teachers of adults will . . .

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In recent years, educational leaders in this country have expressed a growing concern over the increasing complexity of teaching. In fact, Florida's State Department of Education feels it's no longer feasible to evaluate the qualifications of teachers by reviewing course titles on college transcripts. Instead, it's moving toward a new approach based on teacher performance and competence. From now on, instructional personnel will be certified on the basis of their performance of specified teaching or teaching-related behaviors and the demonstrated ability of a prospective teacher to bring about the desired instructional outcomes.

What competencies are crucial for the effective teaching of adults? The following is a list that research and theory on adult learning consider essential to assist adults in achieving instructional goals and objectives. A brief justification and examples of ways to evaluate if the competency has been achieved follows this listing.

Catalog of Competencies*

Teachers of adults will have to be able to:

1. Demonstrate competence in the subject matter to be taught.
2. Involve the learners in diagnosing their competencies.
3. Involve the learners in setting up measurable and attainable objectives based on their needs.
4. Provide a learning environment in which the learners set their own pace for achieving the objectives.
5. Select alternative resources for achieving the objectives based on learners' needs and experience.
6. Plan and sequence instruction.

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*This list isn't meant to convey any rank ordering of competencies nor is each mutually exclusive.

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7. Select and use the instructional techniques most appropriate for the learning task and the characteristics of the learner.
8. Arrange opportunities for the learners to interact in groups.
9. Involve the learners in the continual evaluation of their progress toward the objectives.
10. Provide opportunities for the learners to apply what they've learned.
11. Adapt the learning environment, where possible, to counteract the physiological factors of age.
12. Provide a threat-free, supportive, and accepting learning environment.

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Ways To Assess

Subject-Matter Competency

It's almost axiomatic that the teacher must have a thorough command of the subject-matter material. The learning theories of Gagné, Ausubel, and Bruner call for subject-matter competence as a prerequisite for effectively designing instruction. These authors see such competence as a necessary condition for facilitating learning, but not the *only* condition.

Among the ways that this competence might be assessed are giving the prospective teachers of adults standardized subject-matter tests and requiring a minimum level of performance. Also, this competence might be evaluated by having people with expertise in the subject matter interview the "student teacher."

Entering Capabilities Diagnosis

To measure whether learning has occurred as a result of instruction, you must assess the entering competencies. Another reason for assessing the entering capabilities is to design more effective instruction. By knowing where each student is, you can more rationally and effectively provide for individual differences.

Among the methods that might be used to determine whether a prospective teacher has mastered this competency is observing if a pre-test to measure entering competencies is administered. Another procedure that, if performed by the teacher, might indicate the possession of this competence is interviewing students to determine their skills.

Setting Objectives

Involving the learner in selecting objectives enhances motivation and learning. Specific objectives are stated in measurable terms: (1) to assess the learning outcome that's

aimed for, so the teacher can help effectively design the instruction and (2) to facilitate measuring learning outcomes— whatever capability of the learner can't be specified in observable human performance, can't be measured.

Observing students writing contracts that describe their objectives might be one indication that the teacher has this competence. These contracts, used as the basis for further counseling sessions to determine attainable objectives, as well as to discuss the needs of the learner, would be further evidence that the teacher can perform in this area.

Learning Pace   One of the basic principles of adult learning is that students should be able to learn at their own pace. Research indicates that the speed of performance and speed of reaction time tend to decline with age, which explains the slower rate of learning of adults, but doesn't mean their ability to learn is less. Thus, adults perform best when they're able to set their own pace.

Evidence that the teacher of adults is able to perform in this area includes observations that provision of numerous exit and entry points according to abilities and needs are made. The availability of multimedia materials so that the learners can select methods and materials suited to their particular learning style points to the teacher's ability to perform in this competence.

