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# Introduction

The *2000 Families First Idea Book*, like the 1999 edition, is a collection of lesson plans by Tennessee adult education instructors in the educational component of Families First, Tennessee's welfare reform program. These instructors have continued to break new ground for all adult educators as they create learning activities that integrate work preparation and basic skills.

Over the last year, the creators of these lessons participated in an action research project to try to make their classes more work focused. In the spirit of action research, they asked hard questions and took risks as they tried new approaches. They taught and learned from each other. For their stories, please see the companion piece to the *Idea Book*, *It Gave Me a Chance: Helping Adult Learners Attain Goals of Employment and Self Sufficiency*. When taken together, the two pieces document the action research project and provide all Tennessee Families First instructors with the opportunity to look inside the process and to use the results.

## **Context**

The integration of basic skills with work preparation has been a significant shift in adult education in the last ten years. Action research projects and the resulting *Families First Idea Books* reflect this rethinking of adult education in the context of welfare reform and the increasing national focus on workforce development. The federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 has made all adult educators more aware of this changing focus.

## **SCANS**

The 1991 SCANS report (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills): "What Work Requires of Schools" made it clear that "for work" people need a foundation of basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities as well as competencies in five areas: information, interpersonal, resources, systems, and technology. This report made a strong case for a much different framework for education.

In 1996 Tennessee took a groundbreaking stand in its approach to welfare reform by insisting that "for adults to be really self sufficient" they must have a basic educational foundation while they were preparing to go to work. Adults in Families First, Tennessee's welfare reform program, had the opportunity for twenty hours a week of adult education as a solid first step toward a sustainable wage.

### **KSAs (Tennessee Essential Workforce Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes)**

At the same time, the Tennessee Department of Human Services commissioned Dent Davis of the Institute for Work and Learning to work with Tennessee employers to find out what they needed in entry-level employees. Whereas SCANS presented a comprehensive array of work skills, Davis' research zeroed in on those "vital few" that were essential to getting and keeping a job. His extensive research, documented in "Keys to the Future: Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Work" (1999), provides valuable information for those charged with preparing adults to be successful employees, particularly if they are inexperienced in the workplace. The KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes) provided the basic framework for Families First adult education instructors as they began to integrate work preparation with basic skills. (A full listing of the Tennessee Essential Workforce Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes is found in the appendix.)

Copies of "Keys to the Future: Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Work" can be obtained by contacting Dent Davis at [dcdavis3@bellsouth.net](mailto:dcdavis3@bellsouth.net)

### **Equipped for the Future (EFF)**

While some teachers saw instant possibilities, others struggled with integrating work and basic skills. Some were troubled by narrowing the focus of adult basic education to work alone because they knew that equally important were educational experiences that equipped people to be successful in all areas of their lives.

A national initiative, Equipped for the Future, is providing a broader perspective that helps teachers reframe their instruction to take in adults' roles as workers, family members and community members. EFF skills parallel many of the Tennessee KSAs and SCANS skills, but they grow out of what adult learners themselves said they needed in order to be effective in their lives and equipped for the future. (The EFF standards and framework are included in the appendix.)

If you are interested in reading more about the development of the EFF role maps and standards, you may order (free) copies of *Equipped for the Future Content Standards: What Adults Need to Know and Be Able to Do in the 21st Century* from ED Pubs. To order: Phone 1-877-4ED-Pubs, e-mail to: [edpubs@inet.ed.gov](mailto:edpubs@inet.ed.gov), or use the Internet: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>

### **The 2000 Families First Idea Book: Learning Activities by and for Adult Education Teachers in the Tennessee Families First Program.**

Through the *2000 Families First Idea Book*, Tennessee teachers are sharing some of the learning activities they developed to integrate work skills with basic skills in their classrooms. Some of these learning activities stand alone and can be accomplished in one class period. Others are projects by themselves taking several class periods over a longer period of time to do. Still other single activities are integral

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parts of a larger project and are tied to other learning activities also included in the *Idea Book*. In looking over these learning activities, the reader's horizons will be expanded to encompass the variety of ideas that can be used to connect work skills and basic skills. These activities show the originality, inventiveness, and resourcefulness of the teachers who developed them. The hope is that sharing these activities will precipitate the same kind of creativity in teachers who read them and think about how to create similar atmospheres in their own classrooms. The activities in this book are only a beginning and an indication of what can be done.

These learning activities were submitted for inclusion in the *Idea Book* using the online interactive template for the Workforce Education Learning Activities Bank (LAB) at <http://slincs.coe.utk.edu/gtelab/>. The Learning Activities Bank collects and distributes high-quality Web-based learning activities that focus on the basic skills and knowledge adults need to be effective in the 21st Century. Using the LAB template provided Families First teachers with a standardized format and online help in designing their lessons. Many of the Tennessee learning activities submitted through the LAB and published here in the *Idea Book* will eventually also be published online in the LAB with the learning activities of teachers from across the country who are also seeking to combine work skills and basic skills in their classrooms. Readers of the *Idea Book* are encouraged to look for these and other work-related lessons in the LAB site, (URL provided above). Once on the site, point to "find learning activities" in the left navigation bar.

The learning activities in the *2000 Families First Idea Book* are presented in loosely organized sections around the four Equipped for the Future skills categories: Communication, Decision-Making, Interpersonal, and Lifelong Learning. Authors of the learning activities chose both primary and secondary skills presented in their lessons from the list of the 16 Equipped for the Future (EFF) generative skills, and the lessons were placed in the section of the large skill category under which their primary skill was located. Thus, a lesson focusing on "Convey Ideas in Writing" as its primary skill can be found in the Communication section, while a lesson constructed around the primary skill of "Take Responsibility for Learning" will be found in the Lifelong Learning section. Often the secondary skills chosen by the author would have placed their learning activity in additional sections, and when that is the case, the learning activities are referenced in the introduction to the section where their secondary skill would have placed them.

We owe the teachers who contributed these lessons a debt of gratitude. While many teachers have good ideas and develop good learning activities for their adult learners, it is not always easy to put these ideas into words that will clearly communicate to another person both the idea and how it was actualized. It takes time and attention to detail to do it. Thank you for all your good work!