



formerly Bright Ideas

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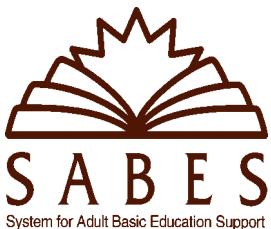
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Assessment and Accountability: A Modest Proposal

by Heide Spruck Wrigley

At times it seems that everything there is to say about testing and assessment in adult literacy has been said. By now, practitioners and administrators alike can cite the shortcomings of standardized tests using multiple-choice formats and are familiar with the inadequacy of grade levels as indicators of what adult learners know and are able to do. Yet, multiple-choice, pencil and paper tests continue to be used not only as placement instruments but as measures of learner gains and evidence of program success. Given current reporting requirements, their use is likely to increase, at least in the near future. From the perspective of programs, there seem few viable alternatives that would meet the information needs of funders interested in reliable data that indicate how a program is doing overall. Portfolio approaches, for example—considered the last great hope a few years back—have not quite matured to the level where they might be used as a means to report and aggregate learner gains by group (although they are invaluable as evidence of individual learner progress), largely because the field has not invested in the development of benchmarks and rubrics. Local approaches have remained just that, local approaches, primarily for two reasons: (1) there has not been enough field testing to establish the reliability of these measures and (2) there have not been sufficient efforts to implement alternative assessments across programs. It is easy to see how even programs that have been enthusiastic about developing an assessment system that captures worthwhile outcomes are becoming distressed about the prospects of an alternative system being able to rival the standardized tests currently in fashion.

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FOREWORD

How do you measure a sunset? Can you? Should you? These are the kinds of questions that leave me puzzled in this age of increased attention to measurable goals and deliverables. If I had the correct equipment, I could measure the length of the light waves. If I were an anthropologist, I could measure the way sunsets have been portrayed in artifacts over the years. If I were a psychologist, I could measure the effect of a sunset on a person's rate of relaxation. But...would this really give me what I want? Would this truly measure the sunset? Would these measurements give me a true picture of the sunset?

No, I don't think they would. I think, in the case of a sunset, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and I would venture to say that in some cases, we find ourselves in adult education in the challenging position of trying to measure the difficult to measure and answering the questions: How do we know what our students know? How do we know if we are doing a good job?

These are difficult questions, and this issue of *Field Notes* makes no claims of having the answer, but instead hopes to open up conversation and provide some stories of the various ways that people are trying to answer their questions. As guest editor, I have had the privilege to work with the authors here who represent valuable voices from the field, both here in Massachusetts and around the country.

In this time of exploration in assessment, I'd like to propose that we keep in mind my favorite quote about assessment, which comes from former Massachusetts ABE practitioner, Donna Curry, "Assessment is not something we do to our students or for our students, but rather with our students." Perhaps if we keep this guiding principle in mind we can create something that benefits us all.

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Letter to the Editor



I am writing to thank Field Notes editor Lenore Balliro and all the authors for the Fall 2000 issue (Vol. 10, No. 2) about reading. I truly enjoyed every article and learned a great deal as I worked my way through this very substantial issue. I was particularly struck by the vision and the care each author took to connect theory with the realities of our classes and our students. This distinguishes Field Notes from many other ABE publications, enabling it to serve as a useful stimulus and tool across our field.

I am writing with another purpose as well. While the careful reader can find many places where more structured approaches to teaching reading might apply, the almost exclusive focus of this issue is to highlight approaches that emphasize “making meaning” during the acquisition and practice of reading. I have no quarrel with such approaches—they are, in fact, why we care so much about reading in the first place. However, given the “holy wars” of the last decade between “whole language” versus “decoding/phonics” based approaches to reading, I have become particularly well attuned to how these schools of thought do, and especially how they do not, work together. They do not work together well in this issue, unfortunately, since discussion and examples of structured approaches to reading are largely absent.

I believe we must base reading instruction on theoretical, research-

based, and practical considerations. If the whole idea of reading is to convey and construct meaning, then we should never engage our students, particularly adult students, in approaches that minimize this dimension. The research is also clear that decoding skills are essential to fluency and are essential to accessing the meaning we strive to acquire and build. As an adult educator who made ends meet for years doing carpentry work on the side (we all know about underpaid, part-time employment in adult education), I have a great deal of trouble understanding why some of my colleagues find contradictions rather than synergy in these two approaches. Carpenters show up at a job with all the tools they might need in their toolbox. I can't imagine a carpenter leaving half her/his tools at home because someone might label them “unacceptable.”

We have many of the brightest, most creative and effective adult educators in the nation here in Massachusetts. I am finding, however, that these qualities can also present a challenge when it comes to letting go of polarizing theories of teaching and learning—what I refer to as the “holy war” between whole language and phonics is a great case in point. By the year 2000, almost everyone knows that with at least some audiences, you won't get very far promoting one approach to the complete exclusion of the other. So often, today's dialogue includes an

acknowledgment of the “value” of both approaches while really promoting one to the exclusion of the other. The last issue of Field Notes promotes whole language with only token references to decoding/phonics. On the other hand, some of the reading courses developed by Massachusetts adult educators over the past few years promote decoding with only token references to making meaning/whole language. Every time one or the other side is faced with this dynamic, it only serves to reinforce the belief that they need to defend their “pole” of this unnecessary and unproductive dichotomy.

The Department of Education highly values the contributions of practitioners from these two schools of thought and will continue to encourage them to work together to build more comprehensive, effective, and complete approaches to teaching reading. Every adult educator teaching reading in Massachusetts needs to be equally adept at all proven approaches. In order to respond effectively to the abilities and the needs of each student, we will need to shift gears between and blend together these different approaches to teaching reading. Our students deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,
Bob Bickerton
MA Director of Adult Education

Assessment and Accountability

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All Is Not Lost

Yet, the picture is not as dim and grim as it might first appear. Indeed, it may be premature to give in to cynicism (“it’s all a sham and no one really cares”), paranoia (“next year, all funding will be tied to the results of standardized tests”), and paralysis (“in the end, no one will care about alternative assessment, so let’s just sit and wait to see what comes down the pike”). Since a Pollyanna attitude does not appear to be justified either, given recent legislation, perhaps it is time to take an existentialist perspective where we commit ourselves to forge ahead although (and even because) life in adult literacy does not always make sense, but what else are we going to do to stay sane? Let’s ask then if there is anything positive happening in assessment, and how we can help shape new directions on the national or state level, while continuing to strive for sane assessments within and across local programs.

The Federal Outcome Reporting System

You may have heard that the US Department of Education has mandated a uniform outcome-based reporting system that requires that all states send data for all programs funded under Adult Basic Education (ABE) to the Department of Education in Washington. Assessments for capturing outcomes must be “valid and reliable.” States (and the

programs they fund) will be asked to report “learner gains” in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (and possibly additional skills related to workforce development) and show that learners are advancing across levels.

To understand the thinking behind the initiative, it is important to keep in mind that the primary focus is neither curriculum reform, nor program improvement, but rather an accountability measure to bring adult literacy in line with the requirements of GPRA—the Government Performance and

How we can help shape new directions on the national or state level?

Results Act. GPRA requires that all federal agencies show that they, as well as the agencies and programs they fund, are achieving results or else risk loss of funding. Funders will want to know how a program is doing overall (i.e., whether it is positively affecting literacy skills), and they expect to see numbers in aggregate form. While in many ways, documenting the kinds of outcomes required by the new reporting system is “doable,” two dangers loom as programs try to show gains and as results are increasingly tied to funding. There is a risk that programs will be (1) tempted to manipulate assessment results in their favor and (2) succumb to a practice known as “creaming.”

The Dangers of Creaming

It is an unfortunate fact of adult literacy that programs that help those “hardest to serve” (e.g., learners who are both new to English and new to literacy) have the greatest difficulties showing gains, not only because their learners need a great deal of time until progress is evident, but because the kind of progress they are making is not easily captured by standardized multiple-choice, paper and pencil tests. In addition, programs who serve these students don’t have the resources to set up testing

alternatives appropriate for a low literacy population. There is a danger, then, that programs not fully committed to serving learners who need both special support and extended time will decide to focus their efforts instead on those students who

most easily advance, since the incremental progress of “slower” students only makes the program “look bad.” Thinking along those lines, ESOL programs, for example, might decide to focus the curriculum on immigrants with higher levels of education, rather than serving ESOL literacy students. This process of focusing on participants who are easy to serve is known as “creaming” and has long been decried as an unintended outcome of programs that have signed performance-based contracts, where funds are linked to learner outcomes and program impacts, such as job placement.

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So far, not many public debates have taken place around this issue in adult literacy on the state level, but concerns are sure to arise as programs realize the difficulties they face in reporting progress across levels in the time periods envisioned by the reporting system.

So Why Not Ask for an Exemption?

Two solutions to the problem of creaming seem possible: (1) set aside monies so programs can develop an alternative assessment for lower level students, or (2) ask that learners who have difficulty negotiating paper and pencil tests be exempted from testing. In my view, exemptions, as attractive as they may seem, are not the best solution in the long run, since we may end up marginalizing both this group and programs that serve them. I believe that, rather than asking for exemptions for students who cannot cope with the standardized tests approved by a state, we are better off advocating for the development of an alternative assessment framework for this group. Once such an assessment is developed for one group, it is easier to acquire the resources to extend it to other levels and other populations.

