

Post-secondary Transitioning: The GED Is Only Halfway There

by Hal Beder

In 1993 two University of Chicago economists¹ shocked the adult literacy profession by finding that the earnings of GED® recipients were about half way between what high school dropouts and traditional high school graduates earned.

“How could this be so?” many of us asked back then. After all, the GED Tests are normed on a traditional high school population, so GED recipients should be just as skilled. Moreover, GED recipients are older, more mature, and have dem-

onstrated that they can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They should do better in the labor market than traditional high school graduates, not worse. However, since 1993 a number of researchers have investigated the earnings of GED recipients and have found basically the same outcome: GED recipients earn more than dropouts, but less than traditional high school graduates.²

Are we educating our learners just so they can take their places among the working poor? If our responsibility as

adult literacy professionals ends when our learners earn their GEDs, the answer is “probably.” Yet if we widen our responsibility to include transition to post secondary education, if we see earning the GED as a beginning, not an end, then we are truly helping those we care so much about. This is true because just a little post secondary education has a large impact on earnings.³ Moreover, while the earning trajectory for GED recipients is flat over the lifetime, the trajectory for

Are we educating our learners just so they can take their places among the working poor?

those with even some post secondary education moves steadily upward.

According to the GED Testing Service, roughly two-thirds of GED recipients say they want to go on to post secondary education, but few do. An

Transitions

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analysis of the 1993 NAAL data shows that only about a third of GED recipients have post secondary experience, as compared with 70 percent of those with traditional high school diplomas.⁴ So, our first responsibility in transition to post secondary is to get them there.

Nearly two-thirds of the GED recipients who make the transition enroll in community colleges. By their second year, 52% of the GED recipients in community colleges had enrolled in at least one developmental skill course as

compared with 43% of traditional high school graduates.⁵ Thus another of our responsibilities is to get learners college-ready so that they can escape developmental education courses that typically do not count toward degree completion.

Most GED classes are “warm fuzzies.” When learners come late and miss classes, nothing serious happens. It is possible to pass the GED Tests without ever having read an entire book. What happens, then, when GED recipients

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As I begin to write, I realize that transitioning in adult education is an appropriate theme for the fall issue. Fall is a time of transitions. It seems to be a time of beginnings and endings as classes start and leaves turn.

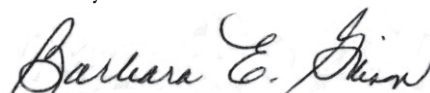
Our students may dream of getting a GED® and going on to college or even graduate school, but studies show that they have little understanding of what it takes to realize those dreams. They have not had the guidance and support high school graduates have had. In "Post-secondary Transitioning" Hal Beder from Rutgers University discusses the challenges students face in transitioning from GED programs to college and describes some of the types of programs addressing these challenges. Providing more detail, "Surveys Say" summarizes a report prepared by Stephen Reder of Portland State University in which he compares GED recipients' and high school graduates' post-secondary performance long term. Reder also makes recommendations for transition programming for adult students.

Students who are not prepared for the rigors of college coursework often fail or drop out. Marilyn Leahy, who has worked in adult literacy as well as teaching at the college level, vividly describes how she approaches her work as a warrior going into battle and gives specific examples of the kinds of instructional activities that would benefit students who expect to go to college.

In Virginia, adult education and literacy programs have been struggling with a variety of transition issues: basic literacy to intermediate adult education, tutoring to classroom, ESOL to GED, as well as GED to post secondary. Several programs that address transitioning are profiled in this issue. Prince William County Adult Education's SOAR Program helps ESOL students to transition to GED instruction. In the Northern Neck Regional Adult Education Program and in the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, the focus is on keeping students in the program long enough to show gains and transition from level to level. Transition from adult education to the workforce has been a major programming effort in the Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center, which offers seven workforce training certificate programs.

Transitioning for adult education students is complex and challenging. Adult education and literacy programs are the best places for these students to gain the skills and experience that will take them into college or career training. Programs designed to assist students in transitioning from level to level with strong academic and study skills as well as an understanding of the basic expectations and requirements of the next level will help build a solid foundation for them to move through adult education, and beyond, with confidence and success.

Sincerely,



Calendar

October

30-November 1
AAACE Conference
Norfolk, Va

November

1
National Family
Literacy Day

7-10

Proliteracy Worldwide
Alexandria, VA

8-9

Program Managers
Meeting

March

30-April 1, 2008
National Conference on
Family Literacy
Louisville, KY

April

28-May 1, 2008
COABE Conference
St. Louis, MO



Incentives Help Low Level Literacy Students Transition Into Public Programs: One Organization's Solution

by Victoire Gerkens Sanborn

According to Patricia Donnelly, Executive Director of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (LCNV) in Falls Church, incentives are helping many of her program's basic adult literacy and ESOL students stay in literacy classes long enough to transition into a public program. Poor attendance can result in poor performance, preventing adult students from achieving their goals and moving forward. Drop out rates are high among low-level literacy individuals when they feel frustrated with their lack of progress. The challenge, then, is for programs to inspire these adults to improve their attendance and remain in the program long enough to realize their immediate goals and move to the next learning level.

For several years, the LCNV has received funding to implement a student recruitment and attendance incentive campaign. Through its classroom-based ESOL Learning Centers and Family Learning Program, and in partnership with the Fairfax and Arlington Adult Education departments, LCNV provides *beginning* level English language literacy instruction to about 900 adults and their children per year. LCNV is the *only* program in this 400 square mile region providing very beginning level literacy instruction for adults.

Adults who successfully complete either the ESOL Learning Centers or Family Learning programs were awarded a \$50 tuition waiver for use toward Fairfax or Arlington County adult education classes. Students who achieved perfect attendance for the 10-week semester of classes received \$25 gift cards to a local store. Those who attended 75% of their scheduled classes were given free tuition, or fee waivers, for the next class session.

