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Reading Resource Guide

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Reading Resource Guide

BY ELEANOR A. DANIEL

Name the area of adult education in which you are interested, and you can find plenty to read. Small groups, adult development, adult class formation, adult instruction and learning—all have significant available resources. The purpose of this article is to introduce you to reading in a variety of areas of adult education. Fuller reviews of several of these volumes (indicated by asterisks) are included in this issue's "Bookshelf."

Adult Development

Anyone who teaches adults should have at least general familiarity with the dynamics of adult development throughout the life span. It hasn't been very many years that such books existed, but we finally have acknowledged that adults experience times of predictable change just as children do. Any one of several books can provide the insights needed. One I would suggest is *Adult Development and Aging* by John C. Cavanaugh (Brooks/College Publishing, 1993). It is especially useful because it includes a section on aging and death, an omission from many of the earlier books—and some of the current ones—in adult development.

Faith Development

James Fowler has written prolifically about issues of faith development. His particular concern is how we think about God and about faith issues. In *Stages of Faith* (Harper & Row, 1981), his seminal work, he presents and explores six stages of faith development. Though the reader will not agree with all of what he has to say (maybe even much of what he presents), this work has had a profound impact upon research in the area of faith development. Fowler has written other works, such as *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (Harper & Row, 1984); *Weaving the New Creation* (Harper & Row, 1991); and *Stages of Faith and Religious Development*, edited by Fowler with Karl Ernst Nipkow and Friedrich Schweitzer (Crossroad, 1991). The last book looks at implications of religious development for church, education, and society.

Fowler's work has given birth to many other works. Two of the best are *Faith Is a Verb* by Kenneth Stokes (Twenty-Third Publications, 1989) and *Life Spirals* by Iris Ford (Welch, 1988). Ford's book in particular examines faith development in light of the work of the local congregation. Fowler's work is important enough that several authors

have responded to it. One of the helpful responses was edited by Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks and is entitled *Faith Development and Fowler* (Religious Education Press, 1986).

An extremely practical book, providing helpful insights for adult education and pastoral care, is *Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle*, edited by Kenneth Stokes (Sadlier, 1982). It is a collection of essays by such notables as Malcolm Knowles, Gabriel Moran, James Fowler, and Linda Vogel.

The Adult Learner

An aspiring adult educator *must* read something by Malcolm Knowles, the father of the adult education movement in this country. A good place to begin is *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (Follett, 1980). But equally important is *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Gulf, 1973). This book significantly altered much of my own thinking about adult education.

Beyond Knowles, Stephen Brookfield's book *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 1986) still provides helpful material for the adult educator. Patricia Cross has similarly helpful resources, particularly *Adults*

as *Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 1981).

A comparison of the status of adult education in the average local church with the material found in Knowles, Cross, and Brookfield (and a host of other later writers), shows immediately why adult learners aren't attracted to learning opportunities in many churches. If we are serious about improving adult education, we must read, digest, and implement the principles presented by these writers.

Adult Education in the Local Church

Theoretical books are quite important for providing a foundation for adult Christian education. But in the end, every minister and church leader is most interested in the practice of Christian education in the local church. Fortunately, many excellent books are available to guide us.

An excellent resource in its day, though a bit dated now, was Jerry Stubblefield's *Ministering to Adults* (Broadman, 1986). It is still worth reading. But a new book, similar in format, is probably the best first choice: *The Christian Educator's Handbook of Adult Education*, edited by Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit (Victor, 1993). Like the Stubblefield book, it is a collection of chapters devoted to the practical issues of adult education in the local church. Two other books to consider are Nancy Foltz' *Handbook of Adult Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, 1986), another collection of essays from various authorities and practitioners in the field, and *The Religious Education of Adults* by Leon McKenzie (Religious Education Press, 1982). McKenzie has been a contributor to adult

education for many years. This book is especially valuable in looking at beliefs about adult education and how they affect what we do. A particularly helpful chapter is the one that identifies problems in adult education and how to overcome them. *Teaching and Learning in Communities of Faith: Empowering Adults Through Religious Education* by Linda Vogel (Jossey-Bass, 1991), though decidedly from a liberal perspective, forces one to think carefully about adult education.

John Elias is a prominent Catholic adult educator, a professor at Fordham, who will challenge the thinking of most of us. His *The Foundations of and Practice of Adult Education* (Krieger, 1982) is a basic handbook for adult educators. The first part deals with an understanding of adulthood: social contexts, development, learning, and history. The second part then introduces the practice of adult education. He deals with theoretical approaches, organization, planning, design, and evaluation. A second helpful resource from Elias is *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education* (Krieger, 1995). Elias is currently working on a history of adult education, including both Protestant and Catholic efforts at adult religious education.

Two particularly insightful books have been especially helpful to me in administering adult education in the church. The first and, I think, the best is *Strengthening the Adult Sunday School Class* by Dick Murray (Abingdon, 1981). It includes a suggested procedure for establishing new classes, one I have used often and have found most beneficial in starting successful adult classes. The second, intended to be the sequel to Murray, is *Vital Adult Learning* by R. Wade Paschal (Abingdon, 1994). It is clearly more recent and, though

it isn't Murray, is very much a helpful handbook.

Teachers in the local church would profit from books such as Richard Robert Osmer's *Teaching for Faith* (Westminster/John Knox, 1992), *Growing Adults on Sunday Morning* by Knute Larson (Victor, 1991), Delia Halverson's *Leading Adult Learners* (Abingdon, 1995), *Growing a Great Sunday School Class* by Debra Fulghum Bruce and Robert G. Bruce Jr. (Abingdon, 1994), and *Creative Bible Teaching* by Larry Richards and Gary Bredfeldt (Moody, 1998). (The Richards and Bredfeldt book is an updated and expanded version of Richards' original 1970 book by the same title.) All of these books provide practical teaching and lesson preparation helps that will indeed improve the average adult Sunday school class.

Small Groups

Perhaps the most basic book to examine to understand small groups and their potential is Gareth Icenogle's *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry* (InterVarsity, 1994). Similarly helpful is Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook of Small Groups* (Victor, 1993). If your need is a practical handbook for creating a small group ministry, try Neal McBride's valuable guide *How to Build a Small Group Ministry* (NavPress, 1996). It is packed with helpful forms and tips for beginning and guiding small group ministry. Be sure to examine Michael Mack's *The Synergy Church: A Strategy for Integrating Small Groups and Sunday School* (Baker, 1996). This is an expansion of his master's thesis, which he did under my direction at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary.

Singles' Ministry

Until recently, the book to read in singles' ministry was *Single Adult Passages* by Carolyn Koons and Michael Anthony (Baker, 1991). That work has perhaps been superseded by Albert Hsu's **Singles at the Crossroads* (InterVarsity, 1997). Many other books about singles' ministry are available, though these two may present the best balance.

Family Ministry

Family ministry is as much adult education as it is anything else. You can find family life books at every turn—a few helpful, most not as insightful. The two that will probably prove the most practical are *Family Ministry* by Charles Sell, 2d ed. (Zondervan, 1995) and *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Family Life Education* by Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit (Victor, 1993).

Conclusion

As you can see, there are ample resources for every area of adult Christian education. These represent only what I consider to be the core materials that can shape your ministry in effective ways. Read on!

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