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## ABSTRACT

This document presents seven papers prepared by experts in the field of adult education on the issues related to developing and implementing quality indicators from the perspective of their program areas or organizational affiliations. "Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Basic Education" (Mary Williams) addresses the appropriateness of indicators of program quality that were developed by Pelavin Associates for adult basic education (ABE). "Indicators of Program Quality: An ESL Programming Perspective" (Inaam Mansoor) examines Pelavin's sample outline of proposed areas in which indicators would be addressed in English as a second language and some sample data elements for the indicators. "Indicators of Program Quality: Adult Secondary Education Programs" (Mary Ann Corley) suggests a repositioning of some indicators, a more specific detailing of others, and the addition of one new indicator. "Quality Indicators of Adult Education Programs for Local Education Agencies" (Connie Eichhorn) suggests additional indicators and dimensions more applicable to local agency programs. "Community College Delivery of ABE: Measuring Effectiveness" (Donna Lane) describes the community college system in Oregon and appropriate indicators. "A New Framework for Assessing Program Quality: Meeting the Challenge of the National Literacy Act of 1991" (Sondra Stein) suggests a shift in the proposed approach to ensure proper evaluation of programs offered by community-based providers. "Indicators of Program Quality for Volunteer Literacy Programs" (Kevin Smith) suggests a set of program quality standards specific to volunteer literacy programs. A list of the sample quality indicators used as a guide by the paper writers is appended. (YLB)

**PROGRAM AND PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES ON  
DEVELOPING INDICATORS OF PROGRAM  
QUALITY FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Literacy Act of 1991 requires the states to develop indicators of program quality for adult education programs by July 1993. To assist states with this process, the Act also requires the Department of Education to develop by July 1992 model indicators of program quality as guidance to states (Section 361(c) of the Adult Education Act). The Act requires the indicators to be developed through consultation with experts, educators and administrators of adult education. To develop the model indicators, the Department established a comprehensive process that included reviewing current state indicators and evaluation criteria; reviewing indicators used by other Federal education and training programs; holding focus groups of a broad segment of adult education providers, researchers, students and administrators; and consulting with state directors of adult education<sup>1</sup>. Pelavin Associates, Inc. assisted the Department in this process.

To assist in the indicator development process, the Department asked seven experts in the field -- researchers, administrators and practitioners -- to write brief papers on the issues related to developing and implementing quality indicators from the perspective of their program area or organizational affiliation. The experts represented the three program areas funded under the Adult Education Act -- adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE) and English-as-a-second language (ESL) and the four main providers of instructional services (local educational agencies, community-based organizations, community colleges, and volunteer organizations). Pelavin Associates provided background materials and a preliminary list of

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<sup>1</sup>The model indicator development process and the indicators are described in *Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs*, available from the Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse, U. S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202-7240, (202) 205-9996.

indicators to the paper writers to assist them (see Appendix). The writers were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Are there any unique aspects of your program area that should be taken into account in the development on indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
- Are these indicators appropriate for your program area? Are any unnecessary or should more be added? If so, specify which and the reasons the measure should be added or deleted.
- What problems or other issues would confront your area when using these or similar indicators?

This document presents the seven papers prepared for this project. The papers were first used by the Department to inform decisions about the model indicators and by participants in the focus groups as part of their preparations for the discussion. The papers will now assist states as they work toward developing their own indicators. The Department gratefully acknowledges the invaluable contribution of these professionals.

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# INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

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The National Literacy Act, which amends the Adult Education Act, requires that by July of 1993, states develop indicators of program quality for use in evaluating adult education programs. The indicators must be used to determine whether programs are effective. Three areas are explicitly cited as areas of concern in the development of indicators. They are:

- Recruitment;
- Retention; and
- Improvement in literacy skills of participants.

The National Literacy Act also charges the Secretary of Education with the responsibility of developing indicators of program quality that can be used as models by states and local programs. The indicators must take into account different conditions under which programs operate and be modified as better means of assessing quality are identified.

Pelavin Associates has defined an evaluation framework for adult education that is both comprehensive and flexible. The framework, published in July of 1991, is built around the factors that, according to federal regulations, must be "considered" by states in evaluating recipients of adult education funds. The framework document presents multiple evaluation options on three levels of complexity and sophistication.

In the introductory pages of the framework document, the assumption is made that three program components -- context, processes and students -- interact to produce measurable outcomes, and that an evaluation should (among other things) "Develop key indicators of the components of adult education programs, with emphasis on program outcomes." Subsumed under

headings that correspond to the three components are the factors that the regulations require to be considered in evaluating recipients, along with other evaluative elements that pop up elsewhere in the regulations, e.g., use of standardized test data.

Several reviewers, including myself, were asked to review a document entitled "Sample Indicators of Program Quality," which extracts the major evaluation topics from the framework, expands or changes them somewhat (in part reflecting changes in the list of evaluation factors in the proposed new regulations), and states them in terms that are measurable or observable. My response was supposed to address appropriateness of these indicators for adult basic education, problems or issues that would confront adult basic education programs in using them, and unique aspects of adult basic education that should be taken into account including what adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary.

In attempting to make sense of the sample indicators or derivations thereof as models for consideration by the states, I found myself confronting various questions and evolving a set of principles to apply in selecting or developing indicators. This paper will address the assigned topics, while incorporating a strategy for thinking through this complex problem.

The sample indicators appear to represent the "key indicators of the components" called for in the framework. But is a "key indicator of a component" and a "quality indicator" one in the same? The material appears to use them interchangeably. Semantics suggests to me that the former term would be useful in characterizing or operationally defining a program feature or requirement, or for identifying any data that helps monitor, verify, describe, or ascertain the extent of a feature or requirement. The latter term, however, suggests the dimension of value, merit or worth. For example, one of the items listed as a sample quality indicator is "existence of an advisory board." We can observe that an advisory board exists (indicator of the component "community input in program development"), but are we willing to say that the mere existence of



an advisory board contributes to program quality? Furthermore, are we willing to accept the "community input" component as a stand-alone manifestation of program quality?

The evaluation literature makes a useful distinction between a "primary indicator" and a "secondary indicator." In fact, Scriven<sup>1</sup> suggests using the term "criterion" to refer to the former and "indicator" to the latter, to reduce confusion. The criterion, he says, essentially defines or embodies success or truth, while the indicator is empirically connected to (a correlate of) the criterion. In the previous example, "community input" is the criterion (success/truth) while "advisory board" is the (secondary) indicator: if you can observe (empirically determine) the existence of the advisory board, then the program is successful on the quality dimension of "community input."

The term "quality indicator" suggests that we are talking about correlates of whatever we agree constitutes success or truth in adult education programs. There is considerable risk not only that we may come up with correlates that are of questionable validity (perhaps because we do not have empirical evidence that they are consistently associated with the criterion), but that the "components" themselves may be questionable as what we want (in Scriven's words) "to count as the payoff."

It is tempting to produce a laundry list of indicators for each and every dimension (component) of a program that might exist. In fact, such a laundry list might have value as a guide to monitoring, i.e., to establish a consistent way that state and federal program requirements can be met. Or, it might serve a useful purpose as a program planning checklist, especially if it incorporates what is known about best practice in the field. But when we get to the point of making quality (value) judgments about a program, judgments that not only may but perhaps

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<sup>1</sup>Scriven, Michael, *Evaluation Thesaurus*, Fourth Edition, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California, 1991.

should affect the lives of students and the livelihoods of staff, we should be focusing on matters of ultimate consequence. Questions which can guide our thinking on this issue are, "Is this component the end we are looking for or is it a means to get at something else?," and "Does this component stand alone as a reflection of success?" For example, is our payoff community input, or is it something more, such as whether the needs of all target populations represented by our advisors are being addressed? Is it sufficient for these to be addressed, or do they have to be met? Unless we define the outcomes we are looking for in forming an advisory board, how will we make appropriate membership selections, define duties, and so on?

Even if every item on our laundry list of components can be justified in some way, this approach tends to give every element equal weight. How many factors can a manager reasonably plan for, assess, fund, train for, hold dialogue on, implement, coordinate, collect data on, and describe on a report form? How are priorities to be set? More importantly, how many of these activities are directly serve our main mission or purpose, as opposed to how many are means to a more important end? If we "require" multiple means as well as ends, how sure are we that they are all necessary *and* sufficient to reach the ends? Do they *indubitably* lead to the end, *sometimes* lead to the end, or *possibly* lead to the end given a host of other circumstances? For example, if a program uses ostensibly excellent recruitment strategies (diverse, targeted to special populations, makes use of media, interagency linkages, etc.) but is not successful in actually recruiting the students, is it an excellent program?

If we can agree on, first, what in and of itself constitutes success (our criteria); second, how we will know those factors when we see them (indicators); and third, how much needs to be there (standards), we will have the basis for a good evaluation process.

I argue that, with only a few possible exceptions, outcome measures should be considered as our criteria. Indicators, then, ought to be those factors which best and most closely measure or

represent the outcomes. The other non-outcome program components (context and process) are presumably those that research and/or practice tell us are most likely to bring about the outcomes. But are we sure enough about the degree and consistency with which these factors contribute to the outcomes to declare programs good, bad, effective, or ineffective on basis of their existence, separately from the outcomes?

If we keep our criteria and indicators in the outcome realm, we can then look for existence of the instrumental or contributory factors as clues to understand differential performance on the outcome measures. If we amass enough data, we may find that there are a few of these contributory factors that so reliably lead to the desired outcomes that we are willing to judge programs on the basis of those factors. More usefully, we can over time refine our knowledge about what leads to success, refine our planning tools, provide training and technical assistance that is targeted to making the right interventions, and fund processes and systems that are linked to positive outcomes -- while continuing to make judgments about program quality on outcome-related performance.

When we think of how "conventional wisdom" has changed in adult basic education, it is clear that there can be danger in making judgments about program quality without defining the desired outcomes and researching whether interventions lead to the outcomes in question. Not too long ago, highly individualized and independent instruction was thought to be indicative of best practice. Now, as research has shown the importance of the ability to work in interdependent groups, especially in the workplace, programs are shifting to small group and cooperative learning.

The hard part is, how do we zero in on the important outcomes? The obvious place to start is with the purposes that undergird the program and with any explicitly stated program outcomes.

The purpose of the Adult Education Act (paraphrased) is to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the literacy skills requisite to citizenship and productive employment, and to improve services to educationally disadvantaged adults, through programs that will, first, *enable those adults to acquire basic skills for literate functioning*; second, *provide them with sufficient basic skills to benefit from job training and to retain employment*; and third, *enable adults who so desire to complete the secondary school level*.

The three areas cited in the National Literacy Act as minimal considerations in the development of indicators of program quality (*recruitment, retention and learning gains*) reflect measurable program results. Indicators will need to be established for all three of these factors because of the requirements of the law, but because only learning gains could be defended as a meaningful end of instruction, making judgments on the basis of the other two factors will be problematic. Example: A program recruits 100 learners. Seventy of them test below the sixth grade level, 20 test between 6th and 9th, and 10 above 9th. Let's assume that our standards reward this program in recruitment because of the large percentage of educationally disadvantaged and adult basic education clients it reaches. Let's also assume that our standards reward programs that retain students for at least 100 hours of instruction. But our 10 high level students could pass the GED after 20-30 hours of study. Do we give precedence to achieving the *outcome* of secondary completion, or persuade students to stay 70 hours beyond what is necessary in order to avoid bringing the retention rate down? Due care must be exercised not only in establishing sensible indicators and standards for such criteria, but in determining sensible rewards, sanctions and recommendations for practice based on measured performance.

There are a few areas in which our criteria of quality may not meet the test of the "ultimate desired end." For example, if we say that a program's enrollment should reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the community, we would be justified on both moral and legal

grounds. Meeting this type of criterion would be *necessary*, but not *sufficient* for quality; the program would *also* have to meet other outcome criteria: We would want to know that our diverse population was not only recruited, but made learning gains and achieved goals. I want to point out that this criterion is nonetheless couched in terms of *results* (persons actually enrolled), and not of *means* (flyers distributed in ten languages).

One other issue needs to be considered in this paper's attempt to develop a set of principles to use in the establishment of quality criteria and indicators. A distinction needs to be made between criteria which are clearly applicable to all programs and clients, and those that are applicable to a subset of programs and/or clients. Of the nine items listed in the program outcomes section of the "Sample Indicators of Program Quality," only two seem appropriate across the board: "competencies attained" and "achieved personal goals."

"Participation rates for population subgroups" will be applicable for most if not all comprehensive programs. But where multiple providers are intentionally funded so that each can address itself to a particular subpopulation, the criterion should not be applied.

"Hours of instruction received" has already been established as an indicator that is contributory to other ends and as one for which standards may appropriately differ for different levels of instruction or type of instructional goal.

"Standardized test score gains" are generally deemed neither useful nor appropriate for complete nonreaders. In addition, progress tests for certain subpopulations (e.g., ESL) are considered inadequate at best. Finally, learners at the secondary level may be better served by tests of mastery or certification (e.g., GED) than by measures of skill gains.

The set of employment-related outcomes are clearly reflective of the purposes of the Adult Education Act – but not all participants have employment-related needs and goals. The same could be said for secondary completion (not listed in the sample outcomes).

The definition of model quality indicators is important in assisting at least some of the states to meet the terms of the new federal legislation. The models need to be designed intelligently and sensitively if they are to be used and if they are to advance the field. This paper has identified and grappled with a number of issues of importance in this process. There is plenty of room for disagreement and debate, especially concerning the selection of particular criteria and indicators. A set of principles for selecting and developing quality indicators may aid the process. One such set has evolved from the exercise of preparing this paper. To summarize:

- Differentiate between "primary" and "secondary" indicators. Consider using the term "criterion" to refer to the primary indicator, or the item we want to "count as the payoff," and quality indicator to refer to its observable manifestation;
- Avoid creating a "laundry list" of indicators for every possible program component or feature, or clearly separate "guidance" about means from "accountability" for outcomes. Use the purposes and social values reflected in the law as a starting point for determining what is most important;
- With only carefully considered and justified exceptions, keep criteria in the realm of outcomes. Even where exceptions are made, focus on results rather than means. Choose indicators that closely and reliably represent those outcomes;
- Design information management systems that keep track of contributory factors that appear to be supported in research and practice, and study their relationship to desired outcomes over time. Some may eventually be worthy of elevating to the status of criteria; and
- Develop mechanisms in the evaluation process for giving more weight to factors of greater importance. Allow for the grouping of factors that may be compensatory, i.e., "any one these may be present to get credit," or "if this one isn't present, this other one is an acceptable substitute." Use differential criteria or indicators in cases where variable outcomes are allowed or encouraged.

# INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY: AN ESL PROGRAMMING PERSPECTIVE

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This paper was commissioned by Pelavin Associates Inc. to assist them in developing indicators of program quality for state adult education programs. Pelavin is preparing these indicators for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Recent amendments to the Adult Education Act require that indicators be developed at the federal level by July 1992 and by each state by 1993. This paper examines Pelavin's sample outline of proposed areas in which indicators will be addressed and some sample data elements for the indicators. This paper is written from an ESL programming perspective.

Pelavin has developed Sample Quality Indicators in the following areas:

<b>SECTION I:</b>	<b>PROGRAM CONTEXT</b>
<b>SECTION II:</b>	<b>PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT</b>
Part I.	Program Planning
Part II.	Program Process & Content
Part III.	Curriculum and Materials
Part IV.	Staff Qualifications

## **SECTION III. PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

The following questions posed by Pelavin Associates are addressed at the end of this document (see Questions for Consideration) for each program area in which quality indicators are recommended:

- 1) *Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?*
- 2) *Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?*

- 3) *What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In general, the development and use of quality indicators will be welcomed by the ESL field, particularly in light of the new federal guidelines which will further open up the delivery of ABE and ESL services to other providers. However, how indicators are formulated at the state level, what expectations they carry, and what support will be made available for implementation will be the determining factors in whether indicators will be accepted as the means of improving program quality or viewed as another bureaucratic burden on already overstretched program staff. If the use of quality indicators is to be successful we need to consider the following:

- Due to the wide diversity among ESL programs in terms of type of program, program setting, learner goals and funding sources, it is impossible to have a "one size fits all" approach to quality indicators. Research has found that even among the best programs, there is no "one definitive ESL or Literacy program" whose practices and procedures should be adopted by all.<sup>1</sup>
- Most programs have been operating on a shoestring. It will be difficult to compare programs and hold them accountable to an external set of outcome standards when some programs are not used to having outcome indicators of their own. Adequate funding to implement quality standards must be forthcoming. A sufficient period of time to raise programs to quality levels will be required along with technical assistance and even external evaluators.
- The primary purpose of quality indicators should be to help programs define themselves as educationally sound systems for the delivery of ESL and literacy instruction.

Sections I & II of the quality indicators proposed by Pelavin can help with this definition of process. Section III seeks to use quality indicators to measure outcomes.

## **SECTION I. PROGRAM CONTEXT**

Indicators of quality in the area of "program context" would require that ESL programs be able to define the context in which services will be offered. This entails an assessment of need for the services, a description of organizational structure of the delivery system and a definition of



the characteristics of the participants. Pelavin suggests defining contexts through information gathered in the following areas:

### **1. Need For Program Services**

- A. Number and demographics of target population
- B. Literacy Levels in community
- C. High School drop-outs in community
- D. Employment related skill needs of community

### **2. Organization and Structure of Delivery System**

- A. Number of projects
- B. Locations and settings of projects
- C. Type of projects (e.g., ESL, GED)

### **3. Characteristics of Participants by skill level**

- A. Number and demographics of participants by skill level
- B. Number and demographics of participants by program type
- C. Number and demographics of participants by program setting

## **RATIONALE**

The process of defining context should begin with the development of a program mission and ideally a statement of the ESL program's driving philosophy. The mission statement should clearly and concisely define the program's purpose for existence. Yet, the statement must be broad enough to enable continued program growth and evolution through flexible and responsive programming. Once the ESL program understands and articulates its own broad mission, it can make more rational decisions on program direction and use of resources. Furthermore, the state agency can more objectively determine an applicant agency's appropriateness for delivering the proposed services, and determine among other things:

- If the applicant agency understands the funding agency's mission and priorities (which themselves must first be clearly articulated to all);
- If the applicant agency has adequately defined its target population;
- If the target population is eligible for services;

- To what extent the need for services exists;
- How much of the need the applicant agency can realistically address;
- If proposed services match the needs of the target population; and
- The extent to which proposed services address a wide range of community needs and learner goals.

Moreover, requiring ESL programs to provide information in these areas will strengthen the program's ability to make an assessment of the overall need for program services, and it will help them to determine their "strategic market position in relation to other providers."<sup>2</sup> This is even more important now as new providers enter the delivery system. Information required by the proposed indicators will help both new and existing programs to clearly define "what business" they are in and what services or benefits they can offer to specific constituencies. It will require programs to closely examine and reexamine their immediate program and environmental context. By doing so, they will become better equipped to determine not only who they are serving, but more importantly, who they are not serving and whether or not they should be. This information, of course, will lead to more creative and dynamic programming because it will require regular assessment of needs and an evaluation of service response to those needs.

