Adult Skills Assessment Program (ASAP)

Team Dr. Stephen Sireci, Dr. Maria Elena Oliveri, Dr. Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Dr. April Zenisky, and Dr. Maura Maxfield

Affiliations University of Massachusetts Amherst

Our Research

The ASAP is a comprehensive *system* of literacy and numeracy assessments to support the academic and occupational goals of adult learners. It is designed to provide actionable information to help adults accomplish their academic and occupational goals. Our research includes co-designing assessments with educators, adult learners, employers, and employees; aligning assessments with CCRSAE and O*NET; and the use of AI in test development.

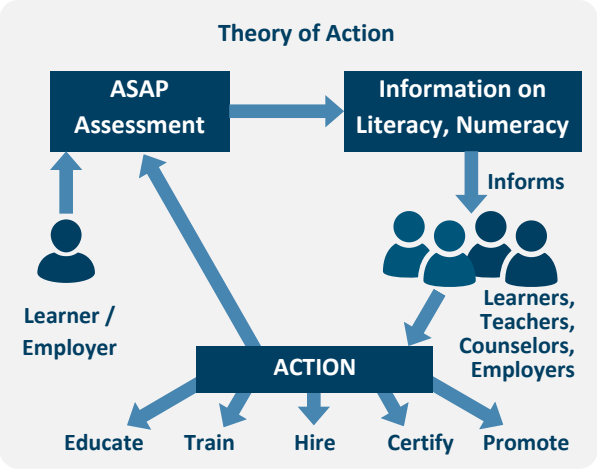
The Year Ahead

ASAP assessments have been developed for placement in math programs, diagnostic assessments for the CALM (math) curriculum, and for Skillblox (reading). These assessments will be piloted beginning March 2025. Reading placement and workplace assessments will also be developed this year. ASAP will be operational in September 2026.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Pilot testing (Math, CALM diagnostic, and SkillBlox)	Pilot testing (reading and workplace)	National pilot and further development	Personalization and reporting enhancements

Questions for the Field

1. What information about reading and math skills would *you* like for placing learners into instructional or workplace training programs?
2. ASAP items and assessments are aligned to CCRSAE and are being aligned to O*NET. What other skills frameworks would be helpful?
3. Would *you* like to be involved in piloting ASAP assessments? Your learners, trainees, or employees can participate now. Contact Dr. Sireci.
4. Would *you* like to be involved in evaluating ASAP assessments? We are studying the degree to which our assessments are culturally responsive, align to CCRSAE, and provide actionable information.
5. What information would *you* like from numeracy and literacy assessments?
6. What are *your* pain points around assessing adult learners?



Future Impact

By providing information on numeracy and literacy skills, we will empower adult learners to improve their skills and help educators assist learners in accomplishing their goals. ASAP will make assessment easy, helpful, and culturally responsive. ASAP will be the model of assessments that serve learners and will evolve to meet the needs of all learners, their educators, and employers.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #305N210031.

References

Learn more:
www.websites.umass.edu/asap/publications-and-products/

UMassAmherst
College of Education
Center for Educational Assessment

AutoTutor for Adult Reading Comprehension (ARC)

Team Dr. John Sabatini, Dr. Arthur Graesser, Dr. Daphne Greenberg, and Dr. Tenaha O'Reilly

Affiliations University of Memphis, Georgia State Univeristy, and Educational Testing Service

Our Research

The 2023 PIAAC Survey of adult literacy skills reveals that 28% of U.S. adults scored at Level 1 or below. This means that approximately 58.9 million adults lack the advanced skills required to handle complex literacy tasks. The AutoTutor for Adult Reading Comprehension (ARC) project is building and evaluating an intelligent tutoring system (ITS) that uses collaborative **'trialogues' among a teacher agent, a peer student agent, and the adult learner** to support literacy and reading comprehension.

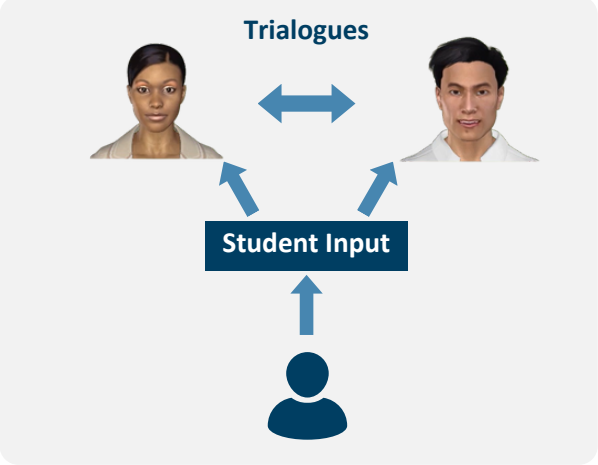
The Year Ahead

In the coming year, we are transitioning the ITS prototype to a scalable platform hosted by Workbay, Inc. This will give us access to pilot it with a broader national population of adults who are 1) in education settings, 2) seeking employment, or 3) in or transitioning from judicial supervision.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Rebuild ITS on New Platform	Debug and Beta test	Recruit for Pilot of Promise	Conduct Pilot of Promise

Questions for the Field

1. What curriculum/instruction/approaches do instructors use to support learners reading comprehension growth?
2. What is the typical ratio of whole class, small group, to individual learning when teaching reading?
3. What, if any, EdTech products or services are used in your program to support learner reading comprehension growth?
   a. Do students use the Learning System by themselves or with a group?
   b. Is time allocated in class to learning on the EdTech system?
   c. Can learners use it outside of class?



