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ABLE in Context

FOR AND ABOUT ADULT BASIC AND FAMILY LITERACY EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

The magic of quality instruction

by Bootsie Barbour, Northwest Professional Development Center

What are the elements that contribute to quality instruction in adult education?

That was the question 15 experienced teachers were asked at a recent ABLE training where the topic of discussion was how to use the Pennsylvania Adult Teacher Competencies to guide individual professional development. Responses were remarkably similar, using phrases such as *passion for teaching and learning, teaching how to learn, spend time getting to know students' goals and ambitions, using authentic and contextualized instruction, keeping up with new research and practices, recognizing and addressing individual learning differences, the ability to be honest and authentic with each student* and words like *devoted, exciting, engaging, prepared, and knowledgeable*. The sentiments all pointed to that human connection between two individuals that sparks lifelong learning. One teacher wrote, "A quality teacher is an ongoing student."

These honest expressions of experienced teachers touch on four elements of quality instruction: craft, research, art, and a good splash of magic. Quality instruction results when a teacher can blend all four elements into the complex and affective world of a classroom.

Quality instruction is a complicated

concept, partly because teaching is part of a much larger social dynamic. Learners come to classes with many different issues and are not always ready to learn. Quality is also affected by the kind of atmosphere in which a teacher works and the leadership provided by the administration. Teachers have to manage these realities and adjust their teaching approach accordingly, sometimes on a daily basis. This requires solid skills and a depth of knowledge. Adult educators also have to keep up with changing curriculum that reflects their learners' world. There is an analogy between teaching a class and painting a picture: both are a unique combination of craft, art, talent, and creativity.

IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

The craft—or "nuts and bolts"—of teaching includes elements such as goal setting, curriculum development, lesson planning, and ongoing assessment of learning. This is a part of the foundation of good teaching. Tom Sticht, international adult basic education consultant, writes that adults need to be taught math and reading skills in the context of learning and performing a given task. He cites military research showing that contextualized instruction provides more rapid gains than generalized literacy instruction. (Sticht, 1997). Knowing

how to incorporate contextualized instruction into teaching

practice is essential for the adult educator because adult learners have a limited time available for school amidst personal logistical demands. Teachers in Pennsylvania's ABLE-funded classes are seeing the benefits of managed enrollment—classes that had a beginning and ending date with clearly shared goals to accomplish. A cohort of learners developed in these classes benefited both academically and socially.

Through the work of groups such as the National Center for Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) there is an increased research base on adult learning and literacy. Quality instruction requires that teachers be good consumers of research, make the time to read research critically, and be able to apply what is relevant to their practice. Administrators must support quality instruction by knowing how to access, understand, and use research for themselves and their staff. Administrators must supervise in ways that promote the transfer of information to actual

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MISSION STATEMENT

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The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Education is to lead and serve the educational community, to enable each individual to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled lifelong learner.

FROM THE BUREAU DIRECTOR

Welcome to the premiere issue of *ABLE in Context*, from the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education. I hope adult basic and family literacy education practitioners across the Commonwealth will find the information in these pages useful. The goal of this publication will be to highlight practices that have proven to be effective in helping learners develop and maintain good literacy skills that lead to an improved quality of life for themselves and their families.

A recent review of research and resources by Priscilla Carman and Barbara Van Horn of Penn State's Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy lists some promising practices that education, training, and human-service providers can use to help adult learners link basic-skill development and lifelong learning to increased earning potential and career growth. All of these practices are incorporated into the articles you'll read here.

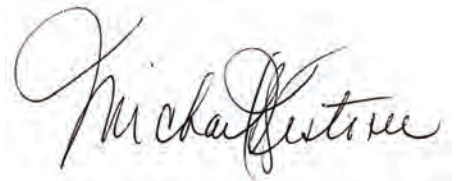
Some common themes that emerged from the resource review point to best practices:

- Use a case management approach.
- Screen participants for barriers and provide support services of sufficient duration and intensity.
- Help adults set achievable short- and long-term goals.
- Guide adults to be self-directed learners.
- Provide multiple entry points.
- Offer a variety of instructional strategies and delivery systems, especially technology-based in a blended learning format.
- Teach "soft" (interpersonal) skills applicable to workplace cultures.



- Provide opportunities for adults to build creativity and innovation skills.
- Provide integrated, contextualized instruction and curriculum.
- Align curricula among programs and throughout the system.
- Use measurable methods and assessments to determine learning gains, certification, or employment.
- Offer internships in cooperating workplaces.

This issue of *ABLE in Context* illustrates how we are applying these best practices in Pennsylvania. Enjoy!



Michael Westover
 Acting Director, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education

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Contextualized instruction: Making learning real

by Susan Finn Miller, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13

The goal of one workplace ESL class was to help students improve their communication skills in English. The instructor asked the students to choose a typical work-related task that they wanted to improve. Some of the students chose to give a tour of the lab. Another chose to conduct training for new workers; others chose to give a formal presentation. During the class, each student was videotaped performing the work-related task. Students then viewed their own videotapes and evaluated themselves using agreed-upon criteria that focused on English communication skills. Peers and the instructor provided feedback using the same evaluation rubric.



