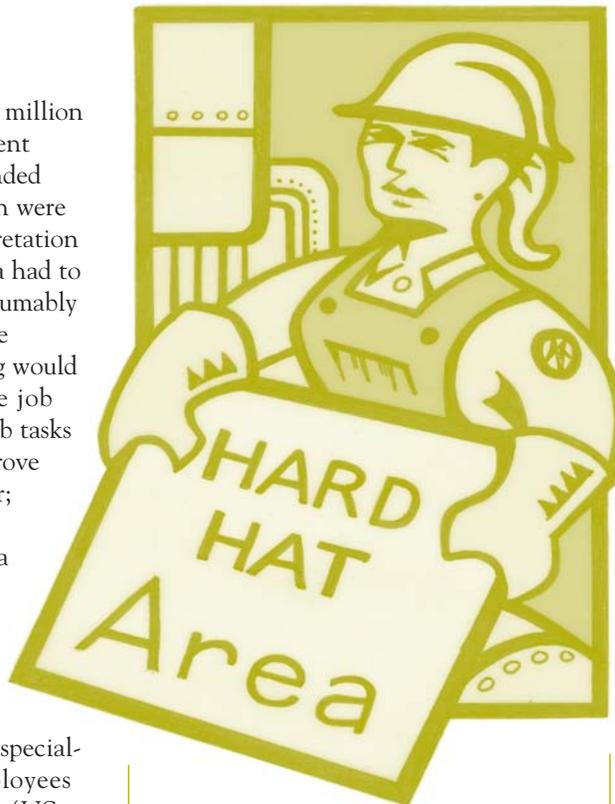
This contextualized view was supported within the United States by the National Workplace Literacy Program

(NWLP), an eight year, \$130 million initiative of the US Department of Education. The NWLP funded demonstration projects, which were held to a fairly narrow interpretation of contextualization: curricula had to focus on skills employees presumably needed for their jobs, with the assumption that such learning would result in improved employee job performance. Typically the job tasks that employees needed to improve were defined by the employer; then a basic skills specialist conducted what was termed a literacy audit (or literacy task analysis) to clarify the basic skills required by that job. After that — through a customized, job-specific assessment — the basic skills specialist determined whether employees possessed the required skills (US Department of Labor & US Department of Education, 1988).

The resulting curriculum focused on the skills identified as necessary through this assessment process. This could be a curriculum that taught carpenters how to make precise measurements, bank tellers the customer service skills they needed to explain new financial services to customers, or production workers how to interpret the statistics issued by computerized equipment. This so-called functional context approach to contextualized learning was promoted in a number of handbooks and papers (BCEL, 1987). It was also adopted by several state-level workplace education initiatives as their standard.

Advantages

Those favoring this approach argue that by mastering literacy and language skills that produce clear, tangible, more immediate results in job performance and job prospects, learners are more likely to see the relevance of developing literacy skills and the value of practicing those skills on a regular basis. They will thereby master those skills more quickly and retain and develop them more fully.



This approach relies on both external and internal experts to develop the workplace education program. Outside experts — trained adult educators who specialize in worker basic skills — know how to conduct needs assessments, create customized curricula, and otherwise organize an effective worker education program. Internal experts — production managers, human resources specialists, technical trainers, supervisors — know the workplace and the workers to be served by the program and can shape the content of the program to ensure its relevance. Involving these important internal stakeholders will also increase the likelihood of their providing the supports crucial to keeping the program on track, such as release time for workers, classroom space, or guest speakers.

A job-specific focus also helps employers and public funders to see how workplace education can contribute to increased productivity and competitiveness, which are important goals of both the private and public sectors.

Disadvantages

A number of criticisms have been raised of this interpretation of contex-

tualized learning. One is that some contextualized programs do not focus on the right skills. For example, some workers have created alternative strategies for handling particular job tasks so they don't need the particular literacy or language skills program planners assume. Another criticism is that planners focus on job skills that will soon become irrelevant to workers, either because the workers change jobs (within the company or to a new workplace) or because their jobs change in ways that planners had failed to anticipate (Belfiore, 2004; Gowen, 1992).

Another argument is that when key planning decisions are made solely by higher-level experts and participating workers have little or no input, contextualized programs can ignore the key factor of learner motivation. If learners do not see particular job tasks as interesting or motivating, they are not likely to invest their energy and brainpower in mastering those tasks. In some cases, workers might not want to learn a particular job because it pays poorly, is a low status (dead-end) job, the working conditions are not good, or the job is the focus of contention between labor and management.

A contextualized adult basic skills program runs the risk of neglecting the basic skills side of the curriculum and becoming merely a narrow job-training program. In such a program, learners might master particular job-related knowledge but it does not strengthen the underlying reading, writing, or other basic skills they need for work or other life roles. If workers' continuing professional and/or personal development is at least one goal of the program, then workers need transferable skills they can apply to a number of job situations and in future training and educational opportunities (Schultz, 1992).

Customizing a curriculum to a particular job context and worker population takes the time of company personnel, who have to give input into curriculum development, and the expertise of one or more professionals.

These represent investments that some stakeholders might not be willing to make.

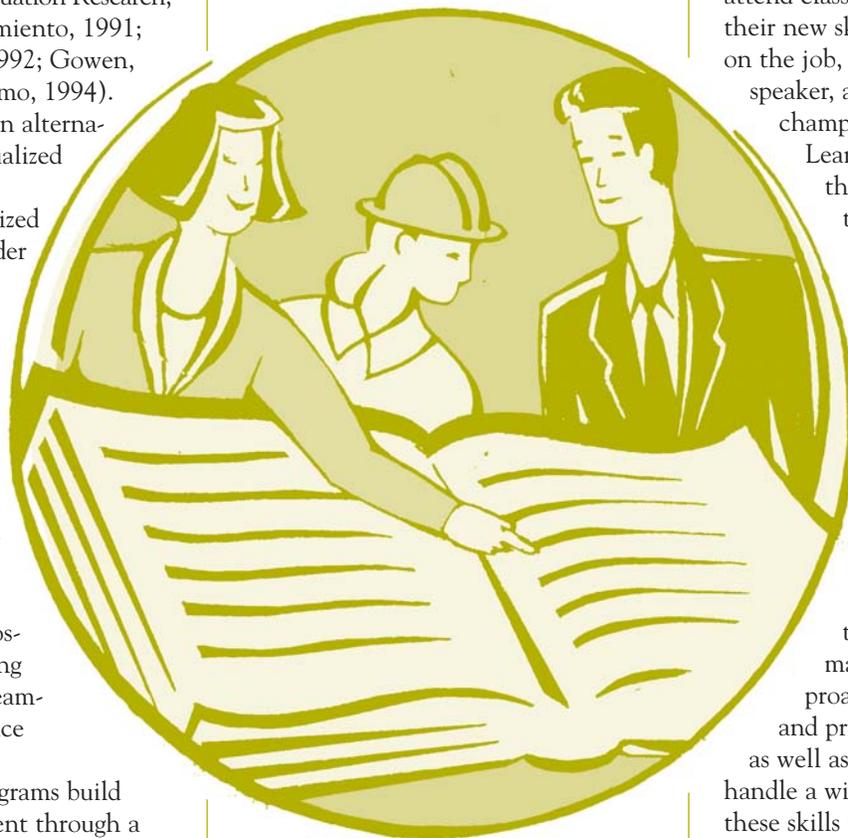
An Alternative Interpretation of Contextualization: The Collaborative, Problem-Posing Approach

