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Labor Education for Women Workers

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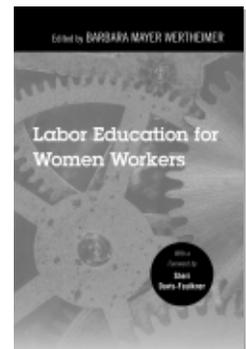
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CHAPTER 18

How to Choose and Use Materials in Education for Women Workers

By JAMES WALLIHAN

In selecting materials, designers of programs for union women face a dual task: they must draw from the the general domain of workers' education, while addressing the special needs of women. Locating appropriate resources and using them effectively is not always simple, but it is possible. The job is made easier when one knows what to look for, how to approach the search, and how to determine the most effective uses for different types of materials. Fortunately, the variety and quality of suitable materials has increased markedly in recent years.

Other contributors to this book have described development strategies, formats, methods, and subjects important to programs for women workers in particular and applicable to worker and adult education in general. This chapter focuses on teaching aids and seeks to clarify why the content and use of materials cannot be considered apart from the audience, goals, and methods of a program.

In their landmark assessment of workers' education, published in 1968, Rogin and Rachlin addressed the development and availability of materials in the field. They wrote that existing materials were fragmented in form, content, and location among individual unions and university labor education centers. With some exceptions, they stated, "there are very few standard materials that incorporate the best experiences so that they can be generally available," adding that "there has been little experimentation in the form of labor education materials."¹

Today we are in a period of dramatic change, and programs for union women lead the way in innovation and development of new materials.

1. Lawrence Rogin and Marjorie Rachlin, *Labor Education in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Labor Education, 1968), pp. 230, 235.

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Something like an explosion has taken place. This is not to say that fragmentation has been eliminated. The emergence of a single font of wisdom and quality materials would be a sure sign of stagnation. In women workers' education, as in any emerging field, creativity is essential to the development and use of materials. Persistent searching and the ability to adapt material has made it possible for the adult and workers' education specialist to find a variety of films, handouts, graphics, and that relatively recent staple of classroom education, the commercially published paperback, for use in programs for or about working women.

Why this development? To say that the impetus is women on the move is a truism. The movement both precedes and results from action, legislation, and increased attention by major institutions. It has created an incentive and a market. Programs and materials for union women need to draw on sources inside and outside traditional workers' education. If workers' education is "education directed toward action," as Rogin and Rachlin state, this is nowhere more true than of education for union women, which combines research, education, organization, and action, with social, economic, and political drives. The resulting instruction and materials both draw upon and enrich many of the traditional subject areas of workers' education.

In addition, technical advances and market changes have placed many audiovisual and print methods and materials within the means of groups with modest budgets, thus contributing to the development and use of new resources in many fields. Videotape equipment, for instance, is widely used now in courses and conferences. Less costly and more accessible are overhead projectors and sophisticated slide projection systems. The diffusion of filmmaking to individuals and groups of relatively modest means, largely a phenomenon of the past decade, has resulted in more and more innovative films. While production of a quality 16 mm film remains costly, anticipated advances in Super-8 mm sound systems should further this trend.

Even more widely utilized are advances in print technology. Photocopying and offset printing are eliminating reliance on the less adaptable mimeograph machine. Assembling handouts and manuals can now be accomplished by copying originals, cutting up or retyping, and then pasting up a master. Varied type styles can be used for text and headlines, choosing from "stick-on" letters or from a variety of styles marketed for ball-type typewriters. Multiple copies of a relatively attractive page are then run at low cost.²

2. Offset technology and changing markets have also hastened the spread of neighborhood "quick-print" shops, which employ few workers and are difficult

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Another advantage of offset is realized when it comes time to revise the material or correct a sentence or two. No longer is it necessary to type an entire new mimeograph stencil, or messily change the old one. The changes can be pasted in on the original page, or the page can be cut and pasted. This makes it much simpler to keep printed materials accurate and up-to-date.

Choosing Materials: Audience, Purpose, Methods

Materials and instructional aids can be matched to many audiences, purposes, and methods. Properly used, they enrich education and learning. Their purpose is not simply to entertain or relieve the instructor of the burden of preparing, although this is too often ignored in practice.

Perhaps the most thoughtless misuse of resources occurs when an instructor says, "I don't know what to do today, so I guess I'll show a film." No attention is paid to the audience's needs, the program's goals, or how the film contributes to learning. Another, less obvious, problem is the teacher who runs her favorite technique or teaching aid into the ground, despite the fact that other resources are available. At the opposite extreme is the over-mixing of media and materials, resulting in "media clutter." Again, the outcome is an obscured message. To be effective, media and materials should be chosen carefully and coordinated effectively. Properly coordinated media produce a synergistic effect in which each unit enhances the others, resulting in a total impact greater than the effect of each part.