The goal for a group of ABE/GED students was to improve their reading and math skills in order to pass the GED test. These students were also concerned about their own and their children's nutrition. The teacher asked the students to bring in food packages from the foods their families ate. The lesson focused on reading and understanding the nutrition labels, which also included some math. The class discussion was full of insightful discoveries as the students critically examined the food labels. For instance, the fat content in foods is labeled based on percent of weight not percent of calories, so 2% milk is not 2% fat as one might assume. In one cup of 2% milk, 45 out of 120 calories are fat. So, what's the percentage of fat in 2% milk?

In the workplace example above, the self-chosen tasks were important aspects of the workers' everyday work lives. Focusing on specific work-related

tasks made the instruction immediately relevant for these workers. In fact, in evaluating the effectiveness of the various activities done in the class, all the students evaluated the work-related task as the most meaningful learning experience for them. In the ABE/GED scenario, students applied reading and math skills to discover new information about the nutritional content of the foods they and their families were consuming. The skills instruction (English communication skills, reading, math, and critical reasoning) in both of these scenarios was embedded, or *contextualized*, into personally meaningful activities for the adults in these classes. Adult learners were reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking for their own purposes and using authentic, real-life materials, rather than materials developed for use in classrooms, such as workbooks.

Adult educators in Pennsylvania have been working with the idea of contextualized learning for several years, for example by using the Foundation Skills Framework (see page 6) as well as Equipped for the Future, and for ESL teachers, Gail Weinstein's Learners' Lives as Curriculum® (see page 7). According to Pennsylvania's Workforce Education Research Center, when we contextualize instruction we draw upon a specific real-life situation or context in order to develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

In fact, research by Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler showed that when instructors designed instruction through using authentic texts and situations, learners were more likely to apply their learning outside

of the classroom. In other words, the contextualized instruction made a real difference for learners in that they were engaging in literacy activities more often in their daily lives outside of school than they had prior to the instruction. For adult learners, being able to do more with language, literacy, and numeracy skills and abilities in their daily lives at home, at work, and in the community is a critically important outcome.

Based on this research, Jacobson, Degener, and Purcell-Gates prepared a practical guide for teachers who want to learn more about how to contextualize instruction. This wonderful step-by-step resource, *Creating authentic materials and activities for the adult literacy classroom: A handbook for practitioners*, is available for free download online. Check it out! ■

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Stay longer, study harder: How managed class structure works

by Tana Reiff, TIU Community Education Services

Open-entry, open-exit has a long tradition in adult basic and literacy education. But open enrollment does little to ensure the intensity and duration of instruction that research indicates is needed to achieve real learning gains. There is no easy path to sufficient intensity and duration of instruction for adults with busy lives; however, managed enrollment can address these issues head on.

Seven years ago, Ulicia Lawrence changed the structure of ABE classes at Temple University to “managed enrollment”: classes with start and stop dates, students committed to the schedule, and curriculum tailored to the group and timeframe. Lawrence had previously coordinated a community program where she conducted group sessions. “My results were great when students worked together,” she recalls, “so I naturally thought that is how classes should be developed.” After applying the structure to Temple’s Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning (TU-WELL) program, student success rates shot up and the program became a model of managed instruction.

Chester County Intermediate Unit and Delaware County Community College offer 15 managed GED preparation classes in Chester and Delaware Counties. Three 11-week sessions per year meet for three hours, twice a week. Classes spend an hour each on reading comprehension (literature, social studies, science); writing; and math. Students who need more instruction may repeat the cycle. “They gain by having the material repeated rather than spending three months on, say, fractions,” says program coordinator Jody Harman.

Lora Zangari teaches ABE classes for Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, Lancaster. Two of the

classes, Intensive Instruction and Career Gateway, operate under managed enrollment. The third is an open-entry ABE/GED class. Most of the students participate in all three classes, for a total of 23 hours possible each week.

In rural Jefferson County, Community Action, Inc., an intensive class runs 20 hours a week for 10 weeks and a less intensive class runs eight hours a week over six weeks. Students enter the managed classes from other classes and move among them to work on specific skills. “The intensity helps students reach goals in shorter periods of time,” reports Katherine Stamler, adult education director.

The Temple classes run on 10- to 12-week cycles, four times a year. Each cycle commences with a three-day orientation, then four days of “Learning to Learn” preparation. “This process al-

There is no easy path to sufficient intensity and duration of instruction; however, a managed class structure can address these issues head on.

lows students to deselect if they are not ready to attend intensive classes or they haven’t had the opportunity to prioritize their life challenges,” explains Lawrence.

The first day of the Chester and Delaware County classes is devoted to registration forms, student-teacher contracts, goal sheets, and the TABE reading locator and reading test. Instructors proceed with an introductory reading and writing lesson. The second day turns to math. In Lancaster, as is typical, students are placed according to instructional level, needs, time commitment, and goals.

Most managed classes are aimed at completing the GED Tests and preparing for postsecondary education or train-

ing. The curriculum may be standard or contextualized, based on the group’s goals.

