

A Practical Guide for the Teaching of Literacy to Adults With Learning Difficulties

Part XIV

MAY 2002

Québec 

A Practical Guide for the Teaching of Literacy to Adults With Learning Difficulties

Diagnosis and Intervention Strategies

**XIV — Cognitive Field
Module: Planning and Executing a Task**

MAY 2002

Direction de la formation générale des adultes

English version

Direction de la production en langue anglaise
Services à la communauté anglophone
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec

Educational institutions are authorized to reproduce this document,
in whole or in part, as needed. If it is reproduced for sale, the
sale price must not exceed the cost of reproduction.

© Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002—02-00357

ISBN: 2-550-39382-1

Legal Deposit – Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION	1
1. Is the adult learner capable of organizing himself or herself in a learning situation, that is, of planning a step-by-step approach to executing a task?	2
2. Does the adult learner know general and specific problem-solving strategies that facilitate learning?	4
3. Is the adult learner capable of checking his or her own work (self-checking)?	5
4. Is the adult learner capable of correcting his or her own work (self-correction)?	7
5. Is the adult learner capable of putting into practice advice from a specialist in a particular field?	9
6. Is the adult learner a potential guide in a particular field?	11
7. Does the adult learner resort to internalized language to regulate his or her conduct?	12
8. Does the adult learner show signs of:	
8.1. impulsiveness?	14
8.2. apathy?	16
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19

XIV—COGNITIVE FIELD

MODULE: PLANNING AND EXECUTING A TASK

INTRODUCTION

“The cognitive field includes the cognitive skills that make learning possible. The existence of learning problems indicates a strong possibility of deficiencies at the cognitive level; if there is dysfunction at the level of cognitive skills, there is a strong likelihood of learning problems.”¹

As this passage makes clear, cognitive skills have a major impact on learning. Skills such as attention, language, perception, memory as well as planning and executing tasks are a part of daily, ongoing learning, and are all directly related to learning basic subjects. During workshops, it is important to encourage adult learners to speak, to think, to use their memory and attention span, and so on.

Although the development of cognitive skills is an ongoing process, specific activities and exercises can help foster these skills. It is important to present the adult learners with the objectives of each activity, to help them make the connection between cognitive skills and learning and to repeat these activities as often as possible.

Activities should be varied in order to stimulate different cognitive skills. Special attention should also be paid to the immediate environment (the organization of physical space), to the ground rules established within the group, to the kinds of work habits being fostered among the adult learners, and so on. Organize workshops in such a way as to encourage participation, responsibility, cooperation and mutual assistance—remember, interaction and the development of cognitive skills go hand in hand.

In short, the suggested intervention strategies for the various aspects of the cognitive field are designed to incite adult learners to interact, not only with the other members of the group, but also with the specific object of learning (a text to read, a problem to solve, etc.). This way, the adult learners’ efforts to grasp the object of learning—through mastery of the necessary cognitive skills—will enable them to gradually understand the purpose of the activity and to successfully complete it.

¹ Translated from J. Jasmin, *Guide d'utilisation de la grille de dépistage de problèmes d'apprentissage chez les adultes* (Montréal: Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal, 1990).

COGNITIVE FIELD

PLANNING AND EXECUTING A TASK

1. Is the adult learner capable of organizing himself or herself in a learning situation, that is, of planning a step-by-step approach to executing a task?

YES: The adult learner is capable of organizing himself or herself in this area.

NO: The adult learner has difficulty organizing his or her work and seems unable to follow a work sequence.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Provide the adult learners with clear and concise instructions, using concrete language, on how to execute a single task, and then a set of tasks.
- Make sure the learners have understood the instructions by asking them about the task, before they start it.
- Serve as a role model in the initial stage by asking questions out loud to review the steps required to carry out the task:
 - ◇ “What exactly do I have to do?”
 - ◇ “Is this really what the instructions are telling me to do?”
 - ◇ “Should I reread the instructions?”
 - ◇ “What are the specific, concrete steps that I must follow and in what order?”
 - ◇ “Is this the best way to proceed?”