Future Impact

Reading literacy is no longer solely a paper-print based medium. Learning (and reading) is also increasingly thought of as a social versus isolated cognitive activity. Learning sciences have identified reading strategy instruction as an evidence-based practice. Intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) supplement classroom instruction, allowing more learners to access and learn as is convenient to their life situations, while still simulating social interactions.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #R305A200413.

References

Hollander, J., Sabatini, J., & Graesser, A. C. (2021). An intelligent tutoring system for improving adult literacy skills in digital environments. *COABE Journal, 10*(2), 59–64.

Writing in Adult Secondary Education (W-ASE)

Team Dr. Cynthia Puranik, Dr. Daphne Greenberg, Dr. Zoi Traga Philippakos, Dr. Charles MacArthur, and Dr. Christine Miller

Affiliations Georgia State University, University of Tennessee, and the University of Delaware

Our Research

Argumentative writing using word processing skills is important for passing high school equivilancy (HSE) exams, as well as for succeeding in postsecondary classes. The primary goals of the Writing in Adult Secondary Education project are to design and evaluate a technology supported argumentative writing curriculum for adult learners, and to develop a professional development delivery model, as well as on-line resources for instructors and students.

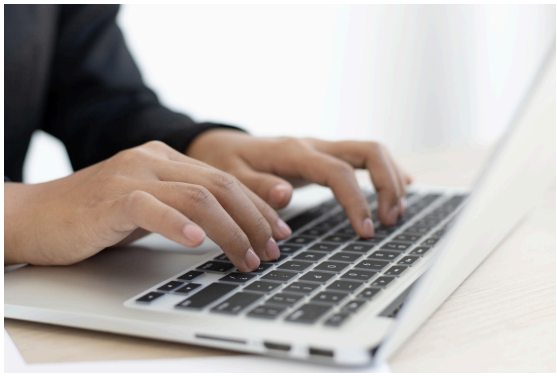
The Year Ahead

Currently, we are beginning the third round of implementation in adult education programs. The curriculum is being taught to adults at the 3-6 educational functional levels by their teachers in their classrooms. What we learn will help us prepare for randomized pilot study later this year.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Round three curriculum implementation	Data analysis & curriculum revisions	Pilot study with treatment and control groups	Data analysis & dissemination

Questions for the Field

Before our first implementation round, we conducted a Digital Writing Assessment with 86 adult learners to assess their keyboarding skills and word processing knowledge. Keyboarding skills are important because individuals with proficient skills can concentrate on the quality and quantity of their writing. The mean score for words per minute was 22.38 which is much lower than the average typing speed for non-professional adults, 40 WPM (American Society of Administrative Professionals). **Should keyboarding be taught to adult learners?** Increasingly, adult educators are asked to embed technology with their instruction in different content areas. **What are some ways that you would suggest we help educators adapt to this trend?**



Future Impact

Digital writing skills are important for adults to navigate daily life. Adult learners need academic writing skills to pass HSE exams, to successfully transition to college, and to expand their employment opportunities. There is very little research on the best way to teach academic writing to adult education students. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge. Products from this project will be available to both adult educators and learners.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #R305N210030.

References

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Adult Numeracy in the Digital Era (ANDE)

Team Dr. Ann Edwards, Dr. Kirk Walters, Dr. Karon Klipple, Dr. Bryan Matlen, Haley McNamara, and Dr. Alexis Cherewka

Affiliations WestEd, World Education, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education

Our Research

Numeracy and digital literacy skills are essential for postsecondary success, workforce entry, career goals, and citizenship. Yet nearly 1/3 of U.S. adults lack basic numeracy and digital literacy skills (OECD, 2024). ANDE aims to develop and evaluate a student-centered and technology-supported numeracy course to engage adult learners more productively and positively in deep mathematics learning and enable them to meet their goals and build robust mathematical reasoning and digital literacy skills for life.