Although the expert-driven functional context version of contextualization became the focal point for many workplace basic skills policies and programs, it too came into question on a number of grounds. Most of the critics agreed that contextualized learning was a good idea, but they questioned the particular way that the NWLP and other sources interpreted contextualization (Evaluation Research, 1992; Imel, 2003; Sarmiento, 1991; Hull, 1993; Schultz, 1992; Gowen, 1992; Folinsbee & Jurmo, 1994). These proponents of an alternative version of contextualized learning argued for an approach that emphasized involvement of a broader range of stakeholders (including participating workers) in the setting of program goals, balancing the need to improve job performance with the goal of employee development, and integrating traditional literacy and language skills with problem-posing and problem-solving and other aspects of team-based, high-performance organizational models.

Collaborative programs build stakeholder involvement through a systematic, inclusive decision-making process. Representatives of various company departments work with adult educators and labor union representatives to clarify how basic skills

fit into the company's strategic plan for workplace and worker development. The organization is seen as a technical-social system that relies on both material and human resources. Members of the workplace education planning team are encouraged to think critically about how a worker education program can help the workforce solve technical and social problems.

This process might result in a curriculum in which workers are organized as problem-solving teams rather than as traditional classes. These teams identify workplace problems and go through a problem-solving process to identify sources of the problems and steps to take to solve them. In the process, participants develop problem-solving, listening and speaking, research, teamwork, math, and presentation skills, while contributing to improvements in



workplace operations. While somewhat similar to the functional context approach in its focus on job-related skills, this collaborative approach dif-

fers in its emphasis on involving a wider range of stakeholders in making decisions about how to run the education program and how to improve the larger work organization (Folinsbee & Jurmo, 1994; Anorve, 1989).

Advantages

Advocates for this collaborative approach to contextualized education argue that the desires and interests of all key stakeholders — especially participating workers — must be taken into account when planning a workplace education program. For a program to be relevant to and supported by key stakeholders, they should be given a chance to set program goals, have a say in planning curricula and schedules, and participate as resources persons (Cichon & Sperazi, 1997). In this way, a supervisor is more likely to be willing to release his or her workers to attend class, encourage learners to use their new skills when they come back on the job, visit the class as a guest speaker, and generally serve as a champion for the program.

Learners likewise need to see the program as relevant to their interests; otherwise they are not likely to invest themselves in making the program work (Evaluation Research, 1992; Sarmiento & Kay, 1990). Program planners should realize that workers want opportunities to advance professionally and personally. Others point out that if a truly high-performance organization requires proactive thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving at all levels, as well as workers with an ability to handle a wide range of job tasks, then these skills need to be a focus of its basic skills program (Sarmiento, 1991).

An additional advantage that proponents cite is that learners bring lots of expertise to their jobs, developed in previous jobs or in their lives

outside work. Some job-specific programs ignore workers' prior knowledge and abilities and assume instead that workplace education should be a mechanism for getting learners to memorize procedures and information developed by others (Gowen, 1992).

Disadvantages

Some believe that involving larger numbers of stakeholders in making decisions about the program is too time-consuming. This more broadly collaborative approach may also subject the planning process to too much debate and possible conflict about what goals to focus on and how best to meet them.

Another concern is that the approach is naïve, since many believe that relationships among employers, workers, and workers' labor unions are inherently adversarial. Attempts to build collaboration, some feel, are doomed at best to token cooperation. Concern has been voiced that inviting workers to identify and solve problems can lead to conflict. Workplace education programs should stay focused on having workers build the skills they need to carry out procedures defined by employers.

Make Informed Decisions

The above summary of workplace basic education's purposes and approaches shows that considerable thought and work have gone into building models that others can learn from and adapt. Yet government support for workplace basic education has declined in the past decade, and the pool of available experienced workplace educators and resource materials has shrunk.

Although our nation has largely been ignoring the issue of workplace basic skills education for the past decade, the need for a well-equipped workforce will not go away. It will be up to a new generation of adult educators, employers, union representatives, pol-

icymakers, and workers to decide how best to deal with the basic skills needs of our current workforce. As a first step, we should take the time to study the various approaches and models that have already been developed. 

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Paul Jurmo teaches courses on adult literacy at New York University. He also recently taught at City College of New York and has served as a consultant to the Transport Workers Union, Rutgers University's John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, and the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission. ❖

Education Leads to Investments

Numeracy and Financial Planning Lessons Motivated DC Workplace Ed Students to Form an Investment Club

by Cheryl Jackson

“How much asphalt is needed to fill a pothole that measures 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 inches?” This is the type of math problem encountered by asphalt workers who participate in the District Department of Transportation’s (DDOT) Paving the Way to Success Workplace Education Program in Washington, DC. The program is a partnership between Literacy Volunteers of America-National Capital Area and Academy of Hope, who have a joint workplace education grant funded by the State Education Agency and DDOT. These workers are responsible for paving streets, alleys, and sidewalks and for installing speed bumps in the District of Columbia. Since May, 2003, the Workplace Education Program has helped employees improve their math, reading, writing, and job skills and also acquire or improve skills in other areas of their lives. The employees now participating in the program have been working for DDOT for two to five years.



In addition to figuring out how much asphalt is needed to fill potholes, the workers are now determining personal debt to income ratio, calculating how much they need to save each month for retirement, comparing different types of life insurance to decide how much they need, calculating interest, creating household budgets, and analyzing stock performance. The enlarged range of the employees’ math focus is a result of a financial literacy course taught by Sun

Trust Bank and offered through the State Education Agency’s Literacy Advocate Institute. The Literacy Advocate Institute offers professional development courses for adult education and family literacy practitioners, adult learners, personnel in DC agencies, and the for-profit and nonprofit community in the District of Columbia. After completing the basic financial literacy course, the workers decided to form an investment club, which has required the continuing refinement of their financial math skills.

Five employees, three men and two women, participate in the Workplace Education Program. (Three more men have joined since this article was written.) Their academic levels range from fifth through

12th grades for reading and fourth through eighth for math. Two have completed their tests of General Educational Development (GED) while the other three have not completed high school. The men’s backgrounds include incarceration and drug rehabilitation. One of the women had been working as a telephone technician after participating in a job training program, but took a downward spiral after the suicide of her 14-year-old son. She quit her job and bounced from program to program. Eventually she ended up in Project Empowerment, which is how she got her job with the District Department of Transportation. All of the employees previously participated in various job-training/ welfare-to-work programs in the District of Columbia, such as Project Empowerment or the YWCA’s nontraditional jobs for women program, which led them to their present jobs. They all started at DDOT as temporary workers; all are now permanent employees since participating in the Workplace Education Program. One has been promoted to the lead person of his crew.