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- ◇ “Are there other ways to accomplish this task?”
- ◇ “Did I recently carry out a similar task?”
- ◇ “Should I check with the instructor to see if I am on the right track?”
- Then, with the learners, analyze the task to be accomplished by asking them to ask questions when listing the steps to be followed.
- Compile a list of these questions which the learners can consult when planning tasks in the future; make sure the questions are concise and written in language that can be easily understood by the learners.
- Help visual learners and learners who have difficulty sequencing steps to draw up a plan that will help them complete a task in an ordered manner. For example:
 - ◇ **Plan**
 1. Beginning
 2. Middle
 3. End
 4. Checking the work
- As they carry out the task, encourage the learners to check if they are still on the right track; to do so, teach them self-checking using internalized language (see section 7).
- Give the learners all the time they need to plan out their task.
- Establish a kind of ritual for executing certain tasks that the adult learners can become familiar with.
- Verify with the learners that they followed their plan.
- Help the adult learners find corrective measures or other solutions, when necessary.

2.	Does the adult learner know general and specific problem-solving strategies that facilitate learning?	
YES:	The adult learner knows general and specific problem-solving strategies.	NO: The adult learner does not know problem-solving strategies for the various subjects related to his or her learning.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Concretely explain to the learners what a learning strategy is and provide them with examples. See *Dover Learning Problems of Adult Basic Education Students: Remediation and Compensation*.
- Use appropriate activities to help the adult learners discover their dominant learning style, and encourage them to find learning strategies that correspond to their strengths. The teaching strategies proposed in Parts IX to XIV are extremely helpful in this area. Refer also to the bibliography.
- Discuss with the learners possible strategies to execute a given task and help them identify and retain the most suitable strategy, in particular:
 - ◇ for studying vocabulary
 - ◇ for determining the meaning of unfamiliar words in a text

3. Is the adult learner capable of checking his or her own work (self-checking)?	
YES: The adult learner checks his or her own work upon completion.	NO: The adult learner never thinks to check his or her own work. Sometimes the learner fails to do so even when asked by the instructor.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Remind learners that checking constitutes an essential step in any task plan, and must never be overlooked. Stress this point whenever a task is being planned.
- With the learners, identify a visual reminder that can be used to prompt them to think about the checking step when carrying out a personal task. This reminder can be put on the board or posted on the classroom wall.
- Propose a self-correction grid adapted to the learner's skill level that the learner can use when checking his or her own work. This type of grid was discussed in the "English (Writing)" module. It can, however, be adapted to more specific topics that have been studied (for example, specific lexical or grammatical concepts).
- Explain to the learners that it is not possible to check everything, but that it is important to check the concepts studied.
- Teach the adult learners how to check their own work. Serve as a role model by:
 - ◇ demonstrating, in the form of questioning, the internalized language used during the checking process
 - ◇ showing how the self-correction grid is used

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Verify the steps taken by the learners to check their own work during an exercise, and mention the strengths and weaknesses of their approach.
- Based on the weaknesses identified, suggest exercises or activities to strengthen the learners' approach.
For example:
 - ◇ Explain the vocabulary in the grid.
 - ◇ Explain the points written down in the grid.
 - ◇ Have the learners review certain rules they have studied.

4. Is the adult learner capable of correcting his or her own work (self-correction)?

YES: The adult learner is capable of correcting his or her own work.

NO: The adult learner is not capable of self-correction, as he or she is often unable to detect errors.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Teach the adult learners how to identify errors using self-correction grids, as discussed above.
- Show the learners how to correct themselves. Serve as a role model by:
 - ◇ expressing, in the form of questioning, the internalized language used when self-correcting. For example:
 - ⇒ “Is this word a verb, a noun,…”?
 - ⇒ “Where is the verb in this sentence?”
 - ⇒ “What is the subject of the verb?”
 - ◇ demonstrating how the rule or method learned that will help in the correction, for example a spelling or conjugation rule, can be identified
 - ◇ teaching the learners to use, when in doubt or error, the most appropriate tool for checking and correcting their own work: vocabulary book, dictionary, simplified grammar reference, grammar guide, etc.
 - ◇ showing the learners how to use different tools

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- During an exercise period, verify the self-correction approach used by the learners and point out its strengths and weaknesses.
- Based on the weaknesses identified, suggest exercises to strengthen the learners' approach. For example, ask the learners to:
 - ◇ consult a dictionary
 - ◇ recognize the nature of words
 - ◇ identify the infinitive of a given verb in order to use a conjugation reference source

5. Is the adult learner capable of putting into practice advice from a specialist in a particular field?

YES: The adult learner is capable of learning from a specialist in a particular field, and of putting the teaching into practice.

