

Proceedings Report
of the Connecting the Dots
Closing Symposium

**Charting the Way:
Identifying Common Values
for Accountability in Adult Literacy**

October 20-21, 2009
Ottawa, ON



Connecting the Dots, a two-year pan-Canadian action research project that examined the impact of accountability on the adult literacy field, engaged 41 participants in a closing two-day symposium entitled *Charting the Way: Identifying Common Values for Accountability in Adult Literacy* on October 20-21, 2009, in Ottawa. Participants included provincial, federal, and other literacy services funders, adult literacy providers, and members of the project's advisory and steering committees and action research teams. The project used a nomination process to select symposium participants. Literacy coalitions, Steering Committee and Advisory Committee members, and provincial literacy officers were asked to nominate people who then applied to attend. We also invited those who had attended the May 2008 symposium that took place at the end of the first year of the project. Selection criteria included geographic and stakeholder diversity, and knowledge of and a commitment to addressing challenges related to accountability issues in adult literacy.

Participants heard about and read project findings, including the work of five innovative action research projects and a first draft of a linkage report that connected the dots among the findings to identify essential lessons related to accountability and adult literacy. Participants also examined and revised a draft set of principles regarding accountability practices in the adult literacy field. The closing activity was an opportunity to envision the next steps to build on and continue the work of *Connecting the Dots* [see symposium agenda, page 3].

Expected outcomes of the symposium

- To provide participants with an understanding of current practices, successes and challenges in implementing accountability structures and processes in adult literacy in the Canadian context.
- To agree on a set of shared principles for accountability in adult literacy to assist literacy funders and providers when designing accountability structures and processes.
- To invite feedback and make recommendations on how to build on and continue the work of the project.

Deliverables of the symposium included:

1. A foundational document describing shared principles related to accountability agreed upon by participants.
2. Recommendations of ways to move forward on improving accountability in adult literacy in Canada.
3. This report describing the symposium

The Project partners thank the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, for approving a 6-month extension and supplemental budget that supported the symposium and provided additional time to complete the work of the project.

Symposium Agenda

Day 1, October 20, 2009

Morning

- I. Opening
 - Welcome and purpose of this Symposium (Melody Paruboczy)
 - Review of process and agenda (facilitator)
 - Participant introductions
- II. Context and Overview of the “Connecting the Dots” Project (Linda Shohet)
- III. What we learned from the Action Research Teams, Part 1
 - Panel to present key findings from the Peterborough, Newfoundland and Alberta projects
 - Small and large group discussions to reflect on a few of the specific findings from these projects

Afternoon

- Continuation of III (if additional time is required)
- IV. What we learned from the Action Research Teams, Part 2
 - Panel to present findings from the Quinte, Ontario and BC projects
 - Small and large group discussions to reflect on a few of the specific findings from these projects
 - V. Presentation and discussion of the various tools developed as part of the ARTs

Day 2, October 21, 2009

Morning

- VI. Linkage Report: Overview of overall findings and conclusions
 - Presentation: Jim Page (followed by question and answer session)
 - Facilitated conversation on most significant conclusions for participants
- VII. Values, Principles and Indicators
Purpose: To seek consensus on the draft principles and indicators related to mutual accountability
Process:
 - Introduction (Linda Shohet & Melody Paruboczy)
 - Small working groups followed by plenary discussion

Afternoon

- VIII. Agreeing on a definition of accountability
Purpose: To seek consensus on the key concepts to be included as part of the definition of accountability.
- IX. Moving forward

Symposium Design

Day 1 focused on the findings and deliverables from the action research projects. Each project explored an innovative approach to accountability encompassing activities such as improved reporting and communication between funders and providers, learner assessment of social capital-related skills and the development of a tool to assess mutual accountability practices. Each action research team (ART) gave a brief presentation followed by a guided panel discussion designed to draw out values, common themes and accountability-related lessons.

Day 2 began with an overview of a draft *Linkage Report* presented by author Jim Page. This report was designed to “connect the dots” among the project’s findings and deliverables. The draft identified 12 “essential to know” lessons that seemed to relate to the stages of the project funding cycle. It also proposed a revised definition of accountability based on the findings. Symposium participants reviewed and revised the 12 lessons.

