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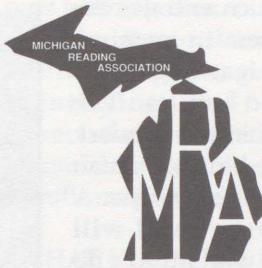
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Adult Education Comes of Age!

by Jean Denomme

with Introduction by Dr. Harry Woods

INTRODUCTION

Adult students who return to adult education programs come back to school with the oddest concept. It is almost as if the clock has stopped running and time stands still but then begins to jump in rhythmic and ever larger increments. Adult students' thoughts and hopes lie in the feeling that school will not be as long nor learning as difficult as it was the first time. That somehow an osmotic process will allow the student to absorb and thus learn. That presence alone is more actual than the pulling apart of words and meanings. The reaching back across memory and thought however, insists on a bridge of discipline to arrange for transfer and new insight. Yet, the adult student sees his day as ravenous and time fleeting. The time-honored regimen of day to day learning belongs to the child-student not the adult who shares fantasy with educational need.

The new adult education teacher, and most adult teachers are new, tries to unravel the past history of education for adults and incite a learning process where adult experiences, passion and learning needs become a singular package with a stair step climb to learning certification. But where do you begin? That some new teacher is hampered less with text than with the current curriculum design that declines to carry the adult learner to learning

fruition.

Most adult education programs seldom worry about innovation as the creation of new education wisdoms. Most adult programs pursue funding as a primary goal with adult learning assigned to a secondary role. So it was not dawn's early light that brings need for curriculum design to adult education programs; but the feeling that somehow to reach adults who cannot cipher nor read, a different approach is a necessity if we are going to be able to influence adult learning. At what point, do we help adult learners to teach themselves to feel enlightenment, and see understanding come into suddenly opened eyes. This curriculum design is an effort that begins to approach that place.

A committee was formed consisting of administrators and teachers from the Adult Education Department of the Detroit Public Schools. All meetings were held after regular working hours. Initially, consultants were brought in to provide additional background knowledge. Then the difficult task began of how to write a curriculum that would result in effective learning by adults.

The article that follows, written by Jean Denomme, describes the step by step process of the curriculum design. Table 1 is a sample of the Competencies (nine total) and strategies that are to be used for teacher inservice and

instruction.

WHY A CURRICULUM FOR THE ADULT LEARNER?

Until recently, District Administrators and the general public have viewed adult education as an addendum to the K-12 program. Night classes for an immigrant population, taught by contract teachers, summarized the common perception. In tandem Adult education program administrators and teachers often approached the adult learner with their day time mentality and K-12 curriculum.

While this design may have served at one time, it does not suffice for participants in today's educational market place. The adult learner has emerged from the stereotype with multiple faces: the teen unable to negotiate a traditional high school regime; the mother without high school credentials; the displaced worker seeking new job skills; the retiree developing recreational hobbies; and, still, the immigrant adjusting to an unfamiliar culture.

As the image of the actual adult learner began to focus, two basic questions also focused: (1) does an adult learn differently than a child; (2) what kind of a curriculum addresses the needs and expectations of this learner. This article is essentially concerned with the second question; however, some ideas around the first provide the necessary framework for discussing the second.

HOW DOES AN ADULT LEARN?

The essential premise of behavioral learning theory states that all human beings receive physical stimuli through their senses. Cognitive theory elaborates that the stimuli is transmitted, in the form of electrical impulses, through the neurological

system to the brain, which encodes the impulses and stores them in memory. This physical basis of learning is the same in children and adults. The **learning difference** lies in the network of associations developed in the human brain through experiences over time. A stimulus perceived by a child will activate an initial image with little or no branching. The same stimulus perceived by an adult may activate a complex network of associations which enables him/her to connect new information to information previously stored in memory. The new information is thereby placed in a context (like an associative grid) which enables the adult to assign meaning to the stimulus (Lewin, 1942).

