



# Fieldnotes for ABLE Staff

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## ABSTRACT

# Using Equipped for the Future in lesson planning

By Peggy Trout and Mike Torkos

**E**quipped for the Future (EFF) is a versatile framework of content standards that can be used to help basic adult education and literacy programs develop meaningful lesson plans and curriculum for all of their students. Goodwill Literacy Initiative at Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh found EFF to be the solution to the challenge of serving a diverse student population. Staff followed a plan that gradually incorporated the EFF standards into the lesson-planning process. Two people have written this article from two different perspectives: an administrator in charge of program-wide training and implementation and an instructor using EFF on a daily basis trying to help his students learn more and reach those goals.

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# Using Equipped for the Future in lesson planning

By Peggy Trout and Mike Torkos

**E**quipped for the Future (EFF) is a versatile framework of content standards for adult learning that can be used to help basic adult education and literacy programs develop meaningful lesson plans and curriculum for all of their students. Our program, Goodwill Literacy Initiative at Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, found EFF to be the solution to the challenge of serving a diverse student population. We followed a plan that gradually incorporated the EFF standards into our lesson-planning process. We have written this article from two different perspectives: an administrator in charge of program-wide training and implementation, and an instructor using EFF on a daily basis trying to help his students learn more and reach those goals. We hope that by reading this article, you will be able to find something to use in your practice, as either an administrator or an instructor.

## **EFF Content Standards**

The [EFF Web site](#) (EFF Center for Training and Technical Assistance at Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee) lists 16 EFF Content Standards that define the knowledge and skills adults need in order to successfully carry out their roles as parents and family members, citizens and community members, and workers. Keeping a focus clearly on what adults need literacy for, EFF identifies 16 core skills that support effective performance in the home, community, and workplace.

### ***Communication Skills***

- Read With Understanding
- Convey Ideas in Writing
- Speak So Others Can Understand
- Listen Actively
- Observe Critically

### ***Decision-Making Skills***

- Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Plan
- Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate

### ***Interpersonal Skills***

- Cooperate With Others
- Guide Others
- Advocate and Influence
- Resolve Conflict and Negotiate

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### ***Lifelong Learning Skills***

- Take Responsibility for Learning
- Learn Through Research
- Reflect and Evaluate
- Use Information and Communications Technology

### **Steps in the EFF Teaching/Learning Cycle**

According to the Learning/Teaching Toolkit page of the [EFF Web site](#), the steps in the EFF teaching/learning cycle are as follows:

#### ***Preparation***

**Step 1:** Determine individual learner's goals and purposes and identify the EFF Standards that will help him/her achieve them. Identify the student's prior knowledge about these goals and Standards.

**Step 2:** In a group, identify a shared interest, purpose or goal and determine the group's prior knowledge of this topic. Identify the Standard that will help the group address this shared goal. Make clear the connection between the class focus and individuals' needs.

#### ***Planning***

**Step 3:** Use the EFF Standard to design a learning activity to address the real-life goal of the learners.

**Step 4:** With students, develop a plan to capture evidence and report learning.

#### ***Carrying Out the Plan***

**Step 5:** Carry out the learning activity.

**Step 6:** Observe and document evidence of performance of the standard.

#### ***Reflection***

**Step 7:** With students, evaluate and reflect on how what was learned is transferable to real-life situations.

**Step 8:** With students, determine next steps to help them meet their goals.

### **Taking stock**

The first step is to determine individual learner's goals and purposes. To begin the process of creating meaningful lessons to help all of our students, we look at four areas: *goals, barriers, life experiences, adaptation needs, and levels.*

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**Goals.** Basic adult literacy students come to our programs with a variety of goals:

- to seek career counseling
- to gain fluency in American Sign Language
- to obtain a secondary school diploma
- to become proficient in the English language and in American culture
- to move beyond dependency on welfare by entering the workforce

**Barriers.** Basic adult literacy students come to our programs with multiple barriers:

- childcare difficulties
- requirements for special accommodations
- mental health challenges
- poor self-esteem

**Experiences.** Basic adult literacy students come to our programs with a variety of life experiences:

- family deaths
- teenage pregnancies
- political persecution
- poor school experiences

**Adaptation needs.** Basic adult literacy students come to our program with a range of adaptation needs:

- physical challenges
- mental differences
- to various learning differences

**Educational functioning levels.** Basic adult literacy students come to our programs with a variety of educational functioning levels:

- beginning literacy
- high advanced secondary
- low intermediate ESL

### Using EFF

Since it is a content framework, rather than a fully developed curriculum, EFF can work well in an adult education classroom—one where every student is different and has different needs. The framework does not restrict an instructor, but instead reminds us to think about the skills adults can use to succeed in the world. This framework allows them the freedom to develop their own lessons and curriculum.