Temple focuses on employability and academic skills contextualized with career-development and industry-specific materials. “Contextualization and instructional delivery must be flexible and adaptable to the learners,” Lawrence stresses.



A managed class in Chester, run by Delaware County Community College

Harman’s instructors are provided a curriculum, which provides structure, but they also bring their own materials.

“With a managed class structure,” Zangari points out, “the teacher can build a community of learners, plan and assess learning activities, and monitor progress. Really, intensive managed instruction is ‘normal.’”

The managed instruction model is not without its kinks. “It is very difficult to get students who will commit to 20 hours per week,” Stamler says. “We would love to go to the 10-hour model but have not had enough students in our rural area and it would double the number of students we are obligated to serve.”

“Not all adult students can make the same time commitment, but one can still manage the structure even if the intensity level isn’t ideal,” Zangari suggests. “It would be ideal to have an orientation process and overall program structure that mirrors what intensive instruction is trying to accomplish, while also accommodating the fast-track students and those who need short-term services.”

Stamler looks at “how we can move the valued components of managed instruction — lesson plans, topics, etc. — into the other classes and facilitate their use across the agency.” ■

Literacy tutoring gets a boost

by Susan Reeve, Bureau of ABLÉ, and Kim Rossman, Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth

Intensive tutoring is a model being implemented under special ABLÉ funding. Ten programs across Pennsylvania are involved in an experiment to intensify tutoring services. Under this model, programs who already serve students with tutoring are asked to increase the intensity of their services from three to six hours per week to a select group of students. The intent is to help motivated students achieve their goals more quickly. Programs are offering intensive services through small groups, mini-classes, computer labs, and/or additional one-on-one tutoring. Staff involved must also participate in an average of two hours of professional development per month.

The model is simple, but implementation has proven to be much more complex. Some programs have hit roadblocks with finding already enrolled students who are willing and able to increase the intensity of their education. The logistics of creating small groups at appropriate times and convenient locations for students in rural areas has been a challenge. In some cases, students receiving one-on-one tutoring have opted to attend mini-classes or small groups. This has been positive; however, an unexpected result has been that students like the group interaction so much that they drop one-on-one tutoring, which was not the intent of the services.

Finding out what works and for whom is all part of the process. Unexpected results have occurred in some cases. Grove City Education Center is a small program contracted to serve only 45 students. With added funding they were able to add another staff person in addition to the part-time Program Coordinator. This person has given students more individualized, case-management-type attention. With

this extra attention, the program saw 10 students earn the GED® credential last program year, compared to two to five in previous years.

In some cases, the model has been particularly successful. The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon was thrilled with this opportunity, because it reinforced what they were already doing. They had prepared staff to improve instruction and students to increase instructional hours in order to help students accomplish their goals more quickly. With everyone on board, it was easier for the program to implement this model. They have found that requiring a commitment on the part of the tutors and students makes them take their work more seriously. The results have confirmed what they believed: while 30% of the regular students have advanced at least one educational functioning level (EFL), 59% of students in the intensive program have advanced at least one EFL—a big payoff for the extra time and effort.

The Altoona Area Public Library has implemented intensive tutoring in their literacy program in the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Cresson. The tutors and students selected to participate in this initiative (all incarcerated) are willing and eager to intensify their education. The model used at this program is strictly one-on-one tutoring since small groups are not allowed to meet in the prison. The challenge has been for the coordinator to manage the extra scheduling and monitoring that is required.

Programs have come up with creative themes for mini-classes and small groups: Learning about State Government; Personal and Professional Development (which includes sessions on Beliefs, Learning Styles, Multiple Intelligences, and Memory Aids); Reading Recipes; and Using Public Transportation. Students love the interaction, support, and fun that come



Kim Rossman leads tutor training on Meeting the Needs of the Struggling Adult Learner.

with learning in a group.

An added benefit of the model is the network coordinated by Kim Rossman of Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth (TLC). Programs have shared ideas, lesson plans, frustrations, and encouragement through calls, meetings, and Google groups. Programs receive individualized support from a technical assistant who is available to provide professional development, facilitate meetings, and assist with curriculum development. TLC provides materials to the participating agencies, based on requests from the program coordinators.

Is intensifying tutoring worth the effort? Those involved have said the impact to their programs has been great. They report dramatic results for those students who persevere with intensive instruction. For the programs struggling to implement the model, the struggle is worth the effort if it leads to better quality of services for their students. There is no doubt that the students, coordinators, teachers—and ABLÉ in Pennsylvania as a system—are growing from this experience. ■

Applying the Foundation Skills to workforce instruction

by KayLynn Hamilton, The Pennsylvania State University

The Foundation Skills Framework was developed to provide a common language and understanding of the basic skills, knowledge, and competencies adults need to obtain or maintain jobs and advance to higher-paying jobs. It has been a very effective tool for developing work-based foundation skills programs within Pennsylvania's Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) system and promoting their importance within the continuum of workforce development system activities.

Adult education practitioners throughout the ABLE system have had success incorporating work-based basic skills into their practice. In rural Jefferson County, instructors worked with student groups to create imaginary businesses with the goal of developing an understanding of the foundation skill *Understands Finances*. Learners created personal budgets and budgets for the businesses, incorporating the same components. Instructors created and used checklists to determine gains in competency. Since this activity was being used program-wide, instructors were able to share resources and work together to meet the goals of instruction.