Life experiences are stored in the human brain through memory traces, i.e., a chain of nerve cells linked by synapses, the points at which nerve impulses jump from one cell to the next. The memory traces form a network of nerve cells, creating multiple pathways in the cortex of the brain along which fresh impulses travel, seeking association. This is analogous to a freeway overpass where multiple paths intersect, branching off into several directions. In the human brain, however, all paths are activated and the impulses, unlike the car, travel several pathways at once. Clearly, the more complex this network of images and ideas, the more information the brain is able to associate and recall (Lynch, 1986).

Adults, in contrast to children, come into the classroom with highly developed memory structures or traces. Tapping into these structures, i.e., **activating prior knowledge**, is then a critical principle in the instruction of an adult (Marter, 1989).

Adults also enter the classroom with a specific agenda; they will stay as long as that agenda is being pursued. All

new learning then must be perceived as contributing to the realization of the adult learner's goals. Therefore, **identifying and clarifying the expectations** that adults bring into a formal learning situation is another significant principle in their instruction.

WHAT KIND OF A CURRICULUM?

These two principles: (1) tapping into prior knowledge; (2) identifying and clarifying the goals of the adult learner, are essential guidelines in the development of a curriculum that address the needs of the adult learner. The first provides insight into appropriate instructional practice while the second gives direction regarding relevant content.

The Curriculum Task Force of the Department of Adult Education, Detroit Public Schools, adopted these two principles as criteria for decision making in the development of the CYCLE I - PRE ABE CURRICULUM FOR ADULTS. Consideration of these principles, as well as attention to the demands of employment and the social responsibilities facing the adult learner, led the committee to select an **outcomes based curriculum**. This design complements the State of Michigan's emphasis on outcomes reflected in its Core Curriculum (Michigan State Board of Education, 1991). The design requires the learner to demonstrate mastery of specific skills in a project that reflects a meaningful integration of content. For example, in one activity the learner will describe the problem of purchasing baseboards for a room by presenting a floor plan with measurements, computing the total perimeter, obtaining the price per foot, and computing the cost. This demonstration involves problem solving, computing, drafting, and presenting.

Research on the learning of children and adults indicates that the teaching-

learning environment should replicate as closely as possible real life situations which have relevance for the learner (Hunter, 1982). For this reason, the committee consistently incorporated the basic principle of the whole language approach: the integration of different skills into meaningful learning experiences (Shanahan, 1990). In the communications strand, this is reflected in the inclusion of reading, writing, listening and speaking activities in each simulated activity. In the mathematics strand, reading, writing, computation and problem solving, including estimation and probability, are combined into unified learning activities.

WHAT IS THE CURRICULUM BUILDING PROCESS?

The development of a curriculum is a **process**. Instructional technology provides the outline for the development of the instructional process: **assess, design, develop, implement and evaluate**. **Assessment** asks: Who is the adult learner? Next, the question: What does this learner need/want to do, guides the **design**? How can this skill most effectively be presented to the learner is the concern of the **development** phase? **Implementation** is the actual testing of the curriculum and **evaluation** determines how the learner and the instructor know that learning has taken place. Determining the answers to each of these questions and elaborating upon them constitutes the curriculum development process. By way of demonstration this article will walk through the process as it was followed by a team of adult educators in the Detroit Public Schools.

WHO IS THE LEARNER? (ASSESSMENT)

The curricular framework for adult education in the Detroit Public Schools consists of five cycles: **Cycle I**, or the pre-ABE cycle, for learners whose reading skills fall between 0 and 3.0; **Cycle II** or the first ABE cycle, for learners whose reading skills test between 3.0 and 6.5; **Cycle III**, the second ABE cycle, for readers between 6.5 and 9.0; **Cycle IV**, the GED cycle and **Cycle V**, the high school completion cycle (Detroit Public Schools, Quality Education Plan for Adult Education, 1991).

The Detroit committee decided to work with Cycle I, not simply because it is the first cycle, but rather because it would establish the core of basic skills and habits of critical thinking to be expanded and refined both developmentally and sequentially through the following cycles.

