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WHAT GRADE IS DR. CHAN IN?

by Donna Ilyin

First presented at Northern University of Illinois, "What Grade is Dr. Chan In?" was written to present to adult educators and consultants in Local and State Departments of Education and Federal Regions.

Too often attempts are made to place highly educated non-English speakers into children's school grades. This system is humiliating and degrading. It seems rather foolish to say that Dr. Chan is in the first

grade because he can't read or speak English, yet reading grade levels are important to the Federal and State Government when evaluating Adult Basic Education programs. They are important to employers when selecting minority workers for employment and they are important to Dr. Chan and to his teachers when selecting reading materials after he has reached the intermediate and advanced courses in adult schools.

When Dr. Chan can read well enough in English, he can take adult tests which place him into those reading grade levels. When he has the proficiency of an adult intermediate level student, he can also take tests designed for foreign college students who are entering beginning courses (often called ELI or ALI)¹ giving him intensive English

¹Dr. Robert Kaplan (USC) has informed me that some ALI or ELI programs have students with nil proficiency in English. If those beginning courses are in his area and scheduled when he can attend and if they are not too expensive, he is indeed fortunate. Usually, however, Dr. Chan has to attend a free adult program ESL class.

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for college work. However he cannot take any of these tests if he has no English proficiency at all. In adult program ESL classes the beginning level classes as well as the lower intermediate level class are often called *SURVIVAL ENGLISH*. When Dr. Chan has acquired survival English proficiency, he can now take native-speaker tests that will give him a grade level equivalency. He can now take college foreign-born tests qualifying him for beginning English classes.

How long does it take for Dr. Chan to show the Local, State, and Federal Government that he can get a grade equivalency and then show gains in grade levels as he continues to study? How long will it take Dr. Chan to qualify as a beginner in a college intensive English class for foreign

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students? It really depends on many factors. (Language Proficiency Study p. 25 and 26) Adult beginning students on the average, take anywhere from 500 to 1500 hours of instruction to reach this proficiency.

How should the Federal programs evaluate Dr. Chan's progress when he is in those Survival English classes? How do teachers select materials and reading for Dr. Chan when he is in those levels? Are most courses the same throughout the country? Is survival English just hit and miss with no plan, course outlines, curriculum or special materials, methods, tests, etc? Is it impossible for Dr. Chan's progress to be reported?

Many adult school programs throughout the country have similar plans, curriculum outlines, behavioral objectives, recommended

texts and materials for those beginning Survival English classes. (For two plans and outlines see: ESL Structure Outline, Los Angeles and Master Plan II, S.F.)

Many of us believe it would be helpful for the Federal, State, and Local programs to refer to Dr. Chan's classes as SE-1 (Survival English-1) or 100, SE-2, or 200, SE-3 or 300. It really is much kinder and more realistic to say that Dr. Chan is in level 100 or SE-1 or SE-100 than to ask for a grade equivalent that doesn't exist because Dr. Chan can't read well enough to take a test in English to demonstrate his English reading grade.

It is especially more honest and rewarding for Dr. Chan and for us to report that after 350-500² hours of instruction Dr. Chan has progressed to a proficiency level equal to ESL 200, SE-2, or SE-200...whatever you want to call it. Dr. Chan still can't read well enough to take the test in English to show his grade or to become a college foreign student beginner, but he usually can read well enough to take an ESL test to show his ESL level or SE level.

Dr. Chan's oral proficiency should also be evaluated since oral communication is important for surviving and finding a job in the United States. Dr. Chan may have to work part-time while he is learning English. Oral comprehension also aids reading comprehension. We want Dr. Chan to understand what he can decode--not just read a lot of words he can't understand in context. Neither Dr. Chan nor any other ESL non-English speaker should be forced to take a native speaker test or a test for foreign college students until he can read and understand English well enough to attempt the test. He shouldn't take a special ESL

²This figure is an estimation based on testing research that I have done in adult program ESL classes. Students in junior high, senior high and true beginning classes in ALI and BLI would undoubtedly take less time. Hopefully some researcher will study the problem in open enrollment adult ESL classes using true beginners with nil English.

screening test either until after he has acquired some English proficiency.

