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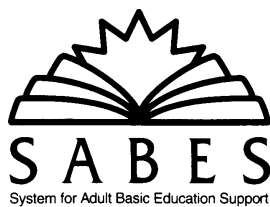


**Learner-centered  
approaches  
to assessment &  
evaluation  
in adult literacy  
Volume 10**

**ASSESSMENT**

**december 1997**

Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education



SABES is the System for Adult Basic Education Support, a comprehensive training and technical assistance initiative for adult literacy educators and programs. Its goal is to strengthen and enhance literacy services and thus to enable adult learners to attain literacy skills.

SABES accomplishes this goal through staff and program development workshops, consultation, mini-courses, mentoring and peer coaching, and other training activities provided by five Regional Support Centers located at community colleges throughout Massachusetts. SABES also offers a 15-hour Orientation that introduces new staff to adult education theory and practice and enables them to build support networks.

SABES also maintains an adult literacy Clearinghouse to collect, evaluate, and disseminate ABE materials, curricula, methodologies, and program models, and encourages the development and use of practitioner and learner-generated materials. Each of the five SABES Regional Support Centers similarly offers program support and a lending library. SABES maintains an Adult Literacy Hotline, a statewide referral service which responds to calls from new learners and volunteers. The Hotline number is 1-800-447-8844.



The SABES Central Resource Center, a program of World Education, publishes a statewide quarterly newsletter, "Bright Ideas," and journals on topics of interest to adult literacy professionals, such as this volume of "Adventures in Assessment."

The first three volumes of "Adventures in Assessment" present a comprehensive view of the state of practice in Massachusetts through articles written by adult literacy practitioners. Volume 1, **Getting Started**, includes start-up and intake activities; Volume 2, **Ongoing**, shares tools for ongoing assessment as part of the learning process; Volume 3, **Looking Back, Starting Again**, focuses on tools and procedures used at the end of a cycle or term, including self, class, and group evaluation by both teachers and learners. Volume 4 covered a range of interests, and Volume 5, **The Tale of the Tools** is dedicated to reflecting on Component 3 tools of alternative assessment. Volume 6, **Responding to the Dream Conference**, is dedicated to responses to Volumes 1-5. Volume 7, **The Partnership Project**, highlighted writings from a mentoring project for practitioners interested in learning about participatory assessment. Volume 8 covered a range of topics from education reform to learner involvement in assessment. Volume 9 looked at assessment in a volunteer program, native language literacy, ESOL programs, and evaluations in workplace education programs. In this volume, many different practitioners offer their view on alternative assessment and the BEST.

We'd like to see your contribution. Contact Editor Alison Simmons to discuss your submission.

Opinions expressed in "Adventures in Assessment" are those of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of SABES or its funders.

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**a d v a n c e m e n t u r e s**



**Learner-centered  
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## Introduction

# Volume 10: Time to Reflect

**A**s the new year approaches we are filled with anticipation about what lies ahead for *Adventures in Assessment* and alternative assessment. Since this is the tenth volume, I guess I am feeling compelled to reflect a bit and revisit the purposes for *Adventures*. In Volume #6, Loren McGrail talked about the origins of the journal and the purpose and audience she had in mind when she started it in 1991. She wrote:

*"... in addition to providing a framework and a forum for alternative assessment, I saw the creation of a field-based journal as a golden opportunity to put into practice a process approach to writing, a way for practitioners to experience first-hand the power of having their writing responded to with non-evaluative feedback... All authors commented on the self knowledge they gained by the act of writing itself. I had underestimated the power of writing to reflect back to us what we really think and believe. And...I was surprised to hear, repeatedly, the desire many authors expressed to connect with others so they could get feedback on their own practice.... I am also struck by some authors' clarity about the need to get this information out... "I wanted to support the cause for alternative assessment and remind people that there are other options to the TABE."*

*Adventures in Assessment* was always intended as a staff development journal for authors reflecting on their own experience and sharing with others, as well as for readers interested in looking at other ways to do assessment in their programs and classrooms. When I am on my annual journey in search of adventurers to write about

their practice, I am struck by the number of practitioners who feel they have little to offer others in the area of assessment. Although, I hear about a lot of great ideas, tools and questions, it is hard to convince people that they have a lot to offer and can write about a process, an idea, or a question without having the ultimate answer.

For those who do not know already, there is *not* a clear bright light at the end of the assessment tunnel that will resolve all the many dimensions of assessment that are inherent in our classrooms and programs. What each teacher/practitioner *can* offer is their take on assessment and the ways in which they come to terms with the many challenges assessment poses. This may take the form of tools, ideas, questions or a review of other materials. It is these ideas and this format that make *Adventures in Assessment* unique among the journals and books on assessment. I feel we have continued in the spirit with which Loren began this journal and hope we do not to lose sight of *Adventures'* importance as a field-based journal for teachers and practitioners in search of an adventure in assessment.

What might the future hold for *Adventures in Assessment*? As the standards-based initiatives take hold both nationally and statewide (Equipped for the Future, Curriculum Frameworks, Skill Standards for Workplaces, etc.) , it will be interesting to watch how the field responds to these initiatives and how it looks at and defines assessment. Will these initiatives help us develop a common language and common expectations for outcomes? Will we align

by  
Alison Simmons



Editor  
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World Education



our instruction and assessment practices with the standards? *Adventures in Assessment* seems more relevant now as we enter a time of content standards and outcomes from our field, as well as other fields that define what our learners should know and be able to do. *Adventures* will continue to offer a forum where practitioners can document their practices and we will see where these experiences take us.

This tenth volume of *Adventures in Assessment* has a great assortment of writers looking for ways to integrate assessment into their current teaching/learning.

**Marta Mangan-Lev** writes about authentic assessment and cooperative learning. We look at how she applies the principles of one educational theory to her classroom and the principles of authentic assessment. She believes that our assumptions about teaching and learning should integrate our instructional methods with our assessment practices.

**Maria Kephallenou** talks about her experience at the Haitian Multi-Service Center in Boston. She looks at questions and issues that constantly surface in her program around assessment, the complex nature of assessment in a multi-service center, and her view of assessment as she moved from teacher to administrator.

**Judy Chau** asks us to think about what we assess and whether we are too focused on skill areas and spend less time with fewer, less tangible skill areas. She offers us a peer evaluation tool for interviewing that focuses on those less tangible areas.

**Martha Jean** takes a look back at her EGAP assessment tool that has been used and adapted by other teachers in the field. She talks about the minor adjustments made partly due to her work in Learning Disabilities and Multiple Intelligences.

**Sylvia Greene, Nancy Hoe and Lally Stowell** take us on a trip through the assessment process in their family literacy program. What seems like miles and miles of assessment protocol is really a very comprehensive system that aims to look at the whole learner and cover all the areas where they are making progress. What struck me about this piece was that all of the information gathered near the beginning of the learners' time at the Center is used to help students identify their goals for learning. Their initial assessment reveals areas of strengths and weaknesses, then the information is used to help students write goals and objectives.

**The Operation Bootstrap Health Team** assesses community health needs at an adult education program in Lynn, MA. After an initial assessment, the team develops a program for the students centered around a topic. Along the way, students assess the effectiveness of their program as well as how they are working within the team.

**Kathy Sikes** (interviewed by Melody Schneider) talks about her experience implementing and training volunteers in the use of portfolio assessment.

**Beth Bingman** from the University of Tennessee gives us an update on the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's (NCSALL) assessment/outcomes research.

In **Voices From the Field** practitioners look at the Basic English Skills Test (BEST). **Maira Lucey** gives us a history of the BEST and valuable information about its design and purpose. **Barbara Lippell-Paul** looks at the BEST from an historical perspective and helps us to look critically at what the test is asking us to do and what some of the issues are with administering the test.



**Dulany Alexander** looks at the BEST by comparing the profiles of two ESOL students. **Rachel Donnelly**, a VISTA volunteer, relates some of the insights she has had as a “beginner” with the BEST.

**Cathy Coleman** in **Learning from Experience** reflects on the use of the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) in her program. She suggests questions to consider when using a standardized test but mainly to question if the test is a good fit with what your learners and program want to accomplish.

In **What Counts?**, **Ken Tamarkin** offers a way to look at assessment in a computer class at Malden Mills. He looks at tools he uses for placement, progress, and program evaluation. He involves students from the beginning in developing and understanding the assessment process.

Finally, **Caroline Gear** looks at the book *Phenomenal Changes: Stories of Participants in the Portfolio Project* as a staff development tool. In the first of two articles, she shares with us how she and her staff are using the book to help them in their work on portfolio assessment.

It is a full volume of tools and ideas. As always we welcome your comments and suggestions. If you wish to submit an article or respond to an article in this issue, feel free to contact me at the address below. The authors would appreciate your feedback and ideas.

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# The Connection between Cooperative Learning and Authentic Assessment

**A**ssessment. Evaluation. The words conjure images of tests — sharp #2 pencils, rows of bubbles to be darkened in, quiet rooms with perspiring test-takers and only the sound of rustling paper. I'm learning, along with my learners, to replace these dated images with a reality that conforms more with my values about teaching and learning. We're learning to use authentic, learner-centered tools which integrate assessment into the cycle of teaching/learning. We're learning to use assessment as a tool for self understanding and instructional planning.

There are other, equally-dated images I can conjure from my educational experiences: straight rows of wooden desks, one behind the other; a teacher's desk facing the rows of students; a teacher, talking, talking, and writing on the broad expanse of a blackboard, occasionally calling upon a student to supply an answer, with luck the correct one.

My classroom doesn't look like this. We start out seated around a horseshoe of tables, each learner facing the others. We often work in cooperative groups, for which learners pull chairs into small clusters to work together. My position is not at the front of the room lecturing (well, maybe once in a while), but usually circulating among learners engaged in using language, engaged in learning. We're learning to create and work in a learning environment in which learners work together cooperatively to achieve shared goals.

Cooperative learning in the adult education classroom offers some valuable opportunities for authentic assessment. In my work with cooperative groups and authentic assessment I have learned there are many parallels between the two. This has made it easier to integrate them. To see this more clearly we will first look at some principles of cooperative learning.

## THE STRUCTURE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

If you were to survey teachers of adult education about their use of groupwork, nearly all would probably respond that they often have people working in groups. In my ESOL classes learners may work in groups formed using a number of random techniques: counting off by 3s or 4s; distributing three or four different pictures and then forming a group with those who have the same picture, choosing a topic (for example, a kind of music or food) and then grouping those who made the same choice. While learners work together in these groups for conversation or to complete a task, they are not explicitly cooperative. Cooperative groupwork is distinct from work in small groups:

- learners work in **positive interdependence**,
- each participant has a **clear and specific role**,
- the **process** of working together is an important focus,
- participants **reflect upon and analyze their work together**.

by  
**Martha Mangan Lev**



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A cooperative model of groupwork is structured in these specific ways. The role of the teacher is to set up those structures by considering these questions: What will learners do? What role will each learner play? How will they reflect upon their work together? Equally important, the teacher considers the personality, skills, and learning style of each learner to form groups that can work together effectively. Next, she/he facilitates the formation of the group and observes them in action. Finally, the teacher provides learners with a means to reflect upon and evaluate their group's work; that is, she incorporates assessment tools.

About now, you may be thinking, "Yikes, I've got 30 minutes to plan tomorrow's class. Let's just count off by 3s and talk about the weekend. We can work cooperatively sometime when I've got a day or two to plan!"

It's true that the most extensive work of the teacher is in planning cooperative interactions, in setting up just those conditions outlined above. It's equally true that there's a learning curve in developing and honing our skills as facilitators of cooperative learning; the initial time investment is significant. As we become more adept at the process, it takes less time.

We find the same is true of using authentic assessment. We can opt to use 'quick and dirty' standardized tests, or can invest the time to develop authentic assessment tools that also collect information about learners' skills, learning styles and personalities.

The payoff for investing in these two approaches is significant. Teaching and learning are enhanced as learners acquire the habits of reflecting upon their learning and working with others. Our teaching, by

integrating on-going feedback from learners, also becomes more relevant and meaningful in learners' lives.

One way to simplify the planning of cooperative groupwork is to think of it as three sets of variables to be sorted and matched: 1) the content and process of the task to be carried out, 2) the attributes of the learners to be grouped together, and 3) the assessment component: the tools learners will use to reflect upon their experience.

### **Content/process of the task**

This is a starting point for any lesson planning. What exactly will learners do together? What skills will they learn/practice? What are the goals of their work? What roles can group members fill in order to achieve the goals? With the possible exception of the last, these questions underlie any lesson planning. In this sense, the planning is the same, although the task will be tailored to the structure of a group working cooperatively. While appropriate roles will vary according to the nature of the activity, there are a number of frequently relevant roles which can also be customized to the particular activity. The level of support for each role—checklists or other ways to clearly specify what the learner will do in that role—can be adapted to suit the level(s) of the learners.

Possible roles to assign may include an observer, a questioner, a timekeeper, and a summarizer and facilitator.

**Observer:** watches the work of the group, often equipped with a checklist of specific behaviors to look for (e.g., does everyone speak? Are all ideas treated with respect?).

**Questioner:** asks questions of one or more



participants. This learner could also be provided a list (e.g., of question words [who, what, etc.], or of specific questions).

**Timekeeper:** keeps the group within time limits set or agreed upon.

**Summarizer:** may sum up the work of the group herself, or may present a group-developed summary to the class.

**Facilitator:** helps the group accomplish its agreed-upon tasks.

### Grouping Learners: Attributes of Learners to be Grouped Together

The next piece of the puzzle is learner attributes. As I get to know my learners, I pay attention to their individual differences in an on-going process of assessment through observation. I use this information to mix and match qualities to increase a group's success. **Learner Skills** are one set of attributes: language, leadership, facilitation, etc. Another variable is the **consistency of attendance**, which will be particularly relevant for groups working on a project over time.

**Native language** should be taken into consideration: would the task be best accomplished in a group as heterogeneous in language as possible, such that more interaction would take place in the target language? Or would learners benefit from the ability to perform parts of their task in a shared native language?

**Learning style** in general will be an important factor in group interactions, and particularly an individual's preference for working independently or with others. Finally, but not least importantly, the mix of **personalities** in a group will affect its success. A group in which each member tends to be quiet and shy may have trouble getting going.

### Vignette:

*A group from my Level One class is a wonderfully-varied and complex group of learners. Su, from Korea, has very good listening, speaking, and reading skills, though her pronunciation is sometimes difficult for others to understand. She engages enthusiastically in all tasks and attempts to involve others. Panay, from Laos, is very quiet and reluctant to speak. She has a good sense of humor and understands most of the classroom talk. Jay, from the Philippines, is the youngest member of the class. He also has very good language skills, but is easily distracted from a task. The fourth member of the group, Dorota, a very new speaker of English, tends to be quiet. She has little confidence in her skills but is determined to learn English.*

*The configuration of this group meant that English is their only common language and they sometimes struggle to communicate. Su often takes leadership in getting their work started, but Dorota also pays attention to keeping them on task. Panay sometimes shyly teases Jay, who enjoys the playful interactions. The group works well together.*

### AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK

So, okay, you've worked out some group tasks, figured out roles that you hope will work to accomplish them, and made some initial groupings of learners. What about assessment? What information have you already gathered? What will you now assess? How?

Through the structure and process of cooperative learning learners use a wide range of skills. These skills include:

- **language/content** skills used to accomplish the group's goals, both in what students do and how they do it,
- **taking/following leadership**, to participate in any of the various roles, and to to-

*As I get to know my learners, I pay attention to their individual differences in an on-going process of assessment through observation. I use this information to mix and match qualities to increase a group's success.*



gether move a group to achieve its goals,

- **negotiating** with each other when different ideas are being considered,
- **problem solving**: clarifying ideas, elaborating the ideas suggested by others, or seeing the consequences of particular solutions,
- **reaching consensus**, a specific and not widely familiar decision-making process that honors the opinions of all involved to come to an agreed-upon outcome,
- **synthesizing/summarizing** in order to present the group's work, or to facilitate its on-going work,
- **observation/analysis**, identifying what is to be observed and how to understand what one is seeing, and
- **giving feedback** to other learners or to the instructor about the group's process, the task, and other aspects of the groupwork.

Not only are these skills critical to effective groupwork, they will also enhance success beyond the classroom, in the workplace, and in the community. Those skills more related to process, to how we work with others, are seldom explicitly elicited in classroom work and are even less often evaluated by 'traditional' assessment. By developing tools to use in the cooperative classroom, learners can get feedback on their skills in these areas as well as develop them.

### Authentic Assessment Tools

So you've got some groups that are, with support from you, working together well. You're helping learners identify and develop skills, such as those listed above, in the course of their cooperative efforts.

What tools can you and they use to reflect upon and evaluate their work? Here are some suggestions.

- **learner questionnaires** (*see box*). In their simplest form, these ask learners to choose a response. For more advanced learners, questionnaires may also ask for more extensive responses.

---

How did your group work together tonight?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What did your group do today?

\_\_\_\_\_

*Circle one*

I feel *good not good* about my group today.

