

Education as a Tool for Effective Prisoner Re-Entry

*Professional Development Workshop
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Objectives

Participants will answer:

1. What economic challenges do your students face as they try to re-integrate into work, family, and civic roles?
2. What educational practices are you now using to help your students deal with the challenges they face?
3. What are the strengths and needed improvements of those practices?
4. What are guidelines for effective practice in work-related adult basic education?
5. What are examples of uses of educational technologies that meet those guidelines?
6. What resources might you use for further professional development in these areas?

Question #1: What economic challenges do returning inmates (& their families and communities) face?

1. Returning inmates generally face the same challenges as other low-income, hard-to-employ people, including:
 - a. A difficult job market:
 - Job opportunities have declined in the past 6-12 months (particularly full-time jobs that provide a family-supporting wage and benefits).
 - The pool of job seekers (both unemployed and under-employed workers) has grown tremendously.
 - That pool of job seekers has more better-qualified workers in it, making it even more difficult for lower-skilled workers to compete.

Question #1: (cont' d.)

b. significant personal challenges, including:

- Low basic skills (communication, problem-solving, teamwork, math, and other skills needed for work, family, and civic roles);
- Limited occupational skills and knowledge;
- Lack of high school diploma or post-secondary credential;
- Lack of realistic goals and lack of a career and education plan;
- Limited self-efficacy (belief that making an effort to improve one's situation is likely to produce a positive result);
- Lack of "maturity," organizing skills, and self-discipline needed to stay focused, make progress, deal with challenges;

Question #1: (cont' d.)

- Health problems (both physical and mental health, including substance abuse);
- Lack of financial literacy;
- Lack of work experience and chronic (generational) dependence on welfare payments;
- Lack of access to computers and phones;
- Disabilities (physical and/or learning disabilities);
- Lack of disposable income for basic needs (e.g., lunch);
- Being affected by discrimination (for age, race, language background, or other reasons);
- Lack of support systems for transportation; childcare; clothing for job interviews and employment; eldercare; healthcare; housing, etc.

Question #1: (cont' d.)

2. *Ex-offenders also face unique challenges, including:*

- Criminal records which can block employment in many occupations (legally or illegally);
- Debt due to fines, legal bills;
- Families which refuse to provide housing or other supports to the returning inmate;
- Families who engage in illegal or risky behavior and with whom the ex-offender cannot live;
- Discrimination by employers, landlords, etc.;
- Lack of driver's license and ID;
- Requirements to attend counseling, parole meetings, etc. which can block successful participation in education and other programs;
- Peer pressure to return to illegal behavior;
- Self-image as a “criminal.”

Question #2: What educational practices are you now using to help your students deal with the challenges they face?

Question #3: What are the strengths and limitations of those practices, and how might your programs be improved?

Question #4: What are guidelines for effective practice in work-related adult basic education?

Equipped for the Future

- An adult education systems reform initiative of the National Institute for Literacy, begun in mid-1990s.
- Broadened the definition of basic skills:
 - From 3Rs and listening and speaking . . .
 - To include problem-solving, teamwork, research, use of technologies, etc.
- Emphasizes contextualized (real-world) applications of basic skills in the work, family, and civic roles common for U.S. adults.
- Identifies guidelines for instructors, program administrators, and policy makers and funders.

Question #4: (cont' d.)

The 16 EFF Skills Standards

- Communication Skills: Read With Understanding . . . Convey Ideas in Writing . . . Speak So Others Can Understand . . . Listen Actively . . . Observe Critically;
- Interpersonal Skills: Cooperate With Others . . . Guide Other . . . Advocate and Influence . . . Resolve Conflict and Negotiate;
- Decision-Making Skills: Solve Problems and Make Decisions . . . Plan . . . Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate;
- Lifelong Learning Skills: Take Responsibility for Learning . . . Learn Through Research . . . Reflect and Evaluate . . . Use Information and Communications Technology.

Question #4: (cont' d.)

EFF Guidelines for Effective Instruction

- Focus instruction on content that is purposeful (meaningful, important, motivating) for learners.
- Contextualize instruction by teaching skills as they are used by learners in work, family, or civic roles.
- Build on what learners already know.
- Make instruction “transparent” by making it clear to learners why they are being asked to engage in particular learning activities. Use assessment to help learners continually monitor & improve their learning.
- Provide multiple opportunities and incentives for learners to master skills (through practice, reflection, fine-tuning of strategies). Don't be superficial. Be sure that learners master all components of standard.

Question #5: What are examples of uses of educational technologies that meet those guidelines?

Two approaches to using educational technologies for work-related adult basic education

1. Use pre-packaged educational software.
2. Use existing Word software to foster writing, computer, research, and other EFF skills.

Question #5: (cont' d.)

Educational Technologies Approach 1

Use pre-packaged educational software.

- Advantages: Pre-structured, easy to use; requires limited teacher preparation; can track attendance and achievement.
- Disadvantages: Teachers can over-rely on this as an electronic babysitter. Software can be an electronic workbook with activities that are not authentic.

Question #5: (cont' d.)

Educational Technologies Approach 2

Use existing Word software to foster writing, computer, research, and other EFF skills.

- Advantages: Can be used to present learners with realistic uses of computer and basic skills (e.g., composing emails, searching for information on Internet, presenting findings) that might be used in work-related roles. Learners can be creative rather than just fill in pre-determined blanks on screen.
- Disadvantages: More open-ended, requiring instructors to be flexible and responsive to learner interests. More difficult to track achievement.

Question #5: (cont' d.)

An example of how to use Word software to foster EFF skills

■ Project-based learning

“In its simplest form, project-based learning involves a group of learners taking on an issue close to their hearts, developing a response, and presenting the results to a wide audience.”

Heide Spruck Wrigley

Dec. 1998 issue of “Focus on Basics”

<http://www.ncsall.net/?id=31>

Question #5: (cont' d.)

An example of how to use Word software to foster EFF skills

Project-based learning

To help your learners prepare for a job interview for a clerical position:

- What kind of project might you assign them?
- How might they use Word software as part of that assignment?
- What EFF and other skills might they develop when doing that assignment?

Question #5: (cont' d.)

An example of how to use Word software to foster EFF skills

Learner Web (www.learnerweb.org)

- A national network of adult education programs that are developing a system of free web sites, which adult learners can use to get their GEDs, help their children succeed in school, transition into college, and prepare for careers in various industries.

Question #5: (cont' d.)

An example of how to use Word software to foster EFF skills

Learner Web

- “Learner Web Career Pathways” is being developed by Union County College and partners in Minnesota and Washington, D.C.
- Links users to existing free web sites which help users (a) prepare a career plan, (b) develop transferable work-readiness skills, (c) understand career options in various industries.
- Ex-offenders can use this post-release.

Question #6: What resources might you use for further professional development in these areas?

Equipped for the Future website: <http://eff.cls.utk.edu/>

“EFF Fundamentals”

- Four purposes for learning;
- Role maps (work, family, community/citizen);
- 13 common activities (common to all 3 roles);
- 16 content standards.

EFF Teaching/Learning Toolkit

- Teaching/learning cycle;
- Handouts explaining the 16 EFF content standards;
- Sample instructional activities for GED; ESL; basic literacy; and work, family, and civic education;
- Background research.

Other EFF resources (e.g., Work Readiness Credential, NRFF retail curriculum, assessment tools...)

Question #6: (cont' d.)

Resources for professional development

Project-based learning

- December 1998 issue of Focus on Basics
www.ncsall.net/?id=31

Educational technologies in adult basic education

- “Learning with Computers: The Theory Behind the Practice” www.ncsall.net/?id=303