

Transitions to Work

Abstracts of Selected Research, Resources, and Promising Practices that
Link Basic Skill Development and Lifelong Learning to
Increased Earning Potential and Career Growth

Prepared for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education's 2009 National
Conference for Adult Education State Directors

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March 2009

Foreword

Much of the current adult education literature is focused on transitioning adults to post-secondary education, especially since numerous studies have shown a positive relationship between postsecondary education degrees or credentials and increased earnings and job stability. However, many low-skilled adults want — or need — to work before, during or after participating in education programs, even though the research suggests their chances of getting and keeping good jobs with benefits are slim and turnover is high. Regardless of the individual's background or reasons for wanting to work, employers need a workforce that is “work ready” with the skills, knowledge and abilities to do the job. To advance the status of a low-skilled, low-income population, we must understand the job market they face, find ways to ease transitions to work that will increase their potential to move forward and succeed, and support educational approaches that will lead to “sustainable employment with better wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement” (United Way, 2007).

Various sources were consulted to identify trends and/or strategies that adult education programs might use to assist low-skilled, low-income individuals in getting, keeping, and maintaining good jobs. Many of the sources are outside of the adult literacy field, including welfare-to-work; adult learning theory; educational inequality; re-entry from prison; innovative practice reports; “bridge,” out-of-school youth, and work-focused initiatives evaluations and reports; corporate training; and joint labor-management initiatives.

Abstracts for the resources reviewed include the website URL, reference citation, and key points in the document. In general, the sources include research, general concepts, promising practices, as well as specific and concrete ideas to foster and build systems for adults to transition successfully to work. They address adults who are: 1) unemployed or never employed; 2) newly hired workers, including those in subsidized employment; and 3) incumbent workers, including those who frequently change jobs or have periods of unemployment. The sources do not always directly address adults with limited literacy or English language skills. In some, the role of adult education is not specified but it is implied. In others, the resource refers to low-income and “hardest to serve” populations as those who face multiple barriers including low skills, substance abuse, housing, transportation, childcare, and unemployment.

Key Themes Emerging from Reviewed Sources

Below are themes (e.g., strategies, systems, practices, concepts) that were noted repeatedly in the resources. Many themes were supported by research while others were identified as promising practices that could benefit from research-based evidence. The themes are worded as action steps and sorted according to three main populations: workforce development systems, educators, and employers.

Workforce development systems directors should:

- Provide more intensive services.
- Make appropriate referrals.
- Make financial aid information available so learners may plan ahead.
- Facilitate and develop strategic partnerships and collaborations.
- Facilitate communication among all partners.
- Focus on specific regional workforce education and training needs.
- Build on high growth, innovative industries.

Education, training, and human service providers should:

- Ensure high quality professional development for key stakeholders
- Use a case management approach.
- Screen participants for barriers and provide support services of sufficient duration and intensity.
- Help adults set achievable short- and long-term goals.
- Guide adults to be self-directed learners.
- Provide multiple entry points.
- Offer a variety of instructional strategies and delivery systems (especially technology-based in a blended learning format).
- Teach soft skills (interpersonal skills) and workplace cultures.
- Provide opportunities for adults to build creativity and innovation skills.
- Provide integrated, contextualized instruction and curriculum
- Align curricula among programs and throughout system.
- Use measurable methods and assessments to determine learning gains, certification, or employment
- Offer internships in cooperating workplaces.

Employers should:

- Invest in lifelong education of employees, including tax credit, joint labor/management.
- Offer career-planning support for all employees.
- Focus human resources on case management.
- Work closely with school districts, adult education and training programs, and workforce development systems to align curricula, credentials.
- Integrate all education (including basic education) and training opportunities into a seamless department.
- Provide close supervision at first with “hardest to serve” workers.
- Provide mentoring, peer support, and ongoing support for low-skilled workers.
- Gradually increase demands with “hardest to serve” workers.

Resource Abstracts

Entry-level and Next-Step Jobs

Acs, G. & Loprest, P. (November 2008). *Entry-level and next-step jobs in the low-skill job market*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <<http://www.urban.org/>>

This brief presents the results of a 2007 *Survey of Employers in the Low-Skills Labor Market*, in which 1,060 employers were surveyed about job opportunities for those without a college education. They distinguish between jobs that have very low requirements—entry-level jobs—and those that require some higher skills—“next-step” jobs. The survey asked employers to rate job requirements by three criteria: a high school diploma, prior job-specific experience, and specific skills training in a related area. Among the sample, about 30% are entry-level jobs with very low requirements (few or none of the criteria) and about 70% are next-steps jobs for which at least one of the three criteria are important.

