BRIDGES TO PRACTICE

PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS
FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Donna D. Sherman
September 30, 2003

Learning Disabilities Training and Dissemination Project
A Partnership of ProLiteracy America and the National Institute for Literacy

ProLiteracy America
U.S. Programs Division of ProLiteracy Worldwide
1320 Jamesville Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210
Telephone: (315) 422-9121 Fax: (315) 422-6369
http://www.proliteracy.org

Background

The *Program Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs* were developed to accompany the *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks and training. *Bridges to Practice: A Research-based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities* was produced in 1999 as part of a National Institute for Literacy project. In this series of five guidebooks, *Bridges to Practice* describes what is needed to create systemic reform in the adult education system's approach to learning disabilities. The guidebooks take programs from the preparation and planning stages through learner assessment and instruction to professional development. In order to fully understand *Bridges to Practice*, literacy leaders are encouraged to participate in a companion professional development program incorporating the *Program Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs.*

Development of the *Program Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs*

The basic points in the *Indicators* are taken directly from the Indicators of High-Quality Services section included in each *Bridges* guidebook. The *Indicators* are organized into four tables to correspond with the first four guidebooks. Each table is divided into three topic areas: staff, program, and learners. Although there is some overlap between the areas, in general the staff activities are those activities that are primarily carried out by individual program staff. The program area addresses the policies and procedures that shape the work of the program, and the learner area addresses the learners' participation in the program.

After the *Indicators* were drafted, they underwent two rounds of reviews. A total of 32 persons who are actively involved in the adult education field and knowledgeable about *Bridges to Practice* reviewed and commented on the drafts. As much as possible, their input was incorporated into the final document. Our deep appreciation goes to those persons who spent time reviewing the drafts. Their perceptive suggestions for modifications were very helpful to us.

Using the *Indicators*

It is important to keep in mind that the *Indicators* are intended to accompany training in the *Bridges to Practice* systems and principles, which were specifically developed for use by people working with adults with **learning** disabilities. We understand that adult education programs also serve adults with other disabilities, that these disabilities are often interrelated, and that the laws that relate to people with disabilities cover a broad range of disabilities. Many of the general principles in the *Indicators* relate to serving all adults with disabilities, but the focus of the *Indicators* is learning disabilities.

It is our hope that the *Indicators* will be useful to *all* adult educators, even though they were designed primarily as a *Bridges to Practice* tool. The *Indicators* incorporate the language of the *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks and follow the sequence of topics addressed in the guidebooks. The *Bridges* materials are inclusive and research-based, but neither they nor these *Indicators*

could possibly include all of the thinking on learning disabilities that exists in the adult education field.

The legal issues related to serving adults with disabilities are very complex and may vary from area to area. All adult education programs need to be aware of these issues. When learners with diagnosed learning disabilities disclose this, staff should be able to discuss with them their rights and responsibilities as well as the accommodations to which the learners are legally entitled. For learners with the characteristics of learning disabilities, the discussion generally centers on their learning strengths and difficulties. We have grouped these two categories of learners together in some places in the *Indicators*, but program staff should be aware of the differences.

Because each of the four tables in the *Indicators* corresponds to one of the *Bridges* books, there is some redundancy among them—just as there is among the four book topics: preparing, assessment, planning, and teaching/learning. Issues of staff development, for example, are relevant to each of these areas and are repeated in each of the tables, although with a different focus each time. Each table is intended to stand alone with the corresponding *Bridges* book so that it can be used as a tool for programs as they begin to address systemic change and how they can increase the quality of their services to people with learning disabilities.

It is important to remember that *Bridges to Practice* is a tool to help create **systemic** change in services for people with learning disabilities. As with any systemic change, this change will require time and must involve the whole delivery system if it is to be successful. Each time we look at the system, we will see new ways to improve it. *Bridges to Practice* is intended to be a catalyst for this change, helping practitioners, programs, and policymakers improve their systems for providing adult education to adults with learning disabilities.

Action Plan

As programs use *Bridges to Practice* for systemic change work, they will develop action plans with specific steps to be taken, areas of responsibility, and follow-up to check the progress. It is not possible to include that level of detail in the *Indicators,* and each program needs to shape a plan that meets its specific areas of need. However, in the context of ongoing training and systemic change, the *Indicators* can be used as a general tool to measure progress. A program using the *Indicators* in this way could circulate the document among its staff annually and compare the Action Needed sections in order to study progress from one year to the next.

The level of detail that should be addressed in a program's action plan is different from the general standards in the *Indicators.* For example, one reviewer pointed out some of the supports that are important in her program's screening process: counseling prior to testing, guidance through the process, a tester with experience in screening adults, a bilingual tester, and post-test counseling. Another reviewer mentioned the importance of developing "sensitivity to the needs of adult learners"; yet another stressed the need for "professionalism." Each program needs to determine what factors are most important for its clientele and then include these in its action plan. Another reviewer asked, "Whose responsibility is it to carry out this work?" That is an operational decision that needs to be addressed in the action plan.

