



*Improving
Distance
Education
for Adult
Learners*

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**Using Assessment to
Guide Instructional
Planning for Distance
Learners**

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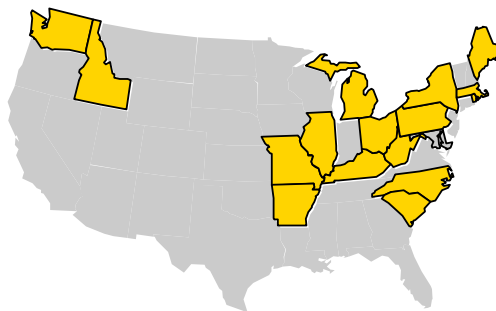


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- *Study Guide for Distance Learning 101: Teaching Adult Learners at a Distance. Second Edition, November 2003. (Available only to member states)*
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Using Assessment to Guide Instructional Planning for Distance Learners

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Using Assessment to Guide Instructional Planning

Assessment is a key component of all educational programs; used properly it can yield valuable information for teachers, students and administrators. Assessment can be used for various purposes, including placing students into appropriate classes, gauging student progress, and measuring overall educational gains for accountability purposes. This working paper examines how the second of these—assessment to gauge student progress—can be used in distance education programs for adult basic learners, with a particular focus on using assessment to guide instructional planning. Because distance learning is so different from classroom learning, it is important to look at both the roles of assessment and the implications of that assessment as it pertains to distance learners. This paper suggests that certain types of assessment can create a foundation for effective lesson planning at a distance. It also suggests that the logistics of distance may require innovative thinking about ways to conduct assessment of student progress.

In most states, standardized tests such as the AMES, ABLE, CASAS, or TABE are routinely used to determine student placement and to measure student progress after an extended period of instruction. As a progress measure these tests provide a useful summary judgment—e.g. a single scaled score or grade level rating—that can be used to assess overall progress after an extended period of study. But designing the semester’s work itself requires more diagnostic information than a single score.

Pennsylvania and Ohio have been exploring different means of collecting evidence of students’ short-term progress through carefully developed alternative assessment systems. While these were developed for use with students studying in classroom programs, they have the potential for use in distance education as well. This paper explores three assessment strategies that hold promise for progress assessments in distance education.

- *Using checklists to assess competencies.* Pennsylvania has developed two sets of checklists for use with adult learners. This section explores the rationale for developing these checklists, training issues, usage, and possible implications for distance education programs.
- *Maintaining portfolios of student work.* Ohio requires all of its adult education programs to maintain standardized portfolios for each student. This section examines the development of the standardized portfolio and explores how it might be used with distance students.
- *Using online quizzes to assess distance students.* This section examines the development of online quizzes to accompany the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) workbooks. Technical issues in creating online assessment materials, implementation issues and possible uses of these online quizzes with distance learners are discussed.

All three of these assessment approaches share a common goal: to provide the teacher with specific feedback on student performance that can be used for instructional planning. Thus, these assessments form the foundation of a solid educational plan. Teachers and students utilize the systems to identify areas for development, tailor instruction, monitor growth, and collect evidence of student change over time. This paper hopes to stimulate thinking about effective ways of assessing the educational progress of distance learners and ways of integrating that assessment with instructional planning.

The more closely a teacher can gear lessons to the material a student needs to master, the more effective education is likely to be for that student. Distance education provides an ideal vehicle for teachers to meet the diverse needs and widely varying skill sets of adult learners. Unlike a traditional classroom setting, the distance student is not bounded by time or location. Distance education is particularly well suited to self-paced study and the development of individualized learning plans where students study only those materials they need. To successfully implement and sustain a strong, individual learning plan, teachers and students need ongoing assessment activities that indicate what is and isn't working instructionally. These assessments become an important tool in the teaching and learning process.

What type of information do teachers need to know in order to create an effective and personalized lesson plan? In the most general terms, they need to have an understanding of where the student is starting out and what the student hopes to accomplish. For example, the intake process may provide the information that the student is currently reading on a 7th grade level (based on a standardized test) and that the student's goal is to obtain a GED. This informs the teacher that she needs to work with this student on basic academic skills, rather than employment skills or English as a second language. But it does little to help the teacher in planning lessons. While knowing that the student is reading at a 7th grade level has some implications for lesson planning, it is not specific enough about the student's strengths and weaknesses guide instruction. With ongoing assessment systems like the ones described in this paper, teachers and students can work both at the micro level (e.g., developing a specific skill or acquiring particular content knowledge) and at the macro level (how does the skills the student is developing fit into his/her overall goals for education? and, how does instruction need to be adjusted to meet a student's evolving education needs?).

How does ongoing assessment look different for classroom and distance teachers? Classroom teachers have a variety of informal assessment mechanisms available to them to determine student needs and growth. Many of these informal measures (e.g., face-to-face interactions, presentations or class participation, in-class assignments, etc.) are measurement tools that are largely unavailable to distance educators. Thus, distance educators need to be even more creative in developing viable means of gathering ongoing assessment information. They must explore how they can assess and determine student learning without meeting with students in a face-to-face setting. This paper describes three alternative assessment systems that provide valuable frameworks and foundations on which teachers can develop creative means of gathering information on adult learners' progress and use it both to plan instruction and measure progress.

The Use of Checklists to Assess Adult Learners: Examples from Pennsylvania

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Checklists provide an alternative way to assess student progress and competency. They provide a systematic way for teachers to indicate if students possess specific skills, and are particularly well suited to examining the acquisition of competencies. In addition, as they are completed by the teacher, checklists are useful when students either cannot or will not come back to a center for testing. But checklists are not without their limitations. Extensive development efforts are needed to design checklists that include the appropriate skills, are reliable and demonstrate content validity. In addition, checklists require teachers to make judgments regarding whether or not a student has mastered certain skills; thus, teachers need to be trained to complete checklists in a consistent and reliable manner. This section discusses the efforts of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), to use checklists with adult learners.

