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**Learner-centered
approaches
to assessment &
evaluation
in adult literacy
Volume 9**

Editor: Alison Simmons

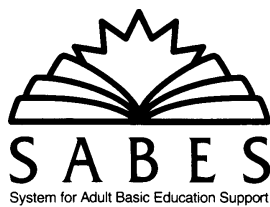
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ASSESSMENT

winter 1996

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. This issue looks at assessment in a volunteer program, native language literacy, ESOL programs, and evaluations in workplace education programs.*

We'd like to see your contribution, especially if you are doing native language lit or low-level ESOL lit. Contact Editor Alison Simmons to discuss your submission.

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Introduction

Rethinking Assessment as an All-the-Time Responsibility

In the previous volume of *Adventures in Assessment* I posed the question “How will [I] measure the progress of my students so it is meaningful to them, informs instruction and curriculum and satisfies funders?”

Through my work in assessment over the year and working with authors on this volume of *Adventures in Assessment*, I have had a chance to rethink this question and what it means for me in my work as editor of this journal. What I found confirmed a belief I have held since I was an ESOL teacher. Assessment is done all the time by students and teachers. Teachers assess students initially for placement, to get a sense of their purpose for studying, and for their skill level.

On an ongoing basis teachers assess students to track progress and make decisions on movement to other levels or to redefine goals as needed as students’ lives change and their goals are accomplished. Finally, when students are finished with our services, teachers assess them to record achievement and indicate where their skills are now.

Teachers use a variety of ways to accomplish these tasks: observation, feedback sessions, portfolios and standardized tests. For many teachers, assessment is integrated into their instruction.

Students self assess all the time. They seek and receive feedback from teachers, community members, co-workers, other students, etc. Most of this feedback is immediate. Non-verbal clues (looks of

confusion and impatience), lack of response or inaccurate responses by the listener are indicators that there was something problematic in the interaction. A series of questions and self reflection start: what was it about this interaction that was problematic? What were the barriers preventing the listener or receiver from understanding the interaction? Was it a bias? What do I need to work on and what is out of my control? The questioning process happens all the time within the students and helps them understand the complex process of language learning and set goals accordingly.

All this information is used to adjust our teaching, learning and perceptions of our students and their abilities.

When I asked teachers how they assess their students, they offer countless anecdotes and tools and systems to move students to levels, assess whether students can understand and apply the materials, and determine the immediate needs of the students, who needs other support services, etc. Teachers have an individual system of assessment and programs have internal systems that may not translate to other audiences.

Teachers know how to measure progress but get stuck trying to find a tool or reporting mechanism to put their data in that would satisfy all the different audiences. The question goes beyond, ‘how will I measure the progress of my students so it is meaningful to them, informs instruction and the curriculum

by
Alison Simmons



Editor
SABES Central
Resource Center /
World Education



and satisfies the funder?’

Rather the questions should be ‘how do I report the progress I have seen to satisfy different audiences? How do I report the progress my students have seen? What information is useful to me in my program and what information do I need to satisfy other audiences? I have seen checklists, portfolios, benchmarks, standardized tools used as alternative assessment forms, videos, audio tapes, charts etc. All document learning but are not transferable to audiences outside of the program or class.

I think we need to look more closely at developing ways to report progress that captures the gains our students are making. We need to look at what teachers are doing in the classroom and students are doing and focus our technical assistance in assisting programs, teachers and students in documenting and validating their assessment tools and seeing how/if they connect with the requirements of SPL levels and other funding mandates. In the process we need to validate and encourage teachers to continue to develop systems that inform instruction and show students where they are making gains and how far they have come in achieving their goals. We need to look more closely into the causes of problematic interactions and not assume that it always lies in the hands of the students.

In this issue **Elizabeth Santiago** talks with six ESOL practitioners about their assessment practices. The practitioners come from different contexts and describe barriers they overcome to make assessment meaningful for themselves as teachers and for their learners. They struggle with meeting reporting requirements and have come up with tools and systems that work for their programs. **Janet Isserlis**

talks about her experience as a volunteer in an adult education program in Canada. She looks at the roles volunteers can play in the assessment process and how a particular assessment tool worked for her and her students in a conversation class. **Olivia Steele, John Antonellis, Jane Shea, Kathe Kirkman, and Debra Tuler** discuss challenges and opportunities in implementing a team-based approach to planning and evaluation in workplace education programs in Massachusetts. **Michelle Brown** walks us through the evolution of her Native Language Literacy Program that was developed and implemented after a hard look at why some students were not progressing in her program. She also introduces us to the tool they developed for their Native Language Literacy Program.

In another article **Deborah Mercier-Cuenca** talks about her experience using the Native Language Literacy Screening Device as a tool for her program. What she found out through the assessment process changed the way she approached her class and she, like Michelle Brown, demonstrates student-driven curriculum by teaching English Life Skills as part of their Native Language Literacy program.

Tricia Donovan in the *What Counts?* section asks us to look a different way to assess math skills. It goes beyond assessing just computation to look at habits of mind and other skills involved in solving a math problem. **Peg Reidester** helps us look at these new ideas more concretely as she takes us through an assessment of a math problem using a rubric.

Finally, **Jeanne Kearsley** reviews an assessment package by Cathy Shank that offers beginning and experienced teachers alike a way to document students’ progress.



Our next issue will be our tenth and we would like to look back a few years and see how far we have come. There are a lot of issues and questions left after this volume that we would like to take up in future volumes. There are still questions

about 1) the use and misuse of the “tests,” 2) reporting, and 3) barriers to efficient assessment processes. We invite you to share your ideas, successes, and questions as we learn from each other about our assessment practices.

Alison Simmons





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Assessment in the ESOL Experience

"We have what I call a chat with very basic interview questions to evaluate the student's oral and verbal capabilities. Now we have a mandatory test we have to give from the state. With the new test, I sit down and go through each question. Sometimes, if I speak their language, then I help. But fifty percent of the time they come with an interpreter. Sometimes I will ask to call a family member. Sometimes I am dry. I have nothing." Cecil Demorney, Community Learning Center, Cambridge.

Traditionally, ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) teachers have had to create original assessment tools to place low-level English language learners into their classrooms. Often times, standardized tests can be inappropriate for ESOL learners. Certain funding sources, however, require scores derived from tests like the BEST (Basic English Skills Test) for funding consideration and some funders ask for other documentation showing how learners have progressed. Teachers have had to "dance" with what is required (or what they perceive is required) by the funders and what they feel will help them place and move students more accurately.

How does an ESOL professional utilize what is available to them when placing beginning level students into their classrooms? How about when they are transitioning ESOL students into a higher level class, working with a multi-level class, and/or documenting each learner's progress for multiple funding sources?

In August and September of 1996, Alison Simmons and I visited four programs in Massachusetts: Hamden County

House of Correction in Hamden, Lutheran Social Service in Springfield, International Institute in Boston, and the Community Learning Center in Cambridge. In those diverse settings, we talked to six ESOL professionals about how they assess low-level ESOL students and what concerns they have within that context.

BACKGROUND

ESOL services for adults have been gaining national attention in recent years mostly because more and more adults have enrolled in ESOL classes and waiting lists for services are growing. Recent controversies surrounding immigrants and English-only legislation have put a spotlight on ESOL learners. Even with the current media coverage of English language learners, there is little about ESOL assessment being documented, published, and filtered into the classroom. National organizations like TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and individual states and programs around the country have been researching and piloting assessment tools, but it is not as well known or widespread as it should

by
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“The issue is not so much that outcomes do not exist, but that the ESL field has varying objectives for instruction and does not know how to measure outcomes across groups.”

be. The *Meeting Summary on Current Research and Theory on Effective ESL Instruction* put out by the U.S. Department of Education says “The issue is not so much that outcomes do not exist, but that the ESL field has varying objectives for instruction and does not know how to measure outcomes across groups” (page 10).

In a discussion I had with the editor of *Adventures in Assessment*, I expressed the confusion and frustration I was feeling in trying to assess a young man that I had recently begun tutoring. At our first session I wanted to get a sense where I should begin instruction and what he expected from me. I knew that he had just arrived in this country and spoke little if any English. I went to the SABES library at the Central Resource Center and found a book on low-level ESOL assessment. The book used pictures and leading questions to assess. I decided to try this approach with my learner.

I thought the first few pictures might be too simple for him but I decided to follow the format of the book and asked him the word for each object in English. After three objects, he turned to a friend and interpreter and asked him to tell me in English that he found the questions too easy. What was I to do with the realization he was unable to express to me in English his concerns, but insisted what I was asking him was too easy? I learned that my issue was one of many with which classroom teachers have to deal on a daily basis.

LIMITATIONS OF AVAILABLE TESTS

In *ESL and the American Dream*, authors Chisman, Wrigley, and Ewen state, “There are no standardized tests on the market that can adequately measure the profi-

ciency of the great diversity of adults who need ESL service. This is no surprise given the complexity of language skills and the range of abilities that adult learners demonstrate. Yet funders continue to insist that standardized assessments be used to judge learner progress, and may use such measures of program effectiveness as well. This is true in spite of the fact that the most commonly used standardized tests have severe limitations” (page 58).

What are some tests currently in use by ESOL teachers and what are their limitations? There are both ABE (Adult Basic Education) and ESOL tests. ABE tests include: Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE), and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). These tests may be used with ESOL learners, but have obvious limitations because they were not designed for that population. There are tests specifically designed for the ESOL learner which may or may not be more appropriate. The most popular of these tests include the BEST test, the Comprehensive English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

The BEST test assesses a learner’s basic survival skills such as listening comprehension, conversational ability, and literacy for placement purposes. In many settings, the BEST test is required by funders as a means for assessing learners on an ongoing basis as well as for initial and final assessment. In my discussion with the six teachers, each agreed the BEST was one of the better initial placement tools for their students.

On the other hand, teachers complained that students were able to memorize the items when the test is re-administered,



therefore making it difficult to tell what knowledge a learner has actually acquired. Another criticism of using the test as an ongoing assessment tool is the idea that you have to teach to the test. "Sometimes if you don't teach to the test, the students aren't going to pass and move on to the next level," said Lola Reid at Lutheran Social Settlement Services.

The CELSA assesses how well an English learner can deal with written English tests representing varying levels of difficulty. "The CELSA is useful inasmuch as it provides some indication on the language proficiency level of ESL students... however, it does not tell programs and funders if students can use English to achieve their own purposes in a variety of situations. Therefore, it has only limited use as an ESL proficiency assessment," wrote Chisman, Wrigley, Ewen in *ESL and the American Dream*.

The TOEFL is the most comprehensive of the available standardized ESOL tests. TOEFL scores are used for admission and placement into thousands of colleges and universities across the nation. But the test's purpose is narrow, as suggested above, and not broad enough to use with all of our learners.