Alternative Testing for Low Literacy Students

What might an assessment that measures the incremental changes occurring at the initial levels of language and literacy development

look like? It is entirely possible to design a framework allowing learners to demonstrate what they can say and understand in English despite limited proficiency (in fact, the oral interview component of the BEST test does just that). It is also possible to design a “can-do” literacy assessment based on the kinds of texts and tasks that those new to literacy deal with every day.

If a program wants to create an assessment that works double duty (as a basis for program improvement and for accountability), a further step is necessary: the development of scales, rubrics, and benchmarks indicating the expectations for any given level, and to what degree learners are close to acquiring the kinds of knowledge, skills, and strategies that are a core part of our curriculum.

As funding for adult literacy is increasing, the old refrain of “there is no money to do this,” no longer holds true. There *are* alternatives to multiple-choice tests, and we must advocate for their development and use if we are serious about documenting progress for all learners, including those who still struggle with basic literacy.

Building an Assessment Framework That Yields Worthwhile Results

Developing an assessment that captures gains at the lower levels is only the starting point in a larger effort to build a system that works. Other efforts are needed, at both the local and the state levels, so that we don’t end up with an accountability system driven in large part by what current standardized tests are able to measure. If we want the quality of adult literacy to

increase, we need an approach that measures to what extent learners are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and strategies that matter in the long run. How can this be done? At the local level, a three-pronged approach might be necessary: (1) finding a way to live with the currently available standardized tests, selecting the “LOT”—the least objectionable test—and keeping in mind the principle of “first, do no harm” to students; (2) convincing the state that the data a program has provided over the years are at least as valid and reliable as standardized tests such as the TABE, and therefore the process should continue; and (3) work with others to develop an assessment system reflecting the realities of adult learners’ lives and focusing on what participating programs have deemed to be the core sets of knowledge, skills, and strategies important enough to teach and test.

Components of an Alternative Assessment System

What might be the components of such a system? To start with, any program concerned about serving different groups of learners equally well, needs to collect demographic information capturing the kind of learner characteristics and experiences that may have a bearing on school success. After all, only by having rich descriptive information can we know what learners want and need to do with English and literacy, how much schooling they have had, and what the print and communication challenges are that they face in their everyday lives. Having descriptive information of this kind is

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invaluable, since it allows us to see which learners are succeeding in our programs, and which are languishing (or leaving) because their needs are not met. This information can be collected in the form of profiles that travel with the student and to which teachers and learners contribute on an ongoing basis. In addition to background variables such as age, employment status, years of schooling, country of origin and languages spoken, these profiles can: (1) capture current literacy practices; (2) chart shifts in learner goals; and (3) record changes in life circumstances.

In these profiles, progress can be captured as it occurs. Profiles have the added advantage of encouraging teachers to create opportunities for learners to discuss what is happening in their lives, so they can spend some time observing. Profiles of this sort (also known as “running records”) can be connected with portfolios that demonstrate student progress through writing samples, reading inventories, and various types of performance tasks. If a standardized test is used, results can be included in the profile as well, helping to flesh out the general picture of achievements and struggles.

From Learner Success to Accountability

This must be said: While an approach that combines rich profiles and individual portfolios will produce

important information on individual students and provide insights into the relative success of certain learner groups, it does not, in and of itself, yield the kind of data needed for accountability. After all, we cannot ship boxes of profile folders to funders to have them realize what a great job we are doing. To make profiles work for funders, a further step is needed, one that yields data in aggregate form so that policy-makers can get a picture of the shape and size of the forest, not just a close-up of the trees.

We can also work toward a system that measures effectiveness where it counts...

To measure progress and report to funders, profiles need to include the following: a broad set of language and literacy tasks that are accompanied by rubrics, scales, and benchmarks for transition. Rubrics are used to indicate what expectations are for any given area (face-to-face communication, dealing with print, accessing resources, etc.) and what evidence of success might look like. The scales that accompany the rubrics allow us to document where learners fall on a continuum of proficiency, documenting what they can do with relative ease, where they succeed with some help, and where they are struggling. Since rubrics and scales can be designed for different skill domains (SCANS skills, communication strategies, navigating systems, etc.) and for

various contexts (school, family, community), they can easily be matched to the goals of learners, and adapted to the focus of a particular program.

Once rubrics and scales are in place, meeting accountability requirements calling for aggregate data becomes relatively easy. Since the descriptors on a scale can easily be numbered (from 1 for “struggles” to 6 for “no problem”) assessment results can be easily compiled, summarized, analyzed, and reported out. If matched with demographic profiles, they allow a program to see which groups of learners are being served well by the program and where program changes are in order because success is lacking.

The beauty is that this kind of approach fulfills the same function as standardized tests: learners are assessed on a variety of skills under standard conditions with common instruments on similar tasks. But unlike the standardized tests currently available, profile assessments do not rely on multiple-choice, paper and pencil items. Rather, they give learners the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do with language and literacy through more open-ended assignments. Furthermore, profile approaches to assessment can be adapted for certain learner groups and modified to match the focus of a particular program (e.g., workplace, family literacy, citizenship). Most importantly, they provide rich information that makes sense to teachers and

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learners, information that is useful to programs, not just funders.

Why then, are we not seeing more of these kinds of assessments? While extremely worthwhile and high in validity, these types of assessment carry a significant burden: they require consensus building on what is worth teaching and learning, and a common understanding of what the evidence of success might look like for any given skill domain. To be successful, profiles and portfolios have to be integrated into the curriculum, and ongoing assessment must either be part of the day-to-day teaching we do, or time must be set aside at intake to establish a baseline, and toward the end of a teaching cycle, to document progress. If that means the end of open-entry/open-exit as we know it, and if it forces us into shorter instructional cycles that have a clear teaching/learning focus, so be it.

To give such a framework a chance, a significant amount of teacher orientation, training, and buy-in will be needed. Clearly, there are not many adult literacy programs that have the commitment, energy, and resources to embark on that endeavor, although some, like the Arlington Education and Employment Program in Virginia, are well on their way. But, given sufficient advocacy from local programs, along with a modicum of political will on the part of state directors and other funders, working groups and consortia could be set up to develop an assessment framework that, if not based on profiles, at least

includes them. In fact, the National Institute for Literacy is moving in that direction, developing an assessment framework combining the use of alternative assessments with standardized tests where appropriate, in order to capture the gains that learners make who are part of the Equipped for the Future initiative.

What then is the bottom line, given the current climate of accountability for accountability's sake? We have several options: we can decide that cynicism is the only sane response to the current requirements, live with standardized tests as best as we can, try to lay low, figuring "this too shall pass," or commit ourselves to fighting for a saner system for our own sake and that of our students. On the local level, we must be prepared to work with others to decide on the focus of our programs, and be willing to map out a core set of knowledge, skills, and strategies that matter. At the federal level, we must push for an accountability system that is driven not by what the current standardized tests are able to assess (which is rather limited), but by outcomes that reflect what sound adult literacy programs should be all about.

Furthermore, if we are asked to show accountability related to outcomes and impacts, we must be given the resources to document success in meaningful ways. Finally, while we may need to play the accountability game for the time being, we can also work toward a system that measures effectiveness where it counts: adult learners acquiring the kinds of knowledge, skills, and strategies that are important to them now and that matter in the long run. If we give up too soon, we will only marginalize adult literacy further.

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

Albert Einstein, Physicist



"There is no one giant step that does it. It's a lot of little steps."

Peter A. Cohen, Banker



"Without a clear vision of what is important, measurement can become a sterilized exercise to come up with numbers to satisfy external agencies. What is counted usually becomes what counts."

*Juliet Merrifield,
Researcher/Adult Educator*

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The Uniform Portfolio System as a Standardized Assessment Tool



by Jane J. Meyer

The National Reporting System (NRS) has had the healthy effect of surfacing many questions about assessment and accountability in Adult Basic Education (ABE). The required use of standardized assessments for both placement and measures of progress has caused concern at both the state and program level. Typical standardized tests simply do not capture all the positive outcomes gained from adult literacy instruction.

Reality shows us that even if these tests could measure everything we want to document, many adult students are not available for post-testing. These issues prompted adult educators in Ohio to explore types of standardized assessment beyond the standardized tests. This led to the development of Ohio's Uniform Portfolio System.

Ohio's Uniform Portfolio System (UPS) strives to integrate the positive aspects of portfolio assessment into a standardized assessment system through the use of uniform competency checklists. Working together, consultants from the Ohio ABE office, researchers, and practitioners created reading, writing, math, and ESOL checklists for each of the six NRS levels based on the NRS educational functioning level descriptors. Students are placed into an NRS level for reporting purposes based on scores from a standardized test, but progress is measured by both a standardized

post-test and by the percentage of items mastered on the competency checklists.

Although the actual portfolio may look different in various programs around the state or even in different classrooms within a program, it is uniform in that it must contain student goals, an individual learning plan, and one or more of the competency checklists (depending on the student's goals). As students master competencies from the lists, they check them off and include documentation showing mastery (such as a test or work sample) in the portfolio. Teachers and students have freedom to decide how they will demonstrate mastery, but the items on the checklists are the same across the state, which is what makes the system standardized.

Concerns were raised early on that the checklists not become a mandated curriculum. Because success is measured by how many competencies on the list are checked off, care was taken to make sure the competencies are general enough to be taught in the context of a variety of individual student needs and interests. For example, one of the items on the level 4 reading log says "Draw conclusions based on details in the text." It is easy to see how you can vary the text to meet the student's needs and interests and yet still meet the checkoff. One student might be reading a parent

information sheet from her child's preschool and drawing conclusions about what she needs to do at home to help her child while another student might be reading an article on job hunting and drawing conclusions on what steps he needs to do to get the job he wants.