How can one tell if Dr. Chan is ready to take an adult program ESL screening test? Before giving him the screening tests ask a number of information questions(who, what, when, where, etc.) sprinkled with a few Yes/No questions (are, do, did, etc) about the student, his English ability, the number of classes, or kinds of classes he wants, etc. If the student can ask and answer and read a few simple conversation sentences, give him screening tests for placement. If he can't, place him in the adult beginning survival English class.

After Dr. Chan has been in a beginning Survival English class, how can one tell how much he has achieved? The screening tests can also be used as achievement or post tests if given after 350 hours of instruction. They are useful when time is limited, when teachers have not yet made reliable and valid evaluation tools to measure their objectives and when teachers want another

evaluation to check their own evaluation.

What is really lacking at the present time are reliable and valid screening and achievement tests that measure reading ability in the Survival English classes 100-300. However until new reading tests are developed and normed on adult ESL students in those Survival English classes, the tests listed below can show gain. Teachers' own records of before and after achievements can also be used.

The following is a list of tests with scores showing placement into ESL levels. Grade equivalents are given when appropriate and when gain can be shown. Most of the information given here comes from research in validating my own tests, but other tests are listed. For further information about how those tests place into ESL levels, contact the authors. (See Ramirez pp. 37-41 & pp. 50-58.) Hopefully Federal, State, and Local Governments will begin to use the SE levels rather than grades. Then our Dr. Chan's progress will be realistically reported--our progress better evaluated.

SCREENING TESTS

LEVEL	SCORE	PLACEMENT
ESL 100 of Beginning 1		SE-1 or SE-100
EPT A and B (Ilyin)	0-19	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	0-24	
STEL (Best)	0-19	
(Grinsell, Nixon, Lado, Terrell, Madsen, Martz, others)		
ESL 200 or Beginning 2		SE-2 or SE-200
EPT A and B	20-29	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	25-39	
STEL TESTS		
Beginning 1 & 2	20-27	
(Lado, Terrell, Madsen, others)		

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What Grade Is Dr. Chan In?

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ESL 300 or Intermediate 1		SE-3 or SE-300 Grade 2.9 RFU (Thurstone)
EPT A and B	30-39	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	40-59	
STEL TESTS		
Beginning 1 & 2	30-37	
Intermediate 1 & 2	0-19	
(Finn, Lado, Mills, Terrell)		
ESL 400 or Basic Education where ESL and native speakers of English are in the same class. Vocational 4/4 programs are often at this level also.		Grade 3.5 RFU
EPT A and B	above 35	
and G and H (Ilyin, Best & Biagi)	0-19	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	60-74	
STEL Tests (Int. 1 & 2)	20-29	
TOEFL	350-425	
(Mills, CELT see Harris, and others)		
ESL 500		about 5th grade level RFU (Thurstone) TABE M
(Basic Education English speaking students and non-native speaking students with low educations are now in another course--not usually in ESL classes.)		
EPT TESTS G/H	20-29	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	75-100	
STEL TESTS		
Int. 1 & 2	30-37	
Adv. 1 & 2	0-19	
TOEFL	Below 500	
CELT		
Listening	Average 46	
Structure	Average 41	
MTELP (See Upshur)	Below 54	
ESL 600		about 7th grade level RFU TABE M
(Non-English-speakers only who usually have above 5th grade education in their own country.)		
EPT TESTS G/H	30-40	
ILYIN ORAL INTERVIEW	75-100	
STEL TESTS		
Adv. 1 & 2	20-40	

TOEFL	Over 500
CELT	
Listening	Average 64
Structure	Average 51
MTELP	Average 54
MICHIGAN AURAL ACHIEVEMENT (See Pillsbury)	Average 59
MICHIGAN STRUCTURE (See Pillsbury)	Average 54

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