To organize my conversations with the six ESOL teachers, I categorized the discussions following the three stages of assessment. The categories are initial, ongoing, and final assessment.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

"I use the Oral BEST test. If they pass, I move to the written BEST. I also ask lots of questions, but nothing personal. I will not ask what they have done to get here. I don't need to know that information. I also use Scrabble letters to make words in their

native language. If they use an alphabet which is different than the English language, I will use pictures to assess. If their skills are very limited, I will try to interpret myself or ask another student to interpret." *Eileen Witkop, Hamden County House of Correction*

"I have an informal oral interview so I can gauge their level. After that, there is an application tool with ten sequenced personal questions. I see how they respond and it helps me select which reading sample to give them. I have them read the sample silently and then out loud. There are three or four comprehension questions. Then there is a writing sample. I ask them to write about their family or something else familiar. People usually get nervous about spelling so I tell them up front that's not what I'm looking for now, but how they can write their ideas. We also have an assessment of basic math skills, but applicants often opt out of this saying they want reading and writing." *Leona Breslow, International Institute*

"If I ask their birth date, for example, I will sing, 'happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you...' Most people know the tune so they give me the answer." *Cecil Demourney*

Many teachers have various initial assessment tools they use with their students, but there is not one tool which all the teachers follow. Usually, if a teacher uses a particular test to satisfy their funders, they also come up with some program-based alternative form of assessment to use for themselves. "Our students come in at all levels from 0-above. The BEST test is used to determine the initial level of a student. The numbers generated from the BEST test are the numbers acceptable by the funding sources. We also have

"The CELSA is useful inasmuch as it provides some indication on the language proficiency level of ESL students... however, it does not tell programs and funders if students can use English to achieve their own purposes in a variety of situations. Therefore, it has only limited use as an ESL proficiency assessment,"



an informal assessment of our own once we place the students into our classrooms. We'll list the activities that we did at the end of a class. Students vote on what they like best. This helps them think about their own learning and where it is more helpful to them: reading or writing. Low-level is more tricky. They say that was good. They tend not to be too critical. If you ask them what they want to do, they look at you like, 'this is ridiculous, aren't you the teacher?'" *Lola Reid, Lutheran Social Services Settlement*

The tests also raise issues of inappropriateness where the tests are concerned. "Our students are mostly given the TABE test, but the timing is extremely bad. They are given the test, it's corrected and put on file. We can't really go by that test because it is given at the worst time. It is usually given right after someone enters the facility and at that point they are usually in a state of shock." *Eileen Witkop*

Eileen's sentiment may, at first glance, seem specific to incarcerated individuals. However, ESOL teachers at other settings have similar concerns when dealing with issues of trauma and shock. Some ESOL learners are coming from war-torn countries and may have lost family members or have endured other tragedies. Those issues may arise in all ESOL settings.

Another issue in assessing students initially and getting an accurate measure of their levels is the reality of waiting lists. Some programs test students when they sign up for classes, then place them on a waiting list until a spot opens up. This approach also has problems. "Waiting lists make it difficult to determine their initial level. Because they have been waiting for so long, their English gets better. Sometimes we have to make changes. What we

decided to do was network with other community organizations in Cambridge and help them set up English classes. Waiting lists are shorter which is great." *Cecil Demourney*

Initial assessment is by far one of the most difficult areas for most ESOL teachers, but it has been one of the areas that has garnered more documentation (see previous volumes of *Adventures in Assessment*). There are also many variables associated with ongoing assessment.

ONGOING ASSESSMENT

Each teacher with whom I spoke had more ideas for ongoing assessment, but there were equally as many concerns.

"For my low-level students, I try and teach them survival skills. I take them to places like the supermarket and point out fruits and vegetables, show them how to shop, what the numbers and signs are. I show them how to look for an apartment, learn how to read the abbreviations. I talk about how to take the subway and how to deal with getting lost. We also talk about body parts and medical care. It's easier to gauge this type of knowledge through everyday observation, homework, participation in class and what the teacher perceives." *Cecil Demourney*

The teacher's perception arose over and over. How do you *know* someone is making progress?

"That has always been a question. How much learning time should I spend on assessment? Informal assessment is always in your head. One thing that has been positive for me is after a few weeks when they have a little more vocabulary, I show them a picture. They learned the who, what, when, etc. prior to this. I'll ask them, 'who is this person, what are they doing,'



etc. I ask them to talk about it, but not to write it. At the break, I write the story they discussed and give it back to them with blanks. I would ask them more questions. I mention to them to look at all the English they learned. It's very validating." *Lola Reid*

"A lot of it is work that they do, teacher observations, class work, informal interviews, and end-of-the-cycle interviews. I will reassess students who are having trouble. We do see some students with learning issues so progress can often be slow." *Leona Breslow*

"For lower levels, I list the activities we have just finished on the board and use a happy face, a neutral face, and a frowning face as the determinant of each activity. They would vote on which they preferred. After a while, I said to myself why am I doing this? After that, the students went to the board and rotated the assessment. Then I tried it individually at their desks, but this was for higher levels. The lower levels always did it on the board. Then I tried an assessment sheet because I felt the exercise was taking up too much time in a predictable way. I would give them this sheet and they would bring it back at the end of the week. People didn't like it, in fact they hated it. So I redid it to show their changes. I still think they don't like it, but they like this one better.

It's helpful for me also to figure out what to do in class. Because of the new assessment sheet, we had a conversation about what constitutes reading, mainly because there is a question that asks what have you read this week. They would come back and say, 'I didn't read,' but they would have read an ad, the Yellow Pages, cooking instructions, etc. It's very easy to tell, as a teacher, whether somebody gets it

or doesn't get it. It's hard to say what I do exactly, but I just know." *Rebecca Schiffrin, Lutheran Settlement Services.*

Teachers couldn't always pinpoint exactly how they know a learner has made progress. Each teacher was also at different levels with documentation. Some used portfolios to document learner's progress, some kept informal notebooks, and many talked about goal setting sheets they had developed. "I use portfolio assessment and goal setting sheets to tell if my students have progressed. I revisit the goals list with the students. The students get so excited when they can check something off the list. Whether it is the achievement of writing their name in cursive or watching a TV show in English, it doesn't matter because they always feel a sense of power when they check off something. I also try to establish if there is a learning disability present, but that is often difficult to determine. I am building a kit that is appropriate to ESL learners which might help me see if there is a learning disability." *Eileen Witkop*

"I started doing some portfolio assessment. I would put job applications and other accomplishments in it. It doesn't look the same for each student because of absences. Sometimes I sit with students and go over what they have done over the last few months." *Barbara Lippel Paul, Lutheran Social Service, Springfield*

Some teachers use technology in their on-going assessment tools. "Upon completion of a basic skills/computer class, we did on-line classroom assessment. I prepared a disk for each student. On each disk was a written evaluation the student would respond to. I would have leading questions at the bottom (*see attached tool*). The students loved it and you can see

Assessment of learners in workplace education has always been challenging. An important reason is that no standardized tests are available that measure the learning gains at which workplace education programs aim.



learning styles come out behind the computer. It was also a learning experience for me and I was able to modify as I went along. I let them go at their own pace. Computer class was directly affected by what went on in class. I keep a folder with a written evaluation. I also put in writing assignments and other evaluation materials." *Leona Breslow*

The pattern in these interviews seemed to be that there isn't one way to do assessment and there is a level of intuition on the part of the teacher. Barbara Lippel Paul stated, "You're doing ongoing assessment all along in your class. Everything is to get them out the door to the next level, or job, etc. We are constantly assessing." The next section will discuss that very thing: How do you know when a student is ready for the next level or job or whatever?

FINAL ASSESSMENT

"I always hear when a student wants to go to a lower level, but rarely will a student tell me they want to go to a higher level. When I suspect someone can go into a higher level, I tell them and they are rarely surprised. They sort of already know they are ready to move on." *Leona Breslow*

Knowing when a student is ready to move to another level, whatever that level may be, takes on many forms. Some teachers have informal interviews with each student at the end of a class cycle while some mentioned checklists.

"Some students like to stay in the same level because they know everyone. Some others want to move when they are not ready. Now, we are trying to work harder on more assessment tools. It's challenging. We have a curriculum for each level, but we don't follow it blindly. We do what's

best for the group. We make sure the students master some grammar because we base judgement of level changes on grammar. The problem that comes up is different levels. It's always a multi-level class. Some may be better in writing than in reading. You try to take that into consideration when you are planning your lesson. You try to work on the primary skills. Sometimes you have a student with real literacy problems so you have to be more creative. At the end of a cycle, we are asked to send a list to the counselors of people who are ready to move. It's tough though. For ABE there are standardized tests. For ESL there really isn't anything." *Cecil Demourney*

Cecil's sentiment sums up a frustration these ESOL professionals continue to feel. What can we make of all this? Well, Barbara, Lola, Rebecca, Eileen, Cecil, and Leona shared with us their thoughts and ideas for assessing their low and intermediate ESOL students, but there should be more documented, researched, and published on this very real issue.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Adventures in Assessment certainly has a commitment to exploring all forms of alternative / authentic assessment. What other resources do we have available and what is being done to research this topic? As you can see from the teacher's work, a lot of thought and hours have gone into assessing ESOL learners. Unfortunately, there aren't many vehicles for teachers to share what they've done with each other.

Or worse yet, teachers don't feel as if they are doing anything special. Almost all the teachers I spoke with said something like "well, I'm sure everyone is doing this..." Sometimes what may seem obvious



or simple to one may spark a whole new approach to assessment in someone else.

For example, this experience has helped me with my learner. For one, I decided to have my learner guide me. If he found something too easy, I pushed him to somehow communicate to me why he felt that way and what I could do to make my instruction more satisfying to his needs. It turns out that he was an advanced writer and reader of English, but never really had the opportunity to *speak* English in his native country. Once this was established, I was able to work on his oral abilities. I also realized that the interpreter was my friend, so to speak. I learned many valuable insights from the interpreter although he was not at every session. He came every now and again at the beginning of our sessions. We need to share more of what we do with each other.

Adventures in Assessment is a good place for that, as is the Massachusetts newsletter *Bright Ideas* or other state newsletters, but we should definitely have other outlets. Lenore Balliro of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston is starting an ESOL listserv on e-mail for Massachusetts ESOL teachers. That should be a great

forum for expressing ideas about assessment. *Adventures in Assessment* will be printing another journal midsummer of next year; maybe there could be more articles published on ESOL assessment in the upcoming issue.

There also needs to be more research what learners need to be taught and what are the most effective ways to do that. Along with that, we need more documentation on how variables like shock, trauma, and native language literacy (among others) influence assessment practices. A Center for Applied Linguistics study found that children who had literacy in any language fared better in acquiring another language than those who have no literacy (*Meeting Summary on Current Research and Theory on Effective ESL Instruction*, issued by the U.S. Department of Education, page 8). Studies like this should be made available to ESOL classrooms. On a national level, the TESOL conference is a good place to share ideas and find workshops on ESOL assessment as well as individual state adult education conferences. In Massachusetts, conferences like MATSOL and Network '97 may have ESOL assessment components embedded.



Chisman, F.P., Wrigley, H.S., and Ewnn, D.T. (1993). *ESL and The American Dream*. Washington D.C.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

What Works Evaluation for Adult ESL Students: Current Research and Theory on Effective Adult ESL Instruction. Meeting

Summary (May 1996): U.S. Department of Education

Florida Adult Literacy Resource Center. *Testing and Assessment in Adult Education and English as a Second Language Programs*. Hot Topics #8, March 1995: Florida State University



LOOKING AT MANDATES

Funders I talked with do not mandate a particular assessment test. Some teachers have the perception, however, that funders are mandating the BEST or TABE for example.

