

Title: Making Adult Basic Skills More Meaningful

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Note: The formal title of this report is not clear.

This entry is a summary of several reports, some of which are not clearly identified.

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The information contained in this report illustrates the literacy related competencies of ten skill training programs and their corresponding occupations. The report can be used in several ways. It can be read in the sequence in which the project was conducted - literature review, methodology, presentation of results and strategies to improve instruction. In addition, the different chapters can be used as separate units depending upon the role of the instructor.

For OBS instructors interested in helping trainees develop technical reading and writing skills CHAPTER 4 - ADAPTING PRESENT PRACTICES may be particularly useful. This chapter discusses methods for improving instruction with an emphasis on developing vocabulary, comprehension and writing skills. A number of illustrations are presented in the form of exercises which attempt to integrate literacy skills and impart job-related knowledge. The content of the exercises are based on the results of the investigation.

OBS counsellors and academic advisors may be interested in the tabled information in CHAPTER 3 - LITERACY REQUIREMENTS AND READABILITY ESTIMATES. In this chapter the reading samples from the 10 training programs and corresponding job sites and grade level readability estimates are presented. These estimates may assist students in making more accurate career choices based on their abilities.

For OBS instructors working in the area of curriculum, the twenty-one figures representing reading tasks from the occupational settings will provide the base for further technical vocabulary and comprehension skill development.

Program planners, administrators and OBS instructors working with community groups may find CHAPTER 2 - PROCEDURES OF THE PROJECT of some interest. Highlighted are the role of the advisory committees, interviews with trainees, instructors, employers, employees and assessment procedures of the reading and writing samples. In addition the chapter also reports a complete list of actual workplace and training reading tasks that may be useful in further developing integrated exercises.

For adult educators at every level of the educational process CHAPTER 1 - LITERACY AND THE WORKPLACE provides foundational knowledge that may increase the effectiveness of instruction. The chapter presents the related research on literacy illuminating various facets of the relationship between basic skills and work. Understanding what illiteracy really means, its causes, its appearance on the workplace and the change in specific requirements on the job are discussed.

WORKPLACE LITERACY ASSESSMENT TOOLS

In setting up a workplace basic skills program one of the most important elements is the assessment of the individual employee. Because this field is still evolving, research on different instruments used in these programs is sketchy. However, evaluating the appropriateness of existing literacy instruments for use in workplace basic skills programs may provide some insight into further test development strategies. A technical review of three such instruments is presented here.

The impact of adult illiteracy in the Canadian workforce has become increasingly

visible. There now exists a growing gap between the demands needed in the workplace and the skills resident in the workforce. In order to move towards helping Canadian workers obtain the necessary skills needed for full productivity several key questions require discussion. skill development. Of particular interest to this investigation are the following two questions: What are the basic skills required for an adaptable workforce and how do employers and workplace literacy providers determine which employees require basic skills training? In an attempt to provide relevant information on these issues, this investigation examined the appropriateness of frequently used literacy-related assessment tools for workplace basic skills training.

Because the literacy demands of the workplace are different from general literacy requirements, researchers have begun to identify the basic skills individuals need in order to enter the progress in the workplace. For example, Hull and Sechler (1987) examined the nature and extent of adult literacy needs in several major U.S. corporations. Results from the study indicated that basic literacy skills often serve as prerequisites to the learning of more technical knowledge. This knowledge is specific to types of equipment and industries but the underlying skills tend to be somewhat generic. Company managers, instructors and union trainers reported that the types of skills needed to enter and progress on the job could be classified into five major categories: mathematics, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Basic workplace research conducted by the American Society for Training and Development and the U.S. Department of Labour also examined the skills needed in the workplace. Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer (1988) indicated that more recently employer complaints have focused on serious deficiencies in areas that include problem solving, personal management, and interpersonal skills. In a pioneering attempt to conceptualize the skills employers want, the researchers developed a framework which consists of seven skills groups. These groups include: 1) learning to learn, 2) 3 R's, 3) communication, 4) creative thinking and problem solving, 5) goal setting - personal and career development, 6) negotiation, teamwork and 7) leadership. The authors propose that this framework is a prescription for a well-rounded worker who has acquired a number of discrete skills and who has the ability to acquire more sophisticated skills when necessary.

In setting up a workplace basic skills program one of the most important elements is the assessment of the individual employee. Because of the recent Canadian developments in this area, research on the different assessment tools used in workplace basic skills programs is sketchy. To date no Canadian tests have been developed to identify proficiencies or deficiencies of employees for workplace basic skills training. However, evaluating the appropriateness of existing instruments for use in such programs may provide some insight into further test development strategies. Ten instruments frequently used in adult literacy and basic education programs in adult education centres, technical and vocational schools, community colleges, school boards, and other literacy organizations were reviewed in the full report. Three will be presented here. These tests include: The Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT); Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) - Forms 55 and 6; and The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (GMRT) - Canadian Edition. In the full report, each test was reviewed under three categories - test content, test development, and test usability. The purpose of the test and type of items or subtests employed was described under the heading test content. The procedures used to develop the test norms, grade equivalents, reliability, and validity evidence were presented under the heading test usability. It indicated the appropriateness of the instrument in the assessment of the essential basic skills for the workplace as discussed in the preceding section. An abridged version of that discussion appears here. The test reviews are based on information from the actual test, the test

manuals and administrator's guidelines, technical bulletins, a literature search, the Mental Measurements Yearbook, and interviews with instructors in adult literacy and basic education programs.