Similarly, students who helped a friend enroll also received free tuition the following session. These amounts may not seem like much to most of us, but "Even this small sum was enough for our students to improve their attendance," said Ms. Donnelly, who acquired several grants to provide the funds for these incentives.

The results have been impressive. At the conclusion of the first year, perfect attendance had risen 137% in the ESOL programs. The next year, the average student BEST Plus post-test scores in both these programs had increased by more than 60%. Looking at these results, one could argue for a correlation between retention and both performance and the ability of students to transition into public programs and the next level of literacy instruction.

The results have been impressive. At the conclusion of the first year, perfect attendance had risen 137% in the ESOL program.

Incentives were only one part of the equation to successfully transition students to the next level of instruction or a public school program. Staffing with well-trained and compassionate teachers, creating a safe, tight-knit community in the classroom, and increasing the amount of in-class computer time

all contribute to higher student achievement. In addition, close collaboration with Arlington Education and Employment Program, Fairfax County Adult Education, and Hogar Hispano, a local community-based organization, is vital to this program's success.

In 1994, Heidi Wrigley¹ (Wrigley, 1994) evaluated successful transition programs in a practices brief, and identified the following important elements that LCNV has achieved:

- "extensive outreach efforts,
- counseling and advising,
- a curriculum reflecting a continuum of language learning,
- access to technology and alternative learning techniques,
- transition classes within each organization, and
- establishment of strong links between providers."

An incentive program to help students improve their attendance achieved remarkable results for LCVN's students in the first year of implementation and continues to be successful. In future, the major challenge the organization faces will be to acquire enough funds to continue this project. ■

Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is specialist for literacy programs at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center and works with local, community-based programs around the state.

¹ Wrigley, Heide "Meeting the Challenges of Transition: Perspectives on the REEP/AALS Transition Project" An external, formative evaluation, presented to the U.S. Department of Education, January 1994. EDRS Reproduction document ED 373 596

SOAR:

Successfully Obtaining Academic Results

Prince William County Public Schools ESOL to GED Curriculum

by Debby Cargill



Debbie Caselli screening SOAR candidate

The Need

If you work with an adult education program with both ESOL and GED® components, you have probably had the experience of ESOL students entering GED programs after they have moved beyond being qualified for ESOL services at the Advanced level. In Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) Adult Education, this is a phenomenon that occurs regularly, and it involves large numbers of students. Debby Cargill (ESOL) and Sue Garlock (GED), who work closely together on issues facing both of their programs, decided to address the particular issues transitioning students face when moving from one program to the other. Students who persist in learning English in the PWCS program often express the desire to continue their learning path with a transition to the GED program. While ESOL

students may have advanced oral skills in place and exit the ESOL program based on oral language assessment instruments, their literacy skills (reading and writing) often assess at a lower level, even as low as beginning ESOL levels when students have limited literacy skills in their first language.

The Overview

In order to ease the continued learning path of ESOL students transitioning to GED programs and to ensure their success with that goal, PWCS felt it necessary to plan and write a curriculum that would support the transition between the language learner and the GED content learner. Critical considerations in the conceptual design of the curriculum incorporated several factors:

- Supporting language learners with literacy skill building (reading and

writing) from the second language (L2) learner perspective

- Supporting L2 learners with GED topic areas of study from a literacy skill building perspective
- Supporting L2 learners with an introduction to GED content areas where background/prior knowledge is assumed (in a GED class that traditionally has native speakers of English as the primary student)

The intent of the Successfully Obtaining Academic Results (SOAR) curriculum is that it will be used within an adult ESOL program as an additional course offering for High Intermediate (Student Performance Level 5) and above, where the student's academic goal is to complete the course of instruction in the ESOL program and transition to a GED program. We anticipate that the curriculum may also help to prepare ESOL students for the transition to other academic (higher education) or workplace programs. The curriculum has been written for the language instructor who: has knowledge of the teaching methodology appropriate for the language learner, may have little background knowledge of the GED content areas, and has strong skills in teaching reading and writing from the L2 learner perspective.

How the Curriculum Is Organized

Curriculum writers Debbie Caselli (GED Content Expert) and Michelle Nicolai (ESOL Content Expert) organized SOAR into five weeks of instruction with a lesson plan, based on a two hour class, that supports each lesson. Each week has five days of content area instruction. The lessons are language learning based,

while the units of study are GED content based. The overall goal is to introduce L2 students to the format and content of a GED class, while allowing them to continue their language learning.

UNITS OF STUDY

World History
Geography
Civics and Government
Economics
United States History

CONTENT AREA INSTRUCTION

Social Studies
Science
Reading
Math
Writing

Screening and Assessment Criteria

The SOAR curriculum went through its first piloting phase in the spring of 2007. After a re-write of some components for some fine-tuning, the curriculum begins a second round of piloting in the fall of 2007, all within the PWCS ESOL program. The applicants for the initial pilot class went through a rigorous screening. They were given the following

assessments:

- REEP Writing Assessment
- TABE Locator (Math and Reading)
- Computer literacy task
- Literacy questionnaire

The screening included a computer literacy task to insure learners have a basic understanding of web navigation and technical confidence with standard computer lab equipment (mouse, keyboard, and monitor). A critical element of instruction is computer literacy, but the curriculum can be adapted to accommodate the lack of access to a computer lab.

Next Steps

Students in the first pilot class showed learner gains and, just as importantly, had a very high attendance and retention rate: 70% of the students attended ALL classes or missed just one class. Comments from learners in the first pilot class helped to give Debbie Caselli, the first SOAR teacher, the insight that learners felt that we were on the right track with the curriculum framework: "It's the right level because it has all general topics which everyone from different levels can do." Other learner comments expressed how

the SOAR class "gave me good examples how to proceed in my learning skills and that I can still learn after all this (sic) years" and that they felt "I never be in class like this one" and "opening new door to learn more...it feels good to be here." Michelle Nicolai is teaching the second SOAR class, beginning in October 2007, and will be fine-tuning the curriculum from the ESOL perspective. Both instructors presented the SOAR curriculum at the Regional COABE conference in October 2007 in Williamsburg, VA.