Why? I discovered that the wording of documentation requirements can sometimes make the intent confusing. A funder, for example, may require a student SPL level when they enter a program and when they exit or move up, but not specify a test. One of the most reliable and popular ways to arrive at SPL levels is the BEST. Therefore, a teacher may translate a requirement of an SPL level as being a mandate for using the BEST.

Sometimes, too, programs write proposals including an assessment tool and as part of the program design. What is often related to the teachers administering the tests is not the funder's requirement, but what the program said it would do.

There *are* funders who require specific tests. "The Massachusetts Department of Education requires that every program funded to provide ABE services (including basic literacy through adult secondary education and English for speakers of other languages) incorporate an initial an

ongoing assessment of each student's skills, capabilities, and goals. The Department expects such assessments to be appropriate, reliable, and valid measures. The Department does not, however, require programs to use any particular assessment instruments. Programs may choose from a wide variety of standardized, norm or criterion-referenced¹ commercial tests and/or use center-developed assessments, including those referred to as "alternative assessments", structures, portfolios, etc. Our goal is to ensure that students are appropriately placed and that their progress is appropriately documented. Assessments that enable our students to become partners in managing their own learning are particularly encouraged." (Robert Bickerton, ABE State Director, MA)

The Industrial Service Program in Massachusetts requires Worker Assistance Centers to administer the TABE survey or the Job Corps Reading Screen with the WRAT 3. The Department of Labor (original source of funding) requires that there be a reading level score and a math score, not an equivalent, for each of the people enrolled in their programs. They offer a list of options to arrive at these

scores. In Massachusetts the ISP program narrowed down the list to conduct adequate training on these tools. Some programs may use other tests like the ABLE. ORI (Office for Refugees and immigrants) requires SPL levels for entry and exit but does not require its programs to use the BEST. If a specific test is not required, and it is an SPL level or a grade level equivalent, then we need to explore other valid and reliable ways to achieve the same outcome.

¹ Norm-referenced tests measure how well learners perform in relation to a norming group. Learners are tested to determine how their skills/scores compare with those of others who have taken the test, not how well they have mastered certain knowledge or skills. Criterion-referenced tests measure how well learners perform in relation to some absolute standard. Learners are tested to determine how well they mastered certain knowledge or skills, not how they performed in relation to a norming group or to others in the class. (Testing and Assessment in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language Programs)



Volunteer Tutors and Learner Assessment: What Counts Here?

What are adult education programs hoping to assess when they ask their volunteer tutors to assess learner progress? This old, old question has been kicked around in the area of alternative assessment for a very long time. Salaried practitioners have been pondering the value of assessment instruments for years. Volunteer tutors, however, may or may not have been included in the staff development loop when questions about 'what counts' are being asked. This essay attempts to address the fact that volunteers and volunteer programs can benefit as greatly as any others from a processive approach to ongoing assessment, and suggests some steps that may already be in place within many ABE/ESL programs utilizing volunteers.

I've worked in ESL/literacy for the past 16 years, and since 1989 have been one of many people 'seriously' considering assessment. Nonetheless, for the past two and a half years, when asked to fill in learner progress sheets at the learning center where I've volunteered in Vancouver's downtown east side, I've simply filled in the forms I was given, usually writing something general (and occasionally vague) about each learner's overall abilities. It's meaningless, I figured; some papers for the auditor to count. So what? I was just the volunteer in that picture.

This past spring when I was again given learner assessment sheets and told that the process this time would be slightly different, I decided that a shrug and a sigh weren't helpful responses; volunteers and

learners can and should have access to information about and input into learner assessment documents. I'd been given a reading from *True Stories in the News* (and something else I can no longer recall) to give to my students. Essentially I was being asked to administer a reading comprehension test to my conversation group. The information gleaned from this test would then be transferred to a progress report (*see tool on page 19*).

This time I reconsidered. Where I had previously written out something very general about my learners' progress, it now occurred to me that a casually-written, hollow assessment statement seemed pointless. If I thought that the exercise had little intrinsic value, (i.e. I was not convinced that the people for whom the reports were being written would really read them closely), I did, however, see the possibility of using the form as a vehicle through which my learners could reflect upon their own progress in a somewhat more meaningful manner. As well, my colleagues at the center later pointed out to me that these forms may in fact be used by center staff as a form of in-house monitoring; that is, the forms might assist staff in shifting learners from level to level as their abilities increase.

Why discuss this? It's too easy to fill in some form with little effort or substance in order to appease a funder. Approximately the same amount of time and energy could be dedicated to a meaningful session, at the very least, wherein learners are asked to consider their progress over a given

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period of time, and tutors can share in the process of reflection around learning gains and progress.

LEARNERS AT THE CENTER

I've worked with two core groups since I've been a volunteer at this center. Over the course of two and a half years, other learners have joined and left, but this last group has been together consistently for more than a year.

In addition to the English as an Additional Language students with whom I work as a volunteer tutor, the Learning Centre is also open to adult basic education (ABE) students. They are registered through the Vancouver School Board and their attendance hours are carefully documented and counted in reports which, in turn (along with assessment protocols), are translated into continued funding dollars (or so it seems — remember I'm a volunteer and only part-time/occasionally salaried worker at this center).

The learners who attend the center are those who live and/or work in the downtown east side core (the poorest postal code in Canada), as well as others who attend from around the city. The issue of who attends — who should or shouldn't be allowed access to services — is a hotly-contested issue, beyond the scope of this essay. This information is presented in order to give the reader a sense of the context in which the volunteer program has existed.

Throughout the course of the year, I would periodically ask learners to discuss their feelings about the group — what was working, what wasn't, what needed to be changed. Keep in mind that this has been a conversation group meeting once a week for two hours. Our work together has

consisted of reading and discussing newspaper articles and other information that learners and/or I bring in. Occasionally we'd just chat. The point has been to build oral/aural ability. Over time we've come to know one another, at least a little. Some of the learners phone me at home to ask questions, others have written to me when I've been away for the summer. We've had the odd meal or two together. We've spoken periodically about the group itself, what learners like to do, what they want to learn. Asking them to consider their own progress seemed a legitimate request. The actual document used by the Centre is described below.

THE PROGRESS REPORT

The Progress Report form utilized at the Centre asks for the learner's name, date of birth, initial intake date, report date, instructor's name and level at intake. It is worth noting that the instructor is not the same person as the tutor (a volunteer) who is working with the learner in the tutoring group. As well, assessment of level at intake can be arbitrary, not standardized in any way; therefore 'progress' is slippery to describe, at best. Work has been ongoing to try to standardize intake assessment. As far as I can tell, this does not necessarily mean using standardized instruments so much as agreeing upon levels and criteria among those staff who do intake work.

The reporting form given us for our ESL tutor groups appears to be the same form used to document progress for ABE students. It seeks generalized information which may account for ABE learners' movement within levels, but gives little room for real reflection about ESL learners' less 'visible' progress, such as the gradual



shifts in abilities, usage and confidence with English. Further, it is difficult to expect a form to facilitate reflection upon factors contributing to or inhibiting language development — learning about one’s new environment/culture or the ups and downs which impact on all learning processes. I am critical of the exercise, not necessarily of the learning center. Funders want numbers, reports, some sort of accountability. But the one (accountability) does not necessarily need to preclude the other (meaningful information).

After reading an earlier draft of this paper, two colleagues at the Centre told me that Learning Centre staff have, in fact, spoken at great length about the issue of assessment. It was suggested that the auditors who monitor the center are more interested in finding completed intake information than in gauging actual

progress. An ongoing communication log, and student folders — available to learners — serve as means of documenting ongoing work. Staff at the Centre, like those in many others, simply lack the time or institutional support to refine their assessment work. Instructors are mindful of the importance of meaningful assessment, but have had no real means of communicating this to tutors and/or among one another in consistent ways.

The progress update information sought is presented in the tool at the bottom of this page. It represents the actual amount of information that’s implicitly expected to be given. I have no interest in attacking the Centre for using this form, but do want to consider ways in which to engage in purposeful assessment activity when a funder asks for ‘hard data’ and intake information and staff is pressed for time in a busy

Instructors are mindful of the importance of meaningful assessment, but have had no real means of communicating this to tutors and/or among one another in consistent ways.

Written Language Skills
Oral Language Skills
Math
Social Studies
Other Activities
Recommended Level/Course Next Term _____



center. Funders want complete student files in order to determine numbers of FTE (full-time equivalents) and non-FTE students. My colleagues at the center tell me that meaningful assessment is important to many of the workers at the Centre. Time is in extremely short supply. Working day in and day out in a drop-in center with a shifting learner population demands consistent documentation and processes which need time to develop into useful assessment protocols. It is easier, in this context, as a volunteer with a very limited commitment to an agency, and with a very small group of learners, for me to suggest alternatives.

ONE ALTERNATIVE

I asked the people in the conversation group to think about what they believed they'd accomplished during the past year. I wrote a short piece to accompany their writing, and included it with their reports:

Progress Report, 15 May, 1996

I've asked [the learners in the group] to think and write about their own progress over the past year. We have had discussions about police, food, restaurants, the Internet, newspaper articles and book excerpts that we've read. We've also done some creative writing and work on computers.

I think that the core group has made slow and steady progress and participants appear to be more confident and comfortable users of English. My learners, who have given permission for their writing to be reproduced here wrote the following (with only very minor editing for clarity).

Sam's report

Since I started to learn English one and half year ago I feel my English had make a kind of progress. I can communicate with a lot people. and talking freely with people on English. I am being happy on it. I felt that. if you want to get a express way on learning English, the first important thing is you should get more practice in daily life. For example .. I watch the English TV often, keep talk with the people on English often. And now I am looking some people and make friends with them. Lastly I have a lot interest on talking learning English.

Report (this learner gave permission to use his writing, but not his name)

For the past year, I have made a lot of progress in English in our class which Janet taught hard. At first I have improved my hearing and speaking skill through our teacher explained the difficult questions one after another time. Now. I can call a phone to a company to look for a job or ask some questions. But the year before last year I could not do so. Furthermore, I have also improved my writing and reading skills. I can write a simple business for something.

Emily's report

In last year, I have learned more English from the class. I feel more comfortable than before when use English. I want to learn more. [After Emily had written the piece above, I wrote: Emily, can you think of times/ places that are easy or more difficult to speak English, to which she responded: 'depend who you are talk to.'

Hay's Report

Last year, I joined a discussion group in [this] Centre. I wanted to improve my



speaking English. Through the programs of the group, I learned some new words and idioms. I have more opportunity to talk in English too. I feel less uneasy to talk with others in English now.

These reports enable us to reflect on what we had done and what we wanted to do. I imagine that the learners' notes were attached to the progress report form and filed. Additional information may have been added to the actual progress report form, and/or translated to fit that form in some way. Who will read the reports? What will they make of the information? Can or should the learners' comments somehow be translated into something more 'standard'? Many learners, particularly those whose first cultures value respect for teachers, may well write what they think the instructor/tutor wants to hear; candor is difficult at best across cultures and within the uneven power balance between teachers and learners. Nonetheless, a self-reporting process such as this, repeated over time, may assist some learners in gaining greater insights into their own progress. As trust is built between learners and tutors, more frank discussions of what works and doesn't work in the classroom may ensue as well.