On the afternoon of Day 2, participants examined the five foundational principles of accountability that grew out of the project and reworked the accountability definition. In the final session, they discussed potential next steps to build on the work of *Connecting the Dots*.

Day 1

Topic: What we learned from the Action Research Teams (ARTs), Part 1

When: Tuesday morning, October 20, 2009

Process: The first set of ART presentations included Peterborough (Ontario) Native Literacy Program, Bow Valley College (Calgary, Alberta), and Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador. Their action research focused on improving accountability processes by building trust, improving communication, and addressing cultural issues that affected accountability-related communication.

Peterborough Native Learning Program, Ontario

Research Question: *How can we assist Native literacy programs in responding to provincial accountability demands and help them to better explain their challenges and successes?*

Context: From their experience as Native literacy providers and trainers of Ontario Native literacy practitioners, team members were well aware of the challenges these small, isolated programs often faced in providing literacy services. These challenges include funding and resource limitations, staff shortages, and community support and appreciation of the programs. Partially as a result of these challenges, the team frequently observed programs being placed on probation or being taken over by mainstream sponsors, and sponsors giving up on programs. The team hypothesized that these issues were fundamentally connected to non-compliance with funding accountability requirements and the ripple effects of not meeting performance measures.

Actions: The team designed a framework to support Native literacy practitioners in responding to the province’s Program Monitoring Report (PMR). They incorporated research that identified 8 key indicators of successful aboriginal schools into the framework. The framework is designed to support the province’s monitoring report while enhancing the cultural relevance of that form and encouraging Native literacy practitioners to share their stories of successes and challenges.

The team visited three on-reserve programs between two and four times each during the ten-month project timeframe and found accountability compliance issues such as low numbers of learners and contact hours and a lack of proper administrative policies and procedures. Nevertheless, programs were complying with most of the accountability expectations but not in the format desired or recognized by the funder. Different “language” used resulted in each party not being clear about what the other party was looking for or accomplishing.

Outputs of this action research project included:

- A tool/framework that explains/translates the items in the province’s PMR to help Ontario Native literacy providers better prepare for and respond to the requirements.

Outcomes of this action research project included:

- A greater understanding of accountability by enrolled programs.
- Increased confidence in interacting with provincial representatives.
- Improvements in organization of statistics and program information and in timely response to identified action items.
- Increases in the numbers of learners and contact hours.

The Peterborough project manager was gratified by the change in attitudes of the participating programs. Programs realized that they were doing better than they had thought and acquired a new understanding of their own value and the need for them to provide consistent accountability to the funder.

Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador

Research Question: *How can partners, Literacy NL and NL Department of Education, Adult Learning and Literacy Division, improve communication to allow for continuous dialogue and innovation in addressing accountability needs in the literacy field?*

Context: While not the funder of Literacy NL, the NL Department of Education, Adult Learning and Literacy Division provides funding to adult literacy programs throughout the province. As the coalition that represents these providers, Literacy NL proposed this action research project to the provincial department.

Actions: The project partners engaged in a series of meetings in fall 2008 to discuss the impact of accountability expectations on both providers and government and identify principles to support consultation and positive communication. The intention was to listen to all participants’ voices on accountability – government, learners and other stakeholders. In the second phase, the partners convened a series of meetings to demonstrate the communication and consultation methods identified in phase one. Professional development of literacy providers and the attendant accountability-related issues was selected as the topic for the next four meetings, with each meeting centered on one of three areas: qualifications of practitioners, timelines for rolling out professional development consultation, and evaluation.

Outputs of this action research project included:

- A poster of tips for practicing shared accountability and a draft professional development survey for distribution to practitioners. Symposium participants received copies of the poster.

Outcomes of this project included:

- Identified “lessons learned” in practicing shared accountability, and specifically for literacy initiatives focusing on accountability, consultation and professional development.
- Communication practices improved among the partners.

Bow Valley College, Alberta

Research Question: *What characteristics of the relationship between Calgary Learns and two Bow Valley College adult literacy/basic education programs support mutual accountability and how can these characteristics be strengthened or nurtured?*

Context: Calgary Learns is what could be called a “pass through” funder, a non-governmental entity that distributes provincial funds to literacy programs. Initially, the team members observed that the relationship that Calgary Learns had with two providers was qualitatively different. One relationship appeared to be more positive and effective than the other. After discussion and research they identified the concept of mutual accountability as an area for further exploration, leading them to ask whether a higher level of mutuality might be present in one accountability relationship versus the other.