PWCS hopes to pilot the curriculum on a state-wide level in the 2008-2009 school year and will then make SOAR available to adult educators through Internet access on the [PWCS Website](#).

Please contact Debby Cargill at cargildh@pwcs.edu for comments and questions. ■

Debby Cargill is the Lead for ESOL/ Program Developer for Prince William County Public Schools Adult Education where she coordinates the ESOL program and is responsible for all aspects of ESOL program planning. She shares her professional skills and interests with other practitioners across the state of Virginia by providing guidance and mentoring support, participating in state projects and initiatives, and facilitating ESOL and assessment training. She has an M.Ed. in Adult Education from George Mason University.



Michelle Nicolai discusses test results with Lettie, a SOAR learner

Surveys Say: Adult Education Does Not Equal Post-secondary Success

by Marcia Phillips

The National Commission of Adult Literacy recently published a report prepared by Dr. Stephen Reder at Portland State University, in which he compares a newly identified population of GED® holders to their counterparts with high school diplomas and those with no further credentials, looking at longterm post-secondary education outcomes. Until the release of two large-scale national education surveys, the National Household Education Survey (2005) and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003), it has not always been possible to distinguish between those who have attained the GED and those who have the high school diploma when looking at post-secondary education. By seeing the differences in their post-secondary outcomes, we can begin to see some significant problems in the delivery of educational services to the adult learner.

Consistently, these studies show that GED holders fall midway between those with high school diplomas and those who have nothing after dropping out. Reder's study features the surveys of a wide range of topics and considers the race or ethnicity of learners showing percentages of whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians who dropped out only, who attained their GED credential, or who acquired their high school diploma. He compares those same groups by their

The holder of a high school diploma is about twice as likely to transition into college as a GED holder.

socio-economic status, participation in the labor force, weekly wages, and those attaining some college. The holder of a high school diploma is about twice as likely to transition into college as a GED holder. It is not because of a difference in the basic skills of the learners; they are pretty much on a par. Where the difference lies, according to Reder, is that there is no college preparatory counseling for the GED attainers. Additionally, GED holders are more likely to be first generation college attendees, already a high-risk

population for completing college to the degree. Although about 60 percent of GED test-takers indicate that they wish to get their GED in order to continue their education, Reder suggests they are more likely to mean work or career-related certification than a 2-year or 4-year degree.

Reder also notes that few GED candidates, 16 to 38 percent, depending upon the survey population, take any adult education classes prior to taking the GED test. When he studied post-secondary educational attainment and persistence in the GED population, Reder also looked at the Beginning Post-secondary Student Survey, which follows a random sample of students from 1996-2001 to see their post-secondary educational attainment. Most GED holders take longer to begin their college careers than their diploma counterparts. And, probably reflecting a part-time rather than full-time status, they spend a longer time in college, or are more likely to be shown as "Never attained/still enrolled" than those who received a high school diploma. Reder suggests that GED holders probably need more than the five years that the study followed students to capture a true picture of their degree attainment.

The risk factors identified by Reder for post-secondary educational attainment are:

- Older than typical post-second-

- ary students
- Part-time rather than full time student
- Financially independent
- Working full time while enrolled
- Single parent
- Having dependents in addition to spouse

Socio-economic diversity, such as differences in income, class and other indicators of family socio-economic status, is not as significant a factor when comparing GED to diploma holders as the risk factor index. That is about double for the GED holder; he will average about three of the factors compared to slightly more than one factor for the high school completer. It is for this reason that Reder looks at ways to support the adult learner in areas such as transition, persistence, and attainment.

The changes he recommends would be in addition to the current adult education system, which would remain one component of a broader system with an enhanced structure. This would create what he calls a more expansive and effec-

GED holders are more likely to be first generation college attendees

tive post-secondary pipeline. Reder recommends adding two additional strands to the current adult education system, to promote and encourage postsecondary degrees or certifications. The first he considers a college equivalent program for participants who already have either a GED or a diploma, to raise their basic skills to the level required for college. This would result in skills certification. Students in the second strand would be considered college ready: these people would have the college equivalent skills,

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Chesterfield Texts for a Great Response

by Debbie Hinton

“Hey, I’m Ted for GED – get it? T-E-D for G-E-D!”

Those catchy words begin a 60 second radio promotion that Chesterfield County Public Schools Office of Adult Continuing Education aired last February with results that produced a 200% increase in GED® applicants and test-takers. The program, designed by Richmond-based advertising agency Madison + Main, ran radio spots on area stations inviting listeners to interact with a virtual Chesterfield County employee, Ted, to learn more about enrolling in the GED program. At the conclusion of the ad, listeners were directed to text message a keyword to a short code. Funding for the project came from a Virginia Department of Education *Race to GED* grant.

The ads prompted listeners to text the word *GED* to 68247 (OTAir), giving listeners the chance to save money on registration and testing fees. Radio listeners, anticipating the prospect of getting a better job, making more money, and feeling better about themselves, overwhelmingly responded to this opportunity, producing over 400 individual responses during the three-week campaign.

“Using the mobile phone and text messaging as part of this campaign proved integral,” said Dave Saunders,

President and Managing Partner at Madison + Main. “By using text messaging as our primary channel interaction, we were able to connect with a targeted younger demographic, and they responded in a big way.”

National mobile marketing and communication firm OTAir provided the back-end technical interface, supporting the short code and text messages.

“By using text messaging
... we were able to
connect with a targeted
younger demographic...”

“The GED campaign generated lots of excitement, and we were thrilled with the results,” said Deborah Hinton, Administrator of Adult Continuing Education for Chesterfield. “Getting Ted’s message in front of prospective test takers was important, and using such cutting edge marketing methods as text messaging enhanced the response rates.”

Because of the success, CCPS Adult Continuing Education applied for and received additional funds from *Race to GED* for two promotions for 2007-08, again managed by Madison + Main. The first promotion began October 1 and will continue throughout the month. The second campaign will run in February 2008.