Additionally, since adults have a wide variety of background needs and abilities, self-instructional or programmed materials offer possibilities for serving individuals within the group according to their own pacing or learning style. A teacher of adults that uses any or all of these materials shows mastery of competence in providing a learning environment in which learners are able to set their own pace for achieving the objectives.
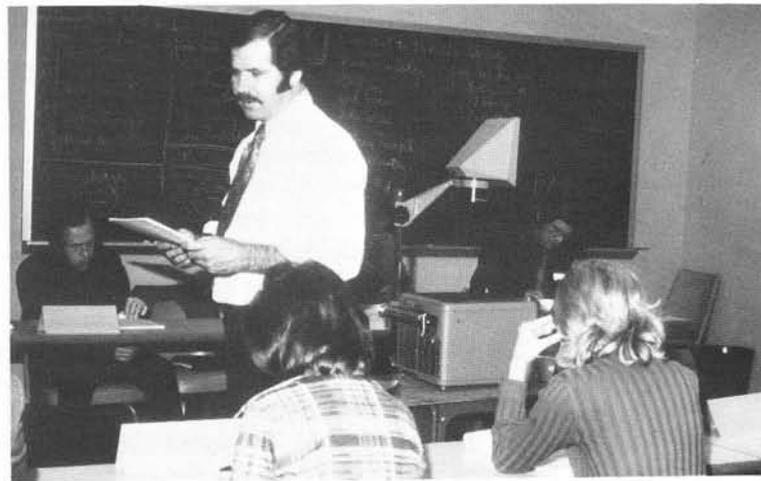
Alternate Resources

Adults learn more quickly if the learning is based on their experiences. The teacher of adults should use many instructional aids to help establish important concepts and relationships. The role of individual differences also is a reason for listing this competency. The use of alternative resources geared to individual differences will help learning.

Observations that might be made to determine whether this competency has been mastered include looking around the room for alternative resources (that is, are all students using the same text). Does the instructor use film strips, field trip experiences, simulation games? Does the teacher encourage students to bring their own instructional resources to share with others?

Planning Instruction

The content is more easily grasped when learning experiences are sequentially ordered and integrated. Each successive step should be built on the previous one, thus aiding the learner into a broader and deeper experience with the content. New material should be presented in the most logical sequence and related to what's already known. Research indicates that when a learning task can be analyzed into a hierarchical structure, sequencing the instruction accordingly takes best advantage of transfer of training and results in the most effective learning.

The teacher of adults has this competency if it's observed that instructional materials are presented in logical units, objectives are stated and time parameters set, and/or task analyses are performed on each instructional unit before it's planned and sequenced.

Instructional Technique

The importance of this competency can be seen in the various research studies indicating that for some tasks and some learner characteristics, it does matter, in terms of learning outcomes, what instructional technique is used. Experiments dealing with changing food habits during World War II found that the group discussion was about 10 times more effective in changing attitudes than was the lecture. Research also indicates that the lecture is an effective technique for imparting information, but it has its limitations. It isn't appropriate for the learning of motor skills, the alteration of attitudes, long-term retention, complex content material, or when participants are below average in intelligence or when they're participating in the learning experience involuntarily.

In assessing the attainment of this competency, look for the use of a variety of methodologies, such as group discussions, case studies, simulation gaming, and programmed instruction. An indication of the proficiency of the teacher of adults in this area would be the ability of the teacher to adjust instructional techniques as the task and learner needs change.

Group Interaction

I think it's important to satisfy learners' social needs and one way to do it is to have this competency. Other, more learning-oriented justification can be found, however, for the inclusion of this competency. One of the richest resources for learning is the adult learner himself. Group interaction enables people to become more open to themselves, to draw on their personal experience and information, and to share that information in a way that maximizes learning.

The following practices would indicate a mastery of this competency: students are encouraged to discuss materials informally and to meet outside the classroom, classroom chairs are arranged to facilitate group interaction, group assignments are given, and social encounters encouraged during breaks. Opportunities for learner interaction could be measured by questions asked by the teacher and the sequence in which they're asked. An acceptable level of performance could be determined by observing whether the questions raised are too broad or too narrow in scope (that is, do they require just a "yes" or "no" response).