The average wage rate for entry-level jobs is \$9.25 and for next-step jobs is \$13.85. More than 35% of entry-level jobs require less than 35 hours a week compared with 13% of next-step jobs. Only 45% of recently filled entry-level jobs offered health insurance compared with 80% of next-step jobs. Workers in entry-level jobs had about a 37% chance to have flexible leave or paid sick days, compared with 62% of workers in next-step jobs.

Entry-level jobs require less experience, less education and fewer job skills and are concentrated among smaller employers and in different industries. Entry-level jobs are more likely to be in service, construction, production, or installation occupations. Next-step jobs are more likely to be managerial and professional or office and administrative jobs. Thus, even in the non-college labor market, job requirements and benefits differ greatly. Employers do not spend the same resources (advertising, screening workers, background checks) trying to fill entry-level jobs as they do for next-step jobs.

However, job opportunities for low-skill, low-income workers without degrees exist in the next-level jobs market if they receive specific skills training, education, and support in education and training programs.

United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB). (2008). *The road to opportunity: Sustainable employment best practices*. Boston, MA: Author.
<www.prohope.org/pdfs/UW%20sustainable%20employment.pdf>

This resource is a goldmine of best practices (and sample programs) from the network of non-profit agencies that contribute to sustainable employment programs in eastern Massachusetts. It is organized along a continuum moving from basic education to skills training for job seekers and incumbent workers. See the following pages for best practices and model programs related to:

- Soft Skills (p.6), including appropriate dress, interview practice, technology, financial
- Transitioning through education and training levels (p.8), including placement screening and assessment, mini-course, progressive learning levels
- Strategic planning and management (p.10), including target performance and outcomes, tracking, evaluation, information management
- Case management and career advisors (p. 10), including deep, comprehensive supports, long-term or wide, small client to advisor ratio
- Reduce barriers to attendance and participation (p.11), such as specific referrals, follow-up client referrals

- Outreach and access (p. 12), target the most vulnerable populations, actively recruit, encourage clients to refer their friends
- Post-placement for incumbent workers (p.22), provide regular support and referral services, set up workplace mentoring, work with company to reduce turnover.

See also the sections in the resource on Vocational Skills Training and Systemic Advocacy (pp.18-32).

Loprest, P. & Martinson, K. (July 2008). *Supporting work for low-income people with significant challenges*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.
<<http://www.urban.org>>

“Improving systems and programs to ease transitions to work for hardest to serve population will require extensive planning, investment at federal, state, and local levels. Any discussion of promoting work among low-income people must acknowledge that major personal challenges make it extremely difficult for some individuals to find or hold down full-time jobs without intervention and support. Obstacles include mental or physical health problems or disabilities to substance abuse, domestic violence, low literacy, learning disabilities and a criminal record, or the need to care for a disabled family member.

What works? Limited information available on which strategies best help “hardest-to-serve; studies using rigorous, experimental designs are especially scarce (Bloom & Butler, 2007). That which does exist calls for a combination of barrier alleviation, employment services, and financial incentives to work. Identified 4 approaches:

1. *Service-focused employment preparation*: combining services to address barriers (substance abuse, mental health); “treat first” to reduce barrier. Rapid movement into unsubsidized employment provides on- and off-site job coaching and counseling as well as peer support.
2. *Subsidized employment*: funds allow individuals with significant challenges to work in a supportive environment where they also learn job skills and work behaviors.
3. *Treatment-management programs*: help individuals manage their health problems by improving access and engagement.
4. *Incentives*: financial support to encourage participation, expanding the availability of health coverage.

Holzer, H.J. & Lerman, R.I. (2007). *America’s forgotten middle-skill jobs*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <<http://www.urban.org/publications/411633.html>>

The authors analyze recent employment and wage trend data, as well as projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), to investigate the future demand for workers in “middle-skill” jobs — i.e., those requiring some postsecondary education or training (associate’s degrees, vocational certificates, on-the-job training) but less than a bachelor’s degree. This paradigm may seem at odds with recent attention focused on the need for the U.S. to invest more heavily in its college-educated workforce. Thus, this resource will be useful for all stakeholders, and especially education providers, who are involved in strategic planning for workforce development.

Roughly half of all employment today is still in the middle-skill category. However, some economists assert that demand for middle-skill jobs will shrink dramatically; the authors conclude that demand for such jobs will remain quite robust and are poised to grow as well as high-skill jobs. For example, the BLS projects that nearly half of all job openings between 2004 and 2014 will be in middle-skill occupations, such as construction, health care, computer use,

and transportation. Another one-third will be in high-skill occupations, and about 22 percent in service occupations.

