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ABSTRACT

Two separate research projects were undertaken in Georgia and Texas to examine the current and future needs of older adults for functional literacy and to analyze the involvement of adult basic education (ABE) programs to better serve those needs. The projects involved literature reviews; mail-out surveys; and one-on-one interviews with senior citizen nutrition site directors, ABE coordinators, ABE teachers, and older adults enrolled in ABE programs. These two research projects were analyzed from the perspective of obtaining key strategies for effective instruction in functional literacy skills and student recruitment strategies. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that subject matter must be relevant and taken from both the ascribed and expressed concerns of older adults. Furthermore, ABE instructors would do better to use an individualized, personal approach with older learners. When feasible, classes should be conducted in facilities designated for older adults. Results of the Georgia and Texas projects also point to several areas in which further research is needed. Particularly needed is inquiry leading to the development of an operational definition of literacy for the undereducated older adult. In addition, research measurements must be developed with and for the older adult; and, when research involves an intergenerational sample, a proportionate number of adults should be included in that sample. (MN)

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN OLDER ADULTS: PROACTIVE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH AND TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The adult learning community has had minimal involvement, much less taken a proactive stance regarding outreach to the older learner population. This is a significant concern, because approximately one-third of adults, age 55 and above are functionally illiterate, while only 5% of current adult basic education activities are serving this group.

Drawing upon past research efforts in the state programs of adult basic education in Georgia and Texas, this paper presentation outlines key strategies for effective instruction of functional literacy skills, selection of knowledge/content areas for older adults, and recruitment strategies by instructors and staff into ABE settings. Research issues for future understanding of functional literacy development in older adults is also examined through consideration of 1) operational definitions of literacy, 2) research measurements of literacy, and 3) various aspects of sampling strategies in researching the illiterate older population.

Functional Literacy in Older Adults: Proactive Approaches to Research and Learning

Background

For several years gerontologists have written that the increasing number of older adults in the United States would have a pervasive impact upon our society (Butler, 1977; McClusky, 1974; Peterson, 1980). Almost no area of American life would go untouched by this demographic shift in population: economics, politics, religion, social service programs, the arts, and education at all levels.

One educational level now beginning to experience the impact of the rise in the elderly population is Adult Basic Education. Many states, including Georgia and Texas, have given priority to developing appropriate curricula and teaching methodology for educating the older adult. Faced with a paucity of materials and prior experience for implementing adult basic education programs for older adults, each state funded research projects to determine:

1. the characteristics of the older ABE student
2. the content needs of older persons
3. the factors affecting participation of the older student
4. the identification of possible successful and unsuccessful teaching methods

Although these research projects were developed separately with different methodologies and designs, they both examined the current and future needs of functional literacy for older adults and the involvement of adult basic education programs to better serve those needs.

The Georgia project involved a literature review, mail-out surveys and one-on-one interviews. The surveys were used to determine the characteristics of older students, the ascribed needs of older Georgians, barriers to participation, and successful and unsuccessful teaching methods. Nutrition site directors, adult basic education coordinators, and adult basic education teachers comprised the sample for the surveys.

Older Georgians from all eighteen regional governmental areas (called Area Planning and Development districts in Georgia) were interviewed in person to determine expressed needs and barriers to participation. A total of 505 interviews were conducted mostly with independent older adults attending nutrition sites. Although few in number, incarcerated and institutionalized (nursing homes) elderly were a part of the sample.

The Texas research project conducted a two phase research data collection activity. A field research survey questionnaire, Survey of Texas Adult Education Cooperatives, was designed to gather basic statistics regarding enrollment patterns, recruitment practices, and priorities for local adult basic education programs of outreach to the older learner. The survey questions were developed from background information regarding current demographic program activities, from preliminary findings of a prior survey of 10 state ABE programs which reported the highest enrollment figures for the older adult learners in the country, and from pilot survey interviews of five identified local ABE programs with a high percentage of older learner enrollment (Kasworm & Stedman, 1980).