An unexpected element of the campaign was the response from other areas about the ads. Interested parties in Virginia cities and counties, as well as from community colleges and universities, have contacted the Chesterfield program with requests for additional information. One adult program from Maine contacted the office when their community was impacted by plant closings.

“Based on last year’s results, we are very excited and optimistic about people re-connecting with Ted and responding to a free opportunity that they may have missed last time,” says Dawn Wells, GED Coordinator. “Truly, we have seen that passing this test changes people’s lives.” ■

Debbie Hinton is the program manager for Chesterfield County Office of Adult Continuing Education.

(continued from back cover)

skills and determination to persevere. He never lost sight of his goal to study filmmaking, and after two semesters at Valencia, he was accepted to Full Sail, School of Film, in Orlando. In 2003, he completed the program with a bachelor’s degree in film and moved back to Richmond. Currently, he is a retail manager and has completed several film projects. Collaborating with friends, he has begun looking for small film and production projects in the Richmond area. Although he plans to attend graduate school sometime in the future, he has not forgotten the importance of the GED in his accomplishments.

“I am very proud of my GED certificate,” Jahvis says. “It hangs on the wall beside my bachelor’s degree. I have been working on an idea for some time to create a film about how the GED changes lives and gives opportunity to people who think they don’t have any.” ■

Jim André is Specialist for Program Development at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

The Modern Version of The Iliad and The Odyssey:



by Marilyn A. Leahy

As the fall semester begins, I find myself packing my book bags like a warrior preparing for battle. Even though my teaching tools are battered, I pack them with the same respect shown to a legendary weapon like William Wallace's broadsword. I would like to retire part of my arsenal, lighten my load, but these thoughts are foolish, for I know I will need them in more ways than I can imagine, even after all the years I have been teaching.

The battle is not new. In fact, some argue the battle became a war when uni-

versities blossomed into cities, stimulating an enrollment boom like the Gold Rush fever of the Wild West. What precipitated the university rush was the same belief that drove the historic westward expansion: the promise of gold. College students have accepted the belief that without a college degree, a person will be left behind mainstream America; however, *with* a college degree, a person could move beyond the mainstream, chart new territory, and achieve the all-powerful American Dream.

What was lost in the dust and debris of this building boom was the student. High schools and higher education targeted the same goal – student enrollment. Numbers make business look good, a phenomenon we increasingly see in education, since numbers define how good we are at our jobs. However, student readiness should have acquired more attention than it ever received, for it has always been the student who wins, or loses, not the institution.

Whether this discussion involves faculty or employers, all agree students are under-prepared for the demands of college or the workplace. We recognize skill deficits as well as global weaknesses because they continue to resurface. Lack

of fluency, limited background knowledge, and vocabulary deficits interfere with reading, writing, and critical thinking. In preparing students to move beyond, whether to employment or higher education, these skill areas need to be the strongest weapons in the war chest.

The following examples are some of my most effective weapons in developing the skills typical post-secondary students need to succeed in the University environment.

Vocabulary Development

Nothing zaps students more quickly than words, specifically the number that appear in their new textbooks. It's as if they've been stunned with a Taser gun. An average course load exposes students to 75-150 new words per week. This is not the time to pull out the word-a-day calendar or even 3x5 cards, as these techniques lack the rigor needed for developing vocabulary in context-rich sentences. Vocabulary appears in multiple-choice questions, which is why it is critical to use it, not memorize it.

Another comment is warranted. Students are expected to have a working knowledge about foreign language phrases found in textbooks and media

Writing a Summary

Students need to know how to write both the more inclusive seven to ten sentence and the tightly developed one to two sentence summary that are analytical, not narrative and emotional. Begin with any topic, such as lawn care, diseases, holidays, or movies/television.

- 1 Use wh-questions to structure the writing.
- 2 Use key words to answer.
- 3 Create 7-10 sentences from key word responses.
- 4 Check for completeness—the reader should have no questions.

Summarizing Tips

To tighten writing, use gerunds or infinitive phrases. (“Running is beneficial.”)

Reduce ‘To Be’ verbs (they’re static). Revise with descriptive verbs. (“Clemson Tigers claw their way to victory, leaving Georgia Bulldogs howling.”)

Study the sports page, TV Guide, and medical pamphlets for effective models.

Students, Teachers, and The Horizon

print. Examples include *ex officio*, *legerdemain*, *vox populi*, *ad hominem*, *ad hoc*, *de facto*, *fait accompli*, *ergo*, *post hoc*, and *et cetera*. (No pun intended.)

Quotations

If you want to see a student lose writing focus, assign a quotation. With the exception of English courses that encourage narrative, how-I-feel writing, other courses require a discussion that begins with Bloom's Analysis Level (examining part to whole) and ends with Bloom's Judgment Level (weighing benefits to risks). Examples and their relevance are the heart of this writing, because examples provide the context for interpretation, and relevance is the justification for use.

Initially, students detest this assignment. They want to use personal experiences, belief systems and anything else to convince the reader that the quote is very, very wrong or absolutely, totally right. These students also, not by coincidence, will fare poorly during the Logic and Argument section of the course.

Quote writing is gold because it is analogous to short answer and test essay questions. My students discover this quickly and beg practice so they can control their testing performance.

Discussing quotes helps to...

- fill knowledge gaps in the humanities and sciences
- practice summary writing
- reduce egocentrism
- lay the foundation for argument

Sample quotes include:

"Imagination is more important than knowledge." *Einstein*

"Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing." *Vince Lombardi*

"I overestimated the patience of the American people and underestimated the tenacity of the North Vietnamese." *Dean Rusk*

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Vocabulary JOT LIST

1. Create a jot list to build associative vocabulary. Fold notebook paper to create two vertical columns. In the left column (red margin), cluster 3-5 like terms (ex. REM sleep, dream, sleep stage, narcolepsy). In the right column, define and generate an example. Skip a space and continue with another cluster.
2. Use the jot list for reverse study: Given the definition, cite the term.
3. Review with a study buddy. Reciprocal teaching tests knowledge gaps.
4. Create list while reading text material. A vocabulary domain promotes stronger notes.

