

ICD's Vision of Assessment: A Position Paper

October 11, 2000

According to the Institute for Career Development *Field Policy Manual*, each Career Development Program has the responsibility for “the assessment of needs of Steelworkers” (p. 1). Traditionally, worker surveys have been used to measure interests; however, helping workers find the most appropriate series of courses once they have entered the program requires additional educational tools. Suppose a Steelworker wants to brush up his/her math skills: which of the many available paths would be best suited for the individual and where should the journey begin? Posing questions like these matters a great deal in encouraging a learner's full engagement in lifelong learning and also constitutes the heart of assessment. The purpose of this paper is to spell out ICD's beliefs about innovative assessment within the Career Development Program (CDP).

Principle One: Assessment should *do no harm* to the learners and to the program.

Assessment should never drive people away from the program. Instead they must be crafted to promote positive attitudes and results. Assessments must be informal, nonthreatening, brief as possible, confidential, and be presented at the optimal points in the learner's course of study. To do no harm, assessments must also be reliable and valid, and there should be evidence that our assessments are accurate within the CDP setting.

Principle Two: Assessments should effectively communicate the ICD Vision of Learning.

A program's choice and implementation of assessment reflect its view of “what counts.” If we expect workers to buy in to the concept of lifelong learning, then we must clearly and consistently convey that vision.

Principle Three: Assessments should be learner-centered.

ICD believes that the driving force in education should be the needs of the learner rather than the preferences of the institution. Consequently, assessments should be responsive to the learner and address individual learner objectives. The process should be thought of as interpersonal communication, and learners ought to be involved in designing and choosing assessments.

Principle Four: Assessments should be empowering.

Successful assessments should serve as positive tools to inform the learner's quest for lifelong learning. Assessments should reveal an array of strategic options that enable learners to choose appropriate paths to reach their evolving goals.

Principle Five: Assessments should accurately position learners along the Continuum of Lifelong Learning.

As Vella, Berardinelli and Burrow (1998) point out, “It is not enough to gather information about adult learners and their needs and desires for learning; one must have a process for using such data” (p. 3). The ICD Continuum is a complete assessment and curriculum process, a tool for teachers but even more so for learners themselves. Using ICD's Continuum, learners can visualize their progress, plan for the future, and select courses and curriculums that further their individual learning goals. In CDPs, it is important for learners to control the plan for educational progress. Using the customized assessments ICD has collected, workers can make suggestions for specific curriculums to their teacher-facilitators.

Principle Six: Assessments should reflect state-of-the-art adult education research.

Research suggests that most adults learn differently than younger students:

- Adults are autonomous, goal oriented and self directed.
- Adults are practical and relevancy oriented.
- Adult workers experience unique barriers to learning.
- Adults deserve respect for what they know and can do.
- Adults must clearly know what the assessment target is if they are going to hit it.

Principle Seven: New technologies have a place in worker assessment.

To ensure accuracy, workers must be assessed within their comfort levels. However, as learners progress along the continuum, new technologies, such as computers, can be introduced into the assessment process. Paper and pencil or other traditional types of assessments should be always available for learners who dislike using modern technologies for assessment purposes.

Principle Eight: Assessments must foster self reflection and thinking about personal strengths and needs.

Since adult learners like to be in control of their own educational programs, assessments are simply opportunities to stop and reflect back on personal strengths and learning needs. These self reflections must include learners' dispositions: for example, their self-perceptions and attitudes about subject areas (such as feelings about computers, math, and writing). Personal achievement depends upon positive motivation, confidence, and similar feelings about learning.

Principle Nine: Teacher-Facilitators serve important assessment roles and rely on observation to guide learners to the most pertinent assessment and curriculum at the optimal time.

Teachers are catalysts within the Learning Centers. They make suggestions to learners about which assessments and curriculums learners might consider next. The ICD Continuum is a device or pattern which helps facilitators and learners discuss which learning opportunity is most appropriate for given individuals and situations.

Principle Ten: Multiple assessments are needed to adequately reflect learners' progress.

Since all assessments have limitations and shortcomings, no assessment should be accepted as THE truth; comfortably employing multiple assessments, rather than a single snapshot, provides a rich composite from which individuals can regard their own changing abilities. CDPs must seek assessments which provide maximum information with minimum investment of the learner's time.

Bibliography

- Brookfield, S. D. (1990). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Institute for Career Development. (1995). *Assessing workers' needs and interests*. Merrillville, IN: Author
- Institute for Career Development. (1995). *Field policy manual*. Merrillville, IN: Author
- Institute for Career Development. (1997). *The Institute for Career Development's vision of learning: A position paper*. Merrillville, IN: Author
- Knowles, M. (1973). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston: Gulf Publishing.
- Stiggins, R. J. (1997). *Student-centered classroom assessment*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Vella, J.; Berardinelli, P. & Burrow, J. (1998). *How do they know they know: Evaluating adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.