The second phase of the research included on-site interview with enrolled older ABE learners and instructors of older adults. Interviews were conducted in the ten ABE Cooperatives with the highest enrollments of older learner populations. Sixty-two learners and twelve teachers in these co-ops consented to participate in the study. Each participant was involved in the extensive interview protocal, lasting from 45 minutes to 1½ hours in length. Interviews questions examined the learner's education value orientation, recruitment/participation patterns and instruction and curriculum concerns. (For a more extensive discussion regarding research design and methodology, please contact the authors for their final reports regarding each of these projects.)

Overview of Research Findings

Because these two research projects have been the first to investigate through field research the relationship between adult basic education and the older students, several major overview findings will be presented from the analysis of the Georgia and Texas research projects. These findings will not be presented in great detail but some narrative is necessary for clarification and to indicate substantiation with other research findings.

1. There is no adequate definition nor measure of functional literacy for the older adult. Terms like "functional literacy", "functionally illiterate", "functional ability", and "functional competence" are often used interchangeably, yet, according to their sources, are distinct in meaning. (Bureau of the Census, 1971; Bormuth, 1975; Gray, 1976; Adult Performance Level Project, 1977;

Resnick and Resnick, 1977; Bunch, 1978; Kirsch and Guthrie, 1978; McClusky, n.d.). The confusion over terminology makes research measurements and findings questionable in terms of reliability and validity. Looking at the various definitions together, one finds that literacy ranges from the ability to read at a minimal level to the ability to fulfill basic social functions. The significant question is which of the abilities is most appropriate for the older student: Is it reading ability? Computation skills? Is it the ability to analyze, make decisions, pass judgement? Is functional literacy the ability to be socially successful? And what is "socially successful"?

2. Previous research on functional literacy involving older adults has given little attention to older groups in terms of conceptualization, measurement criteria, and treatment of data. (Harris and Associates, 1970; Harris and Associates, 1971; Rosen, 1973; Murphy, 1975; Nafziger, Thompson, Hiscox & Owen, 1976; Adult Performance Level Project, 1977; Harvey and Dutton, 1979; Kingston, 1979; Robinson and Haase, 1979). There is no evidence to raise the question of age-bias in many, if not all, the estimates reviewed during the Georgia project. For the measurements analyzed, literacy tasks were developed for the adult population as a whole. No attempt was made to stratify criteria for functional literacy by age. In short, none of the studies addressed the questions of whether the demands for literacy were the same for various age groups nor whether various competencies were related to adequate functioning in different ways among age groups.

In the Texas project, it was apparent from the field research

that the adult basic education practitioners felt a discrepancy between explicit goals of the program to provide basic skills training for undereducated adults, as a base to become "productive, working citizens" and the often focused learning and personal needs of the older adults with regards to specific life tasks and the need for a personalized non work-goal oriented learning experiences.

3. Older adults (age 65 and above) represent the highest level of the undereducated (as defined by years of educational attainment) and have the highest levels of functional illiteracy of any age cohort as defined by the APL study (Bureau of the Census, 1980; Northcutt, 1975). However, they are the least represented group in propor tion to their educational need in adult basic education programs. Elderly persons have been included as a result of the recent findings by the Commission on Civil Rights. In its Age Discrimination Study submitted to the President and the Congress, the Commission found that only 10 percent of the group represented adult basic education program participation, while this age bracket accounts for 35 percent of the eligible participants. Those over 65 make up only 4 percent of the participation population, although it has been estimated the illiteracy rates are relatively higher for this age group for persons 55 to 65 (p. 37870). This inequity of representation is seen vividly through the Georgia study, where only 6 percent of the ABE students were 60 years or older, and in the Texas study where only 3 percent of the 55 to 64 age group, and 7 percent of the 65 and above age group were Adult Basic Education program participants.

4. When examined on functional literacy measurements, older age groups represent lower scores as a cohort from their younger counterparts. Clearly, there is a need for improving educational opportunities for the older adult basic education student. To wait for future improvement and/or future generations of older adults who are expected to be "literate" is an injustice to the existing generation of older persons. Nor is the current generation uninterested. Regarding basic skills, the Georgia study found 47% of the surveyed older adults "interested" or "very interested" in learning to write; and 46% were "interested" or "very interested" in learning arithmetic.