All teachers in the state are required to review the uniform portfolio with each student a minimum of every three months. At this review each student's NRS level is also reassessed in one of two ways. Students who have completed enough hours to make standardized testing appropriate and meaningful take a post-test. Levels are determined for students who haven't completed enough hours for meaningful post-testing based on the percentage of items mastered on the checklists. The state has designated that when 75% of the items on the checklist are mastered the student has progressed to the next level.

This system reduces the number of students who can not be counted because they do not have a standardized post assessment (a requirement of the NRS), without the problem of giving standardized tests too often in order to be sure students don't leave before post-testing. Because the competencies on the checklists and the percent mastered for completion of a level

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The Uniform Portfolio...

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are standardized across the state, the level determined at the last portfolio review can be used as a standardized post assessment if the student leaves without a post-test.

The UPS supports research on best practices in assessment because it allows and encourages the use of multiple measures using a variety of assessment tools. Use of more than one assessment to measure performance verifies the reliability of the assessment. Anxiety from former negative school experiences can effect the performance of many adult literacy students in traditional testing situations, but these same students may be able to demonstrate competence when measured with other forms of assessment. A standardized test usually shows a snapshot of what the student knows at one particular moment in time. A truer picture emerges by assessing skills over a period of time with several different measures. For example, although a standardized test alone is allowable to measure a student's math level, a better demonstration of what the student knows and can do with math could be documented by a portfolio including an end of the chapter test on fractions, percents, and decimals; a personal budget illustrated with a pie graph; a week's menu with nutritional analysis; and a comparison of the cost of using credit cards, renting to owning, or paying cash for appliances.

Portfolios can document attainment of a broader range of skills and use of skills in context than can be measured on a multiple-choice test of decontextualized skills. They

link assessment closely with instruction and engage adult learners as active partners in the assessment process. This allows teachers to plan instruction and assessment around issues of interest and importance to students. For example, a student interested in a political election could demonstrate a writing competency by writing an essay comparing two candidates, while a young mother could compare and contrast two preschool programs she is considering for her child.

Implementing the UPS in time to meet the NRS deadline has produced several challenges. The portfolio checklists, which are the core of Ohio's system, need to be validated. Current use in the field will show whether the checklists measure what they are supposed to measure, that is, at what NRS level the student is functioning. Teachers are comparing the performance of students at NRS levels as identified by CASAS, TABE, and AMES with the items on the Ohio UPS checklists and with the diagnostic profiles of the standardized tests. Plans are already underway to adjust the checklists.

Reliability, or consistency of measure, is another issue that must be addressed. The UPS will only really become standardized when teachers around the state understand and agree on what each item on the checklist means and what its standard of mastery will be. For example, an item from the level 2 reading checklist states that the student will "interpret abbreviations commonly used in documents." As a field, Ohio teachers need to decide what abbreviations those are so that the criteria for mastery is uniform throughout the state. This does not mean that we intend to create Ohio standardized tests to measure each

of the competencies, but that we need to agree on what it is exactly we are measuring and what mastery will look like, although students may demonstrate it in different ways.

A third challenge is staff training to ensure that all teachers are using the UPS in a standardized fashion for external accountability purposes and to help teachers develop effective techniques in using portfolio assessment to meet the needs of students and staff. Staff development began last spring with videotapes produced by the state ABE office, which were required viewing for all ABE teachers in Ohio. The state is following up with a series of portfolio workshops for staff development. Local programs are encouraged to study the portfolio process and the UPS checklists and submit ideas for improvement.

Although Ohio's Uniform Portfolio System is still in the developmental stage the idea shows great promise. Continued work to ensure validity and reliability, coupled with ongoing staff training on use of the system and alternative assessment techniques, will ensure Ohio develops a system built on sound assessment strategies that meets the need for external accountability for the NRS, and, at the same time, provides useful information for students and teachers to drive the continuous cycle of assessing, planning, and teaching/learning.

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Involving Learners in Assessment



“What do I learn about student learning when I use a joint process of assessment which utilizes different tools?”

A Summary of Nicole Graves' Practitioner Research by Justine Sadoff

This was the question Nicole Graves posed to both students and teachers at her community-based, nonprofit agency providing English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), computer, and other classes to a rural section of western Massachusetts. In order to answer the question, Graves created a unique approach to assessment that collectively utilized more traditional tools, such as teacher-driven observation checklists and progress reports, as well as innovative tools, such as learners' logs and learner self-evaluations. By incorporating student feedback and writings into the assessment process, Graves obtained more accurate and satisfying results.

The initiative for this experiment came from a number of avenues. Already in place was a teacher-driven project to improve upon existing curriculum, and assessment was seen as part of this process. Funders for Graves' agency had also made some changes in their requirements, and these changes were connected to the state ESOL Curriculum Framework. Thus Graves had an impetus to both enhance her agency's curriculum, as well as to meet the new requirements that the state and her funders were putting into place. Her first action was to turn this project into her practitioner research for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

(NCSALL), and the groundwork she laid out included re-examining old progress reports, and then re-arranging these reports to match the state ESOL Framework. She also cross-referenced the reports with Mainstream English Language Training (MELTS) levels, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) assessment instruments, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) 2000 reference levels, and Equipped for the Future. The end result of this groundwork gave Graves a clearer picture of some common themes to all of them, which she could then apply to her own program. And the first step in this application process was creating the above question.

Although beginning learners were not able to evaluate their writing logs or probe deeply into assessing their own learning process, they were nonetheless able to evaluate their class on a weekly basis, and their teacher at the end of the session. Intermediate learners, however, had an opportunity to delve into their own writing and examine how their learning had progressed over the length of the class. Graves then took the students' progress reports and the class, teacher, and self-evaluations and recorded her findings, along with the responses to a survey she had given out during the final week of class. The culmination of these

assessment tools pointed toward the learners' own sense of personal and social improvement. For example, many of the students reported being able to engage in activities they had not been able to do before taking classes and doing personal assessment, such as going to the bank by themselves, going to the doctor's alone, shopping by themselves, answering the telephone, and expressing themselves in general. Such increased independence likewise brought about feelings of heightened confidence and self-worth, and this, in turn, increased the learners' sense of connection with the American culture at large. For instance, one student wrote that she could now “hear American voices.”

Such responses, of course, are positive on many levels. For one thing, these findings correlate with the standards of progress found in the Curriculum Frameworks and the Department of Education (DOE) strands. Furthermore, there is agreement between these progress reports and the Tennessee Longitudinal Study and the NCSALL study, which tested for improvements in socio-economic well-being (jobs, income, survival), social well-being (family and community), personal well-being, and physical well-being. Likewise, the broad categories of the ESOL

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Assessment and Learning Disability: The LD Student in Quinsigamond's GED Program

by Wallace M. Perkins

People, young or old, who return for their GED after being out of school for a time are going to have difficulty because of the skills they have lost over the years or perhaps never developed. However, those who have learning disabilities are going to struggle even more. Many of them left school because they were not successful due to their disabilities or because of teachers who could not meet their needs. Now, in the GED program, it is imperative that instructors use the right strategies to keep these individuals motivated and acquiring the skills necessary for productivity in the workplace and in life.

In the Quinsigamond program, once the student has self-identified, she/he is referred for an evaluation. Quinsigamond employs a retired school psychologist who worked for over 20 years in the elementary school system.

The evaluation of the students involves testing in two areas. First, the WAIS-III, an intelligence test, is given. The results indicate what a person's intelligence is relative to academics. This test is essentially divided into two areas: Verbal and Performance (visual-motor). These two categories include four subdivisions: Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Organization, Freedom from Distraction, and Perceptual Speed Indexes. Second, from the identified weaknesses on the WAIS-III, further testing usually

occurs with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery. This test detects specific learning disabilities such as auditory processing, attention, language, memory, visual perception, and visual-motor. The Woodcock-Johnson is an excellent test to determine a person's cognitive strengths and weaknesses as well as to check levels in reading, writing, and arithmetic. If there are still questions or concerns in the evaluator's mind, parts of other tests such as Wechsler Memory Scale-Third Edition or Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude are given to support or discredit the findings on the WAIS-III and Woodcock-Johnson.

When an individual is having difficulty in reading, writing, and/or mathematics, it is most likely that she/he has a weakness in at least one of the cognitive skills that is needed for success in the corresponding area. The Woodcock-Johnson can be helpful here. It offers four subtests that involve different skills to determine where a student's deficiency in reading lies. Memory for Sentences shows if one has difficulty with short-term auditory memory. Vocabulary is important for reading and Oral Vocabulary is given to show how well one knows definitions by asking for synonyms and antonyms to words. Sound Blending is another subtest that checks a person's phonetic ability by requiring him/her to combine sounds to make words. Finally, visual perception, including

speed, is tested in an activity that requires finding two numbers that are the same in an array of six repeatedly. Similarly, for each of the other cognitive areas there are subtests that can focus on specific abilities that may be causing problems.

However, testing is just one of the early steps in the program to help the learning disabled student in the classroom. The results of the evaluation are discussed at a meeting includes the learning support specialist, the teacher, the student, and the school psychologist. At that time, recommendations are presented for the teacher and the student. If the teacher can be encouraged to include one or two of these recommendations in her teaching style, not only the learning disabled student but the entire class will benefit. Examples of common suggestions include the presentation of new or important information at the beginning of each class or just after the break; the teaching of mnemonic devices for assisting students to memorize important facts; the teaching of specific procedures in solving problems; or the encouraging of students to explain the concepts that are being taught in class and to employ them in solving a specific problem.