Closing Remarks

In my classes, we break all the rules and love doing so: we read aloud; we challenge each other's ideas; we create learning. Why do we put ourselves on the line, risking blows to our collective self-esteem? The short answer: Fifteen weeks to transform students from the dependent learners they were in high school to the independent learners they need to be to survive the university system. The longer, more complex answer lies in a quote from Bill Maxwell's 1994 article entitled "Lazy Students Reject Topics That Require Them to Think," which states that for a democracy to grow

and flourish, students must possess three traits: introspection, self-knowledge, and maturity. When we create a community that embraces the teaching and learning of these traits, we foster more than reading/writing skills; we nurture the very essence of what makes us human, capable of creating the legacies described by Piaget and Erikson. ■

Marilyn Leahy, M.A., M.Ed. has been teaching freshman students at VCU reading, writing, and study skills for the past 11 years. She is also a Title I Math instructor for the Richmond City Schools. She has also worked for the READ Center.

Quote Writing

1. Locate the key terms.
2. Use a **dictionary** to define the terms.
3. Use an **encyclopedia** or other text to define the historical basis.
4. Decide how or if the quote has relevance to a modern situation.
5. Show relevance by example.
6. Time writing to four paragraphs in twenty minutes.
7. Use Toulmin Logic to develop comprehension strategies.

Achieving Student Success

by Tonya L. Creasy

Jumpstarting your adult education program includes having a realistic understanding of what the needs of your students are. The very foundation of program development and design includes the identification of specific remediation that will contribute to each student's success. For administrators, teachers and learners, the assessment process is an ongoing process for gathering and analyzing data to use for making educational decisions. There are several purposes for learner assessment: proper placement, identification of skill strengths, identification of individual goals, measurement of progress, program evaluation, and, not least, accountability. Proper identification of student needs is instrumental in decision making for programming, curriculum design, and instructional methods. The foundation for success of our students is in identifying exactly what skills, and at what level, need to be taught in the classroom.

Determining ABE/GED[®] students' needs is the role of formal assessment. The Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) is an assessment tool generally used in Virginia to determine adult skill level in the field of adult education. The TABE Locator provides the assessor with an indicator of what level TABE to administer. The TABE assessment provides a grade level for each student in the subjects being tested. This information is essential to course and level assignments. However, more information is needed to identify exactly what skill sets need to be taught and at what level within each course.

Focusing on student success is taking this assessment process to the next level.

The diagnostics step in the TABE assessment process is the key and is essential to student success. This diagnostic is critical to understanding what skills need remediation. It is the vital student information for determining proper course level and appropriate curriculum for the students.

In 2005-2006, the Northern Neck Regional Adult Education Program initiated a pilot course to determine how to better meet the needs of our students. The math class we used had nine active students. All of them were given first the TABE Locator to determine the appropriate TABE test level to administer. Following that, we used both individual and group TABE diagnostics to determine

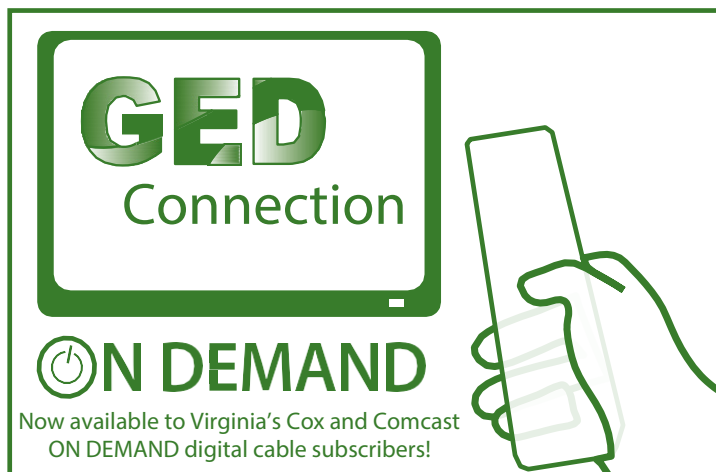
curriculum and instruction. The students "bought into" their learning – each student purchased his own text book. Students were in class four months before the post-test was given. To guide us in selecting the appropriate *Achieving TABE Success* lessons/pages for class instruction, we used *Focusing Instruction for NRS Gain*. (McDowell, M. *Focusing instruction for NRS Gain*. Contemporary.)

A combination of activities taken from *Achieving TABE Success* was used in this multi-level class. Since we had given the Individual Diagnostic Profile from

*One step at a time,
each student can
now visualize
reaching his or her
longterm goal...*

the TABE Complete Battery, we could identify the skill level in each area. We knew exactly what skills each student needed to develop. By having this overview of the entire class, we were able to develop a lesson plan. Students worked individually for part of the time, and

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Workforce Transitions at Virginia Beach

by Hillary Major

The transition from adult education into the workforce is one of the biggest challenges facing adult learners – and one of our learners’ most often cited goals. To meet the needs of learners seeking employment, the Adult Learning Center of Virginia Beach City Public Schools offers a variety of workforce-related courses.

Workforce Training

Foremost among these options are the Workforce Training Certificate programs, offering preparation for the careers of administrative assistant, licensed practical nurse (LPN), medical front office personnel, office associate, pharmacy technician, and veterinary assistant. A seventh certificate program leads to ServSafe® Certification for those interested in the food services industry. Workforce training courses offer no college credit, but are popular among adults who want a “down and dirty” introduction to the basic skills needed for entry level positions in their chosen field. The pay-as-you-go structure allows students to try out a career path that might interest them without too great a financial investment.

