

**The Application of the Australian Core Skills Framework
to Assessment in
the Skills for Education and Employment Program:
*Accounting for heterogeneous learner cohorts***

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Outline

● **Background Information:**

- + The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)
- + The Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE)

● **Challenges with accounting for targeted learner cohorts in:**

- + LLN Framework Development
- + LLN Framework Application

● **Research Overview**

● **Major Findings**

● **Conclusions & Recommendations**

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)



- National assessment & reporting framework;
- Describing five core skills at five levels;
- Assessing and reporting LLN performance by adult learners;
- Applied in diverse government-funded training sector;
- To ensure consistency and quality of adult LLN education & training.

Skills for Education & Employment Program (SEE)



- **Provides language, literacy and numeracy training to**
Australian job seekers with insufficient LLN skills for employment or further education
- **Most heterogeneous learner cohorts with:**
 - + a wide age range (15 to 64);
 - + diverse cultural, linguistic, educational and employment backgrounds.
- **Different training contexts** (e.g. Communities, TAFE, Non-profit Org. across Australia)
- **Different training curricula** (e.g. CGEA, CSWE, EAL framework)
- **ACSF as compulsory for assessment & reporting**

Major Challenges with Accounting for Targeted Learner Cohorts in LLN Framework Development

Accounting for various learner-related factors:

- + linguistic and cultural backgrounds;
- + education or schooling experience;
- + age and stage of development;
- + specific LLN needs

Requiring different sources of input:

- + different theories & research findings;
- + consultation with LLN teachers & experts;
- + trials on targeted learner cohorts

Common Issues with Accounting for Targeted Learners in LLN Framework Application

- **Inappropriate classification of learner's performance levels**

(e.g., not capturing performance by learners at entry and high levels)

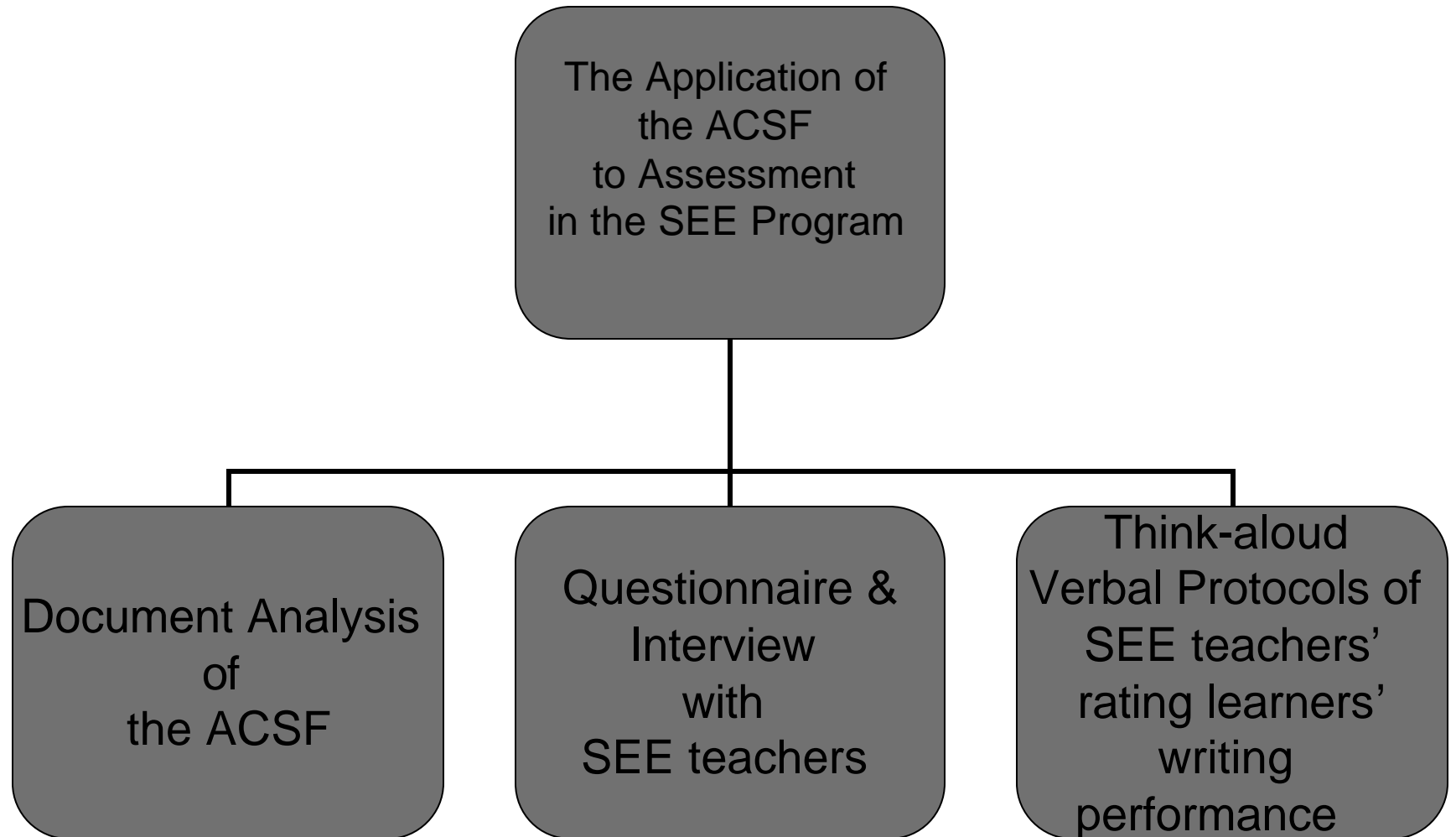
- **Inadequate reflection of learners' progress**