POSSIBILITIES/SUGGESTIONS

As a volunteer tutor at the Centre in Vancouver, I was happy spending time with learners, sometimes coming in early and/or spending time at home in order to prepare materials. I didn't have a lot of extra time, however, nor do many volunteers (and paid workers). It seems important to build this assessment work — especially in the case of volunteer workers — into 'regular' hours.

As part of their training, volunteers/

new workers may be asked to observe intake processes (if confidentiality is not at issue) and to discuss with more experienced practitioners the learners' abilities and weaknesses at the time of entry.

Assessment processes could be discussed within tutor training sessions as part of the ongoing work of language/literacy development. Tutors' notes and logs, along with learners' writing samples, should be utilized in ways that help tutors more clearly understand learners' progress without adding significant blocks of time to their work.

Many programs have already devised their own forms of assessment/progress reporting. Learners and practitioners together could devise appropriate headings/particular questions for their sites/classes and jointly complete the reports, and/or reflect upon the questions at regular intervals. It is possible, for instance, that my learners' comments could be translated into a grid (see, for example, the grid detailed in *Bringing Literacy to Life*, page 145). Such a grid could be revisited regularly by learners and their volunteer tutors; regular staff could participate in this process periodically, too, in order to assist volunteers as needed. Learners could be invited at regular intervals (monthly or quarterly, for example) to sit with staff and/or volunteers to review the items on the grid and to reflect upon where progress has been made, where work is still needed. These conferences could be built into regular class time, where everyone is asked to write a paragraph reflecting their feelings about their own learning for the particular time period. As learners work on their writing, the facilitator(s) can move about the room to confer with learners individually.

As trust is built between learners and tutors, more frank discussions of what works and doesn't work in the classroom may ensue as well.



While serious questions have been raised about the use of volunteers within literacy work (*see Kazemek, 1988*), many programs can and do utilize volunteers very effectively, and volunteers make important contributions to the programs they assist. Why not enable them to learn more about an ongoing part of learning and teaching so they can become yet more effective?

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Developing a Native Language Literacy Program

For five years, Centro Hispano de Chelsea needed a Native Language Literacy class in Spanish to meet the needs of our population. When I started at Centro Hispano, one program taught ESL with a medical emphasis for students who tested at an SPL level of 5-6. This program is designed for 1) foreign licensed medical professionals, 2) individuals currently working in acute care hospitals, and 3) individuals pursuing a career in the health care industry. Needless to say, the students in this program have a much more established and formal educational background and were an excellent match for this program.

Initial elation over the success of this program didn't last long however. Teachers began getting feedback and suggestions from students on how the program could better meet their needs. When these suggestions were not implemented, attrition began to rise. It became apparent that our education department was severely lacking.

While we were meeting the needs of our target population, these same students were asking about the needs of their families. Their parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and children were all in need of English and other referral services. The requests for other ESL classes were overwhelming. We went after funding to expand our ESL offerings.

We started to build our ESL base with informal classes where we assessed students via the BEST (Basic English Skills

Test). Our funding agency mandated this tool in our first program, so we considered it as good as any other tool for our new program. It also seemed that when writing proposals or communicating with funders, they understood the language of the BEST SPL, MELT etc.

Yet, the BEST was often off the mark. The placement test never seemed to coincide with what the teachers thought about the levels of students. It gave us some information for placement but not the information we needed to do it accurately.

Specifically, it did not account for all the variables in our ESL population. Students were ending up in classes and had to be moved after the beginning of a cycle. Still we were able to work things out. Our ESL classes were meeting the needs of many more people. We had a long waiting list, but we had a program we felt was meeting a large community need.

It wasn't long however, before we noticed a rather peculiar thing. The teachers had brought to my attention their frustration with not being able to move the classes along because of a few students. While most of our students were making excellent progress and were moving up to higher levels of ESL or out of the program altogether, some were making little or no progress at all. These students were staying in the same class and ESL level for upwards of a year and even two in some instances. As a result, some beginning ESL classes were full and accepted very few

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Tool co-developed with
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We expected some issues with their native language but we wanted to see what those issues were.

new students from the waiting list.

We decided it was time to look closely at the classes we were offering. Was something missing in our program that could account for this? We started by spending a whole in-service day evaluating different components of our program as a whole group.

We began by looking at the numbers. How many students had come in? What were their BEST scores when entering? What were their scores from class work, quizzes, etc.? and what were their BEST scores when ending each cycle? We discovered that most of the students who repeated two or more cycles were in the lower level classes, while the higher level classes saw little to no repetition. So we narrowed our inquiry to lower level classes and moved our focus from student to instruction: Was the teacher appropriate for the class? Was the material appropriate for the class? Was the method of teaching appropriate for the class? The majority of the class was doing well and showed mobility into the higher level classes. All teacher evaluations written by students had come out very positive, the class curriculum was suitable, and the course work all seemed to be in order.

One of the teachers suggested we ask all the students in the lower level classes to write a short paragraph in Spanish (their native language), perhaps about their early educational experiences. We expected some issues with their native language but we wanted to see what those issues were. Was it a literacy problem? Was it an issue of a bad educational experience? Was it a result of a learning style difference? After the students provided us with a writing sample, the results were so clear and relevant that they gave us two major pieces to the puzzle.

The first was that the lesser-developed paragraphs with the most mistakes all belonged to those students who had remained in the lower level class for more than two cycles. These mistakes ranged from spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, poor sentence structure, to malformed letters, such as backwards p's etc....also the actual writing on the page was not smooth flowing but looked as if a lot of effort was put into writing each word.

The second was that all the students were over 55 years of age. None of these students had education in their own country beyond the third grade (even that was considered advanced); some had absolutely no formal education in either reading or writing. All considered themselves "campesinos," persons who grew up on a farm. Their family priorities were to work on their farms starting at a very young age so they had few opportunities to further their education in their native language.

We needed a class to fit these specific Native Language Literacy (NLL) needs. We believe that people have better success at learning literacy of a second language if they have literacy skills in their native language. This belief led us to pursue funding for a Native Language Literacy Class. Centro Hispano de Chelsea then joined forces with Bunker Hill Community College and other agencies in Chelsea: Chelsea City Hall, Chelsea Community Volunteer Center, Cambodian Community of Massachusetts, Refugee Services, Consilio Hispano de Cambridge, and the Chelsea Community to respond to a request for proposals through the Massachusetts Department of Education. Through this consortium we are able to



provide ESOL, GED and pre-GED in Spanish and English and two NLL programs in Spanish and Khmer.

We could now finally start our program, but the next stumbling block was finding or developing the proper assessment tool. As previously stated, we had used the BEST for our other programs as well as supplemental materials. This test could not address our need to measure Native Language Literacy. We had to look elsewhere for a tool.

We looked at various alternatives, including resource people like Yvonne Lalyre at the Mass. Department of Education and Seidy Rodriguez-Ham, our literacy teacher. Seidy drafted our own in-house Native Language Literacy Assessment Tool (*see Tool, next page*). This tool began to assess students' knowledge of the alphabet, sentence structure, and basic math applications. With invaluable assistance from Diane Paxton, the Elderly Program Life Skills instructor at Centro Hispano, we were able to get an even more advanced assessment and form a more comprehensive curriculum for the NLL program. Seemingly all segments were in place, but there was one last – and probably the largest problem left.

We had identified the students who needed the classes and had found an instructor. We had then developed the necessary assessment tools as well as the curriculum. Yet the students were extremely dissatisfied, and many of them refused to come to the class. Many of them denied their need for classes in native language literacy. Others admitted they needed to learn to read and write in their own language, but wanted and needed to learn English. There was also the issue of being viewed as an “alphabeta(o)” and the

stigma attached to not being able to read and write. This was hard for some students to overcome. It was also hard for us to convince students that this was the best path to learning English. Some students resisted and wanted to just learn English. After listening to their concerns, we then developed what we hoped would be our last solution to the issues surrounding our Native Language Literacy Program.

We offered the students a supplementary class which taught ESL life skills (shopping, emergency procedures, going to the doctor...). They could take the literacy class Monday through Wednesday and take the Life Skills class Thursday and Friday. This would assist them with their literacy skills, while at the same time teach them survival English. This option was extremely popular and even helped us solve other problems we were having in our ESL classes mainly dealing with issues of stereotypes and prejudices from students coming from different parts of Latin America.

Students coming from some Latin American countries are very strong in their English reading and writing skills, seemingly due to learning English in school, some as early as first grade. This English instruction was generally taught in Spanish and emphasized reading and writing, yet did little to develop their oral/aural skills.

Individuals from other Latin American countries, however, have been in this country for a long time and have relied much more on the oral/aural skills to survive and work and have had few or no opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills.

Our Multi Level ESL Life Skills class served a dual purpose in the education,



employment and training department. Not only did it see success with our diverse students from Latin America, but also helped up to implement and see success in our Native Language Literacy Program. Our two classes brought together students from different countries in Latin America

for a common purpose. Through these classes we were able to facilitate conversations and learnings that helped people see the similarities and differences in their languages, phrases and terminology and as a result gave students a more accurate picture of the different cultures.





TOOL: CONTESTE LO SIGUIENTE

Nombre _____ Fecha _____

1. Escriba las Vocales.

2. Escriba las letras del abecedario.

3. Forme palabras con las siguientes letras.

M

S

P

L

N

4. Forme oraciones con las siguientes palabras

mama

luna

nene

casa

papa



Complete el siguiente parrafo

5. Escriba en la raya la letre que falta

Tengo ami___os son Luis y Mario ___aseamos juntos

po___ el campo jugamos ___uando salimos de la

escuela es muy ___onito.

6. Escriba en cada raya los numeros que estan antes y despues de:

___ ___ ___ 4 ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ 10 ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ 20 ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ 37 ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ 49 ___ ___ ___



7. Escriba los numeros de 5 en 5.

8. Escriba 5 numeros pares.

9. Escriba el numero que falta en la raya y que al sumarlo de a 10.

$$7 + \underline{\quad} = 10$$

$$\underline{\quad} + 8 = 10$$

$$\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = 10$$

$$4 + 6 = \underline{\quad}$$

$$\underline{\quad} + 1 = 10$$

10. Reste

8 -	9 -	10 -	6 -	7 -
3	2	5	1	2
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>



Planning and Evaluation Teams: A Model for Workplace Education

Evaluating the quality and effectiveness of workplace education programs creates both opportunities and challenges. To meet the challenges, the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative promotes a team-based approach to program planning, implementation, evaluation, and institutionalization. The approach uses a “Planning and Evaluation Team” model. Since its inception in 1991, the model has been implemented in over 50 workplace education programs. This article describes the issues that have surfaced and includes a response to them from four practitioners.

Evaluating the effectiveness of workplace education programs creates exciting opportunities. If done well, evaluation results can demonstrate concrete and tangible benefits of the program to the students, the employer, the union, and in some cases the community. Evaluation results — including, but not limited to, assessment results — can show what was learned, how that learning transferred to, and got used at, the workplace and in the community, and to what extent participation in the program impacts on the performance of the business. Evaluation results can also show to what extent the improvement of basic or language skills contributes to increasing the quality of goods and services and improving production or service delivery processes. It can inform program improvement, can promote institutionalization of the program, and can help determine whether to continue funding.

