

Materials and Methods

When I began sifting through books and materials for the adult learner, I was overwhelmed. It was like stepping into the ocean for the first time and the beach seemed a swirl of people and voices. How do you find your way through it all? The answer is one-step or page at a time. I looked at many materials that publishers had to offer and tried to decide which had the most value. Many seemed very similar: a series of stories in article or story form, each followed by comprehension questions, a few grammar pointers, and perhaps a writing activity. It was my intention to find literature that had the most merit and would inspire the adult student to want to read.

One area I needed to clarify was grade level. Talk of the Block (series by New Readers Press) was written for the adult beginning reader. Stories Plus (New Readers Press) was designed for high beginning adult readers. What do those levels really mean? I found a chart in the New Teacher Training Handbook that helped a great deal. Beginning adult basic education is described as grades 2.0-3.9. High beginning readers would be closer to 3.9. A low intermediate reader is reading at grade levels 4.0-5.9. The chart helped me to understand the materials that I was studying.

Another series, Voyager, Reading and Writing for Today's Adults, by New Readers Press is set up in clear reading levels. For example Voyager 2 is meant for students reading at grade levels 2.0-3.5. The articles and poems are written about adult issues: marriage, divorce, work, family history, biography, autobiography, etc. The pieces are well written and thought provoking. I spent an autumn using the program with a student from Afghanistan. She was fascinated and able to make many personal connections to her native country and culture. The Voyager series is a solid addition to any literacy program.

I discovered collections of essays written by adult writers in literacy programs. Their essays are honest and inspiring. Except for spellings and some edits, the pieces are as the authors wrote them. It is their imperfection that I found endearing. The writers speak of everyday struggles and everyday joys. I particularly was taken by Speaking Out on Work (Literacy Volunteers of New York City) as well as First Impressions, Volumes 1 and 2, (New Readers Press). The stories in those collections inspired my students to both read and write. They were amazed that students much like themselves had written the essays. My students began to put their own thoughts down on blank pieces of paper.

Once you know your student's grade level, ask your local librarian to help find appropriate books. There are powerful picture books and young adult novels that will interest readers of any age. If he/she is looking for a car, you can clip advertisements from newspapers. There are other materials from day to day life like bills and doctor's reports that need to be understood. You can use the Internet to research a medical procedure that is causing concern. Follow your student's leads whether that is to a driver's manual or a job application. Don't forget the everyday-real life-stuff, and match it up with a quality reading program.

In the New Teacher Training Handbook, there is a quote by Dr. Nancy Boraks, "Materials and Methods can help, but the teacher makes the difference, and teachers who help the most are ones who adapt to their students and make them feel they have come to the right place." As I search through a mountain of material, this quote brings our mission clearly into focus. Materials are important, yet the effect we have is even

more so. Think of what your student needs to learn next and let that be your most important guide.

Works Cited:

1. Holt, Susan T. *New Teacher Training Handbook*. Richmond: Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, 2005.