The most important aspect of ESL programs to consider is that they have ever changing populations. Programs should conduct periodic environmental scans to determine such information as:

- Population trends
- Economic development trends
- Workplace trends
- Legislative trends<sup>3</sup>

There are several other questions that ESL programs might want to investigate, such as what are the educational motivators among the target population, how does the target population

spend its time, when are participants available for instruction, etc. Clearly answers to these and other questions will provide important information to both the ESL program planners and those responsible for determining whether proposed services are warranted. Realistically, however, because of time and budget constraints, programs should only be required to demonstrate their understanding of the target population, the current institutional response from other providers in the service delivery area, and the extent of need for services by providing information such as the proposed Pelavin examples.

## **SECTION II: PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT**

Additional areas in which indicators of program quality are being considered are program process and content. These areas relate to: program planning, program processes and content, staff qualifications, and curriculum and materials.

### **PART I. Program Planning**

Pelavin suggests that program planning should consist of such elements as:

#### **1. Community input in program development:**

- A. Existence of an advisory board**
- B. Program holds public hearings**
- C. Use of a needs assessment**
- D. Other sources consulted (e.g., employers, staff, etc.)**

#### **2. Coordination activities**

- A. Existence of coordination arrangements**
- B. Type of coordinated activities**

#### **3. Written operational plan**

- A. Existence of plan**
- B. Specific program goals and objectives consistent with state plan**
- C. Plan development process**

## **RATIONALE**

Program planning is a process which includes identifying needs, designing program activities, implementing those activities, evaluating results, and making further program decisions. This planning should result in a product -- a written operational plan which enables all personnel to understand, analyze, and critique the program goals, objectives, and the strategies used to achieve them. It sets the framework for an educationally sound program. Ongoing analysis, critique, and revision of plans enable programs to remain dynamic and responsive to new needs and population trends. It is therefore a reasonable requirement for programs to not only be able to describe their process for successful implementation, but also their means of measuring that success within those implementation steps. Establishing indicators of program quality in the area of program planning will lead to more effective implementation and informative evaluation systems for both programs and funding agencies. Requiring evidence of planning will also enable both the program and the state agencies to determine if a program has struck a very necessary balance between what needs to be maintained and what needs to be changed. Although many programs have been in operation for a long time, it is important that ongoing reevaluation of program needs and activities be conducted in order to determine what activities still meet the target population's needs and which ones have just become ritual. In this way, program activities can be more targeted to current training needs, and resources can be used more effectively.

What must be safeguarded, however, is a program's flexibility. An operational plan must not be so rigid or a program manager so concerned about being evaluated against the plan, that it cannot be amended in order to meet a more urgent or changing need. Program planners must remember that they are there for the learners, and policy at all levels must support that.

Community input in ESL programs is also important. There is a growing trend among ESL programs to seek out and involve representatives from the language communities that are to

be served, the learners themselves, and other sources of input (including major employers and potential employers) that have an interest in the target community. Some examples of collaboration and meaningful input are:

- Learner and/or teacher participation in governance, program planning & evaluation, curriculum, etc.; and
- Collaborations with other literacy providers, workplace settings (unions, employers).

Quality indicators should encourage these types of collaborations where appropriate and necessary.

## **PART II: PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT**

Pelavin suggests quality indicators for the following activities:

1. Recruitment;
2. Program intake procedures;
3. Ongoing assessment methods;
4. Support services; and
5. Exit and follow up procedures.

### **RATIONALE:**

The indicators of program quality that Pelavin suggests here are consistent with the work of other researchers who have identified effective and educationally sound program processes. In the areas of program content, Rene Lerche concluded from her work on The National Adult Literacy Study (NALP) that effective adult literacy programs result from a systematic approach to program design and implementation. "Successful programs have been designed as total education systems under which there is a balanced emphasis on (1) clearly stated learning objectives, (2) assessment of learner needs and progress, (3) instructional processes, (4) guidance and counseling, and (5) program management and evaluation." Lerche finds that effective programs:

- Are clear about their goals;
- Have measurable objectives for each program activity;

- Assist learners in determining if the program is suited to their goals;
- Have clear learner outcomes and standards for judging them;
- Diagnose each learner's needs and develop individual learning plans;
- Tie learning objectives to instructional methods, materials, and assessment;
- Provide feedback to learners on their progress and document progress; and
- Evaluate their program's effectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

Aguirre International, in their U.S. Department of Education Study of Effective and Innovative Practices in Adult ESL Literacy Programs, also examined eight program components similar to the NALP: (1) community outreach (2) needs assessment, (3) program design, (4) curriculum, (5) approaches and methods, (6) initial assessment and progress evaluation, (7) staff development, and (8) support services.<sup>5</sup>

These components are the nuts and bolts of an ESL program. They identify who is to be served, how they will be recruited, how their skills will be assessed for placement and progress, what support services will breakdown barriers to participation, and what will happen at program exit and follow up. Indicators of program quality should be established in these areas in such a way as to demonstrate to the funding agency that the program processes have been articulated based on the information that was forthcoming during the planning process and needs assessment. The key to successful and responsive ESL program design is to strike a balance between what a program can offer (given its experience, resources and staff) and what the learners need and want. Quality indicators should be structured to help shape this process. The following are some issues to consider within various program activities:

## **Recruitment**

Most ESL programs will have no trouble defining their target populations, their recruitment methods, and their program outreach activities. Indicators of program quality should require that programs be able to demonstrate that they are targeting outreach efforts to learners for whom the program is appropriate and can show learners how the program can help them.

## **Program Intake Procedures**

Program assessment procedures will, in some cases, have to be tightened up and be more sharply defined to meet standards. Again, because of budget constraints, many programs have limited resources for testing and often students are placed in class through an informal interview. At intake, procedures need to be set into place which allow for a balance between standardized tests (that allow for comparisons across programs) and program based alternative assessments that show where the learner fits into the particular program scheme.

Individual learning plans (as a document) for low proficiency level students are not practical because the learners cannot articulate their goals with enough specificity to be meaningful. Conducting the interviews bilingually is also not possible for large programs with students from many different language backgrounds. While the process of helping learners articulate learning goals should begin at the lower levels (within the limited language available to the student) individual learning plans should only be *required* of intermediate level and advanced students.

## **Ongoing Assessment Methods**

Programs are required by federal law to report standardized testing information as one measure of learner gains and program success. Unfortunately, that is the one measure which may be the least valid in determining those factors. To date, there is no one instrument which can be recommended for all program contexts. Nor is there any that is sensitive enough to record

general learner gains in the short periods of course time in which most ESL programs operate (40-100 hrs of non-intensive instruction). ESL programs should be allowed to demonstrate that their assessment methods for determining student progress and learning gains are consistent with the type of program that they provide, and that their methods are valid and reliable. Curriculum-based pre and post tests, competency based assessment or other alternative assessment systems which demonstrate gains in learning related to the instructional program and content will provide more meaningful data than scores on standardized achievement tests. However, it is possible to use standardized test scores to establish and validate program levels and determine program effectiveness among groups of learners as opposed to individual learner progress. The question remains which test to select and what is an appropriate sampling size and testing procedures. Technical assistance will surely be required.

#### **Support Services**

Programs should not be required to provide support services unless significant funds are available, rather they should be required to demonstrate their knowledge of where the services exist and how their participants are made aware of them.

#### **Exit and Follow-Up Procedures**

Exit interviews or counseling sessions are reasonable and appropriate, but, of course, require a substantial amount of additional time and resources.

ESL program participants are a highly transient population, and follow-up requirements (for each participant) to determine program impact would be difficult to meet. However, programs should conduct surveys of program dropouts to determine whether the program services should be improved or changed.



### **PART III. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS**

Pelavin suggests indicators of program quality related to:

1. Type of curriculum and instruction used;
2. Materials and equipment used; and
3. Selection and evaluation of materials and equipment.

#### **RATIONALE**

Information about curriculum, materials and equipment used, and how those materials are selected is valuable, particularly at a time when the field is changing, new trends are emerging, and the use of educational technologies is being encouraged. Aguirre International, has found that: "a strong curriculum is a conceptual framework that (1) outlines the kinds of literacy the program wants to achieve, (2) suggests approaches, methods, and materials; and (3) links classroom teaching at the various levels with assessment and evaluation." <sup>6</sup>

Since ESL learner needs and goals are broad and vary from program to program, the state should not necessarily mandate a standardized curriculum or mode of instruction, but guidelines in effective practices are appropriate. Some states have already provided direction to programs on methods and approaches, e.g., California stresses lifeskills instruction and language acquisition over "language learning", other states are now identifying approaches that work best with second language learners (New York), and others have developed or are developing curriculum guides (Washington, Texas and Florida).<sup>7</sup> At a minimum, states should require that programs define the linkage between the needs assessment and the curriculum. Programs should establish their curricula first in terms which are appropriate for their learner goals and then in terms of learner needs within those goals. States should also demand that the approach is educationally sound and reflects an understanding of what we know about second language acquisition, adult literacy and how adults learn.

Based on a review of the literature and on input from researchers and practitioners in the field, the Aguirre study showed that educationally sound ESL literacy lessons shared the following characteristics. They are:

**Interactive** (students talk to each other and to the teacher; students are actively involved in generating writing and interpreting what others have written);  
**Responsive to multi-levels** (students work together as a group or in pairs; activities work for different student levels);

**Learner-centered** (the type of language and literacy taught supports the goals of the learners and builds on their personal strengths and their life experiences; students have the opportunity to make choices during the lesson; classroom activities are linked to learners' lives outside of class);

**Meaning-based and communicative** (the activities that students are engaged in reflect language and literacy use outside of the classroom; there is a point to the lesson other than "literacy practice"); and

**Integrated in respect to language skills** (reading, writing and oral language use are connected; conversations and discussions lead to reading and writing and vice versa).

They also provide a balance between activities that focus on communications and the expression of ideas and those that emphasize language awareness.<sup>8</sup>

A strong ESL curriculum will also be organized by instructional levels with specific learner outcomes and related language skills. Additionally, a strong curriculum will define the methods and materials used for implementing the program. Most importantly, the methods and materials used by ESL programs should reflect an understanding of how adults learn and should provide for differences in a learner's ability and learning styles.

#### **PART IV: STAFF QUALIFICATIONS**

Pelavin proposes indicators of quality in this area as follows:

1. **Characteristics of staff**
2. **Staff responsibilities**
3. **Staff development**
4. **Use of volunteer staff**
5. **Evaluation of staff performance**

## **RATIONALE**

Implementation of a quality ESL program is dependent on the staff hired to conduct program activities. Yet, in the past, it was a commonly held view that "if you can speak English, you can teach English". It is difficult to say whether this view is the result of common employment conditions today or the cause of them. Currently, like the field of adult literacy in general, the majority of adult ESL programs in the country are staffed by part time teachers, some of whom are trained professionals, others are trained in other fields and others are volunteers.<sup>9</sup> There is an ongoing debate regarding "who is an adult educator?" and "who educates adults?" This debate cries out for the professionalization of the field of adult education and the teaching of English to adults. The indicators which Pelavin has suggested are appropriate and further our goal of professionalization. It would be helpful to see minimum staffing standards related to training, full/part time status, staff evaluation, and staff input into program design and evaluation. These minimum standards must be backed by the resources necessary to implement them.

A discussion of staff qualifications, however, must recognize the fact that there is no agreement in the field over appropriate qualifications for ESL literacy teachers. Minimum staffing standards may really work against a number of community-based organizations. Despite this conflict, if we are to improve quality of instruction, guidelines need to be established to assist CBO's in improving their staffing situations as well. TESOL's Standards and Self-Study document should be consulted in the development of standards for this area.<sup>10</sup>

Given this ongoing debate, standards for staff development will need to take a more prominent role for ESL programs. Staff development should be based on the needs of the instructors, the needs of the learners and the needs of the program. Standards will also need to be flexible enough to allow for changes that are occurring in staff development such as more teacher centered approaches, where the teacher is helped to meet his/her own goals. This

individualization of staff development is a very powerful means of meeting the needs of teachers, learners and programs.

Staff responsibilities is another issue that needs to be closely considered. Teachers should not be expected to volunteer their time beyond the paid classroom duties. The quality indicators that are being proposed will impact on them by requiring additional responsibilities for counseling, data collection and program input. They should be paid for these additional responsibilities. Most importantly they should be paid for planning time. Paying for planning time in itself sends a message to the practitioner that their endeavor is a professional one requiring an assessment of their individual student needs, an adaptation of the program curriculum to meet the needs and an integration of appropriate instructional and evaluation techniques and materials to implement the curriculum effectively.

### **SECTION III: PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

Pelavin has suggested indicators for the following program outcomes:

1. Retention
2. Educational gains
3. Employment
4. Goal achievement

### **RATIONALE**

These indicators reflect the need to determine both impact on ESL learners and provide data for program accountability. No one would dispute the fact that accountability is necessary and justified. If we are designing and implementing sound learning systems then we should see successful outcomes. The problem then remains to identify and use appropriate indicators and to separate out the purpose for which the data for the indicators will be used. Ruth Nickse in her report, "A Typology of Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs: Implications for Evaluation", uses a framework that identifies five levels of evaluation that she applied to various

types of family literacy programs. The following chart is an adaptation of this framework (for the purpose of examining Pelavin's quality indicators).<sup>11</sup>

LEVELS	LEVEL 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 2: ACCOUNTABILITY	LEVEL 3: PROCESS CLARIFICATION	LEVEL 4: PARTICIPANT PROGRESS	LEVEL 5: PROGRAM IMPACT
QUESTION	Is there a need for the program?	What will the program do to meet the need and how can it be monitored?	How can the program improve its services?	Are participants making progress?	What are the long term effects of program participants?
DATA ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*demographic information</li> <li>*program design &amp; contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*written operational plan</li> <li>*processes &amp; content</li> <li>*curriculum and materials</li> <li>*inputs: staff, community, advisory board, evaluator, funding source</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*participation rates</li> <li>*retention rates</li> <li>*program completion</li> <li>*client satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*proficiency gains</li> <li>*level gains</li> <li>*goal attainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*continuing education</li> <li>*improved job or income</li> <li>*long term goals met</li> </ul>

Most adult ESL programs should be able to meet at least the first four levels of evaluation by providing the suggested outcome data. The fifth level, long term program impact as represented by Pelavin's suggested "employment" related indicators may not be possible to collect accurately. When it is collected and reported for state reports, the information may not be correct because it is often second-hand information from other students. Employment related outcomes, while interesting, cannot truly be attributable to general ESL program, even if valid data collection in this area were feasible.

The employment related outcomes that Pelavin suggests are related to what Hal Beder described in his new book, Adult Literacy Issues For Policy and Practice as the "human capital theory of program impact." The human capital theory of impact provides justification for federal expenditures on adult literacy instruction, the theory being that improving literacy and basic skills will lead to "improved worker productivity which in turn leads to improved national productivity and increased national wealth." Beder lists four components to human capital impact: increased employment and increased quality of employment, increased income, reduced need for public

assistance, continued investment by the student in further education. Beder noted several studies which showed human capital gains, but notes that without experimental control groups, there is no way to know with certainty that those gains were a result of adult literacy instruction. Beder states that when reasons why adults participate are considered, it is clear that most are striving to improve themselves. Beder recommends that "The federal adult literacy education program be held accountable for the broad personal and social development of its clients rather than to narrow human capital outcomes".<sup>12</sup>

Many programs have valid goals that are not directly related to employment such as strengthening literacy practices at home (family literacy); helping learners to communicate in English, access services, and gain greater independence (life skills programs), promote greater participation in the democratic process (community literacy and civics classes) preparing to enter GED, college or vocational programs.

*Much of the literature maintains that increased self-esteem, stronger decisionmaking skills, and effective strategies for learning how to learn are important outcomes of language and literacy programs. Programs that include these domains in their framework should be encouraged to show:*

- (1) How their efforts link linguistic goals with non-linguistic goals;*
- (2) What educational opportunities are provided to reach these goals; and*
- (3) How staff plans to evaluate whether (and to what extent) these goals have been met.*<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, given the fact that we cannot directly attribute human capital gains to general ESL programs, given the need to also impact on the social and personal goals of learners (because that is their primary reason for participation), and given the limited resources that programs have, isn't it more important to measure outcomes over which we have control i.e., retention, educational gains and goal achievement? These three areas are within a program's control over data, and outcomes can be directly attributable to program processes.

Making comparisons of outcomes across programs, however, will still be difficult since effective ESL programming is a dynamic process. Outcomes are based on individual program focus, learner goals, educationally sound program curricula and practices, quality of classroom instruction and evaluation procedures. No two programs are the same. Quality indicators should take this into account and allow for program-based assessment.

### **Summary**

While the use of quality indicators is appropriate, we must be realistic in our expectations. After conducting research on over 200 programs nominated for their promising practices, Wrigley and Guth have found that it is not possible to identify "one definitive program to model". In their forthcoming manual, Adult ESL Literacy: Issues, Approaches, and Promising Practices, the researchers state:

Given the large variety of programs and the diversity in program focus (general, workplace, family, community literacy) and program goals (self-sufficiency; acculturation; academic...) "establishing standards" might require that we emphasize processes that help ensure quality instead of focusing on outcomes or products. That is, programs should be held accountable for having in place structures, plans, and evaluation tools, that promote quality education.

For accountability's sake, programs will be asked to show how they:

- Plan to implement a quality program;
- "Define success" (both in program terms and related to learner outcomes); and
- Will evaluate program success and judge learner progress plan to develop their own standards and help ensure that those will be met.

Accountability will be based on the quality of:

- 1) Their planning process;
- 2) Their effort to provide quality service;
- 3) Their flexibility and responsiveness to learner needs;
- 4) Their evaluation efforts, geared toward both program improvement overall and assessment of learner progress and performance;

- 5) The actual changes made based on the evaluation results; and
- 6) The establishment of quality indicators based on program experience over a reasonable time.<sup>14</sup>

While this may not be a popular approach to take in defining program accountability, it may be a more realistic one (given the state of the art and the unique characteristics of ESL programs which on the one hand enables them to be responsive, and on the other hand impedes comparison of programs against each other).

When finalizing quality indicators, it is essential that the following general characteristics of ESL programs be kept in mind:

- 1) There is wide diversity among ESL programs in terms of service delivery settings, in terms of program focus, and in terms of funding sources. Quality indicators must be broad enough to capture the essence and the reality of these varied programs and flexible enough to enable them to be responsive to their client population and to the many other different requirements that they must be accountable for (funding sources, parent organization rules and regulations, etc.);
- 2) Quality indicators must be written in such a way that they promote responsive programming not inhibit it. Programs must continue to be able to be responsive to the wide range and varied needs and goals of their learners; and
- 3) ESL programs have limited resources. The spirit of the indicators should be such that it encourages and promotes quality services to the learners. If accountability requirements become so cumbersome, and monitoring so rigid, as to cause programs to spend an unreasonable amount of valuable time and resources to meet those requirements, then quality will suffer. If programs are to meet and maintain a minimum set of standards, then additional time, resources and technical assistance must be made available.