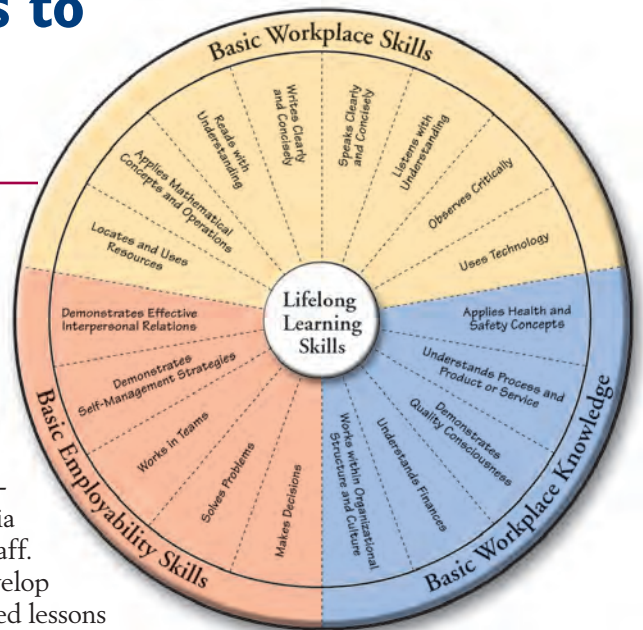
Another ABLE program has incorporated work-based contextualized instruction into its family literacy program. The agency did its homework and contacted local businesses to determine the qualifications neces-

sary for employment in high-priority occupations. Using this information, staff developed lesson plans, correlating them to the foundation skills and the CASAS competences. Lessons were delivered to the learners, who evaluated them based on criteria established by program staff. The staff continues to develop customized, contextualized lessons that directly address the skills needed for local employment.

In an effort to focus on the foundation skill *Demonstrates Self-Management Strategies*, one ABLE agency purchased a time clock to use in the classroom, to simulate the accountability of time in the workplace. Students were required to use the time clock to record attendance rather than the typical sign-in method that had been previously used. The agency also had Day-Timer® planners, electronic calendars/organizers, and alarm clocks available so that students could become more accountable for their time, both in and out of the classroom.

Staff at a central Pennsylvania ABLE program created a staff and student-operated business taking Scholastic Book Club orders. Using seed money generated through previous orders, the business hit the ground running by placing an order that would require students to use real, workplace math skills to track their points, inventory their stock, and account for their orders. As the project progressed, students began to focus on additional work-based basic skills, including *Demonstrates Effective Interpersonal Skills* for working with the public, and *Works in Teams*, when working with one another.

Additionally, contextualized instruction can occur in the workplace. Through the Pennsylvania Workforce Improvement Network (PA WIN),



ABLE agencies provide customized, contextualized instruction to incumbent workers. Recently, one agency provided successful English as a second language instruction to workers at a wood products company. Although they had begun to master workplace vocabulary, the workers struggled with basic prepositions that described, among other things, place. The workplace instructor used authentic materials from the workplace to demonstrate *on top of*, *in front of*, *inside*, *behind*, and *next to*. Instructor-led demonstrations were followed by the workers undertaking commands that included both the workplace vocabulary and the place prepositions. "Grab the shoe molding, take it to the other end of the table, put it on the left of the job traveler form, bring me the maple sample, put on the apron." This example clearly illustrated a successful activity that developed the workers' skill of *Listens with Understanding*.

The Workforce Education Research Center (WERC) is available to provide training and technical assistance related to work-based basic skills instruction. The *Innovative Strategies* publication, the source of the examples in this article, can be found in PDF through the ABLE Web site. ■

The **Workforce Education Research Center (WERC)** provides workforce education professional development opportunities to ABLE agencies statewide. Through PA WIN, WorkABLE, and ABLE Coalition support, the WERC's goal is to improve the cohesiveness and quality of the Bureau's workforce development initiatives. Information is available at www.pawerc.org.

Dr. Gail Weinstein talks about ESL Learners' Lives as Curriculum[®]

An interview with Carol Shefrin, TIU Community Education Services

Q What is your philosophy of teaching English language learners?

A From the time I began teaching English nearly 30 years, I was always curious about the learners in my classes. Listening to their stories felt like virtual world travel. I discovered that learners also liked hearing from one another about their experiences—and their stories were more powerful catalysts for conversation and learning than any text in a book. Studies in the field of second language acquisition began to support with empirical evidence what I was learning through my personal experience—that talking and listening about real things, for real purposes; i.e. meaning-making, is a key condition for language acquisition.

I have come to believe that the most effective language learning environments are ones where learners are encouraged to be curious about their teacher and about one another, where they feel safe enough to talk about things that matter, and where they learn and use language to get things done: gain access to information, talk things over, and solve problems.

Q How does LLC support quality instruction?

