

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: Adult Literacy: A Study of Effective Practices

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“Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, taught to the tune of the hickory stick” says the old song, but we are far removed from the philosophy of beating knowledge into people’s heads. Reading is a skill very necessary in today’s world, but a subject not all have mastered. “There is a startling societal price tag attached to having millions of adults who cannot adequately read, write, solve math problems, and integrate information effectively in order to fulfill their human potential” (State of Adult Literacy, 2005). Hickory sticks are probably not the best choice in getting those skills taught, as there are more effective practices in teaching adults literacy – namely assessment, proper instruction, and building strong relationships.

ASSESSMENT

Proper assessment is the first step in knowing where to help someone. Pre testing with instruments such as the TABE, Nelson Denny, or the Slosson will give an indication of proper reading levels and will yield a good beginning place. Post testing after twenty hours of instruction shows progress made and will also show modification needed with the instruction. A personal goals inventory is also a wonderful testing tool and will guide the assessment process by helping the tutor pick materials appropriate to the learner. This will guide the tutor by creating the type of lessons needed in taking the learner where he or she would like to go.

INSTRUCTION

The instruction needs to be relevant to the learner. Making the lessons pertinent to the learner’s goals, provides a reason to continue and a cause to drive the learning. Knowing a learner’s hobbies also creates interest and a sense of “I know some things really well.” Fragile as can be, many adult literacy learners need the belief reinforced that they are adequate in many areas, but perhaps not all – and that’s O.K. The tutor should be trained and base the approach on research, namely, having reading, writing, and skill building components as part of the lessons. Using a portion of time for reading books, writing exercises, and doing skill builders each separately will create a well rounded educational base for literacy teaching. Education is power and will make literacy instruction that much better for both the learner and the tutor.

RELATIONSHIPS

Building a relationship with the learner is huge. Acceptance of the level he brings and taking them from there, builds trust and encourages risk which is necessary to learn new skills. Showing enthusiasm for reading by modeling it and getting excited by what reading can do for us are keys to unlocking the door of self sufficiency and spurs the learner forward. Literacy is all about helping someone grow and progress along his path of life which is what we all are about really. “Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, taught to the tune of the hickory stick” is far removed from today’s methods of teaching, thank goodness, but there are tools that can be very effective in teaching literacy to adults. These tools are using assessment, employing proper instruction, and building relationships to our advantage. These tools will create a win/win for all involved!

Reference:

Wedgeworth, Robert, President. *State of Adult Literacy, 2005*, Proliteracy Worldwide.