NO: The adult learner is not capable of putting into practice the advice or teaching of a specialist in a particular field.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Ensure that the advice or teaching responds to a problem or weakness that the learner is aware of.
- Ensure that the person guiding the learners uses references and vocabulary familiar to them.
- Ensure that the advice is presented in a clear, structured and logical manner.
- Ensure that the advice or teaching directed toward a particular individual is delivered in small increments with limited objectives.
- Verify that the learners have understood and integrated the advice or lesson by asking them to repeat what they have learned, which will help exercise short-term memory.
- Write down, or have the students write down in a notebook, what they have learned, so that they have a visual support to refer to when necessary.
- Record what the students have learned so that they have an audio support to refer to when necessary.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Ask the learners to put what they have learned into practice. They may use written support if needed.
- Ask the adult learners to recall, or repeat, what they learned in order to enhance their long-term memory.
- Once some time has elapsed, verify if the learners can still put what they learned into practice.
- Assess the results and, if the learners had difficulty putting what they learned into practice, have them discuss these problems, and explain to them the reasons for the difficulty.

6. Is the adult learner a potential guide in a particular field?

YES: The adult learner is a potential guide for the other people in the group. **NO:** The adult learner is not a potential guide.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- When the adult learner has acquired skills in a given field, ask him or her to serve as a resource person for the concepts related to this field.
- Encourage the adult learner to persevere as a guide, which will foster greater self-confidence and a more positive self-image.

7.	Does the adult learner resort to internalized language to regulate his or her conduct?	
YES:	The adult learner is capable of regulating his or her conduct by means of internalized language.	NO: The adult learner appears to have difficulty regulating his or her conduct by means of internalized language.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Teach the adult learner internalized language by providing examples, such as:
 - ◇ a little voice inside one's head
 - ◇ a radio inside one's head
 - ◇ a movie inside one's head
 - ◇ personal cassettes
- Suggest that the adult learners choose a name for their internalized language.
- Verify if the adult learners have already used the “little voice inside their head” in everyday situations by asking them:
 - ◇ the circumstances in which the “little voice” was used
 - ◇ the content of the message conveyed by the “little voice”
 - ◇ the impact of the “little voice” on their conduct, reactions or attitudes
- Serve as a role model to show internalized language can be used in various learning situations:
 - ◇ when analyzing a task to be carried out (see section 1)
 - ◇ when checking one's own work (see section 3)
 - ◇ during self-correction (see section 4)
 - ◇ as a form of encouragement when beginning a task
 - ◇ while carrying out a task, to check if one is on the correct track or should stop and try another direction

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- ◇ once a task has been completed, to congratulate oneself for its completion and to remember to check the work
 - ◇ to set one's goals at the beginning of the day
- Regularly call on the adult learners to use internalized language during various learning activities, using a short phrase that will serve as a reminder and a kind of signal. For example:
 - ◇ “Do you hear your little voice?”
 - ◇ “Is your internal radio on?”
 - ◇ “Turn up the volume on your radio.”
- Have the learners talk about their internalized language.
- Encourage the learners to talk to themselves, making humorous suggestions (based on their nonverbal expressions: a frown, smile, inquisitive look), such as:
 - ◇ “I think that your radio is saying...”
 - ◇ “Turn up the volume of your radio and you'll hear...”
- Basing yourself on concrete situations already used in class, teach the learners how their internalized language can help them in a learning situation to:
 - ◇ orient themselves in the execution of a task
 - ◇ make the necessary checks to obtain the correct information from the appropriate place
 - ◇ set priorities
 - ◇ plan a project
 - ◇ change their self-image
 - ◇ neutralize compulsive behaviour

8.	Does the adult learner show signs of:	
8.1.	impulsiveness?	
YES:	The adult learner shows signs of impulsiveness in that he or she reacts immediately to any form of stimulus.	NO: The adult learner does not show signs of impulsiveness.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Encourage the adult learners to reflect, that is, to mentally envisage several ways to resolve a problem, before giving the answer.
- Explain the meaning of the word “reflect” by discussing with the learners, using concrete examples, various ways to reflect, to mentally resolve a given problem and to organize the information mentally (combine details or deduce on the basis of a hypothesis).
- Relate this process to the previous discussion on internalized language; ask the learners to take the time to listen to the “little voice inside their head” before giving an answer. Again, use humour to get the point across.
- Have the learners solve puzzles, insisting they check all of the clues before giving their answer.
- Provide the adult learners with self-learning techniques. For example, have them:
 - ◊ draw up a list of elements necessary to be an effective reader
 - ◊ before beginning a task, plan the steps necessary to carry it out (see section 1)
- Propose word games such as charades and rebuses.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Propose various games, such as:
 - ◇ puzzles
 - ◇ *whodunit?*
 - ◇ question and answer games, in which there is a choice of answers, requiring the learners to draw on the knowledge they have acquired during this module