In addition to teachers adjusting their programs to meet the needs of the LD student, at Quinsigamond

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Why Do We Have to Do Assessment?

by Shelley Bourgeois

Why do we have to make our students take standardized assessment tests? We know what they need to learn, and we know how to teach. It's just extra work, and the students don't want to take the tests anyway. Many teachers and program directors see this as just one more thing we have to do.

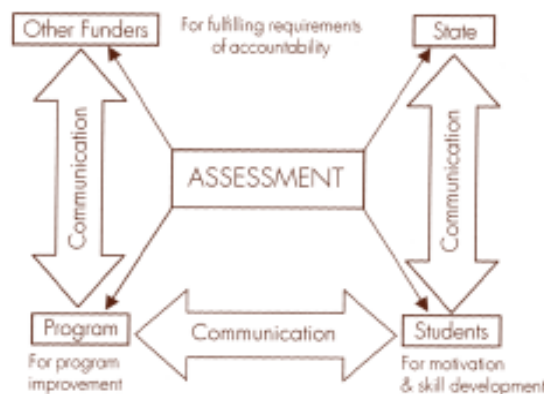
There will never be one standardized test that can measure all that our students have learned, but having more than one way to measure progress is in the best interest of students, teachers, and programs. In-house assessments, portfolio assessments, and curriculum reviews are among the many other ways of measuring progress.

Developing alternative assessments is not an easy task, and the teachers here at the Jackson Mann Community Center have not wanted to take this on either, but we have had the benefit of being involved in a national project called the "What Works Literacy Partnership" sponsored by Literacy Partners Inc. in New York and funded by the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund. Through this project, there are 12 programs from around the country that get together on a regular basis to learn about assessment and program evaluation and how we can use it to benefit our programs.

We at Jackson Mann are learning that we can look at assessment as just another thing we have to do or as something we can learn from. It does take time; it does cost money; it does take training; and we have

learned that we have a lot to learn. The biggest thing we've learned is that we can look at data collection as something that goes into a black hole that we give to the state because we have to or we can use it to make our program better.

It all starts with asking questions. What do we want to know about our programs? One teacher gave an excellent example of this. She noticed that in the program there



seemed to be a certain group of students who were not making progress. These were ESOL students who had reached an oral proficiency level of English but were not making progress in reading or in writing. We wondered if there were other students in the program who fell into this category. We realized through looking at data we had obtained from the BEST test, that the teacher's instincts were correct, that these were not the only students in that situation. The data backed up her intuition. Since this was a new funding year, we were able to create a class for these students.

Through this process, we have discovered that we have mixed

feelings about standardized tests. The scores from standardized tests, while helpful, do not always reflect what skills a student really has. This is one of the reasons we resist using them. Few adults function in the world and come back with a GLE (grade level equivalent) of 1.3 on the TABE. There are many reasons why our students may not do well on a standardized test. They have never even seen one before. They are often nervous. Sometimes the proctor is not skilled in giving the test. However, even given all this, we know that our students need to learn how to take these kinds of tests because they may need to take them to get into further training or higher education.

We have recognized that assessment of many different kinds, including tests, can be helpful to us as a program. There are many programs in Massachusetts and around the country that have developed wonderful assessment measures, and have found that using them can only make their program better. It's only a change in perception.

Shelley Bourgeois is a Teacher and the Director of the Jackson Mann Community Center and participated in the What Works Literacy Partnership.

Crosswalk—A Lesson in Comparison

by Jeri Bayer

Until recently a crosswalk was something I instructed my children to be sure to use when going from one side of a busy street to another. Traffic laws assure me that pedestrians poised at a curb before the painted bar on the pavement are guaranteed safe crossing.

Now, it seems crosswalk has gone the way of eyeball and impact. It has become a verb, and a transitive one at that. Recently, ABE and adult ESOL practitioners needed to crosswalk the results of their students' assessments. Simply put, they needed to compare the results of their own assessments with the proficiency levels described by the National Reporting System (NRS). The comparison is the crosswalk and by using it one can demonstrate compliance with federal regulations while at the same time evaluate learners' strengths and weaknesses in meaningful ways.

For both ABE and ESOL the NRS describes six "educational functioning levels" in three categories. For ABE those categories are Basic Reading and Writing, Numeracy, and Functional and Workplace Skills. For ESOL, Speaking and Listening replace Numeracy. A chart describes each level in terms of a learner's general abilities and weaknesses. The levels range from Beginning ABE Literacy to High Adult Secondary Education and from Beginning ESL Literacy to High Advanced ESL. For each level the chart also lists correlating scores for several standardized tests.

But assessment and the NRS don't have a copyright on crosswalks. In fact, the term has become useful with regard to a number of teaching elements. Recently, for example, Central SABES offered a series of workshops that crosswalked the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks to the national standards initiative, Equipped for the Future. Participants engaged in identifying and comparing the common ground between the two, as well as their uniqueness.

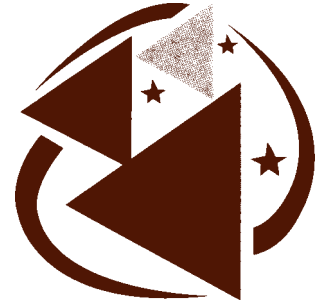
The next step in the assessment crosswalk adventure will be undertaken by the working group that the DOE will convene in January 2001. For 18 months the practitioners and other stakeholders in the group will thoroughly explore a range of standardized procedures that appropriately crosswalk to the NRS proficiency levels. The crosswalks of the individual programs in recent months was a preliminary stroll. Now ABE in Massachusetts stands poised on the curb of a busier street, determined to traverse safely to the other side with an assessment that enables funders to justify their investment, programs to continuously improve their services, and learners to observe their progress in a meaningful way. Controlling the traffic is the crosswalk talk. The time has come to walk the walk and talk the talk, the crosswalk talk.

Jeri Bayer is the Curriculum Coordinator for Northeast SABES. She can be reached by email at jeribayer@aol.com.

ABE Teacher's Certification Update

Substantial progress has been made toward the ABE teacher's certificate. Following submission of the Second Interim Report to the Commissioner, feedback was collected from the field, resulting in further changes to the statewide Advisory Committee recommendations. These recommendations are now being reviewed by Deputy Commissioner, Sandra Stotsky, who appears to be largely supportive. Regulations and Guidelines are being drafted for review by the Commissioner and the Board of Education. With luck, the regulations and Guidelines will be out for public review early in 2001. Meanwhile, DOE is conducting a Needs Survey to determine the number of teachers who might pursue certification and the kinds of support they will need. In addition, two new "pilot courses" (45 PDPs and stipend for completion and extensive course evaluation) are in the works for Spring 2001 presentation: ESOL I and Curriculum & Methods. All referenced documents, including blank Needs Surveys, are online at www.sabes.org and www.doe.mass.edu/acls. Questions? Call Carey Reid (SABES), (617) 492-9485, or Mary Jayne Fay (DOE), (781) 338-3854.

Active, Purposeful, and Contextual: Assessment in the EFF Classroom



by Joan Benz

I am an instructor of adult basic skills and GED at the Bethel Family Learning Center in Eugene, Oregon. Over the last two years I have been involved with teaching and assessing using the Equipped for the Future (EFF) framework. EFF, an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy, was developed to answer the complex question: What do adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members? (NIFL, Equipped for the Future Content Standards, 2000). EFF standards have been identified through a careful research process that began with adult learners and has included administrators, practitioners, tutors, and policy makers as well as experts from adult education, literacy, workforce development, and other stakeholder systems. The 16 EFF standards represent the core skills needed for effective adult performance in the three major adult roles in today's rapidly changing world and are a new definition of literacy for the 21st century. The EFF standards framework includes:

- Four purposes of learning defined by adult students: Access to Information, Voice, Independent Action, and Building a Bridge to the Future.
- Role maps that define what effective adults need to know and do to

carry out their responsibilities. The three role maps are worker, parent/family, and citizen/community member.

- Common activities that cross all three roles.
- 16 standards that support effective performance in the three roles to achieve the four purposes.

EFF is very exciting to use in class because it is based on input from adult learners and therefore is very meaningful to my students. Learning in an EFF classroom is active, purposeful, and contextual. Students are very much in control of their own learning.

Classroom activities are developed around performance tasks. Performance tasks are real-life activities that allow students to demonstrate performance of one or more of the EFF standards. An example of a performance task would be a group of activities that students would do to be able to convey ideas in writing (an EFF standard) in a letter to their child's teacher. Learning activities would address components of performance or skills needed to be able to use the standard for a meaningful purpose. Here are the components of the standard Convey Ideas in Writing (NIFL 2000):

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose, context, and audience.

- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

A well-structured performance task will address all these components.

There is still a point to consider. How do I know that my students are learning? A paper and pencil test will not capture what these students know and are able to do. The EFF framework addresses assessment as movement along a continuum of learning. As people learn, they increase their **knowledge, fluency, independence, and range** in using a skill. EFF refers to these as four dimensions of performance. Each dimension helps describe not only what people know, but also how well they can use what they know (NIFL, 2000).

This is where, for me, instruction and assessment combine. Using the four dimensions of performance allows me to think about what skills are needed to perform the task and to look at where student skill levels are related to these dimensions before and after the task.

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The Pareto Principle: Plotting Learner's Growth

by Donna Curry

Alfredo Pareto was an Italian sociologist who suggested that "80% of all wealth in this country is owned by 20% of the people." (In our country today, the percent is closer to 90%/10%.) This supposition was further developed by business and industry leaders who found that most of the quality problems were confined to a small number of machines or workers. In other words, "80% of problems come from 20% of the equipment or workforce."