Evaluating the effectiveness of workplace education programs also creates challenges. Identifying gains in student

learning, describing the transfer of that learning, documenting the impact of the program on the workplace, and demonstrating the program’s overall quality and effectiveness have been daunting tasks for many practitioners. Several factors make evaluation challenging. One important factor is that workplace education programs are not yet part of the workplace’s infrastructure and culture when they are initiated. Establishing this infrastructure and culture, as well as building systems to take care of planning, implementation, and evaluation functions need to take place simultaneously and require a considerable amount of resources and energy.

Another factor is the involvement of many different players, including students, teachers, administrators, employers, and union representatives, all of whom bring their own ideas and expectations regarding what constitutes success. Striking an appropriate balance between these different expectations is not an easy task.

The varying degree of involvement in the program by those who have a vested

by
**Olivia Steele,
Deborah Tuler,
Jane Shea,
John Antonellis,
Kathe Kirkman**



Massachusetts Workplace
Literacy Program



interest in it or have decisionmaking authority over it, is yet another important challenge to evaluating a program. When key decision makers such as Chief Executive Officers are involved directly, planning, implementation, evaluation, and institutionalization decisions appear to be facilitated more easily. High levels of managerial involvement, however, have in some cases created an imbalance of power. When key decisionmakers are not involved directly in the planning and evaluation of a program, those who are need to invest considerable time in keeping decisionmakers fully apprised. If not, the program may end up being decided upon from a distance by someone based only on his/her expectations and perceptions as to how responsive the program is. This perception may not be an accurate reflection of the program's performance.

Evaluating workplace education programs is most definitely challenging because of the expertise required to develop and implement an evaluation system. Ensuring the confidentiality of records, avoiding legal issues related to testing, and developing instruments that are reliable and valid are not easy tasks.

The most important challenge, however, is one of facilitation and is faced by the provider who in many instances has the primary responsibility for overseeing the evaluation. Often the teacher or the coordinator of the program become responsible for managing the whole planning, implementation, evaluation, and institutionalization of the program. These are not small tasks and require a substantial amount of skill and experience in programming and working with different constituent groups. Even when teachers and coordinators have the know how and resources to do this

work well, they still encounter numerous obstacles on the road to demonstrating program effectiveness. Limited access to information and key individuals at the company or union have made the management of the planning and evaluation process a tough hurdle to jump.

FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY AND POLICY: THE PLANNING AND EVALUATION TEAM MODEL

For a decade, a variety of federal and state funding sources have supported workplace education programs in Massachusetts. Under the umbrella of the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative — a statewide partnership among business, labor, education, and government (represented by agencies that fund workplace education programs) — extensive evaluations are conducted annually to identify best practices. A 1991 evaluation summarized the challenges practitioners faced in implementing workplace education programs and articulated policy recommendations to address them.

One of the main recommendations was to put in place a governance structure, rather than an advisory structure, for local business, labor and education collaborations. The recommendation acknowledged the need to systemically address the significance of performing, planning, implementation, evaluation, and institutionalization functions through a team-based approach. This approach would ensure that clear and realistic goals for the program were set, agreed upon by all partners, and eventually met by enabling all those who could benefit from the program to participate in shaping it. The proposed model was the "Planning and Evaluation Team." The MA Department of Education has since required all recipients

When key decisionmakers are not involved directly in the planning and evaluation of a program, those who are need to invest considerable time in keeping decisionmakers fully apprised.



When debating goals, it often becomes clear that team members may hold different views. To strike a balance, realism and solid data help the team get clearer on realistic goals and how to prioritize them.

of its workplace education awards to implement this team-based approach.

The initial results of piloting the Planning and Evaluation Team (PET) model were favorable and currently variations of the model are being used by all workplace education programs funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education with National Workplace Literacy Program and 8% Job Training Partnership Act funds. Today there are 27 PETs at sites funded through the National Workplace Literacy Program and an additional five at sites funded through the 8% Job Training Partnership Act. PETs consist of representatives from upper management, supervisors, employees (who are enrolled in the program, have an interest in enrolling, or have graduated from the program), teachers and administrators representing the education provider, and labor representatives. Teams meet regularly throughout the life of the program. Initially, teams may meet very frequently. As the program solidifies, teams meet less often.

FUNCTIONS AND TASKS PERFORMED BY PLANNING AND EVALUATION TEAMS

The purposes of the PET are multi-fold: to plan the program, to oversee implementation, to design and implement evaluation, to promote improvement, and to institutionalize and integrate the program in the long-term strategy of the business and/or union. The Massachusetts Department of Education views its funding as seed funds or an investment in building the capacity of the businesses or unions so they are equipped to continue the program without public funding. The return on this investment has been promising. Almost 65% of all partnerships that received funding under the National Workplace

Literacy Program through four funding cycles, continued when public funding ended.

PETs handle specific tasks and go through several stages. First, the commitment from labor and management to a team-based approach is sought. Subsequently, a team is established by identifying key players in the company, labor and the learning provider. In this discussion, the role of the team, the time and energy required, and ways to orient team members are usually clarified. The first tasks are usually accomplished in pre-program discussions between the education provider, management, and the union.

Once the team is established, a start-up meeting is set. The team begins identifying goals for the workplace education program by answering questions such as “What is our ultimate reason for having the program? What is the purpose of this program? What goals do we hope to accomplish by the end of this program? When debating goals, it often becomes clear that team members may hold different views. To strike a balance, realism and solid data help the team get clearer on realistic goals and how to prioritize them. At this point, it is critical to spell out how program goals relate to business and labor goals and not to view them as fully equal. Workplace education programs can help address business needs and goals but in few instances are the sole incentive needed.

The next task involves identifying appropriate indicators that show the program is making progress towards its goals. Following this step, the PET identifies which components of the program (e.g. three ESOL classes) and what kind and level of business and labor support (e.g., release time) is needed. This is also



the time when resources are allocated.

Deciding what to evaluate, how, when, and why is next. The PET selects or develops ways to gather the data the program needs; collects and analyzes the data; and utilizes the information to improve the program. In considering data-gathering instruments, the PET considers resources (e.g., time and dollars required); levels of participation required; staff expertise in evaluating; and other factors.

Improving the program based on evaluation results may lead to modifying goals. This is the last task the PET undertakes after going through the planning and evaluation cycle once. PETs, however, do not necessarily wait until this stage to make revisions to their goals. Changes in the industry (e.g., the recent restructuring and refinancing of health care) may cause the team to modify the course of the program prior to completing its planning and evaluation cycle. Another instance may be that the team discovers that they are collecting important data that are not captured by its current goal statements. These instances demonstrate the need to implement stages and tasks for PETs on an ongoing basis that allows for flexibility and ensures that the process is non-linear.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

PETs have been successful to varying degrees. More than five years of working with the PET model has taught practitioners that a number of issues surface year after year and in both state-funded programs and other publicly- and privately-funded programs that have attempted to replicate the PET model. The issues are:

- How do we start up a PET in a program that is not funded by a public funding

source that requires team-based approaches to programming?

- How do we get supervisors and other company representatives involved in looking at program impact on the workplace?
- How does the PET as a group develop and use a set of tools to gather data?
- What do PET members need to be aware of when developing tools? What happens when we get data we cannot use?
- How do teachers and coordinators on PETs facilitate identifying goals that do not hold the program accountable for the broader company goals, which may require more initiatives or interventions than the program?

Program coordinators from workplace education programs at business sites across the Commonwealth responded to these issues and identified lessons learned.

1. How do we convince an employer of the importance of a governing body responsible for developing and implementing a workplace education program when it is not required by a grant? How do we pull all the necessary players together? Debbie Tuler talks about her experience in a Hospital Workplace Education program:

I was raised on Massachusetts' team-based approach to planning and evaluating workplace education programs. The data collected over the years in the Massachusetts Department of Education Programs demonstrated the value of this team-based approach. So, when I took over a private contract with a hospital (which had offered ESOL/ABE classes for five years without a team or advisory board), I expected that I would institute the PET



By asking questions and engaging supervisors and managers in conversations we encourage them to recognize the benefits.

model in order to bring the program in line with what I believe are indicators for effective programs. I also believe that a collaborative model like the PET approach is important because it keeps players connected, committed, and informed about what is involved in a long-term educational process, the workplace education program. I did realize, however, that I could not force it.

First, I had to convince managers/supervisors that it was worth their time and effort to be involved in the program at some level. Managers and supervisors were unfamiliar with the whole idea of having a coordinator/instructor speak with them about areas of concern and evidence of progress and to request documents and information from their departments. They viewed the program as a benefit that the hospital offered to workers and in some abstract way was a benefit to them too, but they had never clearly understood this benefit.

I pursued conversation with managers and supervisors. There were a lot of changes taking place in the hospital. This meant that employees would have an opportunity to upgrade their position if their language skills improved and if supervisors and managers noticed that their language skills had improved. It was important to get supervisors and managers to see the benefits of the program to them and to the workplace in general. By asking questions and engaging supervisors and managers in conversations we encourage them to recognize the benefits.

By encouraging managers and supervisors from Environmental Services, Transportation and Nutritional Services at the hospital to offer input into the program, I did in fact open the door for expressing

concerns. Until now, they had mainly voiced frustrations that more workers from the day shift do not take advantage of the benefit of classes (classes met from 3-5 pm and their shifts end at 3:30). At the same time, supervisors can only let so many people attend class at the same time during work hours because of staffing constraints. Students pointed out to me that other day shift workers cannot attend class because they had other jobs or child care concerns. Issues of concern then related to scheduling, recruitment and policies. I pointed out to each party, supervisors and students, that it would be easier to resolve these issue if everyone sat at the table together and discussed these issues rather than having me be an intermediary.

Last spring (1996), after six months of working at the hospital and getting to know the various players, I was able to get commitments on the part of managers from Environmental Services, Nutritional Services, and Transportation to participate in an "Education Committee" (a PET by another name) which would include workers in the program. Their task would be to address some of the issues mentioned above. We would start there and move to other areas of the program where this collective input is needed, including curriculum design and goal setting.

We had our first meeting in October to air and clarify concerns and to identify next steps. After discussing the reasons people cannot come to class and the issues surrounding releasing workers to attend class, we came to some decisions. These changes amounted to: change the time of day of classes in order to encourage more participation from day shift workers, have the instructor attend departmental staff meetings to promote the program with



assistance from current and past students, and set up a buddy system where workers who attend the program could bring another worker/friend to class to try it out.

What impressed me about the meeting was that people were talking to each other, not just me. I also got a commitment from the committee to meet monthly to resolve issues that arise. I felt that communication was opening. With this, though, came the realization that the managers believed that the programs solely benefited the workers who participated in it and not themselves. The meeting did little to change this attitude "They should take advantage of this...they should make time to improve their language skills". For the program to continue and develop, this perception needs to change. This can be done in the committee or with individual managers. It is important to keep asking questions and engaging in dialogue. They need to buy into the program so that they argue for its continuation amidst budget cuts and layoffs.

My experience at the hospital during the past nine months has made it clear to me that PETs (or their equivalents) in different workplaces may play different roles and define their purposes in different ways. Defining these roles and purposes is a real challenge.

2. How do we get supervisors and other company representatives involved in looking at program impact in the workplace? And why is this important? Jane Shea from Quinsigamond Community College's workplace education programs talks about taking involvement of supervisors and other company personnel to another level:

It really all starts with the initial goal setting process that we do with our plan-

ning and evaluation teams. This is our springboard. We ask the PET to help identify people within their workplace to solicit feedback about the progress of the program. We have them identify people who they think are not that knowledgeable about the program and its benefits, as well as those who are directly involved through the PET, supervisors of workers etc.

