

AN ACTION
RESEARCH REPORT
FOR ADULT
BASIC EDUCATION
TEACHERS
IN THE
TENNESSEE
FAMILIES FIRST
PROGRAM

Making It On My Own

Helping Adult Learners
Move Toward Self-Sufficiency

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and
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**Center for
Literacy Studies**

**The University of
Tennessee/Knoxville**

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Your Resource Connection

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Introduction

Families First, Tennessee’s ground-breaking welfare reform program, provides resources for participating adults to attend school to gain basic skills and prepare for work. Adult basic education is a vital, integral part of the effort to help adults leave welfare and become employed. Helping learners move toward self-sufficiency by getting ready to enter the world of work, not only through improvement of basic skills, but also by providing a work-focused, contextualized program, is a relatively new assignment for adult education practitioners.

This publication reports on an action research project undertaken by ten adult basic education programs in their Families First classes. Teachers in the Families First program wanted to know how to better prepare their adult learners for the world of work. Teachers proposed ideas in the broad categories of replication of a work environment in the classroom and job shadowing. Over a six-month period, program staff tried out their ideas and documented the results. Periodically they came together with other participating teachers and program administrators to share what was happening in their classrooms, do group problem solving, and support and encourage each other. Participants wrote the stories of their experience in their local program, and together, near the end of the project, summarized what they had learned.

The project was a collaborative effort of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education, the Department of Human Services, and The University of Tennessee Center for Literacy Studies. Office of Adult Education and the Department of Human Services provided funding and guidance for the project. Center for Literacy Studies staff facilitated the work.

Part of the mission of the Center for Literacy Studies is to link theory and practice through research, professional development, and partnerships. We are committed to participatory approaches, and assume that each teacher is an expert on his or her own practice. We facilitate action research and other projects to create spaces where practitioners



Helping learners move toward self-sufficiency by getting ready to enter the world of work, not only through improvement of basic skills, but also by providing a work-focused, contextualized program, is a relatively new assignment for adult education practitioners.

can take risks, reflect, share, and teach and learn from each other. Other examples of action research projects and learner-centered curriculum include those reported in *If Only I Could...Read, Write, Spell: Identifying and Helping Adults Who Find Learning Difficult* (1994) and *Lessons from the Holocaust* (1998). Through these and other activities we have renewed and strengthened our commitment to professional development experiences that engage teachers in finding answers to their own questions through participatory, active learning experiences.

At the Center for Literacy Studies, we are pleased to have been a part of this effort and salute the teachers and program administrators who participated. They have helped us all get much further along on our journey toward understanding how to effectively help adult learners move toward self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 1

Families First and ABE in Tennessee

You are about to read a report of the exciting, challenging, and ultimately rewarding journey of teachers and administrators from ten adult basic education programs in Tennessee who are learning how to better help adult learners get ready for work and move toward self-sufficiency.

These practitioners became action researchers in a project sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, the Tennessee Office of Adult Education, and the Center for Literacy Studies, testing and documenting ways to create more work-centered adult basic education programs. Their efforts included everything from setting up classroom “companies” complete with “paychecks,” to job shadowing. Teachers and administrators met periodically during the six-month project, talked with each other about what they were learning, and in the process, became experts on their own practice and more confident and skilled in their programs and classrooms.

A student in one of the participating adult education classes provided the inspiration for the title of this book and a reminder of why we do this work:

Now I need to get my GED...get a good job, a car, and make it on my own. Because I've spent most of my years helping (family), maybe it's my turn now.... I pray every day that I will have wisdom and strength.

The experiences of administrators, teachers and learners constitute this report, as the staff from each program tell their story. The remainder of this chapter describes the context for the big questions that practitioners investigated, including some information about welfare reform in Tennessee and in the nation.

Welfare Reform

In the past several years, it has become clear that to be successful at work, adults need not only basic skills, but other skills and qualities. In 1991, the Department of Labor commissioned a study to learn what



The efforts of the practitioners included everything from setting up classroom “companies” complete with “paychecks,” to job shadowing.



Families First policies acknowledge that without basic skills and work readiness skills, adults are unlikely to attain employment that leads to lasting self-sufficiency.



Practitioners share program ideas.

youth entering the workforce need to know and be able to do in order to be successful. Employers, unions and workers were asked to define the skills needed for employment and to propose acceptable levels of proficiency. The resulting SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) report *What Work Requires of Schools* (1991) suggested that workers need not only basic skills, but also thinking skills, personal qualities and competencies to equip them for the world of work.

Around the time that the SCANS report and other events pushed Americans to rethink the role of education and work, the public began to demand more accountability regarding the effectiveness of public programs. Policy makers were pushed to come up with new approaches to entitlement programs, approaches that incorporated personal responsibility as well as time-limited benefits and a "safety net" for families struggling to pull themselves out of poverty.

In the following years as the states and federal government moved toward welfare reform, the national debate centered on questions such as how to most effectively help adults gain the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be successful at work. How does this nation help adults move toward self-sufficiency? For example, should policy be established to put welfare recipients in jobs regardless of the person's skills or the quality of the job? Some policy makers asked difficult questions about whether basic skills programs, traditionally a long-term investment, were really worthwhile. Others questioned the wisdom of economics being the sole driver behind public policy and decision-making concerning the value of education.

At the same time, many observed that unskilled workers often move from low-wage job to low-wage job, unable to achieve real self-sufficiency or to truly move out of poverty. As they considered ways to restructure welfare, some policy makers noted respected research which suggests basic skills education, job training, job search, and workplace experience should be integrated for real improvement in the wages and quality of life of welfare-to-work participants. (D'Amico, 1997; Strawn, 1998)



Teachers realized that it took more to hold a job than being proficient at basic skills.

Families First in Tennessee

As welfare reform efforts were sweeping the nation, Tennessee legislators, public officials and citizens were engaged in debate over the future of Tennessee's welfare program. After much discussion, numerous public forums, extensive negotiation and compromise, on September 1, 1996, Families First, Tennessee's ground-breaking welfare reform program, was in place.

Welfare reform programs across the nation typically emphasize work and self-sufficiency. Tennessee's program does that, too. But Families First differs in an important way from virtually every other welfare reform effort: it actively encourages adult education (White, Ziegler & Bingman, 1999). Families First policies acknowledge that without basic skills and work readiness skills, adults are unlikely to attain employment that leads to lasting self-sufficiency.

In order to continue to receive assistance and support services, Families First participants work with a caseworker from the Tennessee Department of Human Services to develop a Personal Responsibility Plan that outlines goals and activities designed to help toward self-sufficiency. There are several possible "activities" from which participants may choose, including job training, job search, and job club. The Department of Human Services provides support services such as transportation and child care to enable adults to participate in sponsored activities.

Although eligibility and need differ according to individual situations, many participants in Families First who lack a high school diploma elect to spend up to 20 hours per week in adult education classes. More than 90% of the adult caretakers in families enrolled in the program have some work history, although it may be sporadic (Fox, Boyer, Cunningham and Vickers, 1998). While participants are working to gain basic skills up to the ninth grade level, there is no additional work component required, and no time limitations on assistance are imposed. Once a participant gains ninth-grade level skills, a work requirement of up to forty hours per week is imposed, and time limitations on assistance begin.

In the beginning, most adult education teachers operated their Fami-



Program supervisors, state office staff, and teachers work together on the project.



How can instruction take place in a different way, a way that helps adults become prepared for workplaces that demand not only basic skills, but also the ability to work together, to solve problems, and to flourish in the complex world of work?



Meeting together gives practitioners an opportunity to share their program stories.

lies First classes much like other ABE classes. They knew how to do a good job teaching basic skills. However, teachers soon saw that they needed to make changes to better help their Families First participants move toward work-readiness. Teachers realized that it took more to hold a job than being proficient at basic skills. At the same time, Tennessee policy makers at the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Office of Adult Education began to ask adult basic education teachers to integrate work-preparedness skills with basic skills in the classroom.

The Department of Human Services commissioned research to find out the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) that Tennessee employers believe essential for success in entry-level employment. That study revealed that while employers definitely value a GED or high school diploma, employee skills and attitudes such as dependability, following instructions and getting along with others are just as vital (Davis, 1998). The KSAs were developed from the SCANS framework in a collaborative project involving Tennessee employers and educators. A full listing of the “Tennessee KSAs” follows this chapter.

Even as teachers saw that learners needed more than GED preparation and heard requests from policy makers to create more work-focused classrooms, they also realized that little in their educational background prepared them for this task. How can instruction take place in a different way, a way that helps adults become prepared for workplaces that demand not only basic skills, but also the ability to work together, to solve problems, and to flourish in the complex world of work? Teachers needed a chance to explore methods of teaching in this different way. They needed to talk with each other and learn together how to weave basic skills instruction with activities that helped adults move toward self-sufficiency.

Program Incentive Grant Process

Working together, the Adult and Community Education Office, the Department of Human Services, and the Center for Literacy Studies devised a way to support teachers who wanted to learn more about helping



Program Incentive Grants were offered—small amounts of money to adult basic education programs whose teachers and administrators were interested in becoming action researchers on this topic.

Families First participants get ready for work. Program Incentive Grants were offered—small amounts of money to adult basic education programs whose teachers and administrators were interested in becoming action researchers on this topic. Applicants for the grants wrote their ideas showing how they would replicate a work environment in the classroom, or add a job shadowing component to their program. Applicants proposed a range of different approaches to the replication of a work environment, including implementing the “look and feel” of being on the job through the use of time clocks and workplace materials, to the creation of classroom businesses such as jewelry making or producing community directories. Other applicants wanted to try out job shadowing, in which adults “shadow” employees on various jobs, finding out about the jobs through observation as a direct learning experience.

Applicants agreed to document their experiments, and to come together with others engaged in the process to talk about what was being learned. They also agreed to share that knowledge with all Families First teachers and caseworkers and others who can learn from their experiences.

Action Research

In Tennessee, teachers have often used action research, implemented as a type of practitioner inquiry, as a way to answer the questions that emerge from their practice, and to gain skills and confidence in new areas. Practitioner inquiry is “a process of generating ideas through reflection and examination of practice, and exploring the implications of those ideas within the practitioner’s setting” (Drennon, 1994).

Teachers from the adult basic education programs and researchers from the Center for Literacy Studies decided to use the action research model again, choosing to come together in three day-long meetings over the course of about six months.

At the first meeting, we introduced ourselves to the group and described the ideas we had decided to try out in our classrooms. We discussed action research methodology and some ways of documenting. We also shared research questions.

Action Research Model

The steps generally include:

- *Reflecting* on practice and *identifying* a problem, issue, question, or concern;
- *Gathering* information on the issue or question;
- *Planning* some action to be taken, such as a new approach;
- *Implementing* the action plan;
- *Monitoring* and *evaluating* the changes that result; and
- *Sharing* what has been learned.



*The overall question central to our action research was
“How can we make our classrooms more work-focused in order
to better prepare learners for the world of work?”*



A learner demonstrates work readiness.

The overall question central to our action research was “How can we make our classrooms more work-focused in order to better prepare learners for the world of work?” A few additional questions were ever present during our project:

- What effect will spending classroom time on job-readiness skills have on student motivation? On student attendance?
- Will the emphasis on work derail learner progress toward the GED?

Several participants added questions they hoped to investigate within their own program and community, including:

- Will a focus on jobs allow my students to work well as a team, to make progress on all the KSAs?
- How can work materials collected from area employers be used effectively in class?
- What are the specific needed employee skills and knowledge in my community?
- Will a focus on job readiness change attitudes of my students who don’t want to work? To what extent might their attitude be due to fear? Will this work focus help them gain confidence?

Throughout this book, we come back to those questions.

In subsequent meetings, we shared the ideas we were trying out, helped each other solve problems, and offered encouragement and support. In between meetings, teachers were back with their students, trying out new approaches, often incorporating suggestions heard at the action research meetings. While teachers, administrators, and learners were “on the front lines” working to implement changes, staff from the Center for Literacy Studies identified and provided information on related issues to the group, provided support, and facilitated action research meetings. Near the end of the project, we began helping each other put our documentation in order and began drawing conclusions from the experience. One nearly universal conclusion we drew is that teachers talking with each other and supporting each other is invaluable in the process of changing practice.