Test Content: The Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT) is a battery of tests designed to measure the level of educational achievement among adults.

Test Content: The Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Forms 5 and 6 are norm-referenced tests designed to measure achievement in reading, mathematics, and spelling.

Test Content: The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (GMRT), Canadian Edition of seven levels which cover grades 1 through 12 and include vocabulary and comprehension subtests. They are norm-referenced tests.

In summary, most of the ten literacy-related tests have made laudable attempts to ensure adult content and tone but are not specifically job-related. Some of the instruments with psychometrically strong qualities could be useful if a company elects to provide general literacy services to their employees such as a high-school equivalency program. In the full technical review three assessment tools were criterion-referenced test which emphasized learner performance on everyday situations of adult life but not situations related to the world of work. Using a criterion-referenced approach to test development of specific work-related skills may be more appropriate for employees in basic workplace training.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Introduction: In North America, adult basic education is a generic term used to denote the building blocks of the lifelong learning structure. Basic education refers to the fundamental areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and mathematics. These basic areas of communication and computation are the foundation that gives individuals the power and freedom to control their own lives and to meet the demands of an ever-changing society. With the provision of these skills, the building of a basic education is possible.

In the United States and Canada, the rubric adult literacy and basic education connotes a field of practice that includes programs of adult basic education (ABE) and, in some communities, English as a second language (ESL). ABE usually aims not only at developing competence with printed English, but also at computational and other coping skills. As described in Chapter Thirty-Seven, the main emphasis in ESL is on teaching conversational skills and, more recently, on teaching reading.

Delker (1984) conducted a study to determine the status of adult literacy programs funded by the state-administered programs of the Adult Education Act (Public Law 91-230). He concluded that the act supported three distinct programs: (1) ABE, (2) adult secondary education (ASE) or high school completion, and (3) ESL. In Canada, under the British North American Act of 1867, education became a provincial responsibility. Therefore, adult literacy and basic education in Canada is the exclusive responsibility of the ten provinces and two territories. Each has a slightly different mechanism for the delivery of specific instruction, but, generally, basic education refers to courses and programs designed to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for an adult to function in modern society. These programs include adult basic literacy and numeracy, high school equivalency, citizenship training, instruction in English as a second language and, in some provinces, French as a second language. In both the United States and Canada, ESL literacy is becoming a linking component between separately administered ABE and ESL programs. In Canada, ASE or high school equivalency, which provides the credentials for job entry or further training, is usually delivered under the auspices of an adult basic education or adult retraining department in a community college, or in an adult day school in a board of education, or through a correspondence course offered by a ministry of education.

ASSESSMENT OF THE BASIC DIMENSIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF INSTRUMENT READABILITY

Introduction: Adult education and training in both business and industrial environments have encouraged the growth of programs and courses which require some form of prior assessment of adult knowledge and skills coupled with the measurement of final outcomes. A recent federal government report entitled *A Review of the Canadian Job Strategy* (1988) has sparked a new interest in establishing valid instruments for adult selection into academic, job-training, upgrading and work place literacy programs.

In both Canada and the United States numerous publications such as *Competing in the New Global Economy* (1988), *the Quarterly Labour Market & Productivity Review* (1988), *Basic Skills in the Workplace* (1988), and *Workforce 2000* (1987) attest to the fact that the knowledge explosion is creating new information so rapidly that job skills and knowledge are becoming obsolete in an ever shorter period of time. Less than 2 years ago more than 100,000 jobs were lost and hundreds of thousands of Canadians were severely affected by technological change. To cope with change, workers and employers must be equipped with new skills and in turn a mechanism for assessment of

these new skills.

Individuals will increasingly need to be trained and retrained or upgraded so that they may participate fully in this new economy. Attached to this strategy of re-skilling is the requirement of some form of adult assessment.

Many provinces are now putting in place contemporary skills training systems as part of the balanced economic policy. For example, Ontario's Training Strategy through the Ontario Basic Skills and Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace are equipping workers with the job entry and basic literacy and numeracy skills essential to gaining employment, further training or becoming a more effective worker. Prior assessment of adult knowledge and skills as well as measurement of final outcomes take on an integral part in this new training system.