In selecting materials, look ahead; how will they be used and who will be using them? Test against the program elements mentioned above—audience, goals, and methods—in terms of the basic principles of adult learning:

1. We learn what we want to learn.
2. We learn with our five senses. Involving more than one sense usually contributes to improved learning.

to unionize, although some are organized in certain areas. This can be a dilemma for the voluntary group or the unit required to use in-house facilities. The big no-no is going to a non-union commercial printer for typesetting, layout, or printing where a thorough search would turn up a union printer with a union label commonly termed "the union bug." If you do your own typing and layout, or if it is done with "labor donated," it may still be possible to have the work printed in a commercial union shop. The quality is usually as good or better, and the price reasonable. Unfortunately, the choice presented is often one of running the material in-house and non-union, or not running it at all.

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3. Different individuals learn in different ways and at different rates.
4. Adults frequently have a greater need to apply what is learned (workers' education is education geared toward action).

The Audience

Even with a specialized program, different individuals are likely to attend for different reasons. How many and how different are these reasons? A "profile sheet," handed out at the beginning of a program, can include questions on what participants want to get out of the experience and what special concerns motivate their attendance. Individuals bring to the program different communications skills and educational levels. Even in America, some come with serious reading handicaps. The materials mix for such a group should avoid lengthy printed matter and include more audiovisuals than would the mix for a group of teachers.

Related to the "different ways, different rates" principle is the fact that individuals differ in their information processing styles.³ Some are active learners who seek out information; others are passive and wait for knowledge or information to be presented. Some are quick at getting the main idea, but slow on mastering detail. Others are just the opposite. Thus a method or aid might be the primary learning vehicle for some, while it only reinforces a point for others, who might learn more effectively with a different method.

Perhaps the most thorough way to engage the five senses is the field trip. One cannot experience a chemical plant simply by viewing a film about it. The senses of touch and smell are engaged only when we approach the plant and get inside.

In choosing materials, keep in mind what the audience wants to learn and why different members of the audience want to learn. Experience has shown that working women coming to school after a day on the job and with family responsibilities waiting for them at home are especially motivated and goal-oriented. The instructor needs to demonstrate how the program's content plugs into their ongoing concerns, how the applications of learning will be useful.

Equally important is the format and sequence of the content. An exercise or demonstration might be conducted near the outset of the program rather than put off to the middle or the end. This could tap the style of

3. Patricia A. McLagan, *Helping Others Learn: Designing Programs for Adults* (Addison-Wesley, rev. ed., 1978), p. 52.

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those participants who have a high need to apply and see the early consequences of what is learned.⁴

The selection of materials is governed to some extent by the goal or goals that a program is designed to achieve. A program can help learners acquire facts, information, or knowledge. It can be designed to change attitudes or priorities (and as a result, perhaps, behavior), or it could emphasize mastery of new skills and behaviors. Or it might lead to increased creativity.⁵

In practice, of course, several of these goals should be built into each session. A program designed to familiarize participants with the provisions of equal employment opportunity legislation (information), might also help them develop a perspective (attitude) on their situation and the possibilities for improving it, demonstrate concrete ways to use the law to advantage or to convince others to do so (skills), and adopt an approach that leads to the invention or discovery of new strategies appropriate to each participant's situation (creativity). Each of these goals lends itself to a different type of instructional aid.

Methods and Techniques

An array of different instructional methods may be effective for a single audience and purpose. We want to synchronize methods with the other elements, and avoid a sole reliance on films, for instance, in a program whose goals make it important for participants to engage actively and manipulate the subject matter and material. Similarly, lengthy texts are not appropriate for a one-day conference on skill development. Participants can better spend the time doing what is best done in the company of others, reading the materials later on their own time.

There are two ways to view the interaction of audience, goals, and methods in the selection of materials. One is to see each element as establishing successively narrower limits within which to choose materials. The other, more useful, view is to look at these elements as an orienting framework within which to try new sources and types of materials that will enrich a program.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5. For two excellent sources on the relationship between different types of goals, methods, and materials in adult education, see McLagan, *Helping Others*, and A. A. Liveright, *Strategies of Leadership in Conducting Adult Education Programs* (New York: Harper, 1959).

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Much can be said about letting course content guide materials. But the labor educator should review the group's sophistication: can it cope with the materials? Is the material accurate? Is it credible? Is it in any way misleading? Questions like these should be routinely asked for each program.

Using Materials

Materials must be seen as integral, essential, and vital to the instructional task. Where available, quality materials should be used to present and to amplify the course content. Their effectiveness depends on instructor attitudes, on the thought that goes into selecting them, on the skill with which they are utilized, and on the extent to which they enable the teacher to develop class involvement, without which learning may not occur.

Preorganized aids are those that are locked into a format of more or less fixed duration. The user cannot normally mix in other techniques or aids until the "run" is completed. These include films, film strips, audio tapes, many slide presentations, and other such aids. Because they are preorganized, these aids often relieve the instructor or designer of putting together the feature element of the presentation. In turn, however, they impose other tasks. The user must be familiar with their content and must take extra care in arranging appropriate facilities and equipment.