I talked *a lot a little* in my group.

Other people talked *a lot a little* in my group.

My group helped me learn *a lot a little* today.

My group got *a lot a little* work done today.

---

- **teacher or learner observation**. The observer may use a checklist and record the frequency of particular events or may watch for specific behaviors.
- **checklists**. Completed by teacher and/or learners, they may include specific content skills in the task or specific cooperative skills.
- **reports/presentations to the class**. In a variety of forms (charts, skits, talks, etc.), these provide a concrete work product.
- **evaluation of groupwork products**.  
What did the group make/present/etc.?  
How does it compare with their goals?
- **learning contracts**. These provide goal-based evaluation of personal, group, or content goals.



A variety of these tools can and should be used over time. Different tools will appeal to different learners and elicit a range of perspectives on the process and/or the product of the work. This assessment should include both learner and teacher input. A growing desire for me is to support learners in developing tools for reflection and evaluation of groupwork.

As is usually true of authentic assessment, what teachers and learners learn from these tools can be translated into content for subsequent groupwork. If an issue is identified as a particular strength or weakness, groupwork can be designed to address this. For example, if one of the roles is that of 'summarizer' and groups report difficulty in carrying this out, class instruction can increase learner understanding and skill in subsequent groupwork. As teachers and learners become more adept in the process, the cycle

of groupwork to reflection to instruction to groupwork becomes increasingly meaningful and on target.

Cooperative groupwork provides an opportunity for learners to express and build a range of social and intellectual skills. The principles of authentic assessment —

- that it be learner-centered and help learners achieve their goals,
- that it be part of the learning experience,
- that it use a variety of procedures,
- that it provide feedback that will lead to better instruction

— are consistent with those guiding cooperative learning and make it the appropriate technique for reflecting upon and evaluating this process. Together, cooperative learning and authentic assessment are powerful tools for understanding ourselves as learners and as teachers.





## Assessment in ESOL

# The Haitian Multi-Service Center Experience

The Adult Education Program at the Haitian Multi-Service Center (HMSC) has developed a program-wide assessment process that responds to the needs and demands of our program. As part of the on-going development of this process we have found that assessment is an important programmatic issue that continually needs to be addressed. As we develop and refine our process, we ask ourselves numerous questions and address many issues about our processes and assessment in general. We always face new challenges and new perspectives on how to use assessment more efficiently.

Some issues arise time and time again. In a class of 15 students with varying educational backgrounds, individual needs, ages, priorities and language skills, for example, assessment of progress is difficult. Students do not progress at the same rate and the same time. Also, individual skills do not progress at the same rate. How do we account for all these different skills and factors and assess progress? Most likely, teachers begin by focusing on the skills: they compare a starting point — the beginning of the class — with the point of time of the final assessment. The different factors (backgrounds, schooling, age, etc.) are then taken into account to better understand and explain why progress was/was not made.

Another issue deals with the movement of students from one level to the next. Generally, a student is ready to move up when an overall better understanding and use of

the language is demonstrated. It includes an initial assessment for the student, a point of time later with another assessment and a comparison between these two. However, “an overall better understanding and use of the language” is very vague. For example, how does one assess it? Is it the same for all students or are there variations? If so, how does one account for them? And how does it tie to the progress of individual language skills? Because teachers think differently, it is amazing that most students move with few problems.

When we talk about student progress at our meetings, the discussion is dynamic with contributions that generate plans to address issues. The discussion becomes difficult, however, when we explore ways to capture all of these dynamics in a form that is simple and easy for students to understand and for other teachers to translate.

Resolving this issue depends largely on one’s position in a program, the purpose and need for assessment, and how it fits into the whole program. Everybody agrees on the importance of assessment for the students, the teachers, and the program, but we all have different perspectives on its purpose.

*A Student’s Perspective.* Students assess their progress continually as an integral part of learning and as a guide. Assessing progress for them may also imply active participation and responsibility for their education. It is like checking where they are according to their plan and where they need to go to next. An articulated plan al-

by  
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Kephallenou



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ways helps as a point of reference. In our program we make efforts to help students articulate a plan through counseling.

*A Teacher's Perspective.* Through assessment, teachers can address different issues such as: methods and effectiveness of their teaching; effectiveness of teaching styles with students of different cultural and educational backgrounds; the specific needs and goals of a student; their own beliefs about what constitutes progress; a specific student's abilities and strengths; and the student's capabilities and progress versus the capabilities and progress of the rest of the students in class.

*An Intake Worker's Perspective.* An intake worker assessing and placing students must have a pretty good understanding of the range of classes, as well as their curricula. Without this understanding, accurate assessment and successful placement of students is extremely difficult. The intake worker seeks to find out whether a particular student shows signs of skills and capabilities usually shown by students who have been placed in a particular class/level. These skills/capabilities are considered as a "starting point," but only to determine placement and to ensure a smooth immersion of the student in the system. The rest is left in the hands of the counselor and the teachers.

*A Counselor's Perspective.* A counselor's assessment involves working closely with students to help them set realistic goals, set a time frame in which these goals can be achieved, quantify progress in and outside of class (job search, resume, referrals, further education, etc.) and offer appropriate programmatic response to expressed needs: referrals for drop-in babysitting, referral to another department for information and/or concrete assistance, etc. As-

essment at this level does not really deal with specific language skills, but rather how mastering language skills is relevant to the overall life, educational, and vocational plans of the students.

*An Administrator's Perspective.* An administrator's view about assessment addresses programmatic concerns, such as class size, outcomes, attendance, terminations (especially if terminations are not job and education related), etc. An administrator may use assessment to (a) measure and assess the effectiveness of the program, (b) capture and document outcomes, (c) project numbers and outcomes for the future, and (d) make the program (curriculum, assessment, teaching methods and materials, etc.) better respond to students' needs for progress. As an administrator, I look for confirmation that the program offers its students what we believe it does: the necessary tools to achieve their educational and vocational goals and to move on to social and economic self-sufficiency.

Having been a teacher not too long ago, I still recall the perspective of a teacher. As a teacher, I thought of assessment in a very limited way: it had to do with my students and my class — not necessarily with the whole program — and it was as much about my students as it was about my teaching and the materials I was using. Often, I considered assessment a burden, a task I had to do and once completed nobody would take another look. As a result, I completed the relevant forms but I was neither detailed nor very explanatory. Going back now to some of those assessments I think they were poorly written and would not be of much help to others.

My perspective on assessment as an administrator is a lot broader than that as a teacher; I have a clearer and deeper under-



*I believe that assessment is a process that does not remain static but evolves together with the program because it is the thread that connects and keeps all the components of a program in place and in check: teaching, curriculum, outcomes, goals and counseling.*

standing of the program as a whole and how its various components support and complement each other. I also have a better picture of what the program is expected to do according to our proposals and funders' expectations. When I review a teacher's assessment of a student, I expect to see that the teacher knows and understands a student's progress. The student's self-assessment and the teacher's assessment should be close. I expect the student to express some satisfaction with the class, progress made, and his/her teacher. If the teacher identifies problem areas, I expect to see a plan that addresses them.

Through the assessment, too, I have an indication if the teacher's work is effective. Effective teacher's work means to me that the teacher has put some thought into developing a curriculum and preparing for his/her class, and knows the strengths and weaknesses of his/her students. Student attendance, drop out and termination rates, and enthusiastic (or not) student comments are also indicative of the class in which active learning takes place.

Another important purpose that assessments fulfill is enabling students to participate in the educational process by assessing their progress. I value their assessments and opinions and take them into account when I assess the effectiveness and work of the program. There is a strong connection between assessment and program functions, such as outcomes, curriculum development, and teaching methods. Just like the students, the program must reflect upon its operations and assess its effectiveness and results. These results should feed back into the program and lead to decisions that will improve the program and benefit its students.

I believe that assessment is a process

that does not remain static but evolves together with the program because it is the thread that connects and keeps all the components of a program in place and in check: teaching, curriculum, outcomes, goals and counseling. Unfortunately, many times, due to lack of resources and restrictions of time, we do not utilize assessment as a tool for check, change and improvement to its fullest.

#### THE HMSC EXPERIENCE

Capturing the dynamics of all assessments and accounting for all different perspectives, purposes and issues may take many creative forms, especially because most funders require that the program incorporate initial, on-going and final assessment of students' accomplishments, but do not require any particular assessment tool. At the HMSC we have developed in-house assessment tools to capture the information we need and answer the questions we raise. They include intake/placement; counseling: orientation and goal-setting; student/teacher conferences: initial, on-going and final; and exit/entrance criteria checklist.

#### Intake/Placement Assessment

The Intake worker determines the level/class in which students should be placed using the placement test. The placement test was developed by the program with the assistance of Loren McGrail through a SABES mini-grant and includes: (a) applications, (b) an oral interview to determine the students' speaking/listening capabilities (at this point initial assessment for non-literate students also takes place), (c) reading materials to determine the students' reading capabilities (reading materials include materials for different levels



and a variety of topics; the test includes comprehension questions, writing the story in students' words and/or responding to the ideas expressed), (d) writing, which includes either responding to the reading or writing about students' experiences, and (e) a grammar test may be given to students depending on their level (see "The Toolkit for Authentic Assessment" from SABES for a detailed description and relevant forms).

This assessment, although not the only one developed, may be unique and exceptionally successful in placing students: students choose to work with the reading(s) they like or think are difficult or easy enough for them. The reading and writing materials are culturally sensitive (all are pieces of writing written by students at the HMSC) and so offer the students a familiar frame of reference. The students also have the freedom to choose the topic they want to write about. During the time they take the test, they are supported, guided, and helped by a bilingual intake worker. This intake/placement is time consuming, taking an average of 50 minutes to two hours. The intake worker needs approximately 15 to 30 minutes to read through and assess the level.

### Counseling

The second assessment comes after the level of students is determined and before they enter class. The Program Counselor meets with students individually for approximately one hour to address two issues: program orientation and goal-setting.

*Program orientation.* This includes necessary information about other services that the HMSC offers, support services (e.g., drop-in day care, referral to other agency departments for services), information

about elective classes that the Adult Education/ESOL Program offers, program policies, and specific information about the class the student will be placed in (times, where the class meets, and who the teacher is).

With the orientation, students feel they are part of a bigger agency with additional available services. This initial meeting introduces the role of the counselor to provide support to the teachers outside of the classroom and provide needed information and referrals to students to help them accomplish their goals.

*Goal setting.* The counselor completes the Educational/Vocational Plan with the students. This document includes background educational and employment information about the students and includes their long- and short-term goals, as well as personal goals (this document has been updated to include information needed for the DOE MIS system).

More often than not, students find it very hard to set goals. It is especially hard for low-level students to articulate specific goals besides "to learn English." The counselor is instrumental in engaging them in a discussion on why they need to be in an ESOL class (or in any other class for that matter) and he helps them to articulate goals. The counselor has to lead this discussion carefully (a balance of articulating real needs and imposing them) because the students should set their own goals, not the counselor. The skills to set short- and long-term goals take a long time to develop as they include certain language that the counselor — and the student — must master.

*The counselor is instrumental in engaging [students] in a discussion on why they need to be in an ESOL class, and he helps them to articulate goals. The counselor has to lead this discussion carefully because the students should set their own goals, not the counselor.*



### Student/Teacher Conferences

In these conferences, progress and evaluation are discussed by both parties. The conferences may take many forms depending on the level of the students (lower level classes may have more group-like meetings) and time. Ideally, they are held three times each session. The student/teacher conferences consist of three parts: initial, on-going, and final.

*Initial.* The first conference takes place within the first two weeks of the students' placement in a class (either right after intake/placement or after movement from another class). The relevant document is completed by the students and identifies their specific goals for the session. The difference between this goal-setting and the goal-setting with the counselor is that the students think of goals that are achievable in a short period of time — the teaching session. These goals tend to be geared more around what they perceive as weaknesses and needs.

*On-going.* The second conference occurs around the middle of the session, or/and any time that is deemed necessary or useful for the teacher or the students. The document has two parts, one that is filled out by the students (their evaluation of their progress and goal achievement) and one by the teacher (the student's evaluation of progress). Often, the students talk about possible problems with their learning, with teaching and materials, etc. These problems are addressed by the teacher and possible solutions are explored.

*Final.* The last conference takes place during the final week of each session. It, too, has two parts: one that is filled out by the students and one by the teacher. The students are asked to evaluate themselves in terms of progress and goals accom-

plished or not; give examples of their progress; reflect on whether they have different or additional goals after attending the class; and evaluate the program's help and support in accomplishing these goals. The teacher is asked to provide a formal evaluation of the students' progress in terms of each of the applicable basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, computer literacy, math) and to provide an evaluation of students' attendance throughout the session.

The purpose of this assessment is to provoke discussion, thinking, and evaluation and become a learning experience for both parties. The teacher's input and opinion is as valued as that of the students'. Through the discussion, the students become as responsible for their learning as the teacher is for his/her teaching. This assessment, too, is time consuming. It is discouraging, however, that the forms often do not capture all the rich discussion that they may invoke either because the teachers do not write enough/well or the students view their part as not very important or both. It is very frustrating to read assessments of progress that are poorly written and that do not give a clear idea of where the students stand in terms of learning and progress. They do, however, add to the incredible amount of paperwork accumulated through the years.

### Exit/Entrance Criteria Checklist

Student/teacher conferences may involve the use and completion of the exit/entrance criteria checklist when a student is ready to move from one level to the next one. As its name suggests, a checklist summarizes the capabilities/skills mastered in a class by students, and, at the same time, summarizes the capabilities/skills needed



for those students to advance to the next class. (There are as many checklists as there are classes.) The checklist is completed by the teacher.

A checklist can, in a short time, quickly display the most important aspects of teaching at one level and the capabilities of the students and, at the same time, can reveal the capabilities of the students as a starting point for the more advanced level. These checklists are curriculum-driven as they include skills that are taught/required in each level. Checklists by themselves are weak evaluative tools. In reality, a checklist is only one element taken into account when evaluating students before

they move to a more advanced level (samples of their work, especially writing, and the initial in-class assessment by the new teacher ensure the right decision).

Despite the problems mentioned (time consuming, some resistance on everybody's part to keep up with all this paperwork that results in very poorly written assessments, etc.), assessment is a very important aspect of a program, a crucial tool for evaluation and self-evaluation, and an important part of teaching because it touches all aspects of a program and can be used to confirm and validate findings about the program, its services, and its students.



*[Author's note: "I wanted to acknowledge Alison Simmons for her assistance in the thinking and writing of this article."]*



STUDENT EDUCATIONAL VOCATIONAL PLAN

*Student's Name:*  
*Counselor's Name:*  
*Date of Orientation/Counseling:*

I. PLACEMENT IN PROGRAM

Native Language Literacy:  
ESOL Class:  
Pre-EDP/EDP:  
Counseling/Orientation (date):  
Math:  
Computer Training:  
Other (specify):

II. BACKGROUND

1. Education:
  
2. Previous Job Experience:
  
3. Skills:

III. POSSIBLE REFERRAL (from, to, date, reason)

IV. STUDENT GOALS

1. Educational Goals
  - a. Complete a class
  
  - b. Speaking  
Communicate more effectively in English
    - understand and feel comfortable in a conversation
    - have a conversation with other people
    - communicate with people on the phone
    - understand the TV
    - understand movies
    - understand the news



c. Reading

Be able to:

- read a newspaper
- read a book
- read maps, calendars
- look up a word in a dictionary
- find information in the phone book

d. Survival

Be able to:

- call 911 effectively
- make doctor's appointments
- give out personal information

e. Writing

Be able to:

- give personal information (name, address, phone #)
- letters (to friends, for business)

f. Obtain EDP

-Complete tasks (specify)

g. Obtain GED

-Pass some tests (specify)

h. Complete some adult HS credits

i. Enroll in Post-Secondary Education

2. Vocational Goals

a. Enter vocational training (specify)

b. Gain Employment

c. Obtain Job Advancement

d. Perform New Job Requirements



e. Be Removed from Public Assistance

f. Fill out applications

3. Personal Goals

a. Read more to children

b. Increase parent/child interaction

c. Help children with homework

d. Enroll in activities that support public school

e. Receive preventive health care

4. Community

a. Enroll in Civics class

b. Receive US Citizenship

c. Register to vote for first time

d. Involved in activities within own community

e. Incarcerated adult return to society

V. NEEDS DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE GOALS

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



VI. STUDENT OUTCOMES (to be completed upon termination)

1. Termination Date:

2. Level started (include SPL):

3. Made progress within same level (include SPL):

4. Highest level completed (include SPL):

5. Found Employment

(Place, Job Title, Phone Number, Starting Date, Salary)

6. Upgraded Employment

(Previous Job Title, Current Job Title, Finished Relevant Training -where?-)

7. Entered Skills Training

(Where, for how long)

8. Entered Higher Education

(Where, what program)

9. Became Citizen

(When)

VII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS





STUDENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

ON-GOING

1. Do you feel that you are making progress? Do you feel you are making progress in:

-Listening and understanding

-Speaking

-Writing

-Reading and understanding (readings inside and outside of class)

-Pronunciation

-Computers

-Math

-Grammar

-Other

2. If you feel you are making progress, how do you understand it? (Give some examples, please).

3. If you feel *you are not making progress*, why is it so?

4. Is there anything you want to change in your class?

5. Is there anything you want to do more in class?

6. Do you have any questions about this program or your class?



STUDENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

FINAL EVALUATION

Progress Assessment

For Students: In what areas did you make progress? How do you know? (Give examples from your class and outside of class, please).

