Build a Little, Test a Little

A consultative approach to providing training that builds communities

Consultative Community Engagement

Build a Little, Test a Little

Many of our local communities throughout the world independently lack the ability to unite our resources and collectively work toward changing our condition. Some problems we face are too big and complicated and require more resources than we have. We need to break them down into smaller parts and try to solve those within our reach.

For example, in broad regions of the world one in five persons do not have the literacy skills needed to function in today's environments. This means they do not have the ability to fill out forms, follow instructions, or learn new skills without dedicated support.

Even when special programs are created and funded to develop these skills, the number of people who lack essential reading and writing skills remains stubbornly high.

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Obstacles that get in the way of progress include:

❖ The entire support system is set up to prioritize people who can quickly complete training, often leaving behind those who need more time to overcome greater literacy gaps.

❖ Programs that offer more personalized assistance frequently say they can only do so with additional private support.

❖ Many locations that lack programs also have high concentrations of low literacy. In lots of these cases the nearest program requires travel beyond the means of some people.

The net positive impact of these programs across the globe continues to be much less than expected.

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The proposed solution approach is to apply the idea to "build a little, test a little" to the process of providing training. This phrase often describes software development efforts where teams of people coordinate their work. Instead of trying to complete the project all at once, they intentionally divide and organize it into smaller, consistent pieces.

This makes it easier for them build and then test the performance of smaller chunks of software before moving on to the next part. When tests reveal failures, they fix the problems, retest, and move on with the development process.

Failure is an incredibly powerful tool for learning. The solution approach explained on the following slide integrates failure into the training process. Dealing with failure is highlighted in the team focused performance training.

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We want to transition from the "as is" process where training programs are:

- ❖ Third party stakeholder designed.
- ❖ Instructor directed.
- ❖ Competitive individual focused performance training.

To the "to be" process where training programs are:

- ❖ Active participant stakeholder designed.
- ❖ Facilitator directed.
- ❖ Consultative team focused performance training.

The intent is to build in our communities the capabilities to use strategies, tools, and methods to solve our problems through consultation with ourselves and others.

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What if we follow a path where we work directly with the very people who need a better solution, and engage them in the problem solving process?

In the following example*, we will demonstrate an approach to building reading skills where the effort is broken down into four self-reinforcing parts:

Determine Purpose
Approach the Text
Read
Evaluate

*Adapted from Omie Drawhorn and Teresa Perrin (2013). *Essential Reading Skills.* Essential Education.

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Let's say we want to decide whether or not to move to a new location and rent a place to live. To accomplish this we would have to be able to read and understand a rental agreement.

D – This situation helps us realize that one of the important factors in improving reading skills is to *determine our purpose* for reading. We could ask ourselves the question:

❖ What about the agreement must we understand to make a good decision whether or not to rent this place?

Well, for sure we would need to understand the details of the agreement. That includes finding any details that might cause problems. And finding details that need to be explained more clearly.

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A – Once the purpose for reading is known, we will need to develop an approach to reading the rental agreement. We refer to this as developing a way to *approach the text.*

In this example we could ask ourselves:

- ❖ What do we already know about rental agreements?
- ❖ What specific details are the most important ones to understand?
- ❖ What sections or other features of the text can help?

Asking these types of questions helps us identify important parts of the agreement, as well as those sections we might be able to skip.

An important component of the proposed solution approach is to use an online platform named ShuraForAll. It provides structured and repeatable processes where multiple users work in teams to address issues and solve problems.

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In this instance, imagine two teams named Journalists and Creatives consisting of three people in each team, working toward improving their reading skills. As they work through the **DARE** process, they come to the **R**ead step described in the following paragraph. (Note: The platform can be used throughout the **DARE** process. For convenience, we have selected only the **R**ead step to highlight how it works.)

R – Next, comes the step where we *read* the text. To check whether we are staying true to our purpose for reading, we should ask ourselves:

- ❖ Are we getting the information we need?
- ❖ Do we understand what we are reading?
- ❖ Are we running into unexpected obstacles?

