



Mindquest Matters

A Mindquest Academy Newsletter

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A Student's Experience with Mindquest Academy

By Luta Tshihamba (The Congo)
(Sue Ann Rawlins' ESL class in Hopkins)

Learning to read and write is the key to success to the academic world. It takes courage, willingness, and determination to achieve your goal. You also need a good teacher to explain what you're reading to make it more interesting. Reading and writing go hand in hand; so of course it is also important to make writing easier and more interesting too. Before I started ESL classes, I didn't have the confidence that I would be able to know how to read and write in English. It was hard, but the biggest challenge was the computer. I was nervous and afraid to touch the computer even though there was one in my home. My fear was that something bad could go wrong if I used it.

In my class with other students, we did the Reading for Second Language Learners and the Writing for Second Language Learners courses. My teacher explained them to us and gave us the courage to use the easy methods of how to read and to write. We used notebooks in the classroom and also the Mindquest Academy courses on the computers. Since

we had to do that, I was forced to do my best in order to stay in the same group with my classmates. At the beginning, I wasn't comfortable to do any one of them. But my teacher told me that I could do it, and that gave me the confidence to go ahead.

Now I read interesting stories, write a lot, and enjoy the computer. I can type, search for information, and read the news about my country. I can write email messages, and share some information with others too. This class has been a great help to my development as a full person. If there could be some changes in the program, it would be the timing. I felt that we didn't have much time to study the materials. We were in a rush all the time. Some of us needed more time to get through the materials.

Transition Models

The New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education, Inc, which works to strengthen adult literacy services in New England, conducted a survey of adult education centers with transition components. The NELRC team found commonalities to describe five distinct

models emerging in the ABE field:

- Advising
- GED-Plus
- ESOL
- Career Pathways
- College Preparatory

We look forward to more exploration of the models in the transitioning to postsecondary education initiative with the state next year.

Academic Preparation for College

Zafft, Kallenbach, and Spohn in the NCSALL Occasional Paper "Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models," state that their experience with the New England ABE-to-College Project suggests that "the level of academic preparation that a typical ABE graduate requires in order to succeed in college-level courses should not be underestimated." For instance, the level of math covered in ABE does not cover mastery for placement into college-level math courses. Students may not be taught how to research and write a term paper or how to use a computer for these activities. Another concern is the lack of strategies for reading dense college textbooks and study skills, such as note-taking. Adults who enter college without these skills are at the highest risk of dropping out in their first year.

The paper can be downloaded at <http://www.ncsall.edu/?id=26>.

Principles to Support Distance Learning

The National Institute for Literacy (NFL) lists six principles of good educational policy to support distance learning:

- Increased or appropriate allocation of resources
- Increased technology investments
- Adjusted reporting structures for cost reimbursement
- Adjusted measurements of student "attendance"
- Intensive training of staff
- Modifications in student recruitment

(from "How States are Implementing Distance Education for Adult Learners: A State Policy Update." The National Institute for Literacy, 2000.)

Distance Learning

The University of Alberta in their research, "Learning Technologies in Distance Education," studied a sample of adult learners over a two-year period. Some of their conclusions were:

- Distance learners need to be able to learn more individually and independently.
- Distance learning instructors need to spend much more time in preparatory activities than traditional learning.
- Methods need to be provided to enable students to interact with both the instructor and with other learners to aid the knowledge construction process.

Phase 1 Training

Phase 1 Training on Friday, March 30 was a lively experience. After Sue Ann Rawlins (Hopkins) shared her experience with a student assignment, all teachers shared in small groups the progress they noted since the last training.

Everyone enjoyed the update on audio in courses and using audio in response to students.

Greta and Bella presented a framework for teaching using the constructivist approach and cognitive apprenticeship. Discussion of the six methods of cognitive apprenticeship (modeling, coaching, scaffolding, reflection, exploration, and articulation) included examples of application.

Learning to Love Technology

By Sue Ann Rawlins, Hopkins ABE-ESL Teacher

Be careful what you say, because you may have to eat your words! I've always said that technology wasn't as important as face to face communication and that computers were too impersonal, something for "techies" only, not "sociable" people like me. It didn't seem natural for me to use them as part of my teaching. I knew that technology was the hot new item, something we teachers were supposed to be integrating into our teaching. I brushed it off as a fad. Well, now that I've taught several Mindquest Academy courses, in both the hybrid and remote models, I have to say I was wrong!

I didn't realize that I would develop a different sort of rapport with my students online. This rapport is not necessarily better, but different and somewhat supplemental. Communicating online allows for a private conversation, something that doesn't really happen that often in the classroom. The students seem free to submit ideas and I enjoy nurturing them individually. For my hybrid class especially, it is wonderful to have that supplemental online relationship in addition to our face to face time in class. I find that although responding to assignments can be burdensome, I feel sad when I check my mailbox and nothing is there! I also go through withdrawal when I finish teaching a course. I immediately start planning how to fit in another one.

Mindquest Academy has made such a difference in my teaching this year; it was a welcome change. Now I find myself incorporating "technology" into my class even when we're not doing a Mindquest course. My students are used to submitting assignments online and I am used to responding, so we continue to use FirstClass as a communication tool for writing assignments. I'm glad that my previous assumptions about using technology have been proven wrong.

Next Meetings

Phase 1 - May 18

Everyone - June 15. Barry and Todd will join us.

Student Evaluations due June 15.