The field is changing and quality indicators must allow for new trends to emerge and for new approaches to be tried. Quality indicators must take into account the creative and experimental nature of programming for effective and innovative ESL and literacy programs. Quality indicators must enable the emergence and experimentation with such trends as:

- **Participatory education:** Programs in which learners have a role in program implementation, curriculum, and assessment;
- **Learner strategies training:** An approach which encourages cognitive awareness and control over learning;



- **Educational technologies:** There is still much to be learned about the potential that new technologies hold for language teaching; and
- **Functional context instruction:** An approach to training which narrows learning to specific content areas

The pluralistic and experimental nature of the field of adult ESL must be safeguarded or we risk the loss of responsive education and the ability to grow and expand knowledge and experience in exploring innovative and effective ways to provide instruction.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

### SECTION 1: Program Context

- 1) **Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

ESL programs are unique in having a greater need for assessing information which can help them define their ever-changing and growing populations. This ever-constant need to evaluate context and make programming decisions based on the context defines the very "fluid nature of ESL programming." However, this characteristic of good ESL programs will make it difficult to evaluate programs against each other. The immediate implication is that programs should be evaluated against how they have defined their contexts, what processes they have established to be responsive and what outcomes they have established for themselves.<sup>15</sup> This is surely not a politically popular implication, but it is the reality of the nature of ESL programs.

Concerning information on "the number and demographics by skill level" programs should have formal descriptions of proficiency levels and should define the relationships among their placement tests, instructional levels, and expected outcomes.<sup>16</sup> Ideally, the levels would be established or correlated to nationally recognized systems. This can be done by either establishing common skill level definitions at the state level or enabling programs to give their own definitions. There are several possible resources for defining levels: the Mainstream English Training Program's Student Performance Level Descriptions,<sup>17</sup> CASAS Scores<sup>18</sup> or BEST test scores.<sup>19</sup> Several states already have skill level descriptions defined by the previously mentioned systems. However, it might be more advantageous and realistic for programs to be required to define their own skill levels and demonstrate that they are appropriate for the type of learner and ESL program services that are being offered. Perhaps the first step is to establish consistency and

progression within a program before we try to compare programs. If programs define their own skill levels, those definitions should clearly indicate both the general language and specific language skills that are represented at program entry and/or are expected at exit.

Skill level descriptions will obviously differ between programs that focus on teaching English for lifeskills communication and programs that focus on workplace literacy skills, or pre-academic skills.

- 2) **Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?**

The information requirements proposed are appropriate and should be considered baseline. Ideally, programs will find out more information than is being required here. A statement of program mission should be added. A broad mission statement will help the program determine how it perceives itself, how it wants to be perceived and whom it wants to serve. In this way it will help the state determine if proposed services are appropriate for the proposing organization.

"Literacy levels of the community" should be changed to education levels of the community.

"The literacy levels of the community" is confusing. Who is the community? Those who are receiving services? The general population? The proposed target population? How would one gather data on the literacy levels of the community? Perhaps this should be changed to "education data on the community", which can easily be gathered through such means as census data and economic development data. Information on subpopulations may also be possible, such as the number of people in the census tract who report that they do not speak English well.

- 3) **Problems or other issues which would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

Clear definitions of terms within the indicators will be required. For example, does "community" refer to the community in general or the target population? Does "skill level" mean individual language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) or does it mean general proficiency level? Perhaps skill levels would even be defined more broadly to include knowledge of U.S. culture or content such as workplace skills, citizenship information, knowledge of the community, etc. that a learner is expected to have or expects to develop in the course.

Concerning "Characteristics of participants by skill level" ( data requirements on participant), in order to facilitate information to programs seeking data information and to avoid duplication of effort, it will be necessary to have a reporting process which will facilitate easy access to information on learners and programs that are currently in the system. The state's annual report to the U.S. Department of Education can serve as one valuable source of information for local providers as well as for the Department of Education. It should also be noted that programs may not be familiar with sources for data requirements and some guidance or technical assistance may be necessary.

Last, but not least, is the fact that ESL programs are generally poorly funded and primarily staffed with part-time personnel. Although many programs conduct the aforementioned activities, the information may not always be in a format that is meant for outside consumption.

## **SECTION II: Program Process and Content**

### **PART I: Program Planning**

- 1) **Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

Although Pelavin's indicators are reasonable for this area, it can be expected that there may be many programs that would not be able to produce written evidence of these activities because of time and resource constraints. Good programs, however, do conduct these kinds of

planning activities. It is the planning and evaluation process that is most important. The task of developing an overall operational plan may seem overwhelming at first, but programs should be encouraged to organize and compile materials produced from the planning process into a systematic operational plan and demonstrate how that operational plan was developed, how it will be evaluated, and how it will be revised.

If programs establish an overall operational plan, then the next logical step is technical assistance for formative and summative evaluations of the plan.

- 2) **Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?**

Pelavin suggests a need for quality indicators for Program Planning related to community input in program development, coordination activities, and written operational plan. Each of these areas is appropriate in that they take into account the who, what, where, when and why of planning. All ESL programs should conduct planning and coordinating activities. However, "Holding Public Hearings" may be an indicator which is significant only if the state or federal agency requires it. Less formal focus group discussions with current and potential clientele usually are far more desirable and productive. Holding public hearings for ESL populations would also require bilingual assistance, and in most programs there are numerous language groups represented.

- 3) **What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

As always, time and resources will be a problem for ESL programs. The activities described above are clearly administrative. Adequate resources and technical assistance must be made available if these activities are to be required.

## **Part II: Program Process and Content**

- 1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

There is wide diversity among programs offering ESL instruction. This diversity includes type of program, program focus, program approaches and philosophies, funding sources, etc. There is also a wide diversity in learner goals and needs. This diversity from both programming and learner needs perspective must be taken into account. There must be a balance between the need to control and regulate quality services and the need to allow for creative, innovative and responsive programming.

- 2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?**

### **ADJUST**

The indicator that will be the most problematic for ESL programs and learners at the lowest proficiency levels is "development of individual learning plans". It is not the process that will be challenged, but the product. Many practitioners will tell you that at this level "an individual learning plan" is an empty exercise in paperwork. Most practitioners will agree that learners at the lowest proficiency levels cannot express goals in English and indeed the concept is likely to be culturally alien to them. Forcing very beginning language learners (particularly literacy students) to set goals that may be too high and unrealistic can frustrate them and cause them to drop out. However, most practitioners recognize that it is important to help learners take charge of their learning by enabling them to begin to discover and articulate their goals. "A process for accomplishing this must keep two issues in mind, (1) learners new to speaking English may not be able to articulate their goals (especially at the beginning course), and (2) learner goals may change as they gain greater confidence and increase their proficiency."<sup>20</sup> For learners at intermediate and advanced levels, individual learning plans may be more appropriate instruments

for goal definition than for the lower proficient students. For them, perhaps more manageable learning goals (i.e., life skills competencies) that the learner can achieve and experience success with will be more favorably received by both learners and instructors and will enable them to begin the process of goal articulation.

- 3) **What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

Discussed in #1 above.

### **Part III: Curriculum and Materials**

- 1) **Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

ESL populations, unlike ABE populations are ever changing and programs must be able to recognize new population trends, assess their needs and respond with new and appropriate curricula that are linked to the changing needs. It is reasonable for a state agency to require programs to define their instructional program in such a way as to enable the state to determine whether content is based on learner goals and needs assessment as well as whether the processes are appropriate. For example, if a program determines that a large number of prospective learners need to learn English in order to function in daily life, a grammar-based syllabus would not show a relationship between learner needs and the proposed plan of instruction. Similarly, a program that has as its goal to help parents support the schooling of children, needs a curriculum that includes strategies for understanding and interacting with the U.S. school system. Responsiveness to context is the key for determining appropriateness of curriculum and approaches.

- 2) **Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?**

The indicators are appropriate.

Most adult ESL programs still do not have access to adequate equipment for instruction. As our communities and work places become more technologically advanced, it is increasingly important for adult learners to use educational technologies. Adult ESL programs should begin to at least plan for the use of educational technologies and explore ways in which the equipment might be acquired.

#### **SUGGESTED ADDITION**

- a) **Methods and materials should be educationally sound and reflect an understanding of how adults learn**
- b) **Program has developed a plan for using and integrating educational technologies**
- 3) **What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

Time and resources will be required to truly achieve this standard. ESL teachers are very creative individuals and the field would benefit from additional allocation of resources to programs for classroom based research, teacher input in programming and evaluation, and development and dissemination of materials.

#### **Part IV: Staff Qualifications**

- 1) **Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

All of the indicators specified by Pelavin are commendable and would indeed demonstrate quality in the area of staff qualifications. However, there is a unique aspect that should be taken into account - the largely part time staffing situation of most ESL programs. This severely limits their availability for staff development and for more staff input and involvement in program design and evaluation. Additional funds for these activities must be forthcoming.

- 2) **Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?**



The indicators are appropriate with adequate resources to support them. Paid pre-service and inservice as well as pay for non-classroom program input are essential elements of quality indicators for staff development.

#### **Suggested Addition**

- a) The term "Staff qualifications" as opposed to "staff characteristics" should be used in the indicators. There is a specialized body of knowledge about teaching English as a Second Language that has been developed and articulated. ESL teachers should have training in the study of language, second language acquisition theory, adult learning theory and ESL teaching methodology.
  - b) Paid Planning time should be included as an indicator of program quality. Paying for planning time recognizes this as a professional activity and is consistent with practices in other educational settings such as the public schools.
  - c) Use of volunteer staff should be viewed as a supplement to paid instructional staff.
- 3) **What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

Most adult ESL programs have chosen to allocate funds toward services at the expense of full time staffing. This is due to the burgeoning need for services that administrators face daily. Most ESL programs could not function without the hard work and contributions of a trained part-time workforce and a volunteer force. However, if programs are to be measured by new and stringent quality indicators, it must be made clear to the funding agency that professional standards require a stable and professional base staff. As Hal Beder states, "Clearly, if adult literacy education is worth doing, it is worth doing well. This requires a well trained, well paid professional workforce. To this end, reliance on part time teachers and volunteers is anathema."<sup>21</sup>

### **Section III: Program Outcomes**

- 1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?**

Limited time and resources, open entry/open exit procedures (which are typical of most ABE/ESL programs), and lack of good standardized test measures, diversity of program types, settings, and goals are all aspects that should be taken into account when setting indicators. Wrigley and Guth suggest that: "Given the diversity of programs and the resources that have been expended on ESL, it may be unreasonable to expect programs to meet externally defined standards. It may first be necessary to require programs to make all reasonable efforts to (1) improve their services (many may need guidance) and (2) provide documentation and what they have done and why, and then (3) develop their own standards given their particular realities."<sup>22</sup>

- 2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?**

Indicators in the area of retention, educational gains and learner goals are appropriate. Indicators in the area of employment changes are not appropriate for general adult ESL programs, because of reasons described in rationale section. An additional problem for ESL programs in inquiring about employment is the issue of confidentiality. Many programs are funded by non federal dollars and there are probably many undocumented aliens participating in the programs who would be reluctant to give employment data. It would be disruptive to program procedures to require employment information for some of the students and not from others, particularly when there is very little confidence in the information's accuracy and relevance.

- 3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?**

Standardized testing remains a problem for adult ESL programs. Although there is a federal requirement for standardized testing, it should be recognized that there are no

standardized tests which can be generally applicable to all types of ESL programs. Most are not sensitive enough to measure general language proficiency gains in short periods of time (especially for low proficiency levels), and most are very lengthy and costly to administer. Additionally, most standardized tests focus on individual facets of language, listening, speaking, reading, writing or grammar. This one-dimensional approach does not capture the holistic nature of second language learning. Thomas Sticht, in his report, "Testing and Assessment in ABE and ESL Programs," reports that there is serious concern from the field about the federal requirement for standardized testing.<sup>23</sup> He suggests, "Generally, in testing in ESL programs, as in other ABE programs, it may be desirable to separate testing for program accountability from testing for instructional decision making."<sup>24</sup> This is a valuable suggestion and programs should be allowed to submit other data on learner gains which will yield more meaningful data related to the outcomes of instruction.

Learner gains in ESL should also be considered in light of various program and student related conditions. Research conducted by the MELT project identified program related factors such as intensity of instruction offered, program curricula, trained staff, etc., had an impact on amount of learner gains made. While these quality indicators will help address some of these program factors, there are other student related factors which impact on learning gains (age, previous education, previous language experience, physical abilities, etc.)<sup>25</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Informal correspondence with Gloria Guth.
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## **INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY: ADULT SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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Quality for Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs can be defined by the presence of key functions (indicators) which, collectively, best support adult learners in acquiring a secondary level education. For each indicator or key function, there must be evidence that minimum standards are being met before "quality" can be said to exist.

It is almost impossible to create a list of quality indicators (key functions) without defining or making reference to the standards against which the indicators or functions are to be measured. The delineation of standards is critical not only to evaluators for determining the degree to which quality exists within a given program but also to directors and planners for the continuous monitoring and strengthening of their programs. Even among those programs which meet minimum standards, there are varying degrees of "quality," with some programs demonstrating greater evidence of quality than others. Planners and directors who use the standards list as a guide for strengthening key program functions automatically engage in the process of improving overall program quality. Therefore, it is essential that the standards list be detailed and specific.

The standards are developed around a definitive list of quality indicators. The list, arrived at by consensus, must represent the collective wisdom of a diverse group of adult education practitioners, researchers, students, and community representatives. This paper presents one practitioner's view.

The author does not attempt to define standards relative to the indicators except as necessary for the sake of clarity. In particular, when indicators are non-specific, as in "recruitment

methods" or "entry policies," standards are referenced as a means of refining or more specifically detailing the indicators. This paper suggests a re-positioning of some of the indicators on the list developed by Pelavin Associates, Inc. a more specific detailing of some of the indicators, and the addition of one new indicator, Institutional Framework. In addition, a recommendation is made that several indicators reference the specific accommodations necessary to provide equal access to adult learners with disabilities.

### **PROGRAM CONTEXT INDICATORS**

#### **1. Institutional Framework**

Most adult secondary education programs are administered within the context of a larger educational institution, whether a public school system or a community college. Unlike traditional K-12 instructional programs which are the primary focus of public school system, and unlike traditional credit-bearing courses which are the primary focus of community colleges, adult secondary education programs often must struggle for institutional support. With institutional support, adult education programs flourish; without it, adult education programs must direct a disproportionate amount of time and resources to their own survival. It seems reasonable then to require that a delineation of quality indicators for adult secondary education programs begin with statements of the parent's institution's mission and goals in relation to adult secondary education. In addition, there must be evidence that the institution pays more than lip service to its commitment to adult secondary education, i.e., that the institution meets or exceeds the pre-defined standards.

Therefore, under PROGRAM CONTEXT indicators, the first should be Institutional Framework: There is a clearly stated purpose for the presence and operation of the adult secondary education program at this educational institution. Suggested standards include the following: (a) One of the written goals of the educational institution defines its commitment to

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1 serving adult students who do not have a high school diploma; (b) The institution commits financial resources to the adult secondary education program beyond the federally required local match; (c) The educational institution has a formal organizational structure for conducting the adult secondary education program (this includes a program director whose primary responsibilities are in adult secondary education; (d) Administrative support services (including clerical support, fiscal management support, computer programming services, and telephone and mail privileges) are provided to the adult secondary education program by education institution; (e) All of the student services of the institution are available to adult secondary education students (i.e., career planning, job referral, library, student center, guidance and counseling services); and (f) Appropriate space is available for intake, processing, and counseling of students, for group and individual instruction, for work area for each staff member, and for storage space for instructional supplies and equipment.

## 2. Need for Program Services

For this particular indicator, there seems to be some overlap between PROGRAM CONTEXT and PROGRAM PROCESS, specifically Program Planning. Given that there are approximately 50 million adults in the United States who do not have a high school diploma, there can be little question concerning the need for program services. However, to plan appropriately for the delivery of services, the adult secondary education program director and staff members must be familiar with the profile of their community; they must possess current information concerning the number and demographics of the target population, the education levels of the community, and the annual number of high school dropouts in the community (compared with the number of adult secondary education completers by age). This data, collected under Need for Program Services, becomes the foundation on which decisions about program planning are made. Because this data is tied inextricably to the process of program planning, a



minimum standard for every Program Planning indicator should be the existence of evidence that decisions have been made based on an understanding and knowledge of the community profile.

3. **Organization and Structure of Delivery System**

The definition of standards for this indicator should include the number of student contact hours provided by the institution. Standards also should specify that the program delivery system adhere to an open entry/open exit policy and that project locations and settings be community-based and distributed throughout the designated service area (i.e., not concentrated at one primary facility). Standards should specify that adult secondary education offerings be diverse (i.e., GED program, external high school diploma program, evening high school program), that instructional facilities be both accessible to and suitable for adult learners, that the number of students on the waiting list to enroll be minimal, and that all instructional facilities be accessible to physically challenged students.

4. **Characteristics of Participants**

In addition to number and demographics of participants by skill level, by program type, and by program setting, another indicator which should be included is the number of participants with disabilities who are served by the program. Data collected should include the type of disabilities of participants by skill level, by program type, and by program setting. In keeping with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, indicators of program quality specifically should include Services/Accommodations for Adult Learners with Disabilities. This can either be a separate indicator under PROGRAM CONTENT, or it may more appropriately be interwoven throughout PROGRAM CONTENT, PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT, and PROGRAM OUTCOMES.

## **PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT INDICATORS**

### **I. PROGRAM PLANNING**

#### **1. Community Input in Program Development**

The standards for this indicator should specify not just the existence of an advisory board, but also that the board membership be representative of the community, including minority community residents, students, and representatives of social services agencies, business and industry, and local government. A list of board members and their affiliations should be available; board meetings should be conducted on a regular basis, and supporting records and minutes of meetings should be available for examination. In addition, the advisory board's function should be to advise and assist all adult secondary education programs (i.e., GED, external high school diploma, and evening school) offered through the educational institution; this is preferable to the existence of a separate advisory board for each adult secondary program.

#### **2. Coordination Activities**

This is perhaps the most significant indicator of quality for ASE programs. In these days of shrinking budgets and resources, a healthy and effective ASE program will have established numerous linkages with other agencies to ensure the effective delivery of services for students. The existence of linkages affords students the best choice of appropriate services while allowing provider agencies to specialize in functions that they perform best.

There is virtually no limit to the number and type of linkages which can be forged to strengthen ASE programs. However, minimum standards should include evidence of coordination in the areas of facility use, guidance, job placement, day care, transportation, tutor training, and coordination of volunteers. In addition, there should be evidence that cooperative linkages exist with local business and industry as well as with other state and federally funded programs which provide employment services, job development, and vocational training at the local level. The

ASE program director's responsibilities should include community involvement and public relations, and there should be evidence that program information is provided regularly to community organizations, agencies, and other public service providers through a variety of means, both oral and written.