The learner in Cycle I either cannot read or has very limited proficiency in reading; in math s/he generally has not mastered the application of the four basic operations in whole numbers. This adult often comes reluctantly into the adult education environment, driven by the need to cope in an increasingly complex society which presumes a reading citizenry. The committee studied the demographics of this learner in Detroit by researching the statistics of the District, the federal census and by interviewing the adult education teachers who work with this population.

The single, most consistent characteristic of this group of learners was age: the non-reader or low skilled reader was generally an older adult who had not attended school or whose formal school experience was very limited. Younger adults, i.e., those in their late teens, twenties and thirties, who tested into Cycle I were generally

described as having some learning disability. Teacher input was critical here since tests are not sufficiently sensitive to make such determinations.

WHAT DOES THIS LEARNER NEED TO KNOW? (DESIGN)

The profile of the learner in Cycle I led the committee to the next question: What does this learner need or want to do? Again the teachers of these students provided insight. They spoke of the adult who wants to read to his/her children, to study the Bible, to negotiate essential activities in day to day living, to feel safe in his/her environment, to express his/her own ideas and feelings without intimidation.

Reflection upon the urgency and desires of these learners prompted the committee to delineate a list of competencies appropriate to the expressed concerns of the learners as well as to the basic skills that needed to be developed. The competencies were grouped by learning content: those relating to communication (reading, writing, speaking and listening) form one sequence; those relating to mathematics (computation and problem solving) form the second.

The determination of basic competencies for functional literacy enabled the committee to focus on skills essential to Cycle I. The competencies served as guideposts in determining relevancy and assisted the committee in keeping the content of Cycle I measurable, appropriate, and manageable in terms of available time.

The communication competencies are the skills to:

- listen with literal and critical comprehension;
- fill out basic forms;
- interpret survival words and symbols, i.e. labels, signs, advertisements;
- share information, tell a story;

- follow written directions;
- exhibit independence in word attack skills;
- use service guides for information;
- create text (write 2-3 simple, related sentences);
- read 3.0 level text with accuracy, fluency and comprehension;
- achieve 3.0 on the TABE, Level E.

As noted above, these competencies are learned by integrating the communication skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening into each lesson or activity.

The competencies relating to mathematics are the skills to:

- use money knowledgeably;
- apply time and measurement skills;
- read and interpret graphs, tables and charts;
- recognize and understand properties of geometric shapes.

The math competencies are developed through a problem solving approach that uses reading, writing, computation, speaking, estimation and probability.

Each competency was then analyzed to identify its requisite or sub-skills. For example, Competency VII, to gather information from service guides, requires several skills: use of alphabetical sequence, recognition of sight words typical of each service guide, e.g., yellow pages, TV guide, etc., use of number sequence, and comprehension of the written word in context. For each identified sub-skill a set of strategies was designed for the teaching-learning process.

The sub-skills for each competency are those needed to function as an independent adult in the essential activities of day to day living. An adult learner who successfully completes Cycle I would then be able to:

- obtain information and directions essential to health and safety through reading and listening;

- give information accurately in spoken and written form;
- derive enjoyment from reading, listening and conversing;
- express personal ideas and feelings with confidence and clarity;
- apply computational skills to complete essential household tasks, such as shopping, budgeting, measuring, record keeping, etc.

HOW WILL THESE SKILLS BE TAUGHT? (DEVELOPMENT)

Once the content of Cycle I had been identified and outlined, the committee developed strategies for the effective delivery of the instructional process. These strategies are directed to the teaching and learning of Cycle I content. Their selection and development was guided by the principles presented earlier: associative learning facilitates the assimilation and retention of new information; new learning must have some value that is clear to the adult; learning should be outcomes based and integrated.