Actions: From these observations and research, the team decided to create and test an assessment tool for mutual accountability. Pertinent characteristics of mutual accountability include negotiating and agreeing on how information is shared and acted upon, the indicators of program success, and negotiating and clarifying expectations and capacity.

1. Tool development
2. Tool piloted
3. Data analysed to test the tool’s usefulness in assessing mutual accountability

Outputs of this action research project included:

- A tool to assess mutual accountability practices for both funders and providers. The team recognizes that additional testing and refining of the tool is needed.

Outcomes of this project included:

- In producing and testing the tool, a better understanding resulted among team members and research participants of the difference between accountability and mutual accountability. Pilot participants appreciated that the tool was both an organizational self-assessment tool and a vehicle for funders and providers to communicate, plan, and work together to improve their accountability relationship. Participants also felt that the tool could easily be used by funders and organizations outside of adult literacy.

After the three action research presentations, the presenters engaged in a discussion facilitated by CtD Project Manager, David Hurley, around the three topics below.

What values underlie your action research project or might be emphasized when people use the tools you created?

Trust and relationships: Alberta (AB) found that relationships were built on obligations, that building trustworthiness would eventually foster trust and that trust would create a better,

mutually beneficial relationship. This feedback was gleaned during the interviews and would perhaps be useful in creating a tool for training practitioners and coordinators.

Communication and trust: Newfoundland & Labrador (NL) was pleasantly surprised by the interest and willingness of the government department to engage in the first place. This showed that there was a level of trust which is crucial to the success of any provider/funder-government relationship.

Importance of relationships: Peterborough, Ontario (ON) indicated that the relationships between people are very important; for example, on one reserve the field coordinator was not “known” at a personal level and silence between the parties undermined success of the program for the participants.

Has anything changed for you in your relationship(s) with your funder(s) as a result of this project?

Improved understanding, ongoing meetings: NL said that both sides understand each other’s mandates better. Traditionally the Department of Education has not been easy to work with and they now have a more relaxed relationship and are able to share information with greater trust and understanding. They also decided that they need to continue meeting on a regular basis after the project.

Community involvement and improved understanding: Peterborough, ON said that the relationship between the program and the funder is now more comfortable, and the funders have sent representatives to program sharing circles and understand better that the culture of participants is key to the program’s success. Programs now have a volunteer base which did not exist before; the community has stepped up to participate. They have also started partnering with local businesses to learn what skills employers are looking for in their employees.

Communication has improved and the provincial field consultants are impressed by the change of attitude of the practitioners towards the funder.

What links can you make to the overall objectives of the broader “Connecting the Dots” project? In particular, how does your team’s action research assist us in developing a common language about accountability OR help to improve accountability in positive ways?

- AB sees great potential for their tool and as a result of its use, there is now more local interest in the program.
- NL indicated that there is simply more engagement on the part of everyone involved.
- Peterborough plans to present the tool and their research to the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) in early November. ONLC has been trying to get funding for a field worker for years to help communities understand how to satisfy accountability requirements. ONLC is hopeful that the improvements realized by the programs enrolled in the research can be institutionalized; that data from the project will hopefully permit ONLC to make the case for a field worker.

After the panel, the facilitator asked symposium participants to respond to the following questions:

What stood out for you about the three action research projects? Selected responses include:

- There is a common message around the necessity of developing partnership trust and communication.
- Applying ideas about trust and trustworthiness to today's reality, i.e. staff turnover (churn), are we discussing trustworthiness between individuals versus the organizations?
- How do we know when trust and respect are achieved? What is the evidence?
- Acknowledging that there are layers of accountability, issues when partners move away from the existing relationship into their own organizational hierarchies.
- That funders and providers understanding each other's worlds is a challenge as they are both very complex.
- Funders and providers need to have the "conversation", feel and show vulnerability and acknowledge when they don't know something.
- Capacity to ask these questions doesn't exist currently and it will take time to build that capacity.
- There is the potential to adapt the tools for broader audiences (generalizability).
- Language – differences in terminology causes gaps. Using the same terms and key words is important. Do they mean the same thing for everyone?
- Thought processes: Literacy is about spirit and heart; program focus can be on administration (forms) and measurement is about the head.