For Teachers: In what areas did the student make progress? How do you know?

Reading:

Writing:

Speaking:

Listening:



Pronunciation:

Grammar:

Word-Processing:

Math:

Other:

Attendance: Regular (75%) Yes    No    (If no, please give reason(s))



# Overcoming Cultural Barriers of a Job Interview

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**N**ever overlook the obvious. This is what I continue reminding myself. After three years of coaching students in a prevocational education program to prepare for job interviews, particularly “white-collar” job interviews, I find myself backtracking and focusing much more with students on the basic presentation aspects of interviewing.

While our program is open to the non-native speaking population of Greater Boston, the typical profile of an Asian American Civic Association (AACA) Prevocational Skills student is a Chinese or Vietnamese female, in her late 20s to early 30s, who has worked as a stitcher, cashier or waitress in a Chinatown business since arriving in the United States. The students are high-beginners or low-intermediate level. The average current length of residency in the U.S. is two or three years.

Most students have a very solid work history in their country, having worked for a single employer for up to ten years. Many have had excellent skills, as teachers, bookkeepers, secretaries, bank tellers, business owners, doctors, tour guides, or hotel clerks. They are mature, with a stable work history and many transferable skills. The main barriers are limited English, difficult acculturation, and a lack of computer skills, confidence, and – for some – adequate daycare. Most are very employable individuals who typically do not see themselves as employable beyond Chinatown. This is one great barrier – especially since many usually summarize their goal as “I

want a good job, an office job”.

Enrollment typically consists of twenty students who are divided into two equal groups. Classes run 16 hours per week. Although not an office skills training program, the students are taught the basics of keyboarding and basic word processing functions of Microsoft Word. They practice math and learn the English necessary for the mathematical skills which they possess. They study grammar for two hours per week, but ESL is intertwined in all course matter. In addition to aiding students with these basic skills, the task of the three prevocational teachers is to assist them to accept themselves as employable outside of Chinatown. They participate in self-assessment activities to recognize their strengths. The Case Manager works with the students on an ongoing basis for five months, both in workshops and individually, to develop goals and follow their action plan.

My responsibility is divided into ten weeks of conversation, culture topics, writing skills, and pronunciation, along with ten weeks of introducing U.S. culture as it relates to the world of work. The greatest challenge: to prepare students for a “white-collar” job interview. The goal of the enrollees is to either find a full-time job after the five-month class period, or to enroll in a full-time training program. Typically, up to 80% opt for the training program; this may be the Office Systems Training Program at AACA, or others throughout the city of Boston.

by  
**Judy Chau**



Asian American  
Civic Association  
Boston, MA



Herein lies the challenge. Within those months, the students must feel confident and ready for either a job or training. Whether preparing for a training program interview, or preparing for a job interview – white-collar or not – the challenges remain the same: the candidate must appear confident, describe and “sell” their skills and experience, and explain their motivation and goals.

The problem lies in the fact that most do not feel confident, cannot adequately describe their skills, have no knowledge of the Boston job market and have not developed long-term career plans which they could express to a Human Resources professional. So, on the larger scale, proficiency in English, a realistic view of the current office job market in Boston, the necessary keyboard and computer skills to obtain an office job, and a plan are paramount to achieving their goals.

Less evident, yet equally as important to the process, are the presentation skills which native speakers of English are coached on at University Career Centers, Massachusetts One-stop Career Centers, or by employment specialists. They are the handshake, volume, eye contact, and the all important ability to “sell yourself” at every opportunity. These are the deeper, cultural aspects of Western-style interviewing which my students repeatedly inform me go against cultural propriety. In addition, in the case of students from mainland China, jobs were assigned by the government, and they have never experienced what we know as a job interview. The lack of experience with interviewing, and the cultural differences are very evident as they come to interview for a slot in the Prevocational Program.

As a Prevocational Instructor, I am a

member of the seven-person Employment and Training team at AACA. The entire team participates in the intake process. Applicants may be directed in one of four ways in AACA. They may be accepted to either Prevocational Skills or to Office Systems. Candidates who need much more remedial English are referred to ESL class. Those who test with high conversational skills and extensive office experience in their homeland are referred to the AACA Job Developer.

During the intake process of potential Prevocational or Office System students, we are assessing many factors, from eligibility requirements including low-income status, residency, and having a work permit, to their English level, and to their commitment to the objectives of the program. With respect to selecting who studies in which program, it often comes down to our determination of their apparent understanding of cultural expectations in the intake interview and their confidence in themselves. Candidates who come across professionally, who smile, give a strong handshake, have good eye contact, and are willing to try to define their work history will typically be accepted to office skills. Realistically, by learning the appropriate office skills, they will be job-ready in five months. In general, these candidates have lived for some time in the United States, and have somehow become acculturated to many of these interviewing factors. They still have to strengthen these skills, but they are well on their way.

The typical Prevocational candidate will rarely extend their hand to the teacher/interviewer. We extend our hand first. The handshake which we receive is the classic “dead-fish” handshake, described in how-to interview books. It is limp, with little or

*So, on the larger scale, proficiency in English, a realistic view of the current office job market in Boston, the necessary keyboard and computer skills to obtain an office job, and a plan are paramount to achieving their goals.*



no grasp. Often it is a two-fingered shake, or “a slider,” which slips through our fingers before we have a chance to grasp it. During the first week of class, we begin to practice the handshake.

It is approached from the cultural aspect first. Students learn that it is appropriate protocol within the business world to do so. Women are assured that they are crossing no boundaries to shake hands, especially with a man. They learn the cultural interpretation of a weak handshake that human resource professionals emphasize: a weak handshake is a sign of either a weak character, or a weak body — or both. Either way, these are less than desirable traits in an employer’s confident, competent, healthy workforce.

Three years ago, I felt that a bit of practice and a cultural explanation would be enough to make students aware of the need for a great grasp. I felt as though I would belittle my students to continue to review this point. I have since discovered how culturally difficult this seemingly simple act can be. The students have listened to many human resource specialists who have come as guest speakers and have emphasized this point. They have practiced with the H.R. specialists, they practice at least once a week in class, and during the 19th week of the program, as students actually experience their first complete mock interview with a true interviewer rather than a teacher, most will have the handshake down. There will still be a few limp hands. My mistake three years ago was believing that I would insult my students by emphasizing this point. I discovered that I was not doing them a favor by failing to demand consistently strong handshakes.

Clearly, a firm handshake is only a piece

of the outside package. Equally important is for the eyes to meet. Maintaining eye contact throughout a thirty-minute interview takes practice for any person who may be less than comfortable in an interview. Coupling that with the fact that in Chinese and Vietnamese culture direct eye contact in a formal situation such as a class or a job interview is seen as disrespectful, this is our second obstacle to overcome. In the initial intake interview for the Prevocational Program, eye contact is no more than the fifty percent range.

And once again, it is first approached through a cultural perspective. Students list the implications of giving direct eye contact in a formal situation. They inform me that to do so is to be an affront. Words that they include are “rudeness” “arrogance” or “a challenge”. They are then introduced to the American take on lack of eye contact — basic shyness and insecurity, possible boredom or lack of interest, perhaps avoidance of the truth to a particular question. The students are very surprised by these last two negative interpretations, but no miracles of eye contact come strictly with knowledge.

Throughout the twenty weeks, the students practice pair activities in which they observe each other’s eye contact. Not being a formal instance such as speaking to a teacher or an interviewer, this is much easier. Although each student spends a total of eight hours per week with me, for twenty weeks, they usually still consider contact with me as “formal”. On an ongoing basis I may sit down with a particular student in class one-on-one, and have a chat. During the chat, I will follow their eyes — up to the ceiling, down to the floor, toward that invisible spider on the wall. This is done in a good-humored way, and



the students have some idea of how much their eyes travel in a one-minute conversation.

At the culmination of the job search skills segment of the Prevocational Program, the students participate in a 15 to 20 minute videotaped mock interview, generally with one of several Human Resources professionals who cooperate with AACA. Until the eighteenth week, when the students have an opportunity to view themselves on the video, eye contact remains a challenge. I find that it improves after the students take their taped interview home to review. Seeing is believing.

Volume is another "sales point" which we work on. Again, sitting face to face, in a formal situation, speaking with volume and emphasizing points emphatically, might indicate a certain boisterousness, arrogance or disrespect. Again, this point is worked on throughout the twenty weeks.

The students bring a blank cassette to class from week 15 onward. We spend the good part of three weeks practicing approximately 35 common interview questions. I act as interviewer, the classmates observe and make notes on a critique form. When initially playing back the tape, students note they hear *me* very clearly, but have trouble hearing themselves. We are sitting equidistant from the recorder. This method seems to help significantly, and students self-improve day by day; most are able to match the volume and energy of the interviewer. Others improve after they hear the same problem with volume reflected in the videotape. We do our best to improve awareness, and to increase confidence, but someone who is inherently shy may continue to be.

Although the handshake, eye contact, and volume are somewhat determined by culture, the main cultural barrier is the

central requirement of Western-style interviewing: "selling yourself." In cultures where humility is a virtue, the concept of recounting past accomplishments and emphasizing strengths is a huge obstacle. The concept is a challenge. The English vocabulary is a challenge. Believing what you say is a challenge.

Students must be convinced that their work history in their home country is important. We find during the initial intake interview that candidates tell us only about their work experience in the United States, as if what went before is not valid. This is especially true for former professionals who realize that they may not practice their previous profession again, at least not on the same level.

To first introduce them to which skills are valued and sought in the world of office work, the students spend a week learning the want ad abbreviations, and reviewing the *Boston Globe* office job ads. The purpose of the exercise is twofold: first, to view the current job market realistically; second, to see which "hard and soft" skills are being sought.

They can clearly see in newsprint which hard skills or computer skills are being sought. This helps them set some concrete training goals. In addition, once they learn that basic soft skills such as teamwork, initiative, hard work, cooperation, honesty, enthusiasm are listed time after time in expensive advertising space, they begin to believe that they have something to sell.

We work for one week to develop the vocabulary of such "soft skills". Students practice giving vivid examples both in writing and orally. For example, one former student wrote, "I like to take initiative. I know that in the past, taking initiative helped me to advance in my job. One



day, when I was working at an electronics company, the assembly line stopped working. My coworkers sat on the floor playing cards, waiting for the line to start. I thought this was a good opportunity to learn something. I asked my supervisor if I could see the other department working. I watched the other worker for more than an hour, and I thought I could do that. The next day, I told my supervisor that I was sure I could do that. The next week, I got a promotion to that department. I don't think that you can advance without doing extra things."

The next week is spent on "functional or transferable skills," or the "I am good at..." skills. Functional skills are things one can do well. We do the same review of the want ads, and look for key words such as "organize, analyze, instruct, sell, convince, motivate, prioritize, calculate, handle multiple tasks, plan, mediate problems." Again, we spend a week for students to develop the vocabulary appropriate to their experience, develop personal examples, and practice pronunciation.

The next three weeks consist of more vocabulary development and affirmation of their previous skills as something valid. This is done with the help of the Job Developer and the Case Manager. The three of us spend significant individual time to develop vocabulary for the third component, the "job-specific" skills. We trace their work history with a chronological form and choose the most appropriate terminology to accurately describe their experience. Having no experience as a seamstress, an accountant, or an acupuncturist, I cannot pull terminology from the top of my head. Developing occupational or professional vocabulary is a team effort, using occupational resource books.

To further reinforce and practice this vocabulary, the students will fill out up to ten Boston-area job applications in class. They will then develop a resume, and will format it in computer class. They will write basic cover letters in response to mock advertisements. Through all of these media, the students become comfortable with the vocabulary, and hopefully they also begin to see that they do have valid, valued skills.

Weeks ten to fifteen have carried us through the job market exploration, skills self-assessment, job applications, resumes, and cover letters. By this time they should have a great handshake, make consistent eye contact, project their voices well, believe that they have skills to offer, know how to describe their skills, and are realistic about which "hard" skills they must learn in a future training program.

Weeks sixteen to eighteen consist of daily practice of 30 to 40 common interview questions, including the areas of small talk, education background, work experience, work style/personal traits, career plans, and hiring details, such as schedules. They have a nightly homework assignment to prepare complete answers to three or four interview questions. The following day, as one student is interviewed on their personal cassette tape, the others observe and critique each other.

By this time, they have become very aware of the completeness of answers, the effectiveness of personal examples, volume, eye contact, posture, and general "sales ability." Having been together for almost 20 weeks, they are comfortable with each other and generally very supportive, yet they are often more critical of each others performance than I might be. This just indicates their awareness, and I love when



I see that.

They are ready for a full trial run. Members of the AACRA Employment and Training Advisory Board are called in. These are most often Human Resource specialists from major area employers such as Fleet Services, BankBoston, New England Medical Center, MetLife. They interview those whose English skills are in the higher range, and who have a great deal of comfort by now with the interview process. Those who are still struggling with English and/or confidence are interviewed by Board members with Adult Education and ESL affiliations. We do not tell this to the students, so not to single them out. Clearly, these interviewers have strategies to ease them through the first interview.

By now, the students have been observing each other for at least three weeks. The mock interview takes place in a classroom observed by the teacher and up to 10 classmates, and it is videotaped. It is a highly artificial situation, but we hope the students will benefit from multiple forms of feedback. The students seem to consider it a rite of passage, and say that it is beneficial. Because there is no real job at stake, they just consider it a good opportunity to practice.

During the interview, classmates fill out peer-critique forms which are in the form of a checklist. In fact, they have been doing this informally during the past three weeks. They pass these to the interviewee after the class. At the culmination of the interview, the interviewee gives a self-critique, describing the basic level of comfort, explaining which questions were difficult, and suggesting how they might improve those answers in the future. By the students' own critique, it is clear how aware they are of themselves. When they can

laugh and suggest improvements for themselves, I know that they are on the way to successful interviews in the future. This is a great sign of success.

The interviewer then gives a critique, explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the interview, and makes suggestions. The final critique is done by the teacher who focuses more on pronunciation difficulties with pivotal words, or grammar which may have impeded understanding. I write those specific words down, and they may ask me to practice with them, and to put it on their audio cassette later.

At twenty minutes per interview, plus time to critique, interviews may take three or four days to complete. The students applaud each other and release a collective sigh of relief. I then copy the videotape onto VHS, and students circulate that copy, often making their own tape.

Cycle after cycle, students tell me how they review their audiocassettes and video cassette, especially as they begin to graduate from other training programs and prepare for interviews. They have also used the videotapes to help instruct friends and family members about interviewing.

By spending almost 10 weeks on the actual process of skills self-assessment, job search skills, and interviewing we hope to prepare students for two options. The first is to seek employment directly from the Prevocational Program. Of course, unless they have work experience in a related field, and a certain competency with English, they will be seeking more basic entry-level service jobs. Secondly, for those who plan to continue on with training programs, we hope to give a comprehensive ESL-oriented view of the employment search process which will be used in conjunction with the more rapid-pace presen-



tation of such skills in other city-wide programs where they may be studying with native-English speakers.

Clearly, a non-native speaker faces the same interview challenges as a native speaker. They face competition, nervousness, insecurity, and the need to prepare.

Coupled with linguistic and cultural barriers, the prospect can be overwhelming. In preparing students for the process, we as ESL teachers should not be uncomfortable to emphasize the basics. If we do not, then who will?





Peer Evaluation Form for \_\_\_\_\_

	still needs work	adequate	well-presented
introduces self & handshake			
posture			
energy			
eye contact			
volume			
makes small talk			
talks about education			
talks about past employment			
explains interest in position			
talks about strengths and work style			
explains long/short-term goals			
uses good examples to clarify points			
asks appropriate questions about job			
says "thank you" & shakes hands			
in general, sells herself/himself well			

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Where's the EGAP These Days?

**M**aybe you remember when Martha Germanowski designed something called an Educational Goals Assessment Packet for learners in adult education classes for the homeless. The EGAP was designed to get a big picture of students' interests, to help learners focus on their goals, and to show their progress. It had an extensive checklist of reading, math and life skills, a goals page, a monthly review page, and a daily log.

This "big picture" benefited the teacher in her planning for a multi-level class. It benefited learners who could choose their goals, see progress on those specific goals, and then get positive feedback on their daily work. Like all teacher tools, parts of it wore out, parts didn't work well, and other parts proved to be "keepers".

A few years after its appearance, the EGAP, like Martha G., is in transition. Now, as Martha Jean, I am considering more EGAP modifications.

