The role of adult literacy center and its design

Design, Architecture

Adult illiteracy is defined as the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who cannot read and write with understanding a short simple statement on his/her everyday life. A large number of Americans have trouble reading, speaking, writing, and listening. With this percentage in mind as well as meeting the needs of a community, adult literacy centers have been created. Adult literacy centers are made to improve literacy, which in part boosts self-esteem and life-long learning. They improve the quality of adults' lives by teaching them to read, write, and comprehend correctly.

Almost all of the people that are seeking an adult literacy center struggled and were left behind by their teachers and classmates. Parents from low income families come often to better themselves and make a better living to support their children, as well as adults that had to leave school due to child birth and problems at home. Most of these people are under 25 and come to create something out of themselves before they see it is too late to learn. A portion of adult learners also use English as their second language. Many people come to earn their GED (General Educational Development). Most places of employment today require a college diploma or a passing of the GED. For example, in one case, a man was let go from his job and was searching for a new job but no one wanted to hire a high school dropout. The man took time and finally decided to go back to a school that was made for him. He studied hard and received individual teaching and finally earned his GED and is now employed. Other people seek adult literacy centers to become better parents, siblings, and family members. They want to be able to read to the children that come into the world and don't want them to be

left behind as well. In addition, other adult learners want to be able to completely understand what is going on in the community, in the world politics, so that they can potentially use their knowledge to influence their communities on issues they became passionate about.

There are many branches of adult literacy because most adults come to literacy centers looking for something different. Many students come to learn the Adult Basic Education (ABE). This group consists of English speakers who want to improve their reading, writing, speaking, problem solving or computation at a level necessary to function in society, on a job or in the family" (National Reporting System for Adult Education, 2001, p. 25). ABE learners, many times, were never given the opportunity to reach their higher education and employment goals.

Some of the adults that come in may have had a learning disability throughout their school years, while others may have a developmental limitation and want to improve skills so that they may eventually have more opportunities to use the knowledge learned. Adult secondary education (ASE) is " designed to help adults who have some literacy skills and can function in everyday life, but are not proficient or do not have a certificate of graduation or its equivalent from a secondary school" (National Reporting System for Adult Education, 2001, p. 25). Adults usually attend ASE classes to earn a GED (General Education Development). Sometimes these students do not know what the test consists of and end up needing extra tutoring before they take their GED. Generally, each subject on the test can be taken up to three times per year. If a student passes any of the subjects, they do not need to

retake that portion of the test. When these students come with their GED in mind, they tend to want to be in and out. A group of adults who claim English as a second language (ESL) come in to seek instruction. These adult learners want to improve their English conversation skills. They usually ask for individual help. ESOL learners also work on improving reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar and other skills once their speaking is fairly fluent.

Many people refuse to enter an adult learning center because they fear what everyone around them will think, especially those who are reasonably successful and well-known in the community, would rather not have services at all than have their friends and neighbors find out that they have a literacy problem (Rabinowitz). A team of volunteers, who are not widely known, can be hired to bring people in and make them want to stay by teaching them with an unbiased approach.

The use of digital media can help draw students in and stimulate their learning process. Using digital media can help when wanting to find new topics that will enhance interest in reading and writing for all students, including adults, to support their learning with prompts to give them more practice. It is likely to motivate their interest in at least three ways: technologies are novel, they can ease the unpleasant parts of practice, and they can empower the learner through development of valued, relevant digital literacy skills (National Research Council).

A question that many people ask is " how does the built environment impact and affect human experience, behavior, and performance?" There are numerous ways that an environment can affect a person's behavior. Human-

centered design is a design and management framework that creates solutions to problems by using the human perspective throughout the design process. Human perception has a great impact when designing an adult literacy center. For example, the school can be located in a safe area that is located a distance away from the main streets of the town, for privacy reasons. The design could also have private rooms to work and study in, but at the same time, have access to the larger room of students and teachers. The private rooms, if requested, could help bring comfort and ease to each student. In each classroom, there should also be room for individual teaching sessions, perhaps with a whiteboard, in each row. Mainly the goal of this facility is finding privacy while at the same time connecting with a room full of students that want to learn just as much. The facility will use the human design perspective to create a school that adults do not mind going to, and create a place that they want to return to.

When discussing the built environment, there are many factors that are actually used to build that environment. The space and distribution of objects and things in the room can greatly affect a person's learning ability. A major problem with creating a room is designing a space that avoids crowded areas and gives each person their own personal space. Through the use of organizers, the rooms can have signs, partitions, doors, and other personal identifiers. People generally feel more comfortable when they are assigned an area and stay close to that personal area. The personal area can move, and that is where the design process gets tough. Another factor to consider is lighting because it greatly affects ones learning process. Lighting is divided into two categories: artificial and natural. Humans need natural

sunlight, and that it beneficial because natural light is known to enhance moods and promotes the health and well-being of each student and teacher. Artificial lighting provides the same illumination as natural lighting, but it does not have the same effects on humans. Another important factor is the air quality of the indoors. If the indoor air quality is bad, people can end up getting sick or having serious health problems in the future. When someone is in a learning environment and feels like their physical well-being is at risk, it is likely that they will want to stop coming and participating. Thermal comfort also plays a large role in student performance. Studies of classroom temperature found that when learning environments included air conditioning, the incidences of classroom annoyances were reduced, and attitudes, performance, and student behavior improved (Stuart).

Finally, noise plays a large role in shaping human perception and feeling in a certain environment. Noise is one of the main sources for distraction and interference with learning. The effects of noise can impact the skills a student is trying to learn greatly, because if they are distracted they are not completely understanding what is being taught to them. Noise from other teachers and students can also affect stress levels, and more noise creates more stress. When students are distracted, their work becomes less important to them and they become less satisfied with themselves. There are many more factors in the built environment that affect the way human feel and the way that they perform.

Universal design involves designing products and spaces so that they can be used by the widest range of people that is possible. There are seven

principles of universal design: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. The principles list the best way to incorporate access for everyone and everything in a certain place. It tends to make things safer and more convenient for everyone. Similarly, ergonomics is designing with people and their efficiency in the environment. One of the main goals of the adult literacy center is efficiency. With universal design and ergonomics in mind, the center will use every space to the best of its ability to accommodate all of the people that walk in the doors.

Wayfinding incorporates all of the ways people orient themselves in a physical space and the ways that they navigate from place to place. In an adult literacy center large signs are needed and should be located all the way around the entire building. The signs should impact people immensely, but what if the student that comes in is not able to read? The walls will be colorful and promote a welcoming environment, the different parts of the building should be separated from each other. The atmosphere of this facility will be free flowing and will promote simple navigation.

In conclusion, the adult literacy center will be created solely to satisfy the needs of each person that steps foot in the building. The staff will have a clear understanding that each student comes from a different walk of life, and that is something that should be understood by a staff member. The main goal of the adult literacy center is to give adults the extra push that they need, and to provide them with an education that they have been longing for.

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