



Bridging the Gap Package:

Background Information

1. Background & Framework

In Quebec, literacy services are offered to adult learners through school boards and community-based groups. Both of these literacy providers have essentially the same purpose: to enable adult learners to access other learning services, to improve the adult learner's capacities in different areas of learning, and to help learners carry out their family and social roles.¹ In October of 2005, the Quebec English Literacy Alliance identified the need to expand and further develop the partnership between councils and school boards in order to better serve the needs of English literacy students across the province. This early project proposal concluded that standardized educational objectives must be established so that councils, school boards, and learners understand what literacy skills must be attained in order to meet educational expectations at all levels.²

Studies have consistently proven that literacy is closely connected to all aspects of an individual's life and livelihood. Literacy education plays a major role in how each citizen contributes to social, cultural, and economic development. In Quebec, community-based groups (or councils) and school boards are valuable players in supporting the educational progress of the adult learners in their respective jurisdictions. Yet Quebecers are far more transient today than in previous generations; many individuals find themselves living in new geographical regions because of employment, familial, or personal reasons. This is why communication across councils and school boards is an important step in supporting adult education. While there is no question that individual councils and school boards must function according to the needs and standards of their own region, establishing standardized entry and exit tools for adult literacy programs is an important part of supporting not only the transition of adult learners throughout the province, but also their educational development.

The main objective of the Bridging the Gap initiative is to implement standardized guidelines for adult literacy programs in order to ease the transition of adult learners between councils and school boards. These standards will help council and school board literacy providers promote learner progress through standard performance assessment and recruitment and retention practices. They will also help literacy stakeholders confidently

¹ Literacy Training in Quebec; Provincial Report Presented at the Provincial/Territorial Literacy Consultation, Ministère de l'Éducation 2002.

² QELA Project Proposal, "From Literacy Council to School: Bridging the Gap for the Literacy Student", October 6, 2005

determine when a learner is ready to move on to new educational or life challenges. Finally, it will promote learner success through incorporating up-to-date pedagogical theory and government educational policy that support optimal learner progress.

It is important to note that literacy providers are in charge of a very important service and, understandably, may be concerned about introducing new literacy methods or tools to their current educational practices; this is a justifiable concern. Nevertheless, it is not the intention of this project to override, confuse, or add to the work of any adult literacy practitioner in Quebec. On the contrary, the Bridging the Gap resources have been designed as tools that will compliment English literacy practices currently in place across the province.

2. Rationale

We have serious literacy challenges in Quebec. According to Statistics Canada and the *Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL)* survey, four out of every ten adult Canadians, age 16 to 65 struggle with low literacy skills. Quebec is identified as one of the four provinces that have more people with low literacy than the national average. Furthermore, *The Government of Quebec Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* defines basic education as a major and urgent challenge. This policy argues that far too few of the number of people who lack sufficient basic education are seeking to pursue educational activities to develop their skills and autonomy. Therefore, despite the efforts on the part of literacy practitioners, we have only been able to reach a small percentage of the population with literacy needs.

We need to take action to encourage the targeted population to engage in learning. This can be done through providing potential learners with all the support necessary to obtain a solid basic education. The Bridging the Gap project offers two main means of standardized support to English language literacy providers. First of all, common tools to assess learner competencies are provided as part of this package. These tools will not only help literacy providers recognize the knowledge and competencies that learners have already acquired, but also help them to determine when an individual is ready to move on to new educational pursuits. Implementing a standardized mechanism for learner assessment, which will translate easily across the province, will also ensure that adult learners do not have to repeat learning when they move on to a new literacy program. Secondly, standard recruitment procedures and tools are offered in this package. Studies strongly suggest that such standard recruitment procedures (for entry) will considerably increase enrolment in our adult literacy programs.

In Quebec, community-based groups (or councils) and school boards are have the crucial role of supporting the educational progress of many adult learners; nonetheless, many individuals find themselves living in new geographical regions because of employment, familial, or personal reasons. This alone is a significant reason for councils and school boards to work more closely together. Regular training seminars and mutually beneficial assessment tools, which are important ingredients in the Bridging the Gap project, will enable us to cultivate stronger partnerships now and in years to come.

Summary list of what the Bridging the Gap Package offers to literacy practitioners:

1. A variety of useful tools and resources for student recruitment and retention.
2. Explanations on how to monitor and assess each learner's progress.
3. Assessment material that will be transferable to English literacy programs across the province.
4. Practical resources that respect both the government's desire to improve literacy education as well as the particular needs of literacy stakeholders in different regions of the province.
5. Information and resources on Personal Portfolio Projects.
6. Project and lesson ideas that will be transferable and suitable to the needs of adult literacy learners.
7. Background information on competency-based literacy instruction.

3. Purpose & Goals

The overarching goal of the Bridging the Gap project has been to develop a solid mechanism that will enable us to bridge the gap between formal and non-formal literacy programs in Quebec. This will be done through the development, refinement, and implementation of several concrete resources that will help adult literacy practitioners to monitor, record, and share students' goals, skills, and progress. These resources serve the following purposes and goals:

Purposes:

- To **facilitate the cohesion of services provided** to English literacy students by councils and school boards in Quebec.
- To **further develop the partnership** between councils and school boards in order to better serve the needs of adult literacy students.
- To **encourage greater learner self-confidence** and self-awareness through implementing standardized assessment criteria that emphasizes performance as opposed to non-performance.
- To **help literacy practitioners to know when a learner is ready to move on** (both in life and learning).

