

## ***English – No Problem!* and the EFF and SCANS Frameworks**

**Brigitte Marshall**

The *English – No Problem!* series has been informed in both its content and its instructional activity design by two significant initiatives that were launched nationwide in the 1990s – the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and Equipped for the Future (EFF).

### **Background**

In 1990, the Secretary of the US Department of Labor convened a group of prominent educators and representatives from business and labor and asked them to determine what work requires of schools. Members of the Commission spent twelve months talking to business owners, public employers, managers, union officials, and desk and line workers in stores, government offices, and manufacturing facilities. The Commission put forth the following conclusion:

Good jobs depend on people who can put knowledge to work. New workers must be creative and responsible problem solvers and have the skills and attitudes on which employers can build. (SCANS, 1991, p. v).

In the course of its work, the Commission prepared a series of reports. The report “What Work Requires of Schools” identifies a set of five competencies that, in conjunction with the three-part foundation of basic skills and personal qualities on which they are based, lie at the heart of effective job performance today. The Commission stated as its intent that the competencies and the foundation skills should be taught and understood in an integrated fashion, reflecting the workplace contexts in which they are applied.

In 1994, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) launched the Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative in response to the National Education Goals Panel challenge for a literate nation by the year 2000 (National Education Goals Panel, 1993). NIFL sent an open letter to teachers, tutors, and adult learners across the country, inviting them to answer the question behind Goal 6: What is it that adults need to know and be able to do in order to be literate, compete in the global economy, exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and participate fully in their children’s education? This research effort attempted to map the critical responsibilities of family, civic, and work life from the perspective of the adult learner. EFF categorized the needs reported by adult learners into the following four fundamental areas, or purposes:

1. **access** to information and resources so adults can orient themselves in the world.
2. **voice** to express ideas and opinions with the confidence that one will be heard and taken into account.
3. **action** to be able to solve problems and make decisions, acting independently.
4. **bridge to the future** to learn how to learn in order to keep up with the world as it changes.

The initiative then went on to develop a core set of sixteen skill standards organized into four areas:

**Communication Skills**

Observe critically; convey ideas in writing; listen actively; speak so others can understand.

**Decision-Making Skills**

Use math to solve problems and communicate; solve problems and make decisions; plan.

**Interpersonal Skills**

Cooperate with others; advocate and influence; resolve conflict and negotiate; guide others.

**Lifelong Learning Skills**

Take responsibility for learning; use information and communications technology; learn through research; reflect and evaluate.

Although the SCANS and EFF initiatives were started at different times and developed from different perspectives, they yielded conclusions that are remarkably similar and mutually supportive. SCANS asked from the perspective of employers, “What does work require of schools?” EFF asked from the perspective of adult learners, “What is it that adults need to know and be able to do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” Although the competencies and foundation skills identified and documented by SCANS were presented as the bedrock of effective job performance, their relevance to and support of other domains of adult learners’ lives is evident and is in harmony with the rationale for the design of the sixteen EFF Standards.

EFF Standards encourage a problem-solving approach to skill development. While the focus of teaching and assessment is on what students need to learn in a particular situation to achieve their purpose, the goal is longer term: to build, over time, the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that facilitate learning with understanding and transfer of learning from one context to another (Stein, 2000, p.20).

This statement resonates with many of the skills and competencies highlighted by SCANS in the five competencies and three-part foundation of skills, which are both summarized below:

**Thinking Skills** – thinks creatively, makes decisions, solves problems, visualizes, knows how to learn and reason.

**Decision Making** – specifies goals and constraints, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses the best alternative.

**Problem Solving** – recognizes problems and devises and implements a plan of action.

**Knowing How to Learn** – uses efficient learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.

**Self-Management** - assesses self accurately, sets personal goals, monitors progress, and exhibits self-control.

**Leadership Skills** – communicates ideas to justify position, persuades and convinces others, responsibly challenges existing procedures and policies.

**Negotiation** – works toward agreements involving exchanges of resources; resolves divergent interests.

### **ENP's Response to Needs**

Teachers and program coordinators who use *English – No Problem!* will immediately recognize the impact of both initiatives in the instructional activity design. Adult learners are presented with situations that reflect the four purposes of learning identified by EFF. SCANS skills are not only reflected and modeled in the characters' lives but are also developed through the structure of activities that are repeated on a regular basis throughout the units. Learners are asked to work and negotiate in teams, identify and work with resources to complete projects and activities, analyze information and demonstrate understanding of systems and processes, and work with technology. As called for by both the EFF skill standards and the SCANS foundation skills, many units also involve use of math skills. The rationale for communicative interactions is built into the various activities so that adult learners are being asked to seek out information for a specific purpose, research from each other and from other sources, or locate information in order to complete a task. Throughout the series, learners are asked to interact with each other and produce and respond to language in ways that replicate the behavioral expectations they will encounter in the workplace, in their community, and in their roles as parents and lifelong learners.

### **References:**

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). (1991). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

Stein, S. (2000). *Equipped for the future content standards: What adults need to know and be able to do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.