Deliverables: Currently emphasis is on a specific product (what gets measured) instead of the process.

An emphasis on diversity in literacy has not necessarily contributed to greater equity.

The facilitator then asked participants to expand on what stood out for them from the morning's presentations:

- Context matters: Accountability requirements should take this into account.
- "Doing" for funding - funding drives activities and accountability
- Idealism versus reality
- Need more options of what to be accountable for
- "Social" versus "human" capital
- Need to clarify language "we" are using, i.e. social versus human capital, etc.
- More is required than to just build relationships (because of transitory numbers/staff), so that accountability survives beyond individuals and becomes entrenched (informal and non-formal).
- There is an obligation on both sides to provide continuity of process, knowledge (sustainability) and support building capacity.

The afternoon continued with reports from the other two action research teams.

Topic: What we learned from the Action Research Teams (ARTs), Part 2

When: Tuesday afternoon, October 20, 2009

Process: Two ARTs presented (Quinte Adult Day School of Ontario and Storytellers' Foundation of Hazelton, B.C. – the program manager/literacy practitioner and the funder of each team were present), followed by a discussion facilitated by Diana Twiss of Literacy BC. These two ARTs both

worked on learner assessment and its relationship to accountability. Using the format of the morning, a brief overview of each research project was followed by questions from the panel facilitator and the discussion of all participants.

Quinte Adult Day School, Ontario

Research Question: *Using United Way's Outcome Measurement process, can we develop a tool that will measure and evaluate changes in learners' self-management, self-development (SMSD) skills and once developed, can we use this tool to demonstrate the importance of SMSD skills to a learner's future success?*

Context: Based on their work with a diverse range of adult literacy clients, including youth involved in a combined job skills training and literacy program, the staff at QADS observed that some learners coming into the program with low literacy skills succeeded more than others entering with higher literacy skills. They noted that the difference between these two groups of learners was often that the former group possessed more advanced SMSD skills. Their action research project grew from this observation and "gut" intuition.

Actions: After being trained in the United Way Outcome Measurement process, Quinte team members drew upon existing measures of SMSD skills to develop their own tool. Two optic-scan tools were developed: One assessed the learner's time management skills and the other more general SMSD skills such as problem-solving and communication styles. A learner observation sheet for practitioners was developed to accompany each tool. In consultation with their research consultant, the team created computer-based data collection and analysis processes and piloted the two tools three times. Curriculum interventions to support changes in learners SMSD skills were also developed.

Outputs of this action research project included:

Two tools to assess learners' SMSD skills. (Quinte will continue to work on the tool this fall, refining, revising and piloting it with two other literacy programs in their region.)

Outcomes of this project included:

- Increased awareness by learners (the team received testimony from learners that taking the SMSD assessment made them more aware of the importance of these skills and of their role in literacy) and by providers of the importance of SMSD skills in literacy acquisition.

Storytellers' Foundation, British Columbia

Research Question: *How can we measure social capital progress among literacy learners? In what ways is social capital acquisition connected to literacy development?*

Context: Storytellers' Foundation provides adult literacy services in a rural BC community. Among their clients, 85% percent are non-treaty First Nations and 90% are unemployed. The community is job-starved with a long history of boom-and-bust economies (e.g. logging). The average age of persons on social assistance is 23 years old. These First Nations learners possess a strong focus on the collective.

Actions: The team used a learning cycle of reflection, planning, action and observation to develop a social capital measurement tool, measuring such “goods” as inclusiveness, sense of belonging and good will. The team observed that learning is most successful when learners are immersed in community and social relationships; thus the tool they developed endeavours to measure the quality of their relationships. They have tested their tool on two groups of learners.

Outputs of this action research project included:

- A tool to measure changes in learners’ attainment of social capital skills. “So far, we’ve only started the conversation”. They will look for ways to apply the tool in situations beyond their organization and work to develop indicators to measure changes in social capital.