### WHAT HAS HAPPENED OVER THOSE FIVE YEARS?

I started using the EGAP in my Pre-GED and GED classes because it gave those learners a sense of their own accomplishments, possible goals, and the same positive feedback. I added and then removed a Reading Interest Checklist that didn't tell me more than an existing intake question about how well a student reads. I kept and modified the Daily Log, Monthly Goals Review, and the Educational Goals Plan pages.

Because of my continual urge to make the EGAP more visually pleasing, over the years I've made some simple changes on

all the pages, aided by computers. The lines have been removed and a clearer font used. Bold and italicized headers have been added. Because the options of "I know/do this," "I would like to know more now/later," "I understand this and I am ready for the next steps," added to student confusion, the latest model reads simply: I KNOW THIS\_\_ and I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS\_\_. Students are told to check only what is important to them. Progress is reported in the Daily Log.

This reads as if I am using the EGAP. I am pleased to say that many teachers have used it or modified it for different classroom use over the years. But, I didn't use it at all this past year.

### WHY NOT?

This year our students had extensive intakes and testing for the DOE SMARTT System. It seemed excessive to burden them with so much paperwork before they even got to be involved in learning. So, I set the EGAP aside to think about how to make it most useful in my GED and multi-level homeless education classes.

I also became part of a teacher research group about multiple intelligence. That added a whole new perspective about how I might want to help students know themselves, their strengths, and what they already know. I had a lot to consider for my next EGAP remake.

### WHAT IS MY THINKING ABOUT THE " FUTURE EGAP" ?

I don't want to overwhelm new class members, so I am going to break the EGAP into smaller parts to be completed by stu-

by  
Martha Jean



Community Action Inc.  
Haverhill, MA



dents over some weeks. I don't plan on removing anything; students and I like what it includes. But, to the checklist I will add skills related to music, movement, nature, spatial understanding, interpersonal and intrapersonal ability. My multiple intelligences research has shown me that these are equally valuable areas of knowledge. My research experience has also reminded me how learners benefit from time to talk about, share, and consider their options. The EGAP can be more than a checklist if time is given to explore the choices learners make. This will support learners' work to reach their goals.

The EGAP was designed as and at its core has remained, a tool for teachers and learners to identify what learners know and what they dream of knowing. There is a do-able goals plan and a daily chance to communicate successes, failures, hopes, and fears. There is a place for goals review and revision. Those have remained the same.

Changes happen whenever I or another teacher asks, "How is this working for the learners?" "Is this leading to some positive learning or is this more burdensome paperwork?" or "How can I make this work better?" Those questions continue to make the EGAP what it is and what it can become.



*My research experience has also reminded me how learners benefit from time to talk about, share, and consider their options.*



EDUCATIONAL GOALS PLAN

THESE ARE THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS I WILL WORK ON WHILE I AM IN THE  
COMMON GROUND CLASSES:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I HAVE READ, OR SOMEONE HAS READ TO ME, MY EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS.  
I HAVE CHOSEN THE GOALS I WOULD LIKE TO START WORKING ON IN EACH  
CLASS.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNED

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



MONTHLY GOALS REVIEW

IN THIS MONTH OF \_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_ I WORKED ON, COMPLETED, OR  
LEARNED THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NEXT MONTH I PLAN TO DO THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

-----

IN THIS MONTH OF \_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_ I WORKED ON, COMPLETED, OR  
LEARNED THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NEXT MONTH I PLAN TO DO THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

-----

IN THIS MONTH OF \_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_ I WORKED ON, COMPLETED, OR  
LEARNED THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NEXT MONTH I PLAN TO DO THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

-----

IN THIS MONTH OF \_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_ I WORKED ON, COMPLETED, OR  
LEARNED THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NEXT MONTH I PLAN TO DO THIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



EDUCATIONAL GOALS ASSESSMENT PACKET



PUT A  NEXT TO YOUR CHOICES

I KNOW  
THIS

I WANT  
TO KNOW  
MORE ABOUT  
THIS

I KNOW  
THIS

I WANT  
TO KNOW  
MORE ABOUT  
THIS

COMPREHENSION SKILLS

- READ AND WRITE MY NAME
- READ AND WRITE MY ADDRESS
- READ AND WRITE MY PHONE NUMBER
- READ AND WRITE MY SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER
- READ LABELS OR INSTRUCTIONS
- READ / UNDERSTAND NUTRITION INFORMATION
- READ A CALENDAR
- READ A BUS SCHEDULE
- READ A T.V. GUIDE
- READ A PHONE BOOK
- READ MENUS OR RECIPES
- READ BILLS
- READ MAPS
- READ NEWSPAPERS
- READ MAGAZINES
- READ HEALTH INFORMATION
- READ AND WRITE CHECKS

READ AND WRITE LETTERS

READ AND FILL OUT FORMS

READ TO CHILDREN

HELP WITH HOMEWORK

USE A DICTIONARY

READ NOTICES FROM SCHOOL

WRITE NOTES TO SCHOOL

I KNOW THIS  I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS \_\_\_

GRAMMAR SKILLS

CAPITALIZATION

PUNCTUATION

SPELLING

DEFINITIONS

WRITING SKILLS

WRITE IN A JOURNAL OR DIARY

WRITE SONGS

WRITE POEMS

WRITE FOR A NEWSLETTER



I KNOW THIS	I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS	I KNOW THIS	I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITE TO A NEWSPAPER <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> DIVISION <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITE ADVICE TO OTHERS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> WEIGHTS/MEASURES (SCALE, THERMOMETER) <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITE THE GED ESSAY <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MEASUREMENT - STANDARD <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITE WORK OR SCHOOL REPORTS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MEASUREMENT - METRIC <input type="checkbox"/>
LIFE SKILLS			<input type="checkbox"/> TELLING TIME <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> REGISTER TO VOTE <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> DECIMALS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> GET A LIBRARY CARD <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> FRACTIONS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> GET A LEARNER'S PERMIT <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> RATIO / PROPORTION <input type="checkbox"/>
LIFE SKILLS			<input type="checkbox"/> PERCENT <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERSTAND WANT ADS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> WORD PROBLEMS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> DO A RESUME <input type="checkbox"/>			GED, WORK, COLLEGE SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/> FILL OUT A JOB APPLICATION <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED WRITING/ GRAMMAR TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERSTAND WORK MANUALS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED WRITING/ ESSAY TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERSTAND WORKPLACE BENEFITS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED ARTS & LITERATURE TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER GRAMMAR, WRITING, LIFE, WORK SKILLS I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ARE:			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED SOCIAL STUDIES TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED SCIENCE TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> BE PREPARED FOR GED MATH TEST <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> JOB TRAINING MATH <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> USE A CALCULATOR <input type="checkbox"/>
MATH SKILLS			<input type="checkbox"/> TYPE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> ADDITION <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> USE A COMPUTER <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> SUBTRACTION <input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/> MULTIPLICATION <input type="checkbox"/>			



I KNOW THIS	I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS	I KNOW THIS	I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS
<input type="checkbox"/> COLLEGE WRITING SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE RENTAL COST <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> COLLEGE MATH SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE REPAIR / REPLACEMENT COST <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> COLLEGE TEST TAKING SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> FIND DIMENSIONS OF A SCALE DRAWING <input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER MATH, GED, WORK, OR COLLEGE SKILLS I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ARE:			<input type="checkbox"/> USE PASSBOOK/CHECKBOOK <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE INTEREST ON SAVINGS OR LOAN <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			OTHER
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> USE A MAP...LOCAL <input type="checkbox"/>
_____			<input type="checkbox"/> STATE <input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. <input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/> WORLD <input type="checkbox"/>
MATH/LIFE SKILLS			
<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERSTAND PAYCHECK (NET, GROSS, S.S., ETC.) <input type="checkbox"/>			OTHER MATH SKILLS I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ARE:
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPARE BENEFITS <input type="checkbox"/>			_____
<input type="checkbox"/> SCHEDULE WORK HOURS <input type="checkbox"/>			_____
<input type="checkbox"/> MAKE A BUDGET <input type="checkbox"/>			_____
<input type="checkbox"/> SET SAVINGS GOALS <input type="checkbox"/>			_____
<input type="checkbox"/> UNIT PRICE FOOD <input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE SALES TAX <input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPARE GENERIC & BRAND NAME ITEMS <input type="checkbox"/>			OTHER
<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE CAR EXPENSES <input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERSTAND A BILL (PHONE, ELECTRIC, HEAT) <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> ADVENTURE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HOW TO SAVE ENERGY <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> ANIMALS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> FIGURE AN INSTALLMENT PLAN <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> ART <input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/> ASTROLOGY <input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/> I HAVE READ THIS	<input type="checkbox"/> I WOULD LIKE TO READ



I HAVE READ THIS	I WOULD LIKE TO READ	I HAVE READ THIS	I WOULD LIKE TO READ
<input type="checkbox"/> CHILDREN <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> LEARNING <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> COMEDY <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MOVIES <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> COMIC BOOKS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> COOK BOOKS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MYSTERY <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> CULTURE <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> NATURE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> CURRENT EVENTS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> OCCULT <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> DRAMA <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> PARENTING <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> POETRY <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> EXPERIMENTAL <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICAL <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> FANTASY <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> RECOVERY <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> FASHION <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> REAL PEOPLE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HEALTH <input type="checkbox"/>			RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL
<input type="checkbox"/> EMOTIONAL <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> MYSTICAL <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> FIRST AID <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> ROMANCE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HUMAN BODY <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> SELF-HELP <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> NUTRITION <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE FICTION <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HOBBIES (TYPE?) <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> SPORTS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HORROR <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> SUSPENSE <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> HUMOR <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> TELEVISION <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> INSPIRATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> TRAGEDY <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> INTELLIGENCE <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> TRAVEL <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> JOBS <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/> WESTERNS <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE <input type="checkbox"/>			



*How Much and What Kind?*

## **One Family Literacy Program's Assessment Story**

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**T**he topic of assessment is a fascinating, challenging, and daunting one for any adult education program, no matter what its scope and setting. In the field of family literacy, however, assessment must broaden to include children as well as parents, and curriculum components such as parenting, parent-and-child time and home visiting along with the traditional conversation, reading, grammar, writing and math.

At the Cambridge Even Start program, we have tried to deal with these challenges by doing everything on the assessment map: standardized and non-standardized; group and individual; formal and informal; teacher and self. You name it, we do it: anecdotal running records, work sampling, conferences and I.E.P.s, journals, locked confidential files, open accessible portfolio files. The result is, as our local evaluator put it recently, we are "drowning in data."

If assessment is always a work in progress, the above-mentioned evaluator, Elizabeth Brach, is the latest chapter in our assessment story. (Elizabeth works for the Office of Resource Development and Assessment at the Cambridge School Department, directed by Barbara Black.) Every program should be so lucky as to experience an outside evaluator as positive, appreciative, fair, rigorous, professional, and willing to look at existing assessment protocols and ask hard questions. Our latest revisions and attempts to streamline owe a great deal to her.

Cambridge Even Start is a collaboration between the Cambridge Community Learning Center and the Cambridge School Department (primarily its Home-Based Early Childhood, Primary Education and Title I programs). Families attend five mornings a week from 9 to 12 at the Gately Shelter in North Cambridge, a multi-use city building housing youth programs in the afternoon and evening. Even Start is a "center-based" program in that most of the components happen in the same place at the same time; however, each family also receives a weekly hour-long home visit at a time convenient to them and their home visitor, and we also take some field trips off-site. We are designed to serve 30 Cambridge families a year. Since our beginning in 1993, we have served 84 families from 20 different countries speaking 12 different languages, reflecting the diversity of Cambridge.

For the parents, we offer an ESL class (Level 2/3 in the Community Learning Center's sequence) taught by Lally Stowell, and an ABE class (Intermediate/Pre-GED level) taught by Sylvia Greene, on Tuesdays 9-12, Thursdays 9-11, and Fridays 9-11, for a total of seven hours a week. Monday and Wednesday are for computer classes (taught by Javier Aponte), with parents coming one day or the other for three hours. On those days, other offerings are an hour-long phonics and spelling class, individual tutoring, group homework time, and time for parents to volunteer in the preschool class. Fridays from

by  
Sylvia Greene,  
Nancy Hoe, and  
Lally Stowell



Community  
Learning Center  
Cambridge, MA



11-12 we have a parent discussion/support group for ESL and ABE parents combined. Thursdays from 11-12 we have Parent and Child Time (PACT) involving all parents, all children, and all staff. Parent and child activities centered around a book, toy, or game are also the central focus of the home visits.

Our preschool class meets every morning from 9-12, and is open to children 2 years 9 months to kindergarten age. It is taught by Nancy Hoe, Estalina Rodriguez, and June Ramdewar. (We provide babysitting reimbursements for children under 2 years 9 months.) About half the parents have their children in our preschool class, and the others have their children in Head Start or other preschool settings, family daycare, or elementary school. We run from September to the end of July, and are open-entry, open-exit.

Even Start is staffed by two Co- Coordinators (Nancy is Early Childhood Co-Coordinator and Sylvia is ABE Co-Coordinator) who each administer half-time and teach half-time; three half-time teachers (Lally who works with Sylvia, and Estalina and June who work with Nancy); a 10-hour-a-week computer teacher (Javier); and a Harvard Graduate School of Education intern and four volunteer tutors who help out in different parts of the program. Counseling is provided by the teaching staff and agencies to whom we refer parents as needed.

#### INITIAL ASSESSMENT

##### Parent

New families come to us in several different ways: through agency referral, word-of-mouth, cable TV announcements, targeted AFDC mailings, and so on. Over the telephone, it is usually possible

through evaluating conversational ability and asking a few questions about previous education to determine whether the parent is more appropriate for Lally's ESL class or Sylvia's ABE class, or not appropriate for Even Start at all, in which case we try to refer the person elsewhere. This initial phone call is the first step in the assessment process.

Next comes an appointment with Lally or Sylvia, in the parent's home or at the Gately Shelter. A Community Learning Center registration form is filled out, yielding the usual demographic data, plus educational history of the parent, and goals the parent chooses for themselves from the range provided on the form (which is useful, but not complete). A separate Child Intake Form is filled out, to be discussed later in this article. At this point, the ESL and ABE initial assessments diverge.

*ESL:* The next step in the ESL assessment is a teacher-made series of graded readings designed by teachers at the Community Learning Center that the parent reads aloud, with Lally asking set questions after each reading. She notes numbers of hesitations and mispronunciations, and level of comprehension, which are recorded on the form and filed eventually in the parent's folder. Based on this reading inventory and informal conversation with the parent, she determines if he or she is appropriate for her class. If the parent scores too low, Lally refers him or her to another class at the Community Learning Center — ESL 1 or ESL Literacy 1 (for people who are also not literate in their own language) — another adult education program, or, in some cases, loans a series of her own tapes to help the parent reach the level of her class. ("Too low" would mean ESL 1 level: someone who speaks hardly any English and would not be able to sit in a group of



*Sylvia analyzes the results with the parent, noting strengths and needs using a checklist of skills ranging from basic computation skills up to geometry and algebra.*

adults from many different countries and have a simple conversation about a topic like discipline or bedtime routines.)

There is no second form of this informal reading inventory to re-administer later in the year to check progress, so Lally, along with the ESL department at the Community Learning Center, will be working on designing new ESL assessments that have two forms, one for pre-testing and one for post-testing.

*ABE:* For ABE parents, Sylvia next uses two interest inventories: one is general, asking questions about the parent's work-related reading, writing and math needs, topics s/he likes to read about, what s/he does well, who s/he most admires, and where s/he would most like to travel. The second is a more specific menu of possible GED-type topics, divided into the areas of Science, Social Studies and Literature, which the parent can rank in order of interest. The topics are ones like the civil rights movement, poetry, stress reduction, geography of the Caribbean, and so on, that have been of interest in the past to many adult learners, not just GED students. (At Even Start, a majority of the ABE students are interested in getting a GED. The others want to improve their reading, writing and math, usually with job training or job advancement in mind.)

Next, the parent does a writing sample, and then with Sylvia analyzes it for strengths and needs using a checklist of writing components, including handwriting, mechanics, spelling, vocabulary, use of standard grammar, ability to stick to the topic, ability to combine thoughts and feelings, and so on. This is kept in the parent's portfolio folder, for diagnostic purposes and for comparison with later writing samples chosen by the parent to measure

progress. The Community Learning Center staff is presently in the process of developing a "writing rubric" to facilitate wholistic scoring of writing samples, and Even Start looks forward to benefiting from this effort.

Usually, this is enough for the first meeting, as 1-1/2 to 2 hours have often passed. In the second session, the parent is given the Diagnostic Assessments of Reading, or DAR (Florence G. Roswell and Jeanne S. Chall, The Riverside Publishing Company, 8420 Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60631). This standardized but informal, individually-administered test yields grade levels and diagnostic information in five reading components: isolated word recognition, word analysis, word recognition in context, oral vocabulary, and silent reading comprehension, as well as spelling. A relatively short, flexible, easy-to-administer instrument, the DAR results in a profile extremely useful in designing instruction specific to the parent's needs. The instrument was chosen by the ABE Department at the Community Learning Center as most useful for looking at several components of reading.

