

# ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

*Updated November 1995*

---

Compiled by Kristin Carl, Maggie Rosen, Christina Cavaluzzi  
Evaluation Assistance Center East, George Washington University

The last decade saw a marked increase in the enrollment of adult English language learners (ELLs) in federally funded adult basic education programs. Enrollment of ELLs in federally-funded adult basic education programs nearly tripled between 1980 and 1993, to serve 1.5 million ELLs. Classes of English as a Second Language are the fastest growing area of adult education, and demand continues to outstrip supply. Hispanics represent the largest language group enrolled at 31%, while Asians comprise 14%. Furthermore, the demand for adult ELL programs is likely to increase along with efforts to achieve the national education goals that focus on adult literacy and lifelong learning.

To meet the educational needs of the adult ELL population there must be appropriate assessment measures to chart student progress. Standardized tests currently in use for adult learners (e.g., the Test of Adult Basic Education and the Test of Applied Literacy Skills) are designed exclusively for native speakers of English. Therefore, they may not accurately assess literacy development of second language learners.

This document contains a bibliography of articles, books, references, and information about projects and resources that specifically address the assessment of ELLs in adult education programs. It was developed as a response to the need for more research and development in the area of adult ESL assessment.

**Please Note:** The numbers beginning with ED or EJ that follow is the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) document number and may be ordered via ERIC.

## References

Adult Learning Resource Center. (1991). *Correlation study of adult English as a second language and adult basic education reading tests*. Des Plaines, IL: Adult Learning Resource Center. (ED 352849)

The study was prompted by the need to standardize the reporting of the educational progress of adult language minority students in the state of Illinois. The study expanded the findings of the William Rainey Harper College research project that there was a strong correlation between an ESL specific test (the English Language Skills Assessment, or ELSA) and an Adult Basic Education Test (the Test of Adult Basic Education, or TABE). Available from Rodriguous Garreton or Dennis Terdy, Adult Learning Resource Center, 1855 Mount Prospect Road, Des Plaines, IL 60018, (708) 803-6420.

Auerbach, E. (1992). *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL*

literacy. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co.

This publication describes guidelines for developing a student-centered, action-based literacy curriculum for adult ESL students. The guide focuses on advice for developing a curriculum, assessing student needs, creating meaningful content, defining the teacher's role as a problem-poser and assessing outcomes of the project. A chapter outlines methods of evaluating student progress.

Balliro, L. (1992, March). *Reassessing assessment in adult ESL/literacy*. The 26th Annual TESOL Convention. San Antonio, TX: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting for the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. (ED 339253)

This paper cites literature to show the opposing positions of proponents of standardized tests and those who search for objective mastery of discrete skills. It discusses a survey of educators on initial assessment procedures, placement, student involvement and final assessment.

Burt, Mirian & Fran Keenan. (1995) *Adult ESL Learner Assessment: Purposes and Tools*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

This new ERIC Digest provides an overview of current assessment approaches in adult ESL, including commercially available tests and alternative tools, and explains the difference between assessment and evaluation. It includes references and resources. Available free from NCLE, 1118 22nd St., Washington, DC 20037. This abstract was quoted from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education *Minibib*, compiled by Fran Keenan, September 1995.

Chisman, F., Spruck Wrigley, H. and Ewen, D. (1993). *ESL and the American dream*. Washington, D.C.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

This resource analyzes the current situation of implementation and policy for teaching adults ESL. The report states that demand for ESL classes is unmet and that many improvements are needed in the classes that exist. The authors claim a strategic plan is necessary for adult ESL education, including (1) separating ESL education from other social services, (2) providing funding to meet the demand for instruction as well as the growing need for more classes, (3) varying services to meet specific needs, such as vocational training of ESL students, (4) improving professional standards for practice in ESL, and (5) creating leadership and structure for advocating better adult ESL education. This report offers descriptive data on adult ESL education in the U.S., including class types, educational institutions, staff qualifications, and statistics about participation and need. Available from the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, Washington Office, 820 First St. NE, Suite 460, Washington, D.C. 20002, (202) 682-4100.