However this interest does not translate into direct older learner participation. In both research studies in Texas and Georgia, older learners were more involved and interested in subject-oriented or task-oriented learning than in basic skills (note Table 1 and 2). For example, in the Georgia project, health was the major content area of interest identified by the older adults. This area identification was confirmed by the Nutrition Site Managers. In the Texas study, enrollment participation patterns were analyzed, with the highest enrollment for individuals 65 years and above represented in life skills instruction. (This represents actual participation). Secondly, when the ABE participants asked about potential topics to be included in a curriculum, the Texas participants noted health as a topic high in interest, with the consumer topic of "more food for less money" as the most significant topic of interest. A review of Table 1 will illustrate the relative low interest of Georgian older adults regarding basic skills curricular oriented to writing, reading and computation.

TABLE 1

Ranking of Topic Areas and Subject Material as reported by Older Learners In Georgia

1. Health

- Medicare
- Personal health care
- Drug-related problems with older adults
- Local health services
- Nutrition
- Aging process
- Movement/Exercise
- Basic Safety Measures

2. Goverment and Law

- Citizen's rights & duties
- Advocacy
- Legal documents
- Goverment structure

3. Personal Development

- Ethos
- Recording life and family history
- Learning to read
- Humanities
- Learning arithmetic
- Learning to write
- Retirement planning

4. Social Services

- Senior Centers
- Transportation services
- Homemaker/Home Health Aide services
- Legal services
- Mental Health
- Housing
- Driving

5. Economics

- Social Security
- Consumer Fraud
- Energy conservation
- Supplemental Security Income
- Comparison shopping
- Budgeting
- Banking
- Second careers
- Job applications

6. Cultural

- Travel
- Music
- Recreation/Leisure
- Local history
- Library services
- Art
- Poetry
- Drama
- Dance

TABLE 2

A COMPARISON BETWEEN MIDDLE-AGED AND SENIOR ABE LEARNERS IN TEXAS REGARDING INTEREST IN TOPICAL INSTRUCTIONAL SESSION

Topic Area	% Adults Age 45-64 who are interested	Adults age 65+ who are interested
More Food for Less Money	81.1	100.0
Manage Money	76.3	57.1
Knowing about the Government	75.0	80.0
Safety, First Aid, and Emergencies	74.4	77.8
How to Write a Will	73.7	50.0
How to Buy Wisely	67.6	66.7
Available Jobs in the Community	63.6	50.0
Job Training in the Community	63.6	50.0
Knowing about your Community	62.2	66.7
Conserving Energy	62.2	53.3
Dealing with Changes in Your Life	59.5	66.7
How to do Income Tax	59.0	23.5
How to Find a Job	57.6	50.0
Nutrition	55.3	75.0
Get-Along Better with Teenagers	55.3	50.0
Home Health Care	52.6	83.3
Getting Along Better with Spouse	43.3	30.0
Getting Ready to Retire	41.7	16.7
Use of Leisure Time	35.9	62.5

These tables also suggest the diversity of interests of older adults regarding a comprehensive curriculum. The obvious implication is that the older adult student has learning content needs incompatible with the current adult basic education subject matter.

5. Adult basic education programs do not have current educational materials and curricula nor the research background to specifically design instructional materials for the older learner. This fact is supported both by the absence of such materials from current ABE publishers as well as the self-report teacher data from the Georgian project. In that state, only ten of 46 coordinators reported that their system had educational materials specifically for use with older adults, and only six coordinators reported having a curriculum specifically designed for use with older adults. In Texas, most programs which served older learners reported their activities in designing or modifying existing materials to accomodate learner topical content needs as well as the design of unique instructional materials to allow for limited vision, hearing, and in certain circumstances memory difficulties.