The authors provide evidence from various states and industries that illustrate the current demand for a middle-skill workforce, one whose workers have some postsecondary vocational training. The authors suggest that growth in the supply of workers with these middle level skills will likely shrink as baby boomers retire and immigrants fill the bottom and top jobs more easily than the middle. Thus, education and training programs that help less-educated workers gain these skills remain a worthwhile investment. “While further aid for those enrolling in four-year college programs is clearly critical, we must also provide other pathways to labor market success for those who cannot enroll in or complete such degrees. Labor market opportunities will clearly be available to such individuals, and proven education and training paths exist for both the current and future workforce. It is time to invest more heavily in appropriate skill development for all of our nation’s current and future workers, at all points in the labor market.”

Education, Training, and Support for Building Careers

Martinson, K. & Holcomb, P. (2007). *Innovative employment approaches and programs for low-income families*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population (for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.urban.org/>

The Innovative Employment Strategies project was designed to identify innovative strategies for promoting stable employment and wage growth among low-income populations. The project team reviewed TANF research and consulted with more than 35 individuals from 27 organizations, including adult education providers. Several factors appear to limit the earnings of low-income adults:

1. Lack of basic skills and credentials
2. Lack of access to quality jobs
3. Limited access to work supports (child care, transportation)
4. Multiple barriers to employment including physical or mental health problems, domestic violence, substance abuse, criminal history or other crises.

The following criteria were used in this study to identify approaches that have potential for improving employment prospects for low-income individuals:

- Address at least one or more of the causes of low earnings among low-wage workers (see #1 above).
- Provide an intervention that may be untested but is research-based.
- Address the policy interests of federal or state policymakers and program operators.
- Have potential to be replicated or adapted in other states and locations.

Through the application of these criteria, 12 innovative approaches and 51 programs (see Appendix A in document) applying them were identified and categorized in 4 areas:

1. *Service-focused employment preparation*: especially focused for hard-to-employ population with significant barriers
 - a. Screening and comprehensive assessments for barrier identification.
 - b. Implementing a plan to assess progress and determine next steps that is regularly monitored and updated.
 - c. Partnering with other public and community-based organizations with expertise in addressing barriers.
 - d. Maintaining a focus on employment and financial goals.
2. *Employment-based experience*: providing short-term subsidized jobs, usually with personal support and wage subsidies, temporary or transitional jobs (see p.13)
3. *Skill development*: set of strategies designed to increase skill levels, including instructional and curricular changes for basic skills and post-secondary (see p.15)
 - a. Providing a mix of services with a strong link to employment, including case management is effective (“Programs with a strong focus on basic education but only limited linkages to employment or job training have generated limited learning gains. In contrast, Center for Employment Training...”).
 - b. Job training has been effective (JTPA).
 - c. Obtaining credentials is important.
 - d. Financial supports are critical.
 - e. Retention is still a problem.
4. *Income and work supports*
 - a. Job placement and ongoing counseling
 - b. Earning supplements
 - c. Child care

Jobs for the Future and National Fund for Workforce Solutions. (November 2008)
National fund for workforce solutions: Experience and evidence. Boston, MA:
Author (for U.S. Department of Labor). <<http://www.jff.org/>>

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS) is a five-year, \$30 million effort to strengthen and expand high-impact workforce development initiatives around the country. NFWS is dedicated to moving America's low-wage workforce into higher paying jobs, while providing employers with the skilled workers they need. The strategies of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions derive from strong evidence that workforce partnerships or intermediaries and sectoral approaches work. This NFWS brief summarizes this evidence.

Four major principles emerged from ten years of research and program experiences (They cite evidence from *Aspen Institute study, SkillWorks in MA* for unemployed and incumbent workers, and the *Jobs Initiative*.)

1. Building regional funding collaboratives that align vision, strategies and resources toward regional prosperity
2. Organizing efforts around key industry sectors that meets need of employers and workers
3. Building career pathways that provide career advancement opportunities for lower-skilled workers and job seekers through workforce partnerships
4. Facilitating alignment across programs and systems involved in workforce development.

Conway, M. & Blair, A. (2006). *Skills to live by: Participant reflections on the value of their sectoral training experience*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.
<<http://www.aspenwsi.org/pubs-topic.asp>>

This resource describes the third phase of a sectoral approach (targeted or high priority industry clusters and related jobs) to education and training for low income and low-skilled individuals, especially to identify the successes and challenges they have faced participating and remaining in the labor market four years after training. 26 participants from three different programs were interviewed (individually and in focus groups). The study illuminates how the training influenced participants' employment path and how other life experiences have played a role. These honest, poignant experiences, successes, and challenges are heard through the participants' voices and the authors' interpretations of what they heard in the study.