We also give the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education, CTB/McGraw Hill, 20 Ryan Ranch Rd., Monterey, CA 93940) in order to satisfy our funders, be consistent with the Community Learning Center, and provide transition to job training centers that use TABE scores. We give the TABE Locator, then the indicated level of the test. (We give only the Reading subtest.)

Next comes the Community Learning Center's informal math diagnostic. As with the writing sample, Sylvia analyzes the results with the parent, noting strengths and needs using a checklist of skills ranging from basic computation skills up to geometry and algebra.



The DAR, TABE and math diagnostic tests are all filed in the parent's locked, confidential file. This is plenty for the second session. At this point the parent can begin class.

The last step in initial ABE assessment happens after s/he has been in class a week or so. The Literacy and Numeracy Practices Questionnaire is a fancy name for a list of real-life reading, writing, and math survival skills, grouped into those used at home, at work, and out in the community. They include such things as reading the newspaper, figuring tips, writing a resume and filling out an accident report. For each skill there are columns for "Can do" already (and if so, "How often?" and "Easy or Hard?"), and "Would like to learn."

Based on the preceding information from all the assessments done so far, it is now possible to sit down with the parent and have an initial conference to set goals. Goals can be chosen from the "Needs work" column of the checklists for the writing sample and math diagnostic, from the "Would like to learn" column of the questionnaire, or the topics ranked high on the interest inventories. The form used for the conference in the ABE class (a different one is used in the ESL class) is on the next page.

All this assessment, then, leads to the parent's conference record, which informs both group and individual instruction and helps track progress. When a parent completes one of their short-term goals as stated on this form, he or she receives a certificate, a copy of which may go in their portfolio file.

### Child

During the first meeting with the parent, a Child Intake Form is filled out for each child in the family aged seven or younger. This yields birthdate; parents' names; names, ages and school placement of all siblings; favorite activities; allergies; other services and agencies involved with the child; and the parents' goals for the child.

During the first home visit to the family, Nancy Hoe or the Home-Based Director (Ellen Grant Valade) takes a developmental history for each child aged seven or younger. They also give the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), a well-respected standardized instrument which tests the child's receptive vocabulary and concept development.

### Family

Soon after parents begin class, they are asked their goals for the whole family. These are often difficult to articulate, and require discussion and modeling in the Friday parent discussion group. Parents often take time to articulate their goals, so a list of examples from other parents is often helpful. (An example of a family goal is to spend more time together on the weekends.) Their goals are filed in their family portfolio folder. For each family, there are two sets of fairly comparable files, one kept inside a locked cabinet, and one in a portable milk carton on top of the cabinet accessible to parents and teachers. In each place, there is a hanging file for each family containing four differently-colored folders, one for the parent's adult class, one for each child seven or younger, one for home visiting and one for the family.

*Soon after parents begin class, they are asked their goals for the whole family. These are often difficult to articulate, and require discussion and modeling in the Friday parent discussion group. Parents often take time to articulate their goals, so a list of examples from other parents is often helpful. (An example of a family goal is to spend more time together on the weekends.)*



CAMBRIDGE EVEN START  
INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN  
and CONFERENCE RECORD FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

1. I think my reading is \_\_\_\_\_

I think my writing is \_\_\_\_\_

I think my spelling is \_\_\_\_\_

I think my math is \_\_\_\_\_

I think my parenting (helping my children develop in a positive way) is

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What goals would you like to work on in the next 5 months?

<u>Goal</u>	Date chosen	Date accomplished
Reading:		
Writing:		
Spelling:		
Math:		
Parenting:		



3. Teacher's goals for the student for the next 5 months:

Reading:

Writing:

Spelling:

Math:

(over)

	Teacher assessment	Self-assessment
4. Comments about attendance:		
5. Comments about homework:		

6. Previous test score:     \_\_\_\_\_     \_\_\_\_\_     \_\_\_\_\_  
    (name of test)     (date of test)     (score)

Previous test score:     \_\_\_\_\_     \_\_\_\_\_     \_\_\_\_\_  
    (name of test)     (date of test)     (score)(score)



*It became clear that there was no opportunity for the parent to evaluate all five components of Even Start at once, thus reflecting the comprehensiveness of family literacy.*

#### ONGOING ASSESSMENT

##### **Family**

The most obvious ongoing assessment information is attendance records. We were keeping separate attendance forms for parents, children in our preschool class, and home visits; now we are consolidating these into one family attendance form to be filed at the end of each month in the locked family file. Also, family goals are updated every five months during individual conferences or in a parent discussion group.

##### **Parent**

Another obvious source of assessment data is a record of homework assigned and either completed or not completed. Discussion of both attendance and homework records is included in the conference. Conferences happen in January and June and include notation of goals met and setting of new goals.

The TABE is re-administered to ABE parents right before these conferences and discussion of (hopefully!) progress as shown by TABE scores is included. Lally uses a group of five parenting issues (such as discipline and giving children responsibility) for ongoing assessments every two months during the year. She pairs two ESL students to discuss the topic, then has them separate and write on the topic; discussion of these writing samples is part of her individual conferences.

ABE parents keep journals which they write in each Friday, answering two questions: "What did you learn in your adult class today?" and "Give an example of something you did this past week to help your child learn," the second question having been suggested by our first local evaluator as a positive, non-judgemental and open-ended way for parents to think about

their parenting.

Copies of all writing samples are kept in the parent's accessible portfolio file, and at conferences can be compared using the same checklist used for the initial writing sample to show changes.

Since math instruction in the ABE class is by necessity individualized, each student has a running Individualized Math Record Sheet, with columns for book, page number, concept worked on, date given, and date received. These are kept in a folder in the classroom.

For each parent, Sylvia also keeps a running Teacher/Tutor Comment Sheet, where she or one of the volunteer tutors who help in the classroom can note anything important. These sheets are confidential and are kept in a folder, eventually filed in the parent's folder in the locked cabinet.

Recently, thanks to feedback from our local evaluator Elizabeth Brach, it became clear that there was no opportunity for the parent to evaluate all five components of Even Start at once, thus reflecting the comprehensiveness of family literacy. Therefore, we came up with the following form, to be filled out by the parents every other Friday during Parent Discussion time. The form has been modified several times, and the final product owes much to the valuable feedback of Home-Based Director Ellen Grant Valade. We have tried it once, and hope it will help us keep an eye on the program as a whole. After the parent has filled it out, the form will be filed in the locked family file.



**" THIS WEEK 'I...' FORM"**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Week ending Friday, \_\_\_\_\_, 199\_

SELF-ASSESSMENT: "This past two weeks, I and/or my child attended . . . "

ACTIVITY/COMPONENT	Yes	No	Comments
Adult class:			
ESL or ABE			
Computer class			
Phonics/Spelling			
Individual tutoring			
Parent discussion			
Contact w. child's school (Comment on any talks you, the parent, had with the teacher, volunteering in the classroom, etc.)			
Even Start preschool			
Headstart, CEOC, other preschool			
Family daycare/babysitter			
Elementary school			
Home Visit			
Parent-and-child time or field trip			
Reading to my children			



#### “ THIS WEEK I...” FORM

The history of the form on the previous page is an example of the ongoing adaptation of our assessment practices. We used to have a separate home visit report form, and a separate school contact report form and a separate form to report books parents read to children during the week. Now the school contact and home visit forms are absorbed into the above one and thanks, to a suggestion from Ellen Grant Valade, the home visitor will now help the parent keep a running record of books read, since it will be easier to do in the home where the books are right there in plain sight.

Each July, during home visits, Sylvia fills out a form with parents asking them to comment on their own progress, their children’s progress, and their plans for September.

#### Child

Work samples are collected throughout the year for each child in the Even Start preschool class, and extensive running anecdotal records are kept. A developmental checklist is filled out for the child at mid-year, then again at the end of the year. (Nancy is presently working on a specific literacy development checklist covering birth to 7 years linked to an instrument the Cambridge School Department is beginning to use which is based on Marie Clay’s *Concepts About Print*, or CAP.) Preschool staff write short monthly goals.

In July, an End-of-the-Year Report is written for each child using the Cambridge School Department’s Kindergarten Transition Form. A copy of this report is given to the parent. This coming year, we will begin keeping a parent-child spiral notebook for each child in the preschool class, in

which staff can write down information about the child, and where parents can read and respond. These will be kept in an accessible box in the preschool room. Finally, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test is readministered by Nancy during the July home visit.

#### EXIT ASSESSMENT

Since parents rarely leave Even Start with plenty of notice, this aspect of our assessment protocol is weakest. Ideally, we hope to give ABE parents a final TABE, all children a final PPVT, and all parents our Exit Interview, which includes questions about their future plans and their ratings of the different components of the program.

After all is said and done, what is the purpose of all this data collection? Within our program, it clearly helps parents document and celebrate their own and their children’s progress. Even Start also needs to make sure, however, that their assessment practices are meaningful to potential funders, since our federal grant runs out the year 2001. We need to demonstrate that we are doing some good in terms that make sense to taxpayers and school departments and state legislators and whoever else might be interested in eventually adopting us.

For this reason, the eleven Even Start programs around Massachusetts – already accustomed to working together, thanks to a caring and energetic statewide coordinator at D.O.E. (Arlene Dale) who assembles us regularly — have begun to discuss the idea of looking at family literacy assessment from a statewide perspective.

In addition to the local and state layers of assessment, there is a national layer. Like the other 600 or so Even Start programs around the country, we have to report each



July to the Even Start Information System (ESIS) standard demographic and attendance data, among other things. For two years, we were also part of something called the National Sample study, and for a limited number of our families, reported TABE or CASAS scores for parents and Preschool Language Survey scores for their preschool children.

The resulting National Even Start Evaluation was disappointing because it did not capture at all the daily progress practitioners were seeing. Partly in response to this situation, a newly-formed national organization of practitioners called the National Even Start Association is moving toward doing its own evaluation, which will hopefully document this progress. Nancy is on their Advisory Board.

Our assessment practices seem to require constant tinkering, and we find ourselves trying this and rejecting that, seeing what works and doesn't work, and listening, reading, sharing, and certainly borrowing. Please feel free to adapt any of the instruments mentioned in this article, or contact us with any questions or ideas. (Sylvia Greene and Lally Stowell can be reached at the Community Learning Center, 19 Brookline St., Cambridge, MA 02139, tel. 617-349-6363; Nancy Hoe is at the Cambridge School Department, 159 Thorndike St., Cambridge, MA 02141, tel. 617-349-6493.) Cambridge Even Start looks forward to feedback to this article, and to the continuing dialogue.



*Our assessment practices seem to require constant tinkering, and we find ourselves trying this and rejecting that, seeing what works and doesn't work, and listening, reading, sharing, and certainly borrowing.*



## What We Had to Think About Before We Could Do Portfolio Assessment

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**T**he Durham Literacy Council is a community agency with a participatory focus. Staff members and volunteer tutors work in a variety of settings from community centers, university worksite programs, residential substance abuse centers, jails and employment training programs. Volunteer training focuses on developing lessons from learners goals and authentic materials, and learners work either in small group settings, one to one tutoring sessions or both.

The Lila Wallace/Literacy South Portfolio Project inspired staff members to examine the role of assessment in a learner centered practice and to create the program structure necessary for implementation. The importance of participatory planning and ongoing reflection became a major focus as authentic assessment practices were explored. I am the program director and have worked for the Literacy Council for seven years.

### INTRODUCTION

The portfolio project has helped us at the Literacy council think about a way to integrate assessment and instruction. If you're going to start into a portfolio, then you have to have some plan in the beginning about what you're after in your learning, beyond, "I want to learn to read and write better" or "I want to get a GED or get a drivers license." Tutors and students are having to do a lot more planning together initially. Even though we've always said we were participatory, and I think we've

done the best job we could do with that, sometimes tutors kind of fumbled with focusing on students' goals. I think it was difficult for them to always see the progress they were making towards those goals, especially if someone didn't read and write very well and they wanted to get a GED or something. Doing the kind of planning that makes sense and there's something there to attach it to, it's almost like some kind of mutual contract, mutual decision making.

We're not where we would like to be in terms of full program participation. It was difficult for us to get started and I'm not sure why. I think we really struggled with how we train volunteers about portfolio, and we're still struggling with that somewhat. The piece that seemed to be missing when we did the portfolio training was the planning piece. Even our small group leaders were saying "We've done so many kinds of things, and there is nothing that really ties it together." I realize that they weren't planning very well and couldn't do portfolios if they weren't doing better planning. So we're just now getting to the point that we're going to start seeing people have real portfolios to talk about.

### INTRODUCING PORTFOLIOS

Our teachers, other than the other two people on our staff, are all volunteers and so part of my charge was to go back and train and disseminate information from the portfolio assessment project. I think we did a good job with that. We held different

by  
Kathy Sikes



Durham Literacy  
Council  
Durham, NC



workshops – on Saturday morning, one in the evening. Early on the workshops were an introduction to the whole portfolio process because we were really new at it too. We just wanted to get started and we handed out some things like cover sheets and portfolios, and said, “Well, go and try it and we’ll meet in a couple of months and see what your questions are.” That couple of months passed and not very many people did anything. Then we evaluated how we would do the training differently.

Next, we invited volunteers and learners who were trying out portfolio assessment to come and talk with other tutors about it. It wasn’t perfect in the beginning. People just looked at the portfolios and talked about how they chose things or why a certain piece was in there. We decided we’d provide ample opportunity for people who had been in the program for a long time to come and get information about portfolio assessment. We wrote about it in newsletters, we did everything we could to incorporate existing tutors. Then we decided to put it in the training. Now, it’s part of the tutor training that we do rather than an in-service workshop. Like pre-service training rather than in-service and staff development.

When we planned the first portfolio training workshop, we tried to do way too much. In some ways, I think we’ve made this an overcomplicated thing. When we first started having conversations in the portfolio assessment project about portfolios, there was a lot that I didn’t understand. I did not understand the concept of “criteria.” I’m not sure why not. Sometimes what I want to learn comes to me in the middle of things. It seemed like “criteria” was an esoteric thing. I didn’t know

the process well enough to feel like I could change it, or we could add other things. I know at one point I felt very limited about what I had chosen for my criteria. And then I got over it. I realized, this is mine! I can change this. It’s fine, right? That part took a long time.

We struggled with how to talk to tutors about portfolio assessment, and basically what we said was, “this is a good thing. Look at all that can be done by using portfolios.” We gave tutors some sample lessons reflecting on change. If I had to do it over again, I would just skip all these discussions about change and start talking about “how do you know you’ve learned something?” rather than it being some kind of introduction into “Now we’re going to prepare you to participate in this process.” I don’t know, I think I was a little too careful, honestly, and not with learners with tutors. Then finally, I realized that part of it was that there was no organizational structure that supported portfolio assessment other than just a philosophical commitment.

Our tutors weren’t having ongoing discussions about progress with their students, and they didn’t have anything to base it on either. All they knew was some kind of large goal that this person had or didn’t have. I hesitated to provide models because there I didn’t want teachers and tutors to name the learning for the learner. I was concerned that we could interfere with the learners’ right to choose and describe their learning any way that they wanted.

#### DOING PORTFOLIOS

As far as the impact on students, that’s hard to know yet. I think that the students will increase their desire to be more par-

*Finally, I realized that part of it was that there was no organizational structure that supported portfolio assessment other than just a philosophical commitment. Our tutors weren’t having ongoing discussions about progress with their students, and they didn’t have anything to base it on either.*



*I tried to watch my progress and my learning and thinking about original criteria specifically. But, not everything I've included in my portfolio is about that. For example, I included part of what I wrote for a small-group inquiry based workshop, because I made an important connection.*

ticipatory because tutors and students are supposed to work together to plan their work for the quarter. People are sending us more complete plans. And tutors and students are filling them out together to plan their work for the quarter. I see two different people's handwriting on things. So I think that part will benefit the students.

Students will also benefit from looking at their work. In our first meeting, I say that it became really clear to people what they hadn't done. I mean, They were really proud of the work that they had done, but they kept seeing these gaps of things that were goals they had not met. We had two people who said "I don't have any writing to put in this," and "what happened to that writing class we used to come to?" And I said, "you stopped coming, and we closed the class. You know, we can't just run it forever with one person in it, or that needs to be a one-to-one match. Oh, well maybe we should do that again."

There were students that came to that meeting that only worked in workbooks. They had much less to put in their portfolios; for example, they saw people putting in their portfolios evidence that they had registered to vote or had been to conferences and had collected lots of material. We had talked about meeting with students individually to look at their portfolios. That evening, four students out of twelve asked me, "when are we going to do that?" So they felt invested in the project.

I'm looking forward to when we have our next meeting. We'll have people who are a little further along in looking at their portfolios than others. But my guess is that rather than everybody taking the same amount of time to get to that point, people will get there faster by seeing the examples of other people doing it.