Companion Publication for Volunteer Literacy Programs and TANF Agencies

The *Program Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs* are designed specifically for programs that serve adults in group or classroom situations through adult education programs. Companion publications, *Program Quality Indicators for Volunteer Literacy Programs* and *Program Quality Indicators for TANF Agencies,* are also available from ProLiteracy America.

BRIDGES TO PRACTICE
PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

TABLE 1: Preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities

INDICATOR	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	ACTION NEEDED
Our program staff:					
• Are trained to recognize the characteristics of learning disabilities.					
• Understand how learning disabilities may affect learners and the learning process.					
• Understand the law and the legal requirements regarding adults with learning disabilities in adult education programs.					
Our program:					
• Has adopted a written definition of learning disabilities that is based on current knowledge in the field of adult education.					
• Follows written policies and procedures for serving adults with learning disabilities.					
• Evaluates policies and procedures annually to maintain and improve services for adults with learning disabilities.					
• Maintains community links to strengthen and expand services for adults with learning disabilities.					
• Provides ongoing professional development opportunities and resources focused on improving services for adults with learning disabilities.					
• Informs learners about learning disabilities as detailed below.					
Our learners:					
• Understand that people learn in different ways and that some adults have specific learning disabilities.					
• Are informed of the legal right to request reasonable accommodations for diagnosed learning disabilities.					
• Understand the legal responsibilities regarding disability disclosure and documentation.					

TABLE 2: The Assessment Process

INDICATOR	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	ACTION NEEDED
Our program staff:					
• Use an intake process that assesses the strengths and needs of learners, including those with learning disabilities.					
• Conduct a learning style assessment to determine best modalities for each learner's education.					
• Recognize patterns of performance that are consistent with learning disabilities and recommend instructional modifications as needed.					
• Work collaboratively with learners to tailor services to each learner's instructional needs and goals.					
Our program:					
• Uses an ongoing screening process utilizing multiple resources over a period of time to identify learners with possible learning disabilities.					
• Uses a research-based learning disabilities screening tool when appropriate.					
• Has access to diagnostic testing for learners when use is indicated through screening and discussion with the learner.					
• Has a system for requesting documentation of a learner's disability when the learner has previously been diagnosed.					
• Has a referral process that makes appropriate community resources available to learners.					
• Has a system for monitoring the progress that a learner is making in the program, allowing accommodations as needed.					
Our learners:					
• Know how to obtain information about learning disabilities screening and diagnosis.					
• Are involved throughout the screening process in developing reasonable adaptations as needed.					
• Are referred to other community resources for additional screening or diagnosis when referral is requested or indicated.					
• Receive a clear explanation of their areas of strengths and weaknesses based on program assessment.					
• Participate in developing a plan for instruction that is appropriate to their strengths and weaknesses, goal-oriented, and based on disability documentation.					

TABLE 3: The Planning Process

INDICATOR	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	ACTION NEEDED
Our program staff:					
• Include representative adult learners with learning disabilities in collaborative planning processes to ensure that program services are designed to meet learner needs.					
• Share with learners instructional plans appropriate for learner needs and present them in a format that learners can understand.					
• Regularly review individual learner progress with learners and adjust plans of instruction as needed.					
• Incorporate self-advocacy information in instructional plans.					
Our program:					
• Develops and implements action plans for assessment, instruction, and progress measurement that take into account individual learner profiles, learner choices, and learning disability documentation.					
• Has a variety of resources and curricular options available to learners with learning disabilities.					
• Plans for ongoing professional development in order to continually upgrade and promote research-based learning disability services.					
Our learners:					
• Are able to identify their needs and know how to access/ask for program and community services.					
• Are involved in planning their program of instruction so that it meets individual goals.					
• Participate in making instructional changes based on periodic progress reviews.					

TABLE 4: The Teaching/Learning Process

INDICATOR	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	ACTION NEEDED
Our program staff:					
• Provide an environment that supports effective learning while promoting independence and self-advocacy.					
• Assure that learners understand their learning strengths.					
• Adapt instructional strategies and provide reasonable accommodations or adaptations as necessary to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.					
• Monitor individual learning plans and accommodations or adaptations with the learner to help ensure that they are being implemented.					
• Implement an instructional system of teaching, reviewing, and planning that includes learner input.					
Our program:					
• Follows written policies for curriculum use and adaptation during instructional activities.					
• Provides models of learning disability-appropriate instruction to guide and evaluate teaching activities.					
• Provides access to appropriate devices, materials, and assistive technology for learners with learning disabilities.					
• Trains staff in research-based principles, instructional strategies, and best practices for teaching adults with learning disabilities.					
• Provides one-to-one instruction by a qualified individual when needed.					
Our learners:					
• Are offered additional instructional and support services as needed.					
• Receive specific accommodations and adaptations throughout the instructional process that are supported by their disability documentation.					
• Receive instruction that is taught using the most effective strategies.					
• Regularly give feedback regarding the effectiveness of the instructional methods.					