A Learners' Lives as Curriculum[®] is a model for developing language lessons and thematic units that grow from learners' lived experiences. A lesson using this model begins with an authentic story as a way to start the conversation. It then leads learners with the teacher as facilitator through a series of activities including nuts and bolts of the anatomy

MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.gailweinstein.net and contact your PDC about Learners' Lives as Curriculum[®] training and contact information for assistance from a PA trainer.

of the language, to support the meaning-making work. An LLC lesson begins with a topic of high interest to learners; provides language development through listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and functions; invites investigation of a problem and collective discussion of solutions; and provides learners with an opportunity to monitor their own progress.

With this model, outside “experts” do not write the curriculum. Rather, teachers develop materials, following a step-by-step collaborative process with clear models for the product they are creating. This encourages teachers to listen deeply to learners, an approach consistent with the growing field of practitioner inquiry. It also keeps materials current, because the experiences of learners update and inform the evolving curriculum. The model is a challenging one, because it acknowledges the teacher as an expert on how the English language works, but also assumes that learners are the experts on their own lives, their strengths and resources, as well as their goals and desires. The approach combines a “transmission model” in which the teacher “transmits” information to the learners about how English works, with a “constructivist approach” in which learners build knowledge by investigating and documenting issues.

Q What is your reaction to working with teachers of adults in Pennsylvania?

A This has been a wonderful journey with a resourceful cohort of fellow travelers. The teachers who agreed to become LLC trainers were extraordinary. I was asking them to embrace a model that represented a paradigm shift. Rather than beginning with language or grammar points and finding ways to practice them, we



Dr. Gail Weinstein of San Francisco State University provides support to Pennsylvania's ESL teachers through Learners' Lives as Curriculum[®].

begin with stories, themes, and listening, with language development growing from these rather than vice-versa. These teacher-learners experimented in their classrooms and made the model their own from the inside out.

Along the way, they have stretched my thinking and improved the model in the process of making it work in Pennsylvania. They helped shift the focus of the training from large and complex thematic units to more teachable language lessons, and they explored how the principles of learner-centered teaching could become more central to a process of reflection on daily practice beyond materials development. Working together to solve a problem modeled a process that could be replicated in their own classrooms.

The teachers of Pennsylvania are the leaders of the future. I hope they will continue the hard work of throwing out old paradigms and ushering in new ones—and pass on the collective wisdom born of listening, creating, and sharing experiences. ■

The case manager is a key piece

by Scott Fennell, Community College of Allegheny County and Renata Henderson, District 1199C Training Fund

Shaping and developing the adult basic and literacy education system so that it helps our students transition to sustainable employment or postsecondary education or training is a challenging puzzle. Adult educators have the task of keeping adult learners engaged in the learning at hand while helping them take the next step. Teachers wear many hats to connect with students and help them move ahead. But, despite sound teaching methods and helping students overcome certain barriers, learners still show difficulty transitioning, and the data reflect that. Some students even become so comfortable with the education process that they remain in our classrooms for years, experiencing little progress beyond the classroom. We are left asking ourselves: *How can we help our learners transition beyond the adult literacy classroom?*

The response to the rise of the ABLÉ intensive instruction initiatives has been to focus on supporting students as they transition to life beyond secondary education. Case management provides the needed component of support and counseling through the case manager.

In Pennsylvania, 19 ABLÉ-funded programs have a case-management component as part of their instructional plan. Like a roadmap or GPS, case management plans out a student's journey, efficiently visualizing the path to the destination through self-discovery. The case manager's role is to empower students to become self-sufficient and to take their learning—and lives—into their own hands.

Case managers take time to develop a strong rapport with each student through an initial interview, followed by scheduled sessions to discuss educa-

tional goals. To support each individual's journey toward self-efficacy, case managers utilize SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-oriented) goal-setting guidelines; portfolio building; self-directed learning; and barrier identification.

Dr. Hanna Fingeret, Executive Director of Literacy South and Adjunct Associate Professor at North Carolina State University, provided a framework for building portfolios in *It Belongs to Me: A Guide to Portfolio Assessment in Adult Education Programs*. This integral part of student case management involves collecting selected school-work samples and projects to observe and reflect on educational development. We have adapted this model to address the needs and goals of our students, working with teachers to create a more contextualized curriculum.

As an emotional support, case managers help students to deal with the many issues they bring to the classroom. We provide resources and encourage students to control their own journey to as great a degree as possible.

Though the jury is still out on the true effectiveness of case management in ABLÉ programs, students have shown significant academic gains, as well as personal growth. Many case managers have reported students who were in ABLÉ programs for years finally reaching long-sought goals such as completing the five GED® Tests, advancing to postsecondary education, moving into their own apartment, or leaving an unhealthy relationship. Students who normally felt disenfran-

chised and discouraged about education are becoming lifelong learners and creating their own niche in the world. ABLÉ data is reflecting the impact of case managers and their ability to address students' needs outside of the classroom.

Dr. Beverly Ford, a nationally recognized expert on case management in adult education, says, "Case management counseling should empower the participant—



teach her to take more control of her life. Counseling should not 'do for' the participant. Too often this kind of 'help' makes her more dependent and thwarts the goal of self-sufficiency."