One nearly-universal conclusion we drew is that teachers talking with each other and supporting each other is invaluable in the process of changing practice.

Using This Book

The primary purpose of this book is to help other Tennessee adult basic education practitioners benefit from what this group of pioneering administrators and teachers learned in making their programs and classes more work-focused.

We also hope to document what we did so that other Tennessee partners in Families First, and our colleagues across the country, might share our learning. We welcome your comments, questions and especially the sharing back of your experience in helping adult learners get ready for work. We hope that as you read Chapter 1, you became familiar with Adult Basic Education in Tennessee, the Families First program, and the action research and incentive grant process used to help the staffs from ten Families First/ABE programs in Tennessee better prepare their adult learners for work.

In Chapter Two, staff from the ten participating Families First adult basic education programs tell their stories in their own words. Chapter Three focuses on what we learned about replicating work environments in classrooms and making basic skills classes more work-focused. In Chapter Four, we summarize how to create a job shadowing program. In Chapter Five, we discuss what we learned from the action research process, including ways our practices changed as teachers and administrators reflected on the new knowledge and skills gained from the project.

Tennessee KSAs

The Department of Human Services commissioned research to find the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) that Tennessee employers believe essential for success in entry-level employment. The KSAs were developed from the SCANS framework in a collaborative project involving Tennessee employers and educators.

According to Dent Davis, author of the study “Essential Workforce Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) for Successful Entry Level Employment,” 2,804 Tennessee employers involved in the research considered 48 possible areas important for success in entry level employment. These were the twelve identified as the most essential:

- Dependability
- Cooperating
- Following instructions
- Listening
- Getting along with others
- Talking respectfully
- Doing the right thing—work ethics
- Following standard procedures
- Accurately working
- Having a GED/high school diploma
- Working as a team
- Quality in the workplace

How Workplace Laws Apply to Welfare Recipients

A statement from Department of Human Services to provide guidance as Families First classes become more work-focused

Nationally, welfare reform began with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) in August, 1996. This new legislation increased emphasis on the need to move welfare recipients from welfare to work. Prior to the passing of PRWORA, Tennessee obtained a waiver to operate the Families First program. Due to this waiver, Tennessee's program is different from those operated in other states. However, all states must abide by other federal laws that include but are not limited to: the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), Unemployment Insurance (UI), and anti-discrimination laws.

In Tennessee, qualifying work activities for program participants include adult education, Fresh Start, job search, job training, and employment. The goal of Families First is for participants to obtain unsubsidized employment that leads to self-sufficiency. Some participants may be involved in work experience or job shadowing as part of their job training.

The Fair Labor Standards Act is the primary law governing welfare recipients' entry into the workplace. If welfare recipients are "employees" under the FLSA's broad definition and not "trainees," they must be compensated at the applicable minimum wage. In Tennessee, most work experience and job shadowing slots are for job training purposes. In order to determine whether the placement is "employment" or "training," a "Six Point Test" has been issued by the United States Department of Labor. According to the "test", an individual (including welfare recipients) in job training that meets the following FLSA criteria, and is not otherwise an employee, is considered a trainee and is not entitled to the minimum wage:

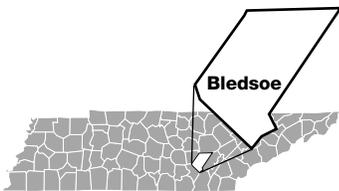
1. Training is similar to that given in a vocational school;
2. Training is for the benefit of the trainees;
3. Trainees do not displace regular employees;
4. Employers derive no immediate advantage from trainees' activities;
5. Trainees are not entitled to a job after training is completed;
6. Employees and trainees understand that trainee is not paid.

Any welfare recipient who is placed in a work experience or job shadowing slot that does not meet the above criteria, should be paid the minimum wage.

CHAPTER 2

Ten Program Stories

In this chapter, ten practitioners describe their award-winning projects to integrate regular GED curriculum with basic knowledge and skills for entry into the workforce. Here are their stories of change—sometimes difficult, sometimes easy—through trial, error, failure, adjustment, and eventual success. Therefore, here are ten success stories, multiplied several times over by students who went on to earn GEDs, to attend trade schools and community colleges, or to obtain regular employment through their own efforts and those of their teachers who were willing to try something new.



Bledsoe County, Tennessee

by *Barbara Young*

Bledsoe County’s Families First class consisted of ten females and one male when our project began. Most of the students had been unemployed for a long time and actually believed there were no jobs to be found in Bledsoe County. They all agreed that our unemployment rate had to be at least 60-70%, with one student predicting it to be at least 85%. They were shocked to learn from our county executive that the unemployment rate was only 4.5%. But even though jobs were available, staff knew that not all the students were ready for work yet.

We began by identifying the hidden skills that each student possessed. Each student demonstrated something that he or she knew how to do, and soon learned that they each had innumerable skills. Students then learned the skills needed to be a classroom assistant for a day. These included telephone etiquette, dressing for work, and operating a copier, fax, and laminator. Each student was assigned a “workday” and became assistant to the staff. Some of the students begged to be the assistant more than once. Everyone, even the shyest student, did a fantastic job as teacher’s assistant.



Each student demonstrated something that he or she knew how to do, and soon learned that they each had innumerable skills.



Learners prepare to use computers at work.

When the group discussed the proper ways to dress for work, the staff learned that the students had the desire to do this, but didn't have the money to purchase clothes. Therefore, we all went to a retail shop and used a portion of the grant to purchase an outfit for each student: casual, yet dressy pants and a nice shirt that were appropriate for a job interview. The general appearance of the job seeker was analyzed, and the students soon learned that we all needed to evaluate our own personal appearance—complete with a personalized checklist of our own hygiene. Students wanted to make a “first impression” as meaningful as possible, so everyone made a trip to Mr. Wayne’s School of Cosmetology for makeovers. This was the highlight of the project! Each student was personally pampered with a new haircut and styling. Their attitudes and self-esteem rose twenty degrees! They looked pretty, and more importantly, felt pretty; therefore, they were ready to tackle the application process.

The students analyzed various job applications and completed one of their own for a hypothetical teacher’s assistant position at our new Bledsoe Middle School. Each student created a computer-generated resume to accompany his or her application. This was followed by an “interview” for the position. They were so nervous awaiting the interview that you would have thought they were trying out for a real position.

We also completed two assembly line activities. We assembled, stapled, labeled, and sorted several hundred preschool newsletters to help another community program. The students decided on individual jobs, such as stapler, folder, sorter, etc., then proceeded to complete the three-hour activity. The students learned that accommodations had to be made so each student could do the job for which she or he was best suited.

Another assembly project we developed was creating a church registry for a local church as a fund-raising event for our incentive grant. A community church was contacted for member information on addresses, birthdays, anniversaries, and church history which students then keyed into our computer. Church photos were copied on a color copier, provided by another individual. The total number of registry pages processed and ready for assembly was twenty-six. After copying each page fifty times, the registries were ready for assembling.

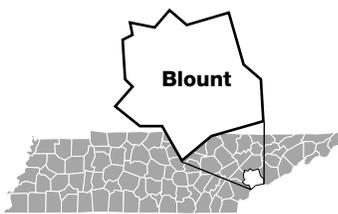
The pages were assembled in the correct order, the title page was added, the plastic cover was placed, and the plastic binder spine was put

onto each booklet with a binding machine. The fifty books were then boxed, ready to be delivered to the church. At a cost of \$5 per registry, the class made approximately \$2.50 excess revenue on each book, for a total of \$125 for the class. With a lot of effort it turned out to be a beautiful registry and allowed the students to get a taste of what assembly line work is really like.

Since this grant project began, I have seen changes in the students. Personal appearance has improved, and I am hearing more comments about getting a good job. Three students have gone to work part-time, and another student is trying to get accepted into a certified nursing assistant course. All of the students' materials and photos are gathered in a portfolio that they can use when completing future applications. Overall, the project definitely has had a positive impact on the students. They are more prepared to enter the job force and have a stronger desire to work than they did before the project began. This desire, in turn, has caused the students to be more goal-oriented, especially toward obtaining their GED. The project has definitely been a positive experience for students and teachers.



The students are more prepared to enter the job force and have a stronger desire to work than they did before the project began.



Blount County, Tennessee

by Glenda Turner

The Families First Program Incentive Grant gave me an opportunity to change the appearance of my classroom. It also gave me an opportunity to better prepare the students for the workplace. As more adults with minimum work skills come to Families First classes, teachers must meet the challenge of helping them obtain a job and being successful on the job.

I first took a look at my classroom and decided it looked very academic. I had a reading center, language center, etc. There was nothing that said "Job Skills Taught Here." That's when I decided I must change the appearance of my room. I now have a job center that is planned around a table and a bulletin board. The board has a large sign that reads "Job Power." I wanted to convince my students of the POWER of a good



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job. A good job means money. Money is what these students needed.

Our job center has books, newspapers, job pamphlets, resume samples, folders, job applications, etc. Nearby is the computer. This is where students compose their resumes and write their letters. Some students choose to use computer programs to guide them in preparing a resume. Others use book samples. These resumes and letters are kept in individual folders labeled “Job Information.”

The manager of a local clothing store told me many of her employees had difficulty operating the cash register and correctly counting money for the customer. I purchased a cash register and play money. The students chose partners and used advertisements from local newspapers as “items” to be purchased. One student would “purchase;” the other would operate the cash register. They learned how to make cash, check, and credit card transactions and also how to communicate properly. This activity can also be extended to include check writing to complete a purchase. As the activity was concluded, the student received a certificate of completion. The certificates were prepared by one of the students on the computer, and I know each student was proud to receive one.

Students are given the opportunity to operate the fax machine. Each day I invite a student to fax the daily attendance sheet to the Department of Human Services. After this activity is mastered, they receive a certificate. These certificates are usually kept by the students in their job information folders.

I purchased items needed to perform manicures. Manicures are done each Friday during the last forty-five minutes of the class period. The students look forward to this time of the week. They are learning the importance of attractive hands for job interviews and on-the-job appearance. This gives us an opportunity to discuss related topics such as clothing and hair care.

My students use a time clock when they enter or exit the class, as many jobs require the employees to use a time clock. The stamped cards are filed in my students’ folders, which may be used as proof of attendance.

My class is located in a building with other Adult Basic Education classes, and we have a student council under the direction of a VISTA worker. I encourage my students to be active in this organization. While I don’t believe I have the time to be responsible for the organization, I can and do encourage their participation. Students have an opportunity to develop leadership, and they can list this participation on their resume. The council has been responsible for planting shrubbery and

plants at the building entrance. They have had a bake sale to raise money; they are in charge of bulletin boards in the hall; and they have a newsletter, for which my students are responsible. They held a contest to name the newsletter. The name chosen? “The Encourager!” In their first newsletter, they included information on recycling, fat in foods, teaching manners, a recipe, information on those who had obtained their GED or had found jobs, and a Student of the Month. Another project for the council was selling food at a “Children’s Day in the Park” sponsored by a local arts council.

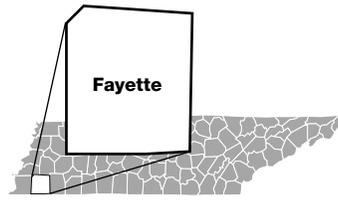
I have purchased and installed a scanner for our computer, which will utilize several software programs we have purchased with grant money. My students have prepared “Job Power” signs on the computer. We will have a contest to determine the best sign designed for a “Job Power” tee shirt. I have purchased a computer program “T-Shirt Maker,” where the scanned pictures are applied with special transfer paper and a heat process. Another possible activity is for students to make napkins and put designs on the napkins, using this same “T-Shirt Maker” process. This could lead to activities such as napkin folding, table setting, and manners. These are life and job skills that could be useful.

Several books have been helpful: *Job Savvy—How to be a Success at Work* (Jist Works); *Work Matters* (Contemporary); *Workforce* (Steck-Vaughn); *Building Success*; and *150 Ways to Keep Your Job* (J. Weston Walch). (Additional ordering information is available in this publication’s Resource List.)