The Bureau has explored the use of checklists in two different situations. The ABLE Level Attainment Checklists were developed specifically to meet accountability requirements; the Work-Based Foundation Skills Checklists were developed as informal assessment or self-assessment tools within two statewide projects designed to provide work-based basic skills programs and services. Extensive efforts were put into developing and validating the checklists and training teachers in their use. This section describes the origins, intent, and uses of these two sets of checklists. It then provides examples of how these checklists might be used by distance educators.

ABLE Level Attainment Checklists

The ABLE Level Attainment Checklists (the hereafter, ALAC Checklists) were implemented in Pennsylvania in 2000-2001. They were envisioned as a method that programs could use at the end of a program year to register a student's Educational Functioning Level (EFL) completion under the National Reporting System (NRS) when a post-test for that student was not available. The checklists were intended to provide an alternative to post-testing (in certain cases) to register student level completion.

Development of the Checklists

At the time the Checklists were developed, the Bureau accepted scores from several test instruments (e.g., Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) 7&8, CASAS Employability Competency System, CASAS Life Skills System, and the Basic English Skills Test, among others) for state and NRS reporting purposes. Funded programs were expected to

assess each student at intake with an appropriate instrument (using the resulting scale score to place the student into an NRS Educational Functioning Level) and then to reassess each student at least once during the program year to track educational progress and movement through the NRS levels. Since the Checklists were intended to provide an alternative to post-testing, they needed to provide a matching post-measure for any one of the subtests that might be used by a funded program. It was determined that checklists would be developed in four areas: Adult Basic Education (ABE) Reading, Math, English-as-a-second-language (ESL) Reading, and ESL Speaking and Listening, since each approved subtest assessed one of these four areas.

Checklist developers began by grouping the approved subtests under the four areas (for example, TABE Reading, and CASAS Reading were grouped under ABE Reading; the Basic English Skills Test Oral Skills Section and the CASAS Listening tests were grouped under ESL Speaking and Listening). Then, the developers looked at the content of the grouped instruments as it related to the six ABE NRS levels or the six ESL NRS levels, generating items that were common across related subtest at each level. It was determined that each of the four checklists would have 10 items at each NRS level. Items for each checklist and each level were generated, reviewed, and finalized (see samples from the Math and ESL Reading checklists at two different levels in the appendix).

Uses of the Checklists

As previously noted, the initial intended use for the Checklists was as a “safety net” to allow end-of-year NRS level attainment to be estimated for students in certain cases. Interestingly, there is evidence that use of the Checklists has broadened beyond the original intent. Forlizzi, Kuhne, and Kassab (2002) found that one quarter of the programs that used the checklists reported more and different use of informal assessments after implementing the checklists. Tutoring programs that used the checklists also reported that the checklists helped involve tutors by giving them

Checklists—A Natural Fit with Teaching and Learning

Programs using the Checklists reported that they helped their learners see success and progress, helped keep them focused, illustrated a continuum of important skills to be achieved, and built self-esteem as progress was demonstrated.

goals to work toward and a basis for designing lessons. Additionally, 43% of checklist users indicated that use of the checklists had bolstered internal program accountability, including successes such as providing a richer picture of progress for the student and the program, increasing dialogue and contact between instructors and students, increasing interest in informal assessment, and assisting with curriculum planning and development. The various ways in which instructors have been using the checklists for more than their original limited intent bodes well for potential adaptation in distance education. The checklists provide a solid framework of information regarding skills and skill levels as well as content knowledge students require to gain proficiency in various academic arenas. The checklist assessment system provides concrete, specific examples of what constitutes competency at different levels of various skills. Having the development process laid out in checklist forms enables teachers to be creative in both designing learning activities and in determining what constitutes evidence of learning. This point is

particularly important for distance educators who are limited in their interactions with students. The case study described below is indicative of the types of alternative methods for collecting evidence of student progress distance teachers need to develop.

Work-Based Foundation Skills Checklists

The Bureau has also explored the use of checklists as part of their Work-Based Foundation Skills Framework State Leadership Initiative. The project, first funded by ABLE in 1999, was designed to 1) develop a common model, language, and understanding of the basic skills adults need to obtain or maintain employment and advance to jobs paying self-sufficiency wages, and 2) support the integration of work-related basic skills services within the continuum of services of the Commonwealth's workforce development system.

Development of the Checklists

The Work-Based Foundation Skills Framework is a curriculum framework of work-related basic skills, knowledge areas, and competencies that adults need to work effectively and safely in today's workplace and work environment. They were identified and developed through an interagency collaboration process with representatives from business and industry, organized labor, and the PA Departments of Education, Labor and Industry, Community and Economic Development, Welfare, and Aging.

The foundation skills and knowledge areas are organized into four areas:

- Basic Workplace Skills – traditional, applied basic skills, including reading, writing, and math, as well as new workplace basic skills, such as using technology and resources
- Basic Workplace Knowledge – basic knowledge about the nature of work in the modern, high-performance workplace
- Basic Employability Skills – cognitive and social skills needed to manage one's work environment and interact effectively within the workplace
- Lifelong Learning Skills – learning skills and strategies that enable one to continually pursue employment and learning opportunities

Each foundation skill and knowledge area is further organized into specific competencies that, when mastered, help learners achieve full competence in that skill. Performance indicators (activities, behaviors, or outcomes) were then identified for each competency. The skills, competencies, and performance indicators went through an extensive validation process by subject matter experts during the first year of the project.

Figure 1 illustrates two of the four competencies and related performance indicators for the basic workplace skill, "Speaks Clearly and Concisely." A competency-based approach to organizing and developing the framework was selected for two reasons. One, it provides the level of specificity required to develop a work-related basic skills curriculum and helps learners set realistic education goals that are based on skills and

competencies. Two, the competency lists provide a meaningful structure for informally documenting achievement. Learners can demonstrate what they know and are able to do before, during, and after participation in a program. In this way, the checklists can be used to provide a basis for instructional planning.

