



Show-Me

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The Adult Basic Education Teacher's Toolkit

Introduction to the ABE Teacher's Toolkit

The following toolkits have been re-printed from the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy & Learning at the following web address: <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/toolkit/ch01.html>. We would like to express our appreciation for sharing this resource.

"Learning is a fluid process of moving forward to the unknown while connecting back to the established knowns." (Goodman, et al., 1986, p. 306).

This manual is designed as a guide for adult basic education teachers who have just entered the field of adult education as well as experienced teachers looking for additional ideas. For all levels of adult education teachers, this manual is useful for developing curriculum with adults who come to the learning setting with very limited literacy skills. The following statement is an underlying assumption of this manual.

Learning and continued motivation of adults to participate in educational programs is best fostered by a problem-solving, exploration process using a student-centered, holistic approach to teaching and learning. This approach requires that course content reflect and build on student interests, knowledge, and experience, and that teaching methods encourage student independence in learning.

Problems with Traditional Approaches to Teaching Literacy Skills

Traditional approaches to teaching, driven by an established curriculum, are founded on a predetermined content. In this setting, teachers deliver the content to the students who are, for the most part, passive receivers of the content. Traditional approaches have not proven to be effective for adult learners with very limited literacy skills.

Educationally disadvantaged adult learners, who face the long process of developing the literacy skills they need to meet the demands of today's technology and information-based society, become discouraged with a curriculum that has no immediate application for them. Such students are likely to leave an educational program before they make any significant gains in literacy skills. An instructional model that builds on learner strengths rather than focusing on deficits offers learners an opportunity to realize immediate success toward goals with personal meaning. Students in such learning environments find learning to be rewarding and are more likely to continue to participate.

The mission of the "Show -Me Literacy Newsletter is to provide professional information-sharing, resources and news about adult education and literacy.

Purpose of this Manual

This manual is not intended to suggest there is one way to organize and develop learning opportunities for adults with beginning literacy skills. It is intended to provide examples of and some ideas for providing a learner-centered, participatory, holistic framework for adult learning. Holistic in this context refers to a curriculum that fosters integration of literacy skills. Literacy skills are not taught or learned as discrete, isolated parts; skills are practiced and learned-as a whole process-as they are commonly used outside the classroom. It is hoped that you will begin an exploration of the many avenues of growth that are possible as your adult learners explore their environments, and practice and develop literacy skills in the process.

With this student-centered, participatory approach, there is no predetermined sequence of learning, text, teaching materials, or specific content for you to use. Instead, students practice and develop skills as they encounter the need for them in solving a problem or exploring an issue that is relevant to a certain skill. As an effective teacher, you come to the learning setting prepared to change directions-to respond to immediate student concerns, to use nontraditional materials and resources. You come ready to be a partner in learning rather than a deliverer of specific content. In this environment, you are less in control of the direction learning will take than teachers are who use the more traditional approaches. Students assume greater responsibility for their own learning in an interactive setting. Using the student-centered, participatory approach, both you and the students find learning to be fun, interesting, and exciting.

It is difficult to model a participatory, student-centered approach to teaching and learning in a manual or handbook format. Because there is no dialogue in a printed manual, information flows only one way. Nevertheless, what has been attempted here is to provide a guide to enable you to actively explore a few of the many avenues possible in developing a supportive learning environment for educationally disadvantaged adults. We have attempted the near impossible task of anticipating your questions concerning your work as an adult education facilitator. Where we have failed in this attempt, we hope that the recommended reading list found in Appendix B, Valuable Resources for Further Information and Suggestions, can provide the missing links.

Organization of this Manual

This manual is organized as follows.

- Chapter 1, Introduction to the ABE Teacher's Toolkit.
- Chapter 2, Some Anticipated Questions, addresses some of the questions commonly asked by teachers new to adult education.
- Chapter 3, Facilitating Adult Learning in a Holistic, Participatory Classroom: a Model, begins with one possible scenario of a student-generated learning situation followed by a discussion of numerous opportunities for the practice of literacy skills.
- Chapter 4, *The Teacher's Toolbox*, gives an overview of chapters, 5, 6, and 7, which make up the Toolbox, and also includes some comprehension, modeling, and thinking skills strategies.
- Chapter 5, Reading Skills Toolbox;

- Chapter 6, Writing Skills Toolbox; and
- Chapter 7, Computing Skills Toolbox; include a collection of specific learning activities for your use and adaptation. You can use these activities to engage your students in the use of literacy skills as they explore themes of interest to them.
- Appendix A, contains the Student Information Sheet, a form to use informally to get an initial estimate of a learner's literacy skills, and additionally includes all the forms presented in the Toolbox chapters.
- Appendix B, Valuable Resources for Further Information and Suggestions, contains a list of resources for further research.
- Appendix C, References, is a list of the names of articles and publications referred to in this manual.
- The Glossary defines educational terms as they are used in this manual.

Other Resources

We encourage you to use many of the excellent resources available for teachers of adult literacy classes to learn more about teaching adult learners. These resources include extensive examples of activities that foster student participation and learning and are far beyond the scope of this manual. As mentioned in the preceding section, Appendix B, Valuable Resources for Further Information and Suggestions, provides recommended titles for further reading. Many of these sources are available at your public library, local college library, or through the Adult Literacy Clearinghouse.