Making these changes in my room and program have been enjoyable. I have seen a difference in students’ attitudes. They understand the importance of our emphasis on obtaining job knowledge and skills. Attendance has improved. In February, 19% of my students had 90% attendance. By April, the number had increased to 53% with 90% attendance.



Making these changes in my room and program have been enjoyable. I have seen a difference in students’ attitudes. They understand the importance of our emphasis on obtaining job knowledge and skills.



Fayette County, Tennessee

by Greta Wilburn and Molly McCarley



The objective of the training project was to allow our students to interact with others, to develop confident and positive attitudes, to convince our students that they are important and they do matter, and to develop basic skills.

The Families First participants at the Adult Learning Center in Somerville, Tennessee, have completed the “Workforce Projects,” and the majority of the participants are ready to take on the challenge of becoming full-time employees.

We began with training our students for employment using workforce activities in the classroom. “Making Connections” was taken from the *Getting There* portfolio we received at the Families First workshop last spring. After reading the *Getting There* material, teachers began calling various businesses asking for their participation in the project. A letter, which included student name, date, and time each student would report to work, and an evaluation form was sent out to each participating business. The local high school, elementary school, board of education, school cafeteria, a hospital, newspaper, and some independent businesses were among those businesses that put our students in training positions to gain knowledge about “real jobs.”

Twice a week the students would report to training instead of coming to class. Their job titles consisted of Secretary—filing, typing; Teacher’s Assistant—reading to students, grading papers; Record Keeper; Stocker—stocking shelves with products; and Manager’s Assistant.

This training project lasted for three months. The objective was to allow our students to interact with others, to develop confident and positive attitudes, to convince our students that they are important and they do matter, and to develop basic skills. After two weeks of class work on job search, completing job applications, dress code, and interviewing, the students were interviewed by professionals. Additionally, representatives from various careers came and spoke with the students concerning their job titles.

Meanwhile, other activities were implemented through teaching, observing, listening, doing, and testing. Skills, such as communication, job, interpersonal, attitudes, and writing were taught intensively in the classroom. A schedule of weekly activities was posted. Before beginning

the training sessions, students recited the class's five affirmations. Reciting the affirmations gave our students the confidence they needed to believe in themselves, that their lifestyle could change from dependency to being independent.

An assembly line project and a Christmas project made a tremendous impact on our students' morale. They began to understand the importance of attitudes, working together as a team, communication, following directions, and being on time. The Families First supervisor (Molly McCarley) introduced the assembly line project, which used a facilitator and a work team to create artificial poinsettia plants. The facilitator designated what the group would do, then the team went to work cutting paper, gathering paper together from the ends, wrapping wire around the paper, and, finally, the facilitator placed the finished product into a box.

Several teachers headed the Christmas project. Students were creative in making Christmas items to be on display during Open House at the Adult Learning Center. The "point game" activity was also a part of the Christmas project. Points were given for workforce activity (questions and answers), for Christmas items for the Open House, for assembly line work, and for attending community services. Prizes were then awarded based on number of points earned. The first three were monetary (\$100, \$50, \$25), with the remaining ones receiving gifts according to number of points earned.

The Allison Corporation, a car seat cover manufacturer, afforded the students another assembly line training experience which required labeling 5,000 bags of seat covers per week. This



FAYETTE COUNTY ADULT LEARNING CENTER

16210 Highway 64 West Somerville, TN 38068 901.465.4231 FAX 901.465.7370

Molly McCarley
Supervisor

Lillie Shelton
ABE Counselor

Patricia Moss
ABE Counselor

February 27, 1998

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am writing to request your help with a special project we are engaged in at The Adult Learning Center. We are working with 30 women and men who are current AFDC (welfare) recipients and are participants in a program called Families First. These students come to class five days/week at The Adult Learning Center to work on their basic skills in preparation for obtaining a GED diploma or to upgrade skills to take college entrance tests.

Most of them have been on AFDC for a number of years and need to make a transition from welfare to work, or further education. This is not an easy transition for a person to make.

We are beginning a curriculum called "Getting There" in which the students will explore their own goals and values, their job interests and opportunities and learn some job seeking skills. Part of that curriculum includes having them "make connection" to the community by meeting/sharing with someone in the community who is a business or professional person and who could listen to them and share some of their own ideas. You were identified as a potential "mentor".

The time commitment for each participant will be from 9:00 A.M. until 12:00 Noon. The participant is to report to his/her mentor for further instructions. An evaluation form will be sent to you prior to the participant's visit with a self addressed stamped envelope. Please mail on completion of site visit. This evaluation form will assist us in training our clients in job seeking skills.

Thank you for supporting this request.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Greta Wilburn
Mrs. Greta Wilburn
Families First Instructor

Molly McCarley
Ms. Molly McCarley
Supervisor of Adult and Community Education



For our learners, it was very important to be able to practice this kind of work in a familiar, supportive environment as they gained the work skills they need when they actually obtain employment.

activity called for checkers, labelers, stackers, and loaders. Monday through Friday for two hours in class, the participants would work on the assembly line. Checkers checked the bags to make sure bags were in the right order to be labeled. The checked box of bags would be passed to the labelers to place labels on the bags. Next, stackers would check for correct labeling and label placement, then align the bags correctly in the box. Loaders would load the completed boxes onto a van for transportation to the Allison Corporation.

The checkers found a few bags not straight. To pin point who was not doing the work correctly, one of the participants suggested each worker initial his/her work. The problem was solved! The Allison Corporation was elated with the Families First participants' performance. The work was efficient, and the class was rewarded with an honorarium from the company.

In this project, the students were also exposed to using calculators and sales items from sale papers of various department stores. Twice a week, students were given a calculator along with activity sheets on how to calculate interest rates, mark-ups, percentages, and deductions from pay checks.

A second type of project was telephone technique: developing positive telephone skills while reinforcing the importance of all aspects of communication skills-especially listening. Various activities were implemented in the training sessions, including role-playing on communication skills through the correct use of the telephone concept. After the training sessions, participants were sent out to on-the-job training assignments to the same businesses listed at the beginning of this report, where they only answered the telephones.

These kinds of projects are different from simply sending students out to work on an assembly line or in an office. For our learners, it was very important to be able to practice this kind of work in a familiar, supportive environment as they gained the work skills they need when they actually obtain employment. This is an exceptional opportunity to gain the confidence required to sustain a job.



Johnson City, Tennessee

by Carol Kiener

During the summer I watched a television news magazine program about women in non-traditional jobs. It explained that there were women making very good money who seemed to be happy in these jobs. I thought that was a terrific idea! When the grant opportunity arose, I decided to see if the non-traditional jobs would be an incentive to my women students to get their GED more quickly and get into the job market.

First, I began calling and visiting employers to try to find jobs for the students. It was harder than I had imagined. None of these businesses would let the women—or anyone—shadow. The barrier no one had seemed to think of was insurance. The women would be in dangerous places for a length of time, not just a visit. I contacted several places including the State education office and local school officials for insurance possibilities. Nothing was available on the State level, and the adult students were over the age limit for school insurance. If I were to pursue my idea, there HAD to be a way around the insurance problem. I began asking if the women could come to work for the employer for minimum wage for a limited time—no more than three months, after class hours. I found three businesses that agreed to do that for the Families First program.

Meanwhile, in class I continued to teach job skills to get the students ready for the jobs they were to shadow. I made booklets for them to keep their lessons in along with materials that I had compiled on attitudes and communication. Additionally, The University of Tennessee extension office provided information on getting and keeping a job.

By late fall, two things began to happen. My students were doing well in class, and the ones who came regularly began to graduate out of the program. Seventeen Families First and four ABE students received their GED this year. The remaining students had very poor attendance. Only one Families First student attended regularly who had not yet obtained her GED. I talked to her about going to work in a tire and automobile repair shop; she was interested. I sent her for an interview, and the employer called to say he would hire her.



When the grant opportunity arose, I decided to see if the non-traditional jobs would be an incentive to my women students to get their GED more quickly and get into the job market.

I had books made for the students to take to the employers containing a contract for the student and employer to sign together. It stipulated the student would come to work at a specific time—designated by the employer, and not during class hours—unless the student had a doctor’s excuse for absence, in which case, the student would call both the employer AND me. Additionally the booklet had a chart with the KSAs and a place to mark the date. The student was to mark the KSAs daily which she encountered. The back of the book was devoted to notebook paper where the student would keep a daily journal of feelings about the job. Of course I had explained that form was not important; real feelings and experiences were. Daily the student was to report

to the class what they were doing and let the class ask questions. The “shadower” was excited to tell what she was doing, which was great communication.

I felt I had covered most of the obstacles that any of the three of us—student, employer, teacher—would encounter. I was wrong! My student “Anna” was working 1-5 p.m. daily and on Saturdays. I received no negative reports from either student or employer, then Anna began talking about going to truck-driving school. Within six weeks she went from ABE Level II to Level III. I gave her the practice test, because the employer said if she passed her GED, she could stay on. (I was thrilled!) Then the bomb hit! Anna came in to tell me she had passed her GED but the employer was laying her off. Why?? He found out she had been driving on a revoked driver license. There it was—the question I had not asked because I had not anticipated the problem! I only knew she had a driver license

**A Sample Contract
for Students in Job Shadowing
Used in Johnson City**

I, _____, agree to intern from _____ to _____ on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (circle the days you will intern). I understand that this is training for a job and that I will come on all days on which I have agreed to come. Unless I am sick, I will attend. The only sick days that will be accepted are those for which I have a doctor’s excuse. In the case of illness when I will need to go to a doctor, I will call both Mrs. _____ (teacher) and my employer. Non compliance with this policy will terminate the internship.

I will keep a journal of what I am doing daily at my place of employment. I will share my experiences with my class, daily.

I understand that my employer will be evaluating me on my ability to get along with others, working on a team effectively when necessary, cooperating with others, listening for understanding, talking respectfully, following instructions, accurately performing my work, and my dependability. This evaluation will be shared with the project director.

Employer Signature _____
Date

because she had used it as picture ID for her GED test.

By this time in the school year, all the incentive grant participants from around the state had met together once to share their ideas and experiences. I was feeling bad about the poor daily attendance of most of my students—which meant I had no one to send to the other two placements I had lined up—so I decided to try some things I had learned from the other teachers.

I purchased a time clock, and we began talking about our class as a business. I explained to the class that the school system gave us memberships at a Wellness Center and that many industries did the same. We discussed why businesses would do that for its workers, deciding that good health made for a better workforce. With that, we began “Noonliting”, a new program through the UT extension office. Since a personal trainer was not an option, we decided to walk for fitness. Christy comes once a week from the extension office to give us nutrition tips, food demonstrations, and to weigh us. At the first meeting for “Noonliting” we set weight goals and began a weekly weight chart. All students were enthusiastic about it. We walk every day—either in the gym or outside—from 11:45-12:15. It gives them time to talk and walk; most have lost weight or at least maintained. They feel very good about themselves.

The time clock has been great. We have learned how to use it, and on Mondays we add up our hours and figure the percent of time we have attended. From the sharing session I learned one county was using “Living in the Real World”, which sounded like a good fit with the time clock. I have ordered it, and this should make my students feel more “on the job.”

Even though I have had 23 students pass their GED this year, others were not willing to try or go into the non-traditional jobs that were offered. I knew from the get-go that these kinds of jobs were not for everyone; I only hoped that for some it might be eye opening and the right thing! I did have a student who got her act together and passed her GED within six weeks after starting work. That was my one success story. Learning from the other grant participants has been the most exciting part about getting the grant.



I explained to the class that the school system gave us memberships at a Wellness Center and that many industries did the same. We discussed why businesses would do that for its workers, deciding that good health made for a better workforce.



Lawrence County, Tennessee

by Carole Cheatwood



Over the past two years, I can't begin to count the number of times students came into the classroom, with the idea that the GED was the magic key to open doors to the future. However, once they got their GED, some still could not get a job.

Background

After attending the fall Families First workshop, I decided to spend more time teaching workplace skills. I used the *Workforce Building Success* series daily. I tried to incorporate the KSAs immediately following the workshop in our group discussions about work related topics. Over the past two years, I can't begin to count the number of times students came into the classroom, with the idea that the GED was the magic key to open doors to the future. However, once they got their GED, some still could not get a job.