In the development of both content and methodology the committee was also guided by the principles of the **Whole Learning** approach, i.e., the understanding that humans learn meaningful configurations; that information should not be presented as isolated facts, but rather in an integrated context. Therefore, in the learning environment, as closely as possible, real life situations are simulated. Materials used in the learning process are not formal textbooks but the materials of everyday life: the newspaper, the bus schedule, the TV guide, etc. Skills are taught and practiced in relationship to the problem, so an activity such as planning a trip might include reading, writing, speaking, computing, listening and

problem solving (Fingeret, 1991).

The strategies designed by the committee for each competency consistently strive to tap into the prior learning of the adult, to relate the learning to real life situations and to integrate skills into a meaningful context. Again, using competency VII, the adult gains experience in classification by grouping TV programs into their respective categories, e.g., sitcom, police stories, sports, drama, etc. This activity involves:

- reading the guide;
- listing the programs;
- discussion to decide the characteristics of each category;
- decision making to complete the sort; and
- teamwork, because only one categorized list is required of a group of four learners.

Some strategies are **teacher directed** because they involve learning a new skill or information. The teacher ensures efficiency and correct learning by guiding the activity. Other strategies are **group directed** because the skill or information is best practiced in an interactive setting. Most strategies designed for practice and reinforcement are interactive. Still other strategies are **learner directed**; these are the activities included to provide the learner with additional drill and practice. Of course, some skills, such as completing a form or reading aloud, must be done by the individual learner; yet these too can be incorporated into a group learning activity that encourages learners to graciously give and receive helpful feedback.

Each strategy is listed under the competency and next to the sub-skill for which it was designed. In an addendum to the content of the curriculum some strategies are developed with step by step procedures. These are strategies

that may be less familiar to the instructor and for which s/he may need some direction in order to understand their instructional purpose and procedure. Many strategies are repeated for more than one competency. As is the case with the **content of Cycle I**, i.e., ten communication competencies and four math competencies, the **strategies of Cycle I** emphasize basic skills and information. It is the intent of the committee to use many of these same strategies, with greater elaboration and complexity, throughout the five cycles. In this way the skill strands consistently embedded in the strategies are reinforced at each level. These strands are: teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, creative or divergent thinking, and self-expression.

HOW IS LEARNING VERIFIED? (EVALUATION)

In determining its basic design, the committee decided the curriculum would be **outcomes based**. This means that learning is demonstrated by the performance of specific tasks corresponding to each competency. There are several points at which these demonstrations of mastery enter the learning cycle. At the beginning of the cycle the learner is expected to perform a list of operations which are listed as **prerequisite skills**. These are simple tasks, e.g., recognizing one's own name in print. Demonstration of these skills assures both the instructor and the learner that the learner is ready for instruction at this level. Because the learner has been referred to Cycle I by some evaluation prior to the classroom assignment, the concern is not his/her placement in the cycle, but rather his/her ability or readiness.

Each skill listed for a given competency is matched by one or several strategies. The strategies

generally include a performance requirement that provides the learner and the teacher with informal and consistent feedback on comprehension and mastery.

Specifically, the maintenance of a journal, both in reading and in math, is an on-going activity that reflects student progress. Also learners are guided in the compilation of a personal story book in which the learner keeps a finished copy of each of the stories developed throughout the course. This gives the learner a clear sense of progress in the realization of his goals. Finally, instructors assist students in the maintenance of student portfolios, folders with dated samples of student work that demonstrate mastery of the skill(s) learned.

At the end of the cycle the learner with the instructor reviews a check list of the **skills requisite** for completion of Cycle I. The list is checked by reviewing the student's portfolio as well as by the learner's completion of the **cycle demonstration**. The cycle demonstration is an activity that consists of several integrated components: reading, writing, speaking and listening for the communications strand; reading, writing, computation and problem solving for the mathematics strand. The learner is prepared for the successful completion of this demonstration throughout the cycle. This culminating activity is designed to demonstrate mastery in a way that celebrates as well as evidences the learner's achievements.

Because the learner participates in a district wide program and because he is a member of a test-oriented society, the final competency in this cycle is directed toward taking a standardized test successfully. The learner who completes the competencies in Cycle I with consistent mastery will test above 3.0 on the Test of Adult Basic Skills (TABE) that is required by the District.

