

## How the EFF Standards Work

OLRC News  
Winter 2002

One of the hottest topics in education reform for more than a decade has been standards. The fear that our future American workforce is not keeping up with their peers in Western Europe and Japan was brought to the forefront with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The National Governor's Association began to see national goals and standards as a mechanism needed to speed educational reform, a priority with voters. In 1989, the governors announced National Education Goals as the central piece of the America 2000 educational reform agenda. The US Department of Education adopted these goals in 1992 with the goal of adult literacy and lifelong learning being "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

The 16 Equipped for the Future (EFF) *standards* define the core knowledge and skills adults need to effectively carry out their roles as parents, citizens, and workers. These standards have been identified through research on what adults need to do in order to meet the broad areas of responsibility defining these three roles. They do not address the full range of activities adults carry out, but focus on the skills adults need to meet their 4 purposes for learning.

- Access - To gain access to information and resources so they can orient themselves in the world.
- Voice - To give voice to their ideas and opinions with the confidence that they will be heard and taken into account.
- Action - To solve problems and make decisions on their own, acting independently, in their roles.
- Bridge to the Future - To keep learning in order to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

With these purposes as the starting place for defining the EFF Standards of what people know and do, we can now focus on the application rather than just the possession of skills. While some of these skills are familiar to adult educators, their definitions reveal them to be more clearly linked to purposeful action. *Read with Understanding*, then, is defined as:

*To read with understanding adults need to determine the reading purpose; select reading strategies appropriate to the purpose, monitor comprehension and adjust reading strategies; analyze the information and reflect on its underlying meaning; integrate it with prior knowledge to address reading purpose.*

The EFF list of necessary skills is different from what adult educators traditionally use. It starts with Communication Skills-the skills adults need for access to information: reading and writing, listening and speaking, and observing. But it also includes three additional categories of skills that adults need in order to use the information they access in their roles. These categories of skills include those

we traditionally think of as interpersonal skills, and those decision-making and learning skills we traditionally talk about as "higher order" or critical thinking skills. Grouping the skills into four categories is intended to demonstrate the interchangeability of skills within a category. For example, the activities that require adults to *Work Together* (Community Role Map) can be accomplished by using oral and visual communication skills, but reading and writing may not be the most important means of communicating. Similarly, the specific interpersonal skills needed may vary from situation to situation depending on the task and context. These categories allow adult learners to think about all the skills as tools they can draw on selectively to achieve their purposes more effectively.

One of EFF's most important contributions to adult education this far has been helping learners and teachers see the explicit connection between what happens in the classroom and what adults do in the rest of their lives. The *role maps* enable students to put their goals in the context of this broader picture and the *skill wheel* enables students and teachers to identify the full range of skills they need in order to carry out the activities important in their lives. Using the Wheel as part of goal setting and the initial assessment process, students can see areas where their skills are already developed or where further work is needed.

Four conceptual threads have shaped the EFF framework in important ways:

a purposeful, constructivist approach to learning

The EFF framework has focused not on bodies of knowledge to be mastered, but on purposeful activity. A constructivist approach focuses on enhancing the individual's capacity to make meaning and achieve purposes by selecting, monitoring, making decisions, and acting upon new information.

rooting education in the context of people's lives

With a focus on use, "context" came to be seen as the reasons people have for learning and is linked to a purposeful approach to learning.

an emphasis on application, not just possession, of skills

A focus on application rather than possession of skills and knowledge sees learning as active and a process not of acquiring facts but of enhancing one's ability to understand, make decisions, and act upon that knowledge.

a view of adult development as transformative rather than additive

Adult development is not simply mastering more knowledge and skills cumulatively, but as mastering consecutively more complex principles of thinking, feeling, and relating.

The most significant accomplishment of EFF has been to shift our thinking about the purpose of adult education. EFF has pushed us to think about preparing people for the future by teaching skills and knowledge adults need to be more effective workers, parents, and citizens.

Many more resources are available at the EFF Special Collection

<http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html>