Responding to Students’ Interests

How did these employees move from doing the math required for paving asphalt to analyzing stock? DDOT has given the program latitude

Participating Organizations

The workplace literacy project described in this article is a collaboration between Academy of Hope and Literacy Volunteers of America of the National Capital Area. The employer, District Department of Transportation (DDOT), pays for the classes, and the State Education Agency provides the mobile technology unit that the class uses when creating a web site, studying for the GED and commercial driver’s license, and improving reading and writing skills.

Academy of Hope is a community-based organization that provides classes in ABE and preparation for the GED and the External Diploma; the agency also provides workplace education programming. ❖

to help learners meet both workplace and personal goals. On the first day of class, the instructor asked them what they wanted to learn. In addition to routine workplace skills such as filling out forms on the job, writing incident reports and memos, understanding benefits, and other work-related learning pertaining to their present jobs, they were interested in gaining new skills for job advancement, buying homes, planning for retirement, increasing personal cash flow, and making informed decisions about insurance and investments.

The Workplace Education Program class meets two days each week for two hours per day. Initially, the classes began by devoting one day to work-related learning and one day to financial literacy. Workers began their financial literacy learning by reading Robert Kiyosaki's *Rich Dad Poor Dad* in class and discussing his ideas. *Rich Dad Poor Dad* presented new concepts and different ways of thinking about financial literacy. His book served as a catalyst for the group's financial literacy journey.

Idrysis Abdullah, Vice-President of Community Affairs of Sun Trust Bank, donated his time to teach the financial literacy classes. He adjusted the curriculum to the students' interests, and they learned about money flows and asset creation, budgeting and goal setting, insurance and investments, and preparing for home ownership. The financial literacy class started out with a values clarification exercise to help employees determine how they would spend their money given limited resources.

In the money flows and asset creation workshop, they discussed the way money works and is recycled

within a community, building assets, saving money, and how interest makes money grow. They learned to calculate simple and compound interest and to use the Rule of 72, which computes how long it takes money left in an account to double.

In the area of budgeting and goal setting, Abdullah taught workers how to create a budget, establish goals to make purchases, and save a percentage of all income. The class discussed paycheck deductions and learned how to calculate these Abdullah taught a class on different types

of insurance, deductibles, coverage vs. cost, and investments. The workers learned how to calculate the approximate amount of life insurance needed based on family size and the number of dependents. Insurance was a particularly interesting class for the employees, because many had purchased insurance through their employment, but were not sure what type they had purchased. Learning about investments sparked interest in starting an investment club. The students were fascinated with learning about stocks, bonds, mutual funds, money market funds, and certificates of deposits. The last classes addressed preparation for home ownership, which absorbed more class time than any other topic. Nearly all of the students were interested in home ownership. Some of the topics covered during these classes included the benefits of owning a home compared to renting, financing the purchase of a home, the mortgage application process, closing and settle-

ment, home maintenance and repair, preventing foreclosure, and protecting one's home from predatory lending. Students said they felt better prepared to start the home buying process after completing these classes.

Upon completion of the financial literacy classes, one of the employees commented that she liked the hands-on, working knowledge approach to the class. She found the class to be informative and educational and felt inspired to pay more attention to her finances. She also said that she had faced some ugly truths about money and debt. Another employee commented that she had lost track of her personal financial goals, but coming to the financial literacy class had put her back on track. Most participants agreed that they had gained a radically different perspective about personal finances after participating in the class.

Student Initiative

As a result of the financial literacy class, one employee suggested that the class form an investment club. The students embraced the idea, and other individuals were invited to join. The employees agreed that they could invest \$35 a month without hardship, with \$25 going toward investment and \$10 for administrative costs. Each member of the class ordered the book

Starting and Running a Profitable Investment Club from the National Association of Investment Clubs, and this book became the instructional material, along with other information collected from the Internet. A study program is a requirement for a successful investment club program, and so

members had to commit to studying and working to have a successful club. While surprised at the amount of work involved, the employees had



their first informational meeting in May, 2004, and have been meeting monthly since then. They are becoming more knowledgeable about selecting brokers. They are using and learning new math skills when evaluating companies, using stock selection guides, stock comparison guides, and record keeping. They are also acquiring skills in researching information and making presentations.

Most of the investment group members are enrolled in the workplace education program, but other people have also joined. I am a member. We have attended other clubs' meetings and a DC Regional Chapter Director made a presentation to us. We will also be attending classes offered by the DC Regional Chapter of the National Association of Investors Corporation to increase our knowledge. Although all of the tasks can be done manually, we plan on purchasing software to complete the stock selection and comparison guides as well as for the record keeping.

In addition to the investment club, the DDOT employees are completing the development of a web site for the Paving the Way to Success Workplace Education Program and will be presenting on the process at the ProLiteracy Conference. The site will include a page dedicated to financial literacy. (Although still a work in progress, the web site is www.dcadultliteracy.org/ptw.)

Challenges and Motivation

Since the employees are involved in what is defined as a workplace education program, on a couple of occasions work responsibilities have kept them from attending classes. Regular attendance has probably been one of the greatest challenges in



keeping up with projects such as the financial literacy classes. In fact, some classes had to be rescheduled to accommodate employee schedules. As with any adult literacy class, another challenge has been the partici-

pants' varying levels of reading and math skills. However, because the employees are accustomed to working together and assisting each other on the job, they have carried this spirit of cooperation and camaraderie into the classroom.

The difference between teaching math in a workplace education and in a regular adult education class is that in the former employees are highly motivated to study math in the context of their paychecks, getting raises, planning for retirement, balancing personal checkbooks, and other math associated with specific job tasks. In my experience, in more traditional adult education classes, students study math primarily in conjunction with preparation for the GED test, which is never as exciting as contemplating one's next paycheck! 

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About the Author

Cheryl Jackson has 20 years of experience teaching and developing curricula for adult education programs. She is working as a workplace education instructor with the Workplace Literacy Project, a joint venture between the Academy of Hope and Literacy Volunteer of America of the National Capital Area. She also serves as a resource instructor on the State Education Agency's mobile technology unit for adult education practitioners. ❖

Focus on Basics Electronic Discussion List

Focus on Basics electronic discussion list is a forum for discussion about the articles published in *Focus on Basics*. It is a place to converse with colleagues about the themes examined in the publication; to get questions answered and to pose them; to critique issues raised in the publication; and to share relevant experiences and resources.

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How States Approach Workplace Education

by Diane Foucar-Szocki

T*o understand better the role state government can play in supporting and enhancing the provision of workplace literacy programs, Focus On Basics asked me to contact adult education directors in Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia and prepare profiles of their statewide workplace education efforts. Workplace education programs are business/education partnerships that provide work-related basic skills instruction to incumbent workers to help them maintain or advance in their jobs. Workforce education includes work-related adult basic education (ABE), preparation for the tests of General Educational Development (GED), and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) services for adults entering the workforce and dislocated workers preparing for job training or new occupations. Both workforce and workplace education focus on skill development and are increasingly hard to separate. My discussions with each of these state leaders focused on workplace education, but often included workforce education.*

These states are addressing workplace education in a variety of ways. Their efforts focus on creating identity via branding and high-profile products such as skills certificates; enhancing the expertise of providers via professional networks, credentialing, training, and curriculum development; providing financial support through, for example,

grants, tax incentives, and tuition incentives; increasing accessibility via partnerships, brokering, and assessment; and collaborations. These states use a combination of strategies, with specialists, grants, partnerships, and assessment most commonly used. Branding, skill certificates, credentialing, specialists, and assessment seem to offer the most promise. In this article, each state's efforts are reviewed and elements for success are listed and discussed.