The Year Ahead

We are currently pilot testing our revised course design and instructor supports, based on learnings from our usability, feasibility, and user-centered design testing.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Spring pilot	Course revisions	Fall pilot	Data analysis & dissemination

Questions for the Field

1. The ANDE course leverages adaptive technologies designed to address learning gaps, support the development of digital literacy and digital numeracy, integrate supports for English Language Learners, and incorporate routines that promote academic mindsets and habits of mind. Yet, we are mindful of disparities in access and comfort with technology and are continuing to learn about, develop, and test intentional supports to increase use of this implementation tool.
2. Comfort with and access to technology both present barriers to its effective use in ABE classrooms. **What strategies and tools have you found motivate/engage adult learners in the continual use of tech tools? And what supports do ABE instructors need to help nurture technology use/engagement among their students?**
3. Systems and structures in adult basic education (e.g open enrollment, unstructured course sequences) present challenges to building community, embracing growth, and strengthening know-how, in addition to nurturing technology use and skills. **We would like to hear thoughts about strategies employed to support adoption of the course given the structural and implementation variation?**

Future Impact

ANDE is more than self-directed learning to prepare for a test. Its research-based approach supports learners to build habits of mind and skills that are beneficial not only for achieving success on their exams, but for adult learners' long-term aspirations (e.g., critical thinking and justifying reasoning which is important for career advancement). We look forward to sharing learnings and resources from this course and the accompanying instructor supports with implementers and researchers to enhance mathematics and digital literacy learning in ABE.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #R305N210029.

References

OECD. (2024). D*o adults have the skills they need to thrive in a changing world?: Survey of adult skills 2023.* OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

Content-Integrated Language Instruction for Adults with Technology Support (CILIA-T)

Team Dr. Aydin Y. Durgunoglu, Dr. Daphne Greenberg, Dr. Elizabeth Tighe, and Theresa Sladek

Affiliations University of Minnesota-Duluth, Georgia State University, Literacy Minnesota, and Northstar Digital Literacy

Our Research

Over half of adult education students are English learners seeking to enhance their language skills (NRS, 2022) while gaining insight into the history, systems, and culture of their new home. We have designed and are piloting a free, open-access curriculum which integrates English instruction with U.S. history and civics while incorporating digital literacy. The curriculum has 16 modules, offering detailed lesson plans to build on learners' background knowledge, foster academic vocabulary, encourage critical thinking and to apply technology in meaningful tasks.

The Year Ahead

The research team continues to work on curriculum revisions and will be further pilot testing the materials this year! We are also working to make materials freely available and to provide professional development materials for teachers.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Curriculum revisions	Recruit and deliver PD for instructors	Pilot testing curriculum	Continue pilot and begin data analysis

Questions for the Field

1. What kinds of professional development would be most helpful to teach integrated content + ESL + technology skills?
2. We have an open-access, high-interest curriculum that can be used flexibly by the teachers. How can we build a Community of Practice so that the crucial dimensions of the curriculum are maintained while the teachers share how they are using, modifying and improving it?
3. What are the best ways to introduce this curriculum to potential users?
4. What are some ways ESL instructors are integrating content (any content, including Civics and U.S History, health, finance) and digital skills into their curriculum?

Future Impact

Our hope is that CILIA-T will remain open-access and therefore, used and discussed widely by instructors to help support learners accomplish their personal, academic and professional goals.

Learn more:
www.sites.google.com/d.umn.edu/ciliat

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #R305N210032.

References

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Teaching Skills That Matter-SkillBlox Instructional Support Pilot (TSTM-SB)

Team Dr. Stephanie Cronen, Dr. Jen Vanek, Dr. Neha Nanda, Jeff Goumas, Rachel Riggs, Dr. Amani Talwar, Justine Schade, Adria Katka, Deeza-Mae Smith, Arianna Bollens, and Gee Rege

Affiliations American Institutes for Research® and World Education

Our Research

The Teaching Skills That Matter (TSTM) initiative aims to help adult education teachers improve instruction by integrating skills and topics aligned with adult learners' educational and employment goals. Our pilot is an independent but complementary initiative that aims to support programs that want to expand implementation of TSTM-based instruction. We have enhanced SkillBlox, a free application, to help educators identify, organize, and share open educational resources aligned with TSTM skills and topics tailored to their students' needs and interests.

The Year Ahead

We are providing pilot teachers with professional development to scale TSTM-aligned instruction using SkillBlox. We will administer a survey and conduct focus groups with participating teachers to learn about their experiences implementing TSTM in their instruction using SkillBlox.

Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Winter 2025
Survey and focus group data collection	Data analysis of surveys and focus groups	Collect state program and learner data	Data analysis and product dissemination

Questions for the Field

1. How do you access open and free instructional resources? How do you share them with learners? What challenges do you experience in doing so?
2. How do you spread the word about digital content that you have found helpful in your instruction or in your programs?
3. What challenges do you face integrating skills into your instruction that are not part of a required set of standards or curriculum?
4. What strategies do you use to help learners access digtial learning content?

Future Impact

We aim to improve the quality and relevance of instruction by making it easier for teachers to leverage the TSTM framework. By supporting adult education teachers in using SkillBlox to share digital content aligned with TSTM topic and skills, we seek improvements in key learner outcomes, such as persistence in classroom and for learners to attain skills required in the workplace and that improve their economic mobility.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education through Award #R305N210025.

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