Three significant themes emerged.

- 1) Participants strongly believed that acquiring the technical job skills increased their confidence and made them more employable. However, the participants repeatedly said that it was the *soft skills* — communication, conflict resolution, body language, self-confidence — that changed their ability to succeed in the system.
- 2) *Support systems* were reported by all respondents as crucial to their ability to succeed in the training program. They mentioned informal peer networks and study groups, counseling services, financial support, and childcare assistance. Respondents also mentioned the beneficial aspects of how the program helped them to identify and address personal barriers to success.
- 3) Participants had *specific goals* for work and employment and understood how the program would help them meet those goals. The realistic, hands-on learning environment in their program was described again and again as critical for providing the motivation to succeed and real-life experiences to build confidence and compete successfully for jobs.

Although the sample size was small, the authors emphasize that the study reveals the challenges low-income and low-skilled individuals continue to face even after successful education and training. These implications are relevant for practitioners and providers, workforce development system building, and policy makers. In addition, the participants' experiences can provide poignant readings and discussions for students who have similar needs and issues in adult education and training programs.

Transitional Jobs

National Transitional Jobs Network. (2007). *Evaluation of transitional jobs programs*. Chicago, IL: Author.

<http://www.transitionaljobs.net/ResearchEvals/Background_Research.html>

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) works to support and expand the size, type, and number of Transitional Jobs programs nationwide and to support the quality of the service model. NTJN fosters economic opportunity for America's workers by developing new TJ programs and building the capacity of its existing 200 TJ programs, and promoting a national dialogue on job advancement strategies.

This brief provides the name of the program, the evaluator, and summarizes the positive outcomes and outputs of a variety of NJTN programs. Below are a few examples.

Transitional Jobs: Stepping Stones to Unsubsidized Employment (Mathematica)

- Participants receive more intensive support
- Consistent participation in the program usually leads to permanent unsubsidized employment.
- Transitional work has a positive effect—financially, professionally, and personally on participants' lives.

Community Jobs Program Moves People from Welfare to a Career Track: Outcomes Assessment Summary (Economic Opportunity Institute)

- 72% of CJ participants find gainful employment.
- Average income of post-CJ workers increased 60% during their first two years in the workforce and is 148% higher than their pre-CJ income.
- Once in the workforce, CJ participants tend to stay in the workforce.

Transitional Community Jobs – Chicago, IL (Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland for Catholic Charities)

This evaluation reports the results for participants with a subsidized job compared to participants who received only employment services without a subsidized job:

- A 32% increase in earnings.
- A 20.2% higher rate of employment
- A 17.7% increase in job retention six months after program completion
- Decreased reliance on welfare.

Incumbent Workers

Bosworth, B. (December 2007). *Lifelong learning: New strategies for the education of working adults*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
<<http://www.americanprogress.com>>

This paper argues for new and better federal policy to support the education of working adults: basic education, ESOL, and post-secondary education for those needing educational and occupational credentials for job advancement and increased productivity.

The author proposes four key principles to promote lifelong learning and five inter-related and interdependent recommendations for policy makers to support this system:

Principles

1. There is no one-size-fits-all or silver bullet approach to adult education reform.
2. We must build and shape demand for adult education among less-educated workers and their employers.
3. The federal government and states need to work together on adult education.
4. We need new and improved education technology to deliver instruction, to measure progress, and to test for competency.

Recommendations

1. We need incentives for employers to invest in the credentialed and portable education skills of their employees. (Ex: employers receive a credit against their federal tax liability amounting to a percentage of their investment in basic education, English language, and lifelong learning.
2. We need stronger incentives for working adult to invest in their own education. (Ex. increase the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit)
3. We need better support and assistance for state governments to help their public postsecondary institutions develop education offerings and degree programs that work for working adults.
4. We need to rethink and restart our whole approach to adult basic education and ESOL and move toward a more demand-driven, technology-based strategy.
5. We need to step up our national efforts to explain to working adults and their employers their shared interest in more and better education and help them learn how to plan, finance, and complete their education.

These principles and recommendations are supported by ample research and examples of programs throughout the paper.

Finance Project. (2005). *Work supports and low-wage workers*. Washington, DC:
Author. <www.financeproject.org>

To date, initiatives for employers to help their workers understand and access work supports have been limited. This publication draws from effective employers practice in this area and identified five key models of employer involvement in work supports are:

1. Build awareness of available work-supports. Employers are in a good position to help raise awareness; they have an accessible location to share information and can engage in outreach activities that target their own workforces.
2. Help facilitate access to work support programs. Human resources departments can help workers apply and complete benefits or they can partner with non-profits.