I've loved doing my own portfolio. I've loved it. Particularly the last time that we all got together in the portfolio project and I got to spend some time really looking at my folder. Until then, I just collected things really. The other times that we had to sort things, I put a few things in my portfolio, but this time I really knew what I wanted in it. I also didn't edit when I was bringing things. I brought a box full of different kinds of reading, writings and work.

Writing the cover sheet has been really informative for me. The first thing that I think was important to mention is that it's not so much what I write on the cover sheet. It is the process of doing it. I mean, I've written handouts for years. I've written training workshops. I've never gone back and said, "why do I like this? Why am I keeping this now?" It's made me feel really good about the kinds of things that I've accomplished in my thinking and my job.

I tried to watch my progress and my learning and thinking about original criteria specifically. But, not everything I've included in my portfolio is about that. For example, I included part of what I wrote for a small-group inquiry based workshop, because I made an important connection. I realized how the planning part was missing for the tutors. They were saying "We love the idea of portfolios, because we weren't sure whether people were making progress, and it's a hard time getting learner input about what to do, and I thought, we're not very good at that, but we are getting somewhere now."

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Portfolio assessment has made us look at our training. Volunteers are, in essence, our staff and as such we expect some



accountability for what's happening with their work. In some ways I which we had a 20 hour a week person who just paid attention to helping people plan, being a resource to them in their planning and then visiting them about their portfolios. We don't provide a lot of leadership on how to get input, how to ask good questions, and how to plan together. We just say "Do it. Good luck. And bring back a beautiful portfolio." So it was the connection between those two things, planning and ongoing assessment, that made me realize where the training needed to be done.

Right now in training, we do a three-hour session on assessment, mostly talking about what happens when people come in the door, what kind of initial assessment. Then we talk about what we do with that information, what we tell the tutor. We talk about the planning sheets and how the tutor can take the information given them and then have this more in depth conversation with the learner. Part of it's for your information lecture type stuff, but then usually at some point we say, "OK, now here's some information we would have given you on the phone about learners," and have them create lessons based on it, so they see the connection between the assessment piece and the lesson piece. People do quite a good job. I mean, I've been impressed. We don't do very much on what happens between the planning and evaluating how well it went, and that's the sort of thing that we have to work on in our training. Then we say . "OK, this was our goal, what might you put in a portfolio? What would be the range of things?" All we can do at this point is brainstorm that. We don't have anything to real to show people. We created sample portfolios that are very differ-

ent from each other and show them to people in training. That seems to help. It wouldn't be anything like if learners were coming and talking about their portfolios, and I think we can pull that off by the next training. I do.

One of the other activities volunteers do in training is to help us create a training portfolio. They answer two questions and then talk about what they would give as evidence. We ask questions like, what did you learn about teaching and learning that you didn't know before? What did you like most about the training? We're getting much better feedback about what people are getting out of training.

#### CONCLUSION

My colleague Lee and I do all the training, so much of it is still in our heads. If we can create some kind of organizational memory of this project by keeping learners doing it— and by January we should have people who have pretty good starts on good portfolios—we will have started that process. If we can keep that going and have students help us lead portfolio workshops for other learners and volunteers then in a couple of years this will be our primary assessment tool.

It has been a real process for the organization, and if it took us two years to feel confident about it, I think we need to give ourselves that much time. Initially, we thought, "this will be a great thing to do because, one, this is the way we think anyway and learners will have that much more ownership over another piece of what they're involved with at the literacy council, and it'll be great to show the funders. We'll have all these really tangible things for people to see." Actually, the biggest impact has been an organizing effect



— making us take a real look at training and saying — “what are we saying about assessment? How can we get people to buy into the process? How can we get them to feel like it’s not some kind of esoteric thing, or additional work, but make it as

real as we’ve made writing and reading strategies?” That’s were we are. It has allowed us to create an instructional organization that we didn’t have before and to learn how to put things into a portfolio. That’s an important step for us.



*Interviewed by Melody Schneider.*

*Reprinted with permission from Phenomenal Changes, Literacy South, Durham, NC.*



## *Students Connecting with Students*

# **Lessons in Health Care**

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**W**ho are we? We are a group of eight women from different places with different languages and backgrounds: Dominican, Haitian, Mexican, Vietnamese, Russian, and American. We get together to work on health issues such as breast cancer, HIV and AIDS, and violence because we want our community to be safe and to be healthy. We are called The Student Action Health Team and got started in 1994, funded by the Comprehensive Health Project from the Massachusetts Department of Education to do health education at Operation Bootstrap, where we are or have been students.

Operation Bootstrap is located in Lynn, MA and offers classes in Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and General Educational Development (GED) as well as Family Literacy and pre-vocational programs. There are about 200 students in all of Bootstrap's programs and classes.

As The Student Action Health Team our job is to find out about the health education needs of students at Operation Bootstrap and develop plans to meet some of these needs. Every year we recruit new members for the team. Right now there are four original members and four new members.

After our first year together, we decided that we needed to do direct teaching in both English and native languages about health in the Bootstrap ABE, ESOL, GED, and Family Literacy classrooms be-

cause most community health education efforts did not meet the needs of Bootstrap students. We had brought in some community health educators during the first year but they talked too fast with difficult language and the materials they brought were too difficult to understand. Bootstrap students did not feel safe to ask questions or talk about whether the information was useful in their lives. The students told us they felt empty inside.

We decided we should let students choose the health topics they want to know more about. The team does this by putting on a health fair every fall for Bootstrap students and staff. We put up a list of health issues and then each student and staff member places one dot next to the issues they are most interested in learning about. In 1995-96, the top vote was for cancer education and we decided to focus on breast, cervical and testicular cancer because if they are detected early, successful treatment is more likely. In 1996-97, the top vote was for violence prevention. Bootstrap students were terrified because of the abduction of 6-year-old Jesus De La Cruz and this made them want to learn more about violence prevention in the community and in the home.

The educational programs are carried out in the classrooms as part of the regular classes. Our programs have three sessions of about 1.5 hours each and provide basic facts, hands-on practice, and information/discussion about community resources. We use lots of drama to get at difficult and

**by Judy Berry,  
Vandal Ivaneko,  
Nguyet Nyugen,  
Ana Reynoso,  
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Magali Torres and  
Charlene Wigfall.  
Marcia Hohn is the  
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Operation Bootstrap  
Lynn, MA



sensitive issues. Drama has been a good way to break the ice between the team and Bootstrap students and to get to students' hearts. We also use methods such as agree/disagree exercises, small group discussions, and pictures to get students and teachers participating, discussing, and interacting with the information.

For example, in the cancer education program, we held up written statements about basic facts and asked students to "vote" whether they thought the statement was true or false and then discussed the "answer" as it is known today. In beginning English classes we translated this information into as many as six languages. We wanted to make sure everyone really understood the information and had a chance to tell their stories and a safe atmosphere in which to ask questions.

In the next session small groups featured hands-on practice with breast and testicular models. A cancer educator helped us and we asked her to work with the men because we felt shy about teaching the men how to examine their testes.

In beginning English classes, we worked in small groups by language. The last session was a drama about going to the doctor and showed a situation where a patient with no insurance and limited English is not treated respectfully by the health care providers. This opened up the discussion about students' fears about discrimination and we talked about rights and responsibilities in medical situations.

We used drama a lot in the Family Violence program to illustrate the stories strangers use to get innocent children to come with them and to illustrate the short- and long-term effects of witnessing violence in the home on children. Our dramas — called Tommy at Eight Years and

Tommy at 14 Years — were about a boy from a violent home and illustrated the long-term effects of witnessing violence. Students discussed the drama afterward and gave their ideas about what could help Tommy. We also performed a man-woman violence drama with a similar small group discussion. The idea is to get students talking about the health issue, to help each other and to find community resources that help. All this must take place in a safe atmosphere where students' privacy and cultural beliefs are respected.

Every year we assess our program to find out what the Bootstrap students thought about it and what changes in knowledge, attitudes and actions happened. As program coordinators, we also reflect about what *we* learned, how *we* changed and how *we* saw the program affect other people. We want to tell you how we do this.

#### ASSESSING THE PROGRAM IN EARLY DETECTION OF BREAST, CERVICAL AND TESTICULAR CANCER 1995-1996

For our assessment, we decided to conduct a student survey to see the results of the work the team had done in early detection of breast, cervical and testicular cancer.

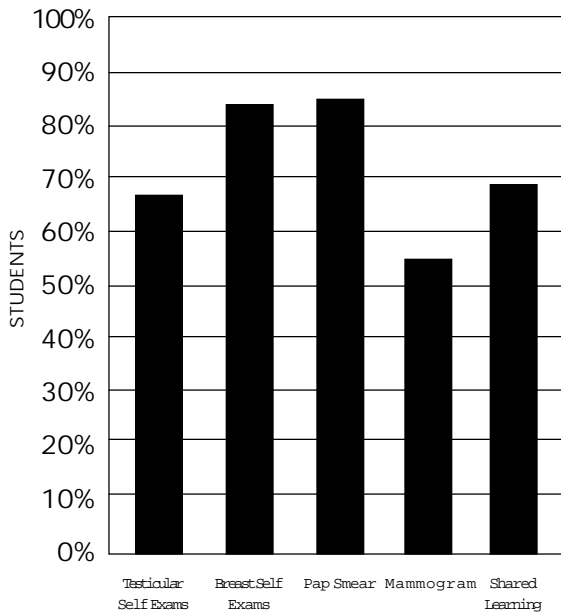
We developed the survey by brainstorming all we wanted to know, writing these thoughts down on Post-Its. For example, we wanted to know if students felt they understood the information, if they liked our teaching methods, if they saw this information as important to them and their families. We grouped the Post-Its to create categories. We then worked in pairs to develop statements that Bootstrap students could agree or disagree with on a scale of 1-5. There were three categories: 1) the importance of learning about breast, cervical and testicular cancer at Bootstrap,



2) the effectiveness of the teaching, and 3) resulting actions or steps the students had taken (such as having gone for a PAP test or a mammogram, or doing self-exams). Each category had six statements or questions.

We distributed the survey to the students in their classrooms, then we compiled the results and put it in bar graph form, which we thought the students could easily understand. The teachers helped us by explaining how to fill out the survey since many students were not familiar with the use of 1-5 scales. Although many students who had participated in the program had already left, 42 students filled out the survey. Here is an example of one of the bar graphs.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY LITERACY STUDENTS AT OPERATION BOOTSTRAP TWO MONTHS AFTER THE BREAST, CERVICAL, AND TESTICULAR CANCER EDUCATION PROGRAM BY THE STUDENT ACTION HEALTH TEAM



The survey showed that the students felt they had learned health information important for their lives and the lives of their families and friends, they liked having other students as their teachers and appreciated the many different teaching techniques, especially the drama. The survey further showed that students were taking action as a result of the education program.

We also conducted an internal team evaluation about how we felt about the work we did. We drew pictures and made statements about our personal feelings and shared these things in the team. Eighteen positive statements were reported, such as school being the best place to learn about health and that the information went beyond the classroom to family and friends. We were proud of each other and saw that we were role models for each other as well as for the Bootstrap students. We appreciated the support of Marie Wallace (who is a cancer educator). She informed us about cancer.

We also appreciated the support of the teachers working alongside the team by preparing students with vocabulary and following up with additional activities. Overall, we saw that receiving information in a native language and/or in simple ways with simple terms made for better understanding. It was our opinion that because students had better understanding they were able to take action such as doing self-exams or going for free PAP tests and mammograms.

#### ASSESSING THE PROGRAM ON FAMILY VIOLENCE 1996-97

We decided to do one-to-one interviews to find out about the effects of the family violence program because this is a personal and very sensitive issue. Many Bootstrap students have this problem in their



lives. Two Operation Bootstrap women students have been killed by their partners over the past few years. Many others live in fear and in threatening situations. Also, Bootstrap students were very emotionally affected by the abduction of Jesus De La Cruz in September of 1996. (He remains missing today.)

We went to the students one by one after the second session of our program – the effects on children of witnessing violence in the home – and did 36 interviews. Team members went to the classrooms and explained that we were evaluating our program and needed students' opinions. Many students volunteered to be interviewed. They told us they learned that children are emotionally affected for life, continue the pattern of violence, and are more likely to use drugs, be runaways, or have an early pregnancy – and that they did not know these facts before. For young students this was very important information for their future lives. After the man-woman violence drama we conducted some additional interviews and we were very careful to let students know we were not singling anyone out, that we needed to get their thoughts so we could improve our teaching.

Students told us they liked the use of drama, that it is a good way to present information. Family violence is a hard topic to talk about and drama keeps it safe so people do not feel singled out. The students liked the opportunity to give opinions in small group discussions after the dramas about how to help stop the cycle of

violence.

We also learned that students were taking action. They were sharing the information with family, neighbors, friends and co-workers, learning how to use neighbors and the phone to call the police for protection, and using community agencies for assistance when necessary. Students were also using religion, support groups, and community counselors. Many students told us that they did not know about these resources before, especially resources for helping with children. Students within the program were also trying to help each other.

In our assessments of both the cancer and violence education programs, students told us that Operation Bootstrap is a good place to learn about health issues and that health education added to their language and literacy learning. Teachers told us that students got so interested in talking about health issues in the class that they would forget to worry about their English — they would just talk in English even if it was not perfect because they were so anxious to communicate about the topic.

Several students told us that the Student Action Health Team should teach in other places because we “know how to teach and teach important things.” This made us feel very proud. During 1997-98 we will be mentors to programs new to doing health education in their program. We have a lot of experience and lessons to share and we look forward to helping them with the important topic of health.





*National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)*

## **Assessment Research Agenda**

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**W**hat impact does participation in adult learning and literacy programs have on an adult's life and how can this impact effectively be assessed?

The NCSALL partners at the Center for Literacy Studies (CLS) at the University of Tennessee and the College of Education at Rutgers University began working with this question. In the first year of NCSALL (the federally-funded National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy) we have been getting our research projects up and running, and beginning to get a handle on this question. It is more complex than we ever imagined!

We are currently working on four projects that we hope will help us move toward an answer. The first is a policy study that examines existing impact studies and state performance accountability projects and systems and draws implications for literacy policy and practice and for the design and methodology of future impact studies. The two papers in this study are being written by Hal Beder and Juliet Merrifield and should be available around the first of the year. The papers make clear that answering questions like, "What difference does our work make?" and "Is it working?" depends on who is asking and for what reasons as well as who is answering based on what data and what assumptions.

The second study is looking at how adult learners identify the impacts of participation in adult education in their lives. We are currently interviewing ten Tennessee adults who have been students in adult

basic education. We are asking them to tell us about their lives —about their work, families, and community activities as well as their educational experiences. We plan to follow these initial interviews with interviews with another fifty adult learners from a variety of programs across the country. From these life stories we hope to be able to "hear" the differences, the impacts that adult education have had in their lives.

A third lens for looking at the larger question is that of local programs. We will be working in an action research project with a Tennessee program that is implementing the new Equipped for the Future framework as it develops new ways of monitoring the program. We have reviewed how other fields (public health, community development) measure outcomes, particularly improvement in quality of life of individuals and communities. We will be working with this literacy program to discover what can be applied to measuring changes in the lives of learners.

The NCSALL partners at Rutgers are beginning to identify the variety of teacher/learner transactions or interactions that occur in adult education classrooms. With this understanding we will be better able to know what it is that adult learners have participated in.

When we're done, what will we have? We know for sure that we will not have the answer to our big question. But we will have more answers. And more questions. We will have looked closely at what has and hasn't worked in previous attempts to answer these questions. We will have

by  
**Beth Bingman**



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heard the voices of learners talking about impacts on their lives. We will have a model of looking at outcomes of adult education in the quality of learners' lives, a model that can be used by local programs. We will have a better understanding of what is happening in adult education classrooms in order to better approach measuring the outcomes.

While I know from experience the many challenges of recruitment, teaching, and staff development, I never had any difficulty thinking about these areas of practice.

But thinking about assessment is a different matter. We began by trying to get clear on the language: inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact, indicators of program quality, performance accountability measures. We tried to find out what these mean and ended up deciding that the best we could do was to decide what we mean by them.

The questions of what to assess and for

what reasons need as much thinking as how to assess. Do we want to know what happened, or do we want to know did x, y, or z happen? We all want to know the impact of our work — as teachers, as learners, as program administrators, as funders. But each of us have different ways of asking the question. "Did they learn what I taught?" "What did I learn?" "How many passed the G.E.D.?" "How many got a job?" "What difference did any of this make in my life?" "What difference does any of this make in my community?" Underlying all these questions is the question of who gets to decide.

So one year into our work on impacts assessment, we are back to doing the work on our projects. We hope the research will contribute to a much bigger discussion about assessment that will help us clarify what we can say about our impact as a field.