Figure 1. An Example of Competencies

<p><i>Competency W 4.1—Demonstrates knowledge of basic concepts about effective speech.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies audience and purpose for communicating• Organizes and paces presentation• Demonstrates effective speech conventions• Employs appropriate nonverbal behaviors• Determines listeners’ understanding by observing verbal and nonverbal cues• Monitors and adjusts language to the level of formality required <p><i>Competency W 4.2—Participates in basic conversation, discussion or interview.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses appropriate conversational techniques and behaviors• Participates in discussion, asking and answering questions and volunteering information as appropriate• Responds appropriately to listeners’ requests, questions, criticisms or praise

Uses of the Work-Based Foundation Skills Checklists

ABLE practitioners have used the Work-Based Foundation Skills Checklists (WBFSCs) in a variety of ways—to help learners set realistic goals, guide instructional planning, document and informally assess competency achievement, and link what is happening in the classroom to the contexts of students’ lives. For example, a student comes to an ABLE program with the goal of getting his GED. Program staff have an in-depth discussion with the learner to determine why he wants to get his GED and what he wants to be able to do as a result of participation in the program. His responses (to improve his math skills at work and at home) help the practitioner and learner select the appropriate WBFSCs to set short-term goals. Using a participatory approach, the practitioner and learner check off demonstrated competencies on the math checklist and decide which activities will best document his achievement in his portfolio. As one practitioner noted, “We post the student’s SMART goals on the bulletin board and put copies of the

competency list in the portfolio. The student reviews them frequently to self assess and select appropriate documentation for the portfolio.

Another program that prepares learners for work in a supported work environment provides each job coach with a booklet that contains copies of the WBFSCs that the student is working on in the classroom and expected to demonstrate on the job. As students demonstrate the competencies in the workplace, notations regarding degree of competence are made and dated in the booklets. Job coaches, practitioners, and learners then discuss together the job activities and how learners applied the targeted skills and competencies on the job.

Recently, the Foundation Skills Framework project staff analyzed the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) videos, workbooks, and online activities to identify the underlying foundation skills and competencies they address. A crosswalk of the WES and WBFSC systems was developed. For example, if an ABLER learner wants to improve his speaking skills for job interviews, the crosswalk suggests appropriate WES materials and activities. Project staff felt this resource would be a beneficial tool for Pennsylvania's ABLER programs that are using WES, either in their classrooms, in the local one-stop centers (CareerLinks), or in distance learning projects. While most workbook and online activities address reading and writing (and online activities certainly require technology skills), many also provide opportunities for learners to apply and demonstrate other work-based foundation skills, competencies, and knowledge.

***Use of Work-Based
Foundation Skills
Checklists***

Breaking larger goals into skills and competencies, and having a device for illustrating that and making the desired result apparent to the learner is motivating and helps with retention.

Using Pennsylvania's Checklists to Track Distance Learners' Progress

Although both the ALAC Checklists and the WBFSCs were developed for use with classroom students, they appear to have the potential to be effective tools for distance education students. Both checklists could be used as alternative assessments to supplement standardized assessment and provide links between goal setting, curriculum, instruction, and assessment in a distance learning setting. Below is an example of how they could be used.

Scenario

The OneStop Center referred Vinh Nguyen to the local Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), English as Second Language (ESL) program. The Case Manager at the OneStop noted that Vinh seemed to have adequate reading and writing skills but reported having difficulty with speaking and listening skills at work. This was an area he wanted to improve.

During his intake interview at the ESL program, Vinh described his busy work schedule and active family life and the challenges of having inadequate transportation during times that the ESL center-based classes occur. He mentioned having been employed for one

year in an entry-level, shift work position at a local distribution center. Vinh had not missed one day of work. However, despite several requests and applications, he had not been selected to interview for various job openings or position upgrades within the company. Vinh felt that working on his English-language speaking and listening skills might help him in his goal of successfully interviewing for advancement at his place of employment.

Vinh was given the CASAS ECS Listening Test, Form 63. His score placed him in the Low Intermediate ESL NRS Level and the Low Intermediate ESL Level of the ALAC ESL Speaking and Listening Checklist. From the CASAS test results, the ESL instructor noticed that Vinh was weak in the following CASAS competency areas, indicating possible priority areas to address:

- Identify procedures involved in interviewing for a job, such as arranging for an interview, acting and dressing appropriately, and selecting appropriate questions and responses
- Follow, clarify, give, or provide feedback to instructions; give and respond appropriately to criticism
- Ask for, give, follow, or clarify directions Identify or use appropriate language in general social situations (e.g., to greet, introduce, thank, apologize, compliment, express pleasure or regret)
- Identify or use appropriate language for informational purposes (e.g., to identify, describe, ask for information, state needs, command, agree or disagree, ask permission)

The instructor planned to retest with an appropriate follow-up form of the CASAS Listening Test after sufficient instructional time has passed to document Vinh's progress for the purpose of accountability to funders.

Using the Checklists to Link Goal-Setting, Instruction, and Assessment

The ESL instructor discussed the CASAS results with Vinh, relating the test results to his goal of getting a better job. She explained that the test results provide ideas about which general communication competencies Vinh should work on. A distance learning approach was selected as an appropriate instructional delivery system since Vinh had significant issues with transportation and schedule.

The discussion then focused on setting short-term goals that would help Vinh develop the specific skills and competencies to meet that goal. Together, Vinh and the ESL instructor reviewed the Speaking and Listening WBFSCs and selected those items that would be most essential to communicating more effectively in his work environment and interview situations. These would serve as the basis for additional instructional planning and informal assessment. Figure 2 Shows the WBFSC speaking and listening competencies.