State by State Overview

Kentucky

Creating Identity

In 1994, Kentucky established the State of Kentucky Investment in Lifelong Learning (SKILL) initiative to support basic skills training in the workplace. The SKILL initiative has increased awareness on the part of employers and other Workforce Investment Act (WIA) service providers of ABE and has contributed to increased enrollments. There were approximately 51,000 workforce enrollments in 2004. Most recently, Kentucky Adult Education (KAE) established the Workforce Alliance in partnership with the Economic Development Cabinet and Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), which has

extended services to a broader audience of employers.

Along with these continuing efforts to create identity and understanding among educators and employers, Kentucky created the Kentucky Manufacturing Skills Standard Certificate (KMSS) and, most recently, the Kentucky Employability Certificate (KEC). The KEC is issued at the silver and gold level to those adults performing at a level four or better on the WorkKeys assessments in reading for information, locating information, and math (WorkKeys is the American College Testing Service Assessment system for academic skills related to the world of work). To date, more than 2,000 certificates have been awarded. These skills certificates align workforce education with workplace needs and provide employers with an educational credential they recognize and can support through their workplace education offerings.

Enhancing Expertise

In 1994, workforce education associates were hired in Kentucky to link local adult education providers to employers. Five associate positions exist today, with each associate responsible for approximately 20 counties. Each builds networks with human resource managers, chambers of commerce, and

“These skills certificates align workforce education with workplace needs and provide employers with an educational credential they recognize and can support through their workplace education offerings.”

Workforce Investment Boards as avenues to reach employers. (Created by WIA, Workforce Investment Boards are local boards, at least 51 percent of which are comprised by employers that oversee distribution of funds for

workforce development in their area.) Workforce education associates link employers with ABE providers who offer customized, onsite programs, including GED preparation, delivered at or through the workplace by local adult education personnel. In 2004, the associates reported serving 996 companies in 100 counties.

curricula targeted to health-care providers, who are often employers of undereducated adults. SkillMobiles are available to employers on a first-come, first-served basis to meet the continuing education needs of Kentucky's workforce. A SkillMobile schedule is published on the Kentucky Adult Education web site.

everyone know what is expected by employers. The state-funded agencies and employers collaborate to help adults meet the expectations. Taxpayers, employers, and the professional associations share the costs of program development and delivery.

Says Robert Curry, Director, Workforce Investment Division at Kentucky's Department of Adult Education and Literacy, "Workforce Alliance has been successful because we have brought together all the necessary partners. This allows us to maximize and leverage our resources to reach more learners in the workplace." In 2000, Kentucky Adult Education enrolled 50,000 learners in all programs. In 2003, enrollment surpassed 100,000, of whom 40,000 were accounted for by workplace education participants. The goal for 2005 is 115,000 workforce participants.



Providing Support

The Workforce Alliance provides funds to employer/provider partnerships to provide basic skill services to individuals pursuing the KEC or the KMSS. These funds are accessed through an application process often initiated by a workforce education associate. Full-time employees who enter into a learning contract with a local adult education program and earn a GED within one year are eligible for tuition discounts, and employers that provide release time are eligible for tax credits.

Increasing Accessibility

Kentucky Adult Education purchased two mobile units, known as SkillMobiles, equipped with Internet-connected computer labs that provide access to Kentucky's "virtual" adult education learning products, including

Collaborating

Kentucky Adult Education has benefited greatly from statewide political attention, governmental reorganization, and collaborations linking basic skills learning with educational and economic achievement. Through a partnership with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, adult education programs provide WorkKeys assessments and apply to the KCTCS on behalf of learners who have achieved silver or gold level certification. These learners include both incumbent workers in workplaces and other adult learners seeking certification. Thus, any adult eligible for ABE can take the assessments free of charge through adult education centers. Whether learners are working or preparing for work, this standards-based approach helps

Virginia

For more than 25 years, Virginia adult educators have served employers' needs through a series of initiatives. In the 1970s, workplace-based services were supported through direct grants to employers. However, services were often not sustained beyond the funding period. To increase sustainability, grants were made to adult education providers working with employers in their area. This approach, however, revealed that local programs lacked both the necessary skill and motivation to respond to employers' needs. As a result, in 1990 funding was redeployed to create the position of employee development directors (EDD) at five rural community colleges. These five EDDs brokered workplace education programs by explaining their benefits to employers and preparing local adult educators to offer them. Although this EDD-based approach was successful

where implemented, for economic and political reasons funding for statewide implementation, which would have established 22 EDD positions, was not made available.

Enhancing Expertise

In 1996, to meet statewide needs with limited resources, Virginia funded the creation of a central professional development network to prepare and support local adult education programs providing workplace-based services. This entity, the Workforce Improvement Network (WIN) at James Madison University, initiated an affiliation program, certifying workplace program developers and preparing workplace curriculum developers and instructors. Programs and individuals could affiliate without having to become certified. Program Developer certification required an application, with explicit program support for the individual seeking certification, coursework, and completion of a portfolio. As an incentive for program developers to obtain certification, those who did so were provided access to small grants for their programs. By 2000, 40 Virginia adult educators were certified program developers. WIN continues to provide affiliate services including biannual meetings, a bimonthly online newsletter, and expanded web-based courses and certifications through the Workforce Development Campus.

Virginia's current emphasis is on doubling its number of GED completers by December, 2005. WIN is working with 15 education programs, selected by the state as pilot test sites for the *Race to the GED* program, to develop partnerships with health-care providers interested in offering workplace-based GED services. WIN will conduct needs assessment and research, design a cur-

riculum framework, and train programs in how to establish these partnerships with health-care providers.

Providing Support

From 1996 to 2000, both affiliated and certified program developers registered with WIN could obtain financial and marketing support, and training in how to establish or expand workplace-based basic skills programs. Certified program developers received a greater level of support than noncertified program developers. In 2002, despite a pool of more than 50 affiliated and certified program developers, applications for support predominantly came from just 10 to 15 of those programs. To encourage more involvement, contract support was abandoned in favor of larger mini-grants to a smaller number of programs. These grants produced valuable programming and produced greater program innovation. These mini-grants are now administered through the State Office for Adult Education and Literacy. As a result, WIN no longer monitors program initiation, but focuses instead on outreach and expertise development.



Creating Identity

One of WIN's initial tasks was to create a recognizable identity, or "brand," for Virginia's workplace adult educators. This did not happen. Now, however, the Governor's *Education for a Lifetime Initiative*, with its workplace-focused *Race to the GED*

program, is creating a recognizable identity for ABE across the state.