Given the broad scope of competencies and sub-skills addressed in Cycle I, this criteria is minimal though essential. Passage of the TABE does provide objective, standardized evidence of reading comprehension and thus does verify learning as a result of completing the Cycle.

TESTING THE CONCEPTS (IMPLEMENTATION and EVALUATION)

The curriculum described in this article is still in the design mode. Its essential components are ready for implementation and revision. A field test is proposed for a six week summer school program at one of Detroit's Adult Education Day Centers. In this controlled environment the adult learners can be carefully selected so that the teacher will be working with Cycle I students only. This highly desirable feature will not be assured in the actual pilot, since most adult education classes serve students with a wider range of skills.

The field test will be conducted by a member of the curriculum committee while committee members will follow her experiences closely. At the end of the six week session, revisions and adaptations will be made so that the document will be more acceptable to the instructors selected for the pilot.

The formal pilot of the curriculum is proposed for the fall of 1992. Experienced adult education teachers who are interested in working with the committee to refine the document will be selected in the summer. These instructors will meet with committee members for an orientation to the concepts and content of the proposed curriculum. Those who are enthusiastic about the project will participate in a five day orientation, which will include a thorough presentation of underlying theoretical principles and content as

well as demonstrations of instructional strategies.

These instructors will meet with a member(s) of the committee every two weeks to discuss and suggest revisions. Trained monitors will work with the teachers in the classroom to provide support and direction. They will document the actual implementation of the project: teacher and learner responses, adaptations, deletions, etc.

It is the expectation of the committee that the curriculum will be ready for general use by the fall of 1993. However, it is also the expectation of the committee that it will never be finished. It has been constructed with the idea that it will always be amended with tested additions and agreed upon deletions. This process of continuous revision, conducted by the committee and participating teachers will keep the document alive and responsive to the needs of the adult learner.

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The Detroit Public Schools
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TABLE I

**IX. COMPETENCY: READ 3.0 LEVEL TEXT with
FLUENCY, ACCURACY and COMPREHENSION**

READING SKILLS

STRATEGIES

**Apply word recognition
and decoding skills**

1. Use flash cards for consistent review of basic sight words. (Student)
2. Give weekly spelling tests, using basic word lists. (Teacher)
3. Schedule monthly spelling bees, using basic words from lists. (Teacher)
4. Use echo reading technique regularly to improve pronunciation and expression. (Teacher and student)
5. Determine word meaning using decoding skills. (Student)
6. Apply rules of syllabication in approach to new vocabulary. (Student)
7. Read orally on a regular schedule. (Student)

**Read contractions and
abbreviations with
comprehension.**

1. Make flash cards for contractions and common abbreviations; practice pronunciation and spelling with one another. (Student groups)
2. Form contractions from list of base words. (Student)
3. Match abbreviations to list of words; emphasize days of week and months of year. (Student)

Read with fluency.

1. Read aloud for one another. Read together with instructor or other students. (Student groups)
2. Listen to taped readings; read same text, imitating expression, pronunciation, phrasing. (Student)
3. Tape own reading and listen for expression, interpretation, etc. (Student)
4. Use echo reading technique to improve phrasing, and comprehension. (Teacher and student)

Recall supporting facts.

1. Use **cloze** exercises to check comprehension of facts. (Student)
2. Develop **word web** prior to reading to tap into prior knowledge. (Teacher and students)
3. Answer questions about facts in text. (Student)
4. Ask one another questions about the text. (Student groups)

Identify main idea.

1. Map text using graphic organizers prepared by teacher. (Student)
2. Apply KWL in process of reading. (Teacher and students)
3. Identify topic and list what text says about it. (Student)
4. Underline sentence that summarizes main idea in a text. (Student)

Read with comprehension.

