

## **Assessment Break-Out Discussion**

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock and Heide Spruck Wrigley led the session on assessment.

1. Amanda: There are three key questions to ask when developing an assessment:

- What do you want to know?
- Why do you think assessment will help you learn that information?
- If you do an assessment, what tool should you use?

2. Today, we will not list of all of the possible assessments out there, but focus on principles and good practices for assessment.

3. Heide: The first good practice is to consider what preparation are you able to provide. Test taking is a skill. Not same as content knowledge. If you don't address students' test taking abilities, you may be assessing only test-taking and not the actual skills. This could exclude clients who could succeed with appropriate supports.

A good strategy is a "Think Aloud": Give your students an assessment test item and ask your students: what do you think is right answer, and why. This will tell you how students are thinking about the questions. This will help you assess any problems with how they are interpreting the assessment and improve their test taking. Any assessment is a test of test taking skills, especially standardized tests.

4. Another principle is that no person's strengths and weakness should be judged by one test. Use multiple measures to document their strengths, life situations, dreams and goals. Good methods include:

- Talking to people (having good conversations helps you really understand them)
- Self-assessments
- Curriculum-based assessments

5. A good strategy is to draw a picture to understand the student's experience and goals. We call this "chalk talk" – Ask the student to create a drawing of their first job, or how they came to US. This will help understand their background. Can be used for other questions.

In drawing pictures, the brain not bounded by language proficiency. "Who are you?" "What are you hopes and dreams?" You can ask them to draw three panels: life before, now, in future. Stories are much better than checklists to learn about people's lives.

6. A good technique is "think-pair-share." Individually reflect and then share with a partner. Learn about the other person's experience, then tell about your experience.

This is a good general communication pattern to teach your clients/students: give background on yourself, not just answering yes/no out of being concerned making English mistakes. Then ask the other person.

7. The break-out group participants used “think-pair-share” to brainstorm questions they had for Heide and Amanda:

- What are good assessments for refugees and immigrants to capture skills? Something that is not CASAS, standardized. Perhaps non-verbal?
- I am at a workforce development board and we also run the OneStop. We use TABE. Clients at very low skill level. How much weight should we put on TABE to determine success? Most of our clients come in at 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> grad. Is TABE the right tool? What are better tools for clients with limited literacy?
- Are there assessments of students’ confidence practicing English in other environments, exploring environments they aren’t used to? To get at soft skills.
- We are revamping CalWorks. We are considering whether English Language assessments be used to populate CalWorks success outcomes. I am observing to learn how we might do this.

Amanda: I hear several threads in these conversations:

- Not sure what’s out there
- Broadening the definition of what counts as success
- How to tell the story to a skeptical WDB or employer who is accustomed to one assessment test and not very open to different approaches

The following points are responses to the questions and suggested principles and approaches:

8. The first response is that we encourage you to develop your own assessments. There are a number of assessments people develop themselves in the field.

- For example, you can test self-efficacy with a “Can Do” list. For example, clients use a scale to respond to the statement: “I can talk to someone in English” (great confidence, some confidence, little confidence, no confidence).
- Another example from the “Can Do” approach:
  - “I can go to an interview if given some conditions” e.g., a) well prepared, b) my friend goes with me c) I can do research the company first, etc.
  - Then have the client demonstrate an interview process and assess skills
  - Then provide an activity to bolster the skills
- Role plays and scenarios
  - Give people a scenario based on a work or other situation
  - Have them role play

- Assess how did the person do: Make eye contact, give more than one-word answers

9. The Best-Plus assessment has advantages. This is an interview-based assessment:

- Asks basics (“tell me your name”) and then other topics (“Tell me about your family”)
- Students are rated on fluency and accuracy
- Used in number of states
- Training for Best Plus assessors - see Center for Applied Linguistic website <http://www.cal.org/content/search?SearchText=Best+Plus+training&SearchButton=Search&SubTreeArray%5B%5D=63>
  - Good if you care about whether they can talk, listen, respond
  - Much more direct than CASAS which only tests listening and uses this as a proxy
  - Helps answer question: will person be successful in a job interview, not whether can they write

10. Heide’s “Technology Can Do” List (see attachment)

- Good when you have high number of clients and can’t individually interview
- Allows you to document client goals / skills to justify why sending to a class

11. Important to start with the question: What is the goal of any given assessment. An example of a CNA program shows how getting clear about what’s actually important to assess makes a big difference:

- A college used an assessment for a CNA program using a standardized assessment. Students needed to reach a threshold to get into CNA
- Many students were not qualified based on the standard
- We had a meeting with the college and discovered the real thing they wanted to know was whether a student succeed in the course
- We asked the college if they would accept multiple measures: If we can show clients are motivated and have support, would the college accept them to the program.
- We created a checklist
  - Is the student’s current work related to CNA, e.g., are they currently a home health aide?
  - Is their written English high enough though not the prior standard?
  - Do they have spoken literacy – can talk, respond?
- Over time, the college could see that the multiple indicators worked
- This approach is good when have a cohort going into a specific program. It’s more difficult if you are referring to multiple programs because there is relationship and trust building involved.

12. What are strategies for assessing clients with very low skills? There is a perception that if a client is not good in book learning, they are not good at anything. Instead you can emphasize successes and competencies. For example, a student's strengths may include:

- Acted as an informal community health advocate for a neighbor
- Got child into special needs class
- Navigated social services

13. Agencies have a legitimate need to not waste training dollars. But using skill level alone without broader assessment can lead to poor outcomes. For example, a training program that only used literacy/grade level experienced dropouts and/or people not wanting to get a job in the field after training. When they started to screen through interview that clients have passion for end job, outcomes improved. This was a revelation for the training provider.

