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## **Perhaps the wolf IS at his door: A sympathetic response to T. Scott Murray**

### **Tom Sticht International Consultant in Adult Education**

While reading T. Scott Murray's article entitled "*It's ok to cry wolf if the wolf is at the door: A rejoinder to Tom Sticht*" I couldn't help feeling a great deal of sympathy for Scott. Having just participated in the release of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) report using methodologies developed in the early 1990s by the U. S. government, he was now learning that a newly released report sponsored by this same government was saying that the methodologies used in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and ALL surveys, projects he had worked on for over a decade, were wrong. Under these circumstances, I can understand why he might feel like the wolf was at his door.

It is also understandable to me that, given his long term investment of time and professional efforts to the IALS and ALL, Scott would want to preserve as much of the value of these surveys as possible. In his rejoinder to my article he provides a lot of his beliefs and understandings about aspects of adult literacy assessment but in the end he actually agrees with the two major points that I reported from the work of the National Academy of Sciences:

1. As I reported from the National Academy of Sciences report, and as Scott acknowledges, performance levels for the ALL were not based on any standard setting process. He says, " Tom is right that none of the surveys (NALS, IALS, or ALL) ever underwent a standard setting process to identify a "suitable minimum needed for coping in today's societies". No such standard setting process was ever undertaken."
2. Scott also acknowledges, "Tom is correct when he says that an RP 50 is the point where one has equal errors about whether a person can or cannot perform a task." That means that this is the RP value that provides the HIGHEST STANDARD OF VALIDITY for inferences drawn about whether people can or cannot perform various tasks. Any other RP standards increase imbalances in either false negatives or false positives.

So I sympathize with Scott for being caught between the methodology of the NALS of 1992 and the criticism of that methodology by the NAS of 2005. I hope that better ways can be developed for discovering the scale of need for adult literacy education so that those who are most in need can be identified and convinced that they and their families can be helped by engaging in adult literacy education. I also hope that by seeing that the demand for adult literacy education is not insurmountably large policymakers can ensure that adult literacy education is funded at the levels needed to make genuine and lasting gains in adult literacy proficiencies. To the best of my knowledge this has not yet happened in most industrialized nations, including Canada.

Thomas G. Sticht  
International Consultant in Adult Education  
2062 Valley View Blvd.  
El Cajon, CA  
92019-2059  
Tel/fax: (619) 444-9133 Email: [tsticht@aznet.net](mailto:tsticht@aznet.net)