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Using the ShuraForAll platform, the Facilitator encourages each participant to enter each of the previous questions in the context of the team the person is working with. **Exhibit 1** shows part of what one of the team members has entered.

Exhibit 1

J **Joyce Flynn**
2024-08-13 at 15:26

Develop the practice of asking questions that help understand how things work.
Team: Journalists

Achieve Rate
58%

Action step
Weight : **8**   Done : ✔
Answer the question: Are we getting the information we need?
↩ Comment

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Each person is expected to work toward meeting an objective as they use the tool. In this example, Joyce is working on the Journalists team and on the objective "Develop the practice of asking questions that help understand how things work."

Notice that at this stage of her work her Achieve Rate is 58%. This number is automatically computed by the tool as work is being performed.

Based on the number of Action Steps completed and their Weight (importance), both self-assigned by Joyce, the Achieve Rate is calculated. This statistic provides a measure of the degree to which each team member is focusing on the most important parts of the work. The score shown is Joyce's individual score as she works with the Journalists team.

To provide evidence that supports indicating that an Action Step is complete, the content can be included using the Comment option. The evidence can also be uploaded in the form of documents in various formats.

Moving on to the next question: "Do we understand what we are reading?", note in **Exhibit 2** where Joyce explains that she has not yet reached a firm understanding of the rental agreement.

Exhibit 2

	Weight : **9.5** Done : -

Answer the question: Do we understand what we are reading?

↩ Comment

> **A** **Ahleyah Abdul-Rahman**
> 2024-08-13 at 16:54
>
> I might be able to help with this. I will upload an example of a more simple lease agreement where things are explained more clearly.

> **J** **Joyce Flynn** ⌄
> 2024-08-13 at 16:52
>
> So far, I think I have a very limited understanding of this rental agreement. For example, I don't clearly understand our responsibilities compared to the owner's responsibilities.

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This stimulates a response from a team member who offers help. From this example we can see how ShuraForAll creates an environment that enables team members to help each other perform better. When consultative team focused training happens like this, we see improved performance at both individual and team levels. **Exhibit 3** shows the automatically generated User Profile Report for Joyce at the individual level for the two teams she works with and the objective she is working toward.

Exhibit 3 - User Profile Report

Joyce Flynn
Building Reading Skills

Objective	Achieve Rate
Develop the practice of asking questions that help understand how things work.	60%

Team Name	Achieve Rate
Creatives	61%
Journalists	58%

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As other participants enter and complete their Action Steps, the tool combines all actions and produces a comprehensive Shura Profile Report as shown in **Exhibit 4**. This view helps everyone understand the progress of their collective efforts. Getting a sense of how everything is coming together in real-time can help identify where problem areas exist. It is important to note that each participant can view his/her individual performance scores and everyone's combined performance scores at any time.

Exhibit 4 - Shura Profile Report   **Building Reading Skills**

Objective	Achieve Rate
Develop the practice of asking questions that help understand how things work.	79%

Team Name	Achieve Rate
Creatives	81%
Journalists	75%

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At this point we continue using the **DARE** process. Based on our answers for the **R**ead step questions presented earlier, we might need to go back and re-read sections to find needed information.

E - And finally, we need to review and evaluate what we have read. Did we get what we needed? Can we make a decision on whether to rent the property?

To perform the evaluation, we should:

❖ Review any notes we took.
❖ Revisit the impressions the information made on our thinking.

After reading the agreement and evaluating it, we may realize that we need to speak with someone to find answers to questions or concerns we still have. All of this is part of the reading process when the purpose is to make a decision.

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As stated earlier,

The intent is to build in our communities the capabilities to use strategies, tools, and methods to solve our problems through consultation with ourselves and others.

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This approach applies the idea to "build a little, test a little" to the process of providing training. We recommend to take big and complicated problems and break them down into smaller parts and try to solve those within our reach. We further recommend using the ShuraForAll platform that provides structured and repeatable processes to support this transition.