Most people tend to respond to questions about program impact and progress by talking about individual students. We make it clear that we design our questions to help people look more broadly at the program's impact and less on individual students. This process takes time; it also involves asking the questions over and over and engaging in dialogue. For example, we ask, 'Have you seen any changes in the workplace/workers? What do you hope to see in this workplace after the program has ended?'

Of course, getting people to answer questions can be a difficult task. People are generally very busy and hard to track down so we need to be flexible in soliciting this information. As the coordinator, I will go to staff meetings and use the questions to gather information collectively. I will ask people when I happen to see them in the hall. I will send questions out to individuals in a survey form and then arrange an appointment to meet them and discuss the questions. I have also made appointments without giving out the questions in advance.

It is worth finding a variety of methods to gather this information in order to note the many different perspectives within the company. The ideas and comments we get from supervisors and workers who have direct or indirect impact on the program is very valuable. They deepen our under-



standing of the workplace. These comments inform us about the employees' perception of the program.

Of course there is always the question of confidentiality for students as well as supervisors. We are very clear up front before we start working with programs, that we have a clear policy protecting the confidentiality of individual students in the program and those that have offered to answer the evaluation questions. We realize that it is very hard when you ask someone how they think the program is going for them not to think about an individual student in particular. The questions, as I mentioned before are designed to look at the general and not specific.

But here is the dilemma: we really like hearing and sharing about the successes of students or the positive feedback of supervisors and managers and really have to try to hold to the same principles and give that worker the opportunity to decide whether to disclose the success, such as getting a GED or not.

Although people within the program (learners, teachers, PET members) aid in the data collection process, PET has the responsibility to report that information to others in a way that recognizes and validates the supervisor's voice, maintains a level of confidentiality for the workers participating in the program, and gives enough information to help inform the planning process.

3. How does the PET as a group develop and use a set of tools to gather data? John Antonellis, coordinator of Workplace Education programs at Jewish Vocational Programs in Boston, talks about where tools may come from:

The starting point for developing

evaluation tools is the program's goal statement. Usually, the PET will examine the goals for the program and discuss who is in the best position to evaluate each goal. At this point we'll have a brainstorm about the kinds of tools that could be used to gather the information we need. Next, I'll draft a set of tools and bring these back to the PET at the next meeting. Having something concrete to work with is important. I've found that this makes it very clear if we're all talking on the same wavelength. The education provider is the perceived expert regarding program evaluation and does in fact have access to a wealth of resources based on past experience which can be used to develop evaluation tools that are tailored to each program. Further, as most PET representatives are under pretty serious time constraints, coming to the PET with a draft in hand is a more efficient use of time. The PET then looks over the drafts and any needed changes are made.

Embedded in every evaluation tool are assumptions about your program's goals. Ideally, the process described above occurs early on in the establishment of a workplace program. While programs usually develop a goals statement early on in the process, they have not always linked their evaluation tools explicitly to these goals. In some cases, the program may be using tools developed for a previous program or may have been developed independently of the goals statement. In cases like this, what I do is examine both the goals statement and the existing evaluation tools. Together with the PET we attempt to make the connection between the goals statement and evaluation tools explicit. In some instances we have found that the goals embedded in an evaluation



tool more accurately reflect the true program goals, and the goal statement is adapted accordingly. In other instances new tools are developed to account for any gaps found between the desired program goals and existing evaluation tools. My experience has been that programs are generally very good at designing tools which measure the impact of the program on the participant, but measuring the impact on the workplace and on the educational partnership is a greater challenge.

We are really trying to develop tools which provide both qualitative and quantitative data that is used to improve existing programs and aid them in their efforts toward institutionalization. One of our most successful tools is the survey because it can be designed to provide both quantitative and qualitative information, it is relatively easy to administer, and requires only a minimum of time to complete. The surveys I've developed are explicitly tied to the goal statement, are short (one side of one page), and include a combination of open and closed ended questions. Open ended questions provide qualitative information while closed ended question provide quantitative results. Another advantage of using surveys as an evaluation tool is that the same survey can usually be adapted for use by both supervisors and program participants. So everyone is evaluating the program for the same goals.

4. What happens when we get data we cannot use?

I think I have heard this joke before, and the punch line is "manipulate the data" Wait! that was intended as humor and not a suggestion.

Most data can be used in "legitimate" descriptive ways even if that isn't really what had been planned. Any data collection plan should include a section on how you intend to use the data. Potential "use" problems often can be detected at the planning stage. However, if you forgot this step in the plan, relax and think creatively (and legitimately).

For instance, you may have hoped to discover how many students progressed during their time in your course, but you only have aggregate data indicating class pre-test scores of 10, 10, 20, 20, 30, and 30 and post-test scores of 10, 20, 20, 30, 30, and 30. In this example, one 10 could have moved to 30 (one person progressed); one 10 could have moved to 20 and one 20 moved to 30 (two people progressed); or two 10's could have moved to 20, one 20 moved to 30, and one 20 regressed to 10 (three people progressed); etc. You can't "use this data" to indicate how many students progressed, but you can use this data to state that the "class average post-test" (23.3) is 3.3 points (or 17%) higher than the "class average pre-test" (20). This is a classic "unit of analysis" problem: you wanted student (unit) information, but because you didn't track individual student progress, you got class (unit) information. Actually, I think a 17% overall increase sounds better than saying one or two students progressed.

Most data that is collected for loftier purposes (e.g. unearthing correlations) can be very useful as descriptive if your data really doesn't meet statistical assumptions. Most readers understand and enjoy pictures (descriptions) as much as statistics anyway.

A word of caution when thinking creatively about your data: in some cases



your lemons cannot be turned into lemonade. If you really have garbage data (check list below for suggestions on getting garbage-proof data), don't try to recycle it....JUST TOSS IT OUT.

Hints for effective evaluations. These are suggestions that I find helpful in guiding my evaluation work.

1. **QUERY.** Start with a specific, simply-phrased research question, such as: Do students in the Math classes make fewer computational errors on sample work orders after the course than before? The question identifies WHO (students in the Math Class), WHAT (computation), HOW (sample work orders), and WHEN (before-and-after-course participation) measurement will occur.
2. **CLARIFY.** Try to identify factors that might impact the answer to your question, other than the factor you would expect. For the question above, the style of instruction may make a difference in outcomes if there are more than one class/instructor. The number of times (or time of day) students attend the class could impact outcomes. Each of these factors may require additional clarifications to your question, such as: 'Do students attend 90% of the math classes...' etc. These clarifications will guide your analysis and interpretation of the findings.
3. **SIMPLIFY.** Simple data collections, such as a test or survey, may not be as soul-satisfying as extensive interviews or simulations, but they are usually easier to do and yield easily-interpreted data. If you choose a more complex route to data collection, be sure you plan for the extra time that will probably be needed to

analyze the results. For example, open-ended interviews often yield very rich information, but analyzing this data can require several readings, coding and reliability checks.

4. **QUANTIFY.** Anecdotal evidence enhances evaluations, but most businesses and funders need quantified results. Even data that is collected qualitatively, through interviews or open ended questions, should be coded into categories and quantified.
5. **UTILIZE.** Even if you are doing evaluation to satisfy a requirement of your employer or funder, make sure it is useful to your program and that you USE the information you get. Evaluation takes time and energy, and GOOD evaluation is an excellent tool for program improvement.

5. How do teachers and coordinators on a PET facilitate identifying goals that do not hold the program accountable for the broader company goals, which may require more initiatives or interventions than just the program?

It is crucial during the goal setting process to phrase questions in such a way as to help employers see the distinction between company goals and program goals. When an employer says that his goal is to improve productivity, ask how the program can help you achieve this goal. What is the link between the basic skills instruction which we offer and the company's broader goals of improving productivity? Are those who will participate in the program the ones who are responsible for this desired outcome? Who else is responsible but will not be participating in the program, and how will we get data from them?



Too often I have seen increased reading and writing skills as a desired outcome for participants when they are not in a position that requires any visible reading and writing or are often not offered opportunities to show gains in these areas. The result is that we as a team do not have the data needed to determine if the company goal

is being reached. The answers to these questions above will force the team to define the connection between the program and the company, and articulate the parameters of the program. This questioning should be the starting point for setting goals and designing instruments.





Learning from Experience: The Native Language Literacy Screening Device

The Native Language Literacy Screening Device (NLLSD) is great. I first used it several months ago with students who were already enrolled in my Native Language Literacy class. At that time, the class worked on their reading and writing in Spanish, with math and science of course also being taught in Spanish. On the NLLSD form it asks students very broadly to write about their families, why they want to study English and something about their lives. This gives the students the opportunity to write about anything.

Most of the more advanced students expressed their desire and immediate need to learn English for a variety of reasons: employment so that they can better provide for their family; to help their children with their school work; and to be more independent in their daily tasks by relying less on translators.

The students were getting impatient with waiting to enter ESOL classes. They were tired and bored with reading and writing exclusively in Spanish. They wanted to learn, for example, practical phrases they could use on a daily basis. This made perfect sense to me but up until that point I felt pretty committed by our former program design to give instruction exclusively in Spanish. But after a good 90% of the students expressed such interest in wanting to learn English, via the Native Language Literacy Screening Device, I decided to ignore my fears and heed my students' wishes. Thus, to answer the

question "How have I used the NLLSD?" I have used it to inform instruction and through this decision I have empowered my students.

I have used it for on-going assessment and just a week ago I used it again for on-going and initial assessment (the latter obviously for my newer students). I like the device because I can glean information about my students that I would not necessarily have had or learned otherwise. I would not necessarily have concentrated my focus on written questions about their families or why they wanted to learn English or what they liked to do in their spare time. The last essay they are asked to write has and will continue to inform instruction. It has helped me to better understand their specific family issues, and to be more sensitive to the students' desire to learn English.

One student who recently completed the NLLSD spoke only of her love for Bingo and the friends with whom she plays (she had an endless list of names). That was a real eye opener for me. She is always talking about how important it is to speak and understand English but since she cannot join the workforce, her needs are a bit different — perhaps. We will now start playing alphabet (and the traditional) Bingo again on a more frequent basis to meet her needs.

The students unanimously agree that this new idea of giving some instruction in English and some in Spanish is working. They are pleased that I was in a position to

by
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Mercier-Cuenca**



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truly listen to them. Their attendance has improved since I started giving them instruction in English and they are becoming more responsible about calling and/or stopping by when they cannot make it to class.

The essay component of the device also helped me see their grammar deficiencies and strengths in their native Spanish. My being fluent in their language has and will continue to enable me to inform instruction. I also enjoyed reading the four pages that preceded the tool. The information

was useful; it talks about how to use the instrument and what information you can conclude from the results of the NLLSD. .

The Native Language Literacy Screening Device is available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Portuguese and Tigrinya. It is available through the New York State Education Department. Attn: Dr. Patricia Mooney Gonzalez, Office of Workforce Preparation and Continuing Education, Room 307 EB, West Wing, Albany, New York 12234.





