

Paradigms of Literacy & Print Literacy Materials

National Literacy Act of 1991

"...to enhance the literacy and basic skills of adults, to ensure that all adults in the United States acquire the basic skills necessary to function effectively and achieve the greatest possible opportunity in their work and in their lives, and to strengthen and coordinate adult literacy programs." (Kirsch, 1992, p.xi)

types of programs

"Literacy education in the United States is primarily provided through federally-funded programs and volunteers; only a very small fraction of programs are grassroots organizations, based in local communities." (Fingeret, 1991, p.2)

adult learning theory

important to recognize learners' knowledges and life experiences

content and context

for possibility of learning is important & relevant

Functional Paradigm - Dominant

content and context

basic & functional literacy
workplace training
family literacy (e.g. MOTHER READ)

needs assessment will discover individual needs of learner / may be "student-centered" within limited context of skill-based learning

"Curricula designed from such materials define the functional illiterate as someone who needs to learn how to follow instructions....in this country literacy programs are funded because the presumed relationship between illiteracy and unemployment. Hence, adult literacy materials and curricula are written from the perspective of what a literate society *believes* employed adults need to know. (Brodkey, 1991, p. 165)

(one-directional)

Materials

reading as set of tasks
decoding procedures, multiple choice
comprehension questions
Perceived as "neutral" / gender-less, class-less, race-less, etc.

Workbooks, Grammar books / basals,
"school-based" textbooks,
Job training manuals &
Job-related materials, including "soft skills"
Children's books
Generally created & published by large educational publishers
Easily attainable & prevalent
One curriculum (with tweaking) fits all.

Results: functional literacy

mastering basic skills (reading, writing, math, verbal communication, decision-making)
well enough to meet individual goals and societal demands.
Satisfied by assessment, testing, evaluation, outcomes.

Critical Paradigm - Alternative

content and context

participatory / learner-centered
(popular education, literacy for social change)
facilitated in grassroots organizations or community-based programs

learners involved in curriculum & program development & take leadership roles
liberatory, transformational

(two-directional)

Materials

often based on LEA approaches
based on needs & expressions of learner participants developed and/or used in relation to current events
Recognition of literacy as power (not-neutral)
Makes attempts to recognize gender, race, class, etc.

"authentic materials" - newspapers, magazines, pictures, cartoons, literature, etc.,
learner-created writing
learner experience approach in ESL Contexts

Generally published by small, alternative publishers, local community groups, or homegrown student and/or teacher created materials & curriculum

Materials may not have longevity depending on situation & timing.

Results: Critical / environmental literacy

mastering basic skills (reading, writing, math, verbal communication, decision-making) also:
reflection/action, opens possibilities for personal, community and social change, enhances leadership skills, develops critical thinking

This illustration was prepared by Mev Miller
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*Women's Literacy Power:
Collaborative Approaches to Developing and Distributing Women's Literacy Resources*

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