Goals:

- To provide **stronger support** to all adult English literacy providers in Quebec.
- To provide a range of **mutually beneficial resources** to bridge the gap in adult literacy and basic education in Quebec.
- To **facilitate the transition of learners** between levels and across programs.
- To have **regular workshops** or seminars in which literacy providers may exchange concerns and ideas.
- To **implement standardized assessment** system that reflects not only learner and practitioner needs, but also up-to-date practices in literacy education.
- To implement **Personal Portfolio Projects** as a standard for all adult literacy learners across the province.
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4. Guiding Principles

Various questionnaires for adult literacy tutors and coordinators at both the council and school board level were distributed in February 2007 in order to clarify concerns, expectations, and ideas for the Bridging the Gap project. The responses to these questionnaires have played an important role in the development of resources in this package. Indeed, concerns and expectations of literacy practitioners must be addressed for the successful implementation of this project. The guiding principles (listed below) reflect the hopes and concerns that were emphasised by both council and school board members; they have therefore played a significant role in the design and direction of the material to bridge the gap.

1. Students must set their own goals for learning

The idea that the student must set their own goals for learning was emphasized by both literacy tutors and co-ordinators. The Bridging the Gap initiative does not seek to deter the educational pursuits of any adult learner. Learners choose their own path for learning; the standardized competency-based assessment tools merely serve as a record and guide for their learning progress. The learner who seeks to go on to more formal education will benefit from standardized exit points in that they will allow for accurate assessment of when they are ready to move on. Learners who do not wish to move on will also benefit as they will be able to monitor their progress according to the standardized criteria.

One tutor from the *Laurentian Literacy Council* pointed out that a student will move on to a new program when they have achieved their goals. She explained that the student “has the final say”. This is an important point that will not change with the implementation of the Bridging the Gap initiative. If a student feels that they are not ready to move on to another program, this will be indicated in the competence category of Self-Reliance (see **Assessment Grid 7A, Self Reliance**). In other words, a student can only move on to a new program if they feel as if they are ready to do so.

2. Programs in Synergy

The project also supports the possibility of a learner staying with their literacy tutor once they have moved on to formal adult education. Programs may work in synergy so as to encourage both the comfort and success of the learner in formal adult education programs.

3. Freedom within Programs

Because no one program functions exactly the same, we cannot expect all parties to use the same training material. Hence, councils and school boards will have the freedom to develop their own competency-based activities and tools. While suggested activities for competency-based instruction are included as part of this package (see **Activity Ideas** in the Bridging the Gap Resources), it is ultimately up to individual tutors (and learners) to select optimal activities and tools for to support each learner's development.

4. Awareness of Educational Options

Students are typically asked to set personal goals for learning when they begin a literacy program. This project encourages the training of tutors on how to inform students of their various educational options. Through consultation with their tutor, the learner may set realistic goals that will be transferable throughout the province.

5. Fostering Student Confidence

Many tutors also emphasized the fact that standardized entry and exit points would provide learners with tangible reference points. Sharing the development of competencies with the adult literacy student will reinforce what they can do, thus encouraging greater self-confidence.

6. Different Learner Needs

Students have different needs. A tutor from *Literacy in Action* explained that performance requirements for a literacy program “depend on the ability and needs of the student” ...“for one, it's to read notes from her children's teachers and reply to them, for another, it's a letter to a university requesting admission”. Fortunately, competency-based assessment respects this reality.

7. Working Together

Another tutor pointed out that she “would find it extremely helpful to have detailed information on a new student (i.e. reading level, writing level, comprehension level), and any problem areas which should be addressed initially.” This is why a learner's competency-based progress assessment will be forwarded when they move to a new geographic region and/or start another literacy program.

8. Training for QELA Members

The fact that we need training and workshops for both school board and council members was voiced on a number of occasions. Both council and school board members share the opinion that if we are to adopt standardized exit points across the province, then we must work together. Communication is essential for success; therefore, training sessions have been included in this project. Training sessions will provide the opportunity for all members to share their views and concerns. Uniform training will also ensure that everyone has the same vision and understands how to implement the material as part of a collective. In particular, training sessions on Personal Portfolio Projects and competency-based learning will be an essential step in bridging in the gap.

9. Regional Needs

In a province the size of Quebec, regional needs vary considerably. This project takes into account the fact that industry, culture, traditions, and general way of life vary from one region to the next. For “Literacy training cannot be centralized and will have to be adapted to places where the need for literacy training is made evident”.³ Because of this reality, the regional and cultural uniqueness of individual communities has been respected in the creation of resources to bridge the gap. Regional needs are respected mainly through the use of the competency-based model, which is both culturally and age appropriate. Under this model, the learners set their own goals for learning, prior learning is acknowledged, and learners are encouraged to connect what they learn with their own life and experiences.

10. English Literacy in a Bilingual/Multicultural Society

Quebec is a multicultural society. Teachers and tutors must often deliver the same curricula to people who acquire knowledge and competencies in different ways. Because there is no benefit to putting additional institutional pressure on learners and their educators, this initiative stresses the use of standardized assessment material that takes into account the various social and cultural implications of living in Quebec society. In other words, the standardized assessment material is flexible enough to accommodate different cultural differences.

³ *Summary Report English Literacy Recruitment in Quebec*, (PROCEDE) by Jan Warnke, October 7, 1999.

5. Tools and Methods

Bridging the Gap in adult literacy education in Quebec is not going to happen over night. Indeed, such an initiative involves not only the creation of mutually beneficial resources, but also revisions to the material, training seminars, and consistent communication between stakeholders. For success, the following tools and methods will be implemented:

Tools:

1. Suggestions, checklists, and questionnaires for student recruitment and retention.
2. Questionnaires and exercises to help learners set short-term and long-term goals.
3. Competency-based assessment charts to monitor and assess learner achievements and progress.
4. Competency-based activity lesson plans (with handouts for the learner).
5. Personal Portfolio Project resources (with handouts for the learner).
6. Evaluation tools to assess effectiveness of the Bridging the Gap resources.

Methods:

1. Have training seminars to ensure that all stakeholders are familiar with the Bridging the Gap resources.
2. Implement Personal Portfolio Projects in all adult English literacy programs. (Note: These projects will not only be of benefit to the students, but will serve as an excellent common assessment tool).
3. Maintain excellence and applicability of the Bridging the Gap assessment material through piloting the project and updating material according to stakeholder feedback.
4. Encourage higher enrolment through implementing standard recruitment and retention procedures that reflect the needs and concerns of adult literacy learners.