6. Instructional strategies also are of significant importance in effective participation and learning by older adults. Surveyed teachers in the Georgia study noted that individualized, personal approaches were the most successful teaching methods with older students. The overwhelming response item was personalized approaches including individualized instruction with frequent student-teacher interaction in setting objectives, selecting materials designed for the individual learner. The second most frequent

response was materials that are practical, concrete and relevant to the learner's life experiences. Small group teaching approaches to instruction was the third most frequent response. The teacher's role in building self-confidence, giving encouragement, providing for flexible pacing of instruction and giving opportunities for frequent repetition and review predominated. Unsuccessful teaching methods revolved around conventional classroom teaching techniques such as lecture. Also counteractive to learning were graded, timed assignments and tests.

In the Texas study, ABE participants were asked about their perceived value of different instructional strategies in their learning. As noted in Table 3, there were no significant differences in reported value of instructional strategies between middle and senior age ABE learners. Those instructional strategies which involved a more active participation were rated as slightly higher, to include demonstrations, questions and answer periods and learning by doing. In both projects, androgogical teaching strategies were supported by surveyed teachers and learners.

7. Participation rates for the older student are affected by a number of variables. The Georgia study reports factors which are believed to influence future participation, the Texas study reports factors which current participants report as influencing their participation. Health status is a key internal variable that emerged from the Georgia-Texas research. Simply stated, given general good health the older adult learner will participate in adult basic education. Particular problems that would hinder participation include poor hearing, poor vision and primary effects from arthritis, diabetes, and cardiovascular problems. However,

TABLE 3

Percentage of Total Learner Group Response Regarding the Value of Specific Instructional Strategies

Category	Quite a Bit	Somewhat	Not at All	No Response
Films and Movies	46.8	17.7	17.7	17.7
Tapes and tape recorders	37.1	16.1	25.8	21.0
Teacher lectures	51.6	16.1	4.8	27.4
Demonstrations	62.9	4.8	6.5	25.8
Class discussions	59.7	6.5	8.1	25.8
Question and answer periods	62.9	8.1	4.8	24.2
Readings	53.2	16.1	12.9	17.7
Guest Speakers	41.9	9.7	14.5	33.9
Workbooks	46.8	12.9	14.5	25.8
Learning by doing	69.4	8.1	1.6	21.0
Pictures, charts and graphs	45.2	21.0	12.9	21.0
Videotapes	45.2	17.7	9.7	27.4

and contrary to popular beliefs, the Texas study indicates that senior students reported not to miss class because of illness or fatigue in any higher proportion than did younger adults. Both groups reported that illness kept them from attending either "very little" or "not at all" (71.4% for seniors as against 72.2% for the 45-64 age group). Slightly more senior members were absent because of fatigue (14.2% as against 5.6%).

The foremost external variable affecting participation in the Georgia study was the time of day of class. Most respondents reported that they would not attend night classes and preferred morning sessions. (46.5%). The Texas study found an even greater interest and participation level in morning classes (77.8%). It is worthy to note that the Georgia project shows 17.9 project of the respondents had no preference relative to time of class.

Transportation problems ranked second among the participation barriers in the Georgia project. This variable also appeared second in the rankings from the nutrition site directors. The Texas study did not ask whether transportation was a barrier. Instead, the respondent was asked the mode of transport to the class. Most rode a bus (50%)-usually a special seniors van-or drove their own cars (14.3%). Those who attended classes in residential facilities or at sites very near their homes were able to walk to class (35.7%).

The location of the class is also important to the older student. The Georgia sample preferred to attend class near home in a senior center (46%). Almost 20 percent had no preference regarding the location of the class. Interestingly enough, the

TABLE 4

LOCATIONS OF CLASSES OF HIGH AND LOW OLDER ADULT ENROLLMENT CO-OPS

Class Location	% of High Co-ops	% of Low Co-ops
Senior Centers	57.1	45.9
Nursing Homes	57.1	27.0
Nutrition Sites	57.1	24.3
Adult Learning Centers	42.9	59.5
Public School Facility	42.9	43.2
State Facilities	28.6	27.1
Public Library	14.3	16.2
Work Site	14.3	2.7

Georgia coordinators overwhelmingly reported a school building as the most frequently used place for holding classes, with senior centers ranked fifth behind community centers, libraries and churches.