The Adult Basic Education Teacher's Toolkit

Chapter 4: The Teacher's Toolbox

The Teacher's Toolbox

This chapter is grouped with Chapter 5, *Reading Skills Toolbox*, Chapter 6, *Writing Skills Toolbox*, and Chapter 7, *Computing Skills Toolbox*. Together these chapters contain a starter set of ideas and strategies that should be useful to you as you work with your students and other teachers to plan learning activities. As with any other art or craft, it is important for the teacher to be skilled in the use of many tools. What works best in one situation may be inappropriate in another. It is important for every teacher to find and learn to use a wide variety of ideas and strategies for helping learners achieve their learning goals. As you read handbooks, newsletters, curricula, and so forth, and as you interact with other teachers as well as with students, you will develop your own toolbox of teaching ideas.

The tips, suggestions, and strategies in Chapters 4 - 7 can help you get started in the classroom. The strategies discussed in these Toolbox chapters will give you the confidence that whatever you propose to do in terms of student learning activities has been tried before and found to be successful. Numerous curricula and teacher handbooks and resources exist with a bounty of valuable suggestions and ideas which you can use as a starting point. Several products recently developed by Adult Education Special Projects (funded by the Texas Education Agency) specifically address the concerns of teachers working with beginning literacy level adult learners and include the following:

- Adult Literacy and Mathematics Curriculum
- English Literacy for Speakers of Other Languages Curriculum
- Curriculum Development for Serving AFDC Participants in Adult Education
- Adult Education Training through Television Technology

These resources are especially valuable to teachers working with adult learners in Texas. These and many other relevant resources are available from your administrative unit or from the Adult Literacy Clearinghouse.

Call or write to ask for these materials and for bibliographies of additional resources available from the Adult Literacy Clearinghouse.

Adult Literacy Clearinghouse
Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning
4477 TAMU
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4477
(800) 441-READ (441-7323) FAX: (979) 845-0952

As an ABE teacher, you should be receiving issues of the Adult Literacy Clearinghouse newsletter, *The Texas Adult and Family Literacy Quarterly*. These newsletters regularly feature articles of interest to teachers including suggestions for teaching practices based on the experiences and research of other teachers; current materials available on loan, as well as other free or inexpensive materials; a calendar of conferences and staff development opportunities for teachers; and other items of interest. If you are not receiving this newsletter, call or write the Adult Literacy Clearinghouse (800-441-7323). Staff members will add your name to the mailing list.

Strategies for Comprehension-Before going on to the three major sections of reading, writing, and computing, found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, go over the strategies given in this section. Take time to use these strategies in your classroom whenever possible to help students become better learners.

Learners must develop their ability to monitor their own thought processes (called *met cognition*) while reading, writing, and computing. Learning to be aware of their thought processes helps them understand what they are practicing with much greater longevity. You can teach students strategies and/or strengthen strategies they already possess so that learners are aware of whether or not they are comprehending. To facilitate this learner process, encourage learners to engage in the following activities.

Before reading, writing, or computing, students should do the following.

- Consider what they already know about the subject.
- Predict what the activity will tell them.
- Consider why they are doing the activity.

During reading, writing, or computing, help students do these activities.

- Pay careful attention to what they are reading, writing, or computing.
- Create mental pictures. When necessary, draw diagrams of their concepts of what they are reading, writing, or computing. Visualize.
- Stop and reconsider what is unclear.
- Stop and mentally explain to themselves what they have just read, written, or computed.

After reading, writing, or computing, guide students' consideration of the following.

- What they have learned.
- How what they have learned fits with what they already know about a topic.
- How they will use this information.

Mental Modeling -Another good strategy to use with your students is that of *mental modeling*. Mental modeling is a teaching technique in which students observe the invisible mental processes necessary for reading, writing, or problem solving. You need to demonstrate out loud the met cognitive strategies and mental processes used in reading and problem solving. This activity requires you to think aloud as you read, write, or solve a problem. The following example of mental modeling illustrates how you can demonstrate the thinking/reading process.

Newspaper Exercise-You can find advertisements (ads) for housing in the classified section of the newspaper and other local real estate publications. Before you read an ad, go through the following thought processes with your class.

- Consider what you already know about looking for housing. Write these down for further consideration.
- Consider what you need to know as you consider housing options. Write these down for further consideration.

While reading the ad, do these activities.

- Look for information you can use to answer questions about the housing options.
- Identify unfamiliar words, phrases, abbreviations, and so forth, and write them in a personal dictionary of terms to be learned.

After reading the ad, go through the following processes.

- Consider whether the information in the ad fits with what you already know about housing.
- Reread the ad for further clarification or seek clarification from others if there is a question about what the ad means.
- Record information to be compared with that of other housing if the ad describes housing that requires further consideration.

You can go through this process with students, modeling how you would complete each step with a specific example. Students will be able to see reading, writing, and computing as processes they can use to gain meaning from printed text. Students see the information they gain as being useful and relevant to them.

Core Thinking Skills

Use this table to get ideas for helping students develop their thinking skills prior to a specific learning activity.

SKILL:	Might Include:
Focusing	attending to information defining identifying concepts
Information Gathering	observing locating information asking questions
Remembering	rehearsal developing <i>mnemonics</i> retrieval
Organizing	comparing classifying ordering
Analyzing	recognizing attributes relating details and structure identifying relationships
Generating	making comparisons constructing metaphors providing explanations inferring
Integrating	summarizing outlining restructuring organizing graphically
Evaluating	establishing criteria proving or verifying data