Among local ASE directors, however, there currently exists a high frustration level over the apparent absence of coordination among federal departments that administer programs for adult learners. For programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education, separate and distinct annual and long-range plans are written at the state and local levels for adult basic education, vocational education, special education, and vocational rehabilitation. In addition, programs funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration provide services to many of the same clients. It appears somewhat misguided for evaluators at the federal level to require linkages among local service providers when it is the sparse coordination at the federal level that sets up the barriers met by local planners in attempting to forge linkages. Nevertheless, coordination activities remains one of the most important indicators of program quality.

### 3. Written Operational Plan

Program directors often prepare operational plans because they are required to by their funding sources, but after funding has been received, they rarely refer to the plans. A written operational plan should be the guide which steers the course of the ASE program, and a quality program will demonstrate its commitment to following the plan.

The plan should contain a mission statement which includes the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the ASE program; it should state the relationship of the ASE program to the mission of the educational institution which houses the ASE program. The plan should describe the interface among various ASE delivery systems (e.g., GED, external high school diploma, and

evening high school) and should detail coordination activities and arrangements with other agencies in the community. Specific program goals and objectives should be written in terms of measurable outcomes (i.e., products, program changes, student accomplishments).

Students, faculty, other administrators of the educational institution, and members of the advisory committee should participate in the development of the plan. Once the plan has been developed, the program goals and objectives should be disseminated to program staff, administrators of the institution, and advisory board members. There should be evidence that the plan is reviewed periodically by program staff and advisory committee members for the purpose of making adjustments to program activities so that stated goals and objectives can be met.

All of the quality indicators which Pelavin Associates, Inc. has listed under PROGRAM CONTENT, STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, and CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS become the "stuff" of the written operational plan. These are the "inputs" or ingredients which go into the making of a quality program. The indicators listed under PROGRAM OUTCOMES become the evaluation measures used to determine the extent to which each objective of the plan has been met. Without a written operational plan, there is no way for administrators, evaluators, and legislators to know the direction the program is headed and no way for them to know if it reaches its destination.

## II. PROGRAM CONTENT

### 1. Recruitment

Each of the indicators listed by Pelavin Associates, Inc. under PROGRAM CONTENT is important and should remain on the final list. Under Recruitment, there should be evidence that the data collected under through a community need assessment (under PROGRAM CONTEXT) are used to target the populations to be recruited. There also should be evidence that the program's written operational plan details diverse recruitment strategies, and that the recruitment

plan involves all relevant segments of the community, not just the learner population. There should be evidence that the program director collects student feedback concerning the recruitment strategies which have proven most successful among various groups of participants. The data gathered under Characteristics of Participants (PROGRAM CONTEXT) should be analyzed to determine which groups within the target population are being successfully recruited.

## 2. Program Intake Procedures

Incoming assessment, conducted for all students at the time of initial enrollment into the program, should collect both placement and diagnostic information about student skill levels as well as information about student needs and interests. Assessment procedures should be non-threatening to students; assessment instruments should have been designed and developed for use with adult learners. During the intake interview, clients should be given clear information about the purpose of the ASE program, including instructional approaches to be used. Clients also should receive results of all assessment procedures used. This information will enable the client to make a more informed choice concerning the suitability of this ASE program to his/her specific needs. It also will be useful in the development of the individual student's learning plan. The learning plan must be decided on mutually by the adult student and the instructor(s), using the results of both formal and informal assessments. Results of all assessment and testing should be maintained as part of the student's file.

## 3. Ongoing Assessment Methods

There should be evidence that instructors view assessment of student progress as an integral part of the teaching/learning process and a valuable tool for improving not only student progress but also instructional methods. Students regularly should have an opportunity to demonstrate subject matter proficiency through mastery testing (progress checks). Results of mastery testing should be shared with the learner and used by instructors to modify the

instructional program. An important feature of the assessment system is for program administrators and teachers to recognize that no one accountability measure is appropriate for all students; therefore, a variety of instruments must be available. The accountability system must be driven by the individual learner's goals, and programs must be evaluated on how well those goals are being met.

#### 4. Support Services

The provision of support services is a critical element in ASE programs, but it is not necessary that the services be provided directly by the ASE program. When strong linkages have been established with other agencies (see Coordination Activities under PROGRAM PLANNING), the resources of the ASE program can best be freed up to provide educational services while other agencies handle the transportation and child care needs of adult students.

#### 5. Exit and Follow-up Procedures

Ideally, exit interviews and testing should be conducted, when possible, as students complete the instructional program and before they leave the ASE program. The program also should have an established procedure for contacting dropouts. However, adult students do not always inform instructors that they are withdrawing from the program and program staff may not be able to contact students easily after the fact to conduct exit interviews and testing. Although it is important for evaluators to recognize that not all dropouts will be contacted, a measure of quality can be that a given percentage of dropouts is contacted successfully.

### III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

All the indicators listed by Pelavin Associates under STAFF QUALIFICATIONS are valid and should remain on the final list. Details to be added include the following: that criteria for employing program personnel are available on request as well as descriptions of duties/responsibilities of each ASE staff member; that duties of program staff are related primarily to

ASE activities; that the ASE program has a plan for staff development and that the plan addresses the training needs of newly hired instructors through orientation and pre-service sessions as well as the needs of all instructors through on-going professional development activities (including attendance at state, regional, and national adult education conferences); and that the educational institution budgets funds for staff development activities for both full-time and part-time staff. In addition, the findings of program evaluations, combined with staff self-assessments of needs, should be used to identify training priorities. Recent developments and trends in adult secondary education should be regularly disseminated to and discussed with instructors and other staff members, including volunteers.

Where possible, the ASE program director should conduct an in-class observation of every instructor every year. If the instructional staff is too large for one person to conduct annual observations, the help of other program administrators (principals, lead teachers, etc.) should be enlisted. Evaluation of staff members should include input from administrators, students, volunteers, as well as self-evaluations conducted by each staff member. Student attendance and retention records also should be considered because they are indicators of how well students' needs are being met. Evaluation results should be used for setting training priorities for the next year, thereby perpetuating the cycle of continuing professional development for all staff members.

The current part-time status of the majority of adult secondary education instructors is a major barrier to the ultimate success of the program. Part-time employees often are deprived of job stability, benefits, and the professional development opportunities afforded other professional educators. This remains a "fact of life" in adult education, and programs should not be evaluated negatively for employing only part-time instructors. Utopia will have been achieved when the funding earmarked for adult secondary education programs is adequate to allow program directors to offer full-time employment to professional adult educators.

#### IV. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

Program effectiveness measures in the area of curriculum and materials must center around the individual learner's goals and how well the ASE program meets those goals. Teachers often feel a conflict between being a true adult educator, i.e., a facilitator of learning, and "teaching to the test" as in GED programs or teaching the prescribed curriculum as in evening high school programs. Adult students are not likely to persist in classes that fail to meet their expectations, to make learning meaningful, or to provide flexibility. Adults are more likely to be motivated to learn when instruction is custom-tailored to their unique interests and needs.

In ASE programs, however, where academic achievement is one of the desired outcomes, there is a delicate balance which must be maintained between traditional teaching methods facilitation of learning, between externally imposed requirements of the ASE curriculum and the adult learner's need to be self-directing. This means that the learning objectives and experiences selected for the individual student's learning plan should be ones which will help the learner attain some personal goals. These goals may match some of the goals imposed by the ASE curriculum, but they need not match them all.

It also means that instruction which addresses a variety of learning styles and preferences must be provided, including large and small group instruction as well as individual or tutorial activities. There are some 20 to 25 instructional methods which can be employed. These range from buzz sessions to case studies to demonstrations to interviews to role-plays to field trips. The choice should be determined by the nature of the subject matter and the individual learning style of the student. A critical element to the success of instruction is the skill and knowledge of the teacher in employing various methods.

All of the indicators in the category of curriculum and materials on the Pelavin Associates' list are appropriate and should remain on the final list. Specific standards should include the



availability of equipment, teachers, methods, and materials for physically challenged and learning disabled students. This is another area in which the establishment of linkages with other service provider agencies can be of considerable help. Materials at all instructional levels should be available in sufficient quantity for classroom use by all students, and materials should be up-to-date, free of sexual and cultural bias, and multilingual/multicultural, if necessary. There should be evidence that audiovisual equipment is regularly used as part of instruction and that computer-assisted instruction is available to learners.

### **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

Evaluation efforts in adult secondary education programs traditionally have focused more on process evaluation (inputs) than on product evaluation (outcomes). For adult secondary education programs to have credibility, evaluation must center around accountability and program outcomes. Of course, legislators and funding agents want to hear that students who have participated in ASE programs have attained new employment, improved current employment, improved income, or attained employment-related skills. However, this is not a faulty yardstick used for measuring ASE programs.

If ASE programs teach academic skills and not employment skills, the measure of program effectiveness should be based on the students' acquisition of academic skills and the attainment of adult secondary high school diplomas, not on the attainment of employment and improved income. While there can be little doubt that these are indirect benefits of participation in ASE programs, quite possibly derived from the acquisition and improvement of academic skills, they are not able to be measured directly from program inputs. Retention and participation rates, educational gains, and goal achievement are direct measures of program outcomes. Information about student employment gains is important for information for program administrators, but it should be not considered a direct measure of program effectiveness. This information would be

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useful in follow-up studies which compare the career development and earning power of ASE program graduates with high school dropouts and with holders of traditional high school diplomas. After all, if we do not judge traditional high schools on the careers and earning power of their students, why would we want to do this for adult secondary education programs?

Evaluation standards should include the following: the ASE program collects information describing the extent to which students' objectives are achieved, and the extent to which student proficiency has increased in academic skills; and program achievements are disseminated to adult learners, counselors, advisors, staff, other public agencies, legislators, and the local community. Program directors should continuously monitor program outcomes, share this information with students, staff members, higher level administrators, and advisory board members to plan for improvements to the program. Students should be surveyed concerning their perceptions of the benefits of participating in ASE programs. Survey questions should address positive life changes such as basic skill growth, increased participation as citizens, increased family benefits, increased personal growth in self-esteem and self-confidence, and economic gains.

## **QUALITY INDICATORS OF ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES**

**Connie Eichhorn  
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Since one source of funding for adult education programs is federal funding, it is consistent that many indicators of program quality should fit any adult education service provider. The basic goals and objectives of any program must fall within the context of the federal guidelines and federal legislation, yet each program should develop goals and objectives reflective of specific local needs to deliver the best possible quality of service. However, there may be some indicators which are more applicable to or perhaps more difficult to accomplish for LEA sponsored programs.

From the list of quality indicators provided, an LEA might have difficulty in helping students find meaningful employment or continuing to higher education or training programs, retaining staff because of part-time status, evaluating part-time staff effectively, expanding projects to the workplace, and providing child care and/or transportation support services. An LEA might have easier and immediate access to dropout statistics and to lists of the dropouts, for convenient student recruitment.

Most of the sample quality indicators are essential ingredients in any adult education program which provides service to the uneducated and/or undereducated. Categories which seem to be underrepresented or neglected are program evaluation, student and volunteer recognition, institutional commitment, student retention activities, and program desire to further the field of adult education. In the area of goal achievement, there are many more items which could be included, such as fulfillment of social service or parole requirement, citizenship, or meeting INS regulations.

The extent of services a program can offer and the extent to which it can reach and serve clients with the greatest needs may be dependent on the mission and philosophy of the sponsoring organization. The basic mission of an LEA is to serve the needs of the kindergarten through twelfth grade age resident of the district, with the early childhood component becoming stronger in many places. The high school diploma may be considered a termination point for students in an LEA, rather than the LEA showing much concern for those 16 years and older who need basic skill improvement.

The LEA sponsorship of an adult education program may in some cases be a true commitment to serve undereducated and/or uneducated adults in the community or may in some cases be considered a peripheral service of the district. One quality indicator in the LEA sponsored program might be the extent to which the LEA provides additional revenue, materials, facilities, personnel, and support services for the adult education program.

Another indicator might be the result of what happens to the adult education program in times of severe budget constraints at the local level. Is adult education one of the first places to look for budget reductions? What would the school administration do to save the program if the school board really wanted to cut or completely eliminate the adult education program?

Institutional commitment, which should be considered as a quality indicator, becomes extremely important in the high stress time of possible budget reductions. It is also important in the pursuit of additional state and/or federal dollars, as well as in the expansion of program services or in the response to changing needs within the community or area served.

The number of projects and type of grants that may be submitted are dependent upon the philosophy and the institutional support by the LEA. For example, workplace literacy programs may not be viewed by an LEA as an essential ingredient in the adult education program, since the mission of the LEA is to serve the K-12 population through high school completion. Is the

education of homeless adults something that all local education agencies are willing to attempt? Are programs designed to help the non-English speaking adult become proficient in English an objective of the LEA? Is serving the institutionalized or criminal adult population supported by the LEA? Is a GED program supported more heavily than an ESL or ABE program, possibly as an alternative to graduating more students within the school district? If these activities are not viewed as a component of the adult education program, there will probably not be much change for expansion of services.

All quality adult education programs must measure well in the defined areas of program content, program process and content, and program outcomes to truly serve the needs of the adult students. Every program provider should know the needs of the potential clientele served and how those needs were assessed. The program provider also must know what types of students and the skill level of students enrolled. The student demographics should reflect the diversity and the needs of the community or area served. If the demographics do not support the results of the needs assessment, more active recruitment or program evaluation may need to be done by the LEA. The needs assessment should be done regularly and should involve a variety of sources, community input, employer and workplace needs, census data (if available), ethnic or minority group input, and high school non-completion statistics. An LEA may not conduct a needs assessment on a consistent basis, but rather it may concentrate on serving those students who have recently dropped out of school. This may be especially true if the LEA can recapture state funds when students come back to complete a high school equivalency program before the age of 21.

By the very nature of being an LEA, the public school sponsored adult education program should have immediate access to dropout information and statistics. Recruitment of this particular age group of potential adult education students should be relatively easy to do.

The locations and settings of projects in an adult education program sponsored by an LEA may be limited to the boundaries of the school district. Classes may not be held in settings outside the district boundaries or may only be held in school facilities. If the adult education classes must be held in school buildings, the LEA should make appropriate adaptations to the facilities for adult learners. Are the classrooms such that there are tables and chairs to be easily arranged for flexible instruction and grouping? Is the furniture physically comfortable for adult students? Is there adequate storage for the adult materials, in the likely event that the space must be shared with other LEA classes and activities? Is there a quiet room for testing and/or special tutoring? Do the adult students have access to all resources in the facility, especially to the computers and appropriate software? Is there a separate entrance available for the adult students? Is there parking? Is there a break room or area? These kinds of needs must be considered when the adult education program is housed within a traditional school facility.

Sometimes advisory groups within an LEA appear to be made up of mainly personnel from the LEA. The advisory board for an adult education program should reflect the diversity of the community by having various ethnic groups, employers, social service agencies, students, volunteers, and teachers represented. Every adult education program provider should have established policies for membership on the advisory board, the role of the board, the length of time to be served, regular meeting times and places, recording minutes, and making recommendations.

Any adult education program should become a stronger program by collaborating with other entities to provide services to adult students. Child care and transportation are support services that may be difficult for the LEA to provider, but often agreements can be worked out with other agencies for these services. Limited types of counseling, such as educational and

career, maybe provided by the LEA, but more extensive counseling needs may be better served through cooperative arrangements with outside groups.

Adult education programs sponsored by an LEA should have clear definitions as to who can be served and how the student can receive service. Must the adult student be a resident of the district to attend class? Must the adult student have been a former student of the district to earn an LEA high school diploma upon successful GED test series completion? Can the program conduct outreach activities outside the LEA boundaries? Who can be involved in the outreach activities, students, volunteers, instructors, community agencies? Are services available only during the traditional school year or is there flexibility in the scheduling? Must the student enroll at a specific time and location rather than the class location to receive service. Are all the special services of the LEA, such as career assessment or special education diagnosis, available to the adult students? Are there translators to help the non-English speaking? What are the LEA policies regarding the use of outside resource speakers, videotapes, etc.? Is there a policy that all instructional materials must be approved by the governing board?

Assessment procedures for monitoring student progress and learning gains should probably not be much different, regardless of the sponsoring institution for the adult education program. Each program should have established appropriate diagnostic tools, recording procedures of test results, and retesting times. Every program should also have established procedures to record student goals and a system of monitoring individual progress toward the goal, while maintaining a file of student work and an individualized education plan.

All adult education programs should have a student follow-up plan, whether to monitor program dropouts or program completers. If a plan is in place to attempt to contact the dropout student, information may be gained for program improvement. Follow-up on program completers provides more data about who has been employed or promoted, who has gone on to higher

education, or who has been removed from the welfare system. The community college may be particularly interested in which students go on to further educational training programs. The information on student follow-up may be difficult for the LEA to obtain if the cooperation and coordination with other agencies and offices in the community have not been developed.

An LEA may have different requirements for adult education instructional staff than the community college. Any instructor, whether part-time or full-time, may have to have current state teaching certification to be hired by an LEA. The instructor may have to be interviewed by both the personnel director and the adult education supervisor. As in any program, the instructor may be limited to a very specific number of hours so that part-time status with no benefits is maintained. Does the part-time employee in the LEA have access to services such as media, photocopying, classroom supplies, etc.?

Some LEAs may require that any and all employees must attend certain kinds of in-service or staff development activities. The adult education instructor may then have little opportunity for input as to the type of staff development needed. Ideally, the adult education program has input from the instructional staff as to the type, time, location, frequency, etc. of the inservice activities. If instructors in an LEA sponsored adult education program have responsibilities other than teaching adults, it may be difficult to schedule activities to always include all adult education instructors. The policies of the LEA may determine whether the instructor receives compensation for staff development participation or for travel expenses incurred for special events.

All adult education programs should include an instructor evaluation component. The LEA may have very specific procedures for full-time staff evaluation, yet the adult education program may be allowed some flexibility in the process or perhaps be completely negligent in staff evaluation, especially with part-time instructors. Some of the flexibility may result from the part-



time or full-time status of instructors and whether instructional duties include more than adult education. Not only should the instructors be evaluated, so should any volunteer and support staff.

The goals and objectives of any adult education program should dictate the type of curriculum and instruction used. Each project within the program may have topics which need to be stressed more than others, such as reading in a low level ABE class or citizenship in a SLIAG class. The instructional techniques used in the class should be appropriate for the students in that particular setting: individualized, small group, whole group, one-to-one tutoring, or independent study.

The materials used in the program should be appropriate for student needs, ability levels, and interests, as well as be multicultural and nonsexist. Manipulatives, workbooks, software, individual practice sheets, audiocassettes, videocassettes, supplementary reading materials, calculators, and newspapers should be available for student use in any adult education program. As stated previously, the LEA may have policies that all instructional materials have to be adopted or at least approved by the governing board. Every attempt should be made to include students, instructors, and volunteer tutors in the process of materials selection and materials evaluation.

