

A Rookie's First Time to the MPAEA Conference
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I was asked to attend the MPAEA 2014 Conference in Santa Fe, NM as one of the representatives from Nevada. I did not know what to expect, yet I was excited to meet other ABE professionals and attend concurrent sessions. I wanted to gather information, listen to problems, solutions, and new ideas in the ABE field.

This year's theme was "Transforming Education" Exceeding the Limits. As ABE professionals, we need to understand that our students go up against different challenges in education and their lives. These challenges are ours to tackle as ABE professionals. It starts with us and attending this conference helped me understand what other challenges educators face and how they step up to the plate and help their students. As I spoke to other educators from different states who teach in various ABE programs, it made me realize that we are all trying to achieve the same goal; which is to assist our students in achieving the highest education as possible that they desire.

I attended a concurrent session (The Complex Issues Underlying Persistence and Learning Gains) presented by Dr. Laura P. Weisel of the TLP Group. I came away from this presentation as a student who had just gained a ton of valuable information. She talked about many factors as to why many adult students are behind in academic/social skills to compete for a life sustaining job. She discussed problems students have with visual and auditory functions, visual stress syndrome, visual processing with and without motor skills, and emotional/social/structural problems. She shared with us that visual stress syndrome could be easy as the lighting in the room being too strong for the eyes of a student or that the color of a test and answer sheet could affect the outcome of a poor score on a test. She suggested to painting the wall from white to a darker color to help lower the brightness in the classroom. Research showed that some students do poorer on tests (test booklet and answer sheet) given to them in black and white than in a color form. Making these changes can help the students with their pathway in going forward in their education and career goals. These changes are some examples that can help learning gains and persistence.

I came away from the MPAEA 2014 Conference well aware that we all (ABE professionals and the students) have a lot of work to do if we are to succeed in what we want to accomplish. It starts with the ABE professionals. I think every ABE professional should attend the MPAEA conference at least once and come away with new knowledge and tools as students do in our classes.

My Impressions as a First Time Attendee at MPAEA 2014
By Brian Dezzani, Community Multicultural Center, csr4572@aol.com

As I packed to get ready for the Mountain Plains Adult Education Association Annual Conference being held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I was excited and eager. I'd been checking the weather for the entire week prior and was pleased to see it was pretty much the same as it was in my home of Las Vegas.

Driving into Santa Fe, my rental car was buffeted by strong winds and freezing snow flurries – Yikes! My light jacket was no match for the freezing weather that awaited the conference-goers. We were assured by the locals that this was extremely unusual. However, it provided us with some beautiful scenery of the snow collecting on the surrounding mountains.

The New Mexico Adult Education Association, (NMAEA) was organizing and hosting the conference; its members were very helpful and ran a very organized event.

I was anxious to attend the preconference seminar of Assisting Struggling Readers and Writers which was an excellent introduction to the Department of Education's LINCS site, (Literacy Information and Communications.) I gathered much useful information and resources to use to help my HSE and adult literacy students with some new and innovative approaches.

Opening day provided us with a keynote speech by Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, the Assistant Secretary of Adult and Vocational Education from Washington, D.C. She gave an inspired speech geared toward the good that adult educators do and the goals the Federal Government has in continued funding and support of adult learners and educators.

The first full day of the conference offered us a myriad of varied and dynamic seminars from which to choose. Everything from Native American Storytelling Techniques to Supporting Students in Drug and Alcohol Recovery.

The wide variety of seminars often posed a dilemma as there were sometimes two conferences I wanted to attend being held at the same time. Overall, I was pleased with the seminars I chose and was able to glean many useful ideas and knowledge from most of the seminars.

One of my favorite seminars was How to Maintain Stable Attendance and Increase Persistence in Your Classroom. There were approximately 30 seats available and about 70 people attended! Obviously this issue spoke to everyone to some degree or another.

The second full day of the conference provided us a keynote speech by Nevada's own Brad Deeds, (Director for Adult education and State High School Equivalency Administrator.)

Brad's engaging and dynamic style energized the audience with his recitation of his history with the MPAEA, and how the association strives to assist and support adult educators and benefits adult learners.

Yet again after the morning ceremonies, I was faced with the conundrum of which seminars to attend. The several I chose all related to the new Hi-SET, TASC and GED tests that were put into place in January of 2014. Again, I was able to gain an abundance of great information that will greatly assist me in my HSE classes.

Aside from the seminars, the great speeches and varied vendors, there was something much more I got from the conference. What did I get? I got a renewed spirit – my pilot light was re-lit! As we know, being an adult educator can be daunting, exhausting and can make one feel burnt-out.

Yes, we are instructors for adult learners, but we also are many other things.

We are social workers looking up resources for the domestically abused and forms of support for the undocumented; we are human resource aides assisting with filling out job applications and finding out information about job fairs; we are life coaches teaching basic social skills and good decision making; we are active listeners for the lonely; we encourage the discouraged and we build self-esteem where there is none.

At the foundation of all these things, we are teaching reading, writing, math and English language skills.

My experience at the MPAEA reinforced one overwhelming fact; we, in a number of small ways, are changing the world one student at a time!