Looking down the road, and hoping to widen it for all

Why ABE Math Assessment Practices Must Change

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from The Problem Solver, a publication jointly funded by SABES and the Department of Education. The edition from which this article was taken was designed to introduce and reinforce changes in mathematical assessment practices as encouraged by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks document (primarily the ABE portions). The Problem Solver pages include materials developed by the three Frameworks Math Assessment Study Groups from Boston, The Northeast and West Regions. Much of the edition focused on potential assessment tasks and actual Frameworks-based assessments performed as part of the study group exploration.

Assessment is a key component of curriculum. It initiates the academic teacher-student relationship and guides instructional decisions in the best of circumstances. Currently, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, encompassing the Mass. ABE Math Standards and the NCTM Math Standards, calls for teachers to heighten their awareness of curriculum decisions which may have become or can become automatic, almost unconscious and too-often homogenized to serve institutional needs, not student needs. Teachers are asked in the Frameworks to reform their mathematical teaching practices, including their assessment methodologies.

The Frameworks and Standards beg teachers to open up their questions, integrate academic skills and pique critical/creative thinking in their courses, their teaching. And all these changes are urged in the belief that students can be better

served by teachers familiar with the nuances, ambiguities and potentials of mathematics. However, the Frameworks recognize that it is impossible to illuminate a course of study without accurate, informed and comprehensive assessment of student knowledge and learning which by rights should drive the curriculum.

A teacher must know what mathematics each student understands in order to serve well that student. To figure out what is known and what is not, how a person learns and what blocks his or her learning, requires assessment of a sort far different from that which has traditionally been practiced; it requires an 'assessment mindset' that, yes, utilizes new tools, but more importantly is exercised diligently/insightfully, regardless of the problem, test or task used. The evolution in assessment asks teachers to think deeply about mathematics and about students *all the time*.

"Every mathematical activity can

by
Tricia Donovan



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become an opportunity for assessment," note teachers engaged in exploration of Frameworks-based assessment.

Both the Frameworks and the NCTM Standards champion an evolution in assessment practices, an evolution in which careful, criteria-based analysis and collections (portfolios) of students' work, not just a compilation of their percentages or positions on the bell curve, becomes the standard procedure used to determine what a student knows, at what level (s)he comprehends what is known and what scholastic attitudes or intellectual behaviors are exhibited. This evolution assumes an awareness of lesson objectives and an investigation of students' meeting, exceeding or confusion with these objectives in order to inform subsequent instruction.

Frameworks-based assessment requires teachers to know what it is they expect students to learn from or demonstrate via a particular lesson. Random selection of activities, whether to keep students busy or to entertain them, is viewed as counter-productive. A clear vision of students' knowledge base and direction for future development is required. That is, the teacher must know the student and the subject in order to develop or locate appropriate materials for instruction and assessment.

When assessing students, teachers are advised to ask:

What skills, knowledge, and academic behaviors do I want my students to express, and what tasks will provide evidence of these?

The emphasis here is on establishing criteria to prove mastery. Does the student understand concepts, techniques, algo-

rithms, etc., and can (s)he apply this knowledge flexibly and appropriately, and, finally, what criteria will establish for teachers valid proof that a student knows the concepts, techniques, algorithms, etc. or possesses academic habits of thinking?

Documentation of investigation results is necessary, just as recording numbers and case notes has been. Only now what is recorded is information relative to specific curriculum objectives, especially as articulated in the Frameworks and the Standards. Is the student a flexible problem solver? Can the student coherently communicate the mathematics embedded in a problem? Does the student apply previous knowledge to a new situation? The answers to these questions, as demonstrated on particular tasks or in exploration projects or in portfolios, are the informational foundations of Frameworks-based academic assessment. (It must be noted that academic assessment always operates within the larger gestalt of assessment which for devoted teachers involves assessment of students' physical, psychological and spiritual statuses as well as mental or academic status.) These informational foundations are built to help teachers better serve the academic needs of their students.

And it is assumed that every ABE (Adult Basic Education) teacher wants to serve her or his students in the best manner possible. Every adult educator wants his or her students to be successful, to get what "they came for" and to feel better about themselves as they become more confident in their abilities. These are the ABE teacher's rewards. Moreover, all ABE instructors know the bottom line for many funding sources and the basic goal of most students is attainment of the GED certifi-

The teacher must know the student and the subject in order to develop or locate appropriate materials for instruction and assessment.



cate. The GED certificate is accepted as recognition of general academic achievement. But for too many students achievement of the GED with a minimum score in mathematics leads to educational and economic stagnation. It is not sufficient preparation for what comes later. Minimum competency is not enough; it is not serving students in the best manner possible.

By aligning itself with the K-12 teachers and administrators who are developing Curriculum Frameworks and Alternative Assessment Practices, the Massachusetts

Adult Education community seeks to dream a bigger dream for ABE students, one which unlocks the prison of poverty and social disenfranchisement. It seeks to clear paths to economic, social and personal growth which formerly opened only for those prepared by a college-prep or advanced technological prep high school program. It says getting by by the skin of your teeth is not enough. It says, "We can help you learn to solve problems, imagine problems and discuss them with others."

The purpose of ABE is not only to teach students a few tricks to get past the 'academic guards' in the GED Testing Office; it is to awaken learners who are alienated from the unavoidable world of academic ideals, and arouse those beginning to see the value of and power in the ability to read all genres, write coherently, calculate and problem solve with mathematics. To awaken and arouse learners requires ongoing, informed, documented assessment of learning. Armed with such assessment information, every teacher becomes capable of leading students down their various paths to success.

The paths to achievement, economic equality and personal development are being widened by efforts like the Frameworks so people of all backgrounds can walk down them. Across the State, teachers and administrators seek ways to better prepare all students for the challenges known to lie ahead. These educational leaders realize that successful citizens are able to reason, solve problems, communicate and make connections throughout their lives. They know that when a student's creative intelligence and curiosity are allowed to flourish, that student plants her/his feet firmly on the paths to fulfillment and success. The determination

ASSESSMENT DEFINITIONS

Webster's: appraisal (expert judgment of value or merit); estimation; to determine the amount or rate of something; evaluate (value or judge)

SABES Alternative Assessment Project: "The whole (alternative assessment) experience has been one of getting to know each other."
Paul Trunnell

Teaching Exceptional Children: Special Needs: The "process of collecting information about individuals or groups for the purposes of making decisions." Ordinarily refers to testing, observation and interviewing. Results should help decide whether problems exist and if so, what to do.

NCTM: "The process of gathering evidence about a student's knowledge or, ability to use and disposition towards mathematics and of making inferences from the evidence for a variety of purposes." This process of describing what students know and do should be:

- aligned with and integral to instruction
- from multiple sources
- use methods appropriate for purposes
- check all aspects of math knowledge (investigation, formulation, representation, reasoning, applying a variety of strategies and shifting from mechanical to cognitive skill comprehension.



of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the development of Frameworks-based assessment practices are efforts to help us all become better skilled, sharper thinking citizens who are able to question and develop solutions to problems.

Teacher and student reflection upon classroom work is integral to the process of improvement. The quality of thinking, the quality of interaction, the quality of expression of each student must be considered and then evaluated in order for learning to take place. In this process of observation, examination, active reflection, consideration and evaluation which The Frameworks terms assessment, the intention is to better serve the individuals involved in educational development. Percentages, bell curve positions and vague intuitions are not enough to prepare adult students of basic education for the demands of the

21st century. Teachers need to know what students truly understand and how they came to understand it if they, the teachers, desire to nourish the students' intellectual capacities and free them from the constraints of a limited education.

To improve students' abilities to maneuver in a fast-changing world, to broaden their horizons and stimulate the desire to understand more about themselves and that world which surrounds and influences them, **teachers have to listen and look deeply, discerningly, at students' mathematical utilizations and inventions.** This is what Frameworks-based assessment advocates. This Frameworks-based assessment process is neither easy nor simple, but it promises to clarify teachers' perceptions of student and to lead to more accurate and useful evaluations of students' accomplishments and needs.



To awaken and arouse learners requires ongoing, informed, documented assessment of learning. Armed with such assessment information, every teacher becomes capable of leading students down their various paths to success.



ASSESSMENT DISCUSSION — WHO, WHAT, HOW AND WHY

Before beginning its experiments in Frameworks-based assessment, the West Group considered basic questions in assessment such as “Why do assessment?”, “When?”, “How does one assess?”, “Who performs assessment?”, and “What is being assessed?” Below is a brief synopsis of ‘answers’ brainstormed by the group.

Why and When

- To place people; enroll or refer
- Determine learning disabilities or learning styles
- Determine where help is needed
- Requirements (funding and program efficacy)
- Inform instruction
- To see what has been learned
- To build confidence
- To have a reality check
- To Determine aptitudes/ strengths
- PRE, ONGOING, POST

Who

- Teachers
- Administration (agency, state, fed.)
- Society
- Students (self or peer)

How

- Standardized instruments (GED pre-tests, ABLE, TABE, etc.)
- Dialogue — informal between students or between teacher and student
- Observation
- Thought protocol (formal)
- Projects (long term or short term)
- Journal reflections
- Learning logs
- ‘Tasks’ (problems)
- Worksheets

What

- Thinking processes: inductive, deductive, logical, intuitive, linear, non-linear, confused, scattered, perseverant
- Learning styles
- Knowledge: algorithm mastery; concepts such as denominator, ratio/proportion, etc.; assumed general knowledge such as weeks in a year; math facts (both recalling and applying)
- Comprehension — basically language
- Problem Solving — flexibility, group process, critical thinking, application, extension



What Counts

Graphing the Average Rent of Athol, Orange, and Greenfield

The following problem was presented to a GED class in Athol by Peg Reidester of F/HETC who subsequently wrote an analysis of the task context and outcome as well as an assessment of one student, Esther, using the Student Assessment Rubric developed by a Frameworks group in western, MA of which she was a part. Her text and rubric results demonstrate a level of quality possible in the expanded assessment process the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks favors.

In her assessment process, Reidester examines the task, the student's performance and her own presentation of the task in order to determine what route her instruction will follow in the days/ weeks ahead. The use of the Student Rubric allows her to pinpoint Esther's strengths and weaknesses, so in subsequent lessons these can be developed and reassessed to determine both Esther's real progress and the efficacy of lessons presented to her. The Rubric's instrument eases the in-depth analysis process while forcing Reidester (and any who use it) to establish the criteria on which she is basing her assessments. Perhaps most importantly, the rubric is a concrete report on which to base discussions with students about academic progress and needs

THE PROBLEM TASK:

Using the Greenfield Recorder newspaper, find the average rent for a one bedroom and a two bedroom apartment. Graph your results. Answer these questions using the graph.

1. Is a two bedroom apartment in Greenfield more or less than a two bedroom apartment in Athol? By how much?
2. Which town has the lowest average rent for a one bedroom apartment? For a two bedroom apartment?
3. Where can one find the highest rent for a one bedroom apartment?
4. What is the difference between the cost of a one bedroom and a two bedroom apartment in Orange?

by
Peg Reidester



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REIDESTER'S ANALYSIS

Context: This exercise was done mainly to reinforce the skill of averaging numbers which the class had been working on for the previous two weeks. It was also used to see which students had any experience with graphing and interpreting graphs (sort of a pre assessment). In addition, it was used to give the students the opportunity to use real life numbers and situations in math class.