In addition to the dimensions listed for retention in program outcomes, effort and activities to retain students in the adult education program until individual goal completion is reached should be an indicator of quality. Some programs appear to emphasize student recruitment, yet do virtually nothing extra to try to retain students in the program. Some activities might include incentives for completing a specified number of class hours, such as earning a pocket dictionary or a calculator upon 40 hours of attendance, the development of a

student alumni group, a monthly student newsletter, or free GED testing if started during a previously identified time.

Another dimension within the student retention category might be the activities done to recognize student achievement. For example, a graduation ceremony might be held for those students who successfully complete the GED test series. Another form of recognition might be certificates of attendance and/or achievement to ABE and ESL students. Articles can be placed in the local newspaper of special accomplishments. Special events, such as holiday parties or potlucks, can be fun and socially important to adult education students. Equally important is the recognition of the volunteer tutors and staff.

Another indicator of program quality is the percentage of students who remain in the program until their individual goals have been met. If a high percentage of students leave before goal completion, a serious look at the program content and instructional methodologies should be made. Are students given the chance to let the program administrator know what they like or dislike about the program? Is this done only when someone leaves the program, or is it done on a routine basis?

One area that may be difficult for the LEA to do well is to help those adult students who have completed the program find meaningful employment. The community college and/or the CBO may have better connections within the community to help students with the job search. The LEA may not have a job placement office that is accessible to the adult students or may not believe that it is an objective of the school district to help the adult student find employment. Therefore, that is one dimension which may be more difficult for the LEA to successfully accomplish.

The LEA may not have the resources to help the program completer continue on to higher education or to another training program. The community college may have a vested

interest in getting the ABE/GED student enrolled in its continuing education courses. This is another dimension that may be difficult for the LEA, unless strong coordination and cooperation exist with other organizations which can adequately provide these services to the adult education student.

While most of the quality indicators presented appear to be fairly generic for all providers of adult education service, some indicators may need to be added. One indicator that appears to be underrated is that of program evaluation. The list has staff evaluation, materials evaluation, and staff development evaluation. The issue of total program evaluation is not adequately addressed. Dimensions of this indicator would include who should be involved, how frequently, internal versus external, whether specific guidelines are established, who receives the report, and who is responsible to see that necessary changes are made. For an LEA, one concern might be whether the evaluation of the adult education program is done the same time as the rest of the district or completely separately. Another might be whether it should meet the same criteria as the school district during North Central Accreditation or similar procedures.

Another indicator of program quality which has been omitted from this list is the willingness of the program administrators to become involved in long term projects, such as research studies or special demonstration activities, to contribute to base field knowledge in adult education. This type of quality indicator can be done by any program and should not be any more difficult for the LEA sponsored program than others to accomplish. Are the program directors willing to help the state department in the development of a new state plan? Are staff willing to be involved in a comparison study to determine which diagnostic tool appears to give the best comprehensive information? Are instructors willing to spend their own time to develop materials for individual or special needs students? Are the administrators willing to be the first program evaluated under a new state evaluation process? Are the staff writing articles to

contribute to professional journals, so other adult educators can learn from the experiences?

What is the program doing to contribute to the field of adult education? Are staff encouraged to join and become active in professional organizations. Is conference attendance and presenting promoted?

The list of quality indicators for adult education programs is reasonably comprehensive, yet consideration should be given to adding a few of the previously mentioned indicators and dimensions. A program which has already incorporated many or all of the dimensions and elements listed should be a successful program, meeting the needs of many of the adult students in the service area. Other programs which do not have some of these dimensions in place should strive to do so, thereby improving the services to uneducated and/or undereducated adults within the delivery area.

## **COMMUNITY COLLEGE DELIVERY OF ABE: MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS**

**Donna Lane  
Director, Oregon Adult Education Program**

### **Unique System**

The community college as a setting for ABE is unique in its comprehensiveness, its parallels to the mission of ABE, and its mechanisms for collecting comprehensive data. It is often positioned within state government as the major training and development provider.

Because community college systems vary greatly from state to state, I will describe the delivery system in Oregon and assume it can be at least partially generalized to other states' community colleges. In Oregon the system has sixteen colleges and provides services through contracts for communities that are not in community college districts. The colleges are recognized by the Governor, the Workforce Quality Council, the State Department of Education, and other state agencies as the state's major provider of adult training and basic skills delivery. ABE is not a stand-alone system in Oregon. It is holistically integrated with other work and education programs.

Students who enter Oregon community colleges lacking basic skills needed for success in vocational training programs or in lower division college classes are identified through placement tests and encouraged to take developmental education classes. Most developmental education post-secondary remedial classes are in the areas of reading, writing, and computing. Study skills, using college resources, goal setting, and decision-making classes are also offered. Few of the colleges have systems for sorting students into ABE or tuition-based post-secondary remedial classes other than by student intent. If students come to the college specifically for basic skills

improvement, they are placed in free ABE classes. If they come to enroll in a college program but lack prerequisite skills, they are placed in the post-secondary remedial classes.

Oregon adult literacy levels are well documented. In addition to doing a county district analysis of the undereducated identified in the census, Oregon conducted a statewide literacy assessment in 1990. Also, a common instrument is used for intake by all state agencies delivering basic skills.

The Oregon Literacy Survey, developed by the Educational Testing Service for a U.S. Department of Education assessment of the literacy skills of young adults and adapted by the U.S. Department of Labor, was used to sample 2,000 Oregonians in five regions and was stratified to provide a representative geographic distribution for adults ages 16-65. Prose, document and quantitative literacy were assessed, giving Oregon agencies data from which to set adult literacy goals for the next two decades.

Oregon has identified numerous benchmarks for improving its quality of life in the next two decades. Three of the ten key benchmarks identified by Oregon's Workforce Quality Council focus on adult literacy. The State ABE Director in the Office of Community College Services (OCCS) is leading the development of a strategic plan to meet the literacy benchmarks.

The statewide assessment used for all clients entering Oregon's correctional institutions, welfare reform programs, JTPA youth programs, and community college ABE programs gives us even more data for program planning. OCCS coordinates this assessment service.

Oregon has a statewide planning Council for Adult Education and Literacy that advises the OCCS ABE staff. It is composed of media, business, agency, program, community-based organization, corrections education, university, other research organizations, and student representation. The council has been most successful in elevating the visibility of adult literacy

programs in the state, in supporting the efforts of training, and in supporting the statewide Literacy Line.

ABE programs, sponsored by community colleges (not unlike programs in other state systems), are offered on campuses, in learning centers, in elementary and secondary schools, in soup kitchens, in jails, in state corrections facilities, in libraries, at community-based organizations, via television satellites, and at other locations.

There are few community-based organizations directly offering literacy services in Oregon. Most subcontract through community colleges because pooling of resources provides more comprehensive services. Oregon Literacy, Inc. (OLI) is the major exception. It provides volunteer tutoring throughout the state. Some local OLI chapters have specific agreements with their local community colleges for joint training and free tutor and student materials. The ABE curriculum and staff development specialist has worked with OLI and community college tutor trainers to develop joint training materials, to establish seven training regions in the state, and to train three master trainers in each region. Certification and training standards have been developed.

Because the community college literacy services have been in place over twenty years, many referral processes and joint planning efforts are in place. Most colleges are leaders of the local literacy coalitions, including all organizations in their communities that provide services to literacy students.

Local college districts develop plans to meet the requirements of the Oregon State Plan. The plans also describe advisory committees, local coordination, and recruitment and retention procedures.

Centralized recruitment is provided by the Literacy Line which is widely advertised on television and radio, and in the newspapers. The welfare division regularly places Literacy Line

stuffers in food stamp mailings. This has been most effective in increasing our services to those greatest in need. The Literacy Line connects students and volunteers with local programs. Exceptional media cooperation with the Literacy Line has contributed to program growth. Literacy Line regularly compiles and publishes sources of student referrals. Currently newspapers (27%), television (21%), followed by agencies, and individuals are the major program referral sources.

Community colleges publish class information throughout their districts each term. In addition, colleges' publications and marketing departments provide considerable recruitment assistance at the local level.

The community college system and its partner agencies face major challenges if they are to meet the benchmarks for a more literate Oregon. However, through joint planning efforts and new and emerging information about how adults learn, the colleges and their community partners are already reporting increased successes in retention and completion of skill levels. A small, select survey of first year welfare reform participants indicated increased employment and incremental salary improvements after participation. Programs are beginning to report post-test and other student achievements that indicate that co-planning, case management, nonduplication of services, shared client profiles, shared demographic information, managed enrollments, intensive orientation, provision of multimodal learning opportunities, contextual learning, and on-going monitoring and certification of student progress can both accelerate and broaden student learning.

#### **Appropriate Indicators**

In Oregon, attention is given to keeping students in programs long enough to complete one or more levels of instruction. We are finding out that students can make significant gains in their basic skills levels in as little as thirty hours. Knowledge about average gains of students



enables staff to individualize retention goals as well as educational goals. Retention goals can be established with students at intake. Programs have documented student retention gains that staff members attribute to improved initial orientation, barrier removal, and goal setting.

Many programs are now giving basic skills certificates at CASAS (California Adult Skills Assessment System) Levels A, B, and C. They are integrating life skills and employability Level D skills into GED preparation. Providing students with benchmarks at the three levels below GED has added significance to Level I instruction and appears to impact retention. Monthly award ceremonies provide extra socialization opportunities for students. The ESL Curriculum Committee is currently piloting assessment instruments and hopes to standardize ESL level attainment.

We feel a need in our community college system to record student progress in several dimensions. Stratifying students according to ESL at three levels, ABE at two levels, and at adult secondary level as required in our federal report is helpful. However, because of our CASAS system, we prefer to divide ABE into three levels and would like to report GED and Adult High School Completion separately. We would like to look at program outcomes by student goals. We would report three groups of students separately: those who want to get a job; those who want to go on to higher education; and those who want to gain personal outcomes. The three groups typically have different outcomes, require different curricula and have different attendance patterns.

We add several items to our annual report because they relate to Oregon ABE goals: number of students receiving tutorial services, diversity of staff as related to target population, and growth in the number of full-time instructors. Staff and student inclusion in planning all local and state activities, staff development needs assessments, and regular evaluations of the state staff by local program personnel are important components of our on-going quality checks. We

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systematically evaluate all staff development offerings. Community college staff members with curriculum and training expertise have been trained by state ABE staff to assist with local program evaluations.

Some program and student indicators being used for all Oregon community college programs are as follows:

- Student demand;
- Job placement or transfer into additional training;
- Instructional cost effectiveness;
- Adequate services in place to serve volume of students;
- Facilities available;
- Equipment/supplies available;
- Revenue projections;
- Course and program retention;
- Student success by offering (ABE, ESL, GED);
- Success in subsequent programs;
- Completion of individual education plan;
- Staff expertise;
- Quality of the curriculum;
- Program's service to other disciplines;
- Program's service to the community; and
- Other.

In our ABE evaluations we also examine administrative support of the program, including adequacy of budget as compared to other college budgets. Rank and title of the program manager also appears to have some significance.

## **Problems and Issues**

Community college ABE programs are part of the larger statewide education and training system that is also struggling with measurement and quality issues. ABE program personnel would hope the same type of program quality information they provide their administrators would be those required in federal reports and that the number of indicators provided at the federal level would be fewer and more general, limited to indicators that are easily interpreted in a macro setting.

There are several measures of ABE quality currently in use that are useless and sometimes harmful for measuring the impact of ABE. Some are as follows:

- A. Percentage measures that compare number of students served in ABE programs against the census to determine a state's effort are erroneous unless there is a mechanism for collecting total state effort beyond ABE. ABE count doesn't pick up all the Level I students served by other federal, state, and local agencies or in college post-secondary remedial classes that are tuition-based. The limited funding does not begin to provide extended services; thus, reporting ABE numbers served as the number being reached is inaccurate.
- B. Measures such as obtained driver's license, entered another training system, gained employment, removed from public assistance, and even obtained a GED are underreported by students and teachers; and, they distort outcomes.

If accuracy of the above information is important and is to be used in comparing and/or evaluating programs, then complex systems need to be devised to gather the information, such as agreements with Departments of Transportation and Employment and with GED Testing Centers. Within community colleges we have good access to computers and management systems. However, it is very difficult for us to report on outcomes that occur outside of our programs and that students "sometimes" self-report.

Data currently collected by programs for federal reports on whether students attain employment, improve employment, and improve income are both inaccurate and an unreasonable

expectation. It isn't realistic to expect that a program would have subsequent employment information or that a student completing a basic skills program has been trained for most living wage jobs. Our adult education programs must be tied to JTPA services, employment division services, and additional educational opportunities. ABE programs can collect information about knowledge and skills gained by students in the program. They should also periodically work with other state agencies to follow-up on students who receive state and federal education and training services to determine long term outcomes and which programs and services contributed to those outcomes.

Follow-up information should also address family changes resulting from educational gains: activities such as driving, voting, participating in community activities, and leadership activities if students attribute these successes to their training programs. These must be gathered through a follow-up or a sampling process. If they are only partially gathered through student self-reporting, they should be merely listed as "other" accomplishments, not quantified.

### Summary

"While more elite institutions may define excellence as exclusion, community colleges have sought excellence in service to many." (Building Communities, 1988)

Community colleges have filled the niche in America for serving community members who dropped out of high school, who completed high school without essential skills needed to compete in the workforce or higher education, and newcomers to America who need English skills. They are often described as the colleges for everyone, democracy's colleges, and open door colleges. Most have the open access value imbedded in their missions. The mission and environment of community colleges makes them a comfortable home for programs designed to assist adults who are in the process of improving their basic skills.

There are many advantages in the community college delivery system. Counseling, access to training programs, child care centers, availability of local transportation, handicapped access, personnel services, research departments, audited business services, access to technology, public information offices, staff evaluation processes, and computerized record keeping are just a few of the many benefits.

Working within the Office of Community Colleges Services, the State ABE Director not only has direct contact with local program directors but also with other college administrators and state training staff. More important are the advantages to the student. Basic skills education is not an isolated educational experience. Program outcomes will be shortlived unless they are coupled with access to parenting education, other college classes, social interaction with peers, vocational training, and, especially, access to career counseling. The student goal setting in a community college program can be much more comprehensive and informed because staff and students are interacting with other programs, staff, and students.

Our community colleges and our state partners are increasingly convinced that federal agencies and our state agencies can streamline and improve all program quality measures by reducing overlapping documentation, eliminating meaningless information, using common definitions across programs, and, yes, by integrated planning at federal, state, and local levels. We must report outcomes, not effort. We have to have programs that are easy to describe, easy to defend, and that taxpayers can understand and appreciate.

Once we establish our common definitions, we can ask the following service-related questions: What is the purpose of the service? Who is the targeted group? What services are provided? Do the services all relate to the purpose of the Act(s)? What group or groups provide the services? Are the services important? What difference do they make to individuals? Are the targeted groups actually receiving the services and benefiting from them? What is the cost per

client and per service? Are the appropriate groups providing the services? Are we collecting enough information to tell our story without providing superfluous or unnecessary information? What are the long range implications for clients? How would our clients improve the services?

Data collection is not an issue in a state that has the community college as its provider. The mechanisms for collecting the data are in place. However, the ABE data needs to be looked at as a data segment that must be combined with Department of Labor and Department of Health and Human Services data to tell the big story. ABE must be recognized as the first important step toward client success, but it should not be considered or evaluated as a job placement program. Nor should data available to a program while a student is attending be considered the complete file of what occurred to students participating in ABE programs. Periodic follow-up sampling is necessary to get more accurate information. This follow-up could be done at either the state or federal level.

#### REFERENCES

Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988). Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century. Washington DC: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.

## **A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING PROGRAM QUALITY: MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY ACT OF 1991**

**Sondra G. Stein, Ph.D.  
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This year begins a great adventure for all of us involved in adult literacy and basic skills education -- as learners, practitioners, administrators, researchers and policy makers. The passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991 provides us with the tools and the Congressional and Executive authority to do what we have long dreamed of doing: to create the infrastructure for a system that will: 1) embrace the diversity of our service delivery network; 2) enhance the quality of literacy programs and the capacity of literacy practitioners through research, training, technical assistance and evaluation, and 3) strengthen the links between us so we can learn from each other and share with each other...so we can see ourselves as parts of one system dedicated to enabling every adult -- but especially educationally disadvantaged adults -- to have access to the best quality literacy and basic skills education.

At this moment, when we are beginning to frame this system -- to build a National Institute for Literacy, to create strong interagency linkages at the national, state and local level, and to establish systems for program quality -- it is especially important to community-based providers of literacy services that they are included, officially recognized by Congress, by National leaders, and by state directors of adult education as a critical part of the literacy delivery system in every state across this country. While much of the attention to date has focused on what that inclusion means in terms of access to new sources of funding for CBOs, at ACBE we are as concerned with inclusion of CBOs and other nontraditional providers in the system development process. It is not that we minimize the value of the Literacy Act's guarantee of access to the one

source of funding for adult literacy and basic skills that is stable, especially at this time when budget deficits are drying up local and state funds for adult basic skills. It is simply that it is foolish to believe that the promise of "direct and equitable access to AEA funds" for CBOs will actually lead to "direct and equitable use of AEA funds" unless CBOs also have a strong voice in shaping the mechanisms that control access to those funds. The only way our new system can be truly inclusive is if the quality control and resource dissemination mechanisms created for it are framed to include CBOs and other non-traditional providers in terms of their values, assumptions and definitions.

It is with this understanding that ACBE is pleased to participate in what we see as a project of pivotal importance in the implementation of the National Literacy Act. The Act calls for the development and implementation of indicators of program quality "to be used to evaluate programs assisted under this title...to determine whether such programs are effective, including whether such programs are successfully recruiting, retaining and improving the literacy skills of the individuals served in such programs." In other words, these "indicators of program quality" will essentially be the "gatekeepers" for Adult Education Act funding, once they are implemented by state directors of education in July, 1993.

As part of their contract with the US Department of Education to assist in the development of these indicators, Pelavin Associates asked ACBE to review a set of preliminary indicators and to respond to them from the perspective of CBO providers by addressing the following issues:

- 1) Are there any unique aspects of CBO providers that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
- 2) Are these indicators appropriate for CBO providers? Are any unnecessary or should any be added? If so, specify which and the reasons the measure should be added or deleted.



- 3) What problems or other issues would confront CBOS when using these or similar indicators?

The best way for us to answer these questions is to step back and ask -- and answer -- three questions of our own.

- 1) What would indicators developed by CBOs look like?
- 2) How would they be similar to/different from the indicators Pelavin has developed? What is the significance of these differences?
- 3) What kind of changes would be necessary to the indicators proposed by Pelavin in order for them to be appropriate to CBOs?

In answering these questions, one by one, my goal is first, to articulate the values, assumptions and definitions that shape CBO indicators of program quality. Second, I will compare these values, assumptions and definitions with those implicit and explicit in the framework developed by Pelavin for the U.S. Department of Education. Finally, drawing on this comparison, I will propose a shift in the approach proposed by Pelavin so that the resulting quality assurance framework can be used both to evaluate and to improve the effectiveness of the full range of adult literacy and basic skills programs, including those funded through programs established in the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services (e.g., JTPA, JOBS, Head Start) as well as those funded through the Adult Education Act as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991.