The Pareto Principle is used by business and industry to work to continually improve quality—whether it be a product or a service. Quality improvement involves tackling one issue at a time. After all, there is rarely just one cause related to a problem. By addressing the one causing the most difficulty (the 20% which are causing 80% of the problem), improvements can be made and monitored for continuous progress. Bar charts, called Pareto charts, are used to decide what steps need to be taken for quality improvement.

A Pareto chart is simply a bar chart that sorts defects, errors, and issues, in decreasing order. In doing so, it is clear which problem is causing the greatest difficulty. Pareto charts can be used to see whether strategies used to correct problems have been effective.

What does the Pareto Principle have to do with education? And, more specifically, what does it have to do with assessment? Documenting a learner's errors using Pareto charts is an interesting way for learners to

see evidence of growth, especially when they are working on discrete skills. Pareto charts can also be used to document overall improvement of a class.

Let's imagine you are an English teacher. Sometimes it's difficult to articulate to learners just how their writing has improved. Pareto charts can help you and your learner note progress.

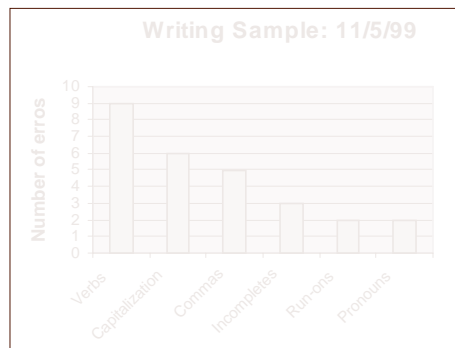


figure 1

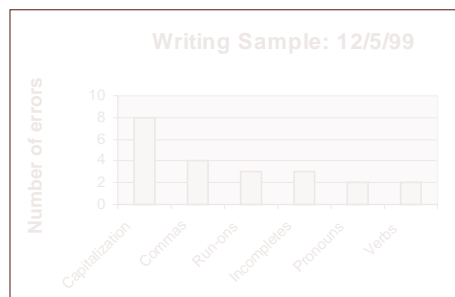


figure 2

Let's say you want to know what types of conventions of English errors learners are making in order to figure out what areas to address. Begin by having each learner provide a writing sample. Analyze the mistakes that the learner makes. You can create a key so that you can code each error made. This makes it easier for the learner to see the types of errors he most typically makes. (See figure 1.)

Have each learner create a Pareto chart showing the errors. The bars should be in descending order. The bar representing the most frequent type of errors is often the one that the learner should focus on first.

After the learner has had a chance to work on a particular area (the one in which she had the most errors), do another analysis of a writing sample. Again, use the same coding. The learner again creates a Pareto chart showing the frequency of errors. The largest bar should now be different from the earlier Pareto chart. By looking at this new chart, the learner can see what area to focus on next. This new chart serves as a "pre-assessment" for the next area of focus. (See figure 2.) (Notice that the assessment involves looking at how learners are applying their new learning in the context of a writing activity rather than simply documenting the completion of pages in a text of workbook.)

If learners keep their charts in their portfolios they can clearly see how they have shown improvement over time. They are aware of what discrete skills they have learned and are able to apply in their writing. They also are getting an opportunity to see how to use math to communicate. And, they are learning a valuable tool used in business and industry.

Donna Curry is the Publications Coordinator for the EFF National Center and has done staff development training for adult educators for 10 years. She can be reached by email at donnac@clinic.net.

The TABE: Thoughts From an Inquiring Mind

by Cathy Coleman

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

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

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

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

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

To begin to address these questions, I look at my own experience as an adult educator. I have been able to gain a fairly accurate, general idea of a learner’s reading comprehension level by using the TABE. Someone might come to my class on any given day with a TABE score of 5.5, for example. This gives me an idea of where to start.



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

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

My career in adult education had almost always involved the wearing of at least two different

hats. One of the hats that I have worn is that of the Practitioner Inquiry Coordinator. In that role, I worked with teachers to see the worlds of our classrooms through the eyes of an anthropologist. We observed carefully. We tried to answer the question: What is going on in this classroom? We tried to identify and question the underlying assumptions in our teaching. Sometimes we made changes based on that.

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

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

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

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

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The TABE

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of the test a few times even before they got to my class.

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

A study published in 1995 by the National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) entitled, *When Less is More: A Comparative Analysis for Placing Students in Adult Literacy Classes*, concluded that "a test as brief as the TABE locator could predict placements as well as the complete group of reading tests." The following sums up their recommendations:

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

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

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

It is possible that the TABE is indeed the very best test to use to determine this kind of information. If we take an inquiry approach to this issue, however, and examine the underlying assumptions, we may discover important information that can help us all better assess the needs of our learners and our programs.

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

Cathy Coleman is a Staff Development Specialist at SABES/World Education. She can be reached by email at ccoleman@worlded.org.

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

Abraham Maslow



"The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled."

Plutarch



"The best way to get something done is to begin."

Anonymous



"...have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves..."

Rainer Maria Rilke

Beyond Good & Evil: Facts on Standardized Tests

Freidrich Nietzsche once commented, "whatever does not destroy me makes me stronger." In the spirit of such courageous optimism, we offer a short introduction to some of the more widely used assessment tests on the market. Take a deep breath, relax, and remember the sage words of Nietzsche...

Compiled by Justine Sadoff

Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)

Authors: Bjorn Gardner,
Eric F. Karlsen
Publisher: Harcourt Education
Measurements, 1986
To order: (800) 211-8378

The ABLE is a battery of tests that measures the general grade level of adults who have not completed 12 years of schooling. There is also a version of the ABLE that tests for adults who have had at least 8 years of school, but have not graduated. The ABLE tests learners for vocabulary, reading comprehension, spelling, number operations, and problem solving.

Adult Measure of Essential Skills (AMES)

Authors: Riverside Publishing House
Publisher: Steck-Vaughn, 1998
To order: (800) 531-5015

The AMES is a battery of assessments designed to measure basic workplace and educational skills. Its focus is on adults who may or may not have graduated from high school. The multiple-choice questions, which are administered on five levels, are meant to reflect real-life experiences encountered at school, work, and within the community.

Diagnostic Assessment of Reading with Trial Teaching Strategies (DARTTS)

Authors: Florence G. Roswell,
Jeanne S. Chall
Publisher: Riverside Publishing, 1992
To order: (800) 323-9540

The DARTTS diagnostic assessment is a kit packaged in a file box. There are two components: the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading, or DAR, which provides diagnostic information on a learner's ability to comprehend reading and language, including word recognition, oral reading, word analysis, silent reading comprehension, and spelling. The second component is the Trial Teaching Strategies, which identifies students' needs through the use of microteaching sessions.

Basic English Skills Test (BEST)

Author: Dorry Kenyon
Publisher: Center for Applied
Linguistics, 1986
To order: (202) 362-3740

The BEST test was initially developed by the Federal Office for Refugee Resettlement and its Mainstream English Language Training Project during the early

eighties refugee influx. It is designed as a life skills, task-based assessment that has two sections. The first section is an oral interview, which assesses listening comprehension, pronunciation, communication, and fluency. The second part is a literacy section, which assesses reading and writing.

Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)

Authors: John P. Sabatini and others
Publisher: CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1994
To order: (800) 538-9547

The TABE test is designed to be used in conjunction with ABE/GED classes, in order to determine a student's initial functioning level, or grade equivalent, upon entry into the program. There is also a TABE Work-Related Problem Solving component, called Forms 7 and 8, and these can be administered either in conjunction with the TABE, or separately. Forms 7 and 8 are meant to provide employers, professional trainers, and educators with an assessment of how learners handle various problem-solving tasks. There is also a Spanish TABE, which is designed for assessing basic reading, math, and language skills in adults whose primary language is Spanish.

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Beyond Good & Evil

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Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)

Author: CASAS

Publisher: CASAS

To order: (800) 255-1036

CASAS is a broad ranging, functional assessment system that measures literacy skills and their application in real-life situations, which they call "Competencies." Some of the Competencies the CASAS measures are basic communication, occupational knowledge, community resources, health, and independent living skills. In total, there are over 4,000 items in the CASAS test bank, and this allows for the creation of customized tests to given objectives and difficulty levels.

Fair Test: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

Fair Test is an advocacy organization devoted to ensuring the fair, accurate, and unbiased administering of standardized tests. They produce a quarterly newsletter, as well as a catalog of test information, for both K-12 and university educators. Their Web site, <<http://fairtest.org>>, is an excellent starting place for information on current educational policies and testing research.

Justine Sadoff is Project Coordinator at the SABES Central Resource Center at World Education.

Assessment Definitions Compiled by Justine Sadoff

Authentic assessment, construct validity, equal-interval scale... reading a few assessment definitions can force a person to ask that great existential question Dionne Warwick posed back in the sixties, "What's it all about, Alfie?" Given that many of the definitions listed below often come attached with varying perspectives on what they should mean *exactly*, we present them more in the spirit of "cooperative dialogue," rather than as definitive statements. At the very least, we hope it will benefit teachers to get acquainted with some of the concepts and terms currently popping up around the issue of assessment.

Authentic Assessment

"Assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks.... Authentic assessments present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities."

Bias

"A situation that occurs in testing when items systematically measure differently for different ethnic, gender, or age groups. Test developers reduce bias by analyzing item data separately for each group, then identifying and discarding items that appear to be biased."