Increasing Accessibility

In 1988, Dr. Shirley Merlin, now a professor emeritus and Director of the Career Enhancement Program at James Madison University, created a mobile ABE unit used by a consortium of poultry industry employers and

James Madison University. In 2004, this mobile unit (the precursor to Kentucky's SkillMobiles) continues to serve employers throughout the Shenandoah Valley. Like Kentucky, Virginia is pursuing a *Career Readiness Certificate*, offering basic skills assessment tests administered at One-Stop Career Development Centers, community colleges, local departments of social services, and other appropriate locations. Basic skills instruction for certification is available in many of these same sites, including workplaces, through local adult education programs.

Collaborating

Race to GED is a collaboration between the Virginia Department of Commerce and Trade and the Department of Education. Dr. Yvonne Thayer, Virginia's State Director of Adult Basic Education, works with her counterparts in several WIA partner agencies to maintain communication. Patty Short, Workforce Development Specialist, links adult education with the Governor's Council for Workforce Development, local Workforce Investment Boards, community colleges, and economic developers. The Virginia Department of Business Assistance and ABE are collaborating to bring more basic skills learning to the workplace, through shared outreach letters and calls to businesses.

Massachusetts

Providing Support

Massachusetts's success in garnering state funds allows for variety in meeting employers' needs. The state has extensive grant and funding programs for adult educators, employers, unions, other education providers, and WIA partners to provide workplace education. Collaboration between the Department of Education and the Department of Labor (now the Department of Workforce Development) began in 1985, and "laid a great foundation, providing good formative and summative data to inform workplace education policy," according to Bob

Bickerton, Massachusetts Adult Education Director.

Andrea Perrault, Workforce Development Specialist, reports that after many years of trial and error, a procedure has been implemented through which workplace programming grants are awarded through a two-stage process. First, local programs, in partnership with employers and unions, apply for funding for planning grants (up to \$6,000). The resulting plan for service delivery for classes at the worksite is then submitted for approval and can be funded for up to \$60,000 per year. In recent years many more applicants have sought funds than could be funded.

These workplace programs must run a minimum of 34 weeks; establish leveled, four-hour classes per week; and ensure that the partnership remains intact for the duration of the grant (up to three years for mid- to large-sized businesses, up to five years for smaller businesses). A planning and evaluation team must be constituted to create a strategy for institutionalizing the program. Each grant requires employers to contribute cash and in-kind matching funds.

Another workplace education initiative in this system is Building Essential Skills through Training (BEST), initiated in 2002 through an interagency partnership spearheaded by the Governor's Office, and continued in 2003 using WIA incentive monies. This year, BEST makes funds available to partnerships interested in participating in industry-focused education and training initiatives through their local Workforce Investment Boards.

Enhancing Expertise

This year, the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES, www.sabes.org), the Massachusetts professional development system, is focusing on Workplace and Workforce Education, at the request of the State Director. Each region of the state has a Workforce Development Specialist hired for his or her specialized expertise.

Collaborating

In Massachusetts, as in other states, the need for adult educators to work with other educators who serve adults is increasing. Workforce needs have driven employers to turn to community colleges and universities—where learner basic skills or preparation for earning a high school credential are the initial focus—for workplace-based services. Adult educators are best prepared to meet the basic skill needs of learners, but must recognize that those learners are working and employers are seeking support through other agencies. In 2005–2006, competitive grants will “encourage AE providers to work more in tandem with the workforce development system, including community colleges, and will strongly encourage providers out of the linear sequence model of service provision, thus getting players more closely connected to one another to meet the needs of the learner,” explains Bickerton.

Other collaborative strategies used in Massachusetts include the outstationing of ABE program staff in career centers to assist in the intake, assessment, and referral of career center customers to ABE programs. In addition, the Massachusetts Department of Education allocates funds to the career centers to support their overall operation in serving the needs of undereducated adults, based on the numbers of undereducated adults in the regions as defined by the latest census data. Also, the DOE collaborates with the chief elected official in each region to determine which among the ABE providers in the region is best suited to serve on the Workforce Investment Board.



Connecticut Enhancing Expertise

In Connecticut's 25-year history of serving employer, worker, and union basic skills needs, service provision was largely fragmented and conducted on ad hoc basis until 2002. In that year

Connecticut used its \$300,000 portion of Connecticut's Workforce Investment Act incentive grant to create the *Workforce Education Initiative Model*. According to Maureen Wagner of the Connecticut Department of

Education, “we are trying to create a system from our ad hoc successes by creating a statewide approach that supports the local structure, gets regions to work together, and gets information to employees.” Each local ABE program was asked to commit to being either a direct workplace service provider or a cooperator. Twenty local education agencies, well distributed across the state, agreed to be direct workplace service providers. These providers received training in workplace learning needs assessment, curriculum and instruction, and program implementation and assessment, with a stipend provided to those who participated.

In addition to providing training, the CDOE hired the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to create the *Workforce Learning System* as an assessment tool for use with workplace-based programming. In 2005, the state's Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN) will provide training and support to the identified direct workplace service providers.

Providing Support

A small grants program supports the direct workplace service providers

as they respond to employers' needs. Employer contributions depend on the size and scope of the program and participant eligibility.

Collaborating

With a larger number of ABE programs capable of responding to employers' needs, the CDOE is working more closely with WIA Title I programs to build collocation relationships within the workforce development system. Under collocation arrangements, services such as intake assessment, counseling, and classes are provided at One Stop Centers. Collocation also includes an emphasis on moving classroom-based activities into other settings, such as workplaces. (See the article on page 37 for an example of classes held in a nontraditional setting.)

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is in its sixth year of sustained support for workplace ABE programs through the Pennsylvania Workforce Improvement Network (PA WIN, www.pawin.org), a project of the Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE). Penn State University's Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy coordinates PA WIN, an initiative focused on developing ABE providers' capacity to work effectively with employers to offer customized basic skills instruction to incumbent workers. The goal of PA WIN is to position ABE providers to receive funds directly from employers to support basic skills instruction for their workers, thus bringing in additional funds for basic education and serving additional adult learners. ABE providers affiliated with PA WIN also are often key contacts within their regions for their local Workforce Investment Boards and One Stops (known as *CareerLinks* in Pennsylvania).

Marketing to and negotiations with employers as well as curriculum and assessment are grounded in the

Bureau's *Work-Based Foundation Skills Framework*. ABE initially provided funding for the creation of this framework through a WIA, Title II state leadership grant to the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy. Its development, which extends Equipped for the Future (a standards-based approach to education), was completed with input from Pennsylvania's former Workforce Investment Board's incumbent worker committee. The framework's purpose is to build a common language across agencies regarding ABE and its role in the larger context of workforce development. Many of Pennsylvania's *CareerLinks* use this framework and its products as a resource in connecting with adults seeking services and with ABE providers in their communities.

Rose Brandt, Director of the Bureau of ABLE, says, "Pennsylvania has recently established the Workforce Education Research Center (WERC) with the goal of providing contextualized adult basic and literacy education services. The context, in this case, is the workplace, and addresses learners' needs and goals to be successful on the job. Often, literacy is seen as a step in the education process that comes before the contextualized learning [that is] necessary for the workplace. In fact, developing literacy skills within the work environment [represents a more effective] model for the development of both literacy skills and workplace skills and knowledge."

The Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy coordinates the WERC (www.pawerc.org), which will continue the work of PA WIN with incumbent workers but will also assist ABE providers in using the *Work-Based Foundation Skills Framework* to develop classroom instruction focused on preparing adults for entry or re-entry to the workplace. Barbara Van Horn, Senior Research Assistant and Co-Director of the Institute at Penn State, adds, "the WERC provides ABE providers... an identity within Pennsylvania's workforce development system. This identity

can help ABE providers secure their 'places at the table' as viable workforce trainers."

Enhancing Expertise

PA WIN provides professional development opportunities and technical assistance to ABE programs who affiliate with PA WIN to serve incumbent workers and to ABE programs interested in building their skills in providing high-quality work-based instruction in their classrooms. WERC staff provides training for interested ABE providers, while regional technical assistants with experience working with employers to offer customized work-based basic skills instruction provide technical assistance as needed throughout the state.

Collaborating

Michael Tucci, Adult Basic Education Advisor for Workforce Development in ABLE, reports that "literacy is a major component of Pennsylvania's workforce development strategy, with adult education recognized as a key player. The PA Department of Labor and Industry, which is responsible for statewide workforce development coordination and collaboration, has pulled together all statewide workforce related agencies to develop a planned approach to addressing the problems and issues we face in Pennsylvania. The Bureau of ABLE is part of that statewide effort. With an aging population, lower higher education completion rates, and high out-migration, incumbent and unemployed worker development is essential. In 1998, the Bureau of ABLE aligned its 150 provider agencies with Pennsylvania's 22 local Workforce Investment Board areas. As a result, 22 adult education workforce development coalitions were formed. State leadership monies were used to form and support coalition development, and each of the local coalitions nominated adult education administrators to serve on the local Workforce Investment Boards, where decisions are made about both workforce and

workplace education needs and responses. One of the primary coalition goals is for all One-Stop partners to become aware of the range of adult education services, including PA WIN, that are available to One-Stop customers and incumbent workers.”

Florida

Creating Identity

In the late 1990s, Florida worked directly with employers to create a curriculum framework known as FLORIDA WORKS. This framework serves as the basis for all basic skills workplace education. The curriculum’s existence prompted employers and individuals throughout Florida to recognize the need and stimulated a demand for workplace education. More recent initiatives, including JUST READ FLORIDA and the Sunshine State Standards, guide education and remind employers and employees about the basic skills services available throughout the state.

Enhancing Expertise

Florida has focused its efforts on curriculum framework design, development, and implementation of FLORIDA WORKS. When the curriculum was introduced, all ABE educators in the state were trained in how to use and evaluate the curriculum. Online support is available and regional specialists assist in customizing materials for use at the local level. Additional curriculum frameworks, such as ESOL, vocational preparation, mathematics, and reading, integrate workplace-based activities for use in workplace education programs focused on these specialized content areas. Regional literacy resource centers throughout the state serve as the dissemination and development source for all efforts.

Collaboration

Education in Florida from kindergarten through doctoral level is overseen

by a single Board of Education. All educators, including adult basic educators, work within the same agency and are governed by the same board. “This unification has created a greater sense of shared purpose and greater interaction among and between programs, especially community colleges, universities, and adult education,” says Robert Wofford, State Director of Adult Basic Education. “With all of education working together, more time and attention can be dedicated

“The curriculum’s existence prompted employers and individuals throughout Florida to recognize the need and stimulated a demand for workplace education.”

to other Workforce Investment Act partners such as Social Services and Employment.”

Increasing Access

Throughout Florida, WIA One-Stop centers are most often located within the ABE centers, where intake assessment can help refer individuals, where appropriate, to other agencies involved in providing workforce-related services. This linkage among agencies also leads employers to seek workplace services for incumbent workers.

Systems Considerations

Creating Identity

Increased capacity and capability are of little use if agencies, employers, legislators, policymakers, and potential learners do not know what services are available and where to get them. In Kentucky, Florida, and Virginia, where the marketing of ABE services, and workplace education in

particular, is part of a long-term strategic plan, enrollments are on the rise.

Sector-focused program development, like Virginia’s Health Care Initiative for *Race To GED* or Kentucky’s workforce education-focused efforts, along with effective marketing, help reach more working adults by outlining benefits for these sector-specific employers who employ large numbers of undereducated adults.

Proficiency as a worker is important to both the incumbent and the new employee and the high school diploma does not always predict that proficiency with accuracy. In creating skill certificates that workers can earn in addition to the GED, employers and adult basic educators reach an agreement about what “basic” skills are and about their role in the workplace. This shared understanding among employers, educators, economic developers, and potential

learners creates an interest in providing more “learning at work” for the basic-skills-level employee, whether or not that employee has a high school credential. The task of helping employers determine what proficiency looks like and what skills are needed to attain it is the point at which workforce and workplace education meet and must begin.

Collaborating

All these ABE leaders reported the need for stronger, more collaborative relationships among and between agencies at the local, state, and national level. In Massachusetts, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, and Pennsylvania, where ABE has enjoyed the support of the Governor’s office, progress has been made. However, changes in administration do occur and support must be sustained. Thus, institutionalizing positions, programs, and relationships becomes essential. For example, Florida’s K-20 Department of Education, Virginia’s *Race to the GED*, the Kentucky Man-

ufacturing Skills Standard Certificate, Pennsylvania's Workforce Education Research Center, Connecticut's Workforce Education Initiative, and Massachusetts' many grant programs are likely to endure because they were systematically created and endorsed not only by adult educators but by a broader range of constituencies.

Accurate data are the basis for accurate accountability. "Accurate data are critical to evaluating our work and measuring our progress," says Reecie Stagnolia, Associate Vice President for Kentucky Adult Education. "The WIA One Stop system helps coordinate services for adults, matching the distinctive strengths of each agency with local and community needs. Relationships across government, nonprofit agencies, and business sectors do matter and they deserve whatever attention and effort are necessary to make them work."

Providing Support

Not surprisingly, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Florida, where state funding is greater than federal funding, report sustained and measurable progress in basic skills workplace education. These states offer more workplace programs to more employers; have more learners completing identified certifications,

including the GED; and more learners advancing to postsecondary education. However, the leaders in each of these states were quick to point out that tenacity and collaboration fueled funding. Approaches that simultaneously address the needs of the employer and the adult learner, as well as the concerns of the policymaker, lead to greater success. Thus, while more state and local ABE money seems to correlate with more services and greater progress, this enhanced capability is furthered by cooperative relationships across agencies where everyone is seeking the best for all concerned.

Enhancing Expertise

Increased capacity can only be filled if the capability of the adult educator includes the specialized skills necessary to work with employers and employees in the workplace. Meeting the needs of individual learners in the traditional classroom model is but one way to provide basic skills education. In Florida, and increasingly in Virginia, curriculum drives instruction. In Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Connecticut professional networks exist to develop and sustain expertise. Preparation is essential for adult educators moving out into the community to meet the needs of up to thousands of individuals through workplace-based programming and sector-focused curriculum. Those states where professional development is systematically available create talent to respond to employers' needs.

