

ADULT EDUCATION FOR DEAF PEOPLE

By KELLY W. BOESEN, Vocational Education Principal, American School for the Deaf

In a speech presented at a workshop on continuing education for deaf adults at Kansas City, Missouri, in 1969, Mr. Fred R. Murphy posed an important question about problems concerned with adult education for the deaf. Paraphrasing Mr. Murphy, we ask, "How are we going to get deaf adults into classrooms when they have such a hard time fitting into those desks made for teenagers?"

An adult deaf man is certainly no longer a growing boy, and at the same time, he may have grown *beyond* the educational offerings of the residential school for the deaf program. If the deaf adult has outgrown the traditional deaf school program, then just *how* do we provide him with updated skills, attitudes and abilities?

Fitting the adult to the program seems to be a bit impractical. After all, what would we do? Require diets before permitting enrollment in adult education classes? It therefore seems to me that we must fit the program to the adult. This may take a bit of "doing" on our part, but it appears there is no other way.

At the American School for the Deaf, along with many other places in this nation, we are searching for some of the answers to adult education for deaf people. At ASD, we feel that we offer a strong vocational program at the secondary level. Ours is certainly *not* the largest or the most extensive program in the nation among schools for the deaf, yet we like to think it is among the best in terms of quality. We feel that we offer solid, practical, needed vocational-technical training at the secondary level.

Our philosophy is to provide relevant, realistic, terminal training for high-school-age deaf students. At the same time, we are working on the integration of deaf adults into the secondary program. We are finding that deaf people are responding to these programs. They are coming to us daily in ever increasing numbers. Thus, we may have some thoughts to share with members of the Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Deaf Adults. We are very much oriented to the practical side of education at ASD. Yet,

for the sake of theorizing here, we will attempt to discuss our program in the light of some of the more recent recommendations for adult education of the deaf and our recent experiences in this line.

These are days of "power". First, we had black power, and then we have deaf power, and now this conference comes along with manpower. The thought of all this power makes a teacher wish for just a small amount of another kind of power, namely, brain power. Nevertheless, the theme of this conference being manpower, we would like to look at it for a few minutes.

Each day we see many high school-age students readying themselves for the world of work, and daily we also see many deaf adults trekking back to the American School for the Deaf in search of assistance. In fact, the numbers in which these deaf adults arrive has us firmly convinced that we certainly have no scarcity of manpower. We feel that we actually have an abundance of manpower. Our task then must certainly be to utilize properly this abundant manpower available to us.

When we deal with people, we run into all sorts of motivational problems, and solutions to those problems become paramount. We feel that we have a very natural "motivation" for providing adult education at the American School, and we feel that similar "motivation" surely exists in virtually every area of this nation. I am speaking of the combined force of automation and economic conditions which currently influences employment in virtually every section of our country and every segment of our population.

People are being replaced by machines at a much more rapid rate than ever before, and we must ask ourselves how this will affect the skilled and semi-skilled deaf workmen who comprise the largest part of our deaf adult population.

As I have said previously, we are not experiencing problems in recruiting adults for our educational training program at American. Rather, we are experiencing problems in developing sufficient programs and staff to meet the needs of the population coming to us for assistance.

We feel that a similar situation must certainly exist throughout the country, if only we will open our eyes to it.

In an address delivered at the opening ceremonies of the National Leadership Training Program in the Area of the Deaf at San Fernando Valley State College in January of this year, Ralph White posed some questions that we, as professional workers with the deaf, surely need to consider. Among his questions were many dealing with the "whys" of failure of many adult education programs for the deaf.

From the vantage point of our brief experience at ASD with the integration of secondary and post-secondary deaf students, we must comment on the area of curriculum as being of extreme importance. Dr. Lloyd Johns of San Fernando Valley State College has often expounded upon the ABC's of curriculum. He has often drawn a comparison of curriculum areas with a three-legged stool. For our purposes today, leg "A"

of this stool will represent articulation. To us, let this mean the content of the curriculum or how the different parts of the program fit together into a progressive, logical, sequential pattern.

Leg "B" of this three-legged stool will represent curriculum balance. There should be proper proportions of content in reference to mathematics, science, English, health, vocational training and so forth.

And finally, we will let leg "C" stand for coordination. To us, this will represent how one part of the program ties in with another part. Here we need to ask ourselves if there is duplication, if the coverage of the course is adequate, and certainly, what will be the end result of the program?

As Dr. Johns is fond of pointing out, the three "legs" must be approximately equal in order for us to have a usable stool, or a viable curriculum.

Perhaps the preceding seems to be very elementary, and we would be among the last to deny that charge. From observing the failures and successes of adult education for the deaf across America, and observing adult education on a first-hand basis at the American School for the Deaf, we must conclude that one of the most commonly overlooked, yet strikingly obvious failures of adult education programs has been the lack of emphasis in the area of curriculum.

From remote observation and from actual experience, our own conclusion is that an articulated, balanced, coordinated curriculum is of paramount importance. When adult education has something to offer to deaf adults, they *will* respond. When their needs are being met by the curriculum, they will pursue adult education programs. It is our feeling that for most programs which have failed, a large measure of the responsibility for that failure can be laid at the feet of poor or no curriculum development. Good ideas, competent teachers, high calibre administrators and fine facilities shall all prove to be of no avail if there exists no comprehensive plan of studies wherein a person can understand the goals of the program as they relate to him. He must have a program that will motivate him. A well-designed, comprehensive educational plan (a curriculum) will be a giant step in this direction.

As we have said previously, many adults are applying at ASD for training in job skills that will help them find employment. These need personal guidance and counseling, academic enrichment, training in social skills, and other kinds of assistance. It is here that a comprehensive curriculum can help them in fulfilling their needs.

Our recommendations for adult education programs serving the deaf are as follows:

1. Utilization of curriculum meeting the needs of the adult deaf person and not merely repeating secondary program matter. If this requires going beyond the capabilities of the sponsoring secondary program, then this should be done.

2. A comprehensive curriculum should be designed to fit the needs of a particular adult education program. This curriculum should include the aspects of articulation, balance and coordination in order to meet the definition of "comprehensive".

Certainly many other considerations need to be kept in mind in the development and conduction of a quality adult education program for the deaf. However, we believe the area of curriculum to be of primary importance as we have tried to point out here.

We would like to close with the story of the old farmer who bought a very stubborn mule. It seems this mule would do no work at all for his first owner, and so the buyer, after completing the purchase, picked up a two-by-four, walked around in front of the mule, and "let him have it" right between the eyes. I am sure you are familiar with this story, and as you no doubt remember, the punch line is that when asked the reason for having hit the mule, the buyer replied, "Oh, that was just to get his attention."

My point in using this old story is that the farmer had a plan of attack. I hope you will compare this with a curriculum. The farmer had a way of getting what he wanted. A curriculum fulfills the same purpose for an adult education program, hopefully with less pain.