Construct Validity

"The test measures the 'right' psychological conditions. Intelligence, self-esteem and creativity are examples of such psychological traits. Evidence in support of construct validity can take many forms. One approach is to demonstrate that the items within a measure are inter-related and therefore measure a single construct. Inter-correlation and factor analysis are often used to demonstrate relationships among the items. Another approach is to demonstrate that the test behaves as one would expect a measure of the construct to behave. For example, one might expect a measure of creativity to show a greater correlation with a measure of artistic ability than with a measure of scholastic achievement."

Content Validity

"Content validity refers to the extent to which the test questions represent the skills in the specified subject area. Content validity is often evaluated by examining the plan and procedures used in test construction. Did the test development procedure follow a rational approach that ensures appropriate content? How similar is this content to the content you are interested in testing?"

Norms

"The average or typical scores on a test for members of a specified group. They are usually presented in tabular form for a series of different homogenous groups."

Performance Assessment

"Performance assessment, also known as alternative or authentic assessment, is a form of testing that requires students to perform a task rather than select an answer from a ready-made list."

"Performance assessment [is an] activity that requires students to construct a response, create a product, or perform a demonstration. Usually there are multiple ways that an examinee can approach a performance assessment and more than one correct answer."

Predictive Validity

"In terms of achievement tests, predictive validity refers to the extent to which a test can be used to draw inferences regarding achievement. Empirical evidence in support of predictive validity must include a comparison of performance on the validated test against performance on outside criteria."

Reliability

"The consistency of test scores obtained by the same individuals on different occasions or with different sets of equivalent items; accuracy of scores."

"Fundamental to the evaluation of any instrument is the degree to which test scores are free from measurement error and are consistent from one occasion to another. Sources of measurement error, which include fatigue, nervousness, content sampling, answering mistakes, misinterpreting instructions and guessing, contribute to an individual's score and lower a test's reliability."

Rubrics

"These are specific sets of criteria that clearly define for both student and teacher what a range of acceptable and unacceptable performance looks like. Criteria define descriptors of ability at each level of performance and assign values to each level. Levels referred to are proficiency levels which describe a continuum from excellent to unacceptable product."

These definitions are taken from the ERICS Digest, <http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed385607.html>, CTB McGraw-Hill, <http://www.ctb.com/about_assessment/glossary.shtml>, and Downing, Chuck. (1995). *Ruminating on Rubrics*. (Online). Access Excellence. <http://www.accessexcellence.com/21*/SER/JA/rubrics.html>.

Assessment, Accountability, the National Reporting System: Who Is Driving This Bus?

An Interview with Bob Bickerton and Donna Cornellier

by Cathy Coleman



Assessment, the SMARTT System, and the National Reporting System (NRS): How do these interact? Where do they intersect? Where is Massachusetts heading in terms of assessment? All of these issues are ones that are on the minds of ABE practitioners in Massachusetts. It was the focus of my conversation with Bob Bickerton, State Director of Adult Education and Donna Cornellier, Project Manager for the SMARTT (the Management Information System for ABE programs) Team. Our discussion fell into three broad categories:

1. Current performance accountability (including assessment) policy in Massachusetts and the impact of the NRS on it
2. The impact of the policy on teachers
3. The impact of the policy on learners

Current Performance Accountability Policy

CC: Can you describe Massachusetts' current performance accountability policy?

BB: We believe that the primary purpose of performance accountability, including assessment, is program improvement. We believe that we are ultimately accountable to students and to the goals that they have set for themselves. Assessment is a way to measure progress towards goals, and in particular the goal of educational gain.

Massachusetts has not mandated any one assessment tool. What we have done is require that programs give an initial, a mid-year, and a final assessment for each enrolled student using any tool that the ABE program has chosen. In order to comply with new requirements under the federal "Workforce Investment Act" (Title II of which is "Adult Education and Family Literacy"), we have also asked that each program submit a "Crosswalk form" which documents how their current assessment tool aligns with grade level equivalents (GLEs) and student performance levels (SPLs) as defined in the National Reporting System.

CC: Can you say something about the crosswalk form? What is a crosswalk? What were programs asked to do and why?

BB: Currently we are allowing programs to explore their assessments and think about how to strengthen them. We're not telling them to change the tools they are using as long as they can provide us with a crosswalk that says we really do assess people in a thoughtful systematic manner and if someone scores this way on our assessment, they are presumed to be at a specific grade level equivalent or at a specific student performance level. The crosswalk is a form we asked programs to submit to document this.

DC: The assessment crosswalks we now have on file for programs document our state's current standardized assessment procedure. In January, we will be convening the task force to look at and decide on a process that will replace the crosswalks, starting with program year 2003.

CC: Some states are choosing to mandate one standardized test to use across the state. Why hasn't Massachusetts chosen to do that?

BB: Because any time we consider the pros and cons of any of the commercially available tests, the cons outweigh the pros. With any standardized test, we need to look at the questions of how does this fit with the learning/content standards included in the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks and how does it fit with what we're teaching? This "alignment" between curriculum and assessment is the key ingredient in determining whether the assessment is "valid"—a requirement of the NRS and just plain good educational practice. That is why we are convening a task force to look at these issues.

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Who Is Driving This Bus?

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CC: Can you tell us more about the Performance Accountability Working Group?

BB: The Department will be issuing a broad invitation to practitioners to join with us in developing a consistent, standardized system of assessment for our state. We would like people who have done work in the area of performance accountability, including assessment to join us in this effort. The Performance Accountability Working Group will begin in January with the goal of having a standardized assessment procedure in place by July 2002.

CC: What determines whether an assessment is “valid” and “reliable?”

BB: Valid means the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability measures the consistency and stability of assessment scores. When we talk of a valid and reliable measure of whether someone achieved a countable goal (e.g., “got a job”), that is a bit different. Whether that measure of the goal is valid and reliable is usually about clear definitions and verification. Then the issue becomes how good are we at reporting what students tell us they’ve achieved.

CC: How is NRS and its requirements impacting Massachusetts Assessment Policy?

BB: We believe that NRS is a subset of our vision for the Massachusetts performance accountability system, that is, being held accountable to students and to the goals that they

have for themselves. NRS is not the main motivator behind what we ask programs to document through SMARTT. NRS requires a standardized system of accountability and has sped up the timeline, but assessment and accountability are issues that we have been studying and working on for a long time.

A key question for me is who do we want to control and own accountability in adult ed? It is true that there is some information that we must collect because of the NRS, but in this state, we collect more than NRS requires and what is driving that is what’s most important. It’s not NRS. In fact, people often ask me “Why are we collecting all this stuff?” If we collect only what NRS requires, then what we are doing is saying that is what’s most important in adult education—data on getting people diplomas, getting people into jobs, post secondary education, and/or training. This would de facto say that’s what’s most important because that is what we are measuring; that is what we’re putting the spotlight on.

For years, we have been saying we don’t want our students to be reduced to one dimension. We want to support all the reasons that people come to us in adult ed. If we don’t ask the questions and record what’s happening in those domains, then we run the risk of those things disappearing. Things like, “becoming a citizen,” “helping my kids with their homework,” etc. Do we want to allow a publication from a funding source to say this is what’s at the center of accountability or do we let what comes from our students determine what’s at the center of accountability? Who is driving this bus? It is our belief that it is the students—not the feds, not our office.

CC: There seems to be some confusion around why the state is requiring three assessments per year. NRS actually only requires two assessments per year. Can you clarify this?

DC: Since we know that about 60% of ABE students across the state leave before the end of a fiscal year (about 30% because they accomplished their goal(s) and another 30% who drop-out before accomplishing any goal), we know that for many students we would not be able to get a final assessment (the second assessment that is required by NRS and which we feel is important to document the success of our services). If we wait until the waning weeks of the fiscal year to conduct a second assessment, we will lose any measure of their educational progress. So what we’ve done is require a mid-year assessment with the result that assessments need to be administered about once every four months for each student.

CC: How does the NRS relate to our Curriculum Frameworks in Massachusetts?

BB: The NRS says we must measure educational gain. The Curriculum Frameworks answer the question “Gain in what?” The Curriculum Frameworks are our attempt to define the universe of content which is an issue the NRS is largely silent on. When you don’t know the answer to what is the content and skills we are measuring gain in, it often becomes, by default, the content of what is contained on the GED test. What we have done in our state is say that there is life beyond the

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Who Is Driving This Bus?

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GED, that the table of contents of a GED textbook does not define our curriculum.

Impact on Teachers

CC: How do you think the National Reporting System will impact teachers in the adult education system?

DC: I think the key is that everyone understand that this is not about penalizing teachers or programs. It's about improving the system.

BB: I think this presents teachers with a choice. Will they be acted upon by the Massachusetts ABE performance accountability system or will they take some control of the process? There are at least two places where they can do that. The most accessible one is when teachers begin to use the information that they put into the accountability (SMARTT) system to inform practice and to see how things are and aren't working with students. We are not suggesting that the accountability system is the whole universe of feedback. There are a lot of ways that teachers get feedback, but we need to get to a place where teachers include this as one of the tools they use. The second way they can become involved is to become involved on the performance accountability working group we talked about before or in their own peer groups (e.g., during staff meetings) so that they have some ownership over the direction this goes in.

CC: Teachers of literacy level students and students with learning disabilities are concerned that NRS will have a negative impact on them and on their students. They are asking how they can show the subtle gains with literacy level students? Can you speak to that concern?