#### I. A CBO View of Quality Assurance

I'll start by trying to answer my first question: If CBOs sat down to develop their own set of indicators for program quality, what would they look like? This is a question that the Association for Community Based Education has been interested in since its inception. From 1980 to 1983 the Association worked with member programs "to develop an approach to institutional quality assessment and to define specifications for self-study that would be relevant to the practice of community-based education." The Standards of Performance for Community-

Based Educational Institutions that resulted from this effort were published with a Self Assessment Workbook aimed at helping CBOs assess the quality of their own performance.

While these standards did not focus specifically on literacy and basic skills programs, the next year ACBE participated in a project sponsored by the Dayton Hudson Foundation - B. Dalton National Literacy Initiative to develop a set of Guidelines for Effective Adult Literacy Programs (Rainbow Research, 1984) that did focus on literacy programs -- although, this time, not just CBOs. Since then ACBE has been working with member literacy programs to strengthen their own performance assessment systems and to improve the quality of their programs. We strongly believe that rigorous standards of program quality and performance work in the best interests of the participants of community-based programs. Building on our past efforts, we have begun to construct a framework for quality assurance for community-based literacy programs.

This past fall, at the annual conference, ACBE convened a Taskforce to participate in the development of this framework. The participants were representatives of more than a dozen community based educational institutions: they included large and small organizations from both rural and urban communities. Some were predominantly literacy and basic skills programs; some offered a much broader range of programs, including community development, housing and child care, to populations that were native speakers of English and native speakers of other languages. They represented, in short, the full range of programs ACBE includes in its definition of CBOs as free-standing, not-for-profit organizations that:

- a) are sanctioned by the communities within which they operate and are accountable to them; b) have a Board of Directors and staff that substantially reflect the population being served; c) reach populations, primarily in low-income communities, that are not served well by traditional programs; d) use methods and materials that are relevant to local conditions and the experience of the participants; and e) integrate teaching basic skills with broader objectives of individual empowerment and community growth.

While this definition includes within it implicit standards of quality, our taskforce's day-long effort to define the key elements of our quality framework did not begin with existing documents. Instead, it began with a consideration of our students -- the adults our programs were set up to serve. Participants were asked to prepare for the session by thinking about a particular adult who it was difficult for their organization to serve, for whatever reason. Participants were encouraged to take a long-term perspective: to think about what that adult had been like when he or she first came to their program; again, after six months; after one year; after two years; after five years.

Our session began with four groups of practitioners sharing within their groups these profiles of "hard-to-serve" adults and their changing needs over time. The task assigned to each group was to envision the key elements of a community-based literacy program that could, in fact, meet the needs of these adults and their communities. After a hard morning's work, each group shared their "key elements" with the rest, and then, for the rest of the day, we worked as a group-of-the-whole to combine the work of all four groups into a list of priority elements.

What was on that combined list? We called our first element "Environment." This is how we described it:

Programs need to provide a safe, supportive, challenging environment or climate that includes as essential ingredients: a) respect for all participants; b) freedom to make mistakes; c) someone to mentor everyone, staff and students alike; d) opportunities for growth and change; and e) opportunities to fill multiple roles (as both learner and teacher).

Our second element focused on "Community-Building." This element was described as follows:

Programs follow effective community-building processes and practices, to foster community within the program (among students, among staff, between students and staff) and to create strong multi-directional linkages with the larger community (including students' families and community organizations, institutions and resources that are critical to student survival and success).

Our third element was "Learner-centered structures and practices." It was described:

Learners are full partners in the conduct of the program, and share responsibility with staff, board and other members of the community for the growth and development of the program. Learners participate in setting long and short term goals for the program and in evaluating the program's success in meeting those goals. The program develops structures and systems to support learner involvement, including training for staff in leadership development techniques, and training for students in goal setting, planning and evaluation as well as training in working in teams and in leadership development."

There were other elements, too, of course. I elaborate these first three to give you a sense not only of what these community-based practitioners considered most important, but how, starting from the perspective of real learner needs, this group thought about program effectiveness.

We all felt good about the work we had accomplished: no one questioned the rightness or appropriateness of these key elements. It was not until I got home and was trying to make sense of the work we had done (alone, in my office, with sheets of news print spread all around) that I was struck by how different these elements were from every other attempt to define program effectiveness I had been involved with -- and there were quite a few during the six years I worked for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While I had not yet seen the evaluation framework developed by Pelavin Associates, I couldn't help thinking that the indicators developed to meet the requirements of the National Literacy Act would be much more similar to these state-level efforts than to the work of the ACBE Taskforce. Was our ACBE Taskforce taking an approach that would be consonant with the federal effort? When I sent back the notes from our session to all the members of our taskforce, I shared with them my concerns, enclosed a copy of the elements produced by one of our Massachusetts efforts (Principles for Effective Literacy and Basic Skills Programs), and invited everyone to think about these issues.

And that's what I did, too. I set about trying to understand how the two models were different, what the source of those differences was, and their significance.

## II. Two Roads Diverged in a Wood...

There are certain things that are very clear. For example, where you start and the questions you ask determine the nature of the key elements you define. I have already said that the CBO practitioners in the ACBE Taskforce began with a focus on students. They also began with a problem-solving focus. I had asked them to start by describing not just any student, but a student their program had difficulty serving. In developing a set of key elements each group of practitioners was answering the following question:

"What are the key elements for assuring that adults from the communities we work with will be able to participate in our educational programs until they achieve their individual or community goals?"

The question that framed the inquiry for both the Massachusetts effort and the Pelavin Framework was very different. Initiated in response to legislative action, one at the state the other at the federal level, both are attempts to standardize across systems a common definition of what constitutes an effective literacy or basic skills program. The question being asked might be phrased as:

"What key elements should state agencies/state directors of education look for in literacy and basic skills programs when attempting to determine if these programs are effective in assisting adults to achieve their goals?"

The framework that Pelavin constructed in response to this question is included, for ease of comparison, in the box below.

There are a number of ways one could characterize the differences between these two approaches. We could say that the unit of analysis for Pelavin is effective service delivery whereas the unit of analysis for the CBO task force is meeting student/community need. Pelavin begins with the formal analytical grid provided by a state plan or request for proposal, the kind of framework that makes sense when one's task is to standardize and optimize existing efforts of state directors.

# I. Evaluation Framework and Sample Indicators developed for US DOE

## A. PROGRAM CONTEXT

1. Need for Program Services
  - A. Number and Demographics of target population
  - B. Literacy Levels in community
  - C. High school drop-outs in community
  - D. Employment-related skill needs of community
2. Organization and Structure of Delivery System
  - A. Number of projects
  - B. Location and settings of projects
  - C. Type of projects
3. Characteristics of Participants
  - Number and demographics of participants by:
    - A. skill level
    - B. program type
    - C. program setting

## B. PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT

### I. PROGRAM PLANNING

1. Community Input in Program Development
  - A. Existence of an Advisory Board
  - B. Program Holds Public Hearings
  - C. Use of a needs assessment
  - D. Other sources consulted
2. Coordination Activities
  - A. Existence of coordination arrangements
  - B. Type of coordinated activities
3. Written Operational Plan
  - A. Existence of a plan
  - B. Specific program goals and objective consistent with state plan
  - C. Plan development process

### II. PROGRAM CONTENT

1. Recruitment
  - A. Recruitment methods
  - B. Population Targeted
  - C. Program Outreach and publicity

2. Program Intake Procedures
  - A. Entry policies
  - B. Incoming Assessment procedures
  - C. Development of individual learning plans
3. Ongoing Assessment Methods
  - A. Procedures for monitoring student progress and learning gains
  - B. Procedures for monitoring student progress toward goals
4. Support Services
  - A. Type of support services offered
  - B. Adequacy of services for meeting student need
5. Exit and Follow-up Procedures
  - A. Methods for contacting drop-outs
  - B. Exit interviews

## III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

1. Characteristics of Staff
  - A. Demographics
  - B. Educational Background, credentials, experience
  - C. Number of staff
  - D. Staff retention
2. Staff Responsibilities
  - A. Duties of staff
  - B. Staff commitment
  - C. Staff input into program design
3. Staff Development
  - A. Existence of staff development component
    1. When provided
    2. Content
    3. Duration
    4. Sequential training
    5. Staff compensation for attendance
  - B. Evaluation of staff development activities:
    1. Systematic needs assessment for content
    2. Evaluation of activities by staff
    3. Staff participation in development
4. Use of Volunteer Staff
  - A. Duties of volunteers
  - B. Volunteer training

## II. Evaluation Framework and Sample Indicators (Cont'd)

### IV. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

1. **Type of Curriculum and Instruction Used**
  - A. Instructional/assessment method used
  - B. Topical emphasis
  - C. Instructional technique
2. **Materials and Equipment Used**
  - A. **Characteristics of commonly used materials:**
    1. Appropriate for student abilities
    2. Appropriate for student interests and needs
    3. Reflects diverse socioeconomic and culture of learners
  - B. **Characteristics of equipment:**
    1. Appropriate to meet program and learner needs
    2. Sufficient amount to meet program and learner needs
3. **Selection and Evaluation of Materials and Equipment**
  - A. Method used to select and evaluate equipment and materials

### PROGRAM OUTCOMES

1. **Retention**
  - A. Hours of instruction received
  - B. Participation rates for population subgroups
2. **Educational Gains**
  - A. Standardize test score gains
  - B. Competencies attained
3. **Employment**
  - A. Attained new employment
  - B. Improved current employment
  - C. Improved income
  - D. Attained employment-related skills
4. **Goal Achievement**
  - A. Achieved personal goals for participation

The CBOs don't really begin with a framework at all; their starting point for identifying elements is the complexity of the lives of their learners. This, too, makes sense, given that few of the programs represented in the taskforce were "planned" or laid out in response to an RFP. Rather, they came into existence in response to some community need, and grew and changed organically, adding or changing elements in response to changing organizational and community needs.

As a result, we could say that the rules of coherence governing these two approaches are different. Since the components of the framework developed by Pelavin are derived from a formal analysis of institutionalized service delivery, the coherence of these "like" or parallel components is a given, a logical outcome of the deductive process that produced them. Conversely, the logic that drives the CBO process is inductive. The principle that enables the

seemingly disparate components CBOs identify to cohere as a system is that all play a critical role in addressing the full complexity of learners' lives.

We can also compare the role of values in these two approaches. Striving for universality, Pelavin intentionally leaves out elements like goals, objectives and philosophic orientation that are the locus of value and can be presumed to vary from program to program and state to state. Working within a smaller, more congruent universe, the CBO taskforce assumes a commonality of values. They start with elements that are already value-laden, that we might describe as philosophic orientations as much as components, like "learner-centered structures and practices" and "community-building practices." The values explicit in these elements are the glue that holds together discrete functions grouped within components, as well as shaping the approach to more traditional elements like "planning," "personnel," "staff development," "governance," "support systems," etc.

Finally, while the CBOs are interested in constructing a formative evaluation framework they and other CBOs can use to improve their programs, Pelavin has been specifically charged by the U.S. Department of Education to develop a framework for summative evaluation across programs and states.

It would be possible to sum up these differences by describing them as the inevitable results of a top-down v. a bottom-up process and to conclude that while the CBO process may be well and good for program improvement, it just doesn't do the job when you are trying to build a "system." While this is the current conventional wisdom on the significance of these differences, I don't think any of us participating in this process would be satisfied with this conclusion. It polarizes issues that aren't polar opposites. On the one hand, it presumes that the only reason CBOs or any nontraditional providers would participate in developing an evaluation system is to undermine or neutralize the process -- to minimize the impact (in terms of what they need to



document and report) on CBOs. On the other, this kind of "summing-up" assumes the approach represented by the Pelavin framework is the only credible approach to developing an evaluation system. As a result, it locks us into a scientific management approach to adult literacy program evaluation just at the point that a new way of thinking about program effectiveness is emerging. In the remaining sections of this paper, I will introduce some of the assumptions underlying this new way of thinking and to explore its application to the process of developing indicators of program quality for the adult literacy and basic skills system.

### III. The Road Not Yet Taken

Those of us who have been involved in workplace education programs over the past few years have had direct experience with the "quality" or "continuous improvement" movement that is transforming how leading edge companies think about productivity. As results documenting the efficacy of this approach come in from corporations around the world, American educators are beginning to ask what the educational reform movement can learn from it. Professor Jacob

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### III. Scientific Management vs. Quality Management

Scientific Management is the approach to the organization of work developed by Frederick Taylor. Widely associated with the American approach to mass production, "Taylorism," as it is often called, aims to achieve the goal of increased productivity by breaking down complex jobs into simple rote tasks which workers can repeat with machine-like efficiency. Quality management takes an opposite approach. It aims to increase productivity by involving every member of the workforce in a continuous process of improving quality, efficiency, and customer satisfaction.

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Stampen of the University of Wisconsin helped to open this avenue of exploration in an article on "Improving the Quality of Education: W Edwards Deming and Effective Schools." Stampen begins his article by reminding us that "educational reforms often have developed from ideas born in industry. In fact, the field of educational administration originated as an offshoot of the scientific management movement in the early 1900's." Since Deming's ideas are "heralded as nothing less than the third wave of the industrial revolution," replacing the ideas of scientific

management that shaped the second wave, Stampen is interested in exploring the extent to which Deming's philosophy and tools might be used to produce a similar transformation in education.

(Contemporary Education Review, Winter 1984)

Since Stampen's article first appeared there have been a number of efforts to rewrite Deming's "14 Points for Quality Improvement" as an explicit guide to school reform. Several of these points seem to have direct applicability to our efforts to improve the quality of adult literacy and basic skills programs.

- 1) An organization is a "connected system." A problem in one part of the "system" impacts the whole. Therefore it is important to break down barriers between departments and functional divisions and to encourage collaborative problem-solving and long-term planning.
- 2) What connects the members of an organization is a sense of common purpose and common goals. Strong leadership helps to build constancy of purpose and total involvement (by staff, students, and community members) in continuous improvement efforts. There is continuous education of all participants so they can fully participate in the process of improving the organization, so they can all do a better job.
- 3) People work best in situations where barriers to "pride in workmanship" are removed; where "slogans, exhortations and targets" that create "adversarial relationships" and build a "climate of fear" are replaced by leadership and training in effective methods to reinforce creativity and build community. This is true for both staff and students.
- 4) The ultimate test of quality of service and quality of product is customer satisfaction. While students are the primary customers of education, they also can be seen as workers (engaged in the learning process/the production of knowledge and understanding). Other customers are those who rely on the quality of the education process -- most notably, employers, family, and the community.

#### IV. Charting a New Path

We need the framework being developed by the U.S. Department of Education to evaluate literacy and basic skills programs to incorporate this new approach to achieving quality in organizations. Instead of working in the tradition of scientific management and focusing on discrete program functions, we need this new evaluation framework to adopt the quality assurance

approach expressed in the Deming principles above, and to focus on literacy and basic skills programs as interconnected systems. This approach assumes that a defining element of program quality for every type of basic skills and literacy program -- not just CBOs -- is the development and articulation of a clear educational philosophy. Broadly understood by staff, students and community, such a defining philosophy is a critical component of the organizational development process, creating a constancy of purpose which galvanizes action. It builds a shared community of values among all members of the program community -- staff, students and board, alike -- that, in turn, produces an "environment of information and trust" that encourages problem-solving and facilitates learning, involvement and empowerment at every level. Everyone works smarter, and the program outcomes reflect this constancy of purpose (Rhodes, The School Administrator, 10/90, 11/90).

If the U.S. Department of Education were to move in this direction in developing its framework for evaluation it would be breaking new ground. So far, efforts to translate the Deming approach to the world of education have focused on school improvement rather than school evaluation. However, the quality movement does offer us two very prominent models for evaluation. The first and most well known is the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, administered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology of the U.S. Department of Commerce. What is particularly interesting about the Baldrige Award, from the point of view of developing an evaluation framework for adult education and literacy, is that its purpose is to "promote awareness of quality as an increasingly important element...[to promote] understanding of the requirements for quality excellence, and sharing of information on successful quality strategies and on the benefits derived from implementation of these strategies" (Baldrige Application, 1991 p. 1). In other words, the intent of this competition, like the intent of Congress

in calling for development and implementation of a system of indicators of program quality, is to improve the quality of a broad range of organizations across the nation.

To achieve this goal, the Baldrige award examination process incorporates several key features which could be replicated in the framework developed for the U.S. Department of Education. These include:

- 1) **an emphasis on being non-prescriptive.** In the words of one examiner, the Baldrige examination is "an audit framework, an encompassing set of categories that tells companies where, and in what ways they must demonstrate proficiency," without prescribing what techniques or methods a company must use to get there.
- 2) **an emphasis on diagnosis as well as evaluation.** Companies that aren't ready to undergo examination can use the Baldrige framework to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. In addition to outlining a set of items to be examined within each category, the Baldrige framework includes a scoring system that looks at the approach a company uses, the extent to which that approach is deployed throughout the company, and the outcomes of that approach.
- 3) **an emphasis on "quality system integration,"** as expressed in the key concepts or values that lie behind the categories examined.

While these general approaches to creating a evaluation framework are relevant to an adult basic education system of program quality evaluation, the Baldrige Award's focus on the development and deployment of management systems to build quality performance means that the specific categories examined are not directly translatable to the evaluation of adult basic education programs. However, there is another quality award, The Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing, administered by the Utah State University College of Business, which is based on the same values and concepts but which, because it is focused more narrowly, provides a set of categories that we could translate quite easily to the world of adult basic education. These categories are outlined in brief, below:

It seems to me that this framework for quality assurance can be easily adapted to the evaluation of adult education and literacy programs. Section by Section it can be transposed on the three major sections of the framework developed by Pelavin, enabling us to maintain the

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#### IV. Categories of The Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing

- I. Strategic Leadership, Involvement and Support
    - A. Management leadership
    - B. Employee involvement
    - C. Business Process, Operations and Support/Service Improvement
  - II. Manufacturing Methods, Systems, and Processes
  - III. Measured Improvements in Productivity, Quality and Customer Satisfaction
- 

formal structure laid out, while we shift the focus within each section and within each topic area identified so that our indicators reflect these system quality issues.