6. Standardized Assessment

6.1. Framework

Bridging the gap between adult literacy programs in Quebec means having common standards that are useful for the collective. Standardized assessment serves as the most tangible tool to achieve this objective. Assessment systems have typically resulted in increased interest in literacy programs and in the more effective organization of resources and strategies to achieve educational goals:

Within the global community, the critical elements impacting quality educational systems include comprehensive, standardized assessment and the use of this information to set targets and guide practices and policy. ... Research suggests that improvement targets must be based on the context and results specific to the school and classroom, and that these processes are essential to improving educational opportunities, especially for at-risk students.⁴

It was this understanding of how standardized learner assessment can be of benefit to not only literacy practitioners, but to students as well, that the Bridging the Gap project first came to life.

In 2002, the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS) began implementing curriculum reforms across the province. As a result, education in Quebec has undergone some significant changes. The motivation behind these changes is quite simple: we need to adapt to the many developments that are taking place in the world around us. The labour market has drastically changed and rapid advancements in information technology mean that individuals have to be adaptable and prepared for independent learning. Furthermore, we now have greater insight as to how a person develops knowledge and skills. In order to remain competitive in the global community, the government has targeted three essential components that education should do for learners: to provide instruction, to socialize, and to provide qualifications. Educational reform in Quebec involves much more than simply reorganizing the curriculum. New policies and therefore new teaching practices must be implemented as well. Bridging the gap in adult education means creating a standardized system that adheres to government policy. This initiative not only recognizes the government's policy, it also incorporates its pedagogical mandate (under the MELS curriculum renewal) through utilizing competency-based assessment as the primary tool to bridge the gap between adult literacy programs.

⁴ Phillips, Susan. "Assessment Literacy", Policy Watch, Winter 2003.

This project adheres to the *Government's Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, which acknowledges the importance of providing quality and meaningful education to its citizens and maintains that education should enable an individual to “enhance and update their competencies”. Meaningful education should be encouraged by providing access to knowledge and promoting life-long learning. This policy points out that a learner who develops essential learning competencies may begin the path of life-long learning.

In particular, the Bridging the Gap initiative corresponds to the *Government's Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* in the following ways.

1. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project call for concerted action and partnership between councils and school boards.
2. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project recognize the need to provide literacy education to all Quebecers.
3. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project seek to ensure that the supply of training in adult education corresponds to “individual and collective aspirations”.
4. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project acknowledge that basic education is a major and urgent challenge.
5. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project maintain that adult education must take into account the needs related to specific groups/communities.
6. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project recognize that the development of competencies is for a collective future.
7. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project acknowledge that all instruction provided for adults must respect quality standards.
8. Both the government's policy and the Bridging the Gap project identify the invaluable contribution of independent groups (community-based education) to adult basic education.

6.2. Assessing the Learner

Knowing how a learner will be assessed is important because it forms the basis from which to start literacy instruction. It not only helps literacy practitioners to monitor each learner's progress, it also allows the learner to set realistic goals for learning based on how they will be assessed. Familiarity with assessment material also helps teachers and tutors to choose appropriate materials for instruction that are appropriate for both the goals of the learner and the assessment process.

The competency-based model is ideal for assessing the adult literacy learner because it calls for the recognition of prior learning and stresses what a learner can already do, it requires regular assessment so learners are consistently aware of their progress, and it allows students to advance when they are ready to do so. Such a model is an excellent choice to bridge the gap because competencies are developed progressively and may be transferred to many different situations (both in life and learning). Because competency-based assessment measures one's ability to perform, a learner's progress must be monitored according to his or her performance. Under such a system, each individual learner is able to progress at his or her own pace.

The beauty of competency-based assessment is that it takes into account each individual student's present abilities. Specific learner characteristics such as his or her "prior learning, aptitudes, learning profile and learning styles, stress level, and interaction with the environment" are completely valid within this framework. In order to determine each student's current level of competence, the following items will be taken into consideration:

- The student's current competencies and past achievements.
- The student's needs and level of comfort in formal versus informal educational settings.
- The student's goals for learning (note: goals will be set for the individual, not the institution involved).

6.3. Evaluating Competencies

Evaluation allows the critical question to be asked and answered: have the goals and objectives of learning been met? In particular, it allows educators to assess individual achievements that satisfy external requirements. Furthermore, evaluation can provide important feedback and motivation for the continual improvement of learners. According

to the government's *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, evaluation applies to the learning that is provided under the program in question. It points out that an individual must draw upon a variety of different resources such as knowledge, skills, strategies, attitudes, and perceptions in order to sufficiently perform a competency. Moreover, it stresses that the evaluation of a competency should take all of these resources into consideration⁵.

Having a competency means having the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified to perform a task. A person becomes competent through education, training, experience, or natural skills. Performance is the achievement of a task in accordance with a set standard of accuracy. Evaluating performance involves measuring a specific range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes in relation to certain set standards. As you may note from the assessment charts in this package, the ratings are based upon observations of a learner's performance against a number of predefined standards.

6.4. Bridging the Gap and the Government's Policy on the Evaluation of Learning

"Evaluation is the process whereby a judgement is made on a student's learning on the basis of information gathered, analyzed and interpreted, for the purpose of making pedagogical and administrative decisions." -
Policy on the Evaluation of Learning, MELS

In order to ensure both the wide-spread acceptance and the efficacy of the Bridging the Gap resources, the competency-based progress assessment that is presented in this package adheres to the government's *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning* in several important ways:

1. It acknowledges that evaluation is largely based on the teacher or tutor's professional judgement.
2. It provides guidelines so that teachers and tutors may better exercise judgement and maintain credibility of evaluation activities.