Outcome: It was soon obvious to me that Esther was not at all familiar with making graphs. She needed a lot of assistance and did not show a sense of the detail required when setting up a graph. For example, the spacing is off: The bars are not separated by a fixed number of units. Also, when labeling her axes, she wasn't specific enough. Someone trying to interpret the graph would have some difficulty. I believe these problems come from her lack

of familiarity with graphing, but she could have a problem with arranging things in space, as well. I would want to work with her more on this to determine which it is.

Esther's computation skills proved adequate for this assignment. She was able to calculate the average rents and subtract whole numbers. She didn't pass in a data sheet with her graph, though, which may indicate a lack of awareness of the connection between data and graphs.

Conclusion: I think this exercise was a good assignment. It provided me with information on the students' abilities to collect and organize data, compute averages, graphs and interpret graphs. Next time, I wouldn't use it until I had done some practicing with graphing beforehand because I would like to see students perform the entire exercise as much on their own or with the help of each other as possible.





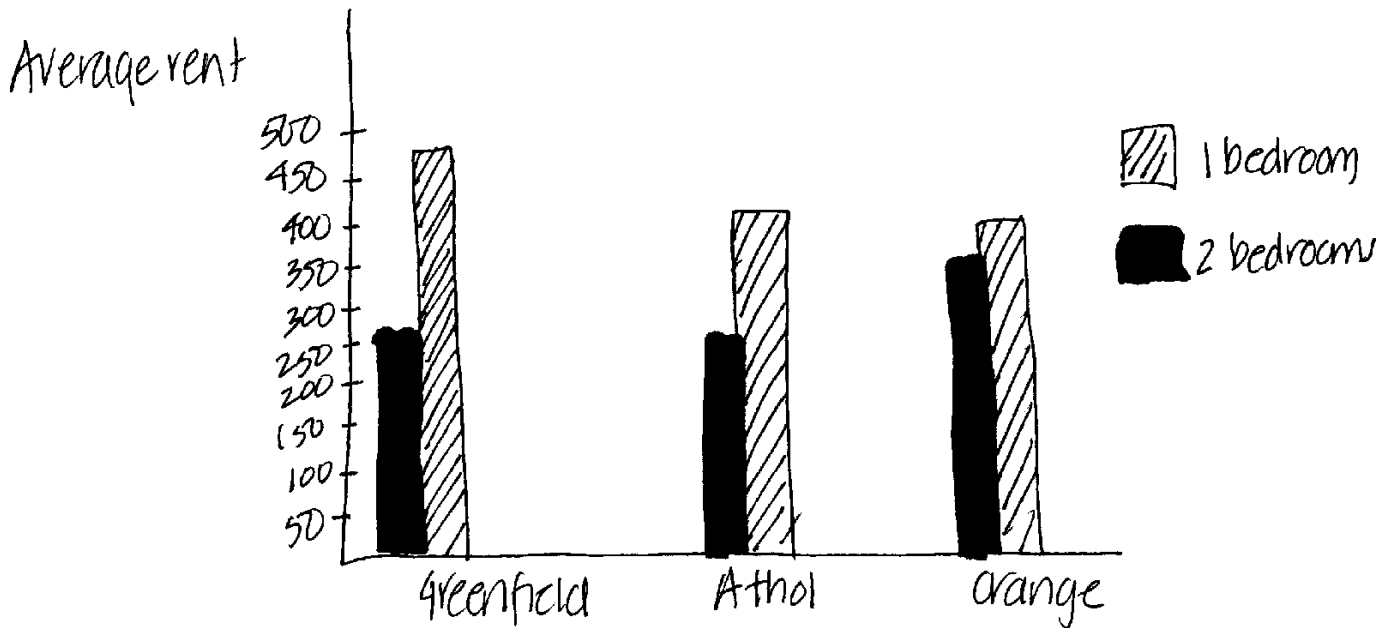
Average rent on 1 and 2 bedroom apartments.

1. How much more is a 2 bedroom in Greenfield than Athol?

$$\begin{array}{r} 475 \\ - 430 \\ \hline 45 \end{array} \quad \$45.00$$

2. How much less is a one bedroom in Greenfield than Orange?

$$\begin{array}{r} 375 \\ - 225 \\ \hline 150 \end{array} \quad \$150.00$$





STUDENT ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Name: Esther

Assessment Task::Graphing Average Rents

Date: 5/12/96

Skills Assessment:

3 - mastery

2 - demonstrated use

1 - unused or misused

Skills Assessed in Task

Competency Level

1. Computation (subtracting whole numbers, dividing)	2
2. Finding the average	2
3. Comparing averages	2
4. Following directions for setting up graphs	2
5. Using a graph to answer questions	2
6. Recording data	3
7. _____	
8. _____	

Partial list of skill types to be assessed:

computation—two-digit multiplication, etc.; solving equations;

notation—student use and student comprehension;

communication—vocabulary comprehension or use;

expression of probabilities; coordinate placement; measurement conversion;

formula use; pattern recognition or description; finding a percent;

locating numbers on a number line; simplifying fractions...



STUDENT ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Name: _____

Assessment Task:: _____

Date: _____

Skills Assessment:

3 - mastery 2 - demonstrated use 1 - unused or misused

Skills Assessed in Task Competency Level

- 1. Computation (subtracting whole numbers, dividing)
- 2. Finding the average
- 3. Comparing averages
- 4. Following directions for setting up graphs
- 5. Using a graph to answer questions
- 6. Recording data
- 7. _____
- 8. _____

Partial list of skill types to be assessed:
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expression of probabilities; coordinate placement; measurement conversion;
formula use; pattern recognition or description; finding a percent;
locating numbers on a number line; simplifying fractions...



HABITS OF MIND EXHIBITED

3 - highly visible *2 - evident* *1 - not evident* *0 - N/A*

Affective Domains Assessed in Task	Expression Level
1. Persistence (sticks with problem)	2
2. Curiosity (engages in problem)	2
3. Flexibility (attempts alternative solution methods)	0
4. Thoroughness (checks answers, responds to all questions, compiles sufficient data)	2
5. Creativity (unique approaches responses or presentation)	0
6. Cooperation (shares ideas and materials, listens)	2
7. Communication (states ideas clearly, asks appropriate questions)	1
8. Reasoning (shows logical and/or intuitive reasoning; inductive and/or deductive reasoning; proportional; generates hypotheses)	1
9. Problem solving (uses a variety of strategies and/or appropriate Strategy; poses interesting, sensible problems)	1

Strengths/Difficulties exhibited:

- * reading comprehension * choosing strategy * computational accuracy
- * choosing operation * efficient w/time * procedural knowledge
- * extending or applying knowledge

General Comments:

Esther easily recorded the data on rents and had no trouble computing the average which had been previously been new to her. Obviously, she has progressed here, though the exercise did not make clear whether or not she understands the distinctions between mean and median. She needed a lot of guidance for the graph which indicates a lack of familiarity with graphing. Her spatial sense of the graph was weak.

Recommendations: _____

Overall Assessment (Math)

1 - needs prior skills/concepts *2 - needs practice* *3 - ready to progress*



Book Review

Assessment Package Offers Useful Resource for Novice and Experienced Practitioner Alike

Collaborations Assessment Package
 Level: Beginning 1, Beginning 2
 Heinle and Heinle Publisher
 A Division of International Thomson
 Publishing, Inc.
 Boston, MA 02116
 Author: Cathy C. Shank

Teachers working in non-credit or workplace education programs face the ongoing challenge of accounting for or demonstrating student progress. Quantifying student progress on a form acceptable to funders and or program administrators can be challenging. Standardized or commercially available tests, which produce funder friendly numbers, are inappropriate to most learner-centered, non academic, adult education programs. Consequently, instructors create their own assessment tools to more accurately test students on the content and instructional methods utilized by their programs. The difficulty of translating the test results into a more usable form for the number of audiences remains, however. The assessment package from the Collaborations series presents a possible solution to this task.

Collaborations is a five-year series designed for the non-credit, adult education program. The series is based on the tenets of a learner-centered and holistic approach to ESOL instruction. In addition to the students books', workbooks, teachers' manuals and supplemental materials, each level also includes an assessment

package. The package is intended to be used in conjunction with the Collaborations series. Its design is generic enough, however, to be used independently of the series.

The materials in the assessment package do not break any new ground in the area of authentic, learner-centered assessment. The majority of its instruments and assessment procedures are fairly traditional, like the initial intake interview and the cloze passages, and have been used in adult education programs for many years. The author does highlight the use of portfolio assessment as a separate alternative section.

The material is clearly presented and the tools can be adapted by an entire program or as needed by classroom instructors. Flexibility in a commercially-prepared assessment instrument is extremely important and rare. The package covers all aspects of the student assessment process: initial, ongoing, and mid- and end-of-level assessment.

Examples of self assessment techniques and course evaluation forms are also included in the package. The content of the forms can be readily changed to reflect the material covered by a specific class or program. I particularly liked the author's concrete suggestions for incorporating various assessment practices into everyday classroom routine, for example pair work, interviewing and reporting, and information gap exercises. These are all valid forms of ongoing assessment.

by
 Jeanne Kearsely



City College of
 San Francisco
 San Francisco, CA



While students are engaged in these activities the teacher is free to circulate and evaluate students. The author also makes a point of identifying activities that teachers may already use in the classroom and suggest ways of incorporating them into the assessment process. I think it was brilliant and I wish she had developed the point further.

Another strength of the assessment package is that it is extremely comprehensive. Charts throughout the package clearly illustrate the content, uses and skills tested by the various instruments. The forms, scripts and scoring keys are clear and comprehensible. These forms are duplication ready and accompanied by very explicit instructions. Clear and basic instructions are essential for practitioners with limited experience implementing non-academic assessment tools. Some of the author's advice may seem too basic — "remember to smile" and "make students feel welcome and comfortable." Sometimes, though, these small details that we assume everyone knows need to be explicitly stated for the benefit of newcomers and experienced practitioners alike.

In many ways the assessment package is similar to a survey course of "learner-friendly" assessment practices, theories and techniques. I particularly like that the author included a brief synopsis of the

theory behind many of the practices she utilized. A clear correlation between theory and application is particularly helpful to those new in the field. Unfortunately, as happens with most survey courses, the treatment of the subject matter can at times seem somewhat superficial and overly simplistic.

I found this to be particularly true when the author gives advice for orienting low-level students to less traditional initial intake and ongoing assessment procedures. For example, suggestions such as "use facial expressions, body language and demonstrations" are not particularly helpful when a teacher is trying to convey the potentially confusing concepts involved in portfolio assessment. Teachers working with very low-level students who want to use alternative methods of assessment need more practical and concrete advice.

Overall, the Collaborations Assessment Package is a very useful resource for classroom teachers and program coordinators. I think the assessment package would be particularly helpful to individuals who have limited experience creating or implementing assessment tools in non-academic or workplace learning situation. It is a well presented collection of assessment tools easily accessible and implemented by either experienced or novice practitioners.



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 to *Adventures in Assessment*, please contact us at:

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617-482-9485/email; asimmons@WorldEd.org

The next issue of *Adventures in Assessment* will come out in Fall 1997 and will highlight writings from workplace education programs and low level literacy assessment tools.

We welcome your input and feedback. To be included in the Fall 1997 *Adventures in Assessment*, please contact Alison Simmons at the above address.



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