
*Adult Learners Welcome Here: A Handbook for Librarians and Literacy Teachers* is Marguerite Crowley Weibel’s third book and updates and expands on her earlier works *Choosing and Using Books with New Adult Readers* (1996) and *The Library as a Literacy Classroom* (1992). Weibel states she is writing for two primary audiences: librarians and literacy teachers/tutors. A medical librarian with a Master’s Degree in adult education, Weibel is an obviously gifted literacy tutor with a passion for books. She is convinced of the power of reading and knows how books can inspire, inform, and comfort people – even people who struggle with reading. This, then, is primarily a book about readers’ advisory for a special group of readers, namely adults with reading difficulties.

*Adult Learners Welcome Here: A Handbook for Librarians and Literacy Teachers* is divided into three sections. Part I outlines the role of the library as a “literacy classroom” and describes the state of literacy in the United States. Although Weibel quotes U.S. statistics, the situation in Canada is very similar, so her message is relevant to librarians in Canada. The profile of adult literacy students is similarly reflective of the Canadian experience. She also briefly describes the main educational theories and techniques for teaching adults basic reading and writing skills. This provides useful background for the sample lesson plans in the following chapters.

Part II *Literacy, Lessons, and Libraries* is the heart of the book. Each of the five chapters looks at a specific type of book or resource: art and photography; poetry; literature; non-fiction; print and electronic reference. A rationale for using that type of book/resource with adult new readers is given along with sample lesson plans and an annotated bibliography of recommended titles. These are “regular” mainstream books selected from the adult and children’s sections of the library. They are titles that most libraries, even Canadian libraries, would likely have in their collections. The bibliographies would need to be culled for titles that would suit the Canadian context and also augmented with additional Canadian titles. However, Weibel’s inspired selections give the reader a good sense of the types of titles that would work well with adult literacy students.

Part III looks at building literacy coalitions. “According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the original root of the word coalition is the Latin word coalere, meaning to sustain and nourish. That seems a particularly apt image of what a library does for literacy students: sustains and nourishes their developing literacy skills and their participation in a life of reading and learning. For this to happen, however, librarians and literacy providers need to work together. They also need significant support and assistance from the community at large. Recognizing this
need for collaborative efforts, library staff and literacy workers across the country are forming coalitions,” (p. 249). Weibel provides very concrete examples of what library staff can do to promote library literacy connections and also what literacy staff and volunteers can do. Although there is nothing new in this chapter, it would behoove all of us to consider Weibel’s suggestions and consider what more our libraries could be offering.

Adult literacy instruction is usually very focused on skill development, so when libraries develop adult literacy collections, they typically purchase books that teach, or provide practice in, some aspect of reading and writing. Weibel looks beyond the mechanics of learning to decode words and considers how to “connect” new adult readers with books. This is a very important connection that is often missed by government funders who see literacy programs as job skill training programs. We know that people become fluent readers by reading – and reading lots! Thus the choice of reading materials becomes crucial - what will “hook” struggling readers, what will inspire them to keep turning the page? Weibel answers that challenge very ably with this book and, at the same time, inspires us look at our collections in a new light and with new eyes.

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