Glossary: Adult ESOL Assessment

Published by the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL)

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AEFLA The Adult and Family Literacy Act [Title II of the **Workforce Investment Act (**WIA**)** of 1998] is the current law governing state-administered U.S. Department of Education funded adult education programs. This law requires funded programs to report adult learners' progress— as described by the **educational functioning levels or EFLs** of the **National Reporting System (NRS)**—to the state. Using this accountability system, each state reports learner performance data to the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), U.S. Department of Education. (for more information, see www.nrsweb.org/)

Assessment refers to the use of instruments and procedures to gather data on a regular basis for such purposes as identifying learners' needs, documenting learners' progress, or determining how program services are meeting learners' needs. (from the CAELA Online Resource Collection on Assessment and Evaluation in Adult ESL, www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/assessment.html)

Evaluation refers to the process of interpreting and analyzing assessment data at a given point in time for the purpose of improving and documenting program and learner outcomes.

Needs Assessment A needs assessment for use with adult learners of English is a tool that examines, from the perspective of the learner, what kinds of English, native language, and literacy skills the learner already believes he or she has; the literacy contexts in which the learner lives and works; what the learner wants and needs to know to function in those contexts; what the learner expects to gain from the instructional program; and what might need to be done in the native language or with the aid of an interpreter. The needs assessment focuses and builds on learners' accomplishments and abilities rather than on deficits, allowing learners to articulate and display what they already know and can do. Needs assessment is a continual process and takes place throughout the instructional program thus influencing student placement, materials selection, curriculum design, and teaching. (adapted from *Needs Assessment and Adult ESL Learners*, 1997, p. 1, www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Needas.html)

Performance Assessment Performance assessments require learners to use prior knowledge and recent learning to accomplish tasks that demonstrate what they know and can do. There is a direct link between instruction and assessment. Examples of performance assessment tasks include *oral or written reports* (e.g., on how to become a citizen); *projects* (e.g., researching, producing, and distributing a booklet on recreational opportunities available in the community); and *exhibitions or demonstrations* (e.g., a poster depicting the steps to becoming a U.S. citizen). A variety of performance assessments provide a more complete picture of a learner's abilities than can be gathered from performance on a pencil-and-paper standardized test. (adapted from *Issues in Accountability and Assessment for Adult ESL Instruction,* Van Duzer, 2002 www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/accountQA.html)

Reliability An assessment is reliable if scores are consistent when the test is repeated on a population of individuals or groups. For example, if a learner takes a test once, than takes it again an hour later, and maybe another hour after that, the learner should get about the same score each time, providing nothing else has changed. Test reliability can be affected by a number of factors: the test itself, the test administrator, the person who does the scoring, the testing procedures, the conditions under which the test is administered, or even the examinee. For example, an examinee might be feeling great the day of the pre-test but facing a family crisis on the day of the post-test The developers of the assessment must demonstrate that reliability *can* be achieved. Program staff using the assessment must administer it in the ways it is designed to be administered. Programs need to train the individuals who will administer the test so that it will be administered appropriately each time it is used, and they need to monitor its administration and scoring. Programs also must ensure that enough time (or hours of instruction) has passed for learners to show gains. (*Practitioner Toolkit* IV p 26 www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/Part4-25AssessingAdultEnglishLanguageLearners.pdf)

Rubric Simply stated a rubric is a rating scale. According to Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=WhatIs&module=Rubistar), "Generally rubrics specify the level of performance expected for several levels of quality." For example, a scale could be designed to assess reading or speaking ability—with descriptors noted at intervals along the scale. The NRS educational functioning table (EFL) itself is an example of a rubric.

Standardized Assessment These assessments are developed according to explicit specifications. Test items are chosen for their ability to discriminate among levels, and administration procedures are consistent and uniform. Pencil-and-paper standardized tests are often used because they are easy to administer to groups, require minimal training for the test administrator, and have documentation of reliability (consistency of results over time) and validity (measuring what the test says it measures). The results of such assessments will have meaning to learners and teachers only if the test content is related to the goals and content of the instruction. If the items in a standardized test reflect the actual curriculum, then the test may accurately assess achievement of the learners. However, if the items do not reflect what is covered in the classroom, the test may not adequately assess what learners know and can do. (Van Duzer, 2002).

Validity Assessment is valid when the test, or other instrument, assesses what it is intended to measure and when uses of the assessment results are only for those which the instrument was designed Any assessment used for NRS purposes is valid only if the inferences made about the learners on the basis of the test scores can be related to the NRS descriptors, or what the learners can do (proficiency) (from *Practitioner Toolkit* IV, p. 26 www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/Part4-25AssessingAdultEnglishLanguageLearners.pdf)