I started thinking more and more about how to “teach” the KSAs. My program coordinator encouraged me to apply for the incentive grant to replicate the workplace in the classroom. We applied for the grant in hopes that we would have the needed opportunity to change the classroom into a workplace.

My program coordinator and I put our heads together to come up with an idea to make ABE class an actual training center for future workers to learn necessary workplace skills, such as the KSAs. Also, they needed to learn necessary skills to get a GED. Originally, I thought the workplace skill focus would detract from the previous GED skill focus. However, we came up with a concept where workplace skills CAN go hand in hand with learning GED skills.

The Plan

We devised a plan where Families First students would have to clock in and out just like a regular job. They were all given a budget; and bills were set at a realistic amount. Each “worker” had to apply for a job within the classroom. Interviews followed. Students would visit local businesses corresponding to the job they were studying. Students were “hired” on a temporary basis for a period of two weeks and given job titles and assignments. Workers figured their own paycheck at the end of two weeks.

The budget was designed to consume 90% of the “earned” income based on 20 hours a week at \$8.25/hour (ABE dollars). Ten ABE dollars equaled one real dollar of buying power in the ABE Store. The store was stocked with items the “workers” suggested they would like to buy from the store. We used some of our Incentive Grant money to purchase rewards for students with attendance better than 90%, since DHS requires 90% attendance to be in the Families First program.



Using a time clock in class helps form good work habits.

What Happened

During the first two-week cycle, we made our first newsletter. We visited a local newspaper and we “hired” writers, editors, and typists. Each group had specific assignments to accomplish within their group to complete the newsletter.

The second workplace we replicated was an office. We visited the local Board of Education and a local bank. Then, back in our adult education class, we devised an eight-week training period for receptionists, secretaries, accountants, and office workers. Each worker worked two weeks in each area. The receptionists learned how to use basic office equipment such as the copier and fax machine. They practiced answering the telephone, taking messages and filing. The secretaries practiced keyboarding and word processing skills. The accountants were responsible for keeping track of the inventory in the ABE store, as well as entering information in the computer for the employee time sheets. The office workers filled out PELL Grants for practice and worked on accurately filling out forms. Following the office setting, the class produced a second newsletter. Currently, the class is divided into three groups. Each group will work for five weeks in one of the following areas: Health Occupations, Payroll, and Automotive Trades.

Changes and Documentation

As with all new programs, adjustments had to be made. Our original plan was to fill out a new job application and have an interview every two weeks. The reality is that job applications and interviews were done every four weeks. Furthermore, instead of studying one job for two weeks, we are extending the time to five weeks to allow the workers more time to learn a job and go into more depth.

Another change we made was to allow the students an opportunity



Another way we found to document attitudes towards KSAs and progress is to have the students do daily journal writings with an emphasis on how the KSAs affect not only their personal, but professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.

to choose what job they were to study instead of having them randomly draw from a hat. This was done to empower students by giving them the opportunity to make choices to form their future.

Due to the constant request for “GED class,” we decided to compromise and have GED class the last two hours of each week. This time is spent working on the GED and tying loose ends as a whole group. This is also the time where I give an opportunity to voice opinions through the “Suggestion Box” and discuss how things are going.

For documentation, I devised a “Cycle Survey.” After each cycle, workers fill out a form which asks them to describe what GED skills and which work skills they learned. They may offer any suggestions for improvement. Also, students write a paragraph or two every two weeks to express in writing what they are learning.

At one point during Cycle 2, I tried to have an observation sheet for each worker. This was extremely time-consuming. As a result, I only used the observation sheet on a daily basis for a short period of time. I still use them, but only once every two weeks to document what work was completed during each cycle.

I found that the simplest way for me to document that the students were learning the KSAs was to have each student write a short sentence with each of the KSAs at the end of the day: i.e., “I practiced dependability today by returning from my break within the allotted time.”

Another way we found to document attitudes towards KSAs and progress is to have the students do daily journal writings with an emphasis on how the KSAs affect not only their personal, but professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Attendance and Statistics

From August to December, attendance averaged 12.8 students. From January to March, attendance averaged slightly better at 13.3 students. From August to December, there were 78 new students enrolled. From January to March, there were 27 new students enrolled. Of the attending students, 11% of the students passed the GED and 11% more only need to pass one more part of the GED; 4% of the students were ready to take the GED and signed up, but went to work; 22% gained the confidence they needed to get into the work world; 41% of the participants during this three month period moved up to the next level. Overall, Lawrence County has reduced the welfare rolls by 55%.

Looking Back

Looking back, I have learned that it is not very difficult to teach the 12 KSAs in a GED classroom. I remind my students by holding up both of my hands and saying that one represents GED skills and the other represents work skills. Then I put my hands together and show that we are trying to work on both the KSAs and the GED skills at the same time. Any kind of group work will incorporate the KSAs. My students use the computer, fax machine, and copier as much as possible. I think it is important to have some basic workplace skills for any job. We plan on reapplying for another Workplace Incentive Grant, if available. We will continue to use what we have already done as lesson plans, as well as expanding, using students' new ideas. As we have talked with the Department of Human Services, it has become apparent that this type of workplace related program is a much needed component to the Families First Program.



McNairy County, Tennessee

by Micki Hendrix

The Spark

The Selmer, Tennessee Families First GED class is made up of a diverse group of people, with a diversity of interests and aptitudes. About two years ago, one of the participants expressed to me her desire to be a florist. She said that she had hopes of getting her GED and working as a florist. Eventually, she hoped to own her own shop. I had read quite a bit of material on apprenticeship and its advantages and was already sold on the idea. I made it my goal to help this student—and others—find a way to explore the work world by job shadowing. When the program incentive grant opportunity came available, I jumped in with both feet!

Our Program

Before receiving news that we had received the grant, I had already implemented many job-related activities in our classroom; however, after



It has become apparent that this type of workplace related program is a much needed component to the Families First Program.



I made it my goal to help this student—and others—find a way to explore the work world by job shadowing.



Participants develop marketable skills.

getting the good news of the grant, I proceeded with my “plan of action.” It consisted of three phases of training and job shadowing that each interested student had to complete. During the actual phases, we made changes to meet the needs and wants of the students and the employers.

What Happened

Phase 1 Training: Phase 1 went as planned. There were some surprises. I found out many new things about the goals of the participants as they revealed them in essays and discussions. The Career/Aptitude Tests also gave us a better picture of what direction to take with each individual. *Social Skills on the Job* (ordering information available in this publication’s Resource List), a video training program was eye opening and valuable. The students learned a lot of KSAs and social skills necessary to get and keep a job. The videos sparked many discussions.

Phase 2 Training/Shadowing: There were many surprises during this phase of the program. It was incredibly worthwhile to interview each student individually. I found out about many obstacles as well as strengths that even they had not realized. After the interviews, we designed a plan to overcome the obstacles (example: need a driver license) and a plan to emphasize strengths. During this phase, each student completed a mock job application and created a resume on the computer. After determining appropriate clothing for interviews and job shadowing, each student was invited to purchase an outfit from a resale shop with the grant money. We also continued working on GED skills during this phase. Several students scored well enough on the practice GED to plan to take the GED test. Phase 2 concluded with job shadowing experiences at our adult education office. Students learned basic office skills as well as KSAs. Their self-confidence was definitely boosted because they could operate office machines, answer phones correctly, etc.

Phase 3 Training/Shadowing: As new students entered the class, they had to be taken through the training process. This became difficult, but manageable. The goal was for each student to have at least five job shadowing experiences. Many of the participants thoroughly enjoyed every experience they encountered. Some of the employers were more helpful than others. We had one employer who actually ended up discouraging

the participants! Even this was a learning experience. We discussed each job shadowing visit in class and identified KSAs that were practiced. A few of the participants actually left the program to work, rather than participate. My concern is that they will not continue to study and get their GED. I have stressed throughout this program that the participants need at least a GED in order to advance on a job. One student job shadowed at a nursing home, and they offered her a job. She took it but promised to still come to class as much as she could. Sadly, she did not come back for a long while, but eventually did return. Her goal is to be a nurse. She was employed as a nurse's aide, but must get her GED to go to nursing school. I stressed this to her. For most of the students, job shadowing was a very rewarding and educational experience. Most of them have gained self-confidence. Many of their fears about working are gone. One of my goals was to convince them that being financially independent is extremely important for them and their families. I believe most of them have gotten that message.

Miscellaneous

Surprises: A need for driver licenses. We studied for the driver's test in class, and many of the students successfully passed the test. Others are in the process. Some have a suspended license and cannot test.

Other Surprises: The varied interests and skills.

Disappointments: Some participants left the program to work before getting their GED. Some participants did not want to job shadow. Some students did not show up when scheduled to job shadow.

Hopes that Came True: Most of the students gained beneficial experience and skills that will help them with any future job. Many of the students realized the value of education and planned to further their education after the GED. Some students passed the GED and have applied for college or technical school.

Class Attendance: Class attendance improved at first. Later, attendance dropped. Several students had personal problems, such as death in family, eviction, etc. Attendance picked up again in April.



For most of the students, job shadowing was a very rewarding and educational experience. Most of them have gained self-confidence. Many of their fears about working are gone.



This whole experience has enhanced my teaching methods. It has helped me to implement life skills and workforce skills into the program without taking away from GED preparation.

What Did I Learn?

WOW...DID I LEARN A LOT!!! I learned so many things. I learned how to apply for a grant. I learned how to turn an idea into a plan and implement it. I learned to expect the unexpected and deal with it. I learned more about the overwhelming obstacles so many of our participants face. I learned that self-confidence and self-esteem improve when new skills are mastered. I learned that when students know they can do a job well, they are happy. I also learned so much from the incentive grant meetings with other teachers. Sharing ideas is awesome! This whole experience has enhanced my teaching methods. It has helped me to implement life skills and workforce skills into the program without taking away from GED preparation. I am very glad that my class was privileged to participate.



Messick Adult Education Center Memphis, Tennessee

by Gloria Cook-Rolfe

Messick's project was to design and implement a simulated work setting in the physical classroom, while preparing students for the GED. Orientation was done with all of our students that were to be involved in our project. The work stations and how they operate were discussed with students. Students were asked to treat the classroom environment as if it were a business.

The first thing we did, after orientation, was to decorate our rooms with workplace-related material. Bulletin boards displayed various tips regarding how to obtain and keep a job.

An employee suitability course was offered to prepare our clients for the workplace. This course covered the following topics: employment orientation, job application, government documentation, resume writing, interview process, personal finance, positive attitudes, personal growth, anger management, health care coverage, and voter registration.

Five study stations for content areas were created in each teacher's

classroom. We added wall bookcases, and offered the students an abundance of resource materials for the five content areas.

The computer lab offered the students a chance to do remedial coursework in subjects in which they were encountering difficulty in GED preparation.

A job skills resource room was established to provide students with various educational material dealing with job skills.

Time clocks were purchased and mounted on walls for students to clock in. A clocking-in procedure was written, with a standard procedure adopted for students to clock in, including both Families First and Adult Basic Education students.

Students picked company names for their classrooms. They designated titles for job responsibilities and developed job descriptions. I got a little frustrated losing job managers frequently—but then I laughed, remembering this is the goal of the program. Students progressed from one level to the next, so as soon as one manager was trained, he or she moved up.

Pre- and post-TABE tests were given to the students. Pre-GED tests were given at the start of the project with another given near the end to measure progress.

These are only a few of the exciting things we have done with the project. To our students and the teachers, this is only the beginning. We hope, as Emeril Lagasse says, “to take the project to a higher level.”



I got a little frustrated losing job managers frequently—but then I laughed, remembering this is the goal of the program.



Stewart County, Tennessee

by *Lajuana Parker, Betty Heflin and Marcia Robertson*



Through this project, the Stewart County Families First class produced a community services directory, a cookbook, and Mother's Day baskets and mugs.

Our Families First class is small, usually consisting of 6-10 people. Attendance is a continuing problem and motivation is always a challenge. That's why we were very interested in the incentive grant and excited when we learned we would be a recipient.

