

Workplace Literacy & Essential Skills

What Counts? and Why?

This year's institute builds on and enlarges the themes and questions raised at the 2009 Summer Institute which posed the question What Works and Why?

From that meeting we learned that the terms "essential skills" or "competencies" vary in different contexts. The nine "Essential Skills" defined by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) contain a core of skills that appear in most lists, but people who talk about and teach "essential skills" in Canada and abroad are not necessarily referring to the exact same skill set.

In 2009, we learned that there is significant literature about what makes workplace literacy and essential skills (WES) program models effective, but very limited long-term evaluation of the results for workers and employers from these various models. We also heard about studies in the UK and New Zealand that were examining longer-term impacts of such programs. Since then, the UK and NZ studies have been completed and come to somewhat different conclusions about the impacts.

The Centre has since begun baseline research on a new three-year OLES-funded project in collaboration with Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development and Workplace Education Manitoba. This project will adapt the research model from New Zealand to capture and compare quantitative and qualitative outcomes from workplace literacy and essential skills programs in these two provinces that have invested in these programs for two decades. It will also allow comparisons with New Zealand.

The first analysis from the NZ study and preliminary work on the Manitoba-Nova Scotia project suggest that growth or improvement in some of the skills and competencies traditionally dubbed "soft" may actually be good predictors of long-term impacts and important to employers, and that employers value workers' oral communication skills and ability to work in groups and adapt to change. Governments everywhere, however, have tended to focus on reading and math, more tangible and testable.

From these threads, we have chosen the focus for the 2010 Summer Institute – What Counts? And Why?

Connecting the Dots, our recently-completed study on accountability in adult literacy in Canada, produced powerful evidence* about the ways in which literacy practice in general is shaped and driven by policy about what will count and be counted. The project offered exciting models of what might be accomplished through open dialogue between funders and program providers about constructing frameworks to count the things that both funders and providers value and need for their own accountabilities.

Connecting the Dots also highlighted the need for a more balanced approach to evaluation that takes account of the skills and competencies associated with the theories of both human capital and social capital. Human capital theory has concentrated on individual acquisition of skills and knowledge, while social capital theory has focused on developing social relationships and networks based on trust and shared values. Social capital contributes to community well-being.

Of course, the great challenge is that social capital and "soft skills" are not easily measured, and workplaces are not always ideal places to do evaluations. However, in the past decade, some frameworks and tools have been exploring how these might be done.

The DeSeCo project (Definition and Selection of Key Competencies) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) produced a framework to guide individuals and societies in deciding on the competencies required for the complex challenges in today's communities and workplaces. DeSeCo identified three broad intersecting categories of competencies. These are: Use Tools Interactively; Interact in Heterogeneous Groups; and Act Autonomously. This framework is of interest to those doing workplace training by including more essential skills than most models.

In the UK, after years of listening to instructors' anecdotes about the importance of confidence for learners' progress, NIACE did research on the nature of confidence, and worked with practitioner-researchers to create *Catching Confidence*, a tool that can capture changes in confidence in ways that speak to policy-makers.

The 2010 Summer Institute will bring together policy-makers, literacy and essential skills providers, and researchers to examine

QUESTIONS

- What do employers value most from WES programs?
- Why have studies in the UK and NZ come to different conclusions about the outcomes of WES?
- How can some existing tools be used to capture competencies that are not measured well by standardized tests?
- How can we use existing structures and mechanisms, such as labour market agencies and intergovernmental tables to share current and emerging knowledge?
- How can apprenticeship programs and workplace essential skills programs be better aligned or work more collaboratively together?

what is currently being counted to evaluate the results of WES programs and whether enlarging the frame of reference could lead to better outcomes for workers, employers and the country as a whole.

Invitees

As always, we have invited a small number of participants who bring outsider perspectives to our questions. Dr. Jan Eldred, Associate Director of NIACE and a principal researcher on *Catching Confidence*, will introduce the tool and also offer recent input from the UK, including reactions to the Wolf Report.

Dr. John Benseman, principal researcher on the NZ study, will bring the final results and insights from that study, and discuss how we might benefit from their learning.

We are excited to have ABC CANADA, the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), and Workbase NZ return as partners, and to welcome NIACE as a new partner for 2010.

Please register and bring your own questions and experience to the table. As always, the Institute program will not be designed until you have registered.

*Most publications from *Connecting the Dots* are online at www.literacyandaccountability.ca and the rest will be posted in early 2010.



I enclose a cheque for ☐ \$495 (until May 1) ☐ \$550 (after May 1) - Payable to “The Centre for Literacy”

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REFUND POLICY:

Until June 10, we will give a full refund, minus a 15% administrative fee. After June 10, refunds will be issued only if you provide valid documentation, e.g. medical certificate.



Make cheque payable to The Centre for Literacy. Mail cheque and completed form to:

2100 Marlowe Avenue, Suite 236
Montreal, QC H4A 3L5

For Visa payment fax completed form to The Centre for Literacy at (514) 798-5602 or mail to the address above.