⁵ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. "A Shared Conception of the Evaluation of Learning", Policy on the Evaluation of Learning – Abridged Version. (Quebec: MELS, 2003), 2

3. It provides clear goals for evaluation (to become autonomous in life and learning).
4. It asks teachers and tutors to judge learners' progress and development through the performance of competencies.
5. It recognizes that evaluation is not an end itself, but rather a stage in the learning process that will help learners to learn more efficiently.
6. It calls for the incorporation of evaluation into all aspects of the learning process so that quick and effective intervention may take place when necessary.
7. It provides learners with opportunities for feedback during the learning process.
8. It acknowledges that regular and standard evaluation is an excellent means of promoting each learner's educational success.
9. It provides a tools with which learners may evaluate themselves/ or participate in the evaluation process with their teachers or tutors.
10. It recognizes that the government and the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* are responsible for setting the rules that govern learning and the certification of studies.

6.5. Specifics on Using the Competency-Based Assessment Model

Competency-based assessment seeks to determine what a learner is able to do in specific contexts. The focus is therefore on performance. To carry out assessment, the literacy instructor needs to measure the learner's performance against predetermined criteria. This means that progress is assessed according to what a learner *can do*, as opposed to how well he or she performs in comparison to others.

The competency-based assessment resources to bridge the gap are a series of observable behaviours (e.g. *the learner can...*) that demonstrate competence. Each list of observable behaviours is separated by essential categories for learning (e.g. reading, writing, etc.). Logically, all targeted competencies in this package pertain to adult literacy and basic education. Specifically, the targeted competencies are those that a learner requires **for**

success in both life and learning. Through successfully demonstrating competence in these areas, a learner is proving his or her ability to both take on new educational pursuits and apply their newly-developed knowledge and skills to real life situations. This means that once a learner has successfully performed all of the pre-determined competencies (that are provided with Bridging the Gap assessment resources), they will be firmly on the path of life long learning. In other words, they will have the competencies to autonomously handle both everyday-life and educational challenges.

Characteristics of Competency-Based Instruction:

- Competencies are carefully selected.
- Learner's prior learning (knowledge and skills) is assessed when they enter a program and the competencies that they have already attained should be recognized.
- Essential knowledge must be learned to support the performance of a competency.
- Training materials are designed for the development of competencies.
- Learning happens at the pace of the individual learner.
- Training is flexible – it includes large group methods, small group activities and individual study.
- Completion of training is based on the achievement of all specified competencies.

There are six basic principles to take into consideration when it comes to competency-learning instruction and literacy education:

1. Competencies to be achieved are pre-determined – they are carefully selected to assess a set measure of proficiency or performance.
2. Competencies to be achieved are carefully identified, verified and shared with learners.
3. Learners should be aware of what will be assessed and under which conditions assessment will take place.

4. The literacy program should encourage the successful attainment of each of the pre-determined competencies.
5. While assessment of a competency should take the learner's knowledge and approach into account, it must be based on actual performance of the competency.
6. Learners may progress at their own pace.

6.6. The Broad Areas of Learning

Under the codes for Common Core Basic Education, the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* has identified four broad areas of learning which are fundamental for success in everyday life. The broad areas of learning help learners relate subject-specific knowledge to their daily concerns and thus give them a better understanding of reality. Each area of learning has an educational aim that should guide teachers and tutors. The broad areas of learning also provide contexts for the transfer of the learning. All material used for literacy education should therefore be connected to at least one of these areas:

1. **Citizenship**
To help adult learners assume their responsibilities as citizens in accordance with shared values and cultural diversity.
2. **Health and Well-Being**
To raise adult learners' awareness of their health, well-being and relationships with others.
3. **Environmental and Consumer Awareness**
To help adult learners understand relations with the environment and to make well-informed and responsible consumer choices.
4. **World of Work**
To help adult learners initiate a vocational plan.

6.7. Operational Competencies

The *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* has identified six operational competencies that should be developed in adult literacy education. The operational competency that is being targeted at any one time depends largely on the literacy course in question and the specific activities involved in learning. In order to stay in step with the government's plan, literacy teachers and tutors should consider which operational competencies are integrated into the framework of their lessons.

The Operational Competencies:

1. Communicates
2. Acts methodically
3. Uses Creativity
4. Thinks Logically
5. Exercises Critical and Ethical Judgement
6. Cooperates

6.8. Bridging the Gap and the Literacy Courses

The *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* has established parameters for a series of accredited adult literacy courses. These courses are designed specifically for adults, to prepare them to face personal, professional, and social challenges and to foster success in learning.* For each of these courses, learners are expected to develop and demonstrate their competence in different pre-determined areas.

It is important to note that while the Bridging the Gap material has been designed to complement these literacy courses, it does not apply to any one of the courses in particular. Essentially, the Bridging the Gap assessment charts are meant to assist and ease the transition of learners between informal and formal literacy programs. Nonetheless, this material was created with the explicit desire to coincide with both the government's policies as well as the courses provided under Common Core Basic Education. Therefore, each list of observable behaviours (see **Competency-Based Progress Assessment**) may easily be used with *any* of the formal literacy courses. They

* The Literacy courses total 950 hours: 600 hours in English, Language of Instruction, 300 hours in Mathematics and 50 hours in Computer Technology.

will help those responsible for assessment to keep track of learners' indicators of success for each of the literacy courses. In other words, literacy practitioners at the school board level may use the standardized progress assessment to monitor the development of each learner's development as he or she moves on from one literacy course to another. This standardized assessment will therefore be of benefit to all literacy stakeholders in the province of Quebec.