Initially, we talked with our participants to explain changes that were to be implemented and how the changes would affect them. We then introduced them to changes to be made in the classroom, clarifying what the grant would mean to our class and the opportunity it could provide for each of them personally. It began with personnel from the TVA plant at Cumberland City sharing their workplace regulations, hiring practices, and personal experiences with getting into the workforce.

Through this project, the Stewart County Families First class produced a community services directory, a cookbook, and Mother's Day baskets and mugs. For the directory, the participants contacted agencies and organizations from a list, introduced themselves, informed the person to whom they were speaking about the directory, and filled in a contact form with the needed information. The students then typed the information into a computer in a specific format, printed it out, and put sample copies together in a stapled booklet. The samples were corrected as necessary and changes made in the computer.

The Mother's Day basket supplies and mugs were purchased by the Literacy Council or donated by individuals. The students gathered a month's supply of prayers and scripture references to type, scroll and tie with curling ribbon. These were then tied to ivy, which they had arranged in the mugs and around the baskets, and were ready for selling for the holiday.

The cookbooks were written to honor mothers or other special women in our lives. The participants distributed forms for people to submit recipes. The class then formed teams to copy, compile, and bind the books. The class also decided how to advertise and distribute the products. Newspaper stories, flyers and word-of-mouth were the media

used. Placing displays in areas of high traffic, such as the library and courthouse, was the primary distribution method.

Since the directories were done as a service to the community, there were no profits from them. More profits were realized from the cookbooks than from the baskets and mugs. Money from the sales was put back into the class productions and used to buy incentives for class members to “purchase” with points accumulated through attendance, job performance, attitude, teamwork, and other evaluation criteria. A schedule of two hours of workforce daily and two hours of regular GED preparation was decided upon. Positive reinforcement of participants who worked well was used as motivation. The participants responded well to this method. Certificates of accomplishment were given to those who completed projects. Participants’ input was encouraged and continuous improvement was emphasized.

The workplace replication is important in GED preparation because the learners were able to understand the dynamics of learning something new, as well as how to apply what they were learning for the test to the real world of the workplace. They learned computer skills, how to punch time cards, faxing, filing, and goal setting, to mention a few. Also, educational skills, such as calculating hours worked and pay, and speaking and writing, were learned and reinforced by this workplace experience. Goals were important in motivating these adults to prepare for the GED test. Experiencing actual work in a comfortable and non-threatening environment proved to be a good motivator for accomplishing the goals of completing their education and entering the workforce.

We would like to say the change was immediately successful. However, the resistance to any change in our classroom is very strong. One adult learner in particular was extremely negative and resistant to any change that felt like the workplace. Unfortunately, this learner has been in class the longest and was looked upon as the leader. Many of the other learners followed the lead and were not interested in the new curriculum. The time clock almost caused a rebellion. The fact that producing books and other marketable goods was being done in the classroom seemed to cause resentment at first. Attendance may not have been any worse, but this allowed one more excuse to be used.

But we persisted with the project. Soon the learners, one by one, began to take pride in the books they were producing and the other proj-



This learner will be ready when opportunity knocks!



As each learner found her strength and received confirmation and rewards, the negative influence of the “leader” and misconceptions of the workplace began to diminish.

ects they were asked to do by different organizations in our county. As each learner found her strength and received confirmation and rewards, the negative influence of the “leader” and misconceptions of the workplace began to diminish. Now the learners encourage each other and point out when someone is not doing his or her job or is taking too many breaks. Many times it is the former leader who is being corrected.

This turnaround has given us hope that this new curriculum will work for our participants and that this change in a new direction will allow them to enter the workplace with confidence. It hasn’t changed everyone, but, for the most part, the class has learned what teamwork is all about. They speak out openly and have discovered talents and abilities within themselves they never knew existed.

Our attendance has made a 100% improvement and the interest is increasing with each positive day. The learners are eager to participate in class and don’t even mind the time clock any longer. Some adapt to change more readily than others, and those that are hesitant in the beginning sometimes come around in the end. Change can be good, and we’re glad we’ve had the opportunity to take part in an important change that can benefit so many in the future.



Trenton Special School District Gibson County, Tennessee

by Connie Bates, Ernest Pounds and Peggy Davis

The Families First class in Gibson County consists of 20-25 students, with 12-15 present on any given day. The class is both gender and racially mixed.

At first, the suggestion of replicating a workplace setting seemed almost impossible, but ideas came from several sources. We agreed to design and make jewelry, replicating a small jewelry company, which included all aspects of jewelry making. We would have designers, production workers, bookkeepers, advertisers, and salespeople.

We decided to set aside a few days over a four-month period for our

jewelry making project. We did our GED preparation work on the other days, integrating the things we learned about work into our basic-skills classroom activities.

Since neither of the two Families First teachers knew a great deal about jewelry making, we decided to ask for people in the community to come to the classes and share their expertise. This helped each student to better understand what would be expected on each job assignment. A local jewelry designer came and showed how to design different kinds and styles of jewelry for different ages. A newspaper owner discussed proper advertisements for the finished product, including size and location of ads as well as their costs.

A factory owner told us how to set up a business. This included costs, OSHA regulations, problems within the factory, and responsibilities to the consumer. Representatives from two temporary help agencies were able to tell the class what personnel departments look for in a good employee. They also helped with resumes and job applications of various types.

After all speakers had finished their presentations, class members were asked to complete an application for the job of their choice. Resumes were written; interviews were held. Members of the class were chosen for their respective jobs based on interest, experience, and ability to perform.

A time clock was purchased so each member of the class could learn to clock in and out, as would be required on almost any job. Required materials for many kinds of jewelry were purchased, and the class “workplace” was started.

Each day that the class worked on jewelry, students clocked in, took their respective positions, and worked as if they were on a real job in a real workplace. When the day was completed, each student was required to complete a work sheet telling what he or she had done that day. The cost of the items was calculated; the finished items were inspected, packaged, and labeled. Records, which were put into the computer by one of the students, were kept of each item made, and a notation made as each item was sold.

On chosen days, members of the class went out into the community to sell the completed items of jewelry. The first day our sales totaled over \$100.

From this experience we learned that not everyone can do the same job. The class learned that in producing a product, one has to produce



On chosen days, members of the class went out into the community to sell the completed items of jewelry. The first day our sales totaled over \$100.

what the consumer likes and not necessarily what the producer likes. We also learned that one of the biggest problems in sales was that most of the workers did not have adequate transportation to go out into areas where the sales could be made.

Overall, the “workplace” setting was most worthwhile. It gave each participant a better insight into what is going on in the real world as far as a workplace is concerned. Students learned that rules are made and must be followed in the workplace. They also learned the importance of team effort and quality control.



Weakley County, Tennessee

by *Beverly Barnett*

Workplace Replication

The Families First class of Weakley County has about 12 students enrolled, including two men. These people want to succeed in life but really feel trapped by their lack of education and employability skills. Our mission was to empower these undereducated adults of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and to assist them in achieving educational and economic self-sufficiency. If they can see some success in life skills, they can hopefully feel better about themselves and be more motivated in their education as well.

As I was brainstorming about how to spark some interest in my class but continue with the academics, I remembered from the previous year how my high school-age GED students had become thoroughly involved with the “Living in the Real World” project. I decided to try it with my adult Families First students!

This was how it worked, and, I might add, it was been a tremendous lesson in math, in teamwork skills, cooperation, and in life skills. We adapted our classroom to a mock work-type setting as much as possible. We “paid” students for coming to class. Hours were documented on a time clock, and overtime pay was determined by the homework students did and presented to the teacher. The homework/overtime situation



Our mission was to empower these undereducated adults of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and to assist them in achieving educational and economic self-sufficiency.

was especially motivating to Level III students who would soon take the GED test. Levels I and II students learned to budget, balance a checkbook, and write checks. The “paychecks” in this mock situation were used to pay “bills” and for savings accounts. What was left over was sometimes spent in a “store” stocked by teachers’ donations.

In general, the “Living in the Real World” project was positive because of all the skills it covered. For example: teamwork was necessary because when a student was absent, another had to take his/her job of phone company clerk, landlord, or car dealer, etc. The students were hindered from their routine if the “accountant” (person who made out the paychecks) was absent. This experience also covered how employees are left hanging when people miss work and how other workers have to cover for them.

Life-coping skills were stressed when an emergency expense had to be chosen from a box of miscellaneous bills. This was done with one student choosing weekly and in alphabetical order. Their attendance, or lack of it, was really emphasized when they had not “earned” enough money in a two-week period to pay their bills and had to come to the banker and “borrow” money to pay them. This procedure included interest for the loan and a payment plan.

Very few students were interested in the time-and-a-half for homework, although a few used it. Most of them said they just didn’t have time at home to study. The items to choose from in the store became a little uninteresting toward the end of the project. Hopefully next year we can find a better way than donations to put items in our “store,” such as a fund-raising activity for purchasing “stock.”

I plan to do this project again next year with very few changes.

Job Shadowing

The job shadowing program, which I also explored in my class, had some good results, but there were some disappointments. The businesses I approached to get documents and materials to study were very cooperative. However, some gave us only rules and regulations for company employees—which really didn’t give a lot of information about the day-to-day operations of the business. Others gave us manuals and quality system procedures that even intimidated me. Of course, there were certain types of material some businesses couldn’t turn over for public



A participant learns how to make technology work for her.



We learned that barriers to successful work experience are emotional as well as physical and environmental. Class discussions involved overcoming such barriers to successful employment.

use. Nevertheless, the information we were given—along with a tour of the business—gave the students insight into what goes on in a workplace. Additionally, no matter the type of material we received, I searched through all material received for general vocabulary that the basic entry-level employee might need, and we learned together.

This program seemed to interest most of the students, although one of them started missing at the beginning because of an “illness.” I believe the idea of going to work made her “sick,” but she gradually got back into it and cooperated. The experience seemed to relieve some of her apprehension; however, she was not chosen for shadowing. One man did not like any of the businesses. They were “just not for him,” he said.

Our procedure was as follows: We dedicated one week to each business, touring each facility, studying material from it, followed by a test on the material. Each student was evaluated during that one-week period on all skills related to job, life, and academics. Some points covered on the evaluation included: attendance, cooperation, desire to work, and test scores. The students with the highest evaluations over the five-week period were given the opportunity to choose the business they would shadow.

The shadowing part went well, except for some unexpected barriers. One student, after his shadowing, decided he would not like to work in that factory. We decided that was a positive experience anyway, because it eliminated a job he was interested in previously. Another student—when she found out she would have to get up one hour early to get to the business on the agency van—decided not to do the shadowing. We learned that barriers to successful work experience are emotional as well as physical and environmental. Class discussions involved overcoming such barriers to successful employment.

I definitely plan to do this project next year but may have to change some of the businesses we study and shadow. One of the businesses, after we had toured and studied its material, found it could not have students shadow because of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act) regulations.

Conclusion

I felt both projects, shadowing and work replication, were worthwhile and will be done again next year with a few minor changes. These projects gave the students some progress along the way if they were not moving very quickly toward their GED.

One of the most common fears is that of the unknown. It is my desire to help my students to be able to cope with the skills of life with which they are unfamiliar. A look on one of my student's face will never leave me. She was hearing another student describe a tour of one factory, since she had been absent the day of the tour. He told how a new person on a machine had someone right there with him to help during his probationary time. The young lady seemed really surprised and relieved to hear this. This is an example of one fear of the unknown that my student was able to eliminate when she found out a new employee is not just put on a job and left to do it without any support.

Finally, these projects seemed to make most students realize that Families First is not just focused upon dumping them into the workforce with no skills in an effort to stop their Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) payments. This collaboration between the school system and the Department of Human Services is designed to not only offer adult basic education classes, but life-coping skills, job ethics, and career development. As a teacher I have learned that, contrary to popular belief, in most cases these adult students want to work; they just have to have an adequate support system to help them become successful in the workforce. I believe these projects are steps in offering that much-needed support.



These projects seemed to make most students realize that Families First is not just focused upon dumping them into the workforce with no skills in an effort to stop their Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) payments.