14. Use your professional judgment to develop indicators that you believe will provide the information you need for placement. You can be an advocate for alternative measures you believe will get the right people in the door.

- For example, in San Diego, we were trying to place clients in jobs.
- We identified the client who was the best person regardless of English ability. We knew the person who would be there every day, work hard, know about this field.
- We asked the employer to give the person a try, and if they succeeded, then increase the number of referrals using this assessment approach.
- Need to also assess the job. Is the job hands-on? Will there be on job communication skills with colleagues (talk about your life, what did on the weekend, etc.) This improves English.

15. Often the key competencies are: Can you hold a conversation, speak up when there's problem, and not pretend you understand when you don't and ask for help.

16. Use a competency approach. Create a "Can Do list." E.g., Juggle, cut a mango. What else can you do that's a process: put together a cabinet. Analyze the sub skills. Then look a job and the sub skills needed in the job.

17. A model to look at is the competency-based hiring model: SKILLFULL in Colorado.

- Get skills break-down from employers
- This is being used for emancipated foster youth, former incarcerated individuals
- Microsoft put investment
- Skillful is looking for partners <https://www.skillful.com/>  
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc/news/colorados-approach-being-competency-based>

18. Workforce Boards often underestimate skills of ELLs and adult learners
  - Survey clients: what are you currently working at, and what other education / training undertaking already. Use results to educate WDB that client group has many skills and assets and are working already and/or investing in their own education already.
19. English for New Bostonians survey available  
<http://www.englishfornewbostonians.org/>
20. Get a grad student or someone to do research on the patterns in client cohort:
  - Here is a cohort of job seekers: what do those cohort members have in common. Use this to design to address needs of particular groups (e.g., those who need math but who have good conversational English; or men over 50 needing a high school equivalency)
  - One site: women were doing fine in GED, men were leaving after 1-2 classes. This was masked by overall averages.
21. Is there a model of English Language Acquisition based on a specific career?
  - There are good models in incumbent worker training: E.g., lean manufacturing: Employees advising employers based on hands-on experience. Pre-Lean ESOL course – what vocabulary is needed?
  - Best if critical mass of employees at a given employer. Necessary to have both CEO and front-line supervisor support
  - Lots of work in Health, but needs are very different in each occupation for technical training. Can't send everyone to "English for Healthcare" if what's needed is technical language in a specific occupation.
  - OSHA Susan Harwood Training – doesn't require documentation. Mostly safety, but includes English <https://www.osha.gov/dte/sharwood/>
  - If you have really good relationship with employer, you can create access for limited English clients. One method is Preview / Review: preview in native language key issues, then training in English, then review in native language.
22. Doing you own assessment for training or employment
  - For listening skills, it's important to have a back and forth dialog
  - It's really hard to listen and take notes in a Second language, so it's important to have clients immediately repeat back what they're hearing.
  - A tough but important skill is to follow multiple directions, as in a sequence of tasks. Therefore, need to always verify and play back to check for understanding
  - Then can certify that a client "can follow multi-part directions"
23. Many countries don't use multiple-choice tests. If we use multiple choice, we may only be testing test taking skills.

24. Assessing literacy in someone's home language is important. The challenges faced by advanced degree holder with low English vs. someone with 4<sup>th</sup> grade education in home country are quite different. Also, assessing differences in written and spoken English important; these can vary widely in each client.

25. It's important to acknowledge that assessment is not neutral. It's a judgment about what counts. Consider this in how you design your intake process. This affects clients' first experience and impression when accessing services.

26. Assessing socio-emotional / readiness is important

- Use a socio-gram to learn who supports the client's success and who doesn't. Provide coaching on how to talk back to those that don't support so the client can persist in training. Help them understand how you build a relationship with people is important to your success.
- Be aware of your assumptions about basic concepts. For example, identifying who students' friends are. A student may ask: "What do you mean by 'friend'?" Turn back to client "What does friend mean to you?" Once a client said "a friend is when I go their house and she doesn't steal my purse when I go to the bathroom." So, friendship was at a much more basic level than my assumption. Our definitions of "friend" may be very different that our clients.

27. A strategy for assessing learning is to use an "Exit Card": 3 things you learned / take-away. Ticket out the door. Nobody leaves unless they give you the ticket. Helps understand what they've learned and encourages active learning.

28. Scenarios are useful in capturing cross-cultural differences. For example: "A person working the late shift. Leaves work, car battery dead. Security guard says, sure I'll help, but let's have a drink first." How do students interpret sexual harassment situations, can they keep themselves safe? Prompt: would you report the guard? Develop case stories to elicit perceptions, identify issues/gaps, and build skills.

29. Turbulence assessing framework (see hand out)

- Scales of adequacy
- Will be on ALLIES website
- Can fill this out incrementally as you have conversations with clients and learn about their lives, as opposed to going through formally

30. Use visual methods for assessment for potentially non-literate populations. E.g., HIV awareness training for farmworkers. Staff used a series of 5 questions about HIV with emojis / images next to the answers. Then worker used a large blow up of the question form; she read answers and pointed to answers. This avoided suggesting that clients couldn't read.

31. Not everything that's measured counts, and not everything that counts is measured. So use your judgment to get at what you really need.