3. Invest in work supports for low-income workers. Some employers are investing their own resources to provide work supports, such as offering on-site services or providing subsidies for services in the community. They can invest in employer collaboratives that finance work supports.
 4. Participate in system-building efforts, such as supporting transportation to jobsites.
 5. Engage in public policy activities related to work supports. More and more employers are meeting with federal, state, and local policy-makers and serving on advisory councils and WIBs.
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Families and Work Institute. (2004). *Tips for managers: Generation and gender in the workforce*. Washington, DC: Author.

<<http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/main.html>>

Prepared for the American Business Collaboration, this brief is based on the Institute's research on generation and gender in the workforce. It includes recommendations that companies, managers, and employees can take (each recommendation is includes numerous ideas for implementing the recommendation):

- Develop training programs that help employees understand and respect differences among the generations
 - Improve the talent development system for workers of all ages, including new and those who have been there a short time.
 - Develop career monitoring and career counseling functions in the company.
 - Create "Second Acts" or Flex-career programs.
 - Development and implement diverse career paths.
 - Improve the performance and advancement systems.
 - Provide increased access to flexibility without jeopardy.
 - Address issues of overwork.
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The next two reviews are part of series of five international reviews commissioned by the New Zealand Department of Labour in 2007 to inform their *Upskilling Partnership Programme*. This program is researching approaches that engage employers in workplace literacy, language and numeracy programs, in order to help raise their productivity. Each document presents a background and history of workplace literacy in that country, demographics, key policies, funding sources major stakeholders, and descriptions and outcomes of current practices. It is within these descriptions that some transition strategies or approaches were identified that might be useful for the United State system to consider. <<http://www.dol.govt.nz/publication>>

Folinsbee, S. (2007). *International workforce literacy review: Canada*. New Zealand: Department of Labour. <<http://www.dol.govt.nz/publication-view.asp?ID=262>>

General Canadian projections about an aging population set the stage for workforce demographic projections. Current articles and reports on workforce demographics and projections stress government and business concerns about the aging workforce and declining numbers of skilled workers. Although there is hope that immigration will solve the problem, many experts say it will not. Nonetheless, because Canada is approaching a 'seller's market' in terms of the labor force, renewed interest is being seen in older workers' rights to remain employed, human rights and language training for immigrants, and the urgent necessity to train all workers. Increased literacy rates are becoming viewed as necessary.

According to the Canadian Council on Learning's (CCL) 2007 report on adult and workplace learning, only about one third of Canadian adults participated in some form of learning or training. The report emphasizes that even though Canadian employers are looking for workers with greater skills and adaptability, only one quarter of the Canadian workforce benefits from employer-sponsored training. The CCL's findings also indicate that most adult learning and training occurs in the workplace. However, barriers such as lack of resources from employers, labor, and government, as well as individual barriers, prevent worker participation in training.

A Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) report found that less-educated individuals are likely to experience lower wages, more unemployment, and lower status. Significantly, the report indicates that a cumulative effect on workers with the least education exists as they fall further and further behind their more educated colleagues during the course of their working lives. The CPRN report also states that those Canadians with a university degree are five times more likely than someone with high school or less to participate in adult learning. The CPRN report stresses that: *Recent research has shown that increasing the skills of the least educated is an important route to increased productivity. For this reason, skills development of the least educated should be as much on the economic agenda as it is on the social agenda. (p. vi)*

This report recommends that Canada develop a pan-Canadian adult training and education vision and policy framework. The CPRN report includes recommendations that focus on:

- Employer incentives to support training for less-skilled workers;
- More government investment for basic skills training;
- Development of a coordinated approach;
- Increased cooperation and investment among significant partners;
- Additional research on the barriers to adult learning;
- Focus on developing learning cultures with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs);
- More focus on motivating and targeting those workers with the least skills.

In 2002, Belfiore analyzed principles of good practice statements in workplace education in Canada, United States, Britain, and Australia. She notes that these principles give direction to all the work that happens in planning and carrying out workplace literacy programs. She found that these principles were fairly consistent after two decades of work. The principles were:

- Voluntary participation in programs;
- Confidentiality in individual and organizational needs assessments and evaluations;
- Need to conduct organizational needs assessments;
- Customization of learning materials and curriculum;
- Need to link learning to other training and education;
- Importance of evaluations and goals set by all partners;
- Need for a project team or joint committee to guide the planning process;
- Equity in partnerships, particularly including workplace educators as partners.