Twenty Ways to Make Families First Classrooms More Work Focused

How do we create a meaningful program and class that helps learners gain academic skills and make progress toward the GED, while helping them become self-sufficient and ready for work? After teachers from the ten programs had worked toward these goals for several months, and had tried out many ideas, they came up with their best tips and guidelines meant to assist other teachers in helping their students get ready for the world of work.

1. Take time to think it through. What changes will you make in your classroom to help learners be ready for work? How will you implement changes? Read, talk with others about your questions. Think it through and develop a plan.

2. Remember that as teacher, we are our learners' model for a working person. Our own work habits are on display. We are who they see every day at work. The care with which we do our jobs—our actions—speak much more loudly than words.

3. Be explicit about the changes in the class. Talk about how being a part of this class is a job (both your job and the learners' job). Talk about how thinking of it as your job changes things—time is taken more seriously, for example. Higher standards are in operation for all of us, learners and staff.

4. Weave basic skills and work skills together in the curriculum. Sometimes it might be as simple as learning work-focused vocabulary, or reading

about different occupations. Other times the weaving may involve contextualizing math problems in a work setting, or writing essays on KSA-related topics. Or, classes may do lessons such as those in the *1999 Families First Idea Book: Integrating Work Skills and Basic Skills* (Brian & Sawyer, editors, 1999) which contain elements of job readiness skills and basic skills.

5. Make the classroom look like a work environment. Have available “artifacts” from work such as job handbooks, rules and regulations, outlines of standard procedures, safety rules, union handbooks. Have a posted schedule and refer to it from time to time. Displays and bulletin boards may be about careers.

6. Use a time clock to remind everyone that time is valuable. A time clock is a constant reminder that using time well (for both learners and staff) is one of the responsibilities of being a part of the program. And, using time well is a way of respecting yourself. Using time well says “it matters how I

spend my time, because the things I can accomplish for myself are important.”

7. Post the KSAs. Display a list of the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes needed for employment. Having the KSAs displayed makes us think about them, and reminds us of their central importance on the journey toward self-sufficiency and employability. It makes it easier to refer to them, to weave them into the curriculum, to assure they are an ever present part of the classroom experience.

8. Whenever possible, use group activities. We live and work in groups—in our families, communities and workplaces. It makes sense to learn and practice skills needed in these arenas while in basic skills classes. When programs and classrooms are designed to be textbook-bound and individually-based, we miss out on a lot of opportunities for learning in authentic settings that involve groups of people interacting with each other.

9. Make site visits and field trips to workplaces. When classes visit workplaces, it provides all sorts of real-world material for learning. Students can research questions related to occupations, interview workers and managers, learn about products and processes, engage in critical thinking (such as jobs and the environment).

10. Set up mock job interviews. Set up mock job interviews for students. Experiment with a variety of interviewers. Videotape the interview. Play it back and critique, letting the interviewee have the first chance at evaluation.

11. Provide tools for getting a job. Adults need tools to help get a job. Teachers suggest that in the work-focused basic skills classroom, learners not

only practice filling out a variety of applications, but also develop a job portfolio, which could include resumes, certificates for skills mastered, letters of recommendation and other materials. This gives learners a boost in the competition for better jobs.

12. Use computers in the classroom to “de-mystify” on-the-job technology. Computers are pervasive in today’s workplaces, and learners need the chance to use them in basic skills classrooms. Chances are, adults will eventually work with a computer of some sort on their job, so getting familiar with lots of technology makes sense for that reason, too. Give plenty of opportunity for students to use computers for various purposes and with different applications—educational software, word processing, games, calculation, graphic design.

13. Know that work can be fun, too. Thinking of the class as a job doesn’t have to take all the fun out of it for learners. Allow for individual differences in abilities and interests. Don’t expect the same from all students, or fall into a rigid way of relating to learners. Use games and active learning methodology for work-related learning as well as basic skills. Use plenty of incentives, rewards and recognitions.

14. Create a payment-reward system for completion of work. As we tell our learners that “school is your job,” we need to remember that most of us work both for the satisfaction of it, and also for the financial rewards. So think about how to create a system that rewards learners for completion of quality work. One way is to set up a store where learners can use “ABE Dollars” to purchase their choice of items.

15. Provide hands-on work experience. Find ways to provide hands-on work experience. Create a company and job assignments in the classroom. Produce a product and market it.

16. Engage speakers from careers which interest learners. Invite speakers from occupational areas which interest learners to come in and talk with class members. Extend the potential of this experience by having learners decide on some questions for the speaker ahead of time, take notes during the session, and discuss what was learned afterwards.

17. Hold a Job Fair. Involve the class in putting together a job fair. Invite employers from the community and surrounding area to come together on the appointed day to present information, hold interviews, and otherwise interact with students about careers with their organizations.

18. Implement work standards in the classroom and require quality standards in all activities. Helping students focus on producing quality work in the classroom helps them understand concepts of quality in the workplace.

19. Demonstrate that economic self-sufficiency is within reach. Invite former students who have “made it”—accomplished the move off welfare and to self-sufficiency—to class. Help learners set reasonable economic goals, and see that, given time, many things are within their reach. Encourage students to find and talk about role models who are everyday, working people. Provide an alternative to unrealistic media images of perfect people who have lots of money and “things”—all of us may not accumulate lots of “things” in our lives, but most of us can be productive and self-sufficient and lead valuable, satisfying lives.

20. Take time for reflection and evaluation. Involve learners in reflecting and evaluating the changes in the classroom. Periodically ask about ways in which students do or do not feel more prepared for work. Encourage honesty in these discussions, and hear out students who may have worries about their progress toward the GED, for example. Encourage a variety of viewpoints to be expressed. And finally, take time for your own reflection and evaluation. Trust yourself and don’t be afraid to make changes as needed.

How to Add a Job Shadowing Component to Basic Skills Class

After reading the Incentive Grant Recipients' stories in Chapter 2, and the tips and advice from teachers for making classrooms more work-focused in Chapter 3, we are now ready to discuss job shadowing, hoping that other teachers may want to add this component to their Families First program. For the reader's ease in getting started, this chapter summarizes the innovative steps used by the programs pioneering job shadowing.

Teachers trying job shadowing were reminded that beginning something new, trying a project never before attempted, is often a frightening prospect. Therefore, reaching within the comfort zone of friends and acquaintances was the method used most often, and not unexpectedly, by practitioners when contacting employers for job shadowing opportunities. Not all the practitioners followed every step listed, but each of the steps was used by at least one practitioner.

Student Involvement. Student involvement in the process was often the start of finding employers. Students were asked to list factories or businesses they wanted to know more about, or would like to work there, or perhaps they merely expressed curiosity about the product. From this list, prospective employers were selected.

Visits from Local Businesses. Sometimes the beginning point was a series of visits from local businesses to the classroom. Nursing homes, day-

care centers, manufacturing and assembly plants, florists, bankers—any business representatives willing to share with students their perspective on employment and its requirements and responsibilities—were invited to speak to their classes.

Service Clubs. Another method used as a starting point was “hounding” service clubs for an opportunity to speak. Selling the program, making the community aware of its existence, was essential to successful contacts and employer participation. The talks included ABE/GED/Families First program information, goals and statistics. Employers were then more willing to discuss job shadowing within their workplace than from a “cold” telephone call. This also eliminated the need to have friends in high places as contact points in local businesses.

Telephone Calls. In most cases, the initial contact was a telephone call to a personal friend/business contact. This person heard them out and referred them to the proper one within the company, or in some cases, the personal friend was the proper person and things progressed from there. However, not all calls to businesses were to personal contacts. A “cold” call in one county turned out to be an extremely valuable contact, resulting not only in job shadowing placement, but real and enthusiastic support for the entire adult basic education program.

Follow-Up Letters. Next was usually a follow-up letter, which reiterated facts and expectations shared in the telephone call. The job shadowing program was explained, along with what the students hoped to do, what the instructor hoped the students would accomplish, what the employer expected and how the employer could help—and mention made of other companies or school programs in the area where job shadowing was known to have been successfully attempted.

Information on Businesses. Somewhere in the telephone call or the letter, practitioners asked for information on the business so that students could learn from it. In some cases, the information was discussed prior to a tour of the plant or business. In others, the information was discussed after a tour. Both ways of teaching the information had plus and minus sides, with neither way favored over the other.

Tours of Area Businesses. Tours were arranged, using different focuses. Sometimes, as a starting point, tours of area businesses were planned before any other formalities occurred, to give students an idea of the work possibilities: assembly jobs, clerical jobs, mechanical jobs, etc., to actually observe people at work. From the classroom, students would then discuss and vote on which businesses to approach for job shadowing. Sometimes tours were arranged after the telephone and/or letter contacts when an employer proved receptive to the whole idea of job shadowing, or sometimes businesses were toured only after they had agreed to place students in job shadowing.

Obstacles Encountered. Instructors found that while some businesses were receptive to shadowing, obstacles were encountered which prevented

students from being placed in the work setting, such as liability, OSHA regulations, and revoked driver licenses. One program was able to get around liability by doing the actual work at the adult center. Employees at the business loaded material into agency transportation, which was then unloaded at the center by students for actual product assembly, so no liability was incurred at the plant. Another business hired a student for minimum wage to shadow, which meant the student was covered by Worker's Compensation. Other businesses could foresee no problems by having students around.

Students had their own set of concerns when given the opportunity to job shadow. They mentioned problems such as transportation in getting to the workplace, reluctance to actually be “in” a job setting, or a variety of personal problems, which included babysitters or health. Often the students' fears disappeared after tours of the businesses. They could actually see supervisors attending the workers, which removed the fear of being left on one's own to complete a task. They could see workers actually going about their jobs and the degree of difficulty involved. The student response was usually, “Oh, I can do that!” or “I don't think I want do that, but I see something else that interests me.” Amazingly, some health “problems” seemed to go away after the tours.

Expectations. Prior to sending students to job shadowing sites, practitioners sent employers letters, or sometimes contracts, outlining exactly what was expected of the shadowers in the workplace. To determine student effectiveness, requests were made, as simple as the employer noting on-time attendance, ability level, and attitude, to more detailed notebooks containing attendance records, KSAs, pages for daily notes or observations by both

employer and shadower, and other information. For the record, one teacher's very elaborate folder for an employer was lost the first day!

Contact with Employers. One instructor, whose student only shadowed one day a week, called the employer weekly to remind him of her student's expected attendance that day and to be on the lookout for him. This resulted in the student being expected and with the feeling that someone cared whether or not he showed up for work.

Thank You Letters. After the assignments were under way or at least shortly after completion, practitioners, and sometimes students as well, sent thank you letters to the employers. A few students even stopped by after assignments ended to keep in touch with employers. A few students were even hired for permanent employment!

Student Evaluations. Also in this time frame of assignments being underway, students were evaluated by their employers and in the classroom by their teachers-some daily, some weekly, some at the end of the assignment. They were questioned on attitude, punctuality, appearance, on what they had learned from the experience, and always were asked to share thoughts and observations with their classmates.

Downsides. Not everything was wonderful! There were some downsides. One practitioner spent a lot of time establishing contacts and finding employers receptive to shadowing. Her idea was to show her all-female class their capabilities to perform

jobs in non-traditional roles, should they wish to try. When the class was presented with shadowing opportunities, all were reluctant, and only one woman tried a non-traditional job. Other practitioners mentioned non-valid driver licenses as being a problem in their attempts to provide job shadowing opportunities for students. Some teachers placed students in shadowing positions only to have them accept a job and leave, uncompleted, their GED program.

Publicize Program Graduates. One suggestion from community employers was to publicize program graduates by placing information on a local website where employers could learn of their availability. The website might be through a local school system or community page, or some other frequently-used community media.

In general, the programs trying job shadowing for the first time were pleased with the results. Students needed to receive lots and repeated encouragement, positive feedback, and motivational efforts to overcome their initial reluctance to try something new. For those about to experience a workplace setting for the first time, their fear was real and their need for help great. For those who actually shadowed, their joy in realizing they could do the job was equally real.

The job shadowing employers, according to all the practitioners, were very pleased with the students and the quality of their work. All employers expressed appreciation for the program and a definite willingness to do it again. This was echoed by the practitioners!

