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CAREER PATHWAY OPTIONS

Student needs and availability vary. Local resources and services vary. As a result, there are a number of options for helping adult learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become college and career ready and qualify for high demand jobs. Here are some examples.

TIER I: BEGINNING READER OR ESOL UP TO SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE LEVEL OR MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES: INTEGRATING THE FOLLOWING INTO EXISTING ABE AND ESL LEARNING PLANS:

- Contextualized reading, vocabulary, and math around the five to ten high demand job clusters in the service area
- Soft skills (SCANS) integrated into existing ABE and ESL learning
- Career awareness – learning what specific jobs are available in the region
- Career exploration – learning what reading, math and soft skill levels are required and what those people do
- Self-assessment – helping the student identify which of those skills she/he already has
- Career planning – learning what a student needs to learn to prepare for those jobs

TIER II: SIXTH GRADE AND UP

- Contextualized Bridge:
 - Highly contextualized class leading to transition to community college occupational program
 - e.g. Virginia's career bridge GED & Hospitality or GED & Health
 - <http://www.valrc.org/resources/hospitality/index.html>
 - <http://www.valrc.org/resources/healthcare/index.html>
- Linked Classes
 - Students enrolled in 1) a contextualized adult education class as well as 2) an occupational training class leading to an industry recognized certificate
 - Teachers confer to provide for continuity, sequence and integration of learning/instruction
- Integrated education and training
 - Adult education and occupational teachers team teach leading to an industry recognized certificate.

Many rural, multi-level classes are limited to Tier I options. Conversely, concentrations of populations have large enough numbers of adults with similar interest and goals to allow Tier II options.

Discussion:

Discussions about “career pathways” often assume a reference to an “I-BEST” type program where team instruction is provided by an adult education basic skills instructor and an occupational skills instructor. The basic skills (reading, math, vocabulary) are couched in the occupational context making it easier to teach because the basic skills are related to the occupation. The occupational skill development is easier because the students have the basic skills (reading, math, vocabulary) to support the occupational learning. Soft Skills (SCANS skills) are introduced throughout along with career awareness, career exploration, and career planning. Such a learning situation is close to ideal.

That “integrated education and training model” requires proximity to a community college or vocational center which has the occupation teacher and equipment on site. It also assumes a population density sufficient to have a large enough cohort of undereducated, under prepared adults who have an interest in that occupation.

Other options:

Not all adult education locations have proximity to occupational teachers and equipment. Not all have a large enough cohort of like-students. Evenso, career pathway work can still be used to prepare adults.

Tier I and Multi-level classes

What if you teach a multi-level class in a rural area or in a satellite class in a city or suburban area. You have ten to fifteen students, all on different levels many of whom want to improve their employment.

Likewise, what if you teach lower level students below the sixth to eighth grade level who are not ready for integrated education and training options.

There is hope.

For those students, you can “infuse” careers into the existing learning plans—you do not need to throw out what you are doing now, you simply infuse careers into the learning. Here are some examples:

- Contextualized instruction around high demand jobs:
 - Your workforce board or Labor Market Information (LMI) system can identify the five to ten high demand job clusters in your service area—that means these are job clusters (e.g. building trades, public health) that hold promise for entry level jobs as well as jobs with family sustaining incomes.
 - ONET and other labor sources (e.g., <http://www.mynextmove.org/>) can identify the math, reading, and vocabulary related to each cluster and the jobs therein.

- Ideally you would have employers (trade advisory groups at the community college or workforce board) validate those skills and abilities.
- Use those contextual examples and integrate them into your student’s learning plan
 - You are going to teach root words, prefixes, and suffixes anyway, so use those contexts; the same with math.
- Soft Skills
 - Adult Educators have always taught problem solving and critical thinking. Now we add those and other soft or work readiness skills in the contexts of those high demand clusters (see Michigan’s *Preparing Workers* free materials).
- Career Awareness, Exploration, Assessment and Planning
 - Many of the jobs in the world of work today are unfamiliar to our students. They know nurse, carpenter, and welder. They do not know phlebotomist, SPS control, etc. (Career Awareness)
 - Using ONET resources and *My Next Move* (above) resources, students can learn about those jobs, the reading math and English required and what those people do. (Career Exploration).
 - They can assess their current skills against those they find in those high demand jobs. (Self Assessment)
 - They can plan how they attain the skills they need for the clusters they like. (Career Planning)
- Classroom Organization
 - Organize your class so that there is a twenty minute group discussion session each night or every other night. These group discussions enable soft skill development as well as career awareness and exploration.
 - Tell students that in order to pass the GED ®, they have to be able to find and use information, understand systems, and become proficient in other soft skills.

We know from John Comings research on student persistence, group activities/project learning builds a “sense of community” and supports student persistence. We know that problem solving, critical thinking, using resources and the like are important for passing the GED and for learning new concepts. Structuring classes to include group activity/project learning has any number of benefits for both multi-level classes as well as lower level ABE or ESOL classes.

Other Tier II Options:

In addition to the integrated education and training option with team teaching, there are other Tier II options for adult secondary classes.

Contextualized Bridge: One option is to build a firm bridge between the adult education class and the next step—the occupational training classes at the community college or tech center. The best examples are the Virginia GED ® and Hospitality curriculum and their GED ® and Health curriculum. The content of these bridge courses are highly contextualized to the occupation. Upon completion of this contextualized GED ® bridge class, the students are highly qualified to enter the occupational training program. Contextualized bridge requires a cohort of students with similar goals and interests.

Linked Classes: Although they are rare, it is possible for a student to be enrolled in an upper level ABE or adult secondary class in an adult education program while also enrolled in an occupational training program at the tech center or community college—a program that does not require a high school equivalency. Through a sometimes informal arrangement, the two instructors collaborate so that the adult education instructor uses contexts from that occupation and the occupation instructor reinforces the basic skills.

The IDEAL WORLD of Sequential Bridges: The perfect world includes a series of bridge classes beginning with lower level ABE or ESOL that integrates the high demand job cluster basic skills, soft skills, and career exploration that leads to a first step Contextualized Bridge class (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant) that leads to employment as a CNA and the next Contextualized Bridge class (e.g., Licensed Practical Nurse) that leads to employment as an LPD and the next Contextualized Bridge class (e.g., Register Nurse) that leads to employment as an RN.