In order to keep the training courses relevant and up-to-date, the Adult Learning Center formed a workforce advisory committee, including more than 30 professionals and representatives from local businesses. These advisors (who are also, in many cases, prospective employers) make sure that courses teach the skills and knowledge students need to make a successful transition into the workforce by gaining and retaining a job. The advisory committee stresses the soft skills: being able to get along with co-workers, work in a team, and embrace a business’

work ethic, are often just as important as the ability to use technology and the more industry-specific hard skills. The Workforce Training Certificate programs cover it all: for example, the office associate program includes courses ranging from “Mouse 101” and “Improving Keyboarding and Data Entry Skills” to “Valuable Customer Service Skills” and, eventually, “Acing the Interview.”

125 individuals enrolled in Virginia Beach’s workforce training programs during the 2006–2007 academic year. These students typically already have their GED, or a high school diploma. Each year, however, approximately 6–10 students transition directly from one of the Adult Learning Center’s ESOL or GED® classes into one of the workforce training programs. Center Director Bonnie Mizenko notes that these students typically do well in their chosen program.

Career-focused GED Preparation

For students who want to begin preparing for future employment while working on their GED, the Adult Learning Center offers a GED class with a health care focus. Virginia Beach participated in the pilots of two new, industry-focused GED curricula: the *GED Career Bridge to Hospitality* and *GED Career Bridge to Health Care*. Both curricula incorporate industry-focused readings, vocabulary, and content alongside GED preparation activities, some of which are re-written to reflect a workplace context. These curricula can now be downloaded for free under “Publications” at www.valrc.org, the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center’s website.

In practice, Virginia Beach’s Adult Learning Center found the health care curriculum to be far more popular than the hospitality curriculum. Mizenko suggested that, due in part to the preponderance of hotels and other tourism-related

businesses in the area, most of her GED students think of the hospitality industry as a job rather than a career. Teacher Leona Collins agrees that students’ perceptions about an industry can be a barrier to enrollment; when she speaks to students before placement testing, she stresses both that there are management opportunities in the hospitality field and that there are opportunities for men in health care careers.

While the hospitality class failed to

Workforce training courses offer... a “down and dirty” introduction to the basic skills needed for entry level positions

attract any students during the initial pilot period, the health care class was small but successful. Class met for three hours, three nights a week and, on average, students stayed in the course for about 15 class periods, or five weeks. Though the class began with only 5 students, 21 students entered the class on a rolling basis during the pilot period. Of these, 9 earned their GED certificate during the pilot, and several more scheduled a test date.

According to Mizenko, the strength of the industry-focused class is that it speaks to students’ natural interests. Students realize they will be taking the same GED tests as everyone else (there is no health-focused GED), but having

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Post-Secondary Transitioning: The GED is Only Halfway There

(continued from front page)

come up against large college reading assignments and attendance policies that say three unexcused classes and you fail the course?

We also need to get them informed. Once GED recipients enroll, they actually receive more financial aid than traditional high school students, an average of \$2,748 in 2004 as compared to \$2,040 for traditional high school students. This is because GED recipients score higher

Successful transition will require adult literacy professionals to work closely with post-secondary educators.

on financial need factors. They are much more likely to be financially independent, be married, and have dependant children.⁶ Yet how many of our GED students know about their eligibility for financial aide? This is an important question.

Successful transition will require adult literacy professionals to work closely with post secondary educators, particularly those in community colleges. For if adult literacy educators can help get them there--college ready and informed--the community college has to take it from there.

GED recipients who make it to community college do well. Indeed, the average GPA for GED recipients is 3.2 as compared with 3.1 for traditional high school graduates.⁷ They are, however, less likely to complete. Three years after enrolling, 45% of GED recipients had no degree and were not enrolled as compared with 34% of traditional high school graduates.⁸ Part of the reason why GED recipients are less likely to complete is that they are at more risk.

Reder (2007), for example, found that GED recipients were significantly more socio-economically disadvantaged than traditional high school graduates and scored higher on a risk factor index⁹. Thus, when GED graduates enter community college, they need more help if they are to complete.

In recognition of the importance of the transition issue, several states have started transitions programs, and the U.S. Department of Education has commenced a major transitions initiative. To date there are several models.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs are post-GED programs that prepare students for post secondary work. They generally offer additional work in reading, writing, and math as well as college counseling. In programs sponsored by public schools or CBOs, programs establish relationships with local community colleges to facilitate admission and help adult learners to experience the community college context. The National College Transitions Network supports 25 transitions programs. Most use the bridge model. You can find descriptions of the 25 programs

on the [National College Transitions Network website](#).

Joint Credit Programs

In joint credit programs, secondary level students are jointly enrolled in high school and in community college. Their courses earn credit in both institutions. Thus when they graduate from high school, they already are admitted to the community college and have earned community college credit. Although these programs are relatively common, they almost always serve the traditional high school population. I could only find one adult literacy [joint credit program](#).

A variation on the joint credit pro-

gram is the career path program. In this case, the community college and participating high schools select a career path in which there are jobs and in which the community college has experience and the necessary resources— health care or the building trades, for example. Then, secondary level students start taking “joint” high school/community college courses in the career path so that they are well launched along the career path when they graduate from high school. The U.S. Department of Education and the League for Innovation jointly operate a career path program called College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI). It is K-12, but there are some interesting models:

- performance Measure Initiative
- Clear Choice Technologies

Merged Programs

USDE/OVAE has funded a research project designed to identify the most successful adult literacy transitions practices:

- <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/sectech/factsheet/cctrans/2005.html>
- http://www.berkeleypolicyassociates.com/text/work_project778.html

Based on that research, one of the most successful transitions endeavors seems to be the merged program. In fact, a Minnesota community college claimed an 80% transition rate. In the merged program, adult literacy students participate along with community college developmental skills students, and little or no distinction is made between them... same room, same teacher, same instruction, same support services. The problem is that this model may be illegal according to AFLA. The legality needs to be clarified.