Reflections

As we reached the end of our project, we returned to our research questions to find we had some answers, and a lot more questions!

Answering Our Research Questions

Our principal research question was “How can we make our classrooms more work-focused in order to better prepare learners for the world of work?” In the process of trying things out, documenting, reading, and talking with each other, we have come a long way toward answering our question—as Chapters 2, 3 and 4 demonstrate. We were pleasantly surprised to find information in the adult education-welfare reform literature that validated our findings. At the end of this chapter, we’ve included a helpful checklist from one of the reports we read — *What Works: Integrating Basic Skills Training into Welfare-to-Work*, by Garret Murphy and Alice Johnson.

We’ve also learned many other things in the process, including some answers (and again, some more questions!) to our other areas of research:

- **What effect will spending classroom time on job-readiness skills have on student motivation? On student attendance?**

In general, teachers found the projects and ideas they tried out in their classrooms to be helpful in student motivation. Often, many learners initially resisted change, but most eventually embraced it with some degree of enthusiasm. Teachers reported that students were more engaged, took more responsibility for their learning, and became more self-directed.

—*I have observed a change in attitude of the students. Some have come from “Do I have to attend 20 hours?” to “Can I attend that computer class on Tuesday afternoons?” [The project has changed] the way the students look and feel about themselves and the friends they have made in the process.*

In their writings, several learners described their support for changes in their classrooms:

—*Change is brought about by 80% attitude and 20% knowledge and skills. I have seen this fact to be true.... Since writing about the KSAs every day I have paid more and more attention to them and how they are being used in class. I have seen the results.... Being enrolled in Families First class and using the KSAs daily has shown me that attitude is very important in everyday life.*

Learners in another program offered these comments:

—*It will give me a better insight on what type of job I want.*

—*I’m willing to learn and try new things.*

Interestingly, learners saw benefits that went beyond the world of work:

—*This class gives you a different outlook on what and how you should be teaching your kids.*

We had hoped to see these changes in students' motivation and focus translate into clear, consistent improvement in attendance across every program. Although that didn't happen, several programs did report improved attendance—some much improved. One of our remaining questions concerns why our projects appeared to have increased attendance in some places, but not others.

- **Will the emphasis on work derail learner progress toward the GED?**

Perhaps the biggest fear that teachers had about trying out an intensive work-focus in their classrooms was that it would slow learners' progress toward the GED. Teachers acknowledge the GED is not the ticket to a new life...students need so much more than just a GED. Teachers also do not want to abandon academic skills or let students' needs for direct academic instruction go unmet.

Teachers tried a variety of ways to balance these sometimes-competing needs. Some teachers tried to always weave together basic skills and work-preparation, trying to set every basic skills lesson in a work context—or from the other direction, making sure that related academic skills were a focus in every work-preparedness lesson.

—I'm now trying to overlap work skills, workplace preparation and GED skills into one set of activities since workplaces require that all the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be rolled up into one package.

Some teachers tried the “weaving” approach, but still set aside a limited time every day or every week to “work on GED,” using traditional approaches such as one-on-one instruction in

basic skills, or regular textbook-based lessons.

When asked directly about this question, most learners were positive about their continued progress toward the GED while focusing on work preparation. However, some learners were ambivalent, and a few wondered if the change was harmful to their academic studies.

—I like the whole program...[now] I stand proud and talk with confidence...I know I am learning and am very close to my GED.

—I am on the fence about this class. I like the skills I am learning. They will be good for my future, but on the other hand I need someone to teach me the skills I need for my GED so I can pass it and go to a trade school. I'm not getting any younger and I need to hurry up and get into the work force.

Interestingly, teachers displayed the same range of reactions on this question as did students—mostly positive, with some reservations.

—It has helped most students.

—Both helped and hurt. Some students have gone to work full-time rather than “waste” time job shadowing. They are not working on GED now. Others are more determined to get a GED and beyond, so they can have a good career.

—Participating has helped. Students felt at first that it was hurting their progress. They began to see how they could apply the learned skills on the GED test. They are learning that the GED will not be the only thing that will help them get off public assistance...the idea of a full-time job is not as scary or unthinkable to the student.

-
- **Will a focus on jobs allow my students to work well as a team, do better with other KSAs?**

One teacher commented, *any kind of group work will help teach the KSAs*. Others observed that approaching the change to a work-focused classroom as a kind of group project “forced” students to work with each other in ways they hadn’t before. Other projects with an intentional group focus probably would also. One student commented *I have always found it hard to communicate with people. This class teaches that and more*. Another said, *[this class] teaches you about being dependable and how to work well with others. It also helps you build self-esteem and gives you a better attitude about work*.

- **How can work materials collected from area employers be used effectively in class?**

Teachers found endless ways to use materials collected from area employers, from utilizing them simply to make the classroom look more like a workplace, to actually teaching lessons from the materials. Using the workplace materials also made clear how difficult some of them really are to read and comprehend—a valuable reminder for us all.

- **What are the specific needed employee skills and knowledge in my community?**

In general, teachers who worked on answering this question found that employers in each of their communities wanted employees with the same kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes as other employers across the state wanted—in short, the Tennessee KSAs.

—As I’ve added more of a job-skills focus into my teaching, I’ve found that all the employers who we have visited or who have visited us want employees who are dependable. Using the time clock has helped bring this home.

- **Will a focus on job readiness change attitudes of my students who don’t want to work? To what extent might their attitude be due to fear? Will this work focus help them gain confidence?**

Teachers spent a great deal of time reflecting on the question of learner attitudes and the influence of previous life experiences on the development or absence of motivation, willingness to work, and the ability to see work as a necessary part of most adults’ lives. While the project wasn’t a “magic bullet” to turn around every reluctant learner, teachers saw real progress in some, and noted a greater depth in their own understanding of how individuals develop and learn.

—My students are scared to go into settings where they haven’t been, especially if they haven’t worked before. They have been failures a lot of their lives and still feel this way.... The tours of work sites have been beneficial to them to feel more comfortable.

Changing Our Practice

As teachers, we found that working in this action research project brought about changes in our practice, some of which we could have predicted, and others which could not be foreseen. The project helped us all make a paradigm shift, from seeing ourselves as teachers of basic skills, to understanding our role to be helping our learners get ready for work and life in a much broader way. It helped us to be more confident that we are able to help students get prepared for work and self-sufficiency. It caused us to question some of our own assumptions about learners and their lives. We teach in a different way, finding more opportunities to ask students to visualize success.

We understand our role in a different way.

Teachers found themselves thinking about their role in a different way—not only as a facilitator of basic skills learning, but as someone who helps others toward a broad array of goals that include work...and success in life.

—*Now that I've implemented work-focused skills, it only seems natural to continue to make the classroom-work force connection. I will continually look for ways to relate all learning to KSAs. The bottom line is: adequately prepare the clients for LIFE, not just the GED!*

—*The GED is only one piece of the pie. Many of my students are looking forward to the next step in life, whether it is a job, college or training.*

We are more confident of our abilities to prepare learners for the world of work, to help them move toward self-sufficiency.

There was marked change in teachers' confidence in their ability to prepare learners for the world of work. In action research meetings, the change in teachers' confidence became more pronounced and clearer as the months passed. The increased confidence is reflected in their writings:

—*I feel like I am more of an advocate for implementing workplace skills. Our students have a lot of self-confidence as a result of our program. I am much more knowledgeable about what workplace materials are available and which ones are worth buying. I feel this experience has helped me to see beyond the GED and in turn, I will help spread the vision that workplace skills and GED skills can go hand and hand.*

—*I will be more aware of the job situation in my county, and pay more attention to the industries and job opportunities we have in the county. I will be*

more alert to expectations of employers, and more aware of the importance of attitude as well as skills. I will use this information to help me better prepare my students for job involvement and success.

We know specific ways to connect basic skills and the world of work.

Teachers wrote about these specific ways of connecting basic skills and the world of work in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and here reflect on what they have learned in that area:

—*I have changed the vocabulary I use to talk to my students about GED subjects—always relating what we are reading in science, for example, to possible jobs in that area. I work hard on self-esteem, and each success they have in learning something new can be related to items they can put on a resume. The students are now beginning to talk about jobs and things they can do in the future.*

—*I believe that each experience—whether teacher, supervisor, or student—helps you grow. It is the sharing of ideas that helps. I would never have thought of the time clock on my own. I have found that there are many work-related activities that we can do with the clock. I got the ideas from the first meeting. I've gotten many ideas here I am now using. Thanks for the opportunity!*

—*Everyday I find more ways to use workforce-related content to improve learning in the classroom. The students even give suggestions on places they want to visit or who they want to come to speak. It helps us do "real world" teaching.*

We find more opportunities to ask students to visualize success.

Teachers more often ask learners what they

expect their lives to be like in the future, how things will change for them, and what some of the steps on the path toward success may be. Teachers use what students write and say to deepen their own understanding of learners' goals, and to inform the way they teach. Teachers spoke of drawing inspiration from learners' hopes and dreams, from student writings such as these:

—*I want to be a better person for my children.*

—*Well, for myself, getting my GED is only a start. I plan on taking a computer course later on. Getting married, working, owning my own car, and raising my daughter to be the very best she can be.*

—*Working in a factory can be enjoyable, doing various kinds of work and being with other people. Making minimum wage can be okay for a while. I would not be content with just minimum wages. As an employee I would not be satisfied working in a factory for the rest of my life, because some factories have no benefits and that to me cannot be a career.*

—*I see myself...getting my GED, married with two children and living in a house. I have a job to support my family. I will be working in a hospital or in a business office...to raise my children so they can be something in life...and to send them to school.*

We question some of our own assumptions.

Teachers spoke of learning more about their students through this process, and of becoming aware of assumptions that they now question.

—*I've learned that some students have many talents, and there are many things they can do better than I can. As a result, I've learned to ask for their input more.*

—*Don't stereotype students. Most are willing to try.*

—*I admire the skill my students have in keeping their families together with very little money. They are not really lazy—[instead] more frightened of what the future has in store for them. How can I make this a more manageable task for them?*

Working on this project has made me a better teacher.

Teachers spoke and wrote of their feelings of more confidence and more engagement in the teaching-learning process. In action research meetings, we talked about how the excitement of working together, the support and encouragement we all felt from each other, made a tremendous difference in our practice.

—*I feel much better about myself as a teacher. I am proud of our accomplishments in the classroom.*

—*I think this grant has made me a better Families First teacher. I find myself doing research on the Internet at home to find new ideas or new materials. I am willing to try anything that will help my students become successful in the workplace.*

—*I feel I have made a difference in the lives of students.*

As teachers, we want to continue growing and learning.

Just as students have goals for the future about "making it" on their own and self-sufficiency, teachers have goals for the future too. Teachers want their experience as action researchers to be only the beginning of their journey.

—*After completing this grant project, I now think more*

toward the skills needed to find employment. I then focus my teaching toward employability skills. Participating in the project has made me grow, as a teacher, because I have learned so many new and creative ways to make my classroom more interesting, exciting, and productive. I feel like my part of the project is just the first step. I used my ideas to create a work environment that will make my students more dependable and more prepared for work. Now I plan to use the many, many ideas I have gained from the others involved with the incentive grant project to further the work aspect of the classroom.

—I have learned so much this year. I couldn't imagine going back to my former classroom procedures. I have gained experience (grant writing, management) that will be of lasting benefit professionally and personally.

Facilitators' Reflections

As facilitators of this action research project, we saw again the importance of contextualized learning in students' lives. As teachers learned to weave together basic skills with life skills such as activities to promote job readiness, learners responded in new, positive ways.

It was particularly helpful to have a supportive environment to try out new workplace skills. We observed that Families First adult basic education classes offer the unique combination of familiar-

ity, support, encouragement, and challenge. For learners who have a way to go before being ready for work, the bridge that this support can provide is essential. Having a "safe" place to try, experience setbacks, and try again is essential.

Working in this project, teachers developed more understanding about students and their lives. This was not an insensitive or disinterested group of teachers. In fact, they knew their students like family, spending twenty hours a week together. But time after time, teachers told us that they learned and understood more about their students in this project than in any other classroom effort.