Increasing Accessibility

Workplace education varies considerably in focus, delivery models, duration, and outcomes. Massachusetts' ABE Director Bickerton requires "programs of substance" where contact

time is at least 60 hours, so that significant progress can be achieved. Other workplace programs focus narrowly on a computational skill such as algebra or ratios, or reading tasks such as locating information for a target population in that workplace. Florida brings a variety of curricula to the workplace and Kentucky has its SkillMobiles. Virginia is currently focusing on GED attainment and relating GED skills attainment to workplace accomplishment. Whatever approach is used, these leaders recognize that adult educators must be prepared to provide their basic skills expertise in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. Responding to the work context and meeting expectations help sustain programs over time. The more workers are served the stronger the workforce, the workplace, and the overall economy.

Conclusion

Today, the majority of Americans work outside the home. Literacy is a moving target, always influenced by politics and commerce. ABE leadership can look to the states profiled here for effective, systematic strategies that provide appropriate support, create identity, enhance expertise, and build collaborative relationships to increase learner access to programming. These are both the means and the ends of workplace education. By increasing both the capacity and capability of adult educators to respond to the learning needs of employers and employees, we are promoting the value of learning and extending the reach of our profession into new arenas where our services are desperately needed. These states are part of the vanguard. 

About the Author

Diane Foucar-Szocki is a professor of Adult Education/Human Resource Development and Director of the Workforce Improvement Network at James Madison University. She is also a member of the National Institute for Literacy's Workforce Collection Core Knowledge Group. ❖

Web Sites for Featured States

Kentucky:

adulthood.state.ky.us/index.htm

Connecticut:

www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/adult/index.htm

Massachusetts:

www.doe.mass.edu/acls/default.htm

www.sabes.org

Pennsylvania:

www.pdehighered.state.pa.us/higher/site/default.asp

www.pawin.org

Virginia:

www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Adult/vawin.jmu.edu

Florida:

www.firn.edu/doe/workforce/adult_ed.htm

Our Own “Crossroads Café”

Small companies can rarely make workplace education feasible. Collaboration across businesses made this pilot work.

by **Andy Tyskiewicz, Aileen Halloran, & Alpha Nicholson**

Workplace education is often unconventional in its location, and its content is tailored to the individual workplace. Classes might be in a warehouse, a company conference room, or in a secure area of a defense industry factory. In this example, classes were held in the small back room of a tiny café in New Britain, Connecticut. The students were employed in several different businesses in the community. What they shared was a common first language (Polish) and a strong desire to improve their English. This English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class was unique in that it brought together students from several firms, which individually did not have enough students or resources to justify having their own classes, and gave them the opportunity to learn some English at a time and place convenient for them all.

Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) is a Regional Education Service Center serving 35 school districts in the Hartford, Connecticut, area. Within CREC, the Division of Community Education, Training and Employment Services provides adult basic education (ABE) and ESOL classes to adults in the capital area. We funded this class with monies received through Connecticut’s new Workforce Initiative, which provided minigrants

from federal Incentive Funds received by the Connecticut State Department of Education for meeting National Reporting System (NRS) goals (NRS is an outcome-based reporting system for the state administered, federally-funded adult education program). We applied for the minigrant with the intent of piloting a collaborative concept for small businesses that need ESOL instruction in the workplace.

New Britain is a midsized city of about 75,000 people located in central Connecticut. According to the 2000 Census, about 20 percent of the total population is of Polish ancestry, making it by far the largest ethnic group in the city. With a long history of welcoming Polish immigrants, New Britain has had many restaurants, stores, churches, and agencies either catering to or owned by Polish families. The continuing growth of its Polish community gives the city an authentically ethnic, European atmosphere. On some of New Britain’s streets Polish is more commonly heard than English, so locating a class in one of these neighborhoods made sense.

Unique Opportunity

The grant money provided a unique opportunity for employers. When we applied for the grant, three small businesses in the neighborhood had committed to sending students,

but as the word spread a few more students joined from other businesses in the community; we admitted others on a space-available basis. Class was scheduled for 90 minutes twice a week, for a total of 27 hours of instruction. Class days and time were chosen to accommodate students’ work schedules and the café owner who volunteered to host the class in the café’s back room. He filled in for the waitress while she was in class and often listened in to lessons between serving customers. While not an ideal classroom, it made up for its drawbacks with charm, accessibility, and the opportunity it gave students to practice some “real life” skills, such as ordering in a restaurant and following directions in the neighborhood.

Eight students, their desks, and a small chalkboard filled the room to capacity, but no one complained. Being in plain view in the café lent an air of informality to the lessons. While the students were not distracted by the café patrons, the class may have been a distraction to the customers, or at least a curiosity. Class

“Finding common ground among café workers, satellite dish installers, and auto body mechanics was not easy.”

did get noisy at times, as the students struggled to understand new concepts and then explain to those who were slower in grasping new vocabulary.

Creating a curriculum to meet the needs of such a diverse group of learners was another challenge. Finding common ground among café workers, satellite dish installers, and auto body mechanics was not easy. So, after some discussion and informal needs assessments with those involved, we agreed to provide instruction on basic communication in the workplace, customer

service, and employment-related vocabulary, such as insurance and safety. We also included some basic skills such as banking and following directions, which all the students needed.

In the beginning, it was difficult to assess the students' actual abilities because they often relied on each other to translate. Testing, although not welcomed by the students, was required by the grant so we did conduct pre- and post-course testing using Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) instruments. Having only nine weeks of classes, we knew gains would be minimal but we also believed that it was important to show progress in a more tangible way for the students. As is often the case, they did want to know the results and were impressed with even minimal gains.

Since the students' abilities ranged from NRS high beginner to high intermediate and they had expressed the desire to practice reading and writing as well as speaking, we chose activities that could benefit all the students in a multilevel class. Initially, they were reluctant to speak in English, especially since it was much easier to ask a classmate to explain in Polish. But the students soon overcame this reluctance and began to ask questions in English as they worked through dialogues and filling out forms. We used banking forms (account applications, checks, deposit and withdrawal slips) and business forms (catalog orders, telephone messages, memos, fax sheets, e-mails, pay stubs) for both reading and writing practice. Although they labored in reading the instructions, students' familiarity with the structure of the forms made completing them relatively easy. Using forms from their respective jobs made the lessons more authentic and relevant for the students and all of them seemed to enjoy learning new vocabulary from the occupations of their fellow students.

Typical Challenges

As is common with many ESOL classes, we lost several of the original

eight students along the way. One returned to Poland and another stopped coming because of a heavy workload. We did, however, pick up two new students due to our location in the neighborhood and word of mouth. Although the local adult education center offers ESOL classes, all our students felt that the classroom-café suited their needs better. Class time was adjusted for their work schedules, the class was very small, and they felt comfortable in the café, often getting a snack before or after class and practicing a little more English before they walked home.

