

The Foundation of EFF: Purposes for Learning

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The goals of EFF have been ambitious – to shape an education system that does not remedy deficiencies from past educational experiences, but prepares adults for the future by building on what adults already know and by giving them tools to continue learning for a lifetime. EFF's most significant accomplishment to date has been shifting the thinking about the purpose of adult education to an integrated approach of what adults need to know and be able to do. EFF began when Congress charged NIFL to measure and track Goal 6 of the National Education Goals. The first EFF stage (1994-1996) was accomplished by consulting learners to describe what it means to be literate, to compete in a global economy, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and then beginning to construct a framework for standards-based system reform. The second stage (1996-1998) was developing the content standards – identifying activities, skills and knowledge that are common elements across the roles. In the third and current stage of work (1998-2001), EFF is developing a performance continuum for these standards. NIFL recognized that system change had to involve the whole system. EFF needed to work at the national level with partners on policy issues, but it also had to work at the local level with program administrators, teachers, and students to ensure that reform was practical and applicable. Ohio has 30 programs that have been part of this development of grounded theory and has helped create the "big picture" that has linked teaching and learning with these broad social purposes for education.

The construction of EFF reflects cutting edge theory on learning and teaching and has involved thousands of people across the U.S. There has been constant interaction between practice and theory and between data and analysis. These four conceptual threads have shaped the framework:

- a purposeful, constructivist approach to learning
- rooting education in the context of people's lives
- an emphasis on application, not just possession of skills
- a view of adult development as transformative rather than additive

Consulting learners about Goal 6 has been the foundation for all subsequent EFF work and the first step toward measuring progress. Sondra Stein (1995) says, "We understood that without a consensus on what skills and knowledge adults actually need to be able to participate fully and successfully in civic and economic life, we could not determine how far we are from Goal 6, or gauge our progress toward achieving it." Analysis of

learner responses focused on discovering patterns and relationships and testing these against each other and against expectations from prior research and theory. The EFF data synthesis describes learners' specific goals, but goes beyond them to identify four underlying **purposes** for adult learning. These were conceived as "fundamental purposes that express the social and cultural meaning or significance" (Stein 1995) of more specific individual goals. They are consistent with the theories of learning and adult development with emphasis on social context, meaning and action.

Four Purposes for Learning

In order to compete in the global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, adults need the skills and knowledge:

- To have access to information and orient themselves in the world
- To give voice to their ideas and opinions and to have the confidence that their voices will be heard and taken into account
- To solve problems and make decisions on their own, acting independently as parents, citizens, and workers for the good of their families, their communities, and their nation
- To be able to keep on learning in order to keep up with a rapidly changing world

[Source: Stein, 1995:4]



For more information about EFF, you might want to read *Equipped for the Future: A Customer-Driven Vision for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning* (July 1995) at www.nifl.gov/linc/collections/eff/archive/content.htm

Many more resources are available at the EFF Special Collection

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