In the Texas study, high and low enrollment co-ops were analyzed for the location of classes in relation to older adult participation. As noted by Table 5 high co-ops (reported 20% or more their total enrollment composed of adults age 65 and above), offered instructional classes at congregate older adult programs. Low co-ops noted limited placement of classes beyond the traditional sites of adult learning centers and public facilities.

Older adults also feel strongly about the frequency and length of a class. The Texas project found that most senior adults (63.1%) reported that they attended class only one or two days per week. When asked how long a class should last, 57.1 percent of the sample selected the category "30 to 60 minutes". (Kasworm and Stedman, 1980).

Size of the class appeared to also influence older learners perceptions of participation. In the Texas project, the sample preferred class sizes of "8 to 10" or "more than 10" (88.2%). Nearly one-third (29.4%) of the sample preferred classes comprised mostly of older adults.

Finally participation would be enhanced by recruitment strategies that involved direct, personal contact. In the Texas study, high enrollment co-ops reported significant recruitment activity in current programs serving older adults, as well as in both public housing and at private residence. This recruitment outreach to the current locations of older adults is further substantiated and

TABLE 5

RECRUITMENT LOCATIONS OF HIGH AND LOW OLDER ADULT ENROLLMENT CO-OPS

Recruitment Location	% of High Co-ops	% of Low Co-ops
Nutrition Site	85.7	35.1
Community Center	85.7	21.6
Senior Center	71.4	48.6
Activity Center	71.4	13.5
Public Housing	42.9	13.5
Private Residence	28.6	8.1

TABLE

MAJOR SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR ABE PROGRAM AS REPORTED BY AGE GROUP

Source of Information	% of Adults Age 45-64 Years	% of Adults Age 65+
Recruited by Teacher or Staff	5.0	57.9
Referred by a Social Service Agency	25.0	0.0
Recruited by Family Member	22.5	5.3
Referred by Another Student	20.0	10.5
Newspaper	7.5	10.5
T.V.	0.0	10.5
Phone Book	7.5	0.0
Church Announcement	0.0	5.3

strengthened by data regarding how the older adult learner initially gained information regarding adult basic education programs. For adults age 65 and above, direct personal contact by a representative of the program was very important. More than half of the older participating learners, reported that they learned of the ABE program from a teacher or staff. In senior congregate sites, the actual contact and encouragement (recruitment) by the teacher was correlated directly to learner student participation.

Proactive Strategies for Research

Results of the Georgia-Texas projects suggest several follow-up steps both in the area of research and instruction (curricula design, methodology, and scheduling). From the analysis of these project findings, there are specific actions that, if implemented will improve educational experiences for the older adult basic education student. We suggest a set of recommendations--proactive approaches and strategies that beg for immediate application. First, there are three strategies regarding research and the older adult basic education student:

1. Inquiry toward and development of an operational definition of literacy for the undereducated older adult is necessary. The literature analysis in the Georgia study revealed several meanings with a broad range of interpretations. None of those definitions of literacy related specifically to older adults. Because of the plethora of definitions and their non-age specific nature, at least two questions remain unanswered by current research findings:

a. What is the primary need of the older ABE student relative to the acquisition of basic skills? Do they really desire

and need to learn to traditional components of reading, computing, and writing? What are the subjects and skills that are signficant to the life of an illiterate individual who has survived successfully for 70 years?

b. Are there separate criteria for functional ability for older adults? At a stage in life when social and personal roles have changed, do the current meanings of "functional literacy" have relevancy for older students?

The answers to the above questions will not only provide an operational research definition of literacy appropriate to older adults, but will also guide the development of curricula and methodology.

Also important to the above questions is the need to select a diversity of older adults in samples. Individual differences become more pronounced as one ages, making it necessary to gather input from as many types of older adults as possible. Characteristics to consider would include socioeconomic level, sex, age (ranges would suffice), residence (independent, semi-independent or dependent), health, ethnic or social background, and previous educational experiences.