Investment in people is a key strategy in our economic renewal. Utilizing the human resources of both working and non-working people to overcome barriers to participation in the labour market is a part of a balanced economic policy. Adult assessment therefore plays a vital role in this strategy. Assessment of the basic dimensions can be viewed as a mechanism in the decision making process. Adult educators must be aware of the different purposes of adult assessment, the different methods of testing and the considerations in choosing a test or measure.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION AND ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN CANADA
(co-authored by Maurice Taylor, Carolyn Gaskin and Alan M. Thomas)

Introduction (Part I): Popular versions of the control and administration of education in Canada allow little room for considerations of federal participation in "basic" education of any kind, with the possible exception of provisions for Native Canadians. "Basic" education, which must deal with the mastering of literacy, numeracy, and elementary social skills, is surely the domain of the provinces, as clearly established by the British North America Act (1867) and subsequent judicial decisions. To be sure, the federal government has played, and continues to play, a major role in the wider reaches of "basic" education, adult and otherwise. These activities, represented by such agencies as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and indeed the regulation of all broadcasting, the National Film Board, the museums, galleries, and supportive activities of the Canada Council, play an immense and powerful role in the continuing socialization demanded of all modern societies. But when it comes to specific instructional characteristics of training and education, that surely has been and is dominated exclusively by the provinces.

Any reply to that assertion has to be guarded and qualified. While the provinces have, by means of the monopolization of familiar and conventional educational delivery systems, maintained the higher profile, the fact is that the provision of basic education for adults has been defined, and relentlessly driven - at least until recently - by the efforts of the federal government. So much is this the case that Canada is rapidly approaching a time when the basic responsibilities for the maintenance of systems of genuine "continuing education", available to all ages, for multiple purposes, defined both individually and collectively, will have to be re-examined and reassigned. Nothing prompts that argument more cogently than an examination of the provisions for adult basic education in Canada, and the "stealthy" incursions of the federal government.

Adult Basic Education has been defined elsewhere in this volume. From one point of view, it is simply the adult equivalent of elementary education, traditionally considered, in western societies, as that education necessary for the entrance of the young to the society as a whole. The character of those societies has determined that this initial education be concerned primarily with literacy with respect to printed information; numeracy, and basic "lifeskills." It is assumed, or more accurately, hoped, that the other dimensions of the child's life, family, neighbourhood, economic circumstances, each one a source of learning if not teaching, will be reasonably supportive of the objectives pursued by the school.

Such is not the case with respect to basic education for adults. What has formed this enterprise primarily has been the need for entry to the work force, rather than the society as a whole, and a realization that the other dimensions of the adult's life are likely to be unsupportive if not downright hostile to the efforts of the educational enterprise. Since the turn of this century the developments in the economy have, with increasing relentlessness, altered the demands for skills necessary not only to enter but also to remain in the work force, the character of adult basic education has changed more frequently than has the character of elementary education for the young, despite the much greater public attention directed to the latter. For understandable reasons, perhaps, the provinces, until quite recently, seem to have clung to the promised potential of compulsory education of the young, hoping that the demands for education by adults would eventually decline. The need for "elementary education" would have been taken care of for all citizens as children and young people (Thomas et al, 1979:89).

Nevertheless, with its repeatedly acknowledged responsibility for the state of the

national economy, and for employment, the federal government has been obliged to respond to the circumstances of certain groups of individuals with respect to their ability to participate in both. As the century has progressed, the federal response has had to be increasingly in educational terms, or, at least in terms of the needs of larger and larger groups of individuals, primarily adult individuals, for access to opportunities to learn knowledge and skills they do not possess.

While our attention can be focussed on the three inclusive pieces of legislation of the past three decades: The Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act (TVTA) 1960; The Adult Occupational Training Act (AOTA) 1967; and the National Training Act (NTA) 1982, those developments do have a history. A glimpse of that history helps to explain their character, and may assist us in planning for the next stages.

READABILITY AS APPLIED TO AN ABE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT (co-authored by Maurice Taylor and M.W. Walstrom)

Abstract: This study examined the procedure for applying the Fog, Flesch, and Fry readability formulas to the Internal, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales and in modifying the instrument for use with adult basic education (ABE) students. Item writing procedures, quality comparisons, application of the formulas, and a Q-sort were used to develop a modified scale suitable for an ABE learner with reading skills of the fourth- and fifth- grade range. Field trial results and comprehension limitations of the readability formulas are discussed.

BLADE FOR NON-READERS

Introduction: Reading is a vital life skill. Yet despite the fact many Canadians take reading for granted, there is a sizeable out-of-school Canadian population with reading difficulties. It comes as a surprise, however, that in a country which has had compulsory schooling for several decades there is a large number of adult for whom the lack of an adequate level of education constitutes a daily problem.

According to the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy (1985) approximately 5 million of Canada's adults read below the Grade 9 level and 1 million adults cannot read or write at all. The realization that a considerable portion of the Canadian adult population is seriously "under-educated" and that many could be considered as functionally illiterate is relatively new. Until some 15 years ago illiteracy was considered by most Canadians as a somewhat remote problem attached to developing countries. This view has since changed.

Cairns (1983) maintains that with the new requirements posed by technological change and the transformation of communication systems adults with only five or six years education will be marginalized. In Canada an unemployed adult of 35 or 40 with less than a grade 8 education is faced with fundamental barriers to economic and educational opportunities. For this reason debates about literacy and illiteracy which concentrate on levels of reading and writing are misleading. Cairns (1983) states that the real issue is whether people possess the education and skills necessary to participate fully and productively in the life of their society. This is what functionality is all about.