## *Voices from the Field: The Basic English Skills Test*

*In this section we look at various voices from the field around the much-used BEST. Although Adventures is a journal about learner-centered approaches to assessment and evaluation, it is time to look more deeply at other "assessment tools" that we all use. This section is not intended to encourage or discourage the use of the BEST, but to ask practitioners in the field how they view the test from the historical, teacher, and volunteer perspectives. We should all reflect on the tools we use to see if they fit with our programs and our learners.*

# **The History of the BEST**

**T**he history of the BEST is an interesting one. It began in the early 1980s when the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) saw a need to more effectively move refugees from welfare to economic self sufficiency through the "provision of a coordinated and structured English Language Training Program." In order to make this happen, they invested in a national initiative called the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) Project which brought together ESL professionals from throughout the US. The goal of this initiative was to develop and design not only a test, but curriculum guidelines and Student Performance Level (SPL) definitions.

The International Institute of Boston was one of the contributors to the MELT Project. As part of the Project, the BEST (Basic English Skills Test) was developed and field tested in a number of locations, including Boston. This test was designed to assess "elementary" listening, speaking, reading and writing skills reflecting a competency based approach to language teaching and assessment. The test could be reliably used if an individual had low literacy skills. The oral test could be used by itself if an individual did not have the literacy skills needed for the written component.

The BEST is life skills- and task-based, evaluating a student's ability to use English in real life situations. It was thought to be a tool that could provide useful information in determining an initial class

placement or determining progress in some specific functional areas such as telling time or counting money. It was never intended to test general language proficiency or to be especially useful in programs that did not use a survival life skills-based curriculum.

Much of the ESL being offered in the early 1980s was *not* life skills-based and did little to introduce learners to the world of work. Often the emphasis was grammar rather than functional language skills. Even more important to teachers, there were no resources for working with adults who were non-literate or had low native language literacy skills.

Likewise ESL assessment tools tended to be more academic with an emphasis on testing grammar. Very few tests could effectively assess learners with low literacy and/or little or no knowledge of English. As a result, many of the materials being used in the field were either inappropriate or were being generated by teachers with few guidelines or standards.

ORR, together with ESL professionals from many parts of the United States, decided there was a need to develop some common tools and common language for the Refugee ESL programs which were overwhelmed by the large numbers of adults arriving each month needing both English and the skills to get jobs.

Another interesting fact about the MELT Project is its relationship to the overseas refugee camp programs. In the late 1970s and early 1980s following the Cambodian

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*At a program level, however, assessment has to carefully consider both learner and program goals. So while the BEST is often thought to be one of the better tests, especially for learners at the beginning levels, it is not adequate for all programs and learners.*

genocide and the aftermath of the Vietnam war, large number of refugees were filling camps in countries throughout Southeast Asia. Many of them were applying to emigrate to the United States. The Department of State funded processing centers in a number of sites in both Southeast Asia and Africa where ESL and orientation prior to arrival to the U.S. was required for all adults accepted into the U.S. refugee program.

Close to 35,000 people graduated from these programs each year. In places like Galang, Indonesia, Bataan, Philippines and Phanat Nikon, Thailand, programs were set up and intensive efforts were made to develop common curriculum, common assessment processes and uniform class level definitions. As a result, the curriculum development, staff training and resources produced in these overseas programs was impressive.

Even more impressive was that the work done in these refugee camps was coordinated with the MELT material developed stateside. For example, when a refugee arrived in the U.S., his or her class level was stamped on the I-94 card giving stateside ESL programs an indication of a learner's SPL upon completion of the overseas program. Since the BEST was correlated with the SPL, it was possible to verify an SPL using the BEST and more easily place a student into a class. Overseas ESL and Cultural Orientation curriculum was shared with teachers in the U.S so teachers often knew what material students had covered in the camps; the MELT curriculum was designed to build on what was covered in the camps.

Now, almost 12 years later, the BEST and other MELT material have gone well beyond ESL programs targeting incoming refugees. As accountability and outcomes

measurement become increasingly important, many funders have adopted the SPL and the BEST as required tools for ESL programs. Obviously the framework and "common language" that these tools provide give funders a better ability to quantify progress.

At a program level, however, assessment has to carefully consider both learner and program goals. So while the BEST is often thought to be one of the better tests, especially for learners at the beginning levels, it is not adequate for all programs and learners. The test was developed as an alternative to traditional paper and pencil tests, with an emphasis on assessing very basic life skills. If a program is not working with a basic survival life skills focus, this test may not be particularly useful when determining initial class placement or when measuring progress. If the emphasis is pre-vocational, for example, more specific pre-vocational skills may need to be measured rather than survival skills. In addition, for learners who have lived in the U.S for a long time, this test may not be appropriate. Tasks like telling time, counting money, writing checks or circling dates on a calendar may simply not be challenging enough.

Programs often use the BEST in conjunction with other tools. This enables teachers to individualize testing by drawing on a variety of tools, not just one test. Testing needs to match both the learner and where he/she is coming from culturally, linguistically, and academically and what the program needs to know to adequately address the learning needs of the student. The BEST by itself may or may not satisfy all of this.

*Taken from Competency-Based Mainstream English Language Training Project (MELT), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration, Office of Refugee Resettlement (March 1985), p. 1, section 1.*





# Why I Think the BEST Isn't Good Enough

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According to its documentation, the BEST was designed for determining classroom placement, for assessing individual or class progress, and diagnosing “language-use tasks” (like telling time) that need teaching and remediation.

As a placement tool, the BEST attempts to cover a lot of ground, including not only grammar and vocabulary but also cultural familiarity and the American idiom. Were all prospective students nearly alike in background, the BEST might be more useful. But consider two possibilities: a Russian immigrant with post-secondary education (including formal English studies) who arrived in the US two days ago; and an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who completed only primary school and has lived in the US for twelve years, all the while working on an assembly line with little opportunity for contact with native speakers.

The Russian is likely to miss all the money questions, never having seen American currency before the test; most of the other questions will be incomprehensible because the examiner’s American accent is so unlike the British accent the Russian encountered in previous studies. Yet, this person may have considerable vocabulary and exposure to written English, not to mention the benefit of having already studied English.

Meanwhile, the factory worker has been shopping, watching television, and seeing her children through school. She has

learned to speak enough pidgin English to get through day-to-day language encounters, as well as several questions on this test.

Consider the possible core evaluation scores for these two students. The newly-arrived Russian is so mystified by the American accent that she can understand few of the questions, although she eagerly names objects in each picture of the test. She scores eight points, although with a couple of trips to the grocery store she might have gotten another four or five points for the shopping portion of the test. Her core evaluation results: SPL 0 (Beginning Literacy ESOL).

The second student’s performance reflects cultural familiarity and a lot of (fossilized and incorrect) language. She gets five points for the shopping portion of the test, she does well on the fluency questions (where volume of production is measured without penalty for grammatical inaccuracy), earning 13 more points. These 18 points place her at SPL 2 (Beginning ESOL). Both students are in some sense beginners, but their language needs are very different. The difference is far more complex than 10 points worth.

As a student gains more language, the scoring of the BEST test becomes more punishing. The listening vocabulary needed to earn the nine “listening comprehension” points is not difficult, although an inability to follow a map may cost even an advanced student two of these points. Eight questions are scored for fluency. The

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three points for a “fluency question” are accessible to a student who has only a minimal degree of grammatical control but who is expressive and uninhibited by a concern for perfection; a reticent personality can easily diminish the score of a more capable student. But the 24 questions on Form B that are scored for grammatical and idiomatic accuracy are truly problematic for the ESOL student.

Consider the question “What is she doing?” accompanied by a picture of a woman watching TV. “She watch TV,” “Her watching TV,” and “She watching TV” all get scored as a one-point answer (correct information in a response that would not be used by a native speaker), while “Watching TV” is a two-point answer. For these “communication questions” there is a one-point risk in attempting anything more sophisticated than the phrasal response “watching TV.” A two-point answer requires subject-verb agreement, verb tense, articles, prepositions and word choice being grammatically and idiomatically correct, too. For a student who is in a class that encourages communication over grammatical precision, the BEST changes the rules by awarding more points when

the student gives an answer terse enough that the inevitable slip of article or preposition never occurs. The BEST fails to capture how well the student has mastered any of the pitfalls that lie between “watch TV” and “she’s watching TV.”

The BEST’s third goal — as a diagnostic tool — is only somewhat better met. The BEST can point out which of the several areas of “survival” vocabulary (and culture) are needed by a student. However, given its all-or-nothing approach to grammatical accuracy, it is of no use in determining the structural issues of English that need to be addressed.

The MELT curricula framework, of which the BEST was the final piece, defined the task of the ESOL class as being tied to “language use tasks” in the American culture, necessary for functioning in the US. It is a useful tool for the ESOL teacher. The long form of the BEST is a cumbersome attempt to quantify language skills that fails to account for the diversity of our students’ backgrounds and for the immensity of the language learning task. An ESOL program would do well to consider other tools for placement, progress, and diagnosis of the language learners’ needs.





# The BEST is Workable, But It's Not the Only Choice

I began using the BEST in the early 1980s when I was an ESL coordinator for the Refugee Employment and Education Program (REEP) in Massachusetts. I used it to help assess the oral English language skills of the newly-arriving adult refugees.

At that time, there was only one version each of the core section and the literacy skills section. The program was a competency-based program which taught survival skills and pre-vocational skills, and the BEST tested these areas. It provided a baseline score which could be compared to all learners for placement purposes. When used as an on-going assessment tool, it tested mastery of the materials, showing the need for more practice, movement to a higher level or, ultimately, ability to handle employment.

When used in this manner, the BEST was quite effective, but its biggest drawback was that it took too long to administer. The core section had to be administered to each student individually, which often took half an hour. Only several years later did a short version appear which could be given in ten to fifteen minutes. The literacy skills section was still rarely used because it took at least an hour and the program emphasized aural/oral skills.

In the late 1980s, refugee programs were funded through local Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) which had a central assessment unit that administered the BEST to all program participants. Individuals who never used the BEST or had no experience testing

limited English-proficient clients were now responsible for program referral and placement. I was asked by the local SDA to train their assessment staff in the use of the BEST. However, since this subjective test was open to the opinion of the tester, the scores often made no sense. Students who could repeat their personal information, tell time, and identify money would score higher than they really were in overall English Language Skills. Conversely, students soon learned that high scores could prevent them from attending ESL classes, so they often would not answer questions in order to score low. As a result, I had to develop an in-house assessment tool which would be more reliable for placement purposes.

Most recently I was still associated with a refugee education program, and assessment has gone back to the programs. The BEST, in its long form, is still the chosen tool of assessment. It is used for placement purposes, but it is also used as the only on-going assessment tool to identify student achievement. The same version of the test was administered every ten weeks (until recently the test was given every five weeks).

Since the success of the program is linked to the increase in the number of Student Performance Levels (SPLs), the curriculum is centered around the basic skills tested in the test. When a student reaches an SPL level 6, he is no longer eligible for English classes. This has led to many questions about the validity of the test in my

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mind. While participating in the program, a student could take the same test six or more times. Also, many people overlook the fact that this is an oral interview for assessing basic life skills. If you have been in this country for a year or more, you most likely will be able to answer questions about survival topics but do you really have enough language skills to successfully obtain employment or advance in your position?

I do understand and support an “early to work” philosophy for limited English speakers, but I feel that students should be allowed to continue their education to achieve advancement. The BEST is a good assessment tool for placement, but it should not be the only tool used to show

individual achievement or program effectiveness. In the late 1980s when the Federal government passed legislation calling for standardized tests to evaluate ABE and ESL programs, there was much debate about the purpose of assessment and interest in the field for alternative assessment tools. The conclusions made were that assessment should focus on the needs of the students and measure how we are helping students meet their goals. It is an ongoing partnership between the program and the student.

Assessment can take many forms, including for example, student portfolios, teacher observation, student feedback, and student participation in discussions, simulations, and demonstrations.





# An AmeriCorps Volunteer's First Impressions of the BEST

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I have been an AmeriCorps\*VISTA volunteer at the International Language Institute of Massachusetts in Northampton, MA for three months. One of the most exciting parts of my assignment is learning more about the field of ESL education.

I was recently trained by another VISTA volunteer at my site to administer BESTs to incoming and current students. The training procedure seemed quite lax to me: my training involved reading the BEST booklet to become familiar with the questions, observing several testings, scoring the observed tests, and then comparing my scores with those of the tester. I noticed that my trainer skipped or reworded some questions that were in the test booklet. Upon asking about this, my trainer explained to me that those questions were "worded too hard" and that the woman who trained her "didn't like" certain questions and so skipped them or worded them differently.

After several observations, I was deemed ready to begin testing students myself.

Two groups of people in our school take the BEST. Incoming ESL students take the BEST to determine in which class level they belong. Students already in our program take the test to determine their progress and, if progress has been made, to reassign classes.

It seems more natural to administer the BEST to incoming students. Students who have never met me or other members of

the staff don't think it strange if I ask them their name, where they are from, or what their native language is. But it sometimes strikes current students as strange to be asked questions we already know the answer to and have on record. At best, the student realizes this is part of the test, and plays along. At worst, the student does not take the tester or the test seriously.

Students at the ILI long enough to be retested are usually comfortable enough to want to talk expansively to their tester. While we certainly encourage our students to share their thoughts and feelings with us, while taking the BEST students may sometimes, through conversation, give an answer before the question is asked. This prevents the tester from determining whether the student does or would understand the question.

The BEST does offer a truer assessment of communication skills than a multiple choice test. Because questions are open ended, students may answer questions in a way that better demonstrates their skills. However, students may speak with fluency and skill about topics not covered by test questions and there is no way for students to be "credited" for these skills in the BEST.

The BEST seems to work better as an assessment tool for those at rudimentary levels of English. Because it doesn't address more sophisticated English speaking skills, the BEST offers no place to go for a student who has mastered basic communication skills. The BEST score also, while it has a

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few literacy questions, does not comprehensively test reading and writing levels, so those who have adequate speaking skills but lower literacy levels may fall through the cracks.

The scoring of the BEST depends greatly on the tester. While being trained, there were several instances in which my trainer and I gave different scores on the same question. Because the score depends on the tester's perception of "good" or "bad," the test score cannot be compared consistently with BESTs administered by other testers. For true consistency, the BEST needs to be administered in the same way each time

by the same person. If the test is being used internally at one agency, skipping one question will not affect class levels if all of the tests have the same question omitted. However, because we work with other agencies and often refer students back and forth, test scores may not be consistent with those given at other agencies.

I feel that the BEST is appropriate for what it was designed for: as an intake tool for those with a low level of English. For levels of English higher than basic survival skills, however, a new assessment tool needs to be found.





## *What Counts?*

# **Assessing Computer Skills**

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I am currently working as an instructor at Malden Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts in a project funded by the Corporation of Business, Work, and Learning. One of my first tasks was to design an "Introduction to Computers" class along with assessment tools that could help us place students at the appropriate level and measure both an individual's progress and the effectiveness of the class.

I wanted to develop a rubric that consisted of an even number of competency levels, since people have a tendency to go for the middle when there is an odd number. I came up with descriptions of six levels of computer use (Figure 1) ranging from never having used a computer (level 1) to basically being a computer guru (level 6). Our Introduction to Computers course was designed to serve people from levels 1, 2, and 3. Each class worked best and the participants made the most efficient use of their time if the abilities of the participants differed by no more than one level. A class that was mostly level 1 could concentrate on learning how to handle a mouse and how to enter and leave programs while a class that was mostly level 3 could go into programs in more depth.

Since I was giving an assessment to as many as twenty people at once, and I am not a particularly good detective, I decided to utilize self-assessments. With each group, I walked them through the six levels of the rubric in detail, expanding on exactly what I meant by each level and emphasizing the importance of answering

honestly. If a person was really level 3 and self-described herself as level 1, she might be bored in a class that spent an hour learning to handle a mouse and another hour learning to open and close programs.

We decided a few weeks later that more than 90% of the students demonstrated computer knowledge and performance in class that matched their self-assessments. Since I also wanted some objective information, I developed a short questionnaire to go along with the rubric (Figure 2) to get a sense of both computer and written language skills. If questions were answered inappropriately or not at all, I would refer the participant to our ESOL assessment process. If questions were answered with considerable sophistication, I might refer the participant to a community college program more appropriate for an advanced student than our introductory course.

I needed to develop a checklist of skills that our course would address. My first effort (Figure 3) drew upon many years of introducing computers to adults plus a month of examining the needs of workers and managers at Malden Mills by going on repeated tours of the plant and having numerous informal conversations with both workers and managers. In addition, I received the considerable assistance of my colleagues, Cindy Cook, Judy Hikes, and Johan Uvin. While both Cindy and Judy had extensive experience with adult students and had worked with computers in a classroom setting before, this was the first

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time they were teaching a formal computer course. They provided a continual reality check for me and helped me from becoming too technical, while I provided the overall course outline and first draft of the assessment form, as well as technical assistance. The three of us taught a total of nine sections of the Introductory course. Two more instructors have been added in our second cycle.