Targeted Assistance

In higher education there has been a long tradition of targeted assistance for special populations. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, re-entry programs for women were quite popular. In targeted assistance, GED recipients would receive extra assistance to alleviate the problems that constrain their ability to complete. This might include additional counseling, financial aide, remediation, and perhaps childcare. ■

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adult education, he specializes in policy studies, strategic planning, professional development and evaluation research. For more information, see <http://hbeder.com>



Hal Beder

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9 Reder, *op.cit.*

Workforce Transitions at Virginia Beach

(continued from page 11)

relevant reading material and activities can be a motivating factor in persisting with their GED preparation. Student persistence in the focus industry is not guaranteed: Collins recalls one particularly eager student from the health care class, who, during a follow-up interview shared that she had changed her mind and now wanted to become a teacher! Additionally, some students may find the transition into a new career path difficult for financial reasons; students with a full-time job, for example, are understandably reluctant to take a part-time entry-level position with a local health care system, even if that job could provide support for further training and may eventually be the gateway to nursing licensure or other advancement.

Based on their experiences, Mizenko and Collins agree that the greatest challenge in offering an industry-focused class is finding enough students with the same interest to make the class cost-effective. One solution has been a focus on outreach. "We're always recruiting!" said

Mizenko. The Adult Learning Center regularly places ads in the local military news, in newspaper supplements and the community notice section of the newspaper, and on the local cable TV channel. They also print fliers and distribute camera-ready copy about their programs to over 100 area churches and 85 PTAs. Another solution has been grouping within the classroom. During group work, one small group might focus on an activity related to the health care field while other groups work with more general GED content.

A key element in making the health-focused GED class a success is the Adult Learning Center's partnership with local employers, Sentara Healthcare and River Pointe Rehabilitation. River Pointe shared information about the kinds of entry-level positions available at their center and offered their facility for a class field trip. Sentara took a more active role, sending speakers into the health-focused classes. While neither partner offered any guaranteed incentives to program com-

pleters, Sentara has said they welcome referrals from the Adult Learning Center. Sentara is also participating in the Center's Career Day. This annual event allows ABE, GED, and ESOL students to peruse vendor booths and collect information from area employers. 24 vendors are scheduled to participate in the next Career Day, on November 16th.

Obtaining employment is and will continue to be one of our learners' most important goals. Virginia Beach City Public Schools' Adult Learning Center has found a variety of ways to meet the need for workforce training and to ease the transition from the classroom into the workforce. ■

Hillary Major is Publications Coordinator at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Book Review

Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition, Proceedings of the Second Annual Forum

edited by Nancy Faux / reviewed by Hillary Major

Last fall, The Literacy Institute at VCU hosted the second annual LESLLA Forum. *LESLLA* (low-educated second language and literacy acquisition) refers to adult immigrants who have little or no schooling in their native language. An international assembly of more than eighty researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers met to discuss the needs of this group of learners and to ask a number of important questions: Why do some learners seem to remain at a certain skill level, unable to progress? Do low-educated learners learn to speak a new language in stages, and, if so, are those stages the same as those experienced by educated adults or by children learning to speak? What can reading components assessment tell us about second language learners? Exactly what effect does literacy have on learning to speak a new language? How does prior language knowledge help or hinder the language acquisition? What roles do memory and phonological awareness play in language learning?

The first section of the *Proceedings* reports recent research from experts in Europe and the United States. While most casual readers may find the scientific language and academic prose too dry, teachers will recognize many familiar problems and situations and discover valuable case studies. For example, in "Social and Cultural Capital at School: The Case of a Somali Teenage Girl," Martha Bigelow from the University of Minnesota profiles Fadumo, a Somali refugee whose first experience in formal schooling came when she was placed in an urban U.S. high school. Fadumo's strong family ties and her mother's interest and involvement provided valuable support for her studies. Strong ties in the immigrant community helped Fadumo's family access the translators they needed to negotiate the school system and receive support services. Even for the successful

English language learner, however, challenges remain: although Fadumo graduated from her high school with a 3.85 GPA, she found she lacked the skills to take advantage of post-secondary opportunities, requiring many developmental classes before being able to enter a nursing program. Fadumo said her biggest challenges included knowing how to apply to college, take the necessary standardized tests, and complete financial aid applications. Fadumo's case reminds adult educators both of the valuable resources and commitment learners often bring to their studies and of the many areas in which they need support, particularly in making the post-secondary transition.

The second and third sections of the *Proceedings* focus on policy and practice. In "Literacy in East Timor," Danielle Boon, Adult Literacy Advisor to the Ministry of Education and Culture of East Timor, describes the process of developing a national literacy program, including the creation of a core curriculum with content and themes relevant to adults in a new, developing nation. In "A More Perfect Union: A National Citizenship Plan," Jeff Chenoweth shifts the focus to the United States. Chenoweth, Division Director of National Programs at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), presents an analysis of the U.S. (legal) immigrant population and sets out policy and practice recommendations emphasizing the need for federal leadership and funding to assist low-income and low-literate immigrants to better integrate into U.S. society. Chenoweth points out that 37 million foreign-born residents live in the United States, making up more than 10% of the population. While immigrants strongly value U.S. citizenship, more than 8 million eligible immigrants have not yet been naturalized. Chenoweth discusses the barriers these immigrants

face. James Simpson, of the University of Leeds, concludes the policy section with an overview of second language instruction in the United Kingdom, including the field's response to *Skills for Life*, a national adult education policy.

In the practice section, Susanna Strube provides an analysis of classroom practice in the Netherlands. Joy Kreeft Peyton and colleagues from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, D.C., present a plan for "Professional Development for Practitioners Working with Adult English Language Learners with Limited Literacy." Peyton, who has worked with professional development planning teams from 24 states, including Virginia, notes that "approximately half of the students in federally fund adult education [ESL] programs test at the two lowest levels of the National Reporting System" (p. 213). Teachers need guidance and support to work with these learners effectively, and Peyton delineates key steps in the professional development process.