Figure 2. WBFSC Speaking and Listening Competencies

Speaking Competencies

- W 4.2 Participates in basic conversation, discussion or interview
- Uses appropriate conversational techniques, such as including others in conversation or volunteering information
- W 4.3 Uses questioning strategies effectively to obtain or clarify information.
- Asks for basic assistance or information
- Asks clarification questions
- Repeats information for clarification

Listening Competencies

- W 3.2 Demonstrates comprehension of verbal message, conversation or other oral communication, including when the speaker is not physically present
- Accurately paraphrases and summarizes orally presented information
- Modifies a task based on changes provided in oral instructions

Finally, because Vinh's reasons for participating were clearly related to employment in general and communication for the purpose of interviewing for a higher-level position in particular, the WES curriculum was selected to ground instruction in a work-based context. Consulting the WES and WBFSC crosswalk, the instructor selected the WES Employment Workbook pages 89-99, Internet Units 9 and 12, and Video 9 as one component of instruction; performance on these materials would comprise one element of an informal assessment.

The following illustrates one goal that Vinh and the instructor developed that outlines an instructional activity developed using the WBFSCs and WES materials:

Goal #1: Within two weeks of starting the program, Vinh will practice his responses to five questions on page 92 of WES Employment Workbook (commonly asked interview questions) with one family member and one friend (perhaps a co-worker); each answer will include two key points. Vinh will summarize his responses in an e-mail message to his instructor. This e-mail will be used to document completion of the activity.

While the CASAS assessment and WBFSCs provide depth of information to develop goals based on specific skills and competencies, the Checklists provide breadth of information to describe what students should be able to do at a certain NRS educational functioning level. In Vinh's case, the ESL instructor consulted the Low Intermediate ESL

Level of the ALAC ESL Speaking and Listening Checklist to help with the design of additional, related supplemental activities for instruction and assessment that support Vinh's completion of his intake NRS level and provide opportunities to document progress in areas related to his main goal.

One ALACs Checklist competency on the Low Intermediate ESL Speaking and Listening ALAC reads: "can introduce self and others." The following illustrates a second goal that Vinh and the instructor developed outlining an instructional activity using this ALAC competency.

Goal #2: Within two weeks of starting the program, Vinh will practice introducing himself to the same family member and friend/co-worker; Vinh will ask the person working with him to videotape his introduction. The tape will document the completion of this activity and can be used for documentation of the targeted competency on the ALAC.

The instructor decided that assessment activities should integrate ongoing communication via telephone so that Vinh would have opportunities to demonstrate (that is, perform) the application of his speaking and listening skills. The following illustrates another goal developed using the Checklists, WBFSCs and supplemental activities based on the targeted WES materials for authentic assessment purposes:

Goal #3: Within three weeks of starting the program, Vinh will appropriately introduce himself and will give his responses to five questions on page 92 on the telephone with the ESL instructor; each answer will include three key points. This phone call will be audio taped, and the audiotape will be used by the instructor to assess attainment of the targeted WBFSC and ALAC competencies. Vinh and the instructor will then review the tape together.

In summary, each of the assessment components described above works with the student's goals and curriculum plan to provide a distance education experience that meets the learner's needs and documents the learner's educational progress in a variety of ways. The CASAS assessment provides a reliable and valid estimation of the learner's functioning level and a preliminary idea of some strengths and needs in the area of adult learner competencies. The WBFSCs provide a goal setting and assessment tool to delineate specific skills inherent in these competencies and track the learner's achievement of these skills through authentic assessment. The ALACs Checklists provide related, supporting competencies important at the learner's educational functioning level. These can also provide a focus for related instruction and a tool for additional authentic assessment. The learner's goals provide the context that allows the instructor to utilize the tools to tailor the instruction and assessment to the learner's needs.

Benefits and Challenges

Using these checklists in distance instruction has several potential challenges and benefits. Challenges include training and developing teachers so that they have the tools and skills to implement the components in the way described in a distance setting.

Additionally, teachers would need time and program/administrative support to implement and adapt such an approach to their own environments (e.g., student/program needs including whether the program offers fixed instructional periods or is open entry/open exit and the amount of time students typically remain in the program). Further, distance teachers would have to develop an additional set of data collection approaches not addressed in the current system. Yet while distance teachers will need to be more creative in using the checklist systems, the benefits of this approach are ample. First, the checklist system is truly learner-centered. Second, it coordinates and connects all aspects of teaching/learning cycle. It encourage instructors to teach by assessing and working with students more carefully -- in an ongoing way that helps them develop the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to achieve their personal goals. Finally, it provides centers with important information on their students' progress.

Using Portfolios to Assess Student Progress: Ohio's Uniform Standardized Portfolio for Adult Education

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Portfolios offer another approach to assessing student work. Used effectively, they are far more than a storage place for completed or exemplary work. They allow teachers and students to demonstrate growth in students' abilities, identify strengths and weaknesses and provide a way for students to reflect on their work. Although the portfolio concept may not be widely used in adult education, it is accepted as an alternative method of assessing student work in both K-12 and college writing classes (Elbow, 1991). Portfolios can be formalized to include specific types of evidence of student progress, such as standardized test scores, class work and teacher-completed checklists. For portfolios to be used effectively in assessment and lesson planning, the criteria for what to include must be developed and then teachers need to be trained to use the portfolio system. This section discusses the development of Ohio's Uniform Portfolio System (UPS) for adult learners; it explores the rationale behind portfolio usage, implementation, training, and offers recommendations regarding potential uses of the Ohio's portfolio system in distance education.

Development of the Uniform Portfolio System

Ohio's Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) teachers have routinely supplemented standardized testing with portfolio assessment to gather ongoing evidence of performance. These were primarily demonstration portfolios holding best-work samples or final products. Students liked the idea of showcasing their best work and instructors found the portfolio to be a good tool to use in interaction with students about their learning. The instructor and student were the sole judges of how the portfolio was used and what was included. There were no requirements from the state about portfolio use (e.g. what to include, how to score, how to manage).

