

Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve" - Karl Popper

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The "Transition" Issue

November 5, 2009

Skilling Up!!

Last week I went to a "summit" in Sacramento on Transitions. In attendance were state and national adult ed bureaucrats, but also it combined "developmental ed" people from the community colleges with adult ed. administrators. "Developmental" means those classes and programs that prepare those adults who are not ready for college level work. Increasingly "college students", both those who have graduated from high schools and adults who return to college, function at a level of literacy and numeracy too low for college level work.

You know every few years the language describing public adult education's impact and strategic goals change. This is not only what I call the "froth of reform" that regularly hits education like waves, but rather it is something that emerges from both the continuing research about adult learning and the changes in our communities that ask adult education to respond. Remember the "persistence" research a few years ago... So "Transition" essentially is a term that covers a range of issues. First, there have been a series of important national studies that show that not only are college students unprepared, but the "basic skills" level of the American workforce has leveled out, and may be lowering from previous decades (with some evidence that immigration of adult workers is in part responsible). Economic recovery for communities like Salinas may depend on addressing this lack of basic skills. Second, the level of literacy and numeracy needed by American workers continues to rise. Apparently a GED alone no longer has an impact on income. This is a paradigm change for us in "night school"... we've presented GED as a

step up to better jobs for many decades. This may be in question. Are we preparing our students to stay in entry level employment? "Transition" means ... getting our students to the next level, into career pathways and pipelines, and although adults will always stop out and take a longer time to achieve goals because of the demands of work and family, we in adult education are asked to think about helping our students think about continuing in education in ways much more focused than in the past. Certainly the work we are doing to build VESL career ladders, helping students transition to Hartnell or other post-secondary education, connecting our basic skills and high school level classes to further career and college education, incorporating the WorkKeys certifications in our programs... all this work is consistent with the new emphasis on outcomes and getting students to attain higher level skills. We are doing the work, but there are practices, structures, curricula, support services that increase our adult learners likelihood of continuing to the next level. In all of our programs this attention to "what's next" is possible... the children in our pre-schools are prepared for kindergarten, the students in our adults with disabilities programs are preparing for independent living and work. I think in all instances we will be asked to answer the question of "what's next" for our students. I think our Schoolwide Action plan that targets "Access" is in part about this. Public adult schools like ours should be the door to lifelong learning for our students. This also asks why adult education and community colleges are two distinct systems. I don't think this new focus is really "reinventing ourselves"... we've always valued lifelong learning. This emerging research (with the resulting mandates, measurements and *potential funding attached to such outcomes*) simply asks us to do what we've always done in a more focused, conscious, and effective way.

Calendar

Nov. 11—Veterans' Day, no classes

Nov 12—Leadership Team Meeting, 3:45-5:45

Nov 19—Evening ESL Dept Meeting

Nov 20—Morning ESL Dept Meeting

Nov 25—Pre-Thanksgiving (most classes not held)

Nov 26-28—Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec 5—SAS Symphony Night

Dec 10—All Staff Holiday Potluck

Dec. 18—Last day of Fall Term

Jan 11—First day of Winter Term

Short Cuts....

we received formal notice that we will receive a \$32,000 grant to enhance our literacy curricula to focus on financial, healthy, workforce and family literacy, and support our effort to train literacy tutors... we met with staff from Hartnell and local agriculture reps to begin to build a "VESL Agriculture" class... there was a spectacularly delicious "Chard Recipe Contest" in the garden last week... we hosted an "Abriendo Caminos" training for parent educators... the new, smaller, and improved brochure is being developed for winter and spring terms; it should be out by the second week of December...