Chapter 14
Methodologies for Assessing the Adult Learner

Learning Objectives. Assessments, when properly considered and constructed, have a potential to recognize and value the adult learner, their varied learning styles, and the diverse backgrounds which they represent in the classroom. Properly prepared, assessments present the adult with complex, purposely ambiguous, open-ended problems and tasks that demand from them the ability to integrate knowledge and demonstrate mastery and performance of critical skills.

It is important for course designers to create an environment in which formal assessment is fully utilized to track and document learners' educational successes and learning shortfalls gains. Teachers conduct informal assessment on a daily basis. They should be encouraged to use the informal tools and procedures consistently, testing and retesting as needed and documenting changes in skill levels to gauge learner progress and supplement lesson instruction as it moves forward. Research in adult education has indicated that many teachers are not well-equipped to carry out crucial assessment (Forlizzi, Kuhne, & Kassab, 2002; Stiggins, 2002). This chapter will present many tested methods for evaluating adult learning. Readers of this chapter should:

- Become familiar with the fundamentals of authentic assessment for the adult learner in the classroom.

- Become familiar with the fundamentals of portfolios for assessing the adult learner.
- Become familiar with the fundamentals of the portfolio-based authentic assessment with respect to text-based, visual-based, and web-based materials.

Lesson Plan Template. Refer to **Appendix B, Adult Learner Lesson Plan Template** as the chapter discusses **Focus on Outcomes** as depicted in Figure 1.

INTRODUCTION

Plans to assess adult learners are designed to evaluate student outcomes as well as course objectives. To evaluate adult learning, course developers are encouraged to consider both formative and summative measures to consider feedback from as many different perspectives as possible. To evaluate course objectives, it is highly recommended that developers use a variety of tools to simultaneously assess the effectiveness of the course and identify features that require modification.

Formative assessment measures include in-class and homework writing tasks; readings tasks; tasks involving listen, note-taking, and summarizing of classroom and taped lectures; participation in class discussions; and, group and individual presentations and projects. Summative assessment measures include examinations based on reading and writing assignments, listening and note-taking, and discussion and presentations.

In addition to assessing student progress toward course goals, developers try to integrate student assessment to secure a positive impact on student attitudes toward learning. Adults perform well when engaged in tasks that allowed them to assess their own learning and progress. For example, the use of portfolios requires students to compose, compile, and share their learning – a highly successful medium for evaluating adult learning. A properly constructed portfolio contains artifacts of assigned writing tasks essay, entries from learning and thinking (i.e., reflection) journals, evidence of peer assessment, and final disposition of research projects.

In Parts I – V of this text, design guidelines were recommended that included creating successful materials and effective lessons for the adult learner. In assessing adult learning, the basic question changes somewhat from that of the traditional learner. It becomes more encompassing. "How well does this particular lesson increase learner knowledge and understanding of the content area?" Whereas, traditional learners were evaluated with rubrics (i.e., Yes/No, True/False, Present/Missing), rating scales are used quite frequently in adult assessment to expand the choice of responses from among several arranged in hierarchical order.

There are several different kinds of rating scales. A typical rating scale asks learners to choose one response from several categories composed by the evaluator and arranged in hierarchical order. Response categories may be labeled using one of the following schemata:

(1) Category labels use words as descriptors of possible reactions. Researchers who are interested in creating interval scales (scales in which the respondents perceive equal-sized gradations between the points on the scale) must be careful to choose category descriptors that are truly equal-interval. For example, "always," "constantly," "continually," "frequently," "seldom," "not at all," "none of the time," and, "never" provides an equal-interval category label.

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