The portfolio landscape changed with the creation of the National Reporting System (NRS) requirements in 1999. The NRS guidelines opened the door for the development and use of performance assessment as an accountability measure, and Ohio took advantage of that opportunity. In creating its response to the NRS requirements, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) created the Ohio Performance Accountability System (OPAS) and the portfolio became a key component of that system. The ODE ABLE state office determined that every student enrolled in an Ohio ABLE program would have a portfolio. Each student would continue to be pre- and post-tested with a standardized

assessment instrument to determine the educational functioning level (EFL) placement and advancement, and the portfolio would support progress towards advancement. The purposes of the portfolio were many:

- To serve as a safety net for making progress decisions about those students who drop out before a post test score could be obtained
- To provide instructors with an organized method of determining student progress without relying solely on standardized test scores
- To foster student participation/ownership in the learning process
- To have an up-to-date reference point for students to review their progress towards meeting their stated academic and personal goals

The state leadership entered the process with a long-range plan. The first step was to develop the contents and processes for portfolio usage. This was followed by the development of rubrics and scoring protocols. Finally, validation studies of the complete portfolio system would be conducted.

To research the development of a statewide portfolio system, the Ohio ABLE state office turned to the Central/Southeast Resource Center at Ohio University. Their work resulted in the identification of criteria for contents, guiding competencies for math, reading, and writing, and a system for documentation of progress. An introductory training was presented via teleconference for programs throughout the state and ABLE programs were to begin initial use of the portfolio on July 1, 2000.

The ABLE Evaluation Design Project at the Ohio State University managed phase two of the UPS implementation. Their task was to design and deliver program level training in the components of the portfolio system throughout the state. Follow-up trainings to the teleconferences included a review of the content criteria, templates for forms, basic portfolio management, suggestions for instructional use, and timelines for reporting progress to the state. A total of twenty-two trainings were delivered throughout the state. The four Ohio Regional Resource Centers continue to provide professional development support on portfolio use.

Portfolio Requirements

Every portfolio must include specific components. These requirements create a standardization of portfolios across all adult education providers throughout the state. Required portfolio elements are presented in Figure 3.

Portfolios are reviewed every 90 days and a progress form is completed for each student. The progress data is entered into ABLELink, Ohio ABLE's information management system. This portion of the portfolio system also assists teachers in making decisions about the appropriateness of administering a standardized test to determine level

advancement readiness. Students must complete all of the benchmarks within a level at a mastery rate determined by the program. *The completed rubrics will bring some change to this system.*

Figure 3: Required Portfolio Components

Required Component	Description
Goal Form	This document records the student's primary, secondary and personal goals.
Standardized test scores	The test scores are recorded in the portfolio. They provide evidence of placement in the appropriate EFL.
Individual Learning Plan	This document is evidence that learning activities are directly related to learner goal and needs; it also serves as an ongoing check of instruction for the teacher and progress for the student. This is a collaborative effort between student and instructor
Samples of student work	These documents are the evidence of the student's performance. The work is selected by the student and the instructor.
Reporting Forms	These forms (called documentation logs during Fiscal year 2003) identify the standards and benchmarks of the content areas in which the student is working. It serves as a place to record assessment (informal and formal) results as the student works towards his/her goals. The collected student work provides the evidence of these assessments.
Learning Styles Inventory	Added to Fiscal year 2004. The results from the inventory provide valuable information that can be used by the student and the instructor in planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning activities.

Refining the Portfolio System

Programs continue to fine-tune the portfolio work. Using the portfolio as an assessment and accountability tool has required instructors and administrators to review their processes, resources, and management skills. Instructors particularly had to rethink what progress indicators they used and how the student could be involved in the decision-making. Paperwork associated with the portfolio necessitated changes in classroom procedures. Administrators had to make changes in program hours and funding so that instructors could be compensated for the time involved with portfolio review. Programs and instructors continue to creatively meet the challenges posed by the portfolio system.

While programs were embedding the portfolio into their program process, Ohio State University was working on the third phase of the portfolio system by preparing to create rubrics and conduct a series of validation studies. As is often the case with a multi-phased plan, events occur that change the timetable. The original competencies in use with the portfolio were found to be inadequate measures of performance by the field and the decision was made to move to a standards and benchmarks system. Ohio adopted the **Read with Understanding, Convey Ideas in Writing, and Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate** standards from Equipped for the Future. This adoption required the development of benchmarks and validation of those benchmarks with NRS

Educational Functioning Levels. Benchmarks were written by task forces made up of ABLE personnel with experience and expertise in the content areas named by the three standards. Two regional institutes held in August of this year provided initial professional development in using the standards and benchmarks. A selected number of ABLE programs are currently serving as pilot sites for the validation study on the rubrics. The completed portfolio system is expected by July 1, 2004.

Adapting the Uniform Portfolio System for Distance Instruction

Ohio created their portfolio system to provide students and programs with alternative methods for monitoring and assessing progress towards goals in the traditional classroom. In addition, the portfolio can be used to create a learner-centered approach, in which students monitor and evaluate their work and involvement in the learning process. Although not designed with distance education in mind, the portfolio approach may be an effective way for distance teachers to assess their students' progress on an ongoing basis. This section discusses how the portfolio was used in a pilot program exploring the use of distance education for adult learners.

During fiscal year 2003, seven Ohio sites were selected to start their journey with implementing distance instruction for adult basic learners. For instruction, the pilot sites used GED Connection. The curriculum includes 39 half-hour video programs, three workbooks, free Web-based GED Connection learning activities, a Teacher's Guide and an on-line management system. In the first year of the pilot study, the ODE - ABLE office gave the pilot sites flexibility in terms of being required to include their learners in ABLELink, Ohio's ABLE Information Management System.

The ABLE instructors who participated in the pilot project had experience utilizing the UPS in the traditional classroom; however, this would be their first attempt at applying the UPS requirements to the distance-learning environment. Since the pilot sites had prior knowledge of the requirements, they could provide guidance on what adjustments need to be made for using the portfolio when working at a distance.