From the beginner to the most experienced instructor, EFF provides tools to think beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic and develop meaningful lessons to address all the realms of an adult student's life. EFF also gives adult educators and administrators a common language. If an instructor writes a lesson plan about Advocate and Influence, for example, another instructor reading the lesson plan can understand the basic concepts and refer to

the content standards for any clarification needed.

The best EFF lessons are those that leave the student feeling that they are, well, equipped for the future! For this to happen, the students must “buy into” the lessons. Students want lessons that are relevant to today, this week, and the future: for GED preparation and beyond, through postsecondary education and career goals.

Because teachers create lessons that target their specific learning communities and are relevant to every student in the classroom, the EFF framework helps teachers bridge across a wide variety of age, experience, and academic levels. The framework also encompasses a wide range of specific real-life events and situations, making learning relevant to all of the students.

To accomplish this twofold mission of teaching lessons that are both relevant to individual students and appropriate for multilevel classrooms, the EFF framework allows a teacher to begin with the student’s raw ideas and interests. As professional educators we do not assume that our students are reflecting on their own thinking process. This behavior, called metacognition, is the higher-order process that controls the way a person perceives a learning situation, in short, their responsibility toward a learning task. Our students often lack this self-reflective behavior. Luckily for us, the EFF wheel provides a framework for teachers and students to explore this self-reflective, lifelong learning behavior.

One of the best ways to use your student group to help you choose an EFF lesson plan is to go on a little fishing expedition to “find the missing skill.” This missing skill is often the cause of painful and reoccurring frustrations in life. Teacher-led group discussions will reveal these missing skills. Asking questions that lead to class discussion is one way to begin. Answers to a simple question such as, “*Have you ever been embarrassed in the grocery store because you were short on cash or counted your money too slowly? Tell us your story.*” will often reveal missing skills. Later, the teacher may reflect on this conversation using the EFF wheel. In this particular example, students may struggle with counting, rounding, and estimating, a perfect fit into the EFF Decision Making Skill: Use math to solve problems and communicate.

Frequently, an individual student will need to vent about a frustrating experience. It is important to listen to our students and examine any frustrations they feel in their daily lives for more EFF lesson-planning opportunities. A student who recently argued with her child’s teacher may feel helpless and angry, and her story might excite and evoke the sympathy of the entire group. As the student unloads on the group, the teacher should listen carefully. How might this student’s poor interpersonal skills have led to frustration? What are the other students’ reactions to the story? Simply letting these students vent their frustrations could provide fertile ground for lessons around the EFF Interpersonal Skills: Resolving Conflicts and Negotiating, in the near future.

A better understanding of social dynamics will prompt our students to examine the category of Communication Skills. What communication skills will enable the student in the above scenario to advocate for her child? Follow-up exercises may include writing a letter to the teacher, effective note-taking skills for a parent-teacher conversation, and reading about effective communication with guidance counselors. The teacher could expand upon these exercises to create a letter-writing lesson, a note-taking lesson, and an outlining les-

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son applied to assorted self-help texts. Simply listening to a student vent for a few minutes could generate a month of EFF lessons!

### Training in EFF

In 1998, our program became one of the Pennsylvania pilot agencies using EFF as an EQUAL (Educational Quality for Adult Literacy) program-improvement project. At that time, there was a lot of statewide training on EFF and several programs were involved in helping develop EFF at the national level. Since 1998, the staff at our agency, as in many adult education programs, has changed significantly. In fact, only three people who were involved in the original project are still on staff. So, how can we continue to inform new staff of EFF and how can it be useful?

We provide periodic training for new and existing staff on the EFF framework. Every staff member has an *Equipped for the Future Content Standards* book and is encouraged to read it. We use the terms from the framework in conversations and in staff meetings.

Several years ago, we began our implementation of required EFF lesson plans to be submitted to our supervisors. We required a few lesson plans per month and did not give much direction, only that the plans address something from the EFF standards. At right is a blank EFF lesson plan.

In early 2006, we provided specific training over two months for all of our staff on lesson planning. We allowed staff to use either the EFF framework or the Foundation Skills. We standardized the format and gave the assignment to write 12 lesson plans from one “spoke” of a wheel. Each staff member is required to submit a specific number of lesson plans.

In order to help new staff, we created an intranet via an internal folder on our Web server for posting lesson plans. As time goes on, we are building a large database of potential lessons for staff to use.

**Basic Skill Focus/ EFF Standard:**  
Learning Objective/Purpose:  
Materials and Resources:  
Procedure:  
Prior Experience/Knowledge:  
Vocabulary/Concept Development:  
Instructional Process:  
Additional Practice/Extension Activity:  
Evaluation of Lesson:

### Conclusion

We hope that this discussion around using EFF for lesson planning is helpful to your program. We have found that it validates good teaching and helps to improve the thinking of struggling new teachers—and it gives all of us a common language to discuss ideas.

### Reference

For much more information on Equipped for the Future, visit the EFF Web site at <http://eff.cls.utk.edu>.