(e.g., not reflecting learning pathways of ESL, native English speaking or Aboriginal learner cohorts)

- **Inadequate coverage of learners' LLN needs**

(e.g., inauthentic texts& tasks; not incorporating academic English for school learners, adult-oriented texts and tasks unfamiliar to school learners).

Research Overview



Findings on the ACSF accounting for SEE learners: Strengths

Accounting for SEE learners' LLN needs

- ✍ Including a wide range of real-life LLN performance contexts, tasks & text types;
- ✍ Covering LLN skills needed by adult LLN learners;
- ✍ Allowing assessment of SEE learners across a broad range of LLN skills

Issues of Concern: lack of account for low literacy learners

Teacher's typical comment:

'You have to spend a lot of time with them. You have to drill a lot and they need a lot of support, extensive support. That is why I think the pre-ACSF is needed. You should be able to do block exit assessment in writing if they could copy. So if they could copy a document, that was Ok. But in the ACSF they have to actually construct a sentence at the lowest level.'

(Vivien's Interview Extract)

Issues of Concern: Lack of account for characteristics of different learner cohorts

Teacher's typical comment:

'Level 1, if they write about themselves, it is easy to write 'I'm Anh Le. I live in Springvale' . But actually they can write only that because they have practiced in previous study when they did their 510 hours in AMEP. If we ask them to write sentences about their daily routines, they don't know how to use sentence structures, paragraph writing. That's mainly for migrants, not for Australians. If you take local students, if they don't write, they don't write at all.' (Diana's Interview Extract)

Issues of concern: Difficulty with matching learners' performance to the ACSF levels

Teachers' Typical Comments:

'I had a client who had a level 3 for calculation but the same client could not read a map and give directions for level 1. It was difficult for me to decide the level of the client';

'The inclusion of some indicators is sometimes not practical. For example, using conjunctions 'but' and 'and' falls under level 2 in writing. So does using 'adjectives'. But often, many clients' writing does not meet level 1 requirements but still has basic conjunctions like "and". And adjectives, many level 1 students use them.'

(Lona's Interview Extracts)

Conclusions & Recommendations on Accounting for Heterogeneous Learner Cohorts

- **SEE Low Literacy Learners:**

- Accounting for majority of SEE learner population (50% Initial English, 41% Basic English, see *DEEWR, 2005*);
- Requiring the application of the ACSF Pre- level 1 Supplement for capturing performance and measuring progress;
- Requiring similar understanding and accommodation of LLN needs and performance as identified in various studies on low LLN learners (see *AMEP, 2006; Gunn, 2003; Nawrocki, 2004; Ollerhead, 2010; Ross, 2000*).

Conclusions & Recommendations on Accounting for Heterogeneous Learner Cohorts

- **SEE Diverse Learner Cohorts**

- + trials of the ACSF on different learner cohorts in different training contexts for better LLN performance description and level discrimination;
- + incorporating various learner-related factors like education experience:
 - in the ACSF (*similar to the ESL Bandscale, see McKay, 1995*); and
 - in the implementation of the ACSF in a training program (*similar to the CSWE in the AMEP, see Ross, 2000 and Burrows, 2001*);
- + the need for more teachers' professional judgment and assessment training;
- + the need for further research on the LLN performance and progress by learners from different backgrounds.

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Thank You !

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Questions