MELS' Accredited Literacy Courses (for English Language of Instruction)

1. *Discovering the World of Print*
2. *Building Foundations*
3. *Satisfying Basic Needs*
4. *Accessing Services*
5. *Leisure and Personal Interests*
6. *Community Life*

Key Points for Assessment under the MELS' Curriculum Renewal:

- We no longer use the term “formative assessment”, but rather “to support learning”.
- We no longer use the term “summative assessment”, but rather “certification and recognition of learning”.
- We no longer use the term “exam, but rather “learning situation”.
- No grades can be awarded for assessment situations to support learning (formerly “formative assessment”).
- Operational competencies cannot really be evaluated, but they should be integrated in the indicators of learning (or **observable behaviours**).
- All evaluation criteria for the Literacy courses are taken from the course outcomes.
- Evaluation criteria of the Literacy courses are broken down into different indicators of learning. They represent the **observable behaviours** in the evaluation situation.
- Evaluation should always be done in situations (i.e. through “doing”). Learners must be evaluated on what they can do.
- Teachers must be able to see (observe) what the learner can do in a situation.

6.9. Target Competencies in the Bridging the Gap Package

The standardized assessment material to bridge the gap has been divided by eight different broad categories for learning (e.g. Lifelong Learning, Reading, Writing, etc.). These categories have been broken down into essential sub-categories (e.g. setting goals, reading everyday print, reading academic texts, speaking, listening, etc.). For each of these sub-categories, there is a comprehensive list of observable behaviours that a learner must demonstrate (through performance) in order to prove his or her competence in the given category.

Target Competencies

- 1. Lifelong Learning**
 - A. Setting Goals
 - B. Time Management & Organizational Strategies
 - C. Study Skills
- 2. Reading**
 - A. Strategies for Reading
 - B. Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation
 - C. Everyday Print (magazines, newspapers, prescriptions, etc.)
 - D. Academic Texts (literal and critical reading)
- 3. Writing**
 - A. Strategies for Writing
 - B. Everyday Writing (notes, letters, messages, personal information, etc.)
 - C. Academic Writing (proper paragraph, three paragraph essay, etc.)
- 4. Communication**
 - A. Speaking
 - B. Listening
 - C. Professional
- 5. Numeracy**
 - A. Basic Numbers
 - B. Adding and Subtracting
 - C. Multiplying, Dividing, & Basic Fractions
 - D. Math for Everyday Life (reading maps, shopping, paying bills, etc.)
- 6. Information Technology**
 - A. Basic Computer
 - B. Internet
 - C. Word Processing
 - D. Media Viewing and Listening
- 7. Personal**
 - A. Self-reliance
 - B. Attitude
 - C. Health
- 8. Citizenship**
 - A. Citizenship Awareness
 - B. Environmental Awareness
 - C. Community Awareness

6.10. Easing the Transition of Learners

The assessment tools in this package will ease the transition of learners in English literacy programs throughout Quebec in the following ways:

1. The progress of literacy learners across Quebec will be assessed in the same way.
2. We will all be working towards the same progress goals.
3. The learner will not have to redo what they have already accomplished. Their progress assessment will be exchanged between programs when a student moves to a new literacy programs. This way, the new tutor will know which competencies the student has already developed and which need further attention.

6.11. Important Points about Standardized Assessment:

- **All students (regardless of level and educational pursuits) will benefit** from this progress assessment. While the student progress assessment will help practitioners to know when a student is ready to move on to the academic stream, it will also help them to identify which skills need to be developed for success in everyday life. Ideally, the literacy tutor will allow the learner to establish which competencies will be worked on at a given time.
- **Literacy practitioners are free to use their own instructional tools.** The assessment material will help literacy practitioners to assess and monitor learner progress. It will also help them to determine which skills require greater attention.
- **Learners need to be involved.** Assessment of this kind is meant to be shared with the learner. Through identifying these skills together, the tutor will not only recognize their student's current knowledge and skills, they will also encourage a greater sense of personal accomplishment and self-reliance. Furthermore, involving the learner in this assessment process will help them to set their own goals for their learning.
- **Learning is not linear.** No one person learns the same as another does. Learning is not linear, but rather multi-faceted. While there is generally a logical process to learning, it would be erroneous to assume that a learner will develop

competencies in any specific order. The emphasis should always be on which competencies the learner is most interested in developing.

- **Confidence is needed for success.** Adult literacy learners often struggle with self-confidence when it comes to education and learning. Previous negative experiences in the classroom may have left the learner with a lot of self-doubt. Such self-doubt may result in uncertainty in one's own ability to learn or an incapacity to actively participate. Tutors should encourage learners by emphasizing which competencies they have already achieved. Reinforcing what a learner can do, as opposed to what a learner cannot do, should foster confidence and enable the learner to get past some personal barriers to learning.

6.12. Using Competency-Based Assessment

Education today focuses on skills for lifelong learning. Educators should keep in mind that a competency is not a piece of information that may be forgotten – it is a skill that will remain throughout one's life. Competencies are developed progressively and may be transferred to many different situations, both in life and learning. Competency-based assessment measures one's ability to perform. Hence, the learner's progress will be monitored according to their performance, not their ability to regurgitate information.

Competency-based learning ensures that learners attain specific skills, knowledge, and abilities that are required to meet the challenges of today's competitive world. It also allows the learner to set specific goals for their own learning. Individualized goals should play an important role in determining which competencies are to be assessed and in which order. Naturally, this must be within reason. The development of competencies must follow a reasonably logical sequence.

6.13. Specifics on Assessment

The competencies listed in the assessment charts (See **Competency-Based Progress Assessment**) encompass the skills that a learner needs for to be autonomous. The successful attainment of these competences will serve as proof that a student is ready to move on, whether it be on to new learning challenges, or simply on to enjoying life as a self-governing citizen.

Literacy tutors have the responsibility of guiding and monitoring the development of an individual's knowledge and skills. This includes using training material that is appropriate for the attainment of specified competencies. When a tutor assesses a learner's performance, they are verifying that the learner is able to do something – that he or she is competent. Like anything else in life, this is not entirely black and white. For example, a learner's knowledge and approach to doing something may be correct, but the successful performance of a competency may not be achieved. In order to acknowledge the emergence of competencies, tutors should assess learners by using the following measures of performance:

Well-Established: The learner **has successfully demonstrated the ability** to do the given task. The skills and knowledge required for performance have clearly been attained. The learner will be able to repeat this behaviour in learning or life situations.