A UNIQUE FORMAT

The Institute offers a unique opportunity to share and create knowledge at a collaborative event with a limited registration (100). We build the program around participants’ experience and expertise.

If you register, you may become a presenter. Participants work together for three days from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. After hours, there are optional sessions with demonstrations, and small group discussions for those who want to explore a specific issue or study a model in greater depth.

Last year, we explored the issues of what works in workplace literacy and essential skills based on twenty years of programming and limited long-term assessment. This year, participants will present, question and reflect on how such programs have been evaluated. We will ask whether we are indeed capturing the outcomes that employers, workers and governments claim to want, whether current policies and measures align with good practice, and what credible alternatives exist.

We will start from some recent large-scale studies in the UK and New Zealand, and share some early findings from a pan-Canadian project that is adapting the NZ model for long-term evaluation of workplace initiatives in the provinces of Manitoba and Nova Scotia. We will also look at programs from other parts of Canada, the US, and selected other countries.

To begin the conversation, we will send a few short documents three weeks before the Institute. These include updates from recent studies on workplace literacy and essential skills in Canada and abroad. We ask each registrant to identify issues and questions on a one-page Participant Profile. These are compiled and shared so we have a common starting point.

If you prefer to listen but not present, we still invite you to identify relevant topics or themes from your own experience. Time is set aside each day to discuss, reflect and invite feedback from colleagues. You will leave with a new understanding of the issues, access to new resources and practices, and ideas for collaborations in your own milieu.

You can share information on free tables and with posters.

SCHEDULE

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday
June 28, 29 and 30, 2010 • 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Daily after 3:00 p.m.:
Optional demonstrations, discussions, networking, and research opportunities
Daily schedule will be finalized two weeks before the Institute.

FEE

Includes materials, continental breakfasts, lunches and refreshments
Early-bird registration (until May 1, 2010)\$495
After May 1, 2010\$550
All amounts must be paid in Canadian dollars.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Arrangements have been made at the Hotel du Fort within easy access of Dawson College where the Institute will take place and close to downtown shopping and attractions. The hotel is offering a special rate of \$135/single or \$145/double occupancy. They will hold the block of rooms until May 25, 2010. After that, reservations will be based on availability. The Montreal International Jazzfest runs from June 25 to July 6, 2010.

For reservations, contact the hotel directly:

Hotel du Fort, 1390 rue du Fort, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3H 2R7
Tel.: (514) 938-8333 or 1-800-565-6333 • Fax: (514) 938-2078
E-mail: reserve@hoteldufort.com • Ask for *The Centre for Literacy Summer Institute*

Literacy for the 21st century: A definition

Literacy involves a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. The need and demand for these abilities vary in different societies. In a technological society, the concept is expanding to include the media and electronic text in addition to alphabets and numbers. Individuals must be given life-long learning opportunities to move along a continuum that includes reading, writing, and the critical understanding and decision-making abilities they need in their communities.

Source: The Centre for Literacy

The Centre for Literacy of Quebec is a non-profit research, professional development and resource centre. Through action-research projects and publications, it bridges and links policy and practice in adult literacy and essential skills. It offers opportunities for practitioners, policy-makers and researchers to meet and exchange as peers. www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca

Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM) has been enhancing essential skills awareness, application and enhanced functioning in response to workplace requests for essential skills solutions since 1991. Performing original research, WEM supports business, labour and practitioners by offering workplace essential skills assessments and developing and delivering essential skills training and human resource solutions. www.wem.mb.ca

Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development focuses on workplace education, labour issues, employment rights and responsibilities, adult learning, apprenticeship training and trade qualification, skill development, public and workplace safety, industry regulation, licensing and pensions. The department supports employers to create safe work environments and build a highly-skilled and competitive workforce. www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/

ABC CANADA is the private sector voice championing adult literacy. The organization works to raise public awareness of literacy issues and foster an environment where all adults have access to opportunities that increase their literacy skills and prepare them to realize their full potential at work, at home and in the community. www.abc-canada.org

National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) provides internet-based literacy and essential skills information and resources in both Canada’s official languages. NALD@Work specifically emphasizes development of workplace literacy and essential skills, by providing access to current resources, materials, research, programming and information. www.nald.ca

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the national organization for adult learning in England and Wales. Through their research and development activity and their campaigns and publications, they promote the study and general advancement of adult learning and work towards improving the quality of opportunities available for adult learners and potential learners. NIACE gives priority to measures which aim to secure more and different adults in formal and non-formal learning. www.niace.org.uk

Workbase is the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development. Its vision is of a literate New Zealand workforce. Established as a not-for-profit organization in 1996, it works with business, unions, industry training and education to develop tailored literacy solutions to support government and company initiatives. Workbase provides workplace literacy programs, professional development, and consulting services; and develops resources, and maintains a free specialist library.www.workbase.org.nz

Dawson College is the largest English CEGEP in Quebec and serves 10,000 day and evening students in more than 50 fields of study, preparing them for further academic education and for immediate employment. It is proud of the diversity of languages and cultures among the students, faculty and staff. Dawson College housed The Centre for Literacy from 1989 to 2009. www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca



The Centre for Literacy

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