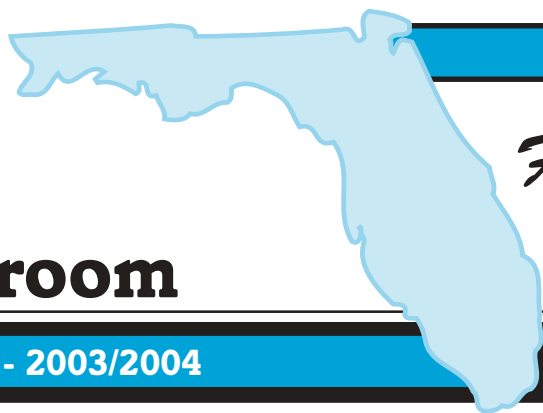


The

# Adult Basic Classroom



*For Florida Adult Basic  
Education Practitioners*

VOLUME 7 - 2003/2004

[www.ABEFlorida.org](http://www.ABEFlorida.org)

**How do I make my classroom a place where my adult learners will be successful? Most already have memories of struggling in a traditional classroom, so how do I make sure their experience in my classroom is different?**

## ADULTS LIVE IN THE "REAL WORLD"

Adult learners come to your classroom with a history of failure or at least struggle in the traditional classroom. This means that they have, in general, not performed well on tests, not absorbed material presented through lectures and have seen few connections between the ideas presented in the classroom and the information needed in the "outside" world. However, because they are adults and because they have made the effort to continue to seek education, you can rest assured that they have learned many things and that they have a desire to improve, to change, to learn somehow. Adult learners bring rich life experiences to the classroom which often include successful work in groups, such as committees, choirs, neighborhood associations and even families; experience in travel and possibly relocation, integration into a new culture or learning a new language; and the ability to find information when needed, either by asking, reading, surfing the web, or getting directions. So adult learners probably bring strengths in working with others, adapting to new situations and working by themselves. All of these skills are important in the workplace, and it just may be that your adult learners need more "real world" workplace-like struc-

tures in your classroom. Consider some of these suggestions.

### "REAL WORLD" CONNECTION: TIME MATTERS

In the "real world," time matters. Have your students sign in with the time of their arrival; have them sign out whenever they must leave. Find a way to enforce logical consequences for excessive tardies, absences, or time away from class. Such an approach reinforces the importance of what they do in the classroom and probably is familiar to them because of other work experiences.

### "REAL WORLD" CONNECTION: PEOPLE WORK TOGETHER

In the "real world," people work together. Even in this technological age, very few people work exclusively alone. People who do contract work at home must still work with their clients and possibly their bosses. In an office setting workers share responsibilities for certain tasks, serve on committees and taskforces, or work in groups that rely on other groups' work. Any adult learner that lives in a family has experienced group work doing chores, going on vacation, planning rides to and from school and work, or making a family decision.

In the classroom, working together

means working in a group. Require your adult learners to spend a part of each day in your class working in small groups. They may be the leader of a group and help teach others a skill; they may be the lowest learner in a group trying to keep up with their peers. Either way, group work is beneficial.

Groups can be set up for a variety of purposes: to study for tests, to develop skills, to complete a project, to write a report, to gather information, to take a survey, to explore a reading, to debate current events. Groups may meet once, for a set number of meetings, until the assigned task is done or all year long. Groups may circulate members or hold to the same few. It is beneficial for adult learners to be a part of several different types of groups so that they may experience different ways to serve a group. The same student should not be the leader in every group; craft groups so that even the brightest, most motivated student is the one learning and asking questions and completely in the dark at least once. Make sure your students understand their responsibility to the group and model, either by being part of a small group or by using the whole class as a large group setting, how productive work gets accomplished in a group.

The benefits to group work are many. Students learn how to work cooperatively, how to work with different types

of people, how to share responsibility and how to fulfill their own responsibilities. Group work expands exponentially the knowledge available to students. Each group member will bring different experiences and ideas to the task at hand and will, therefore, expose your student to more than even you could. Group work makes huge tasks doable; group work allows more chances for new explanations to be offered and fewer chances for repeating the same failed explanation with the same failed results. Group work creates accountability and group work does not feel like the traditional classroom. It is easier in a small group to ask questions, to ask that an idea be repeated, written down, spelled, or explained. Certainly groups will need monitoring and perhaps even intervention from the teacher sometimes, but so do committees at work and sub-committees in the legislature and even family groups during extended holiday times together. Group work during class time connects all kinds of learning to the “real world.”

**“REAL WORLD” CONNECTION:  
PEOPLE SET GOALS AND  
MAKE PLANS**

In the “real world” people must set goals and make plans to reach them. Both personally and professionally, we each must make decisions about where we want to go and how we want to get there. We may ask for much input as we make these decisions, but we also do much work alone during these decision times. Make each of your adult learners responsible for writing down their goals for life, for their education and for your class. Make each one write down a plan for attaining those goals and write a regular update on their progress toward their goals. Reflecting on their own work and goals is a mature skill and one they have used to decide to return

to school. Help them learn planning skills and writing skills and reflective thinking skills through goal-setting and planning. Make sure that each adult learner has time everyday to review or work towards the goals they set for themselves. Do not let their entire class time be governed by the small group needs or goals; be sure that each student has time to work alone and with you on his or her own skills.

**“REAL WORLD”  
CONNECTION: PEOPLE ARE  
HELD ACCOUNTABLE**

In the “real world” there is accountability. Interact with each student everyday. See what they are working on. Check their goal and planning sheets. Ask about their families and what movie they saw last. Make it clear to your student that you are interested in her, that you are paying attention to what he does, and that you are available to answer questions and help with problems. Much of an adult learner’s difficulty in a traditional classroom involves a perceived lack of support. It is your responsibility as an adult education teacher to be a very obvious and available avenue of support. In every other setting of this adult learner’s life people interact – supervisors, parents, spouses, co-workers, bosses. Adult learners need accountability and support.

**THE “REAL WORLD” FOR  
TEACHERS IS A BALANCING ACT**

Effective adult education is a balancing act. Some group time, some working alone time, some attention from the teacher, and some autonomy are all necessary to make the adult education classroom look and feel different than the traditional classroom. It is that balance that will help make the results of the adult education classroom different as well. ABE Florida web-based training

on Florida Technet, <http://www.floridatechnet.org> emphasizes this balance between group work, individual work, and teacher support. The ABE classroom is described as a place that “designs a program to meet individual interests and needs and encourages interaction among peers.” The training also advises that adult learners prefer education that “focus[es] on real-world problems and life situations with practical strategies to address life situations and problems,” relates to their own goals, and “provide[s] appropriate support, direction, and structure.” The ABE Florida web-based training claims that adult learners want teachers who “care about them as individuals and treat them as adults.” The interaction, individual interest and support that adult learners need are found in that daily classroom balance between group work and independent work and between teacher support and teacher student autonomy.

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This newsletter was developed by the Adult Basic Education Practitioners’ Committee with an Adult Education State Leadership Grant, 2003-2004, from the Florida Department of Education, Office of Workforce Education.

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