On-Track: The learner **has almost successfully demonstrated the ability** to do the given task. The skills and knowledge required for performance are generally good, but the learner is not able to fully carry out the task. The learner may not be able to repeat this in other learning or life situations.

Emerging: The learner has **demonstrated some ability** to do the given task. The skills and knowledge required for performance are present, but they need to be refined. The learner would not yet be able to employ this competency in other learning or life situations.

Off-Track: The learner **is not using the correct skills or knowledge** for performance. Attitude and approach needs work. There is a need for revision and/or greater focus in this area.

6.14. Using Authentic Material

Competency-based instruction requires that students demonstrate their ability to respond and act in real-life situations. While it is impossible to fully replicate real-life scenarios in the classroom, it is possible to integrate authentic material – material that would be used in the lives of learners outside of their literacy program – into lessons. This may be done through encouraging students to interact with “real-life” texts. Some examples of “authentic” or “real-life” texts include:

- business cards
- a newspaper
- hazard symbols
- shopping lists
- phone messages
- graffiti, street names
- warranties
- receipts
- cheques
- a speeding ticket
- job applications

When selecting an authentic text for instruction, the different purposes for using that text should be kept in mind. The primary purpose for using the material should be the same as it would be outside of the classroom. This can be called the “real world purpose.” For example, if students are working with the *Yellow Pages*, they should be looking for information that they need, rather than for a list of spelling words chosen by the teacher or tutor. Many students do not have a lot of experience using the *Yellow Pages* on their own and may not understand the structure. Learners must become more comfortable with such texts because they are used in everyday life. Developing a comfort level with such real-world materials will serve as a powerful motivator in learning.

6.15. Giving Feedback after Assessment

Assessment can be an intimidating process for the adult learner; however, there are a number of ways that literacy tutors can make this process an agreeable experience:

- Give feedback individually.
- Ensure privacy.
- Share the evaluation with the learner.
- Discuss what was done well before addressing weaknesses in performance.
- Clearly explain what the assessment means.
- Give advice on what the learner should do next (either work on this area or take on new challenges).
- Explain what is available to help the learner to improve his or her skills.

Personal Portfolio Projects

7.1. What is a Personal Portfolio?

A personal portfolio is a collection of work samples and documents gathered as an individual updates his or her skills and learning. It profiles the learner's goals, advancement, awards, achievements, and competencies in an organised and purposeful format. Personal portfolios are developmental projects. They allow learners to monitor and present what they have learned and what they are learning. A personal portfolio is a "living document" that evolves with each learner. (See **Personal Portfolio Project Resources** for student handouts)

Learners should view their portfolios as important and relevant to their academic, personal, and professional development. They will be given the responsibility for keeping them up to date and well organized.

Note: A Personal Portfolio can be used for different purposes; for example, entering academic programs and employment interviews.

Personal portfolios projects will serve as excellent standardized assessment tools in Quebec's English literacy programs for the following reasons:

1. They are ongoing projects that require learners' active involvement
2. As adult learners decide what to include in their portfolios, they must reflect on what and how they have learned.
3. They promote self-awareness.
4. They are tailored to the individual.
5. They are worthwhile - *they are useful in all educational programs and in professional life.*
6. They foster self-reliance and a desire for personal improvement.
7. They serve as excellent tools for the Competency-Based Progress Assessment.
8. They are easily transferred between literacy programs.

7.2. What a Personal Portfolio Should Do

- Present goals, progress, achievements and competencies to a range of audiences, including new educational program teachers, peers, course counsellors, and/or prospective employers.
- Encourage a range of learning activities such as goal setting, decision making, educational and professional planning, and prioritising.
- Enhance learner self-esteem by profiling achievements (academic, sporting, leisure, work experience, community activities, etc.)

The following information and documentation should be included in a Personal Portfolio:

- Cover page (presenting the owner)
- Goal statements, action plans, interests, and skills inventories
- Basic résumé or curriculum vitae
- List of achievements
- Samples of school work that demonstrate strengths and achievements outlined in the portfolio
- Certificates of achievement and awards
- Work experience and achievements, e.g. employer and community-based certificates of participation
- Photograph(s)
- Reference letters
- Lists of schools attended, work experience, and character references

7.3. Layout of Personal Portfolios:

The layout of the portfolio depends on the learner. However, it is important that personal portfolios be presentable and formatted logically. Tutors may wish to brainstorm ideas on possible ways of presenting their information. They may also need to guide learners on logical methods of presentation and sequence of information.

Note: See section on **Personal Portfolio Projects** for more details on how to implement personal portfolios.

8. Suggestions for Recruitment and Retention

8.1. Studies in Participation

Not every person who makes the first steps towards literacy training will end up as a program participant. *Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy and Upgrading Programs* is a summary report that details the results from a national study conducted by ABC CANADA in 2001. In this study, more than 300 people across Canada who were seeking information about literacy programs were surveyed. The *Patterns of Participation* report provides important insight into some of the barriers in literacy recruitment and retention. (For more information, please visit ABC Canada's website at: www.abc-canada.org)

Primary motivation for contacting a literacy organization:

- General educational (29%)
- Job-related (26%)
- Upgrade for retraining (17%)
- Improve everyday skills (15%)
- Personal well-being (14%)

Source: *Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy and Upgrading Programs*, 2001

Patterns of Participation reveals that program or policy-related factors have a significant impact on learner participation. Forty-three percent of callers do not enrol in a program for the following reasons: no follow-up procedures, long waiting lists, inconvenient hours, inappropriate content, and/or having an unsatisfactory experience with the program contact person. More than twenty-five percent of those students, who enrol but drop out, said that it was due to program or policy-related factors such as wrong program level, inappropriate content, teaching structure, or program cancellation. The report also explains that, despite our common perceptions of the literacy student, cognitive-emotive factors (such as fear or embarrassment) were the least likely reasons for not enrolling. In fact, only six percent of responders stated cognitive-emotive reasons as their main cause for dropping a program. This does not fully negate the reality of emotional responses amongst adult literacy learners; the study revealed that nervousness about being in a program influences more than a quarter of those who drop out.

