

# IALS

## International Adult Literacy Survey

### Its Meaning and Impact for Policy and Practice

OCTOBER 23-25, 2011 • BANFF, ALBERTA

Be part of an international gathering that examines the evolution and impact of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the most comprehensive and innovative assessment of adult literacy ever undertaken.

#### What will you learn?

This institute will illuminate and explore the *various meanings and impacts of IALS* and discuss how we can apply this understanding in our own milieus across countries.

#### Why look at IALS?

The initial IALS (1994) was carried out through the collaboration and cooperation of governments, statistical agencies and research centres and included seven industrialized countries which over the next four years rose to 23.

IALS changed the way literacy is defined, from an either/or state to a continuum of skills that adults use to accomplish increasingly complex tasks. It distinguished different kinds of reading – prose and document – and included math (numeracy) and problem-solving, extending the boundaries of what was traditionally considered “literacy”. It applied a new statistical methodology that allowed a direct measure of performance to assess skill and ability instead of proxy measures such as years of schooling or self-report which had been used in the past.

IALS offered the first internationally comparative performance survey of adult skills at a population level. For Canada, it provided comparable data across provinces and territories which had never before been available. Statistics Canada describes the purposes of IALS as follows:

- ▶ To find out how well adults use printed information to function in society
- ▶ To collect data on the incidence and volume of participation in adult education and training

- ▶ To investigate the relationship between initial and adult education
- ▶ To investigate the relationships between literacy proficiency and wider economic and social outcomes

(<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/dli-ild/data-donnees/ftp/ials-eiaa-eng.htm>)

IALS and subsequent surveys based on the same theories have had a strong impact on government policy and on the field of adult literacy in participating countries. Findings have been used to measure literacy in specific areas such as health and to underpin local assessment frameworks; in Canada, they have also been applied to the creation of tools and curricula. But in every country, the meaning assigned to IALS findings and their impacts have been closely linked to history and context. Understanding the meaning and significance of these similarities and differences can help us improve our own policy and practice.

Some of the world’s most knowledgeable experts on international literacy and skills assessment, including a leader in developing the original survey, will work with us for three days to explain the theory behind and history of IALS and help us analyze its benefits and challenges.

#### Topics include:

- **How was IALS designed and adapted over time?**
  - Historical overview of IALS and later literacy and skills surveys, including the forthcoming Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
  - Methodology and measurement frameworks for the surveys
  - Validity – How do we know we are measuring what we say we are?
- **How has IALS been taken up in policy to date?**

Trace the evolution of IALS through the policy story in four countries – Canada, United States, UK and Norway
- **How has IALS influenced literacy programming and instruction?**

Examine the effects of IALS on assessment, research and practice in programming and instruction through specific examples from Canada and abroad

#### Literacy for the 21st century: A guiding 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*

## A UNIQUE FORMAT

The Institute offers a unique opportunity to share and create knowledge in a collaborative environment with a limited number of participants (100). We build the program around the experience and expertise of those who register. If you register, you may ask to be a presenter. Participants stay together for three days from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. After hours, there are optional demonstrations and small group discussions for those who want to explore a specific issue or study a model or tool in greater depth.

If you simply want to listen, we still ask you to identify relevant topics or themes from your own experience to be woven into our discussions. Time is built in each day to talk, reflect and debate with colleagues. You will leave with a deeper understanding of the benefits and issues related to international assessments, access to new resources, people and practices, and ideas that are relevant to your own milieu.

You can share information and display materials on free tables, and use the breakfast, lunch, breaks and after-hours sessions to network.

## SCHEDULE

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday  
October 23, 24 and 25, 2011  
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Sunday and Monday after 3:00 p.m.:  
Optional demonstrations, networking, and webinars

Daily schedule finalized two weeks before the Institute.

## FEE

Includes materials, continental breakfasts, lunches and refreshments

Early-bird registration

Until August 15, 2011 .....\$595

After August 15, 2011.....\$640

All amounts must be paid in Canadian dollars (CDN).

## REGISTRATION

Online registration is available from our website:

<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/learningevents>

## ACCOMMODATIONS

A block of rooms has been reserved at The Banff Centre:

- The Professional Development Centre offers a special rate of \$108 plus taxes per night for a Superior room (2 double or 1 King)
- Lloyd Hall offers a rate of \$99 plus taxes per night for a standard room (1 or 2 double-sized beds)

They will hold the rooms until August 23, 2011. After this date, reservations will be based on availability.