Outcomes of this project included:

- Increased awareness by funder of the importance of social capital acquisition, especially for the learners served by this program.
- Contributes to the ongoing discussion and debate about the importance of human capital versus social capital skills acquisition. As was evidenced in the discussion at the symposium, the acquisition of these skills should not be viewed as an either/or proposition; both are important in learners’ personal growth and literacy acquisition.

The ART project managers and their funders were asked the following questions by Diana Twiss. Unfortunately, the responses were not captured in the process notes taken at the symposium.

- *What were the challenges and tensions you experienced as you created these tools and ways to measure learner success/progress?*
- *How do you see these tools being used in other community programs?*
- *As you are both seasoned instructors, what improvements have you seen in your programs as a result of the development of these tools?*

After the panel discussion, given the hour, audience feedback was limited to general comments, so participants could talk with the ARTs about their tools. The questions and comments included:

- Are there promising practices here to move accountability out to help programs to articulate what they want to measure?
- What does “knowledge mobilization” mean? There is potential for moving results out to other audiences beyond the literacy field.
- How do we broker relations between funders and programs to translate the work of these groups into other environments?
- From this work, I can see that funding practitioners permits them to research options, move forward, articulate their work.
- Meetings/communication between all parties fosters mutual accountability. Should be normalized as part of the process.
- Power of relationship, project versus program funding. Dependence on funding can cloud accountability. Subservient = fear of losing funding = silence.

The day ended with participants meeting action research team members to review and discuss the tools that they had developed.

Day 2

Topic: Linkage Report: Overview of project findings and conclusions

When: Wednesday morning, October 21, 2009

Process: Jim Page began his presentation by stating that he was reporting on the material he had read and tried to remain neutral while preparing the Linkage Report. Jim presented the report as a first draft and invited input/comments from symposium participants, which he would incorporate into a second draft of the document. He highlighted key points: Reflection on the original goals of the project and the six areas of work completed by the project.

He discussed some of the challenges faced during the project:

- Project leaders had hoped to develop a common language for funders and literacy providers to use, but funders did not engage as fully as hoped
- Tensions about what constitutes “literacy”
- Literacy providers felt “devalued” or undervalued
- Differences in funding priorities – government generally more interested in work skills (human capital) and literacy practitioners more interested in social capital

This was followed by discussion of specific sections of the Linkage Report which had been structured to follow the stages used in funding proposals, activities familiar to all participants – project development, application/funding, activity/performance, interim reporting and final reporting. Jim identified twelve “essential to know” lessons.

Connecting the Dots Linkage Report Twelve “**Essential to Know**” Lessons

1. Each stakeholder has multiple accountabilities.
2. Accountability must be based on the realities or context of both the funder and the recipient.
3. Learning from previous accountability experiences pays dividends when developing new project concepts.
4. Both human and financial resources must be adequate to the tasks of delivering on project outcomes and being accountable for results.
5. Reciprocal, respectful relationships around accountability processes are fundamental.
6. Frank communication between funders and recipients is crucial to ensure the development and implementation of effective accountability measures.
7. Attention needs to be paid to both financial and performance accountability.
8. “Policy steadfastness” on the part of funders has huge implications for accountability and success.
9. Experienced and knowledgeable staffs working for both the literacy provider and the funder are essential to effective accountability.
10. The way providers are held accountable can compromise their ability to be accountable.
11. What is counted can easily become what counts.
12. Trust is the key to effective accountability.

The presentation ended with a proposed definition of accountability, based on the literature review and the presentations at the project's 2008 symposium:

Accountability is the obligation assumed by both funders and recipients to take shared responsibility for quality performance and results in a transparent and respectful manner, based on mutually agreed upon expectations, outcomes and reporting requirements, with the provision of the human and financial resources necessary to accomplish these tasks successfully.

The audience asked general questions about the Linkage Report and the presentation.

Q. What else will we need to do to have this definition of accountability accepted when conversation is one-way – no funder participation?

A. Jim Page: “Policy is made at a higher level. There is little, no interface between literacy field and government. Strategic policy makers need to be involved. There needs to be engagement with senior level of government and politicians. There is a need for policy steadfastness.”

Q. Did you find a difference in the feedback from providers and funders?

A. Jim Page: “There was very little feedback directly attributable to funders. There seemed to be no great difference between front line government people and service providers. I noted that trust and respect are important to both. If senior policy makers had been involved, it would have been a different conversation.”