The case manager can be the missing puzzle piece in adult education programs, helping students become empowered to succeed. Many teachers are "spread too thin" by being both teacher and case manager—another reason case managers are so important in ABLÉ programs. The case manager is the piece that catches the learners who, without support, can too easily fall through the cracks in the sidewalk of real life. ■

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Career Gateway paves the pathway to postsecondary goals

by Susan Finn Miller, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13

The Bureau of ABLÉ's Career Gateway initiative is currently in its fourth year. There are now 17 ABLÉ agencies across the state focused on transitioning adult learners to postsecondary education or training. This article outlines how Career Gateway programs are successfully supporting adults through high-quality programming and instruction to achieve postsecondary goals.

Data from the GED Testing Service show that 63% of those who passed the GED® Tests said they pursued the credential in order to qualify for further education. However, according to researcher John Tyler, only 30–35% of those who pass the GED Tests actually obtain any postsecondary education. These statistics are of concern to adult education programs since it is clear that most jobs that provide a living wage require more than a GED credential. Accordingly, the goal of the Career Gateway initiative has been to provide services and support to adults, to not only enroll in postsecondary education or training but also to succeed in their educational pursuits.

Toward this end, Career Gateway agencies have restructured their programs to ensure adults receive extensive information about career opportunities in high-demand occupations as well as the wage potential and education or training required for these jobs. Gateway students learn about the postsecondary institutions or organizations that offer education or training and receive assistance when applying. Career Gateway instructors also provide information and training on essential support services including financial aid, time management, study skills, and stress management.

The work of transitioning adults from ABLÉ programs to postsecondary

education or training is most effective when meaningful networking relationships are developed with PA CareerLink and postsecondary partners. Career Gateway agencies have continued to build these partnerships so that adult learners can access the many career-planning resources, including training dollars, available through the PA CareerLink. Strengthening these partnerships not only helps adult learners benefit from the services PA CareerLink has to offer but also enables literacy programs to receive referrals from PA CareerLink when adults can benefit from the services ABLÉ programs provide.

Close networking relationships with postsecondary and training institutions have enabled Career Gateway programs to identify and address the skills gap between where adult students are and where they need to be in order to achieve their postsecondary educational goals. As a result, teachers are providing intense, high-quality instruction in academic reading and writing, algebra, and technology.

Programs also focus on helping students prepare for the various college placement tests required by postsecondary institutions, such as the COMPASS or ACCUPLACER®. Since research has shown that students who take more than one noncredit developmental course in college very often do not complete an academic program, Career Gateway programs seek to support students to place directly into



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credit-bearing courses.

It is clear that many adults who come to ABLÉ programs can greatly benefit from receiving support and information on how to transition to postsecondary education or training. The ABLÉ programs involved in the Career Gateway pilot participated in developing a toolkit full of resources that can be drawn upon to successfully

support adults who want to transition to postsecondary education or training. The *Career Gateway Tool Kit*; *Career Gateway: Resources for Practitioners*, which combines the practitioner and curriculum guides; and *Career Gateway: Partnerships for Transitioning*, which includes resources for ABLÉ administrators, are all available for free download on the ABLÉ Web site.

ABLÉ programs have long understood the importance of helping adults set long-term goals. Now, literacy providers are taking steps to support learners to design the pathway to achieve these long-term goals. ■

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Professional development supports quality instruction

by Susan Reeve, Bureau of ABLE

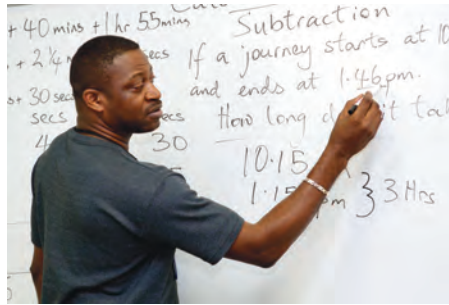
ABLE professional development in Pennsylvania has been taking some interesting turns. This past year has been one of collaboration, getting up to speed on new initiatives, addressing new professional development goals, and using a wide range of technology for professional development. The following is a sampling of offerings aimed at quality instruction.

ADULT LEARNING THEORY COURSE

Technology has more and more to offer and, in an effort to meet the diverse needs of teachers and administrators across Pennsylvania, diverse approaches are being used. The *Adult Learning Theory* course was launched online. This course, which offers 18 Act 48 hours, covers theories, principles, and strategies of adult learning, and much reflection on learning styles and methods appropriate for adults. Along with the usual course reading and reflection, participants can post to discussion boards and create collaborative projects. More labor intensive than a workshop, the course can be done from the home or office and is spread across many weeks, allowing for more reflection and application of learning in between sessions. Students appreciate the interaction and feedback from their classmates.

TRAINING FOR NEW TEACHERS

The regional Professional Development Centers (PDCs) have launched a distance training opportunity for new teachers. Students access *The Basics of Adult Literacy Online Course* (created by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education) from their own computers. The course's five modules provide new teachers with a solid foundation from which to begin teaching adults: The Adult Learner, Orientation and Assessment, Curriculum Develop-



ment, Instructional Techniques, and the Adult Literacy Classroom. As students work through the modules, they submit reflective journals to their PDCs. The course facilitator responds to the worksheets with comments and feedback. This is an excellent way for new teachers to learn about teaching adults and also be mentored by experienced adult education professionals.

CONTEXTUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Contextualized Instruction training was launched at the Impact Institute in June 2008, and since then has been successfully offered to varying groups of teachers and tutors across the state. This course also offers a basis in how adults learn and the implications for teaching. Contextualized instruction is meaningful to adult learners because it draws on the life experience that all adults bring to the classroom.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

Several Learning from Practice initiatives are underway across the state. Learning from Practice, similar to Practitioner Inquiry or Action Research, allows teachers to ask questions about their own practice or their students' learning and to collect and analyze data to answer a question. Family Literacy has been using data to inform program improvement for many years. Programs ask, "What does our data show that indicates areas for program improve-

ment?" Practitioner Action Research (PAR) has been integrated into Family Literacy Professional Development. The Workforce Education Research Center (WERC) has a statewide action research group that meets monthly through conference calls, wikis, and other methods.

Alisa Belzer of Rutgers University is working with Professional Development Centers around their own practitioner inquiry projects. Each PDC has created workgroups within their region. Some are working with teachers and administrators to do practitioner inquiry or action research.

LEARNING DIFFERENCES PROJECT

The Learning Differences Project is working intensively with a small number of programs in each region this year, spending a couple of weeks with classes, staff, and students, to help staff learn effective ways to teach students with learning differences. The methods used for learning differences are simply good teaching for any adult, and the intensive coaching being offered gives programs the tools to implement the expert instructional techniques that Dr. Richard Cooper and Dr. Richard Gacka have developed over many years.

These offerings demonstrate how professional development is going deeper. It is offering more and requiring more of participants. It is offering more support to participants over a longer period of time. This is important because the stakes are high. How many of us know students who have floated from class to class, program to program, stopped in and out, and still have been unable to succeed? We all know students are ultimately responsible for their own learning, but a good teacher gives students the tools to succeed. All the attention on professional development we trust will lead to quality instruction and a high level of professionalism within our system.

To learn more, contact your regional PDC, the Workforce Education Research Center, the Learning Differences Project, the Family Literacy Professional Development Project, the Distance Learning Project, or Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth. ■

GET TO KNOW BUREAU OF ABLE STAFF

ABLE working with you toward quality instruction

If you're talking about quality instruction and you're talking to the Bureau of ABLE, you may be talking to one of these staff members.

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Susan Reeve is the Professional Development System Coordinator for the Bureau of ABLE. She has worked on various special projects, such as ABLE's outstanding student and teacher awards, Intensive Tutoring and ESL programs, and the ABLE Web site. She has been involved in ABLE publications, such as the PA ESL Content Standards and the Success Stories publications. Susan taught ESL for Harrisburg Area Community College, Dickinson College, and Catholic Charities Immigration and Refugee Services and was the administrator for Catholic Charities' ESL program before coming to the Bureau. She also taught English in Mexico City. She has an MA in TESOL from West Chester University. Susan's literacy activities have expanded in recent years to



include her 5- and 7-year-old children.

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Paula Smith has been a Bureau of ABLE advisor for three-and-a-half years. What she enjoys most about her work is the direct contact with programs and people in the field. Although she says monitoring, compliance issues, and data review drive her up a wall, she also says she is learning to "embrace" these responsibilities as part of helping agencies with program improvement and "other duties as assigned"!

Paula's adult education career began in the 1990s when she received a Master's in Adult and Continuing Education from Temple, and took a job as coordinator of a newly established ABLE Professional Development Center.



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Luke Suereth is an advisor, covering the South-Central, Montgomery, Northwest, and Pocono Counties WIA areas. He also is the advisor for the PA Literacy Corps and assists with program management duties. In his Bureau position, Luke attends ABLE Coalition meetings, performs site visits, monitors agency data, reads grant applications, and handles questions from the field on a variety of issues.

Luke is a graduate of The Pennsylvania State University with a B.S. in Secondary Education and a B.A. in Business. Before joining the Bureau he worked for Tri-County OIC, Harrisburg, first in workforce basic skills, then in Family Sustaining Job Initiative projects. He ran the Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) preclinical class, taught computer literacy, GED, and ABE prison classes, assisted students at the PA CareerLink, and led OIC's orientation sessions.



MAGIC, FROM PAGE 1



instruction.

The art of teaching begins with innate talent and grows with experience and listening to the "professional wisdom" of others in the field. Art comes in with the ability to actively listen to a learner's needs and to meet the individual at his or her level. It is that part of instruction, like questioning techniques, that motivates, inspires, engages, and provides a rich learning environment while at the same time is relevant and effective. Experience, perseverance, creativity, and, as one ABLE teacher wrote, "the willingness to fight for a learner when they want to give up," all add to the art of teaching.