DC: It is also important for people to understand that the performance system does NOT stipulate the classes people are placed in. In some places, people are setting up six classes to match the six levels of the NRS. The classes you set up should be based on the needs of your students and your programs;

they should not be set up simply to mirror the reporting system. We don't expect students to move from one class to the next necessarily in one reporting cycle. What we do look at is their assessments and their progress on those.

Impact on Students

CC: How do you think the NRS will impact adult learners in Massachusetts?

BB: I think if we do a good job at putting students in the drivers' seat of accountability, this could have a very positive impact. When we talk to students about these issues, as Anne Serino of Operation Bootstrap in Lynn has done in her program, we find out what students really want to know. They say things like "I'd like to know more about how long this is going to take, and I'd like to know how I'm really doing.... I like hearing that I'm doing well, but give me a measure that says where am I compared to where I need to get." There are some people who believe that students will get a real benefit out of this. It depends on whether we keep them in the driver's seat.

If we do a good job at putting students in the driver's seat of accountability, this could have a very positive impact.

BB: The standards that we set must be appropriate to the level and the circumstances of the students we serve. We will be using real data of how the system is working to help set benchmarks for different population subgroups—whenever there is a significant difference in the participation and performance characteristics of that group. This could turn out to be the case for students with certain disabilities, or for homeless adults, single parents, etc. This is why it is crucial to have data we can rely on. If people give us data that may be overly ambitious (e.g., "inflated") about how many grade level equivalents students gain in a certain amount of time, and that data isn't accurate, we could end up setting unrealistic benchmarks—and then everyone suffers! But clearly we will take into account population subgroups when setting benchmarks.

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Who Is Driving This Bus?

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CC: Will students end up penalized if they are not making progress fast enough? Some program feel pressured to produce measurable gain, and, as a result, students who struggle academically or have social issues that interfere with attendance get dropped from the program. These students represent some of our neediest clients. How will we deal with this issue given the requirements of the accountability system?

BB: As long as students have the capacity to learn how to read and write and are working seriously toward meeting their goals, we should not set artificial time limits to their learning. We ALL learn at different rates! One issue that the performance standards taskforce addressed was the issue of retention, and we all agreed that the definition of retention should not be continuous attendance but should include what people refer to as “stopping out.” What we had a harder time with was defining what stopping out was. Did it mean stopping out of the program for a couple of weeks, a few months, a year? It is clear that we need to acknowledge the issue of students who need to stop out of a program and don’t define themselves as dropping out.

DC: One of the reports I do is on total attendance. If they came, dropped out, and came, we take their total hours. The SMARTT system is set up to answer questions like that.

CC: Older learners sometimes come into adult education without employment goals or family literacy goals but

simply to learn to read and write better for their own satisfaction. Will there be room for these students under the new accountability system?

DC: Our system in Massachusetts is broader than the NRS, and we think that what the NRS refers to as the secondary descriptors are just as important as the goals of employment and family literacy. Any goal can be a person’s primary goal, whether its on our list of goals or not.

BB: People (our students) set the education-related goal that is important to them and we need to be ready to respond. The goals that they set are the ones we’re accountable to. The list from NRS is a subset of a larger list that the students set themselves (the list of goals in the SMARTT database reflect seven years of collecting student articulated goals for their learning). After they set a goal for themselves, they should be asked if they think they can achieve that within a year. Helping set shorter-term goals is an important part of the process so that the person can get a sense of progress and mobility. What are the things that we can do within a year that will let you know that you are making progress? That is the question we need to ask.

Final Questions

CC: What do you think is the biggest misconception about the National Reporting System?

BB: That it is driving accountability in Massachusetts. It isn’t. Students are.

CC: What do you think is the biggest misconception about the SMARTT system?

BB: That it asks a lot of pointless questions. Actually we thought hard about what questions it asks. For example, we ask if a person is a single parent not because we want to intrude on people’s lives, but because we believe that single parents might be a group whose performance profile might significantly differ from other groups—which would result in setting different performance benchmark(s) for that group. It’s important to ask it so that we don’t “cream” the crop and simply take students who we think will make us look good. Creaming in our field would be disastrous and would set up what they call “perverse incentives,” where we end up creating incentives to do the very things we know will hurt our students—like enrolling only those we know will quickly succeed. There really are reasons behind what we ask for in the SMARTT system.

CC: Do you have anything else to add that we didn’t cover today?

BB: Yes, that we think its great that Field Notes is doing this issue.

DC: That the most important thing is to get the information out so that we can clear up misconceptions. Robert Foreman and I are the NRS trainers for the state. I would be glad to answer questions from people on this. People are welcome to email me with questions at dcornellier@doe.mass.edu.

Cathy Coleman is a Staff Development Specialist at SABES/World Education. She can be reached by email at ccoleman@worlded.org

Ever Widening Circles: Involving Teachers in the Development of an Assessment System

by Cynthia Gaede

Washington state has embarked on a three-year project to create an ongoing assessment system that encourages the use of performance-based assessment tasks and is aligned with the Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative.

Well into the second year of our effort to create an ongoing assessment system, the challenges involved in creating and using a system at the same time are coming into focus. Washington state Basic Skills Programs Administrator, Brian Kanes, defines the issue in this way: "We're developing while we're doing and we're trying to use the medium of assessment to promote a totally different basic skills 'culture.'" Among those issues are:

- How will teachers be convinced to convert their experience and knowledge to a system that better serves students, but relies heavily on the concept of teachers as partners in learning?
- How will the new system continue the alignment we want to have with EFF and at the same time retain its own integrity?
- How will it accommodate the alignment we need with the National Reporting System (NRS) in light of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and performance funding?
- How can the emerging system withstand the pressures of being created very quickly and very publicly with every potential flaw or inconsistency in each draft coming under scrutiny.

- How should feedback be incorporated or addressed and by whom?

The emerging assessment system will rely on the use of performance tasks scored by holistic rubrics to demonstrate progress, making it possible for instructors to more closely align assessment and instruction. Washington state's adoption of EFF as the primary framework for curriculum, instruction, and assessment intends for instruction to be based "on the application of skills in real-life contexts which are meaningful to the learners." One hoped-for result would be the flexibility to allow for regional, programmatic, and individual differences by using the state competencies and assessment to guide instruction, and more closely align instruction and assessment with learner goals. The use of holistic rubrics to assess level progression will not replace ongoing classroom assessment used to gauge effectiveness of instruction and learner mastery of individual competencies. Teachers will be encouraged to continue using the analytic rubrics to help guide planning and instruction.

Our clarity about the system and the process for developing it is greater now than when we began over a year ago. Like most states, Washington found itself scrambling to put an assessment system in place to comply with accountability aspects of WIA. In January 1999, a group of experienced basic skills

practitioners met with state administrators to design a process by which to build a "toolbox" of assessment strategies that identifies level progression and meets WIA's requirements.

While the system now under construction in Washington was not the result of a "grassroots" movement, both the product and the process were inspired by that first group of practitioners, and refined by subsequent work groups. The initial attempt in April 1999 to create rubrics for ABE and ESL writing was complicated, then stalled, when members of the work group concluded that the competencies needed revision before they could begin creating rubrics. The process of creating rubrics had revealed that the competencies weren't leveled equally and would not provide a sound basis from which to create rubrics. This realization led to a more intentional and time-consuming process last year of revision and creation resulting in the foundation of our performance-based assessment system. The competencies were made more consistent in magnitude and aligned with the six levels defined by the US Department of Education. Then the corresponding holistic rubrics were created to assess level progress or completion.

During that first year of the "official" three-year process, 81 basic skills practitioners from 44

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Ever Widening Circles

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programs across the state met to revise the state's basic skills competencies and create content area rubrics that will be used to reflect level completion. Their mission was successful, but thorny issues are inevitable in a project of this scope and importance. Washington's adoption of EFF as a primary framework provokes the need for clarification about what EFF looks like in Washington.

Teacher work groups this year will define quality criteria by which performance tasks will be guided; they will identify the components of performance tasks and create samples to be used as models; they will act as ambassadors for the system by training their program colleagues; and they will try using the rubrics with scoring tasks. By June 30, 2001, Washington will have quality criteria by which to assess performance tasks, a set of sample tasks that meet the quality criteria, as well as rubrics and competencies that have been piloted in programs statewide. Training in effective use

of performance tasks to inform instruction, and use of the rubrics to measure progress will continue as the system develops.

Very little of consequence happens in Washington without consensus-building, and that is certainly true of the ongoing assessment project. Clearly, the system benefits from broad participation in the implementation of its vision through "buy-in" from the field. Washington's adult basic skills teachers are pragmatic, visionary, hard-headed, and smart. Their willingness to share their experience and knowledge is crucial to the success of the project. Only practitioners are able to "contextualize" the system by sharing what they know about their students' lives, hopes, fears. The state can only build a base broad enough to support the emerging system by asking teacher to participate in ever-widening circles.

In return, the obvious value for teachers lies in a very real sense of ownership and professional recognition. There are rich opportunities for both direct and indirect professional development opportunities. Considering that virtually all

participants in the development of this system are being asked to volunteer their expertise, the state promises that teachers will use and develop tremendous creative thinking, problem-solving and negotiation skills. In addition, participants must use all their leadership skills to share the system vision and concepts with their colleagues. They become "insiders;" they are being asked to lead, facilitate, and negotiate as they seek collaboration in the research necessary to complete the project. It's a lot to ask.

When it seems like the state is asking "too much," it helps to remember that the vision driving the system puts learners where they belong—squarely at the center of both instruction and assessment.

Cynthia Gaede is a Training Coordinator for the Adult Basic Literacy Educators Network of Washington charged with coordinating Washington's adult basic skills ongoing assessment project. She can be reached by email at cgaede@sccd.ctc.edu. The basic skills competencies and rubrics are available on the Web at www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Board/Educ/ABE/assess.htm.

