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“My Turn,” Women’s Goals and Motivations in a Diploma Program: A Constructive-Developmental Approach

By Eleanor Drago-Severson

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BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is a reporting of findings from a larger study sponsored by the National Center of the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In this article, the responses of eight women enrolled in a diploma program through their employer, Polaroid, were analyzed and reported. The author used a constructive-developmental approach to understanding how the motivations of the women for participation in the diploma program changed over time.

The theoretical framework is based on a combination of developmental stages from a number of theorists including the work of Gilligan (1982), Kegan (1982), and Kohlberg (1984), among others. Three developmental stages critical to adults' learning were identified by the author. The first stage is instrumental knowers, in which a person is oriented toward their own concrete needs, self-interests, purposes, and desires. In essence, the person looks at what is in it for themselves. They view knowledge as a type of possession, something to be acquired and used to address personal needs or to solve problems. Knowledge is often viewed as coming from an authority such as a teacher or book. In this stage, education is instrumental; that is, it is an instrument used to acquire other things (a job, credential, promotion, etc.)

Learners in the second stage are called socializing knowers. In this stage, a person is sensitive to others and dependent on external authority

There are three developmental stages described based on ways of knowing.

As learners move from being instrumental knowers to social knowers to self-authoring knowers, they experience perspective transformations.

for their own sense of value and self-worth. Overriding questions at this stage include “What do you think I should know?” and “Am I meeting your expectations?” As in the previous stage, learners frequently see knowledge as information needed to fulfill social roles and meet the expectations of authority figures such as teachers or employers; knowledge is something that comes from authority figures. Education, at this stage, is about what a person is: “I’m accepted because of what I know or can do.”

The third stage is self-authoring knowers. In this stage, one becomes attuned to one’s own personal values and internal authority. Considerations move from concerns with pleasing external authorities to developing a sense of internal authority, a personal identity that provides a basis for critiquing one’s own performance. Self-authoring learners increasingly become concerned with what they want to learn as opposed what they think others want them to learn. Learners become aware that knowledge stems from their curiosity, and they take a sense of responsibility for their own learning. They begin to understand that their life is being enriched by what they learn. Their conceptualization of education at this stage moves from what they are to what they can become through learning and education.

Drawing on the work of Mezirow (2000) and others, the author postulates that transformative learning occurs as people move from one of the above stages to another. Drago-Severson (2014) explains that transformative learning consists of “increases in a person’s cognitive, affective and interpersonal capabilities which develop abilities to take broader perspectives and better manage the life’s complexities” (p. 3). Thus, as learners move from being instrumental knowers to social knowers to self-authoring knowers, they experience perspective transformations.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were based on progressive qualitative interviews with eight women over the 14 months they were enrolled in a diploma program at their place of work. The average age of the learners was 42 with a range from 27 to 58. Most of the participants were married and had children. Seven of the women were born in West Africa, and one was born in the Caribbean.

They had lived in the United States an average of 20 years; all eight women were nonnative speakers of English.

The interviews focused on the participants’ learning experiences and how they transferred their learning from the classroom to work and other aspects of their lives. Of particular emphasis was ascertaining why the women were

enrolled in the diploma program and what they hoped to gain from doing so. Data analysis was conducted by identifying emerging themes regarding motivations for and expectations from learning.

FINDINGS

Three general themes emerged from the data regarding motivations to participate in the diploma program. The first theme was practical goals (i.e., increased work opportunities). All of the women expressed that they anticipated that attending the diploma program would yield practical results. Examples of these practical goals included improved communications skills on the job and increased opportunities for promotion in the company as a result of obtaining their high school diploma. The second theme was timing. Timing of their participation in the diploma program was a major issue for all of the women in the study. The women indicated that their participation in the program was related to the needs of their children and families. The third theme was leadership aspirations as parents and workers. The women wanted to assume a leadership role in their families. This was frequently expressed as a desire to help their children learn and succeed in life. Participation in the diploma program helped them move from a role of dependency to one of leadership in their families.

DISCUSSION

These three major themes were further analyzed in terms of the developmental model described above. The women were interviewed over the course of their enrollment in the program. During that 14 month time span their motivations for attendance changed. The changes correspond with changes in their ways of knowing as they transitioned from instrumental knowers to social knowers to self-authoring knowers.

The author provides many examples of quotes from the women to illustrate these changes. For example, one woman transitioning from instrumental to socializing ways of knowing expressed the desire to obtain her diploma not just because it offered increased opportunities, but because it was a symbol of personal accomplishment. One result of her learning was the ability to ask questions and speak her mind and not be afraid of being looked down upon for misspeaking due to her lack of command of English. In another example, a participant expressed that her understanding of school had changed. At the beginning of the program, she wanted to attend because it was good for her at work and it helped her be a better role model at home with her

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children. While in the program, this woman developed an appreciation for the process of school. Learning for her was equated with practice, practice meant developing competence, and competence resulted in respect from teachers and employers. She felt like people no longer looked at her as if she was "stupid."

The author also provided examples of women transitioning from socializing way of knowing to self-authoring way of knowing. One participant was initially concerned about how others saw her (socializing way of knowing). As time progressed in the program, however, she became increasingly aware of herself as a success story, one that she hoped would inspire her children. She felt like she was growing into the kind of person she wanted to be, someone who had finished school and could dream of more for herself and her children.

CONCLUSION

The constructive-developmental model presented by the author is a framework for understanding the women and their ways of knowing. The three stages each represent ways of knowing that describe learners at different stages and times in the program. Transitioning from early stages to later stages shows development over time. Each stage represents a different way of thinking about oneself and their concept of the nature and purpose of learning. In order to transition from one stage to the next, the women had to undergo a perspective transformation; they had to see themselves differently in relation to education and learning. This perspective transformation is the essence of transformative learning as described by Drago-Severson in the article.

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BOOK REVIEW



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"Sit & Get" Won't Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies That Engage the Adult Brain

By Marcia L. Tate

2012; 2nd Edition; Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA
192 pages, 20 chapters, paperback, \$34.95 (New)

How do adult educators ensure that their facilitations maintain a healthy balance between active engagement of learners and retention of the content being explored? What specific strategies stimulate brain cognition or a desire to participate? *Sit and Get Won't Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies that Engage the Adult Brain* by Marcia L. Tate offers answers to these questions. As its name suggests, the book rejects the notion that consistent stimulation of the brain and, by extension, effective learning can occur in a setting where adults receive information passively. As such, its purpose is to describe 20 methods of delivery that grow dendrites, or memory cells, and facilitate long-term retention. Tate begins with adult learning theories that outline the conditions under which adults learn best. She then discusses learning strategies related to these theories. She concludes with sample professional lesson designs and practical tips. Like its previous version, the book is geared towards adult educators in various contexts.

Throughout her work, the author echoes the belief that recall, retention, and other key outcomes of effective learning are directly proportionate to the levels of active engagement that adult learners experience. Active engagement, she contends, is dependent on the presence of specific conditions, unique to these learners. This perspective is firmly situated in the context of both traditional and contemporary adult learning theories. Her outline of adults' ideal learning conditions in the first section, for example, includes an emphasis on knowledge co-creation, prior knowledge and experience, collaborative learning, and reflection. Such emphases mirror elements of Knowles' (1980) conceptual framework of adult learning as

The book's strengths are content, organization, and layout.

Tate provides over 150 specific activities that complement her strategies and closes with detailed lesson plan samples.

well as elements of self-directed learning, transformational learning, and experiential learning theories.

In building on the foundation of these “best” conditions, Tate offers distinct strategies that embody them in the second section of the book. Strategies range from brainstorming, games, and humor to mnemonic devices, storytelling, and technology. They form the core content of the book, and she offers a holistic approach by exploring not only the “what” or definition of each but also the “why” and “how.” The “why” of a strategy offers diverse theoretical frameworks that provide a solid rationale; the “how” includes multiple learning activities that are specific and complement the strategy. Each strategy description concludes with a section that allows readers to reflect on its application to their teaching or learning.

The book’s strengths are content, organization, and layout. Its content is diverse, relevant, and practical in several ways. First, the author uses varied theoretical frameworks from research on the brain, on adult learning, and on learning styles. She clusters theories from these different areas of study and uses them to provide evidence for the potential effectiveness of each learning strategy. Because each one is framed in diverse theories, it reads as foundational to any effective facilitation, thus appealing to practitioners, program planners, and designers alike. This is also useful as an educational tool for many who facilitate adult literacy programs, but who are new to the field or may not be formally trained in adult learning principles.

Second, Tate provides over 150 specific activities that complement her strategies and closes with detailed lesson plan samples. While these are diverse and steeped in the theories, they are also written in such a way that readers can build on or omit aspects that may not relate to their contexts. These resources may prove invaluable particularly for the adult basic instructor looking to improve instruction with a wide range of fun, practical, and creative activities. They would also, by extension, benefit ESL or adult literacy learners who often struggle with tensions related to writing tasks or returning to a formal classroom environment.

Third, the author adds to the conversation in the field surrounding “[Knowles’] pedagogy to andragogy continuum” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.87) – noting that many of the strategies originate from K-12 spaces. Despite these strengths, Tate did not allude to cross-cultural training/teaching issues, which might have been useful given

growing contemporary work on culture and non-Western ways of knowing in adult learning and ever-increasing ethnic and racial diversity within adult basic education programs.

The author skillfully models several of the adult learning strategies she advocates in the way the book is organized and laid out as well as in her writing style. Written in first-person narrative and interwoven with fun and lively accounts of her adult facilitation experiences, the language of the book is clear and simple; its tone is conversational. Though her target audience is adult educators, it seems the author avoids assuming that readers are *au fait* with the field's vocabulary because she explains most of these thoroughly. In addition, she uses open and closed questions to stimulate critical thinking and reflection, drawing on readers' lived experiences and inviting them to respond with ideas from their own contexts. Tate adds variety by including her own use of each strategy; she also caters to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile modalities by using textual information, visual illustrations, reflection writing, and other physical exercises.

Tate's objectives included describing brain compatible strategies and their associated theoretical frameworks, activities, and lesson designs - all of which are successfully met by the close of the book. The book's contents are precisely limited to these objectives, making it an even more fulfilling and enjoyable read. I highly recommend it not only to instructors who facilitate learning in adult basic education programs but also across diverse adult learning contexts.

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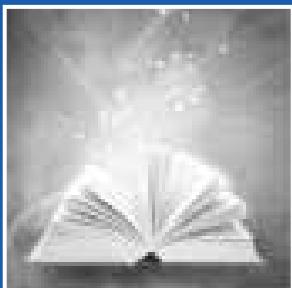
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BOOK REVIEW



Dyslexia Decoded: What It Is, What It Isn't, and What You Can Do About It By Sue Dymock and Tom Nicholson

2012; Dunmore Publishing, Auckland, New Zealand
145 pages, paperback with accompanying CD, \$29.99 (NZD)

The aim of this beautifully designed and reader-friendly book is to provide “a useful and practical resource for educators and employers” (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012, p. 7). Sue Dymock and Tom Nicholson, university professors and reading researchers from New Zealand, give a fine presentation of the important issues facing adults with dyslexia as well as their teachers and employers. The authors’ presentation is firmly grounded in the most current research on dyslexia and other reading difficulties, and avoids what the authors call the “science fiction” that can surround the field of reading. It is one of few resources that provides a truly practical approach to the assessment of reading problems in adults as well as to the interventions that are most appropriate and effective for them.

The book covers a range of topics vital for working with adults with reading problems. Dymock and Nicholson define dyslexia and put forth a “simple” cognitive model of reading and reading disability that guides the development of appropriate interventions. Next, the authors focus on assessment methods and tools as well as discuss teaching reading and writing skills to adults with dyslexia and other reading problems. Also, the authors point out in a poignant way the toll reading disabilities can take on self-esteem, self-aspiration, education, work, and survival skills.

Before each chapter of this book is a list of “Key Messages” that summarize the most important points, along with a range of resources. The chapter on defining dyslexia includes an adult dyslexia checklist that points out both the strengths and weaknesses associated with the reading disability. The focus is not strictly on problems; there is an acknowledgement of the strengths of dyslexic individuals that can be exploited in interventions. Dymock and Nicholson take the time to dispel

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some of the common misconceptions about dyslexia, remaining firmly grounded in the scientific literature. There are simple, sensible steps for assessing reading problems that can be used by teachers and tutors that do not require a doctoral degree to interpret. The assessments are extremely practical, with a laser-like focus on the instructional needs of adult learners. There are helpful guides to decision-making and the use of assessment results. The chapters on instruction include resources for working on basic reading and writing skills, reading comprehension, and narrative and factual writing. Suggestions are appropriate for a range of adult learners from beginners to college students. The teaching ideas are readily put into practice and many of the suggestions place an emphasis on workplace needs and applications. Also, there is a nice emphasis on the use of technology as a method for helping to compensate for and accommodate the problems dyslexia presents to students.

There are some limits to the usefulness of this resource. There is scant attention paid to multisensory instruction, an intervention method that has demonstrated its worth with children and young adults (Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008). Educators might want to supplement this resource with material such as the Wilson Reading System (<http://wilsonlanguage.com>), which provides wonderful basic training in the use of multisensory instruction with adults. In addition, a great deal of the practical research referenced in *Dyslexia Decoded* was conducted in New Zealand and is very specific to New Zealand governmental institutions and policies. The relevance for teachers or employers outside New Zealand is limited at best. Finally, the accompanying CD provides some nice illustrations of the concepts and resources present in the book, but is not a vital component and does not add much value to the overall product.

In conclusion, *Dyslexia Decoded* is written in a simple and straightforward, but not simplistic, manner. It is highly readable and accessible to both professionals and those without a significant background in reading or adult education. Dymock and Nicholson draw on their extensive research and clinical experiences as well as some real common sense to give educators and employers realistic, compassionate, and practical ways to help adults with reading disabilities.

Mary S. Kelly

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Dyslexia Decoded is written in a simple and straightforward, but not simplistic, manner.

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WEB SCAN



*Reviewed by
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Online Tools for Photo Storage

Why store learning-related photos online? Images are powerful tools for learning a range of subjects: English language, math, science, writing, and others. They are great for English vocabulary development. For example, ask your students (you may need to show them how to use their cell phone digital photo feature) to take pictures of things that are words they want to learn. Students can then upload each picture with a caption including the word, part of speech, and definition. Ask them to group their photos in folders such as “Local Market Foods,” “Trees and Flowers in My Community,” “Children Playing,” “Visiting My Public Library” or “Community Service Agencies.” This helps students build vocabulary and community knowledge as well as to learn digital filing strategies. A favorite strategy to encourage writing comes from ESL instructor Susan Gaer at Santa Anna College in California. She asks students to take a picture of something important to them that is hanging in their closet, perhaps something they brought with them from their home country. Then she asks them to write about what it is, why it is important, and what memories it evokes.

Practices like these reinforce that adult learning is connected to family and community. Adult learners in Massachusetts, for example, have made “virtual visit” web pages with photographs they took at a local labor history museum, a nearby computer store, and a neighborhood community health center. You could take your students on work-exploratory field trips where, if the workplace allows it, they can take pictures of the work process and then create a presentation for other students about what they have learned about certain kinds of work.

Ask your science students to search the web for good microscopic images of white and red blood cells or one-celled animals such as the amoeba or paramecium or to find images of deep ocean geographical features; then they can label, sort, and file these images. Students can use saved images for their slide presentations for English, writing, science, or math.

As a teacher, you could develop image-based formative assessments and find and store the images online so you could access them from your classroom, office, or home. For example, to assess English vocabulary, you

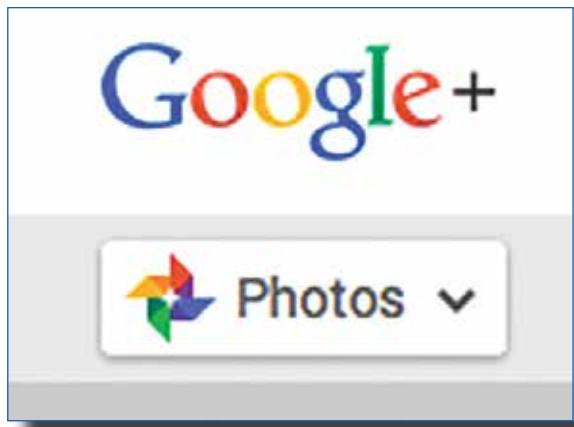
could develop assessment items that had a photo followed by multiple choices of the word or its definition.

Most of the image storage apps point out that they are also a good idea for backing up images stored on your computer.

Here are a few of the better-known, free, online storage spaces.

1. Google+ Photos (formerly Picasa)

<https://plus.google.com/u/0/photos> or <http://picasa.google.com/>



Picasa, a free photo storage service, is now a Google+ feature. With it, you can upload photos from your computer or smart phone, enhance them, create animations from five or more photos, and display photos on a computer or smart phone.

2. Flickr

<https://www.flickr.com/>

Flickr offers 1,000 GB of free storage, enough space for more than 500,000 photos. Flickr is an international online community of shared photo collections in which individuals, organizations, or a teacher and her/his students can upload and share photos. Flickr has partnered with the Library of Congress: “1. To increase access to publicly-held photography collections, and 2. To provide a way for the general public to contribute information and knowledge.”



3. Dropbox

<http://dropbox.com>



Dropbox is a simple way to view, share, and backup your files, wherever you are.

Dropbox is a well-known online “cloud” storage service. Many teachers set up file folders and store documents there. Some use it to develop an online presence that students can access from a computer or other Internet-accessible device in order to get classroom assignments, lesson extensions and enhancements, or “make-up” lessons after missing class. Dropbox can also store photos. Dropbox basic is free for the first 2 GB of space, which should be fine for documents and a few photos. Dropbox Pro is \$9.99/month for 1,000 GBs.

4. Shutterfly

<http://shutterfly.com>

Shutterfly offers unlimited, free, online photo storage. For a fee, it can provide paper or canvas prints, photobooks, cards, posters, or calendars made from your stored photos. It is accessible from a computer, iPad, iPhone, Android phone, or Kindle Fire.



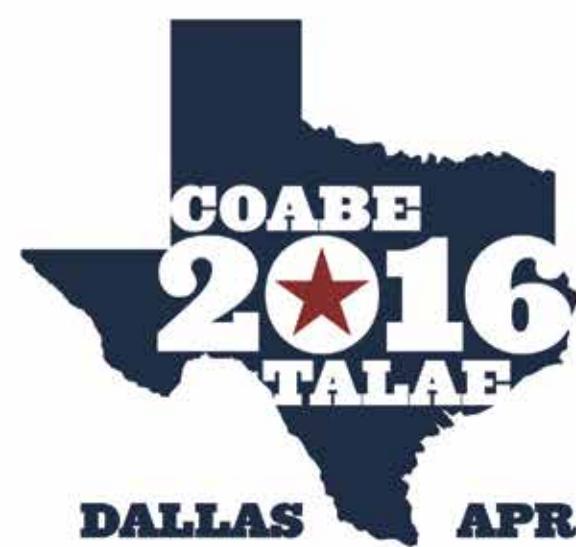
MY SHUTTERFLY MY PICTURES SHARE DESIGN STUDIO

5. Snapfish

<http://snapfish.com>

Snapfish offers unlimited, free, online photo storage for members who maintain active participation. It can provide print photo products such as photobooks, cards, calendars, and more.





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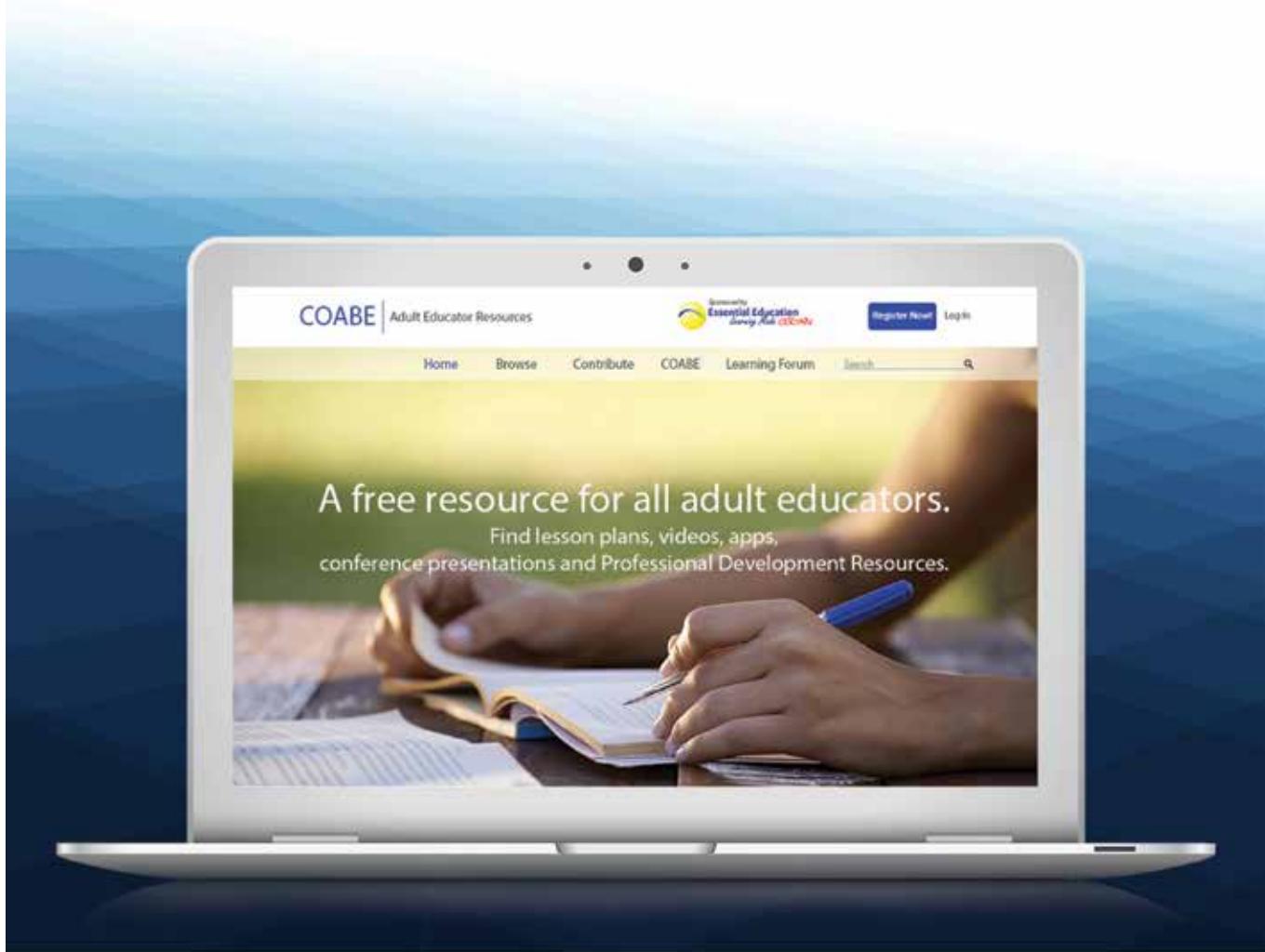
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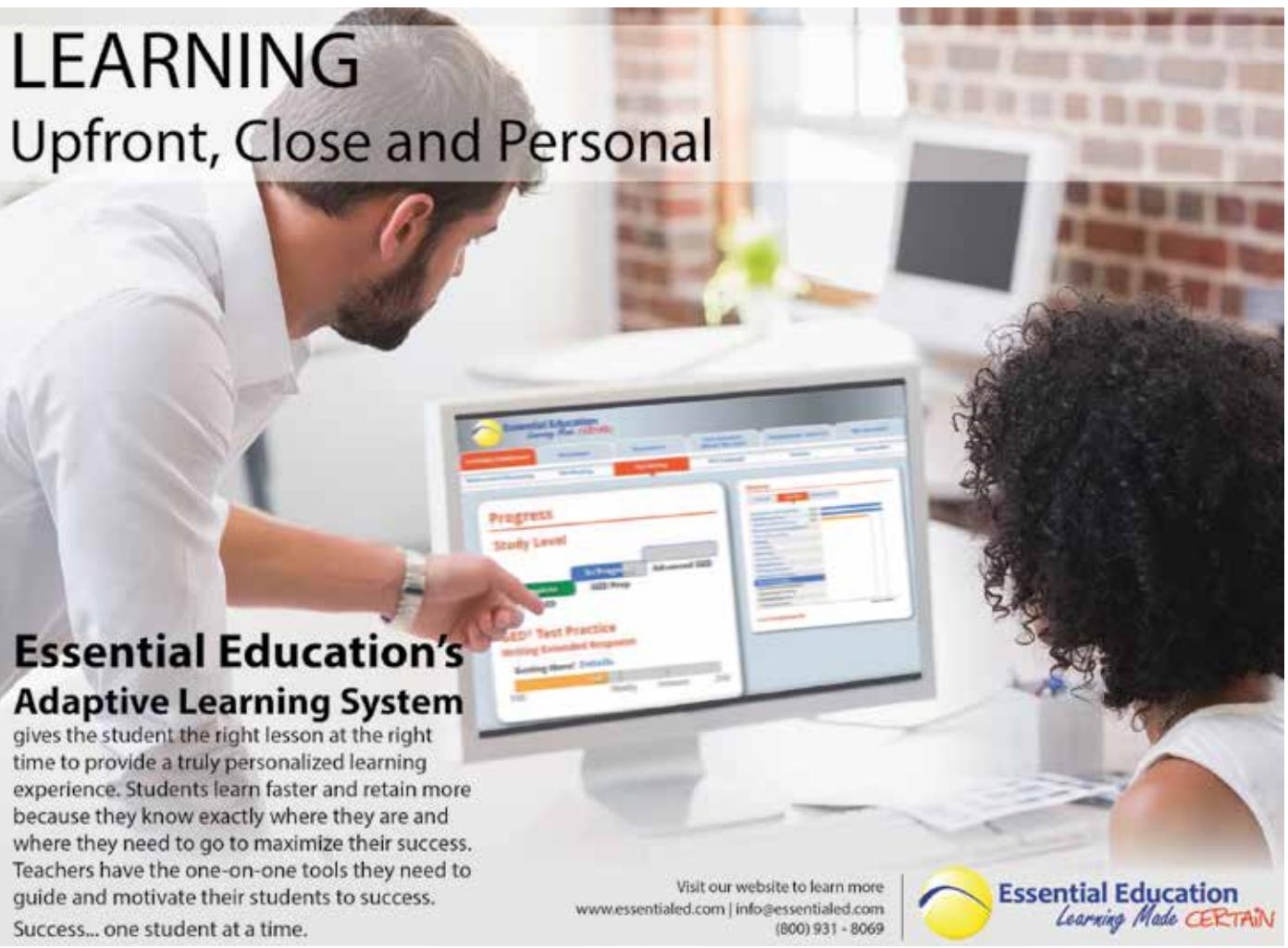
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