

## Research Project on Contextual Teaching

### ABSTRACT

As adult educators are being challenged to raise student literacy performance levels more and more each year, it is vital that these instructors have the tools they need to maximize student achievement. One of the most effective, evidence-based teaching approaches documented in the literature is Contextual Teaching and Learning. This approach helps instructors relate subject matter content to real world situations; motivates students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens, and workers; and encourages student persistence. The hypothesis for this project was: ABE Low and High Intermediate students will achieve greater gains on the TABE test when taught using a contextual approach compared to those students who are taught using traditional methodologies (e.g. workbooks, individualized, self-paced instruction).

The experimental class was taught in partnership with the Wake Tech Basic Skills program at the Adult Education Center (AEC) in Raleigh. The goal of this class was to improve literacy skills using a contextual approach with content from U.S. history and civics. The materials designed for use in this class were targeted to the literacy needs of ABE Low-Intermediate students (4.0 – 5.9) and ABE High-Intermediate (6.0 – 8.9) students.

Students in the experimental class were offered six hours of weekly instruction (78 hours total) through a combination of class, small group, and individual instruction during the two mini-terms of the spring instructional period at Wake Tech. The experimental class was taught by two experienced Motherhead instructors. TABE results for students enrolled in the experimental class were compared with the results of those in the comparison, workbook-based class. Although it was expected that 12 of the students (70%) would improve at least one functional level, a total of 11 of students (65%) did. However, this figure was significantly higher than the 50% of students in the control/traditional group who improved at least one functional level.

Approximately 300 staff hours were used to create contextual learning exercises and student handouts. These materials were developed and used in the experimental class. Revisions and adaptations were made during the second phase of the project.