

General Lessons for Working with Immigrants

- 1) **The learning of English and the learning of job-related skills should be integrated and simultaneous** not sequential. Limited English Proficiency(LEP) individuals cannot afford to wait to learn job skills until they are fully fluent in English, and, at the same time, they can't afford to put off learning English... some level of fluency is generally needed to attain job skills...and the job...Students are more highly motivated when learning is linked to earning.
- 2) **Job related skills can be effectively integrated with the learning of English**...Our instructors spend time in the machine shop at West Side Tech, and at employers. They make lists of terms and phrases that they integrate into their English classes. Job search skills, reading want ads, filling out applications, making a resume, interviewing for a job, etc. are all incorporated as well. Also, we push job related skills, like reading micrometers “down”...into the VESL component.
- 3) **The learning of English can be effectively integrated with the learning of job related skills.** We pushed learning English “up” into the technical “job-related” skills component. Vocational instructors should be bilingual to be able to use materials in English but provide explanations in Spanish. Technical terminology should be presented and learned in English. We have had some success using Spanish-speaking tutors to assist English-only speaking instructors.
- 4) **Second language learning generally takes time...flexibility is key**...Levels of English of incoming students tend to be very low...with most funding, we can offer the student two classes of our “Pre-Bridge” or VESL Program (14 weeks each) prior to entering our “Bridge Program” (16-20 weeks). We also combine with Adult Ed funding, to offer ESL classes either before or after completion of our program. The student may not have the time for this e.g. their funding is short-term, they need to work soon...we do “bilingual” sections of our job skills “Bridge Program”.

- 5) **Ability to attain GED (in Spanish) is important...** Most Hispanics in our programs have not had a high school degree or GED, but they need one for many jobs or entry into further education. Our Applied Math course helps students learn much of what's needed for a GED but they generally still need a course to help them prepare.
- 6) **The quality of instruction makes a huge difference!** Students have often been out of school for many years, their experiences with schools may not have been very good....It is especially important for instructors not only to be engaging but to also utilize hands-on learning techniques, project-based learning exercises, etc.
- 7) **A comfortable, non-threatening learning environment is a big help..** Students seem easily intimidated by large, formal environments in which one can easily become lost, that are bereft of any cultural symbols they can identify with and frequently feature unfriendly security guards and staff....with surveillance cameras keeping watch. We are smaller. We have murals and plenty of pictures. We are bilingual/bicultural. We take students, as a group, to the "big school". We make the introductions. We encourage them to continue there...
- 8) **Case management counseling...**We have spent a lot of time filling out and signing paper-work for students and advocating on their behalf with the unemployment office, case workers, employers, etc We provide bus tokens to those who need them, pay for work boots or other items as needed. We listen to students about problems...(and about instructors) We contact students if they start missing. We make referrals to other agencies for other special needs. Additional support, such as a peer support group, is important particularly for women.
- 9) **Job placement assistance....** Like a business, we work to **develop relationships with employers**...and at the same time to gently challenge stereotypes e.g. Mexicans will work hard, and for little pay...or hire women for small assembly work, but don't consider for higher technical (and higher paying) positions. We follow-up to measure customer satisfaction – both employer and employee. Sometimes, we explain, or mediate cultural differences.