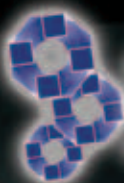


Accountability and Public Trust: RESTORING THE BALANCE

Exploring the impacts of and alternatives to recent accountability measures in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills



The Centre
for Literacy
of Quebec



THE CONTEXT

A submission to the Canadian sponsorship inquiry in November 2005, endorsed by The Voluntary Sector Forum, responded to an invitation for public input on how to improve accountability in the Government of Canada. The submission highlighted the problems faced by the sector. Among them, they note recent practices have emphasized inputs and controls rather than results, and have focused on avoidance of risk that has produced “micro-scrutiny disproportionate to the dollars involved”. The authors call for a recalibration of federal accountability structures that better balance the need for fiscal control and risk management with the need to measure results. They offer a series of detailed recommendations on how to achieve this balance.

In this context, the adult literacy field has been consolidating its efforts to create a ten-year plan of action with measurable outcomes. The time is

appropriate to examine and document the impact of the accountability issue on this field, and to consider how the recommendations from the Voluntary Sector Forum and other alternatives might re-channel our energies toward achieving long-term outcomes.

The culture of accountability is not a Canadian invention. It has a history in OECD countries; members of the European Union have been chafing under the increasing bureaucracy of project funding. In the United States, onerous reporting mechanisms have had serious impacts on the voluntary social sector.

Before we consider alternatives, we have to understand how “global” policies of accountability have developed. In the 2002 BBC Reith Lecture series, Dr. Onora O’Neill, a philosopher and Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, traced the growth in the UK of a public culture of suspicion and distrust. She condemned “new conceptions of accountability, which superimposes managerial

targets on bureaucratic process, burdening and even paralysing many of those who have to comply”. She examined and called into question the assumptions that underlie the prevailing sense of a crisis of trust, a sense shared well beyond the UK, and offered some new ways to consider the idea of public trust.

Recent recommendations on re-balancing the scales of accountability take on added meaning in Dr. O’Neill’s framework.

We have invited Onora O’Neill to contribute to the 2006 Institute.

INSTITUTE FORMAT

The Institute is a collaborative event. Over three days, participants will present, respond, question, and synthesize current thinking about accountability measures implemented over the past decade by government and other funders and their impact on the adult literacy and basic skills field. This field will serve as an example of the larger voluntary sector. We will focus on issues and challenges related to accountability, examine recent efforts across the Canadian voluntary sector and similar efforts abroad to develop viable alternatives, and consider how some of these possibilities would apply in this field. We will consider ways of integrating alternative models into the long term vision for adult literacy.

To start the conversation, we send out a few short documents three weeks ahead. Other exchange is built around pertinent issues and problems identified by participants through a one-page response that we request before the Institute begins.

Anyone who registers may become a presenter.

If you want to share information without making a presentation, we have tables for display materials, screens for posters and computer stations for online links.

If you prefer to listen, we invite you to respond to the issues we pose and to bring other topics or themes from your own experience. Part of each day is set aside to discuss and reflect on these questions, and to get feedback from colleagues.

TO THINK ABOUT:

- How much do **you** trust your public institutions? How do you measure that trust?
- How much does your community trust you and your organization? How do you know?
- How have various accountability requirements affected your program or personal work life in the past ten years? Consider issues of time, energy, creativity, innovation.
- How often do you experience conflict between the accountability measures of different funders?
- Have accountability requirements ever put you in an ethical dilemma?
- How can accountability measures be made less onerous?
- What would count as “evidence” of “results”?
- One component identified for effective public accountability by government is ongoing engagement with service partners. The adult literacy field had an exemplary model of engagement with government through the National Literacy Secretariat, but this has been threatened as a “common system” of accountability has been implemented. How can we sustain and share this model in a more flexible accountability framework?

I enclose a cheque for ☐ \$495 (until May 1) ☐ \$540 (after May 1)

Or, please charge my ☐ VISA

CARD NUMBER

EXP. DATE

(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature: _____

INFORMATION:

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Mailing address in June 2006: ☐ Home ☐ Work

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Institution: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____

Fax: _____ E-Mail: _____

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.

Mail or fax completed form to
The Centre for Literacy
at the address below.

Schedule

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday
June 28, 29 and 30, 2006
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

After 3:00 p.m. daily: Optional discussions, networking and research opportunities. Daily schedule finalized two weeks before the Institute

Fee:

Includes materials, continental breakfasts, lunches and refreshments

Early-bird registration (until May 1, 2006) \$495 CDN
After May 1, 2006 \$540 CDN

All amounts are in Canadian dollars.

Accommodations:

Arrangements have been made at the Hotel du Fort within easy access of The Centre and close to downtown shopping and attractions. The hotel is offering a special rate of \$137/single or double occupancy. They will hold the block of rooms until May 27, 2006. After that, reservations will be based on availability. They will extend the rate over the July 1st holiday for anyone booking before May 27. The Montreal International Jazzfest begins at the end of June.

For reservations, contact the hotel directly:

Hotel du Fort
1390 rue du Fort
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3H 2T2
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.

The Centre for Literacy is a non-profit resource, training and research centre. It is committed to bridging theory and practice to build capacity in adult basic skills wherever learning happens and to inform policy at all levels. It aims to increase public understanding of the changing definition of literacy in a complex society, and serves as a Learning Forum where practitioners, researchers and policy-makers can meet and exchange as peers.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education’s (OISE) Festival of Literacies aims to explore the many literacies used in today’s world, and to make the Festival a meeting ground for diverse literacy communities. They facilitate literacy research workshops and provide a forum for both adult learners and practitioners to pose questions and hopes for future adult learning programs throughout Canada.

The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) is a national non-profit organization that represents literacy coalitions, organizations, and individuals from every province and territory. Their mission is to be a national voice for literacy for every Canadian through networking, research, government liaison, learner development, communication, collaboration and building capacity among the people and organizations involved with adult literacy education.

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

3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4
Telephone: (514) 931-8731, ext.1415
Fax: (514) 931-5181
E-mail: info@centreforliteracy.qc.ca
Web site: www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca

The Centre for Literacy acknowledges the support of the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and Dawson College, Montreal. The Centre is a registered charity.

Visit us on the web at: www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca