

The Functionally Illiterate Employee

THERE IS AN ABET CURE

ABET Hands-On English/Numeracy

❖ The Predicament

“Our trainees are out of their depth. They don't understand the training material; their English is too weak.”

“We have to start the upgrading of our employees by upgrading their English literacy levels first.”

These two excerpts – taken from two progress reports by two different training managers (two different companies) – summarise the predicament of (a) the employer, and (b) the *transferee employee* who is functionally illiterate.

❖ Transferee

A transferee is a person who, in order to make a living, has to transfer daily from his/her natural language environment (and culture) to a different language environment (and culture) and is assumed/expected to cope like a mother-tongue user. In South Africa more than 90% of the workers transfer to an English language environment daily. Some find the transition easy, some manage somehow but the vast majority don't cope at all.

❖ The Cause of Functional Illiteracy

Educationists agree that there is a threshold of *minimum* learning to ensure retention (e.g. reading, writing and numeracy skills) after an individual drops out of an educational programme. *Retention*, in fact, is a key goal of education planners world-wide. Poor retention or partial retention is the *dilemma* of the functionally illiterate transferee.

❖ Definition

Functional illiteracy is the inability to use literacy and numeracy skills to cope with the demands of daily living AND the workplace.

❖ Incidence

During the nineties our consultancy, Hough & Horne, assessed the English literacy skills levels of 646 blue-collar transferees drawn from 53 companies countrywide. We found that while employers believe that 70% of their transferees are functionally literate and 30% are functionally illiterate, the reality is an *inversion* of those percentages.

Subsequent H&H research conducted during 2002 in the commercial sector involving 11000+ respondents shows a significant countrywide drop in countrywide functional skills levels – both English and Numeracy. In fact, more and more school leavers seeking employment hold credentials that are not commensurate with their basic English and Numeracy skills.

❖ Realities of the Work Situation

The lingua franca of commerce and industry in the S.A. is English. It follows that a poor command of English and/or critical deficiencies in basic skills makes it impossible for the transferee to take written instruction, let alone for the transferee to upgrade his/her skills. *Trainability in an English language environment and English literacy skills level go hand in hand.*



Institute for the Development of
Critical Skills of ETD Practitioners



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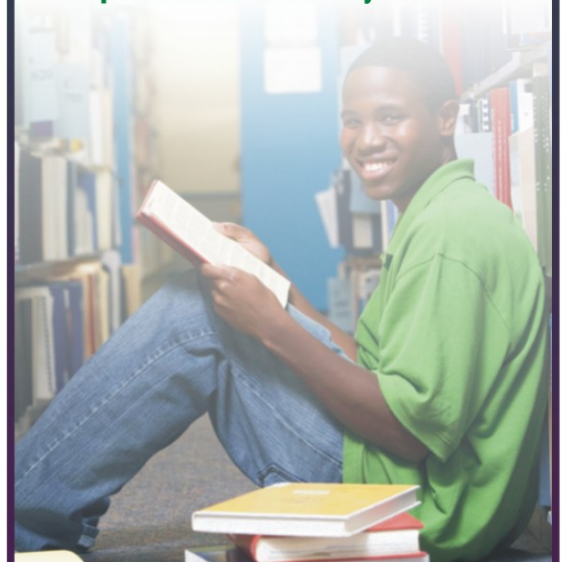
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The Institute supports effective
and quality education by providing
educational resources
and
competence training
for teachers and facilitators from
pre-school to tertiary level.



Rationale for Implementation of the

❖ General Aim

Accepting the NQF and SAQA challenges and the social responsibility to stimulate and accelerate education, training and development.

❖ Specific Aims

Upgrading basic communication (*viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing*) and numeracy skills in order to:

- ◆ meet NQF 1 exit level outcomes;
- ◆ stem the tide of regression into illiteracy;
- ◆ stimulate conceptual maturation;
- ◆ optimize company training;
- ◆ enhance job performance and productivity;
- ◆ improve industrial relations;
- ◆ raise the self-esteem of workers;
- ◆ increase job-satisfaction;
- ◆ establish a foothold for self-advancement, empowerment and improved quality of life;
- ◆ promote interpersonal relations and better understanding.

❖ Description of Programme

ABET Hands-On English is a graded, modular, holistic (LEA), vocabulary enrichment language training programme for **functionally illiterate adults**. The programme is aligned to literacy and communication unit standards on ABET levels 1 to 4 with exit point equivalent to NQF level 1. Hough & Horne, original programme designer, has been accredited as an UMALUSI provider of adult education. Hands-On English is also IEB-registered.

❖ Programme Steps

1. Needs Assessment/Placement Guide: ELSA Elementary (ABET)

Our ELSA Elementary establishes your employees' competency-input levels and identifies *illiterate, marginally literate, literate and functionally literate* employees (see *definitions** next page). In addition it acts as a placement guide for the functionally illiterate's slotting into the modularised ABET Hands-On programme.

The **Placement Guide** takes approx. one hour to administer to groups of no more than 20 evaluands. ELSA is, moreover **norms-based** (South African norms), **standardized, culture fair, cost effective** and its **validity** and **reliability** 84% and 0,86 respectively.

2. ABET Hands-On English

This consists of nine modules, *viz. Literati* (for illiterates or atrophids) and/or 1A & 1B (ABET I), 2A & 2B (ABET II), 3A & 3B (ABET III) and 4A & 4B (ABET IV). The programme is designed to take employees from an

English literacy skills level equivalent of ABET I through to ABET IV. It is based on the Learning Experience Approach and the **main objective is communicative competence**. Hands-On English is also (i) scientifically graded, and (ii) caters both for the demands of adult learner methodology.

The success of Hands-On English is attributed to the fact that it is a holistic, contextualised skills programme for adult transferees. Transferees exposed to Hands-On English improve their skills three times faster than those taught with a decontextualised programme.

Since all Hands-On modules are unit standards-based, national accreditation is a reality. Employees enter the programme at their functional level as set out above. The duration of Literati is 90 hours, 1A and 1B require approx. 80 hours, while 2A to 3B takes about 40 hours each, and 4A and 4B about 60 hours each. Groups should be 12 or less. For Modules 2A to 4B, ideally 3 × 1 hour lessons should be attended per week. Modules 1A and 1B can be conducted on a staggered hour-a-day basis, whereas Literati can be either staggered or a block release (three weeks).

3. Block Release

We regard a block release for the regular Hands-On English programme as a second best option. Hands-On block releases are the exception rather than the rule. Where and when implemented, it is imperative that a post-course-care and mentor-support system is in place to ensure retention.

4. Testing and On-going assessment

The regular tests are OBJECTIVE (i.e. scoring is *mechanical* and not influenced by the judgement of the scorer) and ANSWER KEYS and PROGRESS CHARTS are provided to facilitate EVALUATION (i.e. the systematic process of determining the extent to which educational objectives are achieved).

5. Certification of Course Facilitators

The certification of facilitators is regarded as a must by the compilers of the ABET Hands-On programme for two reasons: (i) it provides on-going feedback necessary to update the programme periodically, and (ii) as a guarantee to employers that the facilitator is competent to run the course. In most cases the duration of such a certification course is two days. Training is scheduled on an ad-hoc basis. See Kaleidoprax price list for training fees.

6. National Accreditation

All Hands-On Modules are ABET-linked and unit standards-based. Eligible trainees who seek a national qualification do so by entering and sitting for IEB examinations. The exit point is GEC (ABET IV/FET 1).

ABET Hands-On Programme

7. Mentoring

We recommend that Hough & Horne mentor the Hands-On programme on a monthly/quarterly basis to ensure that objectives are being met. Interim progress reports are submitted for the duration of implementation or, alternatively, are assessed and awarded credits by presenting a portfolio of evidence.

8. Post-ELSA Test

On completion of the programme an ELSA is administered and a full report is submitted. This service is an optional extra.

❖ Contents of the Programme

Hands-On English for Adults concerns itself with skills and competencies – in other words, with **outcomes**. It is not based on a school teaching syllabus, but rather on the knowledge and skills required for effective communication as set out by SAQA. It follows, therefore, that the desired outcome is **communicative competence** in order to link the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) to the needs of the real world.

❖ Implementation and Incentives

These vary from company to company depending to a large extent on whether the programme is offered during working hours or not. In the ideal situation, the course is

offered at the rate of two or three one-hour sessions per week. This allows time between lessons for assimilation and application of new skills while not over-extending the entire duration of the programme. Where this is impractical in terms of production time, one two-hour lesson per week will suffice. (Modules 1A and 1B can however be conducted on an hour-per-day basis.) **For optimal results**, lessons scheduled to take place early in the day will be preferable to those at the end of a busy shift.

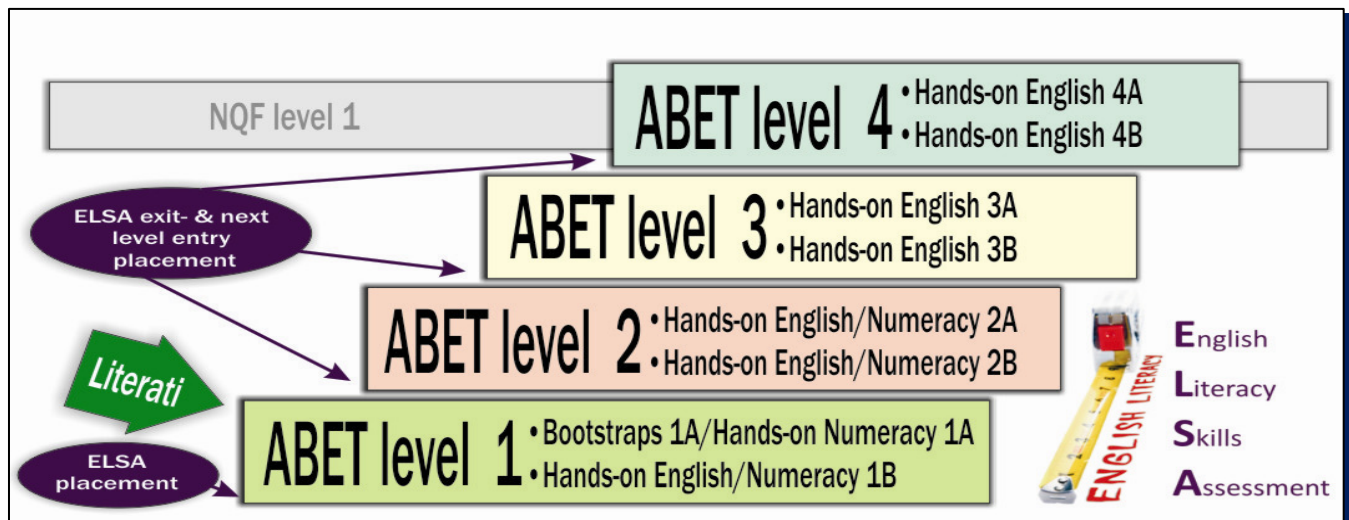
Many companies charge a nominal fee for attendance on the course with the offer of a double return on successful completion of the programme. This tends to increase employees' commitment to the project and reduces the drop-out rate.

❖ Costs

The cost of the work-books vary between R70,00* (1B) and R150,00* (4B). ELSA Elementary (including admin., marking, processing and report) costs R90,00* per employee. (These figures exclude VAT.) See Kaleidoprax price list for further details on facilitator training and resources.

❖ Accreditation

Hough & Horne has acquired programme approval from UMALUSI Council for Quality Assurance. The Kaleidoprax Institute, managing company of the learning programme, has full ETDPSETA accreditation status.



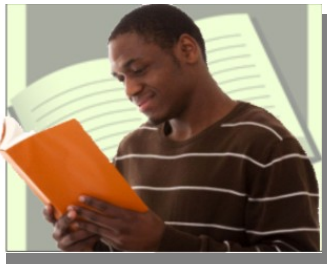
Definitions*

Illiterate: unable to read and write. In most cases this person has had no schooling. Employees falling into this category will require a course in Basic Literacy in their mother tongue. Our Literati training programme caters for this need.

Marginally literate: able to write his name and read and write few basic words. In most cases this person has had less than 8 years formal education and has lost his skills (or regressed) due to disuse. Employees in this category require a basic literacy course in English, possibly at an accelerated pace.

Literate, but not functionally literate: having limited reading and writing skills but not enough to cope with everyday tasks (equivalent to three years of formal schooling). Here too regression plays a role, even where the employee claims to have passed matric. This employee enters Hands-On by slotting in at the appropriate level.

Functionally literate: having the reading and writing skills necessary for everyday living, including work. Theoretically a skills level equivalent to eight years of formal schooling. Most employees in this category fall beyond the scope of the Hands-On programme and do not need this literacy skills training.



What is Literati?

Literati is a *fun-packed, fast-track board game* that revives, revitalises and even improves dissipated mother-tongue reading and writing skills.

- ◆ A combined 'phonic-learning experience' model
- ◆ Constructivist (outcome-based)
- ◆ Accelerated learning principles
- ◆ Harnessing the strengths of learners to drive the programme
- ◆ Scientifically sequenced
- ◆ Steps of learning spelt out in 21 steps
- ◆ Linguistically neutral



What are the features of an accelerated learning situation?

The learners are **relaxed** and **confident (not stressed)**, the learners are **interested** in what they are doing and **having fun (not bored)**, and the learning itself is **meaningful (not meaningless)**. Speed of learning is a MAIN outcomes value. An individual is fast-tracked according to his/her motivation, atrophy level and capabilities.

How long is the Literati programme?

It depends on the learner, say between 70 and 90 hours.

How many learners can be facilitated by a skilled Literati facilitator during one session?

Between four and twenty. It follows that you would need five kits for twenty learners.

Added benefits of Literati application?

- ◆ It is not only the starting point for reading and writing, but develops thinking and problem-solving skills.
- ◆ Reading for meaning and stimulated conversations.
- ◆ Provides opportunities to link to life-skill contexts & build on learning in such awareness programmes.

How long does it take to train a Literati Facilitator?

Experienced literacy trainers/facilitators can be trained in two days. Four days for novices.

What comes after Literati?

Literati is the 'kick-start' part of English ABET 1, and is proven to accelerate learning in the rest of the programme.

Literati is essentially a primer for a basic literacy training programme. Becoming literate is the next most important **first step** towards becoming a self-directed, life-long learner. Literati is the **key**. The **revived-literate** will need help and support to ensure that the door remains open and that he/she does not lose his/her key.



- ◆ **Literati** is the brainchild of Theunis Horne, a professional educator-cum-communication skills consultant with 50 years experience in ETD.

- ◆ **Literati** is marketed and managed by the **Kaleidoprax** Institute, who also trains facilitators.

Literacy Training
for South Africans



'PEOPLE WHO THINK EDUCATION IS EXPENSIVE, SHOULD TRY IGNORANCE'