Why Aren't They Calling? Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs is a second study that was released by ABC CANADA in 2002. For this study, researchers contacted 866 Canadians who had not completed high school and who had never enrolled in a literacy program. The study revealed that nearly sixty percent of those interviewed have thought about upgrading their education; however, only twenty percent thought they would actually take a program in the next five years. Motivation to find or keep a job was most commonly cited as the reason for considering to take a program. Work conflicts, family, and lack of interest were the most commonly cited reasons for not upgrading education and training. (For more information, please visit ABC Canada's website at: www.abc-canada.org)

Concerns people had about registering for a literacy program:

- Financial problems in general (50%)
- Conflict with work schedule (40%)
- Getting to the program (39%)
- Program too difficult (37%)
- Not being able to work at own pace (37%)
- Cost of Transportation (35%)
- Anxiety/nervousness (34%)
- Program too long to complete (34%)
- Program too strict/structured (32%)
- Skills not related to work (29%)
- Not relevant to everyday life (28%)
- Not enough personal attention (28%)
- Too late in life to learn (28%)
- Difficulties with childcare (27%)
- Older than other students (24%)
- Potential embarrassment (20%)
- Unfriendly teacher (18%)
- Not being treated as an adult (17%)
- Other students not friendly (12%)
- Unsupportive family members (10%)
- Embarrassed if others find out (6%)

Source: *Why Aren't They Calling? Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs*, 2002

These studies expose ways of both increasing improving policy and practice-related features of adult literacy and basic education programs. Some suggestions that literacy providers may wish to incorporate in their approaches to reassuring and encouraging current and potential learners are as follows:

A. Follow-Up Procedures:

Many potential literacy students do not enrol in programs because there is no follow-up to their inquiry. While it is important to be warm and friendly when receiving a potential student, it is equally important to get in touch with each person once they have taken the first steps to enter a program. Such a seemingly insignificant act will encourage stronger participation in a literacy program.

B. Encouragement and Understanding:

1. Smile! Be warm and friendly. ☺
2. Acknowledge that many people are unsure or nervous when it comes to upgrading their education.
3. Provide suggestions for family and financial concerns.
4. Use images and ideas that demonstrate that adult learning is not similar to their earlier schooling.
5. Explain exactly what classes, learning groups, and/or tutoring are like.
6. Reassure the potential learner that they will soon feel comfortable.
7. Explain that adult education tutors are sensitive to the fact that they are working with adults who have been away from school for a period of time.
8. Acknowledge challenges in adult learning such as transportation and scheduling conflicts
9. Let them know who the learners and teachers are in the program.
10. Show them what kinds of materials are used in the program.
11. Make it clear that programs do not mix adults with children or teenagers.
12. Emphasize that upgrading is for adults of all ages.
13. Emphasize ability of older people to learn.
14. Let them know that adult basic education is for people just like them (i.e. “You are not alone”).

C. Emphasize Success:

1. Imply that wanting to invest in themselves and their futures is a “smart” move.
2. Share success stories of real people who took part in adult learning.
3. Show that learning and upgrading is an important step in gaining opportunities and achieving one's dreams.
4. Take the time to set learning goals together.
5. Share ideas on how to reach goals.
6. Anticipate the outcome of reaching goals.

Note:

See **Recruitment and Retention Resources** for suggested intake checklists and questionnaires.

Food for Thought:

“There is a serious problem with access to literacy and upgrading education in Canada. While literacy may be more on the public agenda than ever before, it is nevertheless not at a level to fundamentally shift the rates of adult literacy in Canada. The current demand, to say nothing of the potential demand, is not being met.

The shocking statistic is perhaps no longer how many Canadians have low literacy skills, but rather how few are being helped by the country's current service delivery mechanisms. And yet, it is encouraging that more than three-quarters of those who dropped out or didn't enroll in the first place said they would seek help again in the future. Much needs to be done to ensure a more positive picture when they do call again.”

Source: *Patterns of Participation*, Chapter Five (77)

8.2. The Intake Process

In general, intake practices should help both the literacy provider and the learner to determine the following:

1. The learner's goals for learning.
2. The steps required to achieve their goals.
3. Some of the learner's previous education or training.
4. The learner's current skills, knowledge, and abilities.

While the intake process and initial assessment can be a daunting experience for many learners, it is a necessary step that provides literacy programs with the information they need to decide the following:

1. Is this the right program for the learner (based on their current skills, goals, and dedication to learning)?
2. Is the learner eligible to take the program?
3. Is there enough background information to begin a training plan?
4. Are their short and long-term goals well-matched with your program?
5. Do they have any scheduling restrictions?
6. Are the structure and capacity of your program conducive to your learner's needs?

Tips for initial assessment:

1. Hold discussions and interviews with the prospective learner in an area that is private and comfortable.
2. Put the learner at ease. Offer a coffee or tea (if in person) and/or chat a bit before you begin the intake assessment.
3. Begin the interview with some fact-gathering (their name, address, hometown, etc.) before getting into skills assessment. Skills assessment could even wait until a second meeting. **Note:** The standard intake checklists and interview forms will help programs to cover all the necessary information in this process.
4. Be clear about the process. The learner should know how long it will take, what the program will help them do, what they will need to do on their own, what the next steps will be, etc.
5. Choose appropriate skills assessment based on the learner's profile and goals. If the learner's goal is to be more independent in everyday life, you may choose an assessment task that includes authentic material (e.g. shopping lists, written messages, classified ads, flyers, etc.).