The Conference Board of Canada documented the benefits of workplace literacy programs for both employers and workers in 26 exemplary programs. Especially relevant are the outcomes, which are quite similar to outcomes identified in workplace literacy programs in the US. The top benefits for employers were:

- Workers' increased success in technical and other kinds of job-related training;
- Greater productivity;
- Greater adaptability;
- Increased decision-making and better morale;
- Increased health and safety.

Worker benefits included:

- Improved literacy skills
- Greater self-confidence
- Greater employability and ability to take these skills to families and communities.

Merrifield, J. (2007). *International workforce literacy review: England*. New Zealand: Department of Labour. <<http://www.dol.govt.nz/publication-view.asp?ID=263>>

The most recent insight into the impact of literacy and numeracy skills comes from the second of the two longitudinal studies, the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). In 2004 all BCS70 cohort members (then aged 34) completed literacy and numeracy assessments, alongside exercises to assess symptoms associated with dyslexia (Bynner and Parsons, 2006:9). Perhaps the most important aspect of this study was a reminder of the importance of working with people with the lowest skills levels since the biggest impact of poor basic skills is at those levels. The targets of the Skills for Life strategy were set at higher levels to reflect the ultimate goal of the strategy: to achieve the skill levels needed to succeed at work. But the danger of targets is that 'you get what you ask for' which tends to shift the focus onto learners already functioning at higher levels and ignoring the needs of those in lower levels.

Evidence exists that employers are increasingly willing to provide basic skills development for their workers, and in turn, workers are expressing their perceptions about the offered programs. Ananiadou (2003), for example, cites the 2001 *Learning and Training at Work* survey of a sample of 3,000 employers in England. *Among workplaces with five or more employees some 59% offered at least one type of learning opportunity. While IT and working with others were the most common types (offered by 40% and 37% respectively), 11% offered basic numeracy and 10% basic literacy.* The percentage of companies offering basic skills increased with the size of employer, up to 42% offering numeracy and 44% literacy in companies with 500 or more employees. Further, a recent National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) survey on learning at work generally found that workers overwhelmingly preferred less formal and more experiential ways of learning to improve job performance (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2007). For both genders, and across all ages and classes, 'learning by doing the job on a regular basis' was cited as quite or very helpful by 82%. Taking a course was found helpful by only 54%. The least skilled were least likely to find courses helpful.

Two workplace literacy programs are briefly described below:

- *Train to Gain* works through 1:1 support of learners in the workplace, although small groups of learners may be convened when possible. The 1:1 funding model is based on the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) approach, in which qualifications are not taught but gained primarily through application at work and completion of a portfolio of evidence of skills, prepared with support of an NVQ adviser.
- The University for Industry developed *Learndirect*, a service established by the government in 1998 to provide innovative ways to expand post-compulsory learning opportunities, particularly through e-learning and marketing to employers. *Learndirect's* goals are to:
 - Reach those with few or no skills and qualifications who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of learning.
 - Equip people with the skills they need for employability, thereby strengthening the skills of the workforce and increasing productivity.
 - Deliver innovatively through the use of new technologies.

In addition to online learning courses, *Learndirect* operates a free telephone guidance service that provides information about career options and course opportunities.

<<http://www.learndirect.co.uk/aboutus/>>

Outcomes for Learners: The need for further research on the outcomes of basic skills improvement is clear, and a number of studies are currently underway. Of particular importance will be a longitudinal study of approximately 400 employees who have participated in workplace literacy or numeracy courses, and who are being followed up over a 5-year period (part of the

Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TRLP) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and reported at <<http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase111/wolf.htm>>.

Outcomes for Employers: A detailed literature review conducted for the TLRP workplace literacy project concludes that there is remarkably little evidence of the benefits for employers of improving basic skills of workers (Ananiadou et al, 2003: 6). No systematic data from the UK exists and very limited international evidence is available. This is significantly different from the Conference Board's findings (see above).

Adult Learning

Collins, R. K. et al. (2006). *Building blocks for building skills: An inventory of adult learning models and innovations*. Chicago, IL: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). <http://www.cael.org/publications_research_whitepapers.htm>

This report, produced for the U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) initiative, presents the key components – or building blocks – of effective adult learning and skill development programs. The building blocks have been identified from existing research on this topic, the experience and networks of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), as well as documented best practices of practitioners nationwide.

The report is intended to be a resource for Workforce Investment Boards, employers, workforce development organizations, or traditional education and training providers who are planning to develop learning initiatives that are linked to the economic needs of a region.

The components of and innovations in exemplary adult learning programs outlined in this report have been highlighted in three different kinds of source material. Some of the components draw on several decades of work in the adult learning field, epitomized by the work of academic researchers like Malcolm Knowles (the “father of adult learning”). Other components have been drawn from research on community college programs and a growing body of literature on training low-skilled workers that is produced by academics, non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, the public sector and professional evaluators. Finally, the report includes components drawn from the findings of the corporate training field.

