

Using the Foundation Skills Framework for Instruction

Introduction

The success of any curriculum framework or instructional package depends on highly skilled and creative curriculum developers, instructors, facilitators, and trainers to provide an engaging and meaningful learning environment. The Foundation Skills Framework provides the skills and competencies to guide program and curriculum development, delivery, and evaluation. For example, ABLE programs have used the framework for curriculum development in various ways: 1) To identify workplace skills and competencies to address in lesson plans and units in various subject areas or program components; 2) to develop a consistent format and common language for lesson planning; 3) to identify core competencies to address in a program-wide curriculum; and 4) to code available instructional resources to the foundation skills and identify gaps. Pennsylvania's Workforce Improvement Network PA WIN uses the framework to develop, deliver, and evaluate customized basic skills programs that are relevant and meaningful for workers and the employer. The *Exploring Work-Based Foundation Skills Instructional Activities Guide* provides short and easy to use activities and strategies to build background knowledge and provide opportunities for learners to develop foundation skills and competencies. However, the following principles provide important background information to consider before using the framework for instruction.

Contextualized Teaching/Learning Principles

Relevant Context--Contextualized learning develops foundation skills and knowledge in a context that is relevant and meaningful to learners. Using the foundation skills framework, contextualized teaching/learning simulates a workplace environment and embeds work-based skills and knowledge in workplace scenarios, tasks, and activities. The context may focus on a specific workplace (such as in PA WIN programs), or it may focus on preparing for the world of work in general, as is often seen in adult education programs. In either case, learners focus on developing foundation skills, competencies, and knowledge in ways that help them make the connection between what they are doing in the program to applying their skills and knowledge on the job and in their lives.

Active Learning--School-based instruction traditionally focused on the development of skills and knowledge in isolation and often required considerable drill and practice and repetition and recall of facts. While these strategies are still appropriate for developing fluency, contextualized instruction demands more hands-on, active learning where stimulates learners to think, act, and use skills and knowledge as they would in the workplace and in their lives. Learners are not simply passive participants or recipients of learning but active partners in the learning process. Problem-based learning approaches are often used. For example, learners may be given an actual workplace scenario or problem to solve, such as figuring out why parts are often mislabeled and devising ways to solve the problem, which may be as simple as observing that the print on the labels is too small and can be corrected by enlarging or color-coding it.

Skill Articulation--With work-based contextualized teaching and learning, foundation skills and knowledge are embedded in workplace situations and learning tasks. Instructors help learners to reflect on the skills and knowledge they used, and how they may have improved their skills in the process. In the previous mislabeling example, the group may reflect on

which foundation skills and knowledge areas they used to help solve the problem, such as critical observation, understanding quality and reading with understanding. They might also discuss the specifics of how they used those skills to solve the problem and how the skills may be used in other situations or contexts.

Transfer to the Workplace--Transfer of learning from the training environment to the workplace should be a focus of every work-based foundation skills program. Transfer should not be assumed, as it is not automatically or easily achieved and requires careful planning and coordination among all stakeholders. Numerous factors can help or hinder the transfer of new skills and knowledge, such as how closely the learning task, materials, and social context replicate the work environment. Additional barriers may also impede transfer, such as a lack of opportunities to practice and use skills in a supported environment or local of support for transfer within the workplace itself. It is therefore critical that all stakeholders--learners, instructors, trainers, supervisors, job coaches, etc.--understand and support the goal of learning transfer.