1. Apply prediction before reading each paragraph; check for accuracy at end of paragraph. (Student)
2. Discuss possible conclusions; agree on most likely. (Student group)
3. Underline sentence that contains conclusion. (Student)
4. Apply **KWL** in reading. (Student)
5. Role play a scene from a text. (Student group)
6. Use graphic organizers to trace sequence, cause and effect, main idea and supporting details. (Student)
7. Watch for words that signal opinions as distinct from fact. (Student)
8. Summarize story/information orally for group. (Student)
9. Demonstrate use of "**Learning Log**" (Teacher)
10. Demonstrate use of **SQ4R** strategy. (Teacher)

WRITING SKILLS

Write summary of paragraph/story following main idea.

1. Brainstorm ideas; outline and write. (Teacher and student)
2. Transcribe writing onto paper or computer. (Student)
3. Edit and rewrite. (Student)
4. Add to personal portfolio. (Student)

ADULT BASIC LITERACY FUNCTIONS

COMPETENCY IX

STRATEGY

WORD WEB

WHY

Helps the learner to read new material by activating prior knowledge.

MATERIALS

Paper, Pencils, Text to be read that is at student's interest and instructional level.

PROCEDURES

1. Prepare a list words from the reading passage.
Example:

biscuit	Minnesota
banks	Mississippi River
Russia	dairy
four	three

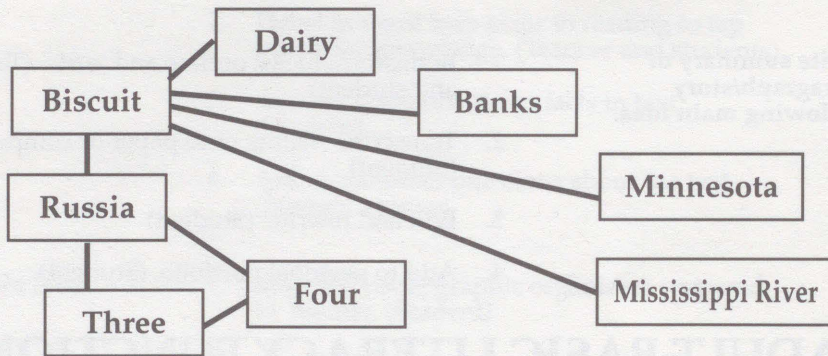
2. Ask students to relate the words to one another.

Sample Connections

1. Biscuits are made in Minnesota and Russia.
2. Water from the Mississippi River is used to make the biscuits.
3. Three biscuits in Russia cost four dollars.
4. Dairy cows love biscuits.
5. People save their biscuits in banks.

WORD WEB (continued)

Word Web



3. Have students read passage.

Reading:

The Ready-Made Biscuit Company is located in Minnesota on the banks of the Mississippi River. The company makes the biggest biscuits in the world. Each one is four inches wide and three inches high. Ready-Made biscuits are sold all over the world, even in Russia. You can buy these world-famous biscuits in your local dairy case.

4. Compare connections with actual reading.
5. Revise connections.

Revised Connections

1. Biscuits are made in Minnesota.
2. Biscuits are sold in Russia.
3. The biscuits are three by four inches.
4. The company is located on the banks of the Mississippi River.
5. The biscuits can be found in the dairy case.

STRATEGY

COMPETENCY IX

SQ4R
(SURVEY, QUESTION,
READ, RECITE, REVIEW, WRITE)

WHY

Provides students with a set of strategies that guide reading to increase comprehension.

Requires students to:

- Ask questions.
- Make predictions.
- Set purpose.
- Check comprehension.

MATERIALS

Textbooks written at instructional level.

PROCEDURES

1. **Survey:**
 - a. Look over the title and definitions.
 - b. What do I already know or want to know?
 - c. Look at pictures or graphs.
 - d. Read summary or introduction.
2. **Question:**
 - a. Formulate questions during survey.
 - b. Write down words that are new and guess at meaning from text.
3. **Read Actively:** Read to find answers.
4. **Recite:**
 - a. Put passage in your own words.
 - b. Answer questions.
5. **Review:** Reread to find unanswered questions.
6. **Write:** Write summary or outline, etc.