In our culture, welfare recipients may be unfairly maligned and marginalized. In this project, we were reminded that as adult educators, we may share some of the same stereotypes. We saw some of that change as we understood more deeply and as teachers and learners, moved beyond media representations toward experiencing each other authentically.

As facilitators, we were struck by the many creative and respectful ways teachers developed to help learners become self-sufficient, in a context that's sometimes difficult and problematic.

And finally, the action research approach was validated for us again. We saw teachers gain skills, confidence and leadership. Participatory, inquiry-based professional development is a powerful tool for all of us.

Checklist for Success

What Works: Integrating Basic Skills Training Into Welfare-to-Work by Garrett Murphy & Alice Johnson
National Institute for Literacy, 800 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-2712
Telephone 202/233-2025
Used by Permission

_____ **Are basic skills integrated with other welfare-to-work activities?**

Are academic, vocational, and job placement activities fully integrated (on-site, if possible)?

_____ **Does your program have clearly defined goals and outcomes that relate directly to success in the workplace?**

Do you assist students in setting clear and appropriate goals for themselves that take into account their skills, interests, and possible career options? Does your program have clearly defined goals? Do you track program costs per outcome (not just seat time)?

_____ **Do you collaborate with welfare agencies and other community groups?**

Have you asked local colleges, school districts, and other human and social service agencies to share resources and expertise?

_____ **Are private sector employers actively involved?**

Have you asked the sector for information on the local labor market, wages, and education and training requirements for various jobs?

_____ **Does your program include hands-on work experience for students?**

Is work experience available on-site or in another convenient location? Do you pre-screen work sites and select them based on the degree to which they model appropriate professional practices for students?

_____ **Is a staff member responsible for providing students with individual assistance in addressing problems that could interfere with attendance?**

Is someone available to assist participants individually with issues such as child care, transportation, physical practices for students?

_____ **Are support services available?**

Do you provide student with information on local health clinics, clothing banks, support groups, and career counseling services? Have you asked the local public transportation system to donate bus tokens or farecards?

_____ **Does your curriculum include both job readiness skills and life skills?**

Does your program offer computer, job readiness, and transition-to-work training? Do you recruit outside speakers to lead workshops on nutrition, budgeting, depression, anger management, etc.?

_____ **Does your staff participate regularly in staff development activities?**

Are instructors certified by the state? Do they participate in special trainings, conferences, and other professional development opportunities?

Resources

This list of resources was compiled from submissions by Program Incentive Grant recipients, who felt these were the most helpful, informative, fun, and/or effective with the students in their programs.

AGS (American Guidance Service, Inc.)

4201 Woodland Road
Circle Pines, MN 55014-1796
1-800-328-2560

Basic Math Skills, by August V. Treff and Donald H. Jacobs. ISBN 0-7854-0916-5-H

Video Series *Social Skills on the Job*.

Macintosh ISBN 07854 1216-6

Windows ISBN 07854 1217-4

Academic Therapy Publications

Novato, CA 94945

Beginning English: Day by Day, by Michael Roddy

Cambridge Adult Education

1-800-ADULT-ED (238-5833)
www.cambridgeadulted.com

On The Job: Reading in Real-Life Competencies (1987) ISBN 0-8428-0161-8

Center for Literacy Studies

The University of Tennessee
600 Henley Street, Suite 312
Knoxville, TN 37996-4135
423-974-4109

Getting There: A Curriculum for People Moving into Employment, by Marian Colette, Beverly Woliver, Mary Beth Bingman, and Juliet Merrifield (rev. 1996)

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc.

200 State Road
South Deerfield, MA 01373
1-800-477-4776

Career Opportunities for Women (1998 Edition)

Your Attitude and You—A Scriptographic Booklet (1998 Edition) ISBN 1801G-5-90

Contemporary Books

4255 West Touhy Avenue

Lincolnwood, IL 60646-1975

1-800-621-1918 (Order Desk)

1-800-998-3103 (FAX)

www.contemporarybooks.com (e-mail)

Communication Skills That Work: A Functional Approach for Life and Work (1991)

ISBN 0-8092-4121-8

Get That Job: Finding Job Openings Order No. CB0761-3

Lifesciences/Life Skills: Reading and Writing for Comprehension (1986)

ISBN 0-8092-5103-5

Reading Skills That Work: A Functional Approach for Life and Work (1991)

ISBN 0-8092-4122-6

WORKmatters (A 10-title series, i.e., Job Search, Workplace Skills, Career Exploration, et al)

Work Wise: Tactics for Job Success Order No. CB4100-5

Ebsco Curriculum Materials

P. O. Box 1943

Birmingham AL 35201

1-800-653-2726

Living in the Real World, by Deanna Belden-Miner (1991)

Glencoe/McGraw-Hill Publishers

Customer Service Department

P. O. Box 544

Blacklick, OH 43004-0544

1-800-334-7344

614-755-5682 (FAX)

Developing Proofreading Skill, by Sue C. Camp (3rd Edition) ISBN 0-02-800897-9

Leadership Development, by George Shinn (2nd Edition) ISBN 0-07-056913-4

Payroll Records and Procedures, by Merle Wood and Sherry Cohen (3rd Edition)

ISBN 0-02-800545-7

Telephone Techniques, by Dorothy Neal (2nd Edition) ISBN 0-02-802011-1

GOAL Series, by Thomas G. Sticht and Barbara A. McDonald

Electricity and Electronics Technology

Knowledge Base ISBN 0-07-061525-X

Reading ISBN 0-07-061526-8

Mathematics ISBN 0-07-061527-6

Health Occupations

Knowledge Base ISBN 0-07-061521-7

Reading ISBN 0-07-061522-5

Mathematics ISBN 0-07-061523-3

Automotive Trades

Knowledge Base ISBN 0-07-061529-2

Reading ISBN 0-07-061530-6

Mathematics ISBN 0-07-061531-4

Office Technology

Knowledge Base ISBN 0-07-061513-6

Reading ISBN 0-07-061514-4

Mathematics ISBN 0-07-061515-2

Lifeworks—A Realistic Job Search (1980) ISBN 0-07-002518-5

Globe Fearon Educational Publisher

Info@globefearon.com (e-mail)

<http://www.globefearon.com>

The Janus Employability Skills (1995) ISBN 0-835-91410-0

Job Planner, Job Application File, Job Interview Practice Pak,

Get Hired!, Don't Get Fired!, Pay Day! Managing Your Paycheck

Jist Works

720 North Park Avenue

Indianapolis, IN 46202-3490

1-800-648-JIST (Order Desk)

1-800-JIST FAX (FAX)

Job Savvy: How to Be a Success at Work, by Laverne L. Ludden

Phoenix Learning Resources

New York, NY

Essential Math Skills, by Leo Gafney and John Beers (2nd Edition) ISBN 0-7915-2198-2

Scott, Foresman, and Company

3280 Summit Ridge Parkway, Suite 100A

Duluth, GA 30096

1-800-241-3532

770-497-6873 (FAX)

Reading for Survival in Today's Society, by Anne Adams, Anne Flowers, and Elsa Woods

ISBN 0-673-16422-5

Steck-Vaughn Publishers

P. O. Box 690789

Orlando, FL 32819-0789

1-800-531-5015 (Order Desk)

1-800-699-9459 (FAX)

Basic Essentials of Mathematics – Book One ISBN 0-8114-4668-9

Basic Essentials of Mathematics – Book Two ISBN 0-8114-4669-7

Building Strategies – Reading ISBN 0-8114-6502-0

GED Skill Books (An 11-book series)

Necessary Skills for the Workplace: Job Readiness ISBN 0-8172-6381-0

Vocabulary Connections, by Dr. Barbara Coulter and Dr. Catherine C. Hatala

Level D ISBN 0-8172-6353-5

Level E ISBN 0-8172-6354-3

Level F ISBN 0-8172-6355-1

Level G ISBN 0-8172-6356-X

Level H ISBN 0-8172-6357-8

Workforce: Building Success

Writing ISBN 0-8172-6522-8

Survival Skills Education and Development

1640 Fairchild Avenue, Suite 4

Manhattan, KS 66502

Survival Skills for Women — Money Management, by Linda P. Thurston

University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service of Family Economics – Financial Management

[Please contact your local County Agricultural Extension Office for copies]

Finding Work

SP461-B Build your future on your past

SP461-D Job openings: Where to Find Them

SP461-E Applying for a Job

SP461-F The Job Interview

SP461-H Surviving a New Job

University of Wisconsin Press

2537 Daniels

Madison, WI 53718-6772

Uwiscpress@macc.wisc.edu

608-224-3900 (Orders)

608-224-3907 (FAX)

HOW TO...Career Development Activities (1999)

J. Weston Walch

P. O. Box 658

Portland, ME 04104-0658

1-800-341-6094

207-772-3105 (FAX)

150 Ways to Keep Your Job, by Nancy Lobb

COMPUTER PROGRAMS

Invest Learning Corporation

% CCC Destinations

1297 Lawrence Station Road

Sunnyvale, CA 94089

1-800-242-2117, ext. 3292

408-704-0408 (FAX)

Invest Destinations (1997) () ISBN 27-08980-100

PLATO Lab

Perfect Copy (Available from Logicus, Inc., Schomberg, Ontario, Canada)

Quicken

Microsoft Works 4.0

Print Shop

T-Shirt Maker

MISCELLANEOUS RESOURCES

Creative Teaching Press

P. O. Box 2723

Huntington Beach, CA 92647-0723

1-800-444-4CTP

1-800-229-9929 (FAX)

webmaster@creativeteaching.com

Vocabulary Builder 6293 (1990) (Game)

Bank Account 4377 (1982) (Game)

Lakeshore Learning Materials

1-800-421-5354

310-537-5403 (FAX)

Survival Word's Bingo (1991 - LC932) (Game)

Participating Programs

Carol Ergenbright

Glenda Turner

Blount County Adult

Basic Education

1500 Jett Road

Maryville, TN 37804

423/982-8998

Carol Colvard

Barbara Young

Bledsoe County Adult

Basic Education

P. O. Box 369

Pikeville, TN 37367

423/447-6314

Molly McCarley

Greta Wilburn

Fayette County Adult

Learning Center

16210 Highway 64 West

Somerville, TN 38068

901/465-4231

Carol Kiener

Johnson City Schools

Adult Basic Education Program

Keystone Community Center

601 Bert Street

Johnson City, TN 37601

423/975-6620

Patti Jaco

Carole Cheatwood

Lawrence County

Adult Learning Center

610 Mahr Avenue

Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

931/762-5251

Charlotte Boley

Micki Hendrix

McNairy County Adult Education

and Training Center

182 West Warren Avenue

Selmer, TN 38375

901/645-5386

Carol Miller

Gloria Cook-Rolfe

Carolyn Warren

Shirley Hubbard

Memphis City Schools

Messick Vocational-Technical

Center

703 South Greer

Memphis, TN 38111

901/325-4840

Marcia Robertson

Betty Heflin

LaJuana Parker

Stewart County

Adult Basic Education

P.O. Box 367

Dover, TN 37058

931/232-5351

Peggy Davis

Connie Bates

Ernest Pounds

Trenton Special School District

Adult Basic Education

201 West Tenth Street

Trenton, TN 38382

901/855-1191

Julia Rich

Beverly Barnett

Weakley County Center for Adult

and Continuing Education

8250 Highway 20

Dresden, TN 38225

901/364-5481

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Davis, D., 1998. *Essential Workforce Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) for Successful Entry Level Employment*. Available from Tennessee Department of Human Services, Citizens Plaza Building, 400 Deadrick Street, Nashville, TN 37248-0001

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Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. June 1991. *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000*. United States Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, Washington, DC 20210.

Strawn, J. 1998. *Beyond Job Search or Basic Education: Rethinking the Role of Skills in Welfare Reform*. Center for Law and Social Policy, 1616 P Street, NW, Suite 150, Washington, DC 20036.

White, C., Ziegler, M., & Bingman, B. 1999. *Families First: Implications of Welfare Reform for Tennessee Basic Education in The Impact of Welfare Reform on Adult Literacy Education: Conference Papers and Themes from Small Group Discussions*. NSCALL Report # 10, pp. 73-103. National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 101 Nichols House, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138.