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Continual Evaluation

This competency is included because motivation and learning are enhanced by immediate and frequent information concerning progress toward learning goals. Teachers of adults should work with them in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress. In addition, the teacher should help the learner develop and apply procedures for self-assessment according to these criteria.

The use of programmed instruction could indicate the attainment of this competency. Other indicators would be evidenced by extensive feedback through the use of interviews, rap sessions, and counseling sessions. You could also ask the teacher of adults to perform the following task: from a catalog of instructional objectives in the subject-matter area, write two assessment items for each objective and outline steps the teacher would follow in involving the learners in the continual evaluation of their progress toward each objective.

Application of Learning

Numerous studies on the transfer of learning and the maintenance of behavioral change indicate that learning must be used to be retained.

Evidence of competency in this area includes providing work-study opportunities for the learner, using laboratory exercises where appropriate, and encouraging students to use their imagination to demonstrate what has been learned. Providing simulated situations or projects that allow for

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practically applying material taught is also an indication of the teacher of adults having skills in this area.

Aging Factor   Many research studies overwhelming show that certain physical abilities decline with age, such as speed of reaction time, vision, and keenness of hearing. (I've already made some provisions for the lessening of speed of performance in the "Learning Pace" competency). The teacher who fails to realize that auditory and visual acuity and energy tend to decrease with age may set unrealistic goals for his students and himself. The learning of older adults can be facilitated by teachers adapting the learning environment to counteract the impact of these changes.

Such adaptations that evidence the mastery of this competency might include using good lighting, arranging seats so individuals are close to the speaker and to the materials used in class demonstrations, using chalkboards that allow maximum contrasts, using textbooks and other educational materials printed in easy-to-read print, and the ability of the teacher to speak slowly and distinctly.

Learning Environment   Obviously, this competency overlaps with a number of other ones, but it's an essential competency if one is to be an effective teacher of adults. Adults carry a stigma that they're not very effective learners. Many also carry the burden of failure and unpleasantness associated with their learning during childhood. Teachers must help adult learners overcome their feelings of insecurity and fear of competition with younger adults and give them a new sense of mastery and success. Thus, a learning environment in which the adult feels comfortable and at ease maximizes learning.

Evidence that the teacher of adults can acceptably perform this competency includes providing a physical setting that doesn't evoke memories of past failure. For example, if possible, the learning experience shouldn't take place in the traditional classroom, but rather in a more informal hall or community center. If this isn't possible, the classroom should be arranged so the formalistic structure and the negative connotations that are too often evoked are circumvented.

Other observations that would contribute to an evaluation of this competency include determining whether the instructor promotes a warm and friendly attitude toward the student by allowing him to express his fears and doubts. Does the instructor avoid lecturing? Does he provide for testing that calls for a minimum level of competence, and for several opportunities to achieve at that level?

In an adult class, attendance at the 90% level or above could indicate that the learners feel that these factors have been provided. The number of adults who continue in the program and who seek the teacher for other classes may also indicate that the teacher has succeeded in providing a threat-free, supportive, and accepting learning environment for adult learners.

Conclusion

The teacher of adults functions in many different settings and with many different "types" of clientele. Thus, this "catalog" is listing competencies for a broad array of situations and students a teacher of adults might come into contact with. Certification based on performance will obviously require new techniques of teacher training.

I'm assuming in listing the competencies and the means by which they could be evaluated that their performance could be observed: in a micro-teaching situation; by direct observation as in an internship experience; and/or via video tape. The examples of observation that might be made to determine the possession of any of the 12 competencies by instructional personnel are by no means all-inconclusive. I'm sure that you, as a professional in Extension, could multiply these examples at least tenfold.

The certification of teachers of adults must be more than a process of shuffling transcripts. Performance-based certification will mean a lot more work for teacher educators, but it will assure the field of teachers who can teach in the highest sense of the word—facilitating and bringing about desirable instructional outcomes.