Quality teaching requires a balance between actual instructional and management skills, knowledge of effective teaching, and art with a dash of magic

thrown in. The magic is that learning chemistry that just seems to happen, almost effortlessly or naturally. This might be the human connection or intuition that several ABLE teachers noted in their descriptions. Often, this comes with the freedom and ability to create learning experiences that connect you with your students. Often the "magic" of teaching is supported by leadership that believes in individuality, experimentation, and openness. Organizational leadership is an important and integral variable in quality instruction and cannot be discounted.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education has long supported quality instruction through professional development for practitioners, administrators, and volunteers through the Professional Development System. The key concept of Indicator Number 4 in the Indicators of Program Quality, ABLE's

framework for Adult Basic and Literacy Education, articulates the importance of "professional development activities that contribute to well-trained administrators and practitioners, including volunteers, to ensure quality teaching that maximizes learner outcomes."

Pennsylvania's ABLE Professional Development System supports the elements of quality instruction. Educators can update their skills in the craft of teaching, participate in study circles, and design their own research projects. Getting to know colleagues, understanding and applying new concepts, and having the passion to be a lifelong student provides the fuel that ignites the magic of quality instruction. ■

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LINCS puts professional resources at your fingertips

With the closing of Pennsylvania's ABLE Resource Center, we direct you LINCS, the Literacy Information and Communication System. A project of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), LINCS is the online information and communications network for adult and family literacy. You are invited to visit www.nifl.gov/lincs for a fine adventure.

Three Resource Collections are at the heart of LINCS. Each Collection focuses on locating, reviewing, and selecting high-quality instructional materials, resources, and research on a different topic.

- **The Basic Skills Resource Collection** focuses on reading, writing, mathematics, and numeracy for use by adult educators to improve instruction in basic skills.
- **The Program Planning Resource Collection** focuses on assessment, learning disabilities, and program improvement.
- **The Workforce Competitiveness Resource Collection** focuses on workforce basic skills education, English language acquisition, and technology.

NIFL also funds three LINCS Regional Resource Centers to disseminate the highest-quality resources using various approaches such as highlighting online materials, face-to-face technical assistance, distance learning, and discussion lists. Through partnerships with adult education organizations, the Regional Resource Centers help practitioners use evidence-based instructional practices that improve outcomes in adult learners' literacy skills. The Centers organize training and workshops based on Institute-developed materials and provide assistance in using online

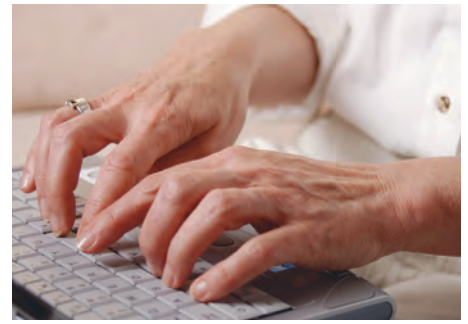
instructional resources. Pennsylvania is in Region 1, headed by Kaye Beall of World Education, Inc., Boston (kaye_beall@worlded.org), and Tim Ponder of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center at Kent State University (tponder@literacy.kent.edu). You may have met them at a PAACE conference, where they have presented the last several years.

Looking for free ongoing professional development? Join the National Institute for Literacy's discussion lists, where literacy researchers, policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and students from all over the country (and even beyond the U.S.) meet via e-mail to share information. The Institute and its partner literacy organizations provide knowledgeable list facilitators. There is a community for everybody here! Topics include Adult English Language Learners, Adult Literacy Professional Development, Assessment, Family Literacy, Health Literacy, Learning Disabilities, Diversity and Literacy, Special Topics, Technology and Literacy, and Workforce Literacy. To learn more about the lists and subscribe to whatever interests you, go to www.nifl.gov/lincs and click on Discussion Lists on the right navigation bar.

But that's not all LINCS has to offer. The LINCS Multimedia Center features live webcasts and on-demand audio and video resources presented by Institute projects and LINCS partners. Get the latest multimedia tools at www.nifl.gov/lincs/lincs_media.html.

You're invited to visit www.nifl.gov/lincs and you can always find a link to LINCS on the ABLE Web site's Resources page. Check it out! ■

A GREAT PLACE
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FOR A WEALTH
OF ADULT EDUCATION
RESOURCES:
WWW.NIFL.GOV/LINCS
—AND IT'S
ALL FREE!



Teachers in Context

While Bureau staff traveled around visiting candidates for Pennsylvania's 2009 ABLE Outstanding Teacher Awards (AOTA), Tana Reiff of ABLE Communications was trailing along with a digital video camera. The 22-minute video that resulted, called *Teachers in Context*, features interviews with the five AOTA recipients, along with classroom scenes illustrating their words.

Now the video is being developed into a professional development opportunity for Act 48 hours. It will serve as the basis for an inquiry-based activity called *Teachers in Context: Reflections on Practice*. In either online or face-to-face groups, participants will consider the focusing question *What can we observe about these five teachers to relate or apply to our own practice?* They will answer for themselves the same questions asked in the video interviews. The short course will culminate in a written exercise to further relate practice to video observations.

Your PDC will make you aware of *Teachers in Context* times and places in the coming months. Meantime, you can view the video in (very) small-screen format on the ABLE Web site, under Spotlight or ABLE Outstanding Teacher Awards. ■