6. Listen carefully to what the prospective learner is saying for clues as to the level of difficulty you should start with in the skills assessment.
7. Give a clear explanation of the purpose of the skills assessment process. Try to reduce assessment anxiety by showing the prospective learner how the task relates to their goals.
8. Encourage the learner to ask questions.
9. Review the assessment results with the learner once the skills assessment activities are completed. Let them know what they did well and then give them an idea of what they need to work on.
10. Clearly explain the next step(s). Let them know exactly what will happen next by reinforcing how you will work together to develop a plan that is right for them – one that reflects their goals. Share expectations for attendance and let them see how their competency development will be monitored.
11. If it is more appropriate to refer the learner to another program, be very clear as to why. Provide a contact name, address, and phone number for the other literacy program or community service. Ask the learner to sign a release of information form so that you can share their intake assessment with another program. Follow-up with the other literacy provider you recommended to make sure that the learner has made contact.

8.3. Gathering Intake Information

The learner will be able to easily provide certain information during the intake process, (such as personal information), while other information will be determined with the assessment (such as reading and writing skills). The intake process should enable literacy programs to gather the following information:

- Personal information (name, telephone number(s), address, e-mail, etc.)
- Language(s) spoken
- Previous educational and training experiences (including their last grade completed and their feelings about school)
- Days and times available for study
- Means of transportation
- Learning styles and preferences
- Current literacy level
- Goals for learning
- Skills for learning (e.g. time management, problem solving)

- Problems with vision or hearing
- Physical concerns that may impact learning
- Preferences for scheduling, location and setting
- Familial restrictions (or need for daycare)
- Allergies, special needs
- Volunteer and work experience
- Personal interests

Note: If the prospective learner appears capable and confident enough, a questionnaire that identifies some of the above information may serve as an excellent writing assessment; however, if the student seems to have trouble filling out the forms, it may be best to merely conduct an oral interview.

9. Exiting Programs:

9.1. The Exiting Process

Naturally, the goal of any literacy program is to work toward the time when a learner is prepared to leave. Leaving a literacy program means that learners have reached their goals or that they are ready to take the next step towards achieving another goal. The reason for exiting a literacy program will vary with each student. For some, they may have reached their goal of independence in everyday life, for others they may be ready to further their education and training or employment. The competency-based assessment in this package will help literacy practitioners know when a learner is ready to move on – it will signal their ability to take on new challenges in life and learning. For community-based literacy groups, this may mean that learners are ready to take on formal educational challenges at the school board level. For school boards, this may mean that a learner is ready to take on new challenges at other educational institutions (i.e. community college, Cégep, vocational school, university, etc.). For both councils and school boards, this may mean that the student is ready to take on new workplace challenges.

When a literacy program sees that a learner is close to successfully acquiring the essential knowledge to be autonomous, they should start administering certain exit activities. These activities will not only help literacy providers collect pertinent information on the learner's achievements, but also help learners prepare for their next steps by reinforcing what they are able to do. This is also a time when adult learners can provide feedback on their experiences in the literacy program.

During the assessment process, a council or community-based program may recognize that some learners may not be ready to fully exit a program, but are still ready for more formal education. In cases such as this, it is really up to the literacy provider and the learner to work together and decide the best course of action. Perhaps the learner will couple formal education at the school board level with non-formal education at the council level. In such a case, the literacy providers can share the competency-based performance assessment and work towards different learning goals simultaneously.

Note: The learner's personal portfolio will be an asset in such a situation because it is a living document that will move easily between programs.

Knowing when students are ready to leave a program will make it easier to collect exit information. Once a student has successfully developed the required competencies, the program responsible will want to do the following:

1. Administer a final performance assessment
2. Conduct an exit interview
3. Discuss the learner's next steps.

9.2. Unplanned Exits

There are many reasons why learners may decide to leave a literacy program without having reached their learning goals. Often, people's life situations have an effect on their studies, thus causing them to quit a literacy program. Here is a list of common reasons why learners unexpectedly quit a literacy program:

- The learner (or a family member) has experienced a sudden change in health.
- New employment – sometimes in a new region.
- Their children may have difficulties at school.
- Negative self-image or feelings that they are not improving.

Whenever possible, literacy programs should try to identify why a learner leaves a program. If a common reason tends to reoccur, this may signal a need to make certain changes to the program. For instance, this may mean adding an evening class, or modifying intake procedures to make sure that learners are fully aware of program expectations. It is also a good idea to keep track of when learners leave for reasons that are beyond a program's control (such as moving, personal problems, medical reasons, etc.). Such information is important for program evaluation and future planning.

9.3. Transition Planning

Planning for a student's exit should include discussion and planning for the learner's next steps. This means identifying how to get to that step. Literacy providers should consider the transition process as the bridge between now and where the learner wants to be. For some learners, acquiring the skills for independence for everyday life may be all they need. If this is the case, there will not be a lot of transition planning. For others, the next step may include the following:

- Another literacy program (perhaps in a more formal setting)
- High school credits
- Cégep courses
- Vocational training

- Apprenticeship
- A new job
- A better job
- Volunteer work

Naturally, transition planning should be part of each learner's training and development. Literacy providers should be aware of each learner's short-term and long-term goals in order to plan for transition. Identifying goals will not only help literacy providers to design competency-based activities that are more pertinent to the learner's needs, it will also clarify exactly what should happen upon exiting a program. It is ultimately the role of the literacy provider to help each learner to achieve the skills needed to successfully achieve his or her short-term goals in order to move on to the next step and eventually achieve his or her long-term goals.

The assessment material to bridge the gap will help literacy providers to observe, recognize, monitor, and record each learner's progress. This progress assessment will not only be shared with the learner, but also with future literacy providers in order to ease the transition of the learner between programs.

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