Components and innovations include:

1. *Need-focused Planning and Analysis* of specific skill needs of a region and its employers and an environmental scan of existing, relevant initiatives.
2. *Progress- and Success-focused Program Design* that supports success (academic and on-the-job) and motivates the learner to persist to completion of a learning goal.
3. *Adult-Centered Implementation* to include a wide range of strategies for instructional delivery based on learners' individual needs, appropriate assessment of skills and competencies, and support services to assist in removing barriers.
4. *Strategic Partnerships*
5. *Evaluation* in which an evaluation plan is set at the beginning of the program with clear goals and outcomes and includes formative and summative approaches.

Cholitz, V. & Prince, H. (2008). *Flexible learning options for adult students*. (2008). FutureWorks and Jobs for the Future (for U.S. Department of Labor). <<http://www.jff.org/>>

The following summarizes components in a framework that might guide postsecondary institutions in providing options to improve adult students' successful completion of coursework. Research exploration was limited to courses and programs that result in a postsecondary credential since these have the great potential return for adult students and society.

Framework of Alternative Delivery Approaches in Postsecondary Education

Course Scheduling and Location

- Weekend colleges
- Evening courses
- Branch or satellite campuses
- On-site at workplace

Course Design

- Open entry-open exit courses
- Modularized courses

Program Design

- Modularized programs
- Accelerated programs
- Developmental education-occupational credential
- Degree programs
- Career pathway and “bridge” programs

Distance Learning

Silver-Pacuilla, H. (September 2008). *Investigating the language and literacy skills required for independent online learning*. Washington, DC: The National Institute for Literacy. <www.nifl.gov>

- Learners with low skills are seeking and engaging in learning, but mainly outside of formal systems. (p. 13)
- The use of computer equipment and online technologies increases as adults' literacy and language skills increase.
- Much of what adults seek to learn and practice in their leisure time are skills that will improve their work performance — and much of this skill enhancement *is* technology-based.

The penetration of a strong work-related learning motivation into all sectors of the societies studied provides strong evidence that an element of the motivational aspect of learning with technology is the perceived applicability of computer literacy skills to job advancement. The literature reported in the next section supports this finding. (p. 21)

Online learners and teachers need support—pure online delivery is not best practice for adult literacy and ESOL learners (AlphaRoute, 2003; Daniels, Gillespie, Stites, & Nelson, 2004; FHRD, 1999; NCVET, 2002; Parke & Tracy-Mumford, 2000; Porter & O'Connor, 2001; Stiles & Porter, 2006).

Support could include:

- A facilitator for students at least some of the time;
- Student-to-student communication;
- Readily available tech support for both teachers and students;
- And peer group for teachers of distance courses as teachers learn the new medium.

Work Readiness

Casner-Lotto, J. & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce*. Washington, DC: The Conference Board.

<www.conference-board.org>

This report presents the findings of a joint study by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management to identify how employers describe and rank the skill demands of the 21st century workplace and the readiness of new entrants (graduates of high school, two-year and four-year colleges) to meet these demands. The participating organizations jointly surveyed over 400 employers across the United States.

In Part 1, the authors discuss the findings in which employers were asked to indicate which basic skills (English language, reading comprehension, math, writing, science, history, etc.) and applied skills (critical thinking, diversity, leadership, creativity, lifelong learning, etc.) were "important," "not important" or "very important" for new entrants' successful job performance. The following (all are applied skills) were rated as the most important skills needed by new workforce entrants at all educational levels:

- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Oral and Written Communications
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving

In Parts 2 and 3, the authors discuss employers' rankings ("deficient", "adequate" or "excellent") of new entrants' readiness in the skill areas and present the findings in a "Work Readiness Report Card," a tool for discussing the nation's workforce readiness and identifying areas of need and success. Of concern are the findings that new entrants with a high school diploma did not have any skill items rated as "excellent," and all 10 skills areas rated as "very important" were rated as "deficient" in this population. Two-year college educated entrants were rated "excellent" on Information Technology Application but had seven skills on the "deficiency" list. Respondents gave an excellent "Overall Preparation" rating to 23.9 per cent of four-year college graduates.

The authors also discuss employer-provided remedial basic skills training opportunities, emerging skills and content areas, and actions for improving workforce readiness. In summary, this report provides the employer perspective of workforce skills needs of today and tomorrow, and their perceptions of the readiness of new entrants to the workforce.