2. Research measurements must be developed with and for the older adult. Again, the Georgia review of the literature found several measurements of literacy, but none developed specifically for use with older students. Is it fair to test or interview an older student with a measure that is completely foreign to his/her thought processes, cultural background, and current role and life-style? That question is akin to the first recommendation above. If we knew how to define literacy vis-a-vis the older student,

then we could develop more appropriate measures. Steps that can be taken now are:

a. Conceptualize measures with older adults in mind.

b. Include content that is familiar and meaningful.

c. Allow sufficient time for completion of tasks.

d. Simplify instructions.

e. Rely less on measures which are highly dependent on eye-motor coordination.

3. When research involves an intergenerational sample, include a proportionate number of older persons. Past research efforts have based findings on samples that were, in terms of numbers, biased against the older student or excluded older adults. Such procedures yield results which inaccurately reflect the differences across ages as well as inaccurate implications for teaching older ABE students.

Proactive Approaches to Instruction

The Georgia-Texas projects also provided data to suggest proactive approaches to instruction. This instructional realm includes curricula development, teaching methodology, times of classes, location of class, size of class, and recruitment. Recommendations for each component are outlined below:

1. Subject matter must be relevant and taken from both the ascribed and expressed interests of older adults. Most of the curricula for older ABE students is a teacher's revision of existing materials for younger students. Curricula are not based on interest assessments nor is teaching material focused at the content interest of the older person. This problem can be corrected by conducting interest assessments of ABE older learners or by obtaining the

results of existing interest assessments that include data from educators, human service providers, and older adults.

The Georgia-Texas projects include findings from all three samples. An interesting fact about the findings is the disparity in ascribed and expressed interests. For example, Table 6 shows how the three groups ranked content in the Georgia study. For the older adult, personal development (which included learning to read, write and compute) was not the highest priority, ranking third. ABE Teachers, however, judged it to be the greatest interest of older adults. Nutrition site managers were in agreement with older individuals on the first ranked topic, health. Clearly, the data in the table shows that there is disagreement among the sample over the priorities of older adults.

Not only do older adults differ from the "professionals" in describing their learning interests, but they also have a diversity of interests. In the Georgia study, their interests were wide-ranging, specific and immediate. Topics which the older adults rated high in interest seemed to relate to either immediate problems and aspirations of adaptation or meaningful use of leisure. They tended to be less "future-oriented", less work-skill or credential oriented. In view of these findings, curricula for older ABE students should be reexamined against the expressed interests of the student.

But what of the basic skills of reading, writing and computing? The studies show that there is a group of older adults who are interested in that subject matter; consequently, it, too, should be represented in ABE curricula. To make it interesting and

TABLE 6

ABE FOR OLDER ADULTS:

RANKING OF TOPICS FOR ADULT & PROFESSIONAL SAMPLES

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA
Health	1. Health	1. Personal Development
Government & Law	2. Social Services	2. Economics
Personal Development	3. Economics	3. Health
Social Services	4. Government & Law	4. Social Services
Economics	5. Personal Development	5. Government & Law
Cultural	6. Cultural	6. Cultural

meaningful for the older student, the teacher should integrate the skills with other subjects. For example, in teaching personal health care, math can be integrated by helping students learn to compute blood pressure or read a thermometer. Life history development offers the teacher the opportunity to teach writing while concentrating on a subject of interest to many older adults. For example, the final product of the Georgia study was a curriculum manual for ABE teachers to use with older students. The content of the manual includes seven units corresponding to the seven topics emerging in the interest assessment. Each module is self-contained and can be taught separately from the others. Moreover, several modules provide the teacher a resource for teaching reading, writing, or math. Thus, ABE teachers in Georgia now have a curriculum or curricula, depending on how they use the manual, that is based on the expressed and ascribed interests of older adults and that provides an opportunity for teaching basic skills via relevant content.

2. The primary teaching method is an individualized, acting personal approach. This individualized approach suggests the need for one-on-one intake assessment with the older student to determine the most pressing interest areas, the goals of the area(s) and steps to reach those goals. It refers also to the use of simple self-paced and progressive methodology. Further, it includes constant, positive feedback.

This approach suggests close involvement of the teacher with the student. Presence alone, however, is not sufficient. The teacher should be sincerely helpful, caring, empathetic, and above

all, comfortable with older persons.