While the rubric gave us a general idea of the computer expertise of our participants, the checklist gave us a far more detailed look at what students knew. In the first cycle, I gave the checklist to my students on the first day of class and had them check off the items they knew under the Pre column. But following Johan's suggestion, we changed to a rating system in which 1 meant they couldn't do the task, 2 meant they could complete the task with some prompting, and 3 meant they could do the task independently in a classroom situation. I used the new system for the first time when I worked with students to complete the "Post" column of the checklist. Since I now knew the students' computer competencies, I was able to participate in the "Post" test with them.

Our experience with the first cycle, along with getting some new capabilities on the computers, led to an expanded form (Figure 4). We added items that we were able to work on in the first cycle, or that we

decided we wanted to add to the curriculum for the second cycle.

As an additional reality check whether our efforts were relevant to the needs of the workers and the workplace, my final task was to relate our Computer Assessment Scoring Guide with the National Skill Standards Project for Advanced High Performance Manufacturing (Figure 5). The National Skill Standards Project is a work-in-progress that is trying to articulate those skills needed by workers across many industries. Such standards can be used as a tool to analyze the skills needed to perform a certain job. They can also provide valuable insight for educators working with future workers.

I felt that our Computer Assessment addressed problem solving skills (PS), as well as computer skills (CU). In general, I think that determining how to use a computer to solve a new problem or complete a new task requires greater understanding than just learning how to use a particular program and being instructed when to use it. For example, it takes a greater understanding to use a computer to troubleshoot a malfunctioning machine than it does to repeatedly go through a standard procedure with a correctly functioning machine. Finally, rather than being an end in itself, at the highest level the computer becomes just one more tool in a broader process of problem solving.





FIGURE 1

Project STEPS                      Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

COMPUTER ASSESSMENT SCORING GUIDE

1. Has never used a computer. Is very worried and uncomfortable about having to use a computer.
2. Has used a computer at least a few times. Can turn a computer on, but understands little else. Needs considerable direction and support to handle even the most fundamental tasks. Cannot handle a mouse without difficulty.
3. Used a computer competently in a structured work situation, but it still uncomfortable with unfamiliar applications. Can follow clear step-by-step directions, but cannot use the computer as a tool. Can use a mouse to move around the screen. Does not fully understand how programs and data differ and how they are organized, stored, and accessed.
4. Has some experience using the computer as a tool. Can use word processing and other programs. Can learn additional programs with training. Is able to experiment and try different things out on the computer. Understands the basic structure of the computer and the difference between programs and data.
5. Experienced and confident using the computer as a tool. Able to do troubleshooting to solve problems. Comfortable using help systems and manuals to learn how to use software. Able to determine the appropriate software to use to accomplish a task.
6. Frequently helps others with their computer problems. Can clearly explain to others computer capabilities and functions. Can evaluate software and hardware. Tests new software and creatively uses it to improve productivity and quality.

Self-assessment score \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment score \_\_\_\_\_





FIGURE 3

Introduction to Computers

Individual Record for:

Class:

Skill

Pre

Post

Turn on computer

Correctly turn off computer

Use a mouse

Use a keyboard

Describe what makes a computer a computer

Adjust monitor

Start a program by double-clicking an icon

Start a program from the Program list or Windows Explorer

Open a document

Save a document

Close a document

Close a program

Understand the difference between a program and a document

Understand the file structure of Windows 95

Navigate the file structure of Windows 95 using Windows Explorer

Create a Microsoft Word document

Print a document

Change print options

Change screen options

Create a Microsoft Excel document

Troubleshoot by checking electrical connections

Install software

Open the system unit



FIGURE 4

Introduction to Computers

Individual Record for:

Class:

Skill	Pre	Post
Turn on computer		
Correctly turn off computer		
Use a mouse		
Use a keyboard		
Describe what makes a computer a computer		
Adjust monitor		
Start a program by double-clicking an icon		
Start a program from the Program list or Windows Explorer		
Open a document		
Save a document		
Close a document		
Close a program		
Understand the difference between a program and a document		
Understand the file structure of Windows 95		
Navigate the file structure of Windows 95 using Windows Explorer		
Create a Microsoft Word document		
Print a document		
Change print options		
Change screen options		
Create a Microsoft Excel document		
Troubleshoot by checking electrical connections		
Install software		
Open the system unit		
Create a Microsoft Access database		
Enter data in a Microsoft Access database		
Select the correct software for a task		
Use tutorial software		
Use educational software		
Find and respond to screen prompts		
Confident in ability to learn computer skills and procedures		
Modify screen properties		
Use digital camera		
Touch up and print digital pictures		
Understand how a computer can control production equipment		
Read a process control computer screen (i.e. Wonderware)		
Use a computer to monitor and control production equipment		



FIGURE 4

Relationship of Project STEPS  
Computer Assessment Scoring Guide  
with the National Skill Standards Project  
for Advanced High Performance Manufacturing

A worker who scores at level 1, 2, or 3 would not meet any of the National Skill Standards.

Depending on the programs learned, a worker at Malden Mills functioning at level 4 would meet one or more of the following standards:

CU 3 List various methods of tracking inventory.

CU 5 Demonstrate use of an industry-accepted word processing software package.

CU 6 Demonstrate use of an industry-accepted spreadsheet software package.

CU 7 Demonstrate use of an industry-accepted database software package.

A worker at Malden Mills functioning at level 5 would meet all the level 4 standards plus:

CU 1 List possible computer applications in manufacturing processes.

CU 2 Identify possible effects of introducing computers into manufacturing processes.

PS 2 Apply a system of problem solving.

PS 3 Identify opportunities for applying problem solving techniques.

A worker at Malden Mills functioning at level 6 would meet all the level 5 standards plus:

PS 1 Explain the value of applying a problem solving system.



## *Learning from Experience*

# **The TABE: Thoughts from an Inquiring Mind**

**A** typical day in my life starts like this: I sit in a stack on the book shelf. Suddenly, I am whisked away and handed to someone who looks as startled by me as I am by them. I am a TABE (The Test of Adult Basic Education) and I have become according to one adult education professional, the “industry standard.” Lots of people know my name. Some love me and some hate me. I guess you can’t please all the people all of the time.

The TABE is a battery of multiple-choice tests. According to the publisher, the purpose of the battery is “not to test specific life skills, but to test basic skills in the context of life skills tasks” (CTB/McGraw Hill, 1987). There is a vocabulary section and a reading comprehension section, which together give a composite reading score. A locator test is available which consists of 25 multiple choice items and 25 multiple choice computation items ranging from whole numbers skills to decimals. The locator requires 37 minutes to administer (for both vocabulary and arithmetic sections). There are also two math sections and two writing sections.

Programs vary a great deal on which sections (or how many sections) of the TABE are given. The reading section is almost always one of the sections included.

You can’t please all the people all the time. The same could be said for any type of assessment. The question for me as an adult educator and staff development person is, does this test meet my needs, the

needs of my program, and the needs of my learners?

To begin to address these questions, I look at my own experience as an adult educator. I have been able to gain a fairly accurate, general idea of a learner’s reading comprehension level by using the TABE. Someone might come to my class on any given day with a TABE score of 5.5, for example. This gives me an idea of where to start. It does not, however, give me an idea of which materials I might try with this learner.

Still, I have learned over the years to take that score with a rather large grain of salt. When I talk to my learners about their scores on the TABE (which they are almost always anxious to find out), I tell them that this score only gives us a ballpark figure and that we will both know better after a few weeks of working together, at which “level,” for want of a better word, they are.

We also talk about the value of knowing a “level.” We discuss how it can give us a general idea about how far they might be from being able to take the GED (which is very often their first, and sometimes only, stated goal).

My career in adult education had almost always involved the wearing of at least two different hats. One is that of the Practitioner Inquiry Coordinator (PIC). In my role as PIC, I work with teachers to see the worlds of our classrooms through the eyes of an anthropologist. We observe carefully. We try to answer the question: What is going on in this classroom? We try to identify

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and question the underlying assumptions in our teaching. Sometimes we make changes based on that.

A counselor I spoke with told me that the TABE is the “industry standard.” I asked how long the program had been using the TABE. He told me that they had been using the TABE “since 1973 when I got here.”

As a teacher who had taught in a number of different programs and settings, and as a staff developer who has contact with many different teachers, I then considered the question: How is the TABE used? What is it used for?

Many programs seem to use the TABE as an initial assessment tool to determine placement in one of three (typically ABE, Pre-GED, and GED) programs. Some programs administer the TABE on a regular basis to determine movement to higher levels.

Some funders do this too. Some mandate intervals at which the TABE must be taken. In one such case, I had several students who needed to take the TABE after every 150 hours of class time (about every two to three months). Some of these students had taken the same form of the test a few times even before they got to my class.

Some students have told me that their goal for class was to reach an eighth grade level on the TABE so that they could enter a particular job training program. In some cases, a great deal was riding on this particular test score. For these students, passing the test (meaning scoring at the eighth grade level) became their priority (understandably so). So...I learned rather quickly in my career that the TABE could sometimes make or break a student’s potential career path.

A study published in 1995 by the National Center for Adult Literacy (NCAL) entitled “*When less is more: A comparative Analysis for Placing Students in Adult Literacy Classes*” concluded that “a test as brief as the TABE locator could predict placements as well as the complete group of reading tests” The following sums up their recommendations:

“Attempts to achieve extremely high accuracy in placement should be tempered by a consideration of the small number of placement levels usually available.... Overall it may be concluded that less testing may be more valuable to both students and adult literacy programs. Less time on testing means less cost for testing. Perhaps more importantly, learners often have distaste for and fear of standardized tests. By cutting back on testing and moving toward a self assessment model, programs may stimulate greater motivation and satisfaction among the clients they serve.”

Based on my experience, I would recommend we consider the following questions:

- When and why did we all decide that the TABE was the “industry standard”?
- Does the TABE help us find out the information we are seeking to know?
- What do we seek to know from using the TABE?
- To what extent is the TABE successful in placing students in the correct classes?
- Is there flexibility in our programs when the TABE results are not successful in placing students in the correct classes?
- Are we using the TABE in a way that is consistent with the intended purposes of the test?
- Does the TABE help learners identify needs and/or levels?

It is possible that the TABE is indeed the very best test to use to determine this kind

*Some students have told me that their goal for class was to reach an eighth grade level on the TABE so that they could enter a particular job training program. For these students, passing the test (meaning scoring at the eighth grade level) became their priority. I learned rather quickly in my career that the TABE could sometimes make or break a student’s potential career path.*



of information. If we take an inquiry approach to this issue, however, and examine the underlying assumptions, we may discover important information that can help us all better assess the needs of our learners and our programs.

If so much is going to ride on the results of a standardized test, perhaps we should take a moment to step back and think about the purpose of a standardized test, what it can and cannot tell us and if indeed this is the most appropriate test to use.

*Inquiring minds want to know.*





## Review:

# Using Phenomenal Changes – Stories of Participants in the Portfolio Project

I have been thinking a lot about coming up with a better model of portfolio assessment in our school so we can be more consistent with the process. In the past, I would always come to the same wall that I have with authentic assessment: you can't force people to do it if they don't have a full understanding of the process. To truly implement any type of authentic assessment, people need to buy into the concept.

But how do you accomplish that when there just doesn't seem to be enough time to nurture the process? It seemed serendipitous that I was asked to review *Phenomenal Changes – Stories of Participants in the Portfolio Project* for *Adventures in Assessment* as it allowed me to focus on how to get both me and the teachers at the International Language Institute (ILI) of MA in Northampton more involved in improving how we do portfolio assessment at the school.

(This is the first of a two-part article as we won't finish our project until the next *Adventures in Assessment* is out; we all know that Authentic Assessment is an ongoing project.)

*Phenomenal Changes – Stories of Participants in the Portfolio Project* is an excellent staff development tool for portfolio development. At the ILI, we are using the text as a springboard for discussions about portfolio assessment.

The articles in *Phenomenal Changes* — a series of interviews with the participants of the project and the Project Director Melody

Schneider — are very reader friendly. The text is divided into five areas: ABE, ESOL, Literacy Councils, Compensatory Education, and Administrators.

We have been using several different variations of authentic assessment tools at the International Language Institute over the years. At a recent staff meeting I asked the teachers how it was going with portfolio assessment in their classes. The teachers replied that they have the students using dialogue journals and learning journals and that they had been collecting things, but they didn't really feel as if they had a handle on the concept of portfolios. We agreed portfolios could take many forms, but that the group needed a model with which we all felt comfortable. I brought out *Phenomenal Changes* and asked if they would be interested in reading about the experiences of other teachers working on portfolio assessment. They were very interested, so we agreed to read and discuss articles for the next five weeks. During curriculum week at the end of the program we would put together all our ideas and develop criteria for portfolio selection and review. We plan to put our findings into place for the program that begins in January.

We decided to begin our weekly meetings with 30 minutes dedicated to portfolio assessment discussion. (Weekly meetings usually last an hour and a half and include both part-time and full-time staff.) The 30-minute segment would be divided into three steps. First, we would discuss our

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reactions to an article. Second, we would discuss how this article would/wouldn't relate to our program. Third, we would establish some action plans to implement in the next month or during curriculum week. Since the staff are ESL teachers, we started off with the two articles in the text that discussed portfolio assessment with ESL teachers.

The first comment that came up the following week at our first discussion was that everyone would have preferred the articles to be actually written by the writer and that vernacular usage was a bit difficult to read. We agreed that Melody Schneider does a good job of letting the reader hear the project participant's voice.

One teacher said she would have liked more information about the contents of a portfolio and more nuts and bolts about the end product. A discussion ensued about how we could look at lists that have been prepared by other people, but would that help find our own way of doing portfolio assessment? We agreed that not having the "nuts and bolts" up front enabled us to look at portfolio assessment without being directed as to what we should be doing. This discussion led to asking, 'what should we be putting in the portfolios?' One teacher said that, since her students were only in class six hours a week, how about including things that the students accomplished outside class?

Another teacher commented that the articles really helped her realize that she needs to get out of her students' way. She felt that she was holding their hands too much and that they needed to "experience" something rather than having her always telling them what to do.

We also talked about the dialogue journals that our students keep. Some students write a lot and "play" with the language, using what they have learned in class while others write the same thing every week: 'I went to church and cleaned my house.' How can we show students their progress if they write the same things week after week?

Our discussion led to considering ways students can see their progress through guided writing, writing with a specific task, and making the writing process interesting for students. We also ended up sharing a writing tool called Fundex of Individualized Activities for English Language Practice\* that the teachers weren't previously aware of and became very excited to discover.

The teachers acknowledge that both students and teachers need to understand why we're doing portfolio assessment. "I need to understand why we're doing this. How do I encourage it to be taken seriously? How do I motivate?" We admitted that we as teachers should also be keeping portfolios about our teaching practices. Included in our portfolios would be our own Learning Journals (a booklet of weekly assessment tools kept by the students (see *Adventures in Assessment*, Volume 5, "Evolution of an Assessment Tool"). These would be completed in class while our students were filling out their own Learning Journals. One teacher said her students might take portfolio assessment more seriously if they saw her taking it seriously.

Naturally, we went over the allotted 30 minutes. At the end of the meeting we did feedback about using the articles as a springboard for discussion and all the

\* *Writing Inspirations: A Fundex of Individualized Activities for English Language Practice* by Arlene Marcus, Prolingua Associates, 15 Elm Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301, (802) 257-7779.



teachers were enthusiastic: “There were a lot of things that I got from these articles,” “I like making time to do this,” and “It’s kind of nice to have an academic focus in our meeting, rather than just going over the attendance list.”

As I listened and participated in the meeting, I realized that we are all stakeholders in the process and that we have to realize that authentic assessment is a change of practice for everyone: teachers, students and administrators.

I also realized that a variety of people interested in portfolio assessment could use *Phenomenal Changes – Stories of Partici-*

*pants in the Portfolio Project*. The readings are just as useful for people just starting out as for people that have been doing it for awhile.

We left our meeting excited and armed with two more articles for the next week. We don’t know exactly how our portfolio system will be in January, but at this point I feel strongly that with the consistency of the weekly meetings about portfolio assessment and using *Phenomenal Changes*, there will be some phenomenal changes of how we all look at portfolio assessment at ILLI.

*to be continued*



*Phenomenal Changes: Stories of Participants in the Portfolio Project*, Melody Schneider, Project Director, with Hanna Fingeret and Loren McGrail, Literacy South available from Peppercorn Books, P.O. Box 1766, Durham, NC 27702, (919) 688-9313.



AN INVITATION TO WRITE

*Adventures in Assessment* accepts articles regarding any of the three components of assessment: *Getting Started*, *Ongoing*, and *Looking Back*, or our other departments: *What Counts?*, *Voices from the Field*, *Learning from Experience*, and *Publication Reviews*.

If you would like to submit an article or review to *Adventures in Assessment*, please contact us at:

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The next issue of *Adventures in Assessment* will come out in Winter 1998 and will highlight writings from Curriculum Frameworks projects and other practitioners exploring alternative assessment.

We welcome your input and feedback. To be included in the Winter 1998 *Adventures in Assessment*, please contact Alison Simmons at the above address.



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