Selecting the Work to Be Used for Instructional Planning and in Evaluating Progress

Pilot programs attempted to collect materials they believed would be beneficial and useful for the learner and the instructor. All materials the pilot sites collected and used during fiscal year 2003 were matched with the documentation logs to determine and track progress, as well as make instructional decisions. The materials included were:

- Documentation from the on-line portfolios within GED Connection
- E-mail correspondence
- Writing samples
- Completed workbook assignments, attached when applicable to the documentation logs
- Copies of the online practice test and charts

- Items the instructor considered to be good *on-line* materials (i.e. tests, Internet activities, modules) that correlated to the UPS
- Copies of logs of student contact with a summary of the topics addressed, which includes phone calls and checking online lessons
- Documentation logs (now referred to as Reporting forms), assessment results, goal sheet and Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
- Learning maps and assignment sheets designed by the pilot programs

Using the collected work to meet student and instructor needs

During the first year, pilot sites provided instruction from February-June. This section describes the approaches that two of these sites took toward using the portfolio with their distance education students during that time. Each site was encouraged to explore how they might best use the information included in the students' portfolios to guide instruction.

One site included a range of materials and information in the portfolios for their distance education students. Students were first pre-tested using the TABE. The site then used charts that they created (called correlation charts) in conjunction with the TABE scores to make decisions about which topics to address for instruction. Instructors then based their next steps for learners on the amount of correct work that was submitted. Instructors also used a learning map, which they designed for each subject area. The learning map was developed as a way to keep the learner on track as they went through the workbooks, videos and the Internet materials. Learners received a copy of the learning map to track their progress. Thus, the materials included in the portfolio guided instruction in several ways. The pre-test required by the portfolio provided a baseline from which to begin instruction. By using the quality of the students' work as the basis for making assignments, teachers were involved in an ongoing assessment process. The learning map provided another means through which both the teacher and the students could monitor the student's progress through the GEDC curriculum.

Another pilot site created different materials for the distance students' portfolios. They developed assignment sheets to record the learners' completed online lessons. Each teacher also maintained a log of their contacts with the students. They recorded the type of contact (e.g., phone call, e-mail etc.) and a summary of the topics discussed. The information that was kept in the portfolio assisted the instructors with determining what the learner needed to complete, and provided guidance to the adult learners on what would be required of him/her during the course of instruction.

Determining what, and how much, information to include in the portfolio

In the first year of the pilot test, sites had the flexibility of determining the kind of student work they would include in the portfolio system. To some degree, pilot sites will have

the same kind of flexibility of determining what material they should include for Fiscal Year 2004. However, if the pilot site plans to include the learner in ABLELink, they must maintain portfolios for distance learning using Ohio ABLE's Standards-Based Education (SBE) that were implemented statewide July 2003.

According to the Ohio ABLE Assessment Policy, there should be physical evidence in a learner's portfolio to demonstrate beginning and ending points that the instructor is using to verify completion of the benchmark. For example, the TABE test results could serve as the initial evidence of performance because the results can be correlated to the standards and benchmarks. At a minimum, the evidence in the portfolio must be in the subject area that the instructor is tracking for the student's progress.

The pilot sites all used GED Connection for student instruction. For the online portion of the curriculum students store all of their work in an online portfolio system. During the first year of the study, pilot sites asked whether they needed to print copies of this material to include in the UPS. For now, they are allowed to leave this material in the GEDC system. However, there is concern about the stability of the GEDC system. How long will the information stored in the online portfolios be accessible to instructors once the learner is considered inactive? ABLE programs are required to keep learner records for a year after instruction is complete. Assurance is needed from Kentucky Educational Television (KET) (the organization responsible for the online component of GEDC) that they will keep the portfolios of students accessible for at least one year beyond when a student becomes inactive on the system.

Issues for Future Consideration

Prior to starting the second year, pilot sites were already thinking how they were going to approach Ohio ABLE's Standards-Based Education (SBE) with their distance learners. All the pilot sites have stated that they plan to include a wider variety and more sophisticated samples of student work in the portfolios. In addition, the pilot sites plan to work more closely with their adult learners to discuss and review the kinds of materials that should be included in the portfolio and why. This will provide an opportunity for the portfolio to help guide instructional planning. As stated previously, the greatest challenge for all the pilot sites during year two is aligning the GED Connection curriculum with the new standards. During this instructional year, the pilot sites have been asked to work with the distance learning coordinator and other members of Ohio's Project IDEAL Advisory Committee, in developing distance examples using Ohio's Uniform Portfolio System (UPS). As pilot sites start the second year of the distance pilot study and approach the third year of instruction there are several issues that need to be addressed:

- Providing individual feedback regarding performance and progress towards goals
- Determining what is important and relevant for portfolio inclusion
- Discussing what makes a particular piece an appropriate choice for inclusion in the portfolio

- The kinds of work that should be included when working at a distance and what information will meet portfolio requirements
- Determining how much is enough
- Method used to collect the information when working at a distance
- Demonstrating how the student work reflects the standards and benchmarks being used by the student
- Challenges of collecting evidence in a distance-learning environment compared to a traditional classroom

By addressing these issues, the distance education pilot sites in Ohio will gain a better understanding of the most effective ways of using portfolios with their distance learning students. This knowledge will assist teachers in assessing students on an ongoing basis and will provide guidance in structuring educational plans to meet individual students' needs.

Using Online Quizzes to Assess Student Progress

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Classroom teachers regularly use quizzes and tests as a way to assess student progress. In addition to their role in grading, these tests are tied directly to the content being taught and provide valuable information on how well students mastered that content. Quizzes can serve as guideposts for both teachers and students to determine particular areas where students need additional support, and thus provide a direction for further instruction. Distance teachers lack an easy way to obtain mastery information from their students. (Some computer-assisted instruction programs such as PLATO and SkillsTutor have quizzes built into their lessons. Students see the detailed results immediately. But the management systems for these programs do not provide teachers with the same level of diagnostic information, nor do they alert teachers when students have taken a quiz.) This section describes the initial attempt to transfer the quizzes included in the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) workbooks to an online format with diagnostic information sent to both student and teacher.