A facilitated discussion followed the Q&A period and participants responded to the following questions:

- What is your general reaction to the 12 “essential to know” accountability lessons drawn from the Connecting the Dots study?
- Do you recognize yourself in these lessons? Do they make sense for you? Share what is most meaningful for you.
- Is any “essential to know lesson” missing from this set of lessons?

Summary of Comments

A number of participants asked if organizing the 12 “essential lessons” around the project life cycle was the best way to present this information. Suggestions were made regarding specific lessons such as combining similar lessons (e.g. One person commented that Lessons 4 and 7, both dealing with trust, could be combined. Several people suggested that Lessons 8, 10 and 11 should reference both providers *and* funders.) A number of participants did not like the term “policy steadfastness” in Lesson 8. They felt it was obscure and required explanation.

Reactions from Participants

Overall Report

- [This report is an] ...affirmation of what we already know.
- Appreciate general principles. Struggling with consistency and language of document. Who is the audience? Need to have another document that doesn't separate into an "us/them" – government/funder relationship.

Accountability Relationship

- Funders and providers have a different understanding of the definition of accountability.
- There are a number of different relationships / accountability relationships
- What are the qualities of a good accountability relationship?
- The "how" – how do you build trustworthiness in a relationship?
- How are we accountable to adult learners? – Pedagogically? Culturally?
- Importance of communication between funder and organization
- Upper levels of hierarchy – not always an understanding of agreement/relationship
- Instead of "recipient" used "funded organization" – less subservient
- The key is the trustworthiness of organization (funder or provider) – not just that organization's representative (person)

Context of Adult Literacy and Accountability

- Cultural context of learning is an important component of success in literacy
- Contextual realities of government funder/service providers
- Issue of diversity needs to come out stronger in Linkage Report
- The reality of adult literacy is marginalization

Accountability Policy

- Accountability at front end – how do we influence thinking at the starting point?
- Reality of ever changing policies – how do we deal with this reality?
- How can we leverage changes through policy formulation?
- If policies change, why don't accountability policies change?
- How do we get no. 8 to be heard by the right echelons?

Knowledge Management and Transfer

- No. 9 – capacity building. Knowledgeable staff – how do we get there? Need to be there. Huge implication – cost, time, choosing the right people.
- Knowledge management infrastructure. Don't have a way to transfer knowledge. Not enough to have knowledgeable staff, need to have a system in place, a way to transfer knowledge.

Impact and Future of the Linkage Report

- We have not had a lot of discussion about research. Fundamental pieces missing – what info is important – important to whom? Grants? Community? Needs?
- The Linkage Report has the essence, but perhaps we need another report or series of briefs that could be presented to the government – something more concise, tighter.
- Agree with prior comment. We should go to the government and find out what is important to funders. We should test our assumptions.
- There is room for further research recommendations. There are other layers to explore.

Topic: Review of Draft Principles and Identification of Indicators

When: Wednesday afternoon, October 21, 2009

Process: Linda Shohet gave a brief overview of how the five principles were developed from the overriding themes identified over the course of the project. The questions for symposium participants was “Do these make sense? Do they need revision and, if so, how? What indicators (activities or outcomes that will indicate when the principle is present or achieved) can be identified?”¹ The sixth participant group was charged with reviewing and revising the definition of accountability presented from the Linkage Report.

Draft Principles	
1. Accountability is necessary because it builds public trust and goodwill and demonstrates program effectiveness.	2. Multiple accountabilities exist that may result in conflicting demands and a variety of measurements and definitions of “success”.
3. Understanding the needs and realities that drive both sides of the accountability equation is critical.	4. Reciprocal relationships between parties must be based on trust, transparency, good communication, and knowledge of the field.
5. A common understanding of the basic meaning of accountability is essential for dialogue.	

Principle 1

Accountability is necessary because it builds public trust and goodwill and demonstrates program effectiveness.

Indicators

- Documents contain definition and writing is clear to reader
- Annual reports
- Present learner success stories to community stakeholders

¹ As there was limited time to identify indicators for each principle, some groups worked on this; others were unable to work extensively on it.