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Center for American Progress

Conference Board

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning

Families and Work Institute

Finance Project

FutureWorks

Jobs for the Future

The Urban Institute

The Urban Institute, Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, National College Transition
Network

National Fund for Workforce Solutions

National Institute for Literacy

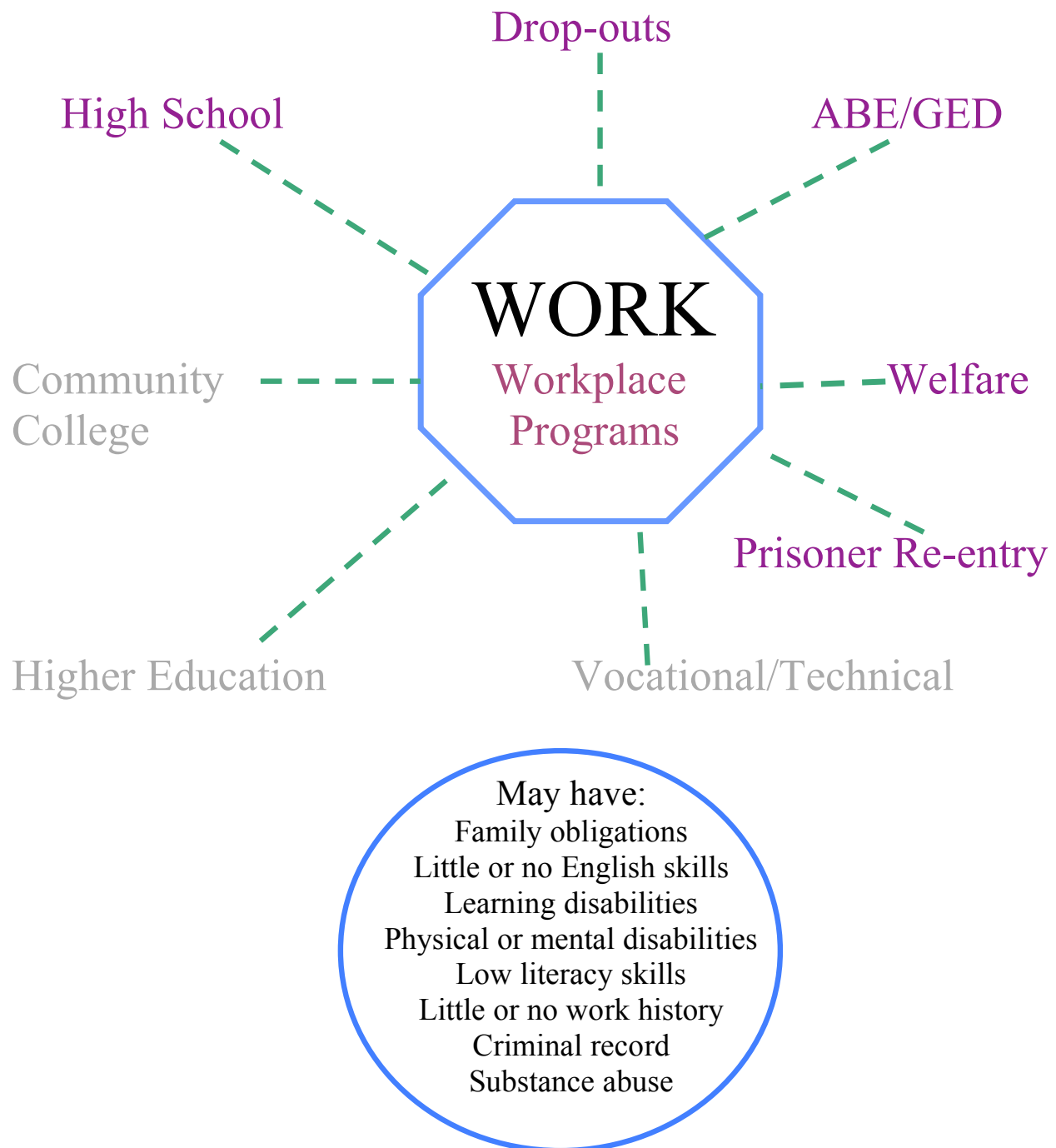
National Transitional Jobs Network

U.S. Department of Labor

New Zealand Department of Labor

Workforce Strategy Center

TRANSITIONS TO WORK



The top part of this illustration shows the many settings from which people enter employment. Those in purple are the focus of this paper; those in gray currently have a considerable amount of attention in related literature that may also apply. Many individuals have, to some degree, the issues/barriers listed in the circle that affect their successful transition into getting, staying, and advancing in the job market. Some sources specifically address populations with these barriers.