Background


Several Project IDEAL States use Workplace Essential Skills (WES) with their distance learning students. WES is a multimedia curriculum comprised of videotapes, workbooks and online lessons separated into four strands: Employment Skills, Workplace Communication and Writing Skills, Workplace Mathematics, and Workplace Reading. Each workbook contains a Skills Preview and Skills Review quiz. The Skills Preview can help the teacher and student determine what areas the student needs to study. When combined with information from the Skills Review students and teachers can measure progress in meeting the goals and thus serve as a valuable tool for instructional planning. However, use of the Skills Review and Skills Preview quizzes is contingent upon the student working in the workbook *and* the teacher having access to that work. Although some of the teachers have intermittent face-to-face contact with their students, and can easily examine their workbooks, other teachers work with their students totally at a distance and do not have an easy way to examine information in the Preview and Review quizzes. Many teachers expressed interest in online versions of the Skills Previews and Review quizzes available to these students. In response to this interest, Project IDEAL undertook a pilot test of creating online versions of these quizzes. The development of these quizzes and ways in which they can be used are described in this section.

Creating the Quizzes Online

The goal for the pilot phase for the WES online quizzes was to replicate, as closely as possible, the print versions of the quizzes in an online medium. Most of the items in the quizzes were multiple choice, although a few questions did require the student to supply a short answer. For the majority of the questions, the text was duplicated exactly. For open-ended questions, Project IDEAL staff developed multiple-choice responses.

The WES online quizzes were created using a Perl CGI script entitled Quiztest, written by Kristina L. Pfaff-Harris (<http://www.tesol.net/scripts/>). Available to educators free-of-cost, Quiztest allows teachers to easily create multiple-choice, true-false, and short-answer quizzes. Early testing of Quiztest indicated that its short-answer option was not robust enough for the potential range of answers adult learners might produce in the WES quizzes. Thus, the Project IDEAL staff decided to re-write the short-answer questions to have multiple-choice responses. WES quizzes range in length from 30 to 40 questions depending on the topic. All of the quizzes include scanned graphics from the workbook when the quiz items are based on a graphic. An example appears below.

WES Employment Skills Preview Quiz



Project IDEAL
improving distance education for adult learners

Employment Skills Preview - Instructor: Rochele Hepler

This is the employment skills preview test. Please give the test enough time to load before proceeding.

Please enter your Full Name:

Your Email Address:

1: Questions 1-4 are based on the following situation:

CONSTRUCTION: Ned is learning more about different career paths and job openings. He needs to find a full-time job that will provide a steady income. Ned needs to earn at least \$8 per hour to pay his bills. If possible, he would like to earn more so that he can put some money in savings. Ned needs a job with opportunities for advancement.

Ned prefers working outdoors. He likes to use tools and make things with his hands. Ned would like to get a job in construction, but he has no formal experience or training. Most jobs in the newspaper advertisements require at least one year of experience.

1: Ned's neighbor tells him about a job opening as a helper at a car repair shop. Which of the following things does Ned not need to find out to see whether the job will fit his needs?

- what the starting pay is
- whether he will like his co-workers
- whether there will be a chance to move up in the company
- whether the job is full-time or part-time

2: Ned finds out that the starting pay for a job at the car repair shop is \$7.50 per hour, but Ned can get a raise of 30 cents per hour after he works there for six months. If earning \$8 per hour immediately is the most important job requirement for Ned, he should

- take the job until he can find a better-paying one
- find ways to get by on less money
- take the job and look for a second part-time job
- look for another job that pays at least \$8 an hour

When learners complete the quiz, they click on a button marked “Grade Quiz” which sends the quiz results to the teacher. The learner is then forwarded to a results page. This page allows the learners to see their overall score, email the results to their own email account and redisplay the quiz with correct and incorrect answers marked. An illustration is shown below.

2. Renaldo should have talked about his children when the customer said, "You know how teenagers are!"

True ... **INCORRECT**

The correct answer was: *False*

3. Renaldo did not listen carefully when the customer describes his needs.

True ... **INCORRECT**

The correct answer was: *False*

4. The customer's wrinkled brow was a nonverbal message that he didn't understand what Renaldo had said.

True ... **CORRECT**

5. When Renaldo asked, "Do you think mailboxes would help out?" he was checking whether the customer understood his explanation.

True ... **CORRECT**

6. The customer checked his understanding by restating what he had heard.

True ... **CORRECT**

7. Renaldo spoke in a negative tone of voice.

True ... **INCORRECT**

The correct answer was: *False*

At the very bottom of the page is text stating how many questions in the quiz were answered correctly and the corresponding percentage (e.g. 13 out of 39 correct, or 33.33%). The learner may now exit the system.

Using Online Quizzes to Guide Instructional Planning

How could teachers use this information to guide instructional planning? Because the quizzes are directly linked to the content covered in Workplace Essential Skills, the Preview can provide teachers and students with information about the students' strengths and weaknesses before they begin their studies. For example, the online Skills Preview in Workplace Reading may indicate that a student is skilled at reading for a purpose but has difficulties reading forms and charts and following written directions. The teacher can then direct the student to the WES units that cover those content areas. After the student has completed the assigned lessons, the online Skills Review can be used to assess the student's progress. Results of the Skills Review may indicate that the student has mastered the content, or may suggest that additional work is still needed in a particular area. The teacher may suggest that the student revisit the WES materials or provide supplemental instructional materials to reinforce the content.