The *Proceedings* conclude with recommendations to further the field of low-educated second language and literacy acquisition for adults. The recommendations cover the areas of research, practice, and public policy; they highlight the fact that more attention needs to be given to the LESLLA population in all three areas and that "the general public should be informed of the issues and concerns surrounding the LESLLA population" (p. 244). As a whole, the volume makes a strong scholarly contribution to the critical but neglected field of second language and literacy acquisition for those adults who lack the necessary skills and knowledge to fully participate in their new countries and provides a firm foundation for future research.

To purchase or borrow a copy of the Proceedings, please contact the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. ■

Achieving Student Success (continued from page 10)

whole class curriculum featured group lessons focusing on the work learners were doing individually. To be certain we reached everyone in the mixed-level class, we blended activities for E, M, and D levels, ensuring that everyone was working at the proper level. More focused instruction, identifying resources and curriculum for skill building in weak areas, complemented the group work. Our results were that eight of nine students had an EFL gain – 89%!

Our diagnostics process included having students circle numbers on the Score-eze form, as well as using an individual diagnostic sheet. Students were able to follow their own progress and could see where they were improving. This added to their sense of accomplishment. Copies of our local diagnostics sheets are available upon request.

This pilot course gave us the information we needed to increase educa-

tional functional level gains and GED success. Despite the best intentions in 2006-2007 to replicate the success of this pilot, we were ill-prepared for making the systemic program changes needed to ensure each class followed the same protocol. We know we could have performed better in 2006-2007 had we made the systemic changes needed to ensure student success program wide.

These systemic changes are planned for 2007-2008. Instead of continuing open enrollment, we are planning 12-week courses and continuing our \$25 registration fee. For those adults enrolling too late for these courses, we offer an open enrollment Learning Lab in each locality to prepare them for the next 12-week course. The full assessment process: TABE Locator, TABE Assessment and TABE Diagnostic, is now in place for our 2007-2008 registration process. To improve student attendance and im-

prove retention, at the end of each course our design includes a post-assessment. We will offer higher-skilled students the practice GED, if the TABE score indicates an educational functional gain. If the student scores a 450 or higher, we will then offer the official GED test in that course subject.

Our program goal for 2007-2008 is to assist our students to pass the GED exam, one course at a time. With this approach, we offer our students concrete short-term goal achievement at the end of each course. One step at a time, each student can now visualize reaching his or her long-term goal of receiving the GED credential. This way, attaining the GED becomes a more realistic goal for our students. ■

Tonya Creasy is the Regional Program Manager for the Northern Neck Regional Adult Education Program.

Surveys Say: Adult Education Does Not Equal Post-secondary Success (continued from page 6)

but no degrees. They would require persistence supports, not skills development. These programs might include such wide range responses to needs as counseling, developing peer groups or cohorts, or providing childcare.

In order to put this pipeline in place, we would need to define and assess the skills necessary for post-secondary success. Part of this is accomplished now through the college admissions process and the post-matriculation skills assessment done both in community colleges, because of their general mission and purpose, and the urban universities, who generally accept a broader range of applicants than the smaller or more selective schools. Defining and assessing the skills for post-secondary attainment could easily double the size of adult education, Reder conjectures.

In addition, he says, we need more transition and bridge programs and more and new techniques for skills development and persistence supports. In fact, we need more information on a wide variety of sub-baccalaureate programs and providers for more meaningful evaluation. Reder points to Washington state and Kentucky for models of first steps in providing such supports.

The field of adult education is at an interesting juncture. In many ways, the information gathering required by the accountability aspects of funding begin to show us not only what we are accomplishing, but in areas we have not anticipated, what we can be doing, as well. When the information first began to show that GED attainers do not on the average accomplish as much academically or financially as high school diploma-

holders, those who are not familiar with the adult learner were not so surprised. High school completion is considered the norm, and by extension, preferred. We in the field know qualitatively or anecdotally, that those of our students who pass the GED and continue to a two- or four-year degree are unusual. It is not because they are not bright enough or academically skilled enough. It is more because the bare-bones system is too stretched and too spare to provide the support they need.

See the full report at: <http://www.nationalcommissiononadulthoodliteracy.org/pandp.html>. ■

Marcia Phillips is Specialist for Special Projects and Editor of Progress at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Jahvis' Story

by Jim André

When Jahvis Carter dropped out of high school in 1998, he gave up his dreams of attending college and having a career in filmmaking. He thought those pursuits required a high school diploma and SAT scores—things that were no longer available to him. So, he resigned himself to earn a GED® and look for a job that would allow him to get by.

After he failed the GED tests by one point in math, Jahvis enrolled in accelerated GED classes in the Richmond area. “I really didn’t have any idea of going to college at that point,” says Jahvis. “I attended classes to refresh myself on the types of questions that I knew I had missed on the test.”

Like so many adults, he found a more suitable environment for learning at the adult education center. “In GED class, everyone was mature and respectful instead of picking on each other or making each other feel stupid like in high school. I felt comfortable asking questions, and I

learned a lot, especially in math.”

While enrolled in the GED class, Jahvis ran into his middle school guidance counselor who convinced him that college was still an option and that he should investigate community colleges. Following his former counselor’s advice and indulging his love of warm weather, Jahvis looked into community colleges in Florida. Two months later, Jahvis passed the GED tests and moved to Orlando to begin fall classes at Valencia Community College.

At Valencia, Jahvis took general study courses and excelled, but he encountered

a few surprises in those first semesters in college. “After attending GED classes, I felt comfortable being a part of the adult world of college, and I felt I had the skills to do well, but college classes were less teacher-led and a lot more work. GED class was kind of light on the homework, so I wasn’t ready for the reading, quizzes and term papers I had in college. Plus, on some days, I’d be in classes all day.”

Jahvis offers the following advice to adult education programs that want to help in the transition from GED to college: “People don’t know that they have options after dropping out of school, so programs should first help them understand that they do. Then, make a whole class about getting the GED (certificate), applying to college, and developing the skills to be successful in college.”

Although he had to acclimate to the rigors of college, Jahvis had the study

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