The individualized, personal method would also utilize teaching cues found to be successful by Glynn and Muth, 1979. For example, the authors found that providing older students instructional objectives before a learning experience improved recall of "objective-relevant information significantly better than subjects who had no objectives" (p. 262). Other important aides discovered by Glynn and Muth are:

a. Providing conceptual prequestions to the student as a means of stimulating focus on the important aspects of the learning experience.

b. Advanced organizers, e.g., outlines, abstracts, are useful in helping the older student integrate what is to be learned with what he/she knows already.

c. Use mediational devices, such as pictures, graphs, symbols, diagrams and phrases or rhymes to translate abstract content into imaginative possibilities.

d. Encourage students who can read to underline, color, italicize, bracket, or indent the content. Called typographical-cuing devices, those suggestions can help the older student find the important elements in a paragraph or chapter.

The above suggestions are based on the assumption that the older student can get to class outside his/her home. But what of the home bound participant? Do we not have a responsibility to meet his/her needs? Perhaps such questions are irrelevant in these times of fiscal constraints, but we are talking about older adults who do have educational interests. Why should their inability to meet with a group prevent them from learning?

To implement in-home service will require more independently oriented materials and/or aides or volunteers. Why couldn't other adults serve as tutors? Why couldn't a system of learning

partners be established whereby as in-class student works with an in-home student? Could cassette tapes be useful, similar to the Florida project for home-bound elderly?

3. As feasible, schedule classes for the morning and for no more than one hour per session. Both Georgia and Texas studies indicate morning classes were most preferred by older adults. The Texas study also shows that older persons do not like to be in a class session more than an hour. This is especially true in a nutrition site due to the noon meals and other distracting activities.

4. As feasible, conduct classes in a facility designated for older adults. In an early study by Hiemstra (1972), and confirmed by the Georgia and Texas studies, older adults prefer familiar places where peers congregate. The nutrition site is an excellent choice because transportation is provided to participants, friends are also present, the facility is free, and the surroundings are familiar. It can have a negative influence if there is no privacy for the class and/or if the space is too small. Other appealing sites for the older student are comprehensive senior centers, churches, libraries and community buildings. The home of an older adult would also be appealing to the older student.

5. Teachers, aides and volunteers should personally recruit participants. The Texas study not only found this approach to be a pattern but also that frequency of attendance was correlated with personal contact. For some systems this may call for a radical departure from past practice. Job descriptions of teachers

may need to be changed to include outreach. Coordinators may find it necessary to recruit and train additional volunteers to assist with recruiting students. Obviously, where in-home students are served volunteer resources will be essential.

The major criterion for places to recruit is the degree of visibility of older adults. Therefore, senior centers, nutrition sites, churches, social security offices, clubs for older adults, associations for older adults and nursing homes would be primary sources. Equally resourceful are personnel who provide services to older adults as aging services administrators, social workers, ministers, and mail carriers. Those persons should be introduced to the adult education program, be willing to make referrals, and know to whom and where to refer a potential participant.

Summary

The demographic changes in the United States population points to an older group of ABE participants. Definitions of and measures for determining literacy are incompatible with the characteristics of this new group. Moreover, topics of interest and teaching resources are non-existant.

To meet this challenge adult educators and gerontologists must develop a situation-specific and research definitions of literacy appropriate to the unique nature of the older adult. Furthermore, research measures should be developed in concert with older adults and intergenerational samples must include adequate numbers of older persons.

Teachers of older adults should begin to look at the diverse interests of older students and plan curricula that are meaningful and relevant to those interests. Individualized, personal instructional measures must be applied to provide maximum learning. Also, classes will have to be in comfortable, familiar places for greatest participation and held within a period of one hour. Personal recruiting approaches should be adopted to reach the most potential students.

Perhaps of significant importance is the development of a new attitude--to be proactive rather than reactive. The challenge is just beginning. Enough data and resources are available for researchers and teachers to make the changes necessary to successfully accommodate the older ABE student. Those who see this challenge and have influence can bring about these necessary and significant changes.

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