The online quizzes replicate most of the features of an in-class quiz: both student and teacher have access to test results with item-level analysis of responses. To be useful as a guide to instruction a teacher needs to work out a strategy for communicating with the distant student that replicates the face-to-face counseling session that makes quiz results useful as a tool in the classroom.

Compared to the checklists and portfolio approaches described earlier, the multiple-choice online quizzes designed for WES are limited in a fundamental way. Quiz

questions are designed to sample a broad knowledge area and see if a learner can recognize—not generate—correct information. They can't represent a learner's knowledge and skills in a fulsome way. The checklists ask a human judge to evaluate how well a learner has mastered a topic based on observation of the appropriate behavior. Similar to a quiz, a checklist item could specify that the learner is able to demonstrate mastery of a knowledge domain. But it could also ask the teacher the teacher to certify that the learner can write an essay that incorporates the knowledge, or that the learner has demonstrated that s/he can fill out a job application neatly, providing all the requested information and spelling every entry correctly. These types of behaviors can't be assessed with a multiple-choice quiz such as the one developed for WES. While it would be possible to design an online assessment activity that might include short answer items, essays or even forms to complete, such activities would lack the automatic feedback feature of the WES multiple-choice quizzes and instead require a teacher to correct the quiz. It is likely that a variety of online assessment tools, each serving a slightly different function, could be developed to meet a variety of needs.

Final Thoughts

Assessment to gauge student progress is important for distance teachers as they strive to create educational plans tailored to students' needs. Compared to their classroom counterparts, distance teachers have fewer sources of day-to-day feedback on how well students comprehend and have mastered course content. Thus, it becomes critical to develop methods that distance teachers can use to gather this information.

In order to be effective, these methods must be based upon a solid understanding of how adult basic learners learn when studying at a distance. This area of investigation is relatively new, but is rapidly expanding. Each of the Project IDEAL states is contributing knowledge about how to recruit, orient and teach adult learners at a distance. This combined knowledge will create a foundation on which teaching and assessment for progress can be linked in order to most effectively meet students' needs.

As distance education for adult basic learners continues to evolve and expand, new and creative methods for assessing students progress will be developed. Some of these may closely resemble classroom practices, while others may be radical departures from what is done in traditional programs. Because there is such diversity in the scope and nature of distance education programs, it is likely that a variety of approaches for assessing distance students ongoing progress will be needed. For example, methods for assessing students studying for a GED at a distance will probably look quite different from methods for assessing studying at a distance to gain basic workplace skills. Some tools may be targeted to a specific curriculum (such as the online versions of WES quizzes) while other approaches may be designed for use across a range of curricula (such as the standardized portfolio developed by the Ohio Department of Education). The most effective tools will be able to provide feedback to both teachers and students that will help shape instructional planning and motivate the students to continue their education.

The development of these tools will take time and effort and will require support from policy makers at both the state and federal levels. Development will hinge on policy makers' recognition of the potential role of distance education in reaching adult learners and the differences between classroom-based and distance education. In addition, the development of these tools will involve creativity and innovation on part of developers, administrator and teachers as they work to create methods that are effective for distance learners.

This paper has examined the need for effective methods to assess student progress for adult learners studying at a distance, with an emphasis on using those assessment tools to help guide instructional planning. It has presented three innovative approaches that have the potential to provide teachers, administrators and students with valuable feedback about ongoing student progress. However, it is too early to know how effective these methods will be in assessing distance students to gauge progress, and how well teachers can use these assessments to guide instructional planning; additional experience in the field should provide some insights into these issues. Moreover, these three approaches represent only a first look at what *might* be possible. They were not intended to be a

comprehensive listing of the possible options, but rather were presented to suggest options and stimulate thinking about other possible approaches to assessing distance students for ongoing progress. This remains a wide-open field.

Appendix

Examples of Checklists from Pennsylvania

Math Checklist

Beginning Basic Education Level

Student Name: _____

Student Number: _____

Program Year: ____ - ____

For estimated completion of the Beginning Basic Education Level, the learner will demonstrate eight of the following ten competencies:

- ___ Can correctly order in sequence whole numbers up to three digits
- ___ Can read three-digit whole numbers
- ___ Can write three-digit whole numbers
- ___ Can read analog clock time and perform simple calculations (e.g., what time will it be in 40 minutes)
- ___ Can locate dates on a calendar in response to a prompt
- ___ Can do simple measurements with a ruler, yardstick, or tape measure
- ___ Can add and subtract three-digit positive whole numbers without carry or borrow
- ___ Can multiply and divide single-digit numbers with whole number results
- ___ Can identify simple fractions (e.g., halves, thirds, fourths, eighths, sixteenths)
- ___ Can count coins and currency

ESL Reading Checklist

Low Advanced ESL Level

Student Name: _____

Student Number: _____

Program Year: ____ - ____

For estimated completion of the Low Advanced ESL Level, the learner will demonstrate eight of the following ten competencies:

- _____ Reads and comprehends complex, multi-step directions or instructions
- _____ Reads and can recap a moderately complex literary text, e.g., a novel, novel excerpt, short story, or short story excerpt
- _____ Locates information in a moderately complex literary text, e.g., novel, novel excerpt, short story, or short story excerpt
- _____ Answers questions requiring inferencing (that is, developing knowledge about information implied but not directly stated) based on a moderately complex literary text or excerpt from such text
- _____ Reads and can select or state a summary statement or main idea for moderately complex expository text (e.g., editorial, newspaper or magazine article, textbook chapter) or excerpt from such text
- _____ Identifies the meaning of new or unfamiliar vocabulary words in a moderately complex literary text
- _____ Locates information in a moderately complex expository text (e.g., editorial, newspaper or magazine article, textbook chapter) or excerpt from such text
- _____ Answers questions requiring inferencing based on a moderately complex expository text or excerpt from such text
- _____ Distinguishes fact from opinion in a moderately complex expository text or excerpt from such text
- _____ Identifies the meaning of new or unfamiliar vocabulary words in a moderately complex expository text or excerpt from such text

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