You can reserve your hotel room online when you register or contact The Banff Centre directly: [reservations@banffcentre.ca](mailto:reservations@banffcentre.ca)  
**1-800-884-7574** (Toll free - North America)  
**001-403-763-6308** (Outside North America)  
Ask for the IALS Institute.



## The Centre for Literacy

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## Confirmed international experts (in alphabetical order)

**Greg Brooks**, retired from the University of Sheffield, is a literacy research consultant. He is currently one of eleven expert members of a European Union-funded High-Level Group on Literacy. As Research Director of the Sheffield arm of the UK National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) (2002-07), he oversaw numerous projects in adult basic skills and co-authored 20 publications, including research reviews. Earlier, he directed several Basic Skills Agency projects, including the 1998-99 *Progress in Adult Literacy Study* in England and Wales, which used several items from IALS and its statistical model. He has expert knowledge on phonics, literacy intervention schemes, trends in educational attainment over time, and the whole field of adult basic skills.

**Egil Gabrielson** is currently vice rector at the University of Stavanger. An acknowledged expert in the field of literacy, he has been an educational and psychological consultant in Oslo, assistant professor in education and special education, chairman of the Research Association for Teacher Education, Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor at the Center for Reading Research/National Centre for Reading Education and Reading Research at the University of Stavanger. Egil was the Norwegian Study Manager for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL). He is currently a member of the Literacy Expert Group in PIAAC.

**Irwin Kirsch** directs the Center for Global Assessment at Educational Testing Service (ETS). Since joining ETS in 1984, he has developed and directed a number of large-scale assessments in literacy, including the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), and was one of the leaders in establishing the first-ever comparative international assessment of adult skills (IALS). He has won many awards for his work. Currently, Irwin is chair of two OECD projects, the Reading Expert Group for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Project Director for PIAAC, a new computer-delivered, international survey of adult skills involving 26 countries and 35 languages. His research interests include issues of comparability and interpretability in large-scale assessments, and expanding the technology and methodology to develop and implement computer-delivered assessments.

**Stephen Reder** is University Professor of Applied Linguistics at Portland State University. His entire teaching and research career and service activities have related to literacy and language issues in education, work and community settings, with a focus on adult literacy and second language development. He has been the Principal Investigator of two recently-completed major projects in adult education: the National Labsite for Adult ESOL and the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL). A new project is applying findings from these projects to design an innovative learning support system called the Learner Web. Steve has written widely about adult literacy and language research and its implications for education and training programs. He recently co-edited *Tracking Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Longitudinal Studies in Adult Education*.

**Kjell Rubenson** had the first chair in Sweden in adult education and was the Dean of Education at Linköping University in Sweden before coming to Canada where he is a professor of education at the University of British Columbia and co-director of the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training. He has supervised several large national and international research projects on structures, policies and outcomes of adult education and lifelong learning. He is the founding president of the European Society for the Study of Education of Adults. For OECD, Kjell was responsible for a review of National Reviews of Educational Policies on lifelong learning and has been involved in the IALS, ALL, and PIAAC projects. At the European Commission, he was a member of the scientific advisory board of EURYDICE.

**John Vorhaus** is Research Director at the UK National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) and former Director of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL). He has directed numerous projects on adult literacy, language and numeracy, many focused on teaching and learning practices, and on disadvantaged groups, as well as on the personal and social benefits of learning in relation to individuals, families and communities. John is currently directing a national longitudinal study on the impact of literacy and numeracy levels on the operational effectiveness of personnel of UK Armed Forces.



**The Centre for Literacy** is a national centre of expertise that supports best practices and informed policy development in literacy and essential skills, by creating bridges between research, policy and practice. The Centre published the frequently cited first set of working papers on IALS in 1996.  
[www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca](http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.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](http://www.niace.org.uk)



**Bow Valley College Centre for Foundational Learning**

promotes and supports excellence in foundational learning (adult literacy, basic education, upgrading and essential skills) through knowledge dissemination, applied research and innovation, professional development and training, assessment and program design. The centre aims to make significant contributions to practice and knowledge in the adult foundational learning field. [www.bowvalleycollege.ca](http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca)



**National Research and Development Centre (NRDC)** is the UK's national independent centre for adult

literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Its aim is to improve professional practice and inform policy. Widely recognized for its expertise, the centre has an international reputation and works across the UK and world wide. NRDC recently published a literature review of international adult literacy policies. [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)



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