While the employers and students all considered the class successful in improving students' ability to communicate in English, we had to deal with many of the same problems found in more traditional classes. Although the initial grant application had specified 30 hours of instruction, which is fewer than most traditional ABE classes, whether in a center or in the workplace, we were only able to provide 27 hours before the deadline. The students all said they learned a lot, and those who persevered until the class finished did show some test score gains. All of the students admitted that they spoke mostly Polish at home and often spoke Polish at work, so the ESOL class represented one of their few chances to practice English. Three hours a week was not enough for significant improvement. Attendance was good but only one student attended every class, while the others averaged between 15 and 18 hours. The café was a charming place, but its use as a classroom required some creativity on our part, since we could use only a small blackboard and had virtually no open floor space.

The Model

In terms of a workplace model, ours had some advantages. Small employers with only a few students were able to give their employees the opportunity to attend ESOL class locally. The curriculum was customized, and the location and time

were arranged to fit the students' schedules. Their cultural bond made the students very comfortable with each other from the start and supportive, patient, and helpful to classmates. However, using only English was a hurdle, especially in the early classes.

The Future

We are exploring strategies for continuing the class. Sharing costs among employers holds some promise. Another option may be to ask employers to purchase slots for interested students, and for us to augment those revenues with state funds. Finding a foundation or agency to provide funding is another possibility, especially if the project emphasizes the same kind of flexibility we incorporated into our class. The location and environment were indeed a plus, enhancing the appeal of the class for our students and supporting their persistence throughout the term. It was our own "Crossroads Café." We might even be able to expand to the Polish deli next door, and add shopping for sausages and pickles to the curriculum. 

About the Authors

Andy Tyskiewicz has 25 years experience in adult basic education as a teacher, trainer, and administrator. He is Division Director of Community Education for the Capitol Region Education Council in Hartford. Former chair of the board of the New England Literacy Resource Center, he is now professional development chair of the Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE).

Aileen Halloran is a certified ESOL teacher and has spent many years teaching in all areas of adult basic education. She currently works at the Capitol Region Education Council in the Division of Community Education providing training and technical assistance to adult education teachers and working in the community to set up new programs.

Alpha Nicholson brings his background as a lawyer to the ESOL classes he teaches. He has taught ESOL classes in the workplace and most recently spent the summer teaching ESOL to middle school teachers in China. ❖

BLACKBOARD

- **“Issues in Improving Immigrant Workers’ Language Skills,”** by Miriam Burt, December, 2003, is an NCLE digest. The author reviews the research from 1992 to 2003 on outcomes in workplace ESOL instruction, identifies five issues to be addressed in improving the English language skills of immigrant workers, and provides suggestions for addressing these issues. It’s available at www.cal.org/ncle/digests/workplaceissues.htm
- The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute recently published **Getting to Work: A Report on How Workers with Limited English Proficiency Can Prepare for Good Jobs.** The report is a study of training and workforce development programs in manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and hospitality that assist limited English proficient (LEP) and immigrant workers get, keep, and advance in good jobs. It is available to download from www.workingforamerica.org. Request a hard copy from Jean Pierce at 202-974-8123 or at info@workingforamerica.org for \$5.00 each.
- **Tennessee ESOL in the Workplace, A Training Manual** prepares both program supervisors and instructional staff to launch successful workplace initiatives. It’s available at cls.coe.utk.edu/pdf/esol_workplace/

[Tenn_ESOL/in_the_Workplace.pdf](#)

- **Bridging the Gap: Best Practices for Instructing Adults Who Are Visually Impaired and Have Low Literacy Skills** is an online course offered free to all professionals interested in improving their understanding of issues faced by adults who are visually impaired and have low literacy skills. The American Foundation for the Blind National Literacy Center designed this program, available at www.afb.org/btgregister.asp. For more information contact Tina Tucker, American Foundation for the Blind, at 212-502-7781.
- **In-Sites Annotated Bibliography for Workplace Literacies**, by Sue Folinsbee and Judy Hunter, (2002), includes annotations of articles and books on research on workplace literacy and learning and related writing on aspects of literacy as social practice. It can be downloaded from www.nald.ca/insites/annotatd.htm
- The **Work-Based Learning Project** is a web site that provides the research, best practices, tools, tips, and learning communities needed to meet the needs of employers, unions, workplace educators and trainers, and officials at the state and local levels responsible for workforce development. Available at www.work-basedlearning.org/index.cfm
- The **National Institute for Literacy’s Workplace Literacy Discussion List** is a forum

for adult educators working or interested in workplace literacy and workforce education to discuss issues such as marketing, funding, program design, instruction, curricula, assessment, evaluation, staff training, research, and policy. To subscribe, go to www.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/discussions.html.

- **The National Institute for Literacy Workforce Education Special Collection** demonstrates the value of workforce learning, fosters and promotes the development of high-quality workforce education programs, provides guidelines for planning and supporting these programs, and supports ongoing communication and collaboration among stakeholders. This project can be found at worklink.coe.utk.edu/
- In **“Why Do Companies Provide Workplace Education Programs?”** by Alec Levenson, in NCSALL’s *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Volume 4*, the author reviews what is known about company-provided training and notes implications for future practice and research. A summary of the chapter is available at ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/ann_rev/v4_c3.html. The book is available from Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, www.erlbaum.com/shop/tek9.asp?pg=products&specific=0-8058-4629-8

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■ NCSALL works to improve the quality of practice in adult basic education programs nationwide through basic and applied research; by building partnerships among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners; and through dissemination of research results. A joint effort of World Education, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Portland State University, Rutgers University, and the Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, NCSALL is funded by the US Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

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Research Methods for Studying ABE ESOL

Populations, by Eleanor Drago-Severson. This report discusses questions of methodological and practical importance encountered by the NCSALL Adult Development research team in their study, *Toward a New Pluralism in ABE/ESOL Classrooms: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"* (NCSALL Reports #19). The team's research methods and interpretive techniques are explored, with a focus on the challenges encountered and strategies used to overcome them. The appendices provide the survey instruments used by the researchers. ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/op_drago-severson.pdf

Summaries of Papers Presented at 20th Annual Rutgers Invitational Symposium on Education (RISE) by Lisa Soricone.

This document is comprised of summaries of 14 papers presented at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education's RISE conference, whose theme was "Toward Defining and Improving Quality in Adult Basic Education: Issues and Challenges." Held October 23-24, 2003, the event focused on the challenges of defining what constitutes a quality adult basic and literacy education system. (The full conference papers will be released in 2006.) ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/risesummary.html

Important Resources on Literacy for

Libraries. Compiled by NCSALL, and based on a survey of librarians, this list provides information on key resources for collections on adult literacy and learning. The resources are organized by three audience categories (learners, teachers/tutors, and program directors/researchers); within each audience category, resources are further subdivided by topic. It also has an order form that libraries can use to order all the NCSALL resources listed, at a special discounted rate. ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/libraryliteracy.html

NCSALL Books

Becoming Adult Learners: Principles and Practices for Effective Development, by Eleanor Drago-Severson. Published by Teachers College Press. Stemming from research conducted by NCSALL's Adult Development Team, this book focuses on the team's examination of the experiences of adult learners at a workplace learning site. Readers of *Focus on Basics* can order this book from NCSALL for \$18 a copy (paper), a 35% discount off the publisher's list price. Contact Caye Caplan at ccaplan@worlded.org or 617-482-9485 to order your copy.

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