8. 8.2.	Does the adult learner show signs of: apathy?	
YES:	The adult learner shows signs of apathy, lacking the energy or motivation to accomplish a task, and failing to react or only doing so when prompted.	NO: The adult learner does not have this problem.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Offer the adult learners a well-defined structure in the form of a written schedule containing precise information about each hour of training.
- Propose instructions that can be followed or a plan that can be used to carry out tasks, for each type of project, and encourage the learners to refer to them.
- Propose concrete tasks that correspond to the adult learners' needs and can be easily applied to their everyday lives.
- Encourage the adult learners to use an agenda to record:
 - ◊ weekly activities
 - ◊ special activities
 - ◊ special occasions, holidays, birthdays and any other event that may require them to send a card or make some kind of gesture
 - ◊ personal projects
 - ◊ research to be conducted

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Organize a treasure hunt or a contest in the training centre, or in the neighbourhood, in which the learners must use various means to obtain information. Ask questions such as:
 - ◇ “What is the name of the person who looks after school supplies at the centre?”
 - ◇ “How many hours is the bank open each day?”
- Give instructions that require the learners to make use of documents or tools available in class.
- Propose a group project (decoration of the classroom or training centre, community dinner, bazaar, etc.) and have the learners plan the various steps required to carry out the project.
- Ask a series of concrete questions and have the learners come back with answers in a few days. For example:
 - ◇ “What is the exact name of the CLSC in your neighbourhood?”
 - ◇ “What is the CLSC’s address?”
 - ◇ “What is the name of the MNA for your riding?”

For this activity, have the learners explain the strategies they used to obtain the information.

XIV—COGNITIVE FIELD

MODULE: PLANNING AND EXECUTING A TASK

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brissard, F. *Développer l'intelligence de votre enfant par la méthode La Garanderie*. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1988.
- Concerted Literacy Councils of Quebec. *Learning Disabilities Workshop Manual*. Montréal: Concerted Literacy Councils of Quebec, 2001.
- Corraze, J. *Les communications non verbales*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980.
- Edwards, B. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: A Course in Enhancing Creativity and Artistic Confidence*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1979.
- Gardner, H. *A Disciplined Mind, What All Students Should Understand*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1999.
- Gazzaniga, M. *The Bisected Brain*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970.
- Hagner, T., L. Hopkins, B. Marshall, D. McAdam, B. Perham and D. Tasker. *Dover Learning Problems of Adult Basic Education Students: Remediation and Compensation*. New Hampshire, 1989.
- Hecaen, H. *Introduction à la neuropsychologie : langue, geste et perception*. Paris: Larousse, 1992.
- Jasmin, J. *Guide d'utilisation de la grille de dépistage de problèmes d'apprentissage chez les adultes*. Montréal: Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal, 1990.

- Kaufman, A. and N.L. Kaufman. *Kaufman Sequential or Simultaneous (K-SOS)*. Circle Pines, Minnesota: AGS, 1984.
- Kinbourne, M. *A Symmetrical Function of the Brain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. *Destination Literacy: Identifying and Teaching Adults With Learning Disabilities*. Ottawa: Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 1999.
- Lezak, M. *Neurological Assessment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Luria, A.R. *Higher Cortical Functions in Man*. New York: Basic Books, 1966.
- Luria, A.R. *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book About a Vast Memory*. New York: Basic Books, 1968.
- Luria, A.R. *The Working Brain*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973.
- Polak, E. and J. Bourgeon. *Anything Can Be: The Identification and Remediation of Learning Disabilities in the Classroom*. Ottawa: Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 1980.
- Swanson H. *Memory and Learning Disabilities*, Greenwich: J.A.I. Press, 1987.
- Turgeon, M. *Right-Brain Left-Brain Reflexology: A Self-Help Approach to Balancing Life Energies With Color, Sound and Pressure Point Techniques*. Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1994.