Involving Learners...

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Curriculum Framework in Massachusetts appear to correlate with the findings of the reports inasmuch as what the students are looking for in a program, the ESOL Framework provides. For example, one of the Framework's categories is "Navigating Systems," which Graves believes is of paramount importance to learners, who want to be able to communicate orally.

Only time will tell if more student-centered assessment is going to find a place within the

boundaries of traditional standardized assessment. It should be noted that some of the teachers who participated in Graves' assessment experiment found her results to be "practical but not always effective at measuring students' progress." Others, however, felt there was no way teachers could know what exactly learners could do outside of the classroom unless they (the learners) reported it themselves. Thus, one of the conclusions that could be drawn is that it would do well to continue documenting learners' various modes of learning, and how they themselves view their own learning. Understanding the

need for such continued research, Graves' agency recently applied for a DOE grant that would allow them to pursue this research, using the groundwork already done as a stepping stone to ultimately refine the progress reports. Such participatory approaches to assessment just might, in the final analysis, prove to be an essential element in the learning process.

Justine Sadoff is Project Coordinator at Boston SABES. Nicole Graves is an ESOL Program Coordinator at the Center for New Americans in Amherst. Justine can be reached by email at jsadoff@worlded.org. Nicole can be reached by email at CNAAMH@rcn.com.

Active, Purposeful...

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Knowledge Base

- What vocabulary do learners have related to the skill?
- What content knowledge do the learners have related to the skill?
- What strategies do learners have for organizing and applying content knowledge?

Fluency

- How much effort is required?

Independence

- How much help is needed from others?

Range

- In how many different contexts can learners perform?
- How many different tasks can the learner do using the skill?

One way I learned to better understand these dimensions of performance was to think about something I was learning; in my case it was learning to swing dance.

When I first started out I really didn't have much of a **knowledge base**—just what was in the catalog. As I learned, I picked up vocabulary (basic step, loop pass, etc.) and got better at organizing what I was learning by being able to put these steps together. **Fluency** was a big problem when starting out. I had to count and concentrate on each step. As I got better, some of the steps became automatic. At first I had a hard time learning from watching and needed the instructor to demonstrate the steps by being my partner. My **independence** grew as I gained confidence and didn't need as much "hands on" support. My **range** of performance is still

limited. I haven't danced anywhere other than the classroom. My goal is to be able to dance (and enjoy it) at my son's wedding next summer. I have a ways to go, but I can see that I am learning and improving.

This is a lot of information for a short article, and I have to say that I certainly don't have all the components working together smoothly in my classroom yet. However, using EFF as a framework for assessment and instruction has allowed me to become a more intentional and informed instructor and learner.

Joan Benz is an Instructor of adult basic skills and GED at the Bethel Family Learning Center in Eugene, Oregon. She can be reached by email at benzj@lanec.edu. EFF is an initiative of the National Institute For Literacy. For more information about EFF visit their Web site at <www.nifl.gov/EFF>.

Assessment and LD

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the student meets one-on-one with a tutor once a week. During these sessions, the student tries to understand rules and procedures and applies them in both real and academic contexts. In addition the student improves his/her comprehension skills by completing homework assignments in reading. (Homework usually entails at least three to four hours between sessions.) Special education teachers in the surrounding communities would be especially well-qualified tutors for the learning disabled.

At Quinsigamond, several students with major learning disabilities have earned their GEDs following the previous procedure. One student in particular had been working for eight years without success. After having the evaluation and following the resulting recommendations, which included much work on her part to compensate for her weaknesses, she passed.

It has been a challenge for all—the teachers have had to change their style to a degree; the students have had to spend many hours doing homework between sessions; and the tutors have had to spend much time preparing required work.

The end results for those who have persisted have been worthwhile. The students have their GED in spite of the odds against them.

Wallace M. Perkins is a licensed educational psychologist and has worked for 20 years as a school psychologist in the Shrewsbury School system. Other interested communities may contact the special education department in their local or surrounding school districts to learn if present school psychologists would be interested in an additional part-time position or to secure the names of retired school psychologists. One can also write to the Massachusetts School Psychologists Association to obtain a list of its retired members.

Click Here: Web Sites on Assessment

Compiled by Justine Sadoff



Sites on Standardized Tests and Testing

ABLE Test

<<http://ericae.net/tc3/TC018651.htm>>
This is another ERICS site, giving descriptive information on the Adults Basic Learning Examination, or ABLE.

Buros Institute of Mental Measurements

<www.unl.edu/buros/>
Another gigantic database. Tests, test locators, test resources, test publishers, and everything you could possibly want to know about tests.

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)

<www.cal.org>
Thorough resource for varied information on language, language testing, and current education policy. Click on Adult ESL Literacy and click on the link for Related Products and Publications. This will bring up a list of many helpful resources for ESOL teachers and learners.

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Competency List

<www.casas.org>
Just about everything you could want to know about CASAS including skill level descriptors, competency lists, and frequently asked questions about the test as well as how it is used.

ERICs Digest

<www.ericae.net/testcol.htm>
Massive database, probably the best resource for information on tests and everything associated with testing and education in general.

Fair Test: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

<http://fairtest.org>
Fair Test is an advocacy organization devoted to ensuring the fair, accurate, and unbiased administering of standardized tests. Their Web site is an excellent resource for information on current educational policies and testing research.

Riverside Publishing

<www.riverpub.com/products/group/dartts.htm>
Riverside Publishing produces a wide variety of educational materials, including tests. They are part of the larger educational publishing house, Houghton Mifflin. This site is a good introduction to the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading with Trial Teaching Strategies and its cousin, the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading.

Sites on Alternative Assessment and Performance-Based Assessment

Access Excellence

<www.accessexcellence.com>
Another example of rubrics, this one focusing on the use of rubrics for teaching science. From the Access Excellence home page, click on "Classrooms of the 21st Century."

A Humorous Look at Performance-Based Assessment

<www.middleweb.com/gradexam.html>
We all need a little chuckle once in a while, and this site may prove helpful. It provides a tongue-in-cheek look at some authentic assessment tasks such as in economics: "Develop a realistic plan for refinancing the national debt. Run for Congress." There is also valuable non-tongue-in-cheek information on this site. Don't be scared off by the middle school aspect. Many of the links under Assessment and Evaluation will prove useful to us in adult education as well.

Education World

<www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr248.shtml>
This site offers information on rubrics, the educational background to rubrics, and how you can use them.

Guideline for Portfolio Assessment

<www.w-angle.galil.k12.il/call/portfolio/default.html>
Another tome of a piece, but just about everything you could think of concerning portfolios is laid out here in clear, thorough detail. Again, this site should not be missed by anyone interested in learning about portfolios.

Interactive Classroom

<www.interactiveclassroom.com>
This site has several articles that address issues of authentic assessment including one that describes the process of "negotiable contracting," which actively brings learners into the process of assessment. Click on articles from the main page.

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education

<www.ncbe.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/pigs/pig9.htm>
Excellent, lengthy, and detailed site on performance and portfolio assessment for language minority students. This is heavy reading, but highly insightful for anyone interested in portfolio-based assessment.

Portfolio Assessment

<www.eduplace.com/rdg/res/literacy/assess6.html>
This site is operated by Houghton Mifflin, the educational publishing house. It's a good introduction to portfolio assessment, giving short but precise explanations for some of the key issues and themes in portfolio assessment.

Using Rubrics in the Washington State Assessment System

<www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Board/Educ/ABE/assess.htm>
Washington State has developed rubrics as part of their assessment system. This site lists several downloadable resources including the rubrics in both Adobe PDF format and in Word.

Mark Your Calendar

January 12–13

Massachusetts Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATSOL), Miniconference
The Stakes of Assessment: Research, Policy and Practice
Newton, MA (Pine Manor College)
Contact: MATSOL, (617) 576-9865

January 22–24

Center for Study of Adult Literacy, Georgia State University & Centre for Literacy (Quebec), 3rd International Conference on Women and Literacy
Atlanta, GA
Contact: Sandy Vaughn, (404) 651-1400
Email: alcsvv@langate.gsu.edu

February 13

Mass Networks Education Partnership CLASP (Curriculum Library Alignment and Sharing Project), Statewide Conference Series
Worcester, MA
Contact: (888) 638-1997
Web: <www.massnetworks.org>

February 28–March 3

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 35th Annual Convention
TESOL 2001: Gateway to the Future
St. Louis, MO
Contact: TESOL, (703) 836-0774
Web: <www.tesol.org/conv/2001.html>

March 14

Massachusetts County House of Corrections (CHOC), Annual Conference
Worcester, MA
Contact: Joanne Harrington, (508) 854-4476
Email: joanneh@gcc.mass.edu

March 18–20

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), 10th Annual National Conference
Partners in Learning
Dallas, TX
Contact: NCFL, (502) 584-1133 x149
Web: <www.familit.org/conference/conf2001.html>

March 30–April 4

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), 2001 National Conference
Meet Me in Memphis
Memphis, TN
Contact: Peggy Davis, (901) 855-1101
Web: <http://206.82.75.28/conf.html>

April 10–14

American Educational Research Association (AERA), 82nd Annual Meeting
What We Know and How We Know It
Seattle, WA
Contact: AERA, (202) 223-9485
Web: <www.aera.net/meeting/am2001>

Information about upcoming conferences relating to adult literacy can be sent to: Lenore Balliro, Field Notes Editor, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210.



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