Crandall, J. and Kreeft Peyton, J. (1993). *Approaches to adult ESL literacy instruction*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, Co.

Articles outline five approaches to literacy instruction for adult ESL students: Competency based education, whole language, the language experience approach, a writing and publishing program, and the Freirean approach (based on the work of Paolo Freire). The focus of each chapter is on instruction, but issues of assessment and testing are also addressed.

Fingeret, H. A. (1993). *It Belongs to Me: A Guide to Portfolio Assessment in Adult Education Programs*. Literacy South.

This guide, written with adult literacy educators in mind, provides a thorough introduction to the concept of portfolio assessment. Free, with a written request that includes a self-addressed mailing label, from the Clearinghouse, Adult Education and Literacy, US Department of Education, 600 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20202-7240.

Fiske, Kristin J., & Kim O. Yap. (1994) *Classroom Strategies for Assessing Limited English Proficient Students in Vocational Programs: A Resource Handbook*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (ED 368872)

This handbook documents assessment strategies for vocational education students with low English proficiency including interviews, cloze exercises, rating scales, and portfolios. It guides teachers through an investigation of how assessment can inform instruction and meet the needs of learners, programs, and funders. Resource listings include organizations, networks, and publications. Available for \$24.95 from Crosspaths Management Systems, 2 Wisconsin Circle, Chevy Chase, MD 20815. This abstract was quoted from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education *Minibib*, compiled by Fran Keenan, September 1995.

Holt, D., (Ed.) (1994). *Assessing Success in Family Literacy: Alternative Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation*. Washington, DC and McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems. (ED 375688)

This book discusses the special evaluation needs of family literacy projects, in particular, ESL family literacy projects. With an emphasis on four alternative assessment approaches--surveys, interviews, observation measures, and performance samples--it gives literacy project staff working with language minority learners the means to gain accurate and comprehensive information about learners' progress and overall project effectiveness. Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270 or 815-363-3582. This abstract was quoted from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education *Minibib*, compiled by Fran Keenan, September 1995.

Jackson, G.B. (1990). *Measures for adult literacy programs*. Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Based Education and the ERIC Clearinghouse for Tests, Measurement and Evaluation. (ED 322208)

Among the measures discussed for general adult literacy programs are instruments for use in adult ESL programs, including the Basic English Skills Test and the California Adult Student Assessment System. Available through the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, The Catholic University of America, 210 O'Boyle Hall, Washington, D.C. 20064, (202) 319-5120.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (1992). *Annotated Bibliography on ABE/ESL Assessment*. Portland, OR: NWREL.

The state of Washington contracted with Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) to develop an assessment system for the state Adult Basic Education/ESL programs. The Annotated Bibliography, a product that resulted from the contract work, is divided into four

sections and one appendix. The first section is a review of the materials found through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and NWREL and received from professional organizations in the field. Sections two, three, and four are updated bibliographies on alternative assessments. Available from the Adult Basic Literacy Educators Network, Literacy Resource Center, Seattle Central Community College, 1701 Broadway, Seattle, OR 98122, (360) 664-9402.

Wrigley, H. S. (1992, September). *Learner assessment in adult ESL literacy*. ERIC Q & A. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. (ED 353863)

Current literacy assessments used with adult ESL learners are examined, including several commonly used standardized tests and alternative assessments. The article considers many alternative measures and considers each for its feasibility and utility in an adult ESL program. Available from National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20037, (202) 429-9292 ext. 200.

Wrigley, H. S., Chisman, F., and Ewen, D. (1993). *Sparks of excellence: Program realities and promising practices in adult ESL*. Washington, D.C.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

This report details several areas of needed improvement in adult ESL education programs, offering suggestions for growth and examples of promising programs. The areas covered include: (1) creating viable transitions from one level of education to another and from education to work, (2) improving testing and assessment of adult ESL students, (3) building a stronger professional cadre of qualified ESL teachers, (4) matching curriculum focus to learner goals in specialized programs, and (5) integrating technology with instruction. The report connects these suggestions to a research and policy agenda that calls for active leadership and advocacy for adult ESL programs. Available from the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, Washington Office, 820 First St. NE, Suite 460, Washington, D.C. 20002, (202) 682-4100.