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#### V. Adaptations for a Quality Assurance Framework: Section II

PROGRAM CONTENT	EDUCATIONAL METHODS, SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES
<p>III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS</p> <p>1. Characteristics of Staff</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Demographics</li><li>B. Educational background, credentials, experience</li><li>C. Number of Staff</li><li>D. Staff Retention</li></ol>	<p>III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS</p> <p>1. Staff Recruitment, Selection and Retention Processes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Processes for recruiting staff with appropriate demographic background and appropriate educational background, credentials and experience.</li><li>B. Processes for ensuring that individuals selected to be on staff reflect appropriate demographic background.</li><li>C. Processes for ensuring that individuals selected to be on staff reflect appropriate educational background, credentials and experience.</li><li>D. Processes and structures for involving staff, students, board and community members in hiring processes.</li><li>E. Processes and structures for ensuring an appropriate staff: student ratio is maintained for every level of class.</li></ol>

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This process of adaptation would be minimal for Sections II and III. Section II of the Pelavin Framework, "PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT" might be slightly refocused to highlight "EDUCATIONAL METHODS, SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES." The emphasis would be on how the program does its work. It would look at the "methods, systems and processes" used

by the program in each component area for evidence that these "methods, systems and processes" are appropriate to meeting the goals of the program and the needs of the targeted student population. The kinds of indicators proposed under Curriculum and Materials/Materials and Equipment Used is what I have in mind here. Thus, under III. Staff Qualifications (1) would focus on "Staff Recruitment, Selection and Retention Processes" rather than on "Characteristics of Staff." While much of the actual data looked at might be similar, the indicators would, again, focus on how what the organization does is appropriate to creating a staff that meets the needs of the learners and the goals of the organization.

Similarly, reframing the final "PROGRAM OUTCOMES" section to focus on "MEASURED IMPROVEMENTS IN PROGRAM QUALITY, PROGRAM GOALS AND LEARNER ACHIEVEMENTS" might allow programs to tie what has been accomplished more directly and explicitly to how they do what they do. To take just one component listed under "OUTCOMES" as an example let's look at "Retention." Retention matters because unless students actually participate in educational activities they won't make educational gains or achieve other goals. So we want programs to document the number and percent of students who stay in the program long enough to achieve their goals (which may include transfer/referral to a more appropriate program). And we want programs to track or document how the methods, processes and systems they employ for recruitment, intake, assessment, instruction, etc. impact on learner retention. That is, after all, what qualifies these components as indicators of program quality: the fact that how we do them has an impact on learner achievement.

What I am suggesting here is that this section must look at the full range of program outcomes. This includes an expansion of the list of learner achievements identified in the Pelavin framework to include the range of learner achievements identified in ACBE's 1989 Evaluation of Community Based Literacy Programs. These achievements, now embraced under the rubric

"achieved personal goals for participation," include outcomes that have been identified as central to the Literacy Act's goals of impacting the intergenerational transfer of literacy as well as the skills of the American workforce. They include: 1) fostering children's intellectual, social and academic development; 2) strengthening participation in community activities; 3) building skills in critical thinking and problem-solving; and, as a pre-condition for these outcomes, 4) enhancing learner self-esteem; and 5) enhancing learner self-determination.

Looking at such outcomes for learners reminds us that programs also may have other goals for impact on the community that are measurable and should also be included in this final section. Such "program achievements" might include such outcomes as: 1) adding a satellite program in a public housing project or some other setting where the program can serve a population it is important to target; 2) working with a community health center to enhance community member's knowledge about nutrition, AIDS and other public health issues. The indicators here would be expressed in terms of the impact on community problems.

This approach to program outcomes also includes measurable improvements in program quality planned and implemented with the intention of enhancing or facilitating the achievement of specific learner and program goals. By focusing on "improvements" in all these outcome areas our framework encourages looking at changes in program quality, program goals and learner achievements over time. It is acknowledging that building quality performance is a process.

The greatest changes would be required to Section I "PROGRAM CONTEXT" of the Pelavin Framework. This section would need to be refocused on the internal as opposed to the external context. Like the Shingo and Baldrige Frameworks it would focus on "STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND VISION, INVOLVEMENT (of the community and the learners as well as staff) AND SUPPORT (Structures and Processes for Planning and Change)." An outline of the

topics where we would want to identify program indicators for this section is included in the box on the next page.

The topics included here are suggestive rather than prescriptive. They include topics currently listed under Section II Program Planning of the Pelavin Framework. I feel they belong in this first section which includes those processes, structures and systems that set the context for understanding how the program goes about its daily work of assisting adults in meeting their educational needs.

## VI. Where Do We Go From Here

Moving into new, uncharted territory is exciting but also a little frightening. The National Literacy Act, with its emphasis on creating a high quality adult literacy and basic skills system that can meet our nation's needs for a well educated adult population, is an invitation to us to develop new tools and approaches that will enable us to map the full extent of this territory. The Program Quality Assurance Framework outlined in this paper provides a set of tools which we believe is well-suited for this task. While we have much work to do to fill out the outline -- to develop and test indicators and standards for every topic and component -- there are clear guidelines for this work, implicit in the approach to quality evaluation discussed above. These key concepts are:

- 1) **The approach is non-prescriptive.** While it requires adult literacy and basic skills programs to develop clarity about their values and philosophy as a key to effective organizational development, it does not prescribe a particular set of values or specific program processes and structures.
- 2) **The approach is diagnostic.** It assumes that literacy and basic skills programs ought to be involved in a process of building program quality. Through our evaluation we take "snapshots" of this process to assess how well the program is doing at a given time. However, we don't want our indicators to be static; we want them to focus on how not what, on "continuous improvement."



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## **VI. Adaptations for Quality Assurance Framework: Section One**

### **A. Strategic Leadership and Vision**

- 1. Broad dissemination throughout the organization of mission, goals, policy and guidelines**
- 2. Program-wide meetings held annually for evaluation and revision**
- 3. Exec Director and other management are in touch with student needs/ student satisfaction and participate in problem-solving taskforces focused on improving program quality.**
- 4. Exec Director and other management reinforce commitment to improving program quality by providing staff with resources, time and encouragement for participation in such efforts.**

### **B. Involvement**

- 1. Processes and structures for building community within the organization**
- 2. Processes and structures for involving staff in regular evaluation/quality improvement efforts**
- 3. Processes and structures for involving learners in regular evaluation/quality improvement efforts**
- 4. Processes and structures for involving broader community in regular evaluation/quality improvement efforts**
- 5. Processes and structures for building strong links with grassroots and public community institutions**
- 6. Processes and structures for participation of learners, staff and community members in program decision-making and other leadership development activities**

### **C. Support for Program Planning and Change**

- 1. Processes and Structures for Community Input in Program Development**
  - 2. Processes and structures for coordination activities**
  - 3. Processes and structures for developing a multi-year plan**
  - 4. Processes and structures for documenting program and learner progress, and for evaluating achievements against plan.**
-

- 3) **The approach stresses integration of components into a system. Rather than looking at program elements in isolation, the approach looks at how the element contributes to the system and evaluates its impact on program goals and learner achievements.**
- 4) **The approach stresses customer satisfaction as the touchstone for quality assurance. If a program is having difficulty meeting its recruitment and retention goals, if learners are not making measurable gains in identified achievement areas then something is wrong. The program must look back at its goals and look carefully at its educational methods, systems and processes to determine where the problem is and what kind of changes it can make to better serve the needs of adults and their communities.**

An approach to program evaluation that is based on these quality improvement principles will enable us to build a nationwide adult literacy system that is strong and flexible; that not only meets its goals for today but is capable of adapting to changing needs as we move toward our national goal of an adult population that possesses the skills and knowledge necessary "to function effectively and to achieve the greatest possible opportunity in their work and in their lives."

## **INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY FOR VOLUNTEER LITERACY PROGRAMS**

**Kevin G. Smith**  
**Literary Volunteers of New York State**

The primary benefit of education is personal empowerment. Empowered people enable social and economic development. The highest levels of personal empowerment occur when the greatest number of individuals are educated to meet existing social and economic expectations. These expectations are in a state of continuous change, yet each must be met. The disparity between expectation and fulfillment, between assimilation and dependency, between skill required and skill available and between input and output is widening. This dynamic relationship determines whether there are high or low rates of literacy.

Until recently compulsory education to age 16 was sufficiently effective meeting the needs of society and the economy. Accelerated economic and social changes have led to higher levels of personal dissatisfaction for many adults. One factor influencing this dissatisfaction is the increase in information which necessitates more advanced skills for processing that information. While there are many positives resulting from the advent of the "Information Age", one of the negatives is the widening gap it has created between those who have the skills to access, understand and utilize information, and those who don't.

Short-term, the easiest place to begin is to further educate those whose skills are closest to meeting needs. This approach has been an effective, interim solution. But as we have learned in the JTPA system among others, this approach, by design, must indicate arbitrary selection criteria creating a wider gap between those chosen to be served and those left unserved. Rather, a long-term, comprehensive approach is warranted which provides access and appropriate service to any and all adult learners in need.

To develop a comprehensive approach to literacy service provision we must define literacy skills standards for the 1990's, and begin to project those skills which will be required in the decades ahead, to enable service providers to adjust their input and output. This prerequisite mandates significant research, analysis and trend extrapolation. It also requires more sophisticated and formal relationships between industry, labor, government and education.

In a sense, enabling the appropriate education of future generations is an easier task than closing the current skills gap, since short-term solutions mandate quick, politically-expedient fixes. As with the relationship between personal empowerment and social and economic well-being, there is a causal relationship between those currently affected and those who will be affected in the future which cannot be ignored. Undereducated parents raise undereducated children who inherit their personal, social and economic problems. A comprehensive system must address this relationship to avoid "writing off" an entire generation. A comprehensive system must be a reasonable blend of short, medium and long range solutions.

The current system engages only a handful of service sectors which bring varying resources and capacities. These sectors include: school districts and vocational/technical institutions, CBOs, two and four-year institutions of higher education, libraries, corrections and volunteer literacy organizations.

To develop a comprehensive system a great deal of additional resource is required. To hold the current system accountable for outcomes it cannot achieve is foolhardy. To establish a universal set of program quality indicators which compares these service sectors as equal in input and output would be a serious error. Each must be enhanced and judged according to its merit. Achievable goals should be established for each. Every resource must be employed to begin to transform what we have into what we need.

For both short- and long-term solutions, one of the best resources available is volunteers. Volunteer literacy programs have a long and positive history of service. Quality indicators for volunteer literacy programs have been almost exclusively based on client satisfaction as agreed upon by tutor and learner. However, expectations have changed. As a result this service sector, as most, needs the time and resource to adjust to the new expectations. Research is needed to determine what the current and future outcome standards for social and economic participation are and how and where volunteer literacy programs contribute. Volunteer literacy programs must have a voice in determining output and what benefit that output has in meeting the current and future skills needs.

Based on this analysis, a set of program quality standards specific to volunteer literacy programs should be established. Once standards are determined, volunteer literacy programs would have a benchmark upon which to be judged.

## **PROGRAM CONTEXT**

### **Need for Program Services**

The need for program services in literacy can be determined through an analysis of census, survey and/or test results. While this data can provide projections for long-rang planning, it's most accurate when viewed as a snapshot of current conditions. Any unforeseen social or economic change can create the need for program service where the need did not previously exist. Any data which indicates that a significant percentage of the population is or is at risk of being unable to engage in positive social or economic endeavor are strong indicators of the need for program services.

The responsibility to determine the need for program should not be weighted heavily in assessing the program value. It is illogical, inefficient and unreliable to have every local service provider determining the need for literacy programs. A comprehensive system should be backed

by a master plan which assesses the current and future needs of the nation, state and local community. Programs should be judged on their ability to develop programs needed rather than on their ability to determine that need.

Volunteer literacy programs cut across demographic, socio-economic and contextual service boundaries. In addition to being particularly well-suited to serving adults with the lowest skills and self-esteem, volunteer programs have the flexibility to serve as adjuncts for adults receiving classroom instruction pursuing higher academic and/or employment related goals or to serve those who have attained a credential but not the skills it represents.

#### **Organization and Structure of Delivery System**

Since the one-to-one tutorial model is the predominant delivery design for volunteer literacy programs, each dyad (tutor/learner pair) must be viewed as a project. In this area, the program's ability to create a structure which minimizes logistical barriers for both the learner and the tutor while maintaining a consistent communication and support network is the critical indicator suggesting quality. An urban program with a high percentage of suburban volunteers who are unable or unwilling to meet the needs of inner city learners is an indication and example of poor program planning. Again, service flexibility is primary. A service delivery system which is organized and structured— which serves those most physically and programmatically hard to reach— is the goal.

Another quality indicator is the level of coordination and integration between and among service providers. Creating this community network is the mutual responsibility of all programs — volunteer literacy and others — and if evidence reveals effort but no result — volunteer literacy programs should not be judged negatively. Many programs complain that they don't have the time or resources to make the connections required to make community connections. Failure to

do so has direct, negative consequence for the learners and should be weighted heavily in assessing program quality.

### **Characteristics of Participants**

Collecting, analyzing and effecting program improvement — based on the number and demographics of participants by skill level, program type and program setting — is an important capacity for any program. One of the potential problems agencies encounter is that the data collected is used to limit or define the program. Evaluation is easiest when there are a minimum number of variables. The tendency is to reduce the number of variables thereby pigeonholing programs into specific, narrowly defined service areas. Volunteer literacy programs may be most susceptible to an effort to limit program variables, for they have the greatest number of them. For example, the perception that volunteer literacy programs serve the hardest to reach, hardest to teach has led some states to delineate the populations to be served by this sector as 0-4 reading level exclusively. LVA-NYS data indicates that over 40% percent of those seeking service from Literacy Volunteers are employed and not in the assumed classification. The common threads seem to be program accessibility and choice based on the learner's perceived or real need for one-to-one, more confidential support.

### **PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT:**

#### **I. Program Planning**

##### **Community Input in Program Development**

Any program designed to serve a community needs to utilize the resources of that community. This is especially true of a volunteer literacy program. National and state volunteer programs offer communities a program model, training and technical assistance to develop a service in their community. State agencies work to empower the community to address its own

needs. The concentration and focus has been on the needs of individuals as opposed to any larger social or economic expectation.

Volunteer literacy programs, as private, non-profit entities, must be operated by a Board of Directors. These Boards should be comprised of a cross-section of community members — including adult learners. Organization plans and policies should emerge through the deliberations of these representatives. LVA-New York State experience shows that local programs which include adult learners in the program and policy process are stronger, more viable organizations.

### **Coordination Activities**

If the goal is to develop a comprehensive continuum of service to meet the personal, social and economic needs of each and every community then, clearly, the existence of coordination arrangements and the articulation of the types of coordinated activities are indicators of good program planning and program quality. These conditions most often occur in an environment characterized by a clear community, state and national knowledge of the standards and changes it wishes to effect, mutual program and professional respect and adequate resource. These prerequisite conditions do not currently exist, therefore, expectations must be adapted.

It is right and good to foster coordination activities among programs to benefit learners who wish to transition and to share resource. However, as long as this is an underfunded enterprise that learners choose to engage, a program should not be judged on how well it coordinates with other programs. Rather, program quality should be judged on how well the literacy program screens its applicants to insure appropriate placement, its knowledge of other services and its systems for getting that information to the people who need it, when they need it.



## **Written Operational Plan**

Adult continuing education is one of the most dynamic growth, issue industries of our time. The enterprise is currently characterized by an evolving definition, a lack of adequate research and empirical data upon which to base prediction and decision, a nebulous sense of purpose, insufficient financial resource and a dearth of expertise. Good planning requires sufficient human, fiscal and information resource. Therefore, planning is very difficult.

Despite these barriers, all programs should plan. The planning process should be as thorough and inclusive as possible. The plan should be written and be subject to constant review and revision.

LVA-NYS has found that some of the resources required are available in the community, frequently through large corporations with planning personnel or the consulting firms utilized for this purpose. The national volunteer literacy networks, often through their mid-level support systems, provide planning support for their local programs and/or advise as to how and where to get support. Evidence of the awareness of the need to plan or an effort to plan should be viewed as positive and built upon.

## **II. Program Content**

### **Recruitment**

Volunteer literacy programs have two constituencies in the community: volunteers and learners and must have solid recruitment systems for each. Learner recruitment is the priority. The most successful approach is a multi-layered direct and indirect strategy. Direct activities should include a full range of print, audio and video media. The most effective recruitment systems include targeting the individuals who provide information to those who are unable to access it themselves. Indirect measures are those which change policy and prejudices that limit program access. Removing the personal stigma which has long been associated with illiteracy is a

very significant recruitment activity. Affecting supportive changes in public policy is important. A program's attention to learner advocacy should be considered when assessing program quality.

Recruitment of volunteers is another, but equally essential, aspect of a good volunteer literacy program. Quality programs only recruit and train enough volunteers to maintain the level of service required. Trained volunteers who are never matched are wasted resource and a negative recruitment factor. If those individuals share, with even one other potential volunteer, a negative experience additional resource is lost. In this environment volunteers are difficult to recruit and retain. Good programs understand their needs and control their recruitment activities to meet them.

Programs that continue to recruit when they do not have the resource to serve and support should be viewed negatively. With the current national attention to the issue of adult illiteracy, some programs have all they can do to keep up with externally stimulated expectation. Good volunteer literacy programs have learner and volunteer recruitment procedures that they can adjust to meet need and capacity. The recruitment of program support should be an on-going, consistent effort.

#### **Program Intake Procedures**

Most volunteer literacy programs have an informal set of entry policies but would be hard pressed to produce them in writing. The critical issues have to do with making decisions about whether the program can assist the individual and whether the learner has the right intentions for seeking assistance. Some programs, for example, have created entry policies which do not permit service to agency referrals which mandate participation. The experience has been that learners who are externally motivated don't follow through. Other programs have reported interview techniques which listen for ulterior motive, such as, the male learner who specifically request a female tutor.

For the most part, programs try not to have policies which create categorical exclusion. Volunteer literacy programs, for example, are one of the few resources available to serve adults with learning problems. Many adults indicate that they have a learning disability when it may be a problem based on other than clinical disfunction and can be addressed by a trained volunteer. The key to quality is capacity of the program to match resource with need. Since volunteers come with varying levels of skill, we cannot say that we are unable to serve any individual need.

Most volunteer literacy programs utilize some type of diagnostic tool to determine deficiencies in reading skills. Most do intake interviews designed to elicit personal goals and expectations. Tutors are trained to develop individual learning plans from the information gathered during intake, from the diagnostic tool and through rapport building techniques.

One of the critical factors is that planning decisions for each learner must involve the learner; all plans should be agreed to by the learner. Evidence of these characteristics is an indication of high program quality.

Good programs provide their learners and volunteers with realistic expectations. One of the most difficult challenges is to assist the learner who desires a GED and is reading at the 2nd grade level to accept the distance between these two points and not make it too daunting. There are typically no short cuts to this type of goal achievement. However, a program which fails to teach skills contextualized within a desired specific personal, social or economic outcome articulated by the learner is risking failure. Most learners have very specific goals which made them decide to seek assistance. Programs which substitute goals that meet program, funding or management outcomes that are inconsistent with personal outcomes will negatively impact learner success and retention and not meet either set of outcomes. The best programs are those that hear what the learner wants and needs and develop learning plans which plot the most direct course to achievement.

## Ongoing Assessment Methods

Most learners want to effect some positive outcome or change in their personal, social or economic condition now and to improve their capacity to effect positive personal change in the future. Improved reading skills are a universal prerequisite to this type of independence. They therefore be a primary approach to improved literacy skills. It is the opinion of this author that reading is only a part of successful information processing and an individual's ability to effect change. A learner, who can decode but not comprehend, who can read but has no knowledge of how to access relevant information, who possesses the needed information but doesn't know how to use or explain it, is still dependent (or functionally illiterate).