- Involve perspectives of all stakeholders
- Engaged, informed public

Principle 2

Multiple accountabilities exist that may result in conflicting demands and a variety of measurements and definitions of ‘success’.

Revised Principle 2

Accountability exists in multiple contexts resulting in a variety of measurements that define success.

Indicators

- Variety of quantitative and qualitative tools to measure performance that are valued
- Process to negotiate what tools will be used – can always be renegotiated
- Accountability is clearly defined and delineated for each context.

Comments

- Primary accountability → learner or community
- “Diverse” demands – set this aside
- Balancing different ways we measure success “that should result in a variety ...”
- There needs to be a process to negotiate what we mean by accountability.
- Don’t remove “conflicting demands” – these could be ethical dilemmas.

Principle 3

Understanding the needs and realities that drive both sides of the accountability equation is critical.

Q: How do we know that we understand the needs and realities?

Indicators

- Stakeholders adopt an agreed-upon definition of accountability

Comments

- Both parties adopt a common tool (i.e. Alberta’s pilot)
Q: What are the cost and time savings associated with implementing it?
Q: Can we get training/support for implementing?
- Outcomes, indicators, projects negotiated jointly
- Flexibility is appreciated and encouraged
- Defined and valued at an organizational level (documented and reviewed).
- Become policy literate

Principle 4

Reciprocal relationships between parties must be based on trust, transparency, good communication, and knowledge of the field.

Revised Principle 4

Relationships between parties are reciprocal and based on respect, transparency, good communication and understanding of the agreed objectives.

Comments

- If we remove “knowledge of the field” from principle 4, we need to have it stated elsewhere – in another principle or somewhere in the Linkage Report.
 - Facilitator: Could it be stated in principle 5?
- If we expect funders to have knowledge of the literacy field, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. Literacy providers should not necessarily expect funders to have an in-depth knowledge of the field, but they should know and understand what providers are supposed to be doing to fulfill agreements. Providers want intellectual curiosity, respect from funders.
- Can’t develop good policy if you don’t have good knowledge.
- Are these principles that are guiding us? So we can start strategizing to change policy? Or are these guiding principles that we use when we are signing proposals?
 - Response: The principles are proposed as a foundational document to use when designing accountability processes.
- Could be viewed as a “pre-nup”, the rules of engagement

Indicators

- Existence of knowledge management policies and strategies
- 360° survey that measures reciprocity and other attributes of the funder/provider relationship from both perspectives
- Meetings in some form or another

Principle 5

A common understanding of the basic meaning of accountability is essential for dialogue.

Revised Principle 5

A common understanding of the basic meaning of accountability is essential for effective dialogue.

Indicators

- All stakeholders have an opportunity to voice their opinion.
- Arrive at a common agreed upon meaning/definition

Proposed Revised Principles	
1. Accountability is necessary because it builds public trust and goodwill and demonstrates program effectiveness.	2. Accountability exists in multiple contexts resulting in a variety of measurements that define success.
3. Understanding the needs and realities that drive both sides of the accountability equation is critical.	4. Relationships between parties are reciprocal and based on respect, transparency, good communication and understanding of the agreed objectives.
5. A common understanding of the basic meaning of accountability is essential for effective dialogue.	

Definition of Accountability from the Linkage Report

“Accountability is the obligation assumed by both funders and recipients to take shared responsibility for quality performance and results in a transparent and respectful manner, based on mutually agreed upon expectations, outcomes and reporting requirements, with the provision of the human and financial resources necessary to accomplish these tasks successfully.”(50 words)

The small group that worked on the revision based the proposed definition on Principles 1 and 2.

Proposed Revision

Accountability is fulfilling obligations negotiated by all parties taking shared responsibility for performance and results. (15 words)

Comments

- Why do you add “obligation?”
Response: Accountability is fulfilling the contract – not the contract itself.
- Steering Committee member: The definition has to be as broad as possible. Some of the words removed from definition can be used as indicators.
- Definition of 15 words or less – credited to Lise (facilitator). Previous workshop – forced us to look at each word and be concise.
- Facilitator: Are we all comfortable with a 15-word definition?
Response: No dissenting comments.