Spruck Wrigley, H. & Guth, G. (1992). *Bringing literacy to life: issues and options in adult ESL literacy*. San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International. (ED 348896)

Designed for teachers, administrators and researchers, this book features current issues that shape adult ESL literacy and promising practices in teaching adults. It includes frameworks for curriculum, teaching and assessment and sections on staff development, native language literacy and technology. Available from Aguirre International, 411 Borel Ave., Suite 402, San Mateo, CA 94402, (415) 349-1842.

Sticht, T.G. (1990). *Testing and assessment in adult basic education and English as a second language programs*. San Diego: Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc. (ED 317867)

The use of tests for adult basic education (ABE) and ESL are reviewed in this report in light of testing required by the 1988 Adult Education Act Amendments. The report expands the discussion of standardized tests given in the federal law and the Department of Education rules and regulations. The information is intended to help in the selection and use of standardized tests.

Texas Education Agency. (1990). *Assessment of adult limited English proficient students: a guide to*

*available instruments*. Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, Division of Adult and Community Education Programs. (ED 322790)

This guide briefly discusses the uses, strengths, and limitations of various assessment instruments in ESL classes for adults. The guide is limited to those instruments already in use in Adult Education Cooperatives in Texas, or those readily available to those cooperatives. Available from the Clearinghouse at Texas A & M, 1-800-441-READ (441-7323).

Yap, K. (1993). *Integrating assessment with Instruction in ABE/ESL programs*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual convention, Atlanta, GA. (ED 359210)

This paper contains the results of a study of assessment methods that could enhance instruction and satisfy accountability requirements for Washington State. It describes how the 35 participating programs showed three methods, including writing assessment, portfolio assessment and classroom assessment, that could enhance effectiveness of Adult Basic Education/ESL instruction.

U.S. Department of Education. (February, 1995). *Adult Education for Limited English Proficient Adults, Fact Sheet 3*. Washington, D.C.: Adult Learning and Literacy Clearinghouse, U.S. Department of Education. (ED 347857)

This sheet outlines basic information about adult education programs for limited English proficient individuals. Types of instruction and assessment are described briefly, and a variety of resources for information are listed.

## Resources

Adult Basic Education, Seattle Central Community College, 1701 Broadway, Seattle, WA 98122, (206) 587-3800.

The organization created and distributes the *Washington State ESL Core Competencies*. This is an integrated system of outcomes, activities, instructional resources, and evaluation strategies based on the latest research in adult learning for limited English proficient adults.

Alderson, J.C., Krahnke, K. and Stansfield, C. (1987). *Reviews of English language proficiency tests*. Washington, D.C.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

This is a general resource that lists and evaluates a host of commonly used language proficiency tests. A synopsis and review of each test are included. Since the information on the tests was current as of 1987, users should also consult test publishers for updated information. Available from TESOL, 1600 Cameron St., Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314-2751, (703) 836-0774.

Clearinghouse, Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20202-7240, (202) 205-9996. Education program specialist for adult English as a second language is Joyce F. Campbell, (202) 205-5412, e-mail address is Joyce\_Campbell@ED.GOV.

The clearinghouse has a variety of resources and materials available, some of which are free of

charge. Among the free materials is ESL Notes, a newsletter published three times a year. This contains information on issues and resources for teaching and assessing limited English proficient adults.

National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, an adjunct ERIC clearinghouse at the Center for Applied Linguistics, 1118-22nd St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20037, (202) 429-9292 ext. 200..

The only national clearinghouse for adult ESL and literacy information, NCLE specializes in issues relating to adults learning English as a second language, including assessment. NCLE's free digests and bibliographies have a special focus on adult ESL and literacy instruction. NCLE also maintains a resource center that includes a database of adult ESL and literacy programs around the U.S.

---

*The Evaluation Assistance Center East at The George Washington University.*