

Technologies for the Adult Literacy Classroom

April 19, 2007

Tom Sticht
International Consultant in Adult Education

Nowadays a number of adults are coming to classes to learn to read and write. There are several technologies that the teacher may use to help these pupils learn. Here are a few.

1. Chalkboards. These are more and more familiar to teachers. They are large black slates (sometimes now in green) on which teachers may write with chalk. For instance, a pupil may give his or her name and the teacher can write it on the chalkboard and show the pupil and class how to spell, write, and read the pupil's name. This can be done with lots of other words, or even sentences, too. Be sure not to stand with one's back to the class for long, as this is not interesting to the pupils. At the end of class, some of the adults may be called upon to help clean the chalkboard and erasers. This can promote friendships in the class! [NOTE: Some progressive teachers are now using different colored chalks to highlight important information.]
2. Newspaper print. Sometimes the local newspaper will have some newspaper print left on the end of a roll after printing the newspaper. Teachers can ask for this newsprint paper, which comes in a large roll. It can be cut up into sheets that can be taped to the walls of the classroom (not on wallpaper however!) and written upon to record the words and sentences that pupils will want to study as they walk around the room and look at the paper hanging on the walls. [NOTE: Some progressive teachers are now using different colored ink pens to highlight important information.]
3. Overhead projectors. These audio-visual tools let the teacher write on transparent film and project the writing onto a light-colored wall or movie screen. With a newer device, the Xerox machine, the teacher can make photocopies of pages of books, photos, charts and other materials and project them on the wall. This can be used to illustrate various aspects of writing and

reading to pupils. [NOTE: Make certain to have one or two extra bulbs for the projector in case one burns out!]

4. Filmstrips. There are now strips of photo film that can be projected one frame at a time onto a wall or screen and the information on the film frames can be used to teach reading. The Army made extensive use of filmstrip materials in World War II and proved the usefulness of this technology in the classroom for illiterate adults. There are educational filmstrips available from supply houses so make sure your superintendent places funds in the budget to purchase both filmstrips and projectors as well as the other electronic technologies discussed below.
5. Photo novels. The Army also used photo novels to make stories starring real people that illiterate soldiers could use to learn to read. Teachers can use a Kodak to take photographs and make up these types of photo novels for classroom use. The pupils themselves may also take photographs and make their own photo novels for their own and their classmate's use.
6. Tape recorders and playback machines. Some teachers are now reading books onto audio tapes so that their adult pupils can listen to stories before trying to read them. Sometimes the pupil can listen and read at the same time to build up speed in reading while comprehension is maintained by listening to the spoken words. [NOTE: Sometimes a radio can be used in the classroom so that teachers and pupils can listen to an important broadcast and then discuss it to build knowledge of current events.]
7. Television. Cassette players are now available to let teachers play TV shows in the classroom. Indeed, there are now many educational cassettes, including those for teaching various aspects of reading, that teachers can use. Many times pupils enjoy these TV materials better than typical classroom lectures or demonstrations.
8. The 'Binocular Organizer Of Knowledge' or BOOK! I once read this amusing name for the old technology that forms the basis for teaching reading. Of course, books remain the foundation technology for teaching in our classrooms. I once read an amusing story by Isaac Asimov, the famous writer, in which he espoused the wonders of the book: Once printed it does not consume any more energy, unlike audio tapes or TV cassettes. It starts when looked at and stops when the reader looks away. It stores speech like the electronic devices, but lets the reader

- create his or her own internal voice or voices. It lets readers produce their own internal images. It can be produced to be carried in the hip pocket and taken to the beach, on the train or bus, and so forth to be used without fear of breaking it or producing any noise to bother others.
9. Finally, we can't forget those old reliable friends, paper and pencils! All students should get paper and pencils to be used to learn to write their names and all the other ideas that are provided in the class by the teacher and other pupils.
 10. Always maintain a well-lighted classroom, with good ventilation, warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Teachers should dress conservatively, wear a smile and maintain a pleasant disposition. Be friendly, but professional, with your pupils and conduct activities to bring about a welcoming atmosphere. An occasional social activity, perhaps with refreshments such as lemonade and cookies, can help the adults, who may be shy about returning to school after a long period, to overcome what anxieties they may feel and develop a high level of class morale that can help all achieve well!

Resource: Asimov, I. (1974, February). The Ancient and the Ultimate. *Journal of Reading*, 17, 264-271.

Thomas G. Sticht
International Consultant in Adult Education
2062 Valley View Blvd.
El Cajon, CA 92019-2059
Tel/fax: (619) 444-9133
Email: tsticht@aznet.net