Topic: Moving Forward

When: Wednesday afternoon, October 21, 2009

Process: Linda Shohet spoke briefly about the end of the project. She reported that funding will end by November 30 and all documents would be finished by that date including: revisions to the Linkage Report with input from this symposium, evaluation report prepared by outside evaluators, a final report by the project manager and the Steering Committee, and the literature review.

The Centre for Literacy is taking over management of the Connecting the Dots website. Reports of the ART projects will be posted to the web site. Decision on what will be done with the ART tools is forthcoming as some of the tools need additional work and some are very specific to a program or province. Ideally, some of the tools require additional work and should be piloted in other literacy programs throughout Canada. This could be through a follow-up project to Connecting the Dots.

Suggested Next Steps

Follow-up Initiative to Connecting the Dots

- Propose a follow-up initiative. We should try to find provincial partners. Open up the conversation with policy makers at senior level.
- If we were to do additional research – what are our research questions?
- There needs to be a new project written up to finish what was started with Connecting the Dots.
- Steering Committee member: The Treasury Board has expressed interest in project. We should contact people from provinces. Who and how to do it? Smaller provinces easier – less layers to work through. How to initiate local conversations?

Dissemination

- Should investigate funding with CASAE, Knowledge Mobilization grants through SSHRC. Dissemination of workshop funds.
- There are many layers of writing to be done beyond this. Possible article for these journals: Literacy & Numeracy Studies Journal, Adult Literacy Basic Education Journal. One participant suggested a possible book on project.
- It's important to talk to policy people. How do we engage them?
- The ART presentations really brought the project to life. We should videotape, post on website. Investigate other media – internet. – podcasts.

Continue Work on ART Tools

- Tools – clean up, build indicators, disseminate them
- Alberta participant: Have submitted a request to Family Community Services for funding. Would like to use the AB ART tool, but questioned the implications, legalities of sharing. Who owns the tool? What are the implications of using a potentially untested tool, not formally tested and validated?

Linda Shohet: There are clauses in the original agreement regarding ownership of tools. This will have to be discussed further with the funder.

- A lot of transition going on in NS. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to talk to government – might be open to new policy re accountability. We would like to use AB ART tool.

Conclusion

The Steering Committee will bring the project to closure, but will explore suggestions and recommendations from project participants on ways to share and build on the learning from *Connecting the Dots*.

Symposium Evaluation

The table below indicates the evaluation results provided by 22 participants.

1) To what extent did this symposium meet the outcomes listed below?

	Not at all				To a great extent
	1	2	3	4	5
1. To provide participants with an understanding of current practices, successes and challenges in implementing accountability structures and processes in adult literacy in the Canadian context.			4	7	11
2. To agree on a set of shared values and principles for accountability in adult literacy to assist literacy funders and providers when designing accountability structures and processes.			2	14	6
3. To invite feedback and make recommendations on how to build on and continue the work of the project.				9	13

The following questions were also asked in the symposium evaluation form, however, 98% of the written responses were to Item 2 only:

- 2) What aspect(s) of the symposium did you appreciate most or find most effective and why?
- 3) What aspect(s) of the symposium did you appreciate less or find less effective and why?
- 4) Please comment on the impact the work of the Connecting the Dots project has had on accountability in adult literacy field.
- 5) How do you expect to make use of the information from this symposium or from the project in your work with accountability and adult literacy?

- 6) What recommendations do you have for continuing the dialogue about accountability between funders and adult literacy providers?

Selected comments to Item 2: What aspect(s) of the symposium did you appreciate most or find most effective and why?

- The amazing structure and flexibility of the past 2 days. Also, I truly feel we accomplished a lot!
- The presentations and discussion of the ARTs was very valuable (8 comments like this).
- Excellent materials provided at the outset of the symposium to get the conversations going. Really helped to foster ideas exchange.
- Organization – pace – well organized discussion.
- Opportunity to participate when creating definitions, principles, values.
- The way the format engaged its audience. (6 comments similar to these two.)
- Making space for our field to discuss this contentious issue.
- The synthesis of a great deal of valuable work was packaged and presented very effectively.
- Jim Page’s draft “linkages” report was great – eloquent and a fine summary.
- The people in the room; participants came from a wide variety of places and vantage points which added great richness to the conversations.
- Linda’s introduction and history of the project
- Excellent facilitation and premises (3 comments like this.)