Procedures for monitoring student progress toward goal achievement should inform student progress and learning gains expected, monitored and achieved. In other words, learning gains are the means to achievement of personal, social and economic goals. They are the means to an end. If the means do not enable the desired end but some learning gains are being achieved, the program can be considered ineffective. Programs should offer learning opportunities specific to the context in which the learner desires to effect positive change and be judged primarily on their capacity to enable goal achievement.

Some learning gains occur which are critical to goal achievement but difficult to monitor. These gains are in the life skills and/or affective domain. One of the greatest strengths of a volunteer tutor is that he/she is a information processor who employs his/her skills to effect desired change in his/her own life and that of their student. In many respects, a volunteer tutor acts as model and mentor to the adult learner they assist. The volunteer tutor has the greatest latitude in using the community as classroom. If an adult learner indicates difficulty in accessing a needed social program or making a purchase or any other personal, social or economic function, the tutor can and should address that specific need and learning opportunity. By indicating and

showing their learner how they deal with similar life situations they are modeling and teaching skills and addressing the immediate concern of the learner which, if not addressed, will probably inhibit learning.

This overall type of tutor/student activity should be considered literacy training. Yet funding requirements to demonstrate grade level growth in reading conflict with, and even inhibit this type of activity. The whole volunteer literacy system is set up to train and monitor tutors in reading instruction. Activity that doesn't feel like reading instruction is probably avoided. Yet, tutors have far more experience and training in processing information necessary to solve life problems than they do in teaching reading. When the definition of literacy was solely based on the ability to read, the focus on reading instruction made sense. With greater enlightenment as reflected in the definition of literacy in the National Literacy Act the type of activities described are clearly appropriate, measurable, fundable and needed.

#### **Support Services**

In many respects the delivery design of volunteer literacy programs responds to the myriad of support services needed. In a one-to-one relationship there is greater flexibility to negotiate and mitigate logistical issues and to follow-up on referrals specific to the need of the individual learner. The critical factor for the volunteer literacy program is making sure that tutors and learners have access to the information. It is a significant responsibility and expenditure to gather and maintain a data base and information dissemination system on all related support services available in a given community. Again, that the program is aware of the importance of such a capacity and has made reasonable effort to achieve this goal based on the resource available is an indication of program quality.

Clearly, the relationship between support services offered or accessible through referral and the needs of the learner is critical. Attrition attributed to a lack of or inappropriate support services is an indication of program quality.

### **Exit and Follow-up Procedures**

All programs should distinguish between positive, neutral and negative termination. Positive termination include reasons such as goal attainment or transition to another, more appropriate service. An example of neutral termination is that the learner moves out of the service area or makes a personal decision to discontinue based on factors the program cannot control. Negative termination is that the program failed to meet the learners' needs and/or failed to refer them to a more appropriate provider.

A goal of all literacy programs should be a full range exit interview including final learning gain toward goal attainment evaluation. Volunteer literacy programs have a particularly difficult time performing this function and getting this data. To some extent, this is so because of a failure to emphasize the expectation to the tutor cadre and, to another extent, it is the result of the nature of the population being served. Many tutorial relationship end because the learner simply stops showing up.

## **III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS**

### **Characteristics of Staff**

Ideally, staff composition should reflect the population of learners to be served in a community. In some cases that balance exists. However, in most cases, the learner population base is multi-cultural, but the staffing patterns are not.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the volunteer literacy network during the past several years in the area of staffing. Not long ago few programs had the "luxury" of hiring paid staff;

those programs that did typically hire from within the literacy program ranks, and often to perform program specific tasks.

However, that scenario has dramatically changed. Most volunteer literacy programs now have some amount of paid staff. An equally dramatic change is occurring in who is being hired.

Staff now have diverse educational, cultural and professional experiences and a wide range of credentials. Newly hired staff often have backgrounds in volunteer and/or not-for-profit management, fund development, and adult education among other fields. Although these professionals bring valuable and needed expertise to their volunteer literacy program, they often have limited, if any, specific volunteer literacy experience.

Within the LVA-NYS network of 50 programs, two have no paid staff, six to eight have one part-time paid staff person, and the rest have between one and seven full-time paid staff positions. Without exception, all programs within the network are understaffed.

Recruiting and retaining high quality professional staff is a major concern of volunteer literacy programs; salary is often not commensurate with other not-for-profits in the local community, and subsequently significant staff turnover exists. That is slowly changing as programs and the field begin to recognize that, just as volunteers aren't free, neither are quality professionals to direct them.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

Staff responsibilities range from Executive Directors having "hands on" direct programmatic and fiscal responsibilities to full or part-time tutor trainers, bookkeepers, office managers, clerical support staff, etc.

Volunteer literacy positions have responsibilities similar to those of other not-for-profit organizations (i.e., bookkeepers, office managers, clerical support, etc.) Their duties, with few exceptions, are not unique to volunteer literacy programs.

Positions and duties unique to volunteer literacy programs often involve training and program specific issues such as Tutor Trainers, Program Coordinators (responsible for volunteer and learner intake and support functions), etc.

As indicated above, staff commitment ranges from having no paid staff or one part time Coordinator to programs having several full-time staff members. The constant that exists among volunteer literacy programs is that individuals often assume duties beyond their job descriptions and beyond their allotted number of hours. It is not unheard of (though not encouraged nor recommended) for a Coordinator paid for four hours per day to work full time at their volunteer literacy position. Rarely is a lack of staff commitment an issue within volunteer literacy programs.

Staff often designs, implements and evaluates programs; the fact is, if they didn't, innovative design would not occur. Being part of a national or statewide volunteer literacy organization, much of the structure, training format and program design at the local level is prescribed or recommended. Given that foundation (i.e., provided with an eighteen hour tutor training design) greater opportunity exists to design new or supplemental programs (i.e. family literacy programs, workplace literacy programs, etc.)

### **Staff Development**

A primary advantage of membership within a larger network or organization is the opportunity provided for staff development. Training (pre and in-service) is often available through mid-level (i.e., state level) or national organizations. Local volunteer literacy staff development issues exist throughout the network, unfortunately the resources to meet those needs are not adequate. Mid-level (whether regional or state) organizations that exist to provide technical assistance to direct service providers are often in the best position to develop and provide local staff development training.



Staff development functions include organizational/volunteer not-for-profit management (i.e., budgeting, finance, public relations, personnel, etc.), program specific issues, and adult education/literacy training. Because volunteer literacy programs are often not in a position to hire multiple staff to handle multiple responsibilities, one person is often responsible for many areas and needs to be trained and supported in all. Training should be sequential and ongoing.

Evaluation of staff development activities are needed throughout the field. Those mid-level organizations presently providing local staff development activities typically evaluate those activities informally and often merely through participation as opposed to planned transference of skills.

#### **Use of Volunteer Staff**

Volunteer staff is the lifeblood of any and all volunteer literacy organizations. Whether a small volunteer literacy program of less than 25 learners or a large program with more than 1,000 learners, volunteers play a crucial role throughout and provide important services. Volunteers recruit, orient, train, assess and match learners and tutors. Volunteers direct and manage the support of other volunteers in the programs. Without program volunteers (i.e. tutors and trainers) and administrative volunteers (i.e., board members, office staff, matchers, recruiters, intake staff, etc.) volunteer literacy programs could not exist.

All volunteers need, and are entitled to, training regardless of their role in a volunteer literacy program. First and foremost, volunteer tutors should be provided with high quality training to enable them to maximize the tutoring experience for themselves and for the learner. Poor tutor training is the precursor to poor tutoring. The volunteers that train tutors also need quality preparation and training. Without quality tutor trainers, a ripple effect of ineffective training and tutoring occurs. Administrative volunteers need training as well: recruiters, matchers,

board members, testers, etc., are all entitled to training in how to do the job they are being asked to do within the volunteer literacy program.

#### **Evaluation of Staff Performance**

Relatively new to areas in the personnel field, volunteer literacy program staff evaluation practices are diverse, if present at all. Evaluation of staff performance is often informal and based upon observation. All areas related to personnel are developing within the field, with evaluation of staff among them.

#### **IV. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS**

##### **Type of Curriculum and Instruction Used**

The history of the two national volunteer literacy programs differs principally in regard to the type of curriculum and instruction used. One has applied an individualized, student goal oriented approach utilizing eclectic, often tutor made instructional materials while the other has employed a sequential, phonics-based instructional model. The former assesses according to a pre-test and post-test designed specifically for its use. The latter charts success along serial set of instructional materials. Both have been successful based on learner satisfaction. Both have evolved to include and encourage other techniques and instructional materials. The phonics-based program is undergoing the most dramatic shift in approach.

As long as the ability to read is a critical prerequisite to information processing, enhanced reading ability will be an indicator of learner and program success. However, it has been suggested throughout this document that volunteer literacy programs are more well-suited to a curriculum based on experiential learning. Tutors trained their whole lives to process information necessary to control and effect life change are more well prepared to impart those skills than they are to teach reading after an eighteen hour tutor training. This approach suggests that tutors build their separate curricula in consultation with their learners to address the immediate goal of

the learner. The tutor could then model their successful information processing skills for the learner and act as mentor and advocate. Learner skills gaps would be exposed in a practical application assessment rather than through normed or criterion referenced test data. Curriculum and instruction used would be specific and practical.

Both national volunteer literacy organizations produce appropriate materials and review and recommend other potential instructional materials. Many local volunteer literacy programs have staff to assess and recommend appropriate instructional materials, provide inservice training and offer technical assistance to tutors on curriculum and instructional materials.

Most local programs maintain in-house libraries with distribution systems and/or have relationships with their local libraries for this purpose. These materials should contain all the qualities listed: appropriate for student abilities; appropriate for student interests and needs and reflect diverse socioeconomic indications and culture of learners. There is an increasing availability of commercial materials meeting these conditions. Programs are still required to be creative because of lack of resource to purchase these materials.

Equipment that can be afforded should be selected and managed to provide the greatest access and applicability for the largest number of learners possible. Some method to determine this should be applied. Once purchased, the program should monitor and evaluate the same.

## **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

### **Retention**

The bottom line for measuring program and learning retention is whether or not the learner achieves their goal. This assumes that the program determined the learner to be appropriate for service and vice versa. Post intake interview referrals to another, more appropriate program should be considered a positive program quality indicator. Adult education

should shift away from seat time retention criteria to goal achievement indicators — quality instead of quantity.

Volunteer literacy programs typically offer one-to-one tutorial instruction based on a tutor and learner commitment to two one-hour instructional sessions per week. The average number of instructional hours per year in our network is approximately forty. This number could become a benchmark for volunteer literacy programs. Clearly, if programs aren't achieving near this number of instructional hours per year, per learner something isn't going right and programs should question the output. In order to determine this average there must be a clear and consistent start point for all volunteer literacy programs. If we include learners who received one instructional hour then dropped-out, it will effect very different results than if we measure only those who receive twelve or more hours as the Adult Education Act suggests. There must be sector wide standards if this retention criteria will carry any meaning.

As stated earlier, volunteer literacy programs must be concerned with retaining both learners and volunteers. Some standard and credit should be given for volunteer retention.

Retention standards must be service sector specific. There is no way to compare a group instruction program structured on minimum of fifteen hours per week to a volunteer literacy program structured on two one-hour sessions per week based on hours of instruction received. Such criterion would serve only to eliminate resource from a field already in deficit. All programs should monitor retention rates of population subgroups they purport to serve. Evidence of low retention rates among a specific subgroup warrant a re-examination of program capacity and output.

### **Educational Gains**

Educational gains which best lead to goal achievement are the most positive program outcomes. There are, however, multiple issues with standardized test scores which suggest that

this is not the optimal approach to verifying educational gains. Such issues include cultural bias, fear of test taking resulting in inaccurate assessment, test score increments that are so broad they don't reflect smaller significant gains. Competencies attained are probably a better approach to determining learner and program outcomes however, these competencies must be achievable for the learner given their starting point. In other words, a program that assists learner who cannot identify letters of the alphabet to be able to read a simple shopping list has achieved more than the program that achieves the same outcome with a learner who engages the program with higher level reading skills.

Programs should get credit for assisting learners to gain those prerequisite skills to learning. Volunteer literacy programs are very involved in imparting this type of skill or ability. These preconditions include self-esteem, the ability to learn and knowing how to learn. Traditional education programs focus on content or what to learn and assume that in learning content, learners will learn technique — will learn how to process information. Many adults considered illiterate have never learned how to learn and cannot be judged on what they know until they are judged on if they know how to learn. Most standardized tests and competency lists assume this basic precondition.

### **Employment**

If employment related goals are consistent with the learners goals they represent positive program outcomes. For many this consistency will exist, especially for those currently employed or those with skills which make them more nearly marketable. Again, for programs serving adults who have not attained learning prerequisite skills (much less traditional educational gains), have multiple literacy related problems and live in areas of high unemployment, employment outcomes are not viable outcomes. This is the area where it is easiest to "substitute social and economic goals" for personal goals. The skills being imparted by programs which are prerequisite to

employability are needed and will determine the future employability of that individual. Great caution should be applied to this criteria to insure that there is reasonable opportunity to achieve the outcome given economic conditions, and that the outcomes are learner consistent.

**Goal Achievement**

Goals, which are agreed to by learner and practitioner as achievable and appropriate, are the best indicator of program quality. It is the system's responsibility to indicate the connectedness between these personal goals and social and economic goals, not the learners'. When a system determines the standards for current and future social and economic participation we will be better able to integrate and assess how personal goals enable social and economic development. Until that time it is difficult to hold programs accountable for anything other than personal goal achievement.

*This response is strictly the opinion of the author. It does not necessarily reflect the thinking, philosophy or program operation of LVA-NYS, LVA or LLA. It is intended to stimulate discussion and debate around the issues it addresses toward improvement in the volunteer service sector and the field. Thanks to Janice Cuddahee, Associate Executive Director, LVA-NYS and Chip Carlin, Director of Development & Information Services, LVA-NYS for their input and patience.*

## Resource Documents

Pelavin Associates, Inc. prepared the following documents as part of this project and other activities performed under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. All documents are available through the Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202-7240, (202) 205-9996.

*Synthesis of State Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs*, by Larry Condelli, Judy Koloski, and Lenore Webb.

*Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs*, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.

*Quality Indicators, Measures and Performance Standards*, by Larry Condelli.

*Primary and Secondary Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs*, by Larry Condelli.

*Evaluation Framework for the State Adult Education Program*, by Joel Sherman and Larry Condelli.

**APPENDIX**  
**SAMPLE QUALITY INDICATORS**

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**SAMPLE QUALITY INDICATORS  
FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
USED BY STATES AND IN PROGRAM EVALUATIONS**

The following list of indicators was provided as a guide to the paper writers. The final model indicators for the project are described in *Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs*, available from the U. S. Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse.

**PROGRAM CONTEXT**

- 1. Documented Need for Program Services**
  - A. Number and demographics of target populations in need
  - B. Literacy levels in community
  - C. High school drop-outs in community
  - D. Employment-related skill needs of community
  
- 2. Organization and Structure of Delivery System**
  - A. Number of projects
  - B. Variety of locations and settings of projects
  - C. Varied types of projects (e.g., ESL, GED)
  - D. Flexible scheduling
  
- 3. Characteristics of Participants**
  - A. Number and demographics of participants
  - B. Number and demographics of participants by skill level
  - C. Number and demographics of participants by program type
  - D. Number and demographics of participants by program setting

## **PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT**

### **4. PROGRAM PLANNING**

- 1. Community and Staff Input in Program Development**
  - A. Existence and use of an advisory board**
  - B. Program holds public hearings**
  - C. Use of staff input**
  - D. Other sources consulted (e.g., employers, staff, CBOs, evaluations, program performance reviews)**
  
- 2. Coordination Activities**
  - A. Existence of coordination arrangements (formal or informal agreements, agencies involved -- number and type)**
  - B. Type of coordinated activities: referrals;  
share staff and/or facilities;  
joint planning and budgeting**
  
- 3. Written Operational Plan**
  - A. Existence of a plan**
  - B. Measurable goals and objectives specified**
  - C. Specific program goals and objectives specified consistent with state plan**
  - D. Plan development process includes broad input and is open to change**

### **II. PROGRAM CONTENT**

- 1. Recruitment**
  - A. Recruitment methods used**
  - B. Special populations targeted**
  - C. Program outreach and publicity activities**

2. **Program Intake Procedures**
  - A. Entry policies
  - B. Incoming assessment procedures
  - C. Development of individual learning plans
3. **Ongoing Assessment Methods**
  - A. Procedures for monitoring student progress and learning gains
  - B. Procedures for monitoring student progress toward goals
4. **Support Services**
  - A. Type of support services offered (e.g., counseling, transportation, child care)
  - B. Adequacy of services for meeting student needs
5. **Evaluation**
  - A. Student, community and staff evaluation of program activities

### **III. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. **Characteristics of Staff**
  - A. Demographics
  - B. Educational background, credentials, experience
  - C. Number of staff
  - D. Staff retention
2. **Staff Responsibilities**
  - A. Duties of staff appropriate for position
  - B. Staff commitment (e.g., full or part-time, additional duties)

**3. Staff Development**

**A. Existence of staff development component:**

1. When provided (pre- or in-service)
2. Content, topics covered
3. Duration
4. Sequential training
5. Staff compensation for attendance

**B. Evaluation of staff development activities:**

1. Systematic needs assessment for content
2. Evaluation of activities by staff
3. Staff participation in development

**4. Use of Volunteer Staff**

**A. Duties of volunteers**

**B. Volunteer training**

**5. Evaluation of Staff Performance**

**A. Methods for evaluating staff**

**IV. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS**

**1. Type of Curriculum and Instruction Used**

- A. Instructional methods meet student needs (sequential, individual, competency-based)**
- B. Topical emphasis relevant to adult learners**
- C. Instructional technique (e.g, peer teaching, small group)**
- D. Amount of instruction offered**
- E. Organized sequence of courses used**
- F. Individualized instruction based on assessment**

**2. Materials and Equipment Used**

**A. Adequate materials used:**

1. Appropriate for student abilities
2. Appropriate for student interests and needs
3. Reflect diverse socioeconomic and culture of learners

**B. Adequate equipment used:**

1. Appropriate to meet program and learner needs
2. Sufficient amount to meet program and learner needs

**3. Selection and Evaluation of Materials Equipment**

- A. Method Used to select and evaluate equipment and materials (e.g., instructor and student input)**

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

**1. Retention and Follow-up Methods**

- A. Hours of instruction received**
- B. Participation rates for population subgroups**
- C. Methods for contacting program leavers**
- D. Exit interviews conducted**

**2. Educational Gains**

- A. Grade level advancement**
- B. Competencies attained**
- C. GED or high school graduation attained**

**3. Employment**

- A. Attained new employment**
- B. Improved current employment**

- C. Improved income
  - D. Attained employment-related skills
  - E. Receiving public assistance
4. **Personal and Social Goal Achievement**
- A. Achieved personal goals for participation
  - B. Improved self-esteem and self-confidence