Often there is no opportunity to interrupt the presentation cycle. It is essential, therefore, to orient the audience in advance in order to maximize the educational experience. A brief description of purpose and content, followed by a suggested list of questions, is a widely used technique. This structures audience perceptions and experience. Follow-up exercises, discussion, or other methods can relate back to the initial questions. For many working adults, material on or about union or other employed women is new; ample time to react to and discuss it is essential.

Films are widely used in workers' education, but the person who participates in several programs may end up having seen most of the good ones. Classic grievance-handling films such as *Shop Steward* and *Grievance* are dated and limited in their usefulness for women workers. Recent films of excellent quality, such as *Union Maids*, *With Babies and Banners*, and *Maria* help to fill some of the gaps. Films offer vicarious experience in a subject. The limits are in the availability of good films and in their misuse.

Such other audiovisual aids as videotapes and slide shows are finding wider use, especially as more portable, inexpensive equipment becomes available. Some of these aids permit decent quality self-production, and offer the additional advantage that presentations can be interrupted either

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by instructor or participants. Manual-advance slide presentations and videotape recorders with a "pause" feature are examples. Include in this category such video aids as the overhead projector, often a good replacement for the blackboard in lecture or discussion settings.

Audio aids such as the tape recorder and even the telephone can be used to bring interview material to participants in courses and conferences, as well as to individuals. Recorded music is highly appropriate in certain situations.

Graphic Materials

This category encompasses much of what labor and adult educators rely on in education programs. Narrowly conceived, graphics are written or pictorial representations—print materials. But the word itself suggests vividness, and this should key us to keep open possibilities for displaying or projecting graphics with video equipment.

Printed materials come in many shapes and sizes, with a number of uses. Length often suggests, and sometimes limits, their use. Brief materials can illustrate lectures and enrich discussion, and are suitable for direct use by participants during the program. Lengthier materials should serve primarily as take-home reference items. Often these are combined in the same set of materials. In some situations printed materials serve as a permanent record of what was covered, and may substitute for note-taking. This is useful where the program presents new information or organizes information in a new framework.

Materials can mix outline and text segments. The outline and selected text might be appropriate for in-class use, with the major portion of the text reserved for individual use back home. As a general rule, texts should be read sparingly in class, perhaps to review technical subjects, contract clauses, and the like. Even here the benefits are questionable, although it can be argued that group reading facilitates later word recognition and understanding when the participant needs to refer back to the material. A preferred practice is to discuss assigned readings in class, focusing on aspects students found confusing, or with which they disagreed. This underscores the importance of the subject and the material and stimulates interest in it.

The skills required to use print materials vary with the form. Coordination, required for multiple handouts, is made simpler with advance planning, numbering systems, and so on. For programs using more than token materials, the advantages of arranging handouts so they can be placed in a looseleaf

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notebook, with a table of contents, are obvious. Color coding handouts or manual sections simplifies in-class directions for their use.

Printed materials serve as discussion guides, mind joggers, checklists for later reference, and so forth. They should be designed for each specific program. This takes into account the capabilities of instructor as well as student. Where several instructors will be using them, it may be necessary to build some standardization. Overly rigid instructor guides may even indicate exactly how many minutes to spend on each point. On the other hand, some materials are so vague that discrete topics may emerge as one and the same when presented by different people.

Materials should include instructions to help less experienced teachers vary their methods. Examples are sections in manuals headed "case study," "discussion question," "film," "group exercise," and "game." Unless the teacher totally ignores the materials, the fact that participants will also see these headings creates an expectation that the method will be used. If it is not, participants can suggest its inclusion.

Three guidelines for relating visual and verbal elements in the teaching message should be stressed.⁶

1. *Maintain visual simplicity and verbal clarity.* Use simple visual illustrations. Seek simplicity and economy in word choice. Material should be written for listening, not reading.

2. *Consider visual-verbal relationships.* Choose visual elements carefully. Eliminate the extraneous; strive for harmony and balance. Lettering style should suit the purpose and context. All elements should communicate the main ideas. Words should supplement and reinforce the visuals without adding too much information. Use related elements and relate the elements you use.

3. *Organize elements of the message for visual-verbal flow.* Position the elements to guide the attention of the audience. Emphasize pattern or logic in visual and verbal elements.

Over 60 percent of the information we absorb is visual. It is important not to distract from our verbal message with visual "noise," or to distract from the visual message with unrelated verbal clutter.

Conclusion

The use of materials is limited only by the interests and imagination of those who develop and take them to the classroom. John Bennett,

6. Based on *Effective Presentations*, a handout by Dennis W. Pett (Instructional Services, Indiana University, Bloomington).

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a co-worker of mine, has amassed a large collection of union badges and buttons going back to the days of the Knights of Labor. He uses his collection to teach the history and organization of the labor movement.⁷ Here is a concrete example of creativity in the use of materials in workers' education.

As women participate more fully in education programs, in the work force, and in labor organizations, it is important to incorporate information about working women into course content. In the past their role, needs, and concerns have been omitted. The materials are at hand to remedy this. It is up to the educator to ensure that in the future they are utilized.

7. John W